

# THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST IN CHURCH AND MINISTRY

## *Introduction*

The title given me suggests that this paper should fall into two parts:

- A. the priesthood of Christ;
- B. the priesthood of Christ as participated in by the Church as a whole, i.e. those initiated into ecclesial life by Baptism and Confirmation; and also, as participated in, for the good of the Church, by the ministry of presbyters and bishops through the sacrament of Order.

Surely something must also be factored in about the Old Testament background of priesthood, since this is the source from which, in biblical revelation and Christian tradition, the language of priesthood arises. Old Testament priesthood furnishes the point of reference when Jesus is called our great High Priest in the Letter to the Hebrews. By both *being*, ontologically, and *becoming*, through the events of his ministry, what priesthood models (mediation between the divine and the human, the human and the divine), the God-man can also be the archetype of the universal priesthood of all the faithful, and, in that context, the archetype likewise of the ministerial priesthood of presbyters and bishops. The universal priesthood and the ministerial priesthood are two modes of participation in the reality of the God-man as High Priest. (To distinguish the participated in from the participating, capitalization of the title 'high priest' or 'priest' when used of Jesus seems appropriate throughout.)

## A. THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST

### *I. Christ's Priesthood in its biblical background and expression*

#### a. Key principles

Though the Letter to the Hebrews is, of course, the great testimony to the Priesthood of Christ in the New Testament, now that I come to think about it I am inclined to support those who would not leave it in splendid isolation in this regard. To consider a priestly Christology the sole preserve of the Writer to the Hebrews is to suggest that this may be something of a 'sport' in the Canon, which could conceivably be sidelined without great loss. What a contrast with, for example, the Christology of St Thomas for which the Priesthood of Christ as mediator between God and humankind is absolutely central and constitutive (see below, A. II.). The importance of the category of Christ's High Priesthood in the classical theology of Western Catholicism makes me sympathetic to exegetes, often non-Catholic, who seek to rescue this same category from the near-oblivion to which 'higher criticism' of the Gospels and *Leben Jesu Forschung*, usually with Liberal Protestant presuppositions, generally abandoned it.

In approaching the Old Testament (and, for that matter, inter-Testamental) evidence, we need to respect the more general principle articulated by Hugh of Saint-Victor in his *De sacramentis christianae fidei*: namely, that ever since the Fall *sacramenta* designed for the purpose of human salvation have been put in place by God (I. 8. 12). Throughout the various epochs of the history of salvation, the object of faith always remains the same, the Creator God and the redeeming Christ (I. 10. 6-8), such that both the regime of nature and that of the Old Covenant have *sacramenta* of the Coming One (I. 11-12). Indeed, the Old Covenant has an entire saving economy of *praecepta, sacramenta et promissa* though, as Hugh stresses, these require retrospective theological elucidation.<sup>1</sup> Possibly it is this Victorine background which explains why St Thomas Aquinas gives so lengthy and detailed an account of the Old Law (it is the

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<sup>1</sup> A good summary of Hugh's thought in this regard can be found in P. Grelot, *Sens chrétien de l'Ancien Testament. Esquisse d'un traité dogmatique* (Tournai 1962), pp. 54-57.

longest treatise in the *Summa theologiae* at Ia. IIae., qq. 98-107). Israel's religion is, as he explains, a *dispositio* which constitutes a preparation and prefiguration of the New Law within the unity of God's saving plan.<sup>2</sup>

This means that pertinent to our subject are Old Testament concepts and practices of priesthood -- both Levitical/Aaronic (from the Mosaic tradition) and Melchizedekian/Zadokite (from the Davidic/Zion tradition, where a priestly aspect may also be acknowledged to the role of the sacral king). In the words of seventeenth century spiritual theologian M. Olier:

God has ordained nothing in the ancient Law which  
he has not related to what his Son was to be and do  
in the Church.<sup>3</sup>

The key to the relation of the Testaments is, accordingly, the notion of a surpassing fulfillment (*both* noun and adjective are necessary), and precisely this furnishes a 'principle of prefiguration' whereby persons, events and -- not least -- *institutions* from the Old Testament -- in the influential language of Paul, the 'letter' -- can enjoy a positive significance vis-à-vis the New -- the 'spirit'. This brings me to:

b. Seven Christological claims.

First claim: IN THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD, THE EXPECTATION OF A PRIESTLY MESSIAH BELONGS WITH THE HISTORICAL PARTICULARITIES OF THE INCARNATION, AND IT HAS A CONGRUENT REFLECTION IN JESUS'S MINISTRY. The Qumran literature and that earlier discovery the Damascus

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<sup>2</sup> M.-D. Chenu, O. P., 'La théologie de la Loi ancienne selon saint Thomas', *Revue thomiste* 51 (1961), pp. 485-497.

<sup>3</sup> Cited J. Galy, *Le sacrifice dans l'Ecole française de spiritualité* (Paris 1951), p. 301.

Document make it plain that eschatological expectation in the inter-Testamental period included the awaiting of a priestly Messiah, 'The Anointed One of Aaron', and not only a royal one, 'The Anointed One of Israel'. The same expectation is found in the text called the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.<sup>4</sup> Nor is the Melchizedekian counterpart to the Aaronic priesthood omitted. One text in the Dead Sea scrolls (11Q13) celebrates the prospective return of Melchizedek to rescue his people from the power of the Evil One. Such literature is not covered by the charism of biblical inspiration, exclusive as this is to the books of the Canon.<sup>5</sup> That is not to say it cannot form part of the providential disposition of things for the mission of the eternal Son in historical time.

The formulaic title 'Holy One of God', which appears at Mark 1, 24 (and is picked up again at John 6, 69) has overtones of such a figure. Priests were said to be 'consecrated to their God' (Leviticus 21:6, II Chronicles 23:6; 35:3), while the high priest was to wear on his turban a plate inscribed with similar words (Exodus 28:36). Such elements in the ministry of Jesus as exorcism, the declaration of pardon, and the blessing of children can be associated with the exercise of priesthood.<sup>6</sup> Admittedly, these elements do not fall into a pattern of this kind if the reader fails to take up the perspective of *congruity with providential expectations*: hence the limited support this thesis has found among exegetes.

