

**“Priests of My People”:  
Levitical Paradigms for Christian Ministers in the Third and Fourth Century Church**

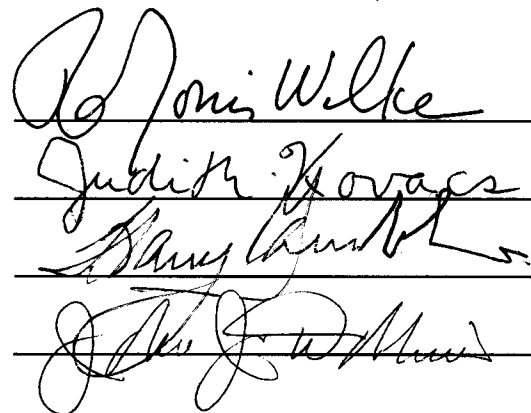
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## Abstract

The question that motivates the present study is this: what theological and historical factors led the Christian Church of the third century to begin calling its leaders “priests”? The goal of this project is to present an explanation for the rise of a Christian priesthood by carefully exploring the Church’s self-understanding in relation both to the broader Roman Empire and to ancient Israel. By examining texts from the first through the early fourth century, I conclude that it is precisely this Christian self-identity (what I term its politico-theological ecclesiology) that influenced the way the Church read Old Testament Levitical texts and appropriated that office as a “type” of Christian leadership.

First, the Church understood itself as a distinct *polis* or ‘culture’ in its own right, an alternative public reality with communally shared stories, rites, customs, and leadership. The development in the church’s understanding of its leadership, then, was part of its development in understanding itself as an alternate society in the Empire. This notion of the church as a ‘culture’ was further nuanced and developed by the rise of a distinctly Christian ‘material culture’ in the early third century, particularly Christian art and architecture. As a result, a new visible Christian ‘sacred space’ emerged, thereby facilitating a re-conceptualization of the bishop as a “priest” who presides over and protects this new ‘sacred space’.

Second, the Church understood itself in connection with Israel such that when they looked at the Old Testament narrative, they saw a divine nation corresponding to their own cultural reality in the world. When they looked to the old priesthood, they saw a figure and model for their own leadership. And when they considered their own ministerial leaders, they reflected on the Levitical priestly paradigm as a “type” of the Christian office.

Thus, this new society of the Church was perceived as nothing less than the renewed nation of Israel. As an awareness of a newly emerging Christian material culture combined with this ecclesiological self-identity, it created the ideal context in which the Levitical priesthood was appropriated as a working typology for the Christian ministerial leadership.

## **Dedication**

To my friend, companion, and loving wife, Jen,  
for her unwavering support, constant encouragement and genuine interest in my work.

And to my children, Eowyn and Riley,  
for their unquestioning love and regular (though sometimes unrequested) visits to my office—  
tangible reminders of what is most important.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In discussing the rise of a Christian ministerial “priesthood” in the early Church, it has often been noted, and assiduously repeated, that the New Testament never designates any Christian leader as a “priest” (*hiereus*).<sup>1</sup> By the end of the third century, however, the terms *hiereus* (in the East) and *sacerdos* (in the West) are used to designate the bishop and/or the presbyter in a universally accepted way. Yet, in observing the end of the third century as a *tertium ad quem* for this general ecclesiastical development, a number of questions remain. When did this designation first appear, and how well accepted was it at the outset? More fundamental, *why* did the term “priest” arise in the Church to designate the Christian minister, especially when the New Testament era seems to remain silent on that very count? Was the Church creating something ex-nihilo to assert a new understanding of Christian leadership, or was it developing pre-existing understandings? From what model(s) did they derive both the designation (*hiereus/sacerdos*) and the understanding of roles and functions for the Christian leader?

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<sup>1</sup> For example, P.M. Gy, “Notes on the Early Terminology of Christian Priesthood” in *The Sacrament of Holy Orders: Some papers and discussions concerning holy orders at a session of the Centre de pastorale liturgique, 1955* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1962), 98; Maurice Bevenot, “Tertullian’s Thoughts about the Christian ‘Priesthood’” in *Corona Gratiarum*, vol 1 (Brugge: Sint Pietersabdij, 1975), 126; Karl Rahner et al., eds., *Sacramentum Mundi*, vol. 5 (New York : Herder & Herder, 1970), S.v. “Priest”, 97; R.P.C. Hanson, *Christian Priesthood Examined* (Guildford: Lutterworth Press, 1979), 35; Carl Volz, *Pastoral Life and Practice in the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990), 32; J.B. Lightfoot, *The Christian Ministry*, (New York, Whittaker, 1878), 12; J.A.T. Robinson, *On Being the Church in the World* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1960), 72; James Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church: Public services and offices in the earliest Christian communities* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1992), 322; James Mohler, *The Origin and Evolution of the Priesthood* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1970), 31; Jean-Paul Audet, *Structures of Christian Priesthood: A study of home, marriage, and celibacy in the pastoral service of the church*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 81-82.



## State of the Question

Questions about the rise of a ministerial priesthood receive no shortage of answers, and scholars for the last 100 years have attempted to address the subject. In surveying the related literature, one is immediately met with a morass of opinions, objections, assertions, and hypotheses. To assist in sifting through the state of the question, I find it helpful to boil down the literature into three main categories, each of which attempts to answer the question of *why* the term “priest” begins to be applied to the Christian minister in the early Church. Most scholars recognize that Tertullian (c. 200 AD) is the first writer to explicitly name the bishop a priest (*sacerdos*), with a few notable exceptions.<sup>2</sup> What scholars do not agree on, however, is the explanation as to why that term began to be used for the Christian leader, and what character and function the Church intended to communicate about their leaders via this designation. Three broad answers have been given.

### 1. *Christian Priesthood emulates Pagan Priesthood*

According to this perspective, the Christian church looked to the surrounding pagan culture for its titles of leadership, power and respect, latching on to the terminology “priest” in order to invest their own leaders with a sense of respect and distinction in the eyes of their neighbors.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Dom Gregory Dix argues that even in 1 Clement, and in second century generally, the sacrificial character of the liturgy and the priestly understanding of the ‘president’ was “universal among the Christian writers of the second century” (“Ministry in the Early Church” in *The Apostolic Ministry: Essays on the history and doctrine of the episcopacy*, ed. by K.E. Kirk [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1947], 247. He has a similar argument in his *Jurisdiction in the Early Church: Episcopal and papal* (London: Church Literature Association, 1975), 36. This seems to misunderstand the force of Clement’s argument, which is about “order” not about “titles” or even sacerdotal conceptions. More will be said about this in my conclusion.

Thomas Martin Lindsay addresses this catalyst in his 1902 work, *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries*. In surveying the church from New Testament times to Cyprian, Lindsay concludes that the earliest church saw itself largely in terms of a priestly society in which the entire community's purpose (as a whole) was to approach God. Over time, however, that conception is replaced by the view that only one part of the assembly constitutes the priesthood, namely, the bishop. The culprit, says Lindsay, is Cyprian. In part, Cyprian wanted to protect his own power, and in part, the church wanted to "justify the pleas that Christians were entitled to the toleration extended to all other religions."<sup>3</sup> How did they do this? Lindsay surveys the organization of the Roman priesthood and concludes: "the Christian churches did copy the great pagan hierarchy. They did so in the distinction introduced into the ranks of bishops by the institution of metropolitans, and grades of bishops, and . . . on the model of the organization of the state temple service."<sup>4</sup> Thus for Lindsay, one can trace the rise of Christian priesthood directly to the Greco-Roman milieu.

James Mohler, nearly seventy years later, likewise draws upon this notion to explain the rise of "sacerdotalism" in the Church. In his work *The Origin and Evolution of the Priesthood* (1972), Mohler argues that "The old democracy of the synagogue, where the presbyters were generally chosen by the people, gives way to the hierarchical ministry built upon the Roman model..."<sup>5</sup> Especially in the fourth century when, according to Mohler, the pagan mystery religions were declining, "there was no danger of confusing Christian ceremonies and terminology with those of the pagans. No doubt the pagan converts, as their Jewish forerunners,

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<sup>3</sup> Lindsay, 273.

<sup>4</sup> Lindsay, 350.

<sup>5</sup> Mohler, 69.

still felt the need of a cultic priesthood. This may have been a factor in the increasing Christian sacerdotalism of the time.”<sup>6</sup> Mohler’s work has not received much attention in scholarly circles, but such ideas have been circulated by later authors.

Shortly following Mohler’s work, R.P.C. Hanson addresses the rise of the Christian priesthood in his *Christian Priesthood Examined* (1979) and again in a shorter essay entitled “Office and Concept of Office in the Early Church” in his *Studies in Christian Antiquity* (1985). While attempting to articulate a variety of factors at work in the rise of a Christian priesthood, Hanson concludes in both works that “the strongest influence producing this development was the example of pagan religion, in its social rather than its cultic aspect.”<sup>7</sup> For Hanson, the title *hiereus* or *sacerdos* carried important distinction in the Roman world, one which the Christians intentionally drew upon in order to gain such prestige for themselves.

More recently, Allen Brent makes a similar argument in *The Imperial Cult and the Development of Church Order* (1999). By first tracing the development of the Imperial Cult under Augustus as a “reorganization” of the Republican cult in order to retain the *pax deorum*, Brent argues that the Church, in turn, reorganizes the Imperial Cult, taking the value and status denied the Christians and appropriating it for themselves. While Brent’s thesis is provocative, most of his evidence for this Christian “reorganization” of the Imperial cult is taken from New Testament and sub-apostolic documents, the very period in which most scholars find an *absence* of priestly designations being applied to Christian leaders.

A number of problems present themselves to this perspective on the rise of a Christian priesthood. First and foremost, there seems to be no strong evidence that this is what Christians

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<sup>6</sup> Mohler, 104.

<sup>7</sup> Hanson, “Office and Concept,” 130.

were attempting to do. In fact, the evidence we do have from early Christian writers suggests just the opposite. Christians of the second and third centuries were attempting to move away from, not embrace, the surrounding pagan culture. Even Justin Martyr, who is at pains to show the reasonableness of Christianity to his pagan audience, never calls the president of worship a *hiereus*, even though he has an appropriate opportunity to do so in *1 Apology* 65-67. Further, Tertullian shows great caution in never using the term *pontifex* to describe a Christian bishop (except in one case in which his tone is sarcastic). After Constantine, however, when paganism does begin to lose ground, terms like *pontifex*, *koruphaios*, and *hierophant* begin to be used by Christians in the third century to describe their leaders, but not before this time.<sup>8</sup> The lack of use of these later titles by Christians suggests that they were not using pagan models (and perhaps intentionally avoiding them) to describe their leaders.

Furthermore, there are certain striking differences between pagan and Christian priesthoods. For example, in *Religions of the Ancient Greeks*, Simon Price notes that women in antiquity were able to be priests;<sup>9</sup> Christians, however, restricted their priesthood to men. Certain priesthoods in ancient times were restricted to particular family lineage;<sup>10</sup> Christians decidedly excluded such qualifications for their priesthood. The duties of pagan priests were restricted by and large to offering sacrifice;<sup>11</sup> Christian priests, however, performed a full array of tasks such as baptizing, teaching, administering penance, and so on. Price further notes that

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<sup>8</sup> Surprisingly, Hanson, a proponent of the Roman model for Christian priesthood, points out this very fact (*Christian Priesthood Examined*, 64).

<sup>9</sup> Simon Price, *Religions of the Ancient Greeks* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1999), 68.

<sup>10</sup> Price, 68.

<sup>11</sup> Price, 68.

priests in antiquity were not interpreters of the law (that was left to the diviners and *exegetai*);<sup>12</sup> Christian priests, on the other hand, were routinely responsible for regular instruction and teaching. In the end, noticeable differences between pagan and Christian priesthods remain, and the suggestion that early Christians developed their ministerial priesthood from Roman models remains unpersuasive. Other models must be sought.

## 2. *Christian Priesthood Represents Christ's High Priesthood*

This perspective holds few proponents, and the literature can be surveyed rather briefly. John Zizioulas, in his work *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the First Three Centuries* (originally published in Greek, 1965) provides a theological examination of early Christian ecclesiology in relation to the Eucharist and the bishop. Though Zizioulas never speaks specifically of the development of the priesthood, he does argue that “the ministries that exist are antitypes and mystical radiations of the very authority of Christ, the only minister par excellence.”<sup>13</sup> He is making a case here, albeit theologically rather than historically, for the bishop as an *alter Christus*, a priest representing Christ the high priest. However, no real historical evidence is given for this picture.

In 1970, Joseph Coppens wrote a short monograph entitled “*Le Sacerdoce Chrétien: Ses Origines et Développement*” in which he addresses a brief summary of the development of priesthood with particular attention to the New Testament. Coppens’ chief concern is to show the reason for the lack of the term *hiereus* as a designation for the Christian leader,<sup>14</sup> but he also

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<sup>12</sup> Price, 70-71.

<sup>13</sup> Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church* 60.

<sup>14</sup> Coppens argues that “The term *hiereus*, priest, was scarcely available for use. It had its own, technical, meaning which excluded it from ordinary Christian usage because on the one

argues that priestly conceptions of leadership were not at odds with the New Testament, even if the designations were not there. In Coppens' view, Christ's ministry in the New Testament was one of priestly nature; therefore, whatever he passes to his disciples as appointed representatives (*shaliah*) also carries this priestly power with it. Like Zizioulas, Coppens provides no actual historical or textual evidence that this was in fact what later writers had in mind when they began designating their leaders "priests".

R.P.C. Hanson (1979), as we saw, argues that Roman priesthood was the primary model upon which Christians built their own priesthood; yet, he does note in passing that the Christian priesthood also developed to "express the priestly activity of Christ."<sup>15</sup> He develops this line of thought no further and provides no texts to support this claim.

Like Coppens earlier, Albert Vanhoye attempts to look at the Christian priesthood with special emphasis upon the New Testament (*Old Testament Priests and the New Priest: According to the New Testament*, 1986). In this work, Vanhoye argues that the New Testament speaks to three types of priests: the Jewish priests, Christ as priest, and Christians as priests.<sup>16</sup> Arguing primarily from Hebrews, Vanhoye concludes that Christ is seen by early Christians as surpassing the old Jewish conceptions of priesthood; he is now the New Priest.<sup>17</sup> While recognizing that the New Testament never designates a Christian leader as a priest, Vanhoye argues that an understanding of Christ's priesthood helps explain the later development in the Church regarding a ministerial priesthood. Once Christ's high priesthood is well developed and

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hand it designated priests of the Old Law, and on the other, ministers of the pagan cult" (*Le Sacerdoce Chrétien: Ses Origines et Développement* [Leiden: Brill, 1970], 103).

<sup>15</sup> Hanson, *Christian Priesthood*, 41.

<sup>16</sup> Vanhoye, xii.

<sup>17</sup> Vanhoye, 232.

accepted, attributing a priestly character to Christian ministers becomes possible.<sup>18</sup> Like those before him, Vanhoye makes a plausible theological argument, but offers no textual evidence for explaining why the later Church began calling her ministers priests.

The few authors who do offer more textual evidence for such a development, do so only in light of Cyprian. Maurice Bevenot's 1979 article, "'Sacerdos' as Understood by Cyprian," and John Laurence's longer work, *'Priest' as Type of Christ: The Leader of the Eucharist in Salvation History according to Cyprian of Carthage* (1984), both argue that for Cyprian, the bishop was a *sacerdos* because he was a type of Christ, the true high priest, presiding over the Eucharist. These works provide a better examination of actual evidence in Cyprian, but do not intend to make claims for the understanding of the Christian priesthood more broadly in other authors of the third or fourth centuries.

This perspective on the development of the priesthood thus seems more plausible than the first option (Roman priesthood models), especially for Cyprian, but the Fathers in general do not draw upon this paradigm very consistently or regularly. In fact, Tertullian and the *Apostolic Tradition*, the two earliest examples of Christian bishops being called priests, designate the bishop *summus sacerdos*, not just *sacerdos*. The connection with Christ, the *summus sacerdos*, does not seem to be in view for these earlier writers, for if it was, one would expect the authors to avoid calling the bishop by the title so uniquely Christ's. Further, the book of Hebrews (from which we get the strongest articulation of Jesus as high priest) remains in the background on this issue in the Western Church until the middle of the fourth century, and was not very influential

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<sup>18</sup> Vanhoye, 316.

in the Eastern church until the third century.<sup>19</sup> Certainly Tertullian and the *Apostolic Tradition* do not appear to draw upon this book or these ideas to develop the priesthood of the bishop. In short, this perspective, although theologically compatible with the New Testament, does not do justice to the Christian writers who first designate the bishop as a priest. A third option, however, remains.

### 3. *Christian Priests are such through their Presiding over the Eucharistic sacrifice.*

Many scholars have sought to explain the development of the Christian priesthood in connection with the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist, and this line of approach has become generally accepted and repeated. Once the Eucharist is seen as a sacrifice, the argument runs, the one who presides over the sacrifice is in some sense a “priest.” This is by far the most frequent explanation given for describing priestly developments in the third century. Many scholars make this point in passing,<sup>20</sup> but several works deserve more a detailed look.

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<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of the influence of Hebrews on the Fathers, see Hanson, *Christian Priesthood Examined*, 41-42. He also notes that when Christ’s high priesthood is asserted in these centuries, Zech. 3:1-5 is the passage used, not Hebrews. Thus, Christ’s high-priesthood was understood, even if not well developed or applied to an understanding of the Christian priesthood.

<sup>20</sup> For examples of this, see encyclopedic entries F.L. Cross & A.E. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1974), S.v. “Priest”, 1104; Walter Kasper et al, eds., *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vols. 2 & 8 (Freiburg: Herder, 1994, 1999), s.v. “Bischof” & „Priester.“ Authors who make this passing suggestion without further examination include: Hanson, *Christian Priesthood Examined*, 52-58, but mostly looking at Cyprian; Hanson, “Office and concept of office in the early Church” in *Studies in Christian Antiquity*, ed. ibid (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985), 129; J. Daniélou, “The Priestly Ministry in the Greek Fathers” in *The Sacrament of Holy Orders: Some papers and discussions concerning holy orders at a session of the Centre de Pastorale Liturgique, 1955* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1962), 125; Richard Nelson, *Raising Up a Faithful Priest: Community and Priesthood in Biblical Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 172; Robert Murray, “Christianity’s Yes to Priesthood” in *The Christian Priesthood*, eds. Nicholas Lash and Joseph Rhymer (Denville, N.J., Dimension Books, 1970), 30. John Grindel, “Old Testament and Christian Priesthood” *Communio* 3 (1976): 36; Ray Robert Noll, *Christian*



The first modern scholarly treatment of the subject comes in 1874 with Charles Drake's monograph, *The Teaching of the Church during the first 3 centuries on the Doctrines of the Christian Priesthood and Sacrifice*. Drake's overarching thesis is that the existence of a priesthood implies the task of offering sacrifice; therefore, the existence of a sacrifice assumes a ministerial priesthood. After surveying the early Christian and Patristic evidence, examining both the language of "sacrifice" and the use of the term "priest," Drake concludes that the two went hand in hand from the very beginning. As he notes near the end of his argument, "if a sacrificial view of the Eucharist prevailed in the Church from the first, a sacerdotal view of the Christian Ministry must have prevailed in the same degree, and to the same extent."<sup>21</sup> Because the Eucharist was seen as a sacrifice from the beginning, so also there must have been a priesthood to preside over this Christian sacrifice.

Drake has set the stage and the agenda for work on the priesthood for the next century. His connection between Eucharistic sacrifice and Christian is continually repeated by scholars to come. J.B. Lightfoot followed Drake a few years later with a work entitled *The Christian Ministry* (1878). He begins with the driving question: in what sense may the Christian ministry be called a priesthood? Arguing that an exclusive priesthood as seen at the close of the second century "contradicts the general tenor of the Gospel,"<sup>22</sup> Lightfoot attempts to explain the shift. While briefly exploring the possibilities of Jewish and Greco-Roman influences, Lightfoot dismisses these for a third alternative: the understanding of the Eucharist as a sacrifice. He

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*Ministerial Priesthood: A search for its beginning in the primary documents of the Apostolic Fathers* (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1993), 44; Bernard Cooke, *Ministry to word and Sacraments: History and theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 541.

<sup>21</sup> Drake, 141.

<sup>22</sup> Lightfoot, 110.

summarizes this shift: “The offering of the eucharist, being regarded as the one special act of sacrifice, and appearing externally to the eyes as the act of the officiating minister, might well lead to the minister being called a priest . . . and the true position of the minister as the representative of the congregation was lost sight of.”<sup>23</sup> Lightfoot has no qualms with the idea of a minister as representative of the people, but the idea of a mediating, sacrificing priesthood is, in his mind, irreconcilable with the New Testament, and the direct result of the rise in understanding the Eucharist as a sacrifice. The connection between Eucharistic sacrifice and the priesthood was becoming firmly entrenched in scholarly perspectives.

Adolf von Harnack carries on this explanation in his 1910 work, *Entstehung und Entwicklung der Kirchenverfassung und des Kirchenrechts in den zwei ersten Jahrhunderten*. Here, Harnack is wrestling with much broader questions than the rise of the Christian priesthood, but in his address of that issue, he concludes, like Drake and Lightfoot, that the Eucharistic sacrifice plays a large role in the development of a Christian priesthood.

Dom Gregory Dix, likewise, argues for this connection in his essay “Ministry in the Early Church” (1947). Arguing for the centrality of the Eucharist for early Christian worship, Dix asserts that the necessity of someone presiding over this liturgical rite would result in “the sacerdotal character of the president [being] unmistakable.”<sup>24</sup> In a later work, *Jurisdiction in the Early Church: Episcopal and papal* (1975), Dix similarly argues that the Eucharist, understood as sacrifice in connection with Christ’s death, lies behind priesthood: “If the Apostle did set apart

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<sup>23</sup> Lightfoot, 138-139.

<sup>24</sup> Dix, “Ministry in the Early Church,” 249.

men permanently for this particular function [offering eucharist] in the Christian communities . . . these men became ipso facto identified with the high-priesthood.”<sup>25</sup>

P.M. Gy offers the same conclusion in his word study, “Notes on the Early Terminology of Christian Priesthood” (1962). There, Gy attempts to examine the terminology of *ordo* and *sacerdos* in the church. In tracing the development of *sacerdos* for the Christian minister, Gy points to 200 A.D. as the first clear attestation of such designation. Sacrificial connections help explain the priesthood development : “Christians of the sub-apostolic period nowhere explain why they developed a terminology with which the new testament had wished to break, but the texts show us clearly that the idea of priesthood was developed at the same time as that of sacrifice, and in conjunction with it.”<sup>26</sup> Like Lightfoot earlier, Gy sees a radical disjunct between the apostolic teaching and the later development of priesthood, pointing to the rise of a sacrificial Eucharist as the culprit.

Not long after Gy’s work, Willy Rordorf offered a short article on the subject in 1964: “La Theologie du ministere dans l’Eglise Ancienne.” While looking at a variety of ancient texts to see the theology of the ministry in the early church, Rordorf also attempts to explain the development of a strong division between laity and an exclusive priesthood clergy. Central to this shift, says Rordorf, is the sacrifice of the Eucharist: “I am persuaded that this change of perspective was produced in connection with the fact that the Lord’s Supper had obtained in the course of the second century the character of a sacrifice, and that this development had favored the identification of the bishop presiding over the Lord’s Supper and the sacrificing priest of the

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<sup>25</sup> Dix, *Jurisdiction*, 37-38.

<sup>26</sup> Dix, *Jurisdiction*, 113-114.

Old Testament.”<sup>27</sup> Because the Eucharist takes on a sacrificial character in the second century, according to Rordorf, it naturally leads to the rise of a Christian priesthood which can be compared to the Israelite priesthood of the Old Testament.

Further, Hans von Campenhausen’s essay entitled “The Origins of the Idea of the Priesthood in the Early Church” in his *Tradition and Life* (1968) attempts to trace the origins and developments of the Christian priesthood. Von Campenhausen posits a two-fold idea of priesthood. In the wider sense, there was an office that was connected with the church and with the rites of the cult. In the narrower sense, a later development of the fourth and fifth centuries, the priest is such independently of the church. It is within the former (wider) sense that von Campenhausen argues that a “priesthood” developed out of the liturgical rites of worship. Moreover, once Christian worship was seen as sacrificial in nature, it immediately “brought about the corresponding conception of a special priestly calling and status. From the cult there came into being a sacred right of the priestly order.”<sup>28</sup> Once again, one sees the connection between Eucharistic sacrifice and Christian priesthood.

Raymond Brown, likewise, carries forth this line of reasoning in his short work *Bishop and Priest: Biblical Reflections* (1970). Like many before him, Brown argues that the apostolic and sub-apostolic age did not consider the president of worship a priest. The reason, according to Brown, is that the Eucharist was not yet seen as sacrificial in nature. Once that happens, however, the Christian leader becomes a priest: “the Christian priesthood, replacing the

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<sup>27</sup> “Je suis persuadé que ce changement d’optique s’est produit en rapport aussi avec le fait que la Sainte-Cène a pris au cours du second siècle le caractère d’un sacrifice, et que cela a favorisé l’identification de l’évêque président à la Sainte-Cène et du prêtre sacrificiant de l’Ancien Testament.” Willy Rordorf, “La théologie du ministère dans l’église ancienne” *Verbum Caro* 18 no. 71-72 (1964): 98.

<sup>28</sup> Von Campenhausen, “Priesthood,” 219.

priesthood of Israel, emerged only when the Eucharist came to be understood as an un-bloody sacrifice replacing the bloody sacrifices of the Temple.”<sup>29</sup> This happens, according to Brown, in the second century. Only then, when the Eucharist takes on sacrificial tones, would the president of the rite begin to accrue priestly designations.

J.M.R. Tillard, in his 1973 article “La ‘qualité sacerdotale’ du ministère chrétien” argues along similar lines. There was no priestly designation for the minister in the early church because the Eucharist was not seen as a sacrifice. Once the Eucharist becomes sacrificial in character, the slow rise of the priesthood results. Because the priesthood “is intrinsically linked to sacrifice,”<sup>30</sup> there could only be a priesthood after the Eucharist takes on such a character in the second century.

This same tired explanation is driven home again and again by scholars throughout the 1970’s. John Grindel (1976), Bernard Cooke (1976), Edward Kilmartin (1977) and Theodore Stylianopoulos (1978) all echo the previous logic that “once the Eucharistic celebration was clearly seen as a sacrifice, then, it is not surprising that this term [priest] would be taken over by the Church and applied to the celebrant of the Eucharist.”<sup>31</sup>

The 1980’s saw some relief to this oft-repeated explanation, but in the 1990’s, Carl Volz (1990), Richard Nelson (1993) and Robert Ray Noll (1993) resurrect the old line of thought. Noll’s conclusion summarizes well the arguments of the others: “The texts also show us clearly that the idea of priesthood was developed at the same time as that of sacrifice and in conjunction

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<sup>29</sup> Raymond Brown, *Priest and Bishop: Biblical Reflections* (Paramus: Paulist Press, 1970), 40.

<sup>30</sup> “Est intrinsèquement lié au sacrifice.” Tillard, “La ‘qualité sacerdotale’ du ministère Chrétien” *Nouvelle Revue Theologie* 95 (1973): 510.

<sup>31</sup> Grindel, 36.

with it.”<sup>32</sup> The turn of the millennium produces more of the same. Colin Bulley, in his reworked dissertation *The Priesthood of Some Believers* (2000), examines the first three centuries to find evidence on the general and special priesthood in the church. While exploring the first three centuries, Bulley offers an explanation for the rise of a ministerial priesthood in the early church. Surveying the major thinkers of this period, he concludes that “the leading of worship, and the offering of the Eucharist in particular, both conceived of in sacrificial terms, were of primary importance.”<sup>33</sup> Thus the connection between priesthood and the Eucharist as sacrifice has become the most accepted scholarly explanation for the rise of a Christian ministerial priesthood.

Ostensibly, this explanation for the development of the priesthood seems reasonable. When looking at the Patristic texts themselves, one quickly observes that a major function of the bishop-priest was to offer sacrifice. Because the Eucharist is seen as a sacrifice, the conclusion that a Christian priesthood arose from this understanding of the Eucharist follows logically.

However, as important a role as the sacrificial Eucharist must play in the development of priesthood, there are reasons to suggest this cannot be the full explanation. The biggest weakness in this logic is the chronological distance between the Christian expression of the Eucharist as sacrifice and the rise of the title “priest” to designate the Christian leader. The Eucharist was understood as a “sacrifice” from the beginning. It is very clear, as Robert Daly so forcefully demonstrates in his work, *Christian Sacrifice: the Judaeo-Christian background before Origen* (1978), that the earliest Christian writers *all* saw the Eucharist in sacrificial

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<sup>32</sup> Noll, 44.

<sup>33</sup> Bulley, 137.

terms.<sup>34</sup> Within the second century, the Didache, I Clement, Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus all speak very clearly about the Eucharist as a sacrifice (without a ministerial priesthood). Yet, even earlier, I would argue, the Lord's Supper is already being connoted in sacrificial terms by Paul.<sup>35</sup> In other words, the Christian movement, from its inception onward, understood the Eucharist to be a "sacrifice" in some sense of the word. Yet, it is not until the early third century that the leader of the Christian assembly is designated a "priest". If in fact the Eucharist was the sole cause or catalyst for the rise of priestly designations, why do these designations not appear earlier, in consistent fashion? In other words, this option does not adequately explain the empire-wide eruption, acceptance, and continuation of the priestly terminology within the church from the early third century onward.

Most scholars who see a Eucharist-priesthood connection argue one of two ways. Either sacrifice and priesthood both develop late and arise together at the same time, or they allow for an early articulation of the Eucharist as a sacrifice, but assume a similarly early ministerial priesthood without any textual evidence. The problem with the former argument is that the Eucharist was understood as a sacrifice much earlier than the rise of the priestly designations. The latter argument suffers from the lack of any explicit priestly designations in the late first, early second century, allowing for only a "phantom" priesthood to correspond with the earlier Eucharistic sacrifice.

More important, one cannot adequately trace the development of the priesthood out of the Eucharist largely because it does not receive emphasis as the main role of the Christian minister

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<sup>34</sup> See also Frances Young, *Sacrifice and the Death of Christ* (London: SPCK, 1975), 47-63.

<sup>35</sup> See for example, 1 Corinthians 10. I say more about this in my conclusion.

or the connecting factor with OT support in most early writers, except Cyprian. As Colin Bulley notes, there are a “variety of major connotations which priestliness could have in the third century A.D. As with Origen, the need for the community to support the bishop and the need for holiness are important points of contact with the priesthood of the OT.”<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the sacrifice of the Eucharist does not receive the prominence of place in Tertullian, *Apostolic Tradition*, Origen, or *Didascalia Apostolorum*, as it does in Cyprian.

From the reverse side, there are plenty of texts that speak of the Eucharist as sacrifice and the bishop’s role as the president of this rite, with no mention of an understanding of the bishop as a “priest.” Given these problems with the current state of scholarship, the need remains for a more adequate explanation for the development of the Christian priesthood.

### **Politico-Theological Ecclesiology: A Way Forward**

While scholars have correctly recognized the importance of the Eucharist as sacrifice in the Fathers’ discussion of the functions of the Christian priesthood, none have emphasized or fully explored the importance of the early Church’s cultural self-understanding in relation both to Judaism and the broader Roman Empire—what I will term its *politico-theological ecclesiology*—in fashioning both its identity and, consequently, its understanding of Christian ministerial leadership. In addition, a number of scholars have assumed a dramatic disjunct between the developments in the third century and the teaching and practice of the Church in the first two centuries.<sup>37</sup> By approaching the question of the Christian priesthood from the

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<sup>36</sup> Bulley, 132.

<sup>37</sup> For example, Gy says, “Christians of the sub-apostolic period nowhere explain why they adopted a terminology with which the New Testament had wished to break” (113); and *Sacramentum Mundi*, vol. 5, argues that the NT shows “obvious opposition to the OT priesthood...” (98). Other scholars who share this perspective include: Paul Bradshaw,



perspective of the church's politico-theological ecclesiology, we can see more clearly that the rise of a ministerial priesthood in the late second, early third century is both an important *new development*, yet also an important *advancement* of previous trajectories. As R.P.C. Hanson notes, "Priesthood, when it entered into Christian tradition, was a development, but a development of doctrine, of interpretation, rather than the development of a new institution."<sup>38</sup>

The Christian priesthood forms as the result of theological consideration upon the existing office of bishop in light of the church's self understanding within the world.

### ***Church as a Culture or Polis***

Although a range of issues could be addressed in examining the rise of a ministerial priesthood in early Christianity, this project will focus particularly on the relationship between an emerging ministerial priesthood and the Church's politico-theological ecclesiology. First, I will examine the notion that the Church understood itself as a *polis* or 'culture' in its own right, distinct from the surrounding cultures of the Empire. Scholars such as David Yeago, Reinhard Hütter, Robert Wilken and Peter Leithart have shown that the social reality of Christian symbols, rituals, communal gatherings, organization, public worship space, art, literature, and leadership structures, all form a developing "Christian culture" which sets the church apart as an alternate society in the Roman world.

A definition of "culture", of course, is a slippery thing, even among those who study "cultures" around the world. Robert Winthrop, for example, has admitted that within the field of

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*Liturgical Presidency in the Early Church* (Bramcote: Grove, 1983), 15-18; J.M.R. Tillard, 498; Thomas M. Lindsay, 266; Nelson, 171; Lightfoot, 111, 143; Cooke, 79, 537; Burtchaell, 321; and Audet, 79.

<sup>38</sup> Hanson, *Christian Priesthood Examined*, 96.

anthropology, “multiple and conflicting definitions of culture are notorious.”<sup>39</sup> Scholars have offered a wide array of definitions which include a community’s “patterns of thought,” “a set of standards for behavior considered authoritative within a society,” or “a system of meanings through which social life is interpreted.” Others have rejected the idea of “culture” altogether.<sup>40</sup> For my purposes, then, I must provide a working definition of “culture” at the outset which lies behind the term used throughout this thesis. I find most useful at this juncture to draw upon the work of David Yeago who defines culture as “a complex of symbols and practices, communally acknowledged as significant, enclosed within an overarching meta-narrative, which shapes the perceptions, experience, [behavior], and sense of identity of a community.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, to speak of the Church as a culture is different than speaking of Christianity as a set of abstract beliefs or ideas. Rather, the “Church as culture” is a way of identifying a community that embodies a public, visible reality sharing certain perceptions, rites, practices, customs, offices and leadership, while embracing an overarching “story” that shapes that very community.<sup>42</sup> When Christians speak about their beliefs, about ritual actions, about community values and practices, or about structures of leadership, they are giving witness to a “culture”—a public social reality in the empire.

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<sup>39</sup> Robert Winthrop, “Introduction: Culture and the Anthropological Tradition” in *Culture and the Anthropological Tradition*, ed. ibid. (New York: University Press of America, 1990), 1

<sup>40</sup> Winthrop, 2-4.

<sup>41</sup> David Yeago, “Messiah’s People: The culture of the Church in the midst of the nations” *Pro Ecclesia* 6 (1997): 150. I have added “behavior” to the definition because how a community acts is just as important to a “culture” as “perceptions, experience, and sense of identity.”

<sup>42</sup> This is what I mean by the term “meta-narrative”: the overarching story which shapes the community.

Furthermore, as anthropologist Clifford Geertz observes, this complex of symbols and practices in a religious culture works both to “express the world’s climate and [to] shape it.”<sup>43</sup> This is no less true when we look at Christian ministerial leadership and the appropriation of priestly designations. The notion of a ministerial priesthood is both a reflection of an existing worldview, and also a living symbol that will continue to shape that very self-understanding of the community.<sup>44</sup> To look at it another way, the practices of the church and the functions of the bishop lead to renewed consideration of the community’s self-understanding in light of Israel and the Roman world (as a unique culture in continuity with Israel); yet as this self-understanding developed and grew, it also began to influence the way Christians described the very practice and functions of the office. Designating the Christian bishop as a priest had as much to do with the functions of the bishop (i.e. practice) as it did with the church’s broader self-identity in the world (i.e. its ecclesiology). I intend to examine both aspects (functions and ecclesiology) as a means to further understand this sacerdotal development while also recognizing this two-way dynamic at work.

One might object, however, that this definition of culture does not ground the Christian social reality in traditional “cultural” elements such as geography, ethnicity, language and so on.

This is true; yet as Geertz and Yeago have both demonstrated, a culture need not have those

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<sup>43</sup> For a broader discussion of the way symbols and practices work in religious communities, see Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System” in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Banton (London: Tavistock Pub, 1963), 9.

<sup>44</sup> The cultural symbols used by Christians such as Israel, altar, sacrifice, temple and priesthood express both a certain cultural reality about the Church but also continue to shape and develop that very reality over time, as we will see. “Priesthood” for example, initially expresses a certain reality and understanding within the church; over time, such nomenclature will inevitably affect other cultural understandings in the community (for example, seeing the church building as a Temple).

aspects so long as symbols, practices and overarching “stories” exist within the community. Yeago, for example, uses the illustration of what was once known as an “American civic culture.”<sup>45</sup> He notes that members of this culture shared certain symbols such as the American flag and the Declaration of Independence, as well as certain practices such as voting, pledging allegiance and singing the national anthem. Additionally, these shared symbols and practices were encompassed within a larger narrative—the retold story of how this country was founded, fought over, and established anew. Figures such as Washington, Lincoln, Paul Revere and Betsy Ross became communally shared stories of the American civic culture which was then “reaffirmed in solemn civic liturgies on the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and the birthdays of the great presidents.”<sup>46</sup> This reality, though not based, for example, on ethnicity, was nonetheless a “culture” in its own right.

The early Christian church, likewise, embodied analogically its own “culture” with shared symbols, practices and an overarching story. Thus, part of what I am arguing is that the Church developed a conscious awareness of itself as a unique *polis*, or culture, distinct from the surrounding cultures, an alternate society complete with symbols (e.g. bread and wine, water, the cross, Israel) and practices (e.g. communal gatherings, baptism, eucharist) governed by certain rules and of course leadership. The development in the church’s understanding of its leadership was part of its development in understanding itself as an alternate society, a *polis* which needed to be ruled, governed and protected just as any other *polis* in the empire.

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<sup>45</sup> See Yeago, 151.

<sup>46</sup> Yeago, 151.

### *A Christian Material Culture*

One may argue, of course, that by this definition, the notion of the church as a “culture” existed in a loose sense from the very beginning of the Christian movement. However, something new arises in the late second, early third century. The development of a distinctly Christian “material culture” at this time gives rise to a more robust, visible, and “public” dimension to Christianity. The development of Christian art and architecture produces the possibility of a new stage in the church’s self-understanding, its politico-theological ecclesiology expressed and represented in more concrete ways. As scholars like Paul Corby Finney, Richard Krautheimer and L. Michael White have demonstrated, this material culture blossomed in the late second and early third century. White’s findings, for example, suggest that the Christian assembly shifted from house-church meeting places to the *domus ecclesiae* roughly between 180-200 A.D. In the house church stage, Christians met for worship in buildings that were also used as domiciles. Between 180-200 A.D., however, Christians began to purchase and renovate existing buildings or build new buildings for the sole purpose of public Christian worship. In other words, a new visible Christian “sacred space” was emerging at the end of the second century or beginning of the third century, the same period in which a Christian priesthood arises.

The work of Paul Corby Finney also sheds light on this cultural development, for he identifies roughly the year 200 A.D. as “the likely *terminus a quo* for the creation of distinctively Christian art.”<sup>47</sup> Before that period, there was no uniquely Christian art; Christians would adapt the style and models of their pagan neighbors. By the late second century, however, a new stage erupts in the development of a material Christian culture. Using the example of the catacomb of

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<sup>47</sup> Paul Corby Finney, *The Invisible God: The Earliest Christians on Art* (New York: Oxford U.P., 1994), 146.

St. Callistus (dated roughly 190-200 A.D.) in which pagan artwork is given new meaning in light of the context of Christian space (the catacomb), Finney concludes that the Callistus project “represents the transition from models of accommodation and adaptation that were materially invisible to a new level of Christian identity that was *palpable* and *visible*.”<sup>48</sup> In turn, the rise of a distinctly Christian art results in the “emergence of a separate, materially defined religious culture.”<sup>49</sup> In other words, this new materially defined culture brings a new stage in the Church’s ecclesiological self-identity: its culture is now visible and tangible, in distinction from both the Jewish and the Roman world.

How, then, does the existence of such a cultural reality bear upon the issue of a Christian priesthood? With regard to the architectural and artistic developments, a sacred space and the emergence of a more materially defined identity would invite a new understanding of the Church as Culture. It would facilitate a re-conceptualization of the role and function of one who presides over the emerging sacred space and objects as a “priest.” Chronologically, the development of this sacred space and material culture, and the rise of the designation “priest” for the bishop occur at nearly the same time (late second/early third centuries), suggesting a correlation in development. In fact, as I will show, Christian writers of this very period demonstrate not only an awareness of this emerging material culture, but also a relationship between it and the designation of the Christian bishop as a priest.

### ***Continuity with Israel***

The second aspect of this Christian politico-theological ecclesiology lies in the church’s understanding of itself in connection with Israel. As defined earlier, the church as a culture

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<sup>48</sup> Finney, *Invisible God*, 151. Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>49</sup> Finney, *Invisible God*, 289.

included symbols and practices embodied in an overarching narrative. The Jewish Scriptures, and the events and history of Israel contained within those Scriptures, became the “symbols” and “overarching narrative” for the culture of the church. In turn, these symbols helped shape the community’s understanding of itself in the world.<sup>50</sup> When the church read the Scriptures, they implicitly identified the story of Israel as its story. As George Lindbeck remarks, “Israel’s story, transposed into a new key through Christ, became prototypical for the history of the church” such that Israel’s story became “a template which help[ed] shape Christian communities.”<sup>51</sup> Thus the Church’s ecclesiology has both a political edge to it (seeing itself as an alternate society in the Roman world) and a theological edge to it (seeing itself as in some sense connected to Israel). Together, this self-understanding of the church is its *politico-theological ecclesiology*.

As a result, then, when ancient Christian writers looked at Israel, they saw a divine nation corresponding to their own cultural reality in the world. “The ekklesia,” as Yeago says, “is nonetheless precisely the same narrative subject as the Old Testament people of God.”<sup>52</sup> When they looked to the old covenant priesthood, they saw a figure and model for their own leadership. Finally, when they considered their own leadership, they introduced a Levitical paradigm as a type of Christian office. Their politico-theological ecclesiology influenced their understanding of Christian ministry.

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<sup>50</sup> See Geertz, 3, for his discussion of the dynamic between symbols, ethos and worldview.

<sup>51</sup> George Lindbeck, “The Church” in *Keeping the Faith: Essays to Mark the Centenary of Lux Mundi*, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright (London: S.P.C.K., 1989), 184, 190.

<sup>52</sup> Yeago, 155.

Examination of the Christian ministerial priesthood in light of this ecclesiological connection with Israel has a few proponents;<sup>53</sup> however, none of the scholars who have suggested this direction have done much in the way of careful examination of the Patristic texts on the relationship between priesthood and ecclesiological self-identity. Some scholars like P.M. Gy, Dom Botte, F.L. Cross and J. Schmitt have all noted, for example, the use of Old Testament texts by the Fathers to support the understanding of the character and function of the Christian priest, but they offer no further reflection on why the Church began to do this in the early third century. That such ancient writers rely so heavily on Old Testament priesthood texts suggests further examination in this direction.<sup>54</sup>

From a more theological perspective, scholars such as A.E. J. Rawlinson, Theodore Stylianopoulos, George Lindbeck, Thomas M. Lindsay, John Zizioulas and Joseph Ratzinger have intimated at and explicitly identified the connection between Israel and the Church as a major factor in priestly developments in the Church. Typically, these theological works lack historical and textual evidence to substantiate such conclusions, but their intuitive claims call for

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<sup>53</sup> J. Schmitt, "Jewish Priesthood and Christian Hierarchy in the Early Palestinian Communities" in *The Sacrament of Holy Order: Some papers and discussions concerning holy order at a session of the Centre de Pastorale Liturgique*, 1955 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1962), 60; Hanson, *Christian Priesthood Examined*, 45-46; Noll, 43; and Lindsay, 34-35.

<sup>54</sup> Other scholars have noted that some interaction or tension with Judaism may have played a part in priestly developments, but textual and historical examination to date have been rather brief and general. R.P.C. Hanson (1979), Ray Robert Noll, Robert Murray and James Burtchaell, for example, have all suggested that the dynamic presented in Jewish-Christian tensions played some role in the formation of Christian organization and hierarchy, but the rise of a Christian priesthood, proper, is rarely treated. I will touch on this issue periodically in certain chapters, but it will not be a major aspect of my argument.



more serious examination in the ancient Christian writers themselves to see if such an ecclesiology lies behind priestly designations.<sup>55</sup>

I find Richard Norris' comments extremely helpful in pointing in this direction. He recognizes that as the office of bishop developed, it "became the subject not merely of customary and canonical regulation, but also of theological reflection," that is, the Church's "place and role in the economy of salvation."<sup>56</sup> Although Norris does not make direct application upon the priesthood issue here, his insight points in the right direction to consider how the Church saw itself in the divine economy (e.g. "people of God" or "Israel") which in turn illuminates how it saw its ministers. No comprehensive examination of this idea has been undertaken yet.

One may object, again, that this ecclesiological understanding of the Church in relation to Israel existed from the beginning of the Christian movement. That is true; more recently, however, the scholarly opinion has come to see that the tension between Judaism and Christianity did not end in the first century. In fact, the dynamics of Jewish-Christian interaction, dialogue and understanding of "Israel" continued well into the fourth century. Scholars like Marcel Simon, Robert Wilken, Daniel Boyarin, and others have made this clear.<sup>57</sup> This is important for my discussion; in recognizing the development of a Levitical priestly model

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<sup>55</sup> For a few exceptions to the lack of historical investigation on this angle, see Dix, *Jurisdiction*, 32-34 and Hans von Campenhausen, regarding Origen in particular (*Kirchliches Amt und geistliche Vollmacht in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* [Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1963], 281-289).

<sup>56</sup> Richard Norris, "The Beginnings of Christian Priesthood" *ATR* 66 Supplemental Series 9 (1984): 27.

<sup>57</sup> Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel : étude sur les relations entre chrétiens et juifs dans l'empire romain (135-425)* (Paris : E. de Boccard, 1964); Robert Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind: A Study of Cyril of Alexandria's Exegesis and Theology* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1971), esp.9-28; *ibid.*, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and reality in the late fourth century* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1983); Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God : martyrdom and the making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

for Christian leadership, one must not neglect or underestimate the importance of the on-going dynamic between Christianity and Judaism of its time, particularly the attempt of Christians to set themselves up in continuity with Israel, yet distinction from Jews.<sup>58</sup>

In addition, certain scholars have come to see that while the Temple destruction in 70 A.D. was significant for both Jewish and Christian self-understanding, it was not until after 135 in the Bar Kochba revolt that a more certain shift in self-understanding took place with respect to Christian regard for Judaism and God's intentions and stance toward the Jews.<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, the role of Marcion in the Jewish-Christian debate must be considered as well. As those like Marcion pushed to further distance Christianity from Judaism and the Jewish Scriptures, others in the Church reacted with a recovery of the emphasis on *continuity* with Israel by appropriating OT language and Israelite institutions more fully. Only in affirming both the continuities with, yet the transformation of Israel, could the Church retain the Jewish Scriptures and its self-designation as "Israel." In affirming this ecclesiology, however, the Church also enabled the fuller appropriation and application of certain Jewish Scriptures such as the Levitical institution of the priesthood.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> I will not spend a lot of time on this issue, but I will explore it in certain texts where such investigation proves illuminating.

<sup>59</sup> See for example, Mohler, 49; Brown, 18; Alexandre Faivre, *Ordonner la fraternité : pouvoir d'innover et retour à l'ordre dans l'église ancienne* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1992), 78-79; Kenneth Clark suggests that the Temple cult was still in operation in Jerusalem until 135, and that Christians prior to 135 still seem to hold a certain respect for the sacrifice in Jerusalem ("Worship in Jerusalem Temple after 70 AD" *NTS* 6 no.4 [1960], 269-80); James Dunn, *Jews and Christians : the parting of the ways A.D. 70 to 135* (Tübingen : Mohr, 1992); and Wilson, S.G. *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians, 70-170 C.E.* Minneapolis, MN : Fortress Press, 1995.

<sup>60</sup> Note for example, the it was not until the mid third century, with Origen, that a full treatment of Leviticus was even attempted by the Church.

These historical occasions regarding the Jewish-Christian dynamics ultimately led to a politico-theological ecclesiology which affirmed a continuity with, yet transformation of Israel, fulfilled and perfected in Christ and his Church. As this further-defined ecclesiological self-identity took root, it allowed for the continued appropriation of Jewish texts, such as those regarding Israelite cultic leadership. Taken together, the emergence of a distinctly Christian material culture combining with a robust politico-theological ecclesiology, created a fresh context in which a new understanding of Christian leadership could develop. The Christian bishop now could be seen as the ruler of the Christian *polis* (including its sacred space and objects) who presided over the sacred worship space of the Church—a typological counterpart to the Israelite priest who presided over the sacred worship space of Israel.

Other historical examples of a politico-theological ecclesiology driving the Church's practice and use of Scripture are known. Consider Walter Ullmann's work *The Carolingian Renaissance and the Idea of Kingship* (1969). In his research, Ullman explores how the ecclesiological ideals of the Carolingian Empire in the eighth and ninth centuries (i.e. seeing the Franks as the 'populus Dei') stimulated the monarchical conceptions of "the king by the grace of God" in which Old Testament kingly texts as well as the Old Testament practice of unction gained common practice.<sup>61</sup> Ullmann observes, "The ecclesiastical writers enveloped the ruler with the aura and the mythos of an Old Testament kingly figure..."<sup>62</sup> thus bolstering the authority and power of the monarch. In this work, Ullmann clearly demonstrates that the Franks' self-understanding as the "populus Dei" drove their practice (the use of unction) and their

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<sup>61</sup> Walter Ullmann, *The Carolingian Renaissance and the Idea of Kingship* (London: Methuen, 1969), 43-48, 64.

<sup>62</sup> Ullmann, 53.

understanding of the king (as an Old Testament type for Christian monarchy). Their politico-theological ecclesiology shaped the Carolingian understanding of kingship and their use of Old Testament kingly texts.

### **The Task of the Present Study**

This study, then, will attempt to shed further light on the understanding of the rise of a Christian ministerial priesthood in the early church. My aim is to demonstrate that as the church's awareness of a newly emerging material culture (such as sacred space and sacred objects) combined with a developing politico-theological ecclesiology (understanding the church as a distinct alternate public society in continuity with Israel), it created the ideal context in which the Israelite Levitical priesthood was appropriated as a working typology for the Christian ministerial leadership. In examining texts where writers speak of this Christian priesthood, I will explore a variety of questions. What are the roles and functions ascribed to bishop-priests (i.e. what do these priests do)? What clues are given regarding the model of priesthood from which this designation is derived? Do these writers articulate or imply a politico-theological ecclesiology in connection with their designations of the Christian leader as a priest? Further, what connection do these writers suggest between the ministerial priesthood and their awareness of a Christian material culture?

Finally, in what ways do these writers portray the Christian ministerial priesthood as a typological appropriation of the Old Testament priesthood? As a basic definition of typology, I offer R.P.C. Hanson's comments: typology is "a method of reading Christian significance into both events and persons in the Old Testament by seeing them as foreshadowings or types of

Christ or events connected with his work and career.”<sup>63</sup> In addition, Hanson emphasizes both the “similar situation” between the events and the “fulfillment” aspect of typology. He explains: “Christian typology . . . was a *fulfilled* typology, that is to say, it saw each of the Old Testament types as ultimately no more than prophecies or pointers to the reality which had taken place in the Christian dispensation.”<sup>64</sup> The realities of the Old Testament become “figures” or “types” of realities found in the New Testament, Christ, or his Church. The important point to observe here is that a typological interpretation works primarily as an analogy which entails both significant continuity yet also noticeable difference in development or transformation between the points of comparison. In other words, I suggest that early Christian writers were appropriating the Levitical priesthood “typologically” as an institution that foreshadowed or signified the future Christian ministry subsequent to, but connected with, Christ. As such, Christian writers saw both continuity between Israelite and Christian priesthood, yet also recognized important development or transformation from one dispensation to the other.<sup>65</sup> To demonstrate this mode of interpretation, I will explore the language of typology (*figura, forma, tupos*) employed by these writers when speaking about the Old Testament or Christian priesthood.

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<sup>63</sup> R.P.C. Hanson, “Biblical Exegesis in the Early Church” in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1, eds. P.R. Ackroyd and C.F. Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1970), 413. Charles Kannengiesser offers an equally helpful clarification of what a “type” is: “a person, an event or an institution with a lasting significance which enables that person, event or institution to signify someone or something else in God’s future acting in history” (*Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, vol. 1 [Boston: Brill, 2004], 230).

<sup>64</sup> R.P.C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event: A study of the sources and significance of Origen’s interpretation of scripture* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1959), 67 italics original. See pp.7 & 22 for his formal definition which emphasizes the aspect of “similar situation” between type and antitype.

<sup>65</sup> For example, early Christian writers are very clear that their priests neither offer bloody animal sacrifices, nor that they come from a special lineage such as Aaron. While stressing other continuities between old and new priests, these examples demonstrate that there were also noticeable differences between the “types”.

In addition to the constructive thesis, I hope also to demonstrate a negative conclusion as a by-product of this project. Namely, in demonstrating the church's designation of a ministerial priesthood in connection with a politico-theological ecclesiology and an emerging Christian material culture, the idea either that the Christian priesthood was modeled on the pagan priesthood or that the Christian priesthood arose solely in connection with the Eucharistic sacrifice, falls short. I will at times take pause to highlight the shortcomings of such ideas in light of the evidence I present.

In general, my argument will proceed along chronological lines, examining the developing Christian ministerial priesthood from its clear inception in the early third century up through the beginning of the fourth century.<sup>66</sup> Since no one thinker and no one treatise can cover both the chronological spread and the geographical acceptance of such developments, I will be tracing the issue through a diversity of thinkers, over a number of decades, across a variety of geographic locations.

I will begin, in chapter 2, with an examination of Tertullian of Carthage, the first consistent witness to the Christian designation of the bishop as a *sacerdos*. Though his references are infrequent, a generally clear picture can be ascertained concerning Tertullian's understanding of the Christian priest in connection with his politico-theological ecclesiology and especially his awareness of an emerging material culture. One treatise in particular (*On Modesty*) demonstrates this relationship in Tertullian's understanding. There he portrays not

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<sup>66</sup> The development of the priesthood, of course, continues in the East and West through to the modern day. I choose to end my study in the early fourth century with Eusebius of Caesarea because with him the notion of a Christian ministerial priesthood in connection with the church's politico-theological ecclesiology and awareness of a Christian material culture finds its climax and stabilization.

only the Levitical priest as a *figura* for the Christian *sacerdos*, but he also depicts the Christian worship space in concrete, physical ways as the sacred space which the bishop, like the Levitical priests, must guard and protect.

Chapters 3 and 4 will examine two different Church Orders. Chapter 3 addresses an early Western Order (*The Apostolic Tradition*) and demonstrates the link between priesthood and politico-theological ecclesiology, even if only in subtle ways. There are striking similarities between the description of the Christian bishop and the OT Levitical priesthood, as ones who “stand and minister before the Lord”, indicating the author’s intentional evocation of the Levitical priesthood as a model or “type” for Christian leadership. Moreover, the *Apostolic Tradition* provides one of the earliest indications of an emerging Christian material culture in its references to *topos*, *locus* and Christian cemeteries. I will demonstrate further that this emerging Christian space plays an important part in the functions and responsibilities of the bishop-priest.

An examination of the Eastern Church Order known as the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, in chapter 4, will demonstrate a continuation of this development. There, the bishop is described in distinctly Levitical ways, such as the “steward of God” and his “house” and the one who “serves in the holy tabernacle, the holy catholic Church.” Moreover, the author also betrays an awareness of an emerging material culture to which the bishop-priest must attend. Just as the Israelite priest was an “attendant to God’s house” (the physical Tabernacle or Temple), so too the bishop is portrayed typologically as the “steward of God’s house” (the physical Church building and Christian *sacra*).

Chapter 5 will demonstrate that Origen of Alexandria also displays similar connections between a Christian ministerial priesthood and a politico-theological ecclesiology. He depicts the

Church both as an alternate *polis* in the Greco-Roman world, and as a people in continuity with, yet transformation of Israel. Combined, this politico-theological ecclesiology enables him to appropriate the Levitical priestly ministry of the Old Testament in a typological way for Christian leadership. Like the nation of Israel, the Church too, says Origen, exists as its own *polis*, complete with Christian sacred things (*sacra*) and a ministerial priesthood which performs the necessary liturgical functions for the community.

Moving back to the West, I will examine Cyprian of Carthage in chapter 6. Like the preceding chapters, I will demonstrate that Cyprian also understands the Levitical priesthood as a typology for Christian ministers, particularly in their role as liturgical leaders and ecclesial authorities. Likewise, he displays a conscious awareness of a Christian material culture (pulpits, altars, buildings) over which the bishop presides. Using the OT priesthood as the “rule and pattern (*forma*) now held in the clergy (*in clero*),” Cyprian describes the bishop as the “attendants of God” who “wait on the altar.”

Chapter 7 takes us to the early fourth century: the post-Constantinian Eusebius of Caesarea. Examining his panegyric on the dedication of the church building in Tyre, I will demonstrate that Eusebius, likewise, couches his priestly designations of Christian bishops in a politico-theological ecclesiology. The building of the Tyrian church becomes a reflection of Old Testament accounts of the building of the Tabernacle and the first and second Temples. Christian churches are represented as Christian sacred spaces over which the bishop, like the OT priest, must preside.

Finally, in chapter 8, I will conclude by comparing the third and early fourth century developments with the earlier evidence of the New Testament and Apostolic Fathers, showing



that the Christian ministerial priesthood in the third century is more than an institutional creation *ex nihilo*, but rather the continuation and advancement of the Church's earlier ecclesiological and cultural trajectories. The New Testament and Apostolic Fathers, though never calling the Christian ministers "priests," all demonstrate a certain arc in that direction through its nascent politico-theological ecclesiology and analogical appropriation of the Old Testament priesthood. This evidence indicates that the developments seen in the third and fourth centuries are in fact not new, but rather advance and develop previous self-understanding and practice in the earlier Church.

## CHAPTER 2

### GUARDIANS OF SACRED SPACE: TERTULLIAN OF CARTHAGE

#### Introduction

The first witness to a consistent application of the title *sacerdos* to Christian leadership comes from Tertullian of Carthage around 200 A.D. The occurrences are not frequent and discerning Tertullian's full understanding of a ministerial priesthood is difficult with such a dearth of references. Nevertheless, Tertullian's appropriation of *sacerdos* as a title for the Christian bishop remains significant. Not only is he the first writer to repeatedly apply the designation, he also clearly derives that appropriation from the Levitical priesthood. Thus his description of the bishop as a *sacerdos* reveals a typological appropriation of the Israelite priesthood within the context of a politico-theological understanding of the church. Moreover, Tertullian clearly identifies the role of the bishop as the guardian of Christian sacred space as central to his designation of the minister as a *sacerdos*. This chapter is significant, then, in demonstrating both the figural reading of the Levitical priesthood and the importance of an emerging material culture for the Christian church in shaping its understanding of Christian leadership.

#### A Christian Ministerial Priesthood

Tertullian designates the Christian leader a *sacerdos* in only four instances.<sup>67</sup> Important to note as well, Tertullian's Montanist conception of the bishop as a priest does not differ from his pre-Montanist days. As David Rankin has demonstrated, Tertullian freely designates the

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<sup>67</sup> There is a fifth instance of priestly designation (*De Pud.* 1.6); however, on this occasion, Tertullian sarcastically calls an opposing bishop a *pontifex maximus* to mock his arrogance. I briefly discuss this text below.

Christian bishop a priest in texts written from both time periods.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, for my purposes, a careful distinction between pre and post-Montanist works is unnecessary.

In his work *On Baptism*, Tertullian explains who can give and receive baptism, remarking: “Indeed the supreme right of giving (baptism) belongs to the bishop who is the high priest (*summus sacerdos*), if anyone is (*si qui est*).”<sup>69</sup> No further explanation is given. The connection between the right of baptism and the priesthood of the bishop, however, is unmistakable.

