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A HISTORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

**“The Minyan (or a Congregation) of Ancient Israel:
A Prologue to the New Testament”¹**

by

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¹ Roderick O. Ford, *The Apostolate Papers* (unpublished research papers, 2015 to 2022). www.roderickford.org.

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² Roderick O. Ford, *The Apostolate Papers* (unpublished research papers, 2015 to 2022). www.roderickford.org.

A Foreword



According to Orthodox Jewish law, a minyan or ten men (i.e., males over the age of 13; bar mitzvah or “coming of age”) are necessary to form a synagogue or a congregation needed to perform public prayer.³

These men need not be ordained clergymen, rabbis, priests, Levites, etc. They only need to be believing and observant Jews.

To emphasize the fact that such common Jewish man may be working class, unlearned laymen, a Yiddish proverb states:

“Nine rabbis do not constitute a minyan, but ten cobblers can.”

³ Rabbi Abraham Milgrim, “Minyan: The Congregational Quorum Only in a group of 10 or more adult Jews is there sufficient sanctity to recite certain public prayers,” <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/minyan-the-congregational-quorum/>, stating:

A minyan is made of ten adult Jews, traditionally males (over the age of 13). In **Orthodox synagogues**, this continues to be the standard. In more progressive Jewish communities, ranging from halachic egalitarianism, to **conservative to reform synagogues**, adult women and men are both counted in the quorum. Some communities also require twenty adults, ten men and ten women, so that women are as essential as men to the formation of the prayer community, but the traditional requirement of ten men is still fulfilled.

Notably, in the Book of Acts, we find that Temple officers noted that two of the principal followers of Jesus of Nazareth, namely the Apostles Peter and John, were “unlearned and ignorant men.”⁴

This paper shall demonstrate that the Jewish-Hebrew theology and law of the minyan is based upon several texts of the Torah—meaning that the minyan, which could comprise of common men, was part and parcel of the constitutional law of ancient Israel.

Of those several texts, Exodus 18:25 (i.e., “rule of the 10s”) appears to me to be the most authoritative. Here the local government of ancient Israel was reduced to its most basic unit: **10 men or heads of ten families.**

Did this “Rule of the 10s” ever become part and parcel of the basic theology of the Protestant Reformation—in its abjuration against Roman Catholicism, the Church of England, or “episcopacy” in general?

I have found no clear references to the “Rule of the 10s” in any of the writings of Protestant sagas, including Martin Luther (1483 – 1546), John Calvin (1509 – 1564), Richard Baxter (1615 - 1691), etc., whereby this Jewish law is cited as a clear reference for a Christian canon or ecclesiastical rule for the foundation for the Christian churches.

However, in *Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate* (1520), Martin Luther uses the following analogy that is eerily similar to the Jewish “Rule of the 10s,” stating:

Through baptism all of us are consecrated to the priesthood, as St. Peter says in I Peter 2:9, ‘Ye are a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom,’ and the book of Revelation says, Rev. 5:10 ‘Thou hast made us by Thy blood to be priests and kings.’ ... [J]ust as though **ten brothers**, all king's sons and equal heirs, were to choose one of themselves to rule the inheritance for them all, -- they would **all be kings and equal in power, though one of them would be charged with the duty of ruling.** To make it still clearer. If a little group of pious Christian laymen were taken captive and set down in a wilderness , and had among them no priest consecrated by a bishop, and if there in the wilderness they were to agree in choosing one of themselves, married or unmarried, and were to charge him with the

⁴ Acts 4: 13.

office of baptizing, saying mass, absolving and preaching, such a man would be as truly a priest as though all bishops and popes had consecrated him.

Thus, in ecclesiology (i.e., the theology of how the church must be structured) the Protestant or Reformed doctrine is similar to that of the Jewish law of the minyan (i.e., the “Rule of the 10s”).

But in Puritan style and parlance, I would be remiss if I did not state that this portion of the Torah (i.e., the “Rule of the 10s”) is also an accurate reflection on the presbyterian nature of the Early Church which we find described in Paul’s letters.

From this we might deduce that the hierarchal structures of Western Christendom are anathema to the Christian faith. But such a deduction would be misleading, because although the Christian churches must protect its egalitarian structure (e.g., the minyan), they must also mold and shape ministries to meet the exigencies and needs of the times—and this must include “high church” ministries whenever that need arises.⁵

Whereas the civil polity itself is under God’s divine Providence, there never was any reason why the churches of Jesus Christ might not reorganize its ecclesiastical structure in order to meet the exigencies of “high church” ministry.

And in the case of the Western Church, that exigency was certainly the Dark Ages and the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West, and the rise of Pope Gregory the Great. The tutelage of the Roman Catholic Church wrought great blessings along with its many misgivings and usurpations.

⁵ This we find amply reiterated through Augustine of Hippo’s *The City of God*. In terms of the Gentiles, it is clear that the Early Church—beginning with the Apostle Paul—embraced the “Roman natural law jurisprudence” of the Cicero and Roman Empire. In his *Confessions* (New York, NY: Barnes and Nobles, 2007), pp. 34-36, Augustine of Hippo follows suit.

Namely, a mission of the church was “to do justice and judgment,”⁶ and this was certainly authorized at a “high church” level,⁷ as well as at a “low church” level.⁸

Ultimately, the Puritan, Congregational, Presbyterian, Baptist and Quaker sects in England and Europe were right to question the usurpations of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England during the period of Reformation. The legal authority and dignity of the common man at the “low church” had been usurped by the leaders at the “high church” level; and, of course, this domination was reflected throughout the body politic of feudalistic Medieval Europe. The Protestant Reformation and the birth of modern Western Europe is the history of the collapse of this system.

But even today, all Western Christianity—both Catholic and Protestant alike—has failed to enfranchise and to elevate the common man to his proper status as “priest” and “king” within the several churches; and this paper surmises that an explicit church doctrine recognizing the Jewish law of the *minyan* (i.e., the Rule of the 10s contained in Torah), as the foundational backbone of local Christian Church, would achieve that ultimate objective.

⁶ Genesis 18: 18-19.

⁷ Exodus 18: 25 (“rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds”)

⁸ Exodus 18: 25 (“rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens”).

Introduction

When Jesus of Nazareth formed his “church,” what precisely did he mean?⁹

This paper examines this question by looking at the question of Christian ecclesiology—i.e., the proper governance and the correct legal structure of local churches.

For this, we must turn to both the Law of Moses (Torah) and to various Jewish and Protestant-Reformed interpretations of that Law.

⁹ NOTE: The Jewish rabbis and theologians do a much better job than do the Roman Catholics or Protestants with extracting from the Torah the legal requirements for a consecrated congregation, minyan, or synagogue.

The Christians did not seem to give this much thought until the exigencies of the 17th-century Protestant Reformation, and even then the “offices” of the several Christian clergy had become so affected by hierarchical and episcopal structures that essential meaning of “priesthood of all believers” was had to implement even in the Protestant-Congregational or Baptist churches.

The Protestant and (or) Reformed definition of the “church” is that it is indeed “catholic” or “universal” but that it not necessarily unified under one ecclesiastical governor called the Bishop of Rome, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox Church, or any other common ecclesiastical governor. Rather, the “church of Jesus Christ” should be more accurately described as “churches of Jesus Christ,” which are “catholic” merely because they are so diverse and universally scattered around the world.