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<sup>4</sup> For some indications of relevant texts, see A. Vanhoye, *Prêtres anciens, Prêtre nouveau selon le Nouveau Testament* (Paris 1980); English translation, *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest according to the New Testament* (Petersham, MA, 1986), pp. 44-47.

<sup>5</sup> But one can note that texts from the Canon speak of divine guarantees for the continuing salvific relevance of the priestly institutions: e. g. Sirach 45: 7 on the 'eternal covenant' given to the Aaronic priesthood; Jeremiah 33: 17-18 on how, in parallel with the irreversibility of the promise to David of a line of sons on the royal throne, so the Levitical priesthood will never lack successors to offer sacrifice; Malachi 3: 3-4 on the purification of the sons of Levi on the Day of the Lord so that they shall be able to offer right offerings.

<sup>6</sup> G. Friedrich, 'Beobachtungen zur messianischen Hohepriesterwartung bei den Synoptikern', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 53 (1956), pp. 265-311.

Second claim: IN JESUS'S FAREWELL DISCOURSE HE ACTS AS PRIESTLY INTERCESSOR FOR THE DISCIPLES AS HE PREPARES FOR HIS SAVING SACRIFICE. The developed theology of Christ's Priesthood in Hebrews, by linking such Priesthood above all to his Passion, death and exaltation, encourages us to seek further evidence for an implicit sense of the Priesthood of Christ on the part of the evangelists in the Passion narratives as well as their accounts of the Resurrection appearances (of which the Ascension is in its own distinctive way the last). In the Fourth Gospel's Farewell Discourse, which forms the prelude to its Passion narrative, chapter 17 constitutes a text with a marked liturgical character. With good reason it has acquired the title 'The High Priestly Prayer'. Though that title seems to have emerged in later sixteenth century Lutheranism, what it signifies was long recognized. Thus, for instance, among the mediaeval divines, abbot Rupert of Deutz writes of this section of St John's Gospel, '[He who is] Priest and Sacrifice prayed for us'.<sup>7</sup> Jesus's prayer for the perfecting of the unity of the disciples, a unity whose source and model is that of the Father and the Son, picks up – precisely by emphasizing *unity* – the theme of the allegory of the vine in an earlier section of the Farewell Discourse, John 15: 1-11. The perfected unity which was the object of Jesus's intercessory action is bound up, so this suggests, with communion in the Holy Eucharist, the sacrament of the saving Sacrifice shortly to be offered.<sup>8</sup> This gives us the formula for the Priesthood of Christ in the High Priestly Prayer (see below, 'Third claim'): it is *together with intercession, sacrificial offering*.

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<sup>7</sup> 'Haec pontifex summus, propitiator ipse et propitiatorium, sacerdos et sacrificium, pro nobis oravit': thus Rupert of Deutz, *In Evangelium S. Joannis Commentarium libri XIV*, at *Patrologia Latina* 169, 764B.

<sup>8</sup> A. Feuillet, *Le sacerdoce du Christ et des ses ministres* (Paris 1972); English translation, *The Priesthood of Christ and his Ministers* (New York 1975), op. cit., p. 25. Feuillet draws much on W. Thüsing, *Herrlichkeit und Einheit: Eine Auslegung des hohepriesterlichen Gebetes [Johannes 17]* (Düsseldorf 1963).

Third claim: THE LAST SUPPER INVOLVES A SACRIFICIAL OFFERING BY THE NEW HIGH PRIEST. Though the setting of the institution of the Eucharist is an actual or anticipated Passover, Jesus uses the opportunity to put in place a new rite which has resonances of other aspects of Israelite ritual: not only the peace-offering whose first celebration was the sealing of the Sinai covenant (Exodus 24) but also the atonement rites of Yom Kippur (Leviticus 16). The peace-offering was not normally considered to atone for sins. Accordingly, Matthew's account of the Last Supper can be thought to contain an allusion, in the words of institution -- 'my Blood of the Covenant which is poured out for many for the remission of sins' (Matthew 26: 28) -- to the high priest's pouring out of blood by way of culmination of the ritual of the Day of Atonement).<sup>9</sup> On that day:

in a state of absolute purity, the high priest went  
into the holy of holies, to the heart of space  
and time, and there... sprinkled blood, i. e.  
life. This was the turning of the year, the rite  
of renewal, the turning of history'.<sup>10</sup>

The polyvalency of the ritual practice and rhetoric of the Old Testament allows us to include likewise -- through the key phrase 'for many' -- reference to the Suffering Servant in the Isaianic oracles, one who offered vicariously the sacrifice of *himself*. In the last of the Servant Songs (Isaiah 52:11 - 53: 12), the Servant makes of himself a sin offering and offers it, and in so doing takes on a priestly role.

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<sup>9</sup> A. Charbel, *Zebah selamin. Il sacrificio pacifico* (Jerusalem 1967), p. 84. But it has been pointed out that for the Targums all sacrifice is expiatory: thus M. McNamara, M.S.C, *Targum and Testament. Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible: A Light on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1972), p. 129. To what extent chronology allows the Targums to be used to throw light on the New Testament is, however, a disputed question.

<sup>10</sup> M. Barker, *The Gate of Heaven. The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (London 1991), op. cit., p. 62. Margaret Barker's work has to be used with caution, since she seems to consider the Old Testament Canon was wrongly drawn up, but she is acutely sensitive to the cultic and mysteric aspects of Israel's faith.

