

An Analysis of the Ministry of the Royal Priesthood in Exodus 19:6 and Its Theological Expansion 1 Peter 2:5, 9–10

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Ministry (*sharāth/šrt*) in the OT is grounded in the nature of God himself. It is grounded in the nature of God's relationship with Israel, his people. Although the Israelites had many failures, God, with love, elected and called the Israelites—both as individuals and groups—his servants, calling them to serve and to minister to the people, who were themselves ministering, as well as to be servants to the servant people of the LORD. On this basis, this essay exegetically and theologically examines the priestly vocation of the ministering people, or the royal priesthood (*mamleket kohānīm* [MT]; *hierateuma* [LXX]) in Exodus 19:6 and its related texts (Isa 61:6). It demonstrates its theological extension to the NT priestly people *basileion hierateuma* (1 Pet 2:5, 9–10; cf. Rev 1:6) in order to underline its theological implication for the vocation of the church, the body of Christ, in Africa.

Key Words: ministry/minster, servants, priestly people, Israel, body of Christ, church in Africa

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that in the OT, ministry is grounded in the nature of God himself and in the manner of his relationship with the Israelites, his people.⁴⁴¹ God elects and calls the whole people to serve (*sharāth*, *diakoneō*) and “to minister” (*ministrare*). Of course, the nation of Israel, first of all, is the servant of the Lord (Ps 136:22; Isa 41:8–9; Jer 30:10; cf. 11:1–2b). Despite the Israelites’ many failures, God continues to love and care for his people and minister to them. He does this by calling and electing individuals, larger numbers of people, and groups from within his people as a whole, including judges, kings, prophets, and priests. Such persons are called to minister to the ministering people, to participate in God’s ministry, and to be servants of the serving people of the Lord.

In Exodus 19:6, the verb *sharāth* is not directly used, but it is implied. In this text, the Lord calls Israel, the Jewish nation, to constitute, to be for him, and to serve as a “kingdom of priests and a holy [or consecrated] nation.” This calling is foregrounded by the extraordinary memory referred to in verse 4: “you have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.” Thus, this narrative of liberation now turns to anticipation of life in devotion to the Lord (Exod 19:5–6). The serving memory and the listening demand of verse 4 lead to the promise of verses 5–6. This community of faith (synagogue, church), the focus of this study, is given a vocation to be a distinct presence in the world on behalf of the world. The priestly vocation of this community is to ponder and mediate the presence of the holy God in the midst

⁴⁴¹ James A. Wharton, “Theology and Ministry in the Hebrew Scriptures,” in *A Biblical Basis for Ministry*, ed. Earl E. Shelp and Ronald Sunderland (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 22–36.

of the nations, acting to resist any profanation of life that dismisses and banishes the powerful inconvenience of God.⁴⁴²

The language of this promise in Exodus is taken up and expanded in 1 Peter 2:9–10 and fulfilled in other relevant NT texts in an attempt to characterize the early church.⁴⁴³ This work exegetically and theologically examines the priestly vocation of the ministering people in Exodus 19:6 with its related texts (Isa 61:6). It demonstrates its theological extension to the NT priestly people, the priesthood of the faithful or of all believers (1 Pet 2:5, 9–10; Rev 1:6). And, finally, it underlines the theological implication of this study for the vocation of the church, the body of Christ—especially for ordinary Christians in Africa living as a family that prays, receives the sacraments, catechizes, gives thanks to God, imitates Christ, serves as a model minister (*diakonos*), bears witness to a holy life by practicing active charity and self-denial and promoting unity that overcomes all entrapments, and ministers faithfully to God and to one another.

Ministry as a Concept

The basic meaning of “ministry” is to engage in the service of others (Lat. *ministrare* = “to serve”; minister = “one who serves”).⁴⁴⁴ In its broadest sense, “ministry” refers to service rendered to God or to people. Its more restricted sense refers to the official service of individuals, specifically those set aside in

⁴⁴² Walter Brueggemann, “The Book of Exodus, Introduction, Commentary, and Reflection,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 1:404.

⁴⁴³ See James D. Smart, *The Rebirth of the Ministry: A Study of the Biblical Character of the Church’s Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 43, where the three distinct ministries in the OT (prophetic, priestly, and kingly) essential to the covenant relationship between Israel and God are argued to have come to fulfillment in Jesus Christ and in his ministry.

