

# Being, becoming and behaving: Developing Christian identity and chaplaincy in a plural world.

---

## Introduction

This paper will examine some of the questions surrounding the formation of early Christian identity, specifically as that identity is formed in interaction with other religious and cultural traditions. It will do so by reference to the communities in Asia Minor, addressed by two New Testament documents: 1 Peter (with a focus on 2:4-10) and Revelation. It will then briefly consider some of what a modern, chaplaincy context could learn from the approach and teaching of these New Testament texts, in terms of its relationship with – and capacity to be shaped by – other faiths and the secular environment.

## Being

While the Christian communities in Asia Minor, addressed by both 1 Peter and Revelation, may be a mixture of Jews and gentiles, it seems probable that they consisted primarily of the latter;<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter's message is that their conversion guarantees them incorporation into the people of God. Among the biblical designations for the church are those which more naturally apply to those converted from outside the chosen people of God, who are, prior to their conversion, 'not a people';<sup>2</sup> they become God's people, or children of Sarah,<sup>3</sup> by conversion rather than by birth. Those references which might seem more applicable to Jews, on the other hand, refer to those dispersed from a homeland identifiable not as Judea but as God's heavenly kingdom.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, references to their life before becoming Christians suggest a Graeco-Roman background,<sup>5</sup> while the fact that many of the churches in the area are of pauline foundation might tentatively add to the conclusion that they are predominantly gentile. Given Christianity's Jewish roots, the Tanakh was authoritative from the beginning, so it is not surprising that it should be used to such an extent, even in addressing gentiles. Similarly, what is known of the social and ethnic make-up of the area addressed by Revelation, together with the author's apparent polemic against Roman oppression and the cult of emperor worship,<sup>6</sup> suggest that these congregations may again be predominantly – if not exclusively – composed of gentile Christians.

These are, then, gentiles who have become part of what is still essentially a Jewish sect; it would seem probable that this would raise questions of identity for such Christians. They are not obviously

---

<sup>1</sup> P.J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A commentary on First Peter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996). 50-1.; J.H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 2000). 89-90.; R. Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter: A commentary on the Greek text*, trans. P.H. Davids (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008). 42.

<sup>2</sup> 2:10; cf. Rom 9:25.

<sup>3</sup> 3:6.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. 1:4; cf. 1:12; 3:21f; 5:10.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. 1:14,18; 2:10-12; 3:5f; 4:3f; but cf. 2:25, which speaks of 'returning', not discovering an entirely new life.

<sup>6</sup> R. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993). 338-83; *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). 35-9; D. Flemming, "'On Earth as it is in Heaven': Holiness and the people of God in Revelation," in *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament*, ed. K.E. Brower and A. Johnson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 344,46,51-2; J.N. Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

and unambiguously included within the unique relationship which the people of Israel have with their God; they are not, for instance, permitted within the inner courts of the temple, in which the most holy rituals were performed. The question of how Paul and his communities dealt with this inherent tension – the issues around circumcision and food laws with which they wrestled and the conclusions which they reached – are well rehearsed and are not our concern here, but should also be held in mind as we consider the ways in which the petrine epistle and Revelation approach the issue.

If these gentile converts to Christianity might feel equivocal about their status within God's favour, however, their place within their native religious milieu is clearly sacrificed, and with it, much of their ability to participate in the civic or social life of their community. It is difficult to reconstruct precisely what part religion played in ordinary people's private lives,<sup>7</sup> but some important documents give some indication of its pervasiveness; fictional works, such as Apuleius' exploration of magic in *The Golden Ass*,<sup>8</sup> or Petronius' *Dinner with Trimalchio*<sup>9</sup> illustrate aspects of Graeco-Roman religious life, as does Plutarch's discussion of *superstitio* and atheism.<sup>10</sup> Also relevant are inscriptions<sup>11</sup> and archaeological remains of household shrines (discoveries at Pompeii and Herculaneum being particularly valuable).<sup>12</sup> The interpretation of this data is not straightforward, in part because religion appears to have been primarily a public or state matter, with 'private' religion an element of the individual's participation in civic life and conduct as a good citizen.<sup>13</sup> On this view, the political and religious spheres are inextricably linked, to the point of being virtually inseparable.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> J.B. Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007). 9.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. III.21-26; IX.29; cf. also Lucius' personal devotion to the gods and goddesses whom he serves (XI.17-19,24-26); the telling, in a domestic setting, of Greek mythology (V); and the selling of (false) oracles to individuals seeking guidance (IX.9).

<sup>9</sup> E.g. frag. 74, where a libation is poured out, to appease the evil spirits after a cock has crowed (taken as a bad omen). The work is satirical, and therefore exaggerated, but presumably grounded to some degree in the realities of daily life and religion.

<sup>10</sup> Defined respectively as too great a fear of, and too little attention to, the divine: *Superstit.* 1-2,7; cf. Rives, *Religion*: 183-7.; M. Bailey, "The Meanings of Magic," *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft* 1(2006): 8.; R. Gordon, "Superstitio, Superstition and Religious Repression in the Late Roman Republic and Principate (100 BCE – 300 CE)," *Past & Present* 199(2008): 77-8., who suggests that *superstitio* is a much broader, largely rhetorical term, which could even include the concept of atheism; R.Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987). 425-6., who considers atheism – a failure to honour the gods rather than a belief system – to be a key complaint against Christians.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. *IEph* 1266, noting the discharge of a vow to Artemis, by Cominia Junia, or *ILS* 3526, marking an offering to Silvanus by Sextus Attius Dionysius on obtaining his freedom.

<sup>12</sup> J.T. Bakker, *Living and Working with the Gods: Studies of evidence for private religion and its material environment in the city of Ostia (100-500 AD)* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1994). 32-43.; Rives, *Religion*: 119-20.. Cf. also accounts of statues of the gods being placed in the home, e.g. Cicero, *Let. Att.* i.1.5.

<sup>13</sup> This position, perhaps now a majority view, is summarised by "Graeco-Roman Religion in the Roman Empire: Old assumptions and new approaches," *Currents in Biblical Research* 8(2010): 269.; cf. M. Beard and M.H. Crawford, *Rome in the Late Republic* (London: Duckworth, 1985).; S.R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman imperial cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). 11.. But Woolf draws attention to the range of religious traditions which fell outside the idea of state religion (e.g. the cults of some deities), or were not ritual-dominated (e.g. myths), and areas in which personal religion might be important (e.g. as a driver of religious change): G. Woolf, "Polis-religion and its Alternatives in the Roman Provinces," in *Römische Reichsreligion und Provinzialreligion*, ed. H. Cancik and J. Rüpke (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 76. For the involvement of civic authority in private religion, and the relationship between private and civic cults, see Rives, *Religion*: 119-22.

