

The Priest as Cultic Figure, Servant Leader and Apostle : Images from Hebrews, John and Paul

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The Priest as Cultic Figure, Servant Leader & Apostle: Images from Hebrews, John and Paul

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for a License in Sacred Theology

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Introduction

The Second Vatican Council's "Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests," *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, describes the three-fold ministry of the Catholic priest as teacher, priest, and king.¹ This broad conception was a departure from the Council of Trent, which associated the priesthood exclusively with the powers to consecrate the Eucharist and to remit sins.² Moreover, Vatican II recognized the priesthood of all the baptized and a universal call to holiness.³ In the wake of the Council, priests' views of the priesthood changed. From 1965 to 1975, the prevailing self-understanding of priests shifted from a "cultic model," which viewed the priest as a man ontologically different and set apart for the sacraments, to a "servant leader model," which viewed the priest as a leader of the community, who collaborated closely with the laity.⁴ Since the 1980's, priests' self-understanding has gradually drifted back to the cultic model, with the greatest change among the newly-ordained and diocesan priests. This drift leaves something of a generation gap between an older "servant leader" cohort and a younger "cultic" one.⁵

There is something of an identity gap between diocesan priests and religious as well, perhaps because of marked differences in formation, spirituality and mission. As John O'Malley

¹Second Vatican Council, "Decree on Ministry and Life of Priests," *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (December 7, 1965), Accessed November 7, 2010 at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_presbyterorum-ordinis_en.html

² Council of Trent, Session XXIII, "The Institution of the Priesthood of the New Law," Chapter 1, Documents of the Council of Trent (July 15, 1563). Accessed November 8, 2010 at <http://www.catholic-forum.com/saints/trent23.htm>

³ Second Vatican Council, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), Accessed on November 7, 2010 at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html

⁴ James Bacik, "The Practice of Priesthood: Working Through Today's Tensions" in *Priesthood in the Modern World*, ed. Karen Sue Smith (Franklin: Sheed & Ward, 1999), 51-65.

⁵Dean R. Hoge, *Experiences of Priests Ordained Five to Nine Years* (Washington D.C.: National Catholic Education Association, 2006), 59.

notes, tension between the two groups is not new: the fifth century monk John Cassian wrote, “A monk ought by all means to fly from women and bishops.”⁶ Indeed, certain orders of religious priests, among them Franciscans, Dominicans and Jesuits, suggest a third model of the priesthood: an “apostolic” model, characterized by mobility, preaching the word and working outside parish boundaries.

With these different models as context, Pope Benedict XVI declared June 19, 2009 to June 19, 2010, a “year for priests,” inviting priests to deepen their commitment to interior renewal for the sake of the Gospel.⁷ This S.T.L. thesis is a response to this declaration, reasoning that the study of scripture is a suitable starting point for deepening interior renewal. We found inspiration for the cultic, servant leadership and apostolic models in the Letter to the Hebrews, the Gospel of John, and letters of St. Paul, respectively. This thesis argues that each model manifests the high priesthood of Christ in its own way. Moreover, these models are not mutually exclusive; they are dimensions of the one ministerial priesthood of Christ. Hence, they overlap and every priest expresses them to varying degrees. We hope that reflecting on these texts will foster a deeper appreciation for each dimension of the priesthood and the priests who typify them.

Before moving forward, it is necessary to define what a priest is and to recall some basic information about the Jewish priesthood, the referent for any priestly imagery found in the New Testament.

⁶ John O’Malley, “One Priesthood: Two Traditions,” in *A Concert of Charisms*, ed. Paul K. Hennessey (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 9.

⁷ Benedict XVI, “Letter of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI Proclaiming a Year for Priests on the 150th Anniversary of the *Dies Natalis* of the Cure of Ars,” (Rome: Vatican, June 16, 2009). Accessed October 31, 2010 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/letters/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20090616_anno-sacerdotale_en.html

The Jewish Priesthood

Merriam-Webster's defines a priest as "one authorized to perform the sacred rites of a religion especially as a mediatory agent between humans and God."⁸ The Roman Catholic Church ordains priests for sacramental ministry, teaching and leadership. When the New Testament mentions the priesthood or uses priestly imagery, it has the Jewish priesthood in mind.⁹ According to the Hebrew Scriptures, the Jewish priesthood originated with Moses, who consecrated his brother Aaron and his sons as priests, giving the priesthood exclusively to their descendants (Exod 28:1, 43).¹⁰ Since Aaron was a Levite, the priesthood of Israel became exclusively Levitical. Aaron was the first "chief priest"; the rest of the tribe of Levi assisted him and his sons in their sacrificial duties. From these beginnings developed a three-fold hierarchy: at the lowest level were the Levites who assisted in the sanctuary; above them in holiness and authority were the sons of Aaron and their descendants, who were consecrated as priests; at the highest level in holiness and authority was the high priest chosen from among the priests.

Under the Mosaic Covenant, Israel was to be a "kingdom of priests," a holy people (Ex 19:6; Lev 11:44ff; Num 15:40). Because the nation was not perfect in holiness, the priests represented the sanctity needed for the service of God and, therefore, became the mediators of the covenant. Each level of the priesthood had specific duties. The high priest alone could enter the "holy of holies" once a year to make atonement for the people's sins. He did this by

⁸ Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary. Accessed November 8, 2010 at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/priest>

⁹ The exception is Acts 14:13, which refers to a high priest of Zeus. See M. Eugene Boring, "Priests in the NT," *The New Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 4, ed. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2009), 613-614.

¹⁰ For this section I depend on R. Abba, "Priests and Levites," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 876-889.

sprinkling the blood of the sin offerings before the sanctuary veil and applying it to the horns of the altar (Lev 4:3-21; cf. 9:8ff). The chief function of the ordinary priests was the care of the vessels in the sanctuary and the sacrificial duties of the altar (Num 18:5, 7). Finally, the Levites assisted the priests and served the congregation. They cared for the courts and chambers of the sanctuary, cleaned the sacred vessels and prepared the cereal offerings (I Chr 23:28-32).

Methodology and Synopsis of Intended Work

This thesis examines scripture as a source for inspiration and renewal for priests. Each chapter contains an exegesis of a key passage that uses priestly imagery and then reflects on the passage in its context and looks for implications regarding contemporary priesthood, especially the cultic, servant leader and apostolic dimensions. The three chapters cover the Letter to the Hebrews, the Gospel of John and selections from St. Paul, in turn.

Chapter One: The High Priesthood of Christ According to Hebrews

Chapter one examines the cultic dimensions of priesthood, by examining the Letter to the Hebrews' depiction of Christ the high priest. This letter is the starting point for the Church's reflection on the identity of the Roman Catholic priest. The author of Hebrews is concerned that the community is falling away from the faith and so he describes the mediation of Christ the high priest in response. He depicts Christ as the high priest who makes himself a perfect offering that removes the guilt of sin so that the people can approach the throne of grace with confidence. We argue that the Catholic priest helps the people of God access the graces of Christ's self-offering through presiding at the Eucharist. Through the Eucharist, Catholics approach "the throne of grace." Moreover, the example of Christ the high priest calls priests to make themselves a self-offering for the people of God.

Chapter Two: The Johannine Jesus: Priest, Shepherd and Model of Humble Service

Chapter two illuminates the servant leadership dimension of priesthood. John presents Christ as a priest who offers himself on the cross for his disciples; this self-offering consecrates them for mission. We argue that Jesus as the good shepherd is an example of servant leadership, patterned after the paschal mystery. He exercises this ministry through revealing the word of God, providing the bread of life and modeling humble service to the community. In our view, Jesus' commission to his disciples suggests lay and clerical collaboration in the work of evangelization. We conclude that Catholic priests should see themselves as shepherds to a community of disciples, with whom the priest collaborates as a servant leader.

Chapter Three: Paul, A Model of Apostolic Priesthood

Chapter three examines Saint Paul, beginning with why he considers his apostolic work a "priestly service" (Rom 15:16). His example is essential for religious priests, because *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, for all its positive aspects, rests on assumptions suitable only for the diocesan priesthood. We argue that Paul understands the entirety of his work as priestly, because it delivers the Gentiles to the Lord as an offering. His embodiment of the paschal mystery reflects the self-giving love of Christ the high priest and encourages us to imagine priestly ministry beyond parish boundaries. We conclude that he is a particularly good model for religious priests in apostolic orders, because his mission takes place at the frontiers of belief as does the mission of many religious priests.

The common thread that unites these three chapters is the paschal mystery. The Letter to the Hebrews shows that the heart of the high priesthood of Christ is his sacrifice of himself and subsequent exaltation by the Father. Through the ministry of presiding at the Eucharist, the priest enables the Catholic community to enter into the paschal mystery. Jesus the good shepherd provides a model of self-giving love for those who would minister as pastors. Christ's example shows that priestly ministry is necessarily lived out as service to the community. The apostle Paul embodied the dying and rising of Christ, while making a priestly offering of the Gentiles through his ministry. He showed that his varied ministry of evangelization is priestly. These are various New Testament images on which a priest can fruitfully meditate in order to appropriate the cultic, servant leader or apostolic dimensions of priesthood.

Chapter 1: The High Priesthood of Christ According to Hebrews

When the Church thinks about priesthood, it begins with the Letter to the Hebrews, the only place in scripture which refers to Christ as a high priest.¹¹ The Second Vatican Council, reflecting on Hebrews, desired that Roman Catholic priests be images of Christ the high priest.¹² Following the lead of the Council, this chapter reflects on Hebrews as source for the “interior renewal” of the priesthood. Hebrews focuses on Christ’s priestly self-sacrifice for his followers. Catholic priests help the faithful appropriate the graces of this sacrifice, through presiding at the Eucharist. Therefore, Hebrews points to the cultic dimension of the priesthood. Yet it also suggests important qualities priests must emulate to be like Christ; none are more important than the grace to sacrifice oneself for others.

This chapter has three sections. The first examines what Hebrews says generally about the high priesthood of Christ. The second performs an exegesis on a key passage that explains why Christ’s priesthood is distinctive and effective. The third reflects on what Hebrews tells us about the Catholic priesthood today.

¹¹ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, #28; *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, #12, #13 and #22; John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (Rome: Vatican, March 25, 1992) Accessed at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031992_pastores-dabo-vobis_en.html

¹² Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* #28.

I. The High Priesthood of Christ in Hebrews

Before we can begin our discussion of the high priesthood of Christ, we need to understand the form, context, setting, structure and eschatology of Hebrews.¹³ Doing so will help us to understanding why the author of Hebrews introduced the notion of Christ the high priest.

Form, Context and Setting

Historically, scholars have debated whether or not Hebrews is part of the Pauline *corpus*. Origen famously encouraged Churches to attribute authorship to Paul, but also claimed that only God really knew who wrote it. Today, the scholarly consensus is that Paul did not write Hebrews, though this view is not held universally. Lacking solid evidence for other attributions, scholars regard the work as anonymous.

Since it was sometimes thought to be a work of Paul, scholars regarded Hebrews as a letter. However, it lacks the standard opening elements of a letter, such as a salutation, names of senders, recipients and a thanksgiving, and also lacks the standard closing elements, such as a benediction and farewell. Scholars now regard the letter as a kind of sermon, though precisely what kind is difficult to pin down. Hebrews calls itself a “word of exhortation” (Heb 13:22). In Acts 13:15, Paul and Barnabas are asked to give a “word of exhortation,” during a synagogue service in Antioch. Thus, a “word of exhortation” is something like a synagogue homily, though Hebrews could have as easily been given in a house church as in a synagogue. Therefore, we will classify Hebrews simply as sermon.

An equally perplexing question is to whom was Hebrews written. The scholarly consensus is a community in Rome, though some have argued for Jerusalem, given the letter’s

¹³ This summary relies on Alan C. Mitchell, *Hebrews*, Sacra Pagina Series, gen. ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009), 2.

interest in the Jewish law and cult. The strongest evidence for Rome as a destination is verse 13:24, which states, “Those from Italy send you greetings.” This greeting makes the most sense when understood as being sent from those in the Diaspora elsewhere in Italy to those back home in Rome. Corroborating evidence is that 1 Clement, a document of Roman origin, mentions Hebrews, meaning Hebrews was known in Roman circles.

The mention in 1 Clement also means that Hebrews was written before 96 C.E., the date 1 Clement was written, but how much earlier is difficult to ascertain. Based on the internal references to the community’s suffering (10:32-34, 12:4, 13:3), commentators correlate the document with various persecutions of Jewish Christians: under Claudius in 49 C.E., Nero in the mid-to-late 60s, and by Rome after the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. Of these, the later dates receive some support from the observation that Hebrews’ description of Jesus’ suffering and death is similar to that of Mark’s Gospel, thought to have been written during one of these later two persecutions. A date in the early 70s appears reasonable.

What is the nature of the community’s present suffering? Blood has not been spilled, because the author says that “in your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood” (12:4). If the letter was written in the wake of the unsuccessful Jewish revolt and the subsequent destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., the audience may have felt threatened or faced discrimination as they were lumped together in popular Roman consciousness with rebellious Jews.

In the face of this suffering, the author worries that his hearers are falling away from the faith. He warns them to pay attention so that they do not “drift way” (2:1) and encourages them to “hold fast” to their confession (4:14; 10:23). He laments the community’s lack of progress in the faith. Instead of teaching others, they again need to be taught the basics (5:11). He warns

them that it is impossible to “restore repentance” to the fallen away (6:4-6) and that it is a “fearful thing” to fall into the hands of the living God (10:31). Apparently, some have stopped meeting for worship (10:25).

Not surprisingly, the theme of endurance and perseverance dominates the latter part of the letter. In addition to encouraging his listeners to “hold fast” (10:23) and continue to meet (10:25), the author reminds them that they endured a “hard struggle” before, sometimes being exposed to “abuse and persecution” (10:32-33). In the past, they cheerfully accepted the plundering of their possessions knowing they had something “better and more lasting” (10:34). Similarly, they now ought to persevere to receive what was promised (10:36). He exhorts them to look to Christ, who endured the cross and shame to take his seat at the right hand of the Father (12:2).

In the context of a people who are suffering and in danger falling away, the priesthood of Christ is apt subject matter for an exhortation. It allows the author to show that Christ suffered just as they are now suffering, yet his suffering was redemptive. Although they are suffering now, Christ’s suffering has won the war. They must persevere to receive their reward.

Structure

The structure of Hebrews remains the subject of scholarly debate. Efforts at delineating a structure have employed rhetorical, linguistic and literary criticism. Based on linguistic clues such hook words, *inclusio* and chiasms, Albert Vanhoye offers a complex linguistic schema.

This is a simplified version of his schema:

Introduction 1:1-4

I. Christ’s situation 1:5-2:18

II. The first presentation of Christ’s high priesthood: 3:1-5:10

- III. Specific characteristics of Christ's high priesthood: 5:11-10:39
- IV. Fidelity to Christ through persevering faith: 11:1-12:13
- V. Orientations for Christian life: 12:14-13:18.

Conclusion: 13:20-21.¹⁴

This schema is helpful for this study, because it closely tracks the author's arguments about Christ's priesthood. This paper will examine briefly sections I, II, III and perform an exegesis on verses 7:23-28 from section III, wherein the author speaks specifically about the effectiveness of Christ's priesthood.

