
**The Bible Embodies Competing Ordination Traditions**

The stated objective of *Holiness and Ministry* is to construct a biblical theology of ordination that is “embedded in broad reflection on the nature of holiness in the biblical literature” and able to stimulate ecumenical dialogue (4, italics added). With respect to the first of these goals, the author’s idea of “broad” reflection becomes more clear when he complains that other theologies of ordination focus to narrowly on “scattered references to the pastoral office in the New Testament” (5). Dozeman’s study of the Mosaic office has led him to believe that the Torah’s depiction of Moses “informs the composition of New Testament literature” in ways that “far exceed the scattered references to pastoral offices” (5). Although the author desires to create a biblical theology, he believes his research must be rooted in the study of holiness in religious experience (3). Our author’s second goal locates his book historically as a response to the World Council of Churches, which called for “renewed theological reflection on the biblical roots of ordination” (5). His practical concern is that future Christian leaders will lack vocational identity without proper theological reflection. The author also assumes that the “original intentions” of ordained ministry are not only discoverable, but that all ordained ministries must be faithful to these original intentions (4).

The author’s self-proclaimed methodology is threefold: 1) “history of religions” approach “and the study of holiness,” (this means he will be focusing on human experience) 2) “the history of the composition of the Pentateuch and the interpretation of the Mosaic office in Torah,” (this means he will be utilizing source criticism) and 3) canonical criticism. Given the space constraints of this short book, however, our author engages more in borrowing than in arguing. For example, Dozeman does not provide anything close to an overview of the teachings and practices of Ancient Near Eastern religions in order to demonstrate the nuances of the concept of holiness in these religions; he simply borrows Mircea Eliade’s categories of holiness as “dynamic force” and “ritual resource,” Otto’s notion of holiness as “numinous,” Jacob Milgrom’s anthropological emphasis on holiness as “sacred space” and “ritual resource,” etc.

Corresponding to these three methods are Dozeman’s three key insights adapted from the fruits of these critical methods. First, he will ultimately wind up with a twofold definition of ordination corresponding to two distinct views of holiness in Ancient Near Eastern religion: 1) holiness as a dynamic force is closely associated with ordination to word and 2) holiness as a ritual resource is associated with ordination to sacrament. Second, these conflicting views of holiness set the background for what our authors believes to be the irreconcilable conceptions of holiness in the biblical literature itself, which reflects the presence of “competing groups in the late monarchical and second temple periods of Judaism” that led to differing views of ordination (6). The “Mosaic office in Torah” is actually composed of, and holds in tension, “competing portraits” of Moses as either prophet or priestly mediator (7). Dozeman is concerned to show
that these conflicting traditions of ordination “cannot be harmonized”; yet he claims these competing notions lay the foundation for how to understand ordination to word and sacrament in the Christian tradition (7).

Third, the author believes that canonical criticism shows that the “authoritative function” of Torah “intended for the religious use of faith communities through time” is related to this inner tension of the Mosaic office (8). The “adaptable character of canonical literature” by communities of faith means “the voice of the same God” can be heard “through historically dissimilar traditions” (10). In other words, Dozeman claims that as canonical, the Mosaic portraits are not intended to be harmonized but to set the boundaries of “diverse interpretations of ordination” (10). He calls this “controlled pluralism,” and it is the key to understanding why Dozeman thinks his study will be so suitable for ecumenical dialogue (10).

Although the author’s methodologies are more focused on the human contributions to biblical literature and religious experience, this does not mean he reduces theology to anthropology, for he claims at the outset that all religion in human experience is caused by the holiness of God, which is God’s “quintessential nature, distinguishing him from all beings” (13). What exactly is holiness? The Anchor Bible Dictionary defines the core meaning as “to be separate.” The term is somewhat mysterious in meaning, but has to do with God’s “otherness” from all creation; God is sui generis and wholly pure or righteous (18). This holiness in God is anything but boring: it is dangerous and kills people; it is life-giving and heals people; it is what makes any contact with God volatile and creates a barrier between God and violent and impure humanity. This brings us to our author’s insight: “The goal of biblical religion is to overcome the separation between God and humans”—which our author describes in terms of the “sacred” and the “profane” (19). Sanctuaries, for example, are like cosmic mountains that overcome the divine-human separation by God’s descent to be among humans, and those who work in such places must go through a rite of passage before they can avail themselves to the “service of holiness” (21-22).