⁴⁴⁴ Charles H. H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 613.

the church.⁴⁴⁵ The verb *šārat* is used about ninety-eight times in the OT to speak of those who are called to serve in a variety of contexts: cultic and non-cultic, religious and non-religious.⁴⁴⁶ Claus Westermann argues that the word denotes primarily service to a person.⁴⁴⁷ F. Sedlmeier, on the other hand, believes that a “public” dimension is always present in the service performed.⁴⁴⁸ William Mounce similarly observes that the verb *šārat* could be used of the “serving” performed by royal household workers (2 Sam 13:17; 1 Kgs 10:5) or by court officials and public servants (1 Chr 27:1; 28:1; Esth 1:10).⁴⁴⁹ Engelkel, though, argues that the verb *šārat* is to be differentiated from *ābad*, “to serve,” which is used of the general work common to all, especially slaves and servants.⁴⁵⁰

It has been further observed that *šārat* normally refers to the service given to or for individuals of status or import. For example, Joseph found favor and “attended” (NRSV) or “served” (*wayyi šārat*) his master Potiphar (Gen 39:4); Elisha had a servant (2 Kgs 4:43); the sons of Ahaziah’s relatives served Ahaziah (2 Chr 22:8); and several personal attendants ministered to King Xerxes (Esth 2:2).⁴⁵¹

A number of times in the OT, the participle form of the verb “*šārat* (*māš ārēt*) is used as a noun for a person engaged in service and is translated as “minister” or “servant.” For example, Joshua is Moses’ servant (Exod 24:13; 33:11; Num

⁴⁴⁵ Martin H. Manser et al., *The Complete Topical Guide to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2017), 524–25.

⁴⁴⁶ K. Engelken, “שרת *šrt* serve,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), XV:503–13.

⁴⁴⁷ C. Westermann, “שרת *šrt pi*, to serve,” *TLOT* 3:1405–7.

⁴⁴⁸ F. Sedlmeier, “Studien zu Komposition und Theologie von Ezechiel 20,” *SBB* 21(1990), esp. 321–37.

⁴⁴⁹ William D. Mounce, *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 451.

⁴⁵⁰ Engelkel, “שרת *šrt* serve,” 513.

⁴⁵¹ Mounce, *Mounce’s Complete*, 451.

11:28; Josh 1:1), and the angels are servants of God (Ps 103:21; 104:4).⁴⁵²

The most common use of *šārat* sometimes denotes those ministering before God (Aaron in Exod 28:35; other Levites in 1 Chr 16:4, 37), though this is not always the case (cf. 1 Sam 2:11, 18; 3:1). Also, *šārat* is used in the context of Israel’s worship of God (Num 16:9; Deut 10:8; Ezek 44:15–16), a usage adopted in this study. Broadly, and particularly in Exodus 19:6, it refers to Israel’s ministering to God and his people. The God to whom the whole earth belongs (Exod 9:29; Ps 24:1) has chosen Israel for a special role as his “treasured possession,” as “the people of God” (Exod 6:7; Deut 7:7; 14:2; 26:18). Israel is to be God’s “priestly kingdom,” “a holy nation,” and his servants (Exod 19:6; Isa 61:6).

Text and the Contents of Exodus 19:6

In Exodus 19:6, we read the following in Hebrew (MT) and in Greek (LXX):

Transliteration from the MT	Working Translation
v. 6a: <i>wə’attem tihyū-lī mamleket kohānīm</i>	And you shall be to me a priestly kingdom
v. 6b: <i>wəgōy qādōš</i>	And a holy nation
v. 6c: <i>’ēlleh haddəbārīm ’āšer tadbabbēr ’el- bənē yisrā’ēl</i> ⁴⁵³	These are the words which you will speak to the children of Israel

Fortunately, there are no textual difficulties in Exodus 19:6; yet when one reads or listens to the text in variant versions, one perceives the unique nuances of each translation with its deeper theological implications. For example, in the LXX, which

⁴⁵² Engelkel, “שרת *šrt* serve,” 509.

⁴⁵³ See the LXX reading: *humeis de esesthe moi basileion hierateuma kai ethnos hagion tauta ta hrēmata ereis tois huiōis Israēl* (“but you shall be to me a royal priesthood and a holy nation; and these are the words which you shall speak to the sons of Israel”).

is closely followed by some NT texts (e.g., 1 Pet 2:9), we read: *humeis de esesthe moi basileion hierateuma kai ethnos hagian tauta ta hrēmata ereis tois huiois Israēl* (“but you shall be to me a royal priesthood and a holy nation; and these are the words which you shall speak to the sons of Israel”).⁴⁵⁴ Notable is the LXX’s translation of *mamleket kohānīm* (“kingdom of priests”) as *basileion hierateuma* (“a royal priesthood”). Many scholars and exegetes, including Albert Cardinal Vanhoye, believe the LXX prefers a fairly free adaptation which replaces the plural “priests” (*hiereis*) with the singular “priesthood” (*hierateuma*). The word must have been purely a creation of an Alexandrian translator since it is not attested elsewhere in Greek literature.⁴⁵⁵ In addition, this is done in the same way to *gōy qādōš* (“holy nation”) and *ethnos hagian* (“saintly or consecrated nation”). Various English variants such as the NRSV and *The African American Catholic Youth Bible* clearly affirm that this is done in order to present Israel as a group of priests chosen by God for his service and for the service of his people, worldwide (cf. Isa 61:6; 1 Pet 2:5–10; Rev 1:6).

