

## Royal Priesthood by T.F. Torrance

### I. Summary of Reading

#### **Preface: Context of the book**

The occasion of the book arose from **ecumenical conversations** between Presbyterians and Anglicans. A key issue became the question of the role of the priest.

- In the 19<sup>th</sup> century desire to make Anglicanism acceptable to Rome it began to sacerdotalize the priesthood. Sacerdotalism is the belief that the church has the role of distributing grace/benefits of the atonement to people.
- Jungmann: There took place a shift in Christology. Christ was exclusively identified with majesty and power. Creatures were left without a mediator. There arose a demand for a human priesthood sacrifice for Christ and dispense sacramental blessing on His behalf. Salvation then got caught up in the priest's role.

Similarly, the question of the **ordination of women**, which got into discussions of power, had problems because of a flawed understanding of priest.

Is the Holy Spirit the endowment bequeathed to the Church to administer grace? Does the clergy/church need to act to activate grace or does grace act upon the church?

**Torrance:** The ordained ministry is in no sense an extension of the priestly ministry of Christ or a prolongation of his vicarious work. **We do not displace Christ**; rather, **we are displaced**. We shrink so he might be greater.

#### **Chapter 1: "The Royal Priesthood"--Biblical perspective**

Priests were a liturgical extension of the once-for-all events of Exodus and the intercession at Sinai.

The sacrificial system was designed to bear witness to what God had done.

- It was never to be independent from the covenant
- It was always God's action; God is always the actor and never the object of the sacrifice.

Problems arose when the priesthood sought to make itself independent from the covenant. This was an attempt to get what they wanted from God without a direct encounter with him.

The Prophets came to call out the error of this view of priesthood. Prophets pointed to a Suffering Servant who would both do actions of prophet and priest.

Church plays a new role. The Church's priestly sacrifice is the life of ministry.

Christ is ascended where he lives before the face of the Father as our intercessor.

The Church's confession is now a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving in response to Christ's sacrifice of redemption. The Church is not sacrificing in place of or in extension of Christ.

Christ as Royal Priest performs a sacrifice once for all. This act is now realized in the life of his people, NOT by repetition of his sacrifice, BUT by dying and rising with Christ in faith and life.

## **Chapter 2: "The Function of the Body of Christ"--Church and Christology**

A. Summary: The doctrine of the Spirit has Christology for its content...so that the doctrine of the Spirit is really Christology applied to the Church.

How did the Apostles demonstrate this identity as Christology Applied?

The Apostles are sent to represent Christ in such a way that their persons retreat into the background and yet their message is Christ's very own Word. The Apostles are chosen vessels appointed to receive the Revelation of Christ, to pass it through their mind, and pass it on to the Church.

B. Relation between Church and Head of Body (4 ways)

*Torrance goes so far as to call the Church, "Christ's other self" 27*

1. It is a **relation of being** between Christ and Church. Mission and being must interpenetrate: the Church is Church as it participates in the active operation of divine love.
2. Paul expressly **distinguishes** the Church from Christ: **analogy of marriage**. "She is not Christ continued, the Incarnation continued....She does not replace Him, but makes Him visible, demonstrates Him without being confounded with Him." 31
3. The whole relation between the Church and Christ is **governed by the atonement**. He took our place that we might take His place before God.
4. The conformity between Body and the Head of the Body  
The Church that is baptized with Christ's Baptism assumes like Him, the **form of a Servant**, working out the salvation God works in it.

C. The Ministry of the Church is the Ministry of Christ

"...because He is pleased to use the Church as His Body and to use it in His ministry of reconciliation, we must think of the ministry of the Church as correlative to the ministry of Christ. The ministry of the Church is thus the function of the Body appropriate to it as the Body of which He is Head and Savior." 35

\*"Sometimes a distinction is drawn, especially by would-be 'Catholics', between certain functions of Christ regarded as primary, unique, and non-transferable, and other functions which can be transferred by His authority

to His chosen representatives and through them be extended in the continuing ministry of the Church. This is a view that **by-passes the resurrection and the ascension** and seeks to **ground the ministry** of the Church **entirely on the historical Jesus**, but it operates also with an un-Biblical way of speaking.”

... Rather the NT speaks of the Church “as participating in the whole ministry of Christ...the Church’s ministry is to be undertaken with reference not to a part but to the whole of His ministry.”

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“The ministry of the Church is in **no sense an extension** of the ministry of **Christ** or a prolongation of certain of His ministerial functions. That is the **view that leads** to very **wrong notions of Eucharistic Sacrifice** as an extension of Christ’s own priestly sacrifice in the Eucharist, and to **wrong notions of priesthood** as the prolongation of His Priesthood in the ministry: and **behind it lies** the **notion** of the Church as an extending or **prolonging of the Incarnation**, and sometimes, as in certain Roman expositions, there even lurks the **heretical idea** of the **reincarnation of Christ** in the Church **through the Spirit** regarded as the soul of the Church.” (emphasis added) 37

#### D. Clarification: Ministry of Church and Ministry of Christ:

1) No relation of identity

2) Church is not “another” ministry different from the ministry of Christ

- “...in and through the ministry of the Church it is always Christ Himself who is at work, nourishing, sustaining, ordering, and governing His Church on earth.” 37
- “Through His Spirit He commands and enables the Church to minister in His Name, to preach Christ crucified and risen, to declare the forgiveness of sins, and call all men to be reconciled to God, but it is the Lord Himself who is present in the midst of His Church as the Word made flesh making the preaching of the Gospel effectual as Word and Power of God.” 38

#### E. The Flow of the Relationship between Christ and Church

The relation always flows decent to ascent, where the church’s ministry is a reflex. It is never the reverse: ascent to decent. That is a Pelagian move that views the atonement as an act of man upon God.

#### F. The Mode of Representation.

- Ministry is not a function of the people or their delegates.
- Ministry is not democratically grounded and built up from the members of the Church so as to represent them before God.
- Paul never speaks of himself as being representative of the Church before God and acting on their behalf toward God, and **therefore**

**responsible to the Church for his action toward God on their behalf.**

Ministerial representatives receive their commission or orders not from the Church but for it, for their commission has its sole right in the gift given by Christ and in offering the gifts given by Christ in Word and Sacrament.

## **II. Implications**

- 1) The Church must not be independent of Christ. Christ is not absent, leaving the church as a human institution pragmatically gathered to simply carry a message.
- 2) The Church is not a replacement for Christ. The Church does not have any authority or spiritual power on its own.
- 3) A ministerial representative is not a representative of the people to God. A representative is not accountable to the people, but does serve for their benefit.
- 4) The Church really can speak the words of Christ and the actions of Christ.
- 5) The priesthood is not a call to personal power, rather a call to personal diminishing so that Christ might increase.

## **III. Discussion Questions**

- 1) What are some of the practical problems that come up in a church when Christ is either disconnected from or replaced by the Church?
- 2) How does this "Christology applied" ecclesiology affect the following:
  - a) Evangelism
  - b) Church power
  - c) Pastoral needs like giving assurance of God's forgiveness and love
  - d) Other areas?
- 3) The temptation is strong to desire sacerdotalism or a "bottom-up" movement of ministry where God is the recipient. What ways have you observed this in interacting with others? What counsel would you give someone who wants to use his/her service to earn God's favor?