In his Montanist work *Exhortation to Chastity*, Tertullian speaks vehemently against Christians marrying twice, even if one’s first wife has died. In chapter 11, he argues that one wife is spiritually distracting enough; two even more so. “For,” he says, “the shame is double, since after a second marriage, two wives stand beside the husband, one in the spirit, the other in the flesh.”<sup>70</sup> Such a man, argues Tertullian, will continue to remember the first wife in his

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<sup>68</sup> See David Rankin, “Tertullian’s Consistency of Thought on Ministry” *Studia Patristica* 21 (1989): 271-276; Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1995); and Colin Bulley, *The Priesthood of Some Believers* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2000), 75. Compare the opposing view, espoused by Adhemar D’Ales, *La Théologie de Tertullien* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1905) and Gustave Bardy, “Le Sacerdoce Chrétien d’après Tertullien” *La Vie Spirituelle* 58 (1939): 109-134. The point D’Ales and Bardy wish to make is that Tertullian seemed to emphasize the priesthood of all Christians more in his Montanist days. Nevertheless, as Rankin has demonstrated, Tertullian still uses the term *sacerdos* in both periods to designate the bishop.

<sup>69</sup> *De Baptismo* 17.2, *CCSL* 1:291. The Latin of this passage is admittedly difficult; scholars have offered different translations for the phrase *summus sacerdos, si qui est, episcopus*, but the general sense is understood: the bishop is the one with the right of baptizing, and if anyone is called a *summus sacerdos*, it is him. See Maurice Bevenot, “Tertullian’s Thought about the Christian Priesthood” *Corona Gratiarum*, vol. 1, eds. A.J. de Smedt et al (Bruges: Sint Pietersabdij, 1975), 129; and Bulley, 69-70.

<sup>70</sup> *De Exhortatione Castitatis* 11.1, *CCSL* 2:1031.

prayers and will offer oblations on her behalf.<sup>71</sup> He continues his argument: “Will you therefore stand before the Lord with as many wives as you remember in prayer? Will you make an offering for two wives and recommend them both through the priest (*per sacerdotem*) who was ordained by virtue of his monogamy?”<sup>72</sup> Here the designation of the Christian minister as a *sacerdos* is used without explanation, this time in relation to the offering of the sacrifice.

Finally, Tertullian employs sacerdotal designations for the Christian leader in his work *On Modesty*. In this treatise, Tertullian is adamant about refusing a second repentance after baptism for those who have committed egregious sins. He cites as evidence for his argument Hebrews 6:4-8 and concludes that this author “never knew of any second repentance for an adulterer or fornicator.”<sup>73</sup> This moves him into a discussion of the Old Testament purity laws which held “types” (*figuras*) for the present day. He takes the case of leprosy as an example: if a man with leprosy should become entirely white, the priest shall declare him clean; if however, the leprosy reappears, he must again be declared unclean (Lev. 13:13-14). Tertullian applies this to his present situation: if after baptism “that which was considered dead to sin in his flesh returns, it is now to be judged unclean and is not to be expiated by a priest (*sacerdote*). Thus adultery, recurring again from that pristine state and defiling the unity of the new color from which it was excluded, is a sin unable to be cleansed.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Presumably prayers offered in the worship service, most likely in association with the Eucharistic offering.

<sup>72</sup> *Exh. Cast.* 11.2, *CCSL* 2:1031.

<sup>73</sup> *De Pudicitia* 20.5, *CCSL* 2:1324.

<sup>74</sup> *De Pud.* 20.7, *CCSL* 2:1324-1325. In this context, “expiation by a priest” most likely refers to the action of the bishop declaring someone forgiven and thus reinstated into the community and welcomed to Eucharistic participation.

Likewise, Tertullian appropriates the law of the diseased house: if a house is found to contain reddish and green spots on the walls, the priest is to examine the house. If the disease remains after seven days, the defiled stones or wood must be removed and replaced with clean material. If, however, the disease returns, the house is declared unclean and the priest must tear the house down (Lev. 14:33-47). Tertullian then makes application to his present situation: “This will be the man (in flesh and soul) who after baptism and the entering of the priest (*sacerdotum*), resumes anew the disease and stains of the flesh . . . and is not rebuilt any further in the church after his ruin.”<sup>75</sup>

To this point, Tertullian has been playing with an extended analogy between the Levitical cleanliness laws and the impossibility of a second repentance after baptism. Moreover, the priests of old are likened to the Christian leaders responsible for admitting or refusing Christians into the church. Just as the cleanliness laws act as *figuras* for the laws of the church, so too the old covenant priests become figures for Christian ministers. Tertullian then makes the appropriation more explicit. Not only must an adulterer be excluded from the church, God alone, not a human leader, has the authority to grant forgiveness to such sinners. He concludes by saying, “For the right and authority (to forgive such sins) is the Lord’s, not the servant’s; God’s himself, not the priest’s (*sacerdotis*).”<sup>76</sup> The working analogy between Israelite priest and Christian leader becomes more explicit in Tertullian’s overt designation of the bishop as a *sacerdos*. The Christian bishop as *sacerdos*, argues Tertullian, has a responsibility in the

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<sup>75</sup> *De Pud.* 20.12, *CCSL* 2:1325. By the “entering of the priest,” Tertullian likely refers metaphorically to the bishop’s examination of the baptizand’s life.

<sup>76</sup> *De Pud.* 21.17, *CCSL* 2:1328.

administration of penance, but certain sins (such as adultery or fornication) are beyond even the authority of the ministerial priests.<sup>77</sup>

From these texts, then, one can see that although not frequent, Tertullian does employ *sacerdos* in reference to the Christian leader, tying the designation to nearly all of the bishop's liturgical responsibilities: baptism, sacrifice, and penance. The first point to note, then, is that Tertullian connects *sacerdos* not solely to Eucharistic functions, but to all liturgical duties in the church. The *sacerdotes* are those who preside over the whole church and its sacramental life.

Moreover, there are a few other instances where Tertullian speaks of "priestly functions" (*sacerdotalia munera*) and a "priestly order" (*sacerdotalis ordo*). In his *Prescription Against Heretics*, Tertullian retorts with an ironic tone that under the leadership of the orthodox church,

the gospel was preached wrongly, it was believed wrongly, so many thousands were baptized wrongly, so many works of faith were performed wrongly, so many virtues, so many gifts were acted out wrongly, so many priesthoods (*sacerdotia*), so many ministries (*ministeria*) were performed wrongly, so many martyrs were crowned wrongly!<sup>78</sup>

His point of course is to show the absurdity of the heretics' arguments that the church did not get it right until the Marcionites and Valentinians arrived, that everything done before then was done "wrongly". In the context of this sarcastic jab, however, one sees that Tertullian likens the *ministeria* of the church to a *sacerdotia*. The context does not give clear indication about what

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<sup>77</sup> I take Tertullian's reference to the Christian leader as a *sacerdos* at face value. He does not qualify or object to the designation itself, only to the abuse of power that some bishops were exercising for themselves. Thus, I take issue with Bevenot's conclusion that because "his treating the bishop as 'sacerdos' was not meant to be complimentary" therefore Tertullian was not necessarily comfortable with such designations (137). From the entire preceding chapter (*De Pud.* 20) it is clear that Tertullian quite freely employs the sacerdotal analogy to Christian leadership without apology.

<sup>78</sup> *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 29.3, *CCSL* 1:209-210.

that *sacerdotia* entailed, only that certain service (*ministeria*), most likely liturgical acts such as preaching and baptism, were included.

A few chapters later in the same work, Tertullian continues his attack on the heretics, this time for their obvious lack of order in the community. They operate “without seriousness, without authority, without discipline.”<sup>79</sup> He sharpens his critique by noting, “And so today one man is a bishop, tomorrow another; today one is a deacon who tomorrow is a reader; today one is a presbyter who tomorrow is a layman. For they even impose on laymen the priestly functions (*sacerdotalia munera*).”<sup>80</sup> Here the context helps identify the “priestly functions” as including the offices of bishop, presbyter, and possibly reader.<sup>81</sup> In other words, the functions necessary for the liturgical operation of the community are deemed by Tertullian as *sacerdotalia munera*.

The liturgical operations of the church cast as “priestly functions” are found again in his treatise *On the Veiling of Virgins*. There, Tertullian attempts to demonstrate that the ecclesiastical rules applying to women should equally apply to virgins. As such, veiling of virgins is consistent with other practices of women in general. He begins with a reference to Paul’s words in 1 Cor. 14:34-35 that women are not permitted to speak in church. He then augments and clarifies that rule: “neither is a woman permitted to teach (*docere*), nor to baptize (*tingere*), nor to offer (*offerre*), nor to claim for herself any male function (*ullius virilis muneris*), still less the lot of the priestly office (*sacerdotalis officii*).”<sup>82</sup> In other words, the priestly office, according to Tertullian, entails the functions (*munera*) of teaching, baptizing and making

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<sup>79</sup> *De Praes.* 41.1, *CCSL* 1:221.

<sup>80</sup> *De Praes.* 41.8, *CCSL* 1:222.

<sup>81</sup> It is not certain that Tertullian includes “reading” as part of these priestly functions; however, the context seems to imply that all the liturgical actions and responsibilities are entailed in the *sacerdotalia munera*.

<sup>82</sup> *De Virginibus Velandis* 9.1, *CCSL* 2:1218-1219.

sacrifice. Again, the liturgical functions within the community (teaching, baptizing, sacrifice) are described by Tertullian as “priestly”.

Finally, in his *Exhortation to Chastity*, Tertullian draws upon the Levitical priesthood yet again in designating Christian ministry as a “priestly order” (*ordo sacerdotalis*). Fomenting against Christians who want to marry twice, Tertullian urges an examination of the “model of antiquity (*formam vestutatis*),” as a pattern of discipline and order. “For behold,” he says,

in the old law I observe the license of repeated marriage being restricted. A caution is given in Leviticus: ‘My priests shall not marry several times.’ . . . Therefore, the apostle more fully and more closely orders that the one who is chosen into the priestly order (*ordinem sacerdotalem*) must be a man of one marriage (cf. 1 Tim.3:2; Tit.1:6).<sup>83</sup>

In this passage, Tertullian clearly has the Christian bishop in mind, referencing the prescription in the pastoral epistles that a bishop must be a man of one wife. Furthermore, he identifies the episcopal office as the “priestly order” directly tying it to the Levitical priesthood. Although no one knows for sure what Levitical passage Tertullian has in mind, it is clear that he is working out an analogy between old covenant priestly leadership and the Christian office of the bishop.

From these passages, then, one can see that Tertullian is freely employing priestly concepts and terminology to Christian leadership. While not always clear about what that priesthood entails, the composite picture indicates that Tertullian attaches his priestly notions not merely to the function of offering sacrifice,<sup>84</sup> but to a much wider array of tasks and responsibilities in the community: baptizing, penance, preaching, and possibly even Scripture reading. In other words, according to Tertullian the ministerial leadership of the church is a

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<sup>83</sup> *Exh. Cast.* 7.1, *CCSL* 2:1024.

<sup>84</sup> Contra Albano Vilela who argues that *sacerdos* is always connected with sacrifice in Tertullian (*La Condition Collegiale des Prêtres au III<sup>e</sup> Siècle* [Paris : Beauchesne, 1971], 241-242).



priesthood by virtue of their responsibilities over the worshipping Christian community. From where then does this notion of a Christian ministerial priesthood derive? Does Tertullian give any intimations about the influences behind his description of Christian leaders as priests?

### **Politico-Theological Ecclesiology: The Church as a polis in continuity with Israel**

Although Tertullian by no means depicts a fully developed understanding of Christian priesthood, he does nevertheless provide a few indications of what drives him in this direction. As seen above, in two separate passages (*On Modesty* 20-21 and *Exh. Chast.* 7) Tertullian draws out an extended analogy between Israelite priesthood and Christian priesthood. The Levitical priests become “types” (*figuras*) for the Christian ministerial office. The old priesthood and its laws act as a “model of antiquity” (*formam vestutatis*), a pattern from which Tertullian can derive his understanding of Christian leadership and its discipline. As Paul Mattei suggests, “It is necessary to see in the Christian domain the re-employment of the Old Testament terms *hiereus* (*sacerdos*), *hierosune* (*sacerdotium*) and especially *leitourgia* (*ministerium*) which applied to the Levitical priesthood and to the sacrificial worship of the Old Law.”<sup>85</sup> The Christian community is a public worshipping assembly likened to the Israelite nation, and at odds with the surrounding pagan culture. As such, the Church is a culture in its own right, distinct from the surrounding cultures.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> “Il faut y voir en domaine chretien le remploi des termes vetero-testamentaires *hiereus* (*sacerdos*), *hierosune* (*sacerdotium*) et surtout *leitourgia* (*ministerium*) qui s’appliquaient au sacerdoce levitique et au culte sacrificiel de l’Ancienne Loi.” Paul Mattei, “Habere Ius Sacerdotis’: Sacerdoce et Laicat au Témoignage de Tertullien” *Revue des sciences religieuses* 59 no.3-4 (1985): 200.

<sup>86</sup> This makes sense, of course, in Tertullian’s Montanist days when he moves to an even more extreme separatist position; however, he clearly views the Church as a unique “culture” in his pre-Montanist writings as well, demonstrating that Tertullian’s politico-theological ecclesiology is consistent in both eras.

This becomes clear in Tertullian's treatise, *On the Apparel of Women*, where he describes the sharp differences of practice and custom between Christians and gentiles. Tertullian reminds the Christian community that in addition to a difference in dress and appearance, "you neither wander through the temples, nor demand public shows, nor have any acquaintance with the feast days of the Gentiles."<sup>87</sup> In *To the Nations*, Tertullian likewise writes that Christians form an alternate society which battles "against the institutions (*institutiones*) of our ancestors, the authority of things received, the laws of our rulers"<sup>88</sup> which are all steeped in the worship of false gods. Finally in his treatise *On the Crown*, Tertullian expresses his most explicit articulation of this notion that the Church is an alternate society, distinct from the surrounding culture. There, he declares:

But your ranks (*ordines*) and your magistrates (*magistratus*) and the very name of your court (*curiae*) is the church of Christ (*ecclesia Christi*) . . . You are a foreigner in this world and a citizen (*civis*) of the heavenly city Jerusalem. 'Our citizenship,' Paul says, 'is in heaven' (Phil 3:20). You have your own registers (*census*) and your own calendars (*fastos*).<sup>89</sup>

In this brief passage, Tertullian accumulates a series of Roman political vocabulary: *ordo*, *magistratus*, *curia*, *civis*, *census*, *fastus*. Yet, he redefines the meaning in a Christian context so that the political vocabulary expressing *Roman* identity and culture is appropriated and transformed as political vocabulary expressing *Christian* identity and culture. Christians, too, have ranks and leaders; however, says Tertullian, their "citizenship" belongs to the heavenly city, Jerusalem, the church of Christ, and not to the Roman world. The Christian church, then, is portrayed as a *polis* in its own right, a public society distinct from the surrounding culture of the

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<sup>87</sup> *De Cultu Feminarum* II.11.1, *CCSL* 1:366.

<sup>88</sup> *Ad Nationes* II.1.7, *CCSL* 1:41.

<sup>89</sup> *De Corona* 13.1, 4, *CCSL* 2:1060-1061.

Roman world. The Christian church, according to Tertullian, is its own culture, complete with rules, rites, registers, calendars, customs and behavior, and, of course, leadership.

Tertullian describes this leadership of the new Christian *polis* in a variety of ways, some of which evoke the Roman political system (such as *magistratus* [*De Cor.* 13.1] and *ordo* [*De Monog.* 8.4; 11.4]). The work of van Beneden has demonstrated that Tertullian was the first to apply this latter term such that the Church *ordo* evoked similar language used in public institutions.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, the Christian rulers, like the Roman rulers, have a certain authority (*ius/potestas*) over the people. Tertullian ascribes to them the *ius docendi*,<sup>91</sup> the *ius dandi baptisimi*,<sup>92</sup> the *potestas delicta donandi*,<sup>93</sup> and the *ius sacerdotis*.<sup>94</sup>

Given this explicit parallel with the vocabulary of Roman structures and authority, one might expect Tertullian's sacerdotal designations to draw upon the pagan priesthood as well. A close examination, however, reveals that this is decidedly not the case. Tertullian never designates Christian leaders as *sacerdos* when speaking to a pagan audience. This is particularly striking in *Apology* 39 where Tertullian gives a full description of Christian social life and practice. There, he describes the Church as a *curia*, a *corpus* with its own treasury, rites, customs, morals, discipline, and leadership. He clearly attempts to establish common ground between the Christian community and the Roman world; yet in this context, he calls the Christian leaders *seniores*, never *sacerdotes*. Had he understood the Christian ministerial priesthood as a

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<sup>90</sup> Pierre van Beneden, *Aux Origines d'Une Terminologie Sacramentelle: Ordo, ordinare, ordination dans la littérature chrétienne avant 313* (Louvain : Spicilegium sacrum Lovaniense, 1974), 49. See also Vilela, 228 for similar observations.

<sup>91</sup> *De Bapt.* 1.3, CCSL 1:277.

<sup>92</sup> *De Bapt.* 17.1, CCSL 1:291.

<sup>93</sup> *De Pud.* 21.7, CCSL 2:1326.

<sup>94</sup> *Exh. Cast.* 7.4, CCSL 2:1025.

counterpart to the pagan priesthood, this would be the most natural place to make that point. Instead, Tertullian avoids the designation altogether. Moreover, the one instance in which Tertullian applies the more pagan title *pontifex maximus* to a Christian bishop (*On Modesty* 1.1), his intention is to mock an opposing bishop who has acquired for himself too much power.<sup>95</sup>

Elsewhere, when he does speak of the pagan priesthood, as expected he offers a very negative critique. The priesthood and sacrifices of the public games, for example are described as participation in “the assembly of demons” (*daemoniarum conventus*).<sup>96</sup> Likewise, in his *Prescription Against Heretics*, he eschews the priesthood and practices of the pagan world as a mere imitation of the Mosaic law. He urges them to consider “the priestly offices (*sacerdotalia officia*) and emblems and privileges, the sacrificial ministry and instruments and vessels, and the curiosities of their sacrifices and rites and prayers. Did not the devil clearly imitate that moroseness of the Jewish law?”<sup>97</sup> The pagan priesthood is at best a demonic knock-off of the divinely established Israelite priesthood.

In other words, Tertullian intentionally avoids the appearance of a correspondence between the pagan priesthood and the Christian priesthood. Instead, as seen already in *De Pud.* 20-21 & *Exh. Cast.* 7, he explicitly draws from the Old Testament Levitical priesthood as the pattern for Christian priestly order, discipline and leadership. The Church is portrayed as a unique culture, like the Roman world, with its own ranks, magistrates, citizens, registers and calendars, and leadership. Yet, the Church’s leadership is consistently grounded in the OT

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<sup>95</sup> Hans von Campenhausen suggests also that the term *pontifex maximus* still would have retained pagan overtones for Tertullian’s audience; this may be why Tertullian chooses to employ such a designation against his opponent (*Kirchliches Amt und geistliche Vollmacht in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* [Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1963], 252 n.3).

<sup>96</sup> *De Spectaculis* 7.3, *CCSL* 1:233.

<sup>97</sup> *De Praes.* 40.6, *CCSL* 1:220.

priestly order. The designation of the Christian leader as a *sacerdos* thus derives straight from Tertullian's politico-theological understanding of the Church. She is a public and political entity in the Roman world who shares a religious and priestly common ground not with the Roman culture, but with the nation of Israel and its institutions.

There is one final aspect of Tertullian's work important to this examination. Not only does Tertullian express his notion of a Christian ministerial priesthood in the context of a politico-theological ecclesiology, he also demonstrates an awareness of an emerging Christian material culture which in at least one text, relates to the ministerial priesthood.

### **Emerging Christian Material Culture**

As mentioned in my introduction, a distinctly Christian material culture did not arise in the Roman Empire until roughly 200 A.D. Before that period, Christians were relatively invisible to the pagan eye; they had no distinctly Christian art or architecture. By the late second or early third century, however, as Paul Finney has demonstrated, a new Christian visibility developed with the "emergence of a separate, materially defined religious culture."<sup>98</sup> What was once a largely invisible community within the *polis* or Empire was now beginning to gain land, property and money, and as a result, a new found public visibility.

This depiction of the Church as a *polis* with an emerging Christian material culture is exactly what we find in the archaeological evidence available in Carthage. The main piece of archaeological evidence pointing to this Christian reality in third century Carthage is the Damous

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<sup>98</sup> Paul Corby Finney, *The Invisible God: The Earliest Christians on Art* (New York: Oxford U.P., 1994), 289.

el-Karita.<sup>99</sup> W.C.H. Frend calls it “by far the most elaborate Christian complex yet found in the Carthage area. It consisted of a church . . . adjoining was a baptistery and a suite of cell-like buildings existing to the west. It was known that it stood over a cemetery.”<sup>100</sup> Frend and J. Ferron date this complex to the late second or early third century, precisely during the time of Tertullian.<sup>101</sup> The existence of a church building, a baptistery and a cemetery all indicate an emerging North African Christian culture that was material in nature.

From the texts examined above, one can begin to see Tertullian’s own awareness of the reality of just such a Christian material culture. The church is cast in politico-theological terms as an alternate society distinct from the Roman world in public and noticeable ways. This is more than rhetorical projection on the part of Tertullian, for he also provides the first textual witness to the emergence of Christian public space and place in the world, as well as a distinctly Christian material culture. He notes, for example, that Christians now have tombs and sepulchers in which the dead are buried. In one instance, he complains against the pagans: “with the very rage of the Bacchanals, they do not even spare the Christian dead, but tear them from their repose in the grave (*sepulturae*).”<sup>102</sup> Elsewhere, Tertullian speaks of a time “when the pagans cried out about the place of our graves (*de areis sepulturarum*): ‘No places (*areae*) for the Christians!’”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> See esp. *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, vol. 2.2, s.v. “Carthage” cols.2252ff.

<sup>100</sup> W. H. C. Frend, “Jews and Christians in Third Century Carthage” in *Paganisme, Judaïsme, Christianisme* (Paris : Éditions E De Boccard, 1978),190.

<sup>101</sup> Frend, “Jews and Christians,”190; and J. Ferrons, “Inscriptions juives de Carthage” *Cathiers de Byrsa I* (1951):184-187.

<sup>102</sup> *Apol.* 37.2, *CCSL* 1:148.

<sup>103</sup> *Ad Scapulam* 3.2, *CCSL* 2:1129.

The emergence of Christian art also appears in Tertullian when he speaks of the Eucharistic cup specially decorated with the image of the Shepherd. In his treatise *On Modesty*, he twice indicates his awareness of contemporary Christians who display “paintings upon your chalices” (*picturae calicum vestrorum*)<sup>104</sup> and “the shepherd whom you portray on your chalice (*in calice depingis*).”<sup>105</sup>

Likewise a number of references to the Christian *ecclesia* connote in their context an architectural reference. In *On Idolatry*, for example, Tertullian warns against Christian participation in idolatry of any form, lest he bewail “that a Christian should come from idols into the Church (*ab idolis in ecclesiam*), should come from a hostile workshop (*officina*) into the house of God (*domum dei*).”<sup>106</sup> As Harry Janssen has concluded, the best interpretation of the expression *ab idolis in ecclesiam* “ought to be understood literally, that is, spatially.”<sup>107</sup> Tertullian depicts an explicit contrast between the Christian going from one architectural structure to another, from the *officina* to the *domus dei*. He clearly has in mind a physical space set aside for Christian worship.

In his treatise *On the Flight in Persecution* he again depicts the Christian *ecclesia* in terms that connote an awareness of the physical nature of the building. There, he describes Christians “who with trembling assemble together in the church (*convenient in ecclesiam*) . . . [and] rally in large numbers into the church (*in ecclesiam*).”<sup>108</sup> From the context it is clear that

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<sup>104</sup> *De Pud.* 7.1, *CCSL* 2:1292.

<sup>105</sup> *De Pud.* 10.12, *CCSL* 2:1301.

<sup>106</sup> *De Idololatria* 7.1, *CCSL* 2:1106.

<sup>107</sup> “... wird wortlich, also local aufzufassen.” Harry Janssen, *Kultur und Sprache: Zur Geschichte der alten Kirche im Spiegel der Sprachentwicklung von Tertullian bis Cyprian* (Nijmegen, Dekker & Van de Vegt, 1938), 32.

<sup>108</sup> *De Fuga in Persecutione* 3.2, *CCSL* 2 :1139.

Tertullian's use of *ecclesia* is much more than a mere "assembly", but an actual physical space. He speaks of the *place* of assembly: the Christians gather in the church (*in ecclesiam*). Part of Tertullian's argument here is that unlike the heretics, true Christians should have no reason to hide their place of gathering. The Christian places of worship are well-known to their pagan adversaries. The Church is a public institution, known to the outside world, and growing in its visible manifestation in the world.

The heretics' lack of just such a public dimension becomes then part of Tertullian's critique on them. After reviewing the dissent and schisms found within the heretical movements, Tertullian further castigates them: "The majority of them do not even have churches (*ecclesias*). They are Motherless, houseless (*sine sede*), deprived of faith, exiled, wandering about."<sup>109</sup> In addition to having perverted the faith, Tertullian levels against them the accusation that they lack church buildings as well. While it is clear that *ecclesia* here refers to actual buildings, Franz Dölger also suggests that "by *sedes* Tertullian probably thinks of the spatial gathering place of the church community."<sup>110</sup> In other words, according to Tertullian, true Christians meet in designated spaces for worship; certain buildings can properly be identified as "churches". Those groups who lack such public, institutional reality are suspect in the eyes of Tertullian.

In the words of Victor Saxer, "it thus seems reasonable to allow that buildings did in fact exist for a cultic use in the time of Tertullian."<sup>111</sup> Tertullian's use of *ecclesia* in certain contexts

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<sup>109</sup> *De Praes.* 42.10, *CCSL* 1 :222.

<sup>110</sup> "Bei *sedes* [denkt Tertullian] wohl an den räumlichen Sammelpunkt der Kirchengemeinde." Franz Dölger, "Unserer Taube Haus: Die Lage des christlichen Kultbaues nach Tertullian" *Antike und Christentum: Kultur- und religionsgeschichtliche Studien*, vol. 2 (Munster: Aschendorf, 1930): 48-49.

<sup>111</sup> "Il me paraît donc raisonnable d'admettre qu'existaient effectivement, au temps de Tertullien, des édifices à usage cultuel" Victor Saxer, *Vie liturgique et quotidienne à Carthage*



lends itself to such an interpretation. This is not to say that Christians were constructing new buildings for worship. Nevertheless, there was an emerging sense of distinct, sacred Christian space and Christian objects set aside for specific use. A distinctly Christian material culture was emerging at this time and Tertullian demonstrates an awareness of such a development. The cups used in their worship services were not just ordinary cups; they were chalices specially designated for their task by the religious images depicted on them. Certain buildings were not just ordinary homes, but could be seen as an *ecclesia* or *domus dei*. As Timothy Barnes concludes, “by the time of Tertullian the city already contained at least one building (perhaps part of a private house) which could be described as a church.”<sup>112</sup>

All of the above texts give testimony to this subtle but significant development in the early third century. Tertullian’s politico-theological description of the Church, then, as an alternate society in the world, becomes more visibly explicit. Christians not only share common beliefs and customs, they have their own sacred space and objects. With such an emergence of a distinctly Christian material culture, the functions and responsibilities of the Christian leader would likely take on new shape as well. There is now a developing sacred space and sacred objects over which the Christian leader must preside and to which he must attend. One text in particular (*On Modesty*) demonstrates a striking accumulation of architectural references,<sup>113</sup> and within this same text Tertullian also designates the Christian leader as a *sacerdos*. I wish now to

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*vers le milieu du IIIe siècle : le témoignage de saint Cyprien et de ses contemporains d'Afrique* (Città del Vaticano: Pontificio Istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1984), 55.

<sup>112</sup> Timothy Barnes, *Tertullian : A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 89.

<sup>113</sup> I am indebted to Franz Dölger, Harry Janssen and Adhemar D’Ales (*L’édit de Calliste : étude sur les origines de la pénitence chrétienne*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Paris: Beauchesne, 1914] “Appendix II: Limen Ecclesiae”, 409-421) for their work in indicating these texts.

examine the relationship Tertullian indicates between the emerging Christian material culture and the Christian *sacerdos*.

In his treatise *On Modesty*, Tertullian repeatedly refers to the architectural reality of the church building in connection with the requirements of administering penance. He launches into his subject with an attack on an unnamed bishop who, in his arrogance, decreed that adulterers and fornicators may be granted forgiveness. Tertullian responds with a lengthy treatise attacking such “liberality” (*liberalitas*). Rather than permit entrance into the church, Tertullian declares that “we fix for adulterers and for fornicators the same boundary of the threshold (*limitem liminis*),”<sup>114</sup> that is, they are not permitted to enter the church. “For he stands before the doors (*pro foribus*) of the church, and admonishes others by the example of his own stigma, and calls for the tears of his brothers.”<sup>115</sup> The sinner is excluded from the worship space of the Christian community and must stand outside the doors (*fores*) of the Church.

Later, Tertullian reiterates this principle: “But we banish the remaining frenzies of passions (impious both in the body and in sex, and beyond the laws of nature) not only from the threshold (*limine*), but from every shelter of the Church (*omni ecclesiae tecto*), because they are not sins, but monstrosities.”<sup>116</sup> Once again, the egregious sinner is not permitted into the worship space, excluded not only from the “shelter of the church” (*tectum ecclesiae*) but from even crossing its threshold (*limen*). The sinner must not taint the sacred space of the church with his “monstrosities”.

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<sup>114</sup> *De Pud.* 1.21, *CCSL* 2:1283.

<sup>115</sup> *De Pud.* 3.5, *CCSL* 2:1286.

<sup>116</sup> *De Pud.* 4.5, *CCSL* 2:1287.

The spatial reference is seen yet again when Tertullian asks, “And indeed why do you lead into the church (*in ecclesiam inducens*) and prostrate in the midst (*in medium*) the repentant adulterer, clothed in a garment of hair and ashes, composed with disgrace and dread, in order to entreat the brotherhood?”<sup>117</sup> From this and the preceding texts, one gains a growing sense that Tertullian is describing a concrete worship space, a church building with doors (*fores*), a threshold (*limen*), and ceiling (*tectum*). Moreover, this worship space is sacred, set apart for holy use. No violent sinner (even penitent) may enter it to defile it. The running thesis of Tertullian’s treatise is precisely this: to ensure that the bishop of the church does not taint the sacred space of the church by allowing such sinners to enter in. The responsibility, says Tertullian, lies upon the Christian leaders to enforce this guardianship.

It is within this same treatise that Tertullian moves into a description of the bishop as a *sacerdos* who must ensure the sanctity of the church. Indeed, in 20.1, referring to the warnings of Hebrews 6, Tertullian avers: “Therefore the teaching of the apostles specifically instructs and principally designates the guaranty of all sanctity (*sanctitatis omnis*) toward the Temple of God (*templum Dei*) and everywhere eradicates from the church (*ab ecclesia*) every sacrilege of immodesty without any mention of restitution.”<sup>118</sup> The *ecclesia* thus is likened to the *templum dei*, and the responsibility of church leaders is to ensure its sanctity (*sanctitas*). Given the architectural vocabulary and earlier instructions in the broader context, Tertullian clearly has in mind here the physical exclusion of the sinner from the sacred worship space of the church. One preserves the sanctity of the Temple by preventing the sinner from entering the church. This moves him into a discussion about the “types” (*figuras*) of the Law which demand the same

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<sup>117</sup> *De Pud.* 13.7, *CCSL* 2:1304.

<sup>118</sup> *De Pud.* 20.1, *CCSL* 2:1323.

action (*De Pud.* 20.5). There, the Christian leader, as we saw earlier, is likened to a Levitical priest whose responsibilities include preserving the purity of Israel and its worship space by declaring people and things clean or unclean and by determining who can come to worship and who cannot. Therefore, says Tertullian, one who commits adultery after baptism “is now to be judged unclean and is not to be expiated by a priest (*sacerdote*);”<sup>119</sup> rather, he is to be excluded from the church.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, the Levitical priest who guards the Temple and preserves the sanctity of the sacred worship space becomes a type (*figura*) for the Christian bishop who guards the *limen* of the church, preserving its *sanctitas* by excluding the sinner from its midst. In other words, Tertullian joins the notion of the bishop as a priest to his awareness of an emerging Christian material culture. Furthermore, Tertullian’s politico-theological understanding of the Church as an alternate public society in the Roman world, fulfilling the *figuras* of ancient Israel both in its leadership and its sacred space, enables him to appropriate the Levitical priesthood as a working typology for the Christian leadership such that the Christian bishop is designated a *sacerdos*. Just as the old covenant priests guarded the sanctity of the place of worship, so too Christian bishops were responsible to guard the sacred worship space of the church in their role as *sacerdotes*.

Tertullian, then, provides the first indication of an understood relationship between a Christian ministerial priesthood and a politico-theological ecclesiology in the context of an emerging Christian material culture. In the chapters to come, I will demonstrate that later writers

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<sup>119</sup> *De Pud.* 20.7, *CCSL* 2:1324.

continued to designate the Christian leader as a priest in conjunction with a similar politico-theological ecclesiology and an awareness of a Christian material culture.

### CHAPTER 3

#### ATTENDANTS OF THE LORD: THE APOSTOLIC TRADITION

In examining the development of the early church's understanding of the bishop as a "priest", one of the most useful groups of texts are the early Christian Church Orders. These are significant for several reasons. First, they provide some of the earliest attestations of priestly language and ideas being applied to Christian leadership. This is especially true for the *Apostolic Tradition*, a document of the early to mid third century. Second, the Church Orders represent the life and order of the Church; they form the very fabric of Christian thought and practice. As such, they stand as the (nearly invisible) backdrop to later Patristic thought. When examining Origen, Cyprian, Ambrose or Eusebius, one must attend not only to their expressions of ideas and thoughts in their writings, but one also must be conscious of the life of the Church of which they are a part. Just as the actual practice of baptism in the life of the Church has shaped their understanding of baptism, and their regular participation in the Eucharist has shaped their perspective of the rite itself, so also when they reflect on the theological understanding of the bishop or presbyter, they are not arriving at independent conclusions. Rather, they are working within a milieu of actual Christian experience and order, an experience and order defined by church custom and practice, especially as evidenced in the ordination prayers and liturgies.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> I am starting from the perspective that the Church Orders actually represent Church life and order to a fair extent. It is possible that such documents do provide an idealized perspective in certain instances, but I reject the notion that the Church Orders do not reflect at all upon actual Christian experience and practice (a view held, e.g., by Allen Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century: Communities in Tension Before the Emergence of the Monarch-Bishop* [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995], 458ff). I agree with Bernard Botte: "Ce n'est pas une description de 'la liturgie romaine' du III<sup>e</sup> siècle à l'état pur; mais il est encore beaucoup moins vraisemblance qu'Hippolyte ait présenté une description qui n'avait aucune rapport avec

The Church Orders, then, are significant as the shaping influence and background to Patristic thought. Gregory Dix suggests that the *Apostolic Tradition* is “the most illuminating single source of evidence extant on the inner life and religious polity of the early Christian Church.”<sup>121</sup> This window into the inner life and thought of the Church holds true for the other Church Orders as well. Because they also represent some of the earliest attestations to priestly paradigms for Christian ministers, they are an important piece of evidence for this work. Thus, they provide not only the backdrop to the Fathers, but also stand as a useful reference point to gauge development and transition in the idea of priesthood itself.

For my purposes, I will examine two different Church Orders: this chapter will deal with the Western *Apostolic Tradition* (AT), an early third century Roman document. The next chapter will address an Eastern order, the third century Syrian *Didaskalia Apostolorum* (DA). In doing so, I will demonstrate that the rise of priestly designations for the Christian minister was widespread (occurring in both the East and the West), one of increasing development, and one reflective (in both the East and the West) of a stabilizing politico-theological ecclesiology in the context of an emerging Christian material culture which, together, influenced the theological understanding of the Christian bishop.

### **Background of *The Apostolic Tradition***

Understanding the background of the *Apostolic Tradition* (AT) is fraught with complexity and controversy. There are text-critical issues, translation difficulties, form-critical problems and suspicions of authenticity. The last hundred years has witnessed no shortage of

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la réalité vécue à Rome” (*La Tradition Apostolique : D’après les anciennes versions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Paris : Éditions du Cerf, 1968], 17).

<sup>121</sup> Gregory Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome, Bishop and Martyr* (London: Alban Press, 1937, 1992), ix.

essays, monographs and books on the topics of authorship, dating and provenance. No sooner has a general consensus been reached when another scholarly publication emerges calling into question all that has gone before.

It is not my task to sift through all the literature comprehensively to arrive at an independent conclusion for each issue (and there are many). Some problems, such as Hippolytean authorship, are irrelevant to my discussion.<sup>122</sup> For issues more germane to my topic such as dating and provenance, I will attempt to survey the general perspectives of scholarship to give a sense of the wide spectrum of opinion, a general consensus (if any) within scholarship today, and then my own conclusions on the matters.

### *Dating*

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<sup>122</sup> Perspectives on authorship abound. Bernard Botte argued with Schwartz and Connolly that Hippolytus of Rome was the author (See Botte, *La Tradition Apostolique*, 14-17; R.H. Connolly, *The So-Called Egyptian Church Order and Derived Documents* [Liechtenstein : Kraus Reprint, 1967]; E. Schwartz, *Über die Pseudoapostolischen Kirchenordnungen* [Strasbourg: K.J. Trübner, 1910]). J.V. Bartlett contends that the original work by Hippolytus was a treatise on spiritual gifts (now found in the *Apostolic Constitutions*), and that the Church Order known as AT was actually penned by an unknown Eastern author (*Church-Life and Church-Order During the First Four Centuries*, ed. C.J. Cadoux [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1943], 106-119). Pierre Nautin has argued that there were two authors, one Hippolytus and the other Josephus (*Hippolyte et Josipe: Contribution a l'histoire de la litterature chretienne du troisieme siecle* [Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1947]). More recently, Allen Brent has argued for non-Hippolytean authorship, and in fact no single authorship at all. Rather, he along with Alistair Stewart-Sykes, argue for two or three generations of authors within the "Hippolytean school" (Brent, *Hippolytus*; and Alistair Stewart-Sykes, ed. *On the Apostolic Tradition* [Crestwood, N.Y. : St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001]). Marcel Metzger argues it was not Hippolytus, but an anonymous text, probably a compilation anthology ("Nouvelle Perspectives pour la Prétendue Tradition Apostolique" *Ecclesia Orans* 5 [1988]: 241-259; and "Enquêtes autour de la Prétendue Tradition Apostolique" *Ecclesia Orans* 9 [1992]: 7-36).

What is important to our task is whether the AT was composed by one author or by several over a period of time. Allen Brent's recent work contends the latter, and given his thesis, this results in issues of authorship overlapping issues of dating. The dating of specific passages within the AT relating to our subject will be addressed below.



There are two different, although related, issues when it comes to dating the AT. From a more general perspective, there is the question of dating the AT as a whole, as it is in the extant versions now available. There is a spectrum of opinion within scholarship. More extreme positions have been taken by Vernon Bartlett on the one hand and Cyril Richardson on the other. Bartlett contends that the AT was actually a production of the second half of the third century (250-300 A.D.).<sup>123</sup> Much of his argument for dating hinges on his thesis for a non-Roman origin, and his conclusions have not gained wide acceptance in the last half century. At the other end, Cyril Richardson suggests a much earlier dating of the AT, arguing that the content of the document best reflects the historical conditions around the year 197 A.D.<sup>124</sup>

The majority of scholars, however, date the AT in the third century, the consensus being somewhere between 215 and 250 A.D.<sup>125</sup> The general perspective among scholars today, therefore, places the AT somewhere in the second or third decade of the third century. For my purposes, I leave the dating as a general time period: the early to mid third century, as more specific dating becomes both overly complicated and unnecessary.

The second issue of dating the AT has to do with particular pieces of the document and the tradition which it represents. Even if the AT reached a final written form as late as the

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<sup>123</sup> Bartlett, *Church-Life*, 120. Bartlett also argues that this production was in the East rather than in Rome, but that matter will be addressed in further detail below.

<sup>124</sup> Cyril Richardson, "The Date and Setting of the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus" *Anglican Theological Review* 30 (1948): 38-44.

<sup>125</sup> E.g. Stewart-Sykes, 12, and Klemens Richter ("Zum Ritus Der Bischofsordination in Der 'Apostolischen Ueberlieferung' Hippolyts von Rom und Davon Abhangigen Schriften" *Archiv Fur Liturgiewissenschaft* 17 (1975): 8) date it at roughly 235 A.D. Gregory Dix and Gerard Luttenberger hold to the date of 215 A.D. (Dix, *Apostolic Tradition*, xxxv-xxxvii; Luttenberger, "The Priest as a Member of a Ministerial College: The development of the church's ministerial structure from 96 to c. 300 A.D." *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale* 43 [1975]: 35). Bernard Botte argues more generally for an early to mid third century dating (Botte, *La Tradition Apostolique*, 16).

middle of the third century, the question remains how early a tradition certain components of the AT reflect. Further complicating the matter, if Brent's and Stewart-Sykes' more recent arguments about dual/generational authorship are taken into account,<sup>126</sup> then not only does the AT represent previous unwritten tradition but also several layers of *written* tradition within itself. For each pericope, then, one must sort out the redactional layers of text to attempt to identify earlier and later material.

For this project, however, I will concern myself only with the texts relevant to our topic, those which revolve around the ordination prayer of the bishop, and to a small extent, the presbyters and deacons as well (ch.3-4, 7-8). Again, there is division about when these prayers of ordination should be dated, particularly the priestly aspects of the prayers. Both C.H. Turner and J.V. Bartlett argue that the priestliness of the prayers does not belong to the original text, especially for the presbyter.<sup>127</sup> Their reasoning, however, is a theological one. Because they see sacerdotal designations as a late fourth century phenomenon, such elements in the AT must be mid-fourth century at the earliest.<sup>128</sup> Once this *a priori* theological assumption is removed, as it should be in light of Tertullian (and my later chapters on the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, Origen, and Cyprian) such late dating is both unnecessary and unlikely.

Paul Bradshaw, using a comparative method, argues a different conclusion. Comparing the AT ordination prayers with Tertullian, Cyprian and the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, he suggests that "since doctrinal developments generally appear in theological discourse well before they

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<sup>126</sup> See Brent, *Hippolytus*, 302-306 and Stewart-Sykes, 22-32.

<sup>127</sup> C.H. Turner, "The Ordination Prayer of a Presbyter in the Church Order of Hippolytus" *JTS* 16 (1915), 542-47; and J.V. Bartlett, "The Ordination Prayers in the Ancient Church" *JTS* 17 (1916), 249.

<sup>128</sup> Bartlett, "Ordination Prayers", 250.

find a place in liturgical texts, which are by nature more conservative, it is unlikely that the prayer . . . is older than middle of the third century.”<sup>129</sup> This may or may not be original to the AT itself, depending on how one dates the document; yet the point is clear: for Bradshaw, the priestly theology of the ordination prayers reflects a later development in the church (250-300 A.D.).<sup>130</sup>

While such caution is appropriate, Botte’s textual and philological method of dating the ordination prayers as original to the AT seems the most plausible. In his discussion of these texts, Botte concludes: “one ought to consider these prayers as authentic, since they are attested by LE [Latin/Ethiopic] and equally by CTK [*Apostolic Constitutions*, *Testamentum Domini*, and *Canons of Hippolytus*].”<sup>131</sup> In other words, because these ordination prayers appear in other translations of the AT (in the West and the East) as well as later adaptations, there is good evidence that the original pericope contained these prayers as well. From these conclusions, it appears that Botte would date the ordination prayers sometime in the early to mid third century. The priestly dimensions of the AT thus can be dated plausibly in the early to mid third century, and could very well reflect traditional material from the first decade of the third century.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Paul Bradshaw, “Redating the Apostolic Tradition: Some preliminary steps” in *Rule of Prayer, Rule of Faith* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996], 8.

<sup>130</sup> Although I agree generally with Bradshaw that the prayer should not be dated late, his assumption that doctrinal developments appear before liturgical practice seems precisely backwards. The ancient dictum *lex orandi, lex credendi* would suggest just the opposite: doctrinal and theological articulations typically come *after* liturgical use, not before. Thus, in the case of the AT, even if one dates the textual articulation to the mid third century, the theology behind the text is most likely even older.

<sup>131</sup> “On doit considérer ces prières comme authentiques, puisqu’elles sont attestées par LE et également par CTK.” Botte, *La Tradition Apostolique*, 22.

<sup>132</sup> Along similar lines, Eric Segelberg argues that the OT allusions in the ordination prayers are more likely to be earlier strata, while longer NT quotes are later. He gives no precise

### *Provenance*

As with the issue of dating, locating the provenance of the AT shares equally diverse opinions. Vernon Bartlett has argued that the original work by Hippolytus of Rome (a work on Spiritual Gifts) was not a church order at all, but dealt mainly with orthodox belief. Over time, this treatise reached Syria where it underwent editing and expansion, and eventually the latter half of the document was replaced by a church order from the East (not written by Hippolytus). The original section on spiritual gifts separated from the document and has only been preserved in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, book 8. The latter section on church order has now come to be known wrongly as the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus. In short, the so-called *Apostolic Tradition* as we have it is actually a production of the Eastern Church.<sup>133</sup> As with his assertions about dating, Bartlett's conclusions have not been well received.

Another minority position is that of Jean Hanssens. He argues that Hippolytus himself and the original church order attached to his name were of Alexandrian origins.<sup>134</sup> Like Bartlett's position, Hanssens' perspective has not been widely accepted. One of the most significant objections to his thesis is that the later Egyptian church orders we do possess (such as the *Prayer Book of Serapion*) bear no strong resemblance to the *Apostolic Tradition*.<sup>135</sup>

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dating for the prayers, however ("The Ordination Prayers in Hippolytus" *Studia Patristica* 13 [Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1975]).

<sup>133</sup> Bartlett, *Church-Life*, 106-119

<sup>134</sup> Jean Hanssens, *La Liturgie d'Hippolyte : Ses documents, son titulaire, ses origines et son caractère* (Rome : Pontificum Inst. Orientalium Studiorum, 1959).

<sup>135</sup> See Botte's brief but cogent refutation of Hanssens' position (*La Tradition Apostolique*, 22).

Others have also argued for a non-Roman provenance of the AT. Most notable is the scholar Marcel Metzger. Arguing that the AT is neither from Hippolytus nor from Rome, Metzger contends that the document is a redactional product of a number of sources and therefore represents a collection or anthology of church orders. The appearance of “doublets” and seemingly contradictory passages lead Metzger to this conclusion.<sup>136</sup> As such, he argues against Roman origins for several reasons, including what he sees as differences between the AT and later Roman orders, and the smaller congregation sizes in the AT as compared to the large Christian population in Rome during the third century.<sup>137</sup>

In the end, Metzger’s argument is only negative; he offers no real alternative for the origins of the AT. Given the traditional placement of the AT in a Roman milieu, and without any substantial evidence against such provenance, minority voices such as Metzger’s remain unpersuasive. As a result, the scholarly consensus is that the AT was of Roman provenance.<sup>138</sup> In other words, we are dealing with a Western, specifically Roman, document of the mid third century at the latest, that reflects ordination custom and theology of the early third century.

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<sup>136</sup> Metzger, “Enquêtes,” 7-16; and “Nouvelle Perspectives,” 250.

<sup>137</sup> Metzger, “Enquêtes,” 28-30. His arguments against Roman provenance do not seem persuasive. There may be some differences between the AT and later Roman orders, but can we not allow for change and development over time? Second, his argument about congregation size assumes that there was only one bishop in Rome at the time and therefore the congregation must have been much larger than what the AT describes. In light of Brent’s thesis, however, that there was no mono-episcopate in Rome even in the time of Hippolytus, there is no real conflict between the AT’s presentation and the Roman Christian population in the third century.

<sup>138</sup> Botte (*La Tradition Apostolique*), Brent, (*Hippolytus*), Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches of East and West* (New York: Pueblo Pub., 1990); Richardson, “Dating,” and Stewart-Sykes all assume or argue for Roman provenance.

One final issue must be addressed, namely, that of the text to be used in this study. Although originally written in Greek, no full Greek manuscript is extant. We do have Greek sections preserved in fragments and in the Epitome of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, and when possible, I will make use of these Greek versions. Additionally, there are numerous translations of the AT existing in Latin, Coptic, Arabic, and Ethiopic. Even here, the Ethiopic version is a translation based on the Arabic which in turn is a translation based on the Coptic. Bernard Botte has recognized the difficulties in the text-critical issues for the AT and has attempted a reconstruction of the Latin text with what he calls a “rigorous philological method.”<sup>139</sup> In the end, Connolly, Schwartz, Botte, Stam and Stewart-Sykes all place great confidence in the Latin text of the AT. Estimated to date to the end of the fifth century, the Verona Latin is a translation very likely from the fourth century, “appears to be largely faithful to the Greek text” and “is the best witness to the writings of Hippolytus.”<sup>140</sup> Because it is the earliest source available, an independent translation of the Greek, and the base source for all subsequent translations, most scholars find the Verona Latin to be the best authority for accessing the original AT.<sup>141</sup> I will follow this general consensus.

### *Summary*

In the end, I conclude that the AT is a document of Roman origin, written in the mid third century at the latest, and quite probably reflecting tradition from the early decades of that same century. The ordination prayers themselves are also original and authentic to the AT and not later additions. As such, they are a faithful and important representation of the developing

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<sup>139</sup> “... méthode philologique rigoureuse ...” Botte, *La Tradition Apostolique*, 18.

<sup>140</sup> Stewart-Sykes, 45-46.

<sup>141</sup> A notable exception would be Metzger, see Metzger’s objection to what he calls Botte’s “texte fantome” (Metzger, “Enquêtes,” 22).

Roman tradition of the early to mid third century which began to understand and designate its Christian leadership in Old Testament priestly ways. My task now will be to explore the text of the AT itself to gain a better understanding of this developing theology and to understand the explanations for such developments.

### **A Ministerial Priesthood in the Ordination Prayers**

The sections of the AT pertaining to my discussion are those of the ordination procedures and prayers for the bishop, primarily, although I will draw upon those of the presbyters and deacons briefly as well.<sup>142</sup> I will be examining these sections with an eye toward the text's understanding of the Christian leader in priestly ways, particularly in terms of the titles and the functions used to describe the minister. Having examined these titles and functions, I will explore the text itself for clues to explain why such sacerdotal designations were employed.

After a brief preface in which the author urges the church in general terms to “guard (*custodiant*) the tradition (*traditionem*) which has been handed down to us,”<sup>143</sup> the *Apostolic Tradition* quickly moves to matters of proper order, beginning with procedures for the ordination of a bishop. Having called together all the people on the Lord's Day, hands are laid upon the bishop to be ordained, while another bishop present is instructed to pray. AT 3 delineates the ordination prayer over the bishop, preserved in Greek in the epitome.

Of significance here are the descriptions of functions and titles given to the bishop in this prayer. The prayer requests that God would “pour out from yourself the power of the spirit of leadership (*dunamin tou hēgemonikou pneumatos*)” and then,

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<sup>142</sup> AT 2-4, 7 & 8 respectively.

<sup>143</sup> AT 1; Botte, *La Tradition Apostolique*, 38.

give to your servant whom you chose for the episcopate [the ability] to shepherd (*poimainen*) your holy flock, to serve you blamelessly as high-priest (*archierateuein*), ministering (*leitourgounta*) night and day, to appease (*hilaskesthai*) your face without ceasing, to offer (*prospherein*) to you the gifts (*ta dōra*) of your holy church, and by the spirit of the high-priesthood (*tō pneumatō tō archieratikō*) to have power to forgive sins according to your command, to ordain (*didonai klērou*)<sup>144</sup> according to your ordinance, to loose every bond according to the authority which you gave to the apostles, and to please you with gentleness and a pure heart, offering (*propheronta*) to you the scent of fragrance through your Son...<sup>145</sup>

Here we have one of the most thorough and illuminating lists of functions for the bishop in the early church, and from this prayer we also have one of the most explicit early designations of the bishop in priestly terms and ideals. In examining this prayer I hope to demonstrate two important observations. First I want briefly to explore the tasks and responsibilities of the bishop as set forth in the ordination prayer. Second I wish to draw special attention to the relationship of these tasks to the Scriptures in general and to an Old Testament priestly paradigm in particular.

The priestly dimensions of the episcopal office are clearly indicated in this prayer. Yet it is more than a bald statement of theological pronouncement that the bishop is a “priest”. Through a series of eight infinitives, the prayer indicates specific functions of the office: to shepherd, to serve as high-priest, to appease God’s face, to offer the gifts, to forgive sins, to ordain, to loose every bond, and to please God. On the surface, these functions are a loose list of tasks and responsibilities; upon closer inspection, however, there is a discernable structure to the prayer, one which follows the “drama of redemption” from old covenant leadership in the priests to new covenant leadership under the apostles.

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<sup>144</sup> Lit. “to give lots”. Botte has noted that this term appears throughout the AT to refer to the ecclesiastical charge, i.e. ordination (see Botte, *La Tradition Apostolique*, 47, n.1). See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.27.1; 3.3.2-3 for a similar usage of the term to refer to ordination.

<sup>145</sup> AT 3, Botte, *La Tradition Apostolique*, 42-46. All translations are my own unless indicated otherwise.



The second infinitive in the list, “to serve as high-priest” (*archierateuein*), is the most obvious point at which the sacerdotal nature of the bishop shows forth. One of the main functions of the bishop according to this prayer is to act as a high-priest, specifically, ministering (*leitourgounta*) night and day. Part of what it means, then, to “serve as high-priest” includes this continual ministry. One must not miss the Old Testament evocations of this task, however. The verb (*leitourgein*) is one commonly used in reference to the Old Testament priest. For example, Exodus 35:19 details instructions for making the priestly garments, “in which they will minister (*leitourgēsousin*) in the holy place.”<sup>146</sup> In the prophecy of Ezekiel, a holy district is to be measured off which “shall be for the priests, who minister (*tois leitourgousin*) in the sanctuary and approach the LORD to minister (*leitourgein*) to him” (45:4). Likewise, the prophet Joel repeatedly narrates the task of the priest as one who “ministers to the LORD” (1:9,13; 2:17). The description of the bishop as one who is ministering (*leitourgounta*) suggests this Old Testament picture of priesthood.

Further, the command to serve “night and day” (*nuktos kai hēmeras*) also evokes the specifically Israelite priestly task in regards to sacrifice and temple caretaking. In Leviticus, the people are commanded to bring oil to the Tabernacle for the lamps which were to burn continually. Aaron is then instructed “to keep it in order from evening to morning before the LORD (*apo hespera heōs prōi enōpion kuriou*) continually” (24:2-4). Exodus 30:7-8 instructs Aaron the priest to burn incense on the altar in the morning and at evening; and Numbers 28:1-8 gives similar instructions for sacrifices to be offered daily, morning (*to prōi*) and evening (*hesperan*). The reference in AT 3 to this continual ministerial function (“night and day”)

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<sup>146</sup> Biblical citations follow the RSV unless indicated otherwise. Greek words indicate the LXX.

suggests yet another connection with the Israelite priesthood. Just as the old covenant priests performed their daily tasks, so the Christian bishop is called to “minister night and day” by performing his liturgical duties on a daily basis.

The other functions such as appeasing God’s face and offering gifts are also priestly tasks. The Greek term (*hilaskesthai*) carries with it the notion of propitiation; combining this with the task of offering gifts, we have a distinctly priestly array of tasks. What is not clear from this prayer is how the bishop is to propitiate. Nevertheless, one need not read far in Leviticus to realize that the tasks of offering sacrifices and effecting atonement before the Lord was a significant task of the old covenant priests.<sup>147</sup> In light of this biblical picture, the AT portrayal of the bishop as one who appeases (*hilaskesthai*) and offers gifts (*prosphelein*) clearly evokes the biblical presentation of priestly duties. That one of the first tasks of the bishop after ordination was to preside over the Eucharistic celebration shows that this task of “offering” was an important part of what it meant to be a bishop-priest.<sup>148</sup>

Three of the first four tasks of the episcopacy are thus centered on the priestly dimension of leadership. Though not as obvious, this also remains true for the first task listed, “to shepherd” (*poimainen*).<sup>149</sup> Though not exclusively a priestly image, shepherding was clearly a prominent biblical metaphor for the spiritual leaders of Israel, and this would have included the priests. Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34 both castigate the shepherd-leaders for their self-interest and their failure to protect the flock of Israel. Because they have been “feeding themselves” (Ezek. 34:2) and “have scattered the flock and not attended to them” (Jer. 23:2), God declares, “I am

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<sup>147</sup> Consider, for example, Lev. 27; Numb 18.

<sup>148</sup> See AT 4 for this post-ordination activity.

<sup>149</sup> Segelberg, 400, notes the 2-4<sup>th</sup> infinitives being priestly but fails to see the shepherding as also a priestly responsibility.

against the shepherds” (Ezek. 34:10).<sup>150</sup> This image of leadership in the Old Testament, picked up by the *Apostolic Tradition*, connects the task of the bishop with that of the spiritual leadership of Israel, including the priests.

From this examination, one finds that the priestly theme pervades and governs each of the first four episcopal tasks listed in this ordination prayer. Above all else, the primary Old Testament biblical “type” used to portray the bishop is that of “priest”. What then of the remaining infinitives, those one might designate new covenant, apostolic tasks?

The remaining list (to forgive sins, to ordain, to loose bonds) are quite easily seen to be “apostolic” functions when viewed through a New Testament lens. The function of forgiving sins is picked up in John 20:23. Here, Jesus commissions the disciples, breathing on them and saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” The *Apostolic Tradition* refers to this event, noting that the power to forgive is “according to your command.”<sup>151</sup> Likewise, several examples are given of the apostles “ordaining” or “commissioning” new generations of leadership.<sup>152</sup> Acts 1:17, in the apostolic ordination of Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot, describes this action as “casting lots (*hedōkan klērous*) and the lot (*klēros*) fell on Matthias.” Thus, the description in AT 3 “to ordain”/“to give lots” (*didonai klērous*) uses the same language found in Acts and evokes the apostolic ministry of ordination seen there. Further, Jesus instructs Peter, after his confession of

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<sup>150</sup> Given Ezekiel’s deep concern for the defilement and promised renewal of the Temple (ch.40-48), it is no stretch to understand the priests as the ‘shepherd’-referents in his proclamations. The passage in Jeremiah 23 seems to have both prophets and priests in mind when speaking of the shepherds of Israel (cf. 23.11). For a detailed examination of the shepherd motif in the OT, see V. Hamp, “Das Hirtenmotiv im Alten Testament” *Faulhaber Festschrift* (1949), 7-20.

<sup>151</sup> AT 3.

<sup>152</sup> See Acts 1:26; 6; 14:23; also 1 Tim. 4:14

Jesus as the Messiah: “whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:19). Clearly, the prayer regarding the power to “loose every bond” points to this apostolic commission by Jesus. All these tasks (to forgive sins, to ordain, to loose bonds) are explicitly connected with apostolic authority and power.

Yet, even here, the connection with the old covenant metaphor remains strong as the priestly principle permeates into these new covenant tasks. After the first four explicitly priestly functions of the bishop are delineated, the prayer asks that God would grant the newly-elect “to have power by the spirit of the high-priesthood (*tō pneumatō tō archieratikō*)” to exercise the list of tasks we saw to be “apostolic” in nature. This dative phrase (*tō pneumatō tō archieratikō*), placed as it is at the beginning of the list of infinitives, lends the force of governing all the remaining verbs in the sentence. Thus, even the tasks of forgiving sins, ordaining, and loosing bonds are all depicted as operating this *priestly-spirit* dimension of authority. The movement from the metaphors of old covenant leadership to new covenant leadership is not a depiction of two separate structures of leadership, but of a continuity between an older model and a newer one. In this sense, the AT portrays the bishop not in parallel with priests on the one hand and apostles on the other, but with the priests primarily through the priestly ministry instituted by Christ through the apostles.

From this perspective, the tasks that were seen previously as “apostolic” should now also be seen in a priestly light. Further reflection on these functions results in just such connections with biblical priesthood, though not as explicit as the earlier tasks in the list. Ordaining was an important role of priests in the Old Testament. For example, Leviticus 8 details the ordination ceremony of Aaron and his sons but also was to be used as the ordination procedures for the

installment of future priests. Numbers 8 is especially provocative in its description of priestly ordination wherein the people are instructed to “lay their hands upon the Levites” (8:10), an action also paralleled in AT 2.

The ability to affect forgiveness through the proper performance of sacrifice was also a priestly function in the Old Testament. Finally, binding and loosing can more broadly be understood as correlating to the Levitical task to declare clean or unclean those who were affected with illness or disease.<sup>153</sup> Interestingly, the bishop is also designated the “high-priest” (*princeps sacerdotum*) in AT 30 where instructions are given for the bishop to visit the sick, perhaps another allusion to the idea of the bishop as ministering to the Christian sick, just as the sick/unlcean Israelite would seek out the priests in the Old Testament.

