

THE CHRISTIAN PRIESTHOOD

Church Association Tract 002

I. The office of the Jewish Priest¹ was “to offer both gifts and Sacrifices for sins.” This was his special function. Heb. v. 1. It was his to dip his finger in the blood of the sin offering, and sprinkle it seven times before the Lord. He alone went into the Holy of Holies once every year, *but not without blood*, which he offered for himself and the people.

II. Christ is the only Priest under the Christian dispensation. (Heb. iii. 1.) He discharges all the priestly functions. Both Priest and Victim, he offered himself once, and only once.

Proof. “He *needeth not daily*, as those high priests, *to offer up Sacrifice*, for this he did once when he offered up himself.” (Heb. vii. 27.)

“Nor yet that he should offer himself often . . . for *then must he have often suffered*.” (Heb. ix. 25, 26.)

“Christ was *once offered* to bear the sins of many.” (Ibid. ix. 28.) “We are sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all*,” &c. &c. (Ibid. x. 10-14.)

It is evident from the foregoing that Christ as priest offered his one only offering once for all. This truth could not be expressed more plainly. He offers not now, for his *offering was connected with his suffering*. (Heb. ix. 25, 26.) If he offers he suffers; but Christ dieth no more, he suffers no more. But by virtue of that one offering once offered “he now appears in the presence of God for us.”

Christ is the only Priest, his sacrifice the only offering, that offering was “finished on the cross.”

III. The Apostles were not priests. *a.* They were never called by that title. The Jewish priests were so called, so was the Priest of Jupiter at Lystra. All Christians are so designated (Rev. i. 6, and v. 10), and their function a Royal Priesthood, (1 Pet. ii. 9.) But the Apostles and Christian ministers, as distinct from the people, are called Elders, Bishops, Deacons, Ambassadors, Preachers, Teachers, Pastors, Prophets, *but never Priests*.

IV. This is inexplicable if the priestly office be indeed their principal and most important function. In that case they are designated by every title but that which was most important and most properly belongs to them. Now, considering how natural it would have been for Jews to have used this title, the fact that *it alone is excluded* from use is decisive. *They were not priests*.

V. No sacerdotal function is ever attributed to them. The priestly office was to offer sacrifice, to shed the blood of the victim and sprinkle it on the sinner; *this they never did*. They killed no animal, they sprinkled no blood. But they went about preaching the abolition of all animal sacrifices (Heb. x. 9.) and proclaiming the all-sufficiency of the one offering and the blood once shed.

VI. All Christians are Priests to offer up the spiritual sacrifices—

a. of themselves, Rom. xii. 1.

b. of Praise, Heb. xiii. 15.

c. of good works, Phil. iv. 18.

The New Testament knows of no other priesthood now on earth save this.

VII. The Church of England has no sacrificing priests.

a. In her ordination service she struck out the words “*Take power to offer sacrifice*,” and substituted for them the words “Be thou a faithful dispenser of the word of God and of his holy sacraments.”

b. The Church mentions no altar but “the Altar of the Cross.”² Her eighty-second Canon prescribes “a decent Communion Table” for the Lord’s Supper. *The word Altar was expunged* from her Prayer Book and “*Table*” substituted.

c. The Church never calls the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper a propitiatory sacrifice, but she calls *the whole Service a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving*. Even this expression is found in an alternative prayer in the post communion, which need never be used.

d. The Church speaks of the “one oblation of Christ finished on the Cross,” of “the offering of Christ *once made*,” and the one oblation of himself *once offered*,” words could not more plainly reject any pretended *repetition or continuation* of the offering of Christ; while the Homily warns us “lest of the memory it be made a sacrifice.”

VIII. The Reformers rejected the idea of sacrificing priests.

CRANMER:—“It is necessary to know the distinction and diversity of sacrifices. One kind of sacrifice there is which is called propitiatory. There is but one such sacrifice, which is the death of the Son of God. Another kind of sacrifice there is which does not reconcile us to God, but is made of them that are reconciled. It is called a sacrifice of laud, praise, and thanksgiving—the first kind of sacrifice Christ offered to God for us; the second we ourselves offered to God by Christ.”

