

The Word Did It All: The Bible and the Priesthood of All Believers

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This paper will explore the doctrinal foundations, articulations, and implications of Martin Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

The foundation of the whole of Luther's view on universal priesthood will first be found in his view of Scripture.

Luther's View of the Scriptures' Power in the Reformation Movement

Martin Luther's explanation of what happened in the Reformation is as insightful as it is characteristic of the Reformer. Stated in his typically blunt and earthy style, Luther said:

Take myself as an example. I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept [cf. Mark 4:26-29], or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything.¹

An early proponent of the Reformation doctrine *sola scriptura*, Luther believed, lived, and taught that the Word of God, not human logic or effort, should be relied upon to bring the necessary changes to the church.

For example, in discussing the idolatrous practice of the mass, Luther urged a reliance upon the Scriptures to persuade people of the need to reform:

It should be preached and taught with tongue and pen that to hold mass in such a manner is sinful, and yet no one should be dragged away from it by the hair; for it should be left to God, and his Word should be allowed to work alone, without our work or interference.²

In an age when so much reform was attempted by papal decrees or magisterial order, why did Luther think God's Word alone should be used to change minds? Luther answered this exact question, declaring:

¹ Martin Luther, *Sermons I*, vol. 51 of *Luther's Works*, eds. John W. Doberstein and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 77-78.

² Martin Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 3rd ed., ed. by W. R. Russell and T. F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 292-294.

Because it is not in my power or hand to fashion the hearts of men as the potter molds the clay and fashion them at my pleasure [Ecclus. 33:13]. I can get no farther than their ears; their hearts I cannot reach. And since I cannot pour faith into their hearts, I cannot, nor should I force anyone to have faith. That is God's work alone, which causes faith to live in the heart.³

What was Luther's expectation that God alone could produce faith? He declared,

Therefore we should give free course to the Word and not add our works to it. We have the *jus verbi* [right to speak] but not the *executio* [power to accomplish]. We should preach the Word, but the results must be left solely to God's good pleasure.⁴

Luther believed that preaching and hearing God's Word was the highest form of worship. He viewed the pulpit as the throne for the Word of God, for Scripture teaches that the Lord's voice is the ultimate one heard as preachers expound the Scriptures.

Luther conducted his ministry in accord with this conviction. In Wittenberg, Luther would preach some two hundred messages a year in his prime, often two or three times during the week in addition to messages on the Lord's Day. He knew that this would result in God himself having sway over his people rather than earthly rulers or ungodly church leaders. A. Skevington Wood said of Luther's preaching,

The salient feature of Luther's preaching was its biblical content and reference. It was subject to Scripture throughout. Luther submitted to a rigorous discipline. He was bound by the Word. His preaching was never merely topical. He could never turn a text into a pretext. 'I take pains to treat a verse, to stick to it,' he explained, 'and so to instruct the people that they can say, "That is what the sermon was about."⁵

In addition, Luther worked tirelessly to translate the Bible into the Germanic language so the Scriptures would be accessible to his own people. Tucked away in the Wartburg Castle, he translated the New Testament into German in just eleven weeks in 1522. Through the next years, Luther led a group of other scholars, whom he affectionately called his "Sanhedrin," to complete the Old Testament translation in 1534. He wanted the common people to be able to read the Bible for themselves and understand it. Luther said, "I try to speak as men do in the market place. In rendering Moses, I make him so German that no one would suspect he was a Jew."⁶

In contrast, by focusing on traditions and sacerdotalism, the priests had starved the medieval church from the Word of God. As Luther and others began reconnecting the people of God to his Word, the laity began to discover their place in the kingdom of God as key texts unveiled to the

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ A. Skevington Wood, *Captive to the Word: Martin Luther, Doctor of Sacred Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 89.

⁶ Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1950), 327.

people their rightful positions in the church. Ultimately, what members of the church discovered was Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and its implication for life in the church. Yet before directly addressing Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of believers, two key theological commitments of Luther derived from his own study of God's Word need to be addressed. In these commitments is found the undergirding and shaping of Luther's approach to the universal priesthood.

