The Biblical Foundations of the Priesthood: The Contribution of Hebrews
Symposium on the Ministerial Priesthood in the Third Millennium
Faithfulness of Christ, Faithfulness of Priests
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Outline

Introduction

I. The Context of Hebrews and Why It Matters
II. The Principal Message of the Letter regarding Jesus Christ, the High Priest
III. The Influence of Hebrews on the Church's Theology of the Priesthood
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Summary of Hebrews 4:14—5:10 - Jesus Christ, the High Priest

- He exercises his ministry from heaven, where he has already passed to exaltation and sits at God's right hand (4:14; also 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2).
- He sympathizes with our weaknesses because he is exactly like us, having been taken from among human beings, but without sin (4:15; 5:1).
- He has not chosen his own identity but was called by God and sent on mission (5:4; 3:1).
- Just as the High Priest of old entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement and offered sacrifices for the sins of the people (9:7; 6:19-20), so Jesus Christ has entered a heavenly sanctuary, having offered sacrifices for sin, offering himself as victim (5:1; 9:12, 14, 25; 10:10; cf. 9:11, 14).
- He learned obedience through suffering (5:8).
- His sufferings made him "perfect" and the source of salvation, redemption, purification, forgiveness, sanctification, and perfection for all (5:9; 10:18, 22).
- As High Priest chosen and exalted by God his Father he is our forerunner (Greeck, prodemos, 6:20); he is Son and a priest forever (7:3, 24, 28; 10:14).
- His royal priesthood has made him mediator of a new and better covenant (7:22; 8:6, 13; 12:24).
- In essence, Jesus’ priesthood both fulfills and yet exceeds and abolishes the Old Testament cult in favor of a new cult (7:18; 8:13-14; 9:10-11, 14; 10:9).
Summary of *Presbyterorum Ordinis* on the ministerial priesthood in relation to the Letter to the Hebrews:

- Priests live on earth but mediate heavenly matters, by offering gifts and sacrifices for sins; they are chosen from among human beings yet remain their brothers (*PO* #3; Heb 5:1).
- Our priesthood is an imitation of Christ’s (*PO* #3; Heb 2:17; 4:15).
- Like Christ, priests should exercise hospitality, kindness, and sharing of possessions (*PO* #8; Heb 13:1-2, 16).
- The priesthood is a universal service, valid for all peoples at all times (*PO* #10; Heb 7:3).
- Christ’s own holiness as the great High Priest makes up for the lack of holiness on the part of priests (*PO* #12; Heb 7:26).
- Priests are called to enter God’s sanctuary with sincere hearts, put the Word of God in practice, and share the wisdom of God (*PO* #13; Heb 10:19, 22; 13:9-10).
- Priests should be men of faith, just as Abraham was a model of faith (*PO* #22; Heb 11:8).

Summary of *Pastores Dabo Vobis* on the ministerial priesthood in relation to the Letter to the Hebrews:

- Ministerial priests are configured to Christ, shepherd and head of the church, and participate in mediating the direct access to God Christ has achieved as High Priest; Christ fulfilled the Old Testament roles of mediation previously performed by kings, priests and prophets; ministerial priests now share this threefold ministry (*PDV* #13; Heb 8—9; esp. 9:24-28).
- Priestly vocation is a mysterious call by God’s grace; it must be answered with full freedom; Christ makes up for our weaknesses even as we are called to perfection (*PDV* #20; Heb 7:26).
- Christ is the definitive Word of God; priests should be formed well to communicate faithfully the true wisdom of God (*PDV* #53; Heb 1:1-4).