“But all such priests as pretend to be Christ's successors in making a sacrifice of Him are his most heinous and horrible adversaries.”

LATIMER:—“Stand from the altar you sacrilegious priests, for you have no authority in God's Book to *offer up* our Redeemer; and you lay people come away from forged sacrifices which the Papists do feign *only to be lords over you and to get your money*. If they had a nail driven through one of their ears every time they offer, as Christ had four driven through his hands and feet, they would soon leave offering.”

JEWELL:—“No, Mr. Harding, neither we nor you can so offer Christ, nor did he ever give you commission to make such a sacrifice.”

IX. Arguments advanced by Romanists in favour of Priesthood:—

1. The words, “Do this in remembrance of me,” constituted the apostles priests.

Ans. This is a simple command by Christ to the apostles, and through them to all His disciples to do what He then did, viz. to break bread and eat it in remembrance of Christ's broken body, and thus to show forth, proclaim the Lord's death till He come. The word translated “Do” is one of the most common words, and never when taken merely by itself means to offer a sacrifice. In order to give it that meaning, it must always have some other word of sacrificial import joined with it, otherwise it simply means “Do.”

2. The words “whosoever sins ye remit,” &c. conferred priestly functions.

Ans. Not so. Christ thus empowered and commanded his apostles to remit sin by the preaching of the word. This they did, as we find recorded in Acts x. 43, xiii. 38, 39, cf with Luke xxiv. 47, Acts xxvi. 18.

To them was committed the word of reconciliation.³ They never once took on them to forgive sin as against God; though they did inflict or remove ecclesiastical censures. (1 Cor. v. 5; 2 Cor. ii. 10.)

3. Malachi predicted the offering of the Mass in the words, “in every place incense shall be offered to my name and a pure offering.”⁴ (Chap. i. 11.)

Ans. This prophecy refers to the spiritual incense and sacrifices of prayer and praise already mentioned (cf. Ps. cxli. 2; Rev. v. 8), and perhaps also it may have a special reference to the odour and sacrifice mentioned by Paul (Phil. iv. 17), viz. the incense and sacrifice of pure, self-denying contributions to the cause of God and his Gospel. Compare Mal. i. 7, 8, with this passage.

Finally, it is not true that the New Testament never speaks of Christ merely as our Priest (Heb. vii. 11, 15, 17), though it generally calls him our High Priest, because the Jewish High Priest was the more eminent type of the Messiah; and it is true that sacerdotalism and sacramentalism are unknown to the New Testament.

The Church teaches us that “*we ought to acknowledge none other priest* for deliverance from our sins *but our Saviour* Jesus Christ.” (Hom. of Repentance.)

We have no need then of earthly priests, since we have the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus. “He for us paid the ransom by his death; He for us fulfilled the law in His life, so that in Him and by Him every Christian man may be said to be a fulfiller of the law.” (Hom. of Salvation, 1st part.) He is thus the only Priest and victim by whom atonement is made. Nor do we need any priest to *apply* the merits of this Sacrifice to our souls. Faith is the *one only means*, whereby we embrace the Gospel, and wash our souls in the blood of Christ.

“Herein thou needest no other man’s help, no other sacrifice or oblation, *no sacrificing priest*, no mass, no means established by man’s invention.” (Hom. concerning the Sacrament.)

Seeing then that Christ has an intransmissible priesthood (Heb. vii. 24,) and that He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and sympathize with us in all our sorrows.—“*Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need.*” (Heb. iv. 16.)

Endnotes:

- 1) The word priest in the Prayer Book is simply a contraction of the word presbyter, or elder, as is expressed by Dr. Hook, in his Church Dictionary.
- 2) *Vide* “Homily on Repentance,” Second part, quoted in the paper on “Must we Confess?” p. 4. *See also* Decision in the “Stone Altar Case,” Faulkner v. Litchfield and Stearn. 1 Roberts, 184.
- 3) The words “whosoever sins,” etc., were *never used in ordaining the clergy in any Christian Church for twelve hundred years after Christ; nor were the words “I absolve thee” ever used by the clergy until after the same time!*
- 4) This passage is quoted in proof of the Mass by the Council of Trent. Sess. xxii. Cap. 1.