

firmation class—an unheard of thing among his circle. He became a Christian just three days before joining the army. We visited Harringay together on his last leave before he was sent overseas. These two, of course, are older than the general run. It is rare for a boy who has passed through Junior Club and has not given his life to Christ by the time he is fifteen, to do so afterwards. But there is a depth in the spiritual life of some of our sixteen year olds that is not easily found elsewhere.

Running a club is an expensive business—in money, time and energy. It is not rewarding if you are thinking in terms of quick results or many converts. But strategically it is terribly important if we are not to lose again the largest section of our community as we have lost it before. I know that the Church needs parsons, that the schools need teachers, and that full time Christian workers are in short supply. The fact remains that there are opportunities in club work to reach these youngsters with the Gospel as they will not be reached in any other way. These opportunities must be regarded as high priority in any Christian strategy, and we do well to commend the possibilities of boys' club leadership, either as part-time service or as a career, to every young Christian man who is looking for the place where God would have him work.

Priesthood and Sacrifice

BY THE BISHOP OF CHELMSFORD¹

*A holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices (1 Peter ii. 5)
A royal priesthood . . . that ye may shew forth the excellencies of God
(1 Peter ii. 9)*

THIS is the Church's vocation. It is the vocation of the Church because the Church is the Body of Christ, and there is no word that better sums up the vocation of Christ than the word priesthood. It is only in the light of Christ's vocation, Christ's priesthood, that we can rightly understand the true meaning of the Church's vocation as His Body in the world to-day and of our vocation within that Body.

The Vocation of Christ. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, so appropriately called by the late Dr. Nairne the Epistle of Priesthood, the heart of priesthood is disclosed in the phrase $\tau\alpha \pi\rho\sigma \tau\omicron\nu \Theta\epsilon\omicron\nu$ which occurs twice in this epistle and which Nairne renders "on the Godward side". Christ is presented as the perfect Priest; in Him we see the true meaning of priesthood revealed; He stands on the Godward side of man, representing God to man and man to God, revealing God to

¹ The opening sermon at the 1954 Conference of the Evangelical Fellowship for Theological Literature. Other views on this subject were put forward at the Conference. See, for instance, W. F. M. Scott, "The Eucharist and the Heavenly Ministry of Our Lord" (*Theology*, February 1953), which embodies the viewpoint expressed in his paper on "Priesthood and Sacrifice in the New Testament".

men and bringing men to God. Such priesthood involved for our Lord complete identification with man whom He was called to represent, identification with man in all his sin and the suffering which sin entailed :

“ Therefore He had to be made like His brethren in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest, standing on their Godward side ” (Heb. ii. 17).

Such identification meant standing beside men and women in true sympathy, suffering with them, interceding for them and offering His life for them. Priesthood involved for our Lord a sacrificial life consummated in the sacrificial offering of Himself on Calvary, where He made “ by His one oblation of Himself once offered a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world ”. If we rightly interpret the heart of worship as self-oblation, then we may see in our Lord’s self-oblation on the Cross a true and perfect act of worship and we may say that our Lord fulfilled His priestly vocation in sacrificial living and sacrificial worship. Only by such costly self-oblation could He, as God’s representative before man, reveal to men the true nature of God’s love ; only thus, as man’s representative before God, could He bring men back to God in a truly personal reconciliation.

