



A Priestly Christology: A Biblical-Theological Investigation of Christ's Priesthood

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ABSTRACT

The concept of Christ's Priesthood has been the subject of comprehensive research work in recent times. Despite several attempts to investigate the doctrine of Christ's Priesthood waves a theological enigma. Thus, the study delved into the concept of Christology as denoted in the Scripture. This scholarly analysis focused on the qualities, which are linked to atonement and mediation. Christian theology has various viewpoints, but the primary model connects the sacrifice of Christ to His role as intercessor. The ontological model was a theological framework that stresses Christ's priesthood on His personality and activities. The sacramental priesthood model denotes a correlation between Christ's sacrificial act and His intercession in a heavenly realm, with distinct aspects following a predetermined sequence. The functional priesthood model is based on classical Protestant theology which portrays that the sacrifice of Christ and mediation are intrinsically interconnected with His being. The study employed a biblical-theological approach that sought to address the prevailing debates concerning Christ's Priesthood. Thus, the study injects relevant sources to formulate and build the Christological concept. The research paper opined a holistic understanding of the nature of Christ and His transformative power to redeem humanity through the unction of the Holy Spirit. It is crystal clear that Christ sacrificed Himself to atone for all humankind's sins. More importantly, the paper contributes to the current exploration of Priestly Christology, thus fostering a deeper understanding of Christ's Priesthood and its significance to contemporary biblical theological discussion. It also helps to lay bare the salvific value of ecclesiology. This paper is recommended for biblical-theological historical students to advance and improve their studies.

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INTRODUCTION

For several decades, scholars from various theological academic disciplines involving anthropology, Ecclesiology, Christology, Pneumatology, and Soteriology have debated and investigated the theology of Christ's Priesthood.¹ Thus, this concept entails a comprehensive exploration of Priestly Christology, Christ's Priesthood and atonement are critically pertinent in defining and determining an individual's salvation. Radically speaking, the sacrifice of Christ has paved the way for mankind's salvific value.

¹ Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, Translated by Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), 103.

Interestingly, many researchers have explored Priestly Christology in a hermeneutical approach, hence there is a still gap in investigating Christ's Priesthood. Significantly enough, Christ's Priesthood has left a profound impact on biblical-theological thought and it continues to be the subject of scholarly debate and analysis. This theological concept results in the comprehensive dimensions of Priestly Christology and the significance of Christ's sacrifice Himself to humankind.

The research work aims to undertake a biblical-theological investigation of Christ's Priesthood to enrich contemporary Christological discourse. The study also seeks to explore Christ's Priesthood in alignment with His powerful sacrifice to humanity. Concomitantly, the research paper examines Priestly Christology by exploring a holistic view of the Priesthood of Christ and its benefits to modern Christianity. The paper uses a comprehensive methodology of a biblical-theological analysis to glean various literature materials. Most importantly, it solicited biblical-theological thinking and expositions about the Priesthood of Christ. In a nutshell, the study contributes to the scholarly Christological theology that earmarks eschatological hope and salvific implications. Essentially, the research paper outlines the Christological definition, the narratological Christology, the Old and New Testaments, the goal and role of Priesthood, the ontological, sacramental, and functional of Christ's Priesthood, the Adventist and Biblical stance on Christ's Priesthood and its implications for contemporary Christians.

The Meaning of Christology

Christ's priesthood is crucial in Christian soteriology as it gives a foundational understanding of Christ's mission. Oscar Cullmann's study on Christology in the New Testament highlights the book of Hebrews' extensive examination of the High Priest notion.² Cullmann identifies three essential aspects of Jesus' activity: earthly work, current endeavors as the exalted Lord, anticipated advent, and a soteriological concept. Scholarly analyses focus on these qualities, which are linked to atonement and mediation. Christian theology has various viewpoints, but the primary model links the sacrifice of Christ to His role as mediator.

The sacramental priesthood model suggests a correlation between Christ's sacrificial act and His mediation in the heavenly realm, with distinct aspects following a predetermined sequence.³ Hans Boersma posits that the sacramental priesthood style, endorsed by orthodox Catholic theology, is linked to the Eucharist, with the sacrificial act serving as a symbol of the completion of priestly responsibilities.⁴ The functional priesthood model based on classical Protestant theology, argues that the sacrifice of Christ and mediation are intrinsically interconnected with His being. The functional priesthood perspective, influenced by John Calvin, objects to the notion of sacramental sacrifice within the ecclesiastical context and its correlation with Christ's atonement of salvific grace.⁵

The reformers believe that the crucifixion of Christ is the ultimate and decisive act of sacrifice, and its subsequent role as an intermediary between humanity and the Father in the celestial realm depends on the unique act of sacrifice. The ontological priesthood model, espoused by Torrance, emphasizes redemptive intervention of Christ's existence, focusing on the intrinsic nature of His being.⁶

According to James Torrance, the word "Christology" originates from the combination of two words: "Christ," which pertains to Jesus, and "ology," denoting the field of study. Christology is a field of study that unveils the examination and analysis of Jesus Christ. Within the realm of systematic theology, Christology serves as a theological discipline that engages with matters about Jesus, drawing upon the teachings presented in the Bible. This encompasses the domains of the field of Theology Proper, which involves the examination of the Triune God, encompassing Paterology (the investigation of the Father) and Pneumatology (the exploration of the Holy Spirit). Christology encompasses the essence, the actions, and the redemptive significance of Christ.

² Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 104.

³ Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 105. This area normally relates to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross (John 3: 16). Thus, Christ came and died for all humanity.

⁴ Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 69.

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. 2vols. Edited by John T. McNeil (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 178.

⁶ James F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 231.