The use of cultic language makes it clear what the prophet is thinking: what the expiatory victims offered in the temple by the Israelite clergy cannot accomplish, the Servant wins from God, because 'he was bearing the faults of many and praying all the time for sinners' (53: 12).<sup>11</sup>

Insofar as Jesus recognized himself in the mysterious figure of the Servant, he implicitly presented himself as Priest of the New Covenant.<sup>12</sup> Indeed insofar as he saw himself as combining in his own person the transcendent Son of Man of the Book of Daniel and the humble 'Servant of the Lord' of the Book of Isaiah, he implicitly presented himself as the *divine*-human Priest of that covenant. The transcendent Son of Man becomes a servant (in the Johannine Farewell Discourse this is acted out in the Foot-washing) and offers his life in sacrifice. In both regards – Servant, Son of Man -- we are dealing with transformations of the Messianic idea whose upshot is a priestly act *in the sense of an act which requires interpretation in terms made available by the practice of Old Testament priesthood*. 'Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God' (Ephesians 5: 2). With this we can compare the key phrase in the High Priestly prayer, which occurs as the opening words of John 17: 19: 'For their sake I consecrate myself'.<sup>13</sup> By uniting the ideas of sacrificial offering and intercession the notion of 'consecration' imposes itself as a self-description of the culminating action in the ministry of the Servant-Son of Man.

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<sup>11</sup> P. Grelot, *Le ministère de la nouvelle Alliance* (Paris 1967), p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> And as Aage Bentzen puts it, 'We can state historically that Jesus of Nazareth must have considered Isaiah 53 the programme of His life', *King and Messiah* (English translation, Oxford 1970, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition), p. 48.

<sup>13</sup> A. Feuillet, *The Priesthood of Christ and his Ministers*, op. cit., p. 35.

Fourth claim: THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN THE SYNOPTICS ENTAILS THE REPLACEMENT OF THE VEIL/VESTURE OF THE OLD PRIESTHOOD. It is noteworthy that all the Synoptics<sup>14</sup> record the tearing of the temple veil at the moment of the redeeming death in what has been called a 'graphic illustration of the identity of flesh and veil'.<sup>15</sup> The veil which architecturally separated the *hekal* or temple hall from the *debir*, the holy of holies, symbolically separated earth from heaven. In Israel's liturgy, it was the high priest, precisely, who could move, ritually speaking, in and out through the veil. In coming out through the veil, he wore vestments made of the same fabrics and colours as the veil itself (cf Exodus 36: 35, 37 for the veil; Exodus 39, 8, 24, 29, for the vestments), thus indicating the intimate connexion between the veil and the high priest's person. In the accounts given by Philo and Josephus,<sup>16</sup> the colours of the high priest's vestments represent the cosmic elements: compare Wisdom 18: 24, 'upon [Aaron's] long robe the whole world was depicted'. For the same commentators, when he entered (as distinct from existed) the holy of holies, the high priest wore white vestments, signifying the angelic world of the court of God. If Christ the Priest took to himself the cosmic elements in the garment of flesh he assumed at the Incarnation,<sup>17</sup> then the same Christ wore a dazzlingly white robe in the Synoptic accounts of the Transfiguration, an event which is a prolepsis of the Resurrection and Ascension when the Jesus who, in his divine nature and personhood never left the true Holy of Holies, the Father's side, entered there in his human nature for the first time.

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew 27: 51; Mark 15: 38; Luke 23: 45.

<sup>15</sup> M. Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*, op. cit., p. 124.

<sup>16</sup> Philo, *Questions on Exodus* II. 85; Josephus, *Jewish Wars* V. 212-213: these references are taken from M. Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*, op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>17</sup>For a beautiful text in St Ephrem, the saving High Priest saw the fate of Adam and came down to purify him so he could re-enter Paradise. 'The Garden cast him from its midst; all shining it thrust him forth. The High Priest, the Exalted One, Beheld him cast from Himself: He stooped down and came to him, He cleansed him with hyssop, and led him back to Paradise.' *Hymns on Paradise* 4, 4.

Fifth claim: THE ASCENSION IS THE PRIESTLY BLESSING BY CHRIST OF THE MEMBERS OF THE NASCENT CHURCH. In the final Christophany of St Luke's Gospel the ascending Jesus, before withdrawing into the world beyond the veil, gives the disciples a solemn blessing: compare the priestly blessing of Abraham by Melchizedek in Genesis 14: 48, and Sirach 50:20 where Simon Maccabeus gives a blessing as high priest in a comparable way.<sup>18</sup> At the end of Luke's Gospel this blessing serves to indicate the Christological foundation for the descent on the apostles of the Holy Spirit at the opening of the sequel, the Book of Acts. As events will show, it is an *epicletic* blessing. The Christological/Pneumatological structure of the Church's worship will reflect this.

Sixth claim: JESUS IS THE TRUE MELCHIZEDEK. If the figure of the priest or high priest or priest-king (Melchizedek of Salem), was important for Jesus's environment, and, so the above references suggest, for Jesus himself and his canonical witnesses in the evangelists (and Paul), it is hardly surprising that the Letter to the Hebrews takes the title up – above all, in chapter 7 of the Letter where the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood over its Levitical counterpart is argued for in a way which simultaneously suggests how Melchizedek bears a resemblance, *homoiotês* (7: 15) to the Son of God. In Genesis, Melchizedek is called simply 'priest of the Most High God' (Exodus 14: 8), but with some small variations, the Targums on this text give

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<sup>18</sup> In the light of these texts, the Ascension may be described as 'the high priest entering the holy of holies surrounded with incense': thus M. Barker, *Temple Theology*, op. cit., p. 32. We can compare with this what she calls 'the earliest material in the Book of Enoch [which] described how Enoch, a high priestly figure, ascended into a heavenly temple of fire and crystal, in which there was an inner house of fire. The Great Glory sat there on his throne, but none of the angels could enter except Enoch, who was summoned into the presence. This must reflect temple practice, where only the high priest could enter the inner shrine, whilst the other priests were allowed no further than the hall of the temple', *ibid.*, p. 20.

him the title found in the Roman Canon from the fourth century on: *high priest*.<sup>19</sup> Hebrews oscillates between these terms: *hiereus/archiereus*. There is reason to think that in the early centuries Christians stressed the figure of Melchisedek somewhat over against Abraham as patriarch of the Jews. Indeed, so much was this so that in the Midrashim Jews began to minimize Melchisedek's place in sacred history (his priesthood was only apparent – he had sacrificed *like* a priest, or if he were a priest his priest prefigured [merely] the Levitical priesthood, or, again, his significance was that he initiated *Abraham* into the function of a high priest).<sup>20</sup>

