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Holiness as Priesthood

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Abstract

'Who are we?' as Christian believers, as Church, is a question that each generation of Christians, collectively and as individuals, is impelled to ask. Vatican II's teaching on the universal call to holiness marks a significant step in our journey toward addressing this question. This paper focuses on the call to holiness as deeply rooted in a sharing in the priestly ministry of Christ. The core of the paper is an exploration of the radical and unique nature of the priesthood of Christ. The paper continues by exploring the significance of the universal call to holiness as priesthood in the light of the unique nature of Christ's priesthood. The paper claims that the priesthood into which we are all baptised is at once Chrisological and ecclesiological, and suggests that, in the light of this theological reading, new answers may then arise in regard to the ever-urgent questions of Church order.

Keywords

Holiness, Temple, Priesthood, Eucharist, Incarnation

This paper strives to bring into relationship two concepts that are of fundamental importance both in New Testament writings and later theological traditions, "holiness" and "priesthood". The overarching motivation for undertaking this paper is to answer a question for the contemporary Church, the question "Who are we?" The underlying reason for asking that question is to seek to make some contribution to a re-ordering of ecclesial structures in a time of unique ecclesial changes and challenges.

"Who are we?" is a question that must seek its answer both in the past, and in the eschaton, as well as today.

The first people to be named Christians knew themselves to be "Children of Abraham". Inheritors of a rich tradition, the great event-signs of Exodus, Covenant, the Davidic kingdom, and the story of exile, all marked their story, their identity. They understood themselves as Jews. Temple worship was an important part of their being,

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of who they were. First-century Jews, which included the early followers of Jesus, understood the Temple in at least four ways. It was first and foremost the dwelling place of God on earth, it was also seen as a microcosm of heaven and earth, it was regarded as the sole place of sacrificial worship and as the place of the sacrificial priesthood.

There are three parts to this exploration of holiness as priesthood. Firstly there is an exploration of the concept of Temple. The focus will be on the understanding of the Temple that Jesus and his followers would have inherited. The paper will explore Jesus' radical claim to both denounce the Temple (Mt 23.38); and at the same time his great respect for it as the dwelling place of God.[1] Key here is Jesus' close affinity with the new Temple, his self-identification with it,[2] and the understanding of Jesus as the High Priest, as described in Hebrews. The Temple contains the Holy of Holies where only the High Priest can enter; it is the dwelling place of the Holy One.

The second part of the paper explores the High Priesthood of Christ. It will focus especially on the Epistle to the Hebrews. In this and in some other key writings of the New Testament, Jesus Christ comes to be depicted as the Holy of Holies, the dwelling place of God – Jesus Christ in his humanity is wholly expressive of the mystery of divinity, or as we say following Chalcedon – fully human and fully divine. This theology of incarnation permeates the theological understanding at the heart of this paper.

The third and final part of the paper explores the significance of this theology of incarnation for the Church, Christ's body. We in our humanity are called to share the priesthood of Christ and in this way to share in Christ's holiness, God's holiness – for we both *are* a "holy people" and are called to *become* a holy people, a holy priesthood, through our participation in the ecclesial community.

I. The Temple

Temple worship was core to the faith and practice of early Jewish Christians. They had Temple worship in their bloodstream. Our concern must be to understand the theological traditions of what is termed Second Temple Judaism. The Second Temple period ranges from roughly 520 BC to 70 AD. For practising Jews of the

[1] Yves Congar in *The Mystery of the Temple*, trans. Reginald F. Trevett (Westminister, MI: Newman, 1962), p.112 explores these apparently paradoxical claims.

[2] John 2.19-21 'Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days? But he was speaking of the temple of his body".

