

The Mystique of the Catholic Priesthood

By Richard Bennett
Former Roman Catholic Priest

One might wonder what remains of the glory of the Catholic priesthood in face of the worldwide scandals, and in particular those that have occurred recently in the U.S.A. For example, on July 7th 2003 under the heading “Clergy Sex Abuse: Justice Must Come for the Bishops”, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported,

“That there are some sinful priests should not itself cause a crisis of faith. In fact, it is a matter of Catholic faith that all men and women are born sinners—and priests are not immune from sin or human nature. But the number of victims and the years that this abuse spans is simply staggering. The real outrage is that it took so long for these men to be brought to justice and that this abuse was allowed to go on for so long. And that is no accident...How does one begin to understand how such a problem could have been allowed to fester for so long? The nature of a celibate all-male clergy, the culture of secrecy and the inclination to protect their fellow priests certainly played a central role.”¹

On July 23rd 2003, the Massachusetts’ Attorney General published a report stating that the Roman Catholic Church abuse scandal in Boston most likely involved more than one thousand victims, causing even more astonishment regarding the state of the Catholic priesthood. The summary report stated,

“The Attorney General’s investigation revealed that the magnitude of the Archdiocese’s history of clergy sexual abuse of children is staggering. Records produced by the Archdiocese reveal complaints regarding at least 789 victims. When information from other sources is considered, the number of alleged victims who have disclosed their abuse likely exceeds one thousand. The magnitude of the Archdiocese’s history of clergy sexual abuse is equally shocking if evaluated in terms of the number of priests and other Archdiocese workers alleged to have sexually abused children since 1940. The investigation revealed allegations of sexual abuse of children made against at least 237 priests and thirteen other Archdiocese workers. Of these 250 priests and other Archdiocese workers, 202 allegedly abused children between 1940 and 1984, with the other forty-eight allegedly abusing children during Cardinal Law’s tenure as Archbishop.”²

Another report surfaced in August, 2003, in the *Dallas Morning News*,

“Roughly two-thirds of top U.S. Catholic leaders have allowed priests accused of sexual abuse to keep working, a systematic practice that spans decades and continues today, a three-month *Dallas Morning News* review shows. The study—the first of its kind—looked at the records of the top leaders of the nation’s 178 mainstream Roman Catholic dioceses, including acting administrators in cases where the top job is vacant...Most protected priests were accused of sexually abusing minors—primarily adolescent boys, but also younger ones, and a sizable number of girls of various ages. The newspaper’s study also covered behavior that indicated a sexual

¹ <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2003/07/07/ED262205.DTL> 7/21/03. *San Francisco Chronicle*, 7/7/03 by James Hammer, Assistant District Attorney in San Francisco and a former Jesuit seminarian (1988-95).

² “Summary report of Massachusetts Attorney General”, p 2, posted on www.ago.state.ma.us 7/23/03

attraction to minors, such as viewing child pornography or, in one case, trading sexually charged e-mails with someone a priest believed was a minor.”³
While the USA is entangled in Catholic sex abuse scandals, similar events have despoiled families in other nations.

“From Canada to Australia, South Africa to Hong Kong, and across Europe from Ireland to Pope John Paul II’s native Poland, clergy sex abuse cases and the ensuing cover-ups have proven to be a worldwide problem. This past spring, three leading bishops resigned in Europe. Scores of other clergy across the globe have faced lawsuits, criminal cases, and public allegations of sexual abuse or cover-up....It is not about one man or one country, it is about an institution.”⁴

While many Catholics in the USA have begun calling for the exposure of the facts, removal of corrupt bishops, reform, redress and compensation, the Vatican has for many years ordered strictest secrecy in child abuse cover-up cases.

“The order, written in Latin, was sent from the Vatican in 1962 and is marked with the seal of Pope John XXIII....The document states: ‘**Matters should be pursued in a most secretive way...they are to be restrained by a perpetual silence...**and everyone pertaining to the tribunal in any way...is to observe the strictest secret, which is commonly regarded as a secret of the Holy Office...under the penalty of excommunication.’”⁵

Under its strictest penalty—excommunication—Rome has since 1962 warned her cardinals, archbishops and bishops to keep the clergy sexual abuse secret. The press has begun to expose this clandestine legislation,