The Danger of Being a Theologian of Glory Rather than a Theologian of the Cross

Luther's 95 Theses called for a debate regarding the practice of indulgences and in so doing, generated a discussion about the nature of theology itself. About six months after Luther posted his Theses, in April of 1518, his Augustinian order, headed by Johannes von Staupitz, called Luther to give an accounting of his teachings. In what became known as his *Heidelberg Disputation*, Luther laid out with precision a series of twenty-eight statements, or theses, which he referred to as "theological paradoxes" to contrast the growing Protestant understanding of the gospel with the reigning Catholic theology of the day. The importance of this presentation is seen in that a number of the early reformers, such as Martin Bucer, were in attendance and were greatly influenced by Luther's teaching.

In Gerald Forde's analysis of the *Disputation*, he shows the four stages through which Luther's thoughts progressed. Theses 1-12 speak of man's works in light of man's sin. The next six theses show that sin impacts the very will of man. Theses 19-24 explain the differences between the theology of the cross and that of glory. The last four theses help reveal the love of God in Christ. Luther created with these twenty-eight theses an arc that moved from the law of God to the love of God, and central to his theology in the *Heidelberg Disputation* is the cross.

Luther taught that a proper look at the cross exposes a sinner's ongoing hypocrisy so that he constantly sees his need for the blood of Christ to cleanse him. He sought to move the motivation for good works and obedience from belief in law-keeping to being motivated by the love that God has shown in Christ. As Luther states in the twenty-first article of the *Heidelberg Disputation*, the theologian of glory manifests himself this way. "This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil."⁷ Luther was seeing from his study of Scripture that

the Lord humbles and frightens us by means of the law and the sight of our sins so that we seem in the eyes of men, as in our own, as nothing, foolish, and wicked, for we are in truth that. Insofar as we acknowledge and confess this, there is 'no form or beauty' in us, but our life is hidden in God (i.e. in the bare confidence in his mercy), finding in ourselves nothing but sin, foolishness, death, and hell.⁸

⁷ Gerald O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 82.

⁸ The *Heidelberg Disputation* (HD) is quoted from Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Volume 31: Career of the Reformer*, ed. Harold J. Grimm and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 39-58. HD Article 4.

Thus, Luther stressed that “man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ.”⁹ Furthermore, Luther went on to say,

Because men do not know the cross and hate it, they necessarily love the opposite, namely, wisdom, glory, power, and so on. Therefore they become increasingly blinded and hardened by such love, for desire cannot be satisfied by the acquisition of those things which it desires.¹⁰

When pastors and leaders do not necessarily deny the cross but rather de-emphasize it in their eagerness to point to other doctrines that they view as more acceptable, glorious, neglected, or visionary, they slide toward being theologians of glory. As Carl Trueman states, theologians of glory “build their theology in the light of what they expect God to be like” while theologians of the cross “build their theology in the light of God's own revelation of himself in Christ hanging on the cross.”¹¹ Recognizing this distinction is not an easy task. “Indeed, one of the difficulties in the attempt to set the theology of the cross apart from the theology of glory is that the differences between the two are often very subtle.”¹²

Though the differences between a theologian of glory and theologian of the cross may be difficult to discern, they are profound. Luther, in examining the priesthood in the light of Scripture, saw the former, and he called the church toward the latter. In so doing, this development in his early theological framework – perhaps a year or so before he was truly converted – was one of the strong factors moving him toward his understanding of the priesthood of all believers.

Now, consider the second key theological commitment of Luther that underpinned his view of the laity.

The Development of Ecclesiology from Pneumatology with Its Reliance on the Centrality of God's Word

In his treatise “On the Councils and the Church,” Martin Luther suggests that ecclesiology (the study of the church) cannot be properly understood apart from pneumatology (the study of the Holy Spirit). Speaking of the believer's possession of holiness provided by the Spirit, Luther states:

Christian holiness, or the holiness common to Christendom, is found where the Holy Spirit gives people faith in Christ and thus sanctifies them, Acts 15 [:9], that is, he renews heart, soul, body, work, conduct, inscribing the commands of God not on tables of stone, but in heart of flesh, II Corinthians 3 [:3].¹³

⁹ HD Article 18.

¹⁰ HD Article 22.

¹¹ Carl Trueman, “Luther's Theology of the Cross,” *New Horizons* (October 2005): 6.

¹² Forde, *Theologian of the Cross*, 6.

¹³ Martin Luther, *Church and Ministry III*, vol. 41 of *Luther's Works*, trans. Eric W. Gritsch, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 145.