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first-century the Temple was the focal point of every aspect of their lives. Synagogues and schools of Torah in other parts of Palestine and in the Diaspora gained their significance from their implicit relation to the Temple. N.T. Wright notes that its importance at every level of Jewish life can hardly be overestimated.[3] E.P. Saunders agrees: "it is almost impossible to make too much of the Temple in first-century Jewish Palestine".[4]

For Second Temple Judaism God was said to dwell in the Temple "by God's name" or "by God's glory" or by the Shekinah (presence). It was a feature of the theology of (some) Second Temple writers that God had not definitively committed to dwell therein: this was because the return from Exile was not yet complete in that the conversion of Israel to its Torah was still inadequate and the nations had not yet turned in wonder to worship in Sion (Malachi 3.1).

For Jesus and his followers, the Temple with its practices, in particular its sacrificial ones, together with its priesthood, was of central significance. It was the presence of God dwelling in the Temple – or promising to dwell in the Temple – that made the Temple a place apart (*hieron* – Greek term for Temple, a place "set apart"). This belief is attested throughout the Old Testament (1 Kings 8.10-14; 8.27). Jews knew that while the transcendent God could not be contained in the Temple, they believed that in some unique way God had chosen to dwell in the Temple, among the people, in a place "set apart". As Josephus wrote:

> This cloud [the glory cloud] so darkened the place, that one priest could not discern another: but it afforded *to the minds of all* a visible image and glorious appearance of God's having descended into this Temple, and of God having gladly pitched God's Tabernacle there.[5]

This was the belief held by the followers of Jesus. The Temple is holy because God dwells in it – not because sacrifice and worship are offered. It is God who makes it holy, not the action of the priests. It is the divine presence of God that is the foundation of all that happens in the Temple and for its importance in the life of the people.

This is an important point for the development of the argument of this paper, and one clearly attested in Matthew 23. In the midst of a list of woes and admonishments Jesus reminds the scribes and all who are listening of the truth regarding the Temple:

> You blind fools . . . How blind you are! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? So whoever swears by the

[3] N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), p.224.

[4] E.P. Saunders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1994), p.262.

[5] Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. 8, Chap. 4, 106 in *The Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), p.219. Italics mine.

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> altar, swears by it and by everything on it; and *whoever swears by the sanctuary, swears by it and by the one who dwells in it*. (Mt 23.17-21)

The Temple is holy because it is the dwelling place of God. It is the holiness of God which renders the Temple and all that happens therein as holy. This is what Jews believed and what we must understand if we are to truly recognise the deep significance of Jesus' claim to be "greater than the Temple".

In Matthew 12.1-8 we hear of Jesus and his disciples walking through the cornfields on the Sabbath, and of his disciples plucking heads of grain to eat, thus breaking the Sabbath law. His response to the Pharisees hits at the very core of their faith: "I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice', you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Jesus claims to be "greater than the temple", he demands "mercy and not sacrifice", and identifies himself as 'Lord of the Sabbath'. These claims are startling to Jewish ears – and we must surmise no less to the followers of Jesus.

The Temple is the chosen dwelling place on earth of the Divine, and now this human being Jesus claims to be greater than the Temple. What can this mean? Brant Pietr puts it well: "the only adequate answer is, of course, God himself, present in person, 'tabernacling in the flesh'."[6] Jesus further asks for mercy, and not sacrifice, thus questioning the very reason for the existence of the Temple. The Temple is the place of sacrifice to God. Then finally, Jesus' claim to be Lord of the Sabbath, posits him as unequivocally identifying with the one God whom the Jews worship – the Creator God, who on the seventh day made the Sabbath (Gen. 1; Exod. 20). We have here a Christology that is, in contemporary terms, at once a very high Christology, and yet very Jewish.

"Something greater than the Temple is here"

This self-identification of Jesus with the Temple is also found in the Gospel of John, quite clearly in John 2.13-22, John's account of the cleansing of the Temple. Reference to the Temple can also be seen in John 1. At the end of this opening chapter of the Gospel, Jesus promises Nathanael that because of his belief he shall see "heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (Jn 1.51). In explaining the depth of meaning

[6] Brant Pitre, "Jesus, the New Temple and the New Priesthood" in *Letter and Spirit* 4 (2008): pp.47-83: p.53.