Competing Notions of Holiness

Rudolf Otto describes the separate quality of holiness with his language of the numinous—a personal and dynamic power (25). The numinous cannot be equated with moral “goodness.” It is a “pre-moral and ineffable” power that invades the human, is appropriated through religious feeling, and results in a “sense of dread, awe, fear, and fascination” that empties the person of their ego (25-27). An encounter with the numinous is so basic to human religious experience that one’s quest for holiness is in vain without it, for the very definition of a holy person is one who is acquainted with the numinous (27). The passive reception of the numinous and loss of ego are charismatic gifts potentially available to everyone and result in exceptional “powers and qualities for authoritative leadership” (27). “The ideal model of such a holy person is a prophet, not a priest” (27, italics added). Finally, this numinous does not reside apart from the profane world, but underlies this world and resides within it (25).

Whereas Otto focuses on religious experience, Jacob Milgrom focuses on religious rituals and the importance of “sacred space” (28). Milgrom defines holiness as “that which is withdrawn from common use” and considers the separate quality of holiness to be a spatial reality. Holiness only directly invades certain sacred locations, so although it ultimately seeks to also “transfer its power” to the rest of the profane world, it cannot, as in Otto, “seize humans directly and immediately in any location” (28). Holiness does not invade persons but locations
Sanctuaries are the exclusive hubs of the dynamic power of holiness that becomes an “ethical resource” to the profane and impure world (29). The two forces of impurity and holiness “cannot occupy the same space,” for one drives out the other, thus the sanctuary must be fortified against the “contamination of impurity” (29). This is why holiness is “unapproachable except through divinely imposed restrictions” (30). Sacred rituals are the exclusive means for the “transfer” of holiness to humans (31). The priest is the ideal model for this conception of holiness, and ordination itself requires rituals and a rite of passage.

Critical Evaluation

Dozeman’s stark contrast between these different conceptions of holiness may be a bit overplayed. Both Otto and Milgrom understand holiness as a dynamic power that is somehow imparted to the human (whether directly or indirectly, whether infused or transferred). Although prima facie Milgrom seems to hold quite a different view since in his scheme holiness does not invade people directly but only exclusive locations, he still believes the power of holiness is “transferred” to people outside the sanctuary and indeed lays claim on “all creation” (28-29). Thus even on Milgrom’s view people can still receive the dynamic power of holiness outside the sanctuary (even if it is “indirect” and flows from a sanctuary-source). To see person-invading holiness and space-invading holiness as necessarily contradictory is counter-intuitive to this reader, for even on Milgrom’s view the chief reason why God would be “invading” any “space” would be for the people in that space (if there is some other reason Dozeman has not told us). Although one works through the book in the hope that it will become more evident what the practical differences between these two conceptions of holiness are, and why they are irreconcilably at odds, the tension only grows.1

Mosaic Office as Supreme But Ambiguous Model for Ordination

Dozeman presents the Mosaic office in Torah as a model for ordination. The divine visitation to Moses at the burning bush, characterized by suddenness and unpredictability, is not something new, for God had appeared in “epiphanic visitations” to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (36). The exodus story continues and completes this narrative in the Pentateuch. Yahweh is the main character in this narrative, and the need of both the Egyptians and the Israelites to know Yahweh sets the stage for Moses, who becomes the central human character. The nature of Moses’s calling, however, is in stark contrast to that of the ancestors, for “when Moses speaks, he speaks for God,” and Moses becomes a mediator of divine authority in a way unparalleled by previous ancestors. To speak of the nature of God’s call on Moses, Dozeman employs Brevard Childs’ term “Mosaic office” (37). The story of Moses functioned to provide paradigmatic models for religious authority and offices in ancient Israel. Dozeman takes for granted that the authorial intentions of the Moses tradition as we have it in its final form are to “institutionalize the office of covenant mediator” in the ongoing worship of Israel (37). Thus, it is a strength of his presentation that Dozeman seeks to build his theology of Christian ordination from the

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1 If “death and disease cannot share the same space with the life-giving power of holiness,” it remains to be explained how people who receive this power (whether in a sanctuary or indirectly through the “transfer” of this power) and are thus “holy” could ever be sick or die. Also, if this is the case, how could Jesus have died on a cross?
Mosaic office since he understands himself to be appropriating the story of Moses in the way that it was originally intended to function.

