

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

THE IDEA OF PRIESTHOOD.

Is the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ considered as a whole priestly or not-priestly? Is the Christian Ministry within her priestly or not-priestly? If both are priestly, what is the relation of the priestly Ministry to the priestly Church? These are questions deserving closer attention than is at this moment paid to them in some at least of the branches of the Christian Church or by many individual Christian men. For

1. The language used in regard to them is often singularly vague, indefinite, and even self-contradictory. It is not uncommon to hear both Christian ministers and laymen glorying in the statement that there is now no priesthood upon earth, and that the Christian revelation knows only one priest, the Great High Priest who has passed into the heavens, and is set down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. They regard it as almost the main factor in the Reformation movement of the sixteenth century, and as certainly one of its most valuable results, that by it the conception of an earthly priesthood was dispelled, and the old power of the priest over his fellow men not only broken but for ever extinguished. They thank God that they themselves do not belong to a priestly Church. In language such as this the word "priest" is used in an invidious and objectionable sense. It is associated with presumption, spiritual pride, tyranny over the conscience, an effort to keep the mass of the Christian people in subjection to a caste, and denial of that independent and free access to the Father of the spirits of all flesh which

is the birthright of every believer in Jesus. The epithet sacerdotalism, meant to be opprobrious, is applied to the views of all who contend for a Christian priesthood still existent in the world; and innumerable pulpits and platforms echo with the cry, "We are no priests," as if nothing could more conclusively establish the humility of those who utter it, or—give them a juster claim upon the submission of their hearers. But this language is not always, perhaps it is seldom, meant to be literally understood. Were explanation asked, we should be told that it was by no means intended to banish the idea of priesthood even from the Christianity of earth, and that the sole aim of those who use it was to contend against the existence of a priestly class, the members of which have any special right to discharge spiritual functions in the Church, any special promises to depend on, or any more reason to expect the Divine blessing on their work than is assured to every true-hearted and genuine disciple of Christ. Not to destroy, it would be said, the idea of the personal or universal priesthood, but only that of the priesthood of the clergy, is the end in view. It is forgotten even that the clergy are at least a part of the Church; that, if the whole Church be priestly, they must at least share in the general priesthood; and that the relation between it and their ministerial duties ought to be defined. The consequence is that large bodies of Christians have avowedly abandoned the idea of a divinely appointed Ministry altogether, while multitudes of individual Christians, still remaining members of Churches professing an opposite belief, have come practically to the same conclusion. The question as to what the Ministry is, and what it is to do, if there be a ministry, they will not consent to look at. The gospel is a spiritual dispensation, there is no difference in the standing of Christian men before God, every man is substantially a minister, settles the question. Where conclusions of this kind are not drawn,

evils of as serious a kind arise in the opposite direction. In the effort to get rid of what are supposed to be the disastrous consequences of admitting the priesthood of the clergy, the priesthood of the laity disappears. It is undeniable that language like that above alluded to leads in innumerable cases to the loss of all recollection that there is even a common or individual priesthood. Privileges associated with that idea are not appreciated, and responsibilities flowing from it are not felt. The polemic against one side of a complex truth has been so conducted as to destroy both sides; until at length, if we take the Reformed Churches generally, those very Churches which a recent writer has declared to be founded upon the notion of a priesthood common to all Christians,¹ it is no exaggeration to say that there is hardly a less operative principle among them than that of which they boast so loudly when their object is not build up but to destroy. Even the High Anglican argument must bear its share in the responsibility of this result. If we may judge from the language of such men as Carter, Moberly, and Liddon, it is felt that the idea of the general Christian priesthood has not had its due prominence assigned to it in the teaching of the Anglican Church, and that it has vanished far too much from the minds of her members. Whether the effect was anticipated or not, it would seem that the mode in which the general subject has been treated, and in which, more particularly, the argument both for and against a ministerial priesthood has been conducted, has almost expelled from the Christian community at large the thought of its personal priesthood. How great the loss thereby incurred, an inquiry into the meaning and functions of the priesthood can alone enable us to determine.