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that this passage conveyed to a Jewish believer, Raymond Brown points out the link between this passage and Jacob's vision of the ladder (staircase). In Genesis 28.10-18 Jacob, many scholars suggest, is having a vision of a heavenly temple, with angels ascending and descending the staircases of the Temple, and these angels are engaged in heavenly liturgical worship. The Lord is in this place. It is the gate of heaven: "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Gen 28.18). Linking these two passages reveals the depth of meaning in Jesus' words to Nathaniel. Brown is clear: "Jesus as Son of Man has become the locus of divine glory, the point of contact between heaven and earth."[7] Jesus is the Temple of God, Jesus is the Holy of Holies among us.

"I desire mercy and not sacrifice"

The Temple is the place of sacrifice – if Jesus now claims to be the Temple, what does this mean for future sacrifice? Let us turn again to the story of the cleansing of the Temple. By overturning the tables of the money-changers and not allowing any one to carry anything through the Temple, Jesus caused sacrifice in the Temple to stop, at least temporarily. This symbolic action, suggesting the cessation of sacrifice, meant "the Temple had lost its raison d'être."[8] In cleansing the Temple, Jesus is demonstrating symbolically what will eventually happen – when the Temple is destroyed (70 A.D.), sacrifice will cease.

The interpretation of this Gospel passage by the Jewish scholar Jacob Neusner, leads to an even richer symbolic reading:

> [The overturning of the money-changers' tables] would have provoked astonishment, since it will have called into question the very simple fact that the daily whole offering [known as the *tamid*] effected atonement and brought about expiation for sin, and God had so instructed Moses in the Torah. Accordingly, only someone who rejected the Torah's explicit teaching concerning the daily whole offering could have overturned the tables – or, as I shall suggest, someone who had in mind setting up a different table, and for a different purpose: for the action carries the entire message, both negative and positive . . . . The overturning of the moneychangers' tables represents an act of rejection of the most important rite of the Israelite cult, the daily whole-offering, and therefore, a statement that there is a means of atonement other than the daily whole offering, which is now null. Then what was to take the

[7] Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1 p.91.
[8] N T Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, p.423.

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> place of the daily whole-offering? It was to be the rite of the Eucharist: table for table, whole offering for whole offering.[9]

Jesus' overturning of the tables symbolised the cessation of the daily whole burnt offering (*tamid*) believed to effect atonement (Num 28.1-8).

This is precisely how the New Testament and Christian theology come to view the story of Jesus. He is the one "who takes away the sin of the world". In Romans 3.24-25 we read that, while all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, "they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith". In 1 John 2.2 Jesus is identified as "the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world". Radical things are happening in Jesus. There is no longer a need for regular Temple sacrifice, for Jesus has offered a sacrifice of atonement, once and for all.

In the many accounts we have of the Last Supper, Jesus, in his use of the terms "body" and "blood" is "applying to himself terms from the language of sacrifice".[10] Jesus himself, the Holy of Holies, the new Temple is at once the sacrifice offered in his own body. In John 2.18-22, as we have seen, the author is clear: Jesus' body replaces the Temple in Jerusalem. When Paul says that the cup of blessing is a "communion" with the blood of Christ he is assimilating the Eucharist to one of the most frequent and popular rituals – the communion sacrifice of the Temple. And, as Revelation proclaims: Jesus is the new Temple: "I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb." (Rev 21.22-23)[11]

In short, Jesus, in his life's actions was proclaiming to his Jewish followers that he is the new Temple, that there is to be an end to daily blood sacrifice. The forgiveness of sins, redemption, is central to Jesus' ministry – he is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (τὴν ἁμαρτίαν, Jn 1.29).

Temple worship has been transformed in the theology of the New Testament through communal reflection on the life and actions of Jesus. In the early Church we see temple worship transformed,

[9] Jacob Neusner, "Money-Changers in the Temple: The Mishnah's Explanation," *New Testament Studies* 35(1989) pp.287-290: 289, 290.

[10] Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1966), p.222.

[11] In studying these claims of Jesus, care must be taken not to fall into a later concept of supersessionism. In the New Testament, Paul insists that God's mysterious fidelity to God's covenant with the Chosen People remains in place, and Thomas Aquinas later strongly affirms, "Salvation comes from the Jews".

