

## THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL THE FAITHFUL.

The teaching of the first epistle of Peter, that all the members of the Church are a 'royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people', called 'to proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light' will be central to our thoughts during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January 2016<sup>1</sup>. It should also be central to the reception process for the World Council of Churches Faith and Order report *The Church; Towards a Common Vision*.

The three key tasks of the Church have been defined as *leitourgia* or worship of the whole people of God, *martyria* or witness and *diakonia* or service, particularly of the most disadvantaged. It can be argued that of the three *leitourgia* is most fundamental because it is in it that the Church receives the vision of the wonder of God's gracious ways that inspires and gives it the strength in which both to witness and to serve. Worship is the Church's most central activity, a point made strongly in both the responses of the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain to the report, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*<sup>2</sup>.

The Church that would witness and serve effectively must first be the Church that is the royal priesthood in Christ.

The worship that the Church, in whatever communion, offers is always worship in, with and through the one Great High Priest, who ever lives to make intercession for us and who continually presents our prayers, praises and intercessions before His Father. All Christians agree that Christ is the only priest in the Christian dispensation and that the entire new people of God are only priests through his gracious incorporation of them as branches of the True Vine through faith and baptism. All priesthood in the New Covenant, whether exercised by ordained ministers or by lay folk, is derived from His and when that priesthood is exercised in whatever way, it is by Him acting through them. He is always the true minister, whether in the administration of the sacraments, the preaching of the word or simply the ministry of loving care which he gives grace to his people to extend to each other and to those beyond their community.

Exegetes accept that the only forms of priesthood witnessed to in the New Testament are those of Christ and the whole people in union with him. The concept of a special separate ministerial participation in the priesthood of Christ only appears later, in the third century<sup>3</sup>. It has, however, since the sixteenth century, been a matter of controversy, with most Protestants arguing that though the concept of special *ministries* in the Church is clearly evidenced in the Bible, the concept of a priesthood other than that of Christ and of the *whole* body in Him is not present. I hope, however, at the end of this paper to suggest a few potentially reconciling thoughts on the issue of ministerial priesthood.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter 2:9.

<sup>2</sup> *Response of the Church of England Council on Christian Unity and Faith and Order Committee to The Church Towards a Common Vision*, para 25, 'The Church of England gives a high value to the role of worship in the formation of disciples and the nurturing of witness..while worship is referred to at various points, we would want to be more explicit that this was one of the ends for which the Church was created and ad redeemed and which belongs to her eschatological reality.' The Methodists add 'the absence of a description of what it means for the Church to be a community of worship is regrettable. Insofar as worship is the source and summit of ecclesial life, it has a bearing on how churches understand the nature of the Church', para 10 of the *Response of the Methodist Church in Britain to The Church Towards a Common Vision* (2013).

<sup>3</sup> Bradshaw, P. *Eucharistic origins* ( 2004), p. 85.

A continuing understanding of the Church as a corporate priesthood of all its members is clear from the testimonies of the Apostolic Fathers. Justin Martyr asserts, 'we are the true high priestly race of God, as even God bears witness'. Here, surely, we catch a sense of the awed awareness that the Christian priesthood transcends all other earlier forms of priesthood, even that of the Old Covenant. *One* high priest alone was allowed to enter the innermost sanctuary on a particular day in the year, now *all Christians* have the privilege of entering the inner sanctuary at will. 'As even God gives witness', may well be a testimony to Paul's teaching on the witness of the Spirit in Romans 8 and to his further insistence in Corinthians that 'the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.' Irenaeus claims something less elevated, but still asserts that 'all the disciples of the Lord are Levites and priests'. Tertullian compares the post-baptismal anointing to the consecration of priests in the OT<sup>4</sup>.