See, e.g., St. Augustine, *The City of God*, supra, p. 660 (“It was given as the chief and most necessary sign of His coming... that every one of them spoke in the tongues of all nations; thus signifying that the unity of the catholic Church would embrace all nations, and would in like manner speak in all tongues.”) and p. 696 (“This heavenly city, then, while it sojourns on earth, calls citizens out of all nations, and **gathers together a society of pilgrims of all languages**, not scrupling about diversities in the manners, laws, and institutions whereby earthly peace is secured and maintained, but recognizing that, however various these are, they all tend to one and the same end of earthly peace.”)

But only in the Jewish law or theology of the “minyan” do we find the true definition of “congregation” or “synagogue” or “church.” And I surmised that because the Jewish definition of the “minyan” is based upon the text of the written Torah, that definition has saliency even within the Christian faith’s ecclesiological foundations.

When Luther and Calvin preached in Western Europe, this, of course, was the \$64,000 question. Indeed, the Protestant Reformation came into existence, because the Western Church had become profligate, incorrigible, and corrupt.

And so naturally, when the Protestant Reformers turned to the Sacred Scriptures, and resolved that “Scripture alone” was to be one of their fundamental tenets, then the episcopal structures of Roman Catholicism— e.g., the offices of pope, patriarch, cardinal, archbishop, bishop, priest, deacon, etc.—came under careful scrutiny of the Protestant Reformers who required Scriptural support for the affirmation of Romish ecclesiological doctrines.

Where in Scripture was there justification for the office of the Bishop of Rome (i.e., the pope), or that of cardinals, archbishops, and so forth?

Therefore, when the Puritans read the Holy Bible and sought answers to ecclesiological questions (i.e., questions about the office (s) and structure of the “church”), they were enamored with the civil polity of ancient Israel in the first five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Also, in the books of the several prophets, one could also readily see that the Messiah (or Christ), who would eventually inherit the throne of King David, would restore the kingdom of Israel—i.e., the Messiah was to re-establish the basic government of ancient Israel, which is also the heritage of the Christian religion, Christian peoples, and Christian nations.¹⁰

The political implications of this Messiah’s kingdom are clear.¹¹

¹⁰ See, e.g., Daniel 7: 13 (“Son of Man”); Daniel 8:25 (“Prince of princes”); Daniel 9:25-26 (“Messiah the Prince”). See, generally, Isaac Newton, *Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John* (United States of America: Renaissance Classics, 2012).

See, also, <https://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-Son-of-Man.html> (“Jesus is referred to as the “Son of Man” 88 times in the New Testament. In fact, Son of Man is the primary title Jesus used when referring to Himself (e.g., Matthew 12:32; 13:37; Luke 12:8; John 1:51). The only use of Son of Man in a clear reference to Jesus, spoken by someone other than Jesus, came from the lips of Stephen as he was being martyred (Acts 7:56).”)

¹¹ Saint Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), pp. 142-143 (“In a word, human kingdoms are established by divine providence”); Ibid, p. 158 (“God can never be believed to have left the kingdoms of men, their dominations and servitudes, outside of the laws of His providence.”)

Jesus used the word “church” only twice in the Gospels, namely, in that of Matthew, to wit:

Matthew 16: 18

- “And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build **My church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” -- Matthew 16:18 (KJV)
- “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build **my church**, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” -- Matthew 16:18 (NIV)

Matthew 18: 17

- “And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear **the church**, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” -- Matthew 18:17 (KJV)
- “If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to **the church**, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.” -- Matthew 18:17 (NIV)

What did Jesus mean by his use of the word “church,” except that of the “minyan” or “congregation” of ancient Israel?

We normally look for synonyms in the Greek language in order to locate the meaning of biblical texts, such as “synagogue” or “ekklesia” or “congregation.”¹²

See, also, Algernon Sidney Crapsey, *Religion and Politics* (New York, N.Y.: Thomas Whittaker, 1905), pp. 90 – 92, describing the political methods of the Early Christian Church, as “passive resistance” to injustice of secular rulers, beginning with the evil Roman empire.

See, e.g., St. Augustine, *The City of God*, supra, p. 658 (describing the Christian Church as “... the true Israelites, the citizens of the country that is above.”)

¹²See, e.g., “Church of Synagogue,” <https://hope4israel.org/church-or-synagogue/>, stating:

One of our earliest English translations of the Bible was completed by William Tyndale. He finished translating the New Testament by about 1526, fully 78 years before the Authorized King James Version came into existence. Tyndale translated the word “ekklesia” quite reasonably as “congregation” (rather than “church”). For some unknown reason, the majority of English translations preferred “church” as the translation of choice for the word ekklesia. One can only hope that the word “church” really did have a similar meaning in early English to that of the word “ekklesia.”

The question remains, however: how did believers in Yeshua some 2,000 years ago view the word “ekklesia”? It’s fine to look in a lexicon and find a literal translation that reads “called out or forth”, but that’s no different than saying that the English word “church” literally means “the Lord’s”. You can even gather from context that the word “church” in English translations of the New Testament is used to refer to a gathering of believers, not to the building in which they gather. However, there is more to the word “ekklesia” than meets the eye — something dictionaries are unlikely to mention.

Did you know that the Jews of Yeshua’s day used the word “ekklesia” interchangeably with the word “synagogue” to refer to the Hebrew concept of “kahal” (kahal, meaning “gathering”)? The Hebrew word kahal is typically used in the ancient Hebrew texts of the Bible to refer to the people of Israel as a collective group. To see how early Greek translations of the Hebrew Scriptures used the Greek words “synagogue” and “ekklesia” for the Hebrew word “kahal”, see below:

... the assembly (synagogue [Greek], kahal [Hebrew]) shall offer a bull of the herd for a sin offering and bring it before the tent of meeting
(Leviticus 4:14)

The Lord gave me the two tablets of stone written by the finger of God; and on them were all the words which the Lord had spoken with you at the mountain from the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly (ekklesia [Greek], kahal [Hebrew]).
(Deuteronomy 9:10)

I was almost in utter ruin in the midst of the assembly (ekklesia) and congregation (synagogue). (Proverbs 5:14)

During the Greek and Roman occupations of Israel, the Jews began forming into small communities that they referred to as “synagogues”. The fact that these communities were referred to as synagogues suggests that the Jews of that time saw these smaller communities as forming part of the larger whole that was referred to in Hebrew as the “kahal” of Israel.

By the time of Yeshua’s earthly ministry, nearly 2,000 years ago, the event of gathering as a “synagogue” was described by Jews as an “ekklesia”. It should come as no surprise, then, that Yeshua went around teaching in synagogues and referring to the gathering of his followers as his “ekklesia”. It’s also not surprising that Yeshua, as the head of an “ekklesia”, was referred to as a rabbi.

Was Yeshua’s ekklesia merely to be a group of “called out ones” with no reference to Jewish perceptions of the word ekklesia at the time when the New Testament was written? Or was the term “ekklesia” rather used intentionally in a Jewish context that understood it as a gathering of the synagogue of Israel (what was referred to in Hebrew as the “kahal”)? Does referring to the gentile believers with the term “ekklesia” negate the typically Jewish use of this term in connection with synagogue communities? How much should the “church” look like the synagogue? The answers to these questions are likely best understood by spending time in prayer and in meditation on the Word of God.