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re-consecrated, re-interpreted, translated. It is worth recalling that any translation still draws fruit from the original, it doesn't destroy it. As Paul states in Romans 11.17 "But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not vaunt yourselves over the branches. If you do vaunt yourselves, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you".

It is important to reflect deeply so that we may more fruitfully understand the radical nature of the transformation effected by Jesus, not only in his words but also by his action. We are witnessing "an extraordinary and paradoxical transformation. All that was meant by the Temple priesthood and sacrifice have found their one meaning in this man Jesus."[12] Jesus Christ is the 'Holy of Holies'.

II. The High Priesthood of Christ in Hebrews

Jesus is the new Temple; in his very body he is the sacrifice to be offered in this new Temple. For Jews, the terms sacrifice and priesthood are intimately connected. "The Temple is the locus of the priesthood because it is the sole place of sacrifice, and it is the sole place of sacrifice because it is the locus of the priesthood."[13]

As the focus of this paper turns towards priesthood, to Christ's high priesthood, we turn to the Letter to the Hebrews. This is a very rich text, probably initially composed and delivered as a homily/sermon. Theologically it is one of the most challenging of the New Testament. Cardinal Vanhoye's classic study on priests and priesthood, identifies it as one of the key New Testament texts on this topic.[14] According to Alan Mitchell, the introductory words of Hebrews, "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son", teach us that "the very nature of God is to speak, to disclose, to reveal" and that "God's desire for self-communication is an ongoing process of self-disclosure, which culminates in the revelation of the Son".[15]

Thomas Aquinas noted in his commentary on Hebrews, that "The transcendence of Christ [*Christi excellentia*], is thus clearly shown in our text; and this is the subject matter of this epistle to the

[12] Herbert McCabe, *God, Christ and Us*, p.51.

[13] Pitre, op.cit. p.51.

[14] Albert Cardinal Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest*, (Gracewing: Leominister, 2009), pp.20-21. (*Prêtre Nouveau, selon le Nouveau Testament*. Editions du Seuil, 1980). First published in English in 1986.

[15] Alan C. Mitchell, *Hebrews in Sacra Pagina*, Daniel J. Harrington, ed. (Liturgical Press, Collegeville: Minnesota) p.2007.

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Hebrews".[16] Hebrews is about Christ, and Christ as High Priest, a High Priest like no other. Vanhoye's work affirms that in Jesus, Son of God (4.14) we have an eminent high priest (*Archiereus megas*, 4.14; *archiereus* (4.15; 8.1).

As High Priest, Christ accomplishes what the Levitical Priesthood could not: purification (*katharismos*) for sins (1.3) and of the conscience (9.14, 22–23; 10.22; 12.24). This we learn in the opening verses, and so we are immediately alerted to the important message of this Epistle. The Son is described as the "exact imprint of God's very/essential being" (καὶ χαρακτὴρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ) and so is the reflection of God's glory. The phrase "God's very being" allows Mitchell to see the Son as image of God, as similarly "capable of a powerful performative word that sustains all things".[17] From its opening lines, Hebrews leaves us in no doubt as to the uniqueness of Christ, Son and High Priest. Christ's priesthood is qualitatively different from the traditional Levitical priesthood of the Temple (1.13; 8.1; 10.12 – 11. 3). His priesthood is not inherited (7.13), he does not belong to a line of priests,[18] and he will not need to regularly offer blood sacrifice.

Christ's is a new priesthood like that of Melchizedek. The author of Hebrews is clear – for the sake of perfection this new priesthood was required:

> Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood – for the people received the law under this priesthood – what further need would there have been to speak of another priest arising according to the order of Melchizedek, rather than one according to the order of Aaron? For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. (Hb 7.11, 12)

This new priesthood changes everything – where there is a change in priesthood "there is necessarily a change in the law as well". This new priesthood brings a new and greater hope. Because of it, access to God is forever changed, there is now a new way to approach God freed from the prescriptions of Temple worship. The transformation of priesthood in Christ has transformed the road to salvation: the message of Hebrews is "one of expansiveness and inclusiveness".[19]

The road toward salvation is now seen as a journey toward glorification and perfection. It is depicted in Hebrews as a growth toward maturity, a maturity that involves both theological and spiritual development. If Jesus' followers want to be transformed, sanctified,

[16] *In Heb*. Prol. 4.

