

An explorative study into the nomenclature, nature and the need for the concept of an eternal sympathiser in the priestly christology

This dissertation will be based on the text in the book of Hebrews 4:15

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin”.

(NRSV), which is centred on the author’s claim about the aspect of the high-priestly Christological sympathy. More precisely, it deals with the enquiry into the actual significance of the work of the sympathiser and of its likely benefits. The first part will examine this claim through a textual analysis based on traditional and modern interpretations in new-testament scholarship. This will set the foundational understanding about how it has been understood and interpreted historically by the church. This will further be explicated into the following three areas of understanding:

- 1) The nomenclatural idea of priesthood
- 2) The nature of this sympathy
- 3) The need for this unique sympathiser

The nomenclatural idea of the priesthood will explore the concept of the priestly sympathy in Judaism and to a lesser but relative extent, in other contemporary dominant religious systems as well. This cumulative thought will enjoin into the idea of the author of Hebrews presenting the alternative and superior Melchizedekian priestly order as being genuinely sympathetic.

The nature of this sympathy will be studied based on the claimed unlikeness to the Aaronic priesthood. This distinction is made by the author stating that Christ’s impeccability is the source that generates the most unique and healing nature of his sympathy. This inimitable sympathy, grants the appropriate succour in human struggles as assured in his chief-priestly intercessory dispensation. The main focus though, will not be about his impeccability relating to his atoning sacrifice.

The need for this unique sympathiser will be examined in the context of a changing and diverse socio-political and religious context. Its relevance will be viewed based on the author's assertion that Christ's sympathy moves him to help by providing a truly satisfying sense of acceptance in him.

A sense of rejection can surface through deep anguish, especially when perceiving failures in trying to meet religious, social expectations and one's own existential struggles and idiosyncratic realities. The scope of this idea of Christ's suffering vis-a-vis sympathy, will be correlated with the understanding and interpretations that arise from third world theologies, contemporary Asian christian theology and liberation theologies. This will help in understanding how these theologians harvest Christ's, or divine sympathy in general, from biblical texts, either directly or indirectly, for their own social contexts.

Finally, the need for this sympathiser will be critically examined based on the new testament idea of the 'royal priesthood' of all believers (1 Peter 2:9). This will consider the presence of the idea of Christ's sympathy in the universal corporate body of the church, that works in either the efficient channelling of this sympathy to help the world, or fuels an unparalleled deep sense of superiority — a spiritual position that defines exclusivity for moral authoritarianism.

This is an attempt to understand the frustration of the human heart that arises out of a sense of deep abandonment, creating a longing for a satisfying sense of acceptance. The universal human need for sincerity in sympathy, which constantly fights against secret skepticism about outward sympathetic assurances, creates a desperation to find true sympathy. This work tries to look into the claim that the Melchizedekian-christological high priesthood's sympathy is actually trying to help deep human troubles .

The proposed work will lean towards a thematic commentary in understanding the affirmation of the author of Hebrews regarding the authenticity of Christ's suffering, as the guaranteeing basis for his authentic healing and helping sympathy. The research tries to explore this experiential idea for all — those who believe in this priesthood, those who struggle to comprehend it and those who resist it.

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