

Art Katz:

The Mystery of Priesthood

Priesthood is at the heart of everything, and probably one of the most lamentable needs in modern Christianity is the absence of the sense of priestliness. If someone had asked me in my adolescence in Brooklyn, New York, as a troubled and perplexed kid, trying to make sense out of a bewildering universe, "What is your true vocation? What is it to which you think you are called?" I knew, even in my atheistic ignorance, that the real answer, if I had the courage to speak it, was, "Priest." Now I can understand better what my heart already knew about the centrality of priesthood.

We stand in a very peculiar danger of adopting yet another 'religious vocabulary.' In the same way that we have been inducted into the 'charismatic,' we can easily be inducted into an 'apostolic' form of speaking, and have yet another phraseology to which, in the end, we have just been rendered mere technicians. To take these holy and absolute things and make of them yet another weary, religious form is the most horrible of all fates. If we are going to be a vital church in word, deed and presence and one that is going to fulfill the eternal purposes of God, then something critical is required, namely, the knowledge of the reality of God. This is the only thing that will save us from being mere technicians. We are therefore commended to consider Jesus in Hebrews 3:1,

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.

There is an inexorable connection between the apostolic and the priestly. There has been no neglect in our thinking of things apostolic, but there is a conspicuous lack of awareness of things priestly. We might attempt some fulfillment of other ministries and callings without the necessity of having a high-priestly center, although I doubt that, but there is something about apostolic that is eternally joined to the high-priestly. That which is expressed in the heavenly calling of Jesus, and indeed that which makes it heavenly, is, of necessity, part of our calling as well. Until God shall inspire and restore in us a true sense of priestliness, we will not be partaking in a calling that is heavenly. The word 'heavenly' does not refer to something spatial, but to a mindset, a mentality, or a mode of being. It is a particular character of something so hard to define, but when you encounter it, when something of it is wafted over you, or communicated to you, you will know it. If priestliness is just a fanciful designation that has a clouded meaning, then that means that our priestliness is equally as clouded. The world is destitute of the sense of things heavenly for the lack of priests who are able to bring that dimension of reality. In fact, another synonym for heaven is reality. Whatever reality is, then that is heaven. It takes even a priestly mentality to sense that, and to feel for that, and a priestly ministry to introduce that in a world that is inhospitable to heaven. Earth resists heavenly things, and yet mankind languishes for the lack of priests.

For a long time, I had considered the teaching on the priestly garments and nomenclature pertaining to priesthood to be quite dull. But I am now convinced that there is an eternal weight of glory in all the things that pertain to priesthood. Priestliness must both precede and accompany the apostolic walk. We urgently need God to breathe upon us the spirit of true priesthood, and to touch and transform every aspect of our lives, our walk, and our ministry. There is a requirement to minister unto God before one ministers to men. If we lack the sense of the sacredness of God, which is to be found only in the holy place, by those who have the posture of the priest, that is to say, prostrated as a dead man before Him, then there is going to be something brittle, something lacking, and something plastic in the ministry we bring. There is a cry of God for the restoration of priesthood that alone will save us from the superficial demonstrations that are ostensibly performed in His Name.

The Levitical Consecration

Leviticus Chapter 8 describes the consecration of the priests. As one reads it through, one cannot but sense the strange and antique ring about it. It seems so altogether remote from anything that can be considered modern, so that one is tempted to hurriedly pass over it as something rightfully buried in antiquity, and no longer having any claim upon our attention. That attitude is completely wrong, for everything in this chapter is profoundly relevant to our age; perhaps even more relevant to us now than it was for the Biblical generation to which it spoke.

It begins with these precious words: "Then the Lord spoke to Moses ..." and follows on with, "As the Lord commanded Moses ... As the Lord commanded Moses ... As the Lord commanded Moses." Right from that beginning, God wants to rivet our minds to the Divine origin of all that is to follow. There is not a requirement given, not an ordinance in it, that could have had its origin in human contemplation. The whole concept is totally Divine and contrary to the flesh. It is a calculated attack upon human sensibility and good taste. It has its origin in the heart of God, and completely contradicts all that is human, and is, therefore, all the more valuable and revealing.

One experiences a certain sense of exhaustion just from the reading of this chapter. What then must have been the effect of actually participating in the fulfillment of all of these requirements of God? All of the cutting, the sprinkling of the blood, the wave offerings, and the sitting at the door of the tent of meeting are seemingly absurd and exhausting. By the time it was all finished, and those blood-bespattered men were waiting at the door of the tent of meeting, everything that seemed appealing and honorific to the flesh about the role and title of priest will have dimmed and paled. This will cure us from romantic notions of what 'priestly' means. It is full of blood, gore, and exhaustion. The details and requirements are so extraordinary.

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments and the anointing oil and the bull of the sin offering, and the two rams and the basket of unleavened bread; and assemble all the congregation at the doorway of the tent of meeting." (Leviticus 8:1-3)

We need to take note that the people were required to observe the entire process as a living instruction. The statement of God to the whole congregation of Israel was not what the priests said, but what they did, and what was done to them, and for them. They had an advantage we do not have. We do not see animals being cut up, and the absurdity of catching the blood in basins and sprinkling it upon articles of furniture, and upon the clothing of the priests, and upon their ear, thumb and big toe. Something has got to happen to the one who is seeing this. Something has got to register upon his deepest consciousness about the meaning of sin, and what is required to expiate it. Someone had to stand between God and man, and death had somehow to be performed in order to obtain the life-giving thing, for the life is in the blood.

And so, if there is a New Testament priesthood, we will never really appreciate it in the depth that God intends unless we understand what preceded it and foreshadowed it. There are, therefore, certain essentials of priesthood itself that were given and described at the first, which are subsumed and brought into the New Testament, Melchizedek priesthood; it is not that the one has replaced the old. In a sense that is true, but it has also subsumed and taken into itself the deepest meanings given to priesthood at the very beginning.