This examination, then, demonstrates that the entire description of the bishop can be subsumed under the broader portrayal of the bishop as priest.<sup>154</sup> All the listed functions and duties hang around the central notion that the bishop is acting as the high-priest of the people of God. Rather than dividing the list between priestly tasks and apostolic tasks, as Bradshaw does, it is more accurate to understand the entire list (which entails OT and NT imagery) as subsumed under the priesthood motif.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Consider, for example, my earlier discussion of the way Tertullian employs the Levitical cleanliness laws in just such a way (chapter 2).

<sup>154</sup> The last infinitive in the series, “to please God” seems much too general to elicit a specifically priestly evocation, yet the added phrase, “offering the scent of fragrance” does lead us back to a priestly image. Also, the notion of “guarding the tradition” found in the preface correlates well to the OT priestly task of “guarding the tabernacle” (e.g. Numb. 3:3,38).

<sup>155</sup> See Paul Bradshaw, “Ordination” in *Essays on Hippolytus* (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1978), 37, wherein he suggests a sharper distinction than I suggest.

Note, then, that the high-priesthood of the bishop is related not just to the offering of the Eucharist, but to a whole range of functions and responsibilities. In fact, one could argue from this ordination prayer that the offering of the Eucharist was not even the main function of the bishop. In other words, the emergence of priestly designations for the bishop in the AT do not stem primarily from his role as one who offers the Eucharistic sacrifice, but more broadly as one who governs the church, shepherding and protecting God's flock, as one who presides over the liturgical dimensions of the church, including but not limited to the Eucharist. The connection between Eucharistic sacrifice and the episcopal offering of it is important, but it is not the entire picture.

Along similar lines, the ordination prayer for deacons comments that the bishop alone, not the presbyters, should lay hands on the deacon-elect, "for the reason that he is not ordained into the priesthood (*in sacerdotio*), but into the ministry of the bishop."<sup>156</sup> By implication, the presbyters *are* part of the priesthood, and their laying of hands along with the bishop would also have made the deacon a part of that *ordo*. This is striking because the deacons, more so than the presbyters, assisted in performing the liturgy of the Eucharist. If the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice was the causal reason for the priesthood designations, then the deacons, it would seem, should at this very point be named priests. The AT, however, is emphatic that they are not. From the opposite angle, the presbyters, who are never said to preside solely over the Eucharist,<sup>157</sup> *are* said to be part of the priesthood. It would seem that the nature of this

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<sup>156</sup> AT 8, Botte, *La Tradition Apostolique*, 58.

<sup>157</sup> See Anscar Chupungco who raises this point ("Ordination Theology in the Apostolic Tradition," in *Mysterium Christi* [Rome: Pontificio Ateneo S Anselmo, 1995], 121-122).

“priesthood” (for the bishop and the presbyters alike) entailed much more than just presiding over the sacrifice of the Eucharist. The picture of their priesthood is much more comprehensive.

The functions of the bishop, as understood by the church, seem to have led to theological reasoning upon those duties which in turn led to the application of the sacerdotal paradigm to the office of the bishop. It was not the one function of offering the Eucharistic sacrifice, but the accumulated force of all the functions including shepherding, appeasing God, ministering, offering gifts, and so on that produce the theological development regarding the bishop-priest. What, then, can help explain this theological understanding of the episcopal office? The answer, I contend, has to do with the church’s developing politico-theological ecclesiology. First, a more concrete expression of continuity with Israel developed. That is to say, Christianity was not simply a religious association; rather it was an identification with a people with a real history, institutions, law, political life and so on. The identification of the Church with this Israel of the past was an identification with all its robust, cultural life and history. Second, there is a more concrete, visible expression of the Church—as a society with an emerging material cultural existence. In other words, the visible Church at this time had a growing sense of corporate identity, with distinct rituals, property, art and so on which formed its cultural life in the Roman Empire. Together, these politico-theological developments form the perfect environment for the emergence of a Christian ministerial priesthood. I will now explore these two developments and then return to the issue of priesthood in the AT, explaining how these developments relate to one another.

### *Continuity with Israel*

The same ordination prayer that portrays the tasks and functions of the bishop in such priestly dimensions also gives us a clear picture of the assumed continuity between Israel and the Church. Prior to the episcopal tasks, the AT instructs the ordaining bishop to pray:

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who inhabits the heights and looks upon the poor, who knows all things before they happen, you who gave the rules of the church (*horous ekklēsias*)<sup>158</sup> through your word of grace, who foreordained from the beginning a righteous race (*genos dikaion*) from Abraham, establishing rulers and priests (*archontas te kai hierais*) and not abandoning your sanctuary (*hagiasma sou*) without ministers (*aleitourgēton*), who was from the foundation of the world pleased to be glorified in those whom you have chosen .  
 . . .<sup>159</sup>

This prayer then moves into the requests that God pour out his spirit to enable the bishop-elect to perform the numerous priestly tasks examined above.

From this prayer, the continuities between the old and the new become obvious. At four separate points this continuity holds. First, there is a continuity between the God of the old covenant and the God of the new. The series of descriptive phrases in the beginning of the prayer are a mixture of material from the Old and New Testaments. The “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Father of mercies and God of all comfort” reflects New Testament theology, quoting directly 2 Corinthians 1:3. Yet, this new covenant God is linked with the actions and activity of the old covenant God as the prayer continues. He is the God “who inhabits the heights and looks upon the poor,” a passage taken from Psalm 112:5-6, as well as the God “who knows all things before they happen,” a quotation from Susanna 35. Thus, the early portion of this ordination prayer expresses an intimate continuity between the God of Israel and the God of the Church.

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<sup>158</sup> Further explanation for the translation will be given below.

<sup>159</sup> AT 3, Botte, *La Tradition Apostolique*, 42-44.



Second, there is a continuity between the old and new “people of God”. The prayer comments that God has “foreordained from the beginning a righteous race (*genos dikaion*) from Abraham.” The words imply the notion that the “righteous race” is now carried forth by the Church, the new people of God. In the following chapter, the newly elected bishop presides over a Eucharistic celebration. During his Eucharistic prayer, the bishop thanks God for Jesus Christ who “fulfilled your will and acquired for you a holy people (*populum sanctum*).”<sup>160</sup> This phrase, *populum sanctum*, picks up on the earlier phrase *genos dikaion*, connecting the ideas of old and new. Whereas the people of Israel were constituted “a holy people” to the Lord,<sup>161</sup> so too the Church is a “holy people”, the righteous race from Abraham.<sup>162</sup>

Third, there is a continuity between the old and new sanctuaries of God. After the prayer above, the bishop asks God to pour out his spirit of governance “which you gave through your beloved child Jesus Christ to your holy apostles, who consecrated (*kathidrusan*) the church in the place of your sanctuary (*kata topon hagiastatos sou*).”<sup>163</sup> The translation *kata topon hagiastatos sou* is an admittedly difficult phrase. Botte prefers the Latin text which reads: *per singula loca sanctificationem tua*, making the translation: “who consecrated the church in every place as your sanctuary/sanctification.” While this smoothes out the Greek, it also changes the nuance of the text. Although more difficult, the Greek reading is not altogether impossible.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> AT 4, Botte, *La Tradition Apostolique*, 50.

<sup>161</sup> See Exodus 19.6 [holy nation—*ethnos hagion*]; Deut. 7.6; 14.21; 26.19 [holy people—*laos hagios*])

<sup>162</sup> See also, for example, 1 Peter 2.9-10 for ideas of the Church being a holy people. See Galatians 3 for ideas of Christians being the true inheritors of Abraham’s promise.

<sup>163</sup> AT 3, Botte, *La Tradition Apostolique*, 44.

<sup>164</sup> Botte suggests this reading is an impossibility (*La Tradition Apostolique*, 45, n.5). Jean Magne, however, cogently argues the necessity of using the Greek text over Botte’s suggestion of Latin. He gives several reasons for doing so : 1.) it is confirmed by the Ethiopic

Liddell and Scott note that *kata* when taken with an accusative can have a range of meaning including “in”, “over against” or even referring to likeness (“like” or “as”).<sup>165</sup> Any of these readings makes perfect sense not only of the following accusative (*topon*) but also of the following genitive (*hagiasmatos sou*). Thus the Greek suggests that the church was established “in the place of your sanctuary,” “over against the place of your sanctuary” or “as the place of your sanctuary.” Whichever of these options one chooses, the force of the text remains: the church is likened to the sanctuary of God. There is a new *topos/locus* (“place”) of worship for the people of God.

All this leads to the tight connection between old and new: the God, the people, the sanctuary. At every point, there is continuity and transformation from the old model to the new. Given this strong connection and development, one can readily see how this lends itself to the expression of continuity of leadership between old and new as well. Examining the AT further, this is exactly what presents itself.

In the early portion of the ordination prayer of chapter 3, the congregation is reminded that the God of old “gave the rules of the church” (*horous ekklēsias*). The translation difficulty here is noted by most scholars, and translations vary from “ordinances”<sup>166</sup> to “les règles”<sup>167</sup> to “limits”<sup>168</sup> to “canons”.<sup>169</sup> Nowhere in the LXX is this term used to describe the “ordinances” of

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text, 2.) if one alters the Greek to read “in every place” one is forced also to alter the genitive (of your sanctuary) into an accusative (as your sanctuary), as does Botte, and 3.) there are other ways to express in Greek the idea of universal diffusion, such as *en panti topoi* (*Tradition Apostolique sur les Charismes et Diataxeis des Saints Apôtres : Identification des documents et analyse du rituel des ordinations* [Paris : Magne, 1975]), 120.

<sup>165</sup> LSJ, 783.

<sup>166</sup> Dix, *Apostolic Tradition*, 4.

<sup>167</sup> Botte, *La Tradition Apostolique*, 43.

<sup>168</sup> Stewart-Sykes, 60.

Israel in a leadership sense, yet this clearly seems to be the implication in AT 3. Following Brent's observations, we find that *horos* is also used in *Refutation of All Heresies* at several points to describe Zephyrinus and Callistus as ignorant of the "ecclesiastical orders" (*tōn ekklesiastikōn horōn*).<sup>170</sup> Thus, if one takes the cues from this other source (one which lies in the same family of texts and tradition as the AT), understanding the *horous ekklesiās* of AT 3 as referring to the canonical, orderly structures of the church makes sense. In this context, the referent clearly implies a connection between the "rules" or "structures" of the old covenant and the "rules" regarding episcopal ordination in the church. A continuity exists between old and new leadership structures.

Just one line later, the prayer recalls that God established "rulers and priests (*archontas te kai hierēis*)" and did not abandon "your sanctuary without ministers (*hagiasma sou aleitourgēton*)."<sup>171</sup> The phrase "rulers and priests" recurs several times throughout the LXX in reference to the religious and civil leaders of the people of Israel and other nations. For example, Nehemiah 12:12 declares that "in the days of Joiakim were priests and rulers" (*hoi hierēis kai hoi archontes*),<sup>172</sup> and then recounts the list of names of these Israelite leaders. Jeremiah 48:7 pronounces judgment on Moab, "his priests and his leaders" (*hoi hierēis autou kai hoi*

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<sup>169</sup> Brent, *Hippolytus*, 303.

<sup>170</sup> *Refutation of All Heresies* 9.11.1; 9.12.21; and 10.5.1-2 (M. Marcovich, *Hippolytus. Refutatio omnium haeresium* [Patristische Texte und Studien 25. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1986]: 53-417). Brent, 303, and Joseph Lecuyer also suggest similar ideas ("Episcopat et Presbyterat dans les Ecrits D'Hippolyte de Rome" *Recherches de science religieuse* 41 (1953), 32).

<sup>171</sup> AT 3, Botte, *La Tradition Apostolique*, 42-44.

<sup>172</sup> LXX=2Esdr. 22.12

*archontes*).<sup>173</sup> Thus, the AT prayer directly evokes the Old Testament imagery of leadership. Further, the prayer reminds the congregation of the faithfulness of God in not abandoning his people or his sanctuary (*hagiasma*). On the contrary, God always provides “ministers” (*leitourgous*) for his people. Again, in this context, the assertion is that God maintains his faithfulness by providing continued leadership for his people of God, this time in reference to the bishops of the Church.

In light of the earlier conclusions above regarding the idea of the church being established “in the place of your sanctuary” (*kata topon hagiasmatos sou*), the connection is made even stronger that the “ministers” which God supplies for his sanctuary are in fact the bishops being ordained to serve the new “sanctuary” of the church. Once again, the continuity holds between old covenant leadership and new, the “rulers and priests” of Israel typifying the bishops of the church.

Perhaps the strongest expression of this link between old and new leadership comes in the next chapter, AT 4. As the newly ordained bishop presides over the Eucharistic service, he prays: “we offer to you the bread and cup, giving thanks to you because you have held us worthy to stand before you and to minister to you (*adstare coram te et tibi ministrare*).”<sup>174</sup> Peter Leithart’s recent article persuasively demonstrates that the overarching aspect of Old Testament priesthood was in their responsibility as “attendants of Yahweh’s house.”<sup>175</sup> As such, the verbs “to stand and minister” form the repeated summary expression of the priestly duty in the Old

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<sup>173</sup> LXX=Jer. 31.7. Amos 1.15 is another text using this double title for leadership. See Andre Rose for fuller development (“Le Prière de Consécration pour l’Ordination Épiscopale” in *Au service de la parole de Dieu* [Gembloux : J Duculot, 1969], 133).

<sup>174</sup> AT 4, Botte, *La Tradition Apostolique*, 52.

<sup>175</sup> Peter Leithart, “Attendants of Yahweh’s House: Priesthood in the Old Testament” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 85 (1999), 12ff.

Testament. While the tasks of sacrifice, mediation, and guardianship were important for the priesthood, no description covers the full range of responsibilities as does the idea of being an “attendant” in the sanctuary. Leithart’s research shows that two verbs stand in regular connection with the noun *cohen* (*hiereus/sacerdos*): to “stand” and to “minister”.<sup>176</sup> In addition to these verbs being used individually to describe the functions of Old Testament priests,<sup>177</sup> there are a number of passages that combine them to form a summary description of the work of the priest.

For example, Deuteronomy 10:8 states that the tribe of Levi was set apart “to stand before the LORD to minister to him” (Vulgate: *staret coram eo in ministerio*).<sup>178</sup> Likewise, Deuteronomy 18:5 explains the special privilege of the tribe of Levites as ones “chosen to stand and minister (*ut stet et minister*) in the name of the LORD.”<sup>179</sup> Such designations are also found outside of the Pentateuch. 1 Kings 8:11 describes the dedication of the Temple under Solomon wherein a cloud began to fill the new building “so that the priests could not stand to minister (*stare et ministrare*) because of the cloud.”<sup>180</sup> Finally, in 2 Chronicles 29.11, under the reign of Hezekiah, reparations are made to the Temple. In a solemn ceremonial gathering of the priests

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<sup>176</sup> Leithart, “Attendants,” 15ff. See also, Aelred Cody, *A History of Old Testament Priesthood* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute Press, 1969), 29.

<sup>177</sup> For example, “to minister”: Exod. 35.19; 39.41; Neh. 10.39; Ezek. 45.4; Joel 1.9,13; and 2.17. “To stand”: Zech. 3.1; 2 Chr. 30.16; 35.10.

<sup>178</sup> All biblical passages are taken from the RSV unless otherwise indicated.

LXX read: *parestanai enanti kuriou leitourgein*.

<sup>179</sup> LXX reads: *parestanai enanti kuriou tou theou kai leitourgein*

<sup>180</sup> LXX reads: *stēnai leitourgein*

and Levites, Hezekiah admonishes them: “do not now be negligent, for the LORD has chosen you to stand in his presence, to minister to him” (*ut stetis coram eo et ministretis illis*).<sup>181</sup>

In light of the numerous continuities already expressed in AT 3 between old/new people, old/new sanctuary and old/new leadership, the summary description in AT 4 should come as no surprise. The bishop-priest, typifying and modeling the Israelite priests, is called “to stand before you and to minister” (*adstare coram te et tibi ministrare*), the very summary language and description of the old covenant priests of Israel as found in the Old Testament.

Thus the strong continuity assumed between Israel and the Church is woven into the theological understanding of the bishop as priest. The continuity expressed between the God of Israel and the God of the Church, between the old people and the new people of God, and between the old sanctuary and the new—all work in conjunction with the express idea of the continuity between leadership. The bishop is the “minister” of God’s people and his sanctuary, the Church. As John Stam puts it, “a continuity is seen between the Old Covenant and the New in the unity of the one divine plan for the ordered life of God’s people.”<sup>182</sup> Bernard Botte suggests this same connection, contending that in the AT

The Church is the new people of God and, at the same time, the new Temple established from now on in every place. But God has never left his people without a leader nor his sanctuary without a priest and one demands from him that he do the same for the new Israel. It is the bishop who ought to be by law the leader of the new people of God and the high-priest of the new Temple.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> LXX reads: *stēnai enantion autou leitourgein*. Other such texts include Deut. 17.12 and Numbers 16.9.

<sup>182</sup> John Edward Stam, *Episcopacy in the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* (Basel: Komm. Friedrich Reinhardt, 1969), 23.

<sup>183</sup> “L’Église est le nouveau peuple de Dieu et, en même temps, le nouveau Temple établi désormais en tout lieu. Or Dieu n’a jamais laissé son peuple sans chef ni son sanctuaire sans sacerdoce et on lui demande qu’il fasse de même pour le nouvel Israël. C’est l’évêque qui doit être à la fois le chef du nouveau peuple de Dieu et le grand-prêtre du nouveau Temple.” Botte,

The *Apostolic Tradition's* presentation of the bishop as the one who typifies priestly leadership finds its roots in this deep-seated ecclesiological notion of continuity between Israel and the Church, the new people of God.

One qualification must be added. Although the AT presumes a strong connection between old and new people, sanctuaries and leaders, there are significant discontinuities as well. One of the most obvious, in relation to the priestly nature of the bishop, has to do with lineage. Whereas old covenant priests were such by way of physical blood line, Christian bishops were elected “from all the people.”<sup>184</sup> In other words, although there is a continuity between Old Testament priesthood and episcopal leadership, there is also something strikingly different. Joseph Lecuyer addresses this important distinction:

The rulers and priests in the current church are not the successors of those of the Old Testament; in Christ are joined all the powers of those who preside over the elect and the cult of Israel; it is from Christ that the apostles have received those powers and from Christ that their successors, the bishops, continue to hold such powers.<sup>185</sup>

In other words, the bishops' function and office is modeled around the typology of Old Testament priesthood, but they are not Levitical priests in a literal sense. Rather, they are new covenant priests, fulfilling the typology of Old Testament priesthood through their participation and identity with Christ and his authority and ministry as given through his apostles.

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*La Tradition Apostolique*, 26. See Chupungco, 114. See also Bradshaw, “Ordination” in *Essays on Hippolytus*, 37, and Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches*, 47, for similar ideas.

<sup>184</sup> AT 2, Botte, *La Tradition Apostolique*, 40.

<sup>185</sup> “Les chefs et les prêtres, dans l’Église actuelle, ne sont pas les successeurs de ceux de l’Ancien Testament; c’est dans le Christ que se sont trouvés réunis tous les pouvoirs de ceux qui présidaient aux destinées et au culte d’Israël, c’est de lui que les Apôtres les ont reçus et que leurs successeurs, les évêques, continuent à les tenir.” Joseph Lecuyer, “La Prière d’Ordination de l’Evêque” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 89 (1967), 604.

This is made clear in the ordination prayer itself which states that the outpouring of the power of governance is that “which through your beloved son Jesus Christ you gave to your holy apostles.”<sup>186</sup> This connection with Christ and the apostles as the mediating factor between old covenant leadership and new provides both the continuity from old to new but also transformation and discontinuity. The major episcopal-priestly functions, then, are not atoning through bloody sacrifices, but presiding over worship, shepherding, guarding the faith, and in general, standing and ministering before the Lord. These are all Old Testament priestly functions, but exercised in new ways in the new context of the early Church as the people of God, established by Christ and the apostles. The Church is a corporate body intentionally identified with the historical, political and religious institution of Israel.

These observations point us in the direction of seeing the church’s politico-theological ecclesiology, specifically the continuity assumed with Israel, as a major factor in the rise and understanding of the priesthood of the episcopal office. Yet, this is not the complete picture or the fullest answer. The Church from the beginning saw itself in some sense as the fulfillment of Israel, or at least as the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel.<sup>187</sup> Certainly, after 70 and then 135 A.D., with the destruction of the Temple and the disappearance of the functioning locale of the Jewish priesthood, the way was made open for Christians to utilize more fully the old covenant sacerdotal ideas and structures as models for themselves. What other factors existed in the early third century that could combine with this politico-theological ecclesiology in order to create the necessary context in which Old Testament priesthood could begin to work as a theological typology for Christian leadership?

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<sup>186</sup> AT 3, Bott, 44.

<sup>187</sup> See for example Gal. 3-4; 6:16; Romans 2:28-29.



### *Christian Material Culture*

Returning to Leithart's recent work, I wish to examine the AT's presentation of the bishop as priest in light of his conclusion that "a priest is one who has been given a permanent standing—both literally and metaphorically—in the house of God, and whose duties range from personal attendance upon Yahweh to stewardship and care of his house."<sup>188</sup> In essence, priests in ancient Israel were servants of God "attached to a house of God,"<sup>189</sup> namely, the Temple or dwelling place of the LORD. As such, Leithart demonstrates that the priestly ministry in the Old Testament is distinct not only by the tasks and functions performed (which correlate with the tasks delineated in AT), but especially by the location of that work. Turning to Ezekiel 44, Leithart illustrates this facet of priesthood, showing God's judgment on the idolatrous Levites by curtailing their duties in "the house of the Lord." The judgment: "They shall not come near to me, to serve me as priest, nor come near any of my sacred things" (Ezek. 44:13). In contrast, the faithful Zadokites "shall come near to me to minister to me, and they shall attend on me . . . and they shall enter my sanctuary and they shall approach my table..." (Ezek. 44:15-16). The centrality of space and place is prominent in Ezekiel's portrayal of priestly duties and definitions. Thus, Leithart concludes: "the distinction between priestly and non-priestly ministry is a matter of location in sacred space, and thus a matter of attachment and access to the house of Yahweh."<sup>190</sup>

It is this distinguishing factor of "place" or "sacred space" that I wish to explore in relation to the priestly developments in the early church, and in the *Apostolic Tradition* in

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<sup>188</sup> Leithart, "Attendants," 18-19.

<sup>189</sup> Leithart, "Attendants," 13.

<sup>190</sup> Leithart, "Attendants," 19.

particular. For, if Leithart's thesis is correct, an Old Testament priest is fundamentally defined as an attendant of God's house. The *Apostolic Tradition*, as I have shown, portrays the Christian episcopacy as an office modeled around and typifying the old covenant priesthood. One, therefore, would expect that the bishop-priest also would be, among other functions already listed, an attendant of God's house, or a personal attendant to God. Can this be demonstrated?

### *Literary Evidence*

In fact, the *Apostolic Tradition* does begin to show evidence of interest in "space" and "place". In chapter 3, as seen above, God is described as one who has not abandoned his "sanctuary without ministers" (*hagiasma sou aleitourgēton*). In one sense, to be sure, the reference to the "sanctuary" for which God provides "ministers" can be taken in a metaphorical and spiritualized way. The assembly of believers now forms the "sanctuary" of God. Yet, there seems to be more than mere spiritualization. The "sanctuary" of old was a physical Temple located in a specific area. It could be located in space. Keeping this in mind, and continuing in the ordination prayer, one reads that the apostles "established the church in the place (*kata topon*) of your sanctuary." As argued above, the force of the text is that the church has replaced, was set up over against, the previous "sanctuary" of God. Even if one prefers Botte's reading ("in every place *as* your sanctuary"), the necessary point still remains that "place" (*topos*) holds curious significance. If the author had wished to suggest that the assembly of believers spiritually replace the old physical temple, a simple *anti* would suffice to make the point. Instead, the author specifically draws upon the idea of "place" (*topos/locus*) to express his idea. Though the English translations look the same ("in place of"), *anti* merely connotes "replacement" while *kata topon* or *per singula loca* evoke the idea of "space" and "place". As Klemens Richter

argues, the AT suggests that although the old Temple of stone is no more, “yet the Church still has meeting rooms (*Versammlungsraume*) on earth, of which it is said they are the house of the Lord.”<sup>191</sup> Although the *ekklesia* may refer simply to the assembly of believers, the author of the AT wishes to stress something more tangible; whatever the “church” may be, it occupies “place” (*topos/locus*) and replaces the old space of the Temple sanctuary.

In AT 4, as seen previously, the bishop thanks God that he has been deemed “worthy to stand before you and to minister to you.” Given the context of the prayer, namely the liturgical offering of the Eucharist in the worship assembly, the words evoke a sense of real space, a definite location wherein the bishop actually “stands” and “ministers” before God. Likewise, in AT 8, the ordination prayer of a deacon petitions God to grant his Holy Spirit on him “whom you chose to minister in your church (*ministrare ecclesiae tuae*) and to offer in your holy of holies (*in sancto sanctorum tuo*) that which is offered to you by your appointed high-priest.”<sup>192</sup> Again, the force of the text is that the church (*ecclesia*) is the new worship space paralleling the Temple’s holy of holies. The tasks referenced in this prayer are the deacon’s responsibilities in the liturgical worship setting and his assistant role in the Eucharist alongside the bishop. Given this context, the connection between the church and the holy of holies suggests a more concrete notion of worship which parallels that which took place in the old Temple. Though not absolute, the text does evoke the language and imagery of the church as a worship “space” or “place”.

Each of these passages begins to signify an interest in physical space. Combined with other texts in the AT, the cumulative force suggests that space and place are in fact important

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<sup>191</sup> “... doch hat die Kirche auf Erden noch Versammlungsraume, von denen gesagt wird, sie sind das haus des Herrn.” Richter, 27.

<sup>192</sup> The Latin of this text breaks off after “to present” and the remaining prayer is supplemented by the Ethiopic version and the *Testamentum Domini*.

conceptions for the Christian community in Rome. For example, AT 39 and 41 both speak to this notion of “place” for the worshipping community. AT 39 specifies that “the deacons and the presbyters gather daily in the place (*in locum*) which the bishop appoints to them.”<sup>193</sup> Likewise, AT 41 instructs that every believer, upon rising in the morning, if teaching in the Word occurs, should “proceed to that place (*ad locum illum*)” for “he who prays in the church (*in ecclesia*) will be able to escape the evil of the day. He who fears God thinks that it is a great evil if he does not hasten to the place (*ad locum*) where there is instruction . . . Let none of you be late in the church (*in ecclesia*), the place (*locus*) where there is teaching.” The instruction concludes: “Therefore, let everyone be careful to go to the church (*ad ecclesiam*), the place (*locum*) where the Holy Spirit abounds.”<sup>194</sup>

From these instructions, one can see again the emerging importance of “place” and “space” for the early Roman church. All of these instructions easily could be given in shortened form without spatial reference. Especially in the concluding remark, “the church” is explicitly identified by the apposite, “the place”. If location and spatiality were of no concern, and if by “the church” the author meant merely the “spiritual” assembly of believers, the same instruction could stand easily without the spatial indicator: “let everyone be careful to go to the assembly where the Holy Spirit abounds.” The addition of a locator, *locus*, suggests that space and place were becoming an important communal notion identifying the church in the Roman Christian mind. As Thomas Finn suggests, “the context of the AT presumes a building set aside for the

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<sup>193</sup> AT 39. Botte, *La Tradition Apostolique*, 122. There is a lacuna in the Latin text at this point, and Botte’s version is a Latin translation of the Coptic (Sahidic), and corroborated by the Arabic and Ethiopic.

<sup>194</sup> AT 41, Botte, *La Tradition Apostolique*, 124. Again, Botte’s text is based on the Coptic and corroborated by Arabic and Ethiopic.

community.”<sup>195</sup> Though his is only a passing remark, Finn recognizes the implications of the way the AT speaks of and uses spatial language in its description of the church.

Finally, the *Apostolic Tradition* testifies to the reality of property owned by the church. In chapter 40, commands are given for the charge of the cemetery. No one, says the AT, should be charged for the services of burial, except for the price of the burial tiles. Rather, with money received from the church, the bishop should provide for those “who are in that place (*in loco illo*) and who care for it . . . so that there be no charge on those who come to that place (*topos*).”<sup>196</sup> Again, the importance of space and place (*locum/topos*) emerges. Additionally, this space seems to be jointly owned by the Church; in other words, here is evidence that this church in Rome owned property and hired someone to manage and care for it, and that, as the property belonging to the assembly, it was to be used by faithful members who passed away. Referring to this passage, Peter Lampe agrees that it witnesses to “one such common burial site preserved by Christians,”<sup>197</sup> another example of the importance of “Christian space” for this Roman church.

From these texts in the AT, one discovers an emerging sense of awareness that the church has its own material culture, with its own property (cemeteries) and its own sacred space (the worship area of the church). Although the more explicit term “*domus dei*” (house of God) is not attested in the first two centuries,<sup>198</sup> there does seem to be a growing sense of the place of worship as a “sacred space” by the early third century and in the *Apostolic Tradition* itself, along

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<sup>195</sup> Thomas M. Finn, “Ritual Process and the Survival of Early Christianity: A study of the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 3 (1989), 82, n.25.

<sup>196</sup> AT 41, Botte, *La Tradition Apostolique*, 122.

<sup>197</sup> “... ein solches gemeinschaftlich von Christen belegtes Grabareal.” Peter Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten : Untersuchungen zur Sozialgeschichte* (Tübingen : J.C.B. Mohr, 1987), 106.

<sup>198</sup> See Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*, 308. Although, see my earlier chapter on Tertullian where he plays with the metaphor of the Church building as the *templum Dei*.

with the designation of the bishop as a priest. Given Leithart's conclusions about Old Testament priests as attendants of God's house, it is striking that the rise of sacerdotal designations for the bishop and a growing sense of Christian space and place both emerge within the same text. Having now examined the textual evidence for an awareness of a distinctly Christian material culture, I turn to the archaeological evidence to see whether the literary and archaeological data concur in pointing toward this emerging awareness in early third century Rome.

### *Archaeological evidence*

What archaeological evidence do we have of more permanent, fixed, places of worship in early third century Rome? Many scholars have suggested that the early third century Roman churches were nothing more than a loose scattering of gatherings. Allen Brent, for example, has contended that the Roman Church at this time consisted of a number of house churches built on the model of philosophical schools.<sup>199</sup> Upon this thesis and what he calls "the negative archaeological evidence" he concludes that "there are no examples of either separate church buildings, or indeed rooms in private houses, set aside exclusively for worship before the middle of the third century."<sup>200</sup> Later, Brent will reassert that "there were no separate chapels until the mid-third century when complexes specifically designed for worship and for burial were built on."<sup>201</sup> By Brent's conclusions, the Roman community surrounding the AT knew nothing of fixed places of worship designated for that sole purpose.

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<sup>199</sup> Brent, *Hippolytus*, 402-405. This is followed by Stewart-Sykes, 38-39, 41.

<sup>200</sup> Brent, *Hippolytus*, 404.

<sup>201</sup> Brent, *Hippolytus*, 439.

Likewise, Peter Lampe argues that only later “did the archaeology of the dwelling house come to light, in which rooms were reserved exclusively for worship.”<sup>202</sup> Until the mid third century, argues Lampe, no houses or rooms had such exclusive (*ausschliesslich*) usage as places of worship, and therefore the evidence for a fixed and permanent worship space for the church of the early third century is primarily “hypothetisch”.<sup>203</sup> There can be no objection, however, that the church eventually did begin to build just such church buildings for worship. The question remains, then, just how early did this process begin?

L. Michael White, building on the earlier work of Richard Krautheimer, has attempted to address the issue of “exactly when Christians first began to renovate houses or other private structures into church buildings”<sup>204</sup> solely for the purpose of Christian worship. He surveys the archaeological development of church structures from the earliest (and nearly invisible) form of the “house church” to the later fourth and fifth century basilicas. Between these two structural and chronological extremes, White contends that the “*domus ecclesiae*” stage represents the point at which churches began to buy or use property for the sole purpose of worship. He essentially agrees with Krautheimer that between the years 150 and 250 A.D. the church

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<sup>202</sup> “... hat die Archäologie Wohnhäuser ans Licht gefördert, in denen Räume *ausschliesslich* dem Gottesdienst vorbehalten waren.” Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*, 307, italics his.

<sup>203</sup> Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*, 307. Along similar lines, Robert Grant argues that there would have been theological objections “to temple-like buildings. The non-local God, who needed no sacrifices, could not be worshipped in a special sacred place and the church consisted of believers, not buildings” (“Temples, Churches, and Endowments,” in *Early Christianity and Society*, ed. idem (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 149.

<sup>204</sup> L. Michael White, *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture*, vol. 1 (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1996), 117.

continued to grow requiring new assembly places. At this point, some congregations began to own property and use buildings for worship.<sup>205</sup>

Broadly speaking, White argues that there is evidence for such a shift between 180-200 A.D. in which “there was an emergence of a more distinctively Christian material culture.”<sup>206</sup> As the Christian population grew and the Eucharistic celebration became separate from the agape meal, the assembly places adjusted as well. White notes that one of the earliest attestations of this separation of the agape from the public Eucharistic celebration is found in the *Apostolic Tradition*. Such liturgical shifts, argues White, “had a correlative impact on the arrangement and setting for assembly,” leading to “the emergence of the hall arrangement for assembly.”<sup>207</sup> As a result, White contends that by the third century, Christian buildings were becoming identifiable public Christian space, even if not architecturally unique.

The Syrian Church in Dura-Europos marks the best known example of such a public Christian “space”, but what archaeological evidence is there for Rome? Are Brent and others correct that no such fixed worship space existed for Roman Christians prior to the third century? Again taking cues from White’s research, and adding to it the work done by Lampe, one can demonstrate that there is good evidence that more permanent worship structures were beginning to arise in early third century Rome as well. Thus, the literary observations about “space” and “place” in the AT point, in fact, to this architectural development in its time.

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<sup>205</sup> White, *Social Origins*, vol.1, 18-20, who follows Richard Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture [ECBA]* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965), 3-12.

<sup>206</sup> White, *Social Origins*, vol. 1, 118. See also Graydon Snyder, *Ante Pacem: archaeological evidence of church life before Constantine* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1985), 163-165.

<sup>207</sup> White, *Social Origins*, vol. 1, 120.



Peter Lampe delineates two possibilities of archaeological evidence for early third century Roman Christian worship space, both of which are *tituli* churches of Rome. *Titulus Byzantis*, later known as the basilica SS Giovanni e Paolo, received major renovations sometime in the early to mid third century. Krautheimer, Lampe and White all agree that from the evidence of the window groupings, the steps, and the reinforcement of the bottom wall, a great assembly hall was located here in the second and third stories, possibly used for Christian worship.<sup>208</sup> What began as a small Christian group meeting in a rear shop of the building soon renovated its space into a “domus ecclesiae”. That this architectural renovation was used as Christian assembly space is corroborated by the evidence of definitive Christian frescoes at the end of the third century.<sup>209</sup> Thus, *titulus Byzantis* was clearly a Christian “domus ecclesiae” by the second half of the third century, and quite possibly used as such from even earlier times.

Second, the *titulus Clementis* (now known as the basilica S Clemente) bears evidence to a building with a large open hall in the early house that could have been used as an assembly place.<sup>210</sup> Archaeological excavations have revealed that the original basilica structure of the late fourth century, was built on structures of even earlier centuries. White notes that the buildings existing under the basilica “were renovated during the third century to serve as a large hall, and thus might well have housed a pre-Constantinian Christian community.”<sup>211</sup> Though conclusive evidence is not available, Krautheimer argues that “the likelihood is undeniable” that Christian

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<sup>208</sup> See Krautheimer, *ECBA*, 9; Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*, 307; and White, *Social Origins*, vol. 1, 114.

<sup>209</sup> Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*, 307-308. See also, L. Michael White, *Social Origins*, vol. 2, 216-217.

<sup>210</sup> Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*, 308.

<sup>211</sup> White, *Social Origins*, vol. 2, 219-222.

congregations used these buildings well before the construction of the basilica.<sup>212</sup> Likewise Matilda Webb argues that the Clementine church group was probably already existing in this very building by the second century.<sup>213</sup> In fact, archaeological evidence suggests that the later basilica was formed and constrained by the pre-existing structure already used by Christians as worship space.<sup>214</sup>

There is a third possibility of evidence for a more permanent Christian worship space, that of the *titulus Equitii*, known now as the basilica S Martino ai Monti. Émile Mâle, in his work on the early churches in Rome, notes that the walls of this early structure are made of bricks resembling the period of the early third century.<sup>215</sup> This early church appears to have been a house used for Christian assembly. Unlike the neighboring houses, however, after approaching through the vestibule, one entered a spacious hall, divided by pillars into two aisles, with room enough to hold a large gathering. The archaeological excavation suggests that the hall had been planned intentionally for a large assembly when the house was first built.<sup>216</sup> Certainly one of the worship places of Christians during the middle third century, it also appears to have existed for Christian use from an even earlier date.

Taking our starting point from Lampe's conclusion that there were no rooms or homes permanently set apart for Christian worship in the first two centuries,<sup>217</sup> and that there is solid evidence that such worship space did exist by the middle to late third century, it is not unlikely

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<sup>212</sup> Krautheimer, *ECBA*, 9. So also White, *Social Origins*, vol. 2, 226-228.

<sup>213</sup> Matilda Webb, *Churches and Catacombs of Early Christian Rome* (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2001), 87.

<sup>214</sup> White, *Social Origins*, vol. 2, 228.

<sup>215</sup> Émile Mâle, *Rome et ses vieilles églises* (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1992), 47.

<sup>216</sup> Mâle, 48. Even Lampe admits this could be a permanent house church of the third century (*Die stadtrömischen Christen*, 308).

<sup>217</sup> Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*, 309.

that such a transition from pure house church to building renovation for exclusive worship was a gradual one from the early to the mid third century. Thus, the AT resides precisely in the midst of this transition and emergence of “sacred space” for the Christian community. Would it be too bold to press the conservative conclusions of Krautheimer, White and Lampe to suggest that perhaps what the AT is witnessing to in its identification of “space” and “place” is in fact the slow but formidable emergence of the more permanent Christian worship space, even before definitive archaeological verification can bear witness? In fact, some scholars such as James Jeffers and Johann Kirsch have already argued that the archaeological evidence does suggest extensive renovation to the early *tituli* buildings by the early third century.<sup>218</sup> Even if not conclusive, the evidence is certainly highly suggestive of Christian worship space in the early third century.

In light of the literary findings in the AT regarding the growing awareness of and sensitivity toward “space” and “place”, the conclusion seems quite probable that Christians did have exclusive worship space by the early third century. Taking this in combination with the additional literary evidence from the early third century (see below), it seems likely that by this time such a shift had begun in the way Christians were viewing their worship.

Turning briefly to these literary sources, Eusebius notes in his *Church History* that Emperor Gallienus, in the year 260, issued an edict to end the former persecution of Christians, calling all heathens to “depart from the places of worship (*apo tōn topōn tōn thrēskeusimōn*)” of

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<sup>218</sup> James Jeffers, *Conflict at Rome: social order and hierarchy in early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 45, and J.P. Kirsch, *Die römischen Titelkirchen im Altertum* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1918), 134, both argue that the renovations and modifications of the *tituli* churches occurred as early as the late second or early third century. See also J.P. Kirsch, *Die christlichen Cultusgebäude im Altertum* (Köln: J.P. Bachem, 1893).

the Christians.<sup>219</sup> It would seem from this decree that Christians not only possessed church buildings in some form by the mid third century, but that their property ownership was well established.

Minucius Felix (late 2<sup>nd</sup>/early 3<sup>rd</sup> c.), like the AT, also points to this transition period toward more permanent places of worship. On the one hand, in *Octavius* 10.2-4, the pagan Caecilius complains that Christians hide their worship and “have no altars (*nullas aras*), no sanctuaries (*nulla templa*),”<sup>220</sup> and Minucius seems to agree, saying Christians have “no temples (*delubra*) and altars (*aras*).”<sup>221</sup> Yet from the context his point is not that Christians have no worship space, but that they are not worshipping in the same way as pagans nor calling their space a “temple.”<sup>222</sup> However, in another passage, Minucius records the objections to Christianity’s “disgraceful chapels” (*sacraria*) and the questionable practices toward the Christian “priests” (*sacerdotis*).<sup>223</sup> Here is the first instance in which the place of Christian worship is designated in more concrete terms—as *sacraria*; interestingly, it occurs in the same context which speaks of Christian “priests” (*sacerdotes*). Thus, these texts seem to mark the shift toward seeing Christian space as sacred and the one presiding over it as a priest.

Taking all this literary evidence (AT, Eusebius, Minucius Felix) as suggestive of a time of transition, one can read the archaeological evidence in a new light. There does seem to be a development of a Christian material culture of fixed worship space, evidenced especially by the literary sources and certainly suggested by the archaeological data.

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<sup>219</sup> Eusebius, *Church History* 7.13

<sup>220</sup> Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 10.2-4 (Latin text in *Octavius*, ed. Bernhard Kytzler [Leipzig: Tübner Verlagsgesellschaft, 1982], 8).

<sup>221</sup> *Octavius* 32.1, Kytzler, 30.

<sup>222</sup> See Krautheimer, *ECBA*, 5 for this point too.

<sup>223</sup> *Octavius* 9.1, Kytzler, 7.

More conclusive evidence of a growing Christian material culture comes from the catacombs. As already noted above, the AT testifies to the existence of church property in the form of burial sites for poor believers. Archaeologically, this literary evidence is corroborated. Krautheimer remarks that the construction of large communal burial sites, especially underground, was the perfect solution for the poorer Christian believers who individually could not afford their own sites. This began, says Krautheimer, in “the last quarter of the second century and the early third centuries,”<sup>224</sup> precisely the period in which the AT resides.

While Brent and Lampe suggest that communal Christian catacombs arose only in the mid third century with Cornelius (250 A.D.),<sup>225</sup> the evidence suggests that an exclusive Christian burial place existed as early as the time of Victor (186-196 A.D.). Vincenzo Nicolai et al., in their work on the Christian Roman catacombs, argue that “the literary and monumental evidence agree in placing the first appearance of collective and exclusive funerary area for Christian communities” in the end of the second century.<sup>226</sup> Certainly, as the *Refutation of All Heresies* 9 records, common Christian burial spots existed by the early third century when, for example, Zephyrinus (195-217 A.D.) assigned young Callistus as custodian and caretaker of the Christian

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<sup>224</sup> Krautheimer, *ECBA*, 9

<sup>225</sup> See Brent, *Hippolytus*, 437-438; and Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*, 310-311. Brent especially seems to dismiss both the account of Victor’s designating Callistus as custodian of “the cemetery” (*Refutation* 9.12.14), and the evidence of AT itself which seems to speak very clearly of a Christian burial place, owned by all.

<sup>226</sup> See Vincenzo Focchi Nicolai et al., *The Christian Catacombs of Rome: History, decoration, inscriptions*, trans. Cristina Carlo Stella and Lori-Ann Touchette (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 1999), 13, 14. Nicolai note that Tertullian also speaks of Christian burial places as early as 197. Origen also, in Alexandria, mentioned burial places by early third century. George La Piana agrees with these conclusions stating: “stronger arguments may be brought in favor of the theory that the acquisition of the new property in the name of the church took place in the episcopate of Victor (“The Roman Church at the End of the Second Century” *Harvard Theological Review* 18 [1925]: 256).

cemetery. Examination of this catacomb, known now as the catacomb of Callistus, demonstrates that its construction was designed from the very beginning as a communal burial ground for larger numbers of people.<sup>227</sup> Throughout the third and into the fourth century, this and other common burial places were enlarged and expanded to accommodate a continually growing Christian population. In fact, one of the distinctive features of Christian catacombs was their intentional construction from the very beginning with a view towards eventual expansion, compared to the more “closed” structure of the pagan sites.<sup>228</sup>

Thomas Harrington’s article on this “common cemetery” of the late second century traces the stages of cemetery development, showing that what were formerly privately owned burial sites in the mid second century, soon become more corporately owned by the end of the second and into the third century.<sup>229</sup> This shift, says Harrington, demonstrates “a dramatic new development in ecclesiastical administration, for it marks the first documented instance of ecclesial exercise of custody and control over real (‘immovable’) property which can be described as ‘belonging’ to the community at large.”<sup>230</sup> Harrington argues that in Rome, where burial of the dead was weighted with such importance, the significance of such property would have been immense for Christians.<sup>231</sup> In other words, these burial grounds would be viewed as “sacred space” and significant evidence of an emerging tangible, public Christian culture in Rome at the beginning of the third century.

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<sup>227</sup> L.V. Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome: in search of the roots of Christianity in the catacombs of the eternal city* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 67.

<sup>228</sup> Nicolai, 16-17. The Catacomb of Callistus is a prime example he gives.

<sup>229</sup> Thomas J. Harrington, “The Local Church at Rome in the Second Century: A Common Cemetery Emerges in this ‘Laboratory of Christian Policy’” *Studia Canonica* 23 (1989): 167-188. See also Jeffers, 49.

<sup>230</sup> Harrington, 180-181.

<sup>231</sup> Harrington, 186.

These burial sites were not merely abandoned places to store the bodies of dead believers. They were invested with “sacredness” as they housed the bodies of Christian saints and martyrs. The church cared for these sites, constructed intentional rooms for them, placed inscriptions on the walls indicating the holy ones buried there, returned to them for worship and memorial services, and created extensive works of art to decorate the rooms.<sup>232</sup> Some of the earliest pieces of extant Christian art are those from the catacombs.

This evidence presents the first view of a context in which Christian leaders, the bishops, are responsible for the care and administration of material property. Even if Christians were not worshipping regularly in the catacombs, they still represented “sacred space” for the Christian community. As Nicolai suggests, one of the reasons for the rise of exclusively Christian burial grounds was “the desire to set out proper spaces for the celebration of burial rites, in part distinctive such as the burial for the dead, funerary Mass, etc.”<sup>233</sup> As such, they along with the developing notions of more fixed worship spaces in the early to mid third century, form the initial stages of a material Christian culture, over which the bishop must preside and to which he must attend. Thus, for the first time there is the creation of a sacred space that requires the care of an appointed caretaker, naturally the bishop. Given the theological reflection on the functions of the bishop as “priestly” in nature, combined with the politico-theological ecclesiology of continuity with Israel and the emerging Christian material culture, one discovers the development of the bishop as the priest of the people of God, his sanctuary the church, and his holy things.

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<sup>232</sup> For the idea of the catacombs retaining a sense of holiness, see Rutgers, 75.

<sup>233</sup> Nicolai, 15. See, e.g. *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 18-28 for examples of Christians returning to burial sites for services.

## Conclusion

A distinct Christian culture is forming in Rome at the end of the second, beginning of the third century. Catacombs (including Christian art) and worship spaces (houses designated as more permanent places of worship) are all becoming more visible, concrete realities in the Roman Christian world. In light of this evidence, the growing interest in “place” and “space” seen in the AT now begins to take shape as something definite in the Christian community. There was a newly emerging consciousness of a Christian material culture, one especially aware of sacred “space” and “place” in which Christians lived, moved, worshipped, and even died. This forms the perfect backdrop for the emergence of the bishop as a priest at precisely the same time. Combining these observations about the emerging Christian material culture with the earlier observations about the church’s politico-theological ecclesiology, the necessary catalysts are present to move early Christians to reflect on their ministry leader as a “priest”. The old covenant attendants of God’s house are fulfilled now by the Church’s new priestly attendants, the bishops. From the *Apostolic Tradition* itself, Willy Rordorf observes this dual influence, what he calls

a temporal aspect and a spatial aspect. On the one hand, it signifies the *oikonomia* of the history of salvation [from Abraham to the Church] . . . on the other hand, the conception of *ordo* is spatial: the ‘race of the just’ forms the Church, the ‘sanctuary’ of God which is installed ‘in every place’, and which recognizes, in its bosom, a hierarchy of ministers.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> “... un aspect temporel et un aspect spatiale. D’une part, il signifie l’*oikonomia* de l’histoire du salut [from Abraham to Church] . . . D’autre part, la conception de l’*ordo* est spatiale : la « race des justes » forme l’Église, le « sanctuaire » de Dieu qui s’installe « en tout lieu », et qui connaît, en son sein, une hiérarchie des ministères.” Willy Rordorf, “L’Ordination de l’Évêque selon la Tradition Apostolique d’Hippolyte de Rom” *Questions Liturgiques* 55 (1974), 148.



Rordforf's observations on the AT comport very well with my observations about the church's politico-theological ecclesiology (the temporal aspect) and the emergence of a Christian material culture (the spatial aspect). Priesthood, then, seems to be developing in this dual context as the bishop, the new priest of the fulfilled Israel, presides over worship and liturgy in the newly developing sacred spaces of the catacombs and worship halls.

In the next chapter, I move from the West to the East where I will examine the Syrian *Didascalia Apostolorum*; yet I am moving forward in time as well. What I have found in the Roman *Apostolic Tradition* will be carried forward by the *Didascalia Apostolorum* as a politico-theological ecclesiology and an emerging Christian material culture are brought further to bear on the priestly office of the bishop.

## CHAPTER 4

### STEWARDS OF GOD’S HOUSE: THE DIDASCALIA APOSTOLORUM

#### **Introduction**

In the last chapter, I examined the development of priestly designations for the bishop in the Western church order, the *Apostolic Tradition*. I turn our attention now to the East, wherein I will examine the *Didascalia Apostolorum* for another early witness to the rise of a sacerdotal understanding of the episcopal office. The importance of the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (*DA*) lies in its portrayal of early Christian life in the third century east, what Bartlett describes as “the most living and detailed picture we possess of Church-life in that century”<sup>235</sup> and what Plöchl calls “a complete summary of the Church Order prevailing in the third century.”<sup>236</sup> For my purposes, the real value of this text lies in its portrayal of the Christian bishop in clear priestly terms, making it, along with the *Apostolic Tradition*, one of the earliest evidences of such a designation within Christianity. By exploring the presentation of the bishop in the *DA*, specifically in its use of sacerdotal designations, I will gain further insight into the understanding of and causal factors behind this perspective.

#### **Background to the *Didascalia Apostolorum***

##### ***Dating and Provenance***

Nearly all scholars agree that the *DA* was written sometime in the third century in the provenance of Syria or northern Palestine. Debate centers around which half of the third century

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<sup>235</sup> James Bartlett, *Church-Life and Church-Order during the First First Four Centuries*, ed. C.J. Cadoux (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1943), 75.

<sup>236</sup> “... eine ziemlich vollständige Zusammenfassung des im 3. Jahrhundert geltenden Kirchenrechts.” Willibald Plöchl, *Geschichte des Kirchenrechts*, vol. 1 (Wien: Verlag Herold, 1960), 108.

is the most likely period of production.<sup>237</sup> Scholars such as Plöchl, Achelis and Schwartz suggest the second half of the third century. On the other hand, scholars such as Bartlett, Brakke, Galtier, and Connolly argue for the first half of the same century. More recent scholarship tends to place the text in Syria during the first half of the third century, and this chapter will follow that general consensus. Thus, we are dealing with a text of the early 200's A.D. from the Middle Eastern region, most likely Syria. Like the *Apostolic Tradition*, the *DA* gives us a glimpse into the world of early Christian thought on ministerial leadership, this time in the eastern empire.

### ***Textual Issues***

Originally written in Greek, the *DA* comes to us in a complete form only in a Syriac translation.<sup>238</sup> In addition to the Syriac, there are considerable Latin fragments of the text<sup>239</sup> and

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<sup>237</sup> See Plöchl, 108; Bartlett, *Church-Life*, 89; Hans Achelis and Johannes Flemming, *Die Ältesten Quellen des orientalischen Kirchenrechts: Die syrische Didaskalia* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1904), 377 (although leaning towards the latter half of the century, Achelis prefers to leave the issue a *non liquet* (not proven); Eduard Schwartz, *Bussstufen und Katechumenatsklassen* (Strassburg: K.J. Trübner, 1911), 23; David Brakke, "The Problematization of Nocturnal Emissions in Early Christian Syria, Egypt, and Gaul" *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 (1995): 424; Paul Galtier, "La Date de la Didascalie des Apôtres" *Revue D'Histoire Ecclesiastique* 42 (1947): 337-350; R.H. Connolly, *Didascalia Apostolorum*. London (Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), lxxxvii & xc. Galtier summarizes nicely the main issues for each side: those who date the *DA* late typically find it to be a reaction to the Novatian schism and demonstrating a later, "lax" attitude toward the penitential system. Those who hold to an earlier date typically demonstrate that a so-called "lax" attitude as found in the *DA* can also be found in earlier writers like Hippolytus, Callistus and even Cyprian to some extent. Connolly also makes the literary observation that the *DA* shows no dependence on any other writings beyond Irenaeus, which suggests that it was written in the early third century rather than later (Connolly, xc).

<sup>238</sup> The critical Syriac edition is Arthur Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, vols. 401 & 407 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1979). English translations are provided by the author in the same series, *CSCO* 402 & 408.

<sup>239</sup> The critical Latin texts for the *Didascalia* can be found in Edmund Hauler, *Didascalie Apostolorum Fragmenta Ueronensia Latina : Accedunt Canonum Qui Dicuntur*

a revised and expanded Greek version available in the fourth century *Apostolic Constitutions*.<sup>240</sup> As Connolly notes, the Latin text is “studiously literal” and can “provide us with a valuable standard by which to measure the more free and literary Syriac version.”<sup>241</sup> In other words, where available, the Latin text can be relied upon as a faithful witness to the underlying Greek text and may in fact be a more accurate translation than the Syriac which requires more idiomatic translation from the Greek.<sup>242</sup> The Greek *Apostolic Constitutions*, on the other hand, demonstrates a strong revisionist hand, sometimes staying close to the original text and at other times greatly expanding and developing it. While one must be cautious about using the *Apostolic Constitutions* to arrive at the original Greek, there can be great value to this text, particularly when it is in agreement with the Latin or Syriac versions, or both. As Vööbus suggests, “the amount of the original Greek text preserved in the *Apostolic Constitutions* must be reckoned as considerable.”<sup>243</sup> Therefore, when the Greek of the *Apostolic Constitutions* shows clear agreement with the Syriac or Latin texts, I will cite it as original. Likewise, if the Latin version is available, that translation may also be employed. If a certain text remains faithful only

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*Apostolorum Et Aegyptiorum Reliquies* (Lipsiae: Teubneri, 1900); F.X. Funk, *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum* (Torino: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1961); and Erik Tidner, *Didascaliae Apostolorum, Canonum Ecclesiasticorum, Traditionis Apostolicae Versiones Latinae* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1963).

English translations can be found in Connolly and Vööbus (see above). A French translation was produced by François Nau, *La Didascalie des douze apôtres: traduite du syriaque pour la première fois*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1912); and a German translation was provided by Achelis and Flemming (see notes above).

<sup>240</sup> The critical edition can be found in Marcel Metzger, *Les Constitutions Apostoliques*, 2 vols., *Sources Chrétiennes* (no. 320, 329) (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1985-1986).

<sup>241</sup> Connolly, *Didascalia*, xix-xx.

<sup>242</sup> See Achelis, *Didaskalia*, 250 for similar assessment of the Latin. Vööbus argues that the Latin is earlier than the Syriac and more literal (*CSCO* 402:25-28).

<sup>243</sup> Vööbus, *CSCO* 408:32.

in the Syriac version I will use Connolly's English translation and cite the Syriac critical edition for reference.

### **Genre**

Because the genre of the *DA* is quite different from that of the *Apostolic Tradition*, I must approach the text in a slightly different manner. Whereas the *AT* provided ample instructions for episcopal ordination, worship services, and institutional life, in many respects the *DA* does not look like a church order at all. As R.H. Connolly notes, the *DA* "is much more an elementary treatise on Pastoral Theology"<sup>244</sup> than a church order proper. Georg Schöllgen likewise argues that the title "Kirchenordnung" may not be the best designation for this text. Rather, Schöllgen observes that the *DA* covers the themes of traditional church orders (liturgy, power, catecheses and so on) in only the most general terms. He also rightly notes that the last section of the *DA* is not a church order in any sense, but a theological writing against schismatics and heretics. In the end, Schöllgen wishes to categorize the *DA* in much broader terms, concluding, "It is rather a pastoral writing of admonition and teaching addressed to a few actual and latent problems and misunderstandings of the community."<sup>245</sup>

As a result of its unique genre, I will not be utilizing ordination instructions and prayers as I did for the *Apostolic Tradition*, but rather will explore the portrayal of the bishop in the *DA*'s presentation of community life, images of authority, worship regulations, and Christian

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<sup>244</sup> Connolly, *Didascalia*, xxvii.

<sup>245</sup> "Sie ist vielmehr eine pastorale Mahn- und Lehrschrift zu einzelnen aktuellen und latenten Problemen und Missständen der Gemeinden des 3. Jh. im apostolischen Gewand." Georg Schöllgen, "Die literarische Gattung der syrischen Didaskalie" in *IV Symposium Syriacum, 1984* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987), 159. See also W.C. van Unnick who argues a very similar line as Schöllgen ("The Significance of Moses' Law for the Church of Christ According to the Syriac Didascalia" in *Sparsa Collecta: The Collected Essays of W.C. Van Unnick*, vol.s 3 [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983], 10-11).

interpretation of Jewish law. Several chapters address the episcopal office explicitly, and these will be mined carefully for the community's understanding of the bishop as a priest.

### **Priestly Depictions of the Christian Bishop**

In chapters 8 and 9 of the *DA*, instructions are given to the clergy and the laity regarding the proper conduct of and respect due to the bishop. From these chapters, one gains a fairly clear picture of the bishop's roles and responsibilities as well as his authority within the Christian community. The biblical priesthood clearly lies as an important influence on this presentation of the bishop; yet, it must be admitted that the priestly metaphor is not the only one used. The author demonstrates his comprehensive biblical influence when he admonishes the bishops:

Therefore today, you O bishops, are to your people priests and Levites, those who serve in the holy tabernacle, the holy catholic Church, who stand before the altar of the Lord your God . . . You are prophets to the laity among you, and rulers and leaders and kings, and mediators between God and his faithful ones, and receivers and messengers of the word, and those who know the Scriptures, and the voice of God, and witnesses of his will...<sup>246</sup>

In this one passage alone, the author portrays the bishop as priest, prophet, leader, king, mediator, preacher and student of the Word. Several scholars have attempted to address this multitude of episcopal metaphors by narrowing the field to one major, dominant presentation. Gorg Schöllgen, for example, argues that the predominant image of the bishop in the *DA* is that of the *oikonomos*, the household ruler.<sup>247</sup> Karen Torjesen has suggested that the *DA*'s

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<sup>246</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 9; *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.25.7, in Metzger 1:230. All translations from the Greek and Latin are my own unless stated otherwise. Syriac translations are those of Connolly.

<sup>247</sup> Georg Schöllgen, *Die Anfänge der Professionalisierung des Klerus und das kirchliche Amt in der syrischen Didaskalie*, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 26 (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1998), esp. 106-120 & 127-134.

episcopacy is primarily one of a monarchical metaphor, the bishop as king, ruler and judge.<sup>248</sup>

Both Schöllgen and Torjesen, however, suggest that the priestly metaphor plays little to no role at all.<sup>249</sup>

It is not the goal of this chapter to provide a comprehensive examination of all the metaphors used to describe the bishop. That the episcopal office is cast in light of a monarchical, prophetic, and household-leadership model cannot be denied. Neither do I suggest that the priestly metaphor is necessarily the primary one. However, *pace* Schöllgen and Torjesen, the sacerdotal imagery does play a larger and more important role in the *DA* than has been suggested in the past, and it will be the task of this chapter to explore that portrayal in more detail.

As mentioned, chapters 8 and 9 deal with the episcopal office in the greatest detail, and the priestly imagery is particularly strong here; however, there are other passages which equally portray the bishop in sacerdotal terms. One discovers this depiction throughout the work in an almost assumed fashion. In other words, the author of the *DA* argues for the continued support and respect of the bishop because of the perspective shared with his audience that the Old Testament model of priesthood corresponds to the Christian bishop.

For example, in discussing the proper conduct of a bishop, the author admonishes: “Therefore let it be examined whether [the bishop] is blameless (*amōmos*) concerning worldly matters; for it is written ‘Search for the faults of the one who is about to be ordained into the priesthood (*eis hierōsunēn*).’”<sup>250</sup> The citation comes from the commands found in Leviticus

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<sup>248</sup> Karen Torjesen, “The Episcopacy--Sacerdotal Or Monarchical? The Appeal to Old Testament Institutions by Cyprian and the Didascalia” *Studia Patristica* 36 (2001): 387-406.

<sup>249</sup> See Schöllgen, *Die Anfänge*, 104-105; and Torjesen, “Episcopacy,” 388, who actually relies on Schöllgen’s assessment for her conclusion.

<sup>250</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 4; *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.3, in Metzger 1:148.