The royal priesthood of the whole body is inextricably related to Christ's function as the one Mediator between God and human beings (1 Tim 2:5). It is also intimately related both to his status as the eternally beloved Son of the Father and to his intimate partnership with the Father in Creation, Redemption and New Creation. 'There is one God from whom all things are and one Lord Jesus Christ through whom all things are and *we in Him*' (1 Cor 8:6), these last three words being especially significant. Though the priesthood of Christ, the lamb slain from the foundations of the world (1 Peter, 1:20; Rev 13:8), is predestined from all eternity, He only becomes priest from the time of His Incarnation because it is only then that He is the man Christ Jesus as well as the eternal Son of God. It is only then that He is in the body prepared for Him in which He is to act on the Cross as both priest and victim, offering to the Father a perfect act of worship, both as the eternal Son worshipping the one from whom he derives his divinity from all eternity and as perfect man, offering a sacrifice of total and complete obedience, lived out throughout his human life, though necessarily consummated in the final resignation of life and breath on the Cross.

In all of this, he does that which could not be achieved by the imperfect offerings of the Levitical priesthood, offerings necessarily incomplete because they lacked the complete identification between offeror and offering that Christ alone could make<sup>5</sup>.

His priesthood is also necessarily related to His sonship and to the plan of the Father in which the eternal Sonship of the one divine Son was to be related to the sonship by adoption conferred on Christians as a result of the Resurrection and Pentecost, as a result of the promise inherent in the first and the actuality of the first fruits of redemption in the second<sup>6</sup>. The Wesleyan systematic theologian, W.B. Pope, puts the relationship this way, 'our status as adopted children of God corresponds to His status as the eternally Beloved and our regeneration to his eternal generation'<sup>7</sup>. It is clear from Paul's teaching that the Father's great plan of salvation involves Christ, 'the first born of all creation' (Col 1:15) as being destined to be the first born also of many brethren within the new creation. We are told in Hebrews that he will 'bring many sons to glory' ( Heb 2:10) and that, at the

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<sup>4</sup> Bradshaw, P, op cit, pp. 85ff.

<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, they were commanded by God for that dispensation, whilst deriving such benefit as they could give from the supreme sacrifice of Christ, cf. Charles Wesley's 'borrowed their virtue from thy name'. *Wesleyan Hymn Book* (1877), no 702.

<sup>6</sup> Paul refers to the gift of the Spirit as the down payment, the first instalment of our complete redemption.

<sup>7</sup> Pope, W.B. *Compendium of Christian Theology* (1880), vol 3, p.4.

end of time, He will say to the Father, 'Here am I and all the children that you have given me.' (Heb 2:13).

In one sense, the analogy must not be pressed too far. Alongside the identification of the Son with those through whom and for whom they were created, there persists both an extraordinary closeness of identity and yet an infinite ontological difference, the difference being between the One who is granted by the Father to have life in Himself and the many whose status remains totally dependent upon the grace of creation. Nevertheless, the closeness of identity effected by sheer grace makes the Orthodox expression that the truly sanctified are 'gods by grace' not totally inappropriate.

Traditional Protestant theology however balances this with an understanding that this privilege of sharing in this new priesthood is conferred on utterly undeserving sinners. Calvin stresses that

'Christ now bears the office of priest, not only that he may render the Father favourable and propitious to us, but also that he might admit us to this honourable alliance. For we, though being polluted, in Him being priests, offer ourselves and our all to God and freely enter the heavenly sanctuary so that the sacrifices of prayer and praise that we present are grateful and sweet to Him'<sup>8</sup>.

P.T. Forsyth, a great British reformed theologian, states that 'the greatest function of the Church is full communion with him who is priestly. It is to confess, to sacrifice, to intercede for the whole race in Him...evangelical Christianity is mediatorial.'<sup>9</sup>

This immense privilege of joining in Christ's work is conferred on the entire pilgrim Church, still awaiting that time when it will finally be without spot or wrinkle, but journeying on in the hope that when he appears, we will be like him (1 John 3:2). It is in the boldness of adopted, yet still undeserving brethren and sisters of Christ that we can echo Charles Wesley's words

'We now, divinely bold

Of thy reward lay hold;

All thy glorious joy is ours

All the treasures of thy love;

Now we taste the heavenly powers,

Now we reign with thee above'<sup>10</sup>.