For instance, it has been said that the word “synagogue” can mean both a Jewish congregation and the house of worship for that congregation; and that the Greek word “ekklesia” can mean “congregation” or “synagogue.”

It is within this context that the Christian “church” has been analyzed and analogized as having been derived from the Jewish “synagogue”—since both terms essentially mean “congregation” or “ekklesia.”

The word ekklesia was first used in ancient Athens in a political context. The Greek translation of the Old Testament often uses ekklesia to translate the Hebrew word qāhāl, which means "community".

The word "church" does not appear in the Old Testament, but the first followers of Jesus, who were mostly Jewish, used the Greek word ekklesia to describe their assemblies. The word ekklesia is a combination of the Greek words kaleo (to call) and the prefix ek (out). It literally means "assembly", "gathering", or "congregation."

Hence, within the Hebrew-Jewish context, the “synagogue” came to have several meanings, because it was a tool that was utilized to serve many different functions, in addition to being centers for community worship.

To that end, “[s]ynagogues are community centers that serve as places of worship, study, and assembly. They also often function as social halls and town halls for the community.”¹³

Without question, when the Early Christians formulated their churches they relied upon the model of these Jewish synagogues. See, generally, Paper # 2 of this Series, **“The Ancient Jewish Synagogues as the Presbyterian and Congregational Model for the Early Church.”**

But there is yet another source—and one that is more directly tied to the Law of Moses itself—that is the etymological foundation of Christ’s use of the word “church” in Matthew 16:18 and 18:17, and in the Christian disciples’ and apostles’ original usage of that word throughout the New Testament.¹⁴

¹³ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/synagogue>

¹⁴ NOTE: one source notes that the word “church” was used about 62 times in the New Testament.

Primary Source: Law of Moses

And that source comes from the Book of Exodus, Chapter 18: 1- 27, when the Children of Israel were first organizing themselves into a nation. There the nation of Israel received the following political-constitutional structure:

And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and **rulers of tens**.¹⁵

This we find reiterated in Cyrus Adler's and Lewis N. Dembitz's "Minyan," *Jewish Encyclopedia*, stating:

The minimum of ten is evidently a survival in the Synagogue from **the much older institution in which ten heads of families made up the smallest political subdivision**. In **Ex. xviii**. Moses, on the advice of Jethro, appoints chiefs of tens, as well as chiefs of fifties, of hundreds, and of thousands. In like manner there were the decurio among the Romans and the tithingman among the early English.¹⁶

Hence, the most basic, fundamental unit of ancient Hebrew polity became an assembly or congregation of 10 adult Hebrew males, with the age of 13 (bar-mitzvah) being the established age.¹⁷

Other Rabbinical Jewish Law

Later, Jewish rabbis and lawyers extrapolated from the story of Abraham in Genesis 18, regarding the destruction of Sodom, that 10 righteous persons were needed to prevent God from destroying an entire city and thus the gathering 10

¹⁵ Exodus 18: 25.

¹⁶ [MINYAN - JewishEncyclopedia.com](https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10865-minyan) (https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10865-minyan).

¹⁷ Rabbi Abraham Milgrim, "Minyan: The Congregational Quorum Only in a group of 10 or more adult Jews is there sufficient sanctity to recite certain public prayers," <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/minyan-the-congregational-quorum/>, stating:

A minyan is made of ten adult Jews, traditionally males (over the age of 13). In **Orthodox synagogues**, this continues to be the standard. In more progressive Jewish communities, ranging from halachic egalitarianism, to **conservative to reform synagogues**, adult women and men are both counted in the quorum. Some communities also require twenty adults, ten men and ten women, so that women are as essential as men to the formation of the prayer community, but the traditional requirement of ten men is still fulfilled.

righteous persons was needed to form an “assembly” or “congregation” suitable for public prayer.¹⁸

Jewish rabbis and lawyers also extrapolated from the numbers of persons saved in Noah’s ark—*only 9 persons* (Noah, his three sons, and their wives). The theological conclusion being that **10 persons** might have saved the world from the flood.¹⁹

Finally, the Jewish rabbis and lawyers also reached a similar conclusion from the story of the 10 spies in the Book of Numbers.²⁰

Therefore, under Orthodox Jewish law, and during Jesus’ day in ancient Judea, in order to form a lawful “synagogue” for public prayer, worship, and all of the other administrative functions associated with synagogues, at least 10 men (males over the age of 13) were needed.

Notably, it was not necessary that any of these 10 men be priests, Levites, and the lineal descendants of the tribe of Levi. Arguably, the “rulers of the 10s” (Exodus 18) pre-existed, and was distinct from, the institution of the Levitical priesthood.

Origin of Congregationalism in Reformed Christian Faith

This paper concludes that the independent, Presbyterian, and Baptist sects which operate “congregational” or “presbyterian” ecclesiastical structures can trace their ecclesiology to the Jewish “law of the minyan” – a house of worship being

¹⁸ Genesis 18: 32, stating:

And he said: 'Oh, let not the LORD be angry, and I will speak yet but this once. Peradventure ten shall be found there.' And He said: 'I will not destroy it for the ten's sake.'

¹⁹ This is taken from the **Assembly of Reformed Rabbis and Cantors**. The narrative of Noah’s Ark is found in Genesis 6: 13 – 9: 29.

²⁰ Numbers 14: 27. See, e.g., Shmuel Kogan, “Why are 10 men needed for a minyan?” https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/543104/jewish/Why-Are-Ten-Men-Needed-for-a-Minyan.htm, stating:

The biblical source for the requirement of ten men to complete a minyan (lit., “count” or “number”) is **Numbers 14:27**. Moses sent spies to scout the land of Canaan. Ten of them returned and issued a report concluding that it was not a conquerable land. G-d was extremely disappointed with their lack of faith in His abilities. He turns to Moses and Aaron, telling them: "How long will this evil ‘assembly’ provoke [the Jewish nation] to complain against Me?" From here it is deduced that an “assembly” is comprised of ten men.

formed without priests and with **only 10 laymen** (all males) who are over the age of 13.

Thus, utilizing the Two-Tables conception of the civil polity and the ecclesiastical polity, the Protestant Reformers envisioned a political system whereby the church and the state constituted two sides of the same coin. Even a small Baptist church of only a few members is considered a constituent part of the body politic—just as the rulers of the 10s (i.e., synagogues) were in ancient Israel.

Under this system, which is espoused in Reform theology, the civil government may not dictate the internal affairs of the churches. Indeed, the civil government must punish crimes even when committed by, or through, churches or pastors.

On the other hand, simultaneously, the several churches are superior to civil polity over deep, spiritual, and eternal moral issues, such as questions of public policy dealing war and peace, slavery, capital punishment, gendercide, genocide, abortion, usury, etc.— i.e., in classical Protestant or Reformed theology, the several churches do exist, at all times, to counsel and to chastise the civil government when it fails to utilize the civil sword in a just and appropriate manner.²¹

It is for this reason that during the late 19th-century, when the Jews from Europe emigrated to the United States that they found correlation and symmetry between their Jewish political-religious beliefs and the worldview of the original Puritans of colonial New England.²²

²¹ See, generally, Martin Luther (1483 – 1546), stating:

Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate (1520)(stating, “the temporal authorities are baptized with the same baptism and have the same faith and Gospel as we, we must grant that they are priests and bishops, and count their office one which has a proper and a useful place in the Christian community.”