21:17-23 in which Aaron is instructed that no one found with a blemish (*mōmos*) can perform the functions of the priesthood.<sup>251</sup>

The author later admonishes the people to respect and imitate their blameless bishop: “For if the pastor is blameless in regard to any wickedness, he will compel his own disciples, even through his very way of life, to urge them to become imitators of his own deeds. As the prophet says somewhere, ‘Just as the priest (*hiereus*) will be, so also will be the people’ (Hos. 4:9).”<sup>252</sup> Again, the underlying assumption is that the biblical priesthood corresponds to the Christian episcopacy such that Old Testament texts speaking of priesthood can be applied analogically to the episcopal office without qualification.

This connection between the authority of biblical priesthood and Christian bishops is made even more deliberate in the author’s attempts to highlight the centrality of the bishop to communal life. Reminiscent of the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, the author of the *DA* urges the community to “do nothing without the bishop.”<sup>253</sup> Unlike Ignatius, however, the *DA* grounds this command explicitly in the correlation between the bishop and Israelite priests: “Therefore just as it was not lawful for him who was not a Levite to offer anything or to approach the altar without a priest (*sacerdote/hiereōs*), so also you should not desire to do anything without the bishop (*episcopo/episkopou*).”<sup>254</sup> Here the parallel between Levitical priesthood and Christian bishop stands pronounced, and the centrality of the bishop’s presence and authority lies precisely

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<sup>251</sup> The important difference of course is that the OT law refers to physical blemish and the *DA* intends moral failure. In other words, the appropriation of the Levitical law is not literal, but analogical.

<sup>252</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 4; *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.6, in Metzger 1:156.

<sup>253</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 9; *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.27; See Letters of Ignatius of Antioch, *To Magn.* 7; *To Trall.* 2; *To Polycarp* 4.

<sup>254</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 9; Latin: *Didascaliae Apostolorum* XXVI, in Tidner, 42; and *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.27, in Metzger 1:240.



in this connection. Just as the Israelite nation approached God via the priesthood, so too the Christian community must operate around the priestly *episkopos*.

Given these examples of the underlying connection between biblical priesthood and Christian episcopacy, it should come as no surprise that the author elsewhere explicitly makes clear this metaphoric connection. In ancient times, says the author, offerings were given through the priests

but today, there are offerings (*prosforae/prosphorai*) which are given to God for the remission of sins through the bishops (*per episcopos/dia tōn episkopōn*). For they are your high priests (*primi sacerdotes/archiereis*); but your priests are the presbyters and your Levites are your deacons...<sup>255</sup>

Here one sees not only the identification of the bishops as high priests, but also the further connection between priests/presbyters and Levites/deacons so that the entire body of clergy are associated with the priestly paradigm found in the Old Testament.

These texts demonstrate that the priestly metaphor held an important place for the author of the *Didascalia*, even if not the sole one. Although he uses a variety of images and metaphors to speak of the bishop (priest, king, prophet, leader, ruler, mediator) the image of priest finds consistent repetition throughout the work and often finds primacy of place when a series of metaphors is given.<sup>256</sup> The idea of the bishop as a priest seems well established and accepted within this early Christian community and repeatedly pervades the presentation of the bishop's role and place in the congregation.

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<sup>255</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 9; Latin: *Didascalie Apostolorum* XXV, in Tidner, 41; and *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.26, in Metzger 1:236.

<sup>256</sup> See for example the passage in chapter 9, given on page 4 above: "You are priests and prophets and rulers and kings..." The priestly metaphor is placed at the forefront of the list.

Further, in each of the above texts, the priestly metaphor clearly derives from the biblical priestly model. The former Israelite priesthood corresponds to the current Christian office of bishop. As Collin Bulley concludes, “The main connotations of the bishop’s priesthood are holiness, sacral authority and centrality to the church’s life, reception, distribution and partaking of the people’s offerings . . . The OT priesthood is seen as the priestly pattern for bishops to follow.”<sup>257</sup> This is significant because it dispels any notion that this early Christian community derived its idea of priesthood from the pagan world around it. At every point, when designated as a priesthood, the Christian episcopacy is likened to the Israelite priesthood, not a pagan one.

This leads to another important observation about the *DA*’s portrayal of the bishop-priest: the author’s theology of hierarchy and community life is influenced profoundly by the biblical text. As P. Beaucamp notes, “He [the author] cites it without ceasing and with marvelous relevance, having for each question a biblical text to make the most of, for each objection a response drawn from the holy books. Scripture forms the foundation of his discourse.”<sup>258</sup> Whether using the New Testament Pastoral Epistles or the Old Testament Levitical laws,<sup>259</sup> the author of the *DA* imbues his address with biblical-theological reasoning and support. This is no less true in his depiction of the bishop in priestly terms. The model of the Old Testament stands as the background for his depiction and understanding of the episcopal office.

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<sup>257</sup> Collin Bulley, *The Priesthood of Some Believers: Developments from the General to the Special Priesthood in the Christian Literature of the First Three Centuries* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2000), 130.

<sup>258</sup> “Il la cite sans cesse et avec un merveilleux à propos, ayant pour chaque question un texte biblique à faire valoir, pour chaque objection une réponse tirée des livres saints. L’Ecriture forme encore le fond de son discours...” Pierre Beaucamp, “Un évêque du III<sup>e</sup> siècle aux prises avec les pécheurs” *Bulletin de Littérature ecclésiastique* 50 (1949): 28.

<sup>259</sup> See Achelis, *Didaskalia*, 272, who notes this connection.

A number of other tasks and functions attributed to the bishop in the *Didascalia* highlight both the influence of Scripture on the author as well as the pervasive application of priestly images. Many of these tasks, such as preaching, judging, and ruling seem to draw upon other Old Testament models of authority such as the prophet or king. Given the author's full dependence upon Scripture, this certainly must be the case; yet, many of these functions also can be connected to priestly tasks in the Old Testament. Menahem Haran, for example, has demonstrated that episcopal tasks in the *DA* such as "delivering the divine will," acting as "physician," "teaching," and "acting as judge" all have their priestly correlates in the Old Testament.<sup>260</sup>

As I demonstrated last chapter, one particularly noteworthy description of the Old Testament priest is that of being an "attendant of the Lord" or a "sanctuary attendant." Peter Leithart, Aelred Cody, Leopold Sabourin and Haran have all argued that one of the chief roles of the Israelite priests was in their capacity to act as an attendant who "stands before the Lord to serve."<sup>261</sup> This links particularly well to the *DA*'s description of the bishop as the "steward of God" (*dispensator Dei*) and the "minister of the house" (*ministrare domum*) (*DA* 8; 9), those

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<sup>260</sup> Menahem Haran, "Priesthood, Temple, Divine Service: Some Observations on Institutions and Practices of Worship" *Hebrew Annual Review* 7 (1983): 122. The priest holds the oracular function of dispensing God's will in 1 Sam. 2:28; 14:18ff, 36-42; 28:6; 30:7 (see *DA* 8). As the one who guarded ritual purity and declared persons clean and unclean, the priest is cast in the mold of a physician (see *DA* 7). The priest is instructed to judge the people in Deut. 17:8-13; 21:5 (see *DA* 5). His role in teaching the law is found in Deut. 33:10; 2 Chr. 15:3; Hos. 4:6; Mic. 3:11; 2 Kgs. 12:2; 17:27-28; Jer. 2:8; Ezek. 7:26; 44:23; Ezra 7:10 (see *DA* 2; 5; 7).

<sup>261</sup> See Peter Leithart, "Attendants of Yahweh's House : Priesthood in the Old Testament" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 85 (1999): 3-24; Aelred Cody, *A History of Old Testament Priesthood* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 29, 101; and Leopold Sabourin, *Priesthood: A Comparative Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 150-157. For this task of guardianship of tabernacle and sacred things, see Numb. 1:53; 3:23-38; 4:48; Deut. 10:8; 17:12; 18:5,7; Ezek. 40:46; 43:19; 44:15.

who “serve the tabernacle” (*hoi leitourgountes tē hiera skēnē*) (*DA* 8) and “stand before the Lord your God” (*parestōtes kuriō theō*) (*DA* 8; 11).<sup>262</sup> Again, the *Didascalia* seems intentionally to draw upon the priestly image through these descriptions, which calls for a reassessment of the scholarship that has downplayed the sacerdotal imagery in the *DA*. Certainly, the episcopal tasks evoke a multiplicity of biblical models of authority, but the evocations of a biblical priesthood are much stronger than many have admitted. The bishops and their roles in the *Didascalia* correspond to the priests of Israel in these ways, both terminologically and conceptually.

Having briefly demonstrated that the *Didascalia* does in fact portray the bishop with priestly images and analogues, I must turn our attention to the question of influences. What were the driving forces behind this designation? What clues within the text itself provide us with further insight into this developing notion of the bishop as a “Christian priest?”

### **Eucharistic Sacrifice?**

As I have explored in earlier chapters, a common explanation given for the rise of priestly designations has to do with the bishop’s connection with offering the Eucharistic sacrifice. Does the *DA* support this idea? At first glance, there are a few texts that seem to suggest a connection between the bishop-priest idea and the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice.

Chapter 9 begins with a comparison between the old people of God and the Christian Church, quickly moving to a comparison regarding sacrifice. The author instructs, “The sacrifices which existed formerly are now prayers and petitions and acts of thanksgiving; formerly there were first-fruits and tithes and portions and gifts, but now there are offerings

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<sup>262</sup> Again, we must reassess the scholarship that has downplayed the sacerdotal imagery in the *Didascalia*. Certainly, the episcopal tasks evoke a multiplicity of biblical models of authority, but the evocations of a biblical priesthood are much stronger than many have admitted.

which are made to God for the remission of sins through the bishop. For they are your high priests.”<sup>263</sup> Here it appears that part of the responsibility of the bishop, *qua* high-priest, is to make the offerings of the Church. Certainly, as president of worship, this is one of the bishop’s primary tasks. Yet, nothing in this passage explicitly speaks of the Eucharistic offering. Instead, the Christian sacrifices are specifically named “prayers and petitions and acts of thanksgiving.”<sup>264</sup> Though the Eucharist certainly would have been seen as sacrificial in nature (a virtually unanimous Christian perspective)<sup>265</sup> it does not seem to be the foremost “sacrifice” in connection with the bishop’s designation as “high priest.”

Another passage in the same chapter also speaks of the bishop as priest in the context of sacrifice by making the comparison between liturgical ministry in Israel and in the Church: “Therefore just as it was not lawful for him who was not a Levite to offer anything or to approach the altar (*altarem/thusistērion*) without a priest, so also you should not desire to do

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<sup>263</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 9; Latin: *Didascalie Apostolorum* XXV, in Tidner, 41; and *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.26, in Metzger 1:236, though in a slightly different form.

<sup>264</sup> The *Apostolic Constitutions*, in comparison with the Latin, omits the word “acts” (*actiones*) and speaks only of “thanksgivings” (*eucharistiai*). This may be taken to refer to the Eucharist; however, it is debatable whether this was the original wording of the *Didascalia*. Van Unnick also sees this passage as speaking of prayers rather than the Eucharist (“Moses’ Law,” 22).

<sup>265</sup> For an overview of the early church’s view of the Eucharist as sacrifice, see Robert Daly, *Christian Sacrifice: the Judeo-Christian background before Origen* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Univ. Press, 1978) 311-372, 498-508; Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Westminster [London]: Dacre Press, 1949) 110-118; G.W.H. Lampe, “The Eucharist in the Thought of the Early Church” in *Eucharistic Theology Then and Now*, ed. R.E. Clemens. (London: SPCK, 1968), 38-46; Edward J. Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West: History and Theology*, ed. Robert Daly, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 8-23. The pertinent church fathers on the Eucharist in connection with either sacrifice or altar include *Didache* 14; Ignatius of Antioch, *Philadelphians* 4; Ephesians 5.2; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 41.1-3, 117.1-3; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV 17.5, 18.1-6; Tertullian, *Exhortation on Chastity* 10.5; 11; *Apostolic Tradition* 4.11-12; and Cyprian, *Epistle* 63.

anything without the bishop.”<sup>266</sup> Again, the priestly metaphor seems to work along the lines of sacrificial, liturgical duties of Levites and Christian bishops. Yet, while the Eucharistic service may be in the purview of the author, it is clearly not the foundational idea. The immediately preceding context helps us see what the “altar” is: as the bishop stands in the place of God and the deacons in the place of Christ, “the widows and orphans should be understood by you as the type of the altar (*in typum altaris/tupon tou thusiastēriou*).”<sup>267</sup> A few lines later, the author commands, “Therefore, make your offerings (*prosforas/tas thusias*) to your bishop, either you yourselves or through the deacons; and when he receives from each, he will divide to each as he should. For the bishop knows well those who are distressed and gives to each according to his stewardship...”<sup>268</sup> The “altar” in this context, though related to the offerings provided in worship, refers metaphorically not to the Eucharistic altar, but to the poor and distressed within the community. They constitute the “altar.” The “sacrifices” brought to the bishop-priest are those goods and gifts which in turn are taken to the widows and orphans, “those who are distressed.”

The priestly function of the bishop, then, does relate to his task as one who receives and distributes the “offerings” of the people. The Eucharistic sacrifice, however, does not play a large role, if any, in the conception of the bishop as priest. In fact, the one chapter where Christian worship is addressed explicitly (chapter 12), the Eucharistic rite receives almost no

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<sup>266</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 9; Latin: *Didascalie Apostolorum* XXVI, in Tidner, 42; and *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.27, in Metzger 1:240

<sup>267</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 9; Latin: *Didascalie Apostolorum* XXV-XXVI, in Tidner, 42; and *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.26, in Metzger 1:240.

<sup>268</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 9; Latin: *Didascalie Apostolorum* XXVI, in Tidner, 42; see also *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.27, in Metzger 1:242, for a slightly revised version.

attention.<sup>269</sup> As Collin Bulley notes, “Although there is no doubt, then, that the author of the *Didascalía* viewed the bishop as the one who normally presided at the Eucharist . . . he nowhere relates the bishop’s priesthood specifically to this function.”<sup>270</sup> Schöllgen also recognizes this absence of a Eucharist-priesthood connection and observes that “the liturgical service of the clergy in the *Didascalía* strongly recedes altogether.”<sup>271</sup> Although the ministration of the Eucharistic service may be one of the functions of the *Didascalía*’s bishop, it by no means holds a primacy of place or lies as the basis for understanding the bishop as a priest. Rather the bishop’s more general role as one who presides over all of worship (including but not limited to the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving) seems to be the connecting point for the priesthood motif.

The priestly depiction of the bishop, then, finds repeated emphasis in the *DA*, both terminologically and conceptually, and at times relates to the bishop’s task of presiding over “sacrificial” worship; yet, these priestly depictions do not seem to arise from the bishop’s specific role in presiding over the Eucharistic sacrifice. What, then, can explain this understanding of the bishop as priest in the *DA*?

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<sup>269</sup> It is for this reason that Schöllgen does not want to place the *Didascalía* in the same category (*Kirchenordnung*) as the *Didache* and the *Apostolic Tradition*.

<sup>270</sup> Bulley, 130.

<sup>271</sup> “Der liturgischen Dienst des Klerus in der Didaskalie insgesamt stark zurücktritt.” Schöllgen, *Die Anfänge*, 91. Oddly, later in this same work, Schöllgen seems to suggest conflicting conclusions. On the one hand, he argues that the priestly understanding of the bishop is best explained because of the “understanding of the Eucharist as sacrifice” and “the liturgy of the Eucharistic celebration” (105). On the same page, however, he argues that the bishop is spoken of as a priest in connection with the Eucharist in only a few places (105).

## Politico-Theological Ecclesiology

### *Continuity with Israel*

If one thing is clear about the ecclesiological identity in the *Didascalía*, it is the firm conviction that the Christian Church fulfills biblical Israel, that, as Marcel Simon puts it, “Church and Israel are synonymous, Christianity and the authentic Judaism are blended together.”<sup>272</sup> From the start this connection is made clear. The preface to the treatise begins:

The planting of God’s vineyard, his catholic church and elect, those who believe in that true religion which is without error, who gain the eternal kingdom and who through faith in his kingdom receive virtue and the participation of his Holy Spirit, who are to be honored as participants of the sprinkling of the innocent blood of Christ, who receive the confidence to call the Almighty God Father . . . Hear the sacred doctrine.<sup>273</sup>

The “catholic church” here is identified on the one hand as that body of the “elect” who participate in “the sprinkling of the innocent blood of Christ,” evoking 1 Peter 1:2: “To those who are **elect** exiles . . . in the sanctification of the Spirit, for the obedience to Jesus Christ and for **sprinkling** with his **blood**.” On the other hand, this same group is likened to “the planting of God’s vineyard” which evokes the parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-17. Here, God sings “a love song for my beloved” (5:1) in which “the **vineyard** of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel” (5:7). In the *Didascalía*’s opening sentence, then, the continuity between Israel and the Church is asserted. That former vineyard of Israel finds expression in the present “catholic church.”

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<sup>272</sup> “Ainsi, Église et Israël sont synonymes, christianisme et judaïsme authentique se confondent.” Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel : Étude sur les Relations entre chrétiens et Juifs dans l’Empire Romain (135-425)* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1964), 104.

<sup>273</sup> *Didascalía*, chapter 1; Latin: *Didascalíae Apostolorum* I, in Tidner, 2. This preface is not found in the *Apostolic Constitutions*.



Likewise, the bishops are instructed: “do not be rough with the people of God which is delivered into your hands. And do not destroy the Lord’s house nor scatter his people...”<sup>274</sup> Here, the identification of the Church—“people of God,” “the Lord’s house,” “his people”—utilizes the same designations for Israel in the Old Testament and thus evokes again the understanding of the Church as the fulfillment of God’s plan with Israel.<sup>275</sup>

In a later chapter, the author attacks the Judaizing tendencies within the Church by refashioning this Church-Israel dialectic in much sharper terms. God’s favor once bestowed upon the Jews has now been turned toward the Gentiles of the Church: “For all the working of the Lord our God has passed from the People [i.e. the Jews] to the Church through us the Apostles; and He has withdrawn Himself and left the People . . . He has left that People, therefore, and has filled the Church.”<sup>276</sup> Yet even here, in a passage that smacks much more strongly of a “replacement theology,” the author continues to maintain that the Church is the *fulfillment* of God’s plan with Israel:

Since therefore he has abandoned the people, he has also deserted the temple as a wilderness, tearing the veil of the temple and taking from them the Holy Spirit. ‘For behold,’ he says, ‘your house will be left to you desolate’ (Matt. 23:38). And he gave to you among the Gentiles the spiritual grace, as he says through the prophet Joel, ‘And it will be after these things, says God, I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh and your sons will prophecy and your daughters will see visions and your old men will dream dreams.

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<sup>274</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 12, in Connolly, 119, slightly revised. This text is unavailable in either the Latin fragments or the *Apostolic Constitutions*. For the Syriac, see Vööbus, *CSCO* 407:143.

<sup>275</sup> See for example, Lev. 26:12; Jer. 7:23; Jer. 30:22; Ezek. 36:28; and Ps. 92:13.

<sup>276</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 23, in Connolly, 198. Syriac: Vööbus, *CSCO* 407:226. Not available in Latin. The *Apostolic Constitutions* Greek is sufficiently expanded and revised that it cannot be relied upon as original. The *Didascalia* is written under the guise of apostolic authorship

For God has taken away from the people the power and efficacy of his word, and such visitations, and has given it to you among the Gentiles' (Joel 2:28).<sup>277</sup>

While dismissing God's favor for the Jews after the destruction of the Temple, the *Didascalía* maintains that the Church (i.e. "those among the Gentiles") represents the fulfillment of God's plans to *Israel* as expressed in the prophecy from Joel. In other words, there is a clear distinction made between biblical Israel on the one hand and contemporary Jews on the other whom Christians face every day. While stressing discontinuity with contemporary Judaism, the *Didascalía* nevertheless enforces a strong continuity with biblical Israel.

This alleged continuity with Israel allows the author to reject certain Jewish practices while at the same time claim the Jewish Scriptures for Christians. One striking example of this appropriation comes from chapter 9 wherein the Church is called to reflect on the experience of biblical Israel as if it were their experience as well:

Hear these things also, you laymen, the elect Church of God. For the former People also were called "people of God" and a "holy nation;" therefore you also are a holy catholic Church, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, an adopted people, a great church, a bride adorned for the Lord God. Those things which were formerly said, you hear now in the present . . . Hear, O holy and catholic Church, who was delivered from the ten plagues, received the ten commandments, learned the law, who hold the faith and believe in the Lord Jesus.<sup>278</sup>

The "former people of God" (Israel) are found now in the new people of God (the Church). Yet it is more than mere replacement; a real, almost organic, continuity exists according to the *Didascalía*, such that the experiences of biblical Israel (the ten plagues, the ten commands and so on) are portrayed as the actual experiences of the Church itself. In the fullest sense, then, the

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<sup>277</sup> *Didascalía*, chapter 23; *Apostolic Constitutions* 6.5, in Metzger 2:304-306. Not available in Latin.

<sup>278</sup> *Didascalía*, chapter 9; Latin: *Didascalíae Apostolorum* XXV, in Tidner, 40-41; and *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.26, in Metzger 1:234-236.

author of the DA contends that the Jewish Scriptures belong to the Church as God's very words and dealings with Christians.

Perhaps no stronger outworking of this principle of continuity is found than in the *Didascalia's* portrayal of the bishop as priest. As we just saw above, the Church is cast in Israelite relief such that the experiences of biblical Israel are claimed as the experiences of the Church itself. The plagues, the divine rescue from Egypt and the giving of the law at Sinai are the experiences of the Church now; yet, the text modifies this continuity with Israel in the next breath: "The sacrifices which existed formerly are now prayers and petitions and acts of thanksgiving; formerly there were first-fruits and tithes and portions and gifts, but now there are offerings which are made to God for the remission of sins through the bishop. For they are your high priests."<sup>279</sup> In the fuller context, this "typological"<sup>280</sup> articulation of the bishop as priest finds its grounding in a robust notion that the Church carries on all that was given to Israel. They share Israel's experiences of God's divine grace and deliverance, his giving of the law at Sinai, and a model of priestly leadership.

No doubt, there are discontinuities as well. Throughout the treatise, the author is very careful and concerned to distinguish between the law given at Sinai (a law still binding for Christians) and the "deuterosis" or Second Legislation given after the sin of the golden calf (a set of laws not binding for Christians).<sup>281</sup> Likewise, in the passage just cited, the author makes a

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<sup>279</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 9; Latin: *Didascalie Apostolorum XXV*, in Tidner, 41; and *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.26, in Metzger 1:236.

<sup>280</sup> I use this term in large part because the author of the *Didascalia* will use it later on in a text speaking of the relationship between Tabernacle and Church (see below).

<sup>281</sup> This distinction can be found in numerous places throughout the *Didascalia*. For example, chapter 2 has a lengthy discussion of this distinction in which the audience is commanded "when you read the Law, beware of the Second Legislation . . . For there is a Law

clear distinction between the old type of sacrifices (prescribed under the Second Legislation) and the sacrifices valid for the Church (praise and thanksgiving). While the priestly paradigm of leadership obtains between biblical Israel and the Church, there is obviously no suggestion that the bishop-priests ought to be offering animal sacrifices or that there is a one-to-one correspondence between old and new paradigms. There is no literal appropriation of priestly paradigms. Yet, even so, as Hans Achelis has observed, “in certain cases, the institutions of the Church must be modeled after the image of Israel”<sup>282</sup> according to the *DA*.

Another key passage which demonstrates this underlying continuity with Israel comes from chapter 8. In a section discussing the proper conduct of a bishop, the author takes time to detail the benefits due to the bishop, that they have the right to live off the revenue of the Church. Borrowing from Paul’s use of Deuteronomy 25:4, the author argues that the ox should not be muzzled when it treads out the grain (see 1 Cor. 9:9) and then makes application to the ministers of the church who also should benefit and live from their work. Yet unlike Paul, the *Didascalia* draws out this analogy even further by moving from the Deuteronomic law to an emphases on an ecclesiological continuity. Just as the ox eats the grain,

so [you bishops] who work in the threshing floor, that is in the Church of God, be nourished from the Church, just like the Levites who minister in the tabernacle of

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which the Lord God spoke before the people committed idolatry, and this is the Decalogue. But after they had sinned, He placed upon them the bonds.” (Latin: *Didascalie Apostolorum* III, in Tidner 6; *Apostolic Constitutions* 1.6, in Metzger 1:116-118). For a discussion of this perspective in the *DA*, see Connolly, *Didascalia*, lxii-lxiv; and van Unnick, 12-13, 19-21. Van Unnick makes the interesting suggestion that the author could negate certain ritual laws such as dietary restrictions, circumcision and purity laws while at the same time affirm a priesthood typology because the tabernacle and priesthood “had already been delivered before that fateful and regrettable day of the Gold Calf. Everything said about priests in the Law remains valid” (21).

<sup>282</sup> “Die Einrichtungen in der Kirche haben sich im einzelnen nach dem Vorbild in Israel zu richten.” Achelis, *Didaskalia*, 360.

witness, which in all things was a type (*typos*) of the Church. For in fact even by its name the tabernacle foreshadowed the “witness” of the Church . . . The offerings of the people were the lot of Levi and the inheritance of his tribe. Therefore today you, O bishops, are to your people priests (*hiereis*) and Levites, those who serve the holy tabernacle, the holy and catholic Church, who stand before the Lord your God.<sup>283</sup>

Again, the bishop-as-priest typology lies in the context of a fuller articulation of ecclesiological expressions about Israel and the Church. From this passage, the author suggests that because Israel, and even the tabernacle, typifies the Church, so too Israelite priestly leadership corresponds to the Christian episcopal leadership such that Christians can designate their bishops as “priests.” This ecclesiological connection between Israel and the Church lies behind the identification of the bishop as a priest.

Two points of observation are in order. First, the two chapters in the *DA* in which the episcopacy receives the greatest attention (chapters 8 and 9), the priestly metaphors are the strongest imagery for the bishop. Second, within these two chapters, an ecclesiological continuity with Israel finds strong articulation. Thus, the conclusions of scholars who downplay the sacerdotal imagery in the *DA* must be reassessed while the ecclesiological motif as a strong theological catalyst and impetus for this typological connection between bishops and priests must receive stronger recognition.

### ***Jewish-Christian Relations: A Political Ecclesiology***

The portrayal of the Church as the fulfillment of Israel was not just a theologically abstract idea or merely playful exegesis. Rather, given the cultural and political situation of third century Syria and northern Palestine, there was also a very real interaction between Jewish and

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<sup>283</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 8; *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.25, in Metzger 1:228-230. The Greek *AC* has “who stand before the altar of the Lord your God.” This may be an addition to the original, though it is hard to say. No Latin available.

Christian communities of this time. Without a doubt, these dynamics had to have played a role in the emergence of priestly designations in the *DA*.

A number of scholars have demonstrated that Jewish-Christian dialogue and tension existed in the Roman Empire well into the fourth century.<sup>284</sup> Though evidence for such interaction in the second and third century is less available, it can be maintained with confidence that such a dynamic existed, especially in the Antiochan and Syrian region. Such tension between these two communities underlies much of the *Didascalía*. As Marcel Simon notes, “the writing [of the *DA*] is conceivable only in a region with strong Jewish communities.”<sup>285</sup> Given the work’s rejection of Sabbath laws, purity laws, circumcision, the entire Second Legislation, and given its “specific purpose of frightening away Jewish-Christians from Jewish practices and usages,”<sup>286</sup> the author clearly has a very real threat in mind.

Despite this attitude toward current Jewish practice, there is still an ongoing interaction between Jews and Christians. Simon points out that rather than contempt for Jews, the *Didascalía* conveys a genuine concern for their error. It calls them “brothers” at one point while the prayers in the *DA* lack the full invective against the Jews typical of other anti-Jewish texts.<sup>287</sup> Moreover, others have noted the *Didascalía*’s strong indebtedness to rabbinic teaching. For

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<sup>284</sup> See for example, Simon, *Verus Israel*; Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: martyrdom and the making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999) and *Border Lines* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Penn. Press, 2004); Wayne Meeks and Robert Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era* (Missoula, Mont: Scholars Press for the Society of Biblical Literature, 1978); Robert Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) and *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind* (New Haven: Yale, 1971).

<sup>285</sup> “L’écrit n’est concevable que dans une région à fortes juiveries.” Simon, 366.

<sup>286</sup> A. Marmorstein, “Judaism and Christianity in the Middle of the Third Century” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 10 (1935): 231-232.

<sup>287</sup> *Didascalía*, chapter 21; *Apostolic Constitutions* 5.14. See Simon, 365.

example, in the admonitions against attending the theatre and circus, the author of the *Didascalia* marshals biblical support, saying “he who enters an assembly of the gentiles shall be accounted as one of them, and shall receive woe. For to such the Lord God said by Isaiah: ‘Woe to them that come from the spectacle.’ And again He says: ‘You women that come from the spectacle, come; for it is a people without understanding.’”<sup>288</sup> This quote “by Isaiah” is actually a composite of citations and allusions to both Isaiah 37:11 and a Jewish Targum of Ps.-Jonathan on Deuteronomy 28:19 which says “Cursed shall you be when you enter your theatres and your circuses, negating the words of the Law.”<sup>289</sup> This prohibition in the *Didascalia* strongly suggests an awareness and use by this author of rabbinic teaching.

Likewise, *Didascalia* chapter 7 uses the repentance and forgiveness of Manasseh, the king of Judah as a model of proper humility and repentance over sin, an example also used quite frequently in rabbinic literature.<sup>290</sup> In the *Didascalia*, a large portion of Scripture is cited recounting the sin of Manasseh, his punishment, and finally his repentance and forgiveness. Yet, in recording that Manasseh was bound and led away to Babylon, certain manuscripts add a non-biblical detail that he was led away “in an animal figure of brass.” Compare this with the Targum of 2 Chronicles 33:12: “Then the Chaldaeans made a bronze mule and bored many small holes in it. They shut him up inside it and lit a fire all around it...”<sup>291</sup> As Connolly suggests, the *Didascalian* variant “must have some connexion with the story in the late Targum on 2 Chron.

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<sup>288</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 13, in Connolly, 128. Syriac: Vööbus, *CSCO* 407:152. This text is not available in Latin and the Greek *Apostolic Constitutions* does not contain these citations.

<sup>289</sup> *The Ps.-Jonathan Targum of Deuteronomy 28:19*, (*The Aramaic Bible*, vol.5B), trans. Ernest G. Clarke (Collegeville: Liturgical Press), 76. See Connolly, *Didascalia*, 128, note on line 6; see also Vööbus, *CSCO* 408:138, n.26.

<sup>290</sup> See for example m.Sanh. 11.1 and b.Sanh. 103a.

<sup>291</sup> *The Targum of Second Chronicles 33:12*, (*The Aramaic Bible*, vol. 19), trans. J. Stanley McIvor (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1987), 230.

xxxiii, to the effect that Manasseh was inclosed in ‘a mule of brass.’”<sup>292</sup> These claims, arguments and the textual support employed by the DA, demonstrate both a Christian indebtedness to Judaism for much of its own textual reading and application, even while distancing themselves from contemporary Jewish practice.

The flow of influence was not, of course, one-sided, and numerous examples can be found where Jews were as much aware of what Christians were saying as Christians were of Jews.<sup>293</sup> All of this demonstrates that within the *Didascalian* community, there was an undoubted interaction and ongoing dialogue between Christians and Jews. This awareness of the “other” influenced the theology and textual reading of each group as they tried to bolster their own theological and practical legitimacy and authenticity. The *Didascalia* urges a particularly strong warning to avoid being too “Jewish” in ritual and observance, even while utilizing certain Jewish textual readings. Yet, given this dynamic of tension and dialogue, and particularly the

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<sup>292</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 7, in Connolly, 72, note on line 8; and p.263 for further discussion on and a reproduction of the Targum text.

<sup>293</sup> For example, *Didascalia* 23 and 24 demonstrate a strong attitude that the destruction of the Temple indicates God’s abandonment of the Jews (God has “left the people and has filled the Church”). This argument was not unknown to the Jews, and the rabbinic literature demonstrates both their awareness of it and their attempt to combat it with their own teaching. The *Mishnah*, *Babylonian Talmud* and midrashic literature repeatedly answer this charge against the Jews and their standing before God, suggesting they were well aware of the accusation (see b.Pes. 87b; b.Ta’anith 20a; b.Sotah 38b; Lev. Rabbah 6.5; Eccl. Rabbah 1.4).

A particularly interesting example of this awareness of the “other” comes from a fifth century midrashic text, *Leviticus Rabbah*. In 25.6, the midrash takes up the account about Abraham and Melchizedek from Genesis 14. In the discussion, the midrash explicitly attacks the Christian notion that the Gentile Christian priesthood was foreshadowed in the Melchizedekian priesthood of the Scriptures. The fact that *Leviticus Rabbah* would take up such an argument demonstrates a clear Jewish knowledge of Christian claims. As Burton Visoztky comments, such a polemic “betrays a sophisticated knowledge of Christian theology;” yet, from our earlier examples in the *Didascalia*, we can equally posit a thorough Christian knowledge of rabbinic teaching (“Anti-Christian Polemic in Leviticus Rabbah” *American Academy for Jewish Research* 56 [1990]: 100).



*DA*'s interest to avoid appearing too Jewish, why would there be such a strong emphasis on an Israelite priestly metaphor for the Christian bishop?

One solution might come from examining the shift in the locus of authority in rabbinic Judaism of the late second and early third centuries. Recent scholarship has suggested that the rise of rabbinic Judaism was the result of a successful transition from a priestly to a non-priestly locus of authority within Judaism. Steven Fraade, for example, has examined midrashic and mishnaic texts to discover exactly this movement, what he calls “a dialectical shift from authority vested entirely in the hereditary priesthood to authority assigned to non-priests by virtue of their learning and experience in matters of Torah law and its application.”<sup>294</sup> For example, Fraade notes that in m.Negaim 3.1, there is a discussion on skin infections in Leviticus 13.<sup>295</sup> Whereas the biblical text explicitly commands that someone with a skin infection, “shall be brought to the priest and the priest shall make an examination” (Lev. 13:9-10), the rabbinic text expands the formerly priestly task by saying that “all are eligible to inspect.”<sup>296</sup> As Fraade explains, the Mishnah does not eliminate the need for examination or even for a qualified examiner, but affirms “that this function is *not* dependent upon priestly lineage per se.”<sup>297</sup> All those who are qualified, “which for the Mishnah would suggest a sage,”<sup>298</sup> can now claim the

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<sup>294</sup> Steven Fraade, “Shifting from Priestly to Non-Priestly Legal Authority: A Comparison of the Damascus Document and the Midrash Sifra” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 6, no. 2 (1999): 122.

<sup>295</sup> Fraade lays out other evidence for this thesis, but for the sake of brevity, I produce just this one.

<sup>296</sup> m. Negaim 3:1; see also Fraade, 118.

<sup>297</sup> Fraade, 118, italics his.

<sup>298</sup> Fraade, 118.

authority formerly reserved for Aaronic priests, leaving the role of such priests “limited, formal and vestigial.”<sup>299</sup>

More recently, Daniel Boyarin has made similar arguments, suggesting that at the end of the second and beginning of the third century, a new rabbinic authority brought about a “disenfranchisement of the previous holders of knowledge/power, the priests.”<sup>300</sup> In examining the well-known rabbinic transmission lists in *m.Avot* 1, Boyarin notes the noticeable lack of any priests in these lists. He concludes: “Since a large part of the attempted rabbinic takeover of religious power involved displacing the priests, this absence is highly telling, especially when we realize that prior succession lists of this type found in pre-rabbinic texts do include the priests.”<sup>301</sup> In other words, the rise of rabbinic Judaism, the Judaism with which the *Didascalian* Christians were in dialogue, involved a displacing, even forfeiting, of the traditional biblical role of the Jewish priesthood and investing the rabbinic sage with all the power and authority of the Jewish religion.

Such a milieu of shifting *loci* of authority creates the perfect environment in which rival communities will wrestle with how to read, understand and appropriate for themselves certain priestly texts in their shared scriptures. Especially after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, both Jews and Christians must approach texts such as Leviticus and the priestly requirements in new ways.<sup>302</sup> As I mentioned earlier, the *Didascalian* notion of the Church in continuity with Israel was not just a theologically abstract exegesis, but one grounded in actual

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<sup>299</sup> Fraade, 119.

<sup>300</sup> Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 74.

<sup>301</sup> Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 77.

<sup>302</sup> For more on this, see Robert Wilken, “Leviticus as a Book of the Church” *Consensus* 23 no.1 (1997):7-19.

cultural dynamics. The Christians, at least, attempted to employ their own interpretive reading in which the previous notion of Israel as a “type” of the Church could be expanded to include the portrayal of the biblical priesthood as a typology for Christian leadership. This is not to say that the rabbinic restructuring of authority was the *cause* of a Christian priesthood; rather, the complex dynamics involved in both Jewish and Christian communities regarding scriptural interpretation after the Temple destruction must necessarily involve an interpretation and appropriation of certain ritual and cultic texts. My point, then, is that these interpretive readings did not take place in a vacuum; they involved a concrete social reality of two communities in tension reading a shared text in a world in which the Temple no longer existed and animal sacrifice could no longer be practiced.

All of this leads us from a purely abstract and theological claim about a Church-Israel connection to a much more concrete, social, even political claim of continuity with biblical Israel even while distancing themselves from contemporary Jews and their practices. In this sense, Christians were a growing social reality at odds with the Jewish social group. The assertion of continuity with Israel was more than an ideological and theological projection; it also entailed a concrete social and political claim to be the true “people of God” in third century Syria. In this sense, the Church was expressing a politico-theological ecclesiology. Von Campenhausen hints in this direction when he remarks that “they have strongly developed their ecclesial self-understanding and the notion of their own distinct law. The ‘nation’ of the Christians feels itself

to be a unique, great and morally superior community in the world...”<sup>303</sup> Christianity has carved out its own social reality, existing alongside the cultures of paganism and Judaism.

The *Didascalia* itself demonstrates this notion of Christianity as a distinct social group of its own. In chapter 9, the author commends reverence for the bishop by use of an extended contrast with Judaism and the pagan culture. The Christian bishop, says the author, must be central to worship

For neither formerly in the Temple was anything holy offered nor was anything done without the priest. And even the worshippers of demons, in their abominable, disgusting and impure detestations, utterly imitate the holy things to this very day. Of course there is a wide distance in comparing their disgusting practices with those of the holy ones, yet in their pretense, they neither offer nor perform anything without their impure priest.”<sup>304</sup>

Given the propriety displayed by even the pagans towards their priests, who are really only imitators of true worship, the *Didascalia* concludes: “how much more reasonable is it for you . . . to honor the Lord God through those set over you [i.e. the bishops].”<sup>305</sup> The Christian community is set in contrast both to the pagan culture and to the Israelite Temple cult, both of which practiced worship via a priesthood. Though related to each by virtue of worship practices and presiding leadership, Christianity stands apart in its own distinct social identity.

Likewise in chapter 13, the Christian community is urged to “gather in large numbers in the Church (*in ecclesia*)” and to “lay everything aside and run together to the Church (*ad*

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<sup>303</sup> “haben auch ihr kirchliches Selbst- und Rechtsbewusstsein kräftig entwickelt. Das ‘Volk’ der Christen fühlt sich al seine eigene, grosse, sittlich überlegene Gemeinschaft in der Welt...” Hans von Campenhausen, *Kirchliches Amt und geistliche Vollmacht in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (Tübingen, Mohr, 1963), 262.

<sup>304</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 9; *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.26, in Metzger 1:246.

<sup>305</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 9; *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.26, in Metzger 1:248.

*ecclesiam*).”<sup>306</sup> The author then moves into another comparison with paganism and Judaism: Since “the pagans, rising from their sleep each day run to their idols to worship them . . . and in the same manner those who are vainly called Jews, after six days, are idle on the seventh day and go together into their synagogues,”<sup>307</sup> how much more should Christians gather together in the Church?

These texts demonstrate a solidifying awareness of itself as a particular culture, *polis* or as Rordorf calls it, “ein Staat im Staat”<sup>308</sup> (a state within the state), with its own form of worship and governance in distinction from its surrounding counterparts. Gathering for Christian worship, as the author intimates, was more than a theological and spiritual exercise; it was also a political and cultural reality in which each Christian was expected to participate. Given this self-perspective on Christianity and the Church, it is no surprise that the bishop began to accrue not only designations like “priest” but also “prince,” “king,” and “ruler”—he was the leader of a living body of “citizens.”<sup>309</sup> Moreover, there is a growing sense in the *DA* that the Church occupies not just an ideological space in a realm of ideas, but an actual space and place in the world, much like the nation of Israel did in her time.

### **A Christian Material Culture**

On numerous occasions, the author speaks of the Church as “the house” or “the house of God.” In its instructions for excommunication, the bishop is advised to “cast out” sinners from

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<sup>306</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 13; Latin: *Didascalie Apostolorum* XXX, in Tidner, 48-49; and *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.59, in Metzger 1:324.

<sup>307</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 13; Latin: *Didascalie Apostolorum* XXX, in Tidner, 48-49; and *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.59, in Metzger 1:324.

<sup>308</sup> Willy Rordorf, “Was Wissen Wir über die christlichen Gottesdienstraume der vorkonstantinischen Zeit” *Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 55, no. 1-2 (1964): 111.

<sup>309</sup> See for example, *Didascalia* 8 & 9.

the Church lest the words of Jesus become true, “My house (*oikos*) is called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves” (Matt. 21:13, citing Is. 56:7). This is an interesting choice of texts, for the Isaiah section of the citation is speaking of the house of the Temple in Jerusalem and Jesus’ words are spoken also in reference to the same Temple. The implication is that the Christian Church corresponds to the Old Testament Temple, and just as the priests of old were responsible for guarding the purity of the Temple and its sacred objects, so too, the bishops are to act as priests guarding this new “house” or “temple”.

Earlier there was an even stronger comparison between the ancient Tabernacle and the Christian Church. There in chapter 8, the *Didascalia* defended the right of a bishop to live off the offerings of the church because, in part, the priests of old did the same, and further, “the tabernacle of witness . . . was a type (*tupos*) of the Church.”<sup>310</sup> Again, in chapter 11, the community is instructed to resolve all quarrels between themselves that there might be peace between all, because “they who enter a house (*oikon*) ought to say, ‘Peace to this house.’”<sup>311</sup> In this way, says the author, “we might do the will of God and fill the house (*oikon*) with guests, that is, his holy catholic church (*ekklesian*) . . .”<sup>312</sup> The “house” then is none other than the Church itself.

One must admit that these references to the Church as the “house of God” can refer metaphorically to the worshipping community, a “house(hold)” of believers. As Georg Schöllgen and others have noted, this notion of the Church as the “house(hold) of God” finds

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<sup>310</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 8; *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.25, in Metzger 1:228-230.

<sup>311</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 11; *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.54, in Metzger 1:304. Citing Matthew 10:12.

<sup>312</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 11; *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.56, in Metzger 1:310. Certain Greek *AC* manuscripts have instead, “fill the feast-chamber with guests which is the holy catholic church.”

similar expression in the New Testament.<sup>313</sup> This is what drives Schöllgen to see *oikonomos* as the major depiction of bishop in the *DA*: the bishop functions primarily as the manager of the Christian *oikos*, which is simply the community of believers. It is easy to see why some might read the *DA* in this New Testament sense; yet, in the context of the early third century, these references to “house of God”, especially in light of calling the church a “tabernacle”, are expanding and enriching the earlier New Testament usage in more concrete ways. In the context of the *DA*, “house” is using the New Testament notion of a small Christian community, but investing it with broader, more concrete ideas of Christianity as a spatial “place” in the world.

A number of scholars have begun to identify the late second and early third century as a time of significant development in early Christian identity formation, particularly in relation to a material culture. Paul Finney remarks that during this stage “Christians possessed their own prayer-houses (*domus ecclesiae*), altars (*altaria*), cups (*calices*), plates (*paterae*) and paintings.”<sup>314</sup> In other words, a material Christian culture was strongly emerging. During this period, as Hans-Josef Klauck observes, there come to exist buildings that the community owns “in which there were unique liturgical rooms which were set apart from the profane use.”<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> Schöllgen emphasizes the Pastoral Epistles in *Die Anfänge*, 106-107, 116; see also Achelis, *Didaskalia*, 272. See Heb. 10:21; Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15; and 1 Pet. 4:17 all of which refer to the church in general as the “house of God.”

<sup>314</sup> “Christen ihre eigenen Gebetshäuser (*domus ecclesiae*), Altaere (*altaria*), Kelche (*calices*), Teller (*paterae*) und (private) Bilder besaßen.” Paul Corby Finney, “TOPOS HIEROS und christlicher Sakralbau in vorkonstantinischer Überlieferung” *Boreas* 7 (1984): 216. Friederich Deichmann also recognizes this shift (“Vom Tempel Zur Kirche” in *Mullus: Festschrift Theodor Klauser* [Münster : Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum, Ergänzungsband 1, 1964], 52-59).

<sup>315</sup> “... in denen es eigene gottesdienstliche Räume gab, die der profanen Nutzung entzogen waren...” Hans-Josef Klauck, *Hausgemeinde und Hauskirche im frühen Christentum* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1981), 69.

While the first and second centuries might be deemed “die Zeit der Hauskirchen,”<sup>316</sup> from the early third century onward, buildings arose which served the Christian community exclusively as worship spaces. The most notable example of such development comes from the findings at the Syrian excavation of Dura Europos.

Sometime between the years 240 and 245 A.D., a group of Christians in Dura Europos acquired a once-residential building and converted it into a church building to be used exclusively for worship.<sup>317</sup> The rooms of particular note are the baptistery and the assembly hall. The baptistery is well known for its “richly embellished”<sup>318</sup> and decorated wall murals. This is one of the earliest and clearest examples of an emerging “Christian” artwork which depicts biblical scenes of both the Old and New Testaments and roots the Christian identity in a continuity with Israel, Jesus, and the current worshipping community. As Kraeling remarks, the

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<sup>316</sup> Rordorf, “Gottesdienstraüme,” 111. By this phrase, Rordorf means a time when houses were used both as worship spaces and also as residential homes. By his definition, “house church” means a worship space that did not serve exclusively as such. Rordorf himself notes that the Church in Dura was also a “house,” but one converted for the sole purpose of Christian worship. In this way, it is not a “house church” in this original sense.

<sup>317</sup> Dating of the building construction is generally agreed upon at 232/3 A.D. Scholars differ, however, over whether this is when Christians came into possession of the building or simply when it was constructed. Most scholars today argue that Christians did not come into possession of the building until the 240’s. For a fuller review of this debate and the evidence used, see Carl H. Kraeling, *The Christian Building* (The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report VIII, Pt.II) (New Haven: Dura-Europos Publications, 1967), 233-238. L. Michael White dates Christian usage at 240-41 (see *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture*, vol. 1 [Valley Forge, Pa: Trinity Press, 1996], 120); and Richard Krautheimer argues for 231 as the date the building became Christian possession (*Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture* [Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965], 6). Klauck, on the other hand, agrees that 240-245 is most likely the period the building became Christian (*Hausgemeinde*, 80).

That this building no longer remained a residential home is evidenced by the plastering over of the latrine (see Kraeling, 155).

<sup>318</sup> Kraeling, 44.



“Baptistry decoration enhanced the importance of the individual’s entry into Christ’s flock.”<sup>319</sup>

The art helped make more visible and concrete the realities to which it pointed; one’s baptism identified oneself with this larger biblical and apostolic community.

The other major liturgical room, the assembly hall, was originally two rooms; the dividing wall was removed by the Christian community and the floor leveled off to make one large assembly room that could hold between 60 and 70 people. Oriented on an east-west axis, the east end of the room featured a low plaster dais, most likely used by the bishop to preside over the worship service. No wall decorations were created for this room.<sup>320</sup>

What makes the building at Dura so significant, as Rordorf comments, is that “all the rooms of this house church served a liturgical purpose.”<sup>321</sup> Likewise, Klauck indicates that “we stand in a transition from inhabited private houses which were at the same time an assembly place for Christians, to a pure church building . . .”<sup>322</sup> Thus, Dura gives us evidence that in Syria during the early third century, Christian communities began to acquire property and, more important, began to set it aside exclusively for sacred purposes. Related to this architectural transition comes another significant shift in the Christian perspective on space as “sacred.” Finney, making this same connection, notes that the Dura house church “signifies a development

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<sup>319</sup> Kraeling, 225.

<sup>320</sup> There has been some debate about why the walls in the baptistry were so well decorated while the ones in the assembly hall were not. Various suggestions have been made, but given the short tenure of the Christians in this building (the city was occupied by the military in 256), I find it likely that they simply did not have time to fully decorate the entire building. They may have started with the baptistry because that was a significant room for Christian initiation, and it shows the value they placed upon this sacred rite.

<sup>321</sup> “... all Räume jener Hauskirche offenbar gottesdienstlichen Zwecken gedient haben” Rordorf, “Gottesdiensträume,” 117.

<sup>322</sup> “Wir stehen an einem Übergang, vom bewohnten Privathaus, das zugleich Versammlungsstätte der Christen war, zum reinen Kirchengebäude.” Klauck, 80.

in Christian architecture which goes hand in hand with the maturity of the early Christian notion of the sanctity of places and buildings.”<sup>323</sup> The acquisition of a building solely for liturgical purposes, the richly decorated walls in the baptistery, and the creation of a permanent assembly hall for worship all demonstrate the value and sacredness of the building and its rooms. These were not homes also used for worship, but buildings specifically set aside for the sacred purpose of Christian liturgy and worship.

The notion of sacred space emerges, then, both in the same time period as the *Didascalia*, and in the very same region. While I want to be careful not to equate the house church at Dura with the worshipping community of the *Didascalia*, the evidence suggests that what we find at Dura, as Kraeling suggests, “may safely be taken as typical of the Christian domus ecclesia of the Tigris-Euphrates basin in the pre-Constantinian times and thus as normative for a whole province of church architecture . . .”<sup>324</sup> A return to the text of the *Didascalia* demonstrates that a situation similar to that at Dura most likely existed for the community of the *Didascalia*.

Of particular note are the instructions for worship given in chapter 12. Rather than specify the proper administration or theology of the Eucharist or baptism, what concerns the author are rather the spatial realities of the building:

And in your congregation in the holy churches hold your assemblies with all decent order, and appoint the places for the brethren with care and solemnity. And for the presbyters, let there be assigned a place in the eastern part of the house; and let the bishop’s throne (*thronos*) be set in their midst, and let the presbyters sit with him. And

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<sup>323</sup> “Sie bezeugt die Entwicklungen in der christlichen Architektur, die mit dem Heranreifen der frühchristlichen Auffassung von der Heiligkeit des Ortes und Gebäudes Hand in Hand geht.” Finney, “TOPOS HIEROS,” 222.

<sup>324</sup> Kraeling, 139; see also Finney, “TOPOS HIEROS,” 222 for similar conclusions.

again let the laymen sit in another part of the house toward the east . . . But of the deacons, let one stand outside by the door and observe them that come in.<sup>325</sup>

The author is intensely concerned with the layout of worship, where people sit, who attends to the door and how the room is oriented toward the east. As mentioned earlier, the Dura house church assembly room was also oriented on an east-west axis.<sup>326</sup> There is an appreciation of the worshipping sacred space in this community. In the next chapter, the *DA* continues its discussion of the Christian assembly space, admonishing believers to “run together to your Church.” This is then contrasted with the pagans who also “rise from their sleep and go in the morning to worship and minister to their idols” on the one hand, and the Jews on the other who “assemble in their synagogues.”<sup>327</sup> Such a comparison points to an implied contrast between not just worship practice, but the sacred worship space used by each group. In this context one can conclude with Achelis that “the community has already been in the position to acquire a unique locale” for worship.<sup>328</sup> Given the acute awareness of space and the place of worship in this text, it is quite probable that this community held worship in a house church similar to that at Dura—a permanent structure (formerly a house) used solely for worship. Thus what Finney concludes regarding the Dura community was likely true for that of the *Didascalía*, that “among the Christians living in this period, a significant shift of consciousness took place in the

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<sup>325</sup> *Didascalía*, chapter 12, in Connolly, *Didascalía*, 119-120; Syriac: Vööbus, *CSCO* 407:143-144. The Greek *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.57 contains some of this passage, but much has been expanded so as to be unhelpful in reconstructing the original Greek.

<sup>326</sup> See Rordorf, “Gottesdienstraüme,” 121 and Klaus Gamber, “Die frühchristliche Hauskirche nach *Didascalía Apostolorum* II, 57,1-58,6” *Studia Patristica*, 10 (1970): 340-341, who also make this connection.

<sup>327</sup> *Didascalía*, chapter 13; Latin: *Didascalíae Apostolorum* XXX, in Tidner, 48-49; *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.59, in Metzger 1:324.

<sup>328</sup> “Die Gemeinde war schon in der Lage gewesen, sich ein eigenes Lokal zu beschaffen.” Achelis, *Didaskalia*, 284.

understanding and usage of places, with respect to buildings. After that, they become certain for the first time of a sanctification of places and buildings in which they are gathered for prayer and teaching.”<sup>329</sup>

The final chapter of the *DA* demonstrates yet another awareness of the sacredness of space and place, namely, the cemeteries. The author reminds his audience:

gather together in the cemeteries (*koimētēriois/memoriis*) to read the holy Scriptures and to offer unceasing prayers to God and to offer the likeness (*antitupon/similitudinem*) of the royal body of Christ, the acceptable Eucharist, both in your Churches (*ekklēsiais/collectis vestris*) and in your cemeteries (*koimētēriois/coemiteriis*) . . .<sup>330</sup>

The author continues his discussion of these holy places by admonishing them to respect the dead, reminding them that even the bones of the prophet Elisha was able to raise up a dead man, for “his body was holy (*hagion/sanctum*).”<sup>331</sup> All of Christian life (and even the places and bones of the dead) began to take on a more concrete and sacred reality. As Achelis remarks, “there was eventually no relationship of human life for which the Church had not set up its special principles. Just as it possessed its unique house of God and cemetery, so also it celebrated its own feasts, performed its worship and began the commemoration of the dead in its own unique way.”<sup>332</sup> There is a definite sense that the Church has taken on its own materially defined cultural existence. Space and place, both in the worship building and in the cemeteries,

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<sup>329</sup> Finney, “TOPOS HIEROS,” 225.

<sup>330</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 26; Latin: *Didascalie Apostolorum* LXI, in Tidner, 98; and *Apostolic Constitutions* 6.30, in Metzger 2:390.

<sup>331</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 26; Latin: *Didascalie Apostolorum* LXII, in Tidner, 99; and *Apostolic Constitutions* 6.30, in Metzger 2:390. See 2 Kings 13:21 for this account.

<sup>332</sup> “So gab es schliesslich keine Beziehung des menschlichen Lebens, für welche die Kirche nicht ihre besonderen Grundsätze aufgestellt hätte. Wie sie ihre eigenen Gotteshäuser und Friedhöfe besass, so feierte sie ihr Feste, vollzog ihren Gottesdienst und beging das Gedächtnis der Toten auf ihre eigene Weise.” Hans Achelis, *Das Christentum in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, 2nd ed., (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1925), 224.

have taken on a sanctity and value within Christian life. The *Didascalia* demonstrates that a distinctly Christian sacred space has emerged. The early third century more broadly, and the Syrian *DA* in particular, give witness that the Church was forming its own “material culture” in the world.

### **Conclusion**

In light of this emerging notion of sacred space and place, one can revisit the earlier observation that the bishop was seen in the *DA* as the “steward of God” and his “house.” In view of this materially distinct culture of Christian sacred space seen in the *DA* itself, the bishop’s role as a “steward of God’s house” echoes not an *oikonomos* (as Schöllgen suggested) but the biblical function of an Israelite priest. Combine this designation (“steward”) with the description of the bishops, seen earlier, as those who “serve in the holy tabernacle, the holy catholic Church” and “who stand before the altar of the Lord your God,”<sup>333</sup> and the physical, concrete function of the bishop as a “priest” serving an actual place of worship becomes apparent. As seen previously, one of the major descriptions of the Levitical priest was an “attendant of God’s house” in his role to guard the Temple worship space. Taking this designation of “attendant/steward” (found in both the Old Testament and the *DA*) together with the notion of sacred space and place evidenced both in the *DA* and in the archaeological evidence of an emerging Christian material culture, one finds that the *DA*’s portrayal of the bishop as a priest works on an analogical model: just as the Israelite priest was an “attendant to God’s house” (the physical Tabernacle or Temple), so too the bishop is the “steward of God’s house” (the physical Church building and Christian sacra). The emerging Christian material culture and the resulting awareness of sacred

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<sup>333</sup> *Didascalia*, chapter 9; *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.25, in Metzger 1:230.

space combines with the politico-theological ecclesiology to produce a robust typology in which the old Israelite priests foreshadow the new Christian priests, the bishops.

In the end, the *Didascalia*, like the *Apostolic Tradition*, clearly portrays the bishop in priestly terms which echo not pagan models, but biblical ones. Levitical priestly paradigms for the bishop arise as the Christian community combines its firm understanding of itself as the fulfillment of Israel with an emerging Christian material culture such that the old attendants of sacred space (Israelite priests ministering in the Temple) become a typology for the new stewards of Christian sacra (Christian bishop-priests ministering in Church buildings and cemeteries).

## CHAPTER 5

### RULERS OF THE DIVINE NATION: ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA

In the previous two chapters, I explored priestly designations for the Christian ministry in two separate Church Orders, one from the West (*Apostolic Tradition*) and one from the East (*Didascalia Apostolorum*). Both came from the early third century. Moving forward, I will now examine two prominent thinkers of the mid-third century, looking for their understanding and portrayal of ministerial leadership via Levitical paradigms. As before, I will examine one representative from the East (Origen) and one from the West (Cyprian).

#### ORIGEN: PRIESTLY DESIGNATIONS IN THE EAST

##### Introduction

Along with Augustine, Origen has been declared “the most immense, the most prolific, and the most personal genius who has illuminated the Church of the first centuries.”<sup>334</sup> These century-old words of Ferdinand Prat, echoed later by Jean Daniélou, remain an accurate assessment of the importance of Origen in the history of the church. No other thinker of the first three centuries has produced such a depth of insight and such a vast command of his subject as Origen (c.185-c.251 A.D.). While many scholars have demonstrated Origen’s thoroughly “philosophical” world of thought,<sup>335</sup> the majority of Origen’s theological contribution comes in

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<sup>334</sup> “... le génie le plus vaste, le plus fécond et le plus personnel qui ait illustré l’Église des premiers siècles.” Ferdinand Prat, *Origène: Le Theologien et le Exegete* (Paris : Librairie Blous, 1907), 165. See also Jean Daniélou, *Origène : Le genie du Christianisme* (Paris : La Table Ronde, 1948), 7 and John McGuckin, “Origen’s Doctrine of Priesthood I” *Clergy Review* 70 n.8 (1985):277.

<sup>335</sup> See for example Eugène de Faye who argues that Origen was nothing more than a Platonic philosopher in Christian disguise (*Origène, sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée*, 3 vols. [Paris: E. Leroux, 1923-28], 1 :85-95; 2:156-163).

the unquestionably “biblical” expression of scriptural commentary and exposition. Prat again: “Subtle theologian, incomparable controversialist, patient critic and prolific orator, Origen is above all an exegete.”<sup>336</sup> Origen knows his Bible, is shaped by it and draws his theology from it. He is, in his own words, a “man of the Church (*vir ecclesiasticus*), living under the faith of Christ and placed in the midst of the Church.”<sup>337</sup> Because of this reality, Origen can provide us valuable insight into the developments of the early Church.

This is no less true in regards to the emerging understanding of the Christian ministry in light of the Old Testament Levitical priesthood. Primarily a biblical and exegetical theologian, Origen provides no systematic treatment of the issue of the Christian minister. However, being a biblical exegete, his many commentaries, homilies, and theological treatises provide ample opportunity to piece together Origen’s understanding of the pastoral office in light of priestly paradigms. As Theo Schäfer observes, “No summary presentation of the priest-image is found in Origen. The few statements to this question must be collected and arranged as stones in a mosaic, in order to obtain such a picture.”<sup>338</sup> How, then, did Origen understand the role and

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<sup>336</sup> “Théologien subtil, incomparable controversiste, critique patient et orateur fécond, Origène est avant tout exégete.” Prat, 111.

<sup>337</sup> *Homilies sur Levitique* 1.1, *Sources Chrétiennes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1981), 68. All translations are my own unless specified otherwise. The strongest objections to this view of Origen come from de Faye (see above) and Joseph Trigg, “Origen Man of the Church” *Origeniana Quinta*, ed. Robert Daly (Leuven Univ. Press, 1992). For strong support of the idea that Origen is first and foremost a Christian, not a philosopher in Christian guise, see Henri de Lubac, *Histoire et Esprit: l'intelligence de l'Écriture d'après Origène* (Paris: Aubier, 1950), esp. chapter 2, “Origène Homme L'Église,” 47-91. See also Jean Daniélou, *Origène : Le génie du Christianisme* (Paris : La Table Ronde, 1948), 41; and Albano Vilela, *La Condition Collegiale des Prêtres au III<sup>e</sup> Siècle* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1971), 127-128.