In Luther's thinking, as the Spirit grants faith in the gospel of Christ to the people of the church, holiness then issues forth from their lives. A relationship is seen, therefore, between the preaching of the gospel with the faith in it given by the Holy Spirit and the holy practices which the Spirit of God produces in the church. Thus, in the words of Reinhard Hütter, "Luther unequivocally associates pneumatology and ecclesiology by way of the concept of 'works' of the Holy Spirit as tied to distinct church practices."¹⁴

This pneumatological-ecclesiological connection led Luther to identify what he believed were the seven principal church practices or parts of the church produced by the Spirit. He identified them as "the pure administration of the Word, of baptism, of the Lord's Supper, and of the keys of the kingdom, the lawful choice of ministers, public prayer and education, and the cross."¹⁵ As Luther's theology developed, however, he especially saw two of these parts as essential, for as Bavinck points out, "elsewhere he only mentioned two: the pure administration of the Word and sacraments."¹⁶ For instance, *The Augsburg Confession* of the German church, published in 1530 by Philip Melancthon under Martin Luther, displays these two marks when it states, "The Church is the congregation of saints in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments rightly administered according to the gospel."¹⁷ Luther referred to these principal parts or marks as "holy possessions."¹⁸

Three important observations can be made regarding these holy possessions that will give further insight into Luther's development of the priesthood of all believers. First, the Holy Spirit, through his ministry in the lives of believers, marks those who are truly God's people with these holy possessions. In other words, to determine where Christ's church is truly present on the earth one should look for the Spirit's presence. God's Spirit is present where God's Word is proclaimed faithfully, the sacraments are administered, and discipleship is practiced. Hütter shows the importance of this in Luther's theology when he says,

Luther is arguing implicitly pneumatologically; insofar as the Spirit makes these 'holy possessions' accessible to faith as the marks of the church, it is comforting the afflicted conscience by showing concretely where the 'church' is to be found even in a time of fundamental ecclesiastical conflict. The church is grounded in precisely these holy possessions, and as such is a work of the Holy Spirit...¹⁹

¹⁴ Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 128.

¹⁵ Herman Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 312. Note that Luther meant by the last item on the list, the cross, the suffering of discipleship.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 11-12.

¹⁸ Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 130.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

God's people should look for and find comfort in dwelling in those congregations where the Holy Spirit is exhibiting his presence with these holy possessions.

Second, Luther acknowledged variation exists in the attributes considered as holy possessions. He also was emphatic that certain possessions were more vital than others. Thus, Luther is showing that these holy possessions can be categorized and ranked in importance. For instance, Luther stressed repeatedly that the faithful preaching of the Word with the proper administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are chief among the possessions the church is to exhibit. These primary workings of the Spirit identify the church *with marks of essentiality*. Consequently, greater importance should be given to these essential marks of the church than to other attributes the Spirit produces. Following Luther's line of thought, holy possessions that would be considered less observable and central to the church's identity, such as suffering for the gospel or experiencing unity, could be viewed as *attributes of faithfulness* that are dependent upon and radiating out from the core identifying marks of the church. Similarly, further fruits or activities of the church, such as members engaging in evangelism or serving the needs of the community, can be regarded as *signs of healthiness*. These lesser attributes are not to be thought of as unimportant or as disassociated from the greater ones, but rather reliant upon and produced by them. Given that they all come from the person of the Holy Spirit, this should only be expected.

An analogy is helpful here. Consider this author's wife. In her identity, she is made in the image of God. As one created by God, he has endowed her with certain attributes, among which quietness and compassion could be mentioned. From her God-bestowed gifts, she practices such works as hospitality and praying with other women. Thus, central identity, certain attributes, and particular acts can be seen as distinct from one another yet related to each other. Similarly, the Spirit identifies the church as Christ's bride and unique possession with marks, bestows on the church certain characteristics or attributes, and produces in the church good works done as a result.

