

# The Priesthood

## The Priesthood

### How come the need for a priest?

Ever since, man has a longing and an aspiration towards something higher, a longing for something he can't describe and that he can't find in anything on earth. He is longing to come near to God, to the Almighty, the creator of heaven and earth. How? Where to find Him? And then, when man is to present himself before God, he has an instinctive fear, a fear that he is not as he ought to be in order to abide in His presence.

This fear was first manifested in Adam immediately after he had sinned disobeying God. He had the definite feeling that he was not as he ought to be and that he had to do something in order to be able to present himself before God. He then sewed fig-leaves together and made aprons. Even so, when God came to visit him, he hid, and when God called him: „Where art thou?“ man answered: „I heard thy voice in the garden, and I feared, because I am naked; and I hid myself“ (see Genesis 3). Although he did his best trying to solve his problem, man still felt incapable to stand before God. And this has been going on for thousands of years: man makes extraordinary efforts to prepare himself to come near to God, yet all his efforts are no more effective than those aprons, for he still feels he is not ready and he is still looking for a way to hide, if possible, away from God's sight. What a drama!

Then, seeing that he can't solve his problem by himself, man tries to find someone who may help him. That is what happened when Israel received the law given through Moses: „ all the people saw the thunderings, and the flames, and the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled, and stood afar off and said to Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die“ (Exodus 20.18-19). They had the feeling that they were not right before God and He could not but kill them, and that made them ask for an intercessor between them and God, one that would be a man. Then God made Aaron's family priests. But, being a man, the priest was also a descendent of Adam, and thus had the same sinful nature as any other man and was just as in danger to die when he came near to God. What was then the answer? It was just the same as in the book of Genesis, when for the issue of Adam's nakedness, the Lord „made Adam and his wife coats of skin, and clothed them “(Genesis 3.21). Some animals had to be sacrificed in order to produce those skin coats. And thus, Aaron and his descendents, when consecrated priest, had first to bring sacrifices for themselves, and afterwards, throughout the whole period of their priestly service, had to bring sacrifices both for the people and for themselves (see Leviticus 8-9 and Hebrews 5.1-3).

## **One mediator of God and men**

Still, why did God require sacrifices? For, in Psalm 50, He says: „If I were hungry, I would not tell thee; for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof. Should I eat the flesh of bulls, and drink the blood of goats?” (v. 12-13) The sacrifices are necessary because „the wages of sin is death “ (Romans 6.23). And, then, if man is not to die, another life has to be sacrificed in order to pay that price. And all the sacrifices brought of old were only pointing towards the perfect sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, who has offered Himself once to bear the sins of many (see Hebrews 9.28). Through His unique sacrifice, offered once for all, the Lord Jesus brought in salvation from the judgment that came upon mankind through the sin of the head of the human race. „For the wages of sin is death; but the act of favour of God, eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord “ (Romani 6.23). And the Lord Jesus is the perfect mediator, the priest that man so needed: „But Christ being come high priest of the good things to come, by the better and more perfect tabernacle not made with hand, (that is, not of this creation,) nor by blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, has entered in once for all into the holy of holies, having found an eternal redemption“ (Hebrews 9.11-12).

After Christ gave Himself sacrifice once and for all, bearing the sins of many, if there is to be a class of priests, then those are no longer supposed to bring any sacrifice, for anyone who would think to bring another sacrifice in order to be accepted before God or to make other people acceptable to God, by this he implicitly expresses the thought that Christ’s sacrifice is not perfect and that sinful man can do something good that Jesus, the perfect man, did not do. And this means to despise Him and His work.

In the first epistle to Timothy, the apostle Paul says: „God is one, and the mediator of God and men one, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all, the testimony to be rendered in its own times“ (1 Timothy 2.5). Thus, according to this clear statement of the apostle, in the organization of Christianity there is no place for a special class of priests, unlike in Judaism or in pagan religions, because no sacrifices are to be brought and there is no need for another mediator between men and God.

„Therefore having been justified on the principle of faith, we have peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ“ (Romans 5.1), which makes us no longer feel that we need another mediator.