The Letter to the Hebrews stands, therefore, in a stream that flows from Jesus himself through the first five or six centuries of the Common Era. For the Writer to the Hebrews the Old Testament cultus could not attain its end: to carry human worship to God (it did not bring him a worship he could accept, Hebrews 10: 5-7, citing Psalm 40: 7-90), and to sanctify men by relating them to him (it was powerless to purify them from their sins, Hebrews 10: 1-4, and make them 'perfect', 7: 19, using the verb *teleioô*). But the sacrifice of our great High Priest Jesus Christ satisfied both these aims. To follow Pierre Grelot's summary of the Letter's argument: Accepted by God, as is demonstrated by his entry into the heavenly sanctuary (9: 11-12; cf. 6: 20), that entry 'consummated' Jesus in his twofold function as Priest and sacrificial victim (*teleioô* again, 5: 9). Thus Jesus became for us 'the principle of eternal salvation' (*aitios sôtêrias aiônîou*, 5: 9). He acquired for us an 'eternal redemption' (*aiônîa lutrôsis*, 9: 12). 'He sanctified us [using the verb *hagiazô*] through the offering, *prophora*, of his body' (10: 10). At the same time, he abrogated the regime of the ancient cultus (10: 9), whose lack of inherent saving power and utility he showed in its full light (7: 18).

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<sup>19</sup> R. Le Déaut, 'Le titre de Summus Sacerdos donné à Melchisédech: est-il d'origine juive?', *Recherches de science religieuse* 50 (1962), pp. 222-229.

<sup>20</sup> M. Simon, 'Melchisédek dans la polémique entre Juifs et chrétiens et dans la légende', *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuse* 17 (1937), pp. 58-93.

The only 'true' worship is his own, not that of the levitical priesthood, inasmuch as the latter was only the 'shadow' of the former (8: 5; 10: 1). To this the 'true form of reality', *hê eikôn tôn pragmatôn*, has now succeeded (10: 1).

The intervention of Christ..., the manner in which, through his passion, he established himself in a new relationship with God and with mankind – this entire intervention has effectively achieved all that the Old Testament sacrifices aspired to do. It has, at the same time, fill the words with a substantial plenitude of content. This why the action of Christ must be recognized as priestly and must be called a 'sacrifice'. For this reason, one must be careful not to say that the author of the Epistle is using 'metaphors; when he applies the title of high priest to Christ and the name of 'sacrifice' to his glorifying passion. His viewpoint is exactly the opposite: it is in the Old Testament that priesthood and sacrifice were taken in the metaphorical sense, as they are there applied to an impotent and symbolic figuration, while in the mystery of Christ these words have at last obtained their real meaning, with an unsurpassed completeness.<sup>21</sup>

In this manner of defining the relation between the two Testaments, this last image (shadow/[heavenly or eschatological] reality) underlines above all the imperfection of the Elder Covenant and attests its definitive surpassing. If it is true that there is, between the one and the other, a profound unity and continuity, so much so that the second 'fulfils' the first, the passage from the one to the other

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<sup>21</sup> A. Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest*, op. cit., pp. 208-209. These critical comments are made à propos of J. Smith, *A Priest for Ever. A Study in the Typology and Eschatology of Hebrews* (London and Sydney 1969).

nonetheless implies in a certain fashion a rupture, a change of level, of which Judaism had no idea before.<sup>22</sup> The sub-apostolic age will register this shift, taking up the theme of the unique and definitive Priesthood, not only with regard to Christ's Sacrifice, but to the entirety of his ministry, including his teaching office. As Ignatius of Antioch writes:

To Jesus alone as our high priest were the secret  
things of God committed...<sup>23</sup>

'secret things' which provided the substance of his teaching and the saving plan he embodied as Messianic priest-king.

Seventh claim: SO JESUS IS THE TRUE PRIEST-KING, FULFILMENT OF THE MESSIANIC HOPE. Such a view of the fulfillment of the messianic hope can fit into the claims of the Davidide heir, the royal Messiah, and need not compete with them. *Pace* Qumran, the bifurcation of Messiah-hood into priestly and royal is, in one perspective, a distinction within a wider unity. In Israel's sacral monarchy, Zion theology gave the king a certain priestly quality, as witness Psalm 110 (109), whose setting in life would seem to be the enthronement of a Davidic king, but which declares him 'a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek' (verse 4). This was, presumably, without prejudice to the particular cultic duties of the Levitical priesthood descended from Aaron (or later, via Zadok) as laid out in the Pentateuchal sources, or other biblical books strongly interested in the priesthood, such as Chronicles. In the Synoptic tradition Jesus applies to himself Psalm 110 where the Messiah is both king and priest according to the order of Melchizedek

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<sup>22</sup> P. Grelot, *Sens chrétien de l'Ancien Testament. Esquisse d'un traité dogmatique*, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>23</sup> Ignatius, *To the Philadelphians*, 5.

(Mark 12: 35-36 and parallels; 14: 62 and parallels).<sup>24</sup> In the Hasmonaean period, after all, high priesthood and royalty had been united in the same person, as they now came to be in Jesus Christ. The difference between Jesus and the Hasmonaean (or indeed Davidide) sacred rulers was that what in Psalm 110 was said of the king *ritually* – perhaps at his coronation, or in connexion with the much-discussed ‘New Year’ Festival of the enthronement of YHWH where the king played the part of God’s vice-regent<sup>25</sup>– was now the case *in all reality*. The divine Son who actually was generated eternally -- the Nicene doctrine, already prepared by the Fourth Gospel’s prologue and discourses -- was to be in historical time the royal High Priest who would bring finite and guilty man into the divine presence – and therefore bring them into meta-history, into the everlasting presence of God, thus winning the victory over all the forces that had conspired against the divine plan.

