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***Jesus as Priest:  
An Examination of the Claim that the Concept of  
Jesus as Priest may be Found in the New Testament  
Outside the Epistle to the Hebrews\****

**John W. Baigent**

[p.34]

It is generally recognised that the distinctive high priestly christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews is unique to that document amongst the NT writings.<sup>1</sup> A number of scholars, however, would qualify this judgment to a lesser or greater degree. Thus MacNeill says of Hebrews: 'That Jesus is presented as High Priest is almost a unique thesis in the New Testament'.<sup>2</sup> F. F. Bruce goes a little further when he writes: 'This epistle, in fact, is the only New Testament document which expressly calls Him a priest, although His priesthood is implied in others'.<sup>3</sup> But writers such as Moe, Spicq, Friedrich and Cullmann have gone considerably further in their claims that traces of a priestly or high priestly christology may be found in other parts of the NT.<sup>4</sup> Cullmann concludes his chapter on 'Jesus the High Priest' with the words: 'Thus we see, that, contrary to the usual assumption, the High Priest concept is not only present in Hebrews, but lies also behind the Christological statements of other

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\* I would like to acknowledge the encouragement and advice given by Dr. Douglas de Lacey (until recently at the London Bible College, now at Ridley Hall, Cambridge) and Dr. Ronald Williamson of the University of Leeds. Neither of them, of course, should be held responsible for the shortcomings of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. R. Williamson, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London, 1964), 22: 'No other NT writer explains the work of Christ in terms of priesthood'; A. Purdy, 'The Epistle to the Hebrews' in *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. XI, ed. G. A. Buttrick (New York, 1955), 586f.: 'The priesthood of Christ is our author's unique contribution to New Testament Christology'; S. Sowers, *The Hermeneutics of Philo and Hebrews* (Zurich, 1965), 119: 'Heb's idea of Christ's work as a priestly one is original and unique in the NT'; R. H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (London, 1965), 259 n.12: 'It is doubtful whether the high priest Christology emerged prior to Hebrews'.

<sup>2</sup> H. L. MacNeill, *The Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Chicago, 1914), 40. He finds a hint of the idea in Romans 8: 34.

<sup>3</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London, 1964), lii. He refers in particular to Revelation 1: 13. Cf. G. Milligan, *The Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh, 1899), 101: 'Nowhere else in the New Testament are the titles Priest or High-Priest applied to Christ, though the underlying thought is to be found, more particularly in the Johannine writings'. J. Baehr, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Exeter, 1978) Vol. III, 40, states that high priestly functions are attributed to Christ in passages which mention intercession (Jn. 17: 19; Rom. 8: 34; 1 Jn. 2: 1) and in those which refer to the opening of access to God (Rom. 5: 2; Eph. 2: 18; 1 Pet. 3: 18). More recently, E. Schillebeeckx, *Christ* (ET London, 1980), 259, has claimed that 'Jesus' priesthood is at least hinted at' in Romans 8: 34 and Revelation 1: 13 and that 'We can find the essence of the claim that Jesus is a priest throughout the New Testament'.

<sup>4</sup> Moe, 'Das Priestertum Christi im Neuen Testament ausserhalb des Hebräerbriefs', *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 72, 1947, col. 335ff.; C. Spicq, 'L'origine johannique de la conception du Christ-prêtre dans l'Épître aux Hébreux', in *Aux sources de la tradition chrétienne* (FS M. Goguel) (Neuchâtel, 1950), 258-269; G. Friedrich, 'Beobachtungen zur messianischen Hohepriestererwartung in den Synoptikern', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 53, 1956; 265-311; O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (ET London, 1963). Cf. A. Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (London, 1958), 200f.; A. J. B. Higgins, 'The Priestly Messiah', *NTS* 13 (1966, 67), 224: 'A good case can be made for the presence of this doctrine (viz. Jesus as high priest) elsewhere in the New Testament'; J. R. Schaefer, 'The Relationship between Priestly and Servant Messianism in the Epistle to the Hebrews', *CBQ* 30 (1968), 370-373.

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New Testament passages'.<sup>5</sup> This claim, and the evidence adduced for it, will be examined in this paper to see whether it can in fact be substantiated.

Methodologically, the basic problem is to determine what is to count as evidence of a concept of priesthood. The problem is particularly acute when it is claimed that the idea is implicit rather than explicit. What sort of pointers are needed to be able safely to conclude that a writer had in mind a view of Jesus as priest? The position taken here is that, short of the use of the actual word 'priest', we would expect to find some reference either to the distinctive functions of a priest, e.g. the presentation of offerings and especially sacrifices for sins (cf. Heb. 5: 1; 8: 3); or to the place where he functions, e.g. the sanctuary (cf. Heb. 8: 2; 9: 6ff.) and, in particular, the altar (cf. Heb. 7: 13; 13: 10); or possibly to his distinctive clothing (cf. Josephus *Ant.* III. 161); or even to his genealogical qualifications for priesthood (cf. Heb. 7: 14).

### THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

Friedrich<sup>6</sup> has attempted to find traces of a high priestly christology throughout the Synoptic Gospels, but his arguments are strained and fail to convince.<sup>7</sup> Some of the main passages cited by him (e.g. Mt. 12: 6; Mk. 12: 35ff.; 14: 62) will be considered below as they are also appealed to by other writers, but it seems unnecessary to examine every passage he refers to since the underlying incorrect assumption vitiates his overall approach. Friedrich's basic mistake is his assumption that Jewish messianic thought in the first century A.D. was largely dominated by the idea of the messianic high priest such as is found in some of the writings of the Qumran sect (e.g. 1 QS 9: 10f.; 1 QSa 2: 12ff.; 1 QSb 4: 23; 4 Qp Ps37 2: 15), in the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs (e.g. Test.Reub. 6: 8; Test.Lev. 18: 2; Test.Jud. 21: 2; 24: 1), and in the Damascus Document (e.g. CD 12: 23f.).<sup>8</sup> Thus,

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for example, he argues, without adequate evidence, that titles like 'Holy One of God' (Mk. 1: 24)<sup>9</sup> and 'Son of God' (Mk. 1: 1) imply priesthood.

Cullmann<sup>10</sup> argues that, despite evidence of Jesus' opposition to the temple and its cult, he could have included the idea of high priest in his conception of his task.<sup>11</sup> Cullmann points to the two recorded sayings of Jesus in which he quotes or alludes to Psalm 110 (Mk. 12: 35ff.;

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<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, 107.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Even Cullmann (*op. cit.*, 104 n.1) questions the connection between many of the passages cited and high priestly christology. For more detailed critiques see F. Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology* (ET London, 1969), 232ff.; J. Gnilka, 'Die Erwartung des messianischen Hohepriesters in den Schriften von Qumran and im Neuen Testament', *RQ* II (1960), 409ff.; J. Coppens, 'Le Messianisme sacerdotal dans les Ecrits du Nouveau Testament' in E. Massaux, *et. al.*, *La Venue du Messie. Messianisme et Eschatologie* (Louvain, 1962), 104-109; E. Grässer, 'Der Hebräerbrief, 1938-1963', *Theologische Rundschau* 30 (1964), 217.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. A. J. B. Higgins, 'Priest and Messiah', *VT* III (1963), 321-336, and 'The Priestly Messiah', *NTS* 13 (1966, 67), 211-239, who argues that there was no idea of a priestly Messiah in the first century A.D., even among the Qumran covenanters. Cf. also Schaefer, *op. cit.*, 359ff.; Gnilka, *op. cit.*, 396-408.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John* Vol. 2 (ET London, 1980), 76.

<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.*, 87f.

<sup>11</sup> '...even in Judaism criticism of the empirical priesthood and belief in an ideal priesthood conditioned each other' (*ibid.*).

14: 62; par.) and claims that Jesus not only saw himself as the messianic king addressed in Psalm 110: 1 but will also have applied to himself the description of Psalm 110: 4 of 'priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek'. In particular, Cullmann finds it significant that it was precisely when he was being questioned by the Jewish high priest concerning his claim to be Messiah (Mk. 14: 62) that Jesus alluded to Psalm 110 (together with Dan. 7). 'He says in effect that his messiahship is not that of an earthly Messiah... but that he is the heavenly Son of Man and the heavenly High Priest'.<sup>12</sup> Cullmann brings his investigation of these two passages to an end with these words: 'We conclude, then, that Jesus considered it his task to fulfil the priestly office'.<sup>13</sup>

Even if Cullmann's arguments for the authenticity of the sayings in Mark 12: 35ff.<sup>14</sup> and Mark 14: 62<sup>15</sup> are accepted, the evidence hardly allows us to draw such definite conclusions. As Higgins comments, 'This is an ingenious but unconvincing case as stated by Cullmann'.<sup>16</sup> The most we can say is that if Jesus applied to himself the words of Psalm 110: 1 it is possible that he also regarded himself as the addressee of Psalm 110: 4.<sup>17</sup> If the authenticity of the passages is denied,<sup>18</sup> it still remains possible that the early church and/or the evangelists regarded the sayings as implying a high priestly concept, although the sayings themselves do not indicate this.

Bruce draws attention to passages in the Synoptics where Jesus prays for his disciples (e.g. Lk. 22: 32) and where he speaks of the Son of Man acting as advocate for them in the heavenly court (e.g. Lk. 12: 8; Mt. 10: 32).<sup>19</sup> Whilst we may admit that these provide parallels to—and possibly confirmation of<sup>20</sup>—the intercessory work of Christ as high priest in Hebrews, there is nothing in these passages which compels us to think of Jesus as a priest<sup>21</sup> (unless intercession is seen as exclusively a priestly function).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Op. cit.*, 89.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Op. cit.*, 88, 222f.

<sup>15</sup> Cullmann assumes rather than argues for the authenticity of Mark 14: 62 (cf. *op. cit.*, 117ff., 157 n.2).

<sup>16</sup> A. J. B. Higgins, 'The Old Testament and Some Aspects of New Testament Christology' in F. F. Bruce (ed.), *Promise and Fulfilment* (Edinburgh, 1963), 139.

<sup>17</sup> This seems to be the position of R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (London, 1971), 102f. The transition from Psalm 110: 1 to 110: 4 is more likely to have been made if it was the practice to understand OT sections as wholes, even when only one particular verse might be quoted: so C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (London, 1965), 126. Cf. p. 110: '...He pointed to Psalm 110 as a better guide to the truth about His mission and destiny than the popular beliefs about the Son of David'. There is reason to believe, however, that the NT use of the OT is often more atomistic than this. Dodd seems to believe that Hebrews was the first to apply Psalm 110: 4 to Christ (*op. cit.*, 104, 122). Higgins (1963: 138) believes that the early church will have applied the whole psalm to Jesus.