It is as a Church sharing in the intercessory ministry of Christ, at the heart of which is his continued pleading of his sacrifice before the Father, that we continue to share in this extraordinary privilege and will continue to do so until, as Yves Congar puts it, the Alpha Christ eventually becomes the

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<sup>8</sup> Precisely in his Commentary on the first Epistle of St Peter ( ch 2, v9).

<sup>9</sup> Forsyth, P.T. *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, (8<sup>th</sup> edn, 1955), p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> *Wesleyan Methodist Hymn Book* (1877), no 723, v.3.

Omega Christ<sup>11</sup>. As the Alpha Christ, the One on whom everything depends, the appointed 'lamb slain from the foundations of the world', Christ offers Himself in deepest loneliness and pain on the Cross. Everything He does there He does alone. However, His aim and purpose, in accordance with the Great Plan of the Father for reconciliation, is to go from this necessarily lonely act of absolute priestly obedience to the Father to the point where He has gathered together all those whom the Father has ever and will ever give Him and has made them fully partners in his adoring praise of the Father and doing of the Father's will. Congar talks of the 'mystery of Alpha and Omega, or, if it be preferred, the paschal and the parousial mystery' as being 'the same mystery, but under two differing conditions, the first a state of root and principle, wherein Christ is all and does all, alone, for us; the second a state of fruition and result, where in Christ is still all and still does all, but not alone—he with us and we with him'<sup>12</sup>. In the second state we will be, by sheer grace and still in complete dependence, his collaborators in virtue of our status as members of his glorious Body, as branches remaining and bearing fruit in the Vine, as offering in and with the Lamb the same adoring obedience and worship that He offers to the Father .

It is at this point that it becomes appropriate to examine the differences in emphasis in understanding of the royal priesthood as between Roman Catholics and most Protestants. Catholics stress the corporate nature of the priesthood, the worship and intercession of the entire people of God. Protestants often use the expression the priesthood of all believers, stressing the fact that *each individual* Christian has a priestly role, albeit one intimately related to his or her membership of the universal body and its missionary and reconciling vocation.

Protestants take the personal responsibility of each person before the Lord for exercising a priestly ministry of intercession and offering in daily life in the community very seriously. Fairbairn argues, 'Let us feel every man (sic) of us, that we are priests standing before God for men and for God before men. Let us create in our churches the feeling that they are priestly bodies, where every man, by personal communion with God and loving intercourse men, can help in the reconciliation of Humanity and God'<sup>13</sup>.

The privilege of immediate access in the spirit of adoption to the Father carries with it an awesome responsibility to minister to fellow Christians in prayer and loving service. Such priestly ministry was at the heart of the early Methodist class meetings, where each member contributed to the building up in faith, hope and love of the others through testimony to God's grace in word and deed and through intercession and sharing of insights into the scriptures. Such exercise of the common royal priesthood is also a key part of the lives of many modern communities such as Focolare and Chemin Neuf. Any pastoral ministry within the one universal priestly body of Christ, whether exercised by an ordained minister or lay person, is essentially priestly because of the association of the two in the one who is simultaneously both the Good Shepherd and the Great High Priest.

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<sup>11</sup> Congar, Y. *Lay People in the Church* (ET, 1957), p. 113.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, p.119

<sup>13</sup> Fairbairn, A.M. *Studies in Religion and Theology*, p.138.

It is interesting to note a similar stress on the mutual ministry of the whole of the royal priesthood within the Orthodox Church. The progress towards divinisation is 'a common task where the progress of one benefits all the others'.<sup>14</sup>

Protestants also stress that nothing can stand in the way of each Christian's free access to the Father in prayer, a privilege which is necessarily part of the privilege of that adopted sonship through which we may address God in intimacy as 'Abba, Father'. This particular emphasis was intensified within the English free churches in the nineteenth century in reaction against the exaggeratedly exclusive emphasis of the anglo-catholic tractarians on sacramental grace, which seemed to devalue the other instituted and prudential means of grace. It also lies behind the doctrine of British Methodism defied in the 1932 Deed of Union that there is no exclusive priesthood belonging to a particular order of ministers, a point that was, in part, designed to safeguard the pastoral role of lay class leaders and preachers within the Methodist community.