Temporal Authority: To What Extent it should be Obeyed (1523)(stating, “[h]ere you inquire further, whether constables, hangmen, jurists, lawyers, and others of similar function can also be Christians and in a state of salvation. Answer: **If the governing authority and its sword are a divine service, as was proved above, then everything that is essential for the authority's bearing of the sword must also be divine service.**”

²² See, generally, Jerold S. Auerbach, *Rabbis and Lawyers: The Journey from Torah to Constitution* (New Orleans, La.: Quid Pro, LLC, 2010).

Chapter One:

“The Minyan—Local Government Unit in Ancient Israel”

The “minyan” being instituted in the Law of Moses as a basic unit of the civil polity of ancient Israel (Exodus 18, “rulers of the tens”), the “minyan” pre-dates both the Jewish synagogue proper and the Christian church.

The Jewish “synagogue” system originated in the Jewish diaspora in Egypt and ancient Judea as a knee-jerk response to the break-down in the normal functioning of civil polity of ancient Israel during the period of Second Temple, Greek domination, and, later, Roman domination.

For instance, during the period of the Moses, Joshua, the reign of the judges, the Prophet Samuel, the reigns of Kings David and Solomon, up to the period of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, the basic civil-political structures of ancient Israel— including the First Temple worship and sacrifices and the organization of the “rulers of the tens, fifties, hundreds, thousands, etc.” (Exodus 18)— remained intact in ancient Israel.

During this aforementioned period—a sort of golden period for classical Hebrew and Jewish culture and government—there would have been no need of a “synagogue,” because the entire civil polity of ancient Israel constituted the great national assembly, with a federated system of judges (i.e., the 10s, 50s, 100s, 1000s, etc.).

For it was not until the ancient Israelites became a client-state of the ancient Greeks and the ancient Romans did their civil polity and religious-civil leaders become so corrupted and untrustworthy that many Jews felt compelled to withdraw from the established civil order in Jerusalem during the Second Temple period, and to form their own authentic houses of meeting and worship, known as the “synagogues.”

- See, generally, Paper # 2 of this Series, **“The Ancient Jewish Synagogues as the Presbyterian and Congregational Model for the Early Church.”**
- See, generally, Paper # 3 of this Series, **“Destruction of the Second Temple of Jerusalem”**

- See, generally, Paper # 4 of this Series, **“Greek Influences Upon the Early Church”**
- See, generally, Paper # 5 of this Series, **“The Jewish Wars: 1st & 2nd Maccabees”**

In addition, through the Jewish diaspora, in places like Egypt and Persia, the Jewish communities relied upon the newly-invented “synagogues” to carry on their Jewish traditions, customs, and laws.

Hence, the synagogues allowed for Jewish culture and religion to survive in lands where Jews did not control the civil polity and were not in the majority.

When Jesus of Nazareth appeared, this assault upon ancient Hebrew civil polity had already led to a firmly-established system of synagogues throughout the Greco-Roman empire, and these synagogues preserved Jewish culture, served as local self-government, constituted houses of worship, and promoted the coming of the prophetic messiah.

Although technically the “rulers of the 10s” in Exodus 18 were not the same as “synagogues” or “minyans,” due to the exigencies faced in the Jewish diaspora as well as the political dominance of the ancient Greeks and Romans, Jewish rabbis and lawyers adopted the “law” of the “rulers of the 10s” as the basic Jewish law for the “minyan” or the “synagogue.”

Here we see that the Jewish synagogue was originated as both a local governmental unit serving a multitude of judicial and administrative purposes, as well as religious house of worship, study, and learning.

Like the law of the “rulers of the 10s” in Exodus 18, the synagogue was merely a sub-component of the national government—whether that government was in ancient Israel, ancient Judea (or Palestine), or throughout the Jewish diaspora in Egypt, Persia, Asia, Europe, North America, or wherever the Jews migrated.

Chapter Two: “The Minyan—Law and Egalitarian Structure”

In summary, a minyan is a quorum of ten Jewish adult males that is required to carry out certain religious obligations and collective worship, or to formally establish a synagogue.²³ Indeed, “[i]t is understood from this that a minyan must likewise comprise ten Jewish adult males.”²⁴

[NOTE: for the movement to count women among the minyan, see, generally, “Minyan,” *Wikipedia* online].²⁵

“The most common activity requiring a minyan is public prayer.”²⁶

“[T]he presence of a rabbi (a teacher, not a priest) is not essential—it is said that ‘nine rabbis do not constitute a minyan, but ten cobblers can.’”²⁷

The Mishnah in Megillah (4:3) mentions the following instances where a minyan is required:

- Public worship, where readings of the Torah, the Prophets, and other Sacred writings occur
- Seven benedictions recited at a wedding.²⁸

²³ Rabbi Abraham Milgrim, “Minyan: The Congregational Quorum Only in a group of 10 or more adult Jews is there sufficient sanctity to recite certain public prayers,” <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/minyan-the-congregational-quorum/>, stating:

A minyan is made of ten adult Jews, traditionally males (over the age of 13). In **Orthodox synagogues**, this continues to be the standard. In more progressive Jewish communities, ranging from halachic egalitarianism, to **conservative to reform synagogues**, adult women and men are both counted in the quorum. Some communities also require twenty adults, ten men and ten women, so that women are as essential as men to the formation of the prayer community, but the traditional requirement of ten men is still fulfilled.

²⁴ “Minyan,” *Wikipedia* (online) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minyan>.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Notably, “[i]t is the firm belief of the sages that whenever ten Israelites are assembled, either for worship or for the duty of the Law, the Divine Presence dwells among them.”²⁹

From this we find that an “Israelite” is a sort of priestly and holy person—no matter his or her actual occupational station in life.

A Jewish rabbi is not more important than the common Jew.

A Jewish priest or Levite is not more important than the common Jew.

Under Jewish law, ten common Jews may constitute a minyan (or a synagogue), without leave or inclusion of a rabbi, priest, or Levite; and, when a minyan is formed, the presence of God is among them; and, indeed, it is the divine right of the common Jew— so called laymen-- under the Law of God, as previously discussed, to do so.

²⁹ Ibid.

Chapter Three:

“The Theology of the Minyan and the Protestant Reformation”

Although I can find no authoritative sources which directly link the theology of the Jewish minyan or synagogue to the theology of the Protestant Reformation, Christian congregationalism, or to Reformed Puritan theology, the closest and most authoritative source which I find linking the “minyan” to the Protestant conception of the “church” in the writing of Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) himself.

This theology of the Jewish minyan we find amply demonstrated in Martin Luther’s landmark essay, *Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate* (1520).

In this *Open Letter to the Christian Nobility*, Luther explains why the priesthood of the Roman Catholic Church had usurped the authority of common man who was a Christian. For Luther, the common man was the foundation and backbone of the Christian church. Like the Jewish minyan, the Christian church could be authorized and formed by several lay Christians.

According to Luther’s theology, no priest, bishop, or pastor was necessary to found and organize a Christian church. In his *Open Letter to the Christian Nobility*, Luther used the analogy of 10 lay Christians coming together, founding a church, and electing from amongst themselves a pastor. Luther’s analogy on this point is eerily similar to that Jewish law on the establishment of a minyan.

Most significantly, Luther goes so far as to say, and demonstrate, that the entire Christian civil polity—not unlike the nation of ancient Israel—was under God’s divine providence, with civil magistrates who were as much serving as “priests” and “bishops” as were the ordained clergy.