2. The question is one which penetrates to the very heart of the Church's life and work in the world. That

¹ Prof. Lindsay, *The Reformation*, chap. iv.

this was the case in Israel will probably be at once admitted. The priestly character of that people was the fundamental principle of their existence, and regulative of all their relations alike towards God and man. The first message of the Almighty by Moses to the tribes assembled at Sinai was, "Ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation" (Exod. xix. 6). This was the charter of their existence, the very centre of the whole economy under which they lived. Only when this end had been attained could they occupy the position, enjoy the privileges, or discharge the functions that had been assigned to them. Failing in this, they would have failed in all. Thus, without being first a priestly, Israel could not have been a *kingly*, people. In the fact that Jehovah was its King much more was implied than that the Jewish nation was ruled by the Divine power and made the depository of a specially Divine legislation. The righteous reign of the heavenly King was to be reflected in it. "Judges and officers," it was said, "shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes; and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift, for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous" (Deut. xvi. 18, 19). In no other way than as living in God its King could Israel be kingly, and it was needful therefore that, in what we have to see is the true sense of the word, it should first be priestly. As with its kingly, so also with its *prophetical* function. For Israel was to be a prophet to the heathen, yet not by actual proclamation to them of a Divine message, but by what itself was. Its life, the holiness and happiness of its obedience, the success which crowned its arms, the plenty which smiled from its vineyards and oliveyards and fields,—these were to be its prophetical message to surrounding peoples. "This," said

Moses, "is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what great nation is there that hath a god so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is whensoever we call upon Him? And what great nation is there that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law?" (Deut. iv. 6-8.) The voice of the nation to the world was to be that of Moses to Jethro: "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good." But before this voice could be uttered with effect, the end of Israel's priestly calling had to be reached. The priestly function, in short, lay deeper than either the kingly or prophetic. As a priest only could Israel be either a prophet or a king.

But we are not left to general reasoning upon this point. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews has distinctly taught us the truth of which we are now speaking: "The priesthood being changed," he says, "there is made of necessity a change also of the law" (chap. vii. 12). Under the word "law" here the whole Old Testament economy is embraced (comp. ver. 11; viii. 6); and the statement is as distinct as language can make it, that so essentially, so fundamentally, did the idea of the Aaronic priesthood enter into the thought of Israel's life that, when that priesthood was "changed" (the word is remarkable, for it is not "was brought to an end"), the whole life of Israel was changed along with it. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the idea of the priesthood was the leading, forming, and controlling idea of the Old Testament dispensation. If it was so then, we may naturally expect it to be so under that New Testament dispensation which proceeds upon the same great lines as the dispensation preceding it, only bringing with it the full accomplishment of what had formerly been presented in type and shadow. But the Epistle to the Hebrews is again decisive upon this point. The priesthood

of Christ, together with the privileges and duties of that priesthood transferred to such as are united to Him in faith, is unquestionably the leading theme of that Epistle, the spring out of which both its doctrinal teaching and its practical exhortations flow? Nor is this the case only, because the Epistle was addressed to a people familiar with the idea of priests and sacrifices. The object of the writer is not to pass from these ideas to other ideas of a different kind, for which it might be said that the former had prepared the way. It is to confirm the ideas, while it is at the same time to show that in Christ they existed not in outward, material, and temporal forms, but that they had been transferred to an inward, spiritual, and eternal sphere. Blot them out from the Epistle, or regard them as spoken only in accommodation to ignorant or childish conceptions, and its whole teaching would become unintelligible, and would leave us no alternative except to reject its canonical authority.

Experience teaches the same lesson. The question of the priesthood of the Church of Christ, in whatever way we understand the particulars of the general statement, pierces to the very heart of Christian thought and life. In comparison with it questions regarding Romish or Episcopal or Presbyterian government, or regarding the propriety of Establishment and Endowment as compared with Disestablishment and Dis-endowment, sink into insignificance. Such questions as these are but little affected by the conclusion come to in reference to the priesthood. The lowest notions upon the point may be and are entertained by Episcopalians as well as Presbyterians. The highest have been and are entertained by Presbyterians as well as by Episcopalians. The clergy of an Established Church are not made by their position more priestly than those of a disestablished Church. In fact they are far less prone to be so; and one of the first effects that would follow dis-

