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THE PRIESTLY ELEMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

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The personal attitude of Christ toward the temple and its priesthood may be defined as that of a loyal Jew. To Him the temple was the house of His Father (John 2:16); to be in company with those in attendance there was to be "among those of His Father" (*ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς μου* Luke 2:49). He makes no apology for exercising His divine prerogative in healing lepers and restoring them to their places in their families and in society, but, as soon as they are healed, He commands them to go and show themselves to the priests and there offer the gifts which Moses commanded (Matt. 8:4; Mk. 1:44; Lk. 5:14; 17:14). He assumes that His disciples will habitually bring gifts to the altar, and only admonishes them to be reconciled to the offended brother before such gifts are offered (Matt. 5:23, 24). But He lived in a period of transition when the old regime had already become antiquated and the new was about to be ushered in. And, notwithstanding His loyalty to the old, we find frequent allusions in His teaching to the near approach of the new and its pre-eminence over the old. In His conversation with the Samaritan woman concerning the superiority of the claims of the Jerusalem temple over those of the Samaritan temple, He asserts that the hour has come when both Moriah and Gerizim must relinquish their claims to peculiar sanctity, for the necessity for temple worship is about to be done away with; a new and better way of approach unto God is about to be opened up. Also in the words of institution of His Memorial Supper, "This is my blood of the New Covenant", He makes the former Covenant old (cf. Heb. 8:13), and implies that the New is about to be sealed with His own blood.

The first covenant had "ordinances of worship and its sanctuary" (cf. Heb. 9:1), and a regularly ordained priest-

hood. To this priesthood belonged certain privileges and prerogatives which a "stranger" dares not assume (Num. 3:10; 18:7.) Only the priests could offer sacrifices (Lev. 1:9-12, 15-17; Ex. 30:20) and burn incense (Ex. 30:7ff; Num. 16:40) before Jehovah, or even come within the altar inclosure (Num. 18:7). To the priests was committed the care of the table of the shewbread (Lev. 24:8), and they alone might lawfully partake thereof (Ex. 29:32; Lev. 8:31; cf. Matt. 12:4). The priests alone might pronounce the benediction on the people (Num. 6:22). They had to guard the distinction between the sacred and the profane, between the clean and the unclean (Lev. 10:10), and pronounce upon the presence and cure of leprosy (Lev. 13). In Christ's commission to those who were to be the ministers of the New Covenant, He commands them to cast out unclean spirits, to heal diseases, to preach the gospel, and to baptize in the name of the Trinity, but nowhere does He bestow upon them any distinctive priestly prerogative. When, under the guidance of the Spirit of truth, His apostles entered upon that work to which He had appointed them, there is no indication, either from their words or actions, that they understood any priestly prerogative to belong to them by virtue of their apostolic office.

But the New Testament makes distinct recognition of a priesthood belonging to the New Economy. Christianity has been defined as "Theism plus mediation."¹ Christ is the "High Priest of our profession". Although it is only in the Epistle to the Hebrews that the word priest (*ιερεύς*) is applied to Christ, other New Testament writers express the same idea in different terminology. To John He is our "advocate (*παράκλητος*) with the Father" (John 2:1); to Paul He is the "one Mediator (*μεσίτης*) between God and men" (I Tim. 2:5), the one through whom the world is reconciled unto God (II Cor. 5:19; cf. Eph. 2:16), the one who "maketh intercession for us" at the right hand of God (Rom. 8:34). The author of Hebrews takes up the subject of Christ's priesthood and

¹See Adeney, Article, "Mediation" in Hastings' D. B.

works it out in all its implications. Indeed, this is the leading idea in the doctrinal portion of his epistle. Moses, Aaron, and Melchizedek are introduced only to show the personal excellency of the Son and His pre-eminence in office. The following points of superiority in the priesthood of Christ are emphasized by our author:

1. *The Manner of His Appointment.* He did not inherit His priesthood by virtue of His tribal connection as did the sons of Levi, for "it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood" (7:14); but He who confers appointments to position in His Kingdom on the basis of fitness (cf. Matt. 20:21-23), appointed His Son as priest after the order of Melchizedek. Aaron and his sons were inducted into office according to a prescribed ritual, but Christ was made a priest by the oath of Him who said: "The Lord swore and will not repent, 'Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek'" (7:21).

2. *The Perpetuity of His Office.* The Aaronic priests "were forbidden by death to continue, but He, because He abides forever, has His priesthood inalienable" (7:23, 24). This perpetuity in office is the guarantee of ultimate salvation to all those who come to God through Him "Since He ever lives to intercede for them."

3. *The Nature of His Sacrifice.* "Every High Priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; wherefore it is necessary that this one also have something which He may offer" (8:3). The Aaronic priests were continually offering sacrifices "unable to perfect the worshiper as to the conscience" (9:9, 10:1-4), but serving rather as a reminder of sin. "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins" (9:22), but this blood must be more efficacious than the blood of bulls and goats which can never take away sins (10:4). Christ as High Priest, being under necessity of offering a sacrifice, and that one which could take away sin, made an offering of Himself (7:27), without blemish to God (9:14), entering "through

the greater and more perfect tabernacle through His own blood. . . . obtaining eternal redemption" (9:11, 12).

The interpretation of the death of Christ as a sacrifice for sin is not peculiar to this epistle, but it is found imbedded in each of the three important types of apostolic teaching, namely the Pauline, the Petrine, and the Johannine. According to Paul (Eph. 5:2) Christ gave Himself as an offering and a sacrifice to God for an odor of sweet smell; according to Peter (I Pet. 1:18, 19) He is the [sacrificial] "lamb without blemish and without spot" whose blood rather than silver and gold redeems from sin (cf. 3:18); according to John it is the blood of Christ that cleanses from all sins (I John 1:7).

