

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The priest is a sacred worship minister who leads the sacrificial ceremony. He is a mediator between humans and the Divine (Heb. 5:1). The priest is understood as an essential figure who bridges the grace of God with humans. In Christianity, the function of the priest in performing the Eucharistic sacrifice is a way to repeat in a new way the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary.¹ To become a priest, one must surrender himself and be appointed through the rite of laying of hands which is carried out at the celebration of ordination. Through ordination, the priest has the authority to offer sacrifice (celebrate the Eucharist), forgive sins, bless, teach and sanctify. The Sacrament of Priesthood makes a priest the primary and even exclusive servant for the spiritual needs of the people.²

The priestly tradition practiced in the Catholic Church today has a long history. This tradition has long been lived in the world of the Old Testament. The priesthood tradition actually appeared before the formation of the nation of Israel. The Bible documents that the first priests did not come from the Israelites, but from pagan nations. The first priest figure mentioned in the Holy Bible is Melchizedek, King of Salem, a priest of the Highest God (Gen. 14:18). Furthermore, the Book of Exodus features a Midianite named Jethro, Moses' father-in-law (Ex. 2:16; 3:1; 18:1-27). Jethro was the priest from Midian who "offered burnt offerings and sacrifices to God; then Aaron and all the elders of Israel came to eat together with Moses' father-in-law before God" (Ex. 18:12). This event was the beginning of the formation of the institution of the Levitical priesthood within Aaron and his sons, the priests of the Israelites (Ex. 18:21).³

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew priests were from the descendants of Aaron, the tribe of Levi. They were chosen from among them and separated from the rest of the people.⁴ The Old Testament states that the priests were consecrated to God, so they were not to remain on the same level as the laity. The ordination ceremony implied a process of separation. Therefore,

¹Yohanes Hans Monteiro, "The Role of the Priest in Thomas Aquinas' Theology of Grace and Its Relevance to the Problematic Discourse of the Lives of Today's Priests", *JPAK: Journal of Catholic Religious Education*, 24:1 (April 2024), p. 73.

²E. E. Whitehead, "Responsibility in the Priesthood: The Story of a Blooming Ministry," in Donald J. Georgan (ed.), *The Priest Today* (Mauere: Ledalero Publishers, 2003), p. 41.

³H u bertus Leteng, *Priestly Spirituality, the Motor of a Priest's Life* (Mauere: Ledalero Publisher, 2003), pp. 20-21.

⁴Adeel Robin, et al., "Priest as a Minister of the Liturgy and Sacrament of Holy Order", *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)*, 6:6 (November 2024), p. 4.

after the ceremony of removing ties with the world, the high priest put on special clothing and sacred adornment. He was anointed on the head with oil and sprinkled several times with the blood of the sacrifice (Exodus 29; Lev. 8-9). Thus, to be a Hebrew priest meant to be chosen to be different, separate from the rest, and on a higher level.⁵

In contrast to the context of the Old Testament, the New Testament specifically in the Letter to the Hebrews reveals that Jesus is the High Priest. As the High Priest, Jesus is compassionate and always faithful to the Father to realize the redemption for the sins of the entire nation (Heb. 2:17).⁶ The title of High Priest breaks the tradition of the priesthood in the Old Testament. In this context, the New Testament wants to convey that the priesthood is a universal grace given to all believers. This means that the New Testament renews the understanding of the priesthood in the Old Testament which was a privilege only for the descendants of Aaron from the tribe of Levi.⁷

The Old and New Testaments also present the duties that must be carried out by the priests. In the Old Testament, the duties of the Hebrew priests were not much different from the duties of the *pagan priests*. The duties of the Hebrew priests were related to cultic matters, such as guarding the Temple, offering sacrificial materials, and giving blessings.⁸ In addition, the priests in the Old Testament also acted as mediators between God and humans. They invited the people to live in a good relationship with God.