The study of Christology has played a significant and influential role throughout the era of Christian history, contributing to the development and formulation of key theological doctrines. The Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451 holds particular significance as it effectively refuted various contentious doctrines that challenged the integrity of the physical and spiritual essence of Christ.⁷ The council served as a significant source of influence for subsequent scholarly works in the field of Christology. In contemporary mainstream Christianity, there is a consensus that Jesus embodies the divine essence, existing as a singular entity with dual natures including both humanity and divinity.

This fundamental assertion in the field of Christology, which is firmly grounded in biblical texts, possesses unsurpassed practical and theological importance.⁸ The field of Christology is primarily focused on the examination and exploration of the fundamental nature and identity of Jesus. Christianity posits the coexistence of Jesus' humanity and divinity, prompting scholarly inquiry into the reconciliation of these two aspects inside a single individual. The field of Christology also explores the correlation between the concept of Christ and the actions and teachings of Jesus. The belief in Jesus and attainment of eternal life are contingent upon the fulfillment of certain conditions, as elucidated in the passage of John 3:11-21.⁹

The Narratological Concept of Christology

The presence of Christ's nature in the material realm is discerned through the concept that salvation is achieved through a lengthy sequence of events involving the creation, incarnation, and ultimate fulfillment. Thus, Christ's priesthood was inaugurated during His incarnation, from a cosmological standpoint, His priesthood aligns with the human aspect of Christ's creative and redemptive mediation.¹⁰ This human aspect serves as a tangible means through which the divine presence interacts with and brings about the transformation of the created world.

Essentially, Aquinas posits that Christ's priestly intercession and His humanity serve as the intermediary between God and fallen mankind.¹¹ This suggests that Christ's humanity functions as the tangible means through which salvific divine actions are carried out. Thus, Christ's humanity is suitable for the sinful state of humankind. The humanity of Christ serves as a tangible medium through which divine grace is transmitted to the individual souls of humanity.¹² This is attributed to the profound unity between His human nature and divine attitude, known as the hypostatic union. The source of grace is attributed to Christ in His divine nature, while the bestowal of grace is facilitated by His human nature.

The main characteristic of Christ as a priest is His humanity, which serves as the foundation for his role as the agent of the priesthood. This underscores the significance of the incarnation, as it is not only essential but also marks the beginning of His priesthood.¹³ About its extent, this suggests that Christ's priesthood embraces the entirety of His mankind's existence, which includes His public ministry. Regarding the aspect of Christ's role as a mediator in his capacity as a priest, it is noteworthy that His human nature serves as the conduit through which divine salvation is facilitated.

From a cosmological view, Christ's priesthood aligns with a certain human of His comprehensive salvific mediation. This concept serves as a tangible means through which the spiritual nature facilitates a change of His creatures. According to Christopher Wright, the divinity of Christ confers grace upon tangible humankind through the material means of His humanity.¹⁴ These

⁷ Paul D. Molnar, *Incarnation and Resurrection: Toward a Contemporary Understanding* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 112.

⁸ Darren O. Sumner, *Karl Barth and the Incarnation: Christology and the Humility of God* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 133.

⁹ John M. Scholer, *Proleptic Priests: Priesthood of Heaven in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, vol. 49, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 157.

¹⁰ Michael Keenan Jones, *Toward a Christology of Christ the High Priest* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2006), 73.

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 5 vols, The Master Christian Library, CD-ROM, version 5.0, Albany, OR Ages Software, 1997.

¹² Thomas Aquinas, *The Passion of Christ's Soul in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2009), 124.

¹³ E. O. James, *The Nature and Function of Priesthood: A Comparative and Anthropological Study* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1955), 63.

¹⁴ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 258.

individuals, in turn, earn grace within their souls by material means of their bodies. Aquinas delves into the concept of Christology in Old Testament theology.

Christology in the Old Testament

According to Wright, the Hebrew word that portrays priesthood is *kohen*. The *kohen* forms the essence of Christ's priestly terminology. From a Reformed theologian, the term conjures up images of Roman Catholicism, and it is typically used in the context of Christ's priestly office. According to modern theologians, *kohen* is used as a priest. The Christian's perception of priesthood should be conditioned by how the meaning progresses across the biblical narrative. The Old Testament background of priesthood is the source from which, in biblical revelation and Christian tradition, the language of priesthood arises.¹⁵ The Old Testament priesthood gives the point of reference when Jesus is called a great High Priest in the Letter to the Hebrews.

The Old Testament Christology throughout the various epochs of the history of salvation, the object of faith always remains the same, the Creator God and the redeeming Christ.¹⁶ This implies that pertinent to our subject are Old Testament theology and practices of the priesthood both Levitical/Aaronic (from the Mosaic tradition) and Melchizedekian/Zadokite (from the Davidic/Zion tradition, where a priestly aspect acknowledged the role of the sacral king).