4. *The Finality of His Sacrifice.* The incomparable worth of such a sacrifice eliminates the necessity of a repetition of the offering. "But now once for all at the end of the ages, He has been manifested to put away sin through the sacrifice of Himself" (9:26). This furthermore denies the possibility of a "continuation" or an "extension" of the sacrifice of Christ through consecrated bread and wine.

But the sacrificial is not the only aspect of Christ's priestly work. Equally important is His work of intercession. He has entered into Heaven itself "to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb. 9:24; cf. Rom. 8:34; I John 2:1), where He ever lives to intercede for His people. No more than His sacrifice does His intercession need to be supplemented by the office of another. He is the one Mediator between God and men (I Tim. 2:5). There is, therefore, no necessity for a "Blessed Virgin" to make intercession before the Heavenly Father on behalf of her spiritual children, or for glorified saints to intercede for the saints on earth, or for a human priest to stand before the altar to present the cause of his people before a God who could not be approached by His believing children without such mediation. It may be that the Scripture language does not demand, possibly does not warrant, the inference that Christ stands incessantly making petitions for His saints all and each, or endorsing to the Heavenly Father

the various prayers which are incessantly offered in His name, or perpetually calling to the Father's notice the sacrifice which He made once for all on Calvary, yet His intercession is equivalent to all this.

But the foregoing does not exhaust the New Testament teaching concerning priesthood. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers which was guaranteed a place in Protestant theology by the emphasis placed upon it by the Reformers, especially Martin Luther, far antedates the Reformation. It is clearly a New Testament teaching. Although it is hinted at elsewhere in the New Testament, it is only in the Petrine epistles, *i.e.*, I Peter and Hebrews² that the doctrine is clearly enunciated. "Ye yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (I Peter 2:5). "Through Him, therefore, let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. But to do good and to distribute forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb. 13:15, 16). In Romans 12:1 Paul speaks of one's "rational service" as "a living sacrifice", but the verb of presentation (*παρίστημι*) which he uses in this connection is never used, either in the Septuagint or in the New Testament, of a priestly act. In The Book of Revelation (1:6; 5:10; 20:6) believers are called "priests unto God", but their specific functions as such are not there defined. It is noteworthy then, that this glorious doctrine of an universal priesthood of believers should have first been promulgated by him who is reputed to be the ancestral head of that organized hierarchy which to-day claims authority to grant absolution from sin, to excommunicate from the church, and, consequently, from Heaven, to deliver souls from purgatory, to change bread and wine into the veritable body and blood of Christ and through

²It is the opinion of the present writer that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written by the Apostle Peter. It does not fall within the scope of this paper, however, to give the argument in favor of this view.

the mass to make a continuation of the sacrifice of Christ.

But whence arises the necessity of such a priesthood? If perfection is brought about by one priesthood, what necessity is there that another should arise? (cf. Heb. 7:11.) If Christ's self-sacrifice was the final offering for sin, and He is the only Mediator between God and men, what need is there for a priesthood of believers? These questions can best be answered by first considering on whose behalf the priest-believer exercises his unique office, and what is the nature of his priestly service. If all believers are alike priests unto God, it seems superfluous that one believer should exercise his office on behalf of others who are priests equally with himself. It is true that prayer is recognized as a means of securing blessing when offered by Christians on behalf of their brethren (I Thes. 5:25; II Thes. 3:1; Jas. 5:16), but this is quite different from the idea involved in the priesthood of believers. On the other hand, if Christians are a "royal priesthood" mediating between God and the unbelieving world, then Christ is no longer the only Mediator between God and men. It appears, then, that each believer is a priest unto God on his own behalf; and just as there are seen to be two aspects of the priestly work of Christ—the sacrificial and the intercessory—there may be said to be two aspects of the believer's priesthood—the aspect of privilege and the aspect of duty. When viewed in its aspect of privilege the believer's priesthood involves the right to come "boldly" and with "a true heart in fulness of faith", through the "new and living way" which Christ "instituted for us" by His own blood to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace for well-timed help (Heb. 5:16; 10:19-22). When viewed in its aspect of duty it involves the offering up of "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"; not sacrifices for sin, but the sacrifices of daily service.

Of the various schemes of classification of the Old Testament sacrifices, as satisfactory as any would be the following:

1. The whole burnt offering of entire self-dedication.
2. The sin offering (described in Lev. 6:24ff.) and trespass (Lev. 7:1-10) or guilt offering.

3. Peace offering (Lev. 7:11), including thank-offerings, votive offerings, free-will offerings. The sacrifices of Christian service are most analogous to this third class. The sin-offering took logical precedence over the other two classes, as no one could offer a burnt-offering or a peace-offering until he had first purged himself from sin by the sin-offering. In like manner the individual must first personally appropriate the benefits of the one sacrifice for sin made by our great High Priest on Calvary before he can offer "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ". The apostle in defining the spiritual sacrifices speaks first of the "sacrifice of praise", which is "the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name" (Heb. 13:15). Surely this "fruit of lips" comprehends far more than the songs of praise which the Christian is admonished to sing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; James 5:13). Does it not include *all* the service which we may render with the lips, our words of testimony concerning God's holiness and love which we address to our fellow-men, as well as our words of praise and thanksgiving directed to the Heavenly Father Himself? The apostle furthermore speaks of our duty to our fellow men, *i. e.*, doing good and distributing (Heb. 13:16), as sacrifices with which God is well pleased. So, then, we may conclude with Forsyth that "the whole sphere of Christian action is a spiritual sacrifice".