#### A. II. *The priesthood of Christ in St Thomas*

As a Dominican, it seems appropriate for me to present a systematic comment by way of St Thomas Aquinas. By far the most important Christological theme which Thomas invokes in connexion with Christ as Mediator from the New Testament and the Fathers is this theme of the Priesthood of Christ. The office of a priest - and on this social anthropology and traditional theology are at one - is to

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<sup>24</sup> The term ‘kingship’ was, in the Ancient Near East, somewhat comprehensive and polyvalent compared with later usage. The Danish Old Testament scholar Aage Bentzen prefers the paraphrase ‘First Man’ (in the light of Psalm 8, the figure of Adam of Genesis 1 is and the kingly man of Psalm 8): ‘This “First Man” is the origin of the functions of king, prophet and priest. In the eschatological “Man” they are again united, in what theologians later called the *munus triplex Christi*’, A. Bentzen, *King and Messiah*, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>25</sup> See for instance Psalm 2, of which Bentzen writes, ‘[The king] guarantees the happiness of Israel in the New Year, inaugurated through the “remembrance” of God’s saving acts of creation. The “Messiah” of early Israel was not an “eschatological” figure, but the incarnation of God’s blessing according to His covenant with Israel. But he did not remain so.’, *ibid.*, p. 73. The shift to an eschatological view is already found in Isaiah 9: 11 and Micah 5. In Daniel 7 the entire vision of Psalm 2 is eschatologised, the sea-monsters of the nations being the equivalent of the psalmist’s ‘kings of the earth’, and the epiphany of the Son of Man, embodying the Kingdom of God, corresponds to the proclamation of the pre-exilic king.

serve as a mediator between God and human beings, conveying men's prayer and penance to God and God's gifts to men. Thomas completely approves of the decision of the Writer to the Hebrews to describe Jesus Christ and his work in priestly terms. As he remarks pithily in the *Tertia Pars*:

Through him [Christ] divine gifts are bestowed  
on human beings, and he himself reconciled the  
human race to God. Thus priesthood is  
maximally fitting to Christ.<sup>26</sup>

In his commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews, Thomas sets out at some length the Priestly office of Christ, the divine Word who assumed the wounded human condition to the extent of the humiliation of the Cross, thereby becoming 'Lord': that is, meriting to be exalted to the glory of heaven and installed in his humanity as our merciful judge and faithful advocate with the Father - the High Priest passing through the veil into the world and back again, his action completed, to the Holy of Holy of Holies that is the Father.<sup>27</sup> It is in this context of New Testament inspired reflection that Thomas is moving when in the *Summa theologiae* he calls Christ the 'primal agent' in the *genus* of priesthood. Just as the sun is not illumined but illuminates, and fire is not warmed but warms, so Christ is the 'fount', *fons*, of all priesthood worth the name.<sup>28</sup> All priesthood must be defined *in relation to him*.

Likewise, his supreme Priestly act - the Sacrifice he consummated in his Passion and death, has an everlasting power which invigorates all the sacrifices dependent on it while receiving nothing from them. In other words, the Sacrifice of

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* IIIa., q. 22, a. 1.

<sup>27</sup> G. Berceville, O. P., 'Le sacerdoce du Christ dans le *Commentaire de l'Épître aux Hébreux* de saint Thomas d'Aquin', *Revue Thomiste* XCIX. 1 (1999, = *Saint Thomas d'Aquin et le Sacerdoce. Actes du Colloque organisé par l'Institut Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin les 5 et 6 juin 1998 à Toulouse*), p. 150.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* IIIa., q. 22, a.4.

our great High Priest is the source of whatever is valid for salvation in the sacrificial worship and the moral/spiritual service of the Church inspired by that worship.

The emphasis lies, then, on the sacramental/liturgical mediation of the Priestly work of Christ, though the sacramental grace drawn from the liturgical celebration is to be set to work in moral/spiritual effort. In a Thomasian perspective, the entire worship of the Church has its foundation in the 'liturgy' of Jesus's life – the worship he gave the Father through the visible signs which were the 'mysteries', the chief events, of that life. The Church's worship and service is effective only by their power.<sup>29</sup> All the mysteries of Christ's life can be included here because the Saviour's self-oblation on the Tree, the 'baptism' (in blood, not water) of which he said he was 'straitened' until it was 'accomplished' (Luke 12: 50), made of *his whole life* the Priestly service of God. All his significant actions and sufferings can be considered as ordered to the offering on the Cross, the Priestly Oblation which will transmit for all time the salvation there merited.<sup>30</sup> Though situated in past time, these actions and sufferings of the incarnate Word, with the Cross as their centre, have present efficacy. The Liturgy draws attention to this in explicit fashion since its prayers and sacrifices are pleaded on the basis of the unique merits his human career and destiny gained him: the goods we seek from God are sought, as the terse Roman formula has it, 'through Christ our Lord'. St Thomas writes epigrammatically: *Totus ritus christianae religionis derivatur a sacerdotio Christi*,<sup>31</sup> a statement which must be interpreted in the light of its fellow in the immediately previous 'question' of the *Summa theologiae*:

Through his Passion he inaugurated the  
rites of the Christian religion by 'offering

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<sup>29</sup> D. Berger, *Thomas Aquinas and the Liturgy* (English translation, Naples, FL, 2004), p. 69.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Hebraeos* 10, 7.

<sup>31</sup> Idem., *Summa theologiae* IIIa., q. 63, a. 3.

himself as an oblation and sacrifice to God'.<sup>32</sup>

Making copious reference to Thomas's theology, Pope Pius XII would write in the single most important document of the magisterium of the Catholic Church on worship as the communication of salvation, 'The Liturgy is nothing more nor less than the exercise of the priestly function of Jesus Christ'.<sup>33</sup> These words were subsequently picked up in both the Liturgy Constitution of the Second Vatican Council and, thirty years later, the present *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.<sup>34</sup>

The all-important role of Christ as principal Liturgist shows itself especially in the celebration of the *sacraments*. Here there is spiritual good not merely *ex opere operantis Ecclesiae*: that is, by the Church's confident supplication as the Lord's bride and body. Rather, the good we obtain in the sacraments is bestowed *ex opere operato*: that is, by the very deed of Christ. In every sacrament what is signified is the Priestly self-oblation of Christ in his Passion, and the fruits of this – granted human co-operation -- in grace and glory. Thomas's theological doctrine, and that of Pope Pius, give us the clue that participation in Christ's Priesthood will consist in liturgical, and notably sacramental, acts, and the carrying out of moral/spiritual actions which, enabled by those liturgical/sacramental acts and consonant with them, have, accordingly, a doxological character. Compare Ephesians 1: 11:

In [Christ], according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will [the Father], we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to life for the praise of his [Christ's and the Father's] glory.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., q. 62, a. 5, with an internal allusion to Ephesians 5:2.