*Eschatology*¹⁵

It is impossible to make any sense of this sermon without understanding the author's eschatological framework, i.e., his sense of history and time. Mitchell calls its eschatology a combination "realized and future eschatology."¹⁶ In other words, the author contends that Christ's death and resurrection has already achieved victory over sin and death, yet his followers await his second coming to implement completely this victory. One also finds this "already/not yet" eschatology in the Gospels (Mt 4:12-17; Mk1:14-15; Lk 4:14-15), and in St. Paul (see 1 Thess 4:13ff). The author argues human history is in the last age, but this last age has not yet reached its fulfillment. He refers to the present age as "these last days" (1:2), where God spoke through his Son, in contrast with the previous age, where he spoke through the prophets (1:1). The faithful await the future coming of the Lord, who will save them from their present woes (9:28) and during which humankind will achieve its eschatological "rest" (4:1, 6, 9, 11). While the final age is already here, the end of time has not yet arrived. In the meantime, Christians

¹⁴ Albert Vanhoye, *Our Priest is Christ* (Roma: P.I.B, 1974), 10.

¹⁵ This section relies Mitchell, 21-22.

¹⁶ Mitchell, 21.

must live as a “proleptic” people, letting knowledge of their salvation and the assurance of Christ’s return, transform their lives.

Just as the concepts of present suffering and future rest exist simultaneously in Hebrews, so also does activity occur in the earthly and the heavenly realms. Christ’s death was an historical event in Jerusalem, yet he intercedes eternally from heaven for those drawing near to him on earth (7:25). John Dunnill proposes that Hebrews presents its readers past and present not with an “argument, but a liturgy.”¹⁷ He notes that Hebrews picks up from Deuteronomic literature the ideas of “liturgical time” and “liturgical space:” seeing all times as one time, the time of worship, and all places as one place, the place of worship.¹⁸

*The High Priesthood of Christ*¹⁹

A priest is “one authorized to perform the sacred rites of a religion especially as a mediatory agent between humans and God.”²⁰ A priest, therefore, has to have access to both God and human beings. The author explains in section I, why Christ was the ideal mediator between God and human beings. Christ was closer to God than the angels, yet at the same time was one with human beings. In verses 1:5-14, the author quotes a series of verses, mainly from the psalms, to demonstrate Christ’s lofty status. For example, he quotes Psalm 2:7: “You are my Son; today I have begotten you” (1:5), an enthronement psalm indicating that God has enthroned a king as his choice; therefore, the king is begotten of God.²¹ The implication is that God has enthroned Christ as king and is with him. Therefore, Christ enjoys an eternal, transcendent,

¹⁷ John Dunnill, *Covenant and Sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 122.

¹⁸ Dunnill, 131.

¹⁹ This section relies on Vanhoye, 20-26.

²⁰ Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. Accessed 9/16/2010 at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/priest>.

²¹ Harold W. Attridge, footnote to the Letter to the Hebrews in *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, rev. ed., gen. ed. Harold W. Attridge (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 2036, FN#1.5.

heavenly status. In verses 2:5-11, the author then contrasts this lofty position with Christ's abasement by becoming human and dying on the cross. He states that for a little while Jesus was made lower than the angels (2:9) and, because he shared the same Father with human beings, he was not ashamed to call them "brothers and sisters" (2:11). Therefore, Christ fills perfectly the two requirements necessary for priesthood: to be accepted by God and to be united to those whom the priest represents before God.

In section II, the first presentation of Christ the high priest, the author elaborates the qualities of "trustworthy" and "merciful" (3:7-4:14 and 4:15-16), mentioned at the end of section I (2:17). First, since Jesus is worthy of faith, we should not only trust him, but "hold fast to our confession" (4:14). Second, since Jesus is merciful, we should not fear to draw near to him. He has been tested as we are (4:15); therefore, we should approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and grace in time of need (4:16). In other words, Jesus knows how humans are tested; he experienced human trials, and, therefore, is sympathetic.

The author indicates that God heard Christ's prayers and supplications, because of his "reverent submission" to God (5:7). The author connects Christ's obedience to salvation:

1. He "learned obedience through what he suffered," and
2. "having been made perfect,"
3. "he became the source of eternal salvation for those who obey him" (5:8-9).

As will be seen below, "having been made perfect" refers to Christ's entry into the heavenly sanctuary. The point of these verses is that Christ was obedient to the Father; this obedience was manifested in suffering, and became the source of our salvation.

In section III, the author develops specific characteristics of Christ's priesthood. He argues that Christ is a priest in the line of Melchizedek in order to overcome Christ's lack of

priestly lineage and to show he is superior to the Levitical priests (7:14-15). First, he argues Melchizedek is superior to the Levitical priests who followed him, because Abraham paid him a tithe while the Levitical priests were still in Abraham's loins (7:4-5). Thus, Abraham recognized Melchizedek as his superior. The author even suggests Levi paid the tithe, in manner of speaking, through Abraham, because he was in his loins at the time (7:9-10). Second, the author argues that a new priesthood was needed, because perfection was not attained under the Levitical priesthood (7:11). Finally, he argues Jesus is a priest in the manner of Melchizedek (7:17), because like Melchizedek, he is a priest eternally, receiving the priesthood based not on lineage, but through an "indestructible life" (7:16).²² Citing Psalm 110:4, "the Lord has sworn an oath he will not change his mind – you are a priest forever" (7:21), Jesus became the guarantor of a better covenant (7:22). This oath confirms the central theme of the passage, "the new eternal priesthood" of Christ will provide effective mediation.²³

II. A Key Text: An Exegesis of Hebrews 7:23-28

Verses 7:23-28 explicate further the distinctiveness and effectiveness of Jesus' eternal priesthood, relative to the Levitical priesthood.

The Argument's Structure

This passage comes near the middle of the sermon. Having established that Jesus is a "priest forever" (7:21) and the guarantor of a better covenant (7:22), this section of text shows how and why Jesus' priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood. The argument unfolds in a series of comparisons:²⁴

²² Mitchell, 142-144, 149-151.

²³ Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia Series, gen. ed. Helmut Koester (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 207.

²⁴ My translations.

Comparison#1, impermanence/permanence (7:23-24): And the ones having become priests were many, but on account of death they were prevented from continuing in office (7:23); (Levitical priesthood: death, temporary)

but because he remains forever, he maintains his priesthood permanently (7:24) (Jesus' priesthood: eternal).

Conclusion, effectiveness of Christ's priesthood (7:25): Consequently, he is able to save for all time those drawing near to the Father through him, because he lives eternally to intercede for them (7:25) (Jesus saves always and completely).

Transition (7:26): For it was fitting that we have such a high priest: holy, innocent, undefiled, set apart from sinners and higher than the heavens (7:26) (appropriateness of Jesus' priesthood).

Comparison #2, ineffective sacrifice/effective self-sacrifice (7:27): He does not have to offer sacrifices day after day, as did the high priests, first for their own sins and then for those of the people (Levitical priesthood: ineffective sacrifices); he did this once for all time, offering himself (7:27) (Jesus' priesthood: effective self-sacrifice).

Comparison #3, fleshly existence/ heavenly existence (7:28): For the law appoints men having weakness as priests, (foundation of Levitical weakness: sin, earthly existence); but the word of the oath, given after the law, appoints the Son, who has been made perfect forever (7:28) (Jesus' strength: without sin, heavenly existence).

Content

A verse-by-verse examination exposes some of the nuances of the text.

23. And the ones having become priests were many, but on account of death they were prevented from continuing in office.

“The ones have having become priests” are the Levitical priests. Death is a natural limitation to their individual priestly term of office. Their mortality implies their inferiority to Christ the high priest.²⁵ Verses 23 contrasts the impermanence of the each Levitical priest with the permanence of Christ the high priest in verse 24.²⁶

24. But because he remains forever, he maintains his priesthood permanently.

The parallel structure of this verse and the previous verse, underscores the contrast the author makes between the two priesthoods.²⁷ The adjective ἀπαράβατον has the sense of unchanging or not being handed over.²⁸ The infinitive verb, μένειν, to continue or remain, parallels the previous verse’s παραμένειν, to remain or continue in office. Unlike the other priests, Jesus remains forever and his priesthood is permanent.

25. Consequently, he is able to save for all time those drawing near to the Father through him, because he lives eternally to intercede for them.

This verse explains the consequences of Christ’s priesthood. There is a significant difference among the major translations for verse 7:25. The issue is whether to translate εἰς τὸ παντελῆς as “always,” “for all time” or “completely.” Is the sense of the verse that Christ, living forever, is always available to save those who approach him, or that he saves those approaching him completely? Does the verse have a temporal or modal sense?²⁹

The major translations render the verse as follows.

²⁵ Mitchell, 154.

²⁶ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 209. Attridge notes the formal balance between vss. 23 & 24: εἰσιν γεγονότες ἱερεῖς : διὰ τὸ . . . παραμένειν :: διὰ τὸ μένειν : ἀπαράβατον ἔχει τὴν ἱερωσύνην.

²⁷ Mitchell, 154.

²⁸ J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, eds., *Louw-Nida Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988). Accessed through Bibleworks.

²⁹ Mitchell, 154.

Therefore, he is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession for them (NAB).

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them (NIV).

Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them (NRSV).

Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them (RSV).

Regarding the key phrase “εἰς τὸ παντελές,” the NAB emphasizes the temporal sense, “always,” while the (NIV) the modal sense, “completely.” The NRSV and RSV capture the ambiguity in the original through “for all time.” Recent interpreters prefer to retain the ambiguity of the phrase, noting that both meanings make sense.³⁰ Therefore, Jesus saves “for all time,” -- that is both “always” and “completely.”

Jesus saves those who draw near to the Father through him. The participle προσερχομένους has cultic implications and can mean “come into the presence of the deity.”³¹ John Scholer notes that in the Septuagint, προσέρχεσθαι, “to draw near” means to draw near to God in worship, implying that the author of Hebrews argues that his listeners ought to draw near to God through prayer and worship.³² Therefore, implicit in this verse is the requirement that Jesus’ followers draw near to the Father in prayer and worship.

This verse also tells us that Jesus does exactly what priests are supposed to do for people -- intercede for them before the deity. Similar to Hebrews, St. Paul states that Jesus is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us (Rom 8:34). The verb ἐντρογγύνειν appears in both verses and

³⁰ Mitchell indicates that Attridge and others favor the ambiguity, 154.

³¹ Mitchell, 154.

³² John M. Scholer, *Proleptic Priests: Priesthood in the Epistle to Hebrews* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 107.

is usually translated as “to intercede” means literally “to turn to God on behalf of, to plead, to appeal.”³³ It is plausible that Paul’s letter to the Romans could have been a source for this aspect of the author’s Christology.³⁴ Jesus’ intercession is effective, not only because he was human, but because he is now “at the right hand of God,” and is eternal and transcendent himself.³⁵ The nature of Jesus’ intercession is not specified: it could be as expiation for sins or, more generally, to provide help in times of distress, or both. It is reasonable to conclude the author intended both meanings.³⁶

26. For it was fitting that we have such a high priest: holy, innocent, undefiled, set apart from sinners and higher than the heavens.

It was “fitting” or suitable that we have such a high priest as Jesus, because only he can accomplish what is necessary for our salvation: saving those who approach the Father through him “for all time” and “completely” (7:23).

As holy, innocent, and undefiled Jesus has the attributes desired for priests, but to a perfect degree. In this verse, “holy” means “devout or pious.”³⁷

“Undefiled” refers to ritual purity, carrying the implication of moral purity.³⁸ The Levitical priests tried to remain holy and undefiled so that they could work in the Temple. Because they could not be perfectly pure, they had to make sin offerings for themselves, before they could make offerings for the people. Chapter 21 of Leviticus offers prescriptions for maintaining priestly holiness.

³³ Barclay M. Newman, *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971). Accessed through Bibleworks.

³⁴ Mitchell, 154.

³⁵ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 211.

³⁶ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 212. In light of the community’s distress, Attridge argues the general intercessory point is what is intended in this verse. Given the proximity to verse 7:27, it is not convincing that the author only intended this meaning.

³⁷ Newman.

³⁸ Louw-Nida.

The placement of “set apart from sinners” poses difficulties for interpretation. On the one hand, Jesus is set apart from sinners because he is “holy, innocent and undefiled,” but on the other hand, because he is “higher than the heavens.” It is likely, the author intended both meanings: Jesus is set apart by virtue of his holiness and his exaltation.³⁹

Jesus’ exaltation also sets him apart from the Levitical priests in terms of his access to the Father. If Jesus is exalted higher than the heavens, he is with the Father. This verse foreshadows the contrast the author makes in Chapter 9 between the Levitical priests’ access to the Father and Christ’s access.

27. He does not have to offer sacrifices day after day, as did the high priests, first for their own sins and then for those of the people; he did this once for all time, offering himself.

The first phrase in verse 27 literally reads, “He did not have need daily to offer sacrifice, just as the high priests before. . .” The NRSV and the NIV in verse 27 read “Unlike the other high priests . . .” even though the Greek lacks “other.”⁴⁰ It is odd that these translations add the word “other,” because it suggests that Jesus is a Levitical priest. The NAB states, “He has no need, as did the high priests . . .” while the RSV states, “He has no need, as did those high priests . . .” Our translation follows the lead of the NAB, because it economically makes clear Jesus is not one of the earlier high priests.

The verse could be read to mean that Christ offered sacrifice for his own sins once, but since the text has elsewhere indicated that Jesus is without sin (4:15), it means that he offered the sacrifice for the sins of the people.⁴¹ This is the first time the text connects Christ’s self-sacrifice with the forgiveness of sins.⁴²

³⁹ Mitchell, 155.

⁴⁰ Attridge, textual note in *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, 2043.

⁴¹ Mitchell, 156.

⁴² Attridge, *Hebrews*, 214.

The author incorrectly suggests that the high priests make a double offering on a daily basis.⁴³ The high priests only made a double offering on the Day of Atonement. Nor did the priests make daily sin offerings, but rather offerings of cereal and grain. Thus, the author may have conflated the Day of Atonement with the daily sacrifices.⁴⁴ Despite this apparent mistake, the author’s point remains the same: the earlier priests offered ineffective sacrifices repeatedly.

The adverb ἐφάπαξ, “once for all,” describes both the temporal and modal sense of Jesus’ sacrifice, similar to εἰς τὸ παντελές in 7:25. The author repeats this word with its dual senses in 9:12 (“Christ enters the heavenly sanctuary once for all”) and in 10:10 (“we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all”). Paul uses this word in Romans 6:10 in a similar way saying “[Christ] died to sin once for all,” perhaps influencing the author of Hebrews. Jesus’ sacrifice accomplishes what the Levitical sacrifices could not: freedom from sin. The author is clear that his listeners should feel free from the consciousness or guilt of past sins. He notes that if the blood of goats and bulls could sanctify flesh, how much more should the blood of Christ “purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!” (9:14). By “dead works” the author does not mean works of law like Paul, but simply sinful acts or those acts that lead to sin.⁴⁵

The participle ἀνενέγκας means, literally, “offering up or bringing (to an altar)” as in a ritual context.⁴⁶ The image of Jesus as high priest offering himself for others is unique to Hebrews, although the concept that Jesus sacrificed himself for others is found throughout the

⁴³ Mitchell, 156.

⁴⁴ Mitchell, 156.

⁴⁵ Attridge, footnote in *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, 2041, FN#6.1.

⁴⁶ Timothy and Barbara Frieberg, *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (2000). Accessed through Bibleworks.

New Testament.⁴⁷ Hebrews' contribution is that it creates a new theological interpretation of Jesus utilizing the Jewish concept the high priest. As a result, the audience can understand that they may now approach the heavenly sanctuary with confidence, because Jesus has expiated their sins (10:19). He is the fitting high priest because his sacrifice takes away sins.⁴⁸

28. For the law appoints men having weakness as priests, but the word of the oath, given after the law, appoints the Son, who has been made perfect forever.