Locating and Delimiting Exodus 19:6

In the book of Exodus, the priestly writer seems to have arranged his traditions into what Richard J. Clifford calls “two interlocking parts: the rescue of the Hebrews in Egypt from Pharaoh (1:1–15:21) and the journey from Egypt to Sinai (12:37–40:38).”⁴⁵⁶ Exodus 19:6 is located in this later part and within the unit that Walter Brueggemann labels the “Sinai *pericope*” or the “Charter of a Holy Nation,” which stands at the very center of the book of Exodus and remains the pivotal point

⁴⁵⁴ Selected key words here are: *humeis* (personal pronoun, nom pl., of *su*); *de* (conjunction); *esesthe* (a verb to be, 2nd plu, future indic., mid of *eimi*); *basileion* (an adjective, nom, neut, “royal”); *hierateuma* (noun, nom, neut, sing, com, “priesthood”) and *eries* (2nd per, sg, fut., indic., of *legō* = “to speak”).

⁴⁵⁵ Albert Cardinal Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest According to the New Testament* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2009), 248.

⁴⁵⁶ Richard J. Clifford “Exodus,” in *NJBC*, ed. Raymond E. Brown et al. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), 44.

of the Mosaic faith (Exod 19–24).⁴⁵⁷ In this very unit, God gives Israel his laws.⁴⁵⁸ The theological claims of this unit are intimately tied to the liberation of the exodus (Exod 19:4; 20:1). The God who here commands (Exod 20:1–17; 21:1–23:19) is the God who has liberated (Exod 1–15). In other words, “Exodus 19–24 is a closely interwoven unit.”⁴⁵⁹

This “Sinai *pericope*” is chiastically patterned as follows:

- **A** Theophany (Exod 19)
 - **B** Law (Exod 20:1–17)
 - **C** Mediator (Exod 20:18–21)
 - **C'** Mediator (Exod 20:22–26)
 - **B'** Law (Exod 21:1–23:19, 20–33)
- **A'** Theophany (Exod 24).⁴⁶⁰

Proximately, Exodus 19:6 is part of the theophany context, regarded as an introduction to the episode of Moses’ first trip to Mount Sinai (Horeb), where he encounters YHWH and receives a message from him for Israel: the revelation of the Decalogue. It has a parallel, beyond the “Covenant Code,” in the conclusion of the covenant by means of sacrifice (Exod 21–23; 24:1–8). This parallelism is more prominent in the parallel declarations in Exodus 19:8 and 24:7: “all that the LORD says we will do.” Presented in a liturgical form, Exodus 19 as a whole narrates Israel’s readiness to qualify for the worship of God. Verses 1–2 describe the journey, while verses 3–6 report God’s speech to Moses. This is followed by a series of transactions that actually make YHWH’S meeting with Israel possible (Exod 19:7–25).⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁷ Brueggemann, “Exodus,” 398.

⁴⁵⁸ For interesting comments on this unit (Exod 19–24), see Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Exodus* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 120–30.

⁴⁵⁹ James Chukwuma Okoye, *Israel and The Nations: A Mission Theology of the Old Testament* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 57.

⁴⁶⁰ Brueggemann, “Exodus,” 399.

⁴⁶¹ Brueggemann, “Exodus,” 399–401.

Granted that the exegesis that follows is done within the overall proximate context of Exodus 19, especially verses 1–6 and beyond (Exod 19–24), its points of departure remain the time and place of the meeting (vv. 1–2); God’s speech to Moses (v. 3); his saving memory (v. 4); divine command (v. 5a); promises (vv. 5b–6); and Israel’s response and oath of promises (vv. 7–8).

Exegesis of Exodus 19:1-6

The narrative in Exodus 19:1–6 begins by setting of the time and place for the meeting between the arriving Israelites and God at the mountain (vv. 1–2). Verses 1–2 thus place this divine human encounter at Sinai in the context of the wilderness journey. Of course, the mountain is not merely a geographical marker, but it is a holy place “where earth touches heaven, where the human realm makes contact with the abode of God.”⁴⁶² God then directs Moses to address the Israelites (v. 3). This is followed by the extraordinary evocation of the memory of the exodus (v. 4), when God metaphorically acted like a powerful, protecting, nurturing, and guiding eagle (Deut 32:11–14; Jer 48:40; 49:27) who delivered Israel from Pharaoh’s oppressive clutches and colonialism.