## **Who do the responsibilities of priesthood fall on now?**

The apostle Peter, addressing to „the sojourners of the dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by sanctification of the Spirit, unto the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ “ (1 Peter 1.1-2) said: „yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up

a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (2.5) and „ye are a chosen race, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a people for a possession, that ye might set forth the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness to his wonderful light" (2.9).

So, Peter speaks clearly concerning a priesthood! And it is remarkable that he says that this priesthood is constituted of all those „sojourners" who are „elect according to the foreknowledge of God ". They are not elected by some kind of democratic elections, nor are they elected by a leader in order to become a special class, a clergy. Peter speaks of all those who have the faith that they are redeemed through the perfect sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. Addressing to all those collectively, Peter said that they are a priesthood.

And those that Peter designated as being a priesthood are by no means superhuman, they do not hover over all the earthly things, above any conflict, tribulation and suffering, but were people who had weaknesses and whom the apostle exhorts to have the „loins of their mind girded" and be „holy in all conversation" and not to be conformed to their „former lusts". They were „sanctified" by election, but had to be also holy in their behavior, as „children of obedience" (see 1 Peter 1.13-16). They had therefore to make efforts to form the habit of obeying God. This corresponds to what the apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Rome: „I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the compassions of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your intelligent service. And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12.1-2).

Thus, according to the apostles, it is possible that a believer who is sanctified by election and calling may still „conform to this world", and his behavior may not be what that a „child of obedience" ought to be. And such a behavior would hinder a believer in fulfilling the priestly responsibilities that result from that priestly position that Peter speaks about. Just as, in the Old Testament, the descendents of Aaron, the priestly family, were forbidden to perform the priestly services when they had a physical defect or they suffered from a disease, nowadays the Lord's believers, who make this priesthood Peter speaks of, can't serve the Lord according to His pleasure if in some respect they are given to the „former lusts". If, in the case of the family of Levi, any defect or disease in the body was not difficult to see and there were no doubts as to the conditions when one of the priests was to be withheld from service, in turn, when it comes to this priesthood that is to be a „spiritual house", the things that make such a priest unable to serve the Lord according to His pleasure pertain to the spiritual realm, and therefore are cannot be perceived by carnal eyes and can be detected only by spiritual persons. This is how it is possible that a believer may continue to do some service that is supposed to be for the Lord, but the service he renders may not please the Lord, and, what is even more grievous is that there may

be no spiritual believers near to him to notice this wrong and to correct it.

## **Cleanness - a necessary condition for the priestly service**

In Leviticus, by touching something unclean according to the standards of the Law, the priest became unclean and was temporarily withheld to perform the priestly services, being able to serve again only after undergoing ritual for his purification. Similarly, when it comes to the priestly service of a Christian, he may be temporarily incapable of fulfilling those duties according to the Lord. But he may be restored. And he is restored only based on the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, according to what the figures in Leviticus indicate: „if the priest that is anointed sin according to the trespass of the people; then for his sin which he hath sinned shall he present a young bullock without blemish to Jehovah for a sin-offering“ (Lev. 4.3). Other spiritual believers may help the restoration of a fallen believer, and therefore the apostle Paul exhorted the Christians in the churches of Galatia: „Brethren, if even a man be taken in some fault, ye who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted“ (Galatians 6.1). And, as to those truly spiritual, they are not characterized by a haughty spirit, looking down with contempt upon the fallen; they are not to behave a teacher towards an unintelligent or rather slothful student, but with meekness and, at the same time, with firmness seeking to bring the fallen one back into the communion of the Lord. And they are throughout the whole process aware that they also can fall, if not in the same manner as the one they are correcting, they can fall in different circumstances. They know that only the grace of the Lord can preserve one from sin, because, through the sinful nature inherited from Adam, as long as they are in this world, they are permanently inclined to fail. The apostle Paul exhorts the believers to have boldness to enter the holies – those places where, according to the ordinances given through Moses, only the priests were to enter – „by the blood of Jesus, the new and living way which he has dedicated for us through the veil, that is, his flesh“ and „approach with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, sprinkled as to our hearts from a wicked conscience, and washed as to our body with pure water“(see Hebrews 10.19-23). The blood of the Lord Jesus, shed once for all, „has perfected in perpetuity the sanctified“ (see Hebrews 10.14), but in order that they may render priestly services in the holies, they have to wash themselves because by walking through this world, even without falling, they get soiled and are no longer in the right condition to serve in the holies. The Hebrew Christians to whom the apostle wrote certainly remembered the washing with the „water of separation“, which was required so that anyone who had touched an „unclean man“ or a dead body would be able to enter the tabernacle. That water was mixed with the ashes of the red heifer, which had been burnt with cedar and hyssop (see Numbers 19). It had to be a heifer that never came under yoke – figure of the Man who never was under the yoke of sin -, and the cedar and hyssop are figures of what is the greatest, respectively the most humble, in mankind: all those had to be consumed by fire. That water of separation is