The author concludes this section with a verse that summarizes and underscores the difference between the two priesthods. The contrast is not simply about moral states, but also about states of existence. The Levitical priesthood exists only in this earthly realm, but Christ (and his priesthood) is eternal and exists with the Father in the heavenly realm.⁴⁹

The author again refers to the oath from Psalm 110:4, which he has partially quoted in verses 7:17 and 21.⁵⁰

The Lord has sworn an oath and will not change his mind, “you are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 110:4).

Psalm 110 is an oracle that attributes priestly authority to King David and assures victory over his enemies. If the author sees Jesus as a descendant of David, he does not make anything of it. Rather, the quote shows what manner of priest Jesus is. The author argues that the Lord's oath, which comes after the law, addresses the weakness of the former priesthood (and by extension the law), by appointing a better priest, Jesus.

Like Melchizedek, Jesus' priesthood endures forever. The weaknesses of the former priesthood are death (7:27) and sin (7:23). Jesus lives forever (7:24-25) and has been made

⁴⁷ Mitchell, 156.

⁴⁸ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 212.

⁴⁹ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 214-215.

⁵⁰ Attridge, footnote in *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, 2043, FN#7:21.

perfect (7:28).⁵¹ In what sense is Jesus made perfect? The participle τετελειωμένον elsewhere means “having been made perfect” in a moral sense.⁵² However, Scholer argues that in this instance “having been made perfect” means having entered into the heavenly sanctuary.⁵³ He notes that in verse 2:9-10, the author equates perfection with Jesus’ entry into glory, which he achieves through suffering. Therefore, perfection means attaining access to God’s sanctuary. Christ is “made perfect” by his obedient death and then enters the heavenly sanctuary (7:28). Thus, the Levitical priesthood suffers sin, death and separation from the Father, while Jesus is sinless, overcomes death and is with the Father in heaven. His priesthood is perfect because it results in his abiding in the presence of the Father.

The author explains the mechanics of Jesus’ priesthood in the next three chapters through an elaborate comparison to the Day of Atonement. In chapter 8, he reiterates that Jesus is “seated at the right hand of the throne of majesty” (8:1), making his sacrifice in the true heavenly sanctuary (8:5); therefore, he is mediator of a “better covenant” (8:6). In chapter 9, he portrays Jesus as enacting the Day of Atonement ritual with his own blood. With so worthy a sacrifice, the consciences of Christians are purified “from dead works to worship the living God” (9:14). In chapter 10, he explains Christ’s sacrifice was made once for all (10:14), therefore, they can approach God with a clean conscience and full assurance of faith (10:22). In his final three chapters, the author argues that the community should persevere in faith (Ch. 11), with the model of Jesus (Ch.12) performing service that is pleasing to God (Ch. 13).

Theological Message of 7:23-28

Unlike the Levitical high priests, the high priesthood of Jesus relieves the guilt of sin. The Levitical priests were susceptible to the human weaknesses of sin and death. Jesus is

⁵¹ Mitchell, 157.

⁵² Louw-Nida.

⁵³ Scholer, 197.

without sin and has overcome death. Therefore, he can intercede for those who approach God through him, for all time, in a completely effective manner. Through his suffering, he has been “perfected,” entering the heavenly presence of his Father.

Sanctified by Christ, the faithful can approach the Lord, primarily through their lives of worship and prayer. We conclude that the faithful draw close to Christ primarily through prayer and worship through the cultic overtones of προσέρχασθαι, “to draw near.”⁵⁴ This “drawing near” is not yet the final end, “rest,” (4:1), because they are suffering in their present circumstances, while they await Christ’s coming.⁵⁵ Therefore, they should persevere in present difficulties, following the model of Christ who obediently accepted suffering on the cross.

These verses highlight the centrality of the paschal mystery, Christ’s death and resurrection (or exaltation, in the language of Hebrews) for the Christian. Christ’s sacrificial death wiped away our sin and resulted in “his having been made perfect” (7:28). If Christ is a model for Christians, then Christians must also live out the paschal mystery, accepting it as the narrative for their lives as well as Christ’s. Indeed, the author of Hebrews thinks along these lines. In his exhortation to perseverance (Ch 11-12), he encourages his hearers to “run the race . . . looking to Jesus” who died for their sake and has taken his seat the right hand of God (12:2). The Christian perseveres knowing Christ suffered before him or her and that present suffering is not the end of the story.

⁵⁴ Scholer, 107.

⁵⁵ Scholer, 200.

III. What Does Hebrews Say to Priests Today?

Commentators are often hard pressed to determine what this sermon might say about the ministerial priesthood, because it mentions neither Christian priests, nor the Eucharist.⁵⁶ Furthermore, it invites all Christians to enter the holy sanctuary (10:21), suggesting that no human priestly mediation is needed. Luckily for us, the purpose of this chapter is not to establish an historical ground for priestly ministry, but rather to consider a source for spiritual “interior renewal” for priests. This chapter takes the legitimacy of the Roman Catholic priesthood as a given and brings the message of Hebrews into dialogue with it. As a source of renewal, this sermon suggests that the cultic role of the Catholic priest helps the faithful live out of the paschal mystery. Although the sermon primarily emphasizes the cultic dimension of priesthood, it suggests attributes for which a priest might pray.

The Cultic Role of the Priest

Hebrews gives us the image of Christ the high priest, who sacrifices himself for his followers. The priest recalls this sacrifice through presiding at the Eucharist. Moreover, for Catholics, the Eucharist responds to the concerns Hebrews raises and the remedy it purposes. Our context has some parallels to that of Hebrews. The time is still the last age, inaugurated by Christ’s death and resurrection (1:2), and Christ is expected to come again (9:28). We are certainly concerned that some are drifting away (2:1) and might not enter the Lord’s rest (4:1). The author’s response focuses on the effectiveness of Christ’s sacrifice, the paschal mystery (7:23-28). Specifically, he points to the eternal nature of Christ’s intercession (7:24, 27-28). In light of this sacrifice, he recommends that his audience approach the throne of grace with

⁵⁶ Mitchell, 25. The scholarly consensus is that Hebrews is not specifically concerned with Eucharist. See Ronald Williamson, “Eucharist and the Epistle to Hebrews,” *New Testament Studies* 21, no.2 (January 1975), 300-12. For an opposing view, see James Swetnam, “Christology and Eucharist in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *Biblica* 70 no. 1 (1989), 74-95.

confidence (10:22). Through its cultic dimension, the Catholic priest implements the author's response "to approach the throne of grace." The priest leads the people in the celebration of the paschal mystery, the Eucharist, which enables us to draw near to the throne of Christ. Moreover, Catholics remember and relive Christ's suffering, death and resurrection (12:2) through the Eucharist. The author of Hebrews has encouraged his readers to remember the sacrifice of Christ and its effects, and to draw near to the throne of grace. Catholics do all these things in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Admittedly, the author of Hebrews does not make the connection between Christ's sacrifice and the Eucharist.⁵⁷ Furthermore, Dunnill rejects the view that Hebrews implies that Christians need to approach God through liturgy, noting that "being in the presence of God is not what Christians do, but what they are."⁵⁸ He also contends that to approach God through the Eucharist is to revert to the "shadows and copies" of the Levitical priesthood. While we agree that Hebrews suggests that Christians are in the presence of God, we draw the opposite conclusion regarding liturgy. The reality of being human is that one forgets one is in the presence of God and so has to remind oneself of this truth through liturgy. The effect of liturgy is to make explicit what ordinarily remains implicit.

Moreover, Dunnill mistakenly assumes that the Eucharist is a repeat of Christ's sacrifice.⁵⁹ If it were, it would be a "shadow and copy" of Christ's true sacrifice. In the eyes of the Church, however, the sacrifice of Christ and the Eucharistic sacrifice are one sacrifice.⁶⁰ Moreover, the liturgy of the Eucharist employs a similar sense of liturgical time and space found in Hebrews. The anamnesis recalls Jesus' passion, death, resurrection and return to the Father in

⁵⁷ As noted already, for an opposing view, see James Swetnam.

⁵⁸ Dunnill, 241.

⁵⁹ Dunnill, 241, 259

⁶⁰ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1994), #1367. Accessed November 15, 2010 at: <http://www.usccb.org/catechism/index.shtml>.

history.⁶¹ At the same time, the liturgy also looks to the future by asking for a share in the fellowship of the apostles, martyrs and saints. Similarly, the Eucharist bridges the spatial gap between earth and heaven. In the first Eucharist prayer, the celebrant begs the Lord that the angel may take “this sacrifice to your altar in heaven.”⁶² By participating in the Eucharist, Catholics make central in their lives what the author of Hebrews makes central in his letter: the paschal mystery. The priest is the community’s designated presider who leads this Eucharistic celebration. It is his responsibility that the liturgy effects what it signifies.

Nonetheless, the Eucharist is not the only way Catholics “draw near” to the throne of grace and it does not take the place of acting morally in the world. Indeed, Catholics live as the body of Christ in the world, doing such things as caring for the poor.⁶³ Dunnill himself acknowledges that the new covenant is a “gift system”; for Catholics the return gift for Christ’s gift of himself is being Christ in the world.⁶⁴ The Eucharist does not confine religious practice to Sunday liturgy, but sends it out into the world.

Attributes of the Priest

Referencing Hebrews, the Second Vatican Council describes priests as consecrated “in the image of Christ the eternal high priest.”⁶⁵ It makes sense to consider what these attributes are and how a Catholic priest might appropriate them.

First, the sermon tells us that Christ the high priest was close to and, in fact, like God. He is the “reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being” (1:3). Clearly, a human priest cannot be such a reflection or imprint. Priests, however, should aspire to be close

⁶¹ Catholic Church, *Catechism*, #1354.

⁶² Catholic Church, *The Sacramentary*, trans. International Commission on English in the Liturgy (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1974), 546.

⁶³ Catholic Church, *Catechism*, #1357.

⁶⁴ Dunnill, 244.

⁶⁵ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, #28, citing Heb. 5:1-10, 7:24, 9:11-28.

to the Father just as Jesus was. The Christian tradition suggests that one becomes close to God through prayer, asceticism and service to others. Perhaps most fundamentally, priests should be devoted to God by being imitators of Christ, who was the imprint of God's being.

Second, the sermon tells us that Jesus was "made lower than the angels" (2:9). In other words, Jesus entered into solidarity with human beings, accepting their conditions, and even their worst suffering. He was "in every way tested as we are, yet without sin" (4:14). Jesus suffered mental agony as he awaited death, just as any human being would.⁶⁶ Likewise, this means that priests have to be in solidarity with those to whom they minister.

On a basic level, solidarity requires that priests should embrace the living conditions of their congregation. In the interests of solidarity, the 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus indicated that Jesuits should have a lifestyle comparable to a family of modest means in their region.⁶⁷ Sometimes solidarity requires that priests live under dangerous conditions. For example, the priests, other religious and lay people, who work for the Jesuit Refugee Service, live near the refugee camps of the people they serve. These locations lack security to varying degrees. Priests may also be in solidarity with the people they serve by speaking out on the injustices their people face. Archbishop Romero and the Jesuit martyrs of El Salvador were examples of this solidarity. On a more mundane level, priests also exercise solidarity by being with the members of their flock in sad moments, such as the death of a family member.

Third, Jesus was a model of prayer. Before he died, he "offered prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears" (5:7) to the one who could save him from death. Therefore, priests should be men of prayer. The Church legislates prayer by requiring that priests pray the Divine Office. Whatever way priests pray, the point is that they should pray.

⁶⁶ Vanhoye, 25.

⁶⁷ General Congregation 34 of the Society of Jesus, "Decree 9: Poverty," #12. In *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. John W. Padberg (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2009), 591.

Fourth, Jesus was obedient to the will of the Father, specifically, “he learned obedience from what he suffered” (5:8). Priests should be obedient to the will of the Father despite the difficulty involved. This obedience presupposes that priests can be men of discernment who try to know what the will of the Father is for them and then have the detachment to follow this will. If God calls one to be a scholar, one must accept long years of study and writing. If God calls one to be a missionary, one must tolerate cultural differences and physical hardships. If God calls one to parish ministry, one must accept that one’s time is not one’s own. A priest is also beholden to the will of his superior to whom he promises obedience at ordination.⁶⁸

Fifth, the office of the priest is permanent, because Christ’s priesthood is eternal. While Catholic priests suffer human mortality just as their Levitical forbearers, they are nevertheless called to persevere in their priestly ministry until death. This means that the call to priesthood is permanent and that a priest never stops ministering. Practically, this means that priests continue their priestly work until they are no longer able to do so. Some diocesan priests in Boston are still working in parishes at close to eighty years of age. When priests are not longer able to engage in active ministry, they pray for the Church, as do the Jesuits in our retirement centers.

Sixth, Jesus was “holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens” (7:26). These qualities suggest that priests must be holy. “Holiness” is word that means set apart for service to God. Certainly, priests must be holy in this sense. The focus of their lives must be God’s work, rather broadly defined. Holiness also has popular connotations of sinlessness and sexual purity. Catholic priests should embody these kinds of holiness as well. Holiness conveys a single-minded devotion. In his letter proclaiming the year of the priest, Pope Benedict XVI recommends that all priests embrace the evangelical counsels as a way to

⁶⁸ Catholic Church, *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, vol. 2, rev. ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 54, #12.

“perfection,” i.e. a path to holiness.⁶⁹ The evangelical counsels are the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Diocesan priests do not pronounce these vows like religious do; nevertheless, the Pope recommends they live them in a way suited to their own priestly state. Each of the counsels has as its purpose allowing the persons to devote themselves completely to the service of the Lord.

Finally, Christ “offered himself” for the sins of the people (7:27). In other words, Christ sacrificed himself totally in an act of self-giving love, so that others might approach God. Called to be images of Christ the high priest, Catholic priests are called to make their lives an offering of self-giving love that helps bring people to God. Their work certainly includes sacramental ministry, but also other works in which priests typically engage: teaching, preaching, visiting the sick, advocacy, school administration, etc. Each of these tasks becomes priestly when it is self-giving and brings people to God. This last characteristic points to the servant leader dimension of priesthood, which the Gospel of John develops more prominently.

Conclusion

The Letter to the Hebrews depicts Christ as the high priest whose self-sacrifice takes away the guilt of our sins. This priestly image points toward the cultic dimension of priesthood, and suggests that Catholic priests have a central role in helping the community engage in the paschal mystery through presiding at the Eucharist. As we will see, the dynamic of the paschal mystery is essential to the servant and apostolic dimensions of priesthood, as well. The message for priests is an encouraging one: although the cultic aspect of priesthood may strike some as something from a bygone era, the truth is that this ministry allows Catholics to appropriate and participate in Christ’s sacrifice. Thus, priestly ministry is critically relevant even in the 21st century.

⁶⁹ Benedict XVI, “Year for Priests.”

The character of Christ the high priest suggests many graces for which contemporary priests might pray. Priests need the grace to be close to God. This implies a certain detachment and ascetical lifestyle. They need to pray for the grace of solidarity with the people to whom they minister. This means they need to share the sufferings of the people. They need to be men of prayer. They need obedience, not just to their legitimate superiors, but to the Father's call to them. They need perseverance to maintain the public commitment which was made before the whole Church. Priests need to be holy. At the most basic level, priests should avoid sin like every other Christian. Finally, priests need to make their lives a self-offering for others in the service of the Gospel. This last grace provides an appropriate segue-way to the servant leader dimension of priesthood.

