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## PRIESTS AND POPE

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IN THE October issue of THE WITNESS a brief article told of the political aims of the Roman Catholic church. Attention is here directed to one of the prominent religious teachings of that church, namely the hierarchy of priests. The Romish church departs widely from the teachings of the bible in many particulars, and one pervasive source of these errors, a source that underlies and unifies them, is the claim of the Roman church to stand between God and man: it is the pretension that outside the Roman church there is no salvation; it is the presumption that the priests and especially the pope are God's representatives on earth.

This Romish doctrine of the priesthood separates man from God. The hierarchy stands between the individual soul and its Creator and Saviour, and claims exclusive power over the distribution of the benefits of salvation. The Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council (fourth session, chapter three) reads partly as follows:

“All the faithful of Christ must believe that the holy Apostolic See and the Roman Pontiff possesses the primacy over the whole world, and that the Roman Pontiff is the successor of the blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles, and is the true vicar of Christ, and head of the whole Church, and father and teacher of all Christians: and that full power was given to him in blessed Peter to rule, feed, and govern the universal Church by Jesus Christ our Lord ... This is the teaching of Catholic truth, from which no one can deviate without loss of faith and salvation.”

Thus the Roman church makes submission to the pope a prerequisite of salvation; thus the Roman church places itself between man and God; thus it claims to control the destiny of souls.

In contrast with the pope's claim to be the vicar of Christ, in contrast also with the practice of praying to the Virgin and to saints, the Scriptures place no barrier between man and God. The apostle Paul in 1 Tim. 2:5 says, “There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” Sinful man indeed needs a mediator in order to approach God, but

that mediator is the God-Man, Jesus Christ. Any reliance on priests, saints, the Virgin, or the pope constitutes a rejection of Christ. Christ is sufficient for our salvation; he does not need to be helped out.

It may be urged that approaching God is a priestly function, and that in the Old Testament the people had to approach God through the priesthood. Is it not so today? Can anyone at all approach God at any time? Would it not be irreverent and impious for one not a priest to take upon himself priestly functions?

While this suggestion, if given in a Romish connotation, is a mistaken one, yet it serves to bring to light an important New Testament teaching. Let it be granted that an approach to God is a priestly function, and that one not a priest has no right to come to God. In a very real sense these statements are true. But one of the glories of the New Testament, one of the blessings purchased by Christ for His people, is exactly the conferring of the priestly function on all Christians. In the Old Testament when the Church was a minor, subject to elementary instruction, restricted by rules designed as a preparation for its later adult life, there was a special priesthood. But the intention of these rules and regulations was fulfilled in the New Testament. Hence the apostolic teaching is (I Peter 2:5) "Ye also are . . . an holy priesthood." If the pope, who claims to reign in the seat of Peter, should follow Peter's teaching, there would be no pope, no priests, no hierarchy to separate man from God. This doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers is so important that it may be well to quote at least another verse from the New Testament. Rev. 1:6, which in substance is repeated in Rev. 5:10, says, "and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father." Notice that these verses from Peter and from John assign the office of priest to all ordinary Christians; the apostles are not restricting the priesthood to a certain select group of Christians. One believer is as much a priest as another; and when any group arrogates to itself alone the privilege of approaching God, when submission to any earthly authority is made a prerequisite of salvation, when Christ alone is not deemed a sufficient mediator, then we may know that such a group is not a holy, apostolic, New Testament church.