So Moses did just as the Lord commanded him. When the congregation was assembled at the doorway of the tent of meeting, Moses said to the congregation, "This is the thing which the Lord commanded to do." Then Moses had Aaron and his sons come near, and washed them with water. And he put the tunic upon him and girded him with the sash, and clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod on him; and he girded him with the artistic band on the ephod, with which he tied it to him. He then placed the breastpiece on him, and in the breastpiece he put the Urim and the Thummin. (Leviticus 8:4-8)

How much are we willing to be stripped and washed in the water of the Word? How willing are we to endure the humiliation of nakedness before men, before even the first priestly garment can be put on? Moses washed Aaron and his sons before the garments were donned. It was a public humiliation, and all Israel was watching the preliminaries of their consecration. Humiliation is, therefore, at the heart of the meaning of the word priesthood. The garments were attached to the priests with skillfully woven cords. There was no quick on-and-off backstage costume change. Priesthood is not a role to be performed behind the pulpit, and then discarded upon returning home. It is not a calling that a man chooses because he thinks it is appealing. It is an exacting preparation, not entered into lightly, nor performed with indifference.

He also placed the turban on his head, and on the turban, at its front, he placed the golden plate, the holy crown, just as the Lord had commanded Moses. (Leviticus 8:9)

Aaron wore a golden plate that rested upon his forehead, and which registered its presence with every step he took. We would do well to sense that same golden shield on which were inscribed the words, "Holiness unto God." With every step and movement of our body, there would be impressed upon us, "Holiness unto God ... Holiness unto God ... Holiness unto God." You could not scratch yourself, nor could you make a gesture without it being pressed onto your head, "Holiness unto the Lord." We need to be reminded of this the whole

time, because our head is always wanting opportunity, if we would grant it, to have its own excursions, its own delights, its own activities, and its own thoughts. The mind continually needs to be brought unto the knowledge of "Holiness unto the Lord." There would be much less brash and soulish ministry, and much less of a rush to come to the place of speaking, if that golden weight were resting squarely between our eyes. Let us feel again the heft of that weight with every step we take. Only then, and only after being thus clothed, and thus prepared, did the priest receive the anointing oil.

The Anointing Oil

Moses then took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it, and consecrated them. (Leviticus 8:10)

If God required furniture to be anointed, then how much more does He require it for the vessels of flesh and blood, who really are His ministers? Do we rightly esteem the anointing of God? If ever a subject deserves examination, it is the phenomenon of anointing, and we need to have the deepest respect for it. Very expensive ingredients, tempered finely together, were required to make it up, and God commanded that it was not to be poured on man's flesh. There was also an extreme penalty for anyone who made anything like it. You do not dare concoct something that approximates to, or is the equivalent of, the holy anointing oil. The ingredients or spices used were usually associated with the anointing of a body for burial. They had a very particular fragrance, and were not to be employed for the things that have to do with the purposes of men, but God's only.

How many times have we been guilty of making our own oil? We can say much about fictitious anointing, things that seem to be like it, and are not, but are really more the effulgence of human personality. How many can distinguish between their own human personality and the holy anointing of God? There are so many 'hotshots' operating today who have the gift of the gab, and an executive ability, and know how to conduct and perform, but that is not the operation of the anointing at all. God will not force upon us the perfect if we are too satisfied with the substitute. When the man-made thing is spurned, and we rest wholly upon what God gives, then we are candidates to receive it. Every time we turn the amplifiers up, or give our voices a little soulish boost, and add a little razzmatazz in order to bring an effect, or give an invitation that we know is calculated to play upon the emotional responses of our hearers, then that is false anointing. It is making something like it. It is not an absolute trust in the power of the anointing itself to obtain the consequences that God desires through His word.

Watchman Nee warned us in the 1920's that the deadliest deception of the Last Days was the soulish substitute for the realm of Spirit that would come through technology. We need to be both wary of it and guarded against it, lest we find ourselves depending upon soul power rather than Spirit power. We have done everything imaginable over the years to simulate the anointing of God, for example, by effecting pious tones, the amplification of sound, but the difference always shows. We know how to produce good services and preach good sermons, but we can never produce glory from heaven. We need to be careful, not only about technology, but also our own voice as a technological instrument employed with cunning to effect a certain response.

The Sacrifice

And he sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times and anointed the altar and all its utensils, and the basin and its stand, to consecrate them. Then he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him, to consecrate him. Next Moses had Aaron's sons come near and clothed them with tunics, and girded them with sashes, and bound caps on them, just as the Lord had commanded Moses. Then he brought the bull of the sin offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the bull of the sin offering. Next Moses slaughtered it ... (Leviticus 8:11-15a)

We need to understand what is implied in Moses' slaughtering the bull. It was a horrific phenomenon of bringing death that there might be life, and it was done before the entire congregation. They are watching the knife go in, and the blood spurt out. They watched the animal sag, totter and go down, and then be cut up. It was a vivid scene before them. The hacking up of the animals, while watching them jerk as their throats were

being slit, was an act of utter foolishness, and there was nothing in the deed that could be explained by reason.

... and took the blood and with his finger put some of it around on the horns of the altar, and purified the altar. Then he poured out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar and consecrated it, to make atonement for it. He also took all the fat that was on the entrails and the lobe of the liver, and the two kidneys and their fat; and Moses offered it up in smoke on the altar. But the bull and its hide and its flesh and its refuse, he burned in the fire outside the camp, just as the Lord had commanded. (Leviticus 8:15b–17)

This is the opposite of what man would do, which shows how much heaven is antithetical to earthly reckoning and consideration. We would have saved the thing that God destroys, and the things that we would have cast aside as disgusting and worthless are the very things that God calls the sacrifice. The flesh and the hide, which we would have savored as of great value, were burnt with the dung. They were not only to be burnt, but burnt outside the camp; such is God's disgust for flesh. What men esteem is an abomination in the sight of God.