<sup>14</sup> M. Beard, J.A. North, and S.R.F. Price, *Religions of Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). 359.; Beard and Crawford, *Rome*: 30.; P.A. Harland, "Imperial Cults within Local Cultural Life: Associations in Roman Asia," *Ancient History Bulletin*, no. 17 (2003): 87-9.; I. Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004). 27-8.; cf. p.29, where he sees this integration also in the offering of honours

Public and private religion seem to be concerned in large part with obtaining and maintaining divine favour and goodwill,<sup>15</sup> which was largely an issue of correct observance of form and ritual.<sup>16</sup> There was room within this system for considerable latitude as to actual beliefs, as long as ritual practice was maintained; this, however, was beyond what could be countenanced by the Christian community. Guilds, associations, public office, games, social activity would all require sacrifice to the gods or to the emperor, or the holding of priestly office. Public and private life seem to have been so thoroughly infused with religious involvement that conversion to Christianity must have been socially and politically isolating.

Not much more can be known about those who first received and preserved the books, but we might speculate that 1 Peter's recipients were generally lacking in political or domestic power, perhaps of lower social status.<sup>17</sup> The churches clearly contained slaves<sup>18</sup> and women,<sup>19</sup> and instruction is directed to these two groups, with no equivalent for masters, and relatively little for husbands.<sup>20</sup> Revelation, if the letters to the seven churches are a reliable guide, may be received by a socially relatively diverse group.

Both texts appear to have been written to those who suffer; the word εἰ, in 1 Peter 1:6, suggests *potential* suffering, although the aorist participle, λυπηθέντες, and the wider context of the letter, perhaps give it the more definite sense of 'despite', or 'although'. It is not particularly clear how severe the suffering is; the comparison in verse 7, with gold refined by fire, may suggest something intense, but as the metaphor is directed to the outcome, not the nature, of the trials, this probably reads too much into the parallel.

The form is also unclear; it could plausibly be persecution by the state authorities,<sup>21</sup> or the determined, possibly violent, opposition of neighbours or families.<sup>22</sup> 1 Peter 3:13-17 seems to speak of general opposition, although the 'defence' (ἀπολογία) and the 'abusers' (ἐπηρεάζοντες) might refer to a courtroom trial.<sup>23</sup> The comparison in the following passage (v.18ff), with the sufferings of

---

or worship to ruling or powerful figures; but cf. B. Dignas, *Economy of the Sacred in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). 271-8.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. e.g. Homer, *Iliad*, 1.39-41.

<sup>16</sup> J. Scheid, "Quand Faire c'est Croire," in *Les rituels sacrificiels chez les romains*, Paris (2005). argues that the true meaning of Graeco-Roman religion was seen, not through an individualised 'faith' system, but through its system of ritual and rite; but cf. C. King, "The Organization of Roman Religious Beliefs," *Classical Antiquity* 22(2003).

<sup>17</sup> J.H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A sociological exegesis of 1 Peter, its situation and strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981). 70-2., *Peter*: 94.; but cf. Achtemeier, *Peter*: 55-7., who sees a more representative cross-section of society, and J.B. Green, "Living as Exiles: The church in the diaspora in 1 Peter," in *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament*, ed. K.E. Brower and A. Johnson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 315.

<sup>18</sup> 2:18-20; but cf. 2:13-17, which may refer to freemen.

<sup>19</sup> 3:1-6, although perhaps including wealthy women.

<sup>20</sup> 3:7, but cf. Achtemeier, *Peter*: 52-5., that the references to women and slaves are examples of the hostile treatment Christians might expect, rather than evidence of low social standing.

<sup>21</sup> F.W. Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970). 32-3,188. The association with Peter may suggest the Neronian persecution: Tacitus, *Ann.* xv.38-44; though cf. Suetonius, *Nero* 16.2; 39.2. However, it is not clear that this extended beyond Rome. A later possible persecution falls during the reign of Domitian: cf. *1 Clem.* 1:1; Rev; Dio, lxvii.14 (if Christians were included in the persecution of Jews – cf. Acts 18:2); Pliny, *Epist.* X.96.6; but cf. F.G. Downing, "Pliny's Prosecutions of Christians: Revelation and 1 Peter," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 34(1988): 118. None of these are conclusive, however, and Pliny's letter would suggest several points of persecution over a twenty-year period: Feldmeier, *Peter*: 12-13.; Suetonius, *Dom.* 8.

<sup>22</sup> *Peter*: 2-10.; Elliott, *Home*: 78-84., *Peter*: 97-103.; L. Goppelt, *Der Erste Petrusbrief* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978). 58-60.

<sup>23</sup> 3:15f. The use of παντὶ, however, seems to render the idea of defence more general: "always ready with a defence for all who ask of you an account...."

Christ, may imply that Christians also risked death at the hands of the law or violent mobs, or simply were called to take as their model Christ, who suffered unjustly. The preceding passage (2:11-3:12) is concerned with their daily conduct, advocating submission to authority, humility, piety, and mutual love, so that their godly life will leave their accusers without an accusation, or, if not preventing persecution, will at least ensure that their suffering is for the sake of Christ, which brings blessing.<sup>24</sup>

The present reality of suffering is much clearer in 4:12-19; verses 12, 13 and 19 in particular speak not of what might come to be, but of what is the case. The appearance of εἰ again in verses 14 and 16, does not contradict this, as any individual might be fortunate enough to escape.<sup>25</sup> The implication is also of severe suffering – of a community taken by surprise by the ferocity of its afflictions; the eschatological framework also suggests a need of greater hope and comfort than human power could provide.

The parallel between glorious suffering ‘in the name of Christ’ and shameful suffering for doing wrong<sup>26</sup> may suggest the criminalising of Christianity, such that the two penalties take the same form; likewise the implication of suffering for being a Christian, rather than for any specific act.<sup>27</sup> However, more general opposition may be at issue here, with Christianity – or popular prejudices – becoming the focus of popular dislike.<sup>28</sup> Taken together with the call to holy living in chapters 2 and 3, this builds up a picture of a religious community, disliked and often victimised by the wider society in which it was located, but eager to show that there was no reason to fear or reject it.

5:9 may not refer to externally imposed suffering at all, but to the struggle with temptation. Indeed, the two may be the same – the call to be holy<sup>29</sup> perhaps recognises that it may be precisely *because* of persecution that temptation arises. If persecution is in mind, it is clearly not localised. There is no evidence for state persecution on this scale;<sup>30</sup> it may suggest that Christians worldwide lived with the constant threat, or ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ may refer to churches in various locations across the empire, rather than a universal phenomenon. More likely, however, is that the suffering envisaged is the struggle to maintain a godly life in the face of general opposition, which may be experienced as popular resentment or even violence; it may at times include official penalisation, but is not limited to such

---

<sup>24</sup> 3:13f; cf. 4:14.

<sup>25</sup> In v.16, at least, the writer is concerned with individual suffering, rather than the corporate suffering of the community: τις ὑμῶν, v.15, on which the beginning of v.16 (εἰ δὲ ὡς Χριστιανός) is dependent.

<sup>26</sup> Vv.15-16; cf. 3:17.

<sup>27</sup> Fox, *Pagans*: 427-8.; though cf. S. Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1985). 24. Cf. also 3:13-15: P. Garnsey, "Religious Toleration in Classical Antiquity," in *Persecution and Toleration*, ed. W.J. Sheils (Basil Blackwell, 1984), 9-10., although it would seem unlikely that the quality of its adherents' personal life would make any difference in a trial.