Thus, in Reformed theology, we say that all Christians are a part of a “priesthood of all believers,” with the right to elect and recall their pastors and bishops—a noble right that is analogous to their natural rights that are preserved in most Western democracies. Luther’s analysis fully describes this entire Christian ecclesiological and civil scheme as follows:

It is pure invention that pope, bishops, priests and monks are to be called the ‘spiritual estate’; princes, lords, artisans, and farmers the

‘temporal estate.’ That is indeed a fine bit of lying and hypocrisy. Yet no one should be frightened by it; and for this reason -- viz., that all Christians are truly of the ‘spiritual estate,’ and there is among them no difference at all but that of office, as Paul says in I Corinthians 12:12, We are all one body, yet every member has its own work, where by it serves every other, all because we have one baptism, one Gospel, one faith, and are all alike Christians; for baptism, Gospel and faith alone make us ‘spiritual’ and a Christian people.

But that a pope or a bishop anoints, confers tonsures; ordains, consecrates, or prescribes dress unlike that of the laity, this may make hypocrites and graven images, but it never makes a Christian or ‘spiritual’ man. Through baptism all of us are consecrated to the priesthood, as St. Peter says in I Peter 2:9, ‘Ye are a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom,’ and the book of Revelation says, Rev. 5:10 ‘Thou hast made us by Thy blood to be priests and kings.’ For if we had no higher consecration than pope or bishop gives, the consecration by pope or bishop would never make a priest, nor might anyone either say mass or preach a sermon or give absolution. Therefore when the bishop consecrates it is the same thing as if he, in the place and stead of the whole congregation, all of whom have like power, were to take one out of their number and charge him to use this power for the others; **just as though ten brothers, all king's sons and equal heirs, were to choose one of themselves to rule the inheritance for them all, -- they would all be kings and equal in power, though one of them would be charged with the duty of ruling.** To make it still clearer. **If a little group of pious Christian laymen were taken captive and set down in a wilderness, and had among them no priest consecrated by a bishop, and if there in the wilderness they were to agree in choosing one of themselves, married or unmarried, and were to charge him with the office of baptizing, saying mass, absolving and preaching, such a man would be as truly a priest as though all bishops and popes had consecrated him.** That is why **in cases of necessity any one can baptize and give absolution,** which would be impossible unless we were all priests.

This great grace and power of baptism and of the Christian Estate they have well-nigh destroyed and caused us to forget through the canon law. It was in the manner aforesaid that Christians in olden days chose

from their number bishops and priests, who were afterwards confirmed by other bishops, without all the show which now obtains.

It was thus that Sts. Augustine, Ambrose and Cyprian became bishops. Since, then, the temporal authorities are baptized with the same baptism and have the same faith and Gospel as we, we must grant that they are priests and bishops, and count their office one which has a proper and a useful place in the Christian community. For whoever comes out the water of baptism can boast that he is already consecrated priest, bishop and pope, though it is not seemly that every one should exercise the office....

On this account the Christian temporal power should exercise its office without let or hindrance, regardless whether it be pope, bishop or priest whom it affects; whoever is guilty, let him suffer. All that the canon law has said to the contrary is sheer invention of Roman presumption. For Thus saith St. Paul to all Christians: Roman 13:1, 4 "Let every soul (I take that to mean the pope's soul also) be subject unto the higher powers; for they bear not the sword in vain, but are the ministers of God for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well." St. Peter also says: 1 Peter 2:13, 15 "Submit yourselves unto every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, for so is the will of God." He has also prophesied that such men shall come as will despise the temporal authorities; and this has come to pass through the canon law. So then, I think this first paper-wall is overthrown, since **the temporal power has become a member of the body of Christendom, and is of the "spiritual estate," though its work is of a temporal nature.** Therefore its work should extend freely and without hindrance to all the members of the whole body; it should punish and use force whenever guilt deserves or necessity demands, without regard to pope, bishops and priests,-let them hail threats and bans as much as they will.

Thus, I find that the Protestant-Reformed theology of congregationalism (as well as the republican structure of Presbyterianism) to be fully supported in original Hebrew civil polity (i.e., Exodus 18: 25) and in Jewish law (i.e., the "minyan," etc.).

Thus, when the Early Church was formed along Jewish lines, using the first-century synagogues (i.e., minyans) as their models, we may rightfully deduce that the Early Church utilized the word “church” in a manner that was fiercely egalitarian, and based upon the structures of early Jewish minyans, congregations, assemblies, and synagogues.

Chapter Four:
“The Jewish Minyan and the English Baptist Church”

When the English Baptists withdrew from the Church of England during the 17th century, in order to reformulate their “congregational” churches, they did not withdraw their allegiance from the Kingdom of England and Great Britain.

For instance, as early as 1644, these early Baptists fully acknowledged and embraced the sovereignty of their Christian king and the laws of England, viz:

1644 London Baptist Confession

“On the Civil Magistrate and Human Government”

XLVIII.

That a civil magistrate is an ordinance of God set up by God for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well; and that all lawful things commanded by them, subjection ought to be given by us in the Lord: and that we are to make supplication and prayer for Kings, and all that are in authority, that under them we may live a peaceable and quiet life in all godliness and honesty.

Rom. 13:1-4; 1 Peter 2:13, 14; 1 Tim. 2:2

XLIX.

The supreme Magistrate of this Kingdom we believe to be the King and Parliament freely chosen by the Kingdom, and that in all those civil laws which have been acted by them, or for the present is or shall be ordained, we are bound to yield subjection and obedience unto in the Lord, as conceiving our selves bound to defend both the persons of those chosen, and all civil laws made by them, with our persons, liberties, and estates, with all that is called ours, although we should suffer never so much from them in not actively submitting to some ecclesiastical laws, which might be conceived by them to be their duties to establish which we for the present

could not see, nor our consciences could submit unto; yet are we bound to yield our persons to their pleasures.

L.

And if God should provide such a mercy for us, as to incline the magistrates hearts so far to tender our consciences, as that we might be protected by them from wrong, injury, oppression and molestation, which long we formerly have groaned under by the tyranny and oppression of the Prelatical Hierarchy, which God through mercy has made this present King and Parliament wonderful honorable; as an instrument is His hand, to throw down; and we thereby have had some breathing time, we shall, we hope, look at it as a mercy beyond our expectation, and conceive ourselves further engaged for ever to bless God for it.

1 Tim. 1:2-4; Psal. 126:1; Acts 9:31

LI.

But if God with hold the magistrates allowance and furtherance herein;(1) yet we must not withstanding proceed together in Christian communion, not daring to give place to suspend our practice, but to walk in obedience to Christ in the profession and holding forth this faith before mentioned, even in the midst of all trails and afflictions, not accounting out goods, lands, wives, husbands, children, fathers, mothers, brethren, sisters, yea, and our own lives dear unto us, so we may finish our course with joy: remembering always we ought to(2) obey God rather than men, and grounding upon the commandment, commission, and promise of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, who as He has power in heaven and earth, so also has promised, if we keep His commandments which He has given us, to be with us to the end of the world: and when we have finished our course, and kept the faith, to give us the crown of righteousness, which is laid up for all that love His appearing, and to whom we must give an account of all our actions, no man being able to discharge us of the same.

1) Acts 2:40,41; 4:19; 5:28,29,41; 20:23; 1 Thes. 3:3; Phil. 1:27-29; Dan. 3:16,17; 6:7, 10, 22, 23.

