PRIESTHOOD, PRIESTLINESS AND PRIESTS
Paul McPartlan

1. ‘... all things should be done decently and in order [kata taxin]’ (1Cor 14:40; NRSV)

2. ‘For in him [Christ] every one of God’s promises is a “Yes”. For this reason it is through him that we say the “Amen”, to the glory of God’ (2Cor 1:20).

3. ‘Come to him, a living stone, ... rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight; and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ’ (1Pet 2:4-5).

4. ‘I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship [logiké latreía]’ (Rom 12:1).

5. ‘Here the eucharistic celebration appears in all its power as the source and summit of the Church’s life, since it expresses at once both the origin and the fulfilment of the new and definitive worship of God, the logiké latreía. St Paul’s exhortation to the Romans in this regard is a concise description of how the Eucharist makes our whole life a spiritual worship pleasing to God.... The bishop of Hippo goes on to say that: “this is the sacrifice of Christians: that we, though many, are one body in Christ. The Church celebrates this mystery in the sacrament of the altar, as the faithful know, and there she shows them clearly that in what is offered, she herself is offered.” (Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation, Sacramentum Caritatis, 2007, n.70; quotation from St Augustine, De civitate Dei 10, 6; PL 41, 284)

6. ‘In the ecclesial service of the ordained minister, it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as Head of his Body, Shepherd of his flock, high priest of the redemptive sacrifice, Teacher of Truth’ (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n.1548).

7. ‘He, then, our Lord and God, was once and for all to offer himself to God the Father by his death on the altar of the cross (cf Heb 7:27), to accomplish for them an everlasting redemption. Because, however, his priesthood was not to end with his death (cf Heb 7:24), at the Last Supper, “on the night when he was betrayed” (1Cor 11:23), in order to leave his beloved Spouse the Church a visible sacrifice (as human nature requires [sicut hominum natura exiguit]), by which the bloody sacrifice which he was once and for all to accomplish on the cross would be present, its memory perpetuated until the end of the world and its salutary power applied for the forgiveness of sins which we daily commit; declaring himself constituted “a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps 109:4; Heb 5:6; 7:17), he offered his body and blood under the species of bread and wine to God the Father, and, under the same signs gave them to partake of to the Apostles (whom he then established as priests of the New Covenant [Novi Testamenti sacerdotes]), and ordered them and their successors in the priesthood to offer, saying: “Do this in memory of me” (Lk 22:19; 1Cor 11:24), etc., as the Catholic Church has always understood and taught.’ (Council of Trent, Doctrine and Canons on the Sacrifice of the Mass, 1562, chapter one [DS 1740]; cfJ. Neuner, J. Dupuis, eds., The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church [7th ed.; 2001], p.627; amended translation)
8. ‘with you I am a Christian, for you I am a bishop [vobis sum episcopus, vobiscum christianus]’
(St Augustine, Sermo 340, 1; PL 38, 1483).

9. ‘Wherever the bishop is to be seen, there let all the people be, just as wherever Jesus Christ is,
there is the catholic church’ (St Ignatius of Antioch, Smyrnæans, 8)

10. The Apostolic Tradition
a) ‘pour forth that power which is from you, of the spirit of leadership that you gave to your beloved
Son Jesus Christ, which he gave to the holy apostles, who established the Church in every
place.... Bestow, knower of the heart, Father, on this your servant, whom you have chosen
for the episcopate, to feed your holy flock and to exercise the high priesthood for you without
blame, ministering night and day; unceasingly to propitiate your countenance, and to offer to
you the holy gifts of your church’ (Apostolic Tradition, 3, 3-4; Ordination prayer for a bishop,
from Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, L. Edward Phillips, The Apostolic Tradition
(Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

b) ‘impart the spirit of grace and of counsel of the presbyterate, that he may help and govern your
people with a pure heart’ (Apostolic Tradition, 7, 2; Ordination prayer for a presbyter)

c) ‘let the bishop alone lay on hands because [the deacon] is not ordained to the priesthood but to
the service of the bishop’ (Apostolic Tradition, 8, 1-2; Concerning deacons)

11. ‘the sacrament of Order is directed to the sacrament of the Eucharist, which is the sacrament of
sacraments’ (St Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologicae, Suppl., q.37, art.2, resp.)

12. ‘Taking part in the eucharistic sacrifice, the source and summit of the Christian life, they [the
faithful] offer the divine victim to God and themselves along with it’ (Vatican II, Lumen
Gentium 10; from Austin Flannery, Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar

13. ‘[I]n virtue of the sacrament of Orders, after the image of Christ, the supreme and eternal priest
(Heb 5:1-10; 7:24; 9:11-28), they [presbyters, presbyteri] are consecrated in order to preach
the Gospel and shepherd the faithful as well as to celebrate divine worship as true priests of
the New Testament [veri sacerdotes Novi Testamenti]’ (Lumen Gentium 28).

14. ‘The faithful indeed, by virtue of their royal priesthood, participate in the offering of the
Eucharist. They exercise that priesthood, too, by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and
thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, abnegation and active charity’ (Lumen Gentium 10).

15. ‘The Church wishes to serve this single end: that each person may be able to find Christ, in order
that Christ may walk with each person the path of life’ (Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter,
Redemptor Hominis, 1979, n.13).

16. ‘Since they share in the function of the apostles in their own degree, [presbyters] are given the
grace by God to be ministers of Jesus Christ among the nations, fulfilling the sacred task of
the Gospel, that the oblation of the gentiles may be made acceptable and sanctified in the Holy
Spirit. For it is by the apostolic herald of the Gospel that the People of God is called together
and gathered so that all who belong to this people, sanctified as they are by the Holy Spirit,
may offer themselves as “a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Rom 12:1).’
(Vatican II, Presbyterorum Ordinis, n.2)