

TOWARD A PRIESTLY CHRISTOLOGY: A HERMENEUTICAL STUDY OF CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD

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Problem

There is disagreement between three theological models (sacramental, functional, and ontological) of interpretation about Christ's priesthood. One clear aspect of this disagreement is the existence of different views on the relationship between sacrifice and heavenly mediation in the priesthood of Christ. These conflicting views reveal that Christian theology does not have a consensus about the nature of the priestly work of the ascended Christ, including the conception of how Christ mediates salvation through his priesthood. This problematic situation raises the question whether there is a way to resolve this conflict of interpretations.

Method

In order to indicate a way to resolve the conflict of interpretations, the present study deconstructs these interpretations of Christ's priesthood through a hermeneutical analysis of this doctrine in the light of Scripture. This deconstruction seeks to uncover the logic of each interpretation of Christ's priesthood from the perspective of the macro-hermeneutical principles of reality or ontological presuppositions assumed in that interpretation. Such perspective indicates how these presuppositions inform and impact an interpretation or theory about the priesthood of Christ. This process of deconstruction takes three steps in this dissertation: (1) a systematic outline of the interpretations of Christ's priesthood; (2) a description of the understanding of the macro-hermeneutical principles of reality assumed in each interpretation depicted in the first step and an indication of the implications for the doctrine of Christ's priesthood; and (3) an attempt to read systematically the picture of Christ's priesthood provided in Scripture, including its pointers to the interpretation of macro-hermeneutical principles of reality, and the implications for the doctrine of Christ's priesthood.

Results

With regard to the macro-hermeneutical principles of reality in the sacramental, functional, and ontological models, the research shows that the divine reality is timeless-spaceless, the humanity of Christ is a spatio-temporal instrument of the divine timeless-spaceless reality, and heaven is a timeless-spaceless environment. When the sacramental, functional, and ontological interpretations of the priesthood of Christ are read from the perspective of these macro-hermeneutical principles of reality, the results below are generated.

In the sacramental model, the priesthood of Christ refers to a Christological picture that is soteriologically concrete in spatio-temporal instruments that convey and actualize the timeless-spaceless reality of the new creation in human beings. In the functional model, the priesthood of Christ is described in a Christological language that involves sequentiality of functions (earthly cross and heavenly intercession), but it is soteriologically concrete in spatio-temporal instruments that convey/actualize the timeless-spaceless reality of the new creation in human beings. In the ontological model, the priesthood of Christ portrays a Christology that reveals, by means of spatio-temporal instruments, in our spatio-temporal world, the soteriological reality of new creation that is already concrete in God.

However, on the basis of a systematic reading of Christ's priesthood in Scripture, the research suggests an alternative view, namely, the historical model. This reading finds pointers to a different interpretation of macro-hermeneutical principles of reality, where the divine reality, the humanity of Christ, and heaven are spatio-temporal realities. In contrast to the other models, as they hold a distinct interpretation of macro-hermeneutical principles, the historical model strongly emphasizes a heavenly priesthood and intentionally interprets Christ's priesthood as spatio-temporal. This means that Christ performs a real spatio-temporal official activity in heaven, in which God is involved in the soteriological process of forgiving and transforming human beings.

Conclusions

The main conclusion of this study is that the historical model constitutes a viable alternative that points to a way out of the conflicting systematic interpretations of the doctrine of Christ's priesthood. This conclusion is unpacked in the following arguments.

First, the basic problem of the sacramental model lies in the interpretation of the macro-hermeneutical principles of reality, as it conceptualizes the divine reality and realm in terms of timelessness-spacelessness. By assuming a spatio-temporal view of divine reality, the historical model necessarily (in terms of internal consistency) outlines a different conception of the priesthood of Christ in comparison with the sacramental model.

Second, in contrast to the internal coherence of the sacramental model, the chief weakness of the functional model is the lack of consistency between its notion of the priesthood of Christ and its interpretation or assumptions regarding the macro-hermeneutical principles of reality. While the picture of Christ's priesthood in this model seems to imply a spatio-temporal view of reality, its interpretation of the principles of reality is aligned with a timeless-spaceless perspective of divine reality. In this way, the important idea of sequential actions and events in the functional model is obscured by a timeless-spaceless understanding of divine reality. With this situation in mind, the historical model stipulates that a consistent understanding of Christ's priesthood characterized by sequential actions and events requires an interpretation of the macro-hermeneutical principles of reality that presupposes spatio-temporality in the notion of divine reality.

Third, the major problem of the ontological model is that it did not modify, in a substantial way, the timeless-spaceless view of reality assumed by the sacramental and functional models. While this model is more internally coherent than the functional model, the interpretation of Christ's priesthood in the ontological model is not consistent with the picture of this priesthood in Hebrews.

Fourth, the consistency of the historical model is basically described by a focus on an official heavenly priesthood in Hebrews that implies, for instance, a real appearance before God and a real activity of intercession in the heavenly sanctuary that is supported by a spatio-temporal view of divine realm and reality. These activities allow an actual interaction between what takes place on earth (for example, human prayer) and what happens in heaven (for example, Christ's intercession).