Christology in the New Testament

Christology is the part of theology that is concerned with the nature and work of Christ, incarnation, and his human and divine natures and their relationship. The underlying methodological assumption of Christology is that the New Testament contains the authentic and accurate record of Jesus, both explicitly and implicitly. The New Testament postulates that Jesus's disciples were convinced that God was portrayed in Christ as a High Priest in the Letter to Hebrews.¹⁷ Thus, universal priesthood and the ministerial priesthood are two ways of participation in the reality of the Godman as the High Priest and redeemer.¹⁸

Theologically, Christological reflection focuses on two specific aspects of that portrayal namely, the person and the work of Jesus. It also seeks to clarify and systematize the meaning of the scriptural depiction of Jesus. The two notions in Christology namely logos and preexistence particular played important roles in salvific value.¹⁹

The Activities of the Priesthood

The activities performed by Christ in his role as a priest can be understood within the overarching concept of sacrifice. This notion encompasses both an intangible and internal aspect, characterized by a personal disposition, as well as a tangible and external aspect, manifested through sacrificial offering.²⁰ Within the framework of Christ's priesthood, the concept of the invisible sacrifice spans the entirety of Christ's life while atonement is specifically characterized by the shedding of his blood on the cross. This visible sacrifice is the fulfillment of Christ's sacrificial act. Christ's priesthood appears to integrate both observable and imperceptible elements of sacrifice, encompassing Christ's celestial mediation and the sacramental practice of the Eucharist.²¹ Hence, the activities undertaken by Christ in His role as a priest are broadly categorized as His imperceptible and internal offering, His observable and physical offering, and His culmination of the offering.

In the subsequent discourse, it can be elucidated the comprehension of these particular priestly activities within the Christian practices' framework. The concept of Christ's imperceptible sacrifice presupposes a differentiation between sacrifices that are imperceptible and those that are perceptible.

¹⁵ J. Coppens, *Old Testament Priesthood: Priesthood and Celibacy* (Milano: Editrice Ancora Publishers, 1972), 21.

¹⁶ Johannes B. Baur, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology* (New York: Cross Road Publishing Company, 1970), 701.

¹⁷ Congar Yves, *A Gospel Priesthood* (New York: Sheed and Ward Publishers, 1964), 96.

¹⁸ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 141.

¹⁹ Bruce A. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation, Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 157.

²⁰ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation, Foundations of Evangelical Theology*, 158.

²¹ Brian A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 179.

In essence, Christ's sacrifice entails both an internal disposition and an accompanying external dimension.

According to Gerald O'Collins, it is noteworthy that any external sacrifice performed by Christ served as a symbolic representation and manifestation of His inner dedication to offering Himself to the Father.²² When contemplating Jesus's priesthood, Aquinas emphasizes both His act of presenting the sacrifice (which is observable) and the profound commitment in which He endured His suffering (which is imperceptible).

The concept of visible and unseen sacrifice suggests Christ's apparent act of presenting the mediation might be understood as a sacrament or a manifestation of His invisible dedication. Consequently, sacrifice is predominantly understood as an invisible or spiritual act of self-offering and devotion. From O'Collins's perspective, the understanding of Christ's sacrifice should be framed within the context of compassion and selflessness.²³ Consequently, this sacrifice encompasses not only His crucifixion but also His entire earthly existence.

Christ is considered a selfless act of devotion to both God and humanity. From this perspective, it can be argued that the deeds of Christ, namely His teachings, miracles, and the Last Supper, can be understood as priestly. According to John Christian Clark, the later event represents the culmination of Christ's internal sacrifice, which is characterized by His life of service towards others.²⁴ This is exemplified by His commitment to a self-sacrificial death during communion service. The notion that sacrifices entail an imperceptible act of self-dedication accompanied by a discernible manifestation or sacrament carries significant consequences for Christ's observable sacrifice on the crucifixion. O'Collins posits an implication that sacrifice, when understood as a self-offering, is bestowed upon God as a gift rather than being perceived as a form of punishment. This denotes the notion of Christ bearing sins and being subjected to divine punishment as the target of displeasure to mankind on the cross engineered by Messiah to save humanity. Christ can be understood as a means of expelling sin or achieving purification, as His suffering and actions, being carried out through His divine nature, possess the power to remove sin. This interpretation aligns with the concept of the sacrament of penance.

Moreover, while taking a more comprehensive viewpoint into account, it is argued that sin, being a state of disorder characterized by the diversion of human focus towards material possessions, necessitates the utilization of the cross and Christ's experience of affliction as a pivotal means employed by God to redirect individuals' attention towards spiritual truth.²⁵ The crucifixion, in addition to its association with penance, serves as a sacrament in two aspects namely; a symbol or tangible manifestation of Jesus's dedication to the Lord. The concept of invisible sacrifice can be understood in two ways. Firstly, it refers to a sacrifice that is not visible or tangible. Secondly, it can be seen as a means through which divine salvific action is carried out, drawing human attention to spiritual realities. These spiritual realities are then transmitted to humans through the culmination of the sacrifice.

Essentially, through the culmination of Christ's sacrificial deed, individuals tangibly experience the outcome of the divine redemptive intervention. The completion of Christ's ascension to heaven embraces both the celestial and earthly realms. The celestial intervention Christ provides its equivalent, specifically in the terrestrial sacrament of the Eucharist. From O'Collins's perspective, in the realm of heaven, Christ engages in intercession by presenting Himself to the Father through the Spirit. Aquinas further asserts that Christ sacrifices His person to the Father during this process. The concept of unseen mediation involves the understanding of intercession through Christ.

The medieval theologians' intention in presenting Christ's humanity is to elicit divine mercy from the Father towards mankind. According to O'Collins, the heavenly mediation of Christ is an integral aspect of His mission to fully realize the divine promises, resulting in blessings for the world.

²² Gerald O'Collins and E. G. Farrugia, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2013), 126.

²³ Gerald O'Collins, *Believing in the Resurrection: The Meaning and Promise of the Risen Jesus* (New York: Paulist Press, 2012), 111.

²⁴ John Christian Clark, "The Priestly Office of Jesus Christ in the Thought of John Calvin," PhD Dissertation, The University of Toronto, 2013.

²⁵ Bruce L. McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 98.

This concept does not pertain to appeasing divine anger. The realization of Christ's atonement in the celestial realm is mirrored on the terrestrial plane by the Holy Spirit, who facilitates the accessibility of the sacrifice's advantages to humanity. The priesthood of Christ is where He assumes the role of the foremost minister in preaching and administering sacraments.