<sup>18</sup> The authenticity of Mark 12: 35ff. is denied by, e.g., R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (ET Oxford, 1968<sup>2</sup>), 136f., but supported by V. Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (London, 1952), 493. M. Casey, *Son of Man* (London, 1979), 213-218, regards Mark 14: 62 as a creation of the early church, but J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* Vol. I (ET London, 1971), 273, believes that the Lukan form (Lk. 22: 69) is probably authentic.

<sup>19</sup> F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, liii.

<sup>20</sup> '...the mere citation of an Old Testament text would have been pointless if in fact the character and work of Christ had not had a recognizably priestly quality' (F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, lii, liii).

<sup>21</sup> Higgins (1963: 139f.) believes that Jesus' depiction of the Son of Man as intercessor lies behind the priestly christology of the early church, but he is quite clear that 'there is no Synoptic evidence that Jesus viewed the work of the Son of Man as in any way priestly'.

<sup>22</sup> The verb *entunchanō*, used of Christ's intercession in Romans 8: 34 and Hebrews 7: 25 occurs in the LXX only in the apocryphal books (in the sense of 'pray, complain, solicit') but never in a priestly context. Cf. O.

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France regards the saying of Matthew 12: 6 ('something greater than the temple is here') as 'the beginning of the typology which the Epistle to the Hebrews develops so fully...'.<sup>23</sup> It is not clear, however, whether he means that he thinks that the writer of Hebrews was influenced (directly or indirectly) by this saying of Jesus or simply that it represents (in embryonic form) a similar attitude to the OT cult. In any case it is doubtful whether on its own this saying implies the priesthood of Jesus.<sup>24</sup>

Later,<sup>25</sup> France links the reported claim of Jesus, 'I will destroy this temple... and in three days I will build another...' (Mk. 14: 58), with Zechariah 6: 11-12, where the high priest Joshua is apparently hailed as 'the Branch' (i.e. the Messiah) and it is predicted that he will build the temple.<sup>26</sup> But even if Jesus did make such a claim and intended an allusion to Zechariah 6: 11-12, it is far from certain that he would be (or be understood to be) claiming to be a priestly Messiah.<sup>27</sup>

The closing scene of Luke's Gospel (24: 50f.), in which Jesus blesses his disciples with lifted hands before he parts from them, is often spoken of in terms of priestly benediction.<sup>28</sup> Luke certainly displays an interest in the temple,<sup>29</sup> but there is no clear evidence that he regarded the person or work of Jesus in priestly terms.<sup>30</sup>

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Bauernfeind, *TDNT* VIII, 242ff. In the OT generally intercession in the sense of praying for others is a prophetic rather than a priestly function, although it appears that in post-exilic Judaism the priests took over this prophetic function (see C. W. F. Smith, art. 'Prayer', *IDB* III, 866). In the OT priestly intercession or mediation seems to have been a matter of making atonement by ritual actions rather than through words. It is not clear whether the Servant of Isaiah 53 would have been regarded as a priestly figure in first century A.D. Judaism. The MT of Isaiah 53: 12 seems to speak of intercession (*w<sup>e</sup>lappoš'im yaphgia'*) but LXX has *kai dia tas anomias auton paredothē*.

<sup>23</sup> R. T. France, *op. cit.*, 47.

<sup>24</sup> I.e., it is unlikely that either Jesus, the early church or the evangelist implied this, and it is unlikely that the first readers of the Gospel would have so taken it. For alternative suggestions on the meaning of this saying, see D. Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (London, 1972), 211.

<sup>25</sup> *Op. cit.*, 99f.

<sup>26</sup> On the difficulties in the passage of Zechariah, see J. G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (London, 1972), 133ff.

<sup>27</sup> For further discussion of this verse, see G. Schrenk, *TDNT* III, 243-4; O. Michel, *TDNT* IV, 887-9.

<sup>28</sup> So, e.g., J. Coppens, *op. cit.*, 105-9; E. E. Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (London, 1974), 279. G. Lohfink, *Die Himmelfahrt Jesu* (München, 1971), 167-9, holds that Luke modelled his scene on Sir. 50: 20f., where the high priest Simon lifts up his hands and blesses the congregation (cited in I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Exeter, 1978), 908f.). Friedrich (*op. cit.*, 294ff.) appeals to Jesus' blessing the children (Mk. 10: 13ff.), but this is refuted by J. Gnilka, *op. cit.*, 416.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Ellis, *op. cit.*, 230f.

<sup>30</sup> 'The idea of Jesus as a priest does not seem to play any role in Luke' (Marshall, *op. cit.*, 909). Ellis (*op. cit.*, 190) refers to the use of *teleioō* in Luke 13: 32. It is true that in Hebrews (2: 10; 5: 9) this verb refers to Jesus' consecration through death and resurrection to his high priestly work (cf. the use of *teleioō* in LXX), but it is probably reading too much into the Lukan reference to find an implication of priesthood (cf. Marshall, *op. cit.*, 572, for the most likely meaning of Luke 13: 32). The suggestion has also been made that Jesus is viewed as intercessor or advocate in Acts 7: 56, but there is nothing in the passage which enables us to confirm that this was in the mind of the author (or Stephen) and certainly nothing to warrant positing a priestly conception (cf. Higgins 1963: 140).

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Even if Luke saw this particular action of Jesus as similar to a priestly blessing, it does not follow that he had developed a concept of Jesus as priest.

