

NOTIONS OF NEW TESTAMENT PRIESTHOOD*

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1. *Biblical terminology*

Together with the Jewish (high) priests and Christ (high) priest, the NT features deacons, presbyters and inspectors (bishops). These three terms indicate various kinds of lay functions both in biblical and extrabiblical texts. In the NT they also indicate hierarchic christian ministries.

A. *Deacons* The Greek verb *diakonéo* means to wait upon, to serve. The angels served Christ at the end of the fast (Mt 4,11), Peter's mother-in-law served him after her own cure (Mt 8, 15), the slave Onesimus would serve Paul (Phm 13). The deacons serve the community (1 Tm 3, 10,13). The Septuagint (LXX) does not have the verb *diakonéo*. In its stead it employs the verb *douleúo*: Jacob served Laban (Gen 29,15). The Masoretic Text (MT) generally has the verb 'abad that means to work and to serve.

The noun *diakonia* means anykind of work or service: the toil of Martha (Lk 10,40), the ministry of Paul (Acts 21,19) and Timothy (2Tim 4,5). It is not employed to indicate the ministry of the deacons. The LXX has it only three times; in its stead it normally employs the noun *douleia*: the service of Jacob (Gen 30,26), the bondage of the Jews in Egypt (Ex6,6). The MT generally has 'abodah which means any kind of work or service.

The noun *diákonos* means servant or minister: the waiters at the Cana wedding (Jn 2, 5), the ministers of the king (Mt 22,13), the civil authorities (Rm 13,4), the disciples of Christ (Jn 12,26) and Christ himself (Rm 15,8). It means also the deacons (Phil 1,1; 1 Tm 3,8,12). The LXX has it only seven times; in its stead it normally employs the noun *doúlos*: the Jews were the bondsmen of the Egyptians (Lev 26,13) and the servants of Yahweh (Dt 32,36). The MT has 'ebed (worker, servant) or 'ebed (servant).

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B. Presbyters The Greek noun (properly a comparative adjective) *presbúteros* indicates the seniors or elders in time, age, status or office. Elders in time: the forbears (Mt 15,2; Heb 11,2). Elders in age: the elder brother (Lk 15,25), adult people (Acts 2,17). Elders in status: the prominent people who formed and represented the communities of the Jews (Mt 16,21) or christians (Acts 14,23); together they form a *presbutérion* (Lk 22,66; Acts 22,5; 1 Tm 4,14). Elders in office: presbyters selected and ordained to lead the christian communities (1 Tm 5,17; Tt 1,5).

The LXX makes abundant use of *presbúteros* to indicate the elders in age: Abraham and Sarah were aged (Gen 18,11); in dignity: worthy people deserve respect (Sir 4,7 S); in status: prominent people who formed and represented the Jewish communities (Jdg 8,14) and who are also called by the collective name of *gerousia* (group of elders, Dt 19,12; 21,4) which does not appear in the NT. The MT employs various terms to indicate seniority. The most common is *zaqen* which means elders in age: Abraham and Sarah were aged (Gen 18,11); in dignity: the notable [old] and the eminent [erect faced] are the head of the community (Is 9,14); in status: prominent people who formed and represented the Jewish communities (Jdg 8,14.16; Rt 4,2.4).

C. Inspectors (bishops) In Greek the verb *episkopéo* and the nouns *episkopé*, *episkopos* have the primary meaning of inspecting (to look upon) and the secondary or derived meaning of watching (to visit, guard, direct, take care).

The verb *episkopéo* appears twice in the NT and has the secondary or derived meaning of watching: the community takes care that nobody is deprived of the grace of God (Heb 12,15), the elders watch over the flock of God (1 Pt 5,2). It appears five times in the LXX. Twice with the primary meaning: Yahweh looks upon (Hebrew *darash*) the promised land (Dt 11,12); Mordecai observed (Hebrew *yada'*) Esther's fate (Est 2,11). Three times with the secondary or derived meaning: the foremen directed (Hebrew *nasah*) the restoration of the temple (2 Chr 34,12); Joab mustered (Hebrew *paqad*) David's forces (2 Sam 2,30 B); the place where wisdom is not seen (Hebrew *paqad*, Prov 19,23).

The noun *episkopé* is used four times in the NT with the secondary or derived meaning of a watch: a visit by God (Lk 19,44; 1 Pt 2,12), the direction of Judas (Acts 1,20) and of the local community leaders (1 Tm 3,1). In the LXX, sometimes it has the primary meaning of inspection: Yahweh looked upon (Hebrew *paqad*) the sufferings of the Jews in Egypt (Ex 3,16). Mostly it has the secondary or derived meaning of a watch: Yahweh will visit (Hebrew *paqad*) the Jews to deliver them

(Gen 50,24).

The noun *epískopos* appears five times in the NT with the secondary or derived meaning of a watch: Christ guards our souls (1 Pt 2,25), the elders of Ephesus direct the Church of God (plur., Acts 20,28; see v.17), the leaders (inspectors, bishops) direct the local communities (Phil 1,1 plur.; 1 Tm 3,2 sing.; Tt 1,7 sing.). In the LXX it appears fourteen times, sometimes with the primary meaning: God looks at (scrutinizes) the heart of the blasphemer (Wis 1,6); mostly with the secondary or derived meaning: Eleazar watched over the oil and other paraphernalia of the desert tabernacle (Num 4,16).

D. Priests The English priest, like the German *Priester*, the French *prêtre* and the Italian *prete*, comes from the Greek *presbúteros*, through the Latin *presbyter*. The NT has the Greek term *iereús* (priest), from *ierós* (sacred): the priest handles sacred things.

In Greek *ierós* means sacred in the sense of divine (full of divinity; a similar term is *ágios* which means sacred in the sense of pure). From it derive *ierón* (sacred thing, temple), *iereutikós* (belonging to the temple), *ierarchés* (head of sacred things), *iereús* (priest), *ierázo* (to function as a priest), *ieráomai* (to be a priest), *ierateia* (priesthood), *iereion* (offering), *iereúo* (to offer), and *ierizo* (to consecrate).

The NT has *ierós* (sacred, 2 Tm 3,15), *ierón* (temple, Mt 4,5), *ieroprepés* (convenient, decent, Tt 2,3), *iereús* (priest, Mt 8,4), *archiereús* (high priest, Mt 2,4), *ierateia* (priestly office, Lk 1,9; or dignity, Heb 7,5), *ieráteuma* (priestly college [people] or priestly quality, 1 Pt 2,5.9), *ierateúo* (to function as a priest, Lk 1,8), *ieróthuton* (immolated, 1 Cor 10,28) and *ierosúne* (priestly nature, Heb 7,11). There is also *ágios* (pure), sometimes with the meaning of *ierós* (compare Rm 1,2; 2 Tm 3,15). These NT terms reflect the terminology of the LXX.

The LXX has *ierós* (sacred, 1 Esd 1,39), *ierón* (temple, 1 Chr 9,27), *iereia* (festival, 2 Kgs 10,20), *iereús* (priest, Gen 14,18), *ierateia* (priestly office or dignity, priestly garb, Ex 29,9; 35,19; Hos 3,4), *ieráteuma* (priestly quality, 2 Mac 2,17), *ierateúo* (to be a priest, Lev 16,32; to function as a priest, Ex 28,1) and *ieratikós* (priestly, 2 Mac 3,15). It also has *ágios* (pure), sometimes with the meaning of *ierós* (compare 1 Mac 12,9; 2 Mac 8,23).

The MT three times (2 Kgs 23,5; Hos 10,5; Zeph 1,4; see Hos 4,4) employs the Aramaic word *komer* to indicate the priests of the idols. Otherwise it employs the Hebrew word *kohen* to indicate all kinds of priests. These can be grouped under four headings: Jewish *kohen* acknowledged and official, Jewish *kohen* acknowledged

not official, Jewish *kohen* not acknowledged, *kohen* of other gods.

Jewish kohen acknowledged and official By anticipation the Jewish *kohen* appears in charge of the sacred objects (Ex 19,22,24) before the construction of the same objects. With the building of the desert tabernacle, the title is given to Aaron and his sons (Ex 29,30), exceptionally to Moses (Ps 99,6). After the entry into Canaan it is given to those who carry the ark and trumpets (Jos 3,13; 6,4), Eli (1 Sam 1,9; 2,11) and his sons (1 Sam 1,3), Ahijah who ministers to Saul (1 Sam 14,19), Ahimelech and the other priests of Nob (1 Sam 21,2; 22,11), Abiathar (1 Sam 23,9), Zadok (2 Sam 15,27) and Ira (2 Sam 20,26) who minister to David together with his own sons (2 Sam 8,18).

With Solomon begins the long line of the temple *kohen* (Jer 18,18), such as Jehoiada (2 Kgs 11,9), Uriah (2 Kgs 16,10), Hilkiah (2 Kgs 22,10), Pashhur (Jer 20,1), Zephaniah (Jer 21,1) and the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek 1,3). After the exile the title belongs to those who started the cult of Yahweh in Palestine (Esd 3,2) and continued it in the newly built temple (Esd 6,16). Ezra is a *kohen* (Esd 7,11; 10,10,16; Neh 8,2,9; 12,26), as also Uriah (Esd 8,33), Eliashib (Neh 13,4) and Shelemiah (Neh 13,13).