Appropriating critical scholarship, the author discerns two distinct calls to ordination in the Moses story (rooted in competing accounts), one which is prophetic in which Moses received revelation at Mount Horeb and passed on charismatically in Numbers 11 and Deuteronomy 31, and another which is priestly and transmitted ritually in the Tabernacle to Aaron and his sons in Leviticus 8-9. Also true to Dozeman’s methodology, he understands the Moses story to conform to the Ancient Mesopotamian genre of heroic legend, and therefore to contain a “right of passage” common to such legends.\(^2\) The important dynamic at work in preparing Moses for his position of authority is this: his alienation in the wilderness (indicating the “liminal” stage of the ancient “right of passage”) as an “antihero” is actually what prepares him to be a leader, since it empties him of his ego and self-sufficiency (40-41). Furthermore, unlike the paradigmatic heroic kind, Moses is never reintegrated into the world of the profane, but remains in a constant liminal state (requiring a “veil” between him and the people of Israel) that becomes “institutionalized” (42-43). The divine light motif associated with Moses’s encounter with God on the mountain underscores the divine origin of ordination, Moses’s ignorance of his status indicates that ordination is a divine—not human—action, and the veil between Moses and the people indicates the permanent liminal state of the ordained office (43).

Moses’s initial encounter with the deity constitutes his prophetic call, which fits with Otto’s notion of the numinous (e.g. the otherness of the experience, the danger of coming into the presence of God, an experience not created by rituals, God as a personal force, Moses’s introspective response to his calling in the divine dialogue based on his sense of dependency and loss of ego, the emphasis on personal power and persuasive speech as a divine gift, the divine name which acquires a mystical meaning in the prophetic call, etc.). The next stage in the unfolding of the divine drama, Exodus 6-7, Dozeman’s interprets as Moses’s priestly call. Here we see public display of legitimacy as opposed to internal experience, ritual competition instead of persuasive charisma, experience expressed through ritual rather than the mystic name Yahweh, reference back to the ancestor anchors (which Dozeman calls “Tradition” and “institutional focus”) rather than mere individual experience (51-55). These accounts are incompatible in Dozeman’s analysis. Moses’s call to priesthood is set against his call as a prophet as “competing traditions” (57).

**Critical Evaluation**

Dozeman’s attempt to construct a theology of ordination might be informed by critical, theological, and anthropological insights, but Dozeman’s rigid separation between Moses’s priestly and prophetic callings certainly seems strained. For example, he caricaturizes Moses’s priestly call as “the absence of introspection” in comparison to Moses’s resistance to God’s prophetic call based on his inadequacies (55). However, elsewhere he admits that in his priestly call, God is asking him to “speak” and he objects in the same fashion as before during his

\(^2\) The story does not merely mimic other heroic legends which were usually applied to kings, for although (like in other legends of this sort) Moses, as a future champion, is abandoned and set adrift on water and adopted in secrete (the common format of heroic legends), his initial act of liberation (killing an Egyptian) is viewed as a failure and the cause of his being alienated from Israel and being demoted to the status of a hunted slave (40). Thus the paradigmatic image of liberation in heroic legends actually becomes anticlimactic and is judged to simply be a murderous example of failed leadership. Our author thus takes the Moses legend as a rejection of the heroic legend paradigm rather than a conformity to such legends.
prophetic call (54). Thus the same style of divined dialogue Dozeman characterizes as “introspection” in one text, he characterizes as “the absence of introspection” in another, in order to conform the biblical narratives to his preconceived idea of “competing traditions” within the text (54-55). This critic sees no reason why Moses’s experience of the burning bush could not be seen as a narrative authentication for ritual purity, since Moses is forced to take his shoes off in light of a *spatial notion of holiness* (he is standing on holy ground), or why Moses’s *verbal proclamations* to Pharaoh (“go and tell Pharaoh…” Ex 6:10) attended by miracles (are they best described as “rituals”?) cannot be considered a model for a prophetic office.

The author writes as if only Exodus 6-7 (the so-called “priestly call”) involves a hearkening to the past and to tradition. He bases the contrast on the fact that in “the priestly call” there is reference to “the past” which he claims constitutes an “institutional focus” (53). He exclaims: “Even the divine motivation for the [priestly] call of Moses stems from tradition” because it “informs Moses of divine obligations with the ancestors from the past” (53). One wonders how our author’s otherwise meticulous penchant for critical details could have missed the fact that in Moses’s blazing encounter with the numinous at the burning bush, Yahweh also makes reference to Israel as “my people” and *bases Moses’s prophetic call entirely on his faithfulness to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob* (Exodus 3:16)! On Dozeman’s own standards, then, Moses’s prophetic call is just as much rooted in tradition and just as institutionally focused as his priestly call. These are some of the reasons why Dozeman’s biblical interpretation is in need of critical cross-examination.