Third, Luther argued Scripturally that the holy possessions are an inheritance that the Trinity gives to all members of the church. In 1 Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul describes the church in Trinitarian fashion. Paul writes, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone" (1 Cor. 12:4-6). Commenting on this passage, Luther describes how the three persons of the Godhead work together to give these possessions to the church:

So he here distinguishes the three — one God, Lord, and Spirit — and gives to each His own work through which He is revealed. One person is God (the Father), from whom all powers are derived as the source and the first person. The second is the Lord, that is, Christ, the Son of God, from whom, as the Head of the Church, all offices flow. The third is the Spirit, who produces and distributes all gifts in the Church. Nevertheless, these three are all one divine, almighty, and eternal essence. Accordingly, these three are all called and truly are one, since God must be one inseparable essence.²⁰

²⁰ Martin Luther, *Church Postil IV*, vol. 78 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Benjamin T.G. Mayes and James L. Langbartels (St. Louis: Concordia, 2015), 339.

As the Triune God operates in the church, God's people have gifts bestowed on them, avenues of service in which to utilize these gifts, and varied activities to fulfill this rendered service. As Luther put it, "However, it is the Christian's own skill, and the chief thing which distinguishes them from the heathen, that they know and recognize such gifts, offices, and powers come from God and the Lord Christ and the Holy Spirit."²¹

With Luther's cross-centered theological focus and Spirit-powered ecclesiological structure now in place, his belief regarding the place of the laity can be established.

The Distillation of the Priesthood of All Believers in Reformation Theology and Practice

Martin Luther, in his first communion as a Catholic priest, trembled because he thought that he was handling the actual body and blood of the Lord. He had experienced firsthand the incredible magisterial weight the papacy had placed upon the priesthood. Yet as he looked anew at the Roman priesthood, with his mind alive with the desire to be a theologian of the cross and to give due credence to the Spirit's work in the church, he became incensed by what he saw.

Luther was so committed to preaching the Word alone that he could not tolerate those with that responsibility who failed to do so. In the preface to his *Small Catechism*, Luther denounced the false priests in the strongest possible terms because of their lack of attention to the Word of God. He cried out,

O ye bishops! [to whom this charge has been committed by God,] what will ye ever answer to Christ for having so shamefully neglected the people and never for a moment discharged your office? ... You do not care in the least [while you are utterly without scruple and concern] whether the people know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, or any part of the Word of God. Woe, woe, unto you forever!²²

In the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, he further expressed his disdain over the Catholic priests:

They have sought by this means (i.e. ordination) to set up a seed bed of implacable discord, by which clergy and laymen should be separated from each other farther than heaven from earth, to the incredible injury of the grace of baptism and to the confusion of our fellowship in the gospel. Here, indeed, are the roots of the detestable tyranny of the clergy over the laity. Trusting in the external anointing by which their hands are consecrated, in the tonsure and investments, they not only exalt themselves above the rest of the lay Christians, who are only anointed with the Holy Spirit, but regard them almost as dogs and unworthy to be included with themselves in the church.²³

In Luther's mind, these priests were theologians of glory in the worst possible way. For they withheld the very holy possessions they were to mark the church with and use to lead its

²¹ Ibid., 343.

²² *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921), 238.

²³ Martin Luther, *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 244.

members into service of Christ. Luther could not bear this pomposity against the people of God. He said,

Thus [the pope] removes and eradicates our Christian priesthood with this damnable priesthood, for hardly anyone knows of any other priesthood except that of the pope. As soon as anyone hears a priest mentioned he imagines one who is tonsured, anointed and dressed in long garments.²⁴

Luther overcame this false priesthood by first establishing the ultimate priesthood of Christ. In his commentary on Psalm 110, where Christ is declared to have the superior priesthood of Melchizedek, Luther said, "We have only one single priest, Christ, who has sacrificed himself for us and all of us with him."²⁵ Luther reasoned that since it was the "priest's task to teach God's Word and intercede for his people, Christ is the supreme priest because he performs these functions supremely."²⁶ As this psalm goes on to indicate, Christians "derive their priesthood from Christ's because they are 'children' of the High Priest."²⁷

The believer's derivative priesthood from Christ does not involve the idolatry of sacrificing Christ in the Mass for our sins, for there is no more sacrifice needed for sin and the one who died was raised never to die again. "For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God" (Rom. 6:10).