Chapter 2: The Johannine Jesus: Priest and Good Shepherd

Chapter two focuses on the ministry of Jesus as priest and “good shepherd” as found in the Gospel of John. Regarding priestly imagery, Jesus consecrates himself so that his disciples may be consecrated for mission. His action points to the priesthood of all believers and suggests that the ordained priesthood supports and ministers to the common priesthood as it witnesses to the love of God for the world. As the good shepherd, Jesus lays down his life for his sheep (Jn 10:13). In his ministry as the good shepherd, he models self-sacrificial love, revealing the Father’s love and bringing into being a community that itself models the Father’s love. Through the image of the good shepherd, who lays down his life for his sheep, Jesus demonstrates the servant leader dimension of priesthood. Just like the cultic dimension, the servant leader dimension reflects the dynamic of the paschal mystery, the dying and rising of Christ.

This chapter has three sections. The first begins with an exegesis of John 17:17-19, three key verses in what commentators call Jesus’ “high priestly prayer.” This prayer reveals that Jesus offers himself as a sacrifice for his disciples in the manner of a priest, similar to Hebrews’ portrayal as Christ the high priest. This section follows this priestly thread and examines Jesus as the Lamb of God and his relationship with the Temple. The second examines Jesus’ ministry as good shepherd – in other words, how he exercises his priesthood. To understand Jesus’ ministry as the good shepherd, it considers how Jesus serves as the revelation of the Father, the bread of life and a model of humble service. In Jesus’ work as the good shepherd, we see the dynamic of the paschal mystery. The third section reflects on the implications of Jesus’ priesthood and good shepherd ministry for the Catholic priesthood.

I. Jesus' Priestly Sacrifice

The Gospel of John does not name its author, but cites as its source an unnamed witness (21:24).⁷⁰ Given the lack of solid data, most contemporary scholars do not venture to name an author. Second century tradition maintains the Gospel was written in Ephesus, a city near the Aegean Sea in present-day Turkey. The most likely date of composition is in the 90s C.E. The Gospel portrays Jesus in frequent conflict with “the Jews,” a term that in this context refers to those in charge of the synagogues. John’s portrayal reflects the tensions between the Johannine community and the synagogue officials during the time the Gospel was written. Considered in its proper historical context, the Gospel does not provide grounds for anti-Semitism.

Jesus never calls himself a “priest” in John’s Gospel. Rather, he states that he consecrates himself so that his followers may also be consecrated to the truth (17:19). Following Raymond Brown, we see the priestly overtones of this verse.⁷¹ By associating Jesus with the Lamb of God, the Gospel writer depicts Jesus’ death in sacrificial terms. Moreover, he sees Jesus as replacing the Temple, suggesting he is the new locus for access to the Father. To examine these issues, this paper begins with an exegesis of John 17:17-19, three key verses in Jesus’ “high priestly” prayer.

Exegesis of John 17:17-19

In John’s version of the Last Supper, Jesus makes a series of speeches to his disciples known as the “farewell discourses” or, taken together, the “last discourse” (13:31-16:33).⁷² These speeches have no parallels in the synoptic Gospels. They fit the form of “last words” or

⁷⁰For this paragraph, I rely on D. Moody Smith, *John*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries, gen. ed. Victor Paul Furnish (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 26-27, 36, 40-43.

⁷¹ Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, The Anchor Bible Series, gen. eds. William Foxwell Albright, David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 766-767.

⁷² Brown refers to them together as the last discourse, 581; Smith as the farewell discourses, 262.

“testament” that a leader in the ancient world would deliver before his death. At the end of the final discourse, Jesus prays for himself and his disciples, a prayer traditionally known as Jesus’ “high priestly” prayer, probably because it mentions consecration (17:1-26). Although some recent scholars separate the prayer from the speeches which precede it, Brown includes it as part of the “last discourse” noting that ancient farewell speeches often closed with a prayer.⁷³ The prayer has three sections in which Jesus prays for different intentions: first, for himself, that he may be glorified so all people may recognize his glory and have eternal life (17:1-8); second, for his disciples, that they may be protected from the evil one and sanctified (17:9-19); third, for those who come to believe through his disciples, that they may be one with him and the Father (17:20-26).⁷⁴

In verses 9-16 of the second section of the prayer, Jesus prays for his disciples who will continue his work after he returns to the Father. Just as the world has hated him, it hates them because they follow him (17:14). Jesus does not ask that the Father take them out of the world, but he asks that He protect them from the evil one (17:15). Like him, his disciples do not belong to the world (17:16).

In verses 17 to 19, Jesus prays that the Father consecrate his disciples to continue his mission. Although the Gospel writer does not refer to Jesus as a priest, ἱερεύς, or high priest, ἀρχιερεύς, Jesus casts himself in a priestly role through his consecration of himself for the sake of his disciples. Each of these three verses has a two-clause structure in which a word is repeated and developed. Verses 17 and 19 repeat forms of the words “truth” and “consecrate” creating something like an *inclusio*. Truth appears twice in verse 17, once in verse 19; in an

⁷³ Brown, xiii. Recent scholars not including the prayer as part of the farewell discourse are David K. Rensberger, footnote to the Gospel of John, *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1840, FN#13.1-17.26 and Smith, 9.

⁷⁴ Brown, 749.

inverse parallel, consecrate appears once in verse 17 and twice in verse 19. The following schema shows the repetition and wordplay of the three verses using boldface, italics and underlining.

Consecrate them in the **truth**;

your word is **truth** (v.17).

As you *sent* me into the world,

so I *sent* them into the world (v.18).

And I *consecrate* myself for them,

so that they also may be *consecrated* in **truth** (v.19).

A verse-by-verse analysis explains that Jesus' self-consecration refers to the sacrificial offering of himself, an offering to sanctify his disciples who will continue his work.⁷⁵

17. Consecrate them in the truth; your word is truth.⁷⁶

The word translated above as “consecrated” is the imperative form of ἀγιάζω, ἀγιάσον, meaning to “set apart as sacred to God; make holy, consecrate; regard as sacred; purify, cleanse.”⁷⁷ The New American Bible (NAB) and Brown translate this word as “consecrate,” while the New International Version (NIV), the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) and the Revised Standard Version (RSV) all translate the word as “sanctify.” Our translation follows the NAB and Brown and translates ἀγιάσον as “consecrate” because it best captures the sense of

⁷⁵ For this section, I rely primarily on Brown, 761, 765-767.

⁷⁶ My translations.

⁷⁷ Newman, *Greek-English Dictionary*.

being set aside for God. The next verse makes clear that Jesus sets apart his disciples for mission: they are sent, just like he has been sent (17:18). Furthermore, “consecrate” captures better the priestly allusions of ἀγιάζω. The Septuagint uses forms of ἀγιάζω, which the major translations translate as “consecrate,” to describe the anointing of Aaron and his sons as priests (Ex 30:30). Similarly, a bishop says the “prayer of consecration” over the *ordinand* during ordination, setting the man aside for priestly service.⁷⁸ Analogously, the ancient Jews consecrated their first born sons to the Lord (Ex 13:2; Lev 22:2), offering sacrifices in the Temple in place of their child, as Mary and Joseph did for Jesus (Lk 2:24).

The “them” that Jesus consecrates refers to all his disciples, present and future. The text does not indicate how many disciples are at the Last Supper scene wherein Jesus says this prayer. They need not all be there. It is clear that the “them” refers to all his current disciples, because he prays for those the Father gave him (17:9) and future disciples, because later he prays for those who will believe in him through his disciples’ words (17:20).

Jesus desires that the disciples be consecrated ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, “in the truth.” The preposition ἐν means both “by” and “for.” Brown, the NAB, the NRSV and RSV translate the phrase “in the truth,” while the NIV translates it, “by the truth.” We translate the phrase “in the truth,” bearing in mind that the phrase indicates both agency and the realm of consecration. Although Jesus himself is the truth (14:6), he tells his disciples that he will send the “Spirit of truth” who “will guide” them into all truth (16:7, 13). Therefore, Jesus’ request that the Father consecrate the disciples “in the truth,” is a request that the Holy Spirit come upon his disciples and that they may dwell in the realm of the Holy Spirit.

⁷⁸ Catholic Church, *Rites*, 44, #21.

18. As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world.

As mentioned above, this verse makes clear that Jesus consecrates the disciples for mission. They are set apart for service, to continue Jesus' mission of manifesting the Father's love for the world. The parallel structure of the verse means that they receive from Jesus the same kind of mission that he received from the Father. He missions them into a hostile world where they will encounter opposition. The verse points to the coming of the era of the Church.

19. And I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth.

Earlier Jesus indicated that the Father consecrated him (10:36), but now Jesus consecrates himself. The major translations differ again as to how they translate the forms of ἀγιάζω. In this verse, the RSV joins the NAB and Brown in translating ἀγιάζω as “consecrate,” perhaps attempting to capture the sacrificial and priestly overtones prominent in this verse. These sacrificial overtones are apparent when one realizes that Jesus' death is the event that brings about the coming of the Holy Spirit (20:21-22). As mentioned already, Jesus tells his disciples that it is good that he go away so that he can send them the “Spirit of truth” who “will guide” them into all truth (16:7, 13). Brown notes that one also finds the association between Spirit, truth and sanctification elsewhere in the New Testament as in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, “God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth.”⁷⁹ Therefore, these associations should not strike one as so strange in John.

The phrase, “for them,” ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν, may suggest death, because throughout this Gospel, the author uses ὑπὲρ to indicate for whom Jesus will die. For example, he will die for the nation (11:51); he lays down his life for his sheep (10:11); he lays down his life for those he loves

⁷⁹ Brown, 766.

(15:13).⁸⁰ Therefore, Jesus portrays himself, albeit obliquely, as a priest who consecrates himself as a sacrifice for his disciples, similar to Hebrews' depiction of him. As chapter one explained, Hebrews describes Jesus as a fitting high priest (Heb 7:26), who offered himself once for all (Heb 7:27).

The second "consecration" in the verse refers to the setting aside of the disciples for mission. Jesus does not set them aside as sacrificial offerings; they will not necessarily offer their lives on the cross. Nevertheless, their discipleship may entail a personal cost. Their consecration suggests the idea of the priesthood of all believers or the "common priesthood," distinct from the ordained or ministerial priesthood. The Second Vatican Council stated that all the baptized are "consecrated as a spiritual house and holy people."⁸¹ Both the common and ordained priesthood participate in the one priesthood of Christ, each in its own way. John's Gospel suggests that Jesus entrusts his mission of evangelization and demonstration of the Father's love to all his disciples, who are one priestly people.

Theological Meaning of John 17:17-19

These verses connect Jesus' consecration and sacrifice of himself with the consecration of his disciples for mission. Through the priestly and sacrificial allusions of the word *ἀγιάζω*, the author suggests that Jesus is a priest who offers himself as a sacrifice for his disciples. The verses imply a role for the Holy Spirit, both as the agent of consecration and the new realm in which the disciples will dwell. Yet Jesus' passion, death and resurrection must occur before his disciples receive the Holy Spirit. Jesus has to "consecrate himself" for his disciples, so they can

⁸⁰ Brown, 766-767.

⁸¹ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, #10.

dwell “in truth,” which is the life of the Spirit. Jesus’ disciples become a priestly people dedicated to evangelizing the world and carrying out his mission.

Jesus concludes his high priestly prayer by praying that those who come to believe in him through the “word” of his disciples (17:20). He affirms that he “has made” the Father’s name known and “will make it known” so that the love with which the Father has loved him may be in them – those who will come to believe in him in the future (17:26). His indication that he will make the Father’s name known may be a specific reference to his death on the cross, which will be a sign of the Father’s love.

In order to understand fully what the Gospel writer may be saying about Jesus’ priesthood and its sacrificial nature, it is necessary to examine the related topics of Jesus as the Lamb of God and his relationship with the Temple.

The Lamb of God

Our interpretation of John 17:17-19 suggests that Jesus makes himself a sin offering to reconcile his disciples to the Father and bring about the coming of the Holy Spirit. Brown endorses this interpretation citing the First letter of John, which states that the “blood of Jesus, his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).⁸² However, Craig Koester rejects this view based on his interpretation of John’s association of Jesus with the Passover lamb. John designates Jesus as “the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (1:29) and has the crucifixion happen on the day of preparation when the Passover lambs are slaughtered (19:14). Furthermore, the Romans did not break Jesus’ legs which accorded with the scriptural

⁸² Brown, 896.

proscription against breaking the bones of the Passover lamb (19:36).⁸³ The Passover lamb was not strictly speaking a sacrifice or sin offering, but rather recalled the Israelites' deliverance from slavery in Egypt (See Ex. 12).⁸⁴ Thus, the association with the paschal lamb argues against a sacrificial interpretation in Koester's view.

Instead, he argues that the Lamb of God "takes away" the sin of the world by fostering belief. In John's Gospel, disbelief is the sin that keeps people from God. He notes, "The Lamb of God removes sin, by removing disbelief" – in other words, the Lamb of God takes away sin by evoking faith through dying on the cross.⁸⁵ In his view, John spells out this dynamic in John 3:16: God demonstrates God's love for the world through the proxy of his Son. Koester does not think that the crucifixion has merely a "moral influence," because such an interpretation presupposes a relationship between God and human beings that does not exist in John's Gospel. Rather, he argues that Jesus' death is an invitation to a relationship with God; it is kerygmatic.⁸⁶

In our view, eliminating the sacrificial dimension of the crucifixion on the grounds that the Passover lamb was not a sin offering is a mistake. Although the Passover lamb was not strictly speaking a sacrificial offering, the sacrificial overtones in John's Gospel are unmistakable, even if John's use of metaphor is not so neat and tidy. By calling "Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away sins of the world" (1:29), John links the Passover imagery with that of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53, who is likened to a lamb that is led to the slaughter (Is 53:7). If the Lamb of God is not strictly speaking a sin offering, the suffering servant is precisely a sin offering: "When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring and shall prolong

⁸³ Rensberger notes the Scripture may be a combination of Ps 34:20 with Ex 12:46 and Num 9:12, 1851, FN# 19:36.

⁸⁴ Rensberger, 1817, FN# 1:29.

⁸⁵ Craig Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 114.

⁸⁶ Koester, 116.

his days” (Is 53:10). Furthermore, the people no longer killed the Passover lambs in their homes in Jesus’ time; rather the priests slaughtered them in the Temple, thus strengthening the sacrificial and cultic overtones of John’s metaphor. Years earlier, Paul used the “paschal lamb” imagery in the same way John does, calling Christ the “paschal lamb” who was “sacrificed” (1 Cor 5:7) and a “sacrifice of atonement” (Rom 3:25).⁸⁷ It is not strange that John would interpret Jesus’ death in a similar way.

Jesus and the Temple

John portrays Jesus’ spirit-filled community as the legitimate place to encounter the Father in the wake of the destruction of the Temple.⁸⁸ By the time this Gospel was probably written in the 90s C.E., the Temple had been gone for twenty years or more. In the wake of this loss, the Jewish people were still figuring out how to live as Jews. The synagogues, which were already in existence prior to the Temple’s destruction, now became the centers of Jewish religious life and worship. The polemics between Jesus and “the Jews” in John’s Gospel reflect the conflict between the leaders of the synagogues and Jesus’ later disciples. Indeed, the text suggests that Jesus’ followers are being cast out of the synagogues (9:22). Jesus’ death led to the coming of the Spirit, so that his disciples worship the Father in spirit and truth, beyond the walls of the Temple (4:23). The old priesthood, swept away with the destruction of the Temple, is obsolete as one can now worship the Father through Jesus, within his spirit-filled community.

Each Gospel recounts Jesus’ cleansing of the Temple (Mt 21:12-22; Mk 11:15-18; Lk 19:45-46; Jn 2:13-23). Jesus’ basic actions in each are the same: he drives out the merchants and the money changers (2:15). Unlike the synoptic accounts, John places the cleansing of the

⁸⁷ Smith, 250.

⁸⁸ For this section, I rely on D. Moody Smith, 88-91.