<sup>338</sup> “Es findet sich bei Origenes keine zusammenhängende Darstellung des Priesterbildes. Die einzelnen Äusserungen zu dieser Frage müssen wie Mosaiksteinchen zusammengetragen und zusammengestellt werden, um ein solches Bild zu erhalten.” Theo



function of the Christian minister within the Church? What continuities did Origen see between the Christian minister and Old Testament leadership offices? What intimations does Origen provide as to the driving force behind his conceptions about the episcopacy as a “priestly” office?

Throughout his exegetical works, but particularly in his homilies on Leviticus, Numbers and Joshua, Origen’s thoughts on Christian leadership come to light, and via these works one can construct Origen’s view of the Christian minister as priest.<sup>339</sup> First, I will demonstrate that Origen understands the offices of bishop and presbyter as *priestly* offices, understood in light of the Levitical priesthood found in the Old Testament. Second, I will demonstrate that the driving force of Origen’s conceptions about the bishop-priest paradigm involve both his politico-

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Schäfer, *Das Priester-Bild im Leben und Werk des Origenes* (Frankfurt am Main : Lang, 1977), 21. See also Aaron Milavec, “The Office of the Bishop in Origen” in *Raising the Torch of Good News*, ed. Bernard Prusak (New York: University Press of America, 1988), 14.

<sup>339</sup> The extant homilies on Leviticus, Numbers and Joshua are Rufinus’ Latin translations from the original Greek, which Rufinus himself admits are not always literal translations, but rather paraphrastic in nature. Methodologically, one may wonder what worth these sermons have for a discussion of *Origen’s* view on the priesthood, or on any issue, for that matter. While it is true that Rufinus does take some liberties with the text, there is good reason for using them in this present study. As Ronald Heine (*Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus* [Washington D.C.: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1982], 30-39) has pointed out, much of what Rufinus changed was based on his belief that heretics had altered Origen’s texts. Therefore, wherever Origen appears to contradict himself, or appears out of line with later orthodoxy, Rufinus attempts to emend the text. This particularly applies to issues of Trinitarian doctrine. As Heine notes, “Nevertheless, one may say that, on the whole, the substance can be regarded as representing Origen’s thought. The major exception to this statement is theological statements regarding the Trinity and the resurrection of the body” (Heine, 38). Therefore, what we find on Origen’s discussion of the priesthood most likely represents Origen’s original thought. See also, McGuckin, “Origen’s Doctrine of Priesthood I,” 279, for similar conclusions.

For the dating and location of Origen’s homilies see Joseph Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third Century Church* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), 176; Pierre Nautin, *Origène: sa vie et son oeuvre* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1997), 389-409; and Robert Wilken, “Leviticus as a Book of the Church” *Consensus* 23 (1997): 10.

theological ecclesiology (the Church as a unique *polis* in continuity with Israel) and the actual practice of episcopal leadership within the Church.

### **A Christian Priesthood**

I must first acknowledge that Origen's doctrine of the priesthood is complex and manifold. Vilela has helpfully summarized Origen's teaching on this topic, noting that Origen affirms a variety of priesthoods: the historic priesthood of Christ, the ministerial/hierarchical priesthood of the clergy, the priesthood of the body of Christ, the priesthood of the spiritually elite, and a heavenly priesthood.<sup>340</sup> John McGuckin also surveys a number of priesthood texts in Origen and argues that the various conceptions of priesthood are often intermingled and intertwined for Origen.<sup>341</sup> Granting this much broader conception of priesthood in the writings of Origen, and the interconnectedness of these priestly embodiments, the focus of this chapter will be the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood only.<sup>342</sup>

Some scholars have suggested that Origen rarely or never makes the connection between the official ecclesial office and the term "priest." Theo Hermans, for example, argues that "Origen only rarely designates the Christian who has received the sacerdotal ordination by the

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<sup>340</sup> Vilela, 56.

<sup>341</sup> McGuckin, "Origen's Doctrine of the Priesthood I," 277. Also, Joseph Lecuyer argues similarly that ministerial priesthood and priesthood of Christ are closely related ("Sacerdoce des fidèles et sacerdoce ministériel chez Origène" *Vetera Christianorum* 7 [1970]: 254).

<sup>342</sup> It is important to note that for Origen there is no conflict in affirming a hierarchical priesthood, the priesthood of Christ, and the priesthood of the Church simultaneously. Those in our modern era who assume such a contradiction should take special note that Origen, like the early Church in general, held various aspects of Christian priesthood in one coherent whole. John McGuckin helpfully explains these differences in priesthood: "the priesthood of ministers and people is not different in essence but in function..." ("Origen's Doctrine of Priesthood I," 278).

term *hiereus*.<sup>343</sup> Likewise, Robert Daly argues that in his homilies, “There is no mention of the office of a class of specially ordained hierarchical Christian priests.”<sup>344</sup> Finally, Joseph Trigg draws similar conclusions, averring “Unquestionably, Origen did not identify priests with the existing officials of the church.”<sup>345</sup> Contrary to such opinions, I will demonstrate that Origen consistently and repeatedly makes the connection between official Christian leadership and Levitical priesthood in numerous passages.

To begin, one finds Origen’s link between bishop and priest, not by locating discussions on the bishop *per se*. Rather, by examining Origen’s treatment of the Levitical priesthood, one discovers the continuities he perceives between the two offices. Two important passages from his *Homilies on Leviticus* make this connection clear. In light of the public ordination of Old Testament priests as prescribed in Leviticus 8:4-5, Origen explains:

For in ordaining a priest (*sacerdote*), the presence of the people is also required in order that all may know and be certain why, from among all the people, one who is more excellent, who is more learned, who is more holy, who is more prominent in all virtue, is chosen for the priesthood (*sacerdotium*), lest afterward, when he stands in the presence of the people, any objection or doubt remain. For this is what the Apostle also teaches in the ordination of a priest (*sacerdotis*), saying ‘For it is proper to have a good testimony from these who are outside’ (1 Tim. 3:7).<sup>346</sup>

In this text, Origen explains the reason God requires a public ordination of the priest (*sacerdos*) as mandated in the book of Leviticus. Though these men are superior in virtue, they are ordained publicly lest some doubt or denial remain as to their appointment. Origen then moves seamlessly

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<sup>343</sup> “Origène désigne, mais rarement, par *hiereus* le chrétien qui a reçu l’ordination sacerdotale.” Theo Hermans, *Origène: théologie sacrificielle du sacerdoce des chrétiens* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1996), 20.

<sup>344</sup> Robert Daly, “Sacrificial Soteriology in Origen’s Homilies on Leviticus” *Studia Patristica* 17,2 (1982): 875.

<sup>345</sup> Trigg, *Origen*, 142.

<sup>346</sup> *Hom. Lev. 6.3, SC vol 1, 278.*

from a discussion of the Levitical priesthood to the Christian ministry by citing 1 Timothy 3:7, “For it is proper to have a good testimony from those who are outside.” The importance of this citation lies in the observation that 1 Timothy 3 delineates the qualifications for the Christian bishop (*episcopus*). The tie between bishop and priest is made explicit by Origen; he grounds his Christian application of the Old Testament Levitical prescription by turning to the New Testament, saying “the Apostle also teaches in the ordination of a priest.”<sup>347</sup> The teaching of the Apostle of which Origen speaks is the qualification for the office of bishop. For Origen, then, the office of bishop in the New Testament has correspondence with the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament such that an Old Testament text on the priesthood is understood to refer to the Christian bishop.

A second text in which Origen draws this link is his seventh homily on Leviticus. Here Origen notes that Leviticus 9:7 commands priests who approach the altar to abstain from strong drink. Origen explains: “Therefore he wants those, to whom the Lord himself is their portion, to be sober (*sobrios*), fasting, vigilant at all times, especially when they are present at the altar to pray to the Lord and to offer sacrifice (*sacrificandum*) in his sight.” These commands hold for the Church as well, avers Origen, since “the Apostle asserts these same things in the laws of the New Testament. For in a similar way, he himself, setting up the rules of life for the priests (*sacerdotibus*) or chief priests (*principibus sacerdotum*), says ‘they ought not to be enslaved much to wine, but ought to be sober (*sobrios*)’ (1 Tim.3:3).”<sup>348</sup> Origen makes explicit his bishop-as-priest paradigm by comparing the commands for the priests in Leviticus with the

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<sup>347</sup> Origen, like the rest of the early church, took the Apostle Paul as the author of the pastoral epistles.

<sup>348</sup> *Hom. Lev. 7.1, SC, vol. 2, 300.*

qualifications for bishops in 1 Tim. 3:3. Where OT priests are commanded to be sober, so New Testament bishops receive similar instruction.<sup>349</sup> For Origen, then, when the Apostle speaks about the qualifications for bishop, he is speaking about a Christian ministerial “priesthood,” and when he reads the Levitical prescriptions of the Old Testament, he unapologetically applies them to the Christian ministry.

Similar connections can be found in Origen’s homilies on the books of Numbers and Joshua. Discussing the text in Numbers 2:2 which commands the Israelites to “encamp each by his own standard, with the ensigns of their father’s house,” Origen interprets it as a prescription for order (*ordo*) within the Church, yet warns against overly idealizing the clergy in the Church.

Do you think that those who discharge the office of the priesthood (*sacerdotio*) and glory in the sacerdotal order (*sacerdotali ordine*) march according to their order (*ordinem*) and do everything which is worthy of that order? Similarly also for the deacons; do you think they march according to the order of their ministry? From where is it often heard to blaspheme men and say: ‘Behold, such a bishop! such a presbyter! such a deacon!’ Is this not said where a priest (*sacerdos*) or minister of God will be seen to violate his order and to act against the sacerdotal or levitical rank (*sacerdotalem vel leviticum ordinem*)?...If they fail in decency and discretion, if they behave impudently will not Moses accuse them at once and say: “Let a man march according to his order”?<sup>350</sup>

Here Origen clearly has in mind the bishop and presbyter as the *sacerdotes*, those who fill the *sacerdotalis ordo*, reminding them of and calling them back to the dignity of their office. There is here an implicit chastisement of those unworthy of their office, but he affirms that office as a *sacerdotal ordo* nonetheless.

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<sup>349</sup> Likewise, Titus 1:7-8 speaks of sobriety (*sobrietas*) as a necessary prerequisite for the office of bishop, a passage Origen doubtless has in mind as he exegetes this Leviticus text.

<sup>350</sup> *Homélies Sur Les Nombres* 2.1.4, ed. Louis Doutreleau, *Sources Chrétiennes*, vol. 1 (Paris : Les Éditions du Cerf, 1996), 58-60.

In a later homily on Numbers 18:8, in which God commands the offerings of the people to be given to the priests “as a portion, and to your sons as a perpetual due,” Origen again makes explicit application to the Christian ministerial leadership:

This passage which we have in our hands, it seems to me, invites the interpretation that it is right and useful to offer also the first-fruits to the priests of the gospel (*sacerdotibus Evangelii*). For thus the Lord arranged that those who proclaim the gospel live from the gospel, and those who serve the altar participate in the altar (cp. 1 Cor 9:13). It is thus right and decent; and thus it is contrary, indecent and unworthy, even impious, that one who worships God and enters into the Church of God, who knows that the priests (*sacerdotes*) and ministers stand by the altar and serve either the Word of God or the ministry of the Church, should not offer to the priests (*sacerdotibus*) the first-fruits from the produce of the earth, which God gave by bringing forth his sun and by providing his rains...<sup>351</sup>

Origen reads the Old Testament with one foot in the New, so to speak. As Schäfer explains, “Since the priest—like the Levites of the Old Testament—should be dedicated entirely to the service of God, Origen demands that [bishops] be provided for materially by the laity . . .

Whoever proclaims the gospel should live from the gospel and whoever serves the altar should also receive his share from it.”<sup>352</sup> Origen continues to understand the Old Testament text in light of its relevance in the New and sees obvious continuity between old leadership and new.

In a homily on Joshua 3, Origen discusses the Israelite crossing of the Jordan River. There he addresses his Christian congregation: “And do not be amazed when these things concerning the former people are applied to you. To you, O Christian, who have passed through the Jordan river through the sacrament of baptism, the divine word promises much greater and loftier things.” Origen then ties together the Old Testament priesthood with current Christian

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<sup>351</sup> *Hom. Numb.* 11.2.2, *SC*, vol. 2, 22-24.

<sup>352</sup> “Da die Priester – wie die Leviten des Alten Testaments – sich ganz dem Dienst Gottes widmen sollen, verlangt Origenes, dass sie von den Laien materiell versorgt werden . . . Wer nämlich das Evangelium verkündet, soll vom Evangelium leben, und wer dem Altar dient, soll auch seinen Anteil davon empfangen.” Schäfer, 52-53.

leadership by reminding his audience that “if indeed you have come to the mystic font of baptism and in the presence of the priestly and Levitical order (*sacerdotali et Levitico ordine*) have been admitted to those venerable and magnificent sacraments . . . then, with the Jordan crossed, you will enter the land of promise by the services of the priests (*sacerdotum ministeriis*).”<sup>353</sup>

While Origen does not name the bishop or presbyter explicitly, the liturgical reference to baptism and the sacraments undoubtedly indicates the ministerial leadership of the Church. Just as “the former people” were led into the land by the priests, so too the Christian people “enter the land of promise by the service of the priests.” The Christian leaders, implies Origen, are the “priestly and Levitical order” for the Christian people.<sup>354</sup> Having sufficiently demonstrated that Origen does in fact consciously designate the Christian leader as a priest, and that this Christian priesthood is informed by the model of the Old Testament priesthood, I shall briefly address the various functions of Christian leaders which Origen connects to such “priestly” duties.

### **Functions of the Bishop-Priest**

#### *Teaching*

First and foremost for Origen, the main task of the bishop-priest is teaching. Repeatedly throughout his scriptural expositions, Origen highlights the duty of instruction as particularly important for Christian leadership. Colin Bulley, representative of the scholarly consensus,

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<sup>353</sup> *Homélie sur Josué 4.1, Sources chrétiennes* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1960), 146-148.

<sup>354</sup> Lest one thinks these Latin translations represent only emendations from later Church tradition, we need turn only to Origen’s homilies on Jeremiah, extant in Greek, to show the bishop-*hiereus* connection is original with Origen. Hom Jer. 11.3; 12.3; 13.13: all equate OT priesthood (*hiereus*) with Christian ministry. Hermann Josef Vogt makes similar conclusions as well (*Das Kirchenverständnis des Origenes* (Köln: Böhlau, 1974), 43; see also Colin Bulley who likewise concludes “Origen himself had used *hiereus*, and it is not an addition of [later Christians], reflecting practice in their own, later day” (*The Priesthood of Some Believers: developments from the general to the special priesthood in the Christian literature of the first three centuries* [Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2000], 98.

observes that “The main priestly task, for Origen, was undoubtedly that of studying the word and teaching the people.”<sup>355</sup> This should come as no surprise given Origen’s own obvious gifts and interest in the task of biblical exposition.

Yet there is more here than first meets the eye, for Origen explicitly links this instructional task with fulfillment of priestly duties. In Homily 4.2 on Joshua, Origen describes the role of the priests and Levites as ones who “show the way to the people of God” and “stand by the ark of the covenant of the Lord . . . in order to enlighten (*illuminent*) the people from the commandments of God just as the prophet says: ‘Your word is a lamp to my feet, O Lord, and a light to my paths.’ This light is kindled through the priests (*sacerdotes*) and Levites.”<sup>356</sup> Here Origen portrays one of the primary functions of the priest as that of a teacher of Scripture.

In a later homily on Joshua, Origen again connects the teaching duty of Christian leaders with the priestly tasks and requirements of the Old Testament. In a discussion of the distribution of the land, Origen observes that the Levites received no land as a heritage. Yet, they are not without earthly support, for the Israelites must care for their priests. Origen explains the contemporary application:

Thus, now also, the Levite and the priest who do not possess the land, are commanded to live with the Israelite, who does possess the land, in order that the priest and Levite might receive from the Israelite earthly things which the priest does not have, and in turn the Israelite might receive from the priest and Levite heavenly and divine things, which the Israelite does not have. For the law of God (*lex Dei*) was entrusted to the priests (*sacerdotibus*) and Levites in order that they might attend to this work alone and be free from any concern except for the word of God (*verbo Dei*).<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Bulley, 107.

<sup>356</sup> *Hom. Josh.* 4.2, in *SC* 152-154. See also *Hom. Lev.* 6.6 where Origen asserts that the two main tasks of the high priest are to either “learn something from God or teach the people.” (*SC*, 294).

<sup>357</sup> *Hom. Josh.* 17.3, *SC* 378-380.



In this passage Origen states the primary duty of the bishop-priests: they are to teach the law of God. It was explicitly entrusted to them and it must occupy their entire attention. As Daniélou aptly summarizes Origen, “The role of the priest is to analyze the letter, to distinguish in Scripture the different aspects of the Logos . . . Thus, the completion of the Levitical priesthood is the ministry of the word. The one was a figure, the other is the reality.”<sup>358</sup> For Origen, then, the bishop-priest is above all a teacher of the Word.

The Old Testament itself likewise presents the priest as a teacher of the law. In Deuteronomy 33:10, for example, Moses pronounces a blessing upon Levi and his sons, saying, “They shall teach (*dēlōsoun*) Jacob thy ordinances and Israel thy law (*ton nomon sou*); they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt offering upon thy altar.” While the latter half of the blessing mentions sacrifice, a task more commonly associated with the priesthood, the duty of teaching is given a prominence of place, being mentioned first in the list of priestly duties.<sup>359</sup>

Likewise, after the Assyrians had conquered Israel and placed foreigners in the land of Samaria, the king of Assyria commanded the captive Israelites: “Send there [to Samaria] one of the priests . . . and let him go and dwell there, and **teach** the foreigners the law of the god of the land” (2 Kgs 17:27-28). Further, 2 Chronicles 15:3 describes the spiritual decline of Judah as being “without the true God and without a **teaching** priest and without the law”<sup>360</sup> while the prophetic books repeatedly chastise the priests for their failure to “handle the law” properly

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<sup>358</sup> “Le rôle du prêtre est d’analyser la lettre, de distinguer dans l’Écriture les différents aspects du Logos . . . Ainsi, l’accomplissement du sacerdoce lévitique, c’est le ministère de la parole. Celui-là était la figure, celui-ci est la réalité.” Daniélou, *Origène*, 59.

<sup>359</sup> See also Louis Leloir, “Permanent Values of the Levitical Priesthood” in *The Sacrament of Holy Orders: Some papers and discussions concerning holy order at a session of the Centre de Pastorale Liturgique*, 1955 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1957, 1962), 50-52.

<sup>360</sup> See also 2 Kgs 12:2 for a similar idea.

(Jer. 2:8). Instead the priests are accused of “teaching for hire” (Mic. 3:11) and letting the law perish in the land (Ezek 7:26). In Hosea, because they have “forgotten the law of God,” God announces, “I reject you from being a priest to me” (Hos. 4:6).

There is, then, biblical precedent for understanding the priest as one associated with teaching and the law, and it appears that Origen draws upon this rich tradition in his understanding of the bishop’s teaching duty as a “priestly” one. However, Origen does not look to the Old Testament priesthood in order to determine *what* the Christian bishop should do; rather, his understanding of the bishop as a “priest” derives in part from the correspondence he sees between the episcopal practice of teaching and the same responsibility given the priests of Israel. That correspondence enables Origen to designate the Christian bishop a “priest.”<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> This raises another important observation about Origen’s attachment to the bishop-as-priest model. Joseph Trigg has argued that Origen uses the *sacerdos/hiereus* language as a polemic against the current holders of ecclesiastical office, with whom he is at odds. Trigg suggests that the priestly model “gave [Origen] a way to oppose the pretensions of official authority, which was rapidly appropriating these very symbols [i.e. priesthood] to legitimate episcopal authority” (“The Charismatic Intellectual: Origen’s Understanding of Religious Leadership” *Church History* 50 [1981]:12). Further, Trigg argues that while the ecclesiastical leaders were portraying themselves as paralleling the Levitical priesthood in their role as mediator, “Origen, on the other hand . . . developed a radically ‘charismatic’ ideology of religious authority with which to confront the ‘official’ ideology of the bishops” (7). While Trigg’s insights into Origen’s tension with Church leadership may play a part in Origen’s conceptions about the bishop, Trigg himself notes that in comparing Origen’s earlier works with his later works in Caesarea, Origen’s “understanding of religious authority was already well formed by the time he settled at Caesarea” (*Origen: The Bible and Philosophy*, 141). If Origen was in tension with the religious leadership and their misappropriation of the priestly title, and instead wanted to emphasize the bishop’s charismatic preaching of the Word, why did Origen not develop an understanding of the bishop based on a prophetic, not priestly, model? In other words, the ecclesiastical tensions do not explain sufficiently why Origen connects the *priestly* model of leadership to the Christian bishop. If the primary role of the bishop is to study and teach the divine word, in what way does that task make him a priest? I hope that my discussion above has provided an answer to why Origen makes the connection to priesthood: he sees a correspondence between the actual tasks and practice of Christian bishops and the practice and task of OT priests as teachers of the law. However, the other functions Origen ascribes to

### *Sacrifice*

In addition to instructional duties, Origen delineates another important priestly function, namely, as the one who presides over the sacrifices. In his homily on Leviticus 4.3, speaking about prescriptions for when a high priest sins, Origen asks: “Who is the high priest (*pontifex*)? He who was anointed, he who ignites the divine altars with holy fires, who sacrifices (*immolat*) to God gifts and salutary victims; who intervenes between God and humans as a certain middle propitiator.”<sup>362</sup> Here, Origen identifies an additional task of the priest (presumably the OT priest) as one who offers sacrifice to God. The priest is not solely a teacher, but also the one who presides over the sacrifices.

Origen describes similar priestly tasks in Homily 7 on Leviticus but there he also connects it to the Christian bishop. He explains that the Lord desires bishops “to be sober, fasting, vigilant at all times, but especially when they are present at the altars (*altaribus*) to entreat the Lord and to offer sacrifice (*sacrificandum*) in his sight.”<sup>363</sup> Bishop-priests are expected, in Origen’s view, to tend to the altar of the Lord, praying and offering sacrifices before him. Theo Schäfer’s observations ring true: “One leading task for the priests of the Old Testament came above all through their service at the presentation of the sacrifice. One such administrative task for the priests of the church also came through their service at the altar. Yet,

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bishops (discussed below) also play an important role in his connection to OT priests. Thus, it seems to me that Origen was not using the designation as an ecclesiastical attack, but rather more fully developing the notion of bishop-as-priest along more robust ecclesiological/typological lines (a point I will develop further below).

<sup>362</sup> *Hom. Lev. 2.3, SC*, vol. 1, 100.

<sup>363</sup> *Hom. Lev. 7.1, SC*, vol. 1, 300.

there was understood here by ‘altar’ something different than in the Old Testament.”<sup>364</sup> What, then, are these sacrifices the Christian bishop must present to God?

One might expect that the sacrifice of which Origen speaks is the Eucharist. By Origen’s day, the portrayal of the Eucharist in sacrificial terms had a long history. It was a well-received notion that the Eucharist was in some sense a “sacrifice” connected with an altar.<sup>365</sup> Although Origen does have a few passing references to the Eucharist in sacrificial terms,<sup>366</sup> it is certainly not central to his reading of the Old Testament sacrifices or explicitly related to the Christian minister being called a priest. In fact, as I shall show, the bishop’s presidency over the Eucharistic rite, while certainly assumed and accepted, is rarely what Origen explicitly refers to when he speaks of the bishop’s role in offering the “sacrifices” of the Church. As McGuckin explains, “There is no thought here of the Christian priest, cleric or otherwise, offering the

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<sup>364</sup> Schäfer, 90.

<sup>365</sup> The pertinent early church texts on the Eucharist in connection with sacrifice and an altar include: *Didache* 14; Ignatius of Antioch, *Philadelphians* 4 and *Ephesian* 5.2; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 41.1-3, 117.1-3; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV 17.5, 18.1-6; Tertullian, *Exhortation on Chastity* 10.5; 11; Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 4.11-12; and Cyprian, *Epistle* 63. See also Robert Daly, *Christian Sacrifice: the Judaeo-Christian background before Origen* (Washington: Catholic U.P., 1978).

<sup>366</sup> For example, Homily 13.3 on Leviticus exposit Lev. 24:5-9 and speaks of the showbread of the Tabernacle placed before the Lord. Origen connects the bread of the OT with the “bread from heaven” celebrated in the “ecclesiastical mysteries” (*ecclesistica mysteria*) which most likely includes the Eucharist (*SC*, vol 2, 208).

In Homily 2.1 on Joshua, Origen makes the point that there are no longer altars with the blood of animals; they have been replaced with altars with the blood of Christ, suggesting a conception of the Eucharist as a sacrifice. At opposite ends of the spectrum are LaPorte who argues perhaps too strongly that much of Origen’s teaching on sacrifice and priesthood is “Eucharistic” and Vogt who says that Origen *never* describes the Eucharist as a sacrifice (Jean Laporte, “Sacrifice in Origen in the Light of Philonic Models” in *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser and William L. Petersen [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988], 258 and Vogt, 42). Somewhere in the middle is most likely the correct view. While Origen does not seem to reject such a notion, the Eucharist as sacrifice rarely plays an important role in his thinking on either sacrifice or the Eucharist.

sacrifice of Christ, either in the Eucharist or in any other way . . . ”<sup>367</sup> To understand Origen’s portrayal of the bishop as one who offers sacrifice, one must look elsewhere.

*The Word as a Sacrifice*

What is the Christian sacrifice, according to Origen? For him, the pastoral task regarding the ministry of the Word is nothing less than a sacrifice. As a result, that very ministry is a priestly function. In other words, the bishop is a “priest” who presides over Christian sacrifice, but that sacrifice is primarily cast as the preaching of the Word. He is unequivocal about this view in his fifth sermon on Leviticus where he describes the priest as one who “kills the sacrifice (*hostiam*) of the Word of God (*verbi Dei*) and offers the sacrifices (*victimias*) of sound doctrine.”<sup>368</sup> The Word of God and sound doctrine are, in Origen’s view, the sacrifices which the Christian priest offers.

Later in the same homily on Leviticus, Origen declares: “Hear these things, all you priests (*sacerdotes*) of the Lord and understand attentively what is said. The flesh, which is counted to the priests (*sacerdotibus*) from the sacrifices (*sacrificiis*), is the word of God (*verbum Dei*), which they teach in the Church.” Specifically, Origen has in mind the spiritual interpretation of the Word, since “through the grace of God, they [priests] always offer new things, and always discover spiritual things.”<sup>369</sup> McGuckin comments that Origen finds “the essential nature of his priesthood in this ‘sacrifice of the word’ which he offers in addressing

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<sup>367</sup> McGuckin, “Origen’s Doctrine of Priesthood I,” 284. See also Bulley, 109, who arrives at similar conclusions.

<sup>368</sup> *Hom Lev. 5.3, SC vol 1, 220.*

<sup>369</sup> Both quotes are from *Hom. Lev. 5.8, SC vol. 1, 242.*

wisdom to the people and reconciling them to God.”<sup>370</sup> According to Origen, the sacrifice of the priest is the Word of God rightly interpreted and explained.

In another homily, Origen expounds Leviticus 1:6-9 wherein the priests are commanded to remove the skin of the sacrificial animal. Understood spiritually, he suggests that the priest who performs this function is the one who can “remove the veil of the letter,” revealing the spiritual understanding of the divine word. By so doing, “he [the priest] arranges it upon the altar (*altare*) when he discloses the divine mysteries not to unworthy people who are leading a base and earthly life, but to those who are the altar of God, in which the divine fire always burns and flesh is always consumed.”<sup>371</sup> Revealing the spiritual understanding of the text, says Origen, constitutes the responsibility of the bishop-priest, and in performance of this duty, Origen likens the work of the preacher to the priest. In revealing the spiritual understanding of scripture, the bishop has “placed it upon the altar.” The Word of God is a sacrifice, offered by the Christian minister who presides over it.

Finally, in a text seen previously, Origen succinctly summarizes the Christian ministerial task: “the priests (*sacerdotes*) and ministers stand by the altar and serve either the Word of God (*verbo Dei*) or the ministry of the Church.”<sup>372</sup> The Christian bishop parallels the Levitical priesthood expressly in his role as the one who presides over the sacrifice of the Word of God. For Origen, the Christian minister’s instructional duty, cast in the mold of a sacrifice, is in large part what makes his ministry priestly.

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<sup>370</sup> John McGuckin, “Origen’s Doctrine of Priesthood II,” *Clergy Review* 70 n.9 (1985): 322.

<sup>371</sup> *Hom. Lev.* 1.4, *SC*, vol. 1, 80.

<sup>372</sup> *Hom. Numb.* 11.2, *SC* vol 2, 24.

We see, then, that Origen draws strong continuities both between Israelite and Christian worship and between Israelite and Christian priesthood. Given the functions of the bishop seen earlier, as the one who “offers sacrifice in God’s sight,” the connections with the Levitical priesthood become clear. The one who presided over the old covenant sacrifices (the OT priest offering bloody sacrifices) now presides over the new covenant sacrifices (the bishop-priest offering the Word of God).

### *Spiritual Leadership*

One final aspect of the bishop-priest’s role which Origen describes is the more general responsibility of leadership. As von Campenhausen observes, “Origen sees the task of the bishop as one comprising the leadership and government of his community, especially in the work of administering justice and the regular administration of penance.”<sup>373</sup> As seen previously, the bishop is like the priests of old in his presiding over the church’s worship, including preaching and sacramental rites like baptism. This is the more cultic side of the bishop-priest’s role.

Yet, Origen speaks also in more general ways about the task of governance and ruling, a spiritual guardianship, of the people of God. For example, in a discussion of the leadership of Moses and his council, Origen turns to his present situation and calls upon the current leaders, “who rule over the people (*qui populis praesunt*),”<sup>374</sup> to be wise students of the word of God, appropriating even pagan wisdom if it is true. Although Christian leadership may have several

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<sup>373</sup> “Sieht auch Origenes die Aufgabe des Bischofs in einem umfassenden Führen und „Regieren“ seiner Gemeinde, besonders in der Arbeit der Rechtsprechung und der regelmässigen Verwaltung der Busse.” Hans von Campenhausen, *Kirchliches Amt und geistliche Vollmacht in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1963), 276.

<sup>374</sup> *Homélie sur l'Exode* 11.6, *Sources chrétiennes* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1985), 346.

different tasks, Origen summarizes their role in the Church in broad leadership terms: “those who rule over the people.”

In another homily on Leviticus, Origen makes a similar summary of the bishop’s role, yet also connects it to the priestly model in the Old Testament. In discussing the Levitical prescription that a portion of the offerings belong to the priests, Origen applies this teaching to his contemporary situation: “Let the priests of the Lord (*sacerdotes Domini*) who rule over the churches (*qui Ecclesiis praesunt*) learn that part [of the sacrifice] was given to them...”<sup>375</sup> He doubtless refers to the official Christian leadership, indicating that their role as ones “who rule over the Churches” is part of their task as *sacerdotes Domini*. The spiritual leadership and authority of Christian bishops echoes for Origen the spiritual leadership and authority of Old Testament priests.

In his homily on Joshua 6-7 regarding the conquest of Jericho and subsequent sin of Achan, Origen addresses the task of admonishing sinners, averring that the duty lies upon “the priests who rule over the people (*qui populo praesunt*).” In this same passage, Origen later describes them as “those who have charge of the churches (*Ecclesiis praesunt*).”<sup>376</sup> Just as the spiritual welfare of the people of Israel was the responsibility of the Israelite priests, so now, implies Origen, the spiritual welfare of the Christian people of God lies in the hands of the bishop-priests.

Finally, in Homily 10 on Numbers, Origen describes the Christian leadership as those “in the sacerdotal order (*in ordine sacerdotali*).” Their task, reminds Origen, like those of the

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<sup>375</sup> *Hom Lev. 5.4.4, SC vol. 1, 224 .*

<sup>376</sup> *Hom Josh 7.6, SC 208, 210.*



Israelite priests, is to “guard (*custodias*) the Tabernacle, the altar and the priesthood.”<sup>377</sup> Just as the Israelite priests were called to rule as guardians of God’s house,<sup>378</sup> so too the Christian ministers retain this governmental and custodial priestly duty.

As with the tasks of teaching and sacrifice, the biblical portrait of priestly responsibilities also includes the notion of spiritual leadership and authority. In general terms, the priests of the Old Testament are repeatedly assigned the task of maintaining the spiritual welfare of the people such that when Israel experiences a spiritual decline, the priests are held responsible. In 2 Chronicles 15:3, the prophet Azariah explains to king Asa: “For a long time Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest and without law.” Later in Ezekiel 44:12, the priests are condemned as those who “became a stumbling block of iniquity to the house of Israel” because they induced the people to idol worship. As a result, the Lord declares that the priests “shall bear their punishment.” Further, in a scathing pronouncement by Hosea, God declares that his contention is with the priests who have failed their duties, causing the people to stumble. As a result, says the Lord, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children” (4:6). Texts such as these demonstrate that the priests of Israel were responsible for the spiritual leadership of the people to such an extent that a failure on the part of the priesthood resulted in disaster and rejection on the part of the people. As Hosea cries in the same context: “And it shall be like people, like priest” (4:9).

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<sup>377</sup> *Hom Numb.* 10.3.1, *SC* vol. 1, 284. He’s citing Numb. 18:2-3.

<sup>378</sup> See Peter Leithart, “Attendants of Yahweh’s House: Priesthood in the Old Testament” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 85 (1999): 3-24, and my previous discussion of his thesis, chapter 3.

Moreover, OT priests are portrayed as those not just with spiritual responsibility, but with spiritual authority over the people of Israel. It is the priest to whom an Israelite must go to receive determinations and pronouncements about clean and unclean skin, clothing and furniture (cf. Leviticus 13:3-35). Likewise, the priests hold the authority in the land as judges in matters of dispute. Deut. 17:8-11 commands:

If any case arises requiring decision between one kind of homicide and another, one kind of legal right and another, or one kind of assault and another, any case within your towns that is too difficult for you, then you shall arise and go up to the place that the LORD your God will choose. And you shall come to the Levitical priests and to the judge who is in office in those days, and you shall consult them, and they shall declare to you the decision . . . You shall not turn aside from the verdict that they declare to you, either to the right hand or to the left.

The priest has such authority that the text declares, “The man who acts presumptuously by not obeying the priest who stands to minister there before the LORD your God, or the judge, that man shall die” (17:12).<sup>379</sup>

From these passages, it is clear that the Israelite priest was one entrusted with the spiritual and judicial care of and authority over the people of God. They were to lead and govern the people faithfully, ensuring their spiritual well-being. Given this biblical backdrop to Origen’s discussion, it is no stretch to see that Origen allows the biblical picture of the priestly leadership to shape his portrayal and understanding of Christian leadership. Yet, he also allows the episcopal office itself to stretch the OT priestly model to fit current Christian practice. The OT priests’ responsibilities for liturgy, teaching and spiritual leadership are applied to the Christian bishop, and from this perspective Origen is simply drawing upon the biblical model as a way of understanding Christian leadership. However, he also allows the more liturgical functions of the

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<sup>379</sup> See again Leloir, 52 for a brief discussion of this priestly function.

OT priest to recede into the background while highlighting the tasks of teaching and leadership so as to match the responsibilities of bishops in his own day to that of OT priests. Thus the influences go both ways. The OT model shapes his understanding of the bishop as a priest while current episcopal practices and responsibilities influence Origen's reading and application of priestly texts to Christian leadership.

Given this broader portrayal of the bishop-priest as one who is responsible for the spiritual leadership of the Church in preaching and sacraments, I agree in part with Theo Hermans who suggests that "Origen continues to envisage the priest as a man who maintains the cult of God."<sup>380</sup> Like the Levitical priests of old, the Christian bishops participate in the cultic service as they "stand by the altar and serve the Word of God,"<sup>381</sup> "pray to the Lord and offer sacrifice in his sight,"<sup>382</sup> and "rule over the Church."<sup>383</sup> Yet it is important to reiterate that this cultic priestly duty is rarely in explicit connection with the Eucharist as a sacrifice. The Eucharistic sacrifice remains in the background to be sure, but rarely receives overt reference when Origen speaks of the bishop's priestly duties. Rather, the broader portrayal of the bishop-priest is as one responsible for the spiritual well-being of the people of God in charge of preaching and the sacraments in general. Like the Old Testament priests who governed and guarded Israelite worship, the Christian bishop also assumes the responsibility for governance and guardianship of worship and the spiritual well-being of Christian people.

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<sup>380</sup> "Origène continue à envisager le prêtre comme un homme qui assure le culte de Dieu." Hermans, 22.

<sup>381</sup> *Hom. Numb.* 11.2.2, *SC*, vol. 2, 24.

<sup>382</sup> *Hom. Lev.* 7.1, *SC*, vol. 2, 300.

<sup>383</sup> *Hom Josh* 7.6, *SC* 208, 210.

Having established that Origen sees the Christian bishop in light of the Levitical priesthood, I turn to explanations for this connection. I have demonstrated that for Origen, the main functions of the bishop, such as teaching, sacrifice and leadership responsibility, are all portrayed as fulfillments of priestly duties. The old covenant priestly paradigm is appropriated and applied to the Christian bishop. What enables Origen to make this connection between Levitical priest and Christian minister?

For one thing, this connection between OT priest and NT minister is becoming a universally affirmed notion. The Church in which Origen finds himself has already begun to appropriate such a model. Thus, Origen, as “man of the Church,” follows suit. This is not, however, the only explanation, for Origen makes clear exegetically what enables him to arrive at such designations: his ecclesiology.

### **Ecclesiological Hermeneutics**

#### *Old Testament as the Book of the Church*

It is clear very early in the life of the church that the Septuagint had become the Christian Scriptures. In the great struggle for legitimacy between Jews and Christians, the Scriptures remain central. As Paul Blowers puts it, “Christian-Jewish confrontations in this period were therefore more than trivial or bookish disputes over the scriptures; they were genuine struggles for credibility.”<sup>384</sup> The early church readily quotes from and interprets the meaning of what came to be known as the Old Testament. Origen is no exception; like the tradition of the church,

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<sup>384</sup> Paul Blowers, “Origen, the Rabbis and the Bible: Toward a Picture of Judaism and Christianity in Third-Century Caesarea” in *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser and William L. Petersen (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 109.

he sees a strong continuity of the biblical testaments: the Old Testament was now the book of the Church.

This applies no less to the cultic prescriptions and institutions found throughout the Old Testament. As Origen says in one of his sermons on Leviticus, “Every single thing which is written in the law is a figure (*formae*) of the things which ought to be carried on in the Church. Otherwise, these (laws) would not have been necessary to be read in the Church, unless some edification from them might be rendered to the hearers.”<sup>385</sup> As Daniélou observes, for Origen the Bible was more than academic study. It was “a word which God addresses to us today.”<sup>386</sup> Similarly, Origen asserts that Moses has revealed future mysteries (i.e. things about the Church) in symbols, figures, and allegorical forms.<sup>387</sup> In other words, even the book of Leviticus, as much as the books of Psalms, Isaiah, or Deuteronomy, was the book of the Church. As Robert Wilken observes, “Christians claimed that they were rightful inheritors of the patrimony of Israel and believed that they were faithful to this inheritance. At the same time, Christians knew they were not the same as Jews and had to demonstrate not only their faithfulness to the Old Testament but also the new import of their teaching...”<sup>388</sup> How this was done, however, was not always an easy task. As Wilken again suggests, commenting particularly on the destruction of the Temple, “Neither Jewish nor Christian interpreters could apply the text [of Leviticus] to the present life of the community without adjustments and adaptations to the changed circumstances

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<sup>385</sup> *Hom. Lev. 5.12, SC*, vol. 1, 260.

<sup>386</sup> “... une parole que Dieu nous adresse aujourd'hui.” Jean Daniélou, “Origène comme exégète de la Bible” *Studia Patristica* 1 (1955): 286.

<sup>387</sup> Cf. *Hom. Lev. 10.11*

<sup>388</sup> Robert Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind: a study of Cyril of Alexandria's exegesis and theology* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1971), 16.

in which the book was read.”<sup>389</sup> Thus, how would Old Testament institutions and commands to Israel now be applicable to the Church? Or, as Marcel Simon inquires, “How could they claim as their Bible what they simultaneously empty of its content?”<sup>390</sup> A popular and successful solution provided by Origen and others was to read the Bible not by the letter, but by the spirit. A spiritual, or typological, interpretation of the Bible was the key to understanding its deeper meaning for the Church.<sup>391</sup>

### *Continuity with Israel and its History*

In turn, this meant understanding the relationship between Israel and the Church in a typological way as well. N.R.M. de Lange comments that “for Origen the ancient history of Israel was also the ancient history of the Church, since the Church is now the true Israel.”<sup>392</sup> In his commentary on Joshua, Origen discusses the Israelites’ destructive campaign against the Canaanites, employing a spiritual interpretation to arrive at its contemporary meaning. Just as the nation of Israel was called upon to fight a carnal battle, so now the Church is called to wage a war against the spiritual adversaries of the soul. He explains further: “And we carefully consider from these nations, which visibly besiege carnal Israel, how many nations there are opposed to

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<sup>389</sup> Robert Wilken, “Origen’s Homilies on Leviticus and Vayikra Rabbah” in *Origeniana Sexta*, (Leuven : Leuven University Press, 1995), 88. Also in Robert Wilken, “Leviticus as a Book of the Church” *Consensus* 23 (1997): 15.

<sup>390</sup> “Comment donc peuvent-ils réclamer comme leur une Bible que simultanément ils vident de son contenu ?” Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: étude sur les relations entre chrétiens et juifs dans l’empire romain (135-425)*, (Paris: Editions E. de Boccard, 1964), 95.

<sup>391</sup> E.g. see C.P. Bammel, “Law and Temple in Origen” in *Templum Amicitiae: Essays on the Second Temple presented to Ernst Bammel*, ed. William Horbury (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 474-75, who addresses the spiritual reading of Origen in light of the ecclesiological issues of his day.

Note also *On First Principles*, IV.2.4; IV.3.1, 4-7, for Origen’s treatment of his three-fold interpretation and the spiritual Israel.

<sup>392</sup> N.R.M. de Lange, *Origen and the Jews: studies in Jewish-Christian relations in third-century Palestine* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1976), 64.

virtue from these spiritual things, which are called ‘spiritual forces of evil in the heavens’ (Eph. 6:12), which stir up wars against the Church of the Lord (*ecclesiam Domini*), which is the true Israel (*verus Istrahele*).”<sup>393</sup> The Israelite wars found in the Old Testament are interpreted by means of re-reading the text in a new way: Israel typifies the Church; the war in Canaan signifies the Christian battle against vice.

In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Origen again addresses these ecclesiological concerns. Comparing the Church with Israel, Origen opines:

I think that the first ancient people who were called by God were divided into twelve tribes for the service of God, and in addition to the remaining tribes, the Levitical order, itself divided according to further priestly and Levitical orders; so I think that all the people of Christ according to the hidden man of the heart, being called a ‘Jew in secret’ and having been ‘circumcised in the spirit’ (cf. Rom. 2:28-29), have the natures of the tribes more mystically.<sup>394</sup>

For Origen, to be a Christian was to be a “Jew in secret” and to have been “circumcised in the spirit.” The Church, therefore, retained the nature of the people of Israel in a mystical sense.

Origen affirms a robust continuity between Israel and the Church.

Origen derives this understanding of the Church not from his own invention, but from the Apostle Paul himself. In his systematic treatment of biblical interpretation, *On First Principles*, Origen explains that “the apostle, raising our understanding, says somewhere, ‘Behold Israel according to the flesh,’ as if there is some Israel according to the spirit. And he says elsewhere, ‘For these children of the flesh are not the children of God, nor are all Israel who are from Israel.’”<sup>395</sup> Taking his cue from Paul, Origen argues that the true Israelite is the one in spirit, that

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<sup>393</sup> *Hom Josh 15.1, SC 330-332.*

<sup>394</sup> *Commentaire sur saint Jean 1.1, Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1966), 56. Origen alludes to Rom. 2.28-29.

<sup>395</sup> *Traite des Principes IV.3.6, Sources Chrétiennes*, vol. 3 (Paris: Les Éditions du

is, the follower of the promised Messiah. As N.R.M de Lange notes, “Crucial to the whole argument is the paradox that the Jews and the Gentiles suffer a reversal of roles. The historical Israelites cease to be Israelites, while the believers from the Gentiles become the New Israel. This involves a redefinition of Israel.”<sup>396</sup>

An equally important component to Origen’s ecclesiological construction is the illumination provided at the coming of Christ. As he says, “the light contained in the law of Moses, having been hidden under a veil, showed forth at the arrival of Jesus, when the veil was taken away, and the good things came into knowledge at once, which the letter held as a shadow.”<sup>397</sup> Only at the arrival of Christ did the shadows and figures of the Old Testament come to full view as symbols about Christ and the Church. As Simon insightfully notes, for Origen “the Church is in the Old Testament. She is Israel . . .” As a result, “Israel’s rites should be understood as the simple prefiguration of the Christian rites.”<sup>398</sup> All that the Old Testament law had to say about Israel Origen sees as fulfilled in the Church.

#### *A Typology of Priesthood*

This hermeneutic of ecclesiological continuity with Israel also allows Origen to understand the Old Testament Levitical priesthood in a typological way. As Daniélou defines it, typology is “the essential idea of analogy between the actions of God in the events, institutions

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Cerf, 1980), 366. Origen cites 1 Cor. 10.18 and Rom. 9.6.

<sup>396</sup> de Lange, 80. Cf. *Hom. Numbers* 15.3

<sup>397</sup> *Traite des Principes* IV.1.6, SC, vol. 3, 282.

<sup>398</sup> “L’Église est dans l’Ancien Testament. Elle est Israël . . . Les rites d’Israël doivent être entendus comme la simple préfiguration des rites chrétiens.” Simon, 104-105.



and individuals of the Old and New Testament.”<sup>399</sup> Elsewhere, Daniélou describes typology as “a relation between realities both of which are historical, and not between historical realities and a timeless world.”<sup>400</sup> Likewise, R.P.C. Hanson emphasizes both the “similar situation” between the events and the “fulfillment” aspect of typology. He explains: “Christian typology . . . was a *fulfilled* typology, that is to say, it saw each of the Old Testament types as ultimately no more than prophecies or pointers to the reality which had taken place in the Christian dispensation.”<sup>401</sup> The realities of the Old Testament become “figures” or “types” of realities found in the New Testament, Christ, or his Church. The important point to observe is that a typological interpretation works primarily upon an analogy between historical realities, not between historical (visible) and spiritual (invisible) realities. While much of Origen’s interpretation of Levitical priesthood does move from historical to spiritual (the heart, soul, morals, and so on), his appropriation of the Levitical priesthood as a “type” of the Christian ministry does not. Rather, he is moving from one historical reality to another, from one visible institution (Israelite priesthood) to another visible institution (Christian ecclesial office). Several examples work to demonstrate this typological reading.

Because neither the Christian Church nor the Jews worshipped in the Temple in Jerusalem or offered bloody animal sacrifices any longer, the Old Testament institution of

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<sup>399</sup> “... l’idée essentielle de l’analogie entre les actions de Dieu dans les événements, les institutions et les personnages de l’Ancien et du Nouveau Testament.” Daniélou, “Origène comme exégète,” 285.

<sup>400</sup> Jean Daniélou, “The Fathers and the Scriptures” *Eastern Churches’ Quarterly* 10 (1954):268.

<sup>401</sup> R.P.C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event: A study of the sources and significance of Origen’s interpretation of scripture* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1959), 67 italics original. See pp.7 & 22 for his formal definition which emphasizes the aspect of “similar situation” between type and antitype.

priesthood and the accompanying laws could not be read without some alteration. It should come as no surprise that Origen applies his typological hermeneutic to his reading of the Old Testament laws. As he says in Homily 4 on Numbers, “We return thus to this Tabernacle of the Church of the living God and see how each of these [prescriptions of the Law] ought to be observed in the Church of God by the priests of Christ (*sacerdotibus Christi*).”<sup>402</sup> The old law must still be observed, even in the Church of God. Just as the priests of Israel were responsible for the exercise of these laws, so too the “priests of Christ” must enact these commands in the Church. Elsewhere in Homily 9 on Leviticus, Origen reminds his listeners: “the things which are written in the law were shown to be copies (*exemplaria*) and figures (*formas*) of living and true things.”<sup>403</sup> Those “living and true things” were none other than the realities now present in the Christian ministerial leadership.

All this to say that Origen reads the Old Testament, even the more difficult parts like Leviticus and Numbers, with an assumption of continuity between the institutions and laws of Israel and the institutions and obligations of the Church. Yet this continuity was not, and could not be, a mere continuation of the old without transformation and change. As von Campenhausen explains,

The Christian Church does not simply continue as the old people of God on the same level. Rather, it has brought to fulfillment Israel’s law in a higher, ‘spiritual’ way and by that has revealed for the first time the true, ‘mystical’ sense of the earlier regulations; the law of leadership and rule appears now in a more altered, spiritual form.<sup>404</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> *Hom Numb.* 4.3.1, *SC* vol 1, 108.

<sup>403</sup> *Hom Lev* 9.2.1, *SC* vol. 2, 74-76.

<sup>404</sup> “Die christliche Kirche setzt ja das alte Gottesvolk nicht einfach auf derselben Ebene fort. Sie hat sein Gesetz vielmehr auf eine höhere, ‚geistliche‘ Weise zur Erfüllung gebracht und damit erst den wahren, ‚mystischen‘ Sinn der früheren Bestimmungen enthüllt, und auch das Gesetz der Führung und Herrschaft erscheint nunmehr in veränderter, geistlicher Gestalt.” von Campenhausen, *Kirchliches Amt*, 281.

In a homily on Numbers seen previously, Origen provides us with an extended example of his hermeneutic played out on Christian priesthood. Having finished a discussion of his three-fold hermeneutical approach, Origen moves to an application of these passages regarding the sacrifice of first-fruits. He has just previously discussed the assertion in Hebrews 10:1 that “the law is but a shadow of the good things to come” and now attempts to demonstrate that principle of the “mystical sense (*mysticum sensum*)”<sup>405</sup> in his reading of the first-fruits and the priesthood.

This passage which we have in our hands, it seems to me, invites the interpretation that it is right and useful to offer also the first-fruits to the priests (*sacerdotibus*) of the gospel. For thus “the Lord arranged that those who proclaim the gospel live from the gospel, and those who serve the altar participate in the altar” (1 Cor. 9:14, 13). This is thus right and decent; and thus it is contrary, indecent and unworthy, even impious, that one who worships God and enters into the Church of God, who knows that the priests (*sacerdotes*) and ministers stand by the altar and serve either the Word of God or the ministry of the Church, should not offer to the priests (*sacerdotibus*) the first-fruits from the produce of the earth, which God gave by bringing forth his sun and by providing his rains...<sup>406</sup>

Origen draws upon Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians to establish his reading: the Old Testament priests are fulfilled by and correspond with the Christian leaders; the old ministers of the altar who receive the first-fruits represent the current Christian ministers who also receive support from their congregation. Thus, Origen’s “mystical” reading has a continuity of application, yet a transformation. In each dispensation the gifts are offered to the spiritual leaders of the people of God, and in this sense, his reading is a literal appropriation of the Numbers text. Yet, Israel with its Temple and priesthood no longer remain and the interpretation moves beyond the literal sense as Origen makes application to “the priests of the *gospel*” who perform “the ministry of the *Church*.” This is not Origen’s invention (he is drawing explicitly

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<sup>405</sup> *Hom Numb.* 11.2.1, *SC* vol 2, 22.

<sup>406</sup> *Hom Numb.* 11.2.2, *SC* vol 2, 22-24.

upon Paul), but this passage demonstrates the typological hermeneutic employed in Origen's reading of the Old Testament priesthood.

Perhaps the most striking example of Origen's typological interpretation of Israel and its priesthood, one which maintains both a continuity and yet a significant transformation, comes from Homily 2.1 on Joshua. In a wonderfully rich passage, Origen expounds on the death of Moses, explaining to his audience that "unless you understand how Moses died, you will not be able to draw your attention to how Jesus reigns."<sup>407</sup> He then moves into a skillful and enlightening contrast between "Moses" and "Jesus":

If therefore you consider closely that Jerusalem is destroyed, the altar having been abandoned, that nowhere are there sacrifices or offerings or first-fruits, nowhere priests, nowhere high priests, nowhere the ministry of Levites—when you see that all these things have ceased, say that "Moses the servant of God is dead."

If you see no one coming three times a year before the face of God, neither offering gifts in the temple nor celebrating the Passover nor eating the unleavened bread, nor offering the first-fruits, nor consecrating the first-born—when you do not see these things being celebrated, say that "Moses the servant of God is dead."

But when you see Gentiles entering into the faith, churches being built, the altars no longer spattered with the blood of animals, but being consecrated with the precious blood of Christ, when you see priests and Levites attending not to the blood of bulls and goats, but to the Word of God through the grace of the Holy Spirit . . . when you see all these things, then say that Moses the servant of God is dead and Jesus the Son of God occupies his place.<sup>408</sup>

In this lengthy passage, Origen compares Moses and Jesus, but in doing so he also draws in an entire portrait of continuity and contrast between dispensations and institutions, the old and new rites, the old and new priesthood, the old and new people of God. Daniélou comments upon the passage this way:

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<sup>407</sup> *Hom Josh. 2.1, SC 116.*

<sup>408</sup> *Hom Josh 2.1, SC 116-118.*

In this magnificent text there appears at the same time both the succession and the continuity of the two economies, simultaneously all the novelty of the gospel and all the collapse of the Law. And at the same time—and this, properly speaking, is the notion of ‘figure’—the resemblance between the spiritual realities of the New law and the fleshly realities of the Old. . . . We have here a typology that is profoundly traditional, which contains its dogmatic reality, one which is in fact an essential part of the deposit of the Church.<sup>409</sup>

Here, perhaps, the culmination of Origen’s typological and ecclesiological reading of Scripture is seen as it bears upon the issue of a hierarchical priesthood. Because the new still maintains a continuity with the old, the Israelite priesthood still finds application in the Church. Yet, because there is also discontinuity and transformation from Moses to Jesus, that application must move beyond a simple succession. The result: the old priesthood of Israel has been fulfilled and transformed in a new priesthood, embodied in the Christian ministerial leadership. The Temple of old no longer remains, those old bloody sacrifices are no longer offered, the old priesthood exists no more. In its place, church buildings arise, the gospel is preached and the Christian leaders inherit the title “priests.”<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>409</sup> “Dans ce texte magnifique apparaît à la fois la succession et la continuité des deux économies, à la fois toute la nouveauté de l’Évangile et toute la vétusté de la Loi, et, en même temps—et c’est proprement la notion de figure—la ressemblance des réalités spirituelles de la Loi nouvelle et des réalités charnelles de l’Ancienne. . . . Nous sommes ici dans la typologie en ce qu’elle a de profondément traditionnel, en ce qu’elle contient de réalité dogmatique, en ce qui en fait une part essentielle du dépôt de l’Église.” Daniélou, *Origène* [S.I.] : Éditions de la Table Ronde, 1948, 153.

<sup>410</sup> Daniélou has suggested, surprisingly, that “the institutions of the Old Testament are the figures of the invisible realities of the New and not the realities of the visible Church” (*Origène*, 74). This seems to press Origen too narrowly into purely invisible, spiritual typology. As I hope I have demonstrated, Origen also seems quite willing to apply a typological reading of the OT priesthood to the visible Christian priesthood of the New covenant.

## The “Culture” of the Church

### *Church as Polis*

The notion of the Church as a unique *polis* or “nation” plays a large role in Origen’s conception of the Church as a distinct “culture”. For example, in his treatise *Against Celsus*, Origen describes the Church of God by making an extended contrast and comparison with other political societies in the Roman world:

For the Church (*ekklesia*) of God, e.g., which is at Athens, is something gentle and stable, as being one which desires to please the God of all things; but the assembly (*ekklesia*) of the Athenians is seditious and should by no means be compared to the Church (*ekklesia*) of God there. And you may say the same thing of the Church of God at Corinth, and of the assembly of the Corinthian people; and also of the Church of God at Alexandria, and of the assembly of the Alexandrian people. And if the one who hears this is reasonable . . . he will be amazed at the One who planned it and was able to accomplish in all places the establishment of Churches (*ekklesias*) of God alongside of the assemblies of the people in each city.

In the same way, in comparing the council (*boulēn*) of the Church (*ekklesias*) of God with the council in each city, you would find that some rulers of the Church are worthy to govern that city [i.e. the Church], if there is any such city in the whole world; but the rulers in all other places do not bear the character worthy of the superiority of rule which they seem to hold over the citizens. And so, too, you must compare the rulers of the assembly of each city who rule those in the city (*polei*).<sup>411</sup>

Throughout this remarkable passage, Origen makes a running comparison between the Church of God (*ekklesia theou*) and the assembly (*ekklesia*) of the cities. His conclusion is that the Christian assemblies are far superior to those of the pagan assemblies. That Origen should hold the Christians in such high regard is not unusual. His characterization of the Church in such political terms, however, is more important and surprising. The church is not just an *ekklesia* in an abstract sense, but a concrete social reality—a “city” (*polis*), governed by a ruler. As von Campenhausen observes, “Even for him [Origen], the Church, with all the emphasis of its

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<sup>411</sup> *Contra Celsum* 3.30, *Sources Chretiennes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1968), 72.

spiritual and super-earthly nature, is also a sacred, sociological reality of an admittedly quasi-political importance.”<sup>412</sup> The Church is not merely a “spiritual” and invisible reality. Although he would not deny this spiritual aspect of Christianity, Origen here clearly presents the Christian Church as a vibrant, visible *polis*, comparable yet superior to the existing secular assemblies in the Empire.<sup>413</sup>

In another revealing passage in *Against Celsus*, Origen touches upon this same notion of the Church being a political entity, comparable yet distinct from the Greco-Roman *polis*. Celsus has accused the Christians of failing their political duty to the state by refusing to take office in the government. Origen responds, again, at length:

But we recognize in each city the existence of another national government (*sustema patridos*) founded by the Word of God, and we encourage those who are powerful in word and of a wholesome life to rule over the Churches . . . And those who rule (*archontes*) us well are under the constraining influence of the great King, whom we believe to be the Son of God, the divine Word. And if those who govern (*archontes*) the Church, being called rulers of the divine nation (*kata theon patridos*)—that is, the Church—rule well, they govern according to the commands of God . . .

And it is not for the purpose of fleeing public duties that Christians avoid public offices, but that they might keep themselves for a more divine and more necessary service (*leitourgia*) in the Church of God—for the salvation of men.<sup>414</sup>

Similar to his previous explanation, Origen here describes the Church as a “national organization” complete with rulers and a “great King”. The Church is likened to a nation, the “divine nation,” ruled by divine commands. Christians, explains Origen, are not attempting to escape public duty; rather, their citizenship, so to speak, is of another political realm—the

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<sup>412</sup> “Auch für ihn ist ja die Kirche bei aller Betonung ihres spirituellen und überirdischen Wesens immer auch eine heilige, soziologische Gegebenheit von einem zugestandenermassen quasi-politischen Gewicht.” von Campenhausen, *Kirchliches Amt*, 289.

<sup>413</sup> See Vogt, 80, who asserts that the Church, for Origen, is “sehr viel weniger spiritualistisch, als man meinte.”

<sup>414</sup> *Contra Celsum* 8.75, *Sources Chretiennes*, vol. 4 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1969), 350-351.

Church. As before, Origen clearly portrays the Church as a visible, active “nation” or *polis*, existing alongside of and distinct from the secular Empire.

In other texts, Origen describes the Church as the “race of Christians”<sup>415</sup> and a “nation of Christians.”<sup>416</sup> From all these passages, then, Origen’s socio-political ecclesiology stands out. While elsewhere affirming the spiritual and invisible nature of the Church, Origen here likens the Church to a *polis* or nation in itself, unique and distinct from the secular *polis* of the Empire. The Church is understood as a culture unto itself, an alternate society, distinct with its own institutions, rituals, laws, leadership and space in the world.

How does this relate to the Christian priesthood? In part, the Christian priesthood was an expression of the Church learning to think of itself as just such an alternate society, containing its own rituals, laws and leadership. Further, the connection lies in remembering the earlier discussion on the assumed continuity with Israel. When Origen likens the Church to a “race” or “divine nation” one must remember that Origen already has a particular “nation” in mind with which the Church is linked: Israel. The “race” of Christianity, according to Origen’s description of the Church, is none other than the *polis* which is built upon and fulfills the Israelite nation of the Old Testament. Thus, Origen articulates a politico-theological ecclesiology. The Church as an alternate society intentionally connects its defining sacred space, rituals and leadership with biblical Israel. The Church as *polis*, by Origen’s construction, is nothing less than the Church as fulfilled and embodied Israel. Vilela explains Origen’s ecclesiology this way: “Origen conceives the local Church as the city of God . . . as a theocratic organization, a spiritual reflection of the

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<sup>415</sup> *Hom Josh* 9.10, *SC* 268.