“The hierarchy of the Catholic Church has been instructed by the Vatican at least since 1962 to keep certain cases of clergy sexual abuse secret under pain of excommunication, according to Boston lawyer Carmen L. Durso. A copy of the directive was sent yesterday to U. S. Attorney Michael J. Sullivan at his Boston office by Mr. Durso, who said he believes the church has been obstructing justice. Mr. Durso said it might also explain why Cardinal Bernard F. Law and bishops of the Boston Archdiocese and elsewhere covered up sexual abuse of children by clergy...Paul Baier, president of Survivors First, a victims’ advocacy group, who is also familiar with the document, called the church’s action in concealing instances of sexual abuse ‘a coordinated effort of conspiracy.’ Bryan Smith of Hubbardston, Worcester area leader of Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests, said people in the church who covered up for priests ‘should be prosecuted. If it were anyone else, they would be in jail by now,’ he said.”⁶

Claim for the excellence of the Catholic priesthood

Regarding prestige of the Catholic priesthood, what non-Catholics fail to realize is the continuing mystique, power, and glory, which is to be given to her priesthood by Catholics. For example, Vatican Council II states,

³ www.dallasnews.com/cgi-bin/2002/priests.cgi 8/26/03

⁴ www.boston.com/globe/spotlight/abuse/print3/121402_failings.htm 8/21/03

⁵ www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2003/0/8/18wvat18.xml&sSheet=/news/2003/08/18/ixnewstop.html 8/21/03 Bolding in any quote indicates emphasis added in this paper.

⁶ <http://www.telegram.com/apps/pbcs.dll/frontpage> 7/29/03

“First, then, priests are to make it their most cherished object to make clear to people the excellence and necessity of the priesthood. They do this by their preaching and by the personal witness of a life that shows clearly a spirit of service and a genuine paschal joy. Then they spare no trouble or inconvenience in helping both youths and older men whom they prudently consider suitable for so great a ministry to prepare themselves properly so that they can be called at some time by the bishops....However, it is emphatically not to be expected that the voice of the Lord calling should come to the future priest’s ears in some extraordinary way....Therefore organizations for the promotion of vocations, whether diocesan or national, are recommended highly...In sermons, in catechetical instruction and in periodicals, the needs of the Church both local and universal are to be made known clearly. The meaning and excellence of the priesthood is to be highlighted.”⁷

Rather than teaching the Gospel and the Scripture, one of the primary jobs of the priest is to recruit other men for the priesthood; but even this is under tight control of the bishop.

Thus the excellence of the Catholic priesthood is a common theme within Catholicism. The glory of the priesthood is to be held up before Catholic youth and their parents. Just what is this charm and nobility that is held up before Catholic youth and their parents by Rome? Rome declares quite emphatically that the priesthood, which is offered to her young men, is an identical priesthood with that of Christ Jesus himself. The actual words are the following:

“All priests share with bishops **the one identical priesthood and ministry of Christ.**”⁸

“The priest offers the holy sacrifice *in persona Christi*. In persona means in specific sacramental identification with the Eternal High Priest.”⁹

What is proposed before Catholic youth is that there is a specific identification between Christ and the priest. This is put in no uncertain terms, for even the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states,

“Now the minister comes by reason of the sacerdotal consecration which he has received, is truly made like to the High Priest and possesses the authority to act in the power and place of Christ himself.”¹⁰

What devout Catholic youth, who really aspires to be good, noteworthy, and successful in his religious life, would not want to be in such an office as to possess the authority, power and very priesthood of Christ Himself? This is what the official documents of the Church of Rome declare. In very attractive terms, this is what is put in the Pope’s addresses, in magazines, articles, and in vocation lectures given in Catholic schools to bring the youth into priesthood.

The very work of redemption is also declared to be part of the priestly life. Thus Vatican Council II states, “In the mystery of the eucharistic sacrifice, in which priests fulfill their principle function, the work of our redemption is continually carried out.”¹¹ Young people are instructed to aspire to an office in which they can continually carry

⁷ Vatican Council II Documents, No. 63, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 7 Dec. 1965 Vol. I, Sec. 11, pp. 884-5

⁸ No. 63, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, Vol. I, Sec. 7, p. 875

⁹ Vatican Council II Documents No. 77, *Dominicae Cenae*, 24 Feb 1980, Vol. II, Sec. 8, p. 74