The Vocation of the Church. To such a priesthood the Church also is called as Christ’s Body in the world. If in the Epistle to the Hebrews the emphasis is placed on Christ’s priesthood, in the First Epistle of St. Peter the emphasis is placed on the priesthood of the Church. The whole Church is called to a holy priesthood, a royal priesthood. Just as the old Israel had been called to exercise a priestly ministry among the other nations to be “ a Kingdom of priests ” (Exodus xix. 6) standing on the Godward side of the world, so the Church as the new Israel is called by Christ, in the words of the Apocalypse, “ to be a Kingdom, to be priests unto His God and Father. . . . ” The whole People of God, the whole *Λαος* is called to a holy priesthood, a royal priesthood. This vocation to stand on the Godward side of the world is a vocation on the one hand to reveal God to the world, to shew forth His excellencies, His noble acts, His redeeming Love, on the other hand it is a vocation to bring men back to God, to exercise a reconciling ministry in the world. Such a vocation must involve for the Church, as for Christ, a life wholly surrendered to the will of God, a life set apart for God’s service, for it is a “ holy ” priesthood to which the Church is called. At the same time such a vocation must involve for the Church, as for Christ, identification with those among whom it is called to exercise its priestly ministry. The Church must ever seek to identify itself in true sympathy with men and women in their need, standing beside them, suffering with them, sharing their burdens, and as the world’s representative before God interceding for the world and offering its life to God on behalf of the world.

The Church is called as a holy priesthood “ to offer up spiritual sacrifices ”. We find even in the Old Testament period signs of the emergence in Hebrew thought of a spiritual conception of sacrifice. The language of sacrifice is used in the Old Testament of prayer

(Ps. cxli. 2), of praise and thanksgiving (Ps. l. 14) and of the righteous life (Ps. iv. 5). In the New Testament we find a similar use of sacrificial language. It is used of prayer (Rev. viii. 3, 4) and of praise and thanksgiving (Heb. xiii. 15), whilst the "sacrifice of righteousness" is interpreted as the surrender of the self to God, "a living sacrifice," "a spiritual rite" (Rom. xii. 1).

These, the Church's spiritual sacrifices, are acceptable to God only as they are offered through Jesus Christ and, to quote Dr. Selwyn's words in his great commentary, "because and in so far as they are brought within the ambit of His own perfect and sufficient sacrifice offered on the cross. The means of this union of the Church's sacrifices with His is faith, and its outward expression, both on God's side and on man's is the Eucharist".

The Eucharist is the focal point in the Church's exercise of its priestly vocation. In the Eucharist the Church, standing on the Godward side of the world, offers to God for its hallowing the common life of the community symbolized in the bread and wine, the life of the village with its agriculture, of the town with its industry and commerce, of the nation and the world. The Church makes its offering of alms, symbolizing its dedication to a life of brotherly love and social service. The Church offers its prayers and intercessions for the world in which its life is set.

In the Eucharist the Church offers its sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for the redemptive sacrifice of Christ's death. Through this shewing of the Lord's death (1 Cor. xi. 26) the Church exercises its priesthood by shewing forth the excellencies, the noble acts of God (1 Peter ii. 9) for the redemption of mankind. But, as Dr. Selwyn reminds us, "it is a fact abundantly attested in history that men have been most able and willing to recognize the excellencies of God, and most alive to the noble acts of His mercy when they have seen them reflected in the dying life of the Church". So in the Eucharist the Church's spiritual sacrifices are consummated in, and indeed find their inner significance in the offering of its very life to God, in its own self-oblation, sacramentally associated with the self-oblation of Christ Himself. Through the bread and the wine, consecrated by our Lord to be unto us His Body and Blood, our Lord imparts to us His Church His own life given in sacrifice, that we may be able in the power of that life to "offer and present ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice". He unites us with Himself, so that we may offer ourselves to God in union with His own perfect and eternal self-offering.

The phrase "eternal self-offering" may seem to present us with a paradox when considered in the light of the "one oblation of Himself once offered". But if we believe in the eternity of that relationship within the Godhead which we call the Trinity, we must expect to be confronted with paradoxes in our faith. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews presents Christ to us as our High Priest who "ever liveth to make intercession" for us. He our ascended High Priest, has taken up our manhood in His perfect Manhood into the heavenly places; standing on our Godward side, He intercedes for us. If we can accept this concept of His heavenly intercession, we may accept with no

greater difficulty the concept of His eternal self-oblation on our behalf ; for is not self-oblation the heart of intercession ?