<sup>28</sup> Fox, *Pagans*: 423-4.; Benko, *Pagan.*, on the basis of a popular view of Christians as cannibals (*ibid.*, 70.), immoral (*ibid.*, 71.) and magicians (*ibid.*, 103,26,31.).

<sup>29</sup> 2:11ff.

<sup>30</sup> Achtemeier, *Peter*: 29-33. Garnsey, "Toleration," 9. sees no systematic suppression, but argues that Christians were constantly vulnerable to the threat of sporadic persecution. Pliny's letter (*Epist.* X.96.6) and Trajan's reply (*Epist.* X.96.97) provide the most concrete evidence for persecution in Asia Minor; concerning Bithynia, they suggest that the profession of Christianity was by then regarded as a crime, punishable by death, although Trajan forbids the active seeking out of Christians for punishment (cf. Justin Martyr, *Apol.* 1.3-4): Fox, *Pagans*: 427-8.; Benko, *Pagan*: 1-4,13-14.; Downing, "Pliny."; Beare, *Peter*: 33-4.; but cf. E. Best, *1 Peter*, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1971). 41.; J.R. Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1988). lxvi.; D.G. Horrell, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, Epworth Commentaries (London: Epworth, 1998). 9.

situations. Rather, it is addressed to a situation where opposition and the danger of violence are part of daily reality.<sup>31</sup>

In the case of Revelation also, uncertainty over dating means that no conclusive answer can be given as to which – if any – period of official oppression lies behind the writing.<sup>32</sup> Whatever its origin or nature, however, it seems that there is here either the expectation<sup>33</sup> or actual reality of genuine, tangible suffering.<sup>34</sup> The writer's knowledge or assumption that there have been or will be martyrs (2:13; 6:9-10; 17:6), and his use of the apocalyptic genre, combine to portray a context in which to be a Christian is neither safe nor easy.

There is, however, one apparent inconsistency. It is easy to see why, under threat or in the face of violent hostility, a once faithful community may abandon its ways and conform – outwardly at least – to the religious and civic demands of its persecutors or wider society. However, it seems unlikely that a persecuted community would be 'luke-warm', like the church in Laodicea, or lack passion or earlier commitment, as with that in Ephesus. Persecution might be expected to sharpen the mind somewhat, and while the less committed may abandon a faith, zeal will often increase among those who remain. It may be, of course, that a general hostility short of outright persecution would cause people to remain nominally committed, while avoiding too great a display of religiosity,<sup>35</sup> and in this case, Revelation's fiery language and imagery might be designed to stir up in the likes of the Laodiceans a sense of the urgency of their faith, for which some have died and many more may suffer and die in future.

In this context, therefore, it is perhaps understandable that there is some emphasis in both letters upon the identity of the Christian communities. 1 Peter 2:4-10 draws upon some very distinctively Jewish ideas, using Exodus 19:5-6 and perhaps Isaiah 9:2; 43:21; 61:6; Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; Hosea 1:9-10; 2:23 to give an account of the status and identity of the Christians. Particularly powerful is the climax to this passage, in verses 9-10; this is, as we have noted, a group of gentiles, and hence outside of the covenant relationship between God and God's chosen people. In addition, it is a community which is on the receiving end of hostility, and whose religious convictions will prevent its full participation in the religious – and hence civic – life of the society in which its members live. And yet, here, they are endowed with some key tenets of Jewish identity as the chosen people of God –

---

<sup>31</sup> Achtemeier, *Peter*: 34-6.; Rives, *Religion*: 196-9.. Feldmeier, *Peter*: 6-9. argues that Christianity's inevitable rejection of the state cults would both bring the believers into constant conflict with the state authority and inevitably isolate them from mainstream society, preventing participation in guilds, festivals and cultic celebrations; cf. Green, "Exiles," 322.; Rives, *Religion*: 129-30,98-99.; but cf. Downing, "Pliny," 115.. T. Seland, *Strangers in the Light: Philonic perspectives on Christian identity in 1 Peter* (Leiden: Brill, 2005). 39-77. argues that this isolation is underlined by a dominant motif of being a proselyte, with the inevitable change from familiar religious practice to unfamiliar.

<sup>32</sup> L.L. Thompson, "The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and empire," (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 101-9, 16., who places it in Domitian's reign, but sees no extraordinary persecution during this time.

<sup>33</sup> A.Y. Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984). 77,165.; D.A. DeSilva, "The Social Setting of the Revelation to John: Conflicts within, fears without," *Westminster Theological Journal* 54(1992): 273-302.

<sup>34</sup> Thompson, "Revelation," 195-7.

<sup>35</sup> It is arguable, for example, that the Nicolaitan heresy encouraged a compromise, permitting continued involvement in the pagan structures of city life, to remain engaged with the Pagan majority: G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A commentary on the Greek text*, vol. 21, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). 30-2,38,248-51,61. Cf. P.A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations: Claiming a place in ancient Mediterranean society* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003). 259-63.; Flemming, "Earth," 344,9,52-53.; Collins, *Crisis*: 84-104.; DeSilva, "Social," 286-96. But cf. also S.J. Friesen, "Satan's Throne, Imperial Cults and the Social Settings of Revelation," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 27(2005): 367-73., who argues that there was agreement over non-participation in at least the imperial cult, although participation in the life and wealth of empire and the eating of sacrificial meat may have been at issue.

as a people and a nation, as royal – and described in terms of the temple and cult which stood at the centre of all this: they are a priesthood, and they are holy. They are consciously being included within the previously unique status of the Jews, and being brought within the terms of the covenant. The focus is on the relationship of the Christian community to God, and perhaps its standing relative to the other, less holy, nations. The position of these verses suggests that this is the point towards which the writer has been working as he explores the church's calling. Nevertheless, even in the midst of this climactic section, the community is identified as having a purpose and task: the declaration of the praises of God. The emphasis may be upon the status of God's people and their privileged position,<sup>36</sup> but this does not come without a corresponding response and responsibility.

Verse 5, conversely, appears to be predominantly concerned with the role to be exercised by the people and priesthood of God. In imitation of Christ, they are to be – or are being – built up into God's house, to offer 'spiritual sacrifices'. In some sense, they are to take on the identity of the place of worship and assume responsibility for offering that worship. The picture is not straightforward, however; the emphasis may be upon their responsibilities, but the description, 'holy', while surely a call to ritual and ethical purity, is also, perhaps more deeply, a statement about the relationship of the priesthood to the God it serves. To be holy is to be close to, and closely identified with, God.<sup>37</sup> The very holiness of the Christians is the sign of their priesthood and divine acceptance. This is no self-appointed priestly body; it is a community dedicated to and by God.