establishment either in Scotland or England would be a stimulating and strengthening of the priestly conception of the Church that might well make not a few of her keenest opponents, if their language is to be understood as the expression of their real thoughts, pause and fear. By our reception or denial of priesthood in the Church, in short, our entire view of what the Church is must be affected and moulded. We shall either accept the idea of a visible and organized body, within which Christ rules by means of a ministry, sacraments, and ordinances to which He has attached a blessing, the fulness of which we have no right to look for except through the channels He has ordained (and it ought to be needless to say that this is the Presbyterian idea), or we shall rest satisfied with the thought of the Church as consisting of multitudes of individual souls known to God alone, as invisible, unorganized, with ordinances blessed because of the memories they awaken, but to which no promise of present grace is tied, with in short no thought of a Body of Christ in the world, but only of a spiritual and heavenly principle ruling in the hearts and regulating the lives of men. Conceptions of the Church so widely different from each other cannot fail to affect in the most vital manner the Church's life and relation to those around her. Yet both conceptions are the logical and necessary result of the acceptance or denial of the idea of a divinely appointed and still living priesthood among men.

3. The question is one, the answer to which must powerfully influence the relations of the different branches of the Church of Christ to one another. Upon this point it is unnecessary to say much. It follows directly from what has been said already. Let it be enough, therefore, to remark that it is by turning their attention to questions such as this that those who take the deepest interest in the unity of the Church will best promote the end they have

in view. Very little good comes of discussing small particulars, for every Christian knows by instinct, what it were well also that he knew by reason, that his real life does not lie in such things. One Church may adopt to a very large extent the fashions and ways of another, and yet be hardly nearer it than it was. Perhaps it may be a little nearer, because the human mind upon a great scale is wonderfully logical, and fashions and ways which have established themselves in the course of centuries mostly always flow from some central spring, and have a close relation to one another. Yet conformity in a few outward particulars will not go far to produce unity. It is in the fire of great questions that the dross of faction must rise to the surface to be skimmed away, while the pure ore will be separated from it to be wrought into bonds of love. It has been the misery of faction in all ages, that it extinguishes the love of great questions and the zeal to solve them in the theologian's breast. These questions cannot live in its unhealthy atmosphere and amid the foul exhalations which it engenders. The more therefore students can turn their thoughts to them the better. They may do something at least to make our different churches feel that they have a great common heritage to preserve, and a great common duty to perform, and that in the effort to do these two things will they best realise the greatness of the Divine love to themselves, taste the blessedness of loving as they have been loved, and show how much they, by love, can accomplish for others.

We have lingered long upon these preliminary remarks, and must without further delay proceed to the topic before us—What is the idea of Priesthood?

In answering this question no help can be obtained from considering the etymology of the word. That etymology is too uncertain to be depended on. But it is of the less moment that this should be the case, because the word is

used in circumstances sufficiently clear to guide us to a distinct conception of the thought expressed by it in Scripture. Thus when Korah and his companions rebelled against Moses because they were denied the office of the priesthood, and were confined to the inferior services of the tabernacle, Moses said, "In the morning the Lord will show who are His, and who is holy, and whom He will cause to come near unto Him; even him whom He shall choose will He cause to come near unto Him" (Num. xvi. 5). These last words distinctly show the nature of the position to which the rebellious Levites aspired; and when, therefore, they are immediately afterwards charged with "seeking the priesthood also" (ver. 10), *i.e.* in addition to the privileges possessed by them as the sons of Levi, we cannot doubt that the "priesthood" and "coming near unto God" are equivalent expressions. The same thing appears in the language of the Almighty to Moses upon the mount, when He set before him the peculiar nature of the position to which Israel had been called: "Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all peoples; for all the earth is Mine; and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Exod. xix. 5, 6). To be a "peculiar treasure" unto the Lord, to be His with a nearness which could not be ascribed to any other nation of the earth, was to be a "kingdom of priests." It is not otherwise in Ps. xcix. in which "the true character of God's worshippers as consecrated priests, holy, set apart for His service, is illustrated by the example of holy men of old, like Moses, Aaron, and Samuel."¹ The characteristic of these men was that "they called upon God, and He answered them," that "He spoke unto them in the cloudy pillar"; while at the same time He was a God that forgave them, though He

¹ Perowne, *in loc.*

took vengeance of their inventions (vers. 6-8). The New Testament bears witness to the same truth; and, more especially in the Epistle to the Hebrews, it finds in the drawing near to God, in the enjoyment of immediate access to His presence, the most distinguishing mark of that priesthood which it ascribes to the heavenly High Priest and to all who in assurance of faith have fled for refuge to the hope set before them in Him (comp. chap. vi. 18-20; viii. 1; ix. 11, 12).