[17] Mitchell, op. cit. p.38.

[18] "Now the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar." Hb 7.13.

[19] Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest,* p.151. See also Hb 7.19.

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glorified they are to move from "milk" to "solid food", from infancy to maturity, from a basic teaching about Christ to an understanding of the sophisticated high priestly Christology that Hebrews puts before us (Hb 5.11 – 6:3).

In Hebrews, a theology of incarnation is a core concept – the God who became flesh and dwelt among us. Unlike the Levitical priesthood, which was the gift of a group set apart, the eternal priesthood of Christ is effective because of the solidarity Jesus shared with humankind. In a remarkable statement we read that "the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father" (Hb 2.11). Hebrew states there is a solidarity of common origin as we share "flesh and blood". Priests are mediators between the God and humankind. Jesus as High Priest, shares the origin and nature of his humanity with us. His solidarity with us removes his need to mediate, as such. In him divinity and humanity come together. Jesus completes in us the glory that God intended us to have from the moment of creation.

This total sharing in all that is human – "he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect" (2.17) – leads the author of Hebrews to depict Jesus as freeing humankind from the fear of death. Hebrews 5.7-10 puts all this very succinctly: Christ, in his flesh and blood submitted himself to the drama of the passion. In this way our flesh and blood, "deformed" by disobedience has been opened to transformation by the action of God. Christ's prayer is answered, and "the action of God and the action of Christ come together in an admirable unity".[20] Jesus Christ in his humanity, wholly expressive of his divinity, having been made perfect, was declared a High Priest like no other and became for all who follow him the source of eternal life.

According to the Order of Melchizedek

In Hb 7.11 the noun used for perfection is *teleiōsis*. This term *teleiōsis* is only used here and in Luke 1:45 in the New Testament. Vanhoye advises that for this Greek term there is no exact equivalent in English, it signifies the "action of making perfect/fulfilment/completion". The message that the author of Hebrews wishes to communicate here is the fact that there has been a transformation of priesthood in Christ. Access to God is now possible for all people. The term *teleiōsis* is found in Leviticus seven times, always in the context of the sacrifice of priestly consecration. It is found in the parallel passage of Exodus. Thus, according to Vanhoye: "In reading the texts of Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8, we readily conclude

[20] Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest*, p.129.

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that Israel possessed a *teleiōsis*: the consecration sacrifice of the high priest".[21] But what the author of Hebrews is stating now is that this *teleiōsis* is ineffectual. It symbolises something – a transformation, a perfection – that *it is powerless to bring about*. Thus a different priest is needed. Hebrews 7.28 is clear: "For the law appoints as high priests those who are subject to weakness, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect for ever". This High Priest is a Son, and he has been transformed, made perfect, *teteleiōmenon*. Christ's priestly consecration "was truly effected by means of a real transformation of his being as human (Hb 2.10, 5.8f) which made him into the perfect human, that is to say, the human recreated according to God's plan, perfectly united to God and totally open to his brethren. Only a priestly consecration of this kind could establish a true priest".[22]

Notably, this transformation was of the flesh and blood – for the Son of God, the "splendour of divine glory" (Hb 1.3) could not be perfected. In order to be proclaimed, High Priest Christ had to learn obedience. In 7.28 Vanhoye suggests that we find the "twofold implication of priesthood, relationship with God and relationship with humankind, expressed in an extremely dense formula".[23] The naming/recognition of Christ as High Priest has brought a radical change in the way priesthood is understood. The Law is rendered impotent (Hb 7.19). A radical intimacy with God has been rendered possible for all humankind.