Temple at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, setting up the conflict with the Jewish authorities. The incident makes theological sense following the miracle at Cana because the wedding feast symbolized new life and Jesus' appearance at the Temple marks something new: Jesus is the new site of God's revelation.

The Prologue hints that Jesus will replace the Temple: "And the word of God became flesh and lived among us" (1:14). The word translated as "lived" is ἐσκήνωσεν from σκηνώω, which means literally to "live or camp in a tent."⁸⁹ The noun form of the word, "σκήνος," means tabernacle or tent, the word used for the Lord's dwelling in the wilderness (Ex 27:21).⁹⁰ Jesus' demand that the merchants stop making his Father's house a marketplace is a reference to Zechariah 14:21, which describes the day of the Lord, suggesting that it has arrived in Jesus.⁹¹ Furthermore, in Zechariah 14:20 the Lord now makes everything holy through his presence, obviating the need for priestly mediation. Therefore, Jesus makes unnecessary what happens in the Temple, because the sanctification of the people now occurs through him.

It is only from their post-resurrection perspective that the disciples understand Jesus' action in the Temple. Looking back on the event, they "remembered" Psalm 69:9 and understood it as referring to Jesus: "Zeal for your house will consume me" (2:17). It indicated that, even then, Jesus was in the presence of his opponents. When asked by the Jews for a sign legitimating his action, Jesus says, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (2:19). After the resurrection, the disciples remembered that he had said this and was talking about the temple of his body (2:22). While pointing to the resurrection, his response again suggests that he takes the place of the Temple as the locus of the revelation of God.

⁸⁹ Frieberg.

⁹⁰ Smith, 58.

⁹¹ Rensberger, 1819, FN# 2.16.

In his encounter with the Samaritan woman, Jesus for a third time implies that he will replace the Temple (4:19-24). She assumes that Jesus, as a Jew, thinks that Samaritans, like Jews, should worship God in Jerusalem, rather than Mount Gerizim, where they had their own temple (4:20). Jesus makes no such case, however. Rather, he tells her that “the hour is coming and is now here when worshippers will worship God in spirit and truth” (4:23). Jesus means that worshippers will access God through the Holy Spirit, which will come to his followers after his death (16:7). His followers will not worship in the Temple, but will worship wherever they desire to gather. Therefore, Jesus’ death and resurrection takes away the traditional Jewish priesthood and makes God accessible to all people. His sacrifice of himself is the sacrifice that ends all sacrifice. God’s presence is not restricted to the Temple, but will be wherever his Spirit-filled community gathers.

Preliminary Implications

Jesus’ high priestly prayer, his role as the Lamb of God, and his relationship with the Temple indicate that he makes possible a new way of relating to the Father. Unlike Hebrews, John does not refer to Jesus as a priest; nevertheless, there are priestly overtones to his words and the dynamic of his actions are similar. Jesus’ crucifixion and death makes a relationship with the Father possible. With the Temple destroyed before this Gospel was written, John interprets Jesus’ sacrifice as eliminating the need for Temple worship and providing a new locus for encountering the Father. Jesus’ followers are the legitimate heirs to Jewish tradition.

Jesus’ consecration of his followers points toward the common priesthood of all believers. He consecrates his followers so that they might be sent. The entire community shares in his ministry. The Second Vatican Council acknowledged a “common priesthood” of all the

baptized, itself called to holiness, and distinct from the ordained priesthood.⁹² The notion of the “common priesthood” suggests that the ordained priesthood serves the common priesthood as it strives for holiness. Indeed, the Second Vatican Council notes that priests are called to serve the people of God.⁹³ This paper assumes that the ordained priesthood is a spirit-filled development in the Church. Therefore, it does not agree that the end of Temple sacrifices means an end to all priestly mediation. Seeking inspiration for how the ordained priesthood should serve the common priesthood, this chapter now examines how Jesus ministers to his disciples as the good shepherd.

II. Jesus the Good Shepherd

An image commonly used for those who lead, guide and serve Christian communities is that of a shepherd. Some Protestant denominations call their leaders “pastors,” a word derived from the Latin *pastor* or herdsman, something like a shepherd.⁹⁴ In the Roman Catholic Church, the priest in charge of a parish is also called a pastor, referring to that priest’s role as shepherd, leader and protector of the community. Pope John Paul II entitled his post-synodal exhortation on the formation of priests, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, “I will give you shepherds.” The title quotes Jeremiah 3:15, drawing attention to the passage wherein God explains that he will never leave his people without shepherds to lead and guide them. In John’s Gospel, Jesus calls himself “the good shepherd” (10:11), indicating that he does the Father’s work as a shepherd. Yet he is a shepherd in a distinctive way: he lays down his life for his sheep (10:1-21). Thus, the image of the good shepherd represents through another analogy the same dynamic as the high priesthood of Christ in Hebrews does: dying for others, so that they may live.

⁹² Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, #10.

⁹³ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, #28.

⁹⁴ Meriam-Webster Online Dictionary. Accessed October 31, 2010 at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pastor>

This chapter first considers Jesus' good shepherd discourse and then examines how Jesus lived this good shepherd ministry by revealing word of the Father, acting as the bread of life and modeling humble service.

The Good Shepherd

Jesus describes himself to an audience of disciples, onlookers and Pharisees, as “the good shepherd” who “lays down his life for his sheep” (10:11). He has just healed a blind man, a sign that attracts the attention of the Pharisees, who do not acknowledge who he is (9:29). Jesus' onlookers would have certainly picked up the allusions from Hebrew Scriptures that the shepherd image evokes. King David was a shepherd who as a boy rescued his father's sheep from the jaws of lions and bears (1 Sam 17:34-35). The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Jer 3:1-6; Ezek 34:1-16, 23-24) portray God as the good shepherd and Israel's leaders as bad shepherds; so the metaphor associates Jesus with the work of God and casts his adversaries, the Pharisees, synagogue leaders and the Temple officials, in an unflattering light.⁹⁵ No doubt his hearers recalled Psalm 23, wherein the psalmist portrays the Lord as a shepherd who leads the psalmist to “still waters” which restore his soul (Ps 23:2-3) and by whose side he fears no evil (Ps 23:4).

Next, he contrasts himself with the “hired hand” that runs away when the wolf comes, because he does not care for the sheep (10:12-13). He indicates that he knows his own sheep and they know him, just as the Father knows him and he knows the Father (10:14-15). Alluding to the Gentiles, Jesus states he has other sheep not of this fold that he must also bring, so that they will form one “one flock and one shepherd” (10:16). Jesus brings his people into unity with him

⁹⁵ Smith, 205; Rensberger, 1834, FN# 10:11-13.

and through him to the Father: he will later pray that his disciples may be one “as we are one, I in them and you in me” (17:22-23).

Finally, he has the power from his Father “to lay [his life] down” and “take it up again” (10:18). Jesus is in control of his own fate. By stating he lays down his life for his sheep, he foretells his death for his disciples. The verse points towards the paschal mystery and is consistent with the notion of Jesus as a priest who makes a sacrifice of himself. In laying down his life for his sheep, Jesus provides a model of Christian discipleship, which each Christian lives in an analogous way, appropriate to his or her own call.

In one of the post-resurrection appearances, Jesus tells Peter to “feed my sheep” thus employing shepherd imagery for the ongoing leadership of the Christian community (21:17).⁹⁶ Yet notice that Jesus’ command is to “feed his sheep.” Thus, this leadership is one of support and care. Moreover, verses 21:18-19 indicate that like Jesus, Peter also will be killed on behalf of the Gospel, thus making complete his imitation of Christ the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. Yet in order to understand how Peter and his descendants might “feed” Christ’s sheep, we consider how Jesus lived his role as shepherd: as the revealer of God and God’s word; as providing the bread of life and as providing humble service to his disciples. In each of these ways, Jesus lives out his shepherd ministry in a way that demonstrates servant leadership.

Preaching the Word of God

Preaching the word of God is a key element of Jesus’ ministry of the good shepherd and an example of servant leadership. First, Jesus is the word of God and he speaks the word of God.

⁹⁶ Chapter 21 may be a later addition to John’s Gospel, which the narrator of John imported from Luke. Nevertheless, there is no reason for us to discount it. Smith, 390-91.

The first verse of this Gospel states, “In the beginning was word, and the word was with God and the world was God” (1:1) and later, “The word became flesh and dwelt among us” (1:14). The Gospel writer states that “he whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure” (3:31). This word brings life, “Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life” (5:24). In the bread of life discourse, Jesus tells his disciples, “The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (6:63). Therefore, Jesus’ words provide spiritual nourishment, just as the Eucharist provides spiritual nourishment.

Second, Jesus expects his disciples to preach word of God after he is gone. In his high priestly prayer, Jesus prays for those who will come to believe in him through “their word” (17:20) – the word of the disciples that he has just sent into the world (17:18).

The Bread of Life

In the feeding of the five thousand (6:1-15) and the bread of life discourse (6:22-59), Jesus shows that the Eucharist is central to shepherd ministry.⁹⁷ These scenes emphasize the connection between Eucharist, servant leadership and care for those in need.

All four Gospels recount the feeding of the five thousand (see also Mt 14:13-21; Mk 6:32-44; Lk 9:10-17). John’s unique details such the boy with the barley loaves and fish, suggest an independent tradition. As in the other Gospel accounts, five loaves and two fish are multiplied, but this Gospel specifies that the loaves are barley, an allusion to 2 Kings 4:42-44, where Elisha feeds a hundred people with a few ears of corn and twenty loaves of barley bread. Jesus has the people sit down, five thousand in all, and then he gave thanks and distributed the bread and fish. The word Jesus uses for giving thanks is the participle, εὐχαριστήσας from

⁹⁷ For this section, I rely on Smith, 146-148, 164-165.

εὐχαριστέω, the word from which we get Eucharist. Only Luke's Last Supper account also uses this word (Lk 22:17, 19).⁹⁸ Everyone ate until they were satisfied and the disciples gathered twelve baskets of what remained. In light of this sign, the crowd recognized Jesus as a prophet (6: 14).

The next day, the crowd is back for more food. Jesus knows they are looking for him simply because they ate their fill of bread (6:27). He tells them, "Do not work for food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you" (6:27). After further discussion, they finally ask Jesus for this bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world (6:32-34). Jesus then tells them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (6:35). The metaphor of the bread of life indicates that Jesus provides a sustenance that will never run out. He is a source of divine life for those who believe in him. His message in this discourse repeats the sentiment he expressed to the Samaritan woman: he will give water such that those who drink it will never become thirsty (4:13).

More specifically, he even goes so far as to say that unless "you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (6:53). It is probable, though not certain, the Gospel writer has the Eucharist in mind with this statement. However, it is anachronistic to contend that John is arguing that the Eucharist as a sacrament itself effects salvation, *ex opera operato*.⁹⁹ Instead, the Eucharist is the hallmark of discipleship for the Christian community, practiced by disciples outside the synagogue.

⁹⁸ Smith, 147.

⁹⁹ Smith, 165.

These two passages suggest a connection between participation in the Eucharist, servant leadership and serving those in need. Of course, the passage highlights the necessity of the Eucharist. In the Catholic Church, the priest has the privilege of presiding at the Eucharist. The unique contribution is the connection John makes between Eucharist and service. In the feeding miracle, Jesus is concerned with what the crowd will eat. The crowd does not wait on him; he waits on them, sharing a simple meal. These passages suggest that priests as well as the communities whom they shepherd must connect their Eucharist with service to those in need.

Model of Humble Service

Jesus further develops the notion of service through washing his disciples' feet. From this scene, we can deduce that if one wants to lead like the teacher, one must serve. His followers must act concretely with self-giving love: they must show the Father's love not only in words, but in deeds.

Jesus knew that his hour to depart to the Father was upon him (13:1) and he loved his own in the world until the end (13:2). Knowing he was "going to God" (13:3), he took off his outer robe (13:4) and began to wash his disciples feet (13:5). Apparently, foot washing was a common custom in the ancient near East. But washing another's feet was an act of servitude that only someone of an inferior rank would perform for another. Peter is startled by Jesus' actions and does not want him to wash his feet, but Jesus tells him that "unless I wash you, you will have share with me" (6:11). This exchange may suggest that the foot washing was a symbol for baptism; however, the proximity of Jesus' death suggests that it is the "wash" about which he is talking. As Smith puts it, if an allusion to baptism is here, it is understood as a baptism into

Jesus' death as in Romans 6:3: "Do you no know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death?"¹⁰⁰

After he washes their feet, Jesus asks, "Do you know what I have done to you?" (13:12). This question indicates that his action is to be a lesson for them. To ensure their understanding, he tells them, "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (13:14). He has given him an example, so that what he has done, they should do also (13:15). Finally, Jesus concludes that whoever receives the one whom he sends, receives him, and whoever receives him, receives the one who sent him (13:20). The word "sent" points toward the consecration and sending of the disciples in the high priestly prayer (17:18). Therefore, the disciples' self-giving service is a witness to the world. To be a disciple of Jesus means acting with the same self-giving love that he did.

If Jesus sets a high standard for his disciples, the standard is even higher for those who would be shepherds to his disciples. Such a person must be model of sacrificial love that moves others to emulate his own service in their own lives. Simply showing up for mass is not enough for priest; a community has to see its shepherd model the self-sacrificial generosity of Jesus, if it is going to be a community that models Christ's sacrificial love. Therefore, the leader of the community must be a servant-leader.

III. What Does John Say to Priests Today?

John's Gospel has several important lessons for the ordained clergy and especially how it relates to the people of God. In particular, this Gospel highlights the servant leadership dimension of the priesthood. Jesus' death reconciled his disciples to his Father. Yet Jesus also

¹⁰⁰ Smith, 252.

consecrated himself so that his disciples might be consecrated for mission. Then, he told Peter to “feed my sheep.” He sends the disciples into the world and then sends Peter to care for the disciples. Taken together, Jesus’ mission to his disciples and his special commissioning of Peter suggest that the ministry of the priest is one of care for the people of God as they evangelize the world. Jesus’ consecration and his ministry as the good shepherd point toward the role of the priest as the servant leader who fosters an evangelical missionary community.

First, Jesus’ entrusting of all his disciples with the mission of evangelization suggests that the common priesthood must share fully in the life of the Church, including being consulted on critical decisions. While priests may have a special vocation to leadership, such leadership requires openness, communication, collaboration and transparency. The Church need not be a democracy, but it should be a consultative, deliberative body. Pastors need parish councils and consulters, whose opinions they take seriously. There should be appropriate sharing of responsibilities and ministries in a parish. Parishes must have town halls and other mechanisms for parishioners to voice their concerns. There must be transparency in all parish financial transactions and the handling of any scandals.¹⁰¹ Similar institutional bodies should exist in dioceses to provide bishops with means to listen to their flocks. With hindsight, the Church understands that greater transparency might have been helpful in mitigating the sex abuse crisis.