2) Matth. 28:18-20; 1 Tim. 6:13-15; Rom. 12:1.8; 1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Tim. 4:7,8; Rev. 2:10; Gal 2:4,5

Externally, the Baptists acknowledged all civil government as an “ordinance from God.” For this reason, they were ready and willing to obey the laws of the land.

On the other hand, the Baptists reserved the fundamental right to organize their own churches in accord to its own dictates, and to withdraw from the official state-run Church of England.

Notably, the English Baptists did not stop being “Anglicans.”

Even though the English Baptists no longer were affiliated with the Church of England, they never stopped being patriotic Englishmen! They never stopped being equal participants in England’s or Great Britian’s “church-state” apparatus.

Theoretically, the English Baptists never stopped being English lawyers or English civil magistrates, alongside their fellow Anglican churchmen in England and North America.

For this reason, the English Baptists were an “Anglican” sect— i.e., they were Christians who practiced a different form of Anglicanism or Puritanism or Independent Christianity—while remaining loyal subjects to the King of England.

The Baptist founders were accomplished Anglicans in their own right, to wit:

| Baptist Founding Fathers | Ministerial Credentials |
|---------------------------------|--|
| John Smyth (1554 -1612) | Anglican Priest Fellow, Christ’s College, Cambridge, 1594 Ordained Anglican Priest, 1584 |
| Thomas Helwys (1575- 1616) | Lawyer/ Baptist Minister Gray’s Inn (Inn of Court) |
| Roger Williams (1603 – 1683) | Anglican Priest |

| | |
|--|---|
| | <p>Pembroke College, Cambridge, 1627</p> <p>Ordained Anglican Priest, 1628</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law secretary to Sir Edward Coke, lawyer, jurist, Chief Judge of England, Member of Parliament |
|--|---|

For that reason, in Great Britain and the United States, the Baptist Church denomination has a two-fold character:

- A. First, they are bound to Anglo-American constitutional law and jurisprudence; and their allegiance is to the constitutions of Great Britain, the United States, and to the Anglo-American common law system;

- B. Second, they reserve the right to form minyans or “quasi-minyans”³⁰ (i.e., congregational churches) that are separate and independent from any established church, such as the Church of England or the Episcopal Church, which was formerly “established” in colonies such as South Carolina, Virginia, and New York.

Hence, when the early English Baptists first formulated their independent churches, they held in their London Baptist Confession of 1644 the following:

³⁰ See, e.g., Martin Luther, *Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate* (1520), stating:

Through baptism all of us are consecrated to the priesthood, as St. Peter says in I Peter 2:9, ‘Ye are a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom,’ and the book of Revelation says, Rev. 5:10 ‘Thou hast made us by Thy blood to be priests and kings.’ ... [J]ust as though ten brothers, all king's sons and equal heirs, were to choose one of themselves to rule the inheritance for them all, -- they would all be kings and equal in power, though one of them would be charged with the duty of ruling.

1644 London Baptist Confession

“On the Meaning and Definition of the ‘Church’”

XXXVI.

That being thus joined, every Church has power given them from Christ for their better well-being, to choose to themselves fitting persons into the office of Pastors, Teachers, Elders, Deacons, being qualified according to the Word, as those which Christ has appointed in His Testament, for the feeding, governing, serving, and building up of His Church, and that none other have to power to impose them, either these or any other.

- 1) Acts 1:2; 6:3; 15:22, 25; 1 Cor. 16:3
- 2) Rom. 12:7, 8; 16:1; 1 Cor. 12:8, 28; 1 Tim. 3 chapt.; Heb. 13:7; 1 Peter 5:1-3

XXXVII.

That the Ministers aforesaid, lawfully called by the Church, where they are to administer, ought to continue in their calling, according to God's ordinance, and carefully to feed the flock of Christ committed to them, nor for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.

Heb. 5:4; Acts 4:23; 1 Tim. 4:14; John 10:3, 4; Acts 20:28; Rom. 12:7, 8; Heb. 13:7, 17

XXXVIII.

That the due maintenance of the officers aforesaid, should be the free and voluntary communication of the Church, that according to Christ's ordinance, they that preach the Gospel, should live on the Gospel and not by constraint to be compelled from the people by a forced law.

1 Cor. 9:7,14; Gal. 6:6; 1 Thes. 5:13; 1 Tim. 5:17-18; Phil. 4:15-16

For this 1644 London Baptist Confession cites none of the Sacred Scriptures which undergird the Jewish law of the minyan, to wit:

Genesis 6: 13 – 9: 29 (Noah's Ark)

Genesis 18: 32 (Abraham's inquiry about 10 righteous persons)

Exodus 18: 25 (Rule of the 10s)

Numbers 14:27 (The 10 spies)

In other words, neither the Baptists or any other Protestant sect concluded that 10 common lay Christian men were needed to form a quorum or a “church.”

But these Protestants cited the Letters of the Apostle Paul, which describes the Early Church implementing Jewish “presbyterian” customs that were undoubtedly based upon the minyan (i.e., the “Rule of the 10s”) or the congregations (i.e., “synagogues”) of ancient Israel.

CONCLUSION

This paper concludes that the Protestant and Reformed churches formulated their ecclesiology in opposition to the hierarchical structures of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England through a careful analysis of the Early Church during the days of the Apostle Paul.

This Early Church was egalitarian and fiercely democratic, literally treating the common man as a “priest” and a “king,” and a member of a common “priesthood of all believers.”

Martin Luther’s *Letter to the German Nobility* (1520)³¹ set forth and further explained the Puritan and Protestant doctrine of ecclesiology, based upon the New Testament.

But if we examine the Old Testament closer we find that this same Protestant doctrine of ecclesiology is contained firmly within the Torah and, hence, within Jewish law of the minyan.

Perhaps for this reason, American Jews who emigrated to the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries found great affinity with Congregationalists of colonial New England.

And this is why the Baptist and Congregational churches are more similar in their ecclesiological structures to the Jewish synagogues than they are to episcopal structures of Methodism, Pentecostalism, Anglicanism, or Roman Catholicism.

THE END

³¹ See, e.g., Martin Luther, *Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate* (1520), stating:

Through baptism all of us are consecrated to the priesthood, as St. Peter says in I Peter 2:9, ‘Ye are a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom,’ and the book of Revelation says, Rev. 5:10 ‘Thou hast made us by Thy blood to be priests and kings.’ ... [J]ust as though ten brothers, all king's sons and equal heirs, were to choose one of themselves to rule the inheritance for them all, -- they would all be kings and equal in power, though one of them would be charged with the duty of ruling.

Appendix

“Black Church, Black Men, and the Jewish Minyan”

by

Rev. Roderick Andrew Lee Ford, Litt.D.

This paper is written in honor of the Bantu-Lemba Jews of southern Africa.³² Although it is directed towards my fellow African American brothers in the United States, its scope is Pan-African in nature and applicable for churches comprised primarily of persons who are of African descent.

Indeed, when we examine the spiritual, moral, and legal remedies which the LORD God of Israel revealed to Moses, the disenfranchisement of the ancient Hebrew or Jewish men in biblical Egypt and the disenfranchisement of African American men in North America must be seen as analogous or parallel events in human history.