Aquinas, *On Hebrews*

Thomas Aquinas, in his Commentary on these verses in Hebrews (7.20-28), follows a similar line of thinking. The priesthood of Christ is eternal, and thus firmer, reliable, to be trusted. For "the priest who is Christ is immortal, for He remains forever as the eternal Word of the Father, from whose eternity redounds an eternity to His body".[24] Christ continues forever and so he holds his priesthood permanently. Hence Aquinas concludes "Christ alone is the true priest, but others are His ministers" (*solus Christus est verus sacerdos, alii autem ministri eius,* 368). The key point for Aquinas is to see the importance of Christ, true human and true God, as priest for the salvation of all. We read that Christ, although he is distant from God in his human

[21] Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest*, p.166.
[22] Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest,* p.167.
[23] Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest,* p.168.
[24] *Super Epistolam B. Pauli ad Hebraeos lectura* (Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews para 368, by Saint Thomas Aquinas translated by Fabian R. Larcher, O.P., para 368 accessed at http://www.corpusthomisticum.org References to section in body of text.

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nature, his divine nature means he can go to God "by himself" (*per semetipsum*, 371).

Christ is the most excellent High Priest there can be. At once Christ has assumed our human nature and he is perfectly holy. Holiness implies purity, consecrated to God: "Therefore, also the Holy which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God" (Lk 1.35); "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 1.20); "The saint of saints will be anointed" (Dan 9.24).

It is this balancing between Christ's divinity and humanity that continues to challenge theologians and all believers, and yet it is precisely here that our surety of salvation and of the gift of holiness lies. Christ is innocent, without blemish, and separated from sinners. "His life is not like others" (Wis 2.15) and yet he ate with sinners in order to converse with them (375).

Christ is true human, true God, the Holy One and hence true priest. His one offering is enough to take away the sins of the entire human race. Aquinas comments, understated and hence the more remarkable that he is "a sufficiently competent priest" (375).[25]

The message of Hebrews is clear: Jesus is High Priest par excellence. The role of any priest is to act as a mediator; Christ fully human and fully divine is in his very self a mediator. Aquinas notes that "the humanity of Christ is an organ of the divinity" (382).[26] Because of this, because of the incarnation Christ has opened access to God for all. He, the Holy One, is the minister of holiness. In Christ we see uniquely holiness as priesthood. To return to an earlier verse in Hebrews, in Christ we experience "the introduction of a better hope, through which we approach God" (7:19). The term used for introduction, *epeisagōgē*, is found only here in the New Testament and refers to something present in a way it was not before – holiness as priesthood in Christ, true God and true human.

So Christ is High Priest, uniquely. He himself is the New Temple, the dwelling place of God. There is no further need for the Levitical priesthood – all is changed. Christ is the Holy One, in Christ we see that the holiness to which we are called, as children of God, manifests itself most clearly as Priesthood.

III. The Significance of this Theology of Incarnation for the Church, Christ's body: "The Universal Call to Priesthood"

So what is the meaning of all this for us? Firstly, we are reminded by St Thomas that this "taking hold of human nature into the unity of

[25] Ergo iste est sacerdos valde sufficiens.

[26] Humanitas enim Christi est sicut organum divinitatis. (382)

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the person of the Son of God exalts our nature beyond measure" (*In Heb* 2.14-18 [148]). Vatican II's proclamation of a universal call to holiness is inseparable from, and intrinsically linked to, its recovery of the earlier recognition of the priestly, prophetic and kingly role of all the baptised. The universal call to holiness is a universal call to holiness as priesthood.

In Jesus Christ, God is present "tabernacling in the flesh", in Jesus Christ there is a change in priesthood and this inevitably necessitates a change in law, as Hebrews declares. It is in the immediate presence of God that we come to understand the true spirit of the Law. We all share in the anointing of Christ, the anointed one. We all share in Christ's priesthood. Our call to holiness is a call to priesthood is a call to act *in persona Christi* – for, as Gilles Berceville notes, it was in his incarnated state that Christ was a priest.[27] The universal call to holiness as priesthood is Christological.