The things that are a sweet savor to God are the inwards, the inner parts—not the outward things. God is not interested in the outer hide and the flesh; He counts that along with the dung. The inside, in the inner man, worked by Him in the hidden places, born of inward wrestling are the offerings of a sweet and pleasing savor before God. We have been guilty as contemporary Christians of offering our personalities, our winsomeness and our fleshly abilities to God, simply because we do not have the inward parts to offer, never having learned to rest or wait before God. We have despised the suffering, reproach and obscurity in which alone the sweet offerings are formed deep within us. We have not esteemed such things as God esteems them, and have preferred to do without them. We need the obedience and vision that will enable us to take our hide and flesh outside the camp, and to exclude it from the holy place, as well as from the pulpit.

You cannot tell where the priest ends and the sacrifice begins, for the priest and the sacrifice are one. And the priest that is a priest indeed, and who himself is a sacrifice, is one who has got 'fat,' an accumulation or residue, or the inward workings of God in the hidden place. He knows God in the hidden place behind the veil of circumstances and outward feelings. God has dealt with him in ways that cannot be explained to men, ways that are scandalous, and that men look upon as reproach, ways that leave one utterly alone to suffer and endure. They are humiliations, things that God has wrought in you in the stillness and the quiet, things that are calculated to bring you to Him. Few have opened themselves to God for that dealing in that inner place, where something can be built up of a sweet savor. Most of us are protective, and we do not allow God or anyone else into that place. We have protected ourselves from the suffering and pain of it, and therefore, our whole life is lived on the outside.

Identification

There was also an identification with the sacrifice, where Aaron and his sons would lay their hands on the heads of the animals. There is something inherent in priesthood in conferring by the laying on of hands, the symbolic identification with something that goes right into the apostolic thing. We see the same principle in Hebrews 2:17,

Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

This corresponds exactly with Aaron and his sons laying their hands upon the animals. It is an identification with the thing that is sacrificed of something that needs to die as a substitute for the sin of man. The priest acknowledged his own sinfulness and the sins of the nation by the laying of the hands on that which is being offered as a substitute for them. It is the same as Job saying, "I abhor myself and I repent in dust and ashes." In other words, he was saying that he needed to go down into death, and that the only place for him, before a holy God, was as a dead man.

This principle of the laying on of hands actually confers something that has come from God, because you have already also identified as a priest with man in his sin, weakness and failings as Jesus Himself did. The whole grit of what it means to be man was the experience of Jesus—that total identification, not just by the laying on of hands, but by being it. This is not an academic consideration of the novelty and esoteric practices of Old Testament priesthood, but God rubbing our faces into the grit and reality of what must be attached to apostolic,

namely, the priestly. The priestly is steeped in blood, gore and sacrifice, right up to our elbows—and you have to eat it!

Obedience

Then he (Moses) presented the second ram, the ram of ordination; and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram. And Moses slaughtered it and took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot. (Leviticus 8:22–23)

"Hear, O Israel!" is the beginning of all of the commandments of God. Hearing is obeying, and obeying is doing. From the ear to the hand, from the hearing to the doing, there must be an unhindered response. Until God has the whole of us in every kind of act, however much it contradicts our natural disposition, then He does not yet have a priest. Blood on the toe suggests Divine control over the direction of our lives. Until we are prepared to remain in those tedious and demanding situations in which God has placed us, then the blood of consecration is not upon our toe. Our 'goings' as well as our 'remainings' have got to proceed out of a death to everything other than the word of the Lord.

How many of us predicate our decisions on mere logic, rather than being led by the Spirit of the Living God? I am not opposed to logic or practicality, as long as it is God's logic and His practicality, and as long as it is not at the expense of hearing the voice of the Spirit. We are entirely capable of drawing reasonable conclusions about how this or that will aid in God's service, or how it will further His interests, without ever having heard from Him concerning His intentions. How many true works of God have been brought forth prematurely, or stillborn and dead, because something in us was still untouched by the blood of sacrifice? We cannot enter into the high, heavenly calling without the oil and the blood. We cannot meet its demands in our own self. We can only come in the power of Another Life. When we have become discontent with everything less, when we have staggered and reeled before the demands of this calling, then we come to see that to enter into this priesthood, we must enter into the High Priest Himself. The book of Hebrews brings us to the reality of which the Levitical priesthood was but a type and a shadow. There is a higher order of priesthood, more sublime, more exalted and more demanding—the order of Melchizedek, the king of righteousness and peace.

Most of us have a rather glamorous notion of what a priest of God is; a notion derived from our own humanity, born of the earth instead of imparted from heaven. The carnality of our understanding is reflected in our discomfort over, and lack of comprehension of, these Levitical requirements. Sadly, it is reflected also in our conduct and ministry in God's house, where there is little evidence of the purging and consecration, the very thing which God requires to produce administration that is heavenly.

Waiting in Silence

After all of these sacrifices had been made for the consecration of the priests, there was yet one last thing,

"At the doorway of the tent of meeting, moreover, you shall remain day and night for seven days, and keep the charge of the Lord, that you may not die, for so I have been commanded." Thus Aaron and his sons did all the things which the Lord had commanded through Moses. (Leviticus 8:35–36)

There is something so human in us that is adept at producing schools of discipleship to process men in three months, and send them out to change the world. Where is the waiting? There is a human itch, where the last refuge of self hides, ostensibly in doing the work of God, but that corrupts it from being a pure and priestly work. It is not, and can never be, a work of eternal consequence. That final waiting somehow brings the death to that last thing. We are not to rush out and do our 'ministry.' There is a season of waiting that is an ultimate waiting. Seven is the number of completion. One can do a lot of 'good' things, but the ultimate things, the priestly things, the apostolic things, require waiting seven days at the door of the tent of the congregation. A lot of us have fallen short at this one place, and have allowed the cutting and shedding, but we have rushed out prematurely without first waiting for the last processes of God to take place.

The book of Acts, Chapter 13, commences with a group of people ministering unto the Lord. In that mode of

being, the Holy Spirit could say, "Set apart for Me Barnabbas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." These men were set apart, or consecrated, in a separation of such an ultimate kind that they would have been just as content to remain in the place of worship at Antioch as to be sent into the purposes of God. They had come to a place of death to themselves, even the religious desire to serve God, and to see fruit, and to be used, that it was all the same to remain as to go. It was a separation from the deepest and most subtle elements of ambition that hide themselves in the last place in which they can find refuge, namely, a religious and spiritual ambition to do for God.

