

Our protestant brothers in Christ appear to deny the teachings of the early church on many fronts, especially the rite of priesthood and sacraments. For the purpose of this discussion I will endeavor to focus on the following points in an attempt to beautify the orthodox teachings which have not changed since the time of Christ. I am no scholar nor profess my authority on such issues however what I will write is neither my understanding nor that of man but of how God through his son Jesus intended it to be.

Issues to be discussed include the following

1. The institution of priesthood and how we are all called to be priests in the Kingdom of God.
2. The true orthodox understanding of what a sacrament is.
3. The Sacrament of Communion – Fiction or Non Fiction.

PRIESTHOOD

Two common teachings propagated by our protestant brothers to diminish the necessity of priesthood are the following.

- That Priesthood is limited to the blessed Person of Christ, and there is no priesthood for any other human.
- All believers, without exceptions, are priests. All are equal and no one has any privilege above others, i.e. all share the same level of responsibility and the same honour.

In regards to the first objection HH Pope Shenouda writes the following,

The objectors rely and produce the following biblical references:

(1 Pet 2:9) But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

They interpret this verse to mean that all are priests, and there is no specific rank of priests!

They also use the words of the Book of Revelation:

(Rev 1:6) and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father.

But the question at hand is this: “Is the rank of priesthood available to all? Or are there a special category of people who are set aside for this priestly function?”

In actual fact, the phrase used by Saint Peter says:

(1 Pet 2:9) But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

This verse is synonymous with what God told the Jews in the Old Testament

(Exo 19:6) 'And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

Most definitely these words did not mean that all the people were priests and were to carry out the known duties of the priests.

This misinterpretation was definitely rejected by God in the case of Kooreh, Nathan and Erbium who used the same line of argument against Moses and Aaron:

(Num 16:3) They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?"

And despite the fact that the whole community was holy, God chose particular people to be His priests, and did the same in the New Testament. So the term priesthood was indiscriminately a common right for all, without differentiation.

While the same verse exists in the Old Testament, priesthood was not something held in common by all rather the contrary, for God singled out Aaron and his sons for this special purpose.

God, in no uncertain terms, dealt with any person from them who dared to unlawfully practice priesthood, even to the extent of death. Only the priests were to offer the sacrifices, raise incense and perform the other functions of priesthood. No one else ever dared to do any of these things, not even the king, who was referred to as 'the Messiah of the Lord'. Despite the fact that the entire nation was "A priestly kingdom" according to the Word of God, the Lord still declared such prohibitions and instituted punishment for those who disobeyed.

So what is meant by:

(Rev 1:6) and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Is priesthood then a common right of all?

Obviously it is not, as this verse could not be taken literally to mean that we are all kings and priests. Please note that it does not say 'we are all priests', but rather "kings and priests". It is obvious that the word 'kings' here, is not to be taken literally, for we cannot all be kings, wearing crowns, sitting on thrones, ruling peoples and being referred to as "Your Majesty!" Therefore, in as much as the people are not literally 'kings', then they are not literally 'priests' either. The same applies to the expression, "a kingdom of priests", which I have explained was not taken literally when it was uttered in the Old Testament.

So what does the reference to the priesthood in both these expressions mean?

This question brings us to the spiritual and metaphorical meaning of priesthood. What is the spiritual meaning of the word 'Priesthood'? Without doubt, priesthood is something spiritual, and in a sense, any believer can offer spiritual sacrifices and spiritual incense without actually being a priest.

David the Psalmist said:

(Psa 141:2) Let my prayer be set before You as incense, The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

This is the spiritual priesthood: raising this kind of incense and this kind of sacrifice. This is something which is granted to all.

In his Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul says:

(Rom 12:1) I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

This is the sacrifice which every believer can and should offer. In doing so, a person can be considered a priest', in a spiritual sense.

(Gal 5:24) And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

St. Paul also mentions other mortification of the flesh

(2 Cor 4:10-12) always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. {11} For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. {12} So then death is working in us, but life in you.

All these spiritual sacrifices are part of worship and prayer.

Another example is the sacrifice of praise,

(Heb 13:15) Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

(Psa 116:17) I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, And will call upon the name of the LORD.

(Heb 13:16) But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

(Phil 4:18) Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.