¹⁰ *Catechism*, Para. 1548

¹¹ No. 63, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, Vol. I, Sec. 13, p. 888

out the work of redemption. What higher call could be presented before youth to which they would not wish, in their youthful enthusiasm, to achieve? They are told that all sacraments are the work of the priest. He is essential to the work of Christ in the modern world, thus in the official words of Rome,

“By baptisms, priests introduce men into the people of God; by the sacrament of Penance, they reconcile sinners with God and the Church; by the Anointing of the Sick they relieve those who are ill; and especially by the celebration of the Mass they offer Christ’s sacrifice sacramentally.”¹²

By far the most grandiose claim made for the Catholic priest is that he can bring down on the altar the same single sacrifice that Christ Jesus offered. This is the most sublime power alleged by Rome for her priests. Thus she teaches,

“The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*: ‘The victim is one and the same: the same now offers through the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the cross; only the manner of offering is different.’ ‘This divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner.’”¹³

Three things are claimed in the pronouncement just cited. First, it claims that Christ is contained in the elements of the Mass. Second, it claims that He is offered by a human being to God, and finally it claims that the offering is in an unbloody mode. None of these claims is true.

Priests are provided to the Catholic to perform rituals for him that will take him from the cradle to the grave—but especially he is needed to perform the supposed very offering of Christ’s own sacrifice. This is the appeal that the Catholic priesthood has to youth. It works even today as many young men go into the diocesan seminaries and into the religious orders (such as the Jesuits, the Carmelites, the Dominicans and the Franciscans) so that they may have a share in the very priesthood of Christ and that they may claim this identity with the High Priest Who is Christ Jesus the Lord.

The One Sacrificial Priest

In the New Testament, no sacrificial priests are mentioned, only elders¹⁴ and pastors. There is utterly and entirely no Biblical basis for the Catholic priesthood. In Christ Jesus, all believers are part of the royal priesthood of Christ in spiritual praise, but no one has a share in His sacrificial priesthood. Like unto the old famous parable of the King’s new suit, the pages of Scripture show that a biblical basis for Catholic priesthood simply does not exist!

The contrast between Christ’s priesthood and the Old Testament priesthood is very clear. The Levitical priests were mere mortal men and, therefore, needed successors; Christ, in contrast, is an eternal Priest and His priesthood is untransferrable and needs no successor. *“And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an un-*

¹² No. 63, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, Vol. I, Sec. 5, p. 870

¹³ *Catechism*, Para. 1367

¹⁴ The terms overseer and elder/pastor are used interchangeably, Acts 20:17, 28; I Peter 5:1-4

*changeable priesthood.*¹⁵ Untransferrable expresses the sense of the passage. The concept strictly speaking was that it was did not pass over into other hands. The Levitical priesthood had passed, as successive generations came, from one to another. This reasoning is designed to prove that the Priesthood of Christ is eternal; it does not pass from hand to hand.

The passage continues, “*Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*”¹⁶ He does not die, as did the mortal Jewish priests. This is the reason He is able to save completely. The passage continues, “*who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.*”¹⁷ Other priests before Christ were mere mortal men, and it was necessary that their office should pass to other hands. They were sinful men also, and it was necessary that sacrifices should be made for themselves as well as others. Christ Jesus did away with the Levitical priesthood and its many priests when He died on the cross, “*behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.*”¹⁸ The veil that hung in the Temple, separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place, was rent in two from top to bottom, signifying the end of the whole priesthood of the Old Testament. The office of the many priests of the Old Testament was done away with because the one Priest continues forever!

Of utter importance is the fact that Christ Jesus alone was qualified to offer Himself. He alone had the absolutely unique qualifications as the Holy Spirit teaches, “*for such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.*”¹⁹ The Lord Jesus is the sole sacrificial priest of the New Testament. He finished the work of our salvation by one sole offering. The Scriptures repeatedly establish this truth. The substance of this is found in the Lord’s declaration from the cross, “*Tetelestai*” “*It is finished.*”²⁰

The One Sacrifice, Once Offered

Christ Jesus’ sacrifice marked the fulfillment and end of the priestly ordinances of the Old Testament, “*there is no more offering for sin.*”²¹ Through His priestly offering on the cross, Christ Jesus “*by Himself purged our sins sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.*”²² It is clear that Christ’s sacrifice was designed to be once for all, in contrast to the many sacrifices of the Old Testament. “*But this man, after he had offered **one sacrifice** for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.*”²³ “*For by **one offering** he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.*”²⁴

¹⁵ Hebrews 7:23-24 “*Unchangeable*” in Greek literally means “untransferrable,” not passing on to others.