thus a figure of the Word that tells about the perfect sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, who „once in the consummation of the ages he has been manifested for the putting away of sin by his sacrifice“ (Hebrews 9.26), and, at the same time, for the condemnation of all that comes out of the corrupted nature of fallen man. Thus, only by occupying with the Word of God, the believers may be cleansed from all that they have to deal with during their sojourn in this world, through this „valley of the shadow of death“, - men dead in their offences and sin and manifestations that may only turn them away from God -, so that they may be in the right condition to serve in the holies.

The Hebrews knew that, according to the ordinances given through Moses, „the holies“ were divided into the „holy“ and the „holy of holies“, which were separated by the inner veil. In „the holy of holies“ being the ark, where only the high priest was allowed to enter, and that only in one single day of each year, bringing in the blood of the sacrifice. But, upon the death of the Lord Jesus, the inner veil was torn (see Matthew 27.51), so that there is no longer any division between the two places, which the apostle then designates as „the holies“. Christ entered once and for all into the „holy of holies“, and that with His own blood, opening thus the way for His believers, that way on which the apostle exhorts us to have boldness to enter, but that taking care to cleanse ourselves.

### **Types of priestly services**

Writing about the priesthood of the believers of the Lord Jesus, Peter first mentions „a holy priesthood“, meant „to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ“. This is a service rendered firstly for God, the believers being called to present before God the perfections of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, like, in the Old Testament the sacrificial animals were cut and washed and the „heave offering“ and the „wave offering“ were presented. And in this service the believers have communion with God, their soul feeding upon the One in whom God the Father finds all His delight.

Then, Peter tells about „a kingly priesthood“, one meant to „set forth the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness to his wonderful light“. This has to do with announcing the glad tidings. Thus Peter sets the seal of apostolic approval, and of divine approval, on the work that many believers had already started without having received a formal commandment from the apostles or from some kind of ruling body of the church. That is the work of the believers scattered abroad who „went through the countries announcing the glad tidings of the word“ (see Acts 8.4, 11.19-21), who brought the faith in the Lord Jesus to Samaria, to Galilee, to Antioch and even to Rome (see Acts 28.13-15). It is the work of some believers whose names are not given in Scripture. Most of them have never seen the Lord during His life in flesh on earth, but have taken as for themselves His words: „ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth“, those words that the Lord

Jesus had addressed directly to His first disciples just before He ascended into heaven. Their faith and love towards the Lord made them fulfill His desire, although those words had not been addressed to them directly. If so, should we not also respect this desire of our Lord and preach the gospel? If Peter approves the gospel preaching of those disciples of the Lord whose names are not given (see also Acts 11.22-24 și 15.6-21), does this not mean that the present day believers who preach the gospel out of love for the Lord, without having been appointed by some human organization, would have the same approval?