The point now before us will be made still clearer if we consider that, when in Num. xvi. 5 the qualifications of the priesthood are described, nothing is said of mediating for others.

The qualifications there spoken of are four. (1) The priest must be the property, or in an eminent degree the possession, of God; "the Lord will show who are His." (2) He must be holy; "and who is holy." (3) He must come near to God; "whom He will cause to come near unto Him." (4) He must be divinely chosen or selected for this purpose; "whom He shall choose will He cause to come near unto Him." The same characteristics again appear in the demands made upon the priestly people, and in the description of the qualities by which they were to be marked. We nowhere read that Israel was to mediate with God on behalf of the Gentile nations by which it was surrounded. Its life was to be a lesson to them. The peace, prosperity, and success which it enjoyed so long as it continued faithful to the covenant, were to illustrate the blessedness of those who had the Lord for their God and whom He had chosen to be His own inheritance. A light was to go forth from it which should lighten the darkness resting upon the earth; and it was thus to prepare the way for the coming of Him who should be the Saviour, not of one people only, but of the world. Nothing, however, is said of mediation. The priestly people were in an eminent

degree God's possession, "His people" and "His inheritance" (Deut. ix. 26, 29), "a peculiar treasure unto Him above all people" (Exod. xix. 5). They were to be holy, for the Lord their God was holy (Lev. xix. 2). They were to draw nigh to God and He was to draw nigh to them in such a manner that the question could be asked, "What other nation has God so nigh unto them?" (Deut. iv. 7.) Finally, they were especially selected for these purposes, "The Lord their God had chosen them to be a special people unto Himself above all people that were upon the face of the earth" (Deut. vii. 6). The same qualifications, in short, which mark the priestly class called out for special circumstances from amongst the priestly people, mark the people as a whole; and interposition on behalf of others is not one of them. It seems, therefore, hardly correct to say that Israel was to be "a priest and a prophet to the rest of mankind."¹ A prophet it was to be, the power of its prophecy to man lying in this, that it was a priest to God. But Israel did not mediate between God and the Gentiles. It was constituted a kingdom of priests by the simple fact, that it had been selected from the rest of the nations in order that God might draw near to it in a grace not experienced by them; and that it might, in return, draw near to Him in a holy life and joyful confidence worthy of the grace received.

In the light of the passages now considered we seem justified in coming to the conclusion that the fundamental and essential meaning of the word "priest," as used in Scripture, is that of one who has the privilege of immediate access to God, and is able to take advantage of it with confidence and hope. The idea of mediation, of interposition with God on behalf of others, does not necessarily belong to the word. The priest may stand before God in his own name only, and may have his mind occupied with

¹ Smith, *Dict. of the Bible*—"Priests."

nothing but the relations between his Creator, Governor, and Friend upon the one hand, and himself as created, ruled, and cared for on the other. The man in whom these relations are fulfilled is not only a friend or child, he is at the same time a priest, of God.

It is not enough, however, to say this. The mode in which man draws near to God, or, in other words, performs his part of the covenant established by the Creator between Himself and His creature, has also to be considered. There is only one way of doing so in a manner corresponding to the circumstances of the case, and that is the way of *offering*. Even if we put aside for a moment the thought of sin, man has no equality of footing with Him to whom he owes both existence and its blessings. God is the giver, man is simply the receiver, of all good. When therefore man draws near to God, it must be as absolutely dependent upon His bounty, and with the feeling that, in surrendering alike what he is and what he has to the Being whose gift they are, he is only discharging an obligation imposed upon him by his creaturely position. This is the idea of offering. It is quite unnecessary that, at the point at which we are now contemplating it, there should be in it any thought of death. How that comes into the priestly offering we have yet to see. But, in the first instance, it is life, not death, with which we have to deal. The one due return to God for His unmerited favour is the man himself, with everything that makes him man and fills up the measure of his human existence. Death may be demanded as a penalty to violated law, but it can never rightly represent to us the position of either of the parties to a covenant of love and friendship. It takes one of the parties out of existence, and in the covenant both must live. The offering, therefore, made by the creature of himself, can be only that of life. Life, not death, must be the return with which as priests we draw near to God.