It needs to be admitted that the stress on the priesthood of all believers has sometimes been misunderstood, particularly within the English free churches. It does not licence anyone to do anything in the context of the Church's public worship. It does not mean that the work of pastoral oversight can be carried out by anyone other than as duly authorised, and either ordained or commissioned as a lay person.

Another Protestant emphasis, from the time of the Reformation, has been on the priesthood of all believers as involving their offering of daily life and service in world to God. This is strongly emphasised in the most recent ecclesiological statement of British Methodism, *Called To Love and Praise*, taking its cue from Paul at the beginning of Romans 12,

'The old cultic language (i.e. of sacrifice) was transferred to the community and daily life. A local church could be called the temple of God (1 Cor 3:10) and the self-offering of Christians to God their sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2). This kind of priesthood was not about presiding at the Lord's Supper but was focussed instead on the living of sacrificial lives'<sup>15</sup>.

The stress on the offering of daily life is not a church dividing matter. Modern Catholic teaching particularly stresses the role of the laity both in acting as a leaven in the daily life of the world and in spreading the gospel by word and example<sup>16</sup>. Pope Francis has certainly reinforced this teaching from the point of view of the sharing of all Christians in the prophetic role of Christ.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, it needs to be stressed that the active priesthood of the individual Christian prepares him or herself for active participation in the corporate priesthood of the Church in public worship. It is only through the discipline of daily meeting with the Lord in personal prayer that one's participation in

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<sup>14</sup> . 'Le sacerdoce de l'Eglise. De l'unique sacrifice du Christ a la solidarite dans le salut'. Article by Alexander Siniakov in *Unite des Chretiens*, no 180, October 2105, pp.21-24. Exact citation, p.24.

<sup>15</sup> *Called To Love and Praise*, para 4.5.2 in *Statements and Reports of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order, vol 2*, (2000) p.47. This emphasis is shared in other Protestant traditions. See e.g. the article '*le sacerdoce universel: un point de vue luthero-reforme*', by Guilhen Antier in *Unite de Chretiens*, no 180, Oct 2015, pp. 16-20.

<sup>16</sup> As in *Lumen Gentium*, 10 and in *Gaudium et Spes*.

<sup>17</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, paras 259-61 and also 273 by implication. See also his address on 17 Oct 2015 to the Commemorative Ceremony for the fiftieth anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, p.2, where he speaks of the people 'who even participate in the prophetic office of Christ'.

the corporate royal priesthood becomes deepened. The stress on being built up as 'living stones' into the one Temple (1 Peter 2:10) testifies to this.

The exercise of the corporate royal priesthood in public worship is essential. In it the local congregation or church expresses its common identity and solidarity with the rest of the royal priesthood across the world. It rejoices in its union with Christ and all His members, in all that Christ has gained for it and in all that He will yet do up to the very day when he will finally stand before the Father, surrounded by all His saints of every age and say, 'Here I am with all the children that you have given me' (Heb 2:13). The worship that is offered is of praise for the unsearchable riches of Christ, for the gifts of the Holy Spirit and for the unfailing mercies of the Father, which are 'over all His works.' (Ps 145:9). The praise will never end, but in the time between now and the return in glory of Christ, it will be accompanied by three other elements, necessary still in a pilgrim Church within an imperfect world. They are corporate confession of sin, intercession for both Church and the world and acts of self-offering from those who have yet to complete the work that God has given them to do.

The adoring service of Christ the Head and Cornerstone and of His Father takes place in a symphonic unity of life and witness in the world and of worship and fellowship within the Great Congregation and the local church. Congar stresses that 'the priesthood of the faithful is a reality so rich that no single aspect or statement exhausts it'. My stress on the symphonic nature of these two is inspired by the famous statement of St John Chrysostom that, at the end of the Sunday celebration of the eucharist, the congregation depart to celebrate the liturgy after the liturgy in terms of rendering praise to their redeeming God in and through their service in everyday life.