Second, a pastor must support and foster the holy evangelizing efforts of the common priesthood. A good example of such support comes from the San Francisco Archdiocese, where five Catholic parishes created a job support network in response to the recession of 2008. The initiative was the inspiration of a parishioner who realized that many of his fellow parishioners

¹⁰¹ See Cindy Wooden, “Catholic Spokesperson says Church Must be Credible, Transparent,” Catholic News Service (October 5, 2010). Accessed October 27, 2010 at <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1004072.htm>

who had lost their jobs did not have the skills to find new ones. They did not know how to write resumes, search, network or interview for jobs. The job support network assembled volunteers with expertise in resume-writing, job searching, networking and interviewing to provide training workshops. Other volunteers role-played job interviews with job seekers and to critiqued resumes. Still others became “buddies” to the unemployed holding them accountable for doing the things that were necessary to find a job. Many parishioners found the program invaluable. The founder testified that none of this would have happened without the support of his pastor, who encouraged them, got the word out and made office resources available. In other words, the pastor enabled his parishioners to “run with the ball.” This program is a beautiful example of a community showing self-giving love.¹⁰²

Third, Jesus’ role as the revealer of God’s word suggests that priests must make effective preaching a priority, so as to provide spiritual nourishment to the people of God. Poor preaching is a major reason Catholics leave the Church.¹⁰³ *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly*, published by the U.S. Catholic bishops stresses that Sunday homily preparation is a week-long process, ideally comprising several steps. First, the priest needs to read, pray and reflect with the Sunday scriptures to discover how the word speaks to the needs, hopes, and anxieties of a particular congregation. Meditating every day on the Sunday scriptures the week prior to giving a homily is not too much. To ensure that the priest is in touch with his congregation, the bishops suggest that every week he convene a group of parishioners to reflect on the Sunday scriptures with him. Next, the priest must do a basic exegesis of the relevant

¹⁰² The founder of this program is William Tauskey. I spoke with him via phone about this project in the spring of 2010. The parishes are St. Gregory, St. Matthias, St. Luke, St. Bartholomew and Immaculate Heart of Mary, all in San Matteo County. The priest in question was Monsignor Robert McElroy, since appointed Auxiliary Bishop of San Francisco.

¹⁰³ Peter Steinfels, “Further Adrift: More Catholics Jumping Ship,” *Commonweal* 137 no. 18 (October 22, 2010), 16-20.

scripture passages and reflect on them further. Third, the document recommends stepping back from the homily -- “letting it go” -- to give the subconscious another chance to surface connections. After completing all this preparatory work, the priest can write the homily, leaving at least two days for revisions. Finally, he should practice delivering the homily so as to give it with ease and confidence.¹⁰⁴

Apart from the Sunday homilies, the priest may find other ways to convey God’s word to the people. The Church has a rich spiritual patrimony from which to “feed” Christ’s sheep. Religious priests can share their spirituality through retreats, spiritual conversation and spiritual direction, all of which incorporate scripture. The *Formula of the Institute of the Society of Jesus* emphasizes that Jesuits should “strive especially for the defense and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine, by means of public preaching, lectures and any other ministration whatsoever of the word of God.”¹⁰⁵ In this regard, the recent efforts by Jesuits to make the Spiritual Exercises available to all those who desire them is noteworthy and laudable. Priests might also foster simple personal prayer with scripture like the *lectio divina* or rosary using meditations on scripture passages that point to the divine mysteries.

Fourth, the association of humble service with the Eucharist in the feeding of the five thousand and the bread of life discourse encourages priests to connect the Eucharist to concrete acts of charity and to lead by their example of service. The Catechism reminds us that the Eucharist commits us to the poor, quoting St. John Chrysostom who states, “You dishonor this table when you do not judge worthy of sharing your food [with] someone judged worthy to take

¹⁰⁴ The Bishops Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1981). Accessed November 1, 2010 at <http://www.usccb.org/plm/fiyh.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ Society of Jesus, “The Formula of the Institute of the Society of Jesus,” (1550), #1. In *The Constitution of The Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms: A Complete English Translation of the Official Latin Texts*, ed. John W. Padberg (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 3.

part in this meal.” Furthermore, St. Augustine reminds us to be the body of Christ which we receive so that our “Amen” may be true.¹⁰⁶

Sometimes the charitable work of a parish appears divorced from its life of worship. Outsiders and paid employs handle the parish’s outreach. To overcome this problem, the priest must connect the Eucharist to a community’s service through his preaching. Perhaps more importantly, it means that the priest must be involved in the parish’s service work as a credible witness and inspiration to his parishioners. Recently, I worked at parish that collaborated with neighboring churches and synagogues in a program to house the homeless. The pastor and several other priests each took turns spending an overnight with the homeless families in the parish center. These concrete actions showed support for this program and demonstrated that it is not enough that a parish “sponsors” some kind of outreach through financial support alone. Being a disciple of Christ requires that everyone show love of others through humble service, including the priest.

Fifth, Jesus’ example of washing one another’s feet means that priest must be a servant to the people of God in terms of availability and humility. When people feel that they need a priest, they need a priest. Later will not do. When a parishioner has a loved one in the hospital or dying at home, they want the priest to visit at that time, perhaps more than once. When someone dies, the family often wants the priest to visit and grieve with them. Jesuits and other religious priests who work in schools are not only expected to fulfill their “day jobs” as teachers, administrators or

¹⁰⁶ Catholic Church, *Catechism*, #1396, 1397 quoting St. Augustine, *Sermo* 272: PL 38, 1247 and St. John Chrysostom, *Hom. in 1 Cor.* 27, 4: PG 61, 229-230; cf. Mt 25:40. Accessed October 31, 2010 at <http://www.usccb.org/catechism/text/pt2sect2chpt1art3.shtml#vi>

campus ministers; they also have to make appearances at as many school events as possible. The people of God claim their priests and rightly so.

Conclusion

The Gospel of John's portrayal of Jesus accentuates the servant leader dimension of the priesthood. Jesus offers himself on the cross for his disciples, as a priestly self-offering that makes possible the coming of the Holy Spirit. His high priestly prayer shows that he desires that all his followers carry on his evangelizing mission. Thus, the priest is the leader who inspires and serves the community in this mission. The paradigm for this form of service is Jesus the good shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep. This analogy is simply another way of expressing the paschal mystery, which is the heart of the high priesthood of Christ. Jesus carried out his ministry through revealing the word of God, being the bread of life and modeling humble service.

John's depiction of Jesus reminds priests that they serve and collaborate with the common priesthood in its call to holiness. First, Jesus' commission to all his disciples suggests that priests, though given a vocation to lead, must nevertheless consult and listen to the common priesthood. The work of the Church requires collaboration, consultation and transparency for important apostolic decisions. Second, the priest must support the common priesthood's holy efforts at service and evangelization. The "blessing" of the priest encourages the laity in their new ventures. Third, priests must make effective preaching a priority. Good preaching requires significant preparation. Fourth, the priest should connect participation in the Eucharist with service to the poor. The priest can make this connection by witnessing to humble service in a way that encourages the people to join him. Receiving the body of Christ ought to remind one to

be the body of Christ in the world. Finally, the priest must strive to be available to the people, showing he is their servant.

Chapter 3: Paul, A Model of Apostolic Priesthood

Chapter one of this thesis examined the Letter to the Hebrews, highlighting the cultic dimension of priesthood. Chapter two illuminated the servant leader dimension of the priesthood found in John's Gospel. This chapter focuses on Paul, whose ministry was priestly because it made an acceptable offering of the Gentiles for God (Rom 15:16). Furthermore, Paul embodies the dying and rising of Christ and so is an image of Christ the high priest. In carrying out his work, he imitates the priestly dynamic that Christ established through his self-giving death. His priestly service highlights several characteristics to which religious priests might look for renewal, including commitments to mobility, the ministry of the word, collaboration and reconciliation. Because of his apostolic work, Paul is a good model for religious priests in apostolic orders.

This chapter has three sections. The first explains why the Church needs an apostolic model for priesthood and why Paul is appropriate. The second performs an exegesis of Paul's description of his ministry as a "priestly service" in Rom 15:15-16. The third highlights the specific characteristics of this ministry and how these might inspire religious priests. Among the attributes of Paul's ministry, this chapter gives special attention to Paul's embodiment of the dying and rising of Christ.

I. The Need for an Apostolic Model of Priesthood

While there is one priesthood in Catholic Church, there are two traditions for living it out: diocesan and religious. Although there are overlaps, these traditions express the priestly vocation differently and in different settings. Often each group views the other warily, with neither fully understanding the customs of the other. For example, from the perspective of diocesan seminarians, it may appear strange to some that Jesuit priests usually do not wear clerics in their ministry of teaching. From the other side, it may likewise appear strange that diocesan seminarians often wear clerics, even when not engaged in public ministry.

There is little doubt that in popular Catholic culture, the word “priest” calls to mind the diocesan tradition and not the religious. The Church’s own documents foster this thinking. The Second Vatican Council’s documents on the priesthood proceed from assumptions that fit well diocesan clergy, but not religious. O’Malley observes that *Presbyterorum Ordinis* and *Optatam Totius*, though in many respects excellent, make four critical assumptions about the priesthood:

1. Priestly ministry is a ministry by and large to the faithful.
2. It is a ministry that takes place in a stable community of faith, that is, in a parish.
3. It is a ministry done by clergy, in hierarchical union with the order of bishops.
4. The warrant for ministry, including preaching, is ordination to the diaconate or presbyterate.¹⁰⁷

These assumptions do not fit the lives of religious priests, who often evangelize those without religious faith, usually work outside parishes and receive their missions from their religious superiors. Their warrant for ministry is entry into religious life, not ordination.

¹⁰⁷ O’Malley, “One Priesthood,” 14.

In light of the experience of religious priests, the Church needs an apostolic model of priesthood. Such a dimension is part of the genetic heritage of the priesthood. Raymond Brown notes that priestly ministry is a distillation of several distinct roles in the New Testament Church, including apostles, disciples, and presbyter-bishops.¹⁰⁸ Paul is a natural starting point for recovering this apostolic dimension, because of the similarity of his ministry to apostolic religious ministry: he ministered to those who did not know Christ, in places where Christ had not yet been preached, largely under his own direction and in response to a call from God. Not surprisingly, O'Malley writes that the histories of ministry in religious life should begin with Paul and not, as is usually the case, with Pachomius.¹⁰⁹ This chapter takes up his suggestion. As an entry point for this discussion, we begin with Paul's understanding of his ministry as priestly.

II. Paul's Metaphor of "Priestly Service"

This section considers what Paul means when he calls his ministry a "priestly service" in Romans 15:15-16. The Letter to the Romans is a fitting setting for this description, as it is Paul's most systematic explanation of his thought and it comes relatively late in his career. Thus, we can regard his description as a mature appraisal of his ministry.

Scholars generally agree that Paul wrote this letter from Corinth, probably between 54 C.E. and early 59 C.E., just before setting out for Jerusalem with the collection for the saints, from the Gentile churches in Macedonia and Achaia.¹¹⁰ He wrote the letter as a means of self-presentation or, in the words of Brendan Byrne, "to set the record straight," on his views before a personal visit to Rome. By this time, he was a controversial figure, because he thought that the Gentiles need not be circumcised or follow the dietary restrictions of the Mosaic Law. After his

¹⁰⁸ Raymond Brown, *Priest and Bishop: Biblical Reflections* (Paramus: Paulist Press, 1970), 20.

¹⁰⁹ O'Malley, "One Priesthood," 14.

¹¹⁰ For this paragraph, I depend on Brendan Byrne, *Romans*, Sacra Pagina Series, gen. ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007), 9-10, 441-442.

journey to Jerusalem, he planned to head west again and stop in Rome on route to missionary work in Spain (15:24, 28). His hope to “be sped on his journey there by you” (15: 24), suggests he desired financial support for his journey from them.

An exegesis of Romans 15:15-16 shows that Paul views his ministry as priestly, because it gave the Gentiles over to the Lord, in the analogy of a sacrifice. His ministry of evangelization and teaching forms the Gentiles into an acceptable offering.

Exegesis of Romans 15:15-16

These verses come in the concluding section of the letter (15:14-16:24). In verses 15:14-33, Paul describes his ministry to the Gentiles; in verses 15:14-21, his mission until now; and in verses 15:22-33, his plans for the future. In verses 15:15-16, he justifies speaking “boldly,” to this community to whom he is a stranger, based on his vocation as an apostle to the Gentiles.

His statement has three parts: first, he acknowledges that he has written a bold and unsolicited letter; second, he explains why he had warrant to do this; and third, he expresses what he hopes to accomplish. These three parts are as follows.

Part #1, What he has done: write a bold, unsolicited letter¹¹¹

Nevertheless, on some points, I have written to you rather boldly, as one reminding you, (Admits his letter is presumptuous; intimates he just reminds them what they already know)

Part #2, Why he has warrant to do this: a grace from God

on account of the grace given me by God (Rom 15:15),
to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the Gospel of God, (Warrant for writing is his call from God)

¹¹¹ My translation.

Part #3, What he hopes to achieve

so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:16). (Hopes his offering of the Gentiles is acceptable to God).

A verse-by-verse analysis explains how Paul understands his ministry to be a “priestly service.”

15. Nevertheless, on some points, I have written to you rather boldly as one reminding you, on account of the grace given to me by God

The participle, ἐπαναμμνήσκων from ἐπαναμμνήσκω, translated as “one reminding you,” literally means “to cause to recall and to think about again” -- presumably recalling something that has already been taught.¹¹² Paul characterizes what he is doing as a reminder in order to head off resentment that the advice he offers is presumptuous, since he did not found this community.¹¹³ Joseph Fitzmyer calls this opening phrase a “quasi-apology” and notes that Paul presumes he is merely sharpening the catechesis of the group.¹¹⁴

The “grace given to [him] by God” is the call to be an apostle.¹¹⁵ The word translated as “grace” is the accusative noun χάριτι from χάρις; it means literally “gift” or “kindness.”¹¹⁶ Therefore, Paul understands his call as gift from God.

In Romans 1:1, Paul hints at what the vocation of apostle means for him. In this verse, he introduces himself as “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the

¹¹² Louw-Nida.

¹¹³ Leander Keck, footnote to Romans in *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1929, FN#15:15.

¹¹⁴ Joseph Fitzmyer, *Romans*, The Anchor Bible Series, gen. eds. William Foxwell Albright, David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 711.

¹¹⁵ Keck, 1929, FN#15.15.

¹¹⁶ Newman.

Gospel of God” (1:1). The word translated as “servant” is δοῦλος, which literally means “slave.” Paul is a slave of Jesus Christ. The word for “called” is the adjective κλητὸς, which has overtones of being urgently invited or summoned.¹¹⁷ The word for apostle, ἀπόστολος, means a special messenger. The early church restricted this term to the immediate followers of Christ, or those, like Paul, who actively proclaimed the Gospel.¹¹⁸ Therefore, as an apostle, Paul considers himself a slave of Christ called to be a messenger and sent on an urgent mission.

At this stage in his career, Paul receives his mission from God, not any particular church (1 Cor 1:1, 2 Cor 1:1, Gal 1:1). A particular church might commission an apostle, providing him or her with letters certifying legitimacy. The church in Antioch probably commissioned Paul’s missionary trip to Pisidia and Cilicia (Acts 13:3). After the dispute over the issue of table fellowship and circumcision, Paul apparently neither sought nor received commissioning letters, instead claiming a direct commission from God.

16. 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

Paul’s grace from God, his apostleship, is specifically to be “a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles.” This description echoes Gal 1:15-16, wherein Paul states that “God set him apart before he was born and called me through his grace” and revealed “his Son to me so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles.” Therefore, Paul justifies his letter to Roman church on the grounds that he is an apostle to the Gentiles.¹¹⁹ The plural noun, ἔθνη, from ἔθνος, translated as “Gentiles,” or “nations,” refers to the population of the world who are not Jews, i.e. heathens.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Louw-Nida.

¹¹⁸ Louw-Nida.

¹¹⁹ Fitzmyer, 711.

¹²⁰ Louw-Nida.

The word λειτουργὸν, from λειτουργός, translated as minister, sometimes has a cultic meaning in the Septuagint, but often just means “servant.”¹²¹ The rest of verse, particularly the participle, ἱεουργοῦντα, from ἱεουργέω, translated as “priestly service” and προσφορά, translated as “offering,” confirm the cultic overtones of λειτουργὸν.