<sup>416</sup> *Contra Celsum* 1.45.



civil society.”<sup>417</sup> Because the Christian *polis* has its own leaders and rulers, and the Christian *polis* is modeled in part around biblical Israel, it makes perfect sense that the leadership of Israel would become the paradigm which shapes and influences the understanding of Christian leadership.

### *Christian Material Culture*

That the Church was portrayed by Origen as a *polis*, an alternate society, distinct with its own institutions, rituals, laws and leadership is clear. Yet there is something else which brings this politico-theological ecclesiology into even sharper focus: the rise of a Christian material culture. With this relatively new development comes the further emergence of Christianity as inhabiting sacred space, a significant context in which the identification of the Christian bishop as a priest can take place.

In a previously examined homily on Joshua, Origen makes reference to “Churches being built” as one sign of a new age, the age of Jesus and his redefined Israel.<sup>418</sup> What other indication is there of an awareness of an emerging Christian material culture, and how might this bear upon the understanding of a Christian ministerial priesthood? Given Origen’s fixation on all things spiritual and invisible, it should come as no surprise that he does not give a lot of attention to the material Christian culture in which he lives. Hanson is correct to assert that “Origen’s references to Christian institutions in his works are on the whole not very frequent, and to the Christian cultus surprisingly rare.”<sup>419</sup> Yet, there are a few texts that give indication of

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<sup>417</sup> “Origène conçoit aussi l’Église locale comme la cité de Dieu . . . comme une organisation théocratique, un reflet spiritualisé de la société civile.” Vilela, 103.

<sup>418</sup> See *Hom Josh 2.1*, SC 116-118.

<sup>419</sup> R.P.C. Hanson, *Origen’s Doctrine of Tradition* (London: S.P.C.K., 1954), 176.

both the existence of such an emerging material culture, and Origen's own awareness of such a reality.

In the same series of homilies on Joshua in which he mentions the erecting of church buildings, Origen gives us a rare glimpse into a church scene of his day. He warns his audience against a show of religiosity without a real change of life, urging them not to be like those who fail to live a life in agreement with their Christian profession and yet “come to the Church (*ecclesiam*) and bow their heads to the priests (*sacerdotibus*), perform their duties, honor the servants of God, and bring something for decorating the altar or the Church.”<sup>420</sup> Here we get a unique window into early Christian culture, where believers were expected to gather at the Christian assembly, show reverence to their priestly leader and participate in the decorating of the church building and its altar. Origen demonstrates a clear awareness of the Church with a real, concrete institutional life. Important for my thesis, Origen also in the same context mentions the presence of priests and servants of God who play an important role in that material culture of Christian sacred space.

Another indication of an awareness of an emerging Christian space comes from Origen's understanding of the Church as the spiritual Temple, a view scattered throughout his homilies on Leviticus. For example, Origen likens the Church to the Temple of the Lord, saying “Behold, you stand in the Temple (*in templo*) of the Lord Jesus, that is, in his Church (*ecclesia*); this is the temple built from living stones.”<sup>421</sup> This view, as observed by Daly, is largely non-material, a view “which sees the community and the individual as the new temple constructed of living

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<sup>420</sup> *Hom Josh.* 10.3, SC 276.

<sup>421</sup> *Homélie sur s. Luc 15.3, Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1962), 234. Cf. *Hom. Lev.* 9.5.

stones, and the individual heart, soul or mind as the altar on which is offered the sacrifices of the new law.”<sup>422</sup>

Yet Origen addresses a more concrete aspect of the Temple-Church analogy in homily 9 on Leviticus. There, Origen addresses the meaning of the two sanctuaries in the old tabernacle, one visible and open to priests, the other inaccessible. He explains: “I think that the first sanctuary (*aedes*) can be understood as this Church (*Ecclesia*) in which we are now placed in the flesh (*in carne*), in which priests (*sacerdotes*) minister, offering burnt sacrifices on the altar.”<sup>423</sup> Here in this last text, the Church is likened not only to the tabernacle, but also to the place where sacrifices are offered at the altar. The place of assembly, the Church, becomes the place of sacrifice, much like the Temple of old. What went on in the worship practices of Israel has continuity with Christian worship practices. As shown earlier, Origen thinks that “Every single thing which is written in the law is a figure (*formae*) of the things which ought to be carried on in the Church.”<sup>424</sup> Without denying the spiritual and invisible dimension of Origen’s understanding, the physicality of space and place is also indicated in his depiction of the Christian “sanctuary.” Important to note in this passage, Origen also mentions the priests (*sacerotes*) as central to this Christian material sacred space.

A passage that speaks particularly to the idea of the “holy” or “sacred” is found in Origen’s eleventh homily on Leviticus. Having reminded his audience that many things are called “holy” (*sancta*) in the Scriptures, including vessels, garments, and places, Origen moves to a contemporary application. He provides his listeners with a personal example in which a

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<sup>422</sup> Daly, “Sacrificial Soteriology,” 875.

<sup>423</sup> *Hom. Lev. 9.9, SC*, vol. 2, 114.

<sup>424</sup> *Hom. Lev. 5.12, SC*, vol. 1, 260.

first-born calf was born in his possession and was consecrated to the Lord as holy. Therefore, says Origen, we can see that things declared holy must be set apart in their use. For example, he says, “there are bowls and cups . . . which must never leave the Temple (*templo*), but always remain in the sanctuaries (*sanctis*).” Likewise, “vestments which are called holy must not be subject to the use of a priest in his house, but in the Temple (*templo*).”<sup>425</sup> His application, relating initially to the Old Testament institutions, clearly has relevance for the Church as well. It is no stretch to see in Origen’s mind the Church (and its own *sacra*) as the meaning behind these commands for consecration. There is a clear sense of the “sacred” in this homily that pertains not just to holiness in living, but to the various articles and vessels for Church use. Again, as before, the notion of priesthood exists alongside this discussion of a sacred material culture. Priesthood and sacred space go hand in hand in Origen’s discussions.

This connection between “sacred things” and the priesthood is found again in Origen’s third homily on Leviticus. Expounding Leviticus 5:14 (“If anyone sins unintentionally against the holy things of the Lord...”) Origen identifies the “holy things” (*sancta*) with “those things which were offered in the gifts of the Lord.” He explains: “For example, [they are] the prayers and gifts which are offered in the Churches of God for the use of the holy things (*in Ecclesiis Dei ad usum sanctorum*) and the priestly ministry (*ministerium sacerdotum*) or for the needs of the poor.”<sup>426</sup> Again, the “holy things” (*sancta*) are in part the visible offerings brought to the church

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<sup>425</sup> *Hom Lev.* 11.1, *SC*, vol 2, 144. It is difficult to determine precisely whether Origen here refers exclusively to the Old Testament temple and furnishings or to both Old Testament and Christian realities. Given the context of the passage and his obvious awareness of a concrete altar, there is good reason to suggest he means both OT and Christian church realities.

<sup>426</sup> *Hom Lev.* 3.6, *SC*, vol 1, 146. See also Schöllgen for a discussion of this text (*Die Anfänge der Professionalisierung des Klerus und das kirchliche Amt in der Syrischen Didaskalie* [Munster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1998], 72).

for the use of the priests and others in need. A Christian priesthood and the notion of sacred objects and sacred space appear connected in Origen's mind.

Thus Origen gives witness to a distinct, concrete reality to the Christian Church which includes buildings, altars and sacred vessels. Most important, Origen's discussions of this sacred material culture also frequently includes references to the Christian "priesthood". This suggests that part of Origen's understanding of a Christian priesthood includes the notion of their responsibility to guard, protect and use the sacred space and sacred things. The Church, then, according to Origen is a *polis*, an alternate society, distinct not only with its own institutions, rituals and leadership, but also sacred space and sacred objects. The Church is the community of people that occupies this space. Further, this new *polis* was intentionally linked to the biblical nation of Israel such that when Origen reads the commands and promises to Israel he understands them as references to the Church. When he reads about the roles and responsibilities of the Levitical priests, he understands them as a typological model of Christian leadership. The Church as a culture is identified with the Church as the fulfillment of Israel, now embodied in actual space in the Roman world. This politico-theological ecclesiology thus resides as the backdrop to Origen's appropriation of the Levitical priesthood as a type or figure for Christian leadership.

### **Conclusion**

Though Origen never sets forth a systematic treatment of his views on the Christian bishop, one can readily ascertain his perspective from his incidental dealings with the issue, particularly in the homilies on Leviticus, Numbers and Joshua. It is clear from these and other texts that Origen understands the Christian bishop in light of the Levitical priesthood. Where the

text speaks of the priest, Origen regularly understands it to mean the Christian bishop. Further, Origen portrays the instructional, sacrificial and governmental duties of the Christian minister as a priestly fulfillment. Perhaps surprising to some scholars, the bishop's presiding role over the Eucharistic sacrifice is not very prominent in Origen's portrayal of the Christian hierarchical priesthood. Certainly, Origen assumes the sacrament as important to his understanding of Christian worship and even one of the bishop's tasks; yet, it rarely provides the link for Origen in understanding why the bishop is designated a priest.

Instead, the key to this connection between OT priest and Christian office lies in understanding Origen's politico-theological ecclesiology. The Jewish Scriptures are the Christian Scriptures. Israel in the flesh foreshadows the Church of God. Yet his portrayal of the Church as Israel is never merely a spiritual or invisible reality (though it certainly includes that). Rather, Origen portrays a much more social and political understanding of the Church. The Church is a *polis*, a "divine nation" comparable to, yet distinct from, the Greco-Roman *polis* with its own sacred objects and sacred space, its own rites and institutions, its own leadership. Yet, Origen's ecclesiology is more than an abstract reality; instead, the "nation" or "race" to which the Church is compared is that of OT Israel. From this politico-theological ecclesiology, Origen easily connects the priest and bishop. The spiritual ruler of the old people of God, the cultic leader, the guardian of the *sancta* is now fulfilled by the Christian bishop, the new "priest," the new leader of the people of God and the Christian *sacra*.

**CHAPTER 6**  
**MINISTERS OF THE ALTAR, LEADERS OF THE CHURCH:**  
**CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE**

**Introduction**

I turn our attention now from Origen in the East to another third century thinker, this time a representative from the West. Cyprian of Carthage is perhaps the most prominent western bishop of the third century. His collection of epistles and treatises provide us a unique glimpse into third century Christian life and specifically the life of an early Christian bishop in North Africa. Although many scholars would agree with Michael Fahey's conclusion that "Cyprian was not a profound or creative theologian gifted with rich and original insights,"<sup>427</sup> Cyprian is also the early Church Father seen as the most important regarding the topic of a Christian ministerial priesthood in the first four centuries. He has been highlighted repeatedly as the figure through whom the most radical development occurred concerning a new conception of Christian ministry. J.B. Lightfoot's remarks from over a century ago have been repeated and affirmed throughout the years: Cyprian "marks the period of transition from the universal sacerdotalism of the New Testament to the particular sacerdotalism of a later age" and has "boldly transferred himself into the new domain."<sup>428</sup> What are we to make of this figure in Church history who on the one hand is dismissed as an unoriginal theologian and on the other hand eschewed as a

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<sup>427</sup> Michael Fahey, *Cyprian and the Bible: A study in third-century exegesis* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1971), 624. A notable exception would be A. D'Alès who suggest that "the imprint placed by Cyprian on the theology of the West is so profound" that it would take two volumes to do it justice" (*La Theologie de Saint Cyprien*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1922], xii).

<sup>428</sup> J.B. Lightfoot, *Christian Ministry* (New York: Whittaker, 1878), 131. Thomas Lindsay, *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1902), 309. G.S.M Walker, *The Churchmanship of St. Cyprian* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1969), 37.

radical revolutionist in the theology of Christian ministry? Furthermore, are Lightfoot's remarks a fair assessment of Cyprian's place in the development of a Christian ministerial priesthood?

It is probably fair to say that Cyprian, when compared with the likes of Origen or Augustine, was not a profound theologian pushing the boundaries of doctrinal expression. He came to Christianity, and to the episcopal office, late in life, wrote for no more than a decade, and was then martyred for his faith.<sup>429</sup> It is not surprising that his theological insights are not all that developed. However, Cyprian is supremely significant for providing one of the clearest articulations of the episcopal office portrayed on the model of the Old Testament priesthood. Yet, while Cyprian articulates this notion perhaps more frequently and more fervently than preceding thinkers, he nevertheless stands well within the interpretive tradition of the early Church, not just in North Africa, but around the Empire as well. For that reason, it is inaccurate to say that Cyprian forged a brand new conception of the Christian ministry in sacerdotal terms. What then did his ministerial priesthood look like and what clues does he provide as to the basis for his understanding?

### **A Christian Ministerial Priesthood**

There is no doubt that Cyprian thinks of the bishop in priestly ways.<sup>430</sup> Although he uses a number of designations for the bishop (*praepositus, pastor, antistes, iudex, gubernator*) his

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<sup>429</sup> For a nice summary of Cyprian's life and ministry see Edward White Benson's old, but still useful, *Cyprian: His Life, His Times, His Work* (London: Macmillan, 1897); Michael Sage, *Cyprian* (Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1975); G.W. Clarke's introductions in his 4 volume series, *The Letters of St. Cyprian* (New York: Newman Press, 1984-1989); and J. Patout Burns more recent work, *Cyprian the Bishop* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>430</sup> There is considerable debate about whether Cyprian sees the presbyter as a *sacerdos* as well. For a good survey of this debate, see Colin Bulley, *The Priesthood of Some Believers: developments from the general to the special priesthood in the Christian literature of the first*



preference for *sacerdos* is exceptional. Richard Seagraves, in his lexical study *Pascentes cum Disciplina*, has demonstrated the statistical facts on this point. Within the works of Cyprian, *sacerdos* is used 122 times to refer to the bishop. The next most frequent term is *praepositus* at 40 uses.<sup>431</sup>

Since a number of scholars have already examined Cyprian's writings with explicit interest in his conception of the Christian ministerial priesthood,<sup>432</sup> I will limit myself to a brief summary of the consensus and then suggest further observations and critiques upon that consensus in light of Cyprian's works and my overarching thesis. Most scholars today agree in some fashion with the words of J.B. Lightfoot regarding Cyprian: "the offering of the eucharist, being regarded as the one special act of sacrifice, and appearing externally to the eyes as the act of the officiating minister, might well lead to the minister being called a priest."<sup>433</sup> R.P.C.

Hanson is representative of this modern acceptance of Lightfoot's conclusions, when he says that Cyprian "adopted the most advanced and sacerdotal doctrine of the ministry and, bound up with

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*three centuries* (Waynesboro, Ga: Paternoster, 2000), 115-118. See also Walker, 38; Richard Seagraves, *Pascentes cum Disciplina: A lexical Study of the clergy in the Cyprianic correspondence* (Freibourg, Switz.: Éditions Universitaires, 1993), 41; Albano Vilela, *La Condition Collegiale des Prêtres au III<sup>e</sup> Siècle* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1971), 282-283; Adrien Demoustier, "L'Ontologie de l'Église selon saint Cyprien" *Recherches de science religieuse* 52 (1964):570, n.62. In the end, Cyprian never directly applies the term *sacerdos* to a presbyter; from this observation, I conclude that *sacerdos* was not the typical way in which he viewed the presbyter. However, there are places where Cyprian includes presbyters in the "sacerdotal rank" and from these few texts, it seems that Cyprian has no problem understanding them as sharing in the bishop's "sacerdotal honor" even if they are not, strictly speaking, sacerdotes themselves.

<sup>431</sup> Seagraves, 40 n.1. Of course Cyprian also uses the term *episcopus* for the bishop, a term used as frequently as *sacerdos*.

<sup>432</sup> See for example, Maurice Bevenot, "'Sacerdos' as Understood by Cyprian" *JTS* n.s. 30 (1979): 413-429; Gustave Bardy, "Le Sacerdoce chrétien d'après saint Cyprien" *La Vie Spirituelle* 60 (1939):87-119; John Henry Bernard, "The Cyprianic Doctrine of the Ministry" in *Essays on the Early History of the Church and the Ministry*, ed. H.B. Swete (London: Macmillan, 1918), 215-262.

<sup>433</sup> Lightfoot, 138.

it, a correspondingly developed doctrine of the Eucharist.”<sup>434</sup> In other words, most scholars argue that Cyprian identifies the bishop as a priest because of his role in presiding over the Eucharistic sacrifice. There is certainly truth to this conclusion. Of the thinkers and church orders examined so far, Cyprian is by far the most explicit about the bishop’s role as the Eucharistic president and his title as priest.

For example, Cyprian at times connects the priesthood with the explicit mention of the sacrifice of the Eucharist. In Epistle 63, Cyprian gives instructions on how to prepare the chalice for communion, strongly urging that it must be water mixed with wine, not just bare water. His reasoning is that bishops must follow the example of Christ himself: “And because we make mention of his passion in every sacrifice (for the passion of the Lord is the sacrifice we offer), then we ought to do nothing other than what Christ did.”<sup>435</sup> Later in the same epistle, Cyprian reinforces this teaching, explicitly connecting it to ideas about priesthood: “Therefore, beloved brother, it is fitting to our religion and fear [of the Lord] as well as the very place and office of our priesthood (*officio sacerdotii nostri*) to guard the truth of our Lord’s instruction by mixing the Lord’s cup [with wine] and offering (*offerendo*) it up.”<sup>436</sup> Here Cyprian’s conception of the “office of the priesthood” entails, at least in part, the sacrifice of the Eucharist itself. It is clear

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<sup>434</sup> R.P.C. Hanson, “Eucharistic Offering” in *Studies in Christian Antiquity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985), 103. See also M.F. Wiles, “The Theological Legacy of St. Cyprian” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 14 (1963):148 who says “Cyprian also saw the priesthood as very closely paralleled and fulfilled in the Christian ministry . . . he saw the Old Testament sacrifices as fulfilled . . . by the sacrifice of the Christian eucharist;” and Bernard, “The Cyprianic Doctrine of Ministry”: “It seems probable that the Eucharistic language of the early Church prepared the way for, and suggested, the use of the term ‘priest’ to denote the minister of the Church’s offering to God” (227).

<sup>435</sup> *Epistle* 63.17.1, *CCSL* 3C, 413. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

<sup>436</sup> *Ep.* 63.19, *CCSL* 3C, 416.

that an important aspect of the ministerial priesthood for Cyprian entailed this function as one who offers the sacrifice of the Church, especially the Eucharist.

Furthermore, Cyprian even more frequently ties together the threefold ideas of a Christian priesthood, altar and sacrifices. In his treatise *On the Unity of the Church*, Cyprian addresses the question of whether rival bishops can set up alternate places of worship. Cyprian vehemently objects, describing the results of such action:

He bears arms against the Church, he fights against the arrangement of God. An enemy of the altar (*altaris*), a rebel against Christ's sacrifice (*sacrificium*). . . by despising the bishops and forsaking the priests of God (*Dei sacerdotibus*), he dares to set up another altar (*altare*) to make another prayer with illegal words, to profane the truth of the Lord's offering by false sacrifices (*falsa sacrificia*).<sup>437</sup>

Again in Epistle 72, Cyprian avers that the schismatics have received an improper ordination and have “attempted to offer (*offerre*) false and sacreligious sacrifices (*sacrificia*) outside [the Church] in opposition to the one, divine altar (*altare*).”<sup>438</sup> This rebellion, says Cyprian, would prevent them from remaining bishops even if they returned to the Church, “For the priests and ministers (*sacerdotes et ministros*) who serve the altar and sacrifices (*altari et sacrificiis*) ought to be pure and blameless.”<sup>439</sup> Numerous other texts could be cited,<sup>440</sup> but the point is that Cyprian sees a strong connection between the Christian priesthood and the idea of sacrifice at the altar.

My aim, then, is not to deny this observation about the connection between priesthood and Eucharist in Cyprian, but rather to argue that it is an incomplete and too narrow a view of his

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<sup>437</sup> *De Unitate* 17, *CCSL* 3, 262.

<sup>438</sup> *Ep.* 72.2.1, *CCSL* 3C, 526.

<sup>439</sup> *Ep.* 72.2.2, *CCSL* 3C, 526.

<sup>440</sup> See *De Unitate* 13; 18; *De Lapsis* 15-16; 26; *Ep.* 1.1.1-2; 43.5.2; 65.2; 67.1.2; 68.2.

understanding of the episcopal-priestly office.<sup>441</sup> First, as we have begun to see and as I will demonstrate further, it is not just the Eucharist, but sacrifices more broadly conceived and Christian worship in general that Cyprian considers when he speaks of the Christian priesthood. As a result, I suggest that Cyprian's understanding of the bishop as a priest is tied not to the Eucharist in particular, but to the entire task of presiding over Christian worship, which by its very nature is sacrificial in character. From this perspective, what drives Cyprian to designate the bishop a priest is the accumulation of liturgical functions (prayer, baptism, Eucharist) all cast in sacrificial terms. This might be termed his liturgical leadership function.

Second, I will demonstrate that the liturgical role of the bishop is not the only important role of the bishop-priest for Cyprian. The governing, or administrative, role is equally important in Cyprian's designation of the bishop *qua priest*. This aspect of Cyprian's priestly ministry has often been overlooked by scholars, but it is fundamental to a fuller understanding of the ministerial priesthood according to Cyprian. The Christian priest, then, is more than the one who presides over the Eucharist, or even sacrifices more broadly conceived. He is also the one who rules and governs the Church, acts as judge in deciding cases, and guards and protects true Christian worship from heretical teaching. This might be termed the governmental function of the bishop-priest. What is important to see, and what I hope to demonstrate, is that both the liturgical and the governmental functions of the bishop are deemed *sacerdotal* in the eyes of Cyprian.

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<sup>441</sup> To this extent, my argument for Cyprian will appear quite similar to my argument in the previous chapter on Origen. The Christian ministerial priesthood, for both Origen and Cyprian, was much broader than merely a connection with a sacrificial Eucharist.

Third, I want to draw attention to the underlying politico-theological ecclesiology that allows Cyprian to connect the Christian bishop to the Old Testament Levitical priesthood. Cyprian's use of the term *sacerdos* for the bishop always finds its ground and source in the Israelite priesthood. By seeing the Church in continuity with biblical Israel, Cyprian appropriates with ease certain biblical texts originally addressed to the nation of Israel and its leadership. Behind these connections between OT priesthood and Christian episcopacy lies Cyprian's assumed ecclesiology that the Church shares a heritage with Israel (including her Scriptures, history and institutions). Exploring his ecclesiological hermeneutic will allow us to see more clearly how he can move from Levitical priesthood to the Christian episcopal office. As a result, this chapter attempts to demonstrate the extent to which the Bible robustly shaped the Church's thinking not just on theological intricacies, but the way they understood the practical dimensions and institutions of the Church, its worship and its leadership.

Fourth, I will demonstrate how the emerging Christian material culture in third century North Africa forms an important backdrop to the way Cyprian talks about Christian worship and Christian priesthood. In short, the previous politico-theological ecclesiology is taking more concrete expression in this material culture such that the Christian bishop is the one who presides over the sacred space and sacred objects of the people of God. Just as the Old Testament priest served and attended the altar in the Temple, so also the Christian bishop acts as priest by attending to the Christian altar in the church building. Thus the important point I wish to make is that, just as with Origen, so also with Cyprian there is more than merely ideas and exegesis forcing a connection between OT priesthood and Christian bishop, but also a material reality and

actual Christian practice that interacts with and influences his understanding of Christian leadership and his reading of priestly texts.

***Christian Priests: Liturgical Leaders of the Church***

As I have already shown, Cyprian sees a strong connection between the ideas of priesthood, sacrifice and altar, and even occasionally identifies the Eucharist as the sacrifice over which the Christian bishop presides. This has led many scholars to conclude that Cyprian designates the bishop a priest because the Eucharist was seen as a sacrifice. I now want to show how this narrow conception of Cyprianic priesthood must be broadened to do justice to the writings of Cyprian himself.

First, it is clear that Cyprian's understanding of Christian priesthood entails the offering of sacrifice. What is important to note, however, is that the Eucharist is not the only locus of meaning when Cyprian speaks of the sacrifices of the priests of God. Rather, Cyprian ascribes other sacrificial and liturgical functions to the Christian priest such as "administering the sacred rites," "offering supplication day and night" and administering the "service of God" as "ministers of God."<sup>442</sup>

For example, Cyprian makes it clear that part of the priestly role of the bishop includes his intercessory prayers. He argues that "everyone honored with the divine priesthood (*divino sacerdotio*) . . . ought to dedicate himself to nothing except the altar and sacrifices (*altari et sacrificiis*) and be freed entirely for supplications and prayers (*precibus atque orationibus*)."<sup>443</sup> This responsibility is echoed again in Epistle 65 where Cyprian explains that the task of the

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<sup>442</sup> Even Bernard, who earlier suggested the connection between the Eucharist and priesthood, notes that the idea of sacrifice is much broader than just Eucharistic ("The Cyprianic Doctrine," 229). These phrases will be examined in context further below.

<sup>443</sup> *Ep.* 1.1.1, *CCSL* 3B, 1.

Christian priest is to “make satisfaction (*satisfacere*) and to apply himself to pleasing the Lord, day and night, with tears and prayers and supplications (*lacrimis et orationibus et precibus*).”<sup>444</sup>

Moreover, in a letter to a group of persecuted Christians condemned to work in the mines, Cyprian reminds them that even if they cannot celebrate the Eucharist, by their humble faith they are still “celebrating and offering a sacrifice to God (*sacrificium Deo*) . . . This is the sacrifice to God you are offering, this is the sacrifice you are celebrating without interruption, day and night. You yourselves have become offerings to God...”<sup>445</sup> Part of the sacrifices offered by Christians and Christian *sacerdotes* include prayers, supplications and a life of godly witness. Thus, it is clear from Cyprian’s letters that he considers Christian sacrifice to include prayers, supplications and even the Christian life.

Elsewhere, in his treatise *On the Lord’s Prayer*, Cyprian explains that when praying, one should “be under discipline, observing quietness and modesty.” This is true even in corporate worship:

And when we come together with the brethren in one place and celebrate the divine sacrifices (*sacrificia divina*) with the priest of God (*cum Dei sacerdote*), we ought to be mindful of modesty and discipline—not to brandish about our prayers (*preces*) here and there with disorderly voices, nor to throw about with tumultuous wordiness a petition (*petitionem*) which ought to be commended to God with modesty.<sup>446</sup>

Here the priests of God offer not just one sacrifice in the Eucharist, but a multitude of sacrifices (*sacrificia*, plural). The prayers and petitions throughout the service are part of the sacrifices celebrated by the priests.

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<sup>444</sup> *Ep.* 65.1.2, *CCSL* 3C, 426-27.

<sup>445</sup> *Ep.* 76.3.1-2, *CCSL* 3C, 611-612.

<sup>446</sup> *De Dominica Oratione* 4, *CCSL* 3A, 91.

This raises an important observation about the way Cyprian uses the words *altare* and *sacrificium*. Nearly without exception, Cyprian refers to the singular *altare* when speaking of local Christian worship.<sup>447</sup> When he uses the plural, it is always in reference to pagan or schismatic alternate places of worship, such as in Epistle 69 when he describes the heretics as those who “forge false altars (*falsa altaria*).”<sup>448</sup> The Christian altar, however, is always singular, such as when he describes the schismatic group as being “in opposition to the one, divine altar (*altare unum atque divinum*).”<sup>449</sup> In contrast, while he will occasionally speak of the singular *sacrificium*, when referring to the Eucharist,<sup>450</sup> Cyprian most regularly refers to the sacrifices of the Christian priesthood in the plural (*sacrificia*). In other words, there is one altar, but many sacrifices.<sup>451</sup> The priests of God “wait upon the sacrifices [pl.] (*sacrificiis*) of the altar [sg.] (*altari*).”<sup>452</sup> They are devoted “exclusively to the altar [sg.] (*altari*) and sacrifices [pl] (*sacrificiis*).”<sup>453</sup> In order to “administer the priesthood (*sacerdotium Dei administrare*)” says Cyprian, Christian bishops must be “fit to do service at the altar [sg.] (*altari*) and to celebrate the divine sacrifices [pl.] (*sacrificia divina*).”<sup>454</sup> The Christian *sacrificia* exist in a plurality, not in a

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<sup>447</sup> In his epistle *Ad Demetrius* 12 he does speak of the *altaria Dei* (the only occasion in all his writings). In the context, however, Cyprian is making a contrast between pagan worship and Christian worship in all of N. Africa, not just in one place (*CCSL* 3A, 42).

<sup>448</sup> *Ep.* 69.1.4, *CCSL* 3C, 471.

<sup>449</sup> *Ep.* 72.2.1, *CCSL* 3C, 526.

<sup>450</sup> E.g. see *Ep.* 63.9.3 and 63.14.4 where he speaks of the Eucharist as a “sacrificium Dominicum” and “sacrificium verum et plenum deo” (*CCSL* 3C, 401 & 411, respectively).

<sup>451</sup> I am indebted to Hans Georg Thümmel for pointing out this observation in Cyprian (“Versammlungsraum, Kirche, Tempel” in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel*, ed. Beate Ego, Armin Lange and Peter Pilhofer (Tubingen: Mohr, 1999), 496.

<sup>452</sup> *Ep.* 72.2.2, *CCSL* 3C, 526.

<sup>453</sup> *Ep.* 1.1.1, *CCSL* 3B, 1.

<sup>454</sup> *Ep.* 67.1.1-2, *CCSL* 3C, 447-48. Albano Vilela points out, and it is interesting to note, that Cyprian always links the word *celebrare* to the bishop, never the presbyter. The word *offere*, however, is used for both the presbyter and the bishop. Vilela’s conclusion makes sense,



singular aspect of worship such as the Eucharist. As just seen previously, Christian *sacrificia* include the Church's prayers, petitions and godly living. The point I wish to make clear, then, is that Christian bishops are priests not simply in their celebration of the *sacrificium* of the Eucharist, but in their entire liturgical leadership over the multitude of *sacrificia* of prayers and supplications in worship.<sup>455</sup>

Even the bishops' role in administering baptism is seen as part of his priestly function. In Epistle 73, Cyprian addresses the question of whether the catholic church should cease from baptizing schismatics who enter the catholic church because Novatian the schismatic is also re-baptizing catholics who join his church. Cyprian is adamant:

What? Should we then reject our priestly chair (*cathedrae sacerdotalis*) just because Novatian usurps the honor of the priestly chair (*cathedrae sacerdotalis*)? Ought we to cease from the altar and sacrifices just because Novatian attempts to set up an altar and makes offerings against the divine command? Ought we to appear not to celebrate similar [rites] that resemble his? It would be absolutely vain and foolish...<sup>456</sup>

The rites of which Cyprian speaks, as the context makes clear, are those of the Eucharist *and* baptism (for remember, the issue of baptism is what prompted Cyprian's letter in the first place). What makes this text so important for my study is that Cyprian seems to connect implicitly the idea of the Christian priesthood with all, not just some, of the rites of the Church,

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when he says "the term *offere* is thus a general term which designates the offering of the Eucharist, which can be made by the bishops or, in most cases, by the simple priest. The verb *celebrare*, employed solely for the bishop in a ministerial context, designates, on the contrary, a solemn Eucharistic action with the participation of the people" ("La Condition Collegiale," 322). Vilela's point helps emphasize that the function of the bishop, although including the offering of the Eucharist, entails something much bigger, even something more "solemn": the entire liturgical service with the people.

<sup>455</sup> Again, see earlier discussion of *Ep.* 76.3.1-2, *CCSL* 3C,611-612 and *De Dominica Oratione* 4, *CCSL* 3A, 91.

<sup>456</sup> *Ep.* 73.2.3, *CCSL* 3C, 532.

including baptism. Once again, for Cyprian the priestly role of the bishop entails all the liturgical functions of his office as he presides over the Church's worshipping life.

From these examples, one begins to gain a bigger picture of Cyprian's understanding of Christian priesthood and sacrifice. Rather than see the Christian priest always in connection with the Eucharistic sacrifice, Cyprian portrays the entire Christian worship as the sacrifices and "divine rites" over which the priest presides. As G.W. Clarke explains, the assumption of Cyprian is that the "Christian liturgy is in some undefined sense of a sacrificial nature."<sup>457</sup> If we fail to see Cyprian's broader notion of Christian worship as sacrificial, we may be tempted to attribute his entire understanding of Christian priesthood to the connection with the Eucharist, failing to notice the broader and more comprehensive connections between Christian priesthood and Christian worship in general. The Christian bishop is a priest, according to Cyprian, not because he presides only over the Eucharistic sacrifice, but because he offers and celebrates all the divine sacrifices and rites entailed in Christian liturgical worship.

In this sense he casts the entire Christian worship experience in terms of sacrifice and priestly responsibility, so that Cyprian can speak of priests of God who are "made available for the temple and altar and sacred ministries (*ministeriis divinis*)" and who "pursue sacred activities (*operationibus divinis*)" and "serve God's altar and Church (*dei altari eius et ecclesiae*)."<sup>458</sup> All these speak of a much broader notion of priestly service to God than just presiding over the Eucharistic sacrifice, but one which more broadly entails, as Seagraves suggests, "the sacramental and liturgical life."<sup>459</sup> Christian bishops are the liturgical leaders of the Church.

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<sup>457</sup> G.W. Clarke, *The Epistles of St. Cyprian*, vol. 1, p.155, n.12.

<sup>458</sup> *Ep* 1.1.1-2, *CCSL* 3B, 1-2.

<sup>459</sup> Seagraves, 258.

***Christian Priests: Administrative Rulers of the Church***

Having demonstrated Cyprian's tendency to explain the bishop's priestly functions more broadly in terms of liturgical leadership, I turn now to another important aspect of Cyprian's understanding of priesthood, one which is often overlooked. Traditionally, scholars of Cyprian, like Georg Schöllgen, have concluded that the duties of the bishop and clergy are "exclusively liturgical-sacral."<sup>460</sup> They serve the altar and sacrifice, and minister heavenly things day and night. This is true; however, the bishop, according to Cyprian, is also a priest because of his divinely appointed authority to rule over the Church as its guardian and judge.

Cyprian is quite clear about his expectations of behavior and attitude toward the bishop: one should "give honor to the priest of God."<sup>461</sup> One owes the bishop "the honor of his priesthood and his throne."<sup>462</sup> Those schismatics who resist the decision of the bishops are in revolt and as a result "all the sacerdotal authority and power is being destroyed."<sup>463</sup> The authority of the bishop-priest, however, does not derive from human power; rather, Cyprian grounds this authority in Old Testament Scriptures and examples. In a response to the bishop Rogatianus, Cyprian writes that he was "disturbed to read your letter in which you complain about your deacon who harasses you, disregarding your sacerdotal office (*sacerdotalis loci*) and forgetting his own duty and ministry." Cyprian reminds Rogatianus that "you had the power, by the vigor of your episcopate and by the authority of your chair which you possess, to punish him

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<sup>460</sup> "... ausschliesslich liturgisch-sakral." Georg Schöllgen, *Die Anfänge der Professionalisierung des Klerus und das kirchliche Amt in der syrischen Didaskalie* (Munster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1998), 60. See Adrien Demoustier who also sees sacerdos as primarily concerned with the liturgical life ("L'Ontologie de l'Église," 570).

<sup>461</sup> *Ep.* 15.1.2, *CCSL* 3B, 86. See also Colin Bulley, 118-119 for a brief discussion of this aspect of the bishop's priesthood.

<sup>462</sup> *Ep.* 17.2.1, *CCSL* 3B, 97.

<sup>463</sup> *Ep.* 43.3.2, *CCSL* 3B, 203.

immediately.”<sup>464</sup> In fact, says Cyprian, “in your sacerdotal power (*sacerdotali potentate*) you have divine commands (*praecepta divina*) concerning men of this sort, since the Lord God says in Deuteronomy, ‘And whatever man acts in arrogance such that he does not heed the priest (*sacerdotem*) or judge (*iudicem*) . . . that man shall die.’”<sup>465</sup> He then provides another Scriptural example to bolster his claim: Korah, Dathan and Abiram, when they resisted high priest Aaron, “who was placed in command, the earth opened up, engulfed and devoured them and they were punished...”<sup>466</sup> The bishops of the Church, in their priestly office, have authority and power within the Church, not just to rule but to discipline as well. Laity and clergy alike must give them their proper respect and obedience.<sup>467</sup> From this text also emerges the notion that the administrative authority of a bishop is strongly connected to his authority as a priest.

According to Cyprian, however, that authority resides specifically in their role as protectors of the Church’s true worship. They are not to wield power and authority for personal gain, but rather, they are to protect God’s flock. As von Campenhausen correctly observes, “Cyprian knows of no operation of the priestly quality independent from his official place and function in the entire community.”<sup>468</sup> The authority of the bishop lies in close connection to his task to protect the church community. This aspect of priestly leadership and protection emerges in a letter to Quintus in which he discusses the validity of schismatic baptism. Although some in

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<sup>464</sup> *Ep.* 3.1.1, *CCSL* 3B, 9.

<sup>465</sup> *Ep.* 3.1.1, *CCSL* 3B, 10. See Deuteronomy 17:12.

<sup>466</sup> *Ep.* 3.1.2, *CCSL* 3B, 11. See Numbers 16.

<sup>467</sup> Colin Bulley points out that “there was a close link in his [Cyprian’s] mind between the bishop’s priesthood and his sacred authority, which link probably increased his predilection for this designation in situations which threatened his authority” (114).

<sup>468</sup> “Cyprian kennt keine Wirkung der priesterlichen Qualität unabhängig von der amtlichen Stellung und Funktion im Ganzen der Gemeinde.” Hans von Campenhausen, *Kirchliches Amt und geistliche Vollmacht in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (Tubingen : J.C.B. Mohr, 1963), 299.

the church declared it unnecessary to re-baptize schismatics who convert to the catholic church, Cyprian vehemently argues that this was not the decision of the council of bishops held in Carthage. “Consequently,” says Cyprian, “as priests of God (*sacerdotes Dei*) who from his honor are made the leaders (*praepositi*) of his Church, we should know that forgiveness of sins (*remissam peccatorum*) cannot be given except in the Church, nor can the enemies of Christ lay claim for themselves any share in his grace.”<sup>469</sup> In this passage we find a unique blend of the bishop’s tasks: Cyprian speaks on the one hand of their being “leaders of His Church” (a more administrative role in their judicial capacity) and on the other hand about their role in granting forgiveness (i.e. in administering penance), a more liturgical role. Yet, strikingly, both of these functions fall under his designation of bishops as the *sacerdotes Dei*. The priestly aspect of the bishop, then, seems to be both a liturgical and also an administrative one for Cyprian.<sup>470</sup>

In fact, I want to suggest that for Cyprian, these two aspects of leadership are not sharply differentiated in his mind. While A. D’Ales would suggest that Cyprian uses the term *episcopus* “to express the power of governance” and *sacerdos* “to express the functions of the divine cult”<sup>471</sup> Cyprian’s own writings, as I have shown, suggest rather that *sacerdos* entails both liturgical *and* administrative functions of the bishop. Thus I am in essential agreement with von Campenhausen’s observations that “the ecclesiological thinking of Cyprian is thus at its root

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<sup>469</sup> *Ep.* 71.3.2, *CCSL* 3C, 521.

<sup>470</sup> For biblical examples of priestly tasks including administrative, not just liturgical, duties, see again similar conclusions in my earlier chapter on Origen.

<sup>471</sup> D’Alès, 310. “... exprime un pouvoir de gouvernement” and “... exprime les fonctions du culte divin.” See also G.W. Clarke, *The Epistles of St. Cyprian*, vol. 3, 319, n.4 who makes the identical point.

certainly sacral-judicial and sacral-political.”<sup>472</sup> It entails both a sacred, liturgical element, but also an element of governance and administration. For example, Cyprian endows the bishop with the responsibility to guard and protect the Church’s worship. He explains their responsibility this way: “The camp of Christ is invincible and steadfast; being fortified by the protection of the Lord, it does not yield to threats. The priest of God (*sacerdos Dei*) who possesses the gospel and guards the commands of Christ can be killed, but not defeated.”<sup>473</sup> Cyprian then illustrates this with the example of Zechariah the priest: “when he could not be terrified by threats and stonings, he was murdered in the temple of God (*in templo Dei*) ...”<sup>474</sup> Like the Israelite priests of old who were to guard the Temple of God and preserve the worship that took place within it, so too the Christian *sacerdos Dei* is called upon to guard and protect the Church from those who would force entrance and desecrate their worship. As Otto Ritschl has observed, “it would be incorrect to continue to support the strict separation of both sides of the episcopal duties, the cultic and the ecclesial administration. For in the consciousness which Cyprian has from his power as bishop, at least, there is no separation.”<sup>475</sup> The Christian bishop-

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<sup>472</sup> “Das kirchliche Denken Cyprians ist also in der Wurzel sacral-juridisch und sacral-politisch bestimmt.” von Campenhausen, *Kirchliches Amt*, 297.

<sup>473</sup> *Ep.* 59.17.1, *CCSL* 3C, 367.

<sup>474</sup> *Ep.* 59.17.1, *CCSL* 3C, 368. See 2 Chronicles 24:20-22. This also works well for material culture (see below). Earlier in 59.16.2 Cyprian speaks of the threshold of the church (*limen ecclesiae*). Taken together these texts seem to indicate a physical guardianship of the Church from heretics. The use of Zech in the Temple helps highlight this point.

<sup>475</sup> “Es unrichtig sein würde, wenn wir bei der strikten Scheidung der beiden Seiten der bischöflichen Tätigkeit, der cultischen und der kirchenleitenden, stehen bleiben wollten. Denn in dem Bewusstsein, welches Cyprian von seinem Amte als Bischof hat, giebt es wenigstens keine solche Trennung“ Otto Ritschl, *Cyprian von Karthago und die Verfassung der Kirche: Eine kirchengeschichtliche und kirchenrechtliche Untersuchung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht’s Verlag, 1885), 220-221.

priest is the protector of Christian worship, a role which combines administrative judgment and liturgical responsibilities.

Within this same epistle, Cyprian bemoans the situation in which those outside the Church have done away with penance and public confession of sin, mocked the bishops, and then offered communion to any who would have it. Cyprian reflects upon this situation and concludes: The bishops should reject such practices because “the greater burden [in dealing with this situation] falls upon the priests (*sacerdotibus*) to protect and attend to the majesty of God.”<sup>476</sup> The bishops exercise their priestly duty by protecting the Church from liturgical aberrations. In doing so, says Cyprian, they are protecting the very “glory of our sovereign God.”<sup>477</sup> Of course, the biblical depiction of Israelite priests comports very well with this picture. Numbers 3:8 commands that the priests are “to take care of all the furnishings of the Tent of Meeting, fulfilling the obligations of the Israelites by doing the work of the tabernacle.” Later in Ezekiel, the priests are described as those “in charge of the temple” and “in charge of the altar”. Again, God declares through Ezekiel: “I will put them in charge of the duties of the temple” (44:14). Thus Cyprian’s portrayal of the bishop’s tasks, like those of the OT priests, involves a protective or guardianship responsibility centered on Christian worship.

This is especially true in the bishop’s task of holding councils and making judgments about who is admitted to Church and who is excluded. Bishops have responsibility, as priests, to judge and make decisions. In cases dealing with individuals who “have refused to obey their bishops and priests (*sacerdotibus*)” Cyprian assures his readers that “we cannot admit them into

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<sup>476</sup> *Ep.* 59.13.5, *CCSL* 3C, 360.

<sup>477</sup> *Ep.* 59.13.5, *CCSL* 3C, 360.

the Church.”<sup>478</sup> Elsewhere, Cyprian addresses the problem of certain leaders allowing lapsed laity into communion too easily, bypassing the necessity of “making satisfaction to the Lord through the bishops and priests (*sacerdotes*).”<sup>479</sup> The bishops are the gatekeepers of the Church. To bypass these leaders, says Cyprian, is in direct contradiction to the firm decision of the universal clergy and confessors. “Against this decision (*consilium*) of ours they now rebel and all the sacerdotal authority and power (*sacerdotalis auctoritas et potestas*) is being destroyed by these seditious conspirators.”<sup>480</sup> In other words, one of the main priestly tasks of the bishops, according to Cyprian, was their judicial role in deciding who was to be re-admitted into the Church. They exercised this role, according to this passage, both in an administrative way via a council of bishops, and in a more liturgical manner via the sacrament of penance (what Cyprian most likely means by referring to “making satisfaction to the Lord through the priests”).

Thus the bishops are priests, in Cyprian’s eyes, due both to their liturgical functions (leaders of worship) and their administrative functions (their authority to lead the church and to hold judgment). Upon closer examination of the texts, however, these two functional categories are for Cyprian quite inter-related, and certainly both related to the notion of sacerdotal leadership. Bishops are “God’s own attendants (*dispensatores*),”<sup>481</sup> leading and governing the Church of God, both in its liturgical and its juridical-administrative elements. This joint perspective on the sacerdotal duties (entailing both liturgical and administrative functions) is nowhere exhibited more clearly than in Cyprian’s words to Stephen the bishop of Rome:

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<sup>478</sup> *Ep.* 4.4.2, *CCSL* 3B, 23.

<sup>479</sup> *Ep.* 43.3.2, *CCSL* 3B, 203. I take the phrase “bishops and priests” as epexegetical, two terms referring to the same thing.

<sup>480</sup> *Ep.* 43.3.2, *CCSL* 3B, 203.

<sup>481</sup> *Ep.* 59.5.2, *CCSL* 3C, 345.



Thus, we ought to gather together and investigate (*considerare*) [heresy]. . . We who are with the Lord and hold to the unity of the Lord and administer his priesthood (*sacerdotium eius administramus*) in the Church according to his honor ought to repudiate, reject and hold as profane whatever his enemies and antichrists do. Likewise, to those who leave error and depravity and acknowledge the true faith of the one church, we ought to give the truth of unity and faith through all the sacraments of divine grace (*omnia divinae gratiae sacramenta*).<sup>482</sup>

Bishops “administer the priesthood” both in their role as a council of judges (rejecting and repudiating enemies of Christ) and in their performance of the “sacred ceremonies.” Their liturgical priesthood is inextricably tied to their administrative priesthood. Texts such as these provide an important and necessary corrective to the typical understanding of the priesthood in Cyprian as one that centers solely on the Eucharist as sacrifice. To be sure, the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice is one of the functions of the bishop-priest in Cyprian’s mind. It is not, however, the sole priestly function. A closer examination of the texts reveals that for Cyprian, the bishop was a priest in a much broader sense, just as the priest of the Old Testament did more than perform the sacrifices. Like the OT priests, the Christian bishop presides over all of Christian worship, which is by its very nature sacrificial; he protects the Church by enforcing his authority to admit or exclude individuals from worship; he governs the Church by convening councils and making important decisions about how the Church will be run and how the sacraments will be administered to the people of God. All these functions, in a nexus of liturgical and administrative tasks, paint the comprehensive picture of the Christian bishop as a *sacerdos* for Cyprian. Thus, similar to Origen, Cyprian allows the biblical picture of priestly leadership to shape his portrayal and understanding of Christian leadership, yet the actual practice and functions of the Christian bishop also work to stretch the OT priestly models to fit

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<sup>482</sup> *Ep.* 70.3.3, *CCSL* 3C, 513-515.

the contemporary office. There is, of course, an underlying ecclesiological catalyst for Cyprian's understanding of the Christian leadership in priestly categories, and to that dimension of thought I turn next.

### **Politico-Theological Ecclesiology: Continuity with Israel**

That Cyprian's ecclesiology has been "the most famous aspect of [his] thought"<sup>483</sup> is certainly true, especially his well-known assertion that there is "no salvation outside the Church" and that one cannot have God as Father without having the Church as mother.<sup>484</sup> As significant as these aspects are for Cyprian's ecclesiology, his understanding of the continuity between Israel and the Church is even more important for this study of priesthood. It should be clear by now that when Cyprian speaks of the bishops as priests, he has in mind the Israelite priesthood. In every instance where Cyprian attempts to justify his conception of the Christian ministerial priesthood, he grounds his ideas in the Old Testament commands, injunctions and descriptions about the Levitical priesthood. This accepted connection between old and new covenant leadership is so strong that Cyprian does not hesitate to apply Old Testament commands directly to the Christian bishop. For example, Cyprian connects Christian bishops and Old Testament pastors and spiritual leaders by referring to the latter as "our predecessors (*antecessoribus nostris*)."<sup>485</sup>

Elsewhere, Cyprian explains the injunction that the Levites were not to possess any land: "The Levites previously held a pattern (*formam*) of this arrangement and sanction in the Law, so that when the eleven tribes divided the land and distributed the property, the tribe of Levi, which

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<sup>483</sup> Wiles, 142.

<sup>484</sup> See *De Unitate* 6 & *Ep.* 74.7.2

<sup>485</sup> *Ep.* 8.1.1, *CCSL* 3B, 40.

was dedicated to the temple and the altar and the sacred duties, secured nothing from that share of distribution.”<sup>486</sup> Cyprian strengthens his point by asserting: “This rule and pattern (*forma*) is held now in the clergy (*in clero*) . . . They are not to withdraw from the altar and sacrifices, but day and night serve heavenly and spiritual matters.”<sup>487</sup> Instead, the congregation must provide for the needs of the clergy. Clearly, Cyprian understands the Christian bishop as an image reflecting the model of Levitical priesthood in the Old Testament. Georg Schöllgen summarizes well this passage:

This rule is attributed directly to divine *auctoritas* and *dispositio* and follows the purpose to guarantee that the Levites are neither distracted nor forced away from the *operationis divinae*, to think or to do *saecularia*. Cyprian sees no difficulty in transferring the Old Testament tithing commands to the Church. What was true for the Levites back then, is true for the clergy today.<sup>488</sup>

Cyprian makes this explicit by a direct connection between the services and duties of the Levites (altar, sacrifices and sacred offices) and the duties of the Christian priest (altar and sacrifice); and between the Levitical commands not to own land and the requirement of Christian leaders not to be involved in mundane affairs.<sup>489</sup> What is more, Cyprian suggests another parallel between OT priests and Christian clergy in this text, namely, the responsibility to be dedicated to spiritual things “day and night.” In Leviticus, Aaron, continually supervising the lamps of the

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<sup>486</sup> *Ep.* 1.1.2, *CCSL* 3B, 2.

<sup>487</sup> *Ep.* 1.1.2, *CCSL* 3B, 3.

<sup>488</sup> „Diese Regel wird ausdrücklich auf göttliche *auctoritas* und *dispositio* zurückgeführt und verfolgt den Zweck, sicherzustellen, dass die Leviten weder von den *operationis divinae* abgelenkt noch gezwungen werden, *saecularia* zu denken oder zu tun. Cyprian sieht keine Schwierigkeiten, das alttestamentliche Zehntgebot auf die Kirche zu übertragen. Was damals für die Leviten galt, gilt heute für den Klerus.“ Schöllgen, *Die Anfänge*, 59.

<sup>489</sup> Cyprian is addressing in this epistle the question of whether Christian clergy should be appointed guardian or trustees in a will. Cyprian’s point is that they should not, because that would distract them from their commitments as clergy.

Tabernacle, is instructed “to keep it in order from evening until morning before the LORD” (24:2-4). Exodus 30:7-8 commands Aaron the priest to burn incense on the altar in the morning and at evening, whereas Numbers 28:1-8 gives similar instructions for the daily sacrifices, “morning and evening.” The reference in Cyprian’s epistle to Christian clergy attending to spiritual things “day and night” evokes this connection with the Israelite priesthood.

Similarly, Cyprian’s repeated description of the Christian bishop echoes the description of Israelite priests: Christian priests are the ones who “wait on the altar and the sacrifices (*altari et sacrificiis deserviunt*)”<sup>490</sup> to “do service at the altar and to celebrate the divine sacrifices (*sacrificia divina celebrare*);”<sup>491</sup> and they are described as the “attendants of God (*dispensatores*).”<sup>492</sup> The Old Testament evocations are clear. For example, Deuteronomy 10:8 describes the tribe of Levi as set apart “to stand before the LORD to minister to him” (Vulgate: *staret coram eo in ministerio*), and Deut. 18:5 explains the privilege of the Levites as ones “chosen to stand and minister in the name of the LORD” (*ut stet et minister*). The rhetorical echoes here between Old Testament Israelite priests and Cyprian’s Christian priests are striking and suggest a fundamental connection between the two.

Liturgical functions are not the only point of relationship, for Cyprian also connects old and new ministerial leadership along issues of authority as well. In Epistle 3, as we have seen, Cyprian emphasizes the authority of the bishop to “exact immediate punishment” from the wayward by citing Deuteronomy 17:12, a favorite of Cyprian, saying,

In fact, you have divine commands (*praecepta divina*) concerning men of this sort, since the Lord God says in Deuteronomy, ‘And whatever man acts in arrogance such that he

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<sup>490</sup> *Ep.* 72.2.2, *CCSL* 3C, 526.

<sup>491</sup> *Ep.* 67.1.2, *CCSL* 3C, 448.

<sup>492</sup> *Ep.* 59.5.2, *CCSL* 3C, 345.

does not heed the priest (*sacerdotem*) or judge (*iudicem*) . . . that man shall die, and when all the people hear of it, they will be afraid and will refrain from impiety from that point on.<sup>493</sup>

He then draws upon the example of Korah, Dathan and Abiram who were punished for their resistance to Aaron the priest. This example, says Cyprian, proves that “priests of God (*sacerdotes Dei*) are shown to be vindicated by him who makes priests (*sacerdotes*).”<sup>494</sup> His point, of course, is that just as the Levitical priesthood was appointed by God himself and to be obeyed, so too the Christian bishop-priests have been appointed by God and ought to be obeyed. His argument only works, however, when his understood connection between old priestly leadership and the Christian leadership of the bishop is assumed.

Another example of Cyprian’s appropriation of Levitical commands has to do with ordination. Cyprian writes:

And we see that the practice that a priest is chosen in the presence of the people under the eyes of all comes down from divine authority . . . just as the Lord commands Moses in the book of Numbers saying: ‘Take Aaron your brother and Eliezer his son, and place them on the mountain before all the assembled people.’<sup>495</sup>

The reason, says Cyprian, that “the whole [Christian] congregation was called together” was because in the passage in Numbers “God commands that the priest is to be ordained before all the assembled people.”<sup>496</sup> Again, Cyprian’s working assumption is that God’s commands about the Levitical priesthood have application to the Christian episcopacy such that OT commands about public ordination dictate similar regulations for Christian clergy, the new Levitical priests

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<sup>493</sup> *Ep.* 3.1.1, *CCSL* 3B, 10.

<sup>494</sup> *Ep.* 3.1.2, *CCSL* 3B, 11.

<sup>495</sup> *Ep.* 67.4.1, *CCSL* 3C, 452.

<sup>496</sup> *Ep.* 67.4.4 & 67.4.2, *CCSL* 3C, 453, 452.

of the people of God. A public ordination for Levites means bishops, the Christian priests, must also be ordained publicly.

Returning again to the liturgical aspect of priesthood, in Epistle 67, Cyprian speaks of the requirement for purity among Christian clergy, saying

for the voice of heaven and the law of God long ago commanded (*mandatur*) and ordered (*praescribitur*) who and what sort of men ought to serve the altar and celebrate sacred sacrifices. For in Exodus God speaks to Moses and warns him, saying, ‘Let the priests (*sacerdotes*) who approach the Lord God be sanctified lest the Lord perhaps should forsake them’ [Exod. 19:22]. And again: ‘And when they approach to minister at the altar (*ministrare ad altare*) of the holy place (*sancti*), they shall not bring sin upon themselves lest they should die’ [Exod. 30:20]. And likewise in Leviticus the Lord commands and says: ‘The man in whom there has been any blemish or sin shall not approach to offer gifts to God’ [Lev. 21:17].<sup>497</sup>

Lest there be any question whether Cyprian thinks these commands apply, he continues “Since these have been prescribed and commanded to us (*nobis*), it is necessary that we subject our obedience to these divine commands.”<sup>498</sup> What was “commanded and ordered” for the Levites has direct application for the Church.

In other words, Cyprian draws upon the commands to the Levitical priesthood and applies them to Christian bishops because he assumes a strong continuity between Israel and the Church. Commands to one can be appropriated and applied as commands to the other. Again in *De Lapsis* 7 Cyprian comments that “the prophets predicted constant oppression by the Gentiles,”<sup>499</sup> a subtle but important rhetorical assumption that the Church (who are nearly all, by Cyprian’s time, gentiles) now equals Israel and the “gentiles” who oppress “Israel” are the pagans and schismatics. His approach to Scripture then, as M.F. Wiles puts it, “is that of a man

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<sup>497</sup> *Ep.* 67.1.2, *CCSL* 3C, 448.

<sup>498</sup> *Ep.* 67.2.1, *CCSL* 3C, 448.

<sup>499</sup> *De Lapsis* 7, *CCSL* 3, 224.

who collects a series of texts to provide clear-cut answers to the theological, and still more the practical, questions of the moment.”<sup>500</sup> His politico-theological ecclesiology is what enables him to do just that, and it is just this ecclesiology that remains such an important aspect of his thought in understanding his doctrine of a Christian priesthood.<sup>501</sup>

Although Cyprian’s politico-theological ecclesiology has received very little treatment, it remains central to his understanding of the Christian ministry as a priesthood. It is precisely because the Church is portrayed in continuity with Israel (including her rights and institutions, her history and her Scriptures) that Cyprian feels justified in calling the Christian bishop a priest.

Cyprian is quite explicit about the connection between Israel and the Church in his treatise addressed to Fortunatus, *Exhortation to Martyrdom*. There he writes that in the Exodus, “the Jewish people were prefigured as a shadow and image of us (*ad umbram nostri et imaginem praefiguratus*).”<sup>502</sup> This notion of the Old Testament being full of shadows (*umbrae*) and images (*imagines*) is a common hermeneutical approach of Cyprian’s. Fahey observes that Cyprian attempts to “present the unity of the whole Scriptural revelation.”<sup>503</sup> All of Scripture was about Christ and his Church. Beyond that Christological focus, however, Fahey also notes that Cyprian “came to find in the OT through the same method Christian teachings and regulations

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<sup>500</sup> Wiles, 141.

<sup>501</sup> There is still the broader question as to what determines for Cyprian which OT commands carried over to the Church and which are abrogated. Although this is not the focus of this project, it would be an interesting study to explore. Of course, even in his appropriation of priestly commands and injunctions, Cyprian clearly does not accept *carte blanche* the Levitical priesthood with its hereditary lineage, bloody sacrifices, etc. Even at this point there is appropriation *and* transformation.

<sup>502</sup> *Exhortation to Martyrdom (Ad Fortunatum)* 7, CCSL 3, 194.

<sup>503</sup> Fahey, 626.

about baptism, the Eucharist, and the priesthood.”<sup>504</sup> As much as the OT was about Christ, it was also about the Church (and all its rites and institutions within it).<sup>505</sup>

Returning to the subject of a Christian priesthood, one can see that Cyprian is employing essentially the same approach. What was recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures acts as a figure for what was to come later. As Vilela suggests, “the Levites of the ancient Law were envisaged as the type, the biblical *forma*, of the members of the hierarchy of the New Testament.”<sup>506</sup> As Cyprian says, “The Levites previously held a pattern (*formam*) of this arrangement and sanction in the Law” such that “this rule and pattern (*forma*) is held now in the clergy (*in clero*) . . .”<sup>507</sup> What makes the bishop-priest connection work for Cyprian is his conceptual understanding of continuity between Israel and the Church worked out in a

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<sup>504</sup> Fahey, 625.

<sup>505</sup> In *Epistle 63*, Cyprian works out an extended typological fulfillment between Melchizedek and Christ, and between the offering of Melchizedek (bread and wine) and the Christian Eucharist. He says, “Likewise in the priest Melchizedek we see foreshadowed in mystery a type (*sacramentum praefiguratum*) of the Lord’s sacrifice . . . And indeed Melchizedek portrayed a type of Christ (*typum Christi*).” He further explains: “who is more a priest of the God most high than our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered a sacrifice to God the Father and offered the very offering which Melchizedek offered, that is, bread and wine. . .” (*Ep. 63.4.1, CCSL 3C, 392-93*). The Old Testament contains types and shadows of things to come.

Likewise, Cyprian (and the North Africa Church as a whole) seem to accept an interpretation of continuity between old covenant circumcision and Christian baptism. In *Epistle 64*, Cyprian addresses the question of whether clergy should wait to baptize infants until the eighth day, because of the circumcision law about waiting until the eighth day. The assumption behind this question is that there is a continuity between the initiatory rite of circumcision in Israel and the initiatory rite of baptism in the Church. Cyprian’s response is interesting. While he rejects the need to wait until the eighth day, it is not on the basis that circumcision does not prefigure baptism, but on the basis that “it is not right to refuse the mercy and grace of God to any man that is born” (*Ep. 64.2.1, CCSL 3C, 419*). Although Cyprian does not use the language of typology or prefiguration, it is clear that the logic of the issue rests on an assumption of continuity between the rite of the old covenant people of God and the rite of the new covenant people of God.