In verse 5 God charges Moses to promise in his name to the Israelites that if they obey him and respect his covenant, they will belong to him in a special manner. Israel will be God’s “own possession,” “property,” or “domain,” (*səgullā*) among all the peoples (*mikkōl hā`ammîm*) since the entire earth belongs to him (*kî-lî kōl hā`aretz*). A few components in verse 5 are of interest to this study. One is the conditionality of Israel’s future relationship with God, expressed by the combination of the hypothetical particle (*im/* “if”) with the *Qal* infinitive absolute (*šāmô*), meaning “if you, hear” and “obey” (*tišmə’û*) God’s voice (*bəqōlî*= “his voice”).⁴⁶³ In this case, it is as if the generous, unconditional liberator-God of verse 4 has suddenly become a

⁴⁶² Brueggemann, “Exodus,” 400.

⁴⁶³ Notice that *tišmə’û* is *Qal* imperfect, 2. mas, plural, that is a collective “you.”

demanding and conditional God in verse 5, since the Israelites' future good rapport with God now depends on their covenant faithfulness.⁴⁶⁴ James Okoye notes that this hypothetical particle (*'im/ "if"*) serves not only as a strong conjunction that introduces the covenant stipulations, but also as a conditional proposal to make Israel a special possession and a holy nation.⁴⁶⁵ In other, words, if the Israelites obey YHWH compared with other nations on the earth, they will enjoy great advantages on account of their special (*səgullā*) relationship with their God. This sense of special possession (*səgullā*) is clear in Deuteronomy 7:6: "for you are a people consecrated to Yahweh, your God; of all the peoples on earth, you have been chosen by Yahweh, your God, to be his own people."⁴⁶⁶ Because Israel is God's "special possession," God addresses Israel as "my people" and promises in various places that "I will be their God and they shall be my people." This last phrase, Okoye stresses, "is often called the 'covenant formula.'"⁴⁶⁷

In verse 6, assuming that all the required conditions of hearing God's voice, keeping his covenant, and obeying him are met, Israel will be for YHWH "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (*mamleket kohānīm wəgōy qādōš*). Of course, this expression has attracted as many interpretations and debates as there are exegetes and commentators.⁴⁶⁸ Okoye observes that *gōy qādōš* ("holy nation") occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible, though *'am qādōš* ("holy people") occurs a number of times in Deuteronomy (Deut 7:7; 14:2, 21; 26:19).⁴⁶⁹ Okoye suggests that *gōy* ("nations") looks beyond the bounds of blood and kinship toward sociological and political organization, since God had promised Abraham that he would be a *gōy gādōl* ("great

⁴⁶⁴ Brueggemann, "Exodus," 401.

⁴⁶⁵ Okoye, *Israel and the Nations*, 60.

⁴⁶⁶ See Deuteronomy 10:14–15; 14:2; Psalm 147:20 for similar categorization.

⁴⁶⁷ Okoye, *Israel and the Nations*, 60.

⁴⁶⁸ See Okoye, *Israel and the Nations*, 61–64, for some of these extended debates and interpretations.

⁴⁶⁹ Okoye, *Israel and the Nations*, 61.

nation”). *Gôy qādôš* (“holy nation”), he insists, can be understood as a reapplication of God’s promise to Abraham of his becoming a *gôy gādôl* (“great nation”). By implication, Israel’s greatness cannot be restricted to political or demographical status; the Israelites’ greatness lies in their witness to Yahweh as a holy God before all nations. In other words, Israel exists for the glory of Yahweh and his worship.⁴⁷⁰

On the other hand, *mamleket kohānîm*, usually translated as “a kingdom of priests,” has multiple possible interpretations.⁴⁷¹ Fiorenza, for instance, observes that in Hebrew, *mamleket* (“kingdom”) can function either as (1) a construct noun, requiring a complement *kohānîm* (“priests”), which results in the translation “a kingdom of priests,” or as (2) a noun in the absolute form, which does not introduce a complement but is simply translated as “a kingdom, priests.” Interestingly, the Aramean targums and the Greek versions of Symachus and Theodotus adopted the second interpretation (in Greek: *basileia hiereis*), as did some NT texts. On the other hand, Aquila adopted the former (in Greek: *basileia hiereon*), as do the majority of modern translations.⁴⁷²

Davies thinks that the phrase should be explored within the larger ancient Near Eastern background and its literary setting, meaning, and significance, as well as within its wider canonical context of the image of God’s people as a “kingdom of priests.” He concludes that although the phrase in the Hebrew Bible is unique to Exodus 19:6, the concept of Israel’s collective royalty and priesthood is not.⁴⁷³ Other exegetes think the phrase means

⁴⁷⁰ Okoye, *Israel and the Nations*, 61.