God has said that we will 'die' if we go before the time, and untold numbers have done that, and died—a short spurt, a little flurry of activity and recognition, and then lost to obscurity. The seven days of waiting is the final death to that last impulse to do for God, and to be found doing. When we have passed those seven days, then we are safe to minister in a priestly way for God, free from any consideration of the effect and benefit for ourselves. If there is something in us that wants to be heard, then our service is not priestly. We are a generation that is so ministry-minded, so doing-oriented that we have no concept for, and no disposition to see, the extraordinary investment that God requires in the preparation of His servants. God sets His premium on what we are, not what we do. If the doing does not flow from the being, then it is not apostolic.

The church at large more or less sees priestly service as little more than a performance for which they are paying, and so they are getting just what they are paying for: cheap, shallow, unheavenly services. They may be scripturally correct, but they are unable to transform life. People have not been brought to a heavenly place. The aura of heavenliness, and the fragrance that is about the Throne have not been breathed because we have not been disposed to wait before God in silence. Even Sunday services have been so structured for the optimum convenience of men, sufficient to allow us a time to sleep in, and to get it over with, and yet not too much so as to ruin the day. We leave a sufficient leisure available for the football game, or whatever our good pleasure is. We need to see modern Christianity as the religion of convenience, contrary to the whole priestly demeanor. We become easily distracted, edgy, itchy and impatient. We reflect the spirit and temper of the world by our inability to wait in silence.

It is not a man, or a bull, but we who are being laid on the altar. In waiting, every fleshly thing, every human contrivance and device, every desire to perform and win some glory for ourselves, every lazy, fearful tendency to take the easy and cheap way out, rises to the surface. It is a kind of mind battle when one really sets oneself to wait. Thoughts come to mind of the things that need to be done and how the time should really be employed. To be able to dismiss that, and bring our minds to a place of rest in God, free from distracting thoughts, is no small thing. We are not going to come to that readily, but through a process of time and experience in waiting, in order to bring our minds into subjection to Christ, and not allow ourselves to be influenced by every stray thought.

All this needs to be brought to the altar, to be hacked and cut up, and the lifeblood allowed to spurt out until it dies there, a spiritual sacrifice before God. There is really no mystery as to why we care so little to wait upon God. We have even less inclination for the making of this sort of sacrifice than we have for the butchery required of the Levites. We find such spiritual 'blood-letting' repugnant, such self-revelation too embarrassing and painful. We are too offended by such a requirement, too ready to deem it absurd, outdated, unloving, and wasteful.

The disciples once asked Jesus, "To what purpose is this waste?" They were referring to the woman who smashed the expensive alabaster box, and Jesus told them not to bother her for she had done a good work. It was the only time in the gospels that Jesus ever acknowledged anything done by man as being a good work. Her work was not only good, but whosoever the gospel was going to be proclaimed in the world, that which the woman had done would be spoken of as a memorial to her. It was an extravagant acknowledgment of the uniqueness of what she had performed. Yet the very same act in the sight of the disciples moved them to indignation at the waste.

Waiting is not entered into in the hope of some breakthrough. Rather, God is God, and He deserves that acknowledgment. We are not to wait expecting some consequence to our waiting, because waiting that has strings attached, even spiritual strings attached, and that hopes for blessing, is not true priestly waiting. Waiting is only waiting when we ask nothing, desire nothing, and expect nothing. We make no claims, we are not requiring, we are His creation and He is the Creator. That is priestliness.

The needs are everywhere about us, crying out for our attention. Only a priestly 'Son of God' could have waited two days longer where He (Jesus) was on hearing that His friend Lazarus, whom He loved, was sick unto death. This is the heart of true priestliness. There was no deferring to the flesh, sentiment, and human need or to the

expectation of men, but to the Father alone. True waiting is a sweeter smelling savor to the Lord than even the sacrifice and the burning, all the more when one has to suffer the reproach for it by those who are activists and say to you, "Well, what are you doing?" And you cannot answer them a word!

In our doing for God, it is possible to be secretly, or even unconsciously, obtaining something for ourselves that therefore dismisses it from being priestly. Pure priestly ministry does not bring to the minister anything for himself. It is totally and exclusively unto God. Paul often writes, "For your sake" and "For God's sake" but never for Paul's sake. Paul is an example of New Testament priestliness, and he would not, therefore, withhold bringing the whole purpose and counsel of God. He did not consider whether it would be approved, whether men liked it, how they would react, or even whether it was appropriate. A priest is utterly selfless, not having any regard for himself.

It is costly, but ultimately glorious, to wait the full seven days upon God. We need to come to this priestly place, and the reality of it, having known such waiting. Should God require action or activity, then it must always flow out of the place of waiting. Waiting has become so structured into the priestly life, that even the acts of God that issue from us, when they are required, still come out of that rest. I am persuaded that the greatest exploits of the Last Days will come out of the rest of God, from those who know that rest, and who, by the wastefulness of finding time for it, make it a habitual aspect of their priestly life.

Waiting inaugurates the priestly ministry, but it is not the end of it. Waiting needs to be characteristic of our whole mind-set and disposition before God, not only for the time of ministry, but even in the process of ministry. Can you believe that one can be waiting, even in the midst of speaking? While you are speaking, you are waiting on God for the next statement. It is a remarkable disposition of an inward kind, even while one is active. This kind of waiting is virtually unknown to modern consideration, but needs to be restored. There is a conjunction between the willingness and the ability to be unseen and unheard, and to wait, that has everything to do with the power, the glory and the authority that is exhibited when we are called to be employed. One never knows when that calling will come, or even if it will come, but one has got to come to a priestly place where it makes no difference. To wait on God silently is as much to render Him priestly service as to go and speak, and only priestly service is effectual service.