In strict conformity with this, accordingly, it will be remembered that in the ritual of the Old Testament the priest did not slay the victim. That was done by the offerer himself, and the work of the priest began with receiving the blood and sprinkling it upon the altar. Further, this blood was not the blood of death, an expression which would have been incomprehensible to the Hebrew mind. It was the blood of life. It was the living principle itself set free from every limiting or restraining influence, and in such a state that it could be brought into the nearest possible connexion with the living God, by being sprinkled upon that Mercy-seat which He occupied as a throne, or by being smeared upon the horns of His altar. In its primary conception, therefore, the duty of a priest was that of taking, not the life of others, but his own life in his hand, and offering it to God as due to Him when the creature responded to the offers of His mercy and entered into His covenant. Such was Israel's ideal state; and, had it been, as it ought to have been, realised, there would have been no room for a priestly caste. All the members of the community would have known that, in offering themselves to God, they could draw near Him with acceptance. In the essence and in the idea of his calling every Israelite would have been, and would have acted as, a priest.

This condition of things, however, was never actually realised. From the first the people were conscious of sin, and were afraid to take advantage of their privilege. When, at Sinai, they heard the noise of the trumpet and the thunder, when they saw the lightnings and the mountain smoking, they "removed and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die" (Exod. xx. 18, 19.) Their cry was heard; and first Moses himself, afterwards Aaron and his sons, and, finally, the whole line

of Aaron's descendants was appointed to express and exhibit what the people were unable to express and exhibit in themselves. So selected, they were to draw near to God, to enter into His tabernacle, to hold communion with Him, to present to Him His people's gifts and sacrifices, to intercede with Him on their behalf, and to obtain and convey to them His blessing. Thus the thought of mediation or intervention was introduced. The priest approached the Almighty not simply in his own name or to maintain his own personal communion with Him; He drew near the footstool of the Divine throne in the name of those who would not, or could not, draw near themselves. He was not a substitute for the people any more than he was a substitute for God. He was dealing with a covenant which had necessarily two parties to it, and he represented both,—on the one hand Israel offering itself to God, on the other hand God conferring His promised blessings upon Israel.

Important as the Levitical priesthood thus was, it was not an embodiment of the idea of Israel's priesthood in its widest and deepest sense. Like all the other parts of the Mosaic economy, it was a declension from higher and purer ideas that had gone before. It was an arrangement rendered necessary by the hardness of the people's hearts. It was a vessel within which a spiritual principle that, just because it was spiritual, knew no bonds, was confined for a time in a limited and straitened form, that it might not wholly perish. It looked forward to something better, for which in the meantime it prepared the way. The Levitical priest represented, as far as circumstances would allow, the idea of approach to God; but his existence as a member of a separate order was in one respect as much an imperfection and a weakness as in another respect it was a strength and a help to higher things.

Hence also the interesting fact that notwithstanding all

the fences by which the priest's office was protected from the intrusion of those who did not belong to the priestly line; notwithstanding the summary punishment inflicted upon Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and the threatenings denounced against Saul when he ventured to offer sacrifice because the coming of Samuel was delayed;—there were yet occasions when these fences were with the Divine sanction broken through, and when the stamp of the Divine approbation was given to the priestly offerings of persons who had no legal right to make them. Samuel was a prophet, not a priest. There may be some doubt whether his father had not belonged to a family of Levi, but none that he had himself no connexion with the priesthood. Yet, when he instructed Saul to wait for him at Gilgal, he said, "And, behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings" (1 Sam. x. 8). Saul expected him to do so; and the narrative leaves upon the mind the distinct impression that, but for what happened in the mean time, he would have done it (1 Sam. xiii. 8-14). When David, in like manner, brought up the ark of the Lord from the house of Abinadab to Jerusalem, we are told that he "offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord," and that "as soon as he had made an end of offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts (2 Sam. vi. 17, 18). The combination of offering and blessing here spoken of leads directly to the thought that these priestly acts were performed by David as if he were a priest. In both cases they were in direct violation of the Divine system under which Israel lived, yet they were performed, with the Divine blessing resting upon them, in great crises of the nation's history. It would seem, therefore, as if we beheld in them an action of principles precisely analogous to that which meets us in the Transfiguration of our Lord. They were moments when the true glory of the heavenly and

ideal was permitted to shine through the limits of the actual, in order that those whose hearts were most in accordance with the former might have a visible representation of that by which and for which they were really living. Considerations of a similar kind may also perhaps explain the much disputed words of Psalm li. 19, "Then shalt Thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings: then shall they offer bullocks upon Thine altar." Is it not possible that these words may mean, "Then, when Thy people have all of them the spiritual mind described in the previous verses of the psalm, they shall all be priests"?