Congar, in a partial analysis of the richness referred to, states, 'there is a moral priesthood, which consists in living and doing with a priestly soul, in a spirit of religion; there is a real but wholly inward and spiritual priesthood, that of prayer and ascetical life; there is a priesthood... associated with baptismal consecration, and whose supreme activity is participation in the Eucharistic offering'. One may perhaps sum up the totality of what Congar is trying to say with the cultic language that Paul uses in 2 Corinthians, where he speaks of the fragrant offering of the Church to God.

'But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph, and through us spreads the fragrance of knowledge of him everywhere For we are the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death and to the other a fragrance from life to life.'<sup>18</sup>

Congar reminds us of the importance of our baptismal consecration, which plunges us into the paschal mystery and thus makes us joint heirs with Christ in all his offices, including, of course, that of priesthood and proclamation<sup>19</sup>. Of course in all of this we remain still utterly dependent upon Him, ever dependent upon his 'kind, continued aid'<sup>20</sup>, particularly expressed and communicated in the holy eucharist, in which we continue to receive his self-gift under the signs of the bread and wine that he has appointed to convey His continuing life to us and in which we are given a foretaste of the heavenly banquet prepared for all humankind. In this eucharist, we both look back in gratitude to all

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<sup>18</sup> 2 Cor 2:14-16, a passage discussed in more detail in Wainwright, G.W. *For our Salvation. Two approaches to the Work of Christ* (1997), pp. 64-70.

<sup>19</sup> Congar, op cit, p.159.

<sup>20</sup> A favourite phrased of Charles Wesley's. See e.g. *Wesleyan Hymn Book* (1877), no 916.

the saving acts of God, most particularly to the paschal mystery and the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost. We look forward to the coming of the New Creation. We worship not just with the local congregation, but with the whole communion of saints, both terrestrial and in heaven. Above all, we worship in, with and through our Christ, our High Priest, who continues his ministry of intercession for us in heaven. We plead His sacrifice, indeed we may even say legitimately with Catholics that in a certain sense we offer it since we know that we have nothing worthwhile to offer the Father apart from Him, through whose *grace alone* is there anything in us that can ever be worthy of being brought before the Father<sup>21</sup>.

In the eucharist, we are brought, as the most recent Methodist-Roman Catholic international dialogue report stresses, to the very centre of the mystery of the trinitarian love, in the presence of which there can be only wonder, love and praise. We read,

‘This sacrificial self-giving of Christ is something “made flesh” once for all in human history on the cross, but the innermost reality of Christ’s Grand Oblation is an eternal mystery at the very heart of the Holy Trinity. God the Father eternally begets the Son-who is true God from true God- and the Son eternally responds to the Father in total self-giving. Jesus’ death on Calvary can be understood as the sacrament-the making tangibly visible to all humanity or our salvation-of this eternal self-giving of God the Son to God the Father in the love of the Holy Spirit, and of the father’s ready welcome and acceptance of that self-giving’<sup>22</sup>.

Vatican II rightly teaches in the Constitution on the Liturgy that the eucharist is the summit of Christian worship<sup>23</sup> and thus the place where our royal priesthood reaches its sublime summit, where we receive the supreme privilege, polluted though we still are, of sitting as it were already in the heavenly places with Christ Jesus, of being associated, despite our total unworthiness, with his continuing adoring worship of the Father. What we experience in this ‘soul transporting’ sacrament<sup>24</sup> sums up everything that characterises all our worship as worship which is always in, through and with Christ, always and only offered in His name and with the intention of fulfilling the will of the Father in all things.

At the end of his study of the royal priesthood, Congar stresses two key points. First, ‘that the Christian priesthood of the faithful has specially and expressly to take over the natural priesthood of every the natural priesthood of every creature’s homage, as a creature, towards its creator’<sup>25</sup>. This parallels a key emphasis in Orthodox thought, that the royal priesthood restores the original natural priesthood of humankind before the Fall. Secondly, he stresses that the offering of the eucharist ‘truly concerns the whole Church’ and, not just the ordained presbyteral priesthood as was held in some earlier catholic thinking<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> It is noted in the most recent quinquennium of the MRCIC dialogue that the term ‘pleading the sacrifice’ is most frequently used by Methodists and the term ‘offering the sacrifice’ by Catholics. However, in both cases, it is understood that the act of pleading or offering can only take place in union with the High Priest who alone can take us into the presence of the Father.