This human thing, this taint that finds expression in witness and ministry, however compatible it might be with 'good' meetings, prevents and forestalls the experience of the glory of God falling in fire from heaven. Being jealous for the glory of God, and the fire from heaven, is an incentive for waiting. If our motive is only success, good messages and good services, then we will not have the stamina and incentive for that final waiting, which is the necessary death that must precede the falling of the fire. The falling of the fire may express itself in a holy hush before God, a moment of such a kind that you virtually stop breathing. God is there! And we need much more of that, and God wants us to have much more of that, not because we are 'glory seekers' in the sense that our flesh wants to be titillated, but that the whole earth should be filled with His glory. His glory is the testimony of Himself, which we ourselves often prohibit and preclude by our own religious and ministerial actions, because we do not know and are not disposed to wait. Men can conduct successful religion, but only priestly ministry can bring down fire from heaven, the glory of God. The glory of God and the fire of God are equally attached to and exclusive to priestly ministrations. Glory is lacking in God's house, and it is glory that ignites and empowers the word, and transforms doctrine and mere religious services into life-changing conviction and heavenly events.

True Blessing

After the last sacrifice, and after the last waiting, and after the last waving of the sacrifice then,

... Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them ... (Leviticus 9:22a)

Can you imagine what those hands looked like? They were steeped and impregnated with blood and gore, right into the fingernails and every pore. He would have looked more like a butcher than a priest. At the incident of the fashioning of a golden calf, God asked the people of Israel which of them would be on the Lord's side, and it was the Levites who separated themselves from the rest of the profaned Israelites, and came to Moses, thereby standing on the Lord's side. They were then required to put their swords on, and go in and out of the camp, and every man was to slay his friend, his father and his neighbor. By this act the priests were consecrated to God, and in fact, the word 'consecrated' means 'hands full of blood.'

So here is Aaron lifting up his hands to bless the people. Only priests can raise holy hands above men and command blessing from heaven. Only the priest has the authority, only he has been in the presence of the Most High. One of the reasons why our attempts at blessing do not convey a blessing is because they are not priestly, and they are not priestly because they are not bloody. It did not cost anything, there was no sacrifice. It was easy and facile, the mere intonation of words that speak of blessing but do not constitute blessing. It was not a hand that has been dipped in blood. A priest is not a priest if he cannot pronounce blessing, and what is his blessing if it is only a mere verbalization without bringing the palpable blessing in fact?

In fact, there has been no word more cheapened than the word blessing—Bless you brother, bless you sister ... bless the Lord, etc. It has been spoken and used as a 'fill-in,' and something good sounding to punctuate the silence. We need, therefore, to contend for, and bring back from the dead, this word 'bless.' It has become a pitiful cliché by people who do not even expect that something is going to be conferred by the speaking of the word. True blessing is a priestly benediction that performs something. Something of a palpable and substantive kind is transmitted. It is something manifest from heaven brought into the deeps of men, and blessedness is experienced, the absence of which is known by the word, curse.

The Glory of God

... and he stepped down after making the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting. When they came out and blessed the people, the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. Then fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces. (Leviticus 9:22b–24)

Everything had been done according as it was commanded, and then God Himself ignited the sacrifice supernaturally. It is interesting that the seventh day of waiting results in the eighth day of release. The number eight represents the resurrection life and power. Seven days of complete death and the eighth day of the power, which is the life of God Himself.

If we have not seen that glory, it is because we have not fulfilled all that the Lord commanded us to do. If there is any single distinctive that is at the heart of apostolic, it is the singular jealousy for the glory of God. That is what makes us fools for Christ's sake, namely, a faith that believes for that glory, and a jealousy for the demonstration of that glory. To have any lesser criterion for success is to rob God's people, and to frustrate the Lord Himself, and to fixate us at a lesser level. When the glory of God appears, then the Lord appears, for the Lord is His glory. It is this appearance that the church so desperately needs. His glory is not some ethereal thing, but a substantive phenomenon that can be seen and experienced. We have lived so long without it that we are satisfied merely with the phrase about it without any real expectation for it. "To Him be the glory in the church ..." is Paul's summation of the church in Ephesians 3:21a. There has got to be glory in the church, or it simply is not the church, and it has failed in its purpose. If glory does not come through the church, then it does not come at all, and if it is not in the church, then how shall it be communicated anywhere in the world?

... and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces. (v 24b)

This is the effect of the appearing of the glory of God on men, despite their resistance, self-will and shallowness. Your face is what you are. Everything came down before God when they saw that. And that alone is true blessedness. There was none of that 'Amen' and 'Hallelujah' stuff that punctuates our charismatic services, but a prostration that is so profound and so utter that when you rise from that, you never rise in the same way in which you went down. All of your seeing, your whole perspective, all of your reckoning, valuing and plans are affected by that going down. You cannot again go on as before. That is what happens when you fall before the demonstration of the glory of God. The God of Moses and Aaron is God still, and if He will have a priestly people on the earth as consecrated as were Aaron and his sons, then that glory will again fall.

The priests were to teach the people the difference between the profane and the sacred. How then as the Body of Christ can we manifest this distinction to the world? How can we perform priestly ministry with such discernment when a priestly reality is absent from our own lives? Perhaps we have neglected to ascend the holy mount, or have lost all desire for transfiguration glory. We have not recognized that there is a holy place where one stands alone in the presence of God, ministering first to Him. We have grown content to remain

outside the tent of meeting where our religious activity has become a kind of entertainment, technically correct, but devoid of glory, devoid of the fragrance of heaven and devoid of priestly ministry.

Jesus Himself came out of the holy place with God, and so must every minister who aspires to be priestly. The brashness, the metallic ring, and the human, earthly atmosphere of so much ministry is sure evidence that men have not waited in the holy place, or even recognize that there is such a place to which God is calling them, and which awaits them. Our voices, like our faces, are a trademark and a statement of a consistent relationship with the God of all grace. They indicate in an unmistakable way the truth and depth of a believer's relationship with his God. When that radiance comes, the irony is that we will not even know it! We will have come to a total unselfconsciousness about ourselves, that we will not even be aware that we are shining. This radiance is obtained in one place only, namely, the priestly place, a place of waiting in the presence of God by those who believe that there is such a place, and have the faith to enter it, and live and move and have their being from that place. Then the world will know the difference between the sacred and the profane.