In Exodus 19:6,<sup>38</sup> the promise was made to Israel, that they would, in the future, become 'a kingdom of priests and a holy people', conditional upon their obedience (19:5). In Revelation, as in 1 Peter, this promise is applied to the church with the crucial difference that it is now in the past, accomplished already. In this context, the progression of the doxology in which the promise is first located within Revelation (1:5-6) is significant: "To the one who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us a kingdom, priests for his God and Father..." The condition of obedience, laid upon Israel in Exodus 19:5, has not been fulfilled, so, on the way to making them royal and priestly, the problem of their sin had to be dealt with. Rather than live in a certain way in order to earn a certain status, they were lifted from sinfulness, all the way to priestliness. The doxology is also striking for its linking of priesthood with Christ's love; the relationship of love between Christ and the church, rather than the covenant between God and God's people, now forms the basis of their status.

One implication of being priests is proximity to the sanctuary, and hence to God. Similarly, the priestly status of those who participate in the first resurrection<sup>39</sup> means that they are admitted to the presence of God,<sup>40</sup> in contrast with all who do not share in this resurrection,<sup>41</sup> whose fate is separation from God.<sup>42</sup> Revelation certainly envisages the ἄγιοι<sup>43</sup> approaching God – ὁ ἅγιος<sup>44</sup> – with an astounding degree of access. Saints, drawn from all the nations are hailed as priests in 5:10, then

---

<sup>36</sup> Elliott, *Peter*: 94. points out that foreigners and the dispossessed – the marginalised in society, from which the recipients may well have been drawn and with whom they are aligned (2:11) – would have been excluded from civic and priestly office, giving this status additional power.

<sup>37</sup> Feldmeier, *Peter*: 141.; Elliott, *Peter*: 420-1.

<sup>38</sup> And cf. Isa 61:6.

<sup>39</sup> 20:6.

<sup>40</sup> 21:3,7;22:14; cf. G. Stevenson, "Power and Place: Temple and identity in the book of Revelation," (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), 239-41., drawing also on the lampstand imagery of 1:12-20 (and cf. 2:5), as representing Christ's presence within the church, mediating God's presence in a priestly manner.

<sup>41</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 21: 1003.

<sup>42</sup> 20:10,14-15; 21:8,27; 22:15.

<sup>43</sup> 5:8; 8:3,4; 11:18; 13:7,10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20,24; 19:8; 20:6,9.

<sup>44</sup> 3:7; 6:10; cf. 4:8. Flemming, "Earth," 345-6. points to holiness as the essence of God's identity, and the community as holy because it participates in God's holiness *ibid.*, 348.

in 7:9ff, great multitudes from these nations come themselves before the throne and the Lamb and participate in the heavenly worship. This idea of priesthood, drawn from Exodus 19:6, is picked up again in Revelation 20:6, where the special status reserved for the saints is intensified for the martyrs. In identifying the Christians as priests, John is perhaps not overly concerned with how such priestliness may be lived out in practice – his main concern is to reflect on their status in God’s eyes. Being made ‘priests’ is to be made special for God, set apart for a life dedicated to God, in general and ontological, rather than functional, terms.

In addition, however, John may be reflecting something of the Christians’ relationship with the world. It does not seem that the priests of 1:6, 5:10 and 20:6 have a mediatory role, but there are other relationships to be had, and again it may be a question of status. Some have seen the ‘royal’ element as dominant in the use of Exodus 19:6, with the priestly aspect retained primarily from habit or an unwillingness to do violence to the scriptural text.<sup>45</sup> Vanhoye almost certainly overstates the case in arguing that the ‘royal’ dimension is essentially an outworking of the priestly status,<sup>46</sup> but it is nevertheless worth remembering that John’s much freer use of the reference in 20:6 not only retains the priesthood, where it could easily have been dropped, but retains it in a form truer to that part of the Exodus verse than ‘kingdom’, which is transmuted into a verb, βασιλεύω. It is probably unjust to the writer’s deliberate intentions to dismiss the priestly dimension as habit; the fact that they are so consistently linked, suggests that they are associated in the author’s thinking. If the idea of royalty relates to the saints’ position in the world, so partaking in Christ’s reign on earth offers the persecuted Christians a seemingly reversed relationship with a hostile world,<sup>47</sup> it is surely not far-fetched to suggest that the related idea of priesthood may also denote an elevated status in relation to the world.

Probably, the two terms together are necessary to express the full status of the believers. Βασιλεία expresses the church’s elevated position in the world and ἱερεῖς the position of the believers in God’s eyes. Both aspects of their status come from Christ’s love and blood (1:6), and, in its fullest, most glorious manifestation, through their own participation in Christ’s sacrifice (20:6), which may seem to make them victims but in fact declares them to be a privileged elite. Ultimately, then, through its application to the church of the promise made to Israel in Exodus 19:6, Revelation reflects a special status which comes in part from being priests and consequently having fuller and closer access to God.<sup>48</sup>

The closing chapters of Revelation are concerned with a glorious future, represented through the ‘new heaven and new earth’ and the renewed city of Jerusalem.<sup>49</sup> In this culmination of the purposes of God, however, the priesthood of his people plays no explicit part; no reference is made to their priestly position in the new creation. Mathewson argues that 22:3-5 expresses the perfection and fulfilment of the believers’ dual – priestly and royal – status; 22:3b-5a reflects a fulfilled priesthood, and 22:5b a fulfilled reign.<sup>50</sup> Vanhoye draws attention to the continuance of worship in the presence of God, and the parallel between the Lord’s name on the forehead of the

---

<sup>45</sup> E.S. Fiorenza, *Priester für Gott* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1972). 413.; in this she is countered by D. Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: The meaning and function of the Old Testament in Revelation 21.1-22.5*, JSNTSup (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003). 213.

<sup>46</sup> A. Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest According to the New Testament*, trans. J.B. Orchard (Petersham, MA: St. Bede’s Publications, 1986). 295.

<sup>47</sup> Though cf. Bauckham, *Theology*: 142., who sees the emphasis of the priestly rule in ch.22 as participation in God’s reign, not ruling over others.

<sup>48</sup> Vanhoye, *Priests*: 306-7.

<sup>49</sup> 21:1-2.

<sup>50</sup> Mathewson, *New*: 212-3,20.

worshippers and the inscription of consecration on the high priest's diadem.<sup>51</sup> He points also to the intimacy with God,<sup>52</sup> superior to that of the high priest,<sup>53</sup> which indicates the priesthood of the saints, perfectly fulfilled.<sup>54</sup> This again unites priesthood with reign, now also a fulfilled reality.<sup>55</sup> This argument is compelling, but it is notable that these chapters contain no direct reference to the priesthood of the saints, nor do they draw upon Exodus 19:6 in their imagery of the final salvation and re-creation of the heavens and earth.<sup>56</sup> Vanhoye perhaps overstates the significance of the priestly image to Revelation as a whole, and is therefore apt to see priestly service and reference throughout, but his insight regarding the uniquely free access of the saints into the presence of God is a helpful one. It is perhaps this which is of importance for Revelation, rather than their consecration as priests, which is simply one way of reminding them of the extraordinary privilege which is – or will be – theirs, in their ability to stand before their Lord in praise and worship.