Offering these kinds of sacrifices is what is intended in the spiritual priesthood of all believers. But this does not in any way prohibit or prevent setting aside a special priesthood for the offering of the holy sacraments, for which God has chosen certain individuals to serve in this way.

Both these aspects can be found together in the Old and New Testaments. The prayers of the prophet David used to rise like incense before God, and the raising of his hands was an evening sacrifice.

(Psa 141:2) Let my prayer be set before You as incense, The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

Yet, David would have dared, even though he was the Lord's anointed and a prophet, to offer a sacrifice in the same way as the least among the priest of the sons of Aaron. In the New Testament, every individual can offer a number of sacrifices of praise or hymns of thanks or make a gift or distribution or present his body as a living sacrifice or to raise his hands as an evening sacrifice, but that does not mean that he should dare offer the sacrifice of the Body and Blood of our Lord in the sacrament of the Eucharist. This is the role of the priest as affirmed in the New Testament.

Observe what St. Paul said about the priesthood of the New Testament.

(Heb 5:4) And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.

If the one who is called by God, being the priest, then the priesthood is not for everybody, and not everyone can lay a claim to it. The desire to seize the priesthood and declare it as a common right to all, is an old issue for which our unchangeable God, set right by severe and decisive punishment.

There is nothing new about the problem of the rebellion against priesthood, and the attempt to seize it and grant it as a birthright to all, such rebellion was spearheaded by people who wrongly interpreted "a kingdom of priests",

(Num 16:3) They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?"

Koorah, Dathan and Abeeram spearheaded a group of rebels, grabbed the incensers and proceeded to offer incense. As recorded in chapter 16 of the Book of Numbers. The Lord commanded the earth to open up and swallow up all of them.

And as a result the Lord said to Aaron:

(Num 18:7) "Therefore you and your sons with you shall attend to your priesthood for everything at the altar and behind the veil; and you shall serve. I give your priesthood to you as a gift for service, but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death."

It is remarkable to observe the confirmation uttered by the Lord of the principle of selective priesthood for a group. Thus God quelled that rebellion decisively.

These circumstances were repeated in various forms, and Lord and in all cases, resulted in God's punishment.

- a) When King Saul dared to raise the burnt offering,

(1 Sam 13:9) So Saul said, "Bring a burnt offering and peace offerings here to me." And he offered the burnt offering.

(1 Sam 16:14) But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the LORD troubled him.

the Lord rejected him, and the Spirit of the Lord departed from him and an evil spirit from the Lord descended upon him Yet, Saul was no ordinary person, he was the anointed messiah. At some stage prior, the Spirit of the Lord had come upon him and he had prophesied. *(1 Sam 10:10- 11).*

But none of this had given him the right to perform any of the functions of the priesthood, which were available to even the least important of Aaron's sons.

b) King Uzziah also dared to hold the censer to raise the incense,

(2 Chr 26:19-21) Then Uzziah became furious; and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense. And while he was angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead, before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the incense altar. {20} And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and there, on his forehead, he was leprous; so they thrust him out of that place. Indeed he also hurried to get out, because the LORD had struck him. {21} King Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death. He dwelt in an isolated house, because he was a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the LORD. Then Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land.

His action was considered treachery and he was banished and excluded from the house of the Lord, where he remained a leper till the day of his death. These are significant examples from the Bible. Though some people object and say, that priesthood belonged to the Old Testament and that priesthood was abolished in the New Testament, as God no longer puts a mediator between Himself and man!

This brings us to ask, 'Is God in the Old Testament different from the God in the New Testament?'

Christ says the following

(Mat 5:17-19) "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. {18} "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. {19} "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Thus we can boldly say that not only the Old Testament is not superseded, but as a matter of fact not even a single letter or dot of it could be made devoid.

Suffice to say that God is the same yesterday today and tomorrow.

SACRAMENTS

The Orthodox Church holds onto seven mysteries or sacraments.

They are

1. Baptism
2. Confirmation
3. Holy Communion
4. Confession
5. Unction of the Sick
6. Marriage
7. Priesthood.

Every sacrament consists of three ingredients.