The major translations have some noteworthy differences regarding this phrase. The differences hinge on the translation of the participle, ἱεουργοῦντα, and the genitive, τῶν ἐθνῶν. These translations with the difference italicized are as follows (my italics).

to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in performing the *priestly service* of the gospel of God, so that the *offering up of the Gentiles* may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (NAB).

to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the *priestly duty of proclaiming* the gospel of God, so that *the Gentiles might become an offering* acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (NIV).

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, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (NRSV).

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, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (RSV).

The first issue is how to translate and understand the participle, ἱεουργοῦντα. The verb ἱεουργέω literally means “to serve as a priest.”¹²² Fitzmyer argues that Paul offers his evangelization of Gentiles as a form of worship, citing Rom 1:9, “the God, whom I worship with

¹²¹ Fitzmyer, 711.

¹²² Newman.

my spirit in the evangelization of his Son . . .” In his view, Paul implies that the “preaching of the word of God is a liturgical act itself.”¹²³ Therefore, Fitzmyer translates the phrase in question as “the priestly duty of preaching God’s gospel.”¹²⁴ The NIV translates the phrase similarly: “priestly duty of proclaiming the Gospel.” However, one would not want to push the preaching-liturgical act equivalence too far, lest one miss the point of analogy, which is that Paul’s ministry delivers the Gentiles over to God’s realm, as in a sacrifice; this is why he mentions subsequently, “the offering of the Gentiles.” The idea behind sacrifice is that the thing sacrificed is sent to the heavenly realm and given over to the deity. Paul’s method of delivering this offering is through preaching and teaching, but the image is sacrificial. Therefore, our translation follows the NRSV, RSV and NAB and translates *ἱεραουργοῦντα* as “priestly service.” By this “priestly service,” Paul means his work as an apostle, preaching, teaching, letter-writing, etc.

A second issue is how to interpret the genitive, *τῶν ἐθνῶν*, “of the Gentiles.” Is “*τῶν ἐθνῶν*,” a subjective genitive indicating an offering that the Gentiles make, or an objective genitive, meaning that the Gentiles are themselves the offering? The NAB and NIV clearly take the latter approach, translating the phrase as “offering up of the Gentiles” and that “the Gentiles might become an offering” respectively. Both the NRSV and RSV translate the phrase as the “offering of the Gentiles,” leaving its meaning ambiguous.

Both Fitzmyer and Byrne take the objective genitive reading of *τῶν ἐθνῶν*.¹²⁵ Fitzmyer rejects the subjective reading in light of Phil 2:17, where Paul describes himself to the primarily Gentile Philippian community as a libation being poured out “over the sacrifice and offering of your faith.” Fitzmyer regards the evangelized Gentiles themselves as the sacrifice in this verse

¹²³ Fitzmyer, 711.

¹²⁴ Fitzmyer, 711-712.

¹²⁵ Byrne, 438.

with Paul as the wine poured over them, which makes the flame flare up.¹²⁶ One might quibble and observe that it's the Gentiles' faith in this verse that is an offering, not the Gentiles themselves. A more convincing reason for taking the objective interpretation is that this reading sets up a priestly analogy that well-captures the purpose of Paul's ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles. Paul's apostleship to the Gentiles delivers them over to God the Father, through Jesus. For our translation, we stick with the phrase "offering of the Gentiles," understanding that this phrase means that Paul offers the Gentiles as the sacrifice.

may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit

The adjective εὐπρόσδεκτος means "acceptable," or "quite pleasing" as in a sacrifice offered to God.¹²⁷ According to Leviticus 22, the priest was responsible for ensuring that the offering brought before God was acceptable: it could not be blemished or profane and must be offered in a proper manner.

The passive participle ἡγιασμένη from the verb, ἀγιάζω, means "set apart as sacred to God; make holy, consecrate."¹²⁸ The Holy Spirit sanctifies the Gentiles. Fitzmyer notes that sanctification is an effect of the Christ event, i.e. the death and resurrection of Christ. Through the death and resurrection of Christ, the Gentiles become set apart for God and dedicated to God's service. The Holy Spirit makes possible this practical dedication on an ongoing basis. Freedom from sin and enslavement to God is sanctification, the end of which is "eternal life" (Rom 6:22).¹²⁹

Byrne observes that the priestly image suggests not so much the role in which Paul usually depicts himself –"that concerned with original preaching and conversion," but of

¹²⁶ Fitzmyer, 712.

¹²⁷ Newman and Louw-Nida.

¹²⁸ Newman.

¹²⁹ Fitzmyer, 123, 712.

“subsequent sanctification” of those who are unclean.¹³⁰ He notes that Paul did not found the community in Rome, but because of this “priestly role” he has a “continuing” function within it. However, as should be clear from our interpretation of Paul’s analogy, it is a mistake to separate Paul’s “priestly service” in this address from his ministry as an apostle. As noted above, the force of the metaphor is that all of Paul’s apostolic work is priestly, because of what it accomplishes.

In the next verses, 15:17-21, Paul continues the summary of his work. These verses underscore that by “priestly service,” Paul means the totality of his apostolic work. He can “boast” of his work in Christ Jesus (15:17). Christ accomplished this work “through [him] to win obedience from the Gentiles” (15:18). Paul notes that he has preached the Gospel from Jerusalem as far as Illyricum (15:19). Of course, Paul only reached a tiny fraction in the population of these areas. Moreover, he did not preach to the Gentiles in Jerusalem nor is there evidence that he established communities in Illyricum. Rather, the point is that he has covered the Eastern Mediterranean.¹³¹ He sees himself as on the vanguard of the spread of the Gospel and it is his ambition to preach the Gospel, where Christ has not yet been named (15:20). In light of this ambition, he desires to cover the western Mediterranean, starting with Spain, when he returns from Jerusalem (15:24, 28).

Theological Meaning of Romans 15:15-16

Paul regards his apostolic work as priestly, because it hands over the Gentiles as an offering to God. Thus, Paul is mediator between God and the Gentiles, bringing one into relationship with the other through Christ. The metaphor of “priestly service” includes Paul’s apostolic work of preaching, fostering conversion, and solving pastoral problems. Paul’s view of

¹³⁰ Byrne, 436.

¹³¹ Byrne, 436-437.

his own work as priestly should encourage us to reject a narrow conception of Christian priesthood focused only on cultic or sacramental work. Indeed, O'Malley notes that *Presbyterorum Ordinis* does not make this mistake, sedulously avoiding associating the priesthood with only the Eucharist, but giving equal importance to the ministries of word, sacrament and governance – prophet, priest and king.¹³² Paul highlights the prophetic and kingly aspects of priesthood and gives encouragement to those priests whose ministry is primarily a ministry of the word. Therefore, he emerges as a particularly apt model for religious like the Dominicans, Franciscans, and Jesuits whose work is primarily the ministry of the word.

In order to draw fruit from Paul's understanding of his ministry as priestly, we consider more closely the character of his priestly service and how it might inform and inspire religious priesthood.

III. What Does Paul Say to Priests Today?

Paul considered his apostolic ministry priestly, because he delivered the Gentiles over to God as a sacrifice. His ministry should inspire religious priests.¹³³ In particular, we will dwell on his embodiment of the paschal mystery, because, in this way, he models the high priesthood of Christ. From this perspective, his ministry was priestly not only in its purpose, but also in the manner in which he carried it out.

First, Paul was an “apostle of Christ Jesus” (Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1). An apostle is a messenger who is sent by someone else. Paul describes himself and his fellow co-workers as “ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us” (2 Cor 5:20). N.T. Wright points out that Paul was not like a “postman ignorant of the life-changing content of the letters he

¹³² O'Malley, “One Priesthood,” 11.

¹³³ In developing these characteristics, I am helped by Michael J. Gorman, *Reading Paul* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2008), 22-27.

was delivering” – his message, “Jesus is Lord,” controlled his life.¹³⁴ The message was the purpose of his activity.

All priests should be able to see themselves as ambassadors of Christ. In particular, religious priests work in a variety of different settings, but the purpose of all these works is to bring people to Christ somehow. This may not always mean preaching in words, but by example. This apostolic purpose might mean that a priest does his job differently than a non-priest might. For example, a priest who works as a medical doctor may make as his focus the poor and disadvantaged, rather than the rich and powerful. Religious priests might try to see how their work is part of evangelization.

Second, Paul believed he was called “by the will of God,” (1 Cor 1:1) making a commission from any human church superfluous and unnecessary. Because of his call, Paul vigorously defended his apostleship before both the Corinthian and Galatian communities. A priest or religious has received a call from God. Certainly, these vocations have an ecclesial dimension and demand loyalty to the Church and one’s religious superiors. At the same time, they require that one take personal responsibility for listening to God’s unique call to oneself. Religious have a particular responsibility in this regard, because so many diverse apostolic opportunities are available to them. There must be nothing more vexing for a formation director or provincial, than trying to mission a man who is unable or unwilling to voice some apostolic preferences. Jesuit Bishop and former novice director, Gordon Bennett called the unwillingness to express apostolic preferences “passive submissive” behavior that is just as undesirable as

¹³⁴ N.T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 163.

passive aggressive or active aggressive behavior.¹³⁵ Religious need to own their vocations and be assertive in listening and responding to God's call.

Third, Paul's ministry was itinerant -- he went from place to place. After his encounter with the risen Lord, he very likely engaged in missionary activity for three years in Arabia (Gal 1:17) and Damascus (2 Cor 11:32). Acts of the Apostles chapters 13 to 15 and 16 to 20 indicate Paul then undertook two great missionary trips. In the first, he worked in Cilicia and Syria, probably between the years 38 and 48 C.E. In the second, he left from Jerusalem in 49 C.E. and went to Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica, Beroea, Corinth, Caesarea, Antioch, through Asia Minor, back to Galatia, then to Ephesus, back to Corinth and, finally, back to Jerusalem with the collection for the saints around 56 C.E.¹³⁶

To describe Paul's ministry as "itinerant," however, does not mean that it was without strategy.¹³⁷ Paul targeted large urban areas so that converts could take the Gospel into the countryside. Wright suspects that he went west rather than east and across Europe rather than North Africa, because he wanted to establish Christian communities that would witness that Jesus, not Caesar, was Lord in the heart of the Roman Empire.¹³⁸ Arriving in a new place, he preached in synagogues where he hoped to make converts among the Jews and the "god-fearers," Gentiles who were sympathetic to Jewish morality and monotheism and often attended the synagogue meetings.¹³⁹

The itinerant quality of Paul's ministry reminds religious priests to be available. For some, this availability simply means a willingness to do new things within one's range of

¹³⁵ He made these distinctions as part of a Vow Renewal Triduum retreat in January 2008 at the Connors Family Retreat Center in Dover, MA.

¹³⁶ Chronology from Marion L. Soards, *The Apostle Paul: An Introduction to His Writings and Teachings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 34-35.

¹³⁷ Gorman, 24.

¹³⁸ Wright, 170.

¹³⁹ For example, Paul gives an exhortation to "You Israelites and others who fear God" (Acts 13:16).

expertise or the willingness to “stay fresh” by growing continually in one’s profession. For others, this availability may actually mean an itinerant existence. Such mobility is part of the *charism* of mendicant orders like the Franciscans and Dominicans and missionary orders like the Jesuits. Adolpho Nicholas, Superior General of the Society of Jesus, has said that at least ten percent of the men of each Jesuit province should be working outside the province at any given time.¹⁴⁰

Fourth, Paul worked at the forefront of missionary territory, both geographically and culturally. His ministry was to proclaim the good news “not where Christ has already been named” (Rom 15:20), but where Christ had not been named. Paul did not want to build “on someone else’s foundation” (Rom 15:20). As he explains to the Galatians, God made Peter an apostle to the circumcised, but him an apostle to the Gentiles (Gal 2:8). He noted that James, Cephas (Peter) and John, recognized that he and Barnabas should go the Gentiles (Gal 2:9). Because his ministry was to Gentiles, Paul had to step outside a strictly Jewish cultural world. He intended to go at least as far as Spain, although it is not clear he made it that far (Rom 15:23).

As Paul worked at the forefront of missionary territory; so also should at least some religious priests. The 35th General Congregation reminded Jesuits of the words of Father Jerome Nadal: the world is our house.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, Pope Benedict XVI in his address to 35th General Congregation rightly pointed out that the boundaries which challenge evangelizers today are not just geographic distances, but a “mistaken or superficial vision of God or man.”¹⁴² Decree 2 of GC 35 recognizes that we must engage new frontiers of faith and justice, religion and culture, in order to “discover Jesus Christ where we have not noticed him before and to reveal him where he

¹⁴⁰ As reported by my Provincial, Rev. David Ciancimino, SJ.

¹⁴¹ General Congregation 35 of the Society of Jesus, “Decree 2: A Fire That Kindles Other Fires,” #40, (2009). In Padberg, *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, 742.

¹⁴² Benedict XVI, “Address of Pope Benedict XVI to the 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus,” #3. (February 21, 2008). In Padberg, *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, 823.

has not been seen before.”¹⁴³ Therefore, religious priests like Jesuits are called not only to geographic margins, but the margins of culture and reason as well.

Fifth, Paul engaged in disagreement and conflict for the sake of the Gospel. Most notably, his mission drew him into conflict over the status of the Mosaic Law for the Gentiles. In the portrayal of Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, the apostles and elders decided that Gentile converts did not have to follow the Jewish law, except for avoiding meat offered to idols and fornication (Acts 15:29). In Acts’ portrayal, these early Christians reach a decision amicably. Yet Paul’s letters to the Galatians, Philippians and Second Corinthians suggest that the issue remained unsettled, because afterwards Paul must respond to missionaries teaching that Gentiles needed to be circumcised and follow the Mosaic Law (Gal 2:7).

Today, religious priests also sometimes experience conflict in the Church, particularly at the forefront of theological inquiry. Perhaps such tension is endemic to this work, because intellectual progress often means challenging conventional wisdom. Sometimes theologians experience condemnation, and then later rehabilitation. One such example is John Courtney Murray, SJ. The Holy Office of Vatican condemned his views on ecumenical cooperation, religious freedom, and the Church-state relationships. Notwithstanding this condemnation, Cardinal Spellman secured his appointment to the Second Vatican Council as a *peritus*, and he became the primary author of *Dignitatis humanae*, The Declaration on Human Freedom.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, religious priests can do the Church a service when they wrestle faithfully with difficult theological problems, despite drawing criticism and even censure. Not all theological insights will stand the test of time and scrutiny, but we as a Church will not know unless someone speaks them first.

¹⁴³ GC 35, “Decree 2,” #40. In Padberg, *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, 742.

¹⁴⁴ Michael, C.P., Komonchak, J.M., “Murray, John Courtney,” in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 10, 2nd ed., ed. Berard L. Marthaler (New York: Thompson-Gale, 2003), 68-69.

Sixth, one notes that despite conflicts, Paul stayed true to the Jewish tradition. For Paul, Jesus was the servant of Yahweh spoken of in Isaiah 40-55, who suffered on behalf of the nation of Israel for its salvation. Jesus' resurrection validated that he was the Messiah. Paul saw his role as implementing Jesus' victory over sin and death, by spreading the Gospel. His ministry to the Gentiles enabled Israel to be the light to nations, a necessary step in the final stage of the history of salvation.¹⁴⁵ Like Paul, religious priests are called to negotiate the difficult task of being at the forefront of history, but of also remaining faithful to the Church's tradition. Indeed, fidelity is a particular concern of Pope Benedict XVI. At significant length, he stressed to the 35th General Congregation that Jesuits needed to be faithful to the Church particularly on "neuralgic points" of Catholic doctrine.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, one can see that some religious may be called to the difficult position of mapping new theological territory, while remaining faithful to the Church's teaching.