The principal *kohen* is a high priest (Lev 21,10; Num 35,25,28), or anointed priest (Lev 4,3,5,16; 6,15), or head priest (2 Chr 19,11; 24,11; Esd 7,5), or simply the priest (1 Sam 1,9; 21,2). There is also a second *kohen* (2 Kgs 23,4; 25,18; Jer 52,24).

Jewish kohen acknowledged not official: Apart from the important sanctuaries such as Shiloh, Bethel, Hebron and Jerusalem with their official *kohen*, there were private sanctuaries with a non official *kohen*. The Ephraimite Micayehu (Jdg 17,1) built a family sanctuary and assumed his son as a *kohen* (Jdg 17,5). Having found a Levite, Micayehu made him *kohen* instead of his son (Jdg 17,10-12). A group of migrating Danites stole the sanctuary (idol) of Micayehu and carried off with them the Levite to become their private *kohen* (Jdg 18,19,30).

Jewish kohen not acknowledged: This includes the priests of the illegitimate hill sanctuaries (*bamoth*, 1 Kgs 13,33; 14,23; 2 Chr 11,15), the priests of the ancient legitimate sanctuaries (such as Shiloh, Bethel and Hebron) illegitimated by the deuteronomic reform (Dt 12,2-14), and the non levitical priests (1 Kgs 12,31; 2 Chr 11,15).

Kohen of other gods: The Bible mentions the priests of other countries, such as Egypt (Gen 41,45,50; 47,22,26), Philistia (1 Sam 5,5; 6,2), Moab (Jer 48,7) and

Ammon (Jer 49,3), and the priests of the Baalim and Asherim worshipped in Palestine (2 Kgs 11,18; 2 Chr 23,17; 34,5; Zeph 1,4).

From *kohen* derive the noun *khunnah* and the denominative verb *kahan*. The noun indicates the priestly quality (Ex 29,9; 40, 15; Num 3,10; 16,10; 18,1,7), or function (1 Sam 2,36), or college (Neh 13,29). The verb means to become a priest (Lev 16,32; Dt 10,6), to function as a priest (Ex 28,1.3.4.41; 29,1.44), to bedeck as a priest (Is 61,10).

The etymological meaning of *kohen* is not certain. The term is a loan word in Arabic, Aramaic and Syriac. It is autochthonous only in Canaanite and in Hebrew where it passed from the Canaanite language.

In Canaanite and Hebrew the verbal root *khn* is not used. For this reason some authors look for an etymology in Akkadian where the Shaphel of *kanu* means to bow (the priest bows to God, worships him) or in Syriac where the Pael of *khan* means to prosper (the priest brings prosperity). With greater probability the etymology is to be explained through Canaanite and Hebrew where *kohen* is autochthonous, and where the root *kwn* (which eventually developed into *khn*) means to stand: the priest stands, viz. waits upon, ministers.

2. The temper priesthood

The Jewish priesthood inherited its name from the Canaanites and developed itself in a Canaanite context and along Canaanite lines.

A. *Canaanite cult minister* In the ancient Canaanite tradition the cult minister and mediator between God and man is the head of the society, practically the king. In the legendary period featured by the stories of Keret (ANET, 142-149) and Aqhat (ANET, 149-155) the king is the son of El (supreme god) and personally offers sacrifices (ANET, 143) without being called kohen. In the historic recent bronze period featured by the administrative lists and the poems of Baal and Anath (ANET, 129-142) the king remains a cult minister, but he is flanked by the kohen as a minister of the king for the cult. In the tomb inscriptions of the Persian period, the king calls himself kohen and mentions his commitment to the cult field (ANET, 505). It appears that the kohen passed from a minister of the king to a minister of the sanctuary, and obtained an important cultic role which the king claimed for himself.

B. Ancient Jewish cult minister In the ancient Jewish tradition the cult minister and mediator between God and man is similarly the head of the society (family, tribe, clan, people). In patriarchal times the cultic activity was exercised by Abraham (Gen 12,7; 22,2.10) and Jacob (Gen 28,22). After them Moses (Ex 24,5-8), Joshua (Jos 8,30.31), Elkanah (1 Sam 1,3), various people (1 Sam 2, 12-17), and Samuel (1 Sam 7,9.17; 9, 12). In the monarchic period various kings engaged in cultic activities: Saul (1 Sam 13,9-12; 14,35; 15,9-22), David (2 Sam 6,12-18; 24, 18-25). Solomon (1 Kgs 3,4; 8,5.14), Jeroboam (1 Kgs 12,33), Uzziah (2 Chr 26,16-19) and Ahaz (2 Kgs 16,12.13). The king was a qualified mediator between God and man since he was God's anointed (1 Sam 2,10) and special son (Ps 2,7).

C. Jewish priesthood till the deuteronomic reform: The Jewish priesthood started during the desert wanderings, slowly evolved in the period of the Judges, and obtained a specific identity in the monarchic period after the erection of the Jerusalem temple.

a. The desert wanderings In patriarchal times there were no Jewish sanctuaries or priests. The patriarchs personally conducted the cult (Gen 12,8) or availed themselves of the Canaanite sanctuaries (Gen 25,23). In Sinai the Jews had their first sanctuary and first priests when Moses erected the desert tabernacle and entrusted it to Aaron and his sons (Lev 8-9) as priests (Ex 29,1). The tabernacle and its priesthood lasted through the desert period. After the entry into Canaan, the ark was deposited in various local sanctuaries (Jos 7,6; 8,33; Jdg 20,27; 1 Sam 3,3). The tabernacle was no longer erected.

b. The entry into Canaan The occupation of Canaan was a slow process of assimilation (with sporadic conflicts, Jdg 1) which slowly turned the country from a Canaanite land with Jewish pockets into a Jewish land with Canaanite pockets (Jerusalem remained Canaanite till the time of David, 2 Sam 5,6-10). The same fate befell the sanctuaries. In Canaan there were central sanctuaries (Shechem, Jos 24,25-28), regional (Shiloh, 1 Sam 1,3), local (Ramah, 1 Sam 9,6-25) or family sanctuaries (Micayehu's idol, Jdg 17,4) with their Canaanite priesthood. These sanctuaries and their priesthood slowly turned Yahwistic.

c. The kohen minister of the king The first kings had priests among their attendants. Ahijah (one of the priests of Nob) ministered to Saul. He went with him to the wars and consulted God for him by means of the ephod (1 Sam 14,3). David had Abiathar, Zadok, Ira (2 Sam 20,26) and his own sons as priestly ministers (2 Sam 8,18). Abiathar, one of the priests of Nob, fled to David in Keilah carrying the ephod (1 Sam 23,6), and stayed with him till the end (1 Sam 30,7; 2 Sam 8,17;

15,27; 20,25; 1 Chr 15,11) when he sided with Adonijah in the struggle for the succession (1 Kgs 1,7). Zadok possibly was a Canaanite priest of Jerusalem (the Bible does not record his genealogy notwithstanding 1 Chr 24,1-6). He stayed with David till the end (2 Sam 8,17; 15,27; 20,25; 1 Chr 15,11) when he sided with Solomon, the winning contender for the succession (1 Kgs 1,26.38).

d. The kohen minister of the sanctuary Solomon built the temple, banished Abiathar to his family holdings in Anathoth (1 Kgs 2,26.27) and entrusted the temple to Zadok and his family (1 Kgs 2,35). From that time the Jewish kohen clearly emerged as a minister of the sanctuary.

As a minister of the sanctuary, the kohen was appointed by the ruler (owner) of the sanctuary. In Sinai Moses appointed the priests for the tabernacle he erected (Ex 29,1; Lev 8-9). In Canaan some sanctuaries (such as Nob, 1 Sam 21,1-10) belonged to a priestly family which managed its own priesthood. In Jerusalem the temple belonged to the king who built it, maintained it (1 Kgs 9,25; 2 Kgs 12,5-17; 23,4), appointed its priests (1 Kgs 2,35) and continued to employ them as higher judges (Dt 17,8-13; 19, 16-21; 2 Chn 19,4-11) and envoys (2 Kgs 22,12). In the northern kingdom Bethel had a royal sanctuary (Am 7,13) and the king appointed its priests (1 Kgs 12,31-33). After the exile, those who rebuilt the temple organized its priesthood into twenty-four classes allotting sixteen to the descendants of Zadok and eight to the descendants of Abiathar (1 Chr 24,1-6). In Maccabean times, Alexander Balas king of Syria gave the title of high priest to Jonathan (1 Mac 10,20). Simon got the title from the people together with the priests (1 Mac 13,42; 14,41) and had it confirmed by Demetrius II (1 Mac 13,36-40; 14,38) and Antiochus VII (1 Mac 15,2). In Roman times, Pompeius gave it to Hyrcanus. After him the Roman Procurators continued to bestow it according to their will.

Again as a minister of the sanctuary the priest had certain prerogatives in the cultic actions performed in the sanctuary, such as the sacrifice, blessing, lots, oracle and judgement. Outside the sanctuary these acts could be performed by anybody, and in the sanctuary itself they could still be performed by the ruler (owner) of the sanctuary.