¹⁶ Hebrews 7:25

¹⁷ Hebrews 7:27

¹⁸ Matthew 27:51

¹⁹ Hebrews 7:26

²⁰ John 19:30

²¹ Hebrews 10:18

²² Hebrews 1:3

²³ Hebrews 10:12

²⁴ Hebrews 10:14

The unique oneness of Christ's sacrifice is in this very fact that it was a single offering once made. The concept "once" is deemed so important that it is asserted seven times by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. The perfection of Christ's sacrifice is contrasted to the daily repeated sacrifices of the Old Testament. The truth of the excellence of Christ's sacrifice is highlighted by the word "once". For example, the Apostle Paul teaches, "*For in that he died, he died unto sin **once**: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.*"²⁵ The Apostle Peter likewise declares, "*For Christ also hath **once** suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.*"²⁶ The same truth is taught in the book of Hebrews five times with the conclusion, "*So Christ was **once** offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.*"²⁷

True worship of God is in Christ Jesus, the eternal Priest

True worship of God is in Christ Jesus, the eternal Priest. He alone authenticates worship, since it is in His name, and in accord with His Word. His own righteousness credited to the believer by grace through faith alone is the only basis of true worship. His restrictions in worship are most serious, "*God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*"²⁸ The greatest comfort believers have in true worship is that they have Jesus Christ, the Lord and Master in Whom they are accepted, as their intercessor. He is their High Priest, "*now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: we have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.*"²⁹ This is the confidence in presence of God that believers now have because they have one eternal Priest, who offered one sacrifice once and for all time! Without this truth, one does not have the Gospel or eternal life!

Life as it is lived in Catholic seminaries

Were it not documented in Catholic books³⁰ one would hardly believe the utter decadence in seminaries and in colleges that train men for the priesthood. The subculture of homosexuality is rampant across the U.S.A. Page after page of *Goodbye, Good Men* tells of the horrific influence of homosexuality that has permeated the youth in the Catholic seminaries. The ideals of the youth are replaced by unnatural lusts that have become prevalent in major seminaries and colleges training for the priesthood in the U.S.A.³¹ Donald Cozzens, leading Catholic priest and rector of St. Mary's in Cleveland, Ohio (a leading U.S. seminary), states in his book on the priesthood that

²⁵ Romans 6: 10

²⁶ I Peter 3:18

²⁷ Hebrews 9:28

²⁸ John 4:24

²⁹ Hebrews 8:1

³⁰ Michael S. Ross, *Goodbye, Good Men, How Liberals Brought Corruption into the Catholic Church* (Wash. DC: Regnery Publ., Inc., 2002); also Fr. Donald B Cozzens, *The Changing Face of the Priesthood: A Reflection of the Priest's Crisis of Soul* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000).

³¹ Ross, Chapter 4

“An NBC report on celibacy and the clergy found that ‘anywhere from 23 percent to 58 percent’ of the Catholic clergy have a homosexual orientation.³² Other studies find that approximately half of American priests and seminarians are homosexually oriented...Moreover, the percentage of gay men among religious congregations of priests is believed to be even higher.”³³

Then nonchalantly he states, “At issue at the beginning of the twenty-first century is the growing perception—one seldom contested by those who know the priesthood well—that the priesthood is or is becoming a gay profession. And to the point is the question: Does it matter? Does not the question reveal still another form of homophobia?”³⁴

Under the heading, “The Gay Crisis”, Cozzens states, “Gay seminarians are likely to feel at home and at ease in a seminary with a significant gay population. They feel they belong and their need for meaningful, deep relationships with other gay man is easily met, and because they instinctively recognize other gay seminarians, circles of support and camaraderie are quickly formed...The straight seminarian meanwhile, feels out of place and may interpret his inner destabilization as a sign that he does not have a vocation to the priesthood.”³⁵

In the concluding sentence of the book, Cozzens says, “Behind the changing face of the priesthood remains the saving face of Jesus the Christ.”³⁶ He had already stated that saving souls through “the celebration of the sacraments is the primary function of the priest.”(p. 8) Later he says, “The ritual, symbolic richness of the sacramental life of the Church, to a great extent, meets the human need for transcendence.”(p. 30) The need for the esthetic may be met in the pageantry of the Catholic sacraments, but it does not meet the need to be right with God. To state that the saving face of Christ Jesus remains behind the priesthood is a lie. What Cozzens fails to see is that his own reliance on the “saving face of Jesus the Christ” is based not on the Gospel, which is *the power of God unto salvation*, but rather on the Catholic understanding of salvation through good works, a doctrine straight out of hell. Christ Jesus stands behind what is true and in accord with His written Word to the glory of His Father! The Catholic priesthood is a parody of all of that for which Christ Jesus stands. The Lord Jesus Christ does not stand behind the Catholic make-believe; rather He is one High Priest Who is holy, harmless, undefiled!