<sup>33</sup> Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, Chapter 1.I.

<sup>34</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1069.

Christ's act of petition and praise on Calvary (the union of sacrificial offering with intercession typical of his Priestly agency) finds subsequent sacramental expression above all in the Eucharistic Sacrifice: for Thomas the undoubted centre of the liturgical cosmos.<sup>35</sup> That explains how the Thomist school came to rally so wholeheartedly to the Council of Trent whose fathers taught in the Council's twenty-second session that the Sacrifice of the Cross and the Sacrifice of the Mass are substantially identical, differing only by the outer form of the one Oblation.<sup>36</sup> That is also why, as Thomism understands it, the Mass can be offered by its ministerial celebrant, and co-offered through and with the hierarchical priest by the people, the ecclesial or universal priesthood, *only in virtue of sacramental character*. That 'character' is for Thomas precisely participation - in various grades conferred by Baptism and Confirmation for the lay faithful, by Order for presbyters and bishops - in the Priesthood of Christ, the Head of the Church. This brings us to the topic of the participations of Christ's Priesthood found in the ecclesial and ministerial priesthods.

## B. THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE (CORPORATE) CHURCH AND THE MINISTERIAL PRIESTHOOD

### I. *The fundamental claim*

From what has been said, it may already be apparent that THE ECCLESIAL OR UNIVERSAL PRIESTHOOD, LIKE THE MINISTERIAL OR HIERARCHICAL

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<sup>35</sup> M. Morard, 'L'Eucharistie, clé de voûte de l'organisme sacramental chez saint Thomas d'Aquin', *Revue thomiste* 95 (1995), pp. 217-250.

<sup>36</sup> '[I] divino hoc sacramento, quod in Missa peragitur, idem ille Christus continetur et incruente immolator, qui in ara crucis semel se ipsum cruenta obtulit': 22nd Session of the Council of Trent, 'Teaching and Canons on the Sacrifice of the Mass', ch. 2, in H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, ed. P. Hünemann Freiburg 1991, 31<sup>st</sup> edition), 1743.

PRIESTHOOD, IS A SHARING (IN TWO DISTINCT MODES, THEN,) OF THE FULFILMENT OF THE MESSIANIC HOPE AS REALISED BY THE ATONING SACRIFICE OF THE GOD-MAN WHICH BOTH REDEEMS, BY FORGIVING SINS, (*gratia sanans*), AND EXALTS BY FURNISHING THE BASIS FOR THEOSIS, DEIFICATION(*gratia elevans*). In more metaphoric language, the messianic hope is fulfilled when the great High Priest opened a new and living way into the true Holy of Holies (Hebrews 10: 20).

In the Johannine Apocalypse, the servants of God and the Lamb, as they worship him, have his Name on their foreheads.<sup>37</sup> They are admitted, then, to the Holy of Holies, since they bear the Name which is the mark of high priesthood.<sup>38</sup> More widely, whenever New Testament Christians thought of themselves as 'children of light', or as the 'saints', *hagioi*, they may be deemed to understand themselves through a 'democratization' of the high priestly concept. Such democratization is to be explained theologically as corporate participation in the Priesthood of Christ. In the founding literature of the Church, however, the evidence for that affirmation co-exists with testimony to the special apostolic consecration the Twelve (or Eleven) underwent on the eve of the redeeming Sacrifice, according to chapter 17 of the Gospel of John.<sup>39</sup>

## II. *The Old Testament prefiguring of the fundamental claim*

The extension of the notion of priesthood in metamorphosed form from the Aaronic priesthood to the entire people was in any case something already in place in the parent religion. In Exodus 19: 6 (which on the – until recently – customary source analysis of the Pentateuch is assigned to an Exilic or post-Exilic redactor) Moses

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<sup>37</sup> Apocalypse 14: 1.

<sup>38</sup> M. Barker, *Temple Theology. An Introduction* (London 2004), p. 26.

<sup>39</sup> A. Feuillet, *The Priesthood of Christ and his Ministers*, op, cit., pp. 121-200.

hears from the divine voice on Sinai that Israel as a whole is to be a 'kingdom of priests', *mamleket kohanim*. Assuming that this phrase is meant to indicate something more than the merely obvious – namely, Israel is God's kingdom and is supplied with a priesthood, what does this expression connote? The author of this text

does not deny the reality of the priesthood of the descendants of Aaron, nor are we to assume that he confuses the priesthood of the other Israelites with it. The priesthood of the Israelites arises from their consecration to God, from their being his own possession, chosen from among the nations [verse 5], as the priests of the line of Aaron were chosen from among men.<sup>40</sup>

As the Aaronic priests were chosen to serve as intercessory mediators for the people, so Israel as a corporate priesthood has a mediatorial role vis-à-vis the other nations. This emerges with especially clarity from a passage in Isaiah 61, where the prophet (or one of the Isaianic circle) declares that Israel/Zion will be supreme among the nations, which will serve her in material things while she devotes herself to the priestly task of mediating the divine to them:

Aliens shall stand and feed your flocks,  
foreigners shall be your ploughmen and vinedressers;  
but you shall be called priests of the Lord,  
men shall speak of you as the ministers of our God.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> M. McNamara, M.S.C., *Targum and Testament*, op. cit., p. 149.

<sup>41</sup> Isaiah 61: 6.