The sacrifice was not a priestly monopoly. The heads of families used to make sacrifices at home (Dt 12,15). The Passover sacrifice was a family affair (Ex 12,3-4). When a sacrifice was offered in the sanctuary, the offerer himself slaughtered, skinned and quartered the victim. But it was the priest, as a qualified minister of the temple, who placed the victim on the altar and poured the blood around its base (Lev 1,1-9). The king, as ruler of the sanctuary, could do everything personally (1

Kgs 3,4,15; 8,5.62-64; 9,25; 12,32-13,1; 2 Kgs 16,12,13; 2 Chr 26,16-19).

The blessing, both commemorative (Ex 12,26,27; 13,8,9; Dt 6,20-25) and programmatic (Gen 27,27-29), was on everybody's lips. In the sanctuary it was pronounced by the priest (Num 6,22-27; Dt 10,8; Sir 50,20-25) or the ruler (1 Kgs 8,14-21; see 2 Sam 6,18).

The lots were a common means to define a situation or decide an action (1 Sam 14,18,19. 36-46; 23,2-4. 9-12; 30,7,8; see Prov 16,33; Acts 1,26). The sacred lots (Urim and Thummim, probably dice) were handled by the priest (Dt 33,8) and eventually became an ornament of the priestly garb (Ex 28,15,30).

The oracle was regularly given by the prophets wherever and whenever they obtained the word of God (Jer 42,1-7). Rebekah (Gen 25,22,23) and Hannah (1 Sam 1,17) obtained their oracle from the priest in the sanctuary. Various psalms contain liturgical oracles (Pss 2; 12; 50; 60; 75; 81; 87; 89; 108; 110).

The divine judgement (ordeal) is invoked in contentious and criminal cases that cannot be solved by the usual means of investigation and witnesses. The Bible mentions three cases: damage to property (Ex 22,7,8; Qo 9,2), adultery (Num 5,11-28) and homicide (Dt 21,1-9). In each case the judgement rests on a self-imprecatory oath administered by the priest. In the last case the venue is a spring of fresh water that serves as a sacred place.

D. Jewish priesthood and cult ministry after the deuteronomic reform This reform started a process which eventually promoted the priest to an exclusive cult minister and mediator between God and man. Various factors contributed to this process. The transmission of the Jerusalem priesthood within the same Zadokite clan and the insistence on the holiness (i.e. separateness) of Yahweh (Is 1,4) tended to distance the priests from the common people. The importance of the royal temple lent great authority to its priests who served as royal envoys (2 Kgs 22,12) and could interfere with a heavy hand with the national politics (the high priest Jehoiada guarded the baby prince Jehoash in the temple quarters and made him king at seven years, 2 Kgs 11,4-20). The deuteronomic reform endorsed the importance of the Jerusalem priests by banning all outlying sanctuaries (Dt 12,2-14) and turning the temple priesthood into a levitical monopoly (Ex 32,29; Num 26,12,13; Dt 33,8). The priests began to appear as an exclusive caste, sacred (separate) to God (Ex 28,36; Lev 21,6; Ps 106,16), given to God (Num 8,5-11) as a redemption of the firstborn (Num 3,12,13.40-51; 8,6-18), sanctioned by a divine pact that ensures eternal subsistence (Num 25,13; Jer 33,17,18; see Sir 45,7,23-25). They started to monopolize

everything sacred (Lev 10,10; Ezek 44,23; Hg 2,10-14) and liturgical (2 Chr 19,4-11). The king countered by assuming the title of priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Ps 110,4), and continued to perform liturgical acts as ruler of the sanctuary (2 Kgs 16,12,13).

Immediately after the exile, the high priest Joshua appeared alongside the Davidic prince Zerubbabel as a national leader. Both are called anointed (sons of oil, Zc 4,14). Soon afterwards the priest emerged as the only head of the Jewish society. He started to be anointed (Ex 28,41; 29,4-9; Lev 4,3.5.16) like a king (the anointing of preexilic priests is an anachronism), and effectively became the sole handler of the sacred things and the only mediator between God and man especially through his sacrificial activity.

3. *The priesthood of the OT people of God*

Two texts feature this kind of priesthood. *"And now, if you really listen to my voice and heed my pact, you will be my treasure among all peoples for the whole earth is mine. And you will be my mamleketh kohanim kingdom of priests and holy nation. These are the words you will say to the sons of Israel"* (Ex 19,5.6). *"Strangers will be pasturing your flocks and foreigners will tend your fields and vineyards. Kohne priests of Yahweh you will be called, ministers of our God you will be named. The opulence of the nations you will eat, and with their glory you will exult"* (Is 61,5.6; see also 2 Mac 2,17).

A. *The first text* (Ex 19,5.6) All the verbs (Imperfect or conversive Perfect) are translated by the Future tense. This is not an eschatological future (connected with the end of time), or messianic (looking forward to the coming of the Messiah) or historic (referring to a fixed point of time). It is the future of the pact, viz. the continuous present as an expression of the pact already stipulated. And it is not a conditional future, notwithstanding the expression "if you really", for God's pact is not conditional.

The pact (brit) is God's adoption of the Jews as his people. The adoption was performed in love (Dt 4,37), was introduced by the call of Abraham (Gen 12,1) and sanctioned by an oath (Dt 7,8). It is an adoption or pact forever (Gen 17,7.13.19; Ex 31,16; Lev 24,8; 1 Chr 16,17; Ps 105,10; Jer 32,40; Ezek 16,60; 37,26). It will never fail, for God is faithful (Ps 89,29). Its strength derives not from the people

who received it, but from God who performed it (Gen 12,1; Ex 20,2).

The term *brit* can mean not only the pact or adoption, but also its sign (circumcision, Gen 17,10), stipulations (decalogue, Dt 5,2-22), promises (Gen 15,18; Lev 26,45; 2 Sam 23,5), threats (Ex 20,5; Dt 5,9) and the people's commitment (Ex 19,8; 24,7.8). These factors could change. They had to change, because the people repeatedly failed in their commitment. The pact or adoption did not thereby fail. It held fast and brought about its sinister consequences. For this reason the people of God became Not-People (Hos 1,9) and then again People (Hos 2,25). For the same reason the *brit* can be called new or future (Jer 31,31).

The meaning of the kingdom of priests is not clear. The *mamleketh kohanim* of the MT is in the construct state and normally means kingdom of priests of priestly kingdom (the construct state often indicates quality). This is how it was translated by Aquilas (*basileia iereôn*, kingdom of priests) and the Vulgate (*regnum sacerdotale*, priestly kingdom), in ancient times. Most modern translations follow suit: RSV: "kingdom of priests", Jerusalem Bible and Ecumenical Translation: royaume de prêtres (kingdom of priests), New Vulgate: regnum sacerdotum (kingdom of priests).

Because the expression "kingdom of priests" is hard to understand, some ancient translations changed the masoretic construct state into an apposition. Targumin: malkin kohanim (kings [and] priests), Theodotion and Symmachus: basileia iereîs (kingdom, priests). The LXX has basileion ierâteuma (royal priesthood) which could be a paraphrase of the MT or a translation of a different Hebrew text.

Many authors explain the text with reference to a priestly kingdom, royal priesthood, theocratic democracy or messianic (royal and priestly) people, whereby the specifically royal or priestly characteristics are enhanced. This hardly agrees with the idea that the Jews had of themselves.

Moses addresses all the Jews (not one class) that reached Sinai after coming out of Egypt, and spells out the privileges of their divine adoption. The royal characteristic is not to be emphasized. The Jews are a kingdom simply because the text was composed in the monarchic period. Actually, in this text the kingdom stands in parallelism with *goy* (nation). Elsewhere it is parallel to *goy* (nation, Ps 46,7), or 'am (people, Ps 102,23), or both of them together (1 Chr 16,20; Ps 105,13). The priestly characteristic which qualifies the kingdom refers to the peculiar position of the priesthood in deuteronomic times (the text is markedly deuteronomic) when the levitical Jerusalem priests began to emerge as a separate caste given to God

(Num 8,5-11) for the redemption of the firstborn (Num 3,12.13.40-51; 8,6-18).

The words of Moses simply mean that God adopted the Jews from among the nations of the earth as he adopted the levitical priests from among the Jewish tribes. The Jews became God's *sgullah* (own property, treasure, v.5), *goy qadosh* (sacred i.e. separate nation, v.6). The emphasis is on separateness, not on ministry or royalty. The Deuteronomist likes to express the Jewish separateness by 'am qadosh 'am sgullah (sacred people, treasured people, Dt 7,6; 14,2).

B. *The second text* (Is 61,5.6) The verbs (all Imperfect) are translated by the covenantal future (continuous present). The two vv. belong to an oracle which describes the happy postexilic situation (Is 61,1-8). God renders double for inflicted hardships (v.7), he justly retributes by making a pact for ever, i.e. by forever implementing the covenantal promises (v.8). These include freedom (v.1), consolation (v.2), joy (v.3), restoration (v.4), and the declaration of the vv. under discussion: service by foreigners, priestly status, adventitious opulence (vv.5.6).

The text is similar to the first one, with the following variations: it refers to the postexilic situation (not to the Sinaitic context), it describes the attitude of the nations with regard to the Jews (not Yahweh's personal action), it introduces universalism and priestly right to maintenance.