Thus, Luther taught that with Christ's

priestly sacrifice we are priested not to offer sacrifices for our sins – he has done that – but to offer ourselves, no longer forfeited to death by our sins, but alive by the forgiveness that delivers us from the dominion of sin, death, the devil, and the Law. We are living sacrifices whose lives are poured out in sacrifice to him where he has put himself to receive the sacrifice of our lives, that is our neighbor in his need.²⁸

One key passage of Scripture in Luther's thinking on the believer's priestly, sacrificial call was I Peter 2:9-10, which reads:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

²⁴ Martin Luther, *Word and Sacrament II*, vol. 36 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Abdel Ross Wentz and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 202.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁶ Uche Anizor, *Kings and Priests: Scripture's Theological Account of Its Readers* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 144.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Norman Nagel, "Luther and the Priesthood of All Believers," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 61, no. 4 (October 1997): 280.

Luther worked this passage out carefully. In promoting the priesthood of all believers, he did not want to communicate that the laity were priests in the same way they had witnessed in the Roman office, where every member has some type of run-away, self-authenticating power. “What Dr. Luther says against the Roman priests is not to get rid of them in order to put ‘the priesthood of all believers’ in their place. That would be to replace one piece of popery with another.”²⁹ Further, Luther maintained a proper place for the ordained pastoral office as a ministerial one. Commenting on this text, Luther explains,

“It says in 1 Peter 2, ‘You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom. In this way we are all priests, as many of us as are Christians. There are indeed priests whom we call ministers. They are chosen from among us, and who do everything in our name. That is a priesthood which is nothing else than the Ministry.’”³⁰

Luther taught that such pastoral ministers should be selected by the congregation they served. Furthermore, the ministerial office did not preclude God’s people themselves from ministering the Word of God. “Even though not everybody has the public office, every Christian has the right and the duty to teach, instruct, admonish, comfort, and rebuke his neighbor with the Word of God at every opportunity and whenever necessary.”³¹

Luther further substantiated the priesthood of all believers from passages that described our Christian life in priest-like terms, such as “the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit” (Ps. 51:17); “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom. 12:1); “let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips that acknowledge his name” (Heb. 13:15); Paul’s description of his calling “to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:16); and Paul’s life as “already being poured out as a drink offering” (2 Tim. 4:6). As such a priesthood, the church is to offer spiritual sacrifices pleasing to God through Jesus Christ. Luther knew that the anticipatory word of Isaiah which saw the Gentiles coming into the kingdom, and said, “You shall be called the priests of the Lord; they shall speak of you as the ministers of our God,” has arrived (Isa. 61:6). Clearly, the whole church is to be holy in their conduct and service as priests to God.

These sacrifices God’s people are to make were to be offered not only in their special religious exercises but also in their daily vocations. Luther saw the monastic life he had once lived as ultimately self-serving, as the piety they exercised did not help their neighbor and thus fell short of the second great commandment. Luther brought dignity back to common labor of all varieties, be it in the home, field, or business. In these places, God’s people were to also minister by serving their fellow man. As Gustav Wingren puts it succinctly in capturing Luther’s teaching, “God does not need our good works, but our neighbor does.”³²

²⁹ Ibid, 281.

³⁰ Luther, *Works*, 36:112-113.

³¹ Martin Luther, *Selected Psalms II*, vol. 13 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), 333.

³² Gustav Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Evansville: Ballast, 1994), 10.

Luther's teaching on the priesthood of believers transformed church and society as the doctrine spread across nations with such impact that it shook kingdoms. For example, when Luther's doctrine reached the land of England, it was not only the pope's priests and bishops that felt threatened and lashed out against them. None other than King Henry the VIII (1509-1547) himself responded. Believing Luther's teachings would upset the social order upon which his throne depended, the king wrote a lengthy rebuttal entitled *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum*, or *Defense of the Seven Sacraments*. This work led Pope Leo X, who by this time had excommunicated Luther, to confer on Henry the ironic title "Defender of the Faith." In this work, Henry attacked Luther's hermeneutical method. He mocked Luther for thinking that I Peter 2:5-9 teaches that we are all really priests, saying, "Does 'ye are gods' make us equal to God? Does royal priesthood make us all kings?"³³ Henry thought that Luther's teaching that all Christians are priests and kings equally was a doctrine designed by the devil. This historical incident highlights that a church committed to the gospel, living in sacrifice to Christ, becomes a direct threat to the beloved order of rulers.

With the articulation and immediate implications of Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers substantiated, a final question may now be considered: How should this doctrine be retained and promoted today?