Continuing in a damning lifestyle

One wonders just how the men who are studying for the priesthood, having been presented with such high ideals as of their identity with Christ, can stay in the seminaries and colleges for religious formation, when they meet the stark reality of a gay subculture and of abnormal sexuality. To answer that problem one has to consider the pressure put on sons by their mothers, in particular, and also the fact that youth, because of their inexperience, are more easily snared. Through this devastating experience and the horrendous guilt it engenders, they become trapped in very vices that they would have

³² Timothy Unsworth, *The Last Priests in America* (New York: Crossroad, 1991) p. 248, in Cozzens, p. 99.

³³ Cozzens, p. 99

³⁴ Cozzens, p. 107

³⁵ Cozzens, p. 135

³⁶ Ibid., p.143

abhorred prior to entering the seminary. Two hooks catch the Catholic youth. First is the tradition of the Catholic Church that teaches that celibacy is a way to sharing the rich experiences of Christ, and second is, through the tradition which they are to hold as sacred, they are caught in a lifestyle that seems to be unbreakable.

Regarding the first of these hooks, the Catholic Church has declared it “unthinkable” that her tradition of celibacy is at fault. In her Vatican Council II Documents she officially states,

“In any case, the [Catholic] Church of the West cannot weaken her faithful observance of her own tradition. And it is unthinkable that for centuries she has followed a path which, instead of favouring the spiritual richness of individual souls and of the People of God, has in some way compromised it, or that she has with arbitrary juridical prescriptions stifled the free expansion of the most profound realities of nature and of grace.”³⁷

The “unthinkable” has become an every day occurrence. Chapter 10 of *Goodbye, Good Men* begins with a quotation, “complaints about doctrinal error, liturgical abuse and even personal conduct in U.S. seminaries are now so common as to be routine.”³⁸ Why then is it that we have a continuation of the Catholic priesthood and a continuation of the horrors that are being foisted on Catholics? The answer is that the Catholic Church is one huge monolithic dictatorial system that continues to plow forward in spite of what is apparent. She continues to uphold her teaching regarding the identity of Christ and the priest, and continues to say that priests are “other Christs”. It is a continuation of the whole theme of Graham Greene’s novel, *The Power and the Glory*.

This famous novel by Catholic author Graham Greene shows the life of a Latino priest, sunk in sin. It was not just that he was drunk with liquor, immersed in immoral living and that his teeth were yellow with nicotine, but that he was still honored among the people as one who gave them Christ’s forgiveness for sin in confession, and baptized their babies to new life in baptism. In real life, the Catholic priesthood ideal continues even if tarnished. Young men are continually struck, as it were, in their very vital organs by the “dual disease”, lust for power and abnormal sexual lust. Graham Greene said it so well, *The Power and the Glory* is the name of the worldly game which is played by the Catholic Magisterium system at the expense of so many ordinary Catholics. The claim that a priest’s sinfulness does not obstruct the grace that flows through him and his sacraments is not simply the perspective of Graham Greene; it is the official teaching of Rome,

“This presence of Christ in the minister is not to be understood as if the latter were preserved from all human weaknesses, the spirit of domination, error, even sin. The power of the Holy Spirit does not guarantee all acts of ministers in the same way. While this guarantee extends to the sacraments, so that even the minister’s sin cannot impede the fruit of grace...”³⁹

Men Freed from the Priesthood

³⁷ Vatican Council II Documents No. 95, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, 24 June 1967, *Vatican Council II: More Post Conciliar Documents*, Austin P. Flannery, Ed. First Edition (Northport, NY: Costello Publ. Co., 1982) Vol. II, Sec. 41, p. 297

³⁸ Francis X. Maier was a former editor of the *National Catholic Register*.

