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
The Catholic University of America
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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
IV. Pastoral Application

Conclusion

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
  (Greek, episkopos, 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
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).
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 latreia]’ (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 fulfillment of the new and definitive worship of God, the logiké latreia. 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 [sicu hominum natura exigir]), 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]; cf. J. 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, Smyrneans, 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) ‘impert 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 Documents, new revised ed., 1996).

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)
Catholic University of America
Year for Priests Symposium

“Stewards of God’s Mysteries”
Theological Insights on Priesthood from the Ordination Ritual
Rev. Michael G. Witczak, S.L.D.
Tuesday, October 6, 2009

Outline of the presentation

1. Introduction

2. Scope and limits: what we’re doing and what we’re not doing

3. The Ritual of Ordination
   a. Some historical notes
      i. Roman core: laying on of hands and prayer of consecration
      ii. Frankish additions: anointing of hands and handing over of paten and chalice
      iii. Medieval theological reflection: matter and form
      iv. Papal clarification of matter and form: Pius XII, 1948
      v. Vatican II reform
   b. The ritual of ordination 1990
      i. Structure (see the outline on the other side of this page)
      ii. Some comments

4. The Prayer of Ordination of Priests
   a. Some historical notes
      i. Sixth century text (Sacramentarium Veronense)
      ii. Medieval touches
      iii. 1968 version: minor revisions
      iv. 1990 version: some major additions
   b. Commentary on the 1990 version of the Prayer of Ordination of Priests (text attached)
      i. General comments on structure: anamnesis and epiclesis
      ii. Specific comments on structure
   c. Theological reflections
   d. Some concerns

5. Conclusions
The overall structure of the Rite of Ordaining One Priest (2003)

1. Introductory Rites: there are special orations for the Rite of Ordination

2. Liturgy of the Word: ends with the reading of the Gospel

3. Ordination
   a. Election of the Candidates
      i. Call by deacon
      ii. Presentation by a designated priest
      iii. Election by the bishop
      iv. Assent of the people
   b. Homily
   c. Promise of the Elect
      i. Work with the bishop
      ii. The ministry of the word
      iii. The Ministry of the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation
      iv. Prayer
      v. Consecration to Christ
      vi. Obedience (placing hands within those of the bishop)
   d. Litany of Supplication (Litany of the Saints)
   e. Laying On of Hands and Prayer of Ordination
   f. Anointing of Hands and Handing Over of the Bread and Wine
      i. Vesting the newly ordained in the vestments of a priest for Mass
      ii. Anointing of Hands
      iii. Handing Over of the Bread and Wine
      iv. Sharing of the sign of peace with the bishop and other priests present

4. Liturgy of the Eucharist: there is a special preface and intercessions for the Eucharistic Prayer

5. Concluding Rites: there is a special final blessing
Beyond the whole world. 

The Passion and the Work of Salvation

You prepared them also with compassion;

You sent them to the whole world.

But in the last days, Holy Father,

You prepared the Gospel to the whole world.

[If the same loving care]

[The increase of grace and worth]

to provide worthy priests in sufficient number

You shared among the sons of Aaron

who helped him to the Great Company of His people.

You extended the spirit of Moses to seventy wise men

in the desert.

established by sacred rites.

[The rite of priests and the offices of Levites]

and so these were led up

to the high place and to help them in their task.

You chose wise men to them in order and dignity.

When you had prepared high priests to rule your people,

Prayer of Ordination

ORDINATION OF PRIESTS (ET 2003)

ORDINATION OF A PRIEST (ET 1975)
Amen.

God for ever and ever,
who lives and reigns with you, Lord Jesus Christ,
and has power to judge all people.

Amen.

and so may the full number of the nations, gathered together in Christ,
and for all the world
for the people entrusted to his care
in improving your mercy,
May he be joined with us, Lord,
and the解锁 released.
so that the saints may be reconciled
and nourished from your altar,
so that your people may be revealed in the waters of rebirth
and may be a faithful steward of your mysteries.
Together with us,
and reach even to the ends of the earth.
the worlds of the eternally blessed, in human hearts
so that by the preaching
May he be a worthy co-worker with our Order,
and the influence of the Holy Spirit
and improve the grace of the Holy Spirit
and may the resurrection pass this office
May he be sanctified in the Spirit of holiness,
May he be sanctified in the grace of the priesthood;
Christ we pray, Almighty Father,
to express the priesthood which comes from the Apostles.
And now we beseech you, Lord, in our weakness,
A Spirituality for the Priest: Apostolic, Relational, Liturgical


Introduction

"Families” and “spiritualities” in Catholicism

Need for an apostolic, relational, liturgical spirituality

The role of the liturgy in an apostolic, relational spirituality that is suited for priests?

Liturgy

Liturgical reform – renewal

Liturgy is the celebration of the paschal mystery of Christ in communities of faith presided over by the ordained in ritual actions through words, actions, signs and symbols that are a privileged means to the end which is nothing less than communal and personal self-transcendence and conversion to the gospel, as we await and welcome the coming of God’s kingdom in its fullness.

Thesis: liturgy articulates and shapes the range of relationships in which the (parish) priest is involved and that the celebration of the liturgy gives shape and right order to those relationships. These are (regularly) articulated in the prayers and rites of the liturgy priests are privileged to preside over.

Spirituality

Spirituality is a way of thinking and acting shaped primarily by the church’s corporate experience of God, who is immanent and transcendent, revealed yet remains hidden, a triune God who invites us into a deep and abiding relationship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit and through them with the
whole church and the wider world. Spirituality enables church members to maintain corporate values and minority positions with confidence in the face of contrary cultural pressures because of the power of God's enlivening Spirit within and among us. Spirituality guides a person's understanding of the world and it provides a basis for discipline in one's life.

God.

Church leaders, Church Universal and Local

Priest – Presbyters

Other Pastoral Ministers

Staff

Lay Volunteers

Parishioners and Those We Serve

Priestly Life and Job Satisfaction

Priestly Sanctification

Presiding at Liturgy

Liturgy for and with the people

Challenges

Communal Spirituality

Fellow Presbyters

Diminished Ability to Know the Folks.

Ministries not Ministers.

Conclusion

Year for Priests