Our conclusion at the end of this brief survey of some of the Synoptic passages which have been put forward as implying a priestly conception of Jesus must be that there is nothing which compels us to recognise such an underlying conception anywhere in the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>31</sup>

### THE JOHANNINE WRITINGS

Cullmann claims that the Fourth Gospel contains the high priest concept: that the 'beloved disciple' (who, according to Jn. 18: 15, was acquainted with the Jewish high priest in the time of Jesus) had a particular interest in the idea that Jesus represents the fulfilment of the OT priesthood. Apart from a reference to John 19: 23 (in which the 'seamless tunic' is seen as an intended parallel to the high priest's robe), the main passage adduced by Cullmann is John 17 (the so-called 'high priestly prayer'), together with other references to Jesus praying for his disciples (e.g. Jn. 14: 16) or preparing a place in heaven for them (e.g. Jn. 14: 2ff.).<sup>32</sup>

Outside the Fourth Gospel, Cullmann points to the description of Jesus as heavenly *paraklētos* in 1 John 2: 1, linking it with the sending of the Spirit (the other *paraklētos* of Jn. 14-16), and to the vision of the Son of Man in Revelation 1: 13, whose long robe and golden girdle are taken as indicators that the ascended Christ is being depicted as a high priest.

Spicq had previously adduced these same Johannine passages (and others like Jn. 1: 14 and 2: 13-22) and concluded that the writer of Hebrews actually derived the concept of Jesus as high priest from the Johannine traditions.<sup>33</sup> Cullmann thinks that this thesis is not impossible but is unnecessary since (as he believes) the concept goes back to Jesus himself and was probably current in early Christianity generally.<sup>34</sup>

Braun has also thrown his weight behind the view that the Fourth Gospel presents Jesus as high priest, appealing in particular to John 17: 19 and 19: 23, and thinks it likely that Hebrews depends upon the Johannine catechesis.<sup>35</sup>

There is no cause to deny that in many respects<sup>36</sup>—and particularly christologically<sup>37</sup>—Hebrews is more closely related to the Johannine writings than to any

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<sup>31</sup> Schaefer *op. cit.*, 371), following Coppens (*op. cit.*, 105-109), thinks it possible that a plausible case can be made that Jesus' eucharistic action at the Last Supper (Mt. 26: 26ff. par.) was a priestly activity (he does not say whether he means that it was so regarded by Jesus, by the early church, or by the evangelists). He does, however, concede that the Synoptics do not seem to have interpreted Jesus' death as a priestly act.

<sup>32</sup> *Op. cit.*, 105f.

<sup>33</sup> C. Spicq, *op. cit.* He is not suggesting that the Fourth Gospel was written before Hebrews but rather that the concept of Jesus as high priest was current in the catechesis of the Johannine circle in Asia Minor (p. 266). He further postulates that it was cultural and religious influences dominant in Asia Minor which partly gave rise to this concept (p. 267). More recently, Spicq has looked for a background to Hebrews in Qumran (see 'L'Épître aux Hébreux: Apollon, Jean-Baptiste, les Hellenistes et Qumrân', *RQ* I (1958, 59), 365-390), but he has not given up his view on the connection with the Johannine writings (cf. *L'Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris, 1977), 17ff.).

<sup>34</sup> *Op. cit.*, 105.

<sup>35</sup> F.-M. Braun, *Jean le Théologien* II (Paris, 1964), 87-101.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Spicq, 1950, 265 n.1; *L'Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris, 1952) 1, 109-138; Grässer, *op. cit.*, 193ff.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. V. Taylor, *The Person of Christ* (London, 1958), 89; A. E. J. Rawlinson, *The New Testament Doctrine of Christ* (London, 1929), 189.

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other NT documents. For example, as Spicq<sup>38</sup> and Cullmann<sup>39</sup> point out, both stress the sinlessness of Jesus (Heb. 4: 15; 7: 26; Jn. 8: 46; 1 Jn. 3: 5, 7). More importantly, the presentation of the Son in Hebrews 1: 1-3 closely parallels the description of the Logos in the prologue of the Fourth Gospel.<sup>40</sup> It is also true that there is a similarity between the depiction in the Fourth Gospel of Jesus praying for his disciples and that in Hebrews of the heavenly high priest interceding for his own (7: 25; cf. 2: 18; 4: 15f.; 9: 24). Perhaps we can even see a conceptual parallel between the 'glorification' of Jesus in John 17 and the 'perfecting' of Christ in Hebrews (2: 10; 5: 9; 7: 28).

Nevertheless, the attempts to demonstrate that the Johannine writings consciously present Jesus as a high priestly figure fail to convince.<sup>41</sup> First and foremost, there is no explicit reference to the priesthood of Christ. Secondly, none of the passages cited compels a recognition that the writer had this concept in mind. (a) Although LXX uses *chitōn* (the word for 'tunic' in Jn. 19: 23) to render the Hebrew *kethōneth* in descriptions of the high priest's apparel (Lev. 16: 4; Ex. 28:

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39), although Josephus (*Ant.* III. 161) describes the high priest's tunic in language similar to that of John 19: 23, and although Philo (*Fug.* 110-112) allegorises the high priest's robe as a symbol of the homogeneous structure of the universe associated with the Logos, there is no reason to think that the Fourth Evangelist (or his source) regarded the seamless tunic of Jesus as pointing to his priesthood.<sup>42</sup> John 19: 24 suggests that the writer is more interested in the fulfilment of the details of the OT scriptures (i.e. Ps. 22: 19) than in priestly symbolism.<sup>43</sup>

(b) Even if we agree that it is legitimate for the modern reader to regard the prayer of Jesus in John 17 as a high priestly prayer,<sup>44</sup> there is no evidence that the writer of the Fourth Gospel

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<sup>38</sup> Spicq, 1950: 264.

<sup>39</sup> Cullmann, *op. cit.*, 106

<sup>40</sup> Cullmann, *op. cit.*, 261.