The New Testament documents also talk about the duties of God's priests. These duties are always guided by the life, ministry, and death of Jesus. This means that the priest has the duty to offer sacrifices to God. The priesthood in the New Testament is understood as a definitive fulfillment of God's promises in the Old Testament. Every believer is also called to take part in the priestly duties of Christ.⁹ Every believer has the obligation to carry out service and solidarity because they are freed from sin by the blood of Christ. The Letter to the Hebrews states that: "Through Him, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips giving thanks to His name. And do not forget to do good and to help others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Heb. 13:15-16). Based on the brief description above, the author is interested in studying the priesthood in the Old and New Testaments. The author

⁵Albert Vanhoye, *Christ Our Priest according to the Letter to the Hebrews*, trans. I. Suharyo (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1987), p. 38.

⁶Adeel Robin, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 27.

summarizes this entire study with the title "**Priesthood in the Old and New Testaments: A Theological Study of Difference and Continuity**".

1.2 Formulation of the problem

Based on the background of the writing above, the main problem formulation of this scientific work is how are the differences and continuity between the priesthood in the Old Testament and the New Testament? The main problem formulation can be detailed into several derivative problem formulations that describe the contents of the entire discussion in this scientific work. *First*, What and how is the concept of priesthood in the Old Testament? *Second*, What and how is the concept of priesthood in the New Testament? *Third*, what are the differences and continuity between the priesthood in the Old Testament and the New Testament?

1.3 The Purpose of Writing

The writing of this scientific paper has general and specific objectives. The general objectives include three things. *First*, to explore and explain the concept of priesthood in the Old Testament. *Second*, to explore and explain the concept of priesthood in the New Testament. *Third*, to analyze, understand, and explain the differences and continuity between the priesthood in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The specific purpose of writing this scientific paper has an important meaning for the author himself. This scientific paper was compiled primarily to fulfill academic demands, namely to fulfill part of the requirements to complete the Theology/Catholic Religion education at the postgraduate education institution of the Institute of Philosophy and Creative Technology (IFTK) Ledalero.

1.4 Writing Method

This scientific paper is a qualitative study. The author uses a library approach or literature study to complete this paper. The author tries to read and explore various literature or writings related to the concept of priesthood in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The author also reads sources related to the interpretation of the Scriptures that talk about the priesthood. The form of data collected by the author is words, clauses or sentences, both in the Scriptures and in reference books and journals. The data analysis method used in this scientific paper is the descriptive method, namely a qualitative data analysis method that aims to describe and explain data in detail.

1.5 Structure of the Writing

This scientific work is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is the introduction. This section contains the background of the writing, the main issues raised or the formulation of the problem, the purpose of the writing, the writing method, and the writing systematics.

The second chapter discusses the topic of the concept of priesthood in the Old Testament. This section contains several points explaining the priesthood in the Old Testament, namely the origin of the priesthood, the liturgical functions of the priesthood, and the subsequent reformation of the Aaronic and Levitical priesthoods.

The third chapter contains a discussion of the priesthood in the New Testament. This chapter specifically explains the understanding of the concept of the priesthood in the New Testament. The focus of the discussion in this section is the shift in the meaning of the priesthood in the New Testament, namely Jesus as the High Priest. There are three main points in this chapter, the newness and perfection of the priesthood, the priesthood in the New Testament, and the elements of the New Testament priesthood.

Chapter four is the core of this paper. This section discusses about the topic of the differences and continuities between the priesthood in the Old and New Testaments. Several main points are explained in this section, the relationship between the Old and New Testaments in the context of the priesthood, the differences between the priesthood in the Old and New Testaments, the continuity of the priesthood in the Old and New Testaments, and theological and pastoral implications.

The last chapter is the conclusion. This chapter contains a general conclusion of the entire discussion in this scientific work and suggestions. The suggestions are addressed to seminary institutions, the Church, Church leaders (clergy), and the faithful (lay people).