There has been a failure of the priestly ministry to be expressed in our midst that we have lost even the desire to experience the glory of God. We have grown content with so little, content with merely 'good' meetings and expecting no more. An expectation must first be rekindled in us, an expectation that the glory of God can actually fall from heaven like fire—men brought down on their faces, awe, gasps, hands clasped over mouths and deep breakings. If we desire this result for the wrong reasons, then we can forget of ever seeing it. Those of us who desire to see people coming down in great prostration can even secretly desire it for their own self-glorification: "Look what my preaching has obtained!" How many of us, who stand behind the pulpit, have in the back of our minds that we are the ones who are going to score a home run? How much of that is unconscious, yet nevertheless there? We want to see the glory of God, but we want to see it for our glorification, and therefore we do not see it. It is an abomination, and we are cheating people from God's glory because such subtleties of self still inhere in our carnal ministerial hearts. When we seek to frame a message in order to impress our audience, then that is the end of the message^{3/4}it is no longer a priestly word.

As the Priest, so also the People

This is one of the reasons why we need each other. There is no man, however pure his priestly desire, who will not one day slip into some admixture and some desire for personal glorification if he is not in some kind of daily relationship with others, who will detect the first signs of it, and call it to his attention. We cannot maintain this priestly-ministry jealousy alone. It was Aaron and his sons. The whole congregation of Israel was assembled to witness the consecration of Aaron and his sons, because all were intimately involved and profoundly connected. The priest was not just a religious functionary who received payment for services rendered. There was a vital link. As the priest, so also the people. We see in Israel's history the decline of the priesthood, the loss of their purpose, their becoming a professional class and the final horror is what Caiaphas became as the tormentor and persecutor of Jesus. We see how even that high calling can go so low. It was a statement of Israel itself. When the priests have come to that place, then the nation is also in that place. If you want to study the history of Israel, then study the history of its priesthood.

When Israel's priestly class was full of zeal and had a heavenly respect for its calling, then Israel was at its zenith. When they began to be seduced away, and were attracted to the Hellenistic culture that was then sweeping the world, and which was the exaltation of man, then Israel declined and ultimately collapsed. The same could be said of the church at large today. We, too, are somewhat embarrassed and offended by the cutting and bloodshed that is inseparable from priestly ministry. We too are swept up in the culture of our day, finding the entertainment, the methods, the psychology, and the wisdom of our age more enlightened and engrossing than the crude insistence on radical purging and cleansing. We have turned away from the priestly thing of sacrifice and blood. It is another way of saying that we have turned away from 'the offense of the Cross.'

We have become smooth professionals and especially this generation. There are so many young men in places, not only of ministry and influence, but supreme places. They are barely into their thirties, and yet they have congregations of thousands of souls. They are whiz-kid successes, with all the 'know how,' and on those rare occasions when I glimpse them on someone's television set, my stomach is sickened. It is so glib, unctuous and professional, because the seeking of God, the blood, and the waiting are unknown to ministers of that kind. Too many of our ministers are coming to resemble modern Rabbis more than biblical priests, and therefore too many of our congregations are coming to resemble merely amiable, religious assemblies, rather than the

peculiar people of God. We do not stand out, because we intuitively know that it would invite repercussion upon ourselves. We are too much like the world, because so also are our ministers. They themselves are the pictures of worldly accomplishment, in the way they dress, their rings, bracelets, and glitter, showing that the world has swept in.

God has, however, established His order. The outer layers, passable in the world, must be stripped off. The Word must wash our nakedness. Then the priestly garments are put on, one by one, in prescribed order, and there was to be only the linen of righteousness—no wool, for God's priests shall not sweat. They went up on a ramp, not on steps. They did not dare lift their legs to the next step lest any flesh be glimpsed. No flesh was to stand in His presence, and no sweat, both the statements of religious, human exertion, rather than the priestly ministry that comes out of the rest of God. With all the hacking, all the slaying, all the blood letting, one would think they would be drenched with sweat. But when we will do the prescribed thing given by God, in an exacting obedience by the Life of God, it will not be done with sweat. The fact that our Sundays are so sweaty is a testimony to the fact that they are no longer priestly. One of the great ironies of our time is that more sweat is exuded on Sundays than any other day of the week. There is more feverishness, more anxiety, more apprehension and nervous exhaustion, more fleshly exertion to produce successful religion than we care to acknowledge. If we were more jealous for His glory than our own honor and reputation, then we would not sweat so much. The sweating shows that there is something in it for us, that is to say, we do not want to take the risk of failing before God's people.

To be priestly is to be untainted by human fretting, human contrivance and human exertion. There is something in all of the laborious requirements, the sacrifices and sprinklings, so immersed in blood and gore from finger tips to elbows, that precludes there being anything of themselves left to perform something priestly. This is the heart of the mystery of priesthood. It must be performed in the power of His everlasting life, not in some makeshift pumping up of ourselves into some image of what we think priestly ministry ought to be. God's priests were so enervated, devastated, and exhausted of all bravado and self-assurance, and so filled with the understanding of the holiness of the things that were set before them, that they could not even begin to presume to initiate, or to do anything out of their own humanity.

The Call to Priesthood

We have fallen so far from the sense of priestliness that we consider service to men to be the highest expression we can, or need to attain to. We regard the sweat of our exertions in that service as evidence of our approval, but God sees it otherwise. The heavenly priest comes out from the holiest place, out from waiting upon God, out from being emptied from all his own good ideas, good intentions and methods. He lets go of his own order of service, his own message, his own selection of songs, and comes forth with that which is given by God. We need to see more of such people, willing to forsake their own intentions.