<sup>41</sup> For a contrary view, see also Moe, *op. cit.*, col. 338; Richardson, *op. cit.*, 200f.; Gnifka, *op. cit.*, 421-425. Coppens, *op. cit.*, 109-112, finds some priestly characteristics in John's Picture of Jesus but not a presentation of him as messianic high priest.

<sup>42</sup> Those who support the view that a reference to priesthood is meant include: Cullmann, *op. cit.*, 105 n.2; Spicq, 1950, 261; Braun, *op. cit.*, 98-101; R. Schnackenburg, *Das Johannes-evangelium* III (Freiburg, 1976<sup>2</sup>), 317f. J. T. Williams, 'Cultic Elements in the Fourth Gospel' in E. A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Biblica 1978: II* (Sheffield, 1980), 343, considers it a possible view. R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John II* (London, 1971), 912f., comments on John 19: 23: 'Jesus is not only a king but also a priest whose death is an action offered for others'. Cf. also M. Aubineau, 'La tunique sans couture du Christ. Exégèse patristique de Jean 19, 23-24' in *Kyriakon* (FS J. Quasten) (Münster, 1970), 100-127.

This view is resisted by R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (ET Oxford, 1971), 671 n.2; B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (London, 1972), 578. J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John II* (Edinburgh, 1928), 630, claims that 'the idea of a high-priestly robe does not enter here'.

<sup>43</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London, 19792), 500, believes that the writer had in mind the death of Christ as bringing into one flock the scattered children of God (cf. Jn. 11: 52).

<sup>44</sup> First so called by David Chytraeus (1531-1600), but already hinted at by Cyril of Alexandria (5th century); cf. Cullmann, *op. cit.*, 105f.; Barrett, *op. cit.*, 426. E. Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus* (ET London, 1968), 5, writes of John 17 that Jesus 'exercises that intercession which in Romans 8 : 34 and in the Letter to the Hebrews belongs to the heavenly High Priest who has been exalted to the right hand of the Father'. Cf. also Brown, *op.*

presents it, or thought of it, as such.<sup>45</sup> Some scholars have pointed to the phrase *kai huper auton egō hagiāzō emauton* (Jn. 17: 19) as depicting Jesus 'as a priest offering himself as a victim for those God had given him'.<sup>46</sup> The verb *hagiāzō* is indeed used in LXX of the consecration of a priest (even of self-consecration: cf. Ex. 19: 22) as well as of a sacrificial victim (e.g. Ex. 13: 2; Dt. 15: 19), but its basic meaning is 'to set apart for sacred use' and there is no reason to make its connotation more specific than the context demands.<sup>47</sup> If we take together the four occurrences of the verb in the Fourth Gospel (Jn. 10: 36; 17: 17, 19), the idea of consecration for mission covers them all.<sup>48</sup> It is true that the mission of Jesus includes dying for his friends, but to bring priestly (or even sacrificial?) ideas into John 17 is to import concepts that are not expressed and probably not even implied.

(c) Other passages cited by Spicq do not demand detailed discussion.<sup>49</sup> Even if *eskēnōsen en hēmin* (Jn. 1: 14) does carry an intended allusion to the OT tabernacle,<sup>50</sup> this is a long way from indicating that the writer thought of Jesus as a priest. Similarly, even if the cleansing of the temple (Jn. 2: 13-22) may be viewed (by us?) as a priestly (and not simply a messianic) act, there is nothing in the passage which suggests that the writer so viewed it.<sup>51</sup>

(d) There is an obvious theological correlation between the heavenly *paraklētos* of 1 John 2: 1 who is *hilasmos peri tōn hamartiōn hēmōn* (v. 2) and the heavenly *archiereus* of Hebrews whose function is *eis to hilaskesthai tas hamartias tou laou* (Heb. 2: 17).<sup>52</sup> But it is doubtful whether either the author or readers of 1 John would have understood *paraklētos* as an

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*cit.*, 767, who speaks of a similar 'atmosphere' in John 17 and Hebrews. Williams, *op. cit.*, 342, speaks of discerning 'certain priestly traits' in John 17, but he is dubious about the presence of a high priestly christology.

<sup>45</sup> Cullmann (*op. cit.*, 106) offers no proof for his statement that the petition of Jesus for the sanctification of His disciples (Jn. 17: 11f., 17) 'is a typical high priest prayer'.

<sup>46</sup> R. E. Brown, *op. cit.*, 767. So also Schnackenburg, 1976: 212f. Bernard (*op. cit.*, 575) comments on John 17: 19: 'In His death He was both Priest and Victim'. Lindars (*op. cit.*, 528f.) argues that the conjunction of *hagiāzō* and *huper* in John 17: 19 gives a sacrificial meaning ('offer myself as a sacrifice on their behalf') which provides an, equivalent to the eucharistic words in the Synoptic Gospels (cf. Mk. 14: 24)—but even this does not necessarily imply the priesthood of Jesus. Cf. also W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, 1972) sub. *hagiāzō*.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. O. Procksch, *TDNT* I, IIIf.; H. Seebass, *NIDNTT*, II, 224ff.; Williams, *op. cit.*, 342 (he sees the language of John 17: 19 as sacrificial but not necessarily priestly).

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Barrett, *op. cit.*, 385f., 510f., who points to Jeremiah 1: 5 LXX. Cf. also Sir. 45:4; 49:7.

<sup>49</sup> Spicq, 1950, 258ff.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Barrett, *op. cit.*, 165f.; Williams, *op. cit.*, 344.