### **The believers in a world hostile to their Lord**

Performing the priestly services a believer should continually have in mind the Lord's words: „The bondman is not greater than his master. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my word, they will keep also yours. But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they have not known him that sent me“ (John 15.20-21). You will certainly say that the Lord addressed these words directly to His disciples, more exactly to the twelve minus one. But, do they not apply as well to anyone who wishes to serve Him faithfully? If His testimony, that of the perfect man, who was in every respect according to God's will and who did only good has been rejected and those contemporary with Him in His days on earth wanted to get rid of Him once and for all, and therefore they crucified Him, do you then think that a testimony similar to His would be better received by the world? Certainly not, for the Lord's testimony to the world was that its deeds were evil (see John 7.7), and whoever is faithful to Him cannot say that the world is getting better. That is what John said in his epistle: „the whole world lies in the wicked one“ (1 John 5.19) and „if anyone love the world, the love of the Father is not in him “ (1 John 2.15) and „do not wonder, brethren, if the world hate you “ (1 John 3.13) and „even as He is (the Son of God), we also are in this world “ (1 John 4.17). And James, addressing the Christians who were not faithful to the Lord said: „Adulteresses, know ye not that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore is minded to be the friend of the world is constituted enemy of God“ (James 4.4).

Paul, in the first epistle to the Corinthians said that „the world by wisdom has not known God“ (1 Corinthians 1.21) and that „the foolishness of God is wiser than men “ – meaning that what pleases God is regarded by the world as foolishness.

Maybe some will say that the world has changed and that the present day world is not as bad as it was in the days of the apostles. The only thing that has evidently changed is technology, but, spiritually, the world has not changed at all. Does not John say at the very beginning of his gospel: „the light appeared in darkness and darkness understood it not“ (1.5)? Meaning that the Lord Jesus, the light, came into the world, but the world did not understand Him and remained just the same as before.

Otherwise, why is there the popular understanding that „apocalypse“ means „the end of the world “? When, in fact, anyone knowing very little Greek knows that „apocalypse“ means revelation. For that last book of the Scripture begins with: „revelation of Jesus Christ, that God gave Him, to show His bondmen what must shortly take place “... Certainly, even without being of the learnt, reading the Book of Revelation one may see it comprises a number of terrible judgments inflicted by God upon the world and that God will put an end to this world. Why would God put an end to a world that can improve? Whoever believes that the world can improve, whether he does not believe that God will put an end to it, or, if he believes that God will put an end to it, that means he believes that God is evil because He will put an end to something that is improving ... And then, can one who believes any of the two alternatives call himself Christian? Or many say: „that Book of revelation is so full of mysterious imagery that one may never understand it well enough, so better not to occupy with it “. But, beyond the imagery for which several people found some interpretations, which, if not evidently erroneous, are at least debatable – that is interpretations which, even if they are perfectly logical and agree with other parts of Scripture, people may still question them -, this book plainly shows that God has pronounced a sentence upon this world and will put an end to this world as economic, social and political system because it is dominated by the evil one.

### **Intercession for the enemies**

Then, the message addressed to other people by any believer faithful to the Lord Jesus is to be something like Peter’s address at the Pentecost: „Be saved from this perverse generation“ (see Acts 2.40). And it is certain that anyone bearing such a message will not be well received by the world in general.

One may say: „But how does this fit with the word: «For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes on Him may not perish, but have life eternal »? Look how John contradicts himself! In one place he wrote «love not the world », and in another «God loved the world »!“ But, in the verse from the gospel, when the Lord said „God loved the world “, He did not afterwards say „that the world may not perish “, but „that whosoever believes on Him may not perish “. There is by no means a „salvation of the world “, but a salvation of any soul in this world who believes on Him, and the words „God loved the world“ mean that he loved every human being in this world, not that He loved the world with the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem, that decided to kill Him, nor that with Herod, with Pilate and the Caesar. Thus, Paul wrote to the believers in Rome: „but God commends His love to us, in that, we being still sinners, Christ has died for us. Much rather therefore, having been now justified in the power of his blood, we shall be saved by him from wrath. For if, being enemies, we have been reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much rather, having been reconciled, we shall be saved in the power of his life“ (Romans 5.8-10).