Significantly enough, Aquinas maintains that the entirety of Christian religious practices stems from Christ's priesthood.²⁶ Thus, Christ operates the sacraments of the Church to impart the efficacy of His sacrifice to humanity. Thus, Christ's personhood served as a tangible instrument of His divinity during the seen sacrifice on the cross, the sacraments function as tangible objects for the fulfillment of atonement enacted on earth by Christ's ascension. The role of Christ as a priest extends beyond the utilization of material items, such as sacraments, and encompasses the involvement of human agents, specifically the priests of the church through holy orders, who operate as representatives of Christ in the administration of these sacraments.

Aquinas posits that the humanity of Christ is rendered as a cohesive entity, referred to as a "united instrument," by the incarnation.²⁷ In essence, the priestly activities of Christ are comprehended within the framework of sacrifice, which entails an intangible act of self-dedication accompanied by a tangible manifestation or sacramental rite.

The Goal of the Priesthood

In the subsequent exposition of this goal, there are two pivotal facets of His sacerdotal office. These include the modality by which this objective is achieved by the priesthood of Christ and the harmonious coexistence of the realization of this objective with the concept of His priesthood being everlasting. Theologically, the preceding statement underscores the existence of the ontological and moral gap between humankind and God, indicating the purpose of Christ's intercession is to establish ontological and moral unity. The concept of this unity is comprehended within the framework of participation. The entirety of creation has been engaged in a participatory relationship with God since its inception. Christ serves as the ultimate origin of its being and existence. The blessed individuals experience the vision of God through His priestly mediation in heaven. Thus, Christ's priesthood establishes a moral connection between humanity and God.

Aquinas postulates that the inherent sinful nature of humanity necessitates the need for the transmission of heavenly gifts to be facilitated through tangible means. Initially, this condition elucidates the priestly function of Christ's corporeal man's essence (the agent). Hence, the incarnation represents the most appropriate method of restoring and redeeming mankind. This perspective underscores the notion that the incarnation serves to ignite theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity within individuals. It accentuates the concept through the humanity of Christ, human beings are granted a way of partaking in the divine nature.

Furthermore, mankind's nature of fallenness serves to elucidate the rationale behind His priestly undertaking, which can be understood as a self-sacrificial act. Therefore, Christ's mediation as an imperceptible act of self-giving motivated by love becomes elucidated by the notion that it denotes the highest among the theological virtues, therefore making it the paramount virtue for communion with the divine. Consequently, the material instruments utilized in Christ's priestly action facilitate communion with the divine essence.

The concept of participation appears to determine the suitability of the devices for facilitating this mediation. When individuals partake in this sacrament with their physical bodies, they also receive the divine Christ in their spiritual realm. This concept of union and participation is facilitated by the instrumental presence of humankind form of Christ within the eucharistic nature. In general, Christ's priesthood serves as a tangible means for individuals to partake in the divine essence emphasizing the ethical and metaphysical unity fostered by His priesthood.

According to Aquinas, the sin issue necessitates the material mediation of divine grace. Additionally, the ontological objective of creation is characterized by an elevated level of participation

²⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*. Translated by Richard J. Regan (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 259.

²⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Selected Philosophical Writings*. Translated by Timothy S. McDermott, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 174.

in the divine essence. However, this particular notion gives rise to an issue concerning the perpetual nature of Messiah's mediatorial priest, as posited in the sacramental framework.

The Role of the Agent within the Priesthood

It is crystal clear that the propitiation and transformation are not solely functional roles undertaken by Christ in his capacity as a priest, but rather constitute an inherent aspect of His character. Thus, the individual of the incarnate Christ is not just understood as the executor of Christological deeds, carrying out a redemptive task, but rather, He embodies the priestly or redemptive task. In essence, Christ is the agent who performs actions upon Himself. The priesthood of Christ is prominently exemplified through two key concepts. In the first place, Christ's role is not limited to making atonement, but rather He embodies the very essence of atonement. Secondly, the tripartite office of Christ does not represent successive stages of His labor.

Radically speaking, Jesus Christ serves as the embodiment of atonement, signifying the occurrence of reconciliatory processes within his being. It is quite obvious that reconciliation is not solely an external phenomenon, but rather an inward event that aligns with one's essence. This internal event is inherently contained within the priesthood of Christ. Thus, the assumption that Christ is a singular being embodying both divine and human nature, the process of reconciliation occurs inside His existence.

Christ assumes the dual role of both the subject, as the Judge, and the object, as the one being judged, in the process of judgment. Essentially, the process of atonement commences with incarnation and culminates in the resurrection and ascension. Hence, the concept of the hypostatic union refers to the son's union with our human nature while being subjected to sin and judgment. This union is understood as a continuous process of atoning and sanctifying reconciliation, wherein the Son simultaneously adjudicates mankind's sin and brings mankind back to his proper connection with God. Thus, Christ's priesthood as a redemptive act can be understood in two ways. It interprets the "hypostatic union" not only as a condition of union but also as a divine manifestation of grace and Christ adopted our fallen nature without sin.²⁸

This assumption of humanity's flawed physicality is deemed an act of atonement and sanctification in itself. In essence, the sacred presumption of our inherently Messiah's purity eradicates our impurity, and his holiness conceals our corruption. The concept of atonement in Christ, as understood ontologically, is linked to a perspective that emphasizes the nature of Christ's threefold mediatorial role, the functional aspect of salvific value. In this understanding, the exaltation of humanity is achieved through the humbling of God.