There seems to be a conspiracy, a calculated campaign, to drive the consciousness of priesthood from the church. We are inundated with sound and noise, multimedia displays, concerts—the sensual ear and eye thing—that not only has to be heard, it has also to be felt. In that milieu, God is yet calling us to be the priests of the holy place. If our speaking has anything to do with the releasing of the word of God from heaven, then it can only come from having heard what He has commanded us to bring in the holiest place of all, which is a place of silence.

Ironically, when one such minister comes, who has waited in the place of silence, we are not always happy over him. We are intimidated because we thought we had it all together. We saw ourselves as well-meaning and industrious elders, who were able to quote the Scriptures, and had a firm grasp on the doctrines of the faith, and knew how to counsel men. Then comes a visitor from heaven, a priest of God, and we are devastated. He brings an aura, a fragrance, and a spirit that challenges us and reveals us to ourselves. All of a sudden, we feel earthbound, heavy and all too human. We recognize that so much of what we had been doing and saying had become old, earthbound and stale.

We need more invasions from heaven, and priests who will come and minister before men only after they had first ministered to God in the holy place. We need priestly ministry, ministry from men who have first made sacrifice for themselves, who have first offered up their flesh, their own ambitions, their own vanity, and self-deceit, their own fear and greed and man-pleasing. We need men who have a heart to endure the 'wearisome' requirements of God, and who will submit to the painful dealings. We need men who are prepared

to see blood spurt, and wounded flesh writhe and kick and gasp for breath. We need men who will stand steadfast and immovable, who will let death be worked in them to the end, who are willing to suffer the reproach and embarrassment of inner parts being exposed. Such men are rare. They are God's priests, who alone are qualified to wield God's sword, sanctified by blood. They alone have the disposition and utter fearlessness required to cut into the flesh of God's people, and to expose the inward hidden parts of our being, to wound flesh and let its lifeblood flow out.

The Melchizedek Priesthood

Though these Levitical practices are no longer required, the truth of them yet is. We need to have our understanding altered, because God says of His Son:

Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 5:6b)

It is a new order, not the Aaronic order, which has passed away. The old priestly order is dispersed and lost. The new order is, in fact, older than the Aaronic order. When Abraham came back from defeating the kings of Sodom, he met a mystical figure, and gave him a tenth of all that he had. He deferred to him, for the lesser is blessed of the greater. This high priest served him bread and wine, and his name was Melchizedek. It was an Old Testament glimpse, a pre-incarnate flash of what is to be the abiding and eternal glory of the Son of Man, who abides a priest forever. Abraham, great man of faith that he was, recognized the authority and superiority of that priesthood. It precedes even the establishment of the Aaronic order, which was only itself a shadow of the greater thing to come.

Not only is there a connection between apostolic and priesthood, but there is also a connection between sons and priests. This mysterious high priest, this Melchizedek, is not descended from the genealogy of Aaron, but a king of righteousness and peace, of whom it says in the Scriptures:

Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually. (Hebrews 7:3)

It is a remarkable antithesis to the earlier priesthood, which was exactly opposite to this. The Melchizedek order is above culture, time and nationality. It is without beginning of days or ending of life. In fact, anything earthly contradicts it. The Aaronic priesthood required genealogy, ancestry and earthly identification. The new resembles the Son of God, a priest without interruption and who abides eternally. What is the source of His animation, His energy and His life? God has called us to be such a people in order to fulfill His eternal purpose, and be the agency for a Kingdom that is to come. What kind of priesthood is this? It is something other than a professional, ministerial posture that is so rampant everywhere. This is true priesthood, a priesthood without interruption. Are we jealous to be this kind of a priest? This priesthood is equally incumbent and required of us, not on the basis of natural qualification, but in exact proportion as we are above time, culture and nationality, without mother or father or ancestry, without beginning of days or ending of life. It is to be performed in a continual flow, out from the Throne of God Himself, on the basis of the power of an endless and indestructible life.

The higher and truer identity is the one in God that abides as a priest forever. It will take a wrenching, because how will your father and mother like it? To renounce your physical identification will be a slap in their face. You have to be cut off from those things that want to obsess you and establish your identification in earthly terms. It is part of the price, and one cannot explain it to men. "Who is My mother?" said Jesus, in reply to being told that His mother and brothers were waiting outside. By an earthly evaluation that sounds cruel, but that is because we have not entered into His priestliness, and have not understood the profound detachment that a priest must have from every fleshly connection here on earth. Ironically, we will never be a better son or daughter than when we will come to this priestly detachment. There is a whole sickly, soulish involvement of life between parents and children, where they live off each other in a 'vampiry' type of bloodsucking relationship.

We need to come to an identity beyond what we are in the earthly and natural way, and yet not to diffuse or eliminate male nor female, Jew nor Gentile. Satan's ploy is to obscure and eliminate the distinctions that God counts very important. It is not that they should be abolished, but that something transcendent comes out of the union of these distinct entities that creates a 'new man.' It is a strange paradox of being a Jew or a Gentile,

a male or female, and not annulling that obvious thing, but esteeming it as from the God who gave it for His own purposes. And yet, we are not to celebrate it in a way that forms a kind of membrane between ourselves and those who are not like us. Wherever time, culture, ethnic, earthly and temporal factors are invoked, consciously or unconsciously, we move out of that priestliness, and we forfeit the New Testament priestly ground, and its power. A priest is detached from racial, ethnic and cultural lines as well as from time and place. He is one who occupies the heavens with God. He is not at all affected or limited by present, contemporary culture. Standing above it, he is transcendent, and therefore he is relevant everywhere, and at any time.

Abraham obeyed the call of God to come out of Ur of the Chaldees only after his father died. There was a delay in the city of Haran, where he did not hearken to the call of God, which was to get out of nation, kindred and father's house, and to follow the Lord into the land that was to be shown him. He collected much substance and many souls in Haran, but it was not the place of blessedness. How many Charismatic, Pentecostal and Evangelical saints are in that place today? How many have misconstrued substance and souls as if it constitutes blessedness? It does not. You are in a place of delay, still attached to flesh, still attached to kindred and father's house, and you have not come out to begin the priestly walk where true blessedness begins.