Similarly it is ecclesiological, for it is as a community that we best express our vocation to priesthood. It is as a sacramental Church that we nourish our vocation to holiness. The celebration of the Eucharist is the place par excellence where priesthood is visible and holiness nourished. Each time the Eucharist is celebrated we are reminded of how heaven and earth, the divine and the human, came together in Christ, and now come together in bread and wine, "fruit of the earth and work of human hands" which becomes for us the bread of life.

Here we come to the crux of the matter. At the celebration of the Eucharist, an ordained minister presides. The minister presides at the Eucharist, leads the priestly people in prayer and in doing so exercises the priesthood of us all, the priesthood of Christ. At mass we all pray that the bread and wine be consecrated, although the words may be articulated by one person, this person represents not only the people gathered together at this event on this day but he represents the priesthood of the whole Church throughout the world. We are not simply a local group of Christians praying, we are the whole Church praying. We are Christ praying. We are Christ offering sacrifice:

> the sacrificial meal in which we are in solidarity with all the victims of the world, and pre-eminently in solidarity with the victim on the cross through whom all humankind are brought through death and out of death to unity in the eternal life of love.[28]

[27] "Cependant, ce fut d'abord dans l'offrande de sa vie sur terre que le Christ fut prêtre" (He 8, 3). Gilles Berceville, "Le sacerdoce du Christ dans l'Ad Hebraeos," *Revue Thomiste* 99(1999) pp.143-158: p.149.

[28] Herbert McCabe, "A Kingdom of Priests?" *New Blackfriars*, 71 (1990) pp.524–526: p.526.

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However, for the Catholic Church in particular, without the ordained minister, representing the catholicity of the gathering, the question arises as to who we are. Lawrence Welch, approaching this question from a different perspective, comments starkly, "Apart from his presence and ministry they are only a group of believers, unable of themselves to represent the Church".[29] This statement seems to be a radical denial of the holiness of the people, and the priesthood which is shared through an anointing from Christ and the Holy Spirit. It does, however, emphasize the importance of the theology of this paper, which suggests the need to recover an understanding of holiness as priesthood, and of priesthood as a sharing in the anointing of Christ. A truthful recalling of this leads to a call to re-vision the church, to perhaps a change in language.

The fundamental argument of this paper has been to establish the priesthood of all the faithful as a consequence of the incorporation of all the faithful into Christ by baptism. In ecclesiological perspective that is to speak of the church as the people of God in Christ. This is the primary meaning of priesthood. Along this trajectory of meaning we come to speak of the priesthood of the ordained. This is perhaps a perspective that is different from the one that had been dominant in our tradition, where the priesthood of the ordained has been primary. In these times when there is clearly a new debate about who the ordained may be (male, female, celibate, married) the recovery of and the insistence on the primary meaning of priesthood as the priesthood of all the faithful in Christ may offer a useful resource for extraordinarily important debates within the Catholic Church today.

Now is perhaps the time to explore these questions afresh. The First Vatican Council, in a particular historical context, focused on the role and ministry of the pope. The Second Vatican Council saw a need to develop a theology of the episcopate. Many then and now say that we need to continue this trajectory and address our understanding of the ordained priestly ministry, and develop afresh our theology of the ordained priesthood for a changed world. People suggest we need married clergy, woman priests; others argue that the concept of *viri probati* remains fundamental to ministerial priesthood.

This paper suggests a different approach, a different starting-point that may lead to fresh expressions of church, and of ministry in church. The starting-point is the universal call to priesthood as holiness. The entry to this priesthood is via the sacraments of initiation, the fostering of this holiness is the sacramental ecclesial community. All other expressions of this priesthood, the priesthood of Christ, are radically rooted in this priesthood.

[29] Lawrence J. Welch, "For the Church and Within the Church: Priestly Representation", *The Thomist* 65(2001) pp.613-637: p.634.

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Perhaps it is timely to rephrase Welch and take as our theological and ecclesiological starting-point the fact that "Apart from the believers' presence [and ministry] he is only an ordained minister, unable of himself to represent the Church".

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