

23 Salvation - Other priests?

In the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches and in the Church of England and other Anglican churches, the priest is a member of the sacerdotal ministry. ... The Mormons recognize both a high priesthood and a lower one. Most Protestant churches acknowledge no specific priesthood. They believe in the universal priesthood of all believers and do not recognize the need for a mediator between themselves and God. The priesthood has traditionally been restricted to men, but in recent years women have been ordained as priests within the Anglican Communion. ... The priestly function continues to be important in modern-day Shinto, Buddhism, and Hinduism.



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In most of Christendom priests are appointed who are regarded as representing the Lord Jesus. In the Church of England, in the service for the ordination of priests, the bishop places his hands on the head of those being ordained and says the following words:



Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained.

The Ordering of Priests, Church of England Book of Common Prayer

The Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church says this of its ministers:

But 'the members do not all have the same function.' Certain members are called by God, in and through the Church, to a special service of the community. These servants are chosen and consecrated by the sacrament of Holy Orders, by which the Holy Spirit enables them to act in the person of Christ the head, for the service of all the members of the Church. The ordained minister is, as it were, an 'icon' of Christ the priest.



'Celebrating the Church's Liturgy' from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

What do these quotations tell you about the role of priests today?

Priests in the New Testament

If you have access to a concordance, you may like to look at the references to priests in the New Testament. You will notice that nearly all refer to the Jewish priests, although in the epistles there are several verses that refer to the Lord Jesus.

There are some which refer to members of the church. Look at 1 Peter 2:3,9; Revelation 1:5-6; Revelation 5:9-10. Who are these passages talking about?



The New Testament, in some translations at least, does talk about bishops, and it is worth looking to see what is said about them. There are just four references: Acts 20:28; Philippians 1:1; 1Timothy 3:1-2; Titus 1:7. Looking at the quotations above, how do the priests in the modern churches compare with what the scripture says about bishops?



There are some scriptural references in the quotations above, and it is only fair that we should look at those. The words 'Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven' from the ceremony for ordaining priests, come from John 20:22-23. Matthew 16:17-19 and 18:18 appear to say similar things. Does that justify the modern role of priests?



In the quotation from the Catechism, the phrase 'the members do not all have the same function' comes from Romans 12:4. A more specific passage is Ephesians 4:11, which talks of the differing roles of members of the church. Does this have any real connection with modern priests?