

o6. The ordained minister as a sacrament of **Christ the Priest**.



The Ordained Minister as the sacrament of
Christ the priest in his self-offering,
drawing his Body the Church
into communion with his Father

The Epistle to the Hebrews, and indeed the whole of the New Testament, makes it clear that the sacrifice which Jesus offered to God was the sacrifice of himself.

The organisational leadership of the presbyter derived from Jewish synagogue practice in which the local community was under the leadership of a group of older men, the presbyters. Though the English word 'priest' derives from the word 'presbyter', the Jewish presbyter (Hebrew: zâkên; Greek: presbyteros; Latin presbyter) was not a priest (Hebrew: kohên; Greek: hiereus; Latin: sacerdos).

By the third century, however, Christian presbyters, as well as the overseers of the community, the 'bishops', were being referred to as 'priests'.

An ordained priest is called to be a sacrament of Christ's priestly mediation drawing the community into communion with God.

He is called, therefore, to live a life of self-offering ('sacrifice') and to encourage the same in the community.

'Acting in the person of Christ, the priest unites himself most intimately with Christ's offering, placing on the altar his entire life, which bears the marks of a holocaust' (Paul VI Priestly Celibacy 1967 n. 29).

‘The life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, loving me and giving himself up for me’ (Galatians 2:20)

‘God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all’ (Romans 8:32).

‘Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her’ (Ephesians 5:25).

‘He gave himself up to the one who judges justly’ (1 Peter 2:23).

gave himself [didômi]

‘Christ gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father’ (Galatians 1:4).

‘God our saviour desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and there is one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all’ (1 Timothy 2:4-6).

gave himself [didômi]

‘The grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all, training us to live religious lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of Jesus Christ, the glory of our great God and saviour, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds’ (Titus 2:11-14).

‘For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’ (Mark 10:45 = Matthew 20:28).

offered himself [prospherô]

‘He offered himself without blemish to God’ (Hebrews 9:14).

‘Christ offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins’ (Hebrews 10:12).

offered himself up [anapherô]

‘He offered himself up once for all’ (Hebrews 7:27)

sacrifice of self [thysia autou]

‘to annul sin by the sacrifice of himself’ (Hebrews 9:26).

‘lay down one’s life’ [tithêmi psychên]

‘I lay down my life for my sheep ... The Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father’ (John 10:15-18).

‘No one has greater love than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends’ (John 15:13).

God's word besides revealing God as love is also an invitation for people to offer themselves in loving response and so enter more deeply into communion with God.

Christ the priest is the mediator who receives our self-offering and draws us into his intimate love-communion with the Father in the Spirit.

The ordained priest is a sacrament of Christ in this mediatory role, which he carries out especially in the liturgy.

‘Priests 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 covenant’ (LG, n.28).

‘Christ calls priests to lead God’s holy people in love, to nourish them by God’s word, and to strengthen them through the sacraments’ (from the Preface of the Chrism Mass).

Ordained ministers are ‘Christ’s servants, stewards entrusted with the mysteries of God’ (1 Corinthians 4:1).

‘Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all’ (Philippians 2:17).

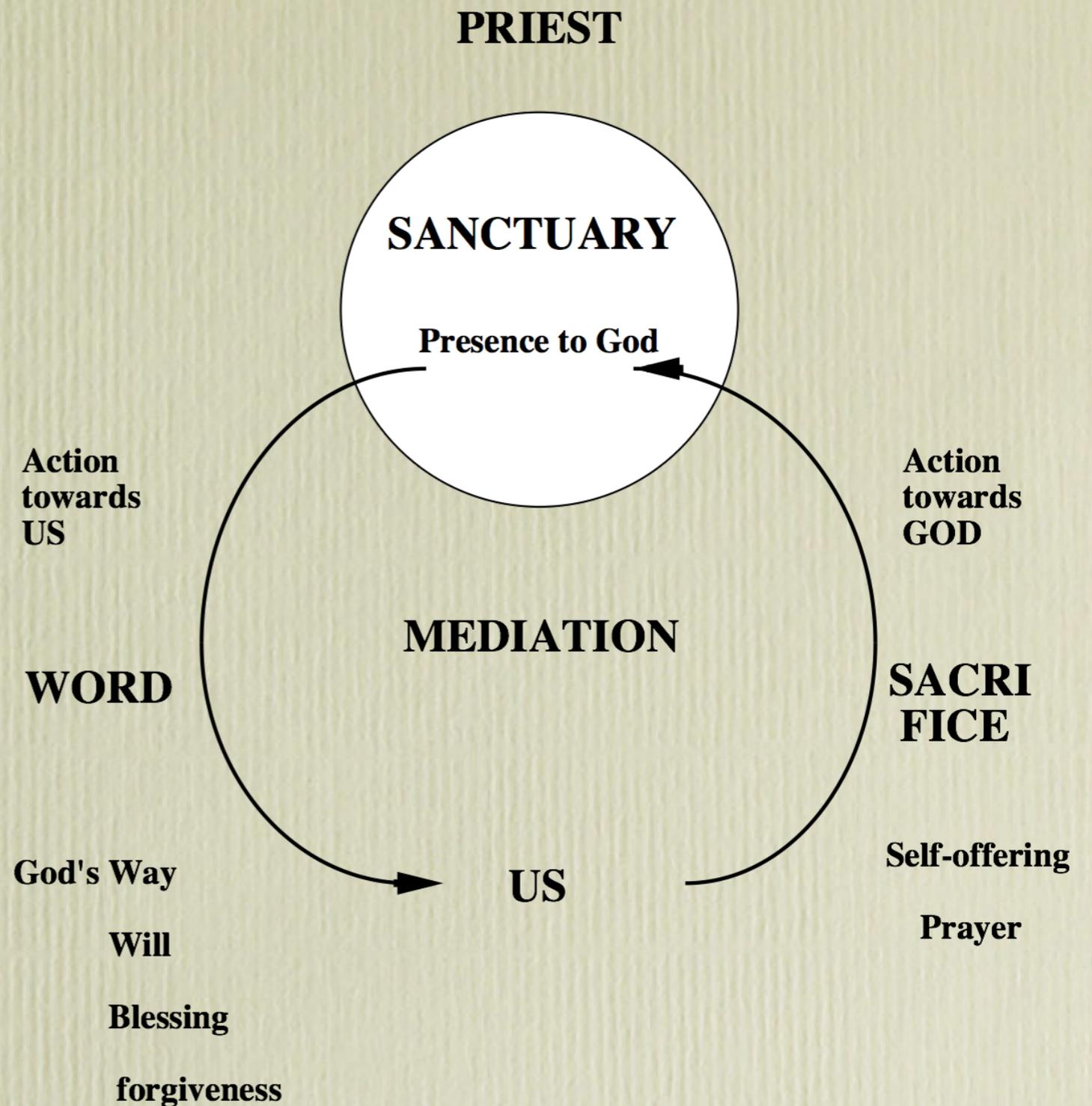
The ordained minister is a sacrament of Christ the sanctifier who makes the community holy. He should, therefore, be one who is able to lead in prayer. He should also be one who is aware of the mystery of God and so of the continuing surprise and creative energy of the divine as incarnated in people.