⁴⁷¹ William Moran, “A Kingdom of Priests,” in *The Bible in Current Catholic Thought*, ed. John L. McKenzie (New York: Herder & Herder, 1962), 7–20.

⁴⁷² See Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Priester für Gott* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1972), 79–80, 89, 117; Vanhoye, *Old Testament*, 246.

⁴⁷³ See John Author Davies, “A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on An Image of Israel in Exodus 19:6,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 53, no. 1 (2002): 157–59.

“a royal power exercised by priests.”⁴⁷⁴ Still others believe the phrase does not apply to the people as a whole, but only to the leaders. The people are defined by the expression “and a holy nation” (*uəgôy qādōš*). Yet the two phrases have a reciprocal relationship: since authority is exercised by the priests, the people are a holy nation. This interpretation does not appear in the Jewish tradition. The targum applies the expression to the whole people. The targum of Jerusalem I even makes the point emphatic with its expression, “crowned kings and celebrating priests.”⁴⁷⁵

The idea that Israel’s destiny is to be the ruler of other nations is widespread in the OT. For instance, in Psalms 2:7–8 and 72:8, the king in Jerusalem is given worldwide rule. In Genesis 27:29, the people are also recipients of this rule, as in Jacob’s blessing of Isaac. In Deuteronomy 15:6, the blessing for obedience to the covenant is that “you will be creditors to many nations but debtors to none; you will rule over many nations, and be ruled by none.” In addition, Isaiah 61:5–6 understands Exodus 19:5–6 in the sense of Israelites being royal priests.

Put differently, while the two nouns used in verse 6, “kingdom” and “nation,” have political implications, the modifiers “priestly” and “holy” move their meaning in a sacerdotal direction.⁴⁷⁶ Israel as a whole is to be a community in which worldly power and holy purpose converge. Israel has been promised the unparalleled vocation of political and religious superiority, and Sinai is the mountain whereby that promised vocation of a priestly kingdom and a holy nation is to be given and

⁴⁷⁴ W. L. Moran, “A Kingdom of Priests,” in *The Bible in Current Catholic Thought*, ed. J. L. McKenzie (New York: 1962), 7–20.

⁴⁷⁵ Fiorenza, *Priester für Gott*, 101, 151.

⁴⁷⁶ Note that Schüssler Fiorenza, in her *Priester für Gott*, 150, thinks differently from this work; in her view, the text of Exodus 19:6 expresses an ideal of democratic theocracy, in implicit opposition to the institutional monarchy and the priesthood. She says, “Israel finds itself in absolutely immediate contact with its God,” and such a situation “does not involve any need for mediating institutions, whether royal or sacerdotal.”

accepted.⁴⁷⁷ What then is the extended implication of Exodus 19:6 for the NT priesthood of the people, especially as expressed in 1 Peter 2:9? Behind this question are two arguments: First, that the divine promise has been fulfilled; all Israelites are already, in some degree, priests of the Lord. Second, that the Israelites' disobedience is an obstacle to the realization of the promise; its fulfilment must now be considered an object of expectation for the messianic times.⁴⁷⁸

Expansion of Exodus 19:6 in 1 Peter 2:9

It is widely acknowledged that 1 Peter 2:5, 9–10 (especially verse 9) and Revelation 1:6 apply to Christians the promise which the LORD made to the Jewish nations in Exodus 19:6: “but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (cf. Isa 61:6).⁴⁷⁹ The Epistle of Peter (my focus here) follows not the MT text of Exodus 19:6 but the LXX: *humeis de esesthe moi basileion hierateuma kai ethnos hagion tauta ta hrēmata ereis tois huiōis Israēl* (“but you shall be to me a royal priesthood and a holy nation; and these are the words which you shall speak to the sons of Israel”).

A careful comparative analysis of 1 Peter 2:9 with the LXX version of Exodus 19:6 reveals fundamental similarities and differences.⁴⁸⁰ To begin, instead of offering a literal translation of the MT's *mamleket kohānīm*, the LXX replaces the plural “priests” (*heireis*) with the singular *hierateuma*, and the qualifiers associated with it serve to qualify a collective group of

⁴⁷⁷ Brueggemann, “Exodus,” 401.