In the end, then, it appears to be the people's relationship with God which is fundamental to their identity, in relation to both God and the world. Their place in this world and in the next, their participation in the community of worshippers gathered around the throne – all this is based upon their privileged standing as the people of God, drawn from 'every tribe and tongue and people and nation',<sup>57</sup> which gives them a closeness to God and a right of approach, never before enjoyed even by his own people. In both 1 Peter and Revelation, the Christian communities of Asia Minor are given confidence in God's love, in their status, in their future and destiny, and in the fundamental rightness of their position, as against any which stands in opposition to them.

## Becoming

How, then, is this special identity to be reconciled with the reality of life in the earthly sphere, amidst the mundane and often hostile realities of Graeco-Roman society? Here, another, rather different, Jewish concept might perhaps be found to be of importance. 1 Peter opens by addressing itself to the *παρεπιδήμιος διασποράς*<sup>58</sup> and this idea recurs in 1:17 and again in 2:11. This latter reference, which leads into the ethical exhortations which form a major part of the letter, immediately follows the inclusion of the gentile Christian communities within the designations of God's people. To be aliens or exiles is not, perhaps, a major step away from such an identity; rather, they seem to be included within that part of the people which forms the 'dispersion' or 'diaspora'.

In Elliott's study of *ἱεράτευμα* in the Septuagint,<sup>59</sup> he draws parallels between the use of the words *ἱεράτευμα* and *πολίτευμα*, with the idea of a *ἱεράτευμα* precisely deriving from the self-understanding

---

<sup>51</sup> 22:3-4; cf. Exod 28:36-38; 39:30f; *Let. Aris.* 98; Josephus, *J.W.* 5.235; *Ant.* 3.178; (perhaps, however, more likely to be a contrast to the mark of the beast on the heads of those deceived by it, in 13:16-17; 14:9-11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4; cf. also 3:12; 7:32): Stevenson, "Power," 247-51.; A. Spatafora, "From the 'Temple of God' to God as the Temple: A biblical theological study of the temple in the book of Revelation," (Roma: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1997), 245.; Bauckham, *Theology*: 142. For a summary of the significance of bearing a name in this way, see Spatafora, "From the 'Temple of God' to God as the Temple: A biblical theological study of the temple in the book of Revelation," 137-9.

<sup>52</sup> 22:4.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Exod 33:20,23; Lev 16:2,13.

<sup>54</sup> Vanhoye, *Priests*: 306.; Bauckham, *Theology*: 142.; Flemming, "Earth," 355.

<sup>55</sup> 22:5; Mathewson, *New*: 213. also points to the structure of the vision as a whole, which he sees as framed by the Exod 19:6 promise (1:6) and its fulfilment (22:3-5).

<sup>56</sup> J.H. Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy* (Leiden: Brill, 1966). 117.; but cf. Mathewson, *New*: 213.

<sup>57</sup> 5:10.

<sup>58</sup> 1:1.

<sup>59</sup> Elliott, *Elect*: 69-70.



of a Jewish community living in the diaspora.<sup>60</sup> This, then, raises the question of what this self-understanding might be. The concept of a *πολίτευμα* might be defined as a community of one particular ethnicity living as foreigners in a particular city, granted at least a degree of legal protection and political or cultural self-determination.<sup>61</sup> Smallwood argues that this was a common arrangement, existing in Antioch, Ephesus, Sardis, Berenice and elsewhere, and that the communities formed “a recognized, formally constituted corporation of aliens enjoying the right of domicile in a foreign city and forming a separate, semi-autonomous civic body, a city within the city.”<sup>62</sup>

A Jewish *πολίτευμα*, then, was a community with enough autonomy to ensure that the Jews could live precisely *as* Jews. If this was a situation which was sought-after by members of the Jewish diaspora, it would seem that their Jewish identity was of some real importance to them. To speak of being a *πολίτευμα* places some emphasis on the homeland from which the diaspora Jew has come and the ethnic identity to which he or she looks. This can be seen, for instance, in Paul’s use of the word to identify the Christians as citizens of heaven.<sup>63</sup> Philo, too, uses the cognate verb, *πολιτεύομαι*, to speak of the patriarchs retaining their identity as citizens of the heavenly ‘homeland’.<sup>64</sup> Conclusions here must be tentative, but it would seem that at least some contemporary diaspora Jews understood their identity as a *πολίτευμα* to emphasise their commitment to living out their Jewish identity in their host city;<sup>65</sup> this would accord well with such displays of loyalty as the commitment to the Temple at Jerusalem.<sup>66</sup> Van Unnik goes further, arguing that ‘diaspora’ was, in a sense, the logical conclusion of ‘exile’, in that the people of God was not only removed from its homeland, but was in a sense dismantled or dismembered as a nation. It was to be understood as the effect of God’s punishment, a state to be lamented, and there would have been in theory – and perhaps in practice – a longing to return to the holy land.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 69.; though cf. E.S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). 243.: “Jews living around the Mediterranean were unapologetic and unembarrassed by their situation. They did not describe themselves as part of a diaspora. ... They felt no need to construct a theory of diaspora.”

<sup>61</sup> M. Stern, “Diaspora,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. M. Berenbaum and F. Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan, 2007), 642. *Let. Aris.* 310. But cf. J.M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE to 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996). 25,n.18; cf. 43-4,n.73, 65.; A. Kasher, “The Jewish *Politeuma* in Alexandria: A pattern of Jewish communal life in the Greco-Roman Diaspora,” in *Homelands and Diasporas: Greeks, Jews and their Migrations*, ed. M. Rozen (London: I.B.Tauris, 2008), 112-3,15.; G. Lüderitz, “What is the *politeuma*?” in *Studies in Early Jewish Epigraphy*, ed. J.W. Van Henten and P.W. Van der Horst (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 196-9. Cf. also Josephus, who appears to use it primarily simply of the Jewish constitution or system of government: *Ant.* 1.5,13; 11.157; *Ag.Ap.* 2.145,165,184,251,258.

<sup>62</sup> E.M. Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 1981). 226.; cf. also P. Borgen, *Philo of Alexandria: An exegete for his time* (Leiden: Brill, 1997). 32.; Gruen, *Diaspora*: 74/ 287,n.159. argues that it is unclear precisely to whom the term refers in Alexandria, but that parallel cases render this understanding likely. Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 11.157.

<sup>63</sup> Phil 3:20: ἡμῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει.

<sup>64</sup> *Conf.* 78; cf. *Somn.* 52. Cf. also Josephus, *Ant.* 12.142; 5.97.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. also Josephus’ affirmation of shared Jewish identity: *Ant.* 5.97.

<sup>66</sup> *Spec.* 1.67,72; *Mos.* 2.141; *Legat.* 198,278,316; *Flacc.* 46 (cf.50); *Prov.* 2.64,107; cf. *Let. Aris.* 83-92 (also written by an Alexandrian Jew); T. Seland, “The ‘Common Priesthood’ of Philo and 1 Peter: A philonic reading of 1 Peter 2.5-9,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, no. 57 (1995): 90,92-3.; see S. Pearce, “Jerusalem as ‘Mother-City’ in the Writings of Philo of Alexandria,” in *Negotiating Diaspora: Jewish strategies in the Roman empire*, ed. J.M.G. Barclay (London: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 19-20,31-36., who seeks to reconcile Philo’s love of the temple and the ‘mother-city’, Jerusalem, with his commitment to the Jewish community in his own home city of Alexandria.