<sup>51</sup> I cannot avoid the suspicion that Spicq has read the Fourth Gospel in the light of Hebrews and thus imported ideas from one to the other (the same applies to Cullmann's reference to John 14: 2). This is not to deny the possibility that elements in the Johannine catechesis provided the spring-board for the development of the priestly christology; but that is far from suggesting that they already carried a priestly connotation within the Johannine circle. Similar strictures must be applied to the suggestion of Richardson, *op. cit.*, 200, that John 14: 6 (I am the way... no one comes to the Father except by me) is a reference to Christ's work as priest (cf. Williams, *op. cit.*, 348f., n.36).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. J. Behm, *TDNT* V, 812 n.91: 'In the picture of the exalted Christ in 1 John 2: 1f. and Hebrews 7: 23-25 (cf. 9: 24; 4: 14-16; 2: 17), also in 1 Clem. 36: 1, the forensic idea of the office of the Paraclete is very closely connected with the cultic conception of the (high-) priestly office'. Moe, *op. cit.*, 338, goes further and claims that Christ is *paraklētos* as high priest. Cf. Spicq, 1952, I, 152ff. R. Schnackenburg, *Die Johannesbriefe* (Freiburg, 1975), 91, writes: 'Die forensische Bedeutung des "Parakleten" tritt hier hinter der hohepriesterlichen Funktion Christi zurück. Das wird nicht nur durch die Nähe zum "Hohepriesterlichen Gebet" Jesus (Joh 17) deutlich, sondern auch durch die kultische Terminologie des folgenden Verses bestätigt'. He continues: 'Die Kontakte zwischen dem Hebraerbrief und den joh. L. Schriften sind auch sonst reich and tief und weisen auf einem gemeinsamen unchristlichen Anschauungsbereich hin'.

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equivalent of or substitute for *archiereus*.<sup>53</sup> *Paraklētōs* (which does not occur in LXX except in the form *paraklētores* in Job 16: 2) is nowhere used of a cultic official; it means a representative who pleads another's case in court.<sup>54</sup> The fact that the *paraklētōs* of 1 John 2: 1 is also a *hilasmos* does not make him a priestly figure.

It seems then that Cullmann's attempt to use 1 John 2: 1 as the middle term between the high priest concept of Hebrews and the Spirit as *paraklētōs* in John 14-16 is based on personal impression ('it seems to me') rather than on logical argument.<sup>55</sup>

(e) Commentators on Revelation are divided over the question as to whether Christ is depicted as heavenly high priest in Revelation 1: 13.<sup>56</sup> In spite of the reference to Christians as priests (1: 9) and the mention of lampstands (1: 12) which might suggest the OT tabernacle, there is no compelling reason for us to draw this conclusion. The Jewish high priest indeed wore a long robe to the feet (Ex. 28: 4; Wisd. 18: 4) and, according to Josephus (*Ant.* III. 7, 2), his girdle was interwoven with gold,<sup>57</sup> but these characteristics were not exclusive to the garb of high priests.<sup>58</sup> The description of the ascended Christ contains elements drawn from a variety of

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OT sources (cf. especially Dan. 7: 9; 10: 5-6), the purpose of which seems to be to stress his glory and deity as Judge.

The conclusion must therefore be that, although there are theological similarities and affinities between the christology of the Johannine writings and the high priestly christology of Hebrews, there is no reason to describe the Johannine Christology as high priestly and

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. J. Stott, *The Epistles of John* (London, 1964), 81: 'In Hebrews Christ intercedes as Priest, in this Epistle as Paraclete'.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. J. Behm, *TDNT* V, 800-814; G. Braumann, *NIDNTT* I, 88-91; B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London, 1882), 211ff.; R. E. Brown, 'The Paraclete in the Fourth Gospel', *NTS* 13 (1966, 67), 113-132.

J. L. Houlden, *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles* (London, 1973), 64, says: 'The image is that of the royal court at which a suppliant needs someone greater than himself, who has the ear of the king, to plead his cause'.

C. H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles* (London, 1946), 24, points out that Philo uses *paraklētōs* in conjunction with the priesthood in *Vita Moses* II, 134, and suggests that such language may have led to the choice of the term *paraklētōs* in Johannine circles. It should be noted, however, that the *paraklētōs* in this passage is distinct from the high priest.

<sup>55</sup> *Op. cit.*, 106. It may well be that the concept of *paraklētōs* in 1 John (but not in John 14:16) can be related to the high priest concept, but that does not entail that the writer of 1 John so related it. It is hardly likely, for example, that the mention of confession of sins in 1 John 1: 9 implies priestly meditation, although at Qumran confession was made to the priestly congregation (cf. 1 QS 1).

<sup>56</sup> *Pro*: W. Milligan (1889: 16); P. Carrington (1931: 80f.); F. F. Bruce, *A Bible Commentary for Today*, ed. G. C. D. Howley (London, 1979), 1682; R. H. Mounce (1977: 78).  
*Con*: H. B. Swete (19093: 15f.); R. H. Charles (1920: I: 27); L. Morris (1969: 53); G. R. Beasley-Murray (1974: 67).

<sup>57</sup> Cf. A. Edersheim, *The Temple* (London, n.d.), 97f.; J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (ET London, 1969), 148, n.d.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. 1 Maccabees 10: 89; 11: 58; Revelation 15: 6. I. T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (1919; reprint, Grand Rapids, 1967) concludes: 'Neither epithet, then, shows Christ to be represented here in his priestly character.... That office of his is not mentioned in our book' (p. 438).