⁴⁷⁸ Fiorenza, *Priester für Gott*, 152–54; Vanhohe, *Old Testament*, 248.

⁴⁷⁹ See Jean Galot, *The Theology of the Priesthood* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 105; Albert Cardinal Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest According to the New Testament* (Gracewing: St. Bede's Publication, 2009) 241–42; Gerald O'Collins and Michael Keenan Jones, *Jesus Our Priest: A Christian Approach to the Priesthood of Christ* (Oxford: University Press, 2012), 27.

⁴⁸⁰ See details of this analysis in Vanhoye, *Old Testament*, 250–55, which is closely followed in this study.

persons indicated by the pronoun “you” (MT: *'attem*; LXX, *humeis de*) who are opposed to another category of persons. In the Greek of both the LXX and the NT, the two sentences bear identical beginnings, *humeis de* (“but you”), and contain similar titles: *basileion hierateuma* (“royal priesthood”) and *ethnos hagion* (“holy nation”).⁴⁸¹ This is why Jean Galot affirms that “the mention of the royal priesthood is expanded more on the basis of the same text from the Book of Exodus (Ex 19:6): ‘so that you too, the holy priesthood that offers the spiritual sacrifices which Jesus Christ has made acceptable to God, may be living stones making spiritual houses’(I Pet 2:5); ‘... you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light’ (I Pet 2:9).”⁴⁸²

In other words, the term *hierateuma* has fundamentally the same meaning in 1 Peter 2:9 as in Exodus 19:6, where it is applied to the Israelites as a whole: “you will be for me,” says God, “a *hierateuma*, a group of people exercising the priestly function.” In choosing this translation, the LXX that 1 Peter 2:9 follows has then added to the MT texts a cooperate aspect which did not appear in the simple plural *kohānīm*, “priests”; or, more precisely, it has extended to the priesthood the corporate aspect which was expressed in the MT by terms of the contexts “kingdom” and “nation.”⁴⁸³

⁴⁸¹ Vanhoye, *Old Testament*, 251. See also page 249 for Vanhoye’s interesting analysis of the Greek suffix- *ma*: “This suffix gives a concrete meaning to the words it helps to form. It indicates neither quality nor a function, but the product resulting from an action or, in a more general sense, an ensemble of things or of persons in relation to this action: *ktisma* signifies “creature/creation,” the tangible result of the action of “creating.”... Formed by means of the suffix *-ma*, the word *hierateuma* will therefore have a concrete meaning and will be able to represent neither a priest quality nor a priest function which is expressed by other words.” Vanyohe notes other similar words within Greek to include: *bouleuma* (group of senators), *techniteuma* (corporation of artisans), *politeuma* (collective citizens).

⁴⁸² Galot, *Theology of the Priesthood*, 106.

⁴⁸³ Vanhoye, *Old Testament*, 249–50.

On the other hand, the two texts (Exod 19:6 and 1 Pet 2:9) differ in certain areas. In Exodus 19:6 it is God who speaks, while in 1 Peter 2:9 it is a human being, an apostle, even though he does this on behalf of God. Importantly, both texts have changes in tense, audience, and conditions. The phrase in Exodus is in the future, it is addressed to the Israelites, whom it is contrasting with the pagan nations, and it is preceded by the conditional proposition “if.” In Peter, the affirmation is applied to the present, it is addressed to the people, who are drawn from pagan nations, and it is not conditional, except that the perspective is transformed. We pass from promise to fulfilment. In 1 Peter not only is the dignity of Christian people, the church, exalted, but also their functions are well spelled out, to include “ a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people destined for salvation, to proclaim great deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). Earlier on, Peter listed out other functions of this community, including to be a living stone built into spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, and to offer sacrifices acceptable to God (1 Pet 2:5). By speaking of proclaiming great deeds, 1 Peter underlines, adapts, and expands from Exodus 19:6 and Isaiah 61 an important function of the priestly people (*hierateuma*), the church—namely, that of bearing witness and proclaiming the good deeds to the ends of the world.⁴⁸⁴ Of course, the conception of the universal priesthood rests on the conception of the church as the new or renewed Israel. It is the church that verifies the promises recorded in Exodus 19:6 and the related text of Isaiah 61:6: “you will be named priests of the LORD, they will call you ‘ministers of our God’” (*māšārātē ‘ēlohēnū*). Even though the priesthood of the Jewish people was regarded as a ministry intended to benefit non-Jewish nations, the intention behind this persuasion was to proclaim the advantages Israel would derive from its privileged situation. We can see here the beginnings of an orientation which is to acquire full significance

⁴⁸⁴ Remember, the priesthood of the Jewish people was regarded as a ministry (*šārat*) intended to benefit non-Jewish nations (Isa 66:6), although its advantage would show the superiority of Israel over other nations.

in the priesthood of Christ in the NT.⁴⁸⁵ The universal priesthood of Christians is called upon to contribute to the sanctification of the world.