In this context, the priestly role can be understood as aligning with the concept of Christ, the son who assumes human form (incarnation) and experiences suffering as a substitute for judgment (cross).²⁹ This aligns with the notion of the High-priest offering Himself as a sacrificial offering. On the other hand, the kingly role can be seen as Jesus returning to the divine realm and acting as a royal figure who is the recipient of divine favor. The events that transpired in God have brought about the elevation of human beings through the embodiment of Jesus Christ.

Rigorously speaking, God is the primary actor in Christ's priesthood, referred to as the divine agent. It asserts that Christ is not merely a tool for divine action, but rather actively engages in divine action himself. In response to the proposition that humiliation and exaltation are not sequential occurrences, it posits that these events occur simultaneously throughout the entirety of Christ's earthly existence.

Christ's priesthood, in his incarnate form, serves as the mediator who effectively overcomes Satan. In an actual sense, the resurrection can be understood as the fulfillment of the redemptive process, intricately connected to the inherent nature of the mediator. In essence, the requirement for divine appeasement and the alteration of mankind is connected to the individual of Christ the priest, as these works of atonement and reconciliation occur inside His essence. Christ's priesthood office

²⁸ Hank Voss, *The Priesthood of All Believers and the Mission Dei: A Canonical, Catholic, and Contextual Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 192.

²⁹ Voss, *The Priesthood of All Believers and the Mission Dei: A Canonical, Catholic, and Contextual Perspective*, 194.

portrays Messiah in the person of Christ, encompassing the embodiment of sinful man and the endurance of our afflictions. Thus, it pertains to the subject matter at hand, namely the priestly domain or sphere of influence.

The concept of self-humiliation involves the recognition that God serves as the subject and object of atoning reconciliation, specifically about the aspect of propitiation. The subsequent elevation of mankind, known as the transformative aspect, succeeds the priestly divine debasement and occurs within the individual of Jesus Christ.

The humility demonstrated by Christ throughout His life can be considered a component of the priesthood. Thus, Christ's obedient life serves as a substitute for the disobedience of humanity. Therefore, it is opined that Christ's existence can be viewed as a sacrificial act, culminating in His crucifixion. In essence, it is argued that Christ's sacrificial nature extends beyond His death alone, including his entire life as a substitutionary offering. Consequently, the concept of obedience emphasizes the role of the priest as a human agent, whereas the ontological approach perceives Christ's sacrifice.

Ontological Approach of Christ's Priesthood

The ontological approach is a theological framework that emphasizes Christ's priesthood on His personality and activities. It posits that sin, a form of defiance and separation from God, is not solely an ontological or metaphysical separation but also a form of rebellion. This separation results in a disconnection from the fundamental relationship that defines human existence, namely the relationship with God.³⁰ The ontological model distinguishes between the historical genesis of the rupture, known as sin, and the divine response, sometimes described as God's anger, to this breach. This shift in interpretation has been prominent in contemporary theology, with the ontological paradigm emphasizing Christology.

The ontological approach of Christ's sacrifice portrays existence as an essential process for the metamorphosis of individuals and their restoration of harmony with God. The ontological model also emphasizes the dual role of God as both the object (where the Maker's wrath is appeased) and the subject where God brings about transformation in humans. In an actual sense, an existential concept exists between God and humanity, devoid of historical context, dating back to the inception of creation. The present circumstances necessitate the intervention of a priestly mediator in the figure of Christ, who seeks to appease divine anger directed against individuals who have transgressed while simultaneously utilizing this wrath as a means to bring about their transformation.³¹

Christ's priestly ministry is essential for appeasing divine anger and undergoing judgment to bring about change in humankind. Thus, Christ and the priest, are central to understanding this priesthood within the ontological framework. Thus, propitiation and transformation are not solely ontological roles undertaken by Christ in his capacity as a priest but constitute an inherent aspect of his character. Christ is the agent who performs actions upon Himself, embodying the priestly or redemptive task itself. The ontological understanding of the priesthood of Christ is exemplified through two key concepts namely; Christ's role is embodied in the very essence of atonement and his priestly office.³²

More importantly, Jesus Christ serves as the embodiment of atonement, signifying the occurrence of reconciliatory processes within his being. This assertion contends that reconciliation is not solely an external phenomenon, but rather an internal event that aligns with one's essence. It expands that ontological reconciliation in Christ by conceptualizing the incarnation as a transformative element with redemptive implications. The concept of the hypostatic union refers to the son's union with our human nature while being subjected to sin and judgment. The theology of Christ's priesthood and kingly exaltation does not imply a sequential order but rather pertains to God's self-humiliation in Christ and the elevation of humanity into divinity.

³⁰ Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 162.

³¹ Robert A. Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit: Union with Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 130.

³² Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Our Priest is Christ: The Doctrine of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1977), 166.

The priesthood of Christ is a complex and multifaceted theology that involves both the individual and the divine. Theologically speaking, Christ in his incarnate form, serves as a mediator who overcomes the divide of hell, transcending physical pain. The incarnation serves as the commencement of the process of atonement, with the resurrection as its culmination. The individuality of Christ is closely linked to the need for divine appeasement and alteration of mankind. The concept of self-humiliation recognizes that God serves as both the subject and object of atonement, specifically about intercession.