The Duties that the Reformed Church Half a Millennium Later Must Retain and Promote

First and foremost, if the word did it all, then the word must still do it all. If the preaching of the word is the chief holy possession of the church, marking the church as the true people of God, then those whose duty it is to teach and preach it must do so with all due diligence. Yet they must be careful as they do. As demonstrated, pastors do not process the magisterial authority *above* the people of God as the priests of old. But they do possess a ministerial authority *among* the people of God. Seminaries, sadly so often a corrupting influence on ministers and the church, must retain the centrality of God's word in their training and instruct pastoral candidates. They must remind students that they are not to become theologians of glory who conduct themselves with the air of magisterial supremacy. Instead, seminaries must train theologians of the cross in a ministerial role that displays humility and willingness to sacrifice for the sake of Christians. Like Luther, pastors should devote their full energies toward being theologians of the cross by bringing people into contact with the pure word of God.

In light of these reformation truths, the second duty for pastors, elders, and the congregations they serve is the structuring of ministries so that the holy possessions are properly arranged. At the core of a congregation's identity should be the primary marks of the church, namely the word, sacrament, and discipline. Today's age is increasingly seeing the Protestant church return to visual forms and expressions in worship in a manner that the Roman Catholic Church sadly still depends upon. With such a regression to visual worship forms, Protestant churches demonstrate, if not actually verbalize, a dissatisfaction with the pure preaching of God's word. Preachers and congregations once again must be urged to demonstrate a sole reliance on the

³³ Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *Royal Priesthood in the English Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 99.

power of the gospel. In so doing, congregations should guard against a focus on or trust in programs or other activities that in actuality could be taking the people of God away from their primary priestly duties.

The third duty in light of the believer's priesthood is the call to sacrifice that comes from the preaching of the gospel. Ministers must view the word of God as the inheritance of God's people and instruct them clearly in their priestly duties. The gospel must call every member of the church to follow Christ by taking up his or her cross. They should be instructed and taught how to offer up the incense of prayer. The Word must guide them in how to care and lay down their lives for their brothers. They must see that it is not only the minister's duty but also their own to take the gospel to those who are still apart from Christ.

Yet with this third duty comes a fourth and final one that protects against a hyper-spiritualization in the understanding of Luther's development of the believer's priesthood. Members of the church should be taught that fulfilling the second great commandment in their vocations is holy work. Luther related the second great commandment to the priesthood of the believer, saying:

If you find yourself in a work by which you accomplish something good for God, or the holy, or yourself, but not for your neighbor alone, then you should know that that work is not a good work. For each one ought to live, speak, act, hear, suffer, and die in love and service for another, even for one's enemies, a husband for his wife and children, a wife for her husband, children for their parents, servants for their masters, masters for their servants, rulers for their subjects, and subjects for their rulers, so that one's hand, mouth, eye, foot, heart, and desire is for others; these are Christian works, good in nature.³⁴

As history has shown, fulfilling these duties is how reformation began, and this is how reformation will continue to spread.

Conclusion: The 95 Theses, the Start of the Reformation, and the Priesthood of All Believers

Certainly, Luther developed the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers over his lifetime. However, returning to his initial theses with the doctrine in mind reveals that these seeds of concern were there all along, although they lacked the purer, direct expressions Luther would later formulate regarding the role of God's people in the church. To those who replaced the true preaching of the Bible with something else, Luther declared, "53. They are the enemies of Christ and the pope who forbid altogether the preaching of the Word of God in some churches in order that indulgences may be preached in others," and "62. The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God." To theologians of glory who denied the cross with their practices he spoke directly, "79. To say that the cross emblazoned with the papal coat of arms, and set up by the indulgence preachers is equal in worth to the cross of Christ is blasphemy." And to the faithful believer, upon whom Christ has bestowed the position of priest, Luther reminded them of their true position, "37. Any true Christian, whether living or dead,

³⁴ Wingren, *Vocation*, 120. Wingren is offering this translation of Luther's *Adventspostille* of 1522 (not available in English).

participates in all the blessings of Christ and the church; and this is granted him by God, even without indulgence letters.”³⁵

Believing and living according to these truths is how reformation began, and this is how reformation will continue to spread.

³⁵ For the translation of these theses, see Martin Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 22-25.