The OT universalism was the fruit of the exile. Before the exile Yahweh looked at the other nations through a Jewish perspective, according to the expression "I bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you" (Gen 12,3; 27,29; but see Am 9,7). During the exile a universalistic perspective began to take roots. The exile itself passed from a punishment of the Jews (Is 54,7.8) to an advantage of the nations (Is 49,6) who adhere to Yahweh (Is 14,1.2; 18,7; 19,16-24; 23,15-18; 55,4.5). The Jews remain a separate people. They will be to the nations what the levitical priests were to the Jews. The Egyptians became the people of God, and the Assyrians the work of his hands, but the Jews remain his inheritance (Is 19,15).

The Levites as priests to the Jews had the right to eat from their offerings (Lev 7,7-10.28-35; Num 18,8-32; Dt 18,3-8; 1 Sam 2,12-17). So also the Jews, as priests of the nations, had the right to eat from the abundance they offered to Yahweh (Is 18,7).

In both tests the priesthood of the Jews indicates their separation from the nations, and their adoption by Yahweh with the ensuing privileges. It does not imply any cultic element.

4. *The synagogue and its ministers*

A. *Name* The Greek word *sunagogé* (from the verb *sunágo*, to gather) means anything connected with a gathering. As applied to people it indicates the act of bringing them together, the people brought together, their meeting and the place of their meeting. It can also mean a Jewish synagogal community, its meeting and the place of its meeting.

In the NT the *sunagogé* mostly indicates a Jewish synagogal meeting place: Christ taught in the Jewish synagogues (Mt 4,23), in the synagogue of Nazareth (Mt 13,54) and Capernaum (Mk 1,21). It can also mean a Jewish synagogal meeting (Acts 13,43) and perhaps a Jewish synagogal community (Acts 6,9; 9,2). A group of hostile Jews is a synagogue of Satan (Rev 2,9; 3,9). A christian meeting is once (Jas 2,2) called a synagogue.

In the LXX it appears 225 times and translates seventeen Hebrew words: '*asap* harvest (Ex 23,16), *bayith* tribe (1 Kgs 12,21), *ben* child (Lev 22,18), *gal* heap (Jb 8,17), *hamon* crowd (Dn 11,10), *hayil* army (Ezek 37,10), *mahol* group (Jer 31,4), *mahaneh* camp (Num 5,2 A), *miqweh* basin (Lv 11,36), *maqom* place (Gen 1,9), *mishkan* company (Num 16,24), *sod* age group (Jer 6,11), '*edah* congregation (Ex 12,3; the most frequent meaning), '*am* people (Lev 10,3), *qabas* gathering (Is 56,8), *qahal* congregation, people (Ex 16,3; Num 20,10; Jer 28,3), *thiqweh* hope (Zc 9,12).

The MT has many references to the Jewish congregation in its manifold meaning, but does not mention a synagogal meeting or meeting place. The elders that listened to Ezekiel (Ezek 8,1; 14,1; 20,1) were a chance gathering not a synagogal meeting, and the *miqdash* promised to the exiles (Ezek 11,16) was God's protection not a synagogal building. Maybe there is a reference to a synagogal community in two deuterocanonical texts: the *sunagogé* of the Hasidaeans adhered to Mattathias (1 Mac 2,42); wisdom is in the law left by Moses to the *sunagogaís* of Jacob (Sir 24,23).

In rabbinic literature the synagogue is a *kneseth* (or *beith hakkneseth*, from the verb *kanas* to gather) and can indicate a synagogal community, its meeting place or meeting. The term does not appear in the MT. In the Mishnah it generally means the synagogal meeting place (Berakoth 7,3; Terumoth 11,10; Erubin 10,10; Pesahim 4,4; Yoma 7,1; etc.). The *kneseth haggdolah* (big synagogue, Aboth 1,1.2) is a legendary postexilic legislative body. The *kneseth yisra'el* (Cant R. 1,4) is the people of Israel.

B. *Beginning and development* According to the Jewish legend, recorded by Flavius Josephus (*Contra Apionem* 2, xvii, 175) and the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Ex 18,20, the synagogue was established by Moses who gave the law and wanted it to be taught.

The identity and historical origin of the synagogue are not clear. The identity is normally derived from non-sacrificial prayer, and the origin connected with the Babylonian exile: in the absence of sanctuary and sacrifice the Jews began to get together for non sacrificial prayer.

Some authors opt for a preexilic origin in Palestine because of the early existence of non sacrificial prayer. From ancient times there was prayer with sacrifices (Ps 116,17; Is 1,11.15), and prayer without sacrifices (1 Sam 1,9-18; 1 Kgs 8,14-61); the deuteronomic centralization of the cult (Dt 12,2-14; 2 Kgs 22-23) barred all sacrifices outside the temple of Jerusalem but did not put any restriction on the non-sacrificial prayer. Other authors, considering the scant historical and archaeological evidence of a synagogal meeting place, opt for the hellenistic diaspora. The earliest uncontroversial evidence is provided by two inscriptions of the third century BC found in Upper Egypt. One dedicates a synagogal meeting place to Ptolomy III Euergetes (246-221); the other recognizes the right of asylum of a similar place.

The non-sacrificial prayer is certainly an important factor of the synagogal institution, but does not define it. The classic Jewish synagogue is the local autonomous community embodied in its elders as constitutive elements.

The local community was the result of sedentarization. At the beginning of the iron period, the roaming tribes abandoned their seminomadic cohesive lifestyle and fractionally settled in separate places thereby producing the local communities. The roaming tribes had been governed by the patriarch who exercised the power of life or death over all the members of the tribe. The local communities were governed by the elders who conducted their public affairs (Jdg 8,6.14.16), including cult (Dt 21,1-9) and judgement (1 Kgs 21,8-14).

The local elders probably were the heads of the important families of each community. Sometimes they are called *'sarim* chiefs (Jdg 8,6.14.16; Jb 29,9) or *horim* nobles (1 Kgs 21,8-11). They appear in the time of the Judges (Jdg 8,6.14.16; Rt 4,2.4.9.11) and the monarchy (Dt 19,12; 21,1-9.20; 22,13-19; 25,5-10; 1 Sam 11,3; 16,4; 1 Kgs 21,8-14) and after the exile (Esd 10,14).

There were also non local elders concerned with higher affairs. They appear at

the time of Moses (Ex 3,16.18; 12,21; 17,5.6; 18,12; 19,17;24,1-14), Joshua (Jos 7,6; 8,10.33; 23,2; 24,1.31; Jdg 2,7), the Judges (Jdg 11,5-11), the monarchy (Lev 4,13-15; 1 Sam 30,26; 2 Sam 19,12; 1 Kgs 20,7.8; 2 Kgs 23,1; Chr 34,29; Jer 26,17) and after the exile (Esd 9,1.2). At the beginning they represented groups of tribes (elders of Israel, Ex 3,16) or of local communities (elders of Judah, 1 Sam 30,26). During the monarchy they mostly appear as ministers of the king. They did not form a compact group. They performed various duties and are known by various names: *'sarim* chiefs (2 Kgs 21,23; Is 3,14; Jer 24,8), *horim* nobles (Jer 27,20), *ndibim chosen* (1 Sam 2,8; Ps 113,8), *gibbore hayil* valorous (2 Kgs 15,20). Here belong also the priests of the temple of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 22,11-14). The king used to consult (1 Kgs 20,7.8), employ (2 Kgs 19,5) and tax them (2 Kgs 15,20). The connection with the king was their source of power.

Till the Babylonian exile, the autonomy and authority of the local communities was overshadowed by the king and his ministers (1 Kgs 21,8-14). In the Babylonian exile the local communities appeared in their full autonomy and authority as centres of Jewish prayer, culture and administration. This can be taken as the historic origin of the classic synagogue.

After the exile the non local elders appear again as *'sarim* chiefs (Esd 9,1.2), *sganim* rulers (Esd 9,2; Neh 2,16; 4,8.13) and *horim* nobles (Neh 2,16; 4,8.13). Their weak authority (not backed by a king) passed to the priests after the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple. From that time, the synagogue (centre of prayer, culture and religion) and the temple (centre of cult and power) marched hand in hand. The Sanhedrin sanctioned this dual leadership by incorporating priests (generally Sadducees, product of the temple) and rabbis (generally Pharisees, product of the synagogue). The rite of the Day of Atonement was jointly conducted by the personnel of the temple and of the synagogue established in the same temple (Yoma 7,1; Sotah 7,7.8).

In the synagogue of the temple the twelve year old Christ entertained the doctors of the law (Lk 2,46), the Pharisee and the tax collector made their respective confession (Lk 18,10), the christians of Jerusalem gathered for prayer (Acts 2,46; 3,1) till they started to form a separate group (Acts 5,12). Christ (Mt 4,23) and his disciples (Acts 9,20) preached in the synagogues of other places.

C. Composition The three principal elements of the synagogue were the elders, the head and the attendant.

The elders were the constitutive elements of the synagogue. They were not chosen officials. In origin they probably were the heads of the important families. At a later time they began to appear as wise people, for wisdom is the product of old age (Jb 12,12; 32,7; Sir 25,4-6). Since the synagogue became the centre of learning, the elder assumed the aspect of a scholar, a teacher. And since the principal object of learning was the Torah, the elder was an expert in the Torah and consequently a just man, for the knowledge of the Torah is more important than its observance (Sif. Dt 41, 79a-80a) just as prayer is higher than good works (Berakoth 32b).