The priestly functions concerned are, no doubt, those of instruction and intercession,<sup>42</sup> rather than the offering of sacrifice. How this universal priesthood of all Israel was

related to the ministering priesthood of the sons of Aaron was a matter that did not exercise the Jewish mind. In no sense did it exclude this other priesthood nor was the Aaronid priesthood found incompatible with it.<sup>43</sup>

The declaration of Exodus 19: 6 passed into the Greek-language scriptures of Israel likewise. In Second Maccabees, the appeal to Egyptian Jews to come and celebrate the rededication of the Temple is fortified by the statement that:

It is God who has saved all his people, and has returned the inheritance to all, and the kingship and the priesthood and the consecration (*to basileion kai to hierateuma kai ton hagianon*), as he promised through the Law.<sup>44</sup>

We note that for this text the promises made to Israel at the moment of the making of the Sinai covenant are to be fulfilled by the ingathering of the exiles and the reconstitution of the 'verus Israel': the very claims later made by the New Testament Church. In the Septuagint text of Exodus, the *meleket kohanim* is rendered as *basileion hierateuma*, which should probably be understood as two substantives, 'a kingdom, a

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<sup>42</sup> The merely oracular task of the priest in giving judgment via the Urim and Thummim (Deuteronomy 33: 8) was combined with the actual teaching of the Torah (ibid. 9b-10). Compare Malachi 2: 7: 'The lips of the priest are to preserve knowledge, and it is from his mouth that instruction is to be sought; he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts'.

<sup>43</sup> M. McNamara, M.S.C., *Targum and Testament*, op. cit., p. 155.

<sup>44</sup> II Maccabees 2: 16-18. A similar phrase in Philo, *On Abraham* 56.

priesthood', though it could also be one noun qualified by an adjective, 'a royal priesthood'.

### III. *The New Testament witness to the fundamental claim in the light of Tradition*

#### a. In regard to the corporate Church

The universal or ecclesial priesthood is best attested in the two New Testament books which pick up this expression, the Johannine Apocalypse and First Peter. In the Apocalypse, the opening address to the seven churches calls Christ the one who, loving us and freeing us from our sins by his blood, has 'made us [even now] a kingdom, priests, *basileion hiereis*',<sup>45</sup> and this is reiterated later in the book, perhaps in the context of the general resurrection, when the elect shall be 'a kingdom and priests, *basileia kai hiereis*'.<sup>46</sup> In First Peter, by contrast, the exact words of the Septuagint are repeated: 'you are ...*basileion hierateuma*'.<sup>47</sup> Here it seems likely that the author is taking 'basileion' in an adjectival sense, since Peter has placed in apposition three phrases, of which this is the central one, and each of the remaining two – *genos eklekton, ethnos hagion* – have this format. That Peter also speaks a few verses previously of Christians as a 'holy priesthood', *hagion hierateuma*, (verse 5) confirms this presumption.

Granted that the Church saw herself as the true Israel, the new covenanted people of God, constituted in the blood of Christ, it is hardly surprising that the apostolic writers proposed to transfer to her all Israel's privileges, being a royal/holy priesthood in the sense of Exodus and Second Maccabees. The *difference* between Israel and the Church follows from the intervening work of the Word incarnate, as described in the seven 'claims' made above. What was prefigured in the institutions

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<sup>45</sup> Apocalypse 1: 6.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 5: 10, and cf 20: 5.

<sup>47</sup> I Peter 2: 9.

of Israel, including her worship, has now come to pass, fulfilling those institutions in surpassing fashion. In this new reality the Church shares corporately, with all her members.

b. In regard to the ministerial priesthood

The mode of this fulfillment, however, respects the integrity of the prefiguration (compare the 'key principles' stated above, A. I.), which in this particular case means guarding, within the unity of *verus Israel*, the distinction between the corporate priestly nation and those set apart for its service by priestly action of a special kind or kinds. The resultant analogy with Israel has to be respected: this, at any rate, is the *sensus fidei* in this matter of the Catholic Church, as witness, for example, the Ordination liturgies of East and West.<sup>48</sup> That the corporate Church of all the faithful is a 'kingdom and priests to our God' (Apocalypse 5: 10):

in no wise dispenses with the hierarchical [or  
'ministerial'] priesthood nor is it in any way  
incompatible with it. The objects of both are  
different; both, however, come from the same  
source and tend towards the same goal. The  
object of one is to perform sacred acts in the  
name of, and for the benefit of, the Christian

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<sup>48</sup> In the three-fold order of deacon, presbyter, bishop: deacons are compared typologically with Levites, presbyters with priestly sons of Aaron, bishops with high priests. E. g. in the present Roman Rite, at the ordination of a deacon, the prayer of consecration recalls that 'as ministers of your tabernacle you chose the sons of Levi'; at the ordination of a presbyter, the prayer of consecration recalls that 'You shared among the sons of Aaron the fullness of their father's power, to provide worthy priests in sufficient number for the increasing rites of sacrifice and worship'; at the ordination of a bishop the prayer of consecration asks that he be 'a high priest blameless in your sight, ministering to you night and day': *The Rites. The Rites of the Catholic Church as revised by the Second Vatican Council and published by authority of Pope Paul VI. Volume II* (New York 1980), pp. 56, 66, 95.

community. The spiritual sacrifices offered by the other is [sic] the testimony of a good life in imitation of Christ.<sup>49</sup>

The ground for the statement which makes up the last sentence of this citation from Martin McNamara's *Targum and Testament* is a reading of Romans 12. In verse 1 of that chapter Paul appeals to the members of the Roman church to 'present [their] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is [their] spiritual worship'. The continuation of the chapter shows more concretely what this means for the apostle. It means having the mind of Christ (*sôma*, 'body', here is not to be taken as excluding either *psyche* or *pneuma*, then) and practicing one's faith in charity according to the gifts received from God. Verses 6 to 21 of the Letter to the Romans describe both the diversity of gifts and the unity of the Christian life in a phenomenology which offers a condensed account of Christian existence at large.

Evangelically animated moral activity, carried out with a transformed mind on the basis of divine gifts will not, however, be an expression of the corporate priesthood of the Church unless it bespeaks liturgical/sacramental initiation into the Priesthood of Christ. McNamara's account – or any exegesis of Romans 12 in terms of theological doctrine -- needs supplementing, accordingly, by a more overt reference to the liturgical/sacramental foundation of Christian moral/spiritual effort (compare A. III. above, on Thomas's account of the Priesthood of Christ). This returns us to the question of the two modes of participation in that Priesthood, bearing in mind the special 'consecration' of the apostles attested in John 17.