The ontological approach emphasizes Christ as the central point for atoning reconciliation while allowing for explanations of His activities as a priest. The concept of Christ's triple function encompasses not only His deeds but also emphasizes His essence and individuality. Christ's priesthood can be analyzed in terms of two distinct forms of mediation: the word mediation, which aligns with Pauline teachings, and the liturgical sacrificial mediation, which focuses on Messiah's role as a high priest offering himself as a sacrifice and interceding on behalf of humanity in heavenly realms. The ontological concept of mediatorial priesthood is influenced by the concepts of judicial and liturgical mediation. It is posited that a correlation exists between the two, with judicial imagery providing a more comprehensive explanation of Christ's mission. The cultic imagery found in biblical texts holds significant relevance but is perceived as detached from the contemporary world. It is the inclination towards forensic imagery that aims to underscore the parallels between cultic and liturgical practices. The ontological study emphasizes that Christ assumes the role of both judge and priest, effectively substituting for humanity. The act of receiving judgment as a judge or serving as the sacrificial offering in the role of a priest culminates in the completion of the process of reconciliation inside Christ. This act, characterized by His entrance into the most sacred and revered space inside the divine realm, holds lasting efficacy.

It unpacks that judicial intercessory specifically referring to atonement as a means of justifying oneself before God's law. It places significant emphasis on the concepts of sacrifice and mediation, with the singular act of sacrifice playing a crucial role in Christ's actions. The ontological connection between mankind and God is deeply connected to the priesthood of Christ. The ultimate objective of salvation is the complete and satisfying union with God through Christ, who provides individuals with divine gifts enabling them to partake in divine nature. Christ's role as a mediator in heaven facilitates the blessed in experiencing God.

Sacramental Approach of Christ's Priesthood

The sacramental approach is a conceptual framework used in religious studies and theology to analyze religious rituals and practices.³³ It emphasizes Christ's priesthood in conveying divine realities to humanity through spatio-temporal instruments. The sacramental model's primary focus is on the medium through which the priesthood operates, with Thomas Aquinas as a participant. The rationale for including priestly ministry within the sacramental framework is based on the perceived separation between divine and human realms, necessitating the presence of a priestly intermediary. This distance is primarily linked to the concept of sin, which is a deliberate attribute inherent to the first act of creation.

Aquinas argues that humanity experienced happiness within paradise before sin, but this happiness was not the ultimate perfection intended for humans.

O'Connor's cosmological viewpoint suggests that sin is a transgression of law that hinders the teleological progression towards God, as both humanity and the planet are subject to the constraints and deterioration caused by sin. The necessity of Christ's priesthood raises questions about whether it solely serves to eradicate obstacles to the teleological progression. The initial inquiry is based on the premise that Christ's priesthood aims to remedy sin (moral distance), it is not necessary for the teleological progression itself (ontological distance).

The sacramental model, rooted in anthropological and cosmological perspectives, emphasizes the importance of divine grace for moral progression. Sin, a fundamental aspect of human nature,

³³ Karl Rahner, *The Theology of the Spiritual Life: Theological Investigations* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1967), 214.

necessitates greater reliance on grace and the mediation of grace through tangible means. The priesthood of Christ is crucial for humanity's acquisition of grace to bridge the ontological and moral gaps.

The sacramental paradigm can accommodate two forms of mediation. Dualistic mediation, as exemplified by Aquinas, purifies individuals from sin and reconciles them with God about their transgressions. On the other hand, unilateral mediation, as advocated by O'Collins, solely pertains to the redemption of humanity. This approach posits that Christ's priesthood begins with His incarnation, which encompasses not only His public ministry but also the entire human life. Christ's humanity serves as a mediator for divine salvation, as His embodiment establishes interplay between the divine realm and the tangible world inhabited by humans. This embodied existence, as the Son of God, initiates a transformative and divinizing system, encompassing the entirety of the mankind race and the created realm.

The presence of material and human nature in Christ's existence within a material universe is evident in the belief that salvation is achieved by a process involving the creation, redemption, and ultimate fulfillment. From a cosmological point of view, transformative and redemptive mediation serves as a tangible means through which the divine presence facilitates the change of the created world.

From an anthropological perspective, Christ is regarded as the Almighty and the source of all grace.³⁴ This suggests that He, by His human nature, imparts the abundance of grace that emanates from Him to others. The mediation role of the individual in question holds significant importance within the context of their priestly duties. The actions performed by Christ as priest can be categorized within the overarching notion of sacrifice. This concept encompasses both unseen aspects, such as personal disposition, and visible aspects, such as tangible offerings. The invisible sacrifice spans the entirety of His life, while the visible atonement is specifically characterized by the atonement of Christ. The understanding of Christ's sacrifice should be framed within the context of compassion and selflessness, encompassing not only His crucifixion but also His entire existence. The teachings, miracles, and the final supper of Christ can be viewed as actions that align with the role and responsibilities traditionally associated with priests. The crucifixion represents the pinnacle of Christ's interior sacrifice, which includes Christ's service to humankind. This is exemplified by His deliberate choice to undergo a self-sacrificial death during the final supper. The significance of the cross lies in Christ's self-sacrifice to God, rather than assuming human sins and enduring divine anger as retribution. The crucifixion serves as a tangible manifestation of Christ's unwavering dedication, symbolically represented during the final supper through an imperceptible act of sacrifice.

Aquinas argues that the crucifixion holds significance about Christ's bodily being, as it represents a divine tool employed by God. It can be understood as a means of purifying and expelling sin, as His suffering and actions possess the power of the divine. The crucifixion serves as a sacrament in two ways: a symbol or tangible manifestation of Christ's dedication, and as a means by which divine salvific action is carried out, drawing human attention to spiritual realities. The heavenly mediation of Christ is an integral aspect of His mission to fully realize the fulfillment of divine promises. It unlocks that the entirety of Christian religious practices stems from Christendom.

The role of Christ as a priest extends beyond the use of material items like sacraments to involve human individuals, specifically ordained priests within the church. These priests carry out the administration of sacraments and possess the instrumental capacity to bestow grace. It is bestowed by the priest and the sacrifice originates from the divinity of Christ by His nature.