Just as God has given the *minyan* to the ancient Hebrews or Jews (i.e., 10 common men were needed to form a congregation or synagogue), so too may present-day African American men consider whether such an ecclesiological foundation is suitable for the “Black Church,” whether the *minyan* might uproot the lingering negative effects of chattel slavery upon the black race; and whether the *minyan* might strengthen Black men as fathers and husbands and, thereby, establish firm foundations for the restoration and uplift of the African American family.³³

³² The Lemba Jews. See, e.g., <https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/lemba-tribe-in-southern-africa-has-jewish-roots-genetic-tests-reveal>

See, also, “Lemba people,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lemba_people

See, also, “Origins of the Lemba Jews of Southern Africa,” <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1914832/>

³³ See, e.g., Martin Luther, *Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate* (1520), stating:

Through baptism all of us are consecrated to the priesthood, as St. Peter says in I Peter 2:9, ‘Ye are a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom,’ and the book of Revelation says, Rev. 5:10 ‘Thou hast

Ten common or lay African American men (i.e., an African-American minyan) being the backbone or the spiritual foundation of the local Black church would likely be positively impactful, if not altogether revolutionary!

Here, I surmise that Black pastors might consult Messianic Jewish or Orthodox Jewish rabbis—i.e., Blacks and Jews working together— for advice and input.

This is important, because we must remember that Priesthood (or the “call to preach”) in the Black Church has deep, deep roots in African nature religion—e.g., voodoo, animism, etc.— and was first manifest in the form of medicine men, root men, and “witch” doctors who healed ailments believed to be caused by witchcraft and evil.³⁴ The spirituality of such African religious practices came to North American on the slave ships and has never fully disappeared from the African American religious character.³⁵

Since, in the Black Church, the “call to preach” is deeply rooted in this African heritage, one can make a strong argument that the Black church’s fundamental and general conception of “priesthood” is in *no way exclusively connected* to the Torah’s, the orthodox Catholic, or the New England Puritan’s

made us by Thy blood to be priests and kings.’ ... [J]ust as though ten brothers, all king's sons and equal heirs, were to choose one of themselves to rule the inheritance for them all, -- they would all be kings and equal in power, though one of them would be charged with the duty of ruling.

³⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Souls of Black Folk,” *Writings* (New York, N.Y.: The Library of America, 1986)(Chapter 10, “Of the Faith of Our Fathers”), p.497, stating:

It was a terrific social revolution, and yet some traces were retained of the former group life, and the chief remaining institution was the Priest or Medicine-man. He early appeared on the plantation and found his function as the healer of the sick, the interpreter of the Unknown, the comforter of the sorrowing, the supernatural avenger of wrong, and the one who rudely but picturesquely expressed the longing, disappointment, and resentment of a stolen and oppressed people. Thus, as bard, physician, judge, and priest, within the narrow limits allowed by the slave system, rose the Negro preacher, and under him the first Afro-American institution, the Negro church.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 493 – 505.

patriarchal conception of the monogamic family— with husbands and fathers serving as “priests” of monogamic families.³⁶

Instead, because of slavery, the institution of the Black Church in the United States *predated* the institution of the Black family.³⁷ Under this set of circumstances, African American males were “not ordinary men either, but black men emasculated by a peculiarly complete system of slavery, centuries old.”³⁸ Hence, Bishop Daniel Payne (1811 - 1893) of the A.M.E. Church has written that “the greatest curse which slavery inflicted upon us was the destruction of the home.”³⁹

Next, after slavery was ended, “the emasculating effects of caste distinctions”⁴⁰ under Jim Crow perpetuated their impediments to patriarchal leadership within the Black family:

For this much all men know: despite compromise, war, and struggle, the Negro is not free. In the backwoods of the Gulf States, for miles and miles, he may not leave the plantation of his birth; in well-nigh the whole rural South the black farmers are peons, bound by law and

³⁶ See, e.g., Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory Or, a Sum of Practical Theology, And Cases of Conscience* (Part 2 Christian Economics)(reprinted in Columbia, S.C. on January 18, 2019), p. 36. (“[e]very **ruler of a family** then was **as a priest to his own family.**”)

³⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Souls of Black Folk,” *Writings* (New York, N.Y.: The Library of America, 1986), p.499 ([The Negro church] as a social institution it **antedated by many decades** the monogamic Negro home....”)

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 378.

³⁹ Daniel P. Black, *Dismantling Black Manhood: An Historical and Literary Analysis of the Legacy of Slavery* (London and New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997), p. 165.

See, also, Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Negro family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, DC: Office of Policy Planning and Research, U.S. Department of Labor (March 1965)), stating: “It was by destroying the Negro family under slavery that white America broke the will of the Negro people....”

⁴⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Souls of Black Folk,” *Writings* (New York, N.Y.: The Library of America, 1986), p. 404.

See, also, Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Negro family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, DC: Office of Policy Planning and Research, U.S. Department of Labor (March 1965)), stating: “It was by destroying the Negro family under slavery that white America broke the will of the Negro people....”

custom to an economic slavery, from which the only escape is death or the penitentiary. In the most cultured sections and cities of the South the Negroes are a segregated servile caste, with restricted rights and privileges. Before the courts, both in law and custom, they stand on a different and peculiar basis. Taxation without representation is the rule of their political life. And the result of all this is, and in nature must have been, **lawlessness** and **crime**. That is the large legacy of the Freedmen's Bureau, the work it did not do because it could not.⁴¹

With such lawlessness and crime came sexual debauchery, systematic abuses of black women, and the systematic break-up of the African American family, both during and after slavery. Under these conditions, the Black church both adjusted and, to some degree, acquiesced—the monogamic Black family structure, with the Black father as “priest of the family,” was never a central feature of the historic Black church. Nor was establishing (or preserving) the Black father as “priest of the family” a central feature of the historic church-led Civil Rights Movement.⁴²

The Puritan ideal of family being thus denied to African Americans during slavery, the materialism and mammon of free-market secularism and popular education also did not promote or reinforce those old patriarchal values within the African American community. So that today, an African American “womanist” theology—undoubtedly the brainchild of American feminism—has taken root in the Black church, and has labeled the old Puritan conception of patriarchy as “Eurocentric” ecclesiological oppression, thus divesting the Black man of his birthright as “priest of the family.”⁴³

In this essay, I shall endeavor to summarize the chapter “Of the Faith of the Fathers” from *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) written by W.E.B. Du Bois; there, he writes:

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 390.

⁴² See, generally, Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Negro family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, DC: Office of Policy Planning and Research, U.S. Department of Labor (March 1965)).

⁴³ See, generally, James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History (Volume Two: 1980 – 1992)*(Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Books, 1993).

First, we must realize that no such institution as this Negro church could rear itself without definite historical foundations. These foundations we can find if we remember that the social history of the Negro did not start in America. He was brought from a definite social environment,-- the polygamous clan life under the headship of the chief and the potent influence of the priest. His religion was nature-worship, with profound belief in invisible surrounding influences, good and bad, and his worship was through incantation and sacrifice. The first rude change in this life was the slave ship and the West Indian sugar-fields. The plantation organization replaced the clan and tribe, and the white master replaced the chief with far greater and more despotic powers. Forced and long-continued toil became the rule of life, the old ties of blood relationship and kinship disappeared, and instead of the family appeared **a new polygamy and polyandry**, which, in some cases, almost reached **promiscuity**.