The head of the synagogue was an official appointed by the elders. He was the overseer of the synagogal meeting place; he directed the meetings (choosing readers and commentators), and looked after the relations of the community with the outside world. In the Mishnah he is called *ros hakkneseth*, head of the synagogue (Yoma 7,1); in the NT *archisunágonos*, ruler of the synagogue (Mk 5, 22.35.36.38; Lk 8,49; 13,14; Acts 13,15; 18,8). In Lk 8,41 the *archisunágonos* of Lk 8,49 is also called *árchon tês sunagogês*, head of the synagogue. The plural (rulers) of Mk 5,22 may indicate the profession of the single rulers, but the plural of Acts 13,15 certainly indicates a plurality of rulers in the same synagogue, perhaps with different duties.

The *attendant* also was an official appointed by the elders. He took care of the synagogal meeting place and meetings, cleaning and illuminating the building, headlining the scrolls before and after the reading (Lk 4,17.20; Yoma 7,1; Sotah 7,7.8). In criminal cases he flogged the convicts (Mt 10,17; 23,34; Mk 13,9; Maccoth 3,12.13). He was supposed to be lacking in physical vigour and abounding in knowledge (Maccoth 23a) so as not to exaggerate in punishing. In the Mishnah he is called *hazzan* caretaker (Yoma 7,1; Sotah 7,7.8), in the NT *uperétes*, properly rower, hence underling, attendant (Lk 4,20).

5. Christ (high) priest

A. *The messianic expectation* The Jews of the time of Jesus were expecting a king of Davidic descent, a prophet like Moses and a priest from the line of Levi.

The expectation of a Davidic king surfaces in so many OT texts, such as Gen 12,2.3; 13,5-18; 27,1-45; 49,8-12; Num 24,15-19; 2 Sam 7,1-17; Is 7,10-17; 9,5.6; 11,1-5; 16,5; 55,3; Jer 23,5.6; 30,9; 33,15.16; Ezek 34,23.24; Hos 3,5; Am 9,11;

Mi 5,2. In the NT Christ is a king (Mt 27,11) and his disciples reign with him (Mt 20,20-23; Mk 10,35-40; Rev 5,10; 20,4.6; 22,5). But his kingdom is not of this world (Jn 18,36).

The expectation of the prophet was spelled out by Moses (Dt 18,15), while Malachi predicted the coming of Elijah (Ml 3,23). In the NT John the baptizer is Elijah (Mt 17,12), and Christ is the prophet (Mt 13,57; Lk 7,16; 13,33; Jn 1,21; 6,14; 7,40; Acts 3,22.23; 7,37). But he does not give the manna like Moses. He gives living water (Jn 4,10-15), and is given as bread from heaven (Jn 6,31-33).

The expectation of the priest is principally based on Jer 33,17-20 which extends to the descent of Levi the promise once made to David. In the early postexilic period the promise was for some time incorporated in the person of the Davidic prince Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua, sons of oil (Zc 4,14). Ben Sira strengthened the promise made to Levi and gave it precedence over the promise made to David (Sir 45,7-25; 47,11.12). The double promise, with the primacy of Levi, appears in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Test. Reuben 6,5-12; Test. Levi 8,11-14; Test. Judah 21,1-5) and, with some fluctuations according to the various time periods, in the Qumran literature viz. no Messiah in Maccabean times (the Master of Justice fulfils the messianic promises), three Messiahs in Hasmonean times (prophet, Messiah of Israel, Messiah of Aaron with precedence over that of Israel), one Messiah both priestly and royal in the time of Pompeius (so also the Damascus Document) and one Messiah of Davidic descent at the time of Herod the Great (*Revue Biblique* 63 [1963] 481-505).

Notwithstanding this widespread expectation of a messianic priest, the NT (outside the Letter to the Hebrews) does not call Christ *iereús* priest. Christ and his chosen disciples do not take this title for themselves or for each other (outside the case of the universal priesthood of the christian people which will be discussed later).

The behaviour and activity of Christ neither call for nor exclude the priesthood. Christ exposed the shortcomings of the priests (Lk 10,29-37) and of the temple (Mt 21, 12.13), but sent the cured leper to the priest of the temple (Mt 8,4). He offered himself a victim (Gal 2,20; Ep 5,2) like the lamb (Jn 1,29; Rev 5,6) or like the servant of Yahweh (Is 53,12). He redeemed us (Rm 3,23-26) as Jahweh redeemed the exiles (Is 41,14). He interceded (Jn 17,1-26) and intercedes (Rm 8,34) like Abraham (Gen 18,22-33). He offered the Passover sacrifice (and changed its signification, Mt 26,17) like any head of a family (Ex 12,1-6). He did not perform any ritual acts, notwithstanding his robe of dignity (Rev 1,13) that could recall the

priestly robes (Ex 28,4; 29,5; Zc 3,4; see Is 61,10), or the robe of Yahweh (Is 6,1), or that of the ancient of days (Dan 7,9).

The NT (outside the Letter to the Hebrews) gives the title of *iereús*, priest, to the priest of Zeus (Acts 14,13) and to the Jewish priests of the temple (Mt 8,4; 12,4.5; Mk 1,44; 2,26; Lk 1,5; 5,14; 6,4; 10,31; 17,14; Jn 1,19; Acts 4,1; 6,7). They have *ierateía*, priesthood (Lk 1,9), and function as priests, *ierateúo* (Lk 1,8). It gives the title of *archiereús*, high priest, to the one official high priest who was the head of the Sanhedrin (Mt 26,51.57.58.62.63.65; Mk 14,47.53.54.61.63.66; Lk 22,50.54; Jn 11,49.51; 18,13.15.19.22.24; Acts 4,6; 5,17.21.27; 7,1; 9,1; 22,5; 23,2.4.5; 24,1) and to the heads of important priestly families (Mt 2,4; 16,21; 20,18; 21,15.23.45; 26,3.14.47.59; 27,1.3.6.12.20.41.62; 28,11; Mk 8,31; 10,33; 11,18.27; 14,1.10.43.53.55.60; 15,1.3.10.11.31; Lk 9,22; 19,47; 20,1.19; 22,2.4.52.66; 23,4.10; 24,20; Jn 7,32.45; 11,47.57; 12,10; 18,3.35; 19,6.15.21; Acts 4,23; 5,24; 9,14.21; 22,30; 23,14; 25,2.15; 26,10.12), to Abiathar (Mk 2,26) and Sceva (Acts 19,14), to Annas and Caiaphas (Lk 3,2; they were successive heads of the Sanhedrin; here they appear together as important priests).

B. The Letter to the Hebrews departs from the rest of the NT tradition when it calls Christ *iereús*, priest (Heb 5,6; 7,11.15.17.21), *archiereús*, high priest (Heb 2,17; 3,1; 4,15; 5,5.10; 6,20; 7,26; 8,1; 9,11) according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb 5,6; 6,20; 7,11.17), *iereús mégas*, great priest (Heb 10,21), and recognizes his *ierosúne*, priesthood (Heb 7,24). In the same Letter Melchizedek is *iereús* (Heb 7,1.3), the ministers of the temple are *iereús* (Heb 7,14.20.33; 8,4; 9,6; 10,11) or *archiereús* (Heb 7,27.28; 9,7.25; 13,11; see 5,1); they have *ierateía* (Heb 7,5) and *ierosúne* (Heb 7,11.12).

The Letter to the Hebrews arrived at the (high) priesthood of Christ in a polemical way, just as in a polemical way the Letters to the Colossians and Ephesians arrived at his supremacy.

The Colossians were in danger of doctrinal aberration through an exaggerated respect for the celestial forces whom Paul, following the lead of the interestamental literature, calls angels (Col 2,18), thrones, dominions, principalities, powers (Col 1,16), principality, power, might, dominion (Eph 1,21). This exaggerated respect could reduce the honour due to Christ and obscure his role as unique *médiateur* between God and man. To counter the danger Paul depreciated the celestial forces and extolled Christ. The mediation of the forces was connected

with the revelation of the law of Moses that no longer is mandatory (Eph 2,14; Col 2,15; see Gal 3,19; 4,3). The forces have become prisoners of Christ who exposed them in his triumphal procession (Col 2,15). Christ is the head of the Church (Eph 1,22; 4,15; Col 1,18; 2,19) which is his fullness (Eph 1,23; 4,13), and the head of the forces (Col 2,10); and the universe is his fullness (Col 1,19). He is the mediator who reconciles everything with God (Eph 2,14-18; Col 1,20-22).

The Christians of Jewish descent were in danger of apostasy because of their nostalgia for the elaborate and mysterious ritual of the temple. The eucharistic rite, simple and popular, without sacred objects and garb, did not impress or attract them. To counter this danger, the Letter to the Hebrews makes a tendentious comparison between the weakness of the Jewish (high) priest, especially in the Day of Atonement (Heb 9,25; 10,3), and the power of Christ on the cross. The true (high) priest is Christ, established by God for ever with an oath, while the Jewish (high) priest was only for a time and without an oath (Heb 7,20-24). The real atonement was that of Christ made only once, for others and for ever, while the Jewish (high) priest made atonement every day for himself and for others (Heb 7,25-28).

To attribute the (high) priesthood to Christ the Letter had to overcome two difficulties. First, Christ belonged to the tribe of Judah (Mt 1,1-17; Lk 1,27; 2,4; 3,23-38; Heb 7,14), while the law of Moses (after the deuteronomic reform) required a levitical descent for the priesthood (Dt 33,8). Secondly, Christ did not officiate in the temple.