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certainly no cause to postulate any dependence (at least in this respect) of Hebrews on the Johannine traditions.<sup>59</sup>

## OTHER NT WRITINGS

### (a) 1 Peter

An attempt has been made by Moe to demonstrate affinity between the christology of 1 Peter and that of Hebrews.<sup>60</sup> Clearly the sacrificial language of 1 Peter (e.g. 1: 2, 19; 2: 24; 3: 18) and the description of Christians as a priesthood (2: 5, 9) provide some parallels with the teaching of Hebrews, but there is no explicit presentation of Christ as high priest.

Moe claims that the concept of Jesus as priest undoubtedly lies behind the phrase *hos tas hamartias hēmōn autos anēnenken en to sōmati autou epi to xulon* (2: 24). But the OT nowhere speaks of the priest as 'carrying' or 'offering up' sins: *anēnenken* is clearly derived from Isaiah 53: 12 LXX (cf. 53: 4, 11), not from the priestly writings (Ex. 24: 5; Lev. 3: 5);<sup>61</sup> and it is highly unlikely that the cross is here seen as an altar. It is much more likely that the writer is using traditional language (perhaps quoting from a Christian hymn) in a primarily paraenetic context and it is presumably wrong to look for underlying theological implications.<sup>62</sup>

It is true, as Moe points out, that *prosagō*, used of Christ in 1 Peter 3: 18 (*hina humas prosagagē tō theō*), is often a cultic term in LXX and refers to the bringing of offerings or persons into the presence of God, but its use is not confined to the activity of priests and it is also used of access to a royal court or to legal proceedings.<sup>63</sup> There is therefore no reason to read any further significance into 1 Peter 3: 18 than that of making possible access to God.<sup>64</sup>

Despite Friedrich,<sup>65</sup> there is no cause to believe that the titles *poimēn*, *episkopos* and *archipoimēn* used of Christ in 1 Peter (2: 25; 5: 4) carry any priestly connotations.<sup>66</sup> *Poimēn* occurs in Hebrews (13: 20), but not in a priestly context.

Similarly, the use of *archēgos* in the Petrine speeches in Acts (3: 15; 5: 31) provides an interesting link with Hebrews (2: 10; 12: 2); but *archēgos* is not a term used elsewhere of

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<sup>59</sup> It may also be noted that there are no quotations from or allusions to Psalm 110 in the Johannine writings. The concept of Jesus as high priest could, of course, have existed without being linked to Psalm 110: 4, and the author of Hebrews may have inherited such a concept before he linked it with Psalm 110: 4, but it is surely not without some significance that the Johannine circle was apparently not influenced by Psalm 110.

<sup>60</sup> *Op. cit.* He rightly refers to 1 Peter as the letter 'welcher die Hauptstütze der Lehre vom allgemeinen priestertum der Christen ist' (337). For a review of the not inconsiderable general affinities between 1 Peter and Hebrews, see Spicq, 1952, 1, 139-144; E. G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (London, 1947<sup>2</sup>), 463ff.; E. Grässer, *op. cit.*, 195f.

<sup>61</sup> The strongest point in favour of Moe's argument is that *anēnenken* is used in 1 Peter 2: 5 of the offering of spiritual sacrifices by Christians as priests.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. E. Best, *1 Peter* (London, 1971), 120f.; Selwyn, *op. cit.*, 180f.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. K. L. Schmidt, *TDNT* 1, 131-133.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Selwyn, *op. cit.*, 196; Hahn, *op. cit.*, 231. Schmidt, *op. cit.*, 131ff., suggests that the readers of 1 Peter might have been reminded of passages like Exodus 29: 4; Leviticus 8: 24; Numbers 8: 9ff., and have thought of Christians as cleansed priests prepared to enter into the presence of God.

<sup>65</sup> *Op. cit.*, 267.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. J. Jeremias, *TDNT* VI, 485-502. In Numbers 4: 16 LXX *episkopos* is used of a priest, but not of a priestly office *per se* (cf. H. W. Beyer, *TDNT* II, 614f.).

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priests<sup>67</sup> and only gets that connotation in Hebrews by its association with the high priest concept.

**(b) The Pauline writings<sup>68</sup>**

Whatever points of contact may be found between the theology (and particularly the christology) of the Pauline epistles and that of Hebrews,<sup>69</sup> there are few (if any) who would disagree with the categorical statement of Montefiore: 'Paul does not regard Jesus as a high priest'.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, there are scholars who interpret some of the Pauline statements (e.g. Rom. 8: 34; Eph. 2: 18) as implying a priestly view of Christ.<sup>71</sup>

Despite these assertions, neither the statement regarding the intercession of the exalted Christ (Rom. 8: 34)<sup>72</sup> nor the references to his opening of the way of access to God (Rom. 5: 2; Eph. 2: 18)<sup>73</sup> necessarily implies a priestly conception of Christ, even though in Hebrews these are functions of Christ as high priest.

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The description of Christ as *hilastērion* (Rom. 3: 25) is obviously similar to the sacrificial language of Hebrews and may even be intended to recall the mercy-seat of the tabernacle,<sup>74</sup> but it hardly proves that Paul thought of Jesus as a priest.<sup>75</sup>

Similarly, the reference in 1 Timothy 2: 5f. to Christ as *mesitēs... ho dous heauton antilutron hyper pantōn* bears a definite affinity with the high priest of Hebrews who is *diathēkēs kainēs mesitēs* (9: 15; cf. 8: 6; 12: 24) and sacrifices himself for the sins of his people (9: 26; 10: 12).<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, it is not certain that the author of 1 Timothy 2: 5 had a priestly concept of

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. G. Dellings, *TDNT* I, 487f. G. Johnston, 'Christ as Archegos', *NTS* 27 (1981), 381-385, argues that in the Bible the title denotes royal leadership.