The believers, if they are aware how the Lord loved them when He gave His life for them, will feel like „ambassadors for Christ“, who have the duty to exhort those of the world to be reconciled with God by faith in the sacrifice of Christ, who was „made sin for us, that we may become God’s righteousness in Him“ (see 2 Corinthians 5.20-21). Yes, but they are the ambassadors of a king whose kingdom is not of this world now (see John 18.33-38) and whose armies are not seen by the men of this world. Moreover, they are ambassadors who have to transmit from their Lord an ultimatum addressed to the men of this world, which makes them undesirable. When a foreign citizen becomes undesirable, he is then expelled to his country of origin, but where to expulse these undesirable foreigners who testify that they have a Lord in heaven world and that their Lord has pronounced a sentence upon this world? That is why, in the first three centuries after Christ, many true Christians have been martyred. But, as this „kingly priesthood“ yielded much fruit in spite of the persecutions and death of many faithful witnesses, „the ruler of the world“, the one who is liar (see John 8.44, 14.30), set aside for a while the violent means that proved ineffective and intensified his efforts to falsify Christian testimony.

### **Falsifying Christian testimony**

The first attempts to falsify Christian testimony manifested even in the days of the apostles, and we may read about these in Paul’s epistles to the Galatians and Colossians. But, in that age, having a spiritual authority as no others have ever had since then, the apostles defeated those movements. And it is a great grace that the Lord allowed such tendencies to falsify the gospel to be made manifest when the apostles were on earth, for so the believers were provided with clear examples of how to reject any doctrine that would make them deviate from the path of life. Towards the end of his career, addressing the elders of Ephesus, Paul told them: „For I know this, that there will come in amongst you after my departure grievous wolves, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall rise up men speaking perverted things to draw away the disciples after them“ (Acts 20.29-30). That means that those „grievous wolves“ will rise even from the circle of the elders, of the bishops...

And don’t we see that history confirms what Paul said? Yes, the very bishops, through their hypocrisy, made Christianity to be the mocking stuff of the atheists and of other religions.

Yet, how did this happen? There has been an evolution. Those who were trying to Judaize the Christians, against whom Paul so fought (see Acts 15 and Galatians), after the apostle’s departure, had no longer a strong opponent and gained influence in the church. Likewise those who introduced philosophies and reasonings contrary to Scripture (see Colossians). Thus, the church service included the practice of rituals similar to those in Judaism and the teaching of the apostles was seamlessly replaced

with philosophies and reasonings that contained a mixture of Judaism and paganism, the pagan aspects being usually according to the national specifics of the region the local assembly was situated in. The things that were at difference with the doctrine of the apostles gradually became traditions, and those traditions were proclaimed holy. Secular historians have proved skilful in detecting the Jewish and Pagan influences in what is practiced in various churches around the world.

But, except for the words of the apostle Paul, do we find any place in Scripture that tells us how this corruption crept into Christianity? Yes, we have some clues in the book of Revelation, in the second chapter. In the Lord's address to the church of Ephesus we find the positive remark that „thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitanes “, and in the address to the church of Pergamos are mentioned „those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes“. Historians have searched in vain for clues about a sect bearing this name, but, the most rudimentary knowledge of Greek makes things clear enough for whoever is really willing to understand: the word (νικολαιτων) is composed of niko (νικο), which means victory and laos (λαος), which means people. Therefore, it tells about some remarkable persons in the church who have won a victory over the people, over the „laos“, the laity... In the beginning, in Ephesus, which represents the Church at the end of the first century after Christ, and possibly in the second century, those persons who dominated the people were only a few remarkable persons, and they had no systematic doctrine yet, so that in Ephesus are mentioned only the „works of the nicolaitanes“, together with the positive aspect that the assembly hated that kind of works. Later on, in Pergamos, there was already a systematic doctrine, so that we find „the doctrine of nicolaitanes “. And the „nicolaitanes“ got to have their system in the church that dwells „where the throne of Satan is“, that is in the world (who does the gospel of John say the ruler of this world is?)... And Christians gained high positions in the hierarchies of the world after the 313 Edict of Milan, when the Caesar proclaimed holy in Christendom opened wide the way for the corruption of Christendom by the fact that many, seeing that the Caesar had put the signs of Christ on his standard, found it was wise politics to say they were Christians in order to please the Caesar. Since then, Christian religion mixed very much with politics and politics contributed to the greater corruption of Christendom. Those who had ambitions to climb up the social ladder sought to enter the ranks of clergy, that category which was considered, not only by the simple folk, but even by Caesar and the social elites, who also were generally superstitious, as being somehow able to intercede in order to obtain for them the favor of the Almighty. Yes, the Romans who, in paganism, searched the bowels of sacrificial animals to find out what the fate had in store for them - whether the gods will favor them -, got to believe that by the intercession of the clergy they may obtain from the Almighty God help to get what they desired... And then, wasn't becoming a priest one of the surest means of obtaining the favor of the powerful men of the age?