The OT tradition had solved the first problem with regard to the OT priests by designing a levitical descent for the Abiatharites and Zadokites (1 Chr 5,27-29; 6,34-38; 24,1-18) and even for Samuel (1 Chr 6,12.18) and the Hasmoneans (1 Mac 2,1; 14,29). The Letter followed a different path. It opted for a higher priesthood outside the law. Paul had followed this path when he promoted his doctrine of salvation through faith outside the law by appealing to the saving faith of Abraham before the law (Gal 3,17). The Letter appeals to the priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek after the law (Heb 7,28).

Melchizedek was an incommensurable figure. He was not a levitical priest, and not even a Jew. Yet the Levites had paid him dues through Abraham (Gen 14,20). The rabbinic tradition reacted to this incongruous situation by depreciating or extolling the figure of Melchizedek. Rabbi Zechariah, on Rabbi Ishmael's authority, depreciated Melchizedek: God removed his priesthood and gave it to Abraham, because he blessed Abraham first and then God (Nedarim 32b; see Lv R. 25,6).

Generally the rabbinic tradition extolled Melchizedek to justify the dues payed by Abraham. In the Second (slavonic) Book of Enoch the child Melchizedek is taken up to heaven (the paradise of Eden) and becomes the head of a line of priests reigning over a royal people (2 Enoch 72-73). In a Qumranic midrash, Melchizedek is an eschatological and soteriological figure who will carry out God's vengeance and free the sons of justice at the end of time (11QMelchizedek). The Letter to the Hebrews attributed to Christ the priesthood of this higher figure (Heb 5,6; 6,20; 7,11.17) just as the king of Jerusalem appealed to the same priesthood (Ps 110,4) when the priests of Jerusalem tried to exclude him from the liturgical functions (2 Chr 26,18).

The Letter solved the second difficulty by appealing to the temple in heaven. According to Jewish thought the temple of Jerusalem was a replica of the celestial temple (Ex 25,40; 26,30). The earthly temple with its priesthood will cease in messianic times. God will raise a new and eternal priest and will open for him the celestial temple (Test. Levi 18,6-9). The victorious christians will dwell in this temple (Rev 3,12); they actually dwell in it after the sixth apocalyptic seal (Rev 7,15). The same temple is opened after the seventh apocalyptic trumpet (Rev 11,19) and stays open till the last apocalyptic cup (Rev 15,5-8). Christ entered the celestial temple with his own blood just as the OT priests entered the earthly temple with the blood of goats and calves (Heb 9,1-14).

C. The nature of Christ's priesthood In Christ everything is similar to our human situation (barring sin, Heb 4,15), but nothing is exactly the same. For this reason some authors feel that the priesthood of Christ according to the Letter is of an order different from that of the OT priests because it is metaphorical (allegorical typology), or fuller (based on the plenary sense) or celestial (connected with the glorious body of Christ). Other authors, with greater probability, opt for different grades within the same order, because the Letter continuously insists on the higher grade of Christ's priesthood (it could hardly establish a comparison between entities of a different order); the priesthood of Melchizedek, figure of Christ, is of the OT order; the Jewish christians to whom the Letter is addressed longed for a priesthood of the same order.

The OT priest to whom Christ is compared bears the marks of Christ's own features. Since everything is a shadow of Christ, the true reality (Col 2,17), everything can be modelled according to his figure. The christian marriage is modelled upon the union between Christ and the Church (Eph 5,21-32).

Melchizedek's genealogy (or lack of it) is modeled upon the eternal existence of Christ (Heb 7,3). So also the OT priest is somehow modeled on Christ's figure. He is chosen by God (Heb 5,4); this applies to the OT priest and to Christ. He offers sacrifices for himself (Heb 5,3); this applies only to the OT priest. He is chosen from among the people with whom he shares his infirmity (Heb 5,1.2); this applies only to Christ, and more as the servant of Yahweh (Is 50,4-9; 52,13-53, 12) than as a priest.

The overall idea of a priest that emerges from the Letter to the Hebrews is that of a mediator through sacrifice (Heb 5,1; 8,3.6; 9,12.14.15); in the case of Christ, a mediator through self-sacrifice (Heb 9,14). This agrees in a general way with the biblical idea of the priesthood at the end of the OT period. One might add that the self-sacrifice of Christ is more an evidence than a source of priesthood. Christ was a priest by divine decree.

6. *The priesthood of the christian people*

Like the priesthood the OT people of God, the priesthood of the christian people belongs to every member of the Church (including the ordained ministers) and not to a group or section of the people. It is a new phenomenon expressed in five texts (1 Pt 2,5.9; Rev 1,6; 5,10; 20,6) with an old terminology borrowed from Ex 19,6; Is 61,6.

"Coming to him, a living stone by men rejected but before God a precious choice, you too like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be *ieráteuma ágion* a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 2,4.5). "But you are a chosen race, *basileion ierateuma* a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Who once were not people, now are a people of God; once without mercy, now have mercy" (12 P 2,9.10). "To him who loves us, and has washed us from our sins in his blood, and made us *basileían, iereís* a kingdom, priests to our God and his father; to him glory and dominion for ever, amen" (Rev 1,5b.6). "And made them to our God *basileían kai iereís* a kingdom and priests and will reign on earth" (Rev 5,10). "Blessed and holy who have a share in the first resurrection; on such the second death has no power, but will be *iereís* priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with him a thousand years (Rv 20,6).

A. *The three texts of the Apocalypse* are the less important because they mention the priesthood only incidentally. The Apocalypse was presumably composed during the persecution of Domitian (AD 81-96), but presents itself as a revelation already given during the persecution of Nero (AD 54-68). To console the suffering Christians and encourage them to remain steadfast in their faith, the author says that the persecution was foreseen, the end announced and the reward ensured. He expresses the consolation by means of OT reminiscences: Christ is the first and last (Rev 1,17) like Yahweh (Is 44,6). The victorious eat of the tree of life in the garden of God (Rev 2,7), prepared for Adam (Gen 2,9). Christ is the victorious lion of Judah (Rev 5,5), figure of David (Gen 49,9). The Christians will be free of harassment (Rev 7,16) like the returning exiles (Is 4,4-6), because the lamb will be their shepherd (Rev 7,17) as Yahweh was the guide of the exiles (Is 49,10). To these OT reminiscences, two of the three texts under discussion add the kingdom of priests (more exactly, kingdom [and] priests) gleaned from Ex 19,6 as it is interpreted by Theodotion and Symmachus (see also the Targum, kings [and] priests). The third text has the priests who reign.

The first text (Rev 1,6) is found in an introductory doxology with four independent elements: Christ loves us, has washed us, has made us a kingdom [and] priests. The kingship and priesthood do not necessarily result from the love and the washing. The nature of kingship and priesthood is not specified. Given the context of the persecution and expected reward, the insistence is principally on the kingship not on the priesthood. The priesthood is included because it is coupled with the kingship in Ex 19,6.

The second text (Rev 5,10) presents the lamb (Christ), lord of history (he opens the seals). As such he redeems us and makes us a kingdom and priests. The three elements are independent (kingship and priesthood do not stem from the redemption) and culminate in the reign on earth, the millenary kingdom. The priesthood is mentioned incidentally, and its nature not specified.

The third text (Rev 20,6) spells out the importance and nature of the kingship and specifies the identity of its beneficiaries. The context is the pause in the middle of the final apocalyptic scene. Christ has won the initial victory. Satan has been neutralized for a thousand years and the millenary reign ushered in. Its beneficiaries are the martyrs. Only they benefit from the first resurrection (Rev 20,4); the others have to wait till the second resurrection at the end of the millenary period (Rev 20,5). The martyrs are priests who reign with Christ a thousand years (Rev 20,6). The accent is on the kingship. The priesthood is mentioned because it is connected

with the kingship in Ex 19,6 and its nature is not specified. Kingship and priesthood belong only to martyrs.

B. *The principal text* is 1 P 2,5 because it specifies the nature of the priesthood. The Letter is addressed to the christians (mostly of gentile origin, 1 Pt 1,14.18; 2,9.10; 4,3) who live in Asia Minor (1 Pt 1,1). They are suffering from a persecution, which is probably a continuous harassment by their fellow-countrymen (1 Pt 2,12; 3,16; 4,4.12-16), rather than a systematic oppression by the rulers. The author exhorts them to be steadfast in their faith notwithstanding the persecution. They build themselves (or should be built; the Imperative Passive is preferable) into a holy priesthood by offering spiritual sacrifices.

The priesthood is *ieráteuma*. In the NT the term appears only in 1 Pt 2,5.9. It is taken over from the LXX where it appears three times and indicates the priesthood of the Jewish people (Ex 19,6; 23,22; 2 Mac 2,17). Its exact meaning is not clear. It is not found in classical Greek. It refers to the priestly character of the people, both in the LXX and in 1 Pt, without specifying it.

Christ had been a living stone, rejected by men and cherished by God (1 Pt 2,4). The allusion is to the whole troubled life of Christ that culminated in the sacrifice of the cross which evidenced his priestly character (see the Letter to the Hebrews). The unfaithful christians find in Christ a stumbling stone (1 P 2,8). The faithful ones find a cherished stone (1 Pt 2, 7). They themselves are living stones, who offer spiritual sacrifices. The reference is to the whole troubled christian existence, which is acceptable to God through Christ, being ordained by him and in union with him. It is a sacrifice and evidences the priestly character of christians. It is a physical existence and a spiritual sacrifice, because it is not ritual.