This holy priesthood of the people (*hierateuma*) who have been saved must also see as their duty the production of the effects of their salvation. They are called upon to let themselves “be built into a spiritual dwelling.” Members of the NT church are to offer themselves in sacrifice and service.⁴⁸⁶ This can come in the form of “voluntary imitation on the part of Christians of the sacrificial offering of Christ, the Suffering Servant who passed through suffering and attained to glory.”⁴⁸⁷ In other words, the offering of spiritual sacrifices is not aimed at promoting only individual perfection. It is an intercession on behalf of all human beings and constitutes a witness for the benefit of those who are near, or for those who are further away. In this sense, “the baptized are the priests of mankind. Their personal worship benefits all men [people]. The universal priesthood seeks to [serve, minister to, and] enhance the holiness of the universe,”⁴⁸⁸ including the church in Africa.

Conclusion & Theological Reflections for the Church in Africa

In the preceding material—in which we analyzed the ministry of the royal priesthood in Exodus 19:6 and its theological extension in 1 Peter 2:5–10—and throughout canonical Scripture, both the OT and NT, we find a recognition of the cooperate nature of faith and the need for inspired leadership, ministry, and organizational structure. Apart from the exceptional leadership of Moses and of the kings, high priests, Major Prophets, the wise people, elders, priests, and prophets

⁴⁸⁵ Galot, *Theology of the Priesthood*, 122.

⁴⁸⁶ Galot, *Theology of the Priesthood*, 107.

⁴⁸⁷ A. Fueillet, “Les ‘Sacrifices spirituels,’ ” *NRT* 96 (1974), 709. See also Vanhoye, *Old Testament*, 255–272 for further detailed analysis.

⁴⁸⁸ Galot, *Theology of the Priesthood*, 123.

that existed from the very beginning of the life of Israel as God's people, Jesus remains the foundation of all ministries and services in the NT.

The most important NT terms for ministry mentioned recently in Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter *Antiquum Ministerium* (on the ministry of the Catechist in the Church) include the verb *diakoneō*, which means "serve," and its cognates (*diakonia* = "service, ministry"; *diakonos* = "servant, minister, or deacon").⁴⁸⁹ Rarely used in the LXX, these words had a humble origin in everyday life where they referred to serving others in a practical way, e.g., by serving at the table (John 2:5, 9).⁴⁹⁰ In the NT, Christians of every culture and continent are "to serve one another" (1 Pet 4:10). All the Corinthians, albeit gifted in different ways (1 Cor 12), are called to be saints (1 Cor 1:2), which essentially means to be set apart or dedicated to the service of God. All believers are slaves/servants of God (1 Pet 2:16; Rev 2:20) and are called to serve Christ (Rom 14:18; Col 3:24).

In every age there has been the need for the oversight and care of God's people. There has always been the need to recognize not just organized ministry and the "ministerial priesthood," but also the "universal priesthood" or the "royal priesthood," which we've discussed extensively in this study (Exod 19:6; Isa 61:6; 1 Pet 2:5–10).⁴⁹¹

The royal priesthood (*hierateuma*) in 1 Peter 2 is expanded further on the basis of the same text from the LXX version of

⁴⁸⁹ See Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter, *Antiquum Ministerium* (Vatican City, Libreria Vaticana, 2021), nos.1–11, where Francis sees the lay ministries especially of the Catechist in the Church as an early one rooted not only in the Scriptures (especially 1 Cor 12), but also in various Church documents (e.g., *Dei Verbum*, 8; *Ad Gentes*, 17; *Evangelii Gaudium*, 102, 163–68).

⁴⁹⁰ Scobie, *Ways of God*, 624.

⁴⁹¹ For detailed discussion on the differences and mutual relations between "ministerial" and "universal" priesthoods, see Galot, *Theology of the Priesthood*, 117–127.

Exodus 19:6, which applies *hierateuma* to the Israelites as a whole as a group of people exercising the priestly function. Peter writes, “so that you too, the holy priesthood (*hierateuma hagion*) that offers the spiritual sacrifices which Jesus Christ has made acceptable to God, may be living stones making a spiritual house ... you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to proclaim the mighty acts of God who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pet 2:5, 9).

In choosing this translation, adapted as a prophetic fulfilment in 1 Peter, the LXX has comparatively added to the Hebrew text of Exodus 19:6 a corporate aspect which did not appear in the initial phrase, ‘*wə’attem tihyû-lî mamleket kohānîm*’ (“and you shall be to me a priestly kingdom”), whereby priesthood was expressed in the contexts of “kingdom” and “nation.”

