

The Being (Greek rendition of YHWH) Exodus 3:14  
ho ôn

Jesus  
Christ



'I will betroth  
you  
to myself  
in tenderness'  
(Hosea 2:20)

Saint  
John

1

Jesus, our One and Only Priest

In the Christian Church there is only one priest,  
Jesus, 'the one mediator between God and  
humankind'(1 Timothy 2:5).

Whatever we say about the priesthood of the  
ordained, it is a special sharing in the priesthood of  
Christ.

As we reflect on Jesus as King, Prophet and Priest, an  
argument can be made that it is the aspect of  
Priesthood that offer the best perspective on the way  
in which Jesus can be said to be King and Prophet.

2

### Jesus as King

Jesus' mission was to bring about the reign of God 'on earth as in heaven'. He fulfilled in his person, in his words, and in his deeds, the role of the king in Israel. This is a familiar idea. What is essential for our reflection is to note how Jesus functioned as king. He did so as a humble servant: 'You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet'(John 1:13-14). He did so as the Good Shepherd 'who lays down his life for his sheep'(John 10:11).

3

### Jesus as King

He was a 'king' by giving himself throughout his ministry, culminating in his gift of himself in love on the cross. As we will note shortly, giving oneself is essentially a priestly act.

4

### Jesus as the Prophet

This, too, is a familiar theme. Jesus not only spoke God's word. He is God's Word-made-flesh. His mission was to 'testify to the truth'(John 18:37). The truth is, of course, that God is love. Jesus testified to this by 'bringing Good News to the poor', by 'proclaiming liberty to captives' and 'new sight to the blind', by 'setting the downtrodden free'(Luke 4:18 = Isaiah 61:1-2).

His prophetic ministry is priestly.

5

The Good News that Jesus proclaimed came from his communion with God. His words impressed people because he 'spoke with authority'. As he said himself: 'What I say is what I have seen in the Father's presence'(John 8:38). His words impressed because they expressed who he was and how he lived. As with his way of being King, so with his way of being Prophet, the key is found in his offering of himself to his Father and to us.

He was a Prophet by giving himself throughout his ministry, culminating in the gift of himself on the cross. Giving himself is essentially a priestly act.

6

### Jesus as Priest

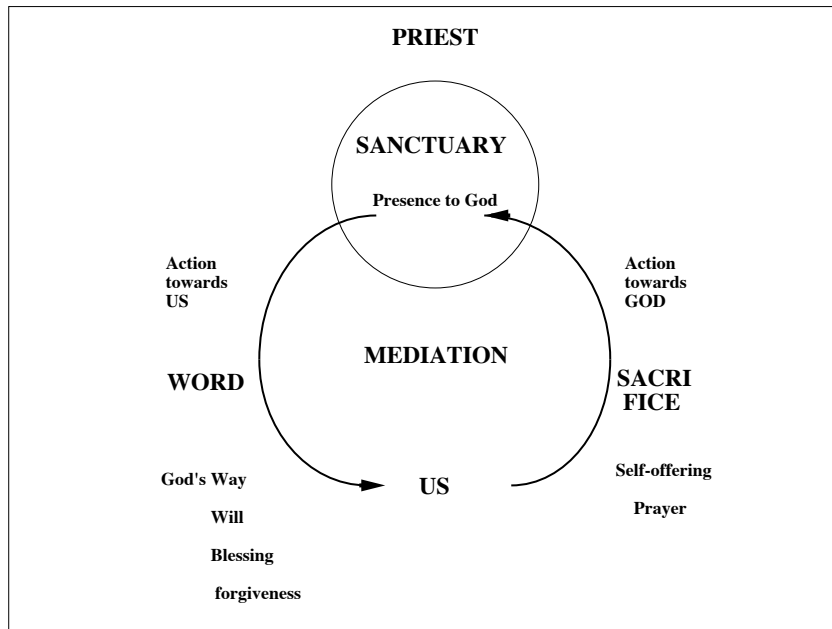
In the New Testament only the Letter to the Hebrews speaks of Jesus as a priest. The reason for this are not difficult to find: Jesus did not belong to the tribe of Levi and was not eligible to be a priest in the Jewish cult. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews, however, recognised that in his person and in his ministry, culminating in his self-giving on the cross, Jesus brought to perfection the priestly ministry.