Paul illustrates the spirituality of the sacrifice in physical existence. He suffered in his flesh to make up for what still remained to be accomplished in the sufferings of Christ (Col 1,24). There is no doubt about the physical character of his suffering. Yet he suffered spiritually, *ô latreúo en tô pneúmatí mou*, whom I worship in my spirit (Rm 1,9) because he was not making a ritual sacrifice in the temple. Similarly he exhorted the faithful to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice, *logikên latreían* spiritual worship (literally, intellectual worship) because it is a non ritual sacrifice (Rm 12,1).

It follows that according to 1 Pt the christians are priests because they suffer in their daily life as Christ suffered in his life and death. They do not share in the

personal priesthood of Christ bestowed by divine decree. They make themselves priests by self-sacrifice.

C. The secondary text of 1 Pt 5,9 (see also v.10) does not add any new concept, and does not specify the nature of the priesthood of the christians. The author makes a comparison between the unfavourable condition of the addressees before they became christians (like the Jews under punishment) and their present favourable situation (like the Jews in normal conditions). Once they were not people (Hos 1,9) and without mercy (Hos 2,3.25). Now they are a chosen race (Is 43,20), a royal priesthood (Ex 19,6), a holy nation (Ex 19,6), God's own people (Hos 2,3.25), and have mercy (Hos 2,3.25). They declare the wondrous deed of God like the Jews restored after the exile (Is 43,21).

The royal priesthood falls back on the kingdom of priests (Ex 19,6) as it is interpreted by the LXX. Its nature is not explained in text or context and does not have to be understood according to the priesthood of 1 Pt 2,5. It is simply one of the honorific titles of the christians.

7. The christian Church and its ministers

The first christian communities sprouted within the synagogues and adopted their framework, so that while Christ is rather polemically called a *iereús*, priest in the Letter to the Hebrews, his chosen disciples are never given that name anywhere in the NT.

A. *The Church* Christ founded the Church and left it the authority to direct itself. The First Gospel, in its thematic disposition, consigns this event to the so-called ecclesial discourse (Mt 18,18). The Church acknowledged and exercised its authority when it chose the thirteenth apostle (Acts 1,15-26), instituted the Seven (Acts 6,1-6), sent Peter and John to inspect the preaching of the gospel in Samaria (Acts 8,14), called for an explanation of Peter's performance in Caesarea (Acts 11,1-3), accepted his explanation (Acts 11,18), and took the decision about circumcision and the law of Moses (Acts 15,28). The foundation stone of the Church was Peter (Mt 16,18), who showed his leadership from the beginning (Acts 1,15).

Born within the synagogue, the Church did not call itself *sunagógé* (except in

Jas 2,2 where *sunagogé* means a meeting of [Jewish?] christians), possibly because this term was closely connected with the local Jewish community. The early christians considered themselves as a continuation of the OT people of God, and called themselves by various names reminiscent of this OT entity, such as people (1 Pt 2,9), race (Acts 17,29), nation (1 Pt 2,9), kingdom (Acts 1,3), multitude (Acts 6,5), disciples (Acts 6,1), saints (Eph 1,1), faithful (Acts 4,32; Eph 1,1), called (Rm 1,6), brothers (Acts 1,15), and *ekklesia* which eventually became the common name for the christian Church. It is found sixty-five times in the Pauline writings, twenty-three times in Acts, twenty-three times in the Johannine writings, twice in the Synoptics (Mt 16,18; 18,17) and once in Jas 5,14).

Speaking in Aramaic, Christ made extensive use of *malkutha* (Hebrew *malkuth*) kingdom (of heaven, thirty-two times in Mt; of God, four times in Mt and always in the rest of the NT) to express various messianic realities including his Church (Mt 5,19; 13,52; 16,19). He must have used also *qahala* (Hebrew *qahal*, congregation, translated by *ekklesia* in Mt 16,18; 18,17). The Aramaic *qahala* or Hebrew *qahal* can mean an act of gathering (or calling, Dt 9,10), a meeting (for civil affairs, 1 Kgs 12,3; for war, Num 22,4; for cult, 2 Chr 20,5), a group (Jer 31,8), a great number (Gen 28,3), and a whole people: the Jews were the *qahal* congregation of Yahweh (Num 16,3). In the LXX it is translated both by *sunagogé* (rarely) and *ekklesia* (mostly). From the LXX it passed into the NT as a common designation of the Church founded by Christ (Actx 8,1). When other congregations were formed, they adopted the same title, so that *ekklesia* can mean a local community (Rm 16,1), various (Rm 16,4) or all (Rm 16,16) local communities together, or the ideal community founded by Christ (Eph 1,22).

B. The Twelve and the Seven The early Church recognized the Twelve as its central figures. Matthew calls them the Twelve (Mt 20,17; 26,14.20), or the Twelve Apostles (Mt 10,2), or the Twelve Disciples (Mt 10,1; 11,1), or the Eleven Disciples (Mt 28,16), or the Disciples (Mt 12,1; 15,23.32). Mark calls them the Twelve (Mk 3,14.16; 4,10; 6,7; 9,35; 10,32; 11,11; 14,10.17.20.43), or the Eleven (Mk 16,14), or the Apostles (Mk 6,30) or the Disciples (Mk 2,23; 8,27). Luke calls them the Twelve (Lk 8,1; 9,1.12; 18,31; 22,3.47; Acts 6,2), or the Eleven (Lk 24,9.33; Acts 2,14), or the Apostles (Lk 9,10; 17,5; 22,14; Acts 5,29; 15,2.4.6.22.23; 16,4), or the Eleven Apostles (Acts 1,26), or the Twelve whom he called Apostles (Lk 6,13), or Disciples (Lk 6,1; 8,9). John calls them the Twelve (Jn 6,67.70.71; 20,24) or the Twelve Apostles (Rev 21,14) or the Disciples (Jn 11,7; 12,4; 16,17.29). Paul calls them the Twelve (1 Cor 15,5).

The Twelve formed a closed and exclusive number. The Disciples were more numerous. They were a large crowd (Lk 6,17; 19,37; Jn 6,60). In some texts they include all the christians (Acts 6,1.2.7; 9,1.10.19.25.26.38). Also the Apostles were more numerous. They included Paul (Rm 1,1; 1 Cor 1,1; Gal 1,1; Eph 1,1; Col 1,1; 1 Tm 1,1; 2 Tm 1,1; Tt 1,1), James brother of Christ (Gal 1,19), Barnabas (Acts 14,14), Andronicus and Junias (Rm 16,7), Christ (Heb 3, 1), and perhaps others who may be alluded to in some uncertain texts (1 Cor 4,9-13; 9,5; 15,7; 2 Pt 3,2; Jude 17).

Christ made disciples like Isaiah (Is 8,16), John the baptizer (Jn 1,35) and any established teacher (Mt 22, 16; Mk 2,18; Lk 5,33). His disciples called him rabbi (Mt 26,25.49; Mk 9,5; 11,21; 14,45; Jn 1,38; 4,31; 9,2; 11,8); so also the people (Jn 1,49; 3,2; 6,25). As disciples, he sent the Twelve to do what he was doing: preach and heal (Mt 10,1-16; Mk 6,7-13; Lk 9,1-6). He also sent the Seventy-Two with the same mission and instructions (Lk 10,1-16).

The apostle did not form an acknowledged category in Greek or Jewish tradition. Etymologically *apóstolos*, from the verb *apostéllo*, to send off, means messenger, despatch; and *apostolé* means despatch, discharge, payment, parting gift. In the LXX *apóstolos* appears only once: the prophet Ahijah tells the wife of Jeroboam I that he is an *apóstolos*, carrier of harsh tidings for her (1 Kgs 14,6; the MT has *shaluah*, Passive Participle of *shalah* to send). *apostolé* generally translates some form of the root *shlh* and means a release (Dt 22,7), discharge (Qo 8,8), despatch (Ps 78,49), banishment (Jer 32,36), gift (1 Mac 2,18), plant shoot (Wis 4,13).

The apostles of Christ do not seem to be intended as messengers sent to somebody (they would have been *mal'akim* in Hebrew and *ángeloi* in Greek). They are rather sent from Christ (they were chosen to be with him, Mk 3,14), like the extended (sent) hand of Yahweh (Ex 24,11), or the commissioned (sent) person (Ex 3,12). As such they were to be principally guarantors of the Gospel. The apostleship was a personal qualification (the Twelve did not have to act as a group) and a divine charism like prophecy (1 Cor 12,28), not a permanent institution.

In its early days the christian community of Jerusalem appointed the Seven for the *diakonía*, service of the tables, while the Twelve continued with the *diakonía* of the word (Acts 6, 1-6). It does not seem that the community intended this *diakonía* as a permanent institution, or that the circumstances that occasioned it repeated themselves in Jerusalem or elsewhere. The preaching of Stephen (Acts 6,8-15) and Philip (Acts 8,5-8.26-40) stemmed from their discipleship rather than from their *diakonía*. Their kind of *diakonía* was not perpetuated.