Whether this latter criticism be accepted or not, the bearing upon the point before us of what has been said is clear. It illustrates the fact that the essential idea of the priesthood is free access to, and union with, God; that the idea of intervention or mediation comes to be connected with it only through the existence of sin; and that the appointment of the priestly class in Israel was a deflection from a better state of things which would otherwise have wholly perished, was a temporary arrangement intended to guard against a still greater fall, and was no more than a guide towards a more perfect relationship, to be introduced in the future, between God seeking after man, and man seeking after God.

Yet it would be a mistake to imagine that the priestly idea, either in itself or in its connexion with the thought of mediation, can ever be dispensed with. In the latter aspect as well as in the former it will be always necessary because men have sinned, are conscious of sin, and can never forget, be their circumstances what they may, that they at least have been sinners. We are separated from God: we are afraid to approach Him: and we require some one in whom we may obtain access to the throne of the Divine Majesty, and may find that even to us it is a throne of grace. It is

not only in times of peculiar discouragement, or of deeper than ordinary reflection on our sinfulness, that we stand in need of priestly intervention. A sense of our need of it can never fail to be a part of the right attitude of the soul towards God. No doubt our Lord has said, "And in that day ye shall ask Me no questions: verily, verily, I say unto you, If ye shall ask anything of the Father, He shall give it you in My name" (John xvi. 23); *i.e.* in the day when the joy of His disciples shall be perfected, they shall ask nothing from their Lord in a spirit of curious questioning. With perfect trust in the Father Himself they shall approach Him, and He will give them what they ask. He has revealed Himself to them as their Father. He has given them "the right to become children [a deeper word here than sons] of God" (John i. 12). They shall receive what they require direct from the Father's hand. Yes; but even then the idea of intervention is included, *not* excluded, for all this is given "in the name" of Jesus. Believers shall then be so completely in Christ and one with Him that *in Him* they shall go immediately into the Father's presence. In other words, when the highest idea of union with God is fulfilled in the members of Christ's Body, it is in Christ that it is fulfilled. The members are one with the Father because the Father beholds them in the Son, and sees that they are one with Him. And so it is. At the highest point of human excellence, when most thoroughly persuaded of the freeness and fulness of that Divine grace which has been made ours, we dare never forget the rock out of which we were hewn, or the pit out of which we were digged. Even in heaven itself we must direct our eyes to the same thought, for He who is there followed by His redeemed is "the Lamb that was slain,"—slain for them. Thus deeply rooted, not in Israel only but in human necessities, is the idea of the priest and of priestly mediation.

One or two points in connexion with the idea of the priesthood still remain to be noticed, but our notice of them must be brief.

1. Two pre-requisites of the priesthood must be constantly borne in mind. In the first place a priest must be appointed by God Himself. For this alone can give man confidence that the Holy One of Israel desires that he should draw near into His presence. Would it be presumption in us to have boldness before the throne of the Almighty, it may be not less presumption in any other to whom we would appeal for help. Nay, it may be even more presumptuous, for he approaches God not for himself only but for us. He bears with him the accumulated load of the sins of all whom he represents; and nothing but a declaration from heaven that he has been divinely called to the priesthood can assure us that he will be accepted in what he does. In the second place, he must be one of ourselves, so connected with us and we with him, to such an extent sharer of our infirmities, that a foundation shall be laid for a union between us that shall be real, and not one of legal fiction only. An outward sacrifice might indeed be made by one whose nature was different from ours. A debt contracted in kind may be paid in money. But no outward sacrifice, however valuable, can effect that close and intimate union between God and man, which is alone worthy of Him and suitable to us. To rest *upon* such a sacrifice is not enough. We must be *in* it. We must appropriate it. In the most intimate way we must share the feelings, cherish the spirit, and enter into the work of the person who represents us. If this be not done, our reconciliation cannot be complete; and those deepest longings of the heart, which are not so much after the pardon of sin as after restoration to the Divine image, cannot be satisfied. Appointment by God and fellow feeling with man are the pre-requisites of the priesthood.