<sup>22</sup> *Encountering Christ the Saviour. Church and Sacraments*. Report of the ninth quinquennium of the international Methodist Roman Catholic Dialogue (2011), p. 35.

<sup>23</sup> Vatican II *Decree on the Liturgy*, para 10.

<sup>24</sup> The reference is to Charles Wesley, *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* (1745), no 94.

<sup>25</sup> Congar, op cit, p. 212.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p 206.

This brings us to one of the thornier controversies in Christendom, that concerning the extent to which there is a *different* form of participation in the priesthood of Christ relating solely to ordained presbyters and bishops. The Anglican response to BEM and ARCIC admits that this is a particularly difficult issue (and, one might add, one that has been particularly divisive amongst Anglicans)<sup>27</sup>. All Christians are agreed that there is only one high priest in himself and that all priesthood derives solely from union with Him as bestowed by Him. Protestants, as already stated, have traditionally denied that there is any such separate ministerial priesthood. Some would add that such belief represents a return to Old Testament religion with its separate Levitical priesthood.

I would suggest that it might be possible for Christians eventually to converge on an understanding based on the particular responsibilities assigned to ministerial leaders within almost all the churches and based on the understanding that they are confided to particular members of the royal priesthood who exercise them within the context of gathering, encouraging and leading the people of God at various levels, both congregational and wider. They focus and represent that royal priesthood but are *within* it rather than *above* it. To the extent that they represent the wider Church by their ordination, since that is always conferred within each separate communion with the intention that it be accepted by the whole Church Universal, they may be said to represent the catholic wholeness of Christ in his universal fellowship Body to the local congregation in its particularity. Their function within the one royal priesthood of all the faithful is that of establishing links of communion and of reminding the local congregation of its essential link in communion with every other local church. It is a *particular* priestly function within the royal priesthood of the whole Church, never to be understood apart from it. Perhaps we can develop a differentiated consensus on the matter along such lines. Pope Francis' recent emphasis on the totality of the synodality of the Church and the walking together of all its members, both lay and ministerial, might give a nudge in such a direction<sup>28</sup>.

In it, we might possibly note that the difference between Catholic priest and Protestant pastor as terms for presbyteral ministers is not as great as might appear at first sight. Both point to a particular participation in the ministry of Christ, albeit related, respectively to the Great High Priest and the Great Shepherd of the Sheep. In both cases, the Church assigns to such people a special responsibility in ordination, invoking the appropriate blessing of the Holy Spirit<sup>29</sup>.

Both recent British Methodist statements on ordination and the Church of England's response to TCTCV would seem to indicate the feasibility of such an approach. The British Methodist statements of 1960 and 1974 both develop the concept of the presbyter as the representative person of the Church and express the hope that this may help to transcend the gap between ontological and purely functional understandings of presbyteral ministry<sup>30</sup>. The Church of England statement stresses that 'for them the bishop is a bishop in church and synod...this is because of the integral

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<sup>27</sup> *Towards a Church of England Response to BEM and ARCIC (GS 661)*, (1985), paras 10-3.

<sup>28</sup> As in the Statement made and referenced above, no 17.

<sup>29</sup> See e.g. Jackson, T. (from within the Methodist tradition) *Christian Presbyters* (1850). Jackson describes presbyters as 'under-shepherds to the Great Shepherd'.

<sup>30</sup> *Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order, 1933-83*, (1984), pp. 124-145.



position of a bishop in a church and of the role of the other members of the people of God in the church.<sup>31</sup>

The picture I have painted may be held to be rather idealistic, though I would still maintain that it represents what Christ has appointed his royal priesthood to be. However it is important to keep before us the vision of what Christ wants his Church to be, prays for His Church to become and, in turn, asks us to pray. Methodists, despite their very real imperfections, continue to treasure Charles Wesley's words

To our high calling's glorious hope,

We hand in hand go on.<sup>32</sup>

We have confidence not in ourselves alone, but in our High Priest and Advocate in heaven and in the Holy Spirit who is able to do in us and for us exceedingly abundantly above all that we can expect or conceive'.