## **Politics that divide or that imposes unity through the use of force**

Still, things evolved both ways, meaning that, on one hand, cunning clergymen have manipulated superstitious nobles, and, on the other hand, nobles who were not so superstitious sought to win in politics by obtaining, for money, the support of unscrupulous clergymen. And this led to „national churches“, which are contrary to Scripture for Paul wrote to the Galatians: „There is no Jew nor Greek; there is no bondman nor freeman; there is no male and female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus: but if ye are of Christ, then ye are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise“ (Galatians 3.28-29). Paul tells thus that the faith in Christ overcomes ethnic and national barriers and places all the believers in a common ground: the one of salvation and of the promises of God, the church, such a ground where there are to be no national differences. And the culmination of the evolution of national churches was reached when the armies of two Christian nations were encouraged, each one by the clergy of its own national church, to fight for God will be on their side to annihilate the other army.

As a reaction to those divisions created by nobles and kings who appointed bishops according to their political interests, the bishop of Rome, the Pope, willing to unite the church under his lead, using bishops if not appointed by him, at least confirmed by him, condemned the sin of „simony“ – the one of selling and buying ecclesiastical dignities like Simon the sorcerer (see Acts 8). But who was in fact condemning „simony“? It was the one who claimed to be the successor of the apostle Peter. Yet, haven't we seen that Scripture does not say that Paul or Peter have designated any successors? Paul said nothing about succession, but about „grievous wolves“ that will come after his departure. And, as we have seen, Peter called all the believers „a holy priesthood“ and „a kingly priesthood“, by this excluding the legitimacy of any special category of believers that would make a clergy... But, if Rome was the ancient capital of the Empire, was it not politically natural for the bishop of Rome to desire pre-eminence? Then, as to Simon the sorcerer, he wanted to use money to gain power, as customary in this world, for his object was power and not serving the Lord. And what else did the bishop of Rome pursue if not political power? Wasn't he then guilty of the same sin that he condemned in others? „Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, every one who judgest, for in that in which thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth upon those who do such things“ (Romans 2.1-2).

Moreover, to the present condition seen in the churches contributed not only the ambitions of some remarkable persons to be part of the special social category of the clergy, but also the fact that many Christians found easier not to take the priestly responsibilities that Peter wrote about, but rather leave the spiritual matters for the „specialists“ to handle, so that, like for shoeing their horse they went to the blacksmith

and for a pair of shoes to the shoemaker, they understood they'd better leave the spiritual matters to the clergy while they would occupy with the matters of the earth – for there were plenty of those. And, now, let's be honest, isn't it somewhat difficult for us, in our daily life, to take literally the exhortation: „ But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you“? (see Matthew 6.25-34)

Certainly, not a few will say that I'm exaggerating or that I am misinterpreting, but I can only exhort anyone who has a true heart and is willing to know the truth, to read first of all the Bible, and then search a little the history of mankind in order to have the elements needed to judge not mainly this writing – for this writing has no importance when compared to the Bible -, but first of all to judge the world and its evolution (the world including also that of many organizations that people call churches) and to decide whether it is better to direct his life according to what the world finds good or according to what pleases the Lord.