<sup>67</sup> W.C. van Unnik, *Das Selbstverständnis der jüdischen Diaspora in der hellenistisch-römischen Zeit* (Leiden: Brill, 1993). 148-65.; cf. also J.M. Scott, “Exile and the Self-Understanding of Diaspora Jews,” in *Exile: Old*

Does this, then, imply that the diaspora Jew, living as part of a *πολίτευμα*, had no loyalty or commitment to the local city? It might be supposed that their choosing to continue living there, rather than relocating to Jerusalem or Judea, would suggest that this is not the case. Barclay argues that:

“Diaspora communities ... retain a sense of belonging elsewhere (in memory, myth or longing to return), but also typically develop strong attachments to their present place of belonging. In this sense ‘diaspora’ is a much more complex ... phenomenon than ‘migration’, since a diaspora community is neither a wandering body of people, nor simply a community of ‘immigrants’ absorbed into a new home.”<sup>68</sup>

Kraabel, like van Unnik, sees ‘diaspora theology’ as developed out of ‘exile theology’, but he sees it as transformed into a positive identity, held with pride.<sup>69</sup> The diaspora, he argues, no longer sees itself as in exile from the holy land, but rather as itself a part of that holy land, within its host nation or city.<sup>70</sup>

If Elliott is right to draw parallels between the words *ιεράτευμα* and *πολίτευμα*, it might follow that the Jewish diaspora – at least in some of its manifestations – held a distinctive identity, not only as a holy people in an unholy nation, but precisely as a community which is holy *on behalf of* the unholy. Just as the separated priesthood of the temple maintained purity and offered worship on behalf of Israel and the dispersed Jews, so those dispersed Jews saw themselves, on this analysis, as maintaining purity and offering synagogue worship on behalf of the nations. The Jews of the dispersion became “a priestly community charged with the worship of the true god,” with “a divinely endowed religious mission to fulfil.”<sup>71</sup>

Of course, this is, to a large degree, speculative, and should be accepted only with caution, but it seems broadly convincing. It does, at least, provide some explanation of why *ιεράτευμα* is found on so few occasions, so many of which originate in one diaspora community.<sup>72</sup> It would also go some way towards explaining why the priestly designation of Exodus 19:6, apparently largely disregarded by many Jewish movements which one might expect to make use of it, seems of relative importance to these diaspora Jews. Perhaps, diaspora Judaism, largely constituted of lay Jews, has a particular need to be corporately priestly, given its higher degree of holiness than the local population as a whole and the probable shortage of designated priests in its midst. The role of worship and atonement which the priests perform on their behalf, they fulfil for the profane nations; this remains true for all Israel, imbued with a priestly quality,<sup>73</sup> but the diaspora is perhaps uniquely placed to appreciate such a status.<sup>74</sup> Add to this the fact that Jewish communities in the dispersion generally lived with the status of outsiders, lacking the privileges of citizenship of either Rome or their own *polis*, and isolated from the centre of Jewish religious life, and we have a picture of a people potentially seeking an identity with status and value.

---

*Testament, Jewish and Christian Conceptions*, ed. J.M. Scott (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 206ff., although he argues that ‘diaspora’ is a synonym, not an extension, of ‘exile’ *ibid.*, 185ff.

<sup>68</sup> J.M.G. Barclay, *Negotiating Diaspora: Jewish strategies in the Roman empire*, ed. L.L. Grabbe and J.H. Charlesworth (London: T. & T. Clark, 2004). 2.. Cf. also, from the same volume, Pearce, “Jerusalem.”; Gruen, *Diaspora*: 243-7.

<sup>69</sup> A.T. Kraabel, “Unity and Diversity among Diaspora Synagogues,” in *The Synagogue in Late Antiquity*, ed. L.I. Levine (Philadelphia: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1987).; he is concerned with the role of the diaspora synagogue, which he sees as representing an integration of Jewish and hellenistic culture.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>71</sup> Elliott, *Elect*: 69.

<sup>72</sup> 2 Macc 2:17; Philo, *Abr.* 56; *Sobr.* 66; possibly Gk. Frag. 67c, concerned with *T. Levi.* 11:4-6. Cf. *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>74</sup> Seland, “Common,” 99,111.; cf. Philo, *Spec.* 2.162.

As we have already identified, this outsider status is one which belongs also to the Christians of Asia Minor. That sense of being formed into a new community – one with its ‘ethnic’ roots elsewhere but living out that identity in this world, as exiles and aliens – is perhaps, then, a valuable one for them also. It also introduces a dynamic quality into their status; they hold a status and identity which is epitomised by the idea that they once were ‘not a people’ but now are God’s holy people, but that is an identity which is not merely fixed and eternal, but is also being lived by reference to the world around them, presumably being shaped by the reality of that life. It is an identity which is found in the tension between the homeland and the host city, and that place of tension should lend to it a creative edge, which allows it to grow, develop and eventually come to full fruition. The sense that theirs is not a completed status, but one which is being refined, is seen also in the idea that they are being (or should be) built<sup>75</sup> into a spiritual house.

This idea of a developing identity is seen perhaps even more in Revelation. The combination of different tenses in speaking of the promise of Exodus 19:6 – whereby they have been ‘made ... a kingdom [and] priests’ in 1:6 and 5:10, but ‘will reign’ in 5:10 and 20:6<sup>76</sup> – suggests different promises, to be fulfilled at different points in time. Nevertheless, the visionary nature of the book means that we cannot identify in a literal sense whether the privileges and status identified for the church are already bestowed, or something into the possession of which they will come in future, but the language nevertheless invites us to see a promise already made, the final fulfilment of which is for another time and realm. The now and the not-yet, heaven and earth, interact and intertwine, as symbolism and realism meet and together explain what is, for the writer, a real truth: that Christians will, or do, enjoy a special relationship with Christ and with God – a relationship which brings privileged and immediate access to the divine, a place in the worship of heaven and a role and privilege in the life of the world.

The idea of an identity which is changing as a consequence of becoming part of the people of God is found again in Revelation, although the image is subtly different from that in 1 Peter. Instead of identifying a unified nation, scattered and dispersed throughout the profane nations, we have those drawn from ‘every tribe and tongue and people and nation’,<sup>77</sup> but who are then made into ‘a kingdom’ – a single body. The understanding in each case, then, is that those who worship Christ are recognisable as a single people, regardless of apparent differences of language, place of residence or ethnic background.

It is perhaps particularly to be expected that gentile Christian communities, such as these, should hold an emerging, developing identity. As converts to a faith which is growing out of – but still clearly related to – a religious, ethnic and national identity to which they do not belong, they will almost certainly bring with them some assumptions, understandings and interpretations which are different from those of the Jewish Christians. The territory of Asia Minor was home to several centres of imperial cult of regional importance,<sup>78</sup> but the religious climate also varied with the geography of the area. Around the coast were some significant cities, which would seem to have been more hellenised; their shrines are correspondingly likely to be dedicated to the various Greek gods and goddesses. Inland, however, in the more rural or mountainous regions, it seems likely that

---

<sup>75</sup> 2:5.