Seventh, Paul's ministry was primarily a ministry of the word. He typically described his ministry as proclaiming or preaching the good news (e.g. Rom 15:19, 1 Cor 15:1, 2 Cor 1:19). The words most often translated as "proclaimed" or "preached" are forms of εὐαγγελίζω, meaning "to bring the good news" or "to preach the good news" or κηρύσσω, meaning to "proclaim, make known, preach."¹⁴⁷ In the First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul mentions that he thinks he baptized Crispus and Gaius (1 Cor 1:14) and, as an afterthought, remembers that he baptized the household of Stephanus (1 Cor 1:16). Paul's fuzzy memory suggests that he did not see baptism as the central aspect of his particular ministry. Indeed, he states that Christ did not send him to baptize, but to preach the Gospel (1 Cor 1:17). While it is possible that Paul presided at table fellowship, he does not mention that he does so. Therefore, his "priestly

¹⁴⁵ Wright, 162.

¹⁴⁶ Benedict XVI, *Address*, #6-7. In Padberg, *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, 824.

¹⁴⁷ Newman.

service” is not sacramental because he presides at liturgies or performs the sacraments in the way the later Church will understand them, but rather because he proclaims God’s word.

Paul’s example as a minister of the word inspires religious priests to re-commit to their *charisms* as ministers of the word. Paul’s example underscores that evangelization first occurs through the proclamation of the word. His ministry is a reminder to religious that the Church needs them to proclaim the word to the unconverted at the boundary between belief and unbelief. This ministry has often been a part of religious life. Franciscans, Dominicans and Jesuits each claim the ministry of the word as part of their particular *charisms*. O’Malley contends that the early Jesuits were first and foremost ministers of the word, because discourse was such central part of all of their ministries.¹⁴⁸ The early Jesuits understood the ministry of the word broadly to include not only preaching and lecturing but sacred conversation, publication and teaching.

Eighth, Paul’s ministry was collaborative. He undertook his Antiochene missionary trip with Barnabas and companions (Acts 13:2, 13) and his missionary trip through Asia Minor and Macedonia with Silas and Timothy (Acts 15:40, 16:1). In Philippi, Lydia assists him (Acts 16:15). In Corinth, he stayed with Priscilla and Aquila; they even accompanied him to Ephesus (Acts 18:19) and it is they who tutor Apollos in the way of God (Acts 18:26). Both Timothy and Titus become Paul’s protégés and delivered messages to the Corinthians (1 Cor 4:17; 2 Cor 7:6).¹⁴⁹

Paul’s example reminds us that ministry in the Church is not limited to the ordained. Indeed, following Paul’s understanding of “priestly,” lay people who engage in a ministry of evangelization are doing priestly work. The Second Vatican Council recognized the common priesthood of all believers and the role of all the baptized in sharing in the sanctification of the

¹⁴⁸ John O’Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 90-133.

¹⁴⁹ He also calls Urbanus (Rom 16:9), Epaphroditus (Phi 2:25) and Philemon “co-workers.” He sent Epaphroditus to Philippi, but is unclear if the Urbanus and Philemon actually labored with him.

world.¹⁵⁰ Paul's example supports the recent efforts of Jesuit provinces to recognize that all their works are collaborative. Therefore, the Society's efforts to share its spirituality and incorporate lay collaborators in the apostolic discernment for its works are praiseworthy and necessary.¹⁵¹ Decree 6 of the 35th General Congregation reflects on collaboration as central to Jesuit ministries and provides recommendations for what constitutes a Jesuit work, what formation is necessary for collaboration and what might make our works more fruitful.¹⁵²

Ninth, Paul was a minister of reconciliation both within and across individual Christian communities. Within communities, he argues that Christ reconciled the world to himself and then entrusted him with this ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18). Therefore, he urges them to be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:20). Yet reconciliation to God for Paul implies reconciliation and unity with one another. He recognizes that unity demands that some should make concessions for the sake of community. For example, "the strong" should not eat meat offered to idols, when doing so might scandalize the weaker members of the community (1 Cor 8:1-13). This is not to say that the community should have lax standards: he recommends casting out a man who is living with his father's wife (1 Cor 5:13).¹⁵³

Moreover, Jewish and Gentile Christians were to be united as demonstrated by table fellowship. He tells the Galatians that he rebuked Peter at Antioch for quitting table fellowship with the Gentiles when representatives from the church in Jerusalem arrived (Gal 2:11-13). Paul argues that both Jews and Gentiles are justified by Christ's death (Gal 2:15-21). He tells the Romans that the Gentile Christians are a "wild olive shoot" grafted onto an olive tree that is

¹⁵⁰ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, #9, #31.

¹⁵¹ A terrific example of this collaboration is the "The Jesuit Collaborative" of the New England, New York and Maryland provinces. Currently, they are discerning how to promote ministries of the Exercises in the future. See <http://www.jesuit-collaborative.org/>

¹⁵² See General Congregation 35, "Decree 6: Collaboration at the Heart of Mission," (2009). In Padberg, *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, 780-788.

¹⁵³ Wright, 166.

Israel (Rom 11:17). He hopes that all Israel will be saved, shown mercy in their disobedience, just as the Gentile were shown mercy in theirs (Rom 11:31). Wright argues that Paul wanted to form mixed communities throughout the Roman Empire, before the inevitable destruction of Jerusalem. He contends that Paul believed if there were not mixed communities, the Jewish Christians might blame the Gentile Christians for “letting down the side” in terms of Torah worship and fraternizing with idolaters, while Gentile Christians might celebrate the overthrow of a nation that did not embrace the Gospel of Christ.¹⁵⁴ Thus, Paul works as if he were under a rapidly approaching deadline to create communities, which will not split down the middle.

Paul’s example encourages religious priests to be reconcilers and community builders. *The Formula of the Institute of the Society of Jesus* mentions the ministry of reconciliation, stating the Society should show itself “no less useful” in reconciling the estranged than in its ministries of the word and sacrament.¹⁵⁵ Paul’s treatment of the eating of meat offered to idols (Rom 14:15; 1 Cor 8:1-13) suggests that all arguments need not be settled on abstract principle, but rather on practical accommodations made for the sake of unity. His example encourages religious priests to bring sub-communities within churches together. For example, many parishes have separate Anglo, Hispanic or other ethnic communities. Often these sub-communities worship separately. Paul’s thought suggests that these communities should express their unity through worship together, at least from time to time. Such a task calls for practical accommodations regarding language and music in the liturgy.

The emphasis Paul places on the collection for the saints in Jerusalem follows from his desire for global unity in the Church. He opens an extended plea for the collection in Second Corinthians, chapters 8 and 9 stating, “We want you to know brothers and sisters . . .” (2 Cor

¹⁵⁴ Wright, 169.

¹⁵⁵ See O’Malley, *First Jesuits*, 5.

8:1).¹⁵⁶ This greeting indicates that he wants the Corinthians to think of themselves as brothers and sisters, not only to him, but to the other churches. He refers to the collection as a “ministry to the saints” (2 Cor 8:4). He uses the word *διακονία* for “ministry,” the same word he has used to describe the “ministry” of the new covenant (2 Cor 3:6) and of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18). In so doing, he indicates the symbolic importance of the collection as a manifestation of the new covenant in Christ.¹⁵⁷ Finally, he desires that there be a “fair balance” between the Corinthians’ abundance and the present need of the Jerusalem church, in order that no one have an abundance while others lack (2 Cor 8:13). Stegman observes that his vision resembles Acts’ description of the Jerusalem church (Acts 2:44-45, 4:34-37), where the rich put their possessions at the disposal of the entire community.¹⁵⁸

Paul’s desire for global Church unity also encourages religious priests to be promoters of solidarity and assistance within the Church across the globe. Given the global reach of religious orders, it is possible for religious to mobilize the faithful to help their brothers and sisters in other parts of the world. A recent example is the mobilizing of Church resources after the earthquake in Haiti. Religious, because they are members of orders with ministers and apostolates in places like Haiti, are in a perfect position to organize the faithful to help the Church throughout the world. Religious-administered non-government organizations (NGOs), like the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) or *Un Techo Para Mi Pais*, also connect the Church across the global in a web of global solidarity. Although JRS and *Un Techo* resemble secular NGOs to a degree, their leadership maintains a public religious commitment, they are motivated by a desire to live the

¹⁵⁶ For understanding these passages, I rely on Thomas D. Stegman, *Second Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 189-202.

¹⁵⁷ Stegman, 193.

¹⁵⁸ Stegman, 199.

Gospel, and their staff members undergo training and catechesis so as to understand the Christian motivation of their missions.

Paul and the High Priesthood of Christ

Finally, Paul embodies the paschal mystery of Christ through his self-giving love. In this way, he is an image of Christ the high priest, reflecting the paschal mystery through his life of service. As we have seen, Paul describes his apostolic work as a “priestly service.” By “priestly service” he does not have the high priesthood of Christ in mind, but the Jewish priesthood. Nevertheless, Paul sees himself as embodying the dying and rising of Christ, making him an image of Christ the high priest. It is not surprising that Paul’s apostolic life bears the image of Christ the high priest, because he recognized the centrality of Christ’s self-offering of himself for humankind: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). Indeed, his letter to the Romans might have provided the basic concepts that the author of Hebrews developed into the metaphor of Christ the high priest.¹⁵⁹ Thus, when we speak of Paul’s priestly service, it is not surprising to see attributes that reflect Christ the high priest.

Paul describes his embodiment of the dying and rising of Christ in 2 Cor 4:7-14, as part of a longer defense of apostolic ministry.¹⁶⁰ After offering a positive assessment of his apostolic behavior and a defense of his teaching (4:1-6), he interprets his suffering in light of Jesus’ self-giving. He states that he has “this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us” (4:7). By “this treasure,” he means “his ministry” (4:1) and the “clay jars” are presumably his fragile, human body. God’s power shines through this ministry, because, he goes on to explain, “we are afflicted in every

¹⁵⁹ Mitchell, 31.

¹⁶⁰ For these paragraphs, I follow closely Stegman pages 107-109.

way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair, persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed” (4:8-9). Outside forces impose these particular hardships on him. In other lists (6:4-10, 11:23-33, 12:10), he mentions hardships he has undertaken for the Gospel, including toil, sleepless nights and lack of food, (11:27). It is only God’s power which enables him to endure this suffering.

Through his life of suffering for the Gospel, Paul becomes a manifestation of the risen Lord. He notes that he is “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies” (4:10). With the phrase, “always carrying,” he indicates that he is talking about a continual process, an experience he describes as part of his existence. Furthermore, since he mentions “in the body,” he is talking about an embodied, physical experience. The accusative noun νέκρωσιν from νέκρωσις translated as “death” also means the action of “putting to death” or “dying”; indeed, the NAB translates the word in this verse as “dying.”¹⁶¹ The reason Christ’s death persists is so that Christ’s life might be “made visible” in his body. The verb φανερωθῆ from φανερόω translated as “made visible” has the sense of making known, showing or revealing.¹⁶² As he notes in Galatians 2:20, “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” Through the power of the risen Jesus, he is not crushed under the weight of his apostolic burdens, but rather God’s power shines forth through him.

Therefore, while he lives he is “always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh” (4:11). The word translated as “given up” is παραδίδομι, which means to “hand over,” as in giving someone over to the authorities.¹⁶³ The Gospel writers use this word to describe Jesus’ being handed over to authorities for crucifixion (Mt 27:2, Mk 15:1, Lk 20:20, Jn 18:30). With this word, Paul closely associates himself with

¹⁶¹ Frieberg.

¹⁶² Newman.

¹⁶³ Newman.

Jesus and the paschal mystery. He regards Jesus as more than a passive actor, however, because Jesus gave himself up for our sake: “the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me” (Gal 2:20). Similarly, Paul’s suffering has more than a passive quality; he actively endures suffering for the sake of Gospel. In his loyalty to Jesus, he follows the pattern of Christ’s self-giving love and endurance of suffering for others.

The next verse sums up the effects of his apostolic efforts: “So death is at work in us, but life in you” (4:12). No doubt “life” is at work in the Corinthians, because of the practical effects of Paul’s preaching: they have become followers of Christ. However, Stegman concludes that Paul sees his suffering as more than just a practical consequence of passing on the Gospel message.¹⁶⁴ Because he aligns his suffering with the redemptive suffering of Christ, Paul’s suffering is also redemptive. Through his own suffering, Paul mediates the graces of the paschal mystery. His suffering has a sacramental quality. From this perspective, Paul reflects the image of Christ the high priest: he carried out his ministry by sacrificing himself for others. Thus, we can say that the apostolic dimension of priesthood can also reflect Christ the high priest.

Paul’s embodiment of the dying and rising of Christ, reminds all religious priests that they may be called to suffer for the Gospel and this suffering can have a redemptive quality. In the developed West, the work of evangelization does not usually involve the physical suffering. However, it can mean death to certain parts of ourselves in order to live the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. We hope that these vows are life-giving and demonstrate the resurrection of Christ. In other parts of the world, standing up for the Gospel may result in death as the example of the Jesuits Martyrs of El Salvador, killed on November 16, 1989, shows.

¹⁶⁴ Stegman, 110.

Conclusion

Paul helps us to recover the apostolic dimension of priesthood, a dimension not well represented in recent Church documents on the priesthood. Paul physically witnessed to the dying and rising of Christ. In this way, he was the image of Christ the high priest. He provides many characteristics from which one can draw inspiration: his commitment to apostleship; his fidelity to God's call; his itinerant ministry; his willingness to be at the margins of faith, both geographically and culturally; his balance of conflict and fidelity to tradition; his focus on the ministry of word; his commitment to collaboration and reconciliation. He saw his apostolic work as a "priestly service" of the Gospel, because it delivered the Gentiles as a gift to God (Rom 15:6). His example encourages religious priests to embody the paschal mystery in their work, giving themselves for others, and by so doing become the image of Christ the high priest.

Conclusion

The cultic, servant leadership and apostolic models of priesthood each manifest the high priesthood of Christ. The Letter to the Hebrews located Christ's priesthood in his self-sacrifice for the sins of his followers. Today's priests reflect Christ's cultic priesthood through presiding at mass. In the Gospel of John, Jesus the good shepherd models servant leadership, through feeding the five thousand and washing his disciples' feet. Today's priests model the servant leadership of Christ, by working side-by-side with lay collaborators in service to the Church and the world. Finally, St. Paul imitated Christ's sacrifice through his suffering for the sake of the Gospel, analogously representing Christ the high priest. Working at the margins of the faith, he is good example for religious priests. Some priests may follow St. Paul by accepting hardship for the sake of the Gospel at the geographic or cultural boundaries of faith.

In response to Pope Benedict XVI's declaration of a "year for priests," this thesis has suggested specific New Testament images for deepening priestly interior renewal. We encourage priests to appropriate fully the cultic, servant leadership and apostolic dimensions of priesthood. If priests see themselves as gravitating toward a particular dimension of the priesthood, they might spend time meditating on the perspective that is not their own. If one tends toward a cultic perspective, one might reflect on Jesus' feeding of the five thousand (Jn 6:1-14) or washing his disciples' feet (Jn 13:1-20). If one is inclined toward the servant leadership view, perhaps one might reflect on Hebrews' description of Jesus' high priesthood (Heb 7:23-18) or Jesus' sacrifice (Heb 9:23-28). Religious priests, who may worry their work is not "priestly" enough, might reflect on Paul's conclusion that his work made the Gentiles into a priestly offering (Rom 15:16). They might also consider whether the dynamic of Christ's dying

and rising is present in their life or work (2 Cor 4:7-12). Finally, this thesis confirms that there are diverse ways to live out the priesthood, but that the life of every priest should have a cultic, servant leadership and apostolic dimension.

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