Thomas's account of participation by sacramental character in Christ's Priesthood suggests why. The capacity to celebrate the liturgical/sacramental

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<sup>49</sup> M. McNamara, M.S.C., *Targum and Testament*, op. cit., pp. 158-159.

actions which anticipate the life and worship of the redeemed and exalted community in heaven turns wholly on the manner of participation in that Priesthood. But that manner of participation is itself a matter of Dominical gift. In John 17: 19, Jesus's self-consecration as Priest has a further consequence in the assimilation of the apostles to that Priesthood in their own dependent and limited mode. 'For their sake I consecrate myself so that they too may be consecrated in truth'. In André Feuillet's words:

The Father had first consecrated his Son as priest (10: 36); now Jesus asks him (17: 17) to consecrate his apostles in the same way. At the next moment (17: 19) Jesus stresses the fact that like the other blessings of the new covenant this consecration will be the fruit of his redemptive sacrifice: The Father will consecrate the apostles through Jesus. It is evident that their consecration will be connected with his own...<sup>50</sup>

That further apostolic 'consecration',<sup>51</sup> like the Christological 'consecration' on which it depends will have its rationale in the service of the wider whole of the community of disciples the High Priestly Prayer envisages. The concrete shape of that rationale emerges fully only when the New Testament is read in the light of Tradition. Only in the writings and practice of the post-apostolic age do we see how the ministry of the apostles was understood to pass into the ministerial priesthood of bishop and

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<sup>50</sup> A Feuillet, *The Priesthood of Christ and his Ministers*, op. cit., p. 147.

<sup>51</sup> At the 22<sup>nd</sup> session of the Council of Trent, the distinctively apostolic priesthood is acknowledged as instituted in the moment of Dominical institution of the Eucharist itself: 'Teaching and Canons on the Sacrifice of the Mass', ch. 1: '[A]postol[os] quos tunc Novi Testamenti sacerdotes constituebat [Christus]', in H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, op. cit., 1740.

presbyter in the Church.<sup>52</sup> On that basis, however, we may ask: How, then, is the integration of the two priesthoods – ecclesial and ministerial – to be conceived?

c. In regard to the integration of the two priesthoods, ecclesial and ministerial

First Peter can provide a departure-point.<sup>53</sup> The suggestion that the apostle's letter may have begun life as a Baptismal homily fits well with the Tradition of the Church for which Baptism, and the seal of Baptism, Chrismation (Confirmation), is a person's entry into a share in the royal and universal priesthood of the faithful, a share which finds its consummation in the Eucharistic banquet-sacrifice. In the mind of the Great Church (as found historically in the Catholic Church and the Eastern churches separated from Rome), such sacramental life requires, by Dominical command, the intervention of the apostolic ministry whose members alone can confer the seal of Baptism -- thus constituting one of the baptized a full member of the *laos*, the holy people of God, and confect the Holy Eucharist -- thus bringing before the baptized (and confirmed) in sacramental form the Sacrifice of the great High Priest which won their salvation and now makes the fruits of that salvation available.

Feuillet's choice of language for the inter-relation of the apostolic priesthood with the Priesthood of the Son – I am thinking of the words 'connected with' (see above, III. b.) -- can only be warranted insofar as it marks a stage in an exegetical argument. The proper expression of the relation concerned (the priesthood of the

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<sup>52</sup> The most coherent account of this process I know is composed of two essays: A. M. Farrer, 'The Ministry in the New Testament', and G. Dix, 'The Ministry in the Early Church', in K. E. Kirk (ed.), *The Apostolic Ministry. Essays on the History and the Doctrine of the Episcopacy* (London 1946), pp. 113-182, 183-304. I drew on these in *Holy Order. The Apostolic Ministry from the New Testament to the Second Vatican Council* (Dublin 1990), pp. 5-66.

<sup>53</sup> See J. Coppens, 'Le sacerdoce royal des fidèles. Un commentaire de la I Petr. II. 4-10, in *Au service de la Parole de Dieu. Mélanges offerts à Mgr André-Marie Charue* (Gembloux 1969), pp. 61-75.

apostles/the Priesthood of Christ) is *dependent participation in*. It is because the mode of dependent participation in the Priesthood of Christ on the part of the apostolic ministry (in the sub-apostolic age, that means the ministry of bishop and presbyter into which that founding ministry passes) is *its own mode* of sharing in the person, work and benefits of the great High Priest that it differs – ‘in kind’, as modern Church documents say, and not only ‘in degree’ – from the mode of participation in the same Priesthood proper to the corporate Church.

Sacerdotium autem commune fidelium et  
sacerdotium ministeriale seu hierarchicum  
licet essentia et non gradu different...<sup>54</sup>

Unless the ‘mode of participation’ of the hierarchical priesthood is thus different in kind it cannot reach its own *telos*, its own goal. And that goal is: to serve the life of the universal ecclesial priesthood in the ways the Redeemer determined in the words and acts of which he was the subject, for the overall end of human salvation.<sup>55</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Hence – in brief! -- the statement of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

The ministerial or hierarchical priesthood of bishops and  
priests, and the common priesthood of all the faithful  
participate, ‘each in its own proper way, in the one

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<sup>54</sup> Lumen Gentium 10, in H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, op. cit., 4126.

<sup>55</sup> The two priesthoods ‘ad invicem tamen ordinantur; unum enim et alterum suo peculiari modo de uno Christi sacerdotio participant’. The text goes on to describe the ministerial priesthood as ‘forming and governing’ the ecclesial priesthood, confecting for it the Eucharistic Sacrifice ‘in persona Christi’, and offering that Sacrifice ‘in the name of the whole people of God’, while the members of the universal priesthood by virtue of their own priestly standing ‘concur’ in the Eucharistic Oblation, exercising their common priesthood ‘in receiving the sacraments, in prayer and thanksgiving, in the testimony of a holy life, in asceticism and active charity’, *ibid*.

priesthood of Christ'.<sup>56</sup>

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31. 5. 2008

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<sup>56</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1546, citing *Lumen Gentium* 10.