<sup>76</sup> Where they also ‘will be priests’.

<sup>77</sup> 5:9.

<sup>78</sup> These include Pessinus, Pisidian Antioch, Ancyra, but the cult was probably much more widespread: Price, *Rituals*: 58,78-80.; S. Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, men, and gods in Asia Minor* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). 100-2. See Price, *Rituals*: xxii-xxv. for maps of the centres of the imperial cult in Asia Minor including the distribution of its altars, temples and priests; pp. 249-274 for a complete catalogue of the known shrines and temples. Also indicative are dedications and inscriptions, often establishing games or celebrations and commemorating Caesar’s divinity, e.g. in Ephesus: *SIG* vol. 2, no. 760.

indigenous religions remained dominant, along with local languages and customs.<sup>79</sup> Living in a context in which so many religious traditions co-existed, and as converts from some of those traditions, means that concepts such as 'holy', 'priesthood', 'spiritual', 'temple' and 'sacrifice' – among others – will not be understood straightforwardly to bear the meaning which Jewish scripture, custom and tradition might ascribe to them. It is also possible – perhaps even likely – that their understanding of God and of the practice of their faith would be shaped to some extent not only *by*, but also *against* the prevailing religious context. 1 Peter draws the recipients' attention to their former way of life, by way of drawing a contrast with how they should live now,<sup>80</sup> while Revelation appears to engage in polemic against Roman oppression and the cult of emperor worship.<sup>81</sup>

## Behaving

As we have noted, the status of the Christian communities as chosen, blessed and consecrated by God would be especially significant in the context in which 1 Peter and Revelation appear to have been written, where persecution and hostility are an ongoing feature of Christian life and witness; this promise of God's regard and loyalty would provide a strong motive for faithfulness under suffering. It is, therefore, perhaps not surprising that the powerful rhetoric of 1 Peter 2:4-10, which precedes a considerable amount of practical advice and encouragement for the beleaguered church, and which begins with a call to imitate Christ and continues through a reminder of Christ's importance for his followers, should build up to a climax in which the status of those followers is affirmed and celebrated. Nevertheless, at neither the beginning nor the end of this passage does the writer neglect to identify a purpose for the believers as a priesthood or a people. It is not an aimless state, but one in which their knowledge of, and relationship with, God places responsibilities upon them of holiness, purity, worship, service, offering and proclamation. It confers holiness, with all that this status implies, but also places upon them a responsibility to live out that holiness in their obedience to God and their witness, as God's people, to the world.

The first aspect of this call to witness seems to be concerned with faithfulness in the face of hostility. 1 Peter seeks to praise and encourage those who might suffer for their faith,<sup>82</sup> not least because in so suffering, they are living out their lives in imitation of Christ.<sup>83</sup> Revelation 20:6 is perhaps still more radical, in that those who so live and die are seen not merely as priests, and reigning, but reigning 'with Christ', in a shared royal destiny. These are the elite – those martyred for their loyalty to Christ, or whose faithfulness is remarkable. Their vocation has been to share fully in the passion of Christ; but it is Christ's passion which is the means by which the priesthood of all Christians is achieved. This is the destiny of all who live out their Christian vocation, either to its fullest extreme, by dying for their faith, or in complete faithfulness, being willing to die, and not succumbing to the temptation to worship the beast. Their reward for sharing (or being willing to share) in Christ's death is to share in his resurrection life and relationship with God.<sup>84</sup> The theme of suffering also leads into that of glory; just as the blood of Christ gives rise to his worthiness to be worshipped,<sup>85</sup> so the suffering of the saints gives rise to their exalted status.<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> Rives, *Religion*: 59.

<sup>80</sup> 4:3-4; cf. 2:9-10,25.

<sup>81</sup> Bauckham, *Climax*: 338-83., *Theology*: 35-9.; Flemming, "Earth," 344,46,51-52.; Kraybill, *Imperial*.

<sup>82</sup> 2:19f; 3:14.

<sup>83</sup> 2:21ff; 3:18; 4:1.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. 21:7.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. 1:6; 5:9-10.

<sup>86</sup> 20:4; cf. 2:26-28; 12:11.

The second aspect of the witness relates to the quality of the life lived by the Christians. The appeal to them, precisely as aliens and exiles, is to behave honourably precisely so that those among whom they live may see how they live and 'glorify God'.<sup>87</sup> It seems, then, that the Christian duty of godly conduct is not merely for the sake of the Christian soul, or only as a form of worship, but also as a means of witness or proclamation to others. It is true that there is no explicit call to missionary preaching and evangelism, but nevertheless, this very call to holiness forms a priestly duty of mediation, representing God to the world, in the hope of bringing the world to share in the praise, worship and glorification of God.<sup>88</sup> This call to proclamation is seen also in 1 Peter 2:9: ὅπως τὰς ἀρετὰς ἐξαγγείλητε. The verb ἐξαγγέλλω in this context has typically been translated 'proclaim', 'preach', 'declare', 'bring witness', or similar, with the implication of proclaiming God's goodness to the world.<sup>89</sup> Some scholars, however, have questioned this, including Michaels, who argues that it is concerned with worship.<sup>90</sup> On this view, ἐξαγγείλητε refers to proclamation to God of the goodness or great acts (τὰς ἀρετὰς) being celebrated; it becomes, then, not missionary preaching, but in essence a form of praise.

The earlier reference to offering spiritual sacrifices would seem to suggest that the focus of the designations in this passage is directed towards God. Seland argues that, at least in the strand of diaspora thinking represented by Philo, a proclamation directed to God would be understood here, precisely because of the association of ideas between sacrifice and proclamations of praise.<sup>91</sup> Although Philo never uses the phrase πνευματικὰς θυσίας, he does, Seland suggests, connect the concept of offering oneself to God as a sacrifice, with that of offering praise and worship.<sup>92</sup> Thus, the diaspora context provides some evidence of ἐξαγγέλλω being concerned with proclamation to God, or worship. Sacrifice will, of course, contain a more human-focused element, in that offerings will be made on behalf of the wider community; sacrifice is effective beyond the one who presides at the altar. This ties in both with Elliott's view of diaspora identity as in part a holy community in an unholy world, and with the wider context of the letter, in which Christians are called to holy living in a society which is far from holy in their eyes. Nevertheless, although this involves one aspect of mediation between the human and divine realms, in that it represents unredeemed humanity to God, it does not reciprocate and is hence in line with an understanding of proclamation which is to God, rather than about God.

It would seem, then, that the primary focus of the Christian life is God; the believer is called to offer spiritual sacrifice, praise and worship to God, and to live a pure, holy life as a means of honouring God. Yet this is not the whole picture; the Christian community may operate as the representative of a wider constituency, being holy and offering worship on behalf of those who are unable or unwilling so to serve. In addition, the emphasis of the letter suggests that there is an element of representation, or proclamation, of God to the world, in order to bring the world to worship God.