Those who adopt an ecclesiastical position based solely on Scripture, not conforming to the practices and doctrines of any institutionalized church, be it national or international, will be called sectarians by most of the clergymen. But, when the Jewish clergy came before the roman governor to accuse Paul they called him „leader of the sect of the Nazareans“ (see Acts 24.1-9). And this is how it has been since then: the clergymen who have a strong organization label as heretics or sectarians those who desire to obey God rather than men (see Acts 5.29).

### **Human authority has replaced God's authority**

And there are many things to learn from the opposition that the Jewish priests manifested first against the Lord Jesus and later against His disciples. They had from Moses the promise given to Israel: „Jehovah thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him shall ye hearken“ (Deut. 18.15). But, when the Lord Jesus came, performing miracles according to what the prophets had long before announced, they rejected Him firstly because he rebuked them for their hypocrisy, and secondly because He wanted first to free them from the yoke of sin, while they desired one that would free them from the Roman yoke and would not repent and admit that the Lord had ordained even that Roman yoke because they had sinned and they were sinners. The Jewish priests knew well the Law given through Moses, and that very law condemned the most secret movements of their heart by saying: „Thou shalt not desire thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not desire thy neighbour's wife, nor his bondman, nor his handmaid, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's“ (Exodus 20.17), and also: „ and thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength“ (Deuteronomy 6.5). But they loved more their positions in society than they loved the

Lord. And when the One through whom came the fulfillment of the vision that David had when he wrote: „Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! Blessed is the man unto whom Jehovah reckoneth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile!” (Psalm 32.1-2), they wanted to get rid of Him as soon as possible for he undermined their authority as religious leaders. But by the very act of delivering Jesus to be killed they have fulfilled the designs of God for bringing the perfect sacrifice. They have afterwards persecuted His disciples, who were preaching about His resurrection and that He is going to judge the world – including them –, and also the salvation received by believing in His sacrifice.

The clergy in Christianity evolved similarly: having the Word of God, they did not observe it and got to teach people to hold different customs, ordinances and superstitions, all which gradually became traditions and were proclaimed holy. Later on, the high clergymen have even burnt to the stake those who wanted to put the Bible before any other thing. Nowadays too, Christendom honors first of all certain ordinances and the clergy and less and almost not at all the Lord Jesus and the teaching of the apostles that has Him as its centre.

### **Service in conditions of weakness**

Gospel preaching meets opposition not only from clergymen and religious people faithful to some religious organization, but also from those who declare to be atheists or who are agnostic. And, generally, those who do not label the believers as „sectarian” or „heretics”, come with reasonings of the following kind: „In what respect is that believer better than me?” And they certainly find in the believers different flaws from which they build a case to reject the gospel. Of course, a believer must not be a hypocrite, one to whom applies the popular saying: „do not what the preacher does “, but, even being in weakness and having several flaws, he should not be discouraged to preach the gospel: were the gospel to be preached only by perfect people, then there would be no one to preach the gospel. What did the Lord Jesus say to those in His days in flesh? „For John has come neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He has a demon. The Son of man has come eating and drinking, and they say, Behold, a man that is eating and wine-drinking, a friend of tax-gatherers, and of sinners: and wisdom has been justified by her children”(Matthew 11.18-19). Even in the Lord Jesus and John the Baptist people found reasons not to receive their testimony! What are we then to expect as to our testimony? The believers of the Lord Jesus are to preach Him and not to preach about themselves. And even if, let’s say, there would be a gospel preacher to whom no one could reproach anything, in whom no one could find any fault, don’t you think that even then there would be not a few people, who, deceived by Satan, would say: „The gospel is for such irreproachable people, not for the likes of me...”? The Lord has sent as preachers of the gospel people who have weaknesses and who may sin, and has not sent angels, for salvation is not for angels but for humans. Were an angel sent to announce the glad tidings of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus,