1. **The visible aspect** – For example in Baptism, we have the baptismal font that is filled with water.
2. **The Participants** – This includes the priest who will officiate the mystery and the parishioner who is wanting the blessings and rewards of that sacrament
3. **The work of the HOLY SPIRIT** – The Holy Spirit is the power that makes a sacrament a mystery. What do I mean by this? How can in marriage the husband and wife become one as is mentioned in the gospels. This is the role of the Holy Spirit. Orthodoxy doesn't teach how the Holy Spirit works, but that he works.

Of course the sacraments of the church are not chosen by randomness but they are indeed directly taken from the bible, and if evidence is required that is no problem and will be provided at request.

THE SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION

Our protestant brothers, having negated the role of priesthood, have also inadvertently scrapped the power that is involved in the sacraments, because it is obvious that without a priest a sacrament can not be done.

Let us consider the following example.

I am a boss of a small organisation with 12 members. Our company focused its attention on 7 key life saving tools that where needed by all mankind. However I've decided that

the time is right to depart on a holiday and the time I will return none of the members are aware of. However not to lose communication with my members, I decide to lend them my mobile number and tell them only to hand it out to those that they elect to the board of the company. This mobile number directly connects to me and I will answer it as soon as it is requested that I do. A few years have passed and my company has grown and the 12 members with my permission have decided to elect new members to the board. These members now have the numbers and are able to call upon my power at any time..... and so on.

This is exactly the story of how Christ gave his twelve disciples the power that is in priesthood.

Moreover history further tells us that as the church expanded the disciples elected righteous men to become priests and so on. This is further seen in the book of Acts, with the ordination of Ananias and Steven the first deacon.

So the power of priesthood to officiate the sacraments is ancient and only the priests that have been given the authority to serve by the previous fathers of the church have the power to participate in the sacraments and call upon the Holy Spirit to work in the mystery.

Turning our attention to communion, it is commonly noted that protestants hold firmly onto the belief that communion is just a remembrance of an event that happened thousands of years ago.

They refer to the following verse to strengthen their argument.

(Luk 22:19)And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

In regards to this verse it is interesting to note two main things.

1. Before it is consecrated, it is bread; but when Christ's words have been added, it is the body of Christ
 - a. This shows that an actual change occurred and that the bread was actually changed into the Body of Christ.
2. The word remembrance in Greek the original language of the new testament means "anamnesis"
 - a. This word means a memorial of a thing regarded as being absent, but it means a recalling or representing the thing in an active sense. It does not mean a remembrance of the sacrifice of Christ as something purely of the past,

something that was done, but as a real and present sacrifice which has its effect on us. It is an “*efficacious commemoration*”.

But do we not daily offer the sacrifice? We offer it, but in making the anamnesis of His death. And this is unique, not multiple. It was offered once, as He entered into the Holy of Holies.

The anamnesis is the figure of His death. ***It is the same sacrifice that we offer, not one today and another tomorrow.***

Christ is One only, everywhere, entire, one only Body. As everywhere there is one Body, everywhere there is one sacrifice. This is the sacrifice that we now still offer. This is the meaning of the anamnesis; we carry out the anamnesis of the sacrifice.

- b. Furthermore the sacrifices of the Old Testament, which were symbols of Calvary, and the Eucharist, consisted essentially of the destruction of the victims. The death of victims, and the fire that destroys them are the signs of God's acceptance of the offering. Their work ends at this point, and it becomes necessary to offer another victim for another occasion.

But the sacrifice of Christ is unique, for His resurrection is the sign of the Father's acceptance of His sacrifice, and the sign of the sacrifice's power to be present to the Church, continuing His redeeming and sacrificial act. For this reason the heavenly High Priest bestowed upon us His mystery, i.e. His sacrificial life. He gave us His sacrificial Body and Blood, that is the mystery of His death; His resurrection and His ascension as a living commemoration (*anamnesis*), acting in our lives. Thus, we understand the Lord's commandment, “*Do this in my Anamnesis. (Remembrance)*”

In all my research of this topic no one in the first 1400 or 1500 years of Christianity actually argued that it wasn't the body of Christ. It wasn't until the bible began to be translated into various languages that confusion arose about the meaning. The English language compared to the Greek dialogue is very weak and often words are impossible to be translated, so scholars have placed similar words in place of it that have often caused great confusion amongst believers. In essence poor translation has caused new teachings to arise. To prove this point, it is unclear whether protestants believe in the fathers of the church, however they provide a great window into Christianity at the time of Jesus and the early few centuries.