<sup>506</sup> “Les Levites de l’ancienne Loi envisages comme le type, la *forma* biblique, des membres de la hierarchie dans le Nouveau Testament.” Vilela, 325.

<sup>507</sup> *Ep. 1.1.2, CCSL 3B, 2-3.*



typological appropriation of Levitical priesthood for Christian leadership. Thus, by examining the roles and functions of the Christian bishop (offering sacrifices, presiding over worship, ruling the people, acting as judge), Cyprian finds echoes and fulfillments of the earlier Israelite priesthood. Because this connection is so evident to Cyprian, Maurice Wiles has suggested that “the theological justification of Cyprian’s idea of the ministry is solidly based upon a literal application of Old Testament texts concerning the Jewish priesthood to the Christian ministry.”<sup>508</sup> Yet, I would clarify Wiles’ comments by noting that this application is cast squarely in terms of a fulfillment and *transformation* of the old priesthood. There are sufficient changes from the old Levitical priesthood to the Christian priesthood so that the Christian priesthood is less a literal application than a metaphorical and typological *fulfillment* of the Levitical priesthood based upon the accepted continuity between Israel and the Church.<sup>509</sup> There is appropriation and transformation.

I should note in passing, too, that Cyprian’s appropriation of the Old Testament text, while certainly theologically significant, was also sociologically pointed as well. A number of scholars have observed that there was a large Jewish population in North Africa during the third century and that Jews maintained an active presence in cities such as Carthage.<sup>510</sup> Cyprian’s use

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<sup>508</sup> Wiles, 144-145.

<sup>509</sup> For example, Cyprian nowhere expects Christian priesthood to be maintained through hereditary lineage, nor does he argue for the continuation of bloody animal sacrifices or grain offerings as prescribed in the Old Testament.

<sup>510</sup> See for example, W.C.H. Frend who points out the existence of a large Jewish cemetery in Carthage at this time (“Jews and Christians in Third Century Carthage” in *Paganisme, Judaïsme, Christianisme: Influences et affrontements dans le monde antique*, eds. Frederick Bruce, et al (Paris: Editions de Boccard, 1978), 187. Also see Robert Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1971), 19; *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, vol. 6.1, ed. Rme dom Fernand Cabrol et du R. P. dom Henri Leclercq (Paris : Letouzey et Ané, 1924) s.v. “Gamart” cols. 604-610 and vol. 2.2, s.v. “Carthage” cols.

of the *Testimonia*, his appropriation of Jewish Scriptures, his assertion of continuity between Israel and the Church—all this was not an argument in the abstract, but the product of a real, ongoing debate between two people groups, both laying claim to the same texts, both asserting their legitimacy as God’s people. As W.C.H. Frend helpfully reminds us, “In these circumstances, the rivalry and enmity between the two communities that existed even in Cyprian’s time can well be understood.”<sup>511</sup> Thus, Cyprian’s assertions of continuity between Church and Israel was not just a religious or theological claim; it was a claim to be the embodiment and continuation of a real history, people, institutions and laws.

This point moves us to another significant aspect of the Church’s developing ecclesiology, that of the concrete material culture and seeing the Church as a distinct *polis* occupying real physical, sociological space in the Empire. This aspect of Cyprian’s ecclesiology lies as an important backdrop for our study of the ministerial priesthood as well.

### **A Christian Material Culture**

It is necessary at this point to be reminded of Peter Leithart’s conclusion, discussed previously in chapter 2, that an Israelite priest was one “who has been given permanent standing—both literally and metaphorically—in the house of God, and whose duties range from personal attendance upon Yahweh to stewardship and care of his house.”<sup>512</sup> In essence, OT priests had functions and responsibilities that took place in a specific location: the Temple of

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2268-2270. For more on the influence of Jews on Christians in Carthage, see Anneliese Adolph, *Die Theologie der Einheit der Kirche bei Cyprian* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 84; and Wiles, 144.

<sup>511</sup> Frend, “Jews and Christian,” 193. See also, Peter Bingham Hincliff, *Cyprian of Carthage and the Unity of the Christian Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman Pub., 1974), 103.

<sup>512</sup> Peter Leithart, “Attendants of Yahweh’s House : Priesthood in the Old Testament” *JSOT* 85 (1999):18-19.

God. As such, their role as priest entailed the care of Israelite sacred space and sacred objects within the house of God. Leithart illustrates this point with Ezekiel 44 where the idolatrous Levites are called into judgment for failing in their duties “in the house of the Lord.” Their judgment: “They shall not come near to me, to serve me as priest, nor come near any of my sacred things (LXX: *ta hagia*/ Vulgate: *ad omne sanctuarium meum*)” (44:13). A few verses later, Ezekiel draws a contrast with the faithful Zadokites who “shall come near to me to minister to me, and they shall attend on me . . . and they shall enter my sanctuary (LXX: *ta hagia mou*/ Vulgate: *sanctuarium meum*) and they shall approach my table (LXX: *trapedzan mou*/ Vulgate: *mensam meam*) . . .” (44:15-16). Thus, based on this centrality of space and place in the role of the OT priest, Leithart concludes: “the distinction between priestly and non-priestly ministry is a matter of location in sacred space. . . .”<sup>513</sup>

I now want to examine Cyprian’s portrayal of Christian priesthood in light of this distinguishing aspect of “sacred space” and “sacred things.” Does the cultural setting of third century Carthage, or Cyprian himself, suggest this physical, material dimension of responsibility for the Christian priest?

#### *Archaeological Evidence*

Broadly speaking, Michael White concludes that “By the third century, then, Christian buildings in many areas of the Empire were becoming recognizable landmarks even though they had not yet begun to achieve monumental architectural definition.”<sup>514</sup> Likewise, Richard Krautheimer suggests that by this period, “the congregations became increasingly organized and

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<sup>513</sup> Leithart, “Attendants,” 19.

<sup>514</sup> L. Michael White, *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture*, vol. 1 (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1996), 123.

expanded their activities of divine worship and care of souls to include charity, the tending of cemeteries, [and] the administration of property...<sup>515</sup> and that “the large Christian congregations of the Empire, by 250, certainly did not live in hiding. They held services, proselytized, baptized, buried their dead, assisted their needy—and to these ends owned property, either legally or by sufferance.”<sup>516</sup> Furthermore, Christian worship in particular had begun to take shape in noticeably distinct spatial terms. Krautheimer again: “The assembly room, no longer a dining room, had to be large, easily accessible, and divided between clergy and laymen. The bishop, flanked by his presbyters, would preside over the assembly from a platform (*tribunal, solium*) . . . The furniture was simple, presumably wooden and moveable: the bishop’s chair, a table (*mensa*) for the Eucharist, and a second table for the offerings...”<sup>517</sup> All this to say that Christianity was emerging as a distinct social group with property, furniture, rituals and laws. It was, in this sense, a “culture” or *polis* of its own within the Empire.

This depiction of the Church as a *polis* with an emerging Christian material culture is exactly what we find in the archaeological evidence available in Carthage. Recall, for example, the excavation site at Damous el-Karita (dated to the late second or early third century) which contained a church, a baptistery, a cemetery, and other structures.<sup>518</sup> The existence of these Christian material artifacts indicates an emerging Christian culture that was physical and material. Moreover, as a number of scholars have observed, North Africa during the second and

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<sup>515</sup> Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965), 3.

<sup>516</sup> Krautheimer, *ECBA*, 4.

<sup>517</sup> Krautheimer, *ECBA*, 5.

<sup>518</sup> See Chapter 2 on Tertullian for a discussion there. See esp. *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, vol. 2.2, s.v. “Carthage” cols.2252ff.

third century was a rather wealthy province, based largely on their agricultural success.<sup>519</sup> It would be no surprise that such wealth would produce material prosperity for Christians, such as Church buildings and other forms of property. What evidence does Cyprian supply about this phenomenon?

### *Literary Evidence*

In fact, Cyprian gives indication in his writings of just such a material Christian culture. In Epsistle 12, Cyprian commends “our most faithful and devoted brother Tertullus” who provides diligent service “concerning the care of the dead in Carthage.”<sup>520</sup> It appears from this text, and others like it,<sup>521</sup> that Christian cemeteries did in fact exist in Carthage at this time, cemeteries for which Christian leaders were responsible to provide care and maintenance.<sup>522</sup>

As to worship space, Cyprian also gives indication that this was more than just an assembly in the private homes of Christian members. Rather, the picture that emerges is one of physicality and a defined sense of worship “space.” For example, Cyprian commends Aurelius to his congregation. Twice a confessor of the faith during the persecution, Aurelius is now made a reader in the church. Cyprian offers a comparison between Aurelius’ speaking as a confessor and his role as a reader: “after speaking out the sublime words concerning the witness of Christ, he moves to read the Gospel of Christ whereby men became martyrs; after the martyr’s scaffold he moves to the pulpit (*ad pulpitem*)—on the one he could be seen by crowds of pagans, on the

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<sup>519</sup> See for example, Victor Saxer, *Vie Liturgique et Quotidienne a Carthage Vers le Milieu du IIIe Siecle: Le Temoignage de Saint Cyprien et de ses Contemporains d’Afrique*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Rome : Citta del Vaticano, 1984), 6-7; Sage, 29-30.

<sup>520</sup> *Ep.* 12.2.1, *CCSL* 3B, 69-70.

<sup>521</sup> See for example, *Ep.* 8.3.2

<sup>522</sup> Consider also the earlier evidence of Christian cemeteries in Carthage in my chapter on Tertullian (chapter 2).

other he can be seen by his brothers.”<sup>523</sup> Again in Epistle 39, Cyprian likewise commends Celerinus, saying “It is fitting for him to be placed on nothing other than the pulpit (*super pulpitem*), that is, on the platform of the Church (*super tribunal ecclesiae*). In this way, elevated by his lofty position (*celsitate*) and seen by all the people on account of the clarity of his honor, he may read the commands and gospel of the Lord.”<sup>524</sup> As Michael White remarks, “by the years 250-252 it can be determined that the area physically defined for assembly was sufficiently large to accommodate a segregated area for the clergy and a raised platform, called the pulpit or tribunal.”<sup>525</sup> What we have, then, is a description of some of the physical furniture within the church building itself. The *pulpitum*, for example, served to physically elevate the speaker within the place of Christian worship.

Like the *pulpitum*, Cyprian speaks of another important piece of liturgical furniture, the *altare*. Although some texts can be taken to mean a metaphorical altar, Cyprian often clearly has in mind the physical, material table used for Eucharistic worship. For example, Cyprian speaks of the “solemn church gathering” in which “the priests of God were seated together and where the altar was set up (*altari posito*).”<sup>526</sup> Here, Cyprian speaks of a physical “altar” which must be “set up” for worship, a material object used in the Christian worship space. As Franz Wieland suggests, “The writings of Cyprian assume a concrete altar for the West.”<sup>527</sup>

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<sup>523</sup> *Ep.* 38.2.1, *CCSL* 3B, 184-85.

<sup>524</sup> *Ep.* 39.4.1, *CCSL* 3B, 190.

<sup>525</sup> White, *Social Origins*, vol. 1, 124.

<sup>526</sup> *Ep.* 45.2.2, *CCSL* 3B, 218.

<sup>527</sup> “Einen konkreten Altar setzen auch für das Abendland die Schriften Cyprians voraus.” Franz Wieland, *Mensa und Confessio. Studien über den altar der altchristlichen Liturgie. I. Der Altar der vorkonstantinischen Kirche* (München: J.J. Lentner'schen, 1906), 116.

Again, in Epistle 59, Cyprian speaks about the real, physical threats against the Church from schismatics. They use “threats” and try to “force an entry” into the church. He calls the priest, then, to continue “guarding (*custodiens*)” the church, drawing upon Zechariah the OT priest as an example. Because of his “bravery and faith,” says Cyprian, Zechariah “was murdered in the temple of God (*in templo Dei*)...”<sup>528</sup> Because of the physicality of the description both of the schismatic’s “forced entry” and the example of Zechariah dying “in the Temple,” Cyprian evokes for us an image of a concrete, physical Church building, bodily protected by the priests from forced entry. Just as Zechariah the priest protected God’s holy house, so too the Christian priest must stand guard over the sacred Christian building. Cyprian continues this evocation of the physical building by rejecting the idea that catholic bishops should leave and let the schismatics have their way. He writes:

All that would remain is for the Church to surrender to the Capitol, with the priests retreating (*recedentibus sacerdotibus*) and removing the altar of the Lord (*ac Domini altare removentibus*), and at the same time the [pagan] images (*simulacra*) and idols (*idola*) with their altars (*aris*) would move in to take over the sacred and hallowed gathering place of our clergy (*cleri nostri sacrum venerandumque congestum*).<sup>529</sup>

This is a revealing passage because it speaks both of the physical worship space and physical objects in that worship space. If the catholic bishops retreat, says Cyprian, the “altar of the Lord” will be physically removed, the pagan altars will physically take their place, and the “sacred and hallowed gathering place of the clergy” will be occupied by heathens. Here in one passage we see the confluence of ideas regarding priesthood, physical objects of worship and sacred space and place. As Victor Saxer concludes from passages such as this, it is “entirely certain that our passage refers to a concrete situation . . . It seems to me scarcely possible to

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<sup>528</sup> *Ep.* 59.17.1, *CCSL* 3C, 367-68.

<sup>529</sup> *Ep.* 59.18.1, *CCSL* 3C, 369.

remove the reference to such an architectural reality from the argument of saint Cyprian.”<sup>530</sup>

Like the Old Testament priests who were the attendants of the Lord and his sacred house, so too Christian bishops are the Christian priests who attend to the Christian sacred space and objects. Cyprian’s weaving together of the images of Christian sacred space and the ministerial priesthood suggest that for him the two were connected. Part of the function of the bishop *qua* priest was to guard the physical worship space of the Church.

This aspect of sacred space and sacred objects appears again in one of Cyprian’s epistles regarding heretical baptism, where he makes an intriguing point about the rite of baptism, the use of oil, and (surprisingly) the connection to the Eucharistic altar. He explains that

it is necessary for one who has been baptized to be anointed so that by receiving the chrism, that is the anointing, he may be the anointed of God and receive within him the grace of Christ. Moreover, it is at the Eucharist (*eucharistia*) that the oil with which the baptized are anointed is sanctified upon the altar (*altari sanctificatum*). But whoever does not have an altar (*altare*) or a church (*ecclesiam*) cannot sanctify the material substance of oil (*sanctificare autem non potuit olei creaturam*).<sup>531</sup>

Cyprian’s point is that the heretics and schismatics, who do not celebrate the true Eucharist or have a true altar or church, can therefore never be able to sanctify (*sanctificare*) the “material substance” of oil.<sup>532</sup> They have no sacred space and therefore no ability to “sanctify” the oil. As G.W. Clarke notes, “*eucharistia* would have signified to contemporary readers the bread and wine consecrated upon the altar. The oil was hallowed (*in altari sanctificatum*) on the same altar

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<sup>530</sup> “Tout aussi sûr que notre passage se réfère à une situation concrète . . . Il ne me semble guère possible d’écarter du raisonnement de S. Cyprien la référence à une telle réalité architectural.” Saxer, 59.

<sup>531</sup> *Ep.* 70.2.2, *CCSL* 3C, 507.

<sup>532</sup> See Wieland, 121. Also, there is extended debate about some textual issues here, but none of the textual alternatives alter the main argument as I see it. See GW Clarke, vol. 4, 201-202, n.10 for an extended discussion of the issues.



in company with the consecrated bread and wine.”<sup>533</sup> Without delving into how Cyprian understood the mechanics of this consecration, one thing is abundantly clear. Cyprian conceives of the altar, the Eucharistic elements and the oil as “sacred” objects in the Christian worship setting. The bishop, as the one who presides over the baptism, would have been responsible for this Christian *sacra*.

Not surprisingly, just a few lines later, Cyprian raises the notion of priesthood, saying “But can a sinful and sacrilegious priest (*sacerdos sacrilegus*) offer any prayer for the person he has baptized, since it is written: ‘God does not hear the sinner...?’”<sup>534</sup> Once again the nexus of priesthood and attendance to the sacred things of the Church stands out. From these texts, one can see that Cyprian understood the Christian priesthood in analogous terms to the Old Testament priesthood: they were the guardians and attendants of God’s house, custodians of the sacred space and sacred objects belonging to the Lord. The emerging material Christian culture is very much a part of Cyprian’s conception of a Christian ministerial priesthood.

## Conclusion

Thus, as I noted earlier, when Cyprian describes the Christian priest as one who “waits on the altar,”<sup>535</sup> “stands at the altar,”<sup>536</sup> or “serves the altar and divine sacrifices,”<sup>537</sup> he has in mind the physical attendance to a physical Church and altar. His responsibility over this sacred space and sacred Christian objects, then, evokes the same attention and protection ascribed to Israelite

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<sup>533</sup> Clarke, vol. 4, 202. Even if *eucharistia* is taken to refer more literally to “thanksgiving” offered over the oil on the altar which then makes it holy, the force of the argument is the same: the oil and the altar are portrayed as “sacred” objects in Christian worship.

<sup>534</sup> *Ep.* 70.2.3, *CCSL* 3C, 509.

<sup>535</sup> *Ep.* 72.2.2, *CCSL* 3C, 526.

<sup>536</sup> *Ep.* 61.2.3, *CCSL* 3C, 381.

<sup>537</sup> *Ep.* 67.1.2, *CCSL* 3C, 448

priests as the “attendants of the Lord” who “stand and minister to the Lord” in his Temple. He sees the church as a worshipping community that occupies physical sacred space and involves sacred objects within that worship context. Over this entire politico-theological and sacred entity of the Church presides the Christian bishop, cast in the model of the Levitical priest who, like the bishop, attends to God’s house and to his sacred objects. Returning briefly to Lightfoot’s comments at the beginning of this chapter, I hope that this examination of Cyprian has demonstrated that contra Lightfoot, Cyprian did not “boldly transfer himself into the new domain” with respect to a Christian ministerial leadership. Certainly, he bolstered the claims of episcopal authority and leadership on the grounds of OT Levitical leadership, and strengthened the ties between the sacrificial Eucharist and a presiding priesthood. However, in most respects, Cyprian stands well within the tradition of the early church by regarding the Christian bishop as a “priest” in light of a robust politico-theological ecclesiology and the emergence of a distinct Christian material culture over which the bishop-priest presided and for which he was responsible.

## CHAPTER 7

### PRIESTS OF GOD’S HOLY TEMPLE: EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA

In my last chapter, I explored the writings of Cyprian of Carthage for the continued development of priestly language being applied to Christian leadership. Within that context of the mid third century, I demonstrated that for Cyprian (as for the other writers and texts examined so far) the designation of the bishop as “priest” stemmed from an appropriation of Israelite “priesthood” and often appeared within the context of an emerging consciousness of Christian sacred space and sacred objects.

All the texts I have considered so far have been pre-Constantinian. I would like now to move forward to examine one fourth century, post-Constantinian thinker (Eusebius of Caesarea) to demonstrate the continued development and natural culmination of the notion that the Christian ministerial priesthood stands in connection with both a politico-theological ecclesiology and the emergence of a Christian material culture. In doing so, I wish to demonstrate two things. First, like his predecessors, Eusebius bears witness to the nexus between an assumed continuity with Israel and the centrality of a Christian sacred material culture as the backdrop to his articulation of a Christian ministerial priesthood. Second, and related to the first, the articulation of a Christian ministerial priesthood during this early post-Constantinian period must be seen in continuity with the earlier expressions of the same by the writers of the third century (chapters 2-6). There is no radical break here in the Christian conception of the Israelite priest finding fulfillment in the Christian priest who presides over Christian *sacra*. The Constantinian period, therefore, although significant in the development of Christian material culture and in gaining Christianity’s favorable standing in the Empire,

produced only further developments of Christian leadership, not a betrayal of the previous century. In this sense, the bishop-as-priest paradigm in the post-Constantinian era is the intended trajectory of Christian thinking in the third century.<sup>538</sup>

### **Priesthood and History: Dedication of the Church at Tyre**

One of the most tangible effects of the conversion of Constantine and his subsequent “Christianization” of the Roman Empire was the building of Christian churches.<sup>539</sup> Yet, as I have shown, Christians had already begun to establish unique places of worship in various parts of the world (for example in Rome, Syria and North Africa). Eusebius also bears witness to this material growth of pre-Constantinian Christianity:

And how could someone describe those myriad assemblies and the multitude of the gatherings in each city and the notable meetings in the places of prayer; on account of which, no one being any longer satisfied with the old buildings, they would raise up from the foundations churches (*ekklēsias*) of spacious dimensions throughout all the cities.<sup>540</sup>

The church building is such a dominant feature of Christianity even prior to the Diocletian persecution (300 A.D) that Eusebius speaks of the persecution of Christians precisely in terms of the destruction of church buildings.<sup>541</sup> The persecution, he says, was God’s discipline whereby he “has profaned to the earth, through the destruction of the churches (*dia tēs tōn ekklēsiōn kathaireseōs*), his sanctuary (*to hagiasma autou*)...”<sup>542</sup>

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<sup>538</sup> I will also argue, however, in the next chapter that this bishop-priest paradigm of the third and fourth centuries is also compatible with and the natural outworking of the trajectories of earlier Christian thinking, namely the New Testament and sub-apostolic period.

<sup>539</sup> See Richard Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture* (New York : Penguin Books, 1979), 17-24; and L. Michael White, *Social Origins of Christian Architecture*, vol 1, 127-139 for a brief overview of Constantine’s contributions in this area.

<sup>540</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *Histoire Ecclesiastique* 8.1.5, (*Sources Chretiennes*) ed. Gustave Bardy, vol. 3 (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1967), 4.

<sup>541</sup> See L. Michael White, vol. 1, 127, who makes a similar point.

<sup>542</sup> *H.E.* 8.1.9, SC, vol. 3, 6.

After Constantine's rise to power, then, there is a renewed emphasis (and with it an imperial approval) on building new Christian structures while also restoring previously destroyed church buildings. This brings us to one of the most illuminating texts for my thesis: the sermon of Eusebius of Caesarea at the dedication of the church re-building at Tyre.<sup>543</sup> Within this lengthy oration Eusebius masterfully weaves together into one narrative the historical occasion of the consecration of the rebuilt Church at Tyre and the biblical stories of God's sacred buildings in the Old Testament. Moreover, in doing so, Eusebius provides a particularly clear witness to the notion of the Christian minister as a "priest" in the context of both a politico-theological ecclesiology which sees the Church as a new Roman *polis* in continuity with Israel, and the reality of the church as a sacred space over which the Christian priest presides.

It should be clear that by the time of Eusebius the designation of the Christian leader as a "priest" was well-established.<sup>544</sup> Eusebius naturally refers to the bishop as such throughout his speech and expects his audience to know what he means. "Our leaders conducted perfect worship, and the consecrated priests (*hierōmenōn*) performed religious services and the appropriate rites of the Church," says Eusebius, which included "psalmody and the reading of words which were given to us from God" and "the ministering of the divine and mystic

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<sup>543</sup> Dated between 313 and 324 A.D. Paul Corby Finney dates it at 313 A.D. (*The Invisible God: The Earliest Christian on Art* [New York: Oxford U.P., 1994], 290); Hans Georg Thümmel dates it at 317 A.D. ("Versammlungraum, Kirche, Tempel" in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel*, ed. Beate Ego, et al [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999], 499; White dates the final redaction to 324 A.D. (*Social Origins*, vol 2, 94-99).

<sup>544</sup> See chapters 2-6.

services.”<sup>545</sup> A little later, Eusebius declares them “friends of God and priests (*hiereis*) who are clothed with the holy robe.”<sup>546</sup>

What is most illuminating about Eusebius’ speech is the way in which he moves from Old Testament narrative to contemporary events and back again. In weaving together these chronologically disparate events, he is demonstrating an underlying acceptance of an historically unified divine plan. As Wallace-Hadrill explains, Eusebius “saw the whole history from Genesis to his own times in a single sweep of vision”<sup>547</sup> such that “everything that Eusebius wrote was historical, and everything was biblical.”<sup>548</sup> The biblical text becomes an illustration of the contemporary event and the contemporary event acts as the fulfillment of biblical realities. This is no less true when it comes to Eusebius’ panegyric on the church building at Tyre, where he oscillates rhetorically between the Church at Tyre and the Old Testament places of worship: the Tabernacle under Moses, the Temple under Solomon, and the re-built Temple under Zerrubabel. Eusebius repeatedly refers to the Christian church building as a “temple” (*neōs, naos*).<sup>549</sup>

In his introduction, Eusebius declares Paulinus, the bishop of Tyre, the “youthful pride of God’s holy temple (*hagiou neō*),” one given the “special honor of building His house upon earth (*ton epi gēs oikon*).”<sup>550</sup> He then introduces three illustrations he will use as metaphors for the Christian Church: the Tabernacle, the Second Temple, and the Solomonic Temple.<sup>551</sup> After a lengthy explication of God’s power and providence through history, Eusebius moves to his

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<sup>545</sup> *H.E.* 10.3.3, *SC*, vol. 3, 80.

<sup>546</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.2, *SC*, vol. 3, 81.

<sup>547</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Eusebius of Caesarea* (London: Mowbray, 1960), 93.

<sup>548</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, 168.

<sup>549</sup> I will return to this important point below.

<sup>550</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.2., *SC*, vol. 3, 81-82.

<sup>551</sup> Eusebius places his illustrations in this non-chronological order, perhaps to end on a high note in the grandeur and splendor of the Solomonic Temple.

illustration of the Tyrian Church paralleling the Old Testament Tabernacle. Like Bezalel,<sup>552</sup> who was called and gifted “as the craftsman for the construction of the Temple through symbols of heavenly types,” so too, says Eusebius, “this man [Paulinus], bearing in his own soul the image of the whole Christ, the Word, the Wisdom, the Light, has formed this magnificent temple of God most high (*theou tou hupsistou neōn*).”<sup>553</sup> Furthermore, just as the Israelites brought precious jewelry, metal, wood, stone, cloth, oil and incense for the construction and decoration of the Tabernacle,<sup>554</sup> so too Eusebius commends the Christian people of Tyre: “it is impossible to describe with what greatness of soul, with what richness”<sup>555</sup> they strove to display their generosity in giving. The Church building is likened to God’s dwelling place under Moses, Paulinus to the craftsman Bezalel, and the Christian people to the Israelites. The Church in Tyre evokes the biblical record of the building of the Tabernacle while the OT event becomes a living word-picture for the Christian Church.

Eusebius then reviews the recent violent persecution suffered by the Christians, reminding them how the pagans destroyed their churches, burned the Christian texts, “and set on fire the sanctuary of God (*to hagiastērion tou theou*) and profaned to the ground the tent of his name (*to skēnōma tou onomatos*).”<sup>556</sup> The point, of course, which Eusebius wishes to make is that those same churches, once destroyed, are now being rebuilt. He draws upon the poetic imagery of Isaiah 35:3 to describe this renewal: “the hands which before hung down have

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<sup>552</sup> See Exodus 31:1-5 and 35:30-33.

<sup>553</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.25-26, *SC*, vol. 3, 89.

<sup>554</sup> See Exodus 35:20-29.

<sup>555</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.26, *SC*, vol. 3, 89.

<sup>556</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.33, *SC*, vol. 3, 91.

become strong . . . the knees which before were weak and diseased have recovered their natural movement.”<sup>557</sup>

This moves Eusebius to a second, brief biblical allusion, and with it yet another connection between Old Testament and contemporary Christian events. The current circumstances remind him of the rebuilding of the Temple under Zerubbabel.<sup>558</sup> Working with Isaiah 35:1 (“The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice...”), Eusebius proclaims: “The word which announced beforehand that she who had been made a desert by God should enjoy these things, this one, our new and excellent Zerubbabel heard with the sharp hearing of his mind, after that bitter captivity and the abomination of desolation.”<sup>559</sup> Through the activity of Paulinus, “our new Zerubbabel,” says Eusebius, the Christians are aroused to the task of rebuilding the church such that the prophecy of Haggai 2:9 might be fulfilled, “And the latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former.”<sup>560</sup>

Again, we see Eusebius effortlessly moving between two worlds. The contemporary events evoke in his mind the events of Scripture while the biblical realities becomes pointers to their ultimate fulfillment in the Church. The Church of Tyre, rebuilt after the destruction by Diocletian, is likened to the second Temple, rebuilt after its destruction by Babylon; the Christian leader Paulinus is likened to the Israelite leader Zerubbabel; and the Christian people are compared with the Israelite workers who help in the task of rebuilding.

This prompts Eusebius to embark on a lengthy description of the architecture of the new Church building, including its outer and inner walls, “sacred areas” (*hieroi*), “thrones” (*thronoi*)

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<sup>557</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.34, *SC*, vol. 3, 92.

<sup>558</sup> See Ezra 3:8-11.

<sup>559</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.36, *SC*, vol. 3, 92.

<sup>560</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.36, *SC*, vol. 3, 93, citing Haggai 2:9.



and an “altar” (*thusiastērion*).<sup>561</sup> Throughout this section, Eusebius employs the term “temple” (*neōs*) to describe the Church structure, demonstrating again his intention to connect the Christian building with the Israelite place of worship.<sup>562</sup>

This extensive description of the architecture of the Church building, however, moves Eusebius toward a third biblical allusion: the glorious first Temple under Solomon. All his talk of the Tyrian church as a “completed temple (*ton neōn epitelésas*)” with “thrones (*thronois*)” and an “altar in the midst of the holy of holies” (*to tōn hagiōn hagian thusiastērion en mesō theis*) impels Eusebius to speak of bishop Paulinus as “our most peaceful Solomon” who constructed the “temple of God (*ton neōn tou theou*) for those who still have need of cleansing and sprinkling with water and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>563</sup> Doubtless, Eusebius intends to compare the “cleansing and sprinkling” of the old covenant priesthood with that of the new (in baptism), both centered around the designated places of worship (the Temple and the church).<sup>564</sup>

### **Continuity with Israel**

Behind all these comparisons lies a continuity assumed between Israel and the Church such that what was said or recorded about Israel in the Scriptures is now illustrated in fuller capacity with Christ’s church. God’s divine plan for Israel has been fulfilled according to Eusebius with the rise of the Christian church. Paulinus is a “new Bezalel,” a “new Zerubbabel,”

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<sup>561</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.37-44.

<sup>562</sup> Although one might speculate whether Eusebius intends to evoke the pagan temple by his use of the term *neos*, his repeated references to the Old Testament narrative and the Old Testament place of worship strongly suggest that Eusebius has this biblical temple in mind.

<sup>563</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.44-45, *SC*, vol. 3, 95-96.

<sup>564</sup> Consider Exodus 24:8 or 29:21 where blood and oil are sprinkled on the people and the priests. Also, Lev. 14:7 and 16:19 speak of an unclean person being “sprinkled” and “cleansed” by blood and water. Eusebius is likely taking his cue from Hebrews 10:22 (“with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water”) which also draws upon OT priestly types as analogous to Christian realities.

“our Solomon”. The OT places of worship become analogies for Christian realities like the churches. Thus, the underlying, but nevertheless firm assumption throughout his discourse is this ecclesiological correspondence with Israel. This implicit connection runs like a careful thread throughout the panegyric. For example, in introducing his subject about the rebuilding of churches after the Diocletian persecution, Eusebius draws upon the prophecy of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37 and proclaims: “Indeed, conforming to the prophetic prediction which mystically signified in advance what was to happen, there came together bone to bone and joint to joint and whatever was truly announced in enigmatic words.”<sup>565</sup> How was this prophecy to Israel fulfilled? Eusebius answers: through the gathering together of Christians in worship, wherein “the consecrated priests performed the religious services and the appropriate rites of the Church...”<sup>566</sup> Ezekiel’s prophecy of renewal “to the whole house of Israel” (Ezek 37:11) finds its fulfillment in the Christian Church and its ministerial leadership.

Again, toward the end of his oration, Eusebius quotes a lengthy section of Isaiah’s prophecies to Israel (selections of Is. 49-54). Speaking of the persecution of the Christian church, Eusebius reminds them of the words of Isaiah: though they have “drunk the cup of fury at the hand of the Lord . . . Behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of stumbling, the bowl of my fury . . . Awake, awake, put on strength, put on your glory.”<sup>567</sup> The implication is that Isaiah’s words to Israel are meant for the Church, which Eusebius himself declares explicitly when he concludes: “These things Isaiah prophesied, these things concerning us (*peri hēmōn*) had been set down long ago in sacred books; but it was necessary for us at some time to

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<sup>565</sup> *H.E.* 10.3.2, *SC*, vol.3, 80.

<sup>566</sup> *H.E.* 10.3.3, *SC*, vol.3, 80.

<sup>567</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.50, *SC*, vol.3, 97-98.

understand the truthfulness of these things by deeds (*ergois*).”<sup>568</sup> The “deeds” of which Eusebius speaks are the current circumstances: churches being rebuilt and their glory being restored. The Church, then, and all its glorious materiality, has become the fulfillment of the prophetic promises to Israel.

In book 8 of his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius portrays the same connection between Israel and the Church. Speaking again of the Diocletian persecution, he remarks: “The Lord drowned all the beautiful things of *Israel* and has broken down all his hedges. And according to what has been foretold in the Psalms, he has overturned the covenant of his servant and has profaned to the ground, through the destruction of the churches, his sanctuary (*hagiasma autou*)...”<sup>569</sup> The persecution of Christians is depicted in terms of the Lord’s chastisement of the Church. The destruction of churches is equated with the destruction of God’s “sanctuary”.

Eusebius maintains an intentional connection between the Church and Israel such that the promises of God to Abraham have been fulfilled in the Church,<sup>570</sup> the promises and commands to Israel are appropriated for the Church, and priestly models of Old Testament leadership become analogical models for Christian bishops. Thus, Eusebius’ conception of the Church in continuity with Israel lies as the tacit reference when, in this same oration, he calls the Church an *ethnos* (nation) which “extends everywhere the sun shines.”<sup>571</sup> Given his explicitly identified connection between Israel and the Church earlier, one sees more clearly that his designation of the Church here as an *ethnos* evokes the biblical “nation” of Israel itself. Yet, in speaking of such an *ethnos*, Eusebius clearly does not intend another ethnic, racial community at odds with

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<sup>568</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.53, *SC*, vol.3, 98.

<sup>569</sup> *H.E.* 8.1.8-9, *SC*, vol.3, 6. Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>570</sup> See *H.E.* 1.4.13.

<sup>571</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.19, *SC*, vol.3, 87.

ethnic Judaism, but rather a worshipping community, ethnically diverse, which identifies with biblical Israel's God, Scriptures, theological vocabulary, rituals, worship space and models of leadership. The Church is a divine nation, the fulfillment of Israel.<sup>572</sup> Though a community in distinction from contemporary Jews, Christians exist, Eusebius claims, in a faithful continuity with the biblical plan of God as first begun in Abraham.<sup>573</sup> As Eusebius himself says elsewhere, "the law and life decreed by our Savior Jesus Christ recapitulates that most ancient piety older than Moses."<sup>574</sup> The Church, then, according to Eusebius, does not abrogate God's work with Abraham and Israel, but rather, the promise to Abraham finds completion and transformation in Christ and the Church, and God remains faithful to his covenant with Israel.<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>572</sup> Consider also the fact that Eusebius is writing a "Church History". Unlike Livy or Tacitus who wrote histories of nations and people groups, Eusebius is writing a history of a religion in itself. This indicates that Eusebius saw the Christian church as something akin to the 'Roman nation,' a culture or *polis* of its own. Consider also, for example, that just as Tacitus structures his *Annals* around the reigns of the Emperors Tiberius, Claudius and Nero, so too Eusebius structures his *History* around the reigns of Emperors and notable bishops (see Wallace-Hadrill, 158-159, who alludes to this).

<sup>573</sup> See also *De Demonstratione Evangelica* 1.6 for the same argument in Eusebius.

<sup>574</sup> *Dem. Ev.* 1.5, PG 22:44D.

<sup>575</sup> Consider also Eusebius' own comments that his writings are not intended to be polemics against the Jews (*Dem. Ev.* 1.1, PG 22:20B). Jorg Ulrich, in his recent work, *Euseb von Caesarea und die Juden* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999) adds some helpful nuance to this issue. He addresses the question of whether Eusebius saw the relationship between Church and synagogue as a "Substitutionsmodell"; his answer is yes and no. On the one hand, the Church does, in a sense, become the replacement for the synagogue (citing similar texts I use above). On the other hand, Ulrich carefully notes that elsewhere Eusebius clearly sees Christ as the fulfillment of the OT models of prophet, priest, and king such these OT models "are not at all abolished in the Church, but in Christ" (214). By examining both sets of Eusebian texts (those depicting the Church as the intended subject of prophetic promises and also those depicting Christ himself as the true fulfillment) Ulrich further concludes: "By this, Eusebius ventures out quite beyond the usual model of a substitution of the synagogue by the Church . . . Thus Christ, as a representative of God's will of universal salvation, stands not for the discharge of the synagogue out of the divine plan of salvation, but for the universalization of this plan of salvation, a principle which also contains the Jews" (215).

Thus, this assumed continuity more broadly between biblical Israel and the contemporary Church finds application not just in historical events such as temple constructions old and new, but also more specifically between priestly leadership and aspects of sacred space, such as the altar and the holy of holies. As seen previously, Eusebius speaks at length about the architectural structure of the Church building in Tyre, but also provides a glimpse of the interior itself. There, says Eusebius, one finds not only “benches”, “seats” and “thrones”, but an “altar placed in the midst of the holy of holies” (*to tōn hagiōn hagian thusiastērion en mesō theis*).<sup>576</sup> A little later, he inquires: “But as to the revered, great and unique altar (*thusiastērion*), what might it be except the pure holy of holies (*hagiōn hagian*) of the common priest of all?”<sup>577</sup> This moves us, then, to consider a second aspect of Eusebius’ portrayal of the Christian church at his time: the reality of a Christian material culture, paralleling the institutional culture of Israelite worship.

### Christian Material Culture

Although writers before him tended to avoid the explicit designation, Eusebius repeatedly describes the Church building as both “temple” (*neōs*)<sup>578</sup> and “sacred places” (*hieroi*)<sup>579</sup> into which one enters. One can conclude with Hans Georg Thümmel that “a radical innovation appears. The Church is not only compared with the Old Testament Temple, but also named as such.”<sup>580</sup> As I demonstrated earlier, this language of “temple” and “sacred place” employed by

<sup>576</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.44, *SC*, vol.3, 96.

<sup>577</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.68, *SC*, vol.3, 102.

<sup>578</sup> See for example *H.E.* 10.2.1 (*neōs*); 10.4.1 (*neōs*); 10.4.2-3 (*hagiou neō*); 10.4.20 (*theiōn naōn*); 10.4.26 (*theou tou hupsistou neōn*); 10.4.39-41 (*neō* and *ton neōn*); 10.4.44 (*ton neōn*); 10.4.69 (*ho megas neōs*). See Ludwig Völkl for broader examination of Eusebius’ terms for church buildings (“Die konstantinischen Kirchenbauten nach Eusebius” *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana* 29 [1953]: 49-66).

<sup>579</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.38-40.

<sup>580</sup> Thümmel, 499.

Eusebius intends to evoke the Israelite Temple of the Old Testament, and with it, the firm notion of the Church as sacred space and place, a “sanctuary” (*hagiasma*). Again, as seen previously, Eusebius describes the Diocletian persecution in just such terms: the pagans destroyed Christian books and “set on fire the sanctuary of God (*to hagiastērion tou theou*); they profaned to the ground the Tent (*skēnōma*) of his name (citing Psalm 74:7).”<sup>581</sup> The destroyed churches are not merely neutral architectural structures; rather, they are invested with sanctity as the place of God much like the Old Testament Temple (his use of Ps 74:7 makes clear his intended connection).

Further, Eusebius describes the furniture of the Church itself in sacred terms. With the temple (*neos*) complete and furnished with thrones and benches, Eusebius adds: “and after all these he placed the altar in the midst of the holy of holies (*to tōn hagiōn hagian thusiastērion en mesō theis*), and that it might be inaccessible to the multitude, enclosed it with a fence of wooden lattice-work.”<sup>582</sup> The liturgical furniture known as the altar and the space in which it is placed is of such sanctity that it must be cordoned off from the congregation. Here Eusebius’ description of the Tyrian Church is clearly meant to evoke the very structure and divisions of the OT Temple layout.<sup>583</sup>

In another passage, Eusebius recounts the tale of Marinus, a soldier whose promotion to high rank was prevented because “he was a Christian and did not sacrifice to the emperors.” Confessing Christ before the judge, Marinus was given three hours to reconsider his position. During that time, the local bishop “took him aside in conversation, and taking him by the hand led him to the church. Once inside,” Eusebius recounts, “he stood him close to the sanctuary (*tō*

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<sup>581</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.33. See also 10.4.58 for the exact same description of the destruction of the “sanctuary of God” and the “dwelling place of his name”.

<sup>582</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.44.

<sup>583</sup> See Exodus 26-27.

*hagiasmati*) itself, and raising his cloak a little, pointed to the sword which was hanging on Marinus; at the same time he brought and placed before him the book of the divine Gospels, and commanded him to choose which of the two he wished.”<sup>584</sup> The significance of this passage lies in the term *tō hagiasmati*. As Michael White concludes, “The text clearly presupposes a formal layout to the church building, since the ‘sanctuary’ or ‘holy place’ is an articulated space *within* the edifice.”<sup>585</sup> While scholars debate whether this term refers to an inner area within the church or to the physical altar itself,<sup>586</sup> Eusebius clearly demonstrates the notion of a sacred, holy space or object of which the bishop has charge.<sup>587</sup>

Likewise, near the end of his Tyrian panegyric, he declares that the “unique altar” (*monogenes thusiaterion*) is the “pure holy of holies (*hagiōn hagion*) of the common priest of all.”<sup>588</sup> In other words, Eusebius’ use of the sacred terms “temple” “altar” and especially “holy of holies” demonstrates that he does not intend his hearers to think in terms of pagan temples, but specifically of the Israelite Temple and worship. Even architecturally speaking, as Krautheimer notes,

for both practical and ideological reasons it was impossible that this new Christian architecture [the basilica] should evolve from the religious architecture of pagan antiquity . . . [Christians] shied away from pagan temples to such a degree that neither they nor

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<sup>584</sup> *H.E.* 7.15.2,4, vol. 2, 189-190.

<sup>585</sup> White, *Social Origins*, vol.2, 91 n.34. Italics his.

<sup>586</sup> White seems to lean toward an area within the church; Franz Dölger, connecting this passage with the later phrase (10.4.44) *to tōn hagiōn hagion*, argues for the altar itself as the referent of *tō hagiasmati* (“Die Heiligkeit des Altars und ihre Begründung im christlichen Altertum” *Antike und Christentum* 2 (1930): 161-183.

<sup>587</sup> For a further examination of the idea of the sanctity of the altar in the ancient church, see Joseph Braun, *Der christliche Altar in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, vol. 1 (München: Alte Meister Guenther Koch, 1924), 666-674; and O. Nussbaum, “Zelebration versus populum und der Opfercharakter der Messe” *Zeitschrift fuer Katholische Theologie* 93 (1971): 156.

<sup>588</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.68, *SC*, vol.3, 102.

even their sites were occupied by the Church before the late fourth century in the East or before the sixth century in the West.<sup>589</sup>

The sanctity of space within the Christian Church is set in parallel and comparison with the Israelite Temple of old, not the pagan temples.<sup>590</sup>

This last text of Eusebius is worth exploring in more detail, for in it we find not just a connection between Old Testament Temple and Christian Church, but also a cosmic and mystical connection to the heavenly worship itself. In addition to being tied analogically to OT worship and sacred space, the church's connection to a cosmic, heavenly worship is part of what gives the earthly church its "holiness" or "sanctity". Eusebius had described the altar as "the pure holy of holies of the common priest of all."<sup>591</sup> He then explains what he means:

Standing beside it on the right hand, the great High Priest of the universe, Jesus himself, the Only-begotten of God, receives with a joyful face and extended hands, the sweet smelling incense from all, and the bloodless and immaterial sacrifices offered in prayer, and sends them on their way to the heavenly Father and God of the universe.<sup>592</sup>

In other words, the altar, says Eusebius, though material and physical, also has a mystical connection with Christ himself as high priest and the spiritual offerings of prayer made in the

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<sup>589</sup> Krautheimer, *ECBA*, 19. For another good discussion of why the Christian basilica was chosen over, say, the pagan temple architecture, see J.B. Ward-Perkins, "Constantine and the Christian Basilica" in *Art, Archaeology and Architecture of Early Christianity*, ed. Paul Corby Finney (New York: Garland Pub., 1993), 363-384. Ward-Perkins notes, especially, that "the traditional pagan temple was architecturally quite unsuited to the needs of Christian worship . . . for its Eucharistic celebrations, and for those other liturgical occasions that involved the presence of the Christian community in large numbers..." (372).

<sup>590</sup> Krautheimer notes that in some instances, basilicas carried a certain religious overtone, connected with the Imperial cult and that "the palace basilica in which [the Emperor] sat enthroned was ipso facto a religious building." (*ECBA*, 21). Although this may be the case in certain instances, it is clear from Eusebius that what makes the Christian Church in Tyre a sacred religious space is not any evocation of the imperial, pagan cult, but its relationship with both the OT models of worship and the heavenly worship.

<sup>591</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.68, *SC*, vol.3, 102.

<sup>592</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.68, *SC*, vol.3, 102-103.



church. As Frederich Deichmann suggests, “The Church building of Tyre was, as Eusebius explains in his sermon, an image of the heavenly Jerusalem. This earthly sanctuary corresponds also to the heavenly and is therefore called a Temple.”<sup>593</sup>

This cosmic connection is asserted yet again in the very next moment when Eusebius continues: “Such is the great temple which the Word, the great Creator of the universe, has built throughout the whole world under the sun, forming again this spiritual image (*eikona*) upon earth of those vaults beyond the heavens.”<sup>594</sup> The idea is that the physical, material church, seen with the visible eye is a representation, an indicator, of the heavenly worship taking place in invisible realms. Thus, while the OT Temple acts as an important type for the contemporary Christian Church building, Eusebius also indicates that the Church’s sanctity and functions derive from and participate in the higher, heavenly realities with which it is connected. Just as the OT Temple expressed “symbols of heavenly types (*tupōn*),”<sup>595</sup> so too the Christian church displays those realities.

## Conclusion

This brings us back to the idea of a Christian priesthood, which must be understood in light of Eusebius’ dynamic connection between Israel and the Church, and his understanding of the Church as a sacred space evoking the OT Temple and participation in heavenly worship. For example, Eusebius begins his oration by proclaiming that “our leaders conducted perfect

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<sup>593</sup> “Der Kirchenbau von Tyrus war, wie Eusebios in seiner Weihepredigt ausführte, ein Abbild des himmlischen Jerusalem. Dieses irdische Heiligtum entsprach also dem himmlischen und wird daher Tempel genannt.” Frederich Wilhelm Deichmann, “Von Tempel zur Kirche” in *Mullus: Festschrift Theodor Klauser*, eds. Alfred Stuiber and Alfred Hermann (Muenster: Aschendorff, 1964), 58.

<sup>594</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.69, *SC*, vol.3, 103.

<sup>595</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.25, *SC*, vol.3, 89.

worship, and the consecrated priests (*hierōmenōn*) performed the religious services and appropriate rites of the Church.” What do those rites include? Singing and the reading of Scripture (“psalmody and the reading of words which were given to us from God”), other liturgical services such as prayers and offerings (“the ministering of divine and mystic services”), and the celebration of the Eucharist (“the ineffable symbols of the Savior’s passion”).<sup>596</sup> In other words, the bishops of the church are “priests” precisely in their entire role of liturgical responsibility and oversight, much in the same way that the priests of Israel were over the Temple and OT worship.

Further, just moments after his description of the “rites and ordinances of the Church,” Eusebius declares Paulinus “friend and priest of God” but also identifies him as the “youthful pride of God’s holy temple” who has the “special honor of building His house upon earth.”<sup>597</sup> Just as the Israelite priests attended to the house of the Lord, the Temple, so too, affirms Eusebius, the bishop-priest attends to the Christian building, “God’s holy Temple.”<sup>598</sup> Thus, the Israelite priesthood (not a pagan priesthood) becomes a model for the Christian bishop, and the Israelite Temple of old a working “type” for the Christian Church building and its sacred space and furnishings.

In light of this observation, however, one striking puzzle remains. It is clear that Eusebius ties Christian legitimacy to Abraham, not the Mosaic legislation, as proto-Christian. As he says in the beginning of his *Ecclesiastical History*, “the religion which was proclaimed to

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<sup>596</sup> All found in *H.E.* 10.3, *SC*, vol.3, 80.

<sup>597</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.2, *SC*, vol.3, 81-82.

<sup>598</sup> It must be admitted that Eusebius may also have in mind the notion of the “temple” as the body of believers (cf. 1 Cor.3, 6); yet given the context of this oration (namely, the dedication of the Church building), it seems quite likely that Eusebius here also intends to include the notion of “temple” as the Church building itself.

all the gentiles . . . is the foremost and most ancient of all religions, and the one discovered by those god-loving men in the age of Abraham.”<sup>599</sup> Further, those who loved God in the time of Abraham “had no care for bodily circumcision any more than we, nor for the keeping of Sabbaths any more than we, nor for avoiding certain foods nor for regarding the other distinctions which Moses first delivered to be observed as symbols between others (such as Moses afterwards first began to hand down).”<sup>600</sup> If, as Eusebius claims, the promises to Abraham are “permissible to be understood as fulfilled in us,”<sup>601</sup> then why does he want to connect Christian worship and leadership precisely to Mosaic models, namely Tabernacle and Temple worship?

Eusebius himself seems to provide an answer in his earlier discussion of Moses wherein he declares that the Tabernacle plan and ceremonies Moses received from God and delivered to the people were a “symbolic worship” (*symbolikēs latreias*) pointing to “the true and pure religion” found in Christ. In other words, Israelite worship prefigured the heavenly worship of Christ in his fullness.<sup>602</sup> So, just as the OT Temple and worship symbolized heavenly realities, so too, Christian worship participates in the cosmic, heavenly worship whose true high priest is none other than Christ himself. Thus, Christian priestly duties (presiding over the rites of psalmody, word and sacrament) are a participation in the heavenly worship, not in contradistinction from OT worship, but precisely in continuity with and fulfillment of it.

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<sup>599</sup> *H.E.* 1.4.10, *SC*, vol. 1, 19-20.

<sup>600</sup> *H.E.* 1.4.8, *SC*, vol. 1, 19.

<sup>601</sup> *H.E.* 1.4.13, *SC*, vol. 1, 20. Eusebius had just cited Gen. 12:3 and 18:18.

<sup>602</sup> See Exod 25:40 and Heb 8:5 for the biblical idea that the OT Tabernacle was a copy and shadow of heavenly realities. See also *Dem. Ev.* 4.15-16 for similar understanding in Eusebius that God established through Moses “a more material worship on earth as an image of the spiritual and immaterial worship” (*PG* 22:300C).

Eusebius indicates this reasoning, for example, in our present oration. Just as Christ, the High Priest, presides over the Temple of the body of believers, so too, says Eusebius, it may be possible for the Christian bishop “to take the second place after Him.” Christ, “the first and great High priest Himself has honored [the bishop] with the second place in the priestly work . . . as if Christ himself had appointed him as His attendant and interpreter, the new Aaron or Melchizedek.”<sup>603</sup> The Christian priesthood is connected with both the OT forms and models (Aaron) and the new found in Christ (Melchizedek) and as such is both a mirror of OT Israelite worship and a fuller participation in and expression of the heavenly, cosmic worship to which OT worship pointed. In this sense, the Church participates in continuity with Israel yet also obtains something new. As Eusebius says, “Christ gave no longer types (*tupos*) or images (*eikonas*) but the bare virtues themselves and the heavenly life.”<sup>604</sup> The Church (and in turn its leadership and worship) has both continuity with yet transformation of Israel, its leaders and worship.

Elsewhere within this same panegyric, Eusebius argues that Christ is a high priest who sees and does what the Father does and works out these images based on the patterns and archetypes he sees. Just as Bezalel was chosen by God and filled with his Spirit “as the craftsman for the construction of the temple through symbols of heavenly types” so too bishop Paulinus, also filled with godly wisdom “has formed this magnificent temple of God most high.”<sup>605</sup> The implication is that the magnificent temple of God which Paulinus has just built is in truth connected to his priestly office. He imitates the work of Christ, the High priest, but also

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<sup>603</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.23, *SC*, vol. 3, 88

<sup>604</sup> *H.E.* 1.3.12, *SC*, vol.1, 16.

<sup>605</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.25-26, *SC*, vol. 3, 89.

the OT Temple worship which likewise displayed “symbols of heavenly types.”<sup>606</sup> Thus, Eusebius’ Church-Israel continuity and fulfillment in Christ along with his notion of Christian sacred space echoing OT models both lie as the backdrop to the understanding of the Christian ministerial priesthood. This is the first point I wish to make in conclusion.

Second, it should be clear by now that the expressions we find in Eusebius, both in his description of the Christian priest and his description of the Church building as a “temple” are only further developments of earlier trajectories, not a break from what has come before. Not all scholars have recognized this. Deichmann, for instance, suggests that Eusebius’ expression of “the Church as the sanctuary of God introduces a *new epoch* of the sacred-building in general.”<sup>607</sup> Likewise, Georg Thümmel finds Eusebius to be a significant “turning point” (Wendepunkt)<sup>608</sup> in the Christian description of the building and minister. In fact, he argues that this is the first demonstrable time “the Church is named a ‘temple’, the meal table an ‘altar’ and the minister ‘priest’.”<sup>609</sup> Statements such as Deichmann’s and Thümmel’s clearly ignore the evidence.

More accurately, one should see Eusebius standing in a clear line of tradition regarding his articulation of the Christian minister as a “priest” in the context of a politico-theological ecclesiology and the notion of an emerging Christian material culture and sacred space over

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<sup>606</sup> *H.E.* 10.4.25, *SC*, vol. 3, 89.

<sup>607</sup> „Die Kirche als Gottes Heiligtum leitete eine *neue Epoche* des Sakralbau überhaupt ein.“ Deichmann, 58. Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>608</sup> Thümmel, 500.

<sup>609</sup> „Die Kirche ‘Tempel’, der Mahltisch ‘Altar’ und die Gestlichen ‘Priester’ genannt werden.“ Thümmel, 501.

which the Christian priest presides.<sup>610</sup> By now my research in the preceding chapters should demonstrate clearly that the pre-Eusebian, third century church repeatedly designated the meal table an “altar”, the minister a “priest” and the worship space as “holy” or “sacred”. Although Eusebius provides a succinct summary and encapsulation of my overall thesis, the only new development he brings is the somewhat inevitable description of the church building as a “temple.” Even this, however, comes as no surprise given the century long tradition preceding him. Recall for example that even by the early third century, Tertullian was likening the physical *ecclesia* to the *templum dei*<sup>611</sup> while the *Didascalia Apostolorum* described the Tabernacle of Witness as “a type (*tipos*) of the Church.”<sup>612</sup> Elsewhere, the Syriac *Edessen Chronicle* records that in the year 201 A.D. there was a massive flood which destroyed buildings, palaces, homes and “the temple (*haikla*) of the church of the Christians.”<sup>613</sup> By the end of the fourth century, the church order *Apostolic Constitutions* would develop an extended analogy between the spatial design and layout of the Church building (*ekklesia tou theou*) and the Tabernacle and Temple of

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<sup>610</sup> Even this Constantinian period of architectural development is not something born *ex nihilo*; rather, as J.B. Ward-Perkins, Michael White and Richard Krautheimer have shown, the basilical church form was the closest approximation on a larger scale to the already existing Christian structures of worship (i.e. assembly halls). As White notes, “The Constantinian innovation of basilical architecture, therefore, seems less abrupt. Although it surely represents a radically new imposition of scale and style on the architecture and aesthetic, it still depends on some continuity with earlier church buildings. The basilica may be seen as a further adaptation, monumentalization, and ultimately a standardization of diverse pre-Constantinian patterns of development” (*Social Origins*, vol. 1, 139). Just as the post-Constantinian developments in architecture lie in continuity with what has come before, so too Eusebius’ expressions of the Christian ministerial priesthood find their roots in the third century tradition. See Ward-Perkins, 363-384; Krautheimer, *ECBA*, 18.

<sup>611</sup> *De Pudicitia* 20.1, *CCSL* 2:1323. See also my discussion of this text in my earlier chapter on Tertullian.

<sup>612</sup> *Didascalia Apostolorum* 8. Greek text is found in *Les Constitutions Apostoliques*, vol. 1, ed. Marcel Metzger, (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1985), 228-230.

<sup>613</sup> Syriac text and English translation provided by L. Michael White, *Social Origins*, vol. 2, 102.

God (*skene tou marturiou kai naos tou theou*)<sup>614</sup> calling the latter a “type” (*tuos*) of the former. The emerging notion of a Christian material sacred space, combined with the full continuity expressed between Israel and the Church, provides the perfect context for eventually appropriating the name of the OT worship space (Temple) for the Christian space and explicitly designating the church building a “temple”. The real question remains, then, whether this entire development of a Christian ministerial priesthood in the third and fourth century is, as many have suggested, at odds with the earlier expressions and understandings of the Church and its leadership found in the New Testament and sub-apostolic periods. It is to this matter that I will devote my final chapter.

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<sup>614</sup> *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.57, in *Les Constitutions Apostoliques*, vol. 1, 310-314.

## CHAPTER 8

### BRIDGING THE GAP: EARLY TRAJECTORIES OF PRIESTLY IDEAS

Having traced the development of a Christian ministerial priesthood in the third and early fourth century, and the underlying politico-theological conditions (the notions of the Church as a *polis* in its own right in continuity with Israel) and the emergence of a Christian material culture, the question remains: is this development of the early third century a radical break from the Church's understanding in the first two centuries? Is the rise of a Christian ministerial priesthood at odds with the very theology and social structure of earlier Christianity, or are there indications that such a development was a legitimate advancement of earlier Christian ecclesiology and social reality? Turning to these questions next, I will argue that these politico-theological aspects lying behind the third century development of a ministerial priesthood were equally present in the first two centuries of Christian existence—leaving the door open for the possibility of a legitimate development of a Christian ministerial priesthood under the right circumstances.

#### **Priestly Ideas in the Early Church?**

As mentioned in my introduction, it is an oft-repeated refrain that the New Testament never designates any Christian leader as a “priest” (*hiereus*).<sup>615</sup> From this observation, many

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<sup>615</sup> For example, P.M. Gy, “Notes on the Early Terminology of Christian Priesthood” in *The Sacrament of Holy Orders: Some papers and discussions concerning holy orders at a session of the Centre de pastorale liturgique, 1955* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1962), 98; Maurice Bevenot, “Tertullian’s Thoughts about the Christian ‘Priesthood’” in *Corona Gratiarum*, vol 1 (Brugge: Sint Pietersabdij, 1975), 126; Karl Rahner et al., eds., *Sacramentum Mundi*, vol. 5 (New York : Herder & Herder, 1970), S.v. “Priest”, 97; R.P.C. Hanson, *Christian Priesthood Examined* (Guildford: Lutterworth Press, 1979), 35; Carl Volz, *Pastoral Life and Practice in the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990), 32; J.B. Lightfoot, *The Christian Ministry*, (New York, Whittaker, 1878), 12; J.A.T. Robinson, *On Being the Church in the World* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1960), 72; James Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church: Public*



have concluded that any notion of a Christian ministerial priesthood only develops a radical break from earliest Christian understanding. Is this a proper conclusion? Terminology can be a tricky thing. Simply because a word does not appear in a text does not mean that the text outright opposes the use of such a word, or that the text opposes any conceptual notion of the same. In our present case, for the first statement to be true (that the NT opposes Christian ministers being called *hiereus*), we would have to find texts that say explicitly, “There is no warrant for a Christian minister to be called a priest.”<sup>616</sup> The second argument (that the NT opposes even the concept of a ministerial priesthood) is perhaps more commonly raised.<sup>617</sup> For

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*services and offices in the earliest Christian communities* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1992), 322; James Mohler, *The Origin and Evolution of the Priesthood* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1970), 31; Jean-Paul Audet, *Structures of Christian Priesthood: A study of home, marriage, and celibacy in the pastoral service of the church*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 81-82.

<sup>616</sup> Of course, no such texts exist in any early Christian period.

<sup>617</sup> Other objections, largely theological, may also be raised. The most common argues that since the book of Hebrews declares Christ as the high-priest who has fulfilled and abrogated the Levitical priesthood, there can be no warrant for human priests built on the model of the (now abrogated) Levitical priesthood. This objection can be answered on two fronts. From a historical and textual front, the book of Hebrews and the high-priesthood of Christ rarely factored into third century consideration of a ministerial priesthood. Perhaps the late acceptance of the book accounts for this.