It was a terrific social revolution, and yet some traces were retained of the former group life, and the chief remaining institution was the Priest or Medicine-man. He early appeared on the plantation and found his function as the healer of the sick, the interpreter of the Unknown, the comforter of the sorrowing, the supernatural avenger of wrong, and the one who rudely but picturesquely expressed the longing, disappointment, and resentment of a stolen and oppressed people. Thus, as bard, physician, judge, and priest, within the narrow limits allowed by the slave system, rose the Negro preacher, and under him the first Afro-American institution, the Negro church.

This church was not at first by any means Christian nor definitely organize; rather it was an adaptation and mingling of heathen rites among the members of each plantation, and roughly designated as Voodooism. Association with the masters, missionary effort and motives of expediency gave these rites an early veneer of Christianity, and after the lapse of many generations the Negro church became Christian.

Two characteristic things must be noticed in regard to this church. First, it became almost entirely Baptist and Methodist in faith; secondly, as a social institution **it antedated by many decades the**

monogamic Negro home....The second fact noted, namely, that the Negro church antedates the Negro home, leads to **an explanation of much that is paradoxical** in this communistic institution and in **the morals of its members....**⁴⁴

Many of the worst characteristics of the Negro masses of to-day had their seed in this period of the slave's ethical growth. Here it was that **the Home was ruined under the very shadow of the Church**, white and black; here habits of shiftlessness took root, and sullen hopelessness replaced hopeful strife....⁴⁵

For fifty years Negro religion thus transformed itself and identified itself with the dream of Abolition, until that which was a radical fad in the white North and an anarchistic plot in the white South had become a religion to the black world. Thus, when Emancipation finally came, it seemed to the freedman a literal Coming of the Lord. His fervid imagination was stirred as never before, by the tramp of armies, the blood and dust of battle, and the wail and whirl of social upheaval. He stood dumb and motionless before the whirlwind: what had he to with it? Was it not the Lord's doing, and marvelous in his eyes? Joyed and bewildered with what came, he stood awaiting new wonders till the inevitable Age of Reaction swept over the nation and brought the crisis of to-day.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Rev. William Goodell, *The American Slave Code* (New York, N.Y.: American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1853), pp. 109- 111, stating:

The Church is here seen submitting, with complacency, to that feature of the Slave Code that annuls marriage! What the Southern Baptists have avowed, the other religious sects there practice. Some of the facts stated concerning the 'uses of slave property' illustrate the absence of slave marriage.... The **restored institution and sanctity of marriage would cut off the supplies that gorge the slave markets**. The Presbyterian Synod of Kentucky, in their address, have given us their testimony to the general fact and its effects. They say: The system '**produces general licentiousness among the slaves....** We are then assured by the most unquestionable testimony that licentiousness is the necessary result of our system.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Souls of Black Folk," *Writings* (New York, N.Y.: The Library of America, 1986), pp. 497-501.

Here in Du Bois' thesis in *The Souls of Black Folk*, we may readily observe that **African indigenous religions** and the transatlantic **African slave trade** and the institution of **African slavery** formed the foundational basis upon which the black Baptist, black Methodist, and other black Protestant churches were formed.

As Du Bois' thesis implies, the central paradox of the Black Church and American Christianity is that the Black family was decimated and sexual licentiousness flourished among the slaves, even as the Gospel was being preached. One can certainly cogently argue that the influences which the Roman Catholic Church or the Church of England might have had upon white Baptists, white Methodists, and other white Protestant churches—particularly regarding patriarchy, sexual morality, and the institution of the family—were systematically deprecated or thwarted, if not altogether absent, in corresponding Black churches.

Arguably, the institution of slavery and its negative effects upon the African American family and the natural rights of African American husbands and fathers prevented Black churches from otherwise operating and functioning along conventional, orthodox ecclesiological principles.⁴⁷

As a consequence, what is seldom heard in Black theology is the following Reformed or Puritan theological doctrine:

- (a) that the “**priesthood of all believers**” means that the common man is indeed a “priest” in his own right;

⁴⁷ Indeed, it was a “badge or incident of slavery” to prevent African American wives from serving as a “Help Meet” to their African American husbands. On this very point, the Rev. William Goodell writes:

The obligations of marriage are evidently inconsistent with the conditions of slavery, and cannot be performed by a slave. The husband promises to protect his wife and provide for her. The wife promises to be the help-meet of her husband. They mutually promise to live with and cherish each other, till parted by death. But what can such promises by slaves mean? The ‘legal relation of master and slave’ renders them void! It forbids the slave to protect even himself. It clothes his master with authority to bid him inflict deadly blows on the woman he has sworn to protect. It prohibits his possession of any property wherewith to sustain her. His labor and his hands it takes from him. It bids the woman assist, not her husband, but her owner! Nay! It gives him unlimited control and full possession of her own person, and forbids her, on pain of death, (as will be shown,) to resist him, if he drags her to his bed!

The American Slave Code (New York, N.Y.: American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1853), p. 108.

- (b) that the “**monogamic family unit**” is a “**church**,”⁴⁸
- (c) that the husband or father, within the monogamic family unit, a “**priest of the family**.”⁴⁹

Under this Reformed and Puritan doctrine, the present-day objective of the institutional black churches of the United States ought to be this, namely,

- (a) to establish the *monogamic* Black family unit as the primary sub-unit and basic foundation of the Black church; and,
- (b) to uproot the negative effects of chattel slavery through re-establishing the Black father as the “priest of the family.”

In closing, the **Jewish minyan** (i.e., 10 men being the foundational backbone of the congregation) might liberate the Black Church and the entire African race.

To achieve this objective of re-establishing the monogamic Black family unit, the Black church’s conception of “priesthood” must also go beyond our predominant notion of ordained clergymen holding theology or divinity degrees; but, rather, as the Reformed theologians, such as Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) and Richard Baxter (1603 – 1691), understood the meaning of “priesthood,” the Black church’s conception clergy must include **a multitude of “elders”** trained in a wide variety of multidisciplinary fields (i.e., *a presbytery*),⁵⁰ and it should certainly acknowledge the Reformed, Puritan doctrine which sees the “civil polity” itself as being a “divine” thing that is ordained and established by God; and which sees the civil magistrates (i.e., legislators, lawyers, judges, and governors, etc.), who have been baptized and who take the sacraments of our Lord, as a part of the common

⁴⁸ See, e.g., Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory Or, a Sum of Practical Theology, And Cases of Conscience* (Part 2 Christian Economics)(reprinted in Columbia, S.C. on January 18, 2019), p. 36. (“[e]very **ruler of a family** then was as a **priest to his own family**.”)

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ 1 Timothy 4:14.

priesthood (i.e., the presbytery) of the church,⁵¹ and who are under solemn oaths to establish true justice and judgment in the land.⁵²

Here, the **minyan** (i.e., 10 men being the foundational backbone of the congregation), or something similar in structure and purpose, might liberate the African American people and the entire African race.

The End

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² See, e.g., Genesis 18: 18-19 (“justice and judgment”); Exodus 18: 21- 26 (judges of ancient Israel); Deuteronomy 1:15- 17 (judges of ancient Israel). See, also, the text of the American Declaration of Independence (1776).

See, also, Martin Luther, *Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate* (1520), stating:

It was thus that Sts. Augustine, Ambrose and Cyprian became bishops. Since, then, **the temporal authorities are baptized with the same baptism and have the same faith and Gospel as we, we must grant that they are priests and bishops, and count their office one which has a proper and a useful place in the Christian community.**