Dozeman’s intentions are also unclear, for at first he wants to claim that “the priestly call to ordination *assumes* Moses’s earlier encounter with holiness” and also “*builds on* the charismatic experience of the numinous, rather than replacing it” (51-52). Later, however, once he is waxing eloquent to build his case for competing traditions, he appears to change his mind and claims “the priestly call to ordination *replaces* the self-critical evaluation of the religious experience of the numinous” (54). Does the priestly model assume and build on the prophetic one rather than replacing it, or does the priestly model replace the prophetic?

**Divine Ordination to the Word**

The chapter on Ordination to the divine Word is not as interesting. Here Dozeman attempts to cast ordination and ministry as the means to overcome the separation between the divine and human—the sacred and the profane. The most helpful emphasis is on how prophetic speech can make past experiences alive to future generations even if they do not have firsthand experience of the divine. The author draws helpful comparisons with the New Testament. The Apostles also had a charismatic gift to tell the story of Christ to others who did not have firsthand experience of him, and one of the roles of the Spirit is also to make past experiences real to believers in the present. The author also puts a charismatic spin on the doctrine of divine election to fit it with his description of the prophetic model of ordination, which overcomes the gulf between the sacred and the profane.

**Critical Evaluation**

Similar problems with Dozeman’s presentation also arise in this chapter. For example, Dozeman has sharply distinguished the two views of holiness so that only the ritual notion of
holiness is compatible with the idea of spatial holiness, but in his description of the “dynamic power” of election in Deuteronomy (a section where he is supposed to be describing the view of holiness as a dynamic power as opposed to spatial) he admits that “the second election of God is the selection of a sanctuary” (66). Why does Dozeman not suspect a priestly redactor’s addition in the midst of an otherwise prophetic text when holiness is so clearly tied to a place rather than retaining its air of ubiquitous accessibility?

The Priestly Model as Superior

Although Dozeman oscillates between the prophetic and priestly, comparing the two competing traditions, his presentation of the priestly literature in chapter five gives the reader the strong impression that the author is portraying the priestly tradition as a superior model for ordination compared to the prophetic. In almost every contrast, the priestly difference is presented as something advantageous over against the prophetic. The priestly model overcomes the “problem” of history and experience found in the prophetic literature by making God more directly accessible in sacred space—people can have their own direct experience with God rather than having the prophet recount to them God’s mighty deeds of history through the spoken word (83). The priestly emphasis is no longer on “experience and memory” but ritual practices (83). Dozeman understands the priestly model to thereby make God “continually present” through the sacraments as compared to the prophetic model’s problem of history and experience (84).

Dozeman argues that the priestly literature actually portrays a God even more transcendent than the God of the prophetic literature. He does this by claiming that whereas in the prophetic literature heaven is God’s dwelling place, in the priestly literature heaven is part of God’s finite creation while the ultimate dwelling place of God remains a mystery; “the priestly literature never tells us where God dwells. … But the permanent dwelling of God resists a location. The deity has become so transcendent in the priestly literature that God cannot be equated with any geographical region of the cosmos” (85). He concludes that the sacred and the profane are even further removed in the priestly model than in the prophetic—an “extreme form of the divine transcendence” (85). Although Yahweh’s descent makes him directly present, the priestly literature in Exodus ends with Yahweh’s presence being a dangerous “problem” solved only by the ordination of the priests in Leviticus. After this Yahweh’s holiness moves, as it were, into the altar so that the deity dwells “even closer” to the people (92). The ordination of the priesthood to work in the presence of God is rooted in the fear of the people that Yahweh “might descend into the midst of the people” (95).

Whereas the prophetic literature places the “burden” of remembering the Abrahamic covenant, exodus, Sabbath, and law on the people, the priestly literature places no such burden upon the people. Rather, in the priestly literature, the burden of memory is on God himself. “God must continually remember the covenant and thus maintain a relationship between the sacred and the profane” (89). Rituals arouse God’s memory of the divine promises of the covenant (91).