On a more theological front, the third century writers never deny Christ’s high-priesthood; rather, they affirm it whole-heartedly even while maintaining a ministerial human priesthood. In other words, Christ’s priesthood and a ministerial priesthood were not deemed mutually exclusive to these writers, and in many cases, the two priesthoods are inter-related so that the ministerial priesthood derives from Christ’s priesthood. I believe there is more work to be done in this area and hope some day to address this broader question.

As for the objection that the book of Hebrews, by its abrogation of a Levitical priesthood, denies any possibility of a Christian appropriation of the Levitical priesthood I offer this brief defense. The book of Hebrews seems to be arguing against the literal continuation of the Levitical priesthood after Christ. The third century writers however, never appropriated this Israelite priesthood in a literal, successive manner; rather they saw the Levitical priesthood as a *type* or *figure* for Christian ministry such that there were analogies with important differences and transformations. The Christian priesthood, as I have shown, was portrayed in typological ways, and by such figural reading, the writers accepted the reality that the Levitical priesthood

now, I want to demonstrate that upon closer examination, early Christian writers (such as Paul, 1 Clement and the Didache) are not opposed to the notion of Christian leadership being cast in priestly molds.<sup>618</sup> This is different, to be sure, than saying that Paul calls Christian ministers “priests”, but it does demonstrate that the lack of designating a minister as a *hiereus* does not prove outright opposition to the appropriation of priestly imagery for Christian leadership. In other words, early Christian appropriation of priestly images and analogues, while not explicitly designating Christian leaders as priests, does provide a certain language, vocabulary and interpretive reading of Scripture (e.g. the use of typology) which shapes the way later writers will understand the developing office of the bishop and the way they would further develop and employ these motifs. There is then a continuity of thought along with development.

The most important Pauline text for my purposes comes from Romans 15:15-16 in which Paul reminds his audience of

the grace which was given to me by God to be a minister (*leitourgon*) of Christ Jesus to the gentiles in the priestly service (*hierourgounta*) of the gospel of God, in order that the offering (*prosphora*) of the gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.<sup>619</sup>

Paul begins this pericope by referring to himself as a “*leitourgon* of Christ Jesus.” Scholars have noted that the term *leitourgon* can have reference to both secular and sacred functions, and that

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no longer existed. In this sense, there is no contradiction with the book of Hebrews. Finally, as I will show below, Paul is quite willing to appropriate the Levitical priesthood for Christian ministry in similar ways. If one argues that the later Christian ministerial priesthood is at odds with the book of Hebrews, then so is the apostle Paul himself.

<sup>618</sup> I mention these two texts because they contain important passages that demonstrate the use of “priestly images” for leadership. Other second century texts such as Ignatius of Antioch and Justin Martyr do not contain any such priestly references; for that reason I have omitted them from this discussion. Irenaeus of Lyons (late second century), likewise never designates a Christian leader a priest, although see *Against Heresies* 4.8.3 for a brief passage that speaks of the “sacerdotal rank” of the apostles and all believers in general.

<sup>619</sup> All translations are my own unless indicated otherwise.

even in this same epistle, Paul uses the term to refer to the civil authorities (Rom 13:6). The LXX likewise uses this term to refer to both cultic duties and public service.<sup>620</sup> Which meaning does Paul intend in this passage?

Further reading indicates that Paul intends to evoke the cultic sense of *leitourgōs*, by referencing his “priestly service (*hierourgounta*) of the gospel of God.” *Hierourgein*, “to serve as a priest,” helps to qualify and explain in what sense Paul is a *leitourgōs*. What makes him a “minister” of Christ is his “priestly service” of preaching the gospel to the gentiles. Thus, as Joseph Fitzmeyer observes, although *leitourgōs* is not Paul’s only designation for his work, it remains significant nonetheless that in this passage, Paul does not describe his role as a “servant” (*diakonos*), nor “steward” (*oikonomos*), but as “cultic minister” (*leitourgōs*).<sup>621</sup> Combine his use of *leitourgōs* and *hierourgounta* with his sacrificial reference near the end of the passage (“in order that the offering [*prosphora*] of the gentiles might be acceptable”) and it becomes clear that Paul is explicitly working with priestly imagery to describe his apostolic work. Within this brief pericope, Paul employs three different terms (*leitourgōn*, *hierourgounta*, and *prosphora*) to describe his apostolic work—all of which relate to priestly service. The cumulative force of these terms compels us to recognize that Paul displays no reservations about describing Christian ministry as *priestly* in character, even if not in title.

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<sup>620</sup> For the neutral sense of public service to a master or king, see eg Josh 1:1; 2 Sam 13:18; and 1 Kgs 10:5. Used in the sense of cultic service, see eg Deut 17:12; 1 Sam 2:11; Is 61:6; Neh 10:40; and Lk 1:23. See also Joseph Ponthot, “L’Expression cultuelle du Ministère Paulinien selon Rom 15,16” in *L’Apôtre Paul: Personnalité, Style et Conception du Ministère*, ed. A Vanhoye (Leuven : Leuven University Press, 1986), 256, for some further discussion of this.

<sup>621</sup> Joseph Fitzmeyer, *Romans* (Anchor Bible Commentaries series 33) (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 711. Paul uses *diakonos* in 2 Cor 3:6 and *oikonomos* in 1 Cor 4:1.

Not all scholars, of course, are willing to accept this obvious reading. C.E.B. Cranfield, for example, while admitting that *leitourgos* “does have a sacral sense,” prefers to translate *hierourgounta* as “serve with a holy service” rather than “serve as a priest.”<sup>622</sup> He argues that *hierourgounta* carries a priestly reference only in relationship to a sacrificial offering and concludes that the impossibility of such usage here is “obvious.”<sup>623</sup> I find this to be amazing exegetical gymnastics, especially since Paul explicitly mentions the notion of sacrifice in his ministry: the *prosphora* of the gentiles are a part of his apostolic ministry! The preaching of the gospel to the gentiles, and in turn their conversion, becomes the offering (*prosphora*) which Paul submits to God. Much more to the point are Fitzmeyer’s comments that “in his mission to the Gentiles, Paul sees his function to be like that of a Jewish priest dedicated to the service of God in his Temple.”<sup>624</sup> Even Cranfield himself notes that the term *hierourgounta* can be used in a priestly sense in relationship to the task of preaching or teaching. In a discussion of Eleazer the priest, 4 Maccabees 7:8 witnesses a variant reading which renders *tous demiourgountas ton nomon* as *hierourgounta ton nomon*.<sup>625</sup> Thus, teaching or preaching can in fact be the object of priestly activity. Remember, too, as I have shown in earlier chapters, that part of the range of tasks assigned to Israelite priests entailed teaching or preaching the law (e.g. Deut. 33:10; Hos. 4:4-6; Mal. 2:5-8). There is nothing unusual about combining a priestly reference with the task of preaching, as Paul does here.

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<sup>622</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2 (ICC) (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 755-756.

<sup>623</sup> Cranfield, 756.

<sup>624</sup> Fitzmeyer, 711.

<sup>625</sup> As Cranfield notes, this variant is found in the Sixtine edition of the LXX, but not recorded in Rahlfs’ edition (756).

In our current passage, then, Paul combines both the *kerygmatic* and the sacrificial aspects of his work under the model of a “minister” (*leitourgos*) exercising his “priestly service” (*hierourgounta*). As such, he preaches the gospel to the gentiles *and* offers them as a *prosphora* acceptable to God. Paul may not call himself a *hiereus*, but he has no hesitations about the appropriation of the priestly image as a metaphor for Christian ministry.<sup>626</sup>

A second Pauline text worth examining is 1 Cor 9:13-14. Paul begins this chapter with a defense of his rights as an apostle, particularly his right to “material benefits” from his congregations. Even though Paul forgoes his right to such benefits, he reasserts the principle, asking, “Do you not know that those who work with the holy things (*ta hiera*) eat the things from the temple, and those who serve at the altar (*thusistēriō*) share in the altar? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who preach the gospel should live by the gospel” (1 Cor 9:13-14).<sup>627</sup> Here, Paul draws directly upon the analogy between Christian preachers and cultic priests, those who “work with holy things” and “serve at the altar.” Paul suggests that just as a priest receives his livelihood from his priestly work, so also the Christian minister ought to be supported by his gospel work. The analogy only works if there is some assumed continuity between the work of one and the work of the other.

On the surface, it is not clear whether Paul refers to Israelite priests or pagan priests, and as it stands, either reference could be taken legitimately. However, I suggest that while Paul

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<sup>626</sup> See also Everett L. Wilson, “The Priestly Service of the Gospel of God” *The Covenant Quarterly* 30 (1972):31-40; and Jean Colson, *Ministre de Jésus-Christ ou le Sacerdoce de l'Évangile* (Paris: Beauchesne et ses fils, 1965), 181-207 for a similar reading on this passage.

<sup>627</sup> The “command of the Lord” may refer to Matt 10:10 and Lk 10:7-8. See Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (ICC) (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1967), 187; William Orr and James Arthur Walther, *1 Corinthians* (Anchor Bible Series 32) (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 239.

leaves open the possibility of a pagan priestly analogy, he is most likely thinking of biblical priests. Just a few verses prior, Paul cites Deut 25:4 (“You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain”) and concludes: “Does God care about oxen or does he speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake” (1 Cor 9:9-10). He is drawing upon Old Testament models to make his case.

Then in chapter 10, he continues his appropriation of Old Testament events for Christian interpretation, stating:

I want you to know, brethren, that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink. . . Nevertheless God was not pleased with most of them. . . Now these things happened as types (*tupoi*) for us (1 Cor 10:1-6).

In other words, Paul sees the events of the Old Testament as working “types” and models upon which the Christian draws in order to gain a fuller realization of their own situation. The Old Testament law about oxen becomes a model for the rights of the Christian preacher. The Old Testament exodus event and wilderness wandering become “types” (*tupoi*) of the Christian life. Between these two bookend examples, Paul inserts the analogy between priestly service and Christian preaching, between priestly rights and apostolic rights. The surrounding context from 9:9-10:6 thus suggests that Paul is working primarily from Old Testament, biblical models, rather than pagan ones.<sup>628</sup> Paul, therefore, likely derives his reference to the entitlements of

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<sup>628</sup> Of course, they need not be mutually exclusive for Paul’s argument to work, and many in his congregation may have thought of pagan priests first. C.K. Barrett, for example, takes this reference to be primarily pagan priesthood, although even he admits “it does apply to the Jewish also” (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968], 207). Harry Nasuti makes the same point that “whether the temple referred to here is the Jewish Temple or the pagan temples (or both), the point [of Paul’s argument] is the same” (in “The woes of the prophets and the rights of the apostle : the internal dynamics of 1

priests for their work in the temple from Numbers 18:8-24 which speaks explicitly of the priests share of the “holy things”. As such, the work of the Christian leader “is analogous to that of the Levitical temple servants so far as support is concerned.”<sup>629</sup>

Again we see that while Paul does not designate himself a *hiereus* in explicit terminology, he freely draws upon biblical priestly service as an analogy for Christian leadership. Among his many arsenal of models and paradigms to explain the work of Christian ministry, the priestly image is one which Paul demonstrates no hesitation in using. Thus Paul provides a set of vocabulary and interpretive method which will continue to shape the thought and practice of the later church. Paul’s suggestion of a correspondence between Christian leadership and Old Testament priesthood is then picked up and developed by subsequent Christian thinkers. As we have seen in previous chapters, later writers turn to these same ideas in 1 Cor 9 for their understanding of the bishop as a priest.<sup>630</sup>

Even before the third century, the Didache<sup>631</sup> also commands: “you will give the first-fruits to the prophets, for they are your high-priests (*archieis*)”<sup>632</sup> taking Paul’s argument in 1 Cor 9 one step further. Where Paul was content to allow the priestly imagery to work out an

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Corinthians 9” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 [1988]: 246-264, at 251). The larger context of Paul’s argument, however, suggests he was thinking in biblical terms.

<sup>629</sup> Orr and Walther, 242.

<sup>630</sup> See for example *Didascalia*, chapter 8; *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.25, in Metzger 1:228-230; and Origen, *Hom. Numb.* 11.2.2, *SC*, vol. 2, 22-24.

<sup>631</sup> The Didache is dated widely, from 50 A.D. to the fourth century. For issues of dating, see *La Doctrine Des Douze Apôtres (Sources Chretiennes)*, ed. Willy Rordorf and André Tuilier (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1978), 91-99; *La Didache: Instructions Des apôtres*, ed. Jean Paul Audet (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1958), 187-210; and Ray Robert Noll, *Christian Ministerial Priesthood : A Search for its Beginnings in the Primary Documents of the Apostolic Fathers* (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1993), 281-284. There is general agreement that the Didache can be dated to the end of the first or beginning of the second century and is likely of Syrian origin.

<sup>632</sup> *Didache* 13.3, in *SC*, 190.

analogy with Christian leadership, the *Didache* goes further by explicitly designating one such Christian leader, the prophet, as a “high-priest”. Although it seems to advance the priestly imagery (which Paul was happy to employ) in more concrete terms (calling the prophets “high-priests”), such explicit designation will not occur again until Tertullian nearly a century later. For this reason, many scholars have suggested that these lines are a later interpolation into an earlier text.<sup>633</sup> The argument for a later interpolation runs something like this: since we know that priestly designations did not develop until the early third century, *any* priestly designations we find in earlier texts must be later interpolations.

Although this presents an interesting problem, it is not enough, in my opinion, to force the conclusion that 13.3 is late. The difficulty with such a conclusion is that, if it is the hand of an interpolator, one would expect the designation of “priest” to be applied to the bishop since (as I have shown in my earlier chapters), this is the office first designated as such. A later interpolator would be attempting to bolster such a designation in his own day. This is precisely what the author of this pericope does not do. The application of “priest” to the prophet, an office that receives very little attention by the third century, rather than the bishop, makes no sense. Thus, it seems more likely that 13.3 is original and demonstrates that the priestly image was still a working analogy, yet its application was not yet firmly decided upon. The *Didache* attaches it to prophets, but only a single time, and no other text of the second century follows suit in calling the Christian prophet a “high-priest”. Not much more can be said here except that the *Didache* represents an anomaly of explicit priestly nomenclature for Christian leadership. In this

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<sup>633</sup> See for example, Noll, 275-277; and J.P. Audet, *La Didache*, 105-110. Rordorf and Tuilier, on the other hand, argue that this allusion to the giving of first-fruits “est également caractéristique des milieux judéo-chrétiens du Ier siècle de notre ère” (95).



sense, while the Didache advances Paul's correspondence between Christian leadership and priestly service, the church's failure to seize upon the prophet-priest connection indicates that this understanding was not widespread.

I move now to the next significant passage: 1 Clement 40-44.<sup>634</sup> In this Roman epistle to the Corinthian Christians, the author, commonly designated as Clement, writes to address specific problems within the Christian community. Members in the Corinthian church had deposed several Christian leaders in defiance of their authority. Clement writes to admonish them toward better order and behavior. In doing so, Clement draws upon a multitude of examples from Jewish and Christian history to warn them against such divisions and jealousy.

One of the major themes of this work is that of order (*taxis*) as God's will for his people. The Corinthians, by their unlawful deposition of certain presbyters, have disrupted this order. Clement writes not only to remind them of God's concern for *taxis* in the community, but that Christ himself has established such order for the Church:

We are obligated to do all things with order (*taxei*)...The Master [i.e. Christ] has ordered sacrifices and services to be carried out, not at random and in a disorderly manner, but at ordained times and seasons. He has ordained, by his sovereign will, where and by whom he wants them to be carried out.<sup>635</sup>

In other words, the necessity of order (*taxis*) in the community is a matter of obedience to divine will. Clement then grounds the admonition for order in a specific example. Still speaking of the Christian situation in Corinth, Clement continues:

Therefore, those who make their offerings at the times commanded are acceptable and blessed; for following the laws of the Master, they do not sin. For to the high-priest

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<sup>634</sup> Generally recognized to have been written close to 96 A.D. See Clement of Rome, *Épître aux Corinthiens (Source Chrétiennes)*, ed. A. Jaubert (Paris : Les Éditions du Cerf, 1971), 15-23 ; and Colson, 216.

<sup>635</sup> 1 Clement 40.1-3, *SC*, 166.

(*archiei*) are given ministries of his own, to the priests (*hiereusin*) his own place has been prescribed, and upon the Levites (*leitais*) their own services are laid.<sup>636</sup>

The *taxis* required of the Christian community is linked with the Levitical priestly structure found in the Old Testament. The Old Testament priests had their proper services and their proper place; so too, Christian leaders and laity must respect their office.<sup>637</sup>

Clement then recounts that the prescription of the law required sacrifices be made at Jerusalem, in front of the sanctuary, with a blameless gift examined by the high-priest. Those who act against these prescriptions “will have death as their penalty,”<sup>638</sup> serving as a reminder to the Corinthians that as for Israel, so too for Christians, prescribed order cannot be flouted without consequence.

Clement drives home the point even further by recourse to another Old Testament example, namely, the strife and contention that arose over the Israelite priesthood in Numbers 17. In that situation, wise-Moses ordered twelve rods to be gathered, one for each tribe, and placed them in the Tabernacle. The next day the rod of Aaron had sprouted, indicating that he was divinely chosen for the priesthood and thereby preventing future strife.<sup>639</sup> Clement draws a parallel with Christian bishops:

Our apostles knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be strife concerning the name of the bishop. For this reason, receiving perfect foreknowledge, they established bishops and deacons and afterwards gave the additional law that when they died, other approved men would take over their ministry (*leitourgian*).<sup>640</sup>

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<sup>636</sup> 1 Clement 40.4-5, *SC*, 166.

<sup>637</sup> A. Jaubert (“Thèmes Lévitique dans la Prima Clementis” *Vigiliae Christianae* 18 [1964]: 195-97) notes as well that the phrase *en taxi* was often used to describe *priestly* order in Jewish and Christian literature (see 1 Esdras 1:5; 1QS 2.22; Lk 1:8; Heb. 5:10).

<sup>638</sup> 1 Clement 41.3, *SC*, 168.

<sup>639</sup> 1 Clement 43.

<sup>640</sup> 1 Clement 44.1-2, *SC*, 172.

Throughout this lengthy pericope (40-44), Clement's main concern is to re-establish proper order (*taxis*) in the Corinthian community. His recourse to apostolic models and Old Testament examples works to reinforce his concern for this order. Using different examples elsewhere in the epistle, he exhorts the same principle in chapter 20 (using the orderly nature of the cosmos) and in chapter 37 (using the organization of the Roman army). Thus, it is important to observe that as comfortable as Clement is with drawing upon priestly, even Levitical, paradigms for Christian leadership, his main concern is for order and not in explicitly designating any Christian leader a *hiereus*. Robert Noll rightly cautions, "To say that in paragraphs 43 and 44 Clement was trying to make the Christian *episcopo* into a priesthood, is to miss the whole point of the analogy,"<sup>641</sup> namely that order, not priesthood is the issue at stake. Likewise Ernst Dassmann concludes, "the comparison by Clement concerns, indeed, not the specific functions of the Levitical priesthood and ecclesial power, but the order required for both in which their service must be carried out."<sup>642</sup> For Clement, Christian polity mirrors the order displayed in Israelite priestly polity. Christian bishops are never designated "priests"; yet again, as in Paul, Clement does not shy away from the appropriation of priestly service as a working imagery for Christian ministry.

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<sup>641</sup> Noll, 79.

<sup>642</sup> „Die aus dem alttestamentlichen Kult heranzogenen Vergleiche fuer die notwendige Ordnung des Gottesdienstes, fuer das Verbot, willkuerlich Kleriker abzusetzen, sind eben Vergleiche, nicht mehr.“ Ernst Dassmann, "Die Bedeutung des Alten Testaments fuer das Verstaendnis des kirchlichen Amtes in der fruehpatriistischen Theologie" *Bibel und Leben* 11 (1970): 203. See also Hans von Campenhausen for similar conclusions (*Kirchliches Amt und geistliche Vollmacht in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* [Tubingen: Mohr, 1963], 100.

## Continuity with Israel

As should be obvious by now, behind each of these texts (Paul, the Didache and Clement) is an underlying notion of the Church as a continuation of Israel with transformation. The assumption is that the Church is in such relationship with biblical Israel that comparisons between the Church and Israel and between Christian leadership and Israelite leadership are accepted entirely without apology. In other words, the idea expressed by Paul in 1 Cor 10:6 that “these things were types (*tupoi*) for us” was a working ecclesiological hermeneutic for the earliest Christian thinkers. Old Testament events and institutions become working “types” which can be appropriated and applied to Christian reality.

In Galatians 3 for example, Paul works out a careful argument that the message he has preached to the gentiles (and their subsequent acceptance of Christ as Messiah) is in fact nothing short of God’s fulfillment of his promises to Abraham. He concludes chapter 3 with a climactic summary statement: “But if you are Christ’s, then you are the offspring of Abraham, heirs according to the promise” (3:29). The work of God through Christ, says Paul, is not a betrayal of Israel or a discarding of Israel, but a fulfillment, a renewing of Israel. It is what David Yeago calls a “re-narration of the story of Israel.”<sup>643</sup> The connection, then, between the Church and Israel is so intimate that Paul can conclude his epistle to a Gentile church: “Peace and mercy upon all those who walk by this rule, and on the Israel of God (*Israel tou Theou*)” (6:15).

Likewise in Romans 9-11, Paul articulates his understanding that “Israel” has been redefined. Pure race or lineage does not make one a child of Abraham (9:6-8); rather those who

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<sup>643</sup> David Yeago, “Messiah’s People: The Culture of the Church in the Midst of the Nations” *Pro Ecclesia* 6 no.1 (1997): 153. Yeago’s work is in large part based upon his reading of Paul and Pauline texts.

have embraced “righteousness through faith” (9:30), whether Jew or Gentile, are counted among the people of God. The Gentiles are said to be “grafted in” (11:17) to the vine of Israel, thereby making gentiles Israelites. Thus the church, as Paul sees it, is nothing less than God’s Israel fulfilled and expanded to include the gentiles. It is for this reason that he can say that gentile believers, like Isaac, are “children of promise” (Gal 4:28), and that the Old Testament events “were types for us”, that is for Gentile Christians (1 Cor 10:6).

Likewise the Didache and 1 Clement both demonstrate an implicit acceptance of a correspondence between Israel and the Church. Although there is no monolithic portrayal of Jews and Judaism by Christian writers in the sub-apostolic period, nevertheless, there are certain shared perspectives on God’s work with Israel and the Church, namely that Israel was “the most important vehicle of God’s revelation to mankind before Christ,”<sup>644</sup> and that the Church holds some element of continuity with God’s prior work through Israel.

The Didache, for example, opens with six chapters on the “2-ways”, a form of parenesis with clear Jewish roots.<sup>645</sup> Didache 1.2, drawing upon Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18, commands: “You will love the God who made you and your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>646</sup> 2.1-3 explicitly draws upon the Decalogue as prescriptions for the Christian community (not to murder, commit adultery, steal, covet, or bear false witness). Likewise, its prescriptions and rules about the offering of first-fruits (ch 13) also indicates influence from Old Testament and Jewish practice.

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<sup>644</sup> See Demetrios Constantelos, “Jews and Judaism in the Early Greek Fathers (100 A.D. – 500 A.D.)” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 23 (1978): 147. The *Epistle of Barnabas* might be one exception to this generality.

<sup>645</sup> For recent discussions of the Jewish roots of the Didache, see Huub van de Sandt and David Flusser, *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002); and Marcello de Verme, *Didache and Judaism: Jewish Roots of an Ancient Christian-Jewish Work* (New York: T & T Clark, 2004).

<sup>646</sup> Didache 1.2, SC, 142.

From such texts, we can well conclude with J.H. Charlesworth that this particular community thought “they belonged within Israel and continued to be faithful ‘Jews’”.<sup>647</sup>

Clement also draws upon a myriad of Old Testament examples for the church such as Abel, Jacob, Moses, Noah, Jonah, Elijah, and Abraham. Elsewhere, considering Deut. 32:8-9 regarding Israel being assigned as “the portion (*meris*) of the Lord” (32:9), he concludes: “Therefore since we [i.e. the Church] are a holy portion (*hagia meris*), let us do all the things of holiness.”<sup>648</sup> Christians, according to Clement, are separate from both “Gentiles” (i.e. pagans) and “Jews” while maintaining a continuity with the Israel of the Old Testament.<sup>649</sup>

Given this ecclesiological backdrop to Paul, the Didache and 1 Clement, it should come as no surprise that they feel free to play on other Old Testament images and events such as the priesthood. Paul and the Didache liken Christian leadership to the priestly ministry of *leitourgia*, such that Christian ministers should be supported by their congregations, just as Israelite priests were supported by the Israelites. Clement’s robust Church-Israel ecclesiology enables him, likewise, to draw upon the orderliness of OT priesthood as a model for order and structure in Christian churches. Important to note, this is not the same thing as saying explicitly that Christian leaders are Christian priests, but it does demonstrate that 1.) the Church-Israel continuity is clearly a part of Paul’s (and the early Church’s) thinking and 2.) early Christians had no objection to using the Israelite priestly imagery as a vivid working analogy or typology for the current Christian ministry of their day.

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<sup>647</sup> In the preface of Verme’s work (*Didache and Judaism*, xii).

<sup>648</sup> 1 Clement 29-30, *SC*, 148. This of course echoes the earlier sentiments of 1 Pet 2:9: “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people.”

<sup>649</sup> See Stanley Harakas’ comments, “The Relationship of Church and Synagogue in the Apostolic Fathers” *St. Vladimir’s Seminary Quarterly* 11 no.3 (1967): 125-26, 135.

Thus, of the two aspects I argued lay behind the third century designation of a Christian bishop as a “priest”, the first (the Church in continuity with Israel) is not only found in the earliest Christian texts, but also lies as the backdrop for the ease with which priestly images are used as analogies for Christian ministry. The Church-as-Israel trajectory is present and would continue to shape the way later Christian writers understood the Church and its ministerial leadership.

### **The Church as a Culture or Polis**

What, then, of the second aspect, that of the Church as a *polis* or “culture”? Does this reality find expression in earlier Christian texts such as the New Testament and sub-apostolic writers? A number of recent scholars have begun to demonstrate forcefully that Christianity, from the very beginning, was a “public” religion with political ramifications.<sup>650</sup> Perhaps one of the most outspoken and significant advocates of such an understanding of the church was the German Catholic theologian of the early twentieth century, Erik Peterson.<sup>651</sup> Critiquing primarily the German Protestantism of his day and its notion of the church as a non-dogmatic, non-sacramental, non-legalistic entity, Peterson articulated a defense of the Church as a visible and public “assembly of the full citizens of the heavenly city, gathering to perform the special cultic actions. The cult which it celebrates is a public cult and not the celebration of the

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<sup>650</sup> See for example, Erik Peterson, “Von den Engeln” and “Die Kirche” in *Theologische Traktate* (Wurzburg: Echter, 1951), 327-407 and 411-429. Michael Hollerich, “Retrieving a Neglected Critique of the Church, Theology and Secularization in Weimar Germany” *Pro Ecclesia* 2 no.3 (1993):305-332; Paul Corby Finney, *The Invisible God: The Earliest Christians on Art* (New York: Oxford, 1994), esp. 104-108 and 287-289; Reinhard Hütter, “The Church as Public: Dogma, Practice, and the Holy Spirit” *Pro Ecclesia* 3 no.3 (1994): 334-361; Yeago, 146-171; and Peter Leithart, *Against Christianity* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003), esp. 16-90.

<sup>651</sup> I am indebted to Michael Hollerich’s insightful summary of Peterson’s work (mentioned in the previous footnote).

mysteries.”<sup>652</sup> As such, Peterson repeatedly stressed the “public and legal character” (*öffentlich-rechtlichen Charakter*) of the Church. Likewise, Peterson argued that the early Christian liturgy (e.g. baptism, Eucharist, marriage, ordination, even Psalm-singing) was a *public* ritual, not a private action, and through such performance the church appropriated for itself and transformed political symbols and meaning.<sup>653</sup> Where do scholars such as Peterson derive this understanding of the early church?

Consider for example the response of the earliest followers of Jesus after Acts 2. It was not to hide in private, but to take the message forth, declaring it publicly both in the synagogue and other populated venues (cf. Acts 17). The earliest Christian apologists also, as Paul Finney observes, “were primarily concerned to draw Christianity into the public realm. They sought to make their religion accessible, intelligible, and above all, visible.”<sup>654</sup> In other words, Christianity by its very theological claims and social structures was conceived as a vital alternate society living in distinction from the Greco-Roman citizens and Second-Temple Jews. As David Yeago notes, “the church is a public reality in its own right, the civic assembly of the eschatological city.”<sup>655</sup> This “public reality” is constituted both by its religio-political beliefs and by its socio-theological practices such that “the church is a culture in its own right; the church has its own culture, which is not simply a function of the cultures of the nations among which it dwells.”<sup>656</sup> It is worth recalling from my introduction the working definition of

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<sup>652</sup> “Versammlung der Vollbürger der Himmelsstadt. Die Kult, den sie feiert, ist ein öffentlicher Kult und keine Mysterienfeier.” Peterson, “Die Kirche,” 422.

<sup>653</sup> Peterson, “Von den Engeln,” 369-371. See also Hollerich, 315, for a succinct summary of these ideas in Peterson.

<sup>654</sup> Finney, *Invisible God*, 288.

<sup>655</sup> Yeago, 150.

<sup>656</sup> Yeago, 150.



“culture” which I am using, taken also from Yeago: “a complex of symbols and practices, communally acknowledged as significant, enclosed within an overarching meta-narrative, which shapes the perceptions, experience, and sense of identity of a community.”<sup>657</sup> (Remember the example of American patriotism and the story of the new world as a ‘civic culture’ in its own right).

Further, the Church’s “culture” or “*Öffentlichkeit*” (in the words of Erik Peterson), by its claims and practices, takes on a distinctly politico-theological dimension such that Reinhard Hütter is correct in suggesting that for Christianity, “‘public’ and ‘political’ are synonyms.”<sup>658</sup> Consider the *kerymatic* message found so often in the New Testament: “Jesus is Lord.” Peter’s public preaching to the Roman centurion Cornelius and his household concludes with the declaration about Jesus: “This one is Lord of all” (*houtos estin pantōn kurios*). These words in the ears of Roman citizens and officials could not but evoke a political counter claim to the

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<sup>657</sup> Yeago, 150. This, of course, is different than defining “culture” as connected to ethnicity, geography, language, and so on. Then again, “American culture” lacks many of these features as well; yet, we are able to speak in some sense of the culture of America. N.T. Wright notes, for example, that Paul “is talking about the transfer from one community to another”, but that the new community is marked out by certain beliefs (and I would add rites) “rather than by its racial origin, its dietary customs, its physical badges” (“Putting Paul Together Again: Toward a Synthesis of Pauline Theology [1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philippians, and Philemon]” in *Pauline Theology*, vol. 1, ed. Jouette Bassler [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991], 201-202). Thus “culture” need not be tied necessarily to race, language or geography.

For this reason, I take exception to Paul Corby Finney’s conclusion that Christianity was not a culture and that “the earliest Christians lacked the independent cultural foundations that gave other religions their identity” (*Invisible God*, 107). His conclusion derives from an understanding of culture as consisting of an *ethnos* with attributes of “land, government, economy, blood (kinship), language, religion and art” (*Invisible God*, 106). Once we understand “culture” more broadly as defined above, then we can conclude that the Church was, in fact, a culture, even if not entirely visible to outsiders. Finney wants to suggest that the existence of “material culture” is the only indication of a “cultural reality” (*Invisible God*, 107). I find this to be too narrow a definition of culture, and argue instead that the emergence of a material culture around 200 A.D. is the visible expression of a cultural reality already present.

<sup>658</sup> Hütter, 349.

assertion that “*ho pantōn kurios kaisar*” (Caesar is lord of all).<sup>659</sup> The claims that “this one (*houtos*)” was Lord, and not Caesar, were radically politico-theological claims, and those who followed Jesus were marking themselves as a new *polis*, under a new *kurios*. Seen from this light, Christianity was not just one private religion subsumed under the larger Empire or within smaller *poleis*. On the contrary, Christians saw themselves as an alternative society, a new *polis* at odds with the surrounding cultures of the Empire. As Reinhard Hütter suggests, this social and theological reality “constituted the church as an identifiable public in distinction from the theologico-political public of the *Pax Romana*”<sup>660</sup> making the church “nothing less than a revolution of the ancient political superstructure of *polis* and *oikos*.”<sup>661</sup>

One can find similar claims in Paul’s epistle to the Philippians.<sup>662</sup> Writing to citizens of a Roman colony, Paul employs the language of both community (*koinonia*) and politics (*politeuma*), two concepts which often overlapped in antiquity. Stanley Stowers notes that “Greek and Roman writers frequently pointed out that friendship is the basis for both political and economic activity and institutions.”<sup>663</sup> Aristotle, for example, said, “every city (*polis*) is some sort of community (*koiononian*) and every community (*koinonian*) has been established for the purpose of some good ... The best community is called the city (*polis*), the political

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<sup>659</sup> Epictetus, *Discourse* 4.1.12, ed. W.A. Oldfather, *The Loeb Classical Library*, vol. 2 (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1928), 246-248. For a fuller discussion of the political ramifications of the Christians’ claim, see Kavin Rowe, “Luke-Acts and the Imperial Cult: A Way through the Conundrum?” *JSNT* 27 no.3 (2005): 279-300, esp. 290-300.

<sup>660</sup> Hütter, 348.

<sup>661</sup> Hütter, 353.

<sup>662</sup> For the following section, I am indebted to Peter Leithart for his exposition of this aspect of Philippians (*Against Christianity*, 27-30).

<sup>663</sup> Stanley Stowers, “Friends and Enemies in the Politics of Heaven” in *Pauline Theology*, vol. 1, ed. Bassler (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 107.

community (*he koinonia he politike*).<sup>664</sup> Thus, when Paul rejoices in their “partnership (*koinonia*) in the gospel” (1:5) and calls them “my partners (*sugkoinōnous mou*) of the gospel” (1:7), he is designating them as a community of “friends”, a *koinonia*. As such, the Christian community is therefore inherently political—their *koinonia* works as a rival *polis* to the surrounding *polis* of Philippi.

One can see this political dimension early in the letter when Paul says, “Only live as citizens (*politeuesthe*) worthy of the gospel of Christ” (1:27). Translations such as “let your manner of life be” (RSV) or “conduct yourselves” (NASB) veil the distinctly political implications of Paul’s words. Paul is not speaking here of general Christian living, but of the lifestyle of the new *polis* which is the Christian *koinonia*.

Later, in 3:20, this political edge of the Christian community takes its sharpest form. There Paul reminds the Philippians that their citizenship as Romans in Philippi must be forsaken for the gospel: “For our citizenship (*politeuma*) belongs in heaven, from which we wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (*sōtēra kurion Iesoun Christon*).” As N.T. Wright comments, “These are Caesar-titles. The whole verse says: Jesus is Lord, and Caesar isn’t. Caesar’s empire, of which Philippi is a colonial outpost, is the parody; Jesus’ empire, of which the Philippian church is the colonial outpost, is the reality.”<sup>665</sup> The Christian *koinonia* is a Christian *polis*.<sup>666</sup>

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<sup>664</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 1252a1-6, in *The Loeb Classical Library*, ed. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Press, 1932), 2.

<sup>665</sup> N.T. Wright, “Paul’s Gospel and Caesar’s Empire” in *Paul and Politics: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl*, ed. Richard Horsley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2000), 173. See also Wes Howard-Brook, *The Church Before Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), 35.

<sup>666</sup> Of course in other texts, Paul harbors no ill-will toward the Roman Empire. In Romans 13:1, for example, he explicitly commands: “Let everyone be subject to the governing

These statements about Jesus as *pantōn kurios* and the admonitions to “live as citizens of heaven (*politeuesthe*)” are politico-theological claims; they are assertions which tell us something about the self-identity of the earliest Christians. They saw themselves as a unique *polis*, a distinct alternative society to the *polis* and larger culture around them. As such, this newly forming *polis* would of necessity require boundaries delineating membership, rules to govern the community, and above all, leadership that would conduct the community’s living and worship. Moreover, because these Christians intended more than empty religio-political rhetoric, it should come as no surprise that we can also gain a window into their social world: the boundaries, rules and leadership of this new *polis*. For the sake of space, I will examine just one passage which gives us such a glimpse.<sup>667</sup>

1 Corinthians 10-11 describes in some detail Christian worship in the community at Corinth. At the center of Paul’s discussion in these chapters is the fellowship meal known as the Lord’s Supper, or the Eucharist. Since table fellowship in antiquity was crucial to community definition and formed and held together the ancient *polis*,<sup>668</sup> Paul is quite concerned to deal with

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authorities.” Nevertheless, his claims that Christ is the *kurios* and that the Church has its “citizenship” elsewhere clearly indicates a political theology in distinction from the surrounding Roman culture.

<sup>667</sup> I will be examining the Christian meal that came to be known as the Eucharist, but the initiatory rite of baptism could equally be used as an example. For some detailed discussion of baptism from a socio-theological perspective, see Peter Leithart, *The Priesthood of the Plebs: A Theology of Baptism* (Eugen, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003).

<sup>668</sup> In addition to the issues I will discuss in 1 Cor 10-11, consider also Galatians 2 for an example of how crucial meal fellowship was in antiquity. On the importance of meals in ancient society, see Simon Price, *Religions of the Ancient Greeks* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1999), 25-46; Keith Bradley, “The Roman Family at Dinner” in *Meals in a Social Context: Aspects of the Communal Meal in the Hellenistic and Roman World*, ed. Inge Nielsen and Hanne Sigismund Nielsen (Aarhus, DK: Aarhus U.P. 1998), 36-55; and L. Michael White, “Regulating Fellowship in the Communal Meal: Early Jewish and Christian Evidence” in *Meals in a Social*

certain aberrations he sees in the Corinthian meal conduct.<sup>669</sup> Meals demonstrate a social reality. Normally stratified by class and economic factors, Paul urges the Corinthians toward a counter-cultural reality: full and equal participation in the Christian meal. (See 11:20-22, 33-34 for the abuses Paul addresses and the solutions he offers). Jews and Greeks, rich and poor are all to participate equally, thus demonstrating publicly the very reality and nature of their community in Christ. Paul reminds them that this meal displays a public reality not only because it “proclaims the Lord’s death until he comes” (11:26) but also in its proclamation about the unity of “the body” (*ta sōma*) of believers. Yeago is correct then in suggesting that “the ritual meal-practice enacts publicly that into which baptism initiates [and] ... determines the communal identity of the *ekklesia* and its members, as well as the social texture of its common life.”<sup>670</sup> According to Paul, the Christian sacrament is not a private, individual experience, but rather a social and communal event, public in character, commanded by Christ and conducted by appropriate leaders in the community (“For I received from the Lord that which I delivered to you...” [11:23]). Paul’s admonitions thus perpetuate the boundaries established by the Christian meal (in-group vs. out-group) as well as provide further rules and instructions for this new community. As a leader, Paul asserts his authority and responsibility to ensure this social-communal Christian event proceeds properly, and from his words in 11:23 he indicates that there is a responsible leadership present in the Corinthian community who also must heed his words.

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*Context: Aspects of the Communal Meal in the Hellenistic and Roman World*, ed. Inge Nielsen and Hanne Sigismund Nielsen (Aarhus, DK: Aarhus U.P. 1998), 177-205.

<sup>669</sup> See Gerd Theissen’s chapter “Social Integration and Sacramental Activity: An Analysis of 1 Cor. 11:17-34” in *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*, ed. Ibid, trans. John H. Schütz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), esp. 147-163.

<sup>670</sup> Yeago, 157.

Furthermore, the preceding chapter (1 Cor 10) provides us with a further glimpse into the meaning of the meal and its construal in relationship to the surrounding culture. There, Paul warns the Corinthians against idolatry, but immediately moves into a discussion of the Eucharist as a sacrificial meal:

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not participation (*koinonia*) in the blood of Christ; and the bread which we break, is it not participation (*koinonia*) in the body of Christ? . . . Consider Israel according to the flesh. Are not those who eat the sacrifices (*thusias*) participants (*koiōnonoi*) in the altar (*thusiasterion*)? What then am I saying, that the food of the idols is anything or that an idol is anything? No, but that which they sacrifice (*thuouein*), they sacrifice to demons and not to God. But I do not want you to be participants (*koinōnouos*) with demons. You are not able to drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you are not able to partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons (10:16-22).

Throughout this passage, Paul is interweaving the themes of sacrifice (*thusia*) and participation (*koinonia*). Just as the Israelites participated in the altar through their sacrifices, and pagans participate with demons through their sacrifices, so too the Christian fellowship meal (cast now also as a sacrifice)<sup>671</sup> is a participation with Christ himself. Again, the political dimensions of the Christian meal come through. The Christian Eucharist is not a private gathering of friends and associates, but a public event, a communal sacrifice-alternative to the Greco-Roman participation in their local deities and sacrifices. As Yeago observes, “when Paul sets the church’s *koinonia* in Messiah’s sacrifice over against the sacrificial practices of the Gentiles, he is effectively setting the *ekklesia* over against the ancient *polis* as a distinct, public, socio-cultural

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<sup>671</sup> Many scholars want to downplay this “sacrificial” aspect of the Christian meal, but the force of Paul’s argument only works precisely if that aspect is assumed. For some discussion of this text in favor of such a reading, see especially Sverre Aalen, “Das Abendmahl als Opfermahl im Neuen Testament” *Novum Testamentum* 6 (1963): 128-152, esp. 128-146; and Helmut Moll, *Die Lehre von der Eucharistie als Opfer: Ein dogmengeschichtliche Untersuchung von Neuen Testament bis Irenaus Lyon* (Koln: Peter Hanstein Verlag, 1975), esp. 60-66.

entity.”<sup>672</sup> The Christian social structure, embodied in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, proclaimed itself a new *polis*, an alternative society in the ancient world, complete with its own boundary markers, rites, rules and leadership.<sup>673</sup>

Without going into too much detail, the same portrayal of the Church as a functioning *polis*, an alternate society, is found in the Didache and 1 Clement. The Didache, for example, delineates clear rules for the community, including the boundary markers of baptism and Eucharist (ch 7-15). Proper leadership functions are addressed and the community is depicted as a unique society in the broader culture. Likewise, 1 Clement displays a clear indication that structure and order is what constitutes the church. As Harakas notes, the Christian churches “are obviously an organized, clearly differentiated body.”<sup>674</sup> Hans von Campenhausen also notes this organizational reality to the church in 1 Clement: “It is no longer an issue of formerly choosing individual persons . . . but of an institution, which must be upheld as such and proscribed in its supporters.”<sup>675</sup> In fact, this is precisely the point Clement urges; the Church is an alternate society like Israel, a *polis* of its own, to such a degree that the order found in one nation (Israel) quite readily applies to the Christian community, the church (ch 40-44). Such order, says Clement, must not be taken lightly.

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<sup>672</sup> Yeago, 157.

<sup>673</sup> In addition to the developing offices of ministry in the early church, consider also 1 Cor 6:1-11 where Paul admonishes believers not to go to the secular courts but to handle justice and judgment within the Church itself.

<sup>674</sup> Harakas, 134.

<sup>675</sup> “Es geht nicht mehr um einmal erwählte Einzelpersonen . . . sondern es geht um eine Institution, die als solche gewahrt und in ihren Trägern geachtet werden muss.” Von Campenhausen, *Kirchliches Amt*, 99.

### Politico-Theological Ecclesiology and the Priesthood

Stepping back a moment from these observations on the Church as a *polis* or a culture in its own right,<sup>676</sup> we can now add the observations made earlier about the Church construing itself as the fulfillment of Israel. Combined they create a forceful politico-theological assertion that the new *polis* of the Church, this new alternate society in the Greco-Roman world, was nothing less than the renewed *polis* of Israel. Consider the sacrificial Eucharist in 1 Corinthians 10 again. In setting up such a religio-political meal, Leithart remarks:

the church was simply following her Jewish predecessor. Israel was also a nation organized and bounded by festivals. Her calendar was a calendar of feasts and sacrifices...By setting up a new festival alongside the Jewish synagogue and Greek city, the Church established an alternative *agora* and marked out new contours of civic order.<sup>677</sup>

The Church was a unique *polis*, distinctly marked as an alternate society in continuity with the nation of Israel.

Likewise, and perhaps most foundational to early Christian ecclesiology, the term *ekklesia* itself carries this dual notion of the Church as a politico-theological community, a renewed Israel existing as an alternate *polis* in the Greco-Roman world. In this milieu, *ekklesia* meant “civic assembly”, or as Erik Peterson notes, “a well known institution of the *polis*. It is

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<sup>676</sup> For the first three centuries, this ecclesial understanding was that the church was a culture “amidst the culture of the nations” (Yeago, 146). By the time we get to post-Constantine Eusebius, that ecclesiology has shifted to understanding the church as the Roman *polis* “of the Empire.”

<sup>677</sup> Leithart, *Against Christianity*, 89-90.



the assembly of the full citizens of a *polis*, gathering for the execution of legal actions.”<sup>678</sup> When Aristotle, for example, spoke of the assembly of citizens in a *polis*, he spoke of the *ekklesia*.<sup>679</sup>

Yet the Septuagint also frequently employed this term to describe the nation of Israel. *Ekklesia* occurs just over 100 times in the LXX, nearly all as a translation of the Hebrew *qahal*. Deut 9:10 and 18:16, for example, speak of the constitution of Israel as a nation at Sinai as “the day of assembly (*hēmera ekklēsiās*).” 1 Kings 8:14 twice speaks of Solomon’s blessing of “the assembly of Israel (*ekklēsia Israēl*).” Many instances speak of the community of Israel specifically as the “assembly of the Lord” (*ekklēsia tou kuriou*) such as 1 Chron 28:8: “Now therefore in the sight of all Israel, the *ekklēsia kuriou*, and in the presence of our God...”<sup>680</sup> The use of the term *ekklesia* by early Christians, then, would have evoked a national-political meaning in two directions. As Howard-Brook explains, “Hellenized Jews raised on the Septuagint . . . would hear in *ekklesia* the echo of God’s calling out of Egypt a people destined to live outside of Egypt’s orbit. Educated Gentiles who felt ‘called to be saints’ would likely recognize in *ekklesia* the ‘ancient’ tradition of Greek democracy.”<sup>681</sup> The earliest Christians were consciously identifying with both aspects of *ekklesia* such that the early church’s self identity displayed a thoroughly politico-theological ecclesiology.<sup>682</sup> The church was in continuity with Israel, existing in the space-time world as an alternate *polis*, with its own rites, organization, rules and leadership.

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<sup>678</sup> Peterson, “Die Kirche” in *Theologische Traktate* (Wurzburg: Echter, 1951), 422.

<sup>679</sup> E.g. *Politics* 1285a11, *Loeb*, 248.

<sup>680</sup> See also e.g. Deut 23:2; Neh 13:1; and Mic 2:5.

<sup>681</sup> Howard-Brook, 34.

<sup>682</sup> E.g. consider the book of Galatians, written “to the *ekklesiās* of Galatia”. In a book written to Gentiles, Paul at the same time builds a careful case for the church’s continuity with Israel and the promises to Abraham so that the church is the *Israel tou theou*. In this context, *ekklesia* connotes both a Greco-Roman political gathering, and the assembly of Israel.

I return now to the issue of priesthood. How does this politico-theological ecclesiology relate to the development of a Christian ministerial priesthood? David Yeago's words are timely:

The most striking thing about the church's culture, as Paul presents it, is that it is Israelite, but not, strictly speaking, Jewish... The church is Israel; it is what has become of Israel now that Messiah has come and the blessing of Abraham is going out to the gentiles. But at the same time, the church is not exactly 'Jewish', because it is an Israel in which covenant membership no longer rests on circumcision and Torah observance.<sup>683</sup>

Thus, thinking back on our definition of culture as entailing symbols and practices placed within the framework of a meta-narrative, one discovers that the organizing meta-narrative of the early church (especially Paul), was the story of Israel.<sup>684</sup> The Christian leadership which oversaw the life and worship of this fulfilled Israel-*polis* already had, ecclesiologically speaking, links and correspondences with Israelite ministerial leadership (as we saw in Paul and later in 1 Clement). Their tasks of presiding over worship (especially the liturgical responsibilities, but also the task of preaching) comported very well with similar duties found in the Old Testament for Israelite priests (such as offering sacrifices and teaching the law). Thus, having already embraced the notion of the Church as a *polis* fulfilling Israel, it is no stretch to understand why the Christian leadership would come to adhere to Israelite offices of priestly leadership.

In other words, the development of a Christian ministerial priesthood in the third century is not a break with earlier Christian thought and practice. Rather, the trajectories of language and ideas which shaped the church in this direction were already present from the first century. New conditions in later centuries only created an important context in which these trajectories could

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<sup>683</sup> Yeago, 155. He further remarks, "Notice that this is not supercessionist; Paul does not think that the church is a new Israel, a replacement for Israel, but rather Israel itself renewed by the coming of the Messiah" (155).

<sup>684</sup> See Yeago, 156.

take fuller shape and expression. For example, once the Temple is destroyed in 70 A.D. cultic worship by Jewish priests in the Jerusalem Temple was impossible. The institutions of sacrifice and priesthood had to take on a new character, especially after the definitive defeat of the Jews by the Romans in 135 A.D. Andrew Chester, for example, notes that the hopes for God's deliverance and the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple after 70 A.D. did not immediately die out, but were instead fortified and reinforced until 135.<sup>685</sup> The Bar Kochba revolt from 132-135 A.D. indicates, if nothing else, this sustained hope. With the consequential Roman ban on Jews in Jerusalem, 135 A.D. marks, as Stephen Wilson has argued, the much more decisive date for the definitive change in both Christianity and Judaism. There was now no longer a place to offer sacrifice; the role of the Jewish priest, which had continued to be active up until that time, by necessity receded into the background. As I discussed in my earlier chapters, within post second-Temple Judaism itself, the priestly authority and role was being superseded by the rabbinic sage.<sup>686</sup> The previously conspicuous priestly office, in its public role over the people and their animal sacrifice, was now disappearing.

Further, as the Church wrestled with the Marcionite debate, it came to affirm the value and legitimacy of the Old Testament as books for the Church. This, of course, was already the case for the earliest Christian writers such as Paul, but further clarification was needed in the years to come. As the church re-affirmed the Jewish Scriptures as their own, there was a strengthening of identification with the Israel of the Bible. Consider, for example, Irenaeus and his proto-covenant theology of the late second century. Only in affirming both the continuities

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<sup>685</sup> Andrew Chester, "The Parting of the Ways: Eschatology and Messianic Hope" in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways A.D. 70-135*, ed. James D.G. Dunn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 258-59.

<sup>686</sup> See chapter 4 (*Didascalia Apostolorum*) especially.

with, yet also the transformation of Israel, did the Church retain the Old Testament and the identification of the church as the people of God, “Israel”. The continued affirmation of the Church in continuity with Israel, within the new post-135 A.D. context, enabled the Church to appropriate and apply for themselves more concretely certain Israelite structures and institutions such as the model of Levitical priesthood.

Last, as I have shown, the Christian church demonstrated quite early a conscious awareness of itself as a *polis*, an alternate culture in the midst of the cultures of the nations, and was “public” in its message, organization, rituals, leadership and so on. Nevertheless, something was lacking. Scholars such as L. Michael White and Paul Finney have demonstrated the noticeable shift in the expression of this Christian “culture” around the turn of the third century. Before that time, the earliest Christians lacked two essential things: land and capital.<sup>687</sup> Once they had grown enough, they began to acquire property and produce distinctly Christian art. As Finney says, they were “transformed into something new, namely, a religious culture *materially* defined.”<sup>688</sup> The previous notion of the Church as a unique *polis* solidified in more concrete and material ways. One significant way in which this demonstrated itself was in the emergence of permanent places of worship. L. Michael White, for example, found that this shift from pure house church to more permanent worship structures took place between 180-200 A.D. During this period, Christians began to renovate existing structures, and eventually to build new structures, for the purpose of Christian assembly and worship. In other words, a newly visible “sacred space” emerged at the end of the second and beginning of the third century.

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<sup>687</sup> Finney, *Invisible God*, 108.

<sup>688</sup> Finney, *Invisible God*, 110, emphasis mine.

As I have shown in the preceding chapters, it is clear that the rise of a Christian ministerial priesthood takes place precisely in this milieu. More important, the Christian writers of this period demonstrate an awareness of such “sacred space” within their articulations and discussions of Christian leaders as “priests.” The roles and functions entailed in the office of Christian bishop are cast in the mold of Israelite priesthood as ones responsible to attend to the holy things. Just as the old covenant priests “stand and minister” before the Lord and his house, offering sacrifices, teaching the law, and guarding the sanctity of the Temple, so too Christian writers of the third and early fourth centuries depict the Christian bishop as a “priest” who “stands and ministers” before the Lord, offering the Church’s sacrifices, teaching and preaching the Word, and guarding worship space. A review of my research is now in order to highlight again these themes.

### **Summary of the Present Study**

I began with an examination of Tertullian of Carthage, the first consistent witness to Christian leadership being designated a “priest”. There I discovered the first indications of an assumed connection between a Christian ministerial priesthood and a politico-theological ecclesiology in the context of an emerging Christian material culture. Tertullian twice grounds his priestly designations in Old Testament texts such that the Levitical priesthood acts as a *figura* for Christian leadership. The relationship between this politico-theological ecclesiology and an emerging Christian material culture appears especially in his treatise *On Modesty*, where Tertullian describes the Christian leaders as *sacerdotes* who, like the Israelite priests, must guard the sanctity (*sanctitas*) of the worship space, banishing the egregious sinner “from the threshold of the Church.”

The western Church Order, *Apostolic Tradition*, also demonstrates this link between priesthood and politico-theological ecclesiology in similarly subtle ways. The Christian bishop is described as one who “stands and ministers” before the Lord, who offers the Eucharist and who attends to Christian sacred space. The similarities between the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament are striking, indicating the author’s intentional evocation of the Levitical priesthood as a model or “type” for Christian leadership. This is, of course, one of the earliest periods of the development of a Christian material culture and as such, the *AT* only indicates its awareness to such emerging Christian space in the subtlest of terms such as *topos*, *locus* and Christian cemeteries. Yet, this emerging Christian space plays an important part in the functions and responsibilities of the bishop-priest.

The Eastern Church Order known as the *Didascalia Apostolorum* continues this development in its description of the bishop as the “steward of God” and his “house”. The connections with a Levitical priesthood become even stronger when the author describes the bishops as those who “serve in the holy tabernacle, the holy catholic Church” and “who stand before the altar of the Lord your God.” Combining these functional descriptions with the *DA*’s clear awareness of an emerging Christian sacred space (e.g. the layout of worship space, seeing the Tabernacle as a “type” of the Church, the care over cemeteries), we find that the *DA*’s portrayal of the bishop as a priest works on a typological level as well: just as the Israelite priest was an “attendant to God’s house” (the physical Tabernacle or Temple), so too the bishop is the “steward of God’s house” (the physical Church building and Christian *sacra*).

Staying in the east, I demonstrated that Origen of Alexandria also displays similar connections between a Christian ministerial priesthood and a politico-theological ecclesiology.

Origen portrays the bishop's responsibilities of teaching, presiding over the Christian sacrifice, and spiritual leadership as parallels to priestly activity. Further, the combination of Origen's depiction of the Church as an alternate *polis* in the Greco-Roman world, with his robust understanding of the Church in continuity with, yet transformation of Israel, enable him to appropriate the Levitical priestly ministry of the Old Testament in a typological way for Christian leadership. Just as certain laws must be observed in the Tabernacle of Israel, so too, says Origen certain rules "ought to be observed in the Church of God by the priests of Christ (*sacerdotibus Christi*)." Like the nation of Israel, the Church too, says Origen, exists as its own *polis*, complete with Christian sacred things (*sacra*) and a ministerial priesthood which teaches, sacrifices, and leads the people of God.

In the west, Cyprian of Carthage provides us with one of the strongest Christian attachments to the Levitical priesthood as a working typology for Christian episcopacy. Especially in their role as liturgical officiants and ecclesial authorities, the bishops are depicted as the Christian counterparts to Israelite priesthood. The old covenant rules for the institution of priesthood have become the "rule and pattern (*forma*) now held in the clergy (*in clero*)." He also affirms a politico-theological ecclesiology by describing Israel as "a shadow and image of us" and by displaying a conscious awareness of Christian *sacra* (pulpits, altars, buildings). As such, his description of the bishops as "attendants of God" who "wait on the altar," indicates that he has in mind the physical attendance to a physical Church and altar. He sees the church as a worshipping community that occupies physical sacred space and involves sacred objects within that liturgical context. Over this entire politico-theological entity of the Church presides the

Christian bishop, cast in the model of the Levitical priest who, like the bishop, attends to God's house and to his sacred objects.

Finally, I examined one thinker in the fourth century, post-Constantinian era: Eusebius of Caesarea. From an investigation of his panegyric on the dedication of the church building in Tyre, I demonstrate that Eusebius, likewise, couches his priestly designations of Christian bishops in a politico-theological ecclesiology. The building of the Tyrian church becomes a reflection of Old Testament accounts of the building of the Tabernacle and the first and second Temples. Christian churches, repeatedly designated as "temples", contain "sacred areas," "thrones" and an "altar". In the midst of such comparison, the old covenant priest is likened to the presiding bishop, "the consecrated priests (*hierōmenōn*) performing the religious services and appropriate rites of the Church."

The depictions of Christian ministry in these six works are by no means monolithic and uniform. Different writers emphasize different aspects of episcopal duties and functions within the community. For some, the liturgical elements far outweigh the teaching duties. For others, just the opposite is the case. For still others, a balanced blend of liturgical, instructional and governmental tasks adhere to the bishop's role within the community. Nevertheless, from this diverse portrait, certain common features emerge. All these writers clearly designate the Christian bishop as a "priest" (*hiereus/sacerdos*). Further, each demonstrates an underlying politico-theological ecclesiology as the backdrop to their sacerdotal designations. To be sure, the indications are slight in the earliest texts such as the *Apostolic Tradition*, but they grow and strengthen over time such that when we arrive at Eusebius the understanding of the Church as a



unique *polis* fulfilling and transforming biblical Israel combines with the specific functions and responsibilities of the Christian bishop to enable the designation “priest”.

Furthermore, Christian writers were not using the pagan priesthood as a model for their own ministerial priesthood. They always tied the priestly designations to Israel and the Old Testament; the functions of Christian priests parallels Levitical priests, not pagan priests; and they were always careful to avoid the appearance of pagan evocations in the descriptions of their own priesthood. Equally obvious by now, the offering of the sacrificial Eucharist, though central to the bishop’s duties in the church, does not play as significant or as comprehensive a role in the development of a Christian ministerial priesthood as many scholars have suggested. For some the priest’s role over the Christian sacrifice was crucial (Cyprian); for others, however, the link between Christian priesthood and Eucharistic sacrifice is very dim at best (*AT*, *DA*, Origen). For this reason, the explanation that the bishop’s role in offering the Eucharistic sacrifice caused the development of a Christian ministerial priesthood remains inadequate.

Rather, understanding the broader politico-theological ecclesiology of the Christian writers, we arrive at a better explanation for the rise and development of a Christian ministerial priesthood as a typology of the Levitical priesthood in the third and fourth century. Just as the old covenant priests of the nation of Israel presided over the liturgical and instructional aspects of Israelite worship and holy things in the physical Temple of God, so too the Christian bishop is portrayed typologically as the Christian “priest” who presides over Christian liturgical and instructional aspects of the Church’s worship and *sacra* in the physical church of God. The earlier priestly analogy of the first two centuries becomes more concrete in application as the politico-theological variables create the necessary context for the development of an explicit

ministerial priesthood. Important to note, these politico-theological variables do not *cause* that development; they merely create the appropriate context in which prior trajectories can more fully develop and express themselves in new, yet consistent, ways with the old. Consider for example, the relationship between trees and birds. Trees do not *cause* birds to live in their branches, but they do create the right environment for birds to come and live there. So too, these politico-theological factors do not *cause* a priesthood to be developed, but they do create the appropriate context in which such realities can find a home.

Understanding this development from such an angle, the emergence of a Christian ministerial priesthood is not a departure from earlier theology and social structure, but a natural outworking of the earliest Christian trajectories. If it is the case that the Church from the beginning was a “culture” in the midst of the nations, existing as an eschatological city with a new public order occupying public space, constituting a *polis* in its own right modeled on biblical Israel, then with the rise of actual physical space and a concrete material culture around 200 A.D., it should come as no surprise that this renewed Israel-*polis* should come to understand its ministerial leadership as the typological fulfillment of Israel’s priesthood. My hope is that this research has helped broaden our understanding of the development of the Christian ministerial priesthood in light of this politico-theological ecclesiology of the early church, offering a fuller, fresh examination of an old topic.

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