If you want to operate from that lesser place, one can, but it will not be priestly. You come into this calling because you have come into the Son, who is the King of Righteousness as well as the King of Peace, the High Priest of God. If you are in the Son of Man by virtue of joining Him in His death by the power of the Cross, through baptism, you are also with Him abiding as a priest continually. You are in the Melchizedek priesthood in exact proportion as you are abiding in the Son, no more and no less. It has nothing to do with natural factors, but only with resurrection life, a life offered in sacrifice and raised up in glory. We are brought to a transcendent place of identification with Him by which every natural, racial, religious, ethnic and other distinction is transcended.

And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of a physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. (Hebrews 7:15–16)

It is the same life, bursting forth out of death in resplendent glory, and now available to everyone who will give it opportunity to be expressed^{3/4}out of their own death. It is the foundation of the royal priesthood and the community of God. This kind of priesthood, that is uninterrupted and that resembles the Son of God, needs also to have as its foundation and source the endless and indestructible life of the Son. We are not going to play at being priests by building on the strength of our own expertise, ability, knowledge, religious cleverness, and even our own well-meaning intention. The Melchizedek priesthood is not based on the inheritance that is come by blood and ancestry. It is based on the inheritance that has come by the blood of the Lamb, to those who have entered into the Life of that Blood and have put aside their own, that they might express, through that Blood and through that Life, these priestly things.

It is my conviction that the issue of the resurrection is going to be the fiercest end-time issue for the people of God. It is going to be the plumb line of God that separates the false church from the true. The false church will, no doubt, applaud the doctrine of the resurrection; but they will refuse to live in it, and by it. That shall be the great divide, between those who have mere verbal profession, and those who are in the Life.

Seated in Heaven

Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all(Hebrews 8:4a)

In other words, He is in another dimension, namely, the heavenly place. Anything less than that would invalidate His priestliness. He has His true existence and reality in the heavenly sanctuary. If He dwelt on the earth, which is to say, if His values and mind-set were earthly, then He would not be a Priest at all. God intended that those made in His image would live in the reality of heaven, even while on the earth. They are on it but they do not dwell in it. When the smoke clears at the very end of the age, in the eschatological climax, there will only be two species of mankind to be found on earth, and it has nothing to do with race, but with earth or heaven. Those who dwell in the earth, whose hearts fail them for fear of the things that shall be coming upon the earth^{3/4}for that is all they know and all they look for and expect. All of their values are established in it. They are earthlings^{3/4}and the other group are those who dwell in heaven. They may be on the earth, but it is not their place of habitation. Earth is not where they reside, but the place where they serve. Most of us as Christians are

earthlings, moored in the earth, so bound by its gravitational tug, so connected by soulful ties of affection and investment in the earth. It will take a wrench of soul to ascend up into the heavenly place.

The Holy of Holies

Only the High Priest could come before God in the holiest place of all. God has eternally fixed it that way. Therefore, in Exodus 25, it is interesting to read the description of the holiest place. God gives it to us in extraordinary detail. We know that the Tabernacle of God, like the Temple that came later, has the same essential architectural pattern and outer court. It was open to the daylight without any covering. The place of entry is the bronze altar for sacrifice and the basin for washing, symbolic of our entry into the house of God through the atonement of the Blood of the Lamb. As we then proceed further, there is a second court, covered by skins, and there is a veil through which the priests daily entered. There were not as many as trafficked in the first court, in the heavy labor of sacrifice and fire and slaughter. Only those priests whose function it was to light, both morning and night, the holy altar of incense, and to place the shewbread on the table of the Lord, went into this second court. It was a room that was shut off from the natural daylight. It received its illumination from a seven-branched candlestick, a much brighter light, not subject to the variables of the natural elements of weather and sunlight. It was light of a kind, but there is yet a final and an ultimate place, and few there be that have entered there. It is the holiest place of all! The Holy of Holies, and there is no daily traffic there. There was only one who could enter there in the course of an entire year, and only then on the basis of the blood of a pure sacrifice. There was no seven-branched candlestick, and yet it was the brightest and most glorious light of all. It is the Shekinah glory of God Himself. It is His Presence, above the mercy seat and over the ark of the Law.

And you shall make a mercy seat of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide. And you shall make two cherubim of gold, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat. And make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim of one piece with the mercy seat at its two ends. And the cherubim shall have their wings spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings and facing one another; the faces of the cherubim are to be turned toward the mercy seat. And you shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I shall give to you. And there I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel. (Exodus 25:17–22)

Perhaps some of us are already emitting a groan as we become increasingly conscious of the magnitude of what this apostolic and priestly calling is. How do we move from an institutional age toward the restoration of apostolic glory in the church? How do we communicate the dimension of things that have been lost in our modern church experience? How are we to restore the sense of urgency and imminence of the things that shall shortly come to pass? How shall we warn our generation that God has appointed a Day in which He will judge all nations by Him whom He has raised from the dead? How are we to be fitted for such apostolic confrontation? Where is our courage, our boldness, our understanding, and our sensitivity? We need to thread our way through all these painful adjustments, and turn from the power of tradition, the established and institutional ways of men, in order to come to the formation of this living church in its prophetic witness. Where are we to find our answers?

And there I will meet with you ... and speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel. (v 22)

This is the alternative to becoming mere technicians and adopting yet another brittle phraseology. God bids us come into the holiest place of all, the high-priestly place, that is open to those who come in the form of the Son of God, without father or mother, or beginning or ending of days. It is the source of the indestructible life, a source of inspiration and anointing, of words that He will give us, if indeed we desire to fulfill the mandate of God. There is a holy place beyond, and there is an entry within that veil by the Holy Spirit, symbolized by the burning incense on the altar that continually ascends up to God. There is a seeing in a much brighter light new things beyond the initial issue of salvation to the more serious and purposeful things of God. It is a deeper place that admits only 'high priests.' We will never glimpse the things apostolic and true except in this light. We will never fulfill the apostolic mandate except it be by the words that are given with inspiration, and that are communicat