It is in the light of a church whose members are imperfect and in the conditions of a fallen World that we must look both at the intercessory priesthood of Christ and the intercessory ministry of the royal priesthood and each individual member of it. The intercessory ministry of the ascended Christ is exercised by one whose sympathy and understanding of both the sufferings and the needs of His members is perfect. The intercessory ministry of His Church is affected by human limitations, a point made vividly by Paul Couturier in his teaching on prayer for Christian unity. He talks of the way in which our limited and inadequate prayers are taken up by Christ and incorporated into His powerful prayer before the Father. That is why the prayers of every local church and every Christian should always be offered in and through His name because He alone is able to complete them before His Father's throne.

The very act of prayer in Christ's name requires an increasing and accompanying act of submission to the divine will in which, as Paul Couturier puts it, 'an ineffable change takes place by which our prayer is stripped to be re-clothed in his prayer...the more effectual does our prayer become since it is he who prays in us.'<sup>33</sup>

All the members of the Church are still in a state of pilgrimage. Though we are aware of our vocation and all the promises connected with it, though we already are able to pray, 'Abba, Father', we are still 'groaning as we await their adoption as sons'(Romans 8:23), that is to say as we await the completion of the work of grace in us, both as individuals and as the one holy people of God. The promises of God are not yet completely accomplished in us. Moreover, as Lionel Thornton points out in his *Common Life in the Body of Christ*, the Church is still going through the messianic sufferings, including both rejection of the Gospel by others and actual persecution, a state that will persist until the final coming of Christ in glory when at last all His faithful members will also be revealed in the full glory of the sons (and daughters) of God, all alike corporately and individually revealed as the awaited children of God, awaited by the expectant creation (Romans 8: 19) and all alike in full

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<sup>31</sup> *Response of the Church of England Council for Christian Unity and Faith and Order Commission to The Church Towards a Common Vision, para 7.*

<sup>32</sup> *Singing the Faith* (current British Methodist hymnal), no 608.

<sup>33</sup> Cited in Curtis, G. *Paul Couturier and Unity in Christ* (1959), p. 330.

possession of the spirit of finished holiness, members in the fullest sense of the Christ Omega, who is now at last not only able to plead for his members but also to present them entire before the Father in glory<sup>34</sup>.

The intercessory ministry of the priesthood of all believers thus remains of vital importance until the end of time. Its members must wrestle and intercede unceasingly till then and each member of the Body must consider seriously his or her particular duty of intercession, both in terms of their local church and its contextual community.

To conclude this paper, I want to argue that the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is one ripe for ecumenical re-reception. It reminds us of the significance of that balance between our activities within the world, activities in which we seek to witness and embody kingdom values and visions in those spheres of human activity in which we are placed, and our passivities, our waiting upon God, our ceaseless attendance upon Him in the searching of Scripture and in prayer as we seek that grace without which we can do nothing<sup>35</sup>. There are dangers alike in a church too dedicated to good works and the social gospel with a less than adequate basis in worship and in an over-pietistic Church, though there is little danger of the latter in current mainstream Protestantism! What is needed is an overarching catholicity of approach that balances the two and never forgets that the end is the fulfilment of the Kingdom in the New Creation.

At the centre of this priesthood is the total offering of self, the offering of an integrated life which finds its fulfilment in the gracious experience of each and every Christian, and of his or her local church, of being enfolded in the trinitarian love and receiving the grace of the two hands of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, thorough whom alone we can do the Father's will and participate in the joy of the Kingdom and the New Creation. The exercise of this priesthood *necessarily* involves all the faithful. Perhaps the last word can be left with Yves Congar,

'Only in and through the faithful does she (i.e. the Church) fulfil herself and attain the verity of her mission and life'<sup>36</sup>.

David Carter.

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<sup>34</sup> Thornton, L.S. *The Common Life in the Body of Christ*, ( 1941), pp. 395ff.

<sup>35</sup> This, of course, is theme of Teilhard de Chardin's great work, *Le Milieu Divin* (ET,1960)

<sup>36</sup> Congar, op cit, p. 216.