

Are Pastors Priests?

In Romans 15:16 does Paul give warrant for calling ministers, “priests?”

A priest is “One authorized to perform the sacred rights of a religion especially as a mediatory agent between humans and God.” (Miriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary)

In the Bible the word “priest” is related to the Hebrew word for “one who stands” before God.

The OT priest represented the people to God through the sacrifices.

Exodus 28:1 “Have Aaron your brother brought to you from among the Israelites, along with his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, so they may serve me as priests.

Leviticus 9:7 The priest is instructed: “Come to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering and make atonement for yourself and the people; sacrifice the offering that is for the people and make atonement for them, as the LORD has commanded.”

The priests were also to proclaim the word of God to the people.

Malachi 2:7 “For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction—because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty.”

But in the NT the role of the priest is superseded by Christ who is final and infinite priest fulfilling all the purposes of the OT priests and the sacrifices.

Hebrews 9:11-12 “When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. ¹² He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.

Hebrews 10:11-12 “Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

Unfortunately, within a couple of hundred years of the beginning of the church, the idea of church ministers being called priests developed. The whole idea grew from copying both the cultures around them and the OT priesthood. A special class of Christians, the ministers, wore more and

more elaborate clothing. They began calling the communion table an altar. They began to think of the bread and wine of the Lord's Table as the literal body and blood of Jesus and thus offered them time after time as a sacrifice. But all of this was contrary to what God teaches us in the book of Hebrews and elsewhere.

Remember, a priest is a mediator. But now the only mediator between God and man is Jesus.

1 Timothy 2:5 "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

Hebrews 9:14-15 "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! ¹⁵ For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance

We believe it is misleading and thus improper to refer to a Christian minister as a priest. And there is no altar at the front of our churches. The ultimate altar was the real cross on which Jesus died. The Lord's Table is not an altar. I want to suggest that the only altar remaining is the human heart. Romans 12:1 "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship."

See a lengthy but helpful article at

<http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/catholicscandal.htm>

It is titled "*The Scandal of the Catholic Priesthood (Selected Scriptures)* Copyright 2002 by John F. MacArthur, Jr. All rights reserved.

The primary role of a pastor to preach/teach the Word of God

The church's word to its pastor: "We want you to be responsible for saying and acting among us what we believe about God and kingdom and gospel... We believe that the invisible is more important than the visible at any one single moment and in any single event that we choose to examine... We need help in keeping our beliefs sharp and accurate and intact. We don't trust ourselves; our emotions seduce us into infidelities. We know we are launched on a difficult and dangerous act of faith in life, and there are strong influences intent on diluting or destroying it. We want you to give us help... Be a minister of the Word... (Let God speak through

you into all the different parts and stages of our lives) – in our work and play, with our children and our parents, at birth and death, in our celebrations and sorrows, on those days when morning breaks over us in a wash of sunshine, and those other days that are all drizzle.

This isn't the only task in the life of faith but it is your task. We will find someone else to do the other important and essential tasks. This is yours: Word and Sacrament. One more thing: We are going to ordain you to this ministry, and we want your vow that you will stick to it. This is not a temporary job assignment for you but a way of life that we need lived out in our community. We know you are launched on the same difficult belief venture in the same dangerous world as I am. I know your emotions are as fickle as ours and your mind is as tricky as ours. That is why we are going to extract a vow from you. We know there will be days and months, maybe even years, when we won't feel like believing anything and won't want to hear it from you. And we know there will be days and weeks and even years when you won't feel like saying it. It doesn't matter. Do it. You are ordained to this ministry, vowed to it...

Promise right now that you won't give in to what we demand of you. You are not the minister of our changing desires or our time-conditioned understanding of our needs, or our secularized hopes for something better....

There are many other things to be done in this wrecked world, and we are going to be doing at least some of them, but if we don't know the foundational realities with which we are dealing – God, Kingdom, Gospel – we are going to end up living futile, fantasy lives. Your task is to keep telling the basic story, representing the presence of the Spirit, insisting on the priority of God, and speaking the biblical words of command and promise and invitation.”

(Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 137-9)