³⁹ *Catechism*, Para. 1550

Far From Rome, Near to God: the Testimonies of Fifty Converted Catholic Priests,⁴⁰ gives first-hand documentation to the fact that these men from many different nations across the world were freed from the priesthood and from the Church of Rome. Why was it that they obtained their freedom and so many more did not? If you read the testimonies of many of these men, you will notice that some began inquiring in the book of Hebrews where they saw quite clearly that Christ's priesthood was unique to Him. Part of the way in which I saw the light was by reading one of our famous Catholic scholars, Raymond E. Brown. In his remarkable book, *Priest and Bishop: Biblical Reflections*, Brown declares,

“When we move from the Old Testament to the New Testament, it is striking that while there are pagan priests and Jewish priests on the scene, no individual Christian is ever specifically identified as a priest. The Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of the high priesthood of Jesus by comparing his death and entry into heaven with the actions of the Jewish high priest who went into the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle once a year with a blood offering for himself and for the sins of his people (Hebrews 9:6, 7). But it is noteworthy that the author of Hebrews does not associate the priesthood of Jesus with the Eucharist or the Last Supper; neither does he suggest that other Christians are priests in the likeness of Jesus. In fact, the once for all atmosphere that surrounds the priesthood of Jesus in Hebrews 10:12, 14, has been offered as an explanation of why there are no Christian priests in the New Testament period.”⁴¹

Thus the noted Catholic author declared publicly that there were no Christian priests in the New Testament period of time. This came as a shock to me when I was a priest. All my hopes, the investment of my whole life was in the priesthood. It was what I had sought after, it was what I had achieved; it was that in which I had my source of revenue. It was that in which I obtained honor and respect from people. I was utterly astounded that one of our famous Catholic authors could state that Christian priests did not exist in the New Testament and that the only the priesthood was that of Christ Jesus the Lord.

I did not have the courage, at the time, to begin studying Hebrews 7:23-27 for myself. Some years later, however, I did study and I saw that the whole reason why there were many priests was because they died and had to be replaced (v. 23). I saw also that verse 24 differentiates the priesthood of Christ from the old Levitical priesthood (and every other “priesthood”), “*But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.*”⁴² As pointed out above, it is interesting that the word “unchangeable” in Greek means literally “untransferrable”, not passed on to anyone else. The passage continues with the great news, “*wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*”⁴³ Christ Jesus saves utterly and completely those who come to God by Him.

⁴⁰ *Far from Rome, Near to God: The Testimonies of Fifty Former Roman Catholic Priests*, Richard Bennett and Martin Buckingham, Eds. (Carlisle, PA 17013: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997) ISBN 0-85151-7331

⁴¹ Raymond E. Brown, *Priest and Bishop: Biblical Reflections* (New York 10019: Paulist Press, 1970), p. 13

⁴² Hebrews 7:24

⁴³ Hebrews 7:25

The reason why is given as the passage continues, “*for such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.*”⁴⁴

Brown’s book, *Priest and Bishop: Biblical Reflections*, had certain repercussions in my life. It caused me to remember back to the year in which I studied as a priest in Rome. We had over three hundred young priests in my class. I could see that, for the most part, they were interested neither in a holy life nor in seeking to magnify Christ Jesus. Rather, for the most part, these men were interested in getting high positions in the different nations across the world. It was a real scandal to me to see with my own eyes men who had no interest whatsoever in the priesthood—except as a means for position and renown. I was horrified to the extent that outside of class, I chose to associate mostly with three other priests, one from Africa, another from Europe, and another from the United States, all of whom seemed to have my same ideals. However, this memory continued with me throughout the years of my own priesthood.

The Lord’s call to ministry and marriage

The Catholic Church completely rules out marriage for its priests. She says emphatically,

“A cleric who attempts marriage, even if only civilly, incurs an *latae sententiae* suspension; if he does not repent after being warned and continues to give **scandal**, he can be punished gradually by deprivations, even by dismissal from the clerical state.”⁴⁵

Most serious for Rome is a priest attempting marriage, and she is arrogant enough to call this a scandal. In the Bible, marriage is “honorable and undefiled.”⁴⁶ Just as the sun overcomes the darkness, so the clear light of God’s Word upholds marriage as honorable and anything but a scandal!