St. John Chrysostom (*On the Lord's sayings*)

I have called It and It really is "My Body." The smallest part of this particle can sanctify Thousands of souls and is sufficient to give life to those who receive It.

St. Ephram the Syrian

The Eucharist is the Flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, who suffered for our sins, and which God the Father rose up

St. Ignatius

The Food, which has been "*Eucharistised*," is the Flesh and Blood of that Jesus who was made flesh.

St. Justin Martyr

The mingled cup and the manufactured bread receive the word of God and become the Eucharist or the Body and the Blood5.

St. Irenaeus

The bread, which He took and gave to His disciples He, made His own very Body by saying, "This is my Body."

Tertullian

What can be sacrificed so full of love, and accepted so gratefully, as the flesh of our sacrifice, which became the body of our Priest!

St. Augustine

Thus, in the Eucharist the Church is presented to the Golgotha, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to enjoy the sacrificial Holy Body and the Precious Blood of her Savior, practicing the saving deeds of her heavenly Father. In other words *the Mystery of the Eucharist is an anamnesis of the redeeming action of Christ in the mysterious sense that it is still active and continuous*.

THE BIBLICAL AND CHURCH TEACHING ON COMMUNION

"Do this in remembrance of me."

Rationalistic assumptions have clouded many an interpretation of Jesus' words here. The word *anamnesis*, as it was often used in ancient times, means to bring the past into the present and the present into the past. In the Eucharist, we truly experience Christ's life, death, and resurrection, and Christ is made present to us, and we are made present to Him. This is far more dynamic than merely remembering something.

The Orthodox Church uses such expressions because in Orthodoxy what is real is *not* opposed to what is symbolical or mystical or spiritual. On the contrary! In the Orthodox view, all of reality -- the world and man himself -- is real to the extent that it is symbolical and mystical, to the extent that reality itself must reveal and manifest God to us.

Thus, the Eucharist in the Orthodox Church is understood to be the genuine Body and Blood of Christ precisely because bread and wine are the mysteries and symbols of God's true and genuine presence and manifestation to us in Christ.

Thus, by eating and drinking the bread and wine which are mystically consecrated by the Holy Spirit, we have genuine communion with God through Christ who is himself "the bread of life" (Jn 6:34, 41).

I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh (Jn 6:51).

Thus, the bread of the Eucharist is Christ's flesh, and Christ's flesh is the Eucharistic bread. The two are brought together into one. The word "symbolical" in Orthodox terminology means exactly this: "to bring together into one."

Thus we read the words of the Apostle Paul:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death, until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread and drinks the cup in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord (1 Cor 11:23-26).

The mystery of the holy Eucharist defies analysis and explanation in purely rational and logical terms. For the Eucharist -- and Christ himself -- is indeed a mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven

which, as Jesus has told us, is "not of this world." The Eucharist -- because it belongs to God's Kingdom -- is truly free from the earth-born "logic" of fallen humanity.

The fact that the Eucharist is really the Holy Body and the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is biblical; as it is clearly written in John 6:51-67. On many occasions, our Lord spoke in signs and parables; but we see Him, here, being very clear in saying literally,

"the bread that I shall give is My flesh." When the Jews could not believe Him, "The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" (John 6:52)

Our Lord didn't try to explain that this is only a symbol or that He meant it as a figure of speech. On the contrary, He answered with great solemnity affirming that to eat His real Flesh and drink His Blood is indispensable

"Then Jesus said to them, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him" (John 6:53-56).

For Him this was not a subject for dispute or argument.

This is the true doctrine to the point that when many of His disciples, after having heard this, had left Him; He didn't try to soften His position to bring them back. On the contrary, He turned to His disciples saying, ***"Do you also want to go away?" (John 6:67)***. If these are our Lord's own words; we have to believe them. Otherwise, we would be making Him a liar. Now the question arises: How do the bread and wine become Flesh and Blood? The answer is through the Holy Spirit in a mystical way. That is why we call it a Mystery or Sacrament.

This is a brief summary on the issue of Priesthood, Sacraments and the Anamnesis.