<sup>68</sup> There is no need for the purposes of this paper to differentiate between those letters which are generally attributed to the apostle himself and those whose Pauline authorship is disputed. See W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (ET London, 1975), 250f.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Spicq, 1952, I, 144-168; F. D. V. Narborough, *Hebrews* (Oxford, 1930), 16; Grässer, *op. cit.*, 186ff.

<sup>70</sup> H. W. Montefiore, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London, 1964), 5. The statement should be qualified by the words 'In his extant writings...'. It is interesting to speculate whether Paul could have reached the concept of Christ as priest by thinking through the implications of his belief that 'Christ is the *telos* of the law' (Rom. 10: 4).

<sup>71</sup> Cf. J. Baehr, *op. cit.*, 40.

<sup>72</sup> M. Hengel, 'Hymn and Christology' in E. A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Biblica* 1978: III (Sheffield, 1980), 183ff., suggests that in Romans 8: 34 Paul uses a hymn fragment which was based on both verse 1 and verse 4 of Psalm 110 and which already held the idea of Christ as high priest. But Psalm 110: 4 says nothing about intercession (cf. Hahn, *op. cit.*, 237) and, as has already been pointed out (n.22), intercession is not specifically a priestly activity. No one assumes that Paul thinks of the Spirit in priestly terms, although he uses the same verb (*entunchanō*) in Romans 8: 27. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London, 1963), 180, suggests that Romans 8: 34 may represent a traditional formulation based on Isaiah 53: 12 MT.

<sup>73</sup> For *prosaḡō* see remarks above on 1 Peter 3: 18.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Hahn, *op. cit.*, 231: 'the transference of a cult trait to Jesus' work of salvation would not necessarily have resulted in Jesus being also regarded as a high priest'.

<sup>75</sup> So T. W. Manson, 'HILASTERION', *JTS* 46 (1945), 1-10; S. Nomoto, 'Herkunft und Struktur der Hohenpriestvorstellung im Hebräerbrief', *Nov. Test.* X (1968), 11. For a full discussion, see C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans I* (Edinburgh, 1975), 214ff.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Higgins, 1963, 140, who links it with Michael as intercessor and high priest in Testament of Dan. 6: 2.

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Christ. *Ho dous heauton antilutron* seems to reflect the saying of Jesus in Mark 10: 45,<sup>77</sup> and *mesitēs* is a legal not a priestly term.<sup>78</sup>

## CONCLUSION

We have found no convincing evidence to support Cullmann's claim that 'the High Priest concept is not only present in Hebrews, but lies also behind the Christological statements of other New Testament passages'.<sup>79</sup>

Ideas are expressed in various parts of the NT which do indeed bear a distinct affinity to the high priest concept of Hebrews. Some statements could imply that the author had the beginnings of such a concept, or are consonant with the possibility that he held such a concept. Some statements could even have sparked off, or been the spring-board for, the development of the high priest concept of Hebrews. But no reference which we have examined compels us to attribute to the writer a priestly concept of Jesus. Certainly we are unable to follow those who think that a sacrificial interpretation of the death of Christ necessarily involves the idea of his priesthood.<sup>80</sup> This assumes that when a person uses a metaphor (e.g. sacrifice) he inevitably has all aspects of the picture in mind. It is clearly not the case. We cannot resist the impression that those who claim to find a priestly view of Jesus in other parts of the NT have imported the idea from Hebrews and read it back into these passages.

It should be noted, however, that the negative conclusion that no other NT writing reflects a priestly christology does not necessarily mean that the writer to the Hebrews originated the concept of Jesus as priest. But it does mean that if we were to follow those scholars who claim that there was already a high priest confession in the early church,<sup>81</sup> we would need to try to explain why it surfaced only in Hebrews. Alternatively, if the writer to the Hebrews was the first to arrive at such a concept, we might feel it necessary to suggest why no one else did so. But these are matters for another paper.

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London, 1963), 63f.

<sup>78</sup> On *mesitēs* see O. Becker, *NIDNTT* I, 372-5. A high priest is a *mesitēs*; but a *mesitēs* is not necessarily a priest.

<sup>79</sup> *Op. cit.*, 107.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. L. Sabourin, *Priesthood, A Comparative Study* (Leiden, 1973), 212ff.: 'It should be legitimately concluded that even if Christ is not explicitly called priest outside Heb. it is implied that He is in the texts that present His death as a sacrifice.... The Author of Heb. has explicated... what was obviously the common persuasion at the time of Jesus, that there can be no true sacrifice without the intervention of a priest'.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. G. Schille, 'Erwägungen zur Hohepriesterlehre des Hebräerbriefes', *ZNTW* 46 (1955), 81-109; S. Nomoto, *op. cit.*, 10-25; H. Zimmermann, *Die Hohepriester-Christologie des Hebräerbriefes* (Paderborn, 1964); G. Theissen, *Untersuchungen zum Hebräerbrief* (Gütersloh, 1969); H. Zimmermann, *Das Bekenntnis der Hoffnung. Tradition and Redaktion im Hebräerbrief* (Bonn, 1977); M. Mees, 'Die Hohepriester-Theologie des Hebräerbriefes im Vergleich mit dem Ersten Clemensbrief', *Bib. Zeit.*, 22.1 (1978).