The eucharist serves as the pinnacle of sacramental administration, with Christ's presence manifested through the eucharistic ingredients, which transform His literal body and blood. This sacrificial representation of Christ's passion and means of communicating its effects to participants allows them to engage in the everlasting consequences of Christ's priesthood by His mediatorial power. The priestly activities of Christ are understood within the framework of sacrifice, which entails an

³⁴ Rahner, *The Theology of the Spiritual Life: Theological Investigations*, 217.

intangible act of self-dedication accompanied by a tangible manifestation or sacramental rite.³⁵ Thus, tangible manifestations of Christ's self-sacrifice portray divine salvific intervention enacted upon individuals in the earthly realm.

Significantly, the overarching objective of the priesthood is to guide individuals toward the ultimate destination of God, which is considered the ultimate purpose of all existence. This is achieved through the modality of the priesthood and the congruence between the realization of this objective and the perpetual nature of His priesthood. The priesthood establishes a moral connection between humans and God, facilitating the attainment of an ontological connection due to sin obstructing the progression of individuals toward God. Christ's humanity allows individuals to partake in the divine essence through His sacrifice, which involves a tangible manifestation.

Functional Approach of Christ's Priesthood

The functional model posits that Christ's priesthood serves as a mediator between God and all of creation, serving as a means of salvation through divine grace. This mediation is a crucial aspect of Calvin's mediation function, which includes the act of creation and providence. The priesthood also involves sacrifice, intercession, and instruction to appease God's anger and bring solace to believers who experience guilt and condemnation due to their transgressions.³⁶ The main objective of the priesthood is to bestow salvation through divine grace, aligning with the Protestant interpretation of justification and sanctification. Through His continuous celestial intercession, Christ serves as our advocate and declares our righteousness.³⁷

The concept of grace as forgiveness pertains to the legal absolution of culpable individuals in the presence of a vengeful deity, while grace as power is comprehended as the metamorphosis of individuals who initially lacked faith in dutiful adherents. Thus, the focus of Christ's priesthood centers on His divine splendor and the created world. In effect, Christ's priesthood offers redemption by grace, amplifying God's magnificence due to His immense benevolence, and ultimately guiding adherents towards the eschatological experience of directly perceiving God.

The Significance of Christ's Priesthood

The necessity of Christ within the ontological framework appears to be predicated upon a comprehension of the functional approach to this matter. The ontological paradigm posits a distinct and significant separation in the connection between individuals and the divine entity, God, resulting from the presence of sin.

The disruptive nature of sin characterizes individuals who violate covenants, resulting in the distortion of their humanity and subjecting them to God's condemnation or punishment, namely His wrath. Sin is understood as a detrimental act of defiance and separation from God.³⁸ It is a form of rebellion where individuals reject God's love and a state of estrangement where humanity deviates from its inherent nature. This deviation results in a disconnection from the fundamental relationship that defines human existence, namely, the relationship with God.

As a result, throughout history, there has not been a period in which humans maintained an unblemished connection with the Creator before their act of defiance against Him. One potential implication that arises from the concept that sin has been inherent in creation since its inception is the notion that God's anger has perpetually been directed at humanity. However, the Christological implications of its methodological commitment appear to go towards a certain perspective. In essence, the functional model posits that divine and human grace and wrath.

The reconciliation of humanity with God is only achieved through this particular method of recreation. The role of Christ as a priest involves addressing God's anger against fallen individuals, not only by serving as the recipient and propitiation of this anger but also by personally experiencing this

³⁵ Paul F. M. Zahl, *The First Christian: Universal Truth in the Teachings of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 161.

³⁶ Graham Redding, *Prayer and the Priesthood of Christ in the Reformed Tradition* (Edinburgh, NY: T & T Clark, 2005), 129.

³⁷ Richard D. Nelson, *Raising Up a Faithful Priest: Community and Priesthood in Biblical Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 153.

³⁸ Louis Berkof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 93.

anger as a divine mechanism for the redemption of humanity. God plays a dual role as both object (where God's wrath is appeased), subject (where God brings about transformation in humans), and intercession. In the sin concept, the priesthood of Christ plays a crucial role in facilitating divine propitiation and human transformation.

More importantly, an existential rupture exists between God and humanity, devoid of historical context, dating back to the inception of creation. The present circumstances necessitate the intervention of a priestly mediator in the figure of Christ, who seeks to appease the divine anger directed against individuals who have transgressed, while simultaneously utilizing this wrath as a means to bring about their transformation.

Seventh-day Adventist Stance on Christ's Priesthood

The concept of Christ's priesthood depicts a deeper connection that is explored by all the systematic theologians or scholars who deeply look at this matter. Thus, the nature of Christ brings about the perspective of the soteriology. Kwabena Donkor posits that, an action-focused hamartiology tends to portray a soteriology, this is hinted at in most of the authors and scholars who propagate the unfallen position.³⁹ Some modern theologians also opine that Jesus did not sin, so no man must sin. Thus, it seems to suggest and bring forth legalistic means of saving ourselves and brings dependence and total need of Christ as atonement and through whom we are saved.