To desire the office of a bishop (that is, an elder or pastor), the Word of God says is good, “*if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.*”⁴⁷ The qualifications for someone who wishes such an office are then given,

“*a bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?*”⁴⁸

The light of God’s Word shows a man must be able to manage his own household before he attempts to oversee the believers in a Christian community. He is to be a man of one wife. Would to God that Catholics, and the Catholic clergy in particular, might read these verses.

The Verdict and the Lesson

⁴⁴ Hebrews 7:26

⁴⁵ *Code of Canon Law*, Latin-English Ed., New English Tr., 1999 (Washington DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1983) Canon 1394, Sec. 1

⁴⁶ Hebrews 13:4, “*Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled.*”

⁴⁷ I Timothy 3:1

⁴⁸ I Timothy 3:2-5

The testimonies of the former priests in *Far from Rome, Near to God* are witnesses to the grace of God. What they have done is best summarized in the words of Apostle Paul, “*having renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the Truth, commending ourselves to everyman’s conscience in the sight of God.*”⁴⁹ It is only when craftiness and deceit is renounced and one accepts the truth of God’s Word that one sees the answer to the Catholic dilemma. The Catholic Church is in sin because of her false traditions. She has shown no fear of God Almighty.

At the end of Henry Lea’s classic book on the priesthood and celibacy,⁵⁰ he states,

“The Catholic Church is unquestionably violating, the precept ‘*Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*’ when, in its reliance that the gift of chastity will accompany ordination, it confers...the priesthood at twenty five—or even earlier by special dispensation—and then turns loose young men, at the age when passions are strongest, trained in the seminary and unused to female companionship, to occupy a position in which they are brought into the closest and most dangerous relations with women who regard them as being gifted with supernatural powers and holding in their hands the keys of heaven and of hell.”⁵¹

The Catholic Church contradicts the very Word of God and tempts the Lord God in what they do to their young men. The whole purpose of the Vatican, Pope, Cardinals, and Curia is to maintain control over the priests worldwide. They have imposed the law of priestly celibacy so that they can continue their control of men who, if they were married, would be responsible for their children, property, households, and most of all for their conscience. Rome has tempted God Himself in upholding an untrue priesthood and, additionally, bringing her youth into an atmosphere where they are waylaid by immoral lusts.

The wretchedness of this whole topic of a pretended priesthood is a picture of the situation for all mankind. All have a bad record and a bad heart. Each has a bad record because of personal sin. Each has a depraved human heart because of the original sin of Adam. All stand in need of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Such was proclaimed over seven hundred fifty years before Christ Jesus had finished His priestly work on the cross. The prophet Isaiah declared, “*all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.*”⁵² The Apostle Peter declared, “*Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers.*”⁵³ The believer is to look unto Christ Jesus, the Author and Finisher of his faith. In trusting on Christ Jesus alone, we have His righteousness credited to us, and though our sins are as scarlet, He makes them white as snow. This is the good news

⁴⁹ II Corinthians 4:2

⁵⁰ Henry Charles Lea, *The History of Sacerdotal Celibacy and the Christian Church* (Republished in the United States of America, 1957)

⁵¹ Lea, p. 560

⁵² Isaiah 53:6, 5

⁵³ I Peter 1:18

and we pray and plead in the Lord that those in the Catholic priesthood and those tempted by worldly power and its fleeting glory will hear the Word of God and live!

Who is your Priest?

The important question at the end of this chapter is this: who is your Priest? The priesthood of Christ is glorious, like unto Himself. It is the priesthood in which He has offered to the Father all that He is. It is His final finished work in which the glory of His person will shine forever. As priest, He had done all that was necessary to put away the sins of His people. He has provided for them both the forgiveness for their sins and His own perfect standing before God. *“It is finished,”* He declared. What was finished was the believer’s slavery to sin and the true moral guilt which attends his sin! Paid was the price of the believer’s redemption! Performed were all the requirements of God’s law. In a word, complete satisfaction had been made to God for the believer. The Catholic priesthood, in contrast, is dust, smoke and mirrors, and like unto the well-known allegory of the King’s new suit, it simply does not legitimately exist! Believe on the Eternal Lord and know the Priest that gives life now, and forever! *“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God....”*⁵⁴ This is the living way. It is death to attempt to come to God through earthly sacrificial priests who have no place in the New Testament. The way to the Eternal Father is through the Eternal Priest alone, His death is for us the way to life. To those who believe this He is precious beyond all understanding! ♦

⁵⁴ Hebrews 10:19-21