Holiness is not transmitted by direct infusion as with the numinous, but through rituals and vestments. The author describes the former as “subjective” and the latter as “more objective” (95). After going through a purification process in which the priest becomes holy, the sacred garments empower the priest, but more importantly, such vestments protect the priests
Dozeman takes this to mean that the power presides not in the person, but in the ritual (95). Dozeman tries to empty the hierarchical nature of the priesthood from its negative stigma by arguing that the biblical writers did not see the office of priesthood as separate from the people in terms of power and privilege; just the opposite was true. The office of priest was “a loss of freedom for the sake of the larger community” (96). He then presents God’s killing of Nadab and Abihu (Lamentations 10:1-2) as proof that when the priesthood is seen as a “privilege” by the priest, he dies (96).4 The purpose of the priesthood is to mediate holiness “to all the people” so that the people get the less intense forms of holiness’s “gradations” (97-98). Through receiving these lesser emanations the people become “a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6).

Because God’s dwelling is abstracted in the priestly literature as “a moment in time, when God rests on the seventh day,” Dozeman claims this lack of identification of the resting place of God is “depriving humans of any resource for imagining the holy habitation of God” (86). It is not altogether clear what the author intends by this claim, since long before the accepted dating for priestly literature the ñayim above the earth was considered the extensive space of Yahweh’s sway normally inaccessible to mortals (e.g. Ps 115:16). This peculiar notion of the divine dwelling—along with various forms of classic ancient Mesopotamian cosmology—was part of the religious literature predating the priestly literature of the post-exilic period. In other words, before the priestly literature was added to the other canonical sources of the Hebrew Bible, the widespread religious ideas of the Mesopotamian culture that viewed heaven as the dwelling place of the gods were more-or-less adapted by those in the Canaanite region (including the people of Israel who construed Yahweh in the same terms). Whatever the priestly literature might have meant to the priestly community before it was incorporated into the larger canonical whole is not as clear and becomes less important, but surely the priestly additions to the Hebrew sacred literature did not throw Israelites into mystifying agnosticism about the divine location.

In chapter 6 Dozeman attempts to make his case that although there is scant ordination theology explicitly present, the authors in fact “presuppose the more extensive theological reflection on holiness and ordination within the Mosaic office from the Pentateuch for background” (105). Predictably, Dozeman rigidly divides two sources on the office of apostle: the Luke-Acts source he pigeon holes into his “priesthood” theology; the Pauline and deutero-Pauline he fits into his “prophetic” schema. The point of Dozeman’s overview of the offices of elder, deacon, and bishop is to paint these offices with the brush of ambiguity in order to present his own theological reflection as the answer for this vacuum of uncertainty. “This brief overview of the offices of ordination in the New Testament underscores the need for a broad view of biblical authority, in which the teachings on ordination in the Hebrew scriptures provide the framework for theological reflection” (119).

In his last chapter—among other things—Dozeman assures us that he does not want to bifurcate the priestly and the prophetic in the actual life of the church’s ordination process, for “the Mosaic office embodies prophetic and priestly dimensions, which can neither be harmonized nor separated from each other” (131, italics added).

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3 If the reason the priests wear the protective vestments is because they must work in the presence of God at the sanctuary, how can the Levites care for the sanctuary without them (101)?

4 Nevermind that Dozeman is equivocating on the term “privilege” here to make his point.
Conclusion

Dozeman has indeed presented an array of thought provoking ideas with respect to ordination in his treatment: the need for a call experience to ordination, the role of mediation and hierarchy amongst the people of God, the dynamic power of holiness, the importance of sacred space, the danger of being killed by God, etc. One cannot help but laud his attempt to construct a theology of ordination not just from the Bible in general but the texts he suspects were originated precisely to provide a framework for such theology (although he does not believe that scripture alone is sufficient for this task, but must inevitably be informed by Tradition). Furthermore, one can see that Dozeman designed this book to be simultaneously practical and ecumenical. Given that Dozeman’s reflections have originated in the academic setting as he developed coursework as a team effort with other students, the most revealing comments of the whole book were found on page 57-58.

The competing experiences of the call to ordination are common in students at my seminary. … Often, my students state that the authentic experience of holiness was the initial charismatic encounter of the numinous and that the ritual power of holiness acquired through professional training is of secondary value—sometimes even viewed as a hurdle to be overcome so that they can enter the ministry. The model of ordination that arises from the Mosaic office indicates that nothing could be further from the truth.

This helps make sense of much of Dozeman’s book, with its artificial (or at least problematic) separation of “priestly” and “prophetic” in his chosen texts and his subtle favoring of “the priestly” schema (see above).