Essentially, the soteriology of the unfallen nature of Jesus and His substitution is highly manifested in salvific value. This is also affirmed by Seventh-day Adventism allows a diversity of opinions on this subject and encourages its study, but it rejects attempts to impose on others our perspectives.⁴⁰ This is because the church realizes the fact that the debate has been ongoing for decades and nearly centuries with no point in resolving the diversity of opinions that characterize the debate. Donkor posits that the "fallen" claim of the nature of Christ, portrays more on the missiology, and moves from ontology to soteriology, while the claims of the "unfallen" view emanates the context of hamartiology, soteriology to determine the ontological nature of Christ.⁴¹

According to Millard Erickson, Scripture reveals to humankind that Jesus is both divine and human. Adventists affirm that the incarnation did not take place to stimulate theological debate among believers but to make it possible for the Son of God to get salvation (Heb. 2:15).⁴² The study is based on the atonement that God made for us, which was able to atone for our sins, and the redemption that we have got through Jesus, and by constant dependency to Christ, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Biblical Position on the Priesthood of Christ

Essentially, from a Scriptural perspective, the foundation of Christ's priesthood unfolds that Jesus Christ died to give forgiveness. He died and rose in three days. Christ died to provide a new covenant for His people to gain eternal life.⁴³ Christ interceded on behalf of humankind to earn a new covenant (Heb 7:25; 9:15-17). Christ experiences His grace now and glory (Heb 9:28). This indicates that Christ is coming to redeem humankind (Heb 13:8).

Biblically, the unity of Christ's priesthood denotes the redemptive history. David Moffitt shows convincingly that resurrection entails the priesthood of Christ. From Christ's earthly priesthood, Moffitt opines that the priesthood of Christ assists in sharpening Christ's resurrection and priesthood connection.⁴⁴ Thus, the priesthood of Christ fortifies the mediatorial nature of the cross. This research

³⁹ Kwabena Donkor, *The Nature of Christ: The Soteriological Question* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2005), 5.

⁴⁰ Alberto R. Trimm, *The Biblical Concept of God in the Writings of Ellen G. White* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2020), 6.

⁴¹ Kwabena Donkor, *Eternal Subordination of Jesus: A Theological Analysis and Review* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2022), 244.

⁴² Andrew Malone, *God's Mediators* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 88.

⁴³ Paul Hoskins, *The Book of Revelation: A Theological and Exegetical Commentary* (North Charleston, South Carolina: ChristoDoulos Publications, 2017), 53.

⁴⁴ David M. Moffitt, *Rethinking the Atonement: New Perspectives on Jesus's Death, Resurrection and Ascension* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022), 72.

work seeks to unlock concern and provide a constructive model for the conceiving of Christ's multi-staged priesthood.⁴⁵ The priesthood of Christ today is essential for our salvific implications.

Implications for the Priesthood of Christ

The Lord Jesus exemplifies the ideal high priest through His compassionate ministry and fervent dedication. The roles mentioned are evident in the Gospel narratives and further elaborated in the writings of Hebrews. Herman Bavinck interprets Christ's miracles as being related to his role as a priest.⁴⁶ He describes them as miracles of redemption and healing that are part of his priestly duties. All of them are examples of profound empathy (Matt. 9:36; 14:14; 15:32), a powerful act of priestly cleansing. In this context, the previously unified concepts of priest and king, which had been distinct during the Levitical administration, are once combined through His regal authority and benevolent priestly nature. Lord Jesus exorcises demons, cures the visually and audibly impaired, enables the physically disabled to walk, restores speech to the mute, brings the deceased back to life, and manipulates natural phenomena for the advantage of His followers and all of humanity.

Christ exemplifies that only Jesus Christ can deliver from such malevolent forces. The sacrificial act of the Lord Jesus, in which He offered His life as a redemption for numerous people, is an additional function of His priesthood. Christ's primary intention in embracing humanity was clearly stated in the Scriptures (Mk. 10:45; Lk. 22:19-20).

Jesus Christ did not offer a bull to God but rather offered Himself as a ransom to redeem humanity. Indeed, Christ did not belong to the tribe of Levi, but rather to the tribe of Judah. The priesthood of Christ demonstrates that Melchizedek combined the qualities of a king and a compassionate priest (Heb. 7:14). Christ secures complete salvation for all of humanity (Heb. 7:10). Therefore, the Old Testament priesthood has fulfilled its intended role: to symbolize the future covenant of New Testament, that centers around Christ's sacrifice for humanity (John 3:16; Heb. 9:15-22).

The Apostle Paul's remarks in 1 Timothy 2:5 best exemplify Christ's flawless execution of His duty as the High Priest. Through His compassionate act of assuming human form, His self-sacrifice to appease God's anger, and His perpetual existence to intercede on behalf of others. Therefore, the priesthood of Christ offers redemptive hope to all humankind.

CONCLUSION

Christ's priesthood as the mediator is an absolute theology and not a participation in others' priesthood because He constitutes His priesthood in His personality and co-existence with His Being. Since the hypostatic union is perpetual and eternal existence, it follows that Christ's priesthood is also eternal and perpetual (Heb 2:17). The priesthood is the representation of the continuation of the High Priest here and now. He represents Christ's function of mediation, especially by acting in the name of the very person of Jesus.

More importantly, the priesthood always depends on the High priesthood of Christ and it can be understood and exercised only in a constant and total relationship to Christ. The priesthood is established by Christ to serve humankind (Mark 10:45). Again, the priesthood evolves around the ontological model, sacramental model, and functional model of Jesus Christ. Thus, Christ exerts his power from God in exercising his functions and duties. The priesthood is apostolic and not monastic. He must go out to reach people to meet and to serve them in their concrete needs. Again, the priesthood is not tied down to any culture, nation, or people living in the world. Therefore, universalism is another characteristic of the priesthood. Christ's priesthood brings about the eternity of all humanity.

⁴⁵ Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ: A Vision for the Priesthood of All Believers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 158.

⁴⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Christology and Economic Ethics: Herman Bavinck's Prophet, Priest and King in the Marketplace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 141.

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