C. Presbyters, deacons, bishops As soon as the christian communities detached themselves from the synagogue and obtained an identity of their own, they fashioned themselves on the model of the synagogue, with presbyters, deacons and bishops. The community of Corinth, established in a Gentile environment, retained its charismatic leadership for some time (Acts 13,1).

Presbyters (presbúteroi) The first decisions of the Jerusalem community had been taken by Peter and the *adelphoi* brothers (Acts 1,15), the Twelve and the *plêthos tôn mathetôn* multitude of the disciples (Acts 6,2.5), the apostles and the *adelphoi* (Acts 11,1), the Church (Acts 11,22). Then appear the *presbúteroi*, presbyters, elders, alone in the voyage of Barnabas and Paul to Jerusalem with the collection (Acts 11,30), or together with the apostles in the assembly of Jerusalem that took the decision about circumcision and the law of Moses (Acts 15,2.4.6.22.23; 16,4; see also 21,18). These presbyters do not appear as officials or ministers. They were rather the community itself embodied in its constitutive members. The presbyters supposedly appointed by Paul and Barnabas at the end of their first journey were probably of the same type: the two apostles organized the communities they had founded according to the synagogal model (Acts 14,23). Later on some presbyters are evidently appointed officials (Acts 21,17.18; 1 Tm 5,17.19; Tt 1,5; Jas 5,14; 1 Pt 5,1.5; 2 Jn 1; 3 Jn 1), ordained leaders (1 Tm 5,22). In some texts the presbyters are identified with the *epískopoi* inspectors or bishops (Acts 20,17.28; 1 Tm 5,17-22; Tt 1,5-9; 1 Pt 5,1-4).

Deacons (diákonoi) They are a class of appointed officials (Ph 1,1; 1 Tm 3,8-13). Their ministry is not specified, but their requirements are spelled out by Paul: respectable, temperate, believers, one marriage, good management (1 Tm 3,8-13). Chosen for probation presumably by the presbyters as the embodiment of the community (Paul speaks impersonally) possibly from among themselves, they receive the ministry if they are found blameless. Maybe they are included among the ordained leaders mentioned in 1 Tm 5,22.

Bishops (overseers, epískopoi) They are a class of appointed officials (Acts 20,28; Ph 1,1; 1 Tm 3,2; Tt 1,7). They guard (Acts 20,28), preside (1 Tm 3,4.5), watch (1 Tm 3,5), pasture and oversee (1 Pt 5,2). Their ministry is especially connected with the doctrine (Tt 1,9; see 2 Tm 3,2; 4,1-5). Their requirements are spelled out by Paul: blameless, one marriage, temperate, hospitable, teachers, kind, good management, old converts, good reputation (1 Tm 3,1-7; Tt 1,5-9). They were presumably chosen by the presbyters from among themselves (Paul speaks impersonally in 1 Tm 3,1-7; see also Didaché ch. 15) or by a higher authority (Paul

speaks in the second person in Tt 1,5). In Ph 1,1 Paul mentions the bishops and deacons in the plural. When he specifies the requirements of the deacons he speaks in the plural (1 Tm 3,8-18) while he speaks in the singular in the parallel texts featuring the bishops (1 Tm 3,1-7; Tt 1,5-9). In some texts the bishops coincide with the presbyters (Acts 20,17.28; 1 Tm 5,17-22; Tt 1,5-9; 1 Pt 5,1-4).

In the NT the presbyters, deacons and bishops are never mentioned together in the same text as three separate categories.

Ignatius of Antioch around 110AD presents together the three separate categories. In the Letter to the Ephesians he mentions the deacon Bhurros and exhorts the readers to submit to the bishop (in the singular) and presbytery (college of presbyters, ch. 2; PG 5, 645). He praises the presbytery for being in harmony with the bishop like cords with a guitar (ch. 4; PG 5,648) and confirms that the Ephesians avoid heresies by being in doctrinal union with the bishop as with Christ himself (ch. 6; PG 5,649). In the Letter to the Magnesians he mentions the bishop and the presbyters (plural instead of collective singular): the Magnesians should do nothing without the bishop and the presbyters (ch. 7; PG 5,668). In the Letter to the Trallians he says both presbytery (collective singular, ch. 2; PG 5,676) and presbyters (plural): everybody should respect the deacons as an injunction of Jesus Christ, and the bishop as Jesus Christ, and the presbyters as the senate of God and as the council of the apostles (ch. 3; PG 5,677; see also Letter to the Smyrnians ch. 8; PG 5,713).

The First Clementine Letter, written in Rome around 96 AD, is less distinct than the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch and reflects the fluid situation transparent in Acts 20,17.28; 1 Tm 5,17-22; Tt 1,5-9; 1 Pt 5,1-4. It never presents the three groups (presbyters, deacons, bishops) together in the same text (but see end of ch.40, PG 1,289). It says that the apostles instituted the bishops and the deacons according to the prophecy of Is 60,17 without mentioning the presbyters (ch. 42; PG 1,292). It identifies the bishops with the presbyters when it says that those who legitimately obtained the *episkopé* and competently exercise it should not be expelled, *and blessed* are the former presbyters who were not afraid of being transferred (ch.44; PG 1,297-300). When it exhorts the rebels to submit to the presbyters (ch.57; PG 1,324), it seems to allude to the bishops or to the deacons and the bishops mentioned beforehand.

One could trace the following development in the church ministry, keeping in mind that the available evidence is scanty and that the development may not have followed everywhere the same pattern. The early christians organized themselves

according to the synagogal model. The community was embodied in the presbyters (elders) as constitutive elements. The elders chose from among themselves (but see Tt 1,5-9) the inspectors (bishops) to take charge of community meetings and meeting places and to ensure the transmission of the christian doctrine. They also chose, presumably from among themselves, the attendants (deacons) as caretakers. The emergence of heresies enhanced the authority of the bishops as guarantors of christian doctrine and made them arbiters of the situation. The community meetings transformed some presbyters into officials under the direction of the bishops in so far as the bishops had to appoint them as active members of the meetings. These appointed members eventually became the only presbyters that counted in the christian community.

D. *Priests* The NT does not mention the priesthood of the Church ministers. The fact that the ministers of the gospel live by the gospel as the Jewish priests lived by their priesthood (1 Cor 9,13.14) does not promote them to the priesthood. However, the earliest christian writings acknowledge their priesthood in connection with the eucharistic ministry.

The First Clementine Letter seems to consider the priesthood of the Church ministers as a fulfilment of the OT priesthood: Moses foresaw the struggle for the priesthood and ensured by a miracle the monopoly of the tribe of Levi (ch.43; PG 1,296); so also the apostles monitored by Christ appointed the bishops and decreed their legitimate succession (ch.44; PG 1,297). The order of the eucharistic meeting evidences the priestly character of the Church ministers and the lay character of the rest, always with reference to the OT precedent: to the high priest [bishop] proper functions are given, to the priests [presbyters] a proper place is assigned, to the levites [deacons] proper ministries are laid out; the layman is bound by lay precepts (ch.40; PG 1,289).

Ignatius of Antioch mentions the eucharistic altar: one altar as one bishop with the presbytery and deacons (Letter to the Philadelphians ch.4; PG 5,700; see also Letter to the Smyrians ch.8; PG 5,713).

The Didaché calls the eucharist *thusía*, sacrifice (ch. 14), but connects the eucharist in a special way with the prophets (ch. 10) reflecting the charismatic leadership of the Antiochian community (Acts 13,1). The christians should give tithes to the prophets (and sustain the teachers) for they are their high priests (ch. 13), but they should also appoint bishops and deacons for these also administer the ministry of the prophets and teachers (ch. 15).

Tertullian, around 200, clearly connects the priesthood with the eucharistic ministry while calling for a clear distinction between the eucharistic ministers and the laymen, and between the various grades of eucharistic ministers: among the heretics today one person is bishop, tomorrow another; today is deacon who tomorrow is lector; today is presbyter who tomorrow is layman; for even to laymen they entrust sacerdotalia, priestly functions (*Liber de praescriptionibus adversus haereticos* 41,5; PL 2,57). After Tertullian the eucharistic ministers were commonly called priests.

E. Women The synagogue was no place for women. They did not have to be versed in the Torah since they were not bound to its integral observance: they were dispensed from the positive precepts connected with a fixed point of time (*Kiddushin* 1,7). Whereas some rabbis allowed them a little training in the Torah, others excluded them altogether (*Sotah* 3,4). They merit by sending their children and husbands to learn the Torah (*Berakoth* 17a).

The synagogues of the diaspora were more open to women (*Acts* 17,1-4), and so were the primitive christian communities. But Paul maintained the submission of women (*1 Col* 11,3; *Eph* 5,21-25; see *1 Pt* 3,1) and excluded them from active participation in the liturgical assemblies (*1 Cor* 14,34.35; *1 Tm* 2,11.12). Only the sectarian groups admitted women to active participation (Ireneus, *Contra haereses* 1,13,2; PG 7,580-581; Tertullian, *Liber de praescriptionibus adversus haereticos* 41,5; PL 2,55-57).

Christ had a female following bigger than one would expect in a Palestinian environment (*Lk* 8,2.3), and perhaps bigger than what is recorded by the canonical gospels. The apocryphal Gospel of Thomas enhances the female following by repeatedly placing women as Christ's interlocutors (*logion* 21, 61, 114), and justifies their presence by saying that Christ gives them the status of males (*logion* 114). The chosen disciples of Christ were males.

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