The third dimension of the call to live a Christian life as an act of witness is perhaps not a separate category at all, being woven through the others: it is the call to holiness, and in particular, holiness on behalf of others. In 1 Peter 2:4-10 it is predominantly a relational or status-based concept, with emphasis on the churches' election by God; it is simply being God's people which makes them holy. Through the letter as a whole, however, it is also an ethical category; it is the way in which they live

---

<sup>87</sup> 1 Pet 2:12; cf. 4:4-5.

<sup>88</sup> So Feldmeier, *Peter*: 136.; cf. also Green, "Exiles," 322-4.

<sup>89</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (London: A. & C. Black, 1969). 99-100.; Beare, *Peter*: 131.; E. Best, "Spiritual Sacrifice: General priesthood in the New Testament," *Interpretation* 14(1960): 279.; Elliott, *Elect*: 41.; P.H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Eerdmans, 1990). 92-3..

<sup>90</sup> Michaels, *Peter*: 110., following D.L. Balch, *Let Wives be Submissive: The domestic code in 1 Peter* (Chico, CA: Scholars press, 1981). 133.; cf. Elliott, *Peter*: 439-40., who sees it as both.

<sup>91</sup> Seland, "Common," 117-8..

<sup>92</sup> *Spec.* 1.271-272; cf. Heb 13:15; Rom 12:1.

which demonstrates that holiness to the world. Unlike the Jews, the holiness which is theirs by virtue of God's election comes not by birth into a particular race or nation, but rather by conversion; its reality can therefore be seen by contrast with a convert's previous life of sin.<sup>93</sup>

Christian holiness in 1 Peter is concerned with difference from the world in which the recipient communities find themselves. They are not to be conformed to the world, but are to recognise their distinctive status as God's chosen people, set apart to worship and serve as God's priesthood, and are to live as citizens of heaven and people of God. Then the world will see their holiness. Their identity as God's holy nation and holy priesthood is not a call to isolationism; they are not to preserve their holiness by separating themselves from the world, but, living as aliens and exiles,<sup>94</sup> they are to live out their holy lives precisely in the world, as a witness to it.<sup>95</sup> Thus, their holiness speaks of the Christians' standing before God and the manner in which they serve – and preserve the purity of their relationship with – God; but it also speaks of the way in which their status and special identity affects their life in the rather more unholy world.

The church as a holy community, then, relates both to its status in God's eyes and to its priestly task. Its holiness comes fundamentally from its proximity to God; it serves God and approaches God in worship, so its holiness is of paramount importance, as God's chosen people and possession. It is this relationship, previously the unique preserve of Israel, which confers the church's holiness upon it. This comes, however, with a corresponding responsibility to live in a holy way, maintaining the holiness necessary to approach God by the purity of its life and worship,<sup>96</sup> and by imitation of Christ, whose death it was which made the believers holy.<sup>97</sup> In this aspect, there may also be an implicit link to their identity as a 'diaspora',<sup>98</sup> in that their 'holiness' and 'priesthood' is lived out by comparison with – and, to a degree, for the benefit of – the communities in which they live.

## Conclusion: the confessions of a chaplain

Christian chaplaincy is not fundamentally different in kind from Christian ministry in general; rather, it seeks to exercise, in particular contexts, the Christian calling to live as a *πολίτευμα*. It exists as dispersed Christians, in 'exile' within institutions and communities that welcome or tolerate their presence. The settings for chaplaincy are almost as varied as they are numerous, but my own situation is as part of an ecumenical, Christian chaplaincy team, within a multifaith chaplaincy service, embedded within a proudly secular university. There are three full-time Christian, and one part-time Muslim, chaplains, and a wide team of volunteers, who give what time they can to support students and staff of particular faiths.

There is certainly not persecution within this context; none of us fear for our safety for practising our faith. There is, however, hostility to the very existence of a chaplaincy service among some who exalt the university's secular identity. This hostility is not unique to the Higher Education sector, and we are, to some extent, protected in my university by the fact that we are paid for by the churches and religious bodies which we represent. Nevertheless, it is there, and we do not help our case if we become apologetic for our very existence; if we seek to play down our religious role, or to become indistinguishable from fellow student support workers; if we become luke-warm and apathetic. We, like the early Christians of Asia Minor, need to know ourselves as a holy nation, a people beloved of God. We need to know that God takes pride in us, and in turn, we must take pride in our God.

---

<sup>93</sup> 1:14-16; cf. 4:1-4.

<sup>94</sup> 1:1; 2:11.

<sup>95</sup> 2:12; cf. 3:15.

<sup>96</sup> 1:15f; 3:2.

<sup>97</sup> 1:15f; 2:5,9; cf. 3:5.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. 1:1,17; 2:11.

Our identity is not a static one, however. If we have a living faith, grounded in a confidence in our God, then we will be well placed to learn from colleagues within the chaplaincy and the university. On an ecumenical level, we seek to work and worship together, so that Christians can be united more than divided. Across the wider chaplaincy, also, we seek for those common points with our multifaith colleagues, which mean that we can work together in offering advice and support, showing by acts of kindness that we care, and living out our shared belief in the uniqueness and infinite worth of each person we encounter.

This does not, however, mean that our particular identities need to be hidden or ignored. A sense of what is of real value within the Methodist tradition helps me, as the Methodist chaplain, to be confident in the distinctive contribution which I can make to our communal life, while also knowing what need not be insisted upon! We are strongest when we see ourselves as a Christian team, rather than a collection of different denominations, but each bringing our own strengths and the strengths of our traditions as a contribution to the work of the team. Again, among the multifaith team we need not be afraid of our differences; if we have confidence and pride in the Christ we follow, who died for us and who calls us to live in imitation of him, then we can engage in open, honest, accepting interfaith dialogue, which will in turn act as a witness to others that we have love and respect, not fear and mistrust, for those with whom we disagree. We can stand in solidarity with one another, without feeling threatened by the positions which others hold. We are God's own people, who can proclaim the love and wonderful deeds of God in our interactions. And, if we do this well, we will be changed and reshaped, sometimes by attitudes which we feel called to challenge, and sometimes by insights and truths which enlarge our understanding.

In the end, however, our life as Christians 'in exile' within the institution which hosts us is not for our own benefit, or primarily for the benefit of Christian students, who can find that support in local churches if they so wish. It is, rather, for those students – of any faith or none – who need to know that they are loved. We pray for the well-being of the institution, its staff and its students, because we are there to bring its needs before the God it often does not know. And we mediate both ways - we are not there to bring God onto campus, but to make visible and manifest the work and love of God. We may name the name of God, or we may simply act in godly ways, but we are visibly and unashamedly representatives of God, seeking holiness by being in relationship with God, and living that holiness for the sake of the university – not arrogantly, but proudly; not rigidly, but as those longing to learn more of God and of life.

The chaplain must be a prophet, a priest, a citizen of God's kingdom, an ambassador for God's holy nation, an inhabitant of a strange land, committed to the holiness of that land, able to communicate with those of every tribe, tongue, people and nation, and to see in them God's own people.