then he would have to speak about something that never was and never will be his part. „The righteous falleth seven times, and riseth up again“ (Proverbs 24.16), and, applying this to the Christian, I would add that each time he rises he preaches the gospel. For a Christian is righteous being justified through the faith in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, but through the sinful nature inherited from Adam, he has always the tendency to fall. But the Lord, in His grace, raises him, and, once raised, he may testify concerning the grace of God. And maybe that is why there are not a few famous evangelists who in the past have sunk deep in the mires of society. Even if, in the visible aspects, one has no problems, he may be somehow fallen in his heart – and maybe only the Lord knows about that fall. Such a fall may be what prevents one for fulfilling the priestly service that the Lord intended for him. And then the Lord has to raise him so that he may do that work.

A type of fall, which, sadly enough, was seen in many believers whose names are written in the history books, is the one that made them have a different politics from the one that suits the position of an ambassador for Christ, which the Lord has given them. For an ambassador is a foreign citizen, and, even if he has certain preferences, maybe even sympathies towards some members of the political class of the country he lives in, he does not vote. Nor is he to stir up a revolution or try to change the government of that country, but he is only to transmit the citizens of that country messages from the head of the state he is representing and to mediate the relations between those in that country and his homeland. Then, as a foreigner in the country he lives in, he has to submit to the laws of that country, giving the Caesar what is the Caesar's (see Matthew 22.17-21, Romans 13.1-7). And the unbelievers can well notice and criticize the situations when those who are the Lord's overstep the limits of their mission as ambassadors seeking to bring in some revolution: they well know to criticize Luther, Zwingli and Calvin and other reformers who were involved in the politics of the age they lived in. And have we not heard, at least once, even in our circles, an unbeliever say to a believer: „You have the heavens, therefore leave us the earth“? Being in this world, the believer is not to forget for a single moment that he is not of this world and that he represents the One whose kingdom is not of this world now. No doubt, the Lord causes His own to pass through affliction and to suffer injustice in this world just because He knows how much they are inclined to forget their position as sojourners in the world, and, if other means are ineffective, at least the afflictions would make them longingly sigh for the desire to see the Lord and then His manifestation in glory.

### **According to the Word: first holy priesthood, then kingly priesthood**

In serving the Lord, every believer ought „not to have high thoughts above what he should think; but to think so as to be wise, as God has dealt to each a measure of faith“ (see Romans 12.3). That is he should understand from the Lord the limits that

He has appointed for his work in all its dimensions. Did not Satan come to the Lord Jesus Himself to tempt Him using words taken from the very Scripture: „If thou be Son of God cast thyself down; for it is written, He shall give charge to his angels concerning thee, and on their hands shall they bear thee, lest in anywise thou strike thy foot against a stone“? (see Matthew 4.6) The same way he may come to the believers, setting before them a word taken out of its context, and then, if the believers follow his suggestion, they certainly overstep the limits that God has ordained for their work, and they somehow are not according to that „measure of faith“, the result being that they dishonor His name before the unbelievers, or, even worse, that they dishonor Him first by divisions in the assembly. How are we then to prevent such things? The believer may prevent things of this kind only being led by the Holy Spirit, because the enemy is extremely cunning. How exactly? An answer is found in the very Psalm 91, out of which Satan had extracted the word for temptation. How does the Psalm begin? „He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty...“ All then depends on our dwelling place. If we dwell in the Lord, then the enemy can't touch us. And does this not agree with the order in which Peter sets forth the priestly services? He first speaks of „a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ“ - which means first communion with the Lord and worshiping Him, and this is a personal relation, „in secret“ or „into thy chamber“ (see Matthew 6.6), not public display that would attract attention. Then Peter speaks „a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a people for a possession, that ye might set forth the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness to his wonderful light“ - which corresponds to preaching the gospel and to a public work. This is the order that the Lord desires that His own should observe: He must always be the first, then, in connection with Him, the believers are to work for His interests, taking care lest, being too occupied with what they once understood to be His interest, they may forget Him, lest they forget their first love (see Revelation 2.4). Yes, because any corruption starts with growing apart from Him and because only in Him we are fully blessed (see Ephesians 1).