In the Eucharist, then, the Church exercises its priesthood by offering its spiritual sacrifices through Jesus Christ ; it makes its own act of self-oblation in union with the perfect and eternal self-oblation of Jesus Christ.

From such sacrificial worship the Church goes forth into the world to exercise its priesthood by living the sacrificial life and to shew forth the Lord's death in its own dying life.

The Vocation of the Christian Minister. It is only within this setting of the priesthood of the whole Church that we can rightly consider the ministerial priesthood to which we have been called. Just as within the old Israel priests and prophets were appointed to stand on the Godward side of the nation, so within the new Israel there are the Christian priests, combining the functions exercised by both prophets and priests of old. This Christian priesthood, like the Jewish priesthood, is a representative priesthood. The Jewish priesthood was " taken from among men " ; the laying on of hands by the people on the Levites was, as Dr. Selwyn has pointed out, " for the purpose of designating them as their representatives before God ". Likewise we who are ordained priests within the Christian Church are called to act not as substitutes for, but as representatives of the whole Body. Before the world we are to give an example of that priestly life to which the whole Church is called. Standing on the Godward side of our fellowmen, we are to exercise a reconciling ministry. Our peculiar calling, however, is to be exercised within the Church. We are called as priests to stand on the Godward side of the Church ; as God's representatives before His people, revealing God and proclaiming His Word to His Church ; as representing the Church before God, leading the Church in its approach to God in worship and in its offering of spiritual sacrifices focussed in the Eucharist in its offering of praise and thanksgiving, in its offering of intercession on behalf of the world and in its self-oblation.

St. Paul in the Epistle to the Romans (I quote from the American Standard Revised Version) speaks of his calling " to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the Gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable. . . ." Paul has already reminded the members of the Church that as members of the Body of Christ they are called to present their bodies a living sacrifice and that this sacrifice, this self-oblation, is their spiritual rite, their spiritual worship. It is significant that Dr. Dodd, commenting on these passages, points out that " the sacrament of the Lord's Supper ", as conceived by Paul, " gives a fitting visible form to the spiritual rite of self-dedication, and the minister's part in it similarly gives visible form to his priestly relation to the Church ". He adds, " It is when the self-offering of the Church, in association with Christ's own sacrifice, is forgotten, or pushed into the background, that the abuses of sacerdotalism arise ".

If we who are ordained priests within the Church of God are rightly to lead the Church in its sacrificial worship, such worship must be for us, as for the Church, the expression of a sacrificial way of life. During

our Conference we shall be discussing the relationship of priesthood and sacrifice ; much of our discussion will be inevitably of an academic character ; a proper understanding of the meaning of priesthood and sacrifice demands disciplined study of Biblical and patristic evidence. It is all the more necessary that at the outset, in our opening worship this evening, we should remember that pastoral insight born of experience is no less important than scholastic research and intellectual debate. We can only hope to gain fresh insights into the significance of the priesthood to which we are called, if in our own experience we know something of what it means to stand on the Godward side of men and women, standing alongside them in their needs, their problems and their sufferings, feeling with them, suffering with them with the sympathetic understanding of true friendship—yes, and if we know, too, something of the cost of sacrificial living in the service of God and of our fellowmen.

We are called to a royal priesthood. We may interpret the Greek word βασιλειον as an adjective, following the Revised Version, and translate the phrase “ a priesthood in the service of a King ” ; or we may take it, as Dr. Selwyn thinks preferable, as a substantive meaning “ a King’s house ”, and, referring back to the “ spiritual house ” of which Peter has already spoken, we may infer that Peter wishes to stress the close association of our priesthood with “ the house of God, the invisible King who is worshipped in spirit and truth ”. Whichever interpretation we choose, the ultimate point is clear. The priesthood to which we are called is a priesthood in the service of the King who said that He had come “ not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life ”, of the King who chose the Cross as His throne and as His crown the crown of thorns. To the priestly service of such a King let us rededicate our lives.

“ Ye are a royal priesthood . . . that ye may shew forth the excellencies of God.” “ A holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices.”