Beyond this fulfilment of Exodus 19:6 in 1 Peter, what are the distinctive theological functions or implications of this biblical universal priesthood to all Christians, or the royal priesthood in the church in Africa? This reflective question presupposes one of the most popular models of the church in Africa, *basileion hierateuma (mamleket kohānîm)*, in a limited way (excluding the ministerial priesthood) as part of a family of God’s people, distinguished from all other human communities by faith, hope, and love that derive from and center on Jesus Christ and his redemptive work.⁴⁹² This church-family, the *hierateuma* of God’s people, the Christian priesthood in Africa, has been blessed historically in many ways: in its sacramental life, its deep sense of the sacred and of the existence of God, its lively liturgical celebrations, and its deep-cherished sense of family values.⁴⁹³ These blessings notwithstanding, its

⁴⁹² In this category belongs the Catholic Church as well as other church denominations.

⁴⁹³ For details of the nature of the church in Africa as a family, see Michael Ufok Udoekpo, “Becoming a Church-Family in Africa that Witnesses the Gospel to Everyone: Perspectives from Luke 3:4-6 and Isaiah 40:4-5,” in *Becoming*

numerous challenges include poverty, political instability, social disorientation, misery, war, injustice of all forms, terrorism, division, ethnocentrism, selfishness, tribalism, and inordinate materialism.⁴⁹⁴

By speaking of the offering of spiritual sacrifices, 1 Peter, so familiar with Exodus 19:6, adopts a viewpoint that is more properly priestly—namely, the offering of sacrifices. This offering is not just mere personal holiness or exemplary Christian living, but it consists in the consecration of the entire Christian people—in this case, in Africa—who have been the recipients of God’s favors (“a chosen race,” “a people set apart,” “a consecrated nation”), including those listed above.

According to Galot, “these phrases are synonymous with the expression ‘a body of priests’ and refer to the holiness received as a result of God’s love and the act of redemption.”⁴⁹⁵ The priestly people in Africa are the people of the saved. They have received salvation, they have been baptized, and they are called upon to produce the effects of salvation they’ve received by caring for one another as members of loving biological families would. The priestly and baptized Christians in Africa are to offer themselves in sacrifice for the common good by reaching out to others, especially the poor, by governing well politically in the fear of the Lord, by avoiding conflict, corruption in public offices, violence, terrorism, and division, and by pursuing justice, love between brothers and sisters, dialogue, unity, and

Church as the Family of God in Africa: Graces, Challenges and Prospects, ed. Nwagwu Gerald et al. (CIWA Theology Conference, 2019), 171–92.

⁴⁹⁴ Cf. John Paul II, First African Synod, *Ecclesia in Africa*; Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Africa and Its Evangelizing Towards the Year 2000; “You Shall Be My Witnesses (Acts 1:8)” (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995); Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus* Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace, “You are the Salt of the Earth... You are the Light of the World (Matt 5:13–14)” (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011); and the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the SECAM Golden Jubilee Year July 2018–July 2019, for some of the challenges and prospects facing the *hierateuma* in Africa.

⁴⁹⁵ Galot, *Theology of the Priesthood*, 106.

peace. In fact, to be more precise, “spiritual sacrifices” for African Christians means worshiping God in spirit and in truth. For the church in Africa, it is a voluntary imitation of the sacrificial offering of Christ as a Suffering Servant to all. Even though the offering of spiritual sacrifices is the personal act of every Christian, it is communal in nature, as is the priesthood itself.

This communal sense of sacrifice amplifies the already familiar practice of *ubuntu* (“I am because you are”) in Africa.⁴⁹⁶ In sum, 1 Peter’s theology of the royal priesthood based on Exodus 19:6 invites the *hierateuma* in Africa to vigorously engage in proclaiming the good deeds of our Lord to the ends of the world: “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9; cf. Exod 19:6). The church in Africa is called to become an agent of evangelization that witnesses the gospel to everyone, poor and rich alike, irrespective of gender, culture, tribe, sociopolitical class, or geographical boundaries.

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⁴⁹⁶ For the most recent discussion of *Ubuntu* for the church in Africa, see Michael Ufok Udoekpo, “A Contextual Re-evaluation of Humanity’s Responsible Identity in Genesis 1:26–28, in the Light of African Sense of *Ubutu*,” in *Light in Once Dark Word: Contemporary Issues In Nigerian Christianity*. Vol 4; ed. John W. Carter (Hayesville: American Journal of Biblical Theology, 2021), 196-220.

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