If John can say of all who want to see God: ‘All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure’ (1 John 3:3), a special purity is asked of the one who is graced to be for the community a sacrament of Christ the mediator.

In exercising his ministry as a priest, the presbyter is a sacrament of Christ the priest.

Like Christ the priest, he must dwell in the sanctuary.

In other words, he must live in communion with God for he is to speak God's words and draw others through his priestly mediation into this communion.



Vatican II PO 3

‘The priests of the New Testament are, by their vocation to ordination, set apart in some way in the midst of the People of God. But this is not so that they should be separated from the people or from anyone, but that they should be completely consecrated for the task for which God chooses them. They could not be the servants of Christ unless they were witnesses and dispensers of a life other than that of this earth. Yet they would be powerless to serve others if they were to remain aloof from their life and circumstances.

Their ministry makes a special claim on them not to conform themselves to this world. At the same time it requires of them that they should live among people in this world and that as good shepherds they should know their sheep, and should also seek to lead back those who do not belong to this fold so that they, too, may hear the voice of Christ and there may be one fold and one shepherd.’

The Ordained Minister will need to open his heart to the risen Christ and receive a share in Jesus' compassion.

In the Gospels many scenes remind us of how deeply moved Jesus was by the suffering of others.

We think of Jesus and the leper (Mark 1:40-45);
of his response to the needy crowd (Mark 6:34);
and of his feeling for the widow of Nain (Luke 7:15).

Compassion features also in the parables of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:33) and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:20).

When speaking of the kind of perfection which God enjoys and so the kind of perfection which is to be our goal, Luke speaks of compassion, using a word which in the Greek versions of the Old Testament is used to translate the Hebrew word that is related to the word for the womb. God feels for us the way a mother feels for the child in her womb:

‘Be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate’
(Luke 6:36).

‘The Christian spiritual tradition regards the sacred heart of Jesus, which draws priestly hearts to itself, as a profound, mysterious synthesis of the Father’s infinite mercy’ (The priest in the third millenium page 51).

1 Thessalonians 2:7-12

‘Though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ we were gentle among you, like a mother feeding and cherishing her own children. Being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

For, my brothers and sisters, you remember our labour and toil; we worked night and day that we might not burden any of you while we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and so is God, how holy and righteous and blameless was our behaviour to you believers; for you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to lead a life worthy of God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.’

‘My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you’ (Galatians 4:19).

‘The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering in doing good, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and control of self’ (Galatians 5:22-23).

‘To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some’ (1 Corinthians 9:22).

‘He said to me: ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’. I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ then I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities; for when I am weak then I am strong’ (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Colossians 3:11-15

‘Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freedman, but Christ is all and in all.

Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, feelings of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and long suffering in doing good.

Bear with one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgive one another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you too must forgive. And over all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.’

The ordained minister is to help make the faithful aware of their role, as baptised Christians, to be sacraments of Christ the Priest, allowing the Spirit of the risen Christ to inspire them to contribute to consecrating the world, drawing others into communion with God, by their holy lives, and by the gift of themselves in love.

‘The ordained 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 covenant’ (LG, n.28).

‘Students for the ordained priesthood should be ‘trained for the ministry of the word ... for the ministry of worship and sanctification ... for the ministry of the shepherd’ (OT, n.4).

Pope John-Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation 'I will give you shepherds' writes:

'Priests are a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ - the head and shepherd - authoritatively proclaiming his word, repeating his acts of forgiveness and his offer of salvation, showing his loving concern to the point of a total gift of self for the flock' (n.15).



A Friend Broken

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Tintoretto

A Friend Broken

Before me I see
a friend broken for me
His voice I hear whispers
“Come, have no fear”.

I see a friend’s blood
poured out of love.

What can I do?

I’ll share
in memory of you.

(3)





A Friend Broken

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