7

### Jesus as Priest

Priesthood focuses on the Holy. It is, as the following diagram illustrates, about the presence of God (in the 'sanctuary') and drawing people into communion with God. While Jesus was not a Levitical priest, he brought to fulfilment their ministry, not by offering animal sacrifices in the sanctuary, but by the offering of himself, to God and to the world, throughout his ministry, culminating in his self-giving in love from the cross. It is as priest, in his self-offering in love, that he lived the ministry of king and prophet.

8



9

### The priestly ministry of the Levitical priest

‘The priests officiate in the sanctuary and approach Yahweh to serve him’(Ezekiel 45:4).

‘The Lord set aside the tribe of Levi ... to stand in the presence of Yahweh, to do him service, and in his name to pronounce blessing’(Deuteronomy 10:8).

‘Moses consecrated Aaron ... to bless his people in the name of the Lord ... to offer sacrifice to the Lord ... to make atonement for the people. He entrusted him with his commandments, committed to him the statutes of the law, to teach Jacob his decrees and enlighten Israel on his law’(Sirach 45:18-21).

10

### Jesus perfects the mediation of the Levitical priests

They carried out their mission in the sanctuary. Jesus is God’s chosen temple, the sanctuary in which God dwells and where God’s Word is incarnate.

They mediated between God and the people when they spoke God’s word from the sanctuary and when they declared God’s will as inscribed in the Torah. Jesus speaks only what he receives from the Father (John 8:28), and he reveals God’s will, thereby showing not only who God is but also how we are to respond to God and so enjoy the divine communion in which holiness consists.

11

The Levitical priests mediated between the people and God when they received gifts from the people and offered them to God as sacrifices. Jesus gives God’s Spirit without measure (John 3:34), welcomes everyone and offers to God all who are in communion with him. Through this communion in self-offering, he sanctifies and saves all who come to the Father through him.

‘He is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them’(Hebrews 7:25).

12

### The priestly ministry of the High Priest

The high priest carried out his special function on the feast of Yom Kippur (the 'day of the cover'). He took the sins of the people into the inner sanctuary of the temple to the 'cover'(the 'mercy-seat'), God's throne. This is the meaning of to 'expiate' or 'atone': bringing sin into contact with divine mercy annihilates sin, for nothing impure can survive in God's presence.

13

### Jesus as 'high priest'

Hebrews 2:17-18

'Jesus had in all things to become like his brothers and sisters so that he might become a merciful and trustworthy high priest for the things of God, in order to expiate the sins of the people. For in what he has suffered himself, being tested, he is able to offer help to those who are being tested.'

14

### Jesus perfects the mediation of the high priest

'He is the expiation-sacrifice that takes our sins away, and not only ours but the whole world's'(1 John 2:2; also 4:10).

'All are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation-sacrifice by his blood, to be received by faith'(Romans 3:24-25)

15

### The priestly ministry of the King

Psalm 110 recognises the priestly role of the king by speaking of him as 'a priest according to the order of Melchizedek'(Psalm 110:4), the priest-king of Jerusalem (Genesis 14:18). His priestly role transcended that of the Levitical priests, for his sanctuary was not just the temple, but the 'Holy Land'. He was a sacrament of God and was to bring about God's reign, firstly in Israel, but then throughout the world. He was to do this by governing the people according to God's Law and in such a way that they would be faithful to the Covenant and 'be holy as the Lord God is holy' (Leviticus 19:2).

16

Jesus perfects the mediation of the priest-king

The king was God's especially anointed one, mediating God's word to the people by governing according to God's law and binding the people together as God's covenant people.

Jesus made the reign of God effective among those who became his disciples: 'a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek'(Hebrews 5:6).

He is the 'the one mediator between God and humankind' (1 Timothy 2:5).