2. The functions of the priesthood must also be remembered.

(1) The most important of these was that of offering; and, although there were many and various offerings, that with which we have chiefly to deal was the offering of blood. In particular it was blood that upon the Great Day of Atonement, in which all the sacrifices of the year culminated, the high priest, the chief representative of the priesthood, took with him into the Most Holy Place that he might sprinkle it on the Mercy-seat. And this blood of the victim was that of its life, not its death. Upon no point in the whole ritual are the words of the law marked by less dubiety. "For the life of the flesh," it is said, "is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life" (Lev. xvii. 11). In bringing therefore the blood into the closest possible contact with God the priest brought the person whose life that blood represented into the same relationship. Sin was covered; the sinner was readmitted into communion with God; the breach between God and man was healed; the covenant, whether in its more superficial or more profound aspect, as the case might be, was restored.

(2) The second function of the priest was intercession for the people, yet not exactly intercession in the simple sense of prayer. At the time when Israel renounced its own priestly privileges, the words of the people to Moses had been, "Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die" (Exod. xx. 19). And when Moses, at a later date, recalled what had happened at that time, he used precisely similar language; the people, he tells us, had said to him, "Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say; and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee" (Deut. v. 27). When Moses therefore acted as Israel's priest; when,

in their name and as their representative, he went into the presence of God, it was not merely to pray for them in the sense in which we use that word. It was to transact with God on their behalf. It was to confess their sins, to make known their wants, to give utterance to their praise. It was also to hear the answer of God, and to communicate that answer to the people. All this included more than prayer. It was the perfecting in detail of all the relations between Israel and its covenant King. It was the application of all the effects of a general condition of reconciliation to Israel's ever varying wants and weaknesses.

(3) The third function of the priest was to convey the Divine blessing to the people. He was not only the representative of the people to God, he was also the representative of God to the people. Therefore he brought back from the secret of the Divine presence the Divine answer to Israel's offerings and prayers. Inasmuch, too, as that answer proceeded from One reconciled to Israel, it naturally assumed the form of blessing. Hence the solemn formula which the priests were instructed to employ when "the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and to his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them,

The Lord bless thee and keep thee :

The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee :

The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace" (Num. vi. 22-26).

Offering, intercession, blessing; such were the three functions of the priests of Israel; and not "through" or "with," but "in" these priests, or in the high priest again in his turn representing them, the great purpose of the ancient economy was attained. It was but a figure, after all, for the time then present. It dealt with the shadows of eternal truths rather than with those truths themselves.

But, such as it was, it was a type of better things to come ; and, if it be given us to "fulfil" the ideas then partially embodied, it will be ours to know in its deepest sense the restoration of the broken covenant, and to reach, in spiritual union with God, the perfection and the glory of our being.

W. MILLIGAN.

NOTES ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

(VIII.-XIV.)

VIII. 3. *ἐλυμαίνετο* does not signify either "havock" or "waste" of the Church as a body, as rendered in our versions ; but personal outrage to individual men and women. It expresses the shameful and degrading treatment to which Christians were subjected. As the description was probably written on the authority of Paul himself, it is interesting to compare it with his language elsewhere. In 1 Tim. i. 13 he records with sorrow and shame his conduct at that season, and describes by the term *ὑβριστήν* the scornful insolence of his behaviour. *ὑβρις* expressed more of personal violence, *λύμη* of personal degradation ; but the two are in this case nearly akin. *Saul was dealing shamefully with the Church*, while devout men were burying Stephen.

viii. 16. The incomplete baptism of these converts is designated as *into the name of Jesus* (*εἰς τ. ὄνομα*). The same phrase is adopted in xix. 5 to denote a similarly incomplete baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit being in both cases subsequently conferred by the laying on of hands. The same phrase *εἰς τὸ ὄνομα* is employed by St. Paul when repudiating the idea of baptism into his own name. It seems therefore to denote mere acknowledgment of Christ, and external admission into the body that bore His name,