

The Dual Work of the High Priest: Jesus and the Spirit in the Sanctuary

Introduction

This paper examines, from the perspective of the Sanctuary, the salvific work of Christ and the Holy Spirit from the Cross to the eradication of sin from the universe.¹ In the post-Calvary work of atonement, Christ continues to be seen in a position of pre-eminence as the High Priest. Also, the character of the Holy Spirit comes to prominence, as one author states, “[t]he age of the Spirit began at Pentecost.”²

This paper will briefly review the functions of Christ and the Holy Spirit as depicted by inanimate symbols within the apartments of the Sanctuary. The larger bulk of this work will consider the sole role of the High Priest and the dual intercession and suggest a harmony to the paradox of one Mediator and two intercessors.

The Sanctuary, Its Furnishings and Articles

The Seventh-day Adventist doctrine of the Sanctuary is described by critics and adherents alike as “the foundation and central pillar of Adventism.”³ While there exists some division among Adventists as to how much about the sanctuary in heaven is literal, many of our scholars agree that it is a real place.⁴ In the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Angel Rodríguez writes, “Hebrews, following the teachings of the OT, argues for a real sanctuary in heaven.”⁵

Frank Holbrook, in his work *The Atoning Priesthood of Jesus Christ*, describes the functions symbolised by the furnishings and articles of the Sanctuary.⁶ Of particular note are the menorah (seven branched lampstand), the golden table, and the altar of incense.⁷

Holbrook makes four points about the menorah which point to it symbolising the work of the Holy Spirit.⁸ He summarises, “[t]he menorah of the sanctuary symbolized the multiple operations of the life-giving, omniscient and omnipresent Holy Spirit.”⁹ The work of the typical priest in tending the lamps represents the “*actual*, multiple operations of the Holy Spirit directed in all His operations by humanity’s High Priest, Jesus Christ!”¹⁰ On its own, though, the menorah does not tell anything about what these actual operations are. It only represents the qualities of the Spirit – life, knowledge, presence and power.

The golden table and the bread of the presence represented another function in the atonement. The bread was regarded as a sacrifice/offering (Lev. 24:9). Holbrook describes offerings as “pictorial prayers, illustrated prayers,” and goes on to infer in the bread offering a prayer akin to “give us this day our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11).¹¹ This offering also is said to point to Christ, the living bread (John 6:35), though this is in a spiritual sense.

The final piece of furniture to consider is the golden altar of incense. The incense is burnt upon it and is described in Revelation as being mingled “with the prayers of the saints” (Rev. 8:3, 4). The incense represents the merits of Christ. “His merits, like incense, render our prayers acceptable when He intercedes at the same time for us.”¹²

The High Priest as Mediator

The author of Hebrews argues that Christ is a High Priest “after the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 7:17).¹³ However, it is largely in the book of Leviticus where we find His work described. The ascended Christ is presented in the New Testament as a real personage at the right hand of the throne of God.¹⁴ This presentation of a real person, ministering in a real place, also highlights the reality of the Father as a real person as well.¹⁵ Thus Paul writes to Timothy, “there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5).

At once the question comes to our minds: What is a mediator and why is a mediator between God and man necessary? The English word *mediator* is taken over from the postclassical—specifically, ecclesiastical (sic)—Latin. The term is derived from the adjective *medius*, meaning ‘middle’ or ‘midst.’ A mediator is one in the middle, a go-between for two parties. The Greek word *mesitēs*, found in 1 Ti 2:5, is also derived from an adjective, *mesos*, meaning ‘in the middle.’ A mediator is one who establishes a relation that otherwise would not exist. A mediator represents each of the two parties to the other and brings them together.¹⁶

Specht goes on to summarise, “[t]he function of this Mediator is to represent God to men and men to God in order to effect the salvation of sinful human beings and thus bring God and humanity together.”¹⁷ So Christ is spoken of in synonymous terms as High Priest and Mediator, both of which carry exclusivity. Looking at this last remark, we see that not only is a Mediator/High Priest to represent humanity to God, but also God to humanity.

An evangelical summary of Christ's post-ascension work as High Priest might read like this:

Jesus Christ the High Priest entered the Holy Place of God and (1) presented His blood once and for all to the Father, obtaining eternal redemption (Heb. 9:11-14; 10:12); (2) presented Himself as the Son of Man to the Father for humanity (Dan. 7:13-14); (3) sat down at the right hand of the Father indicating that our redemption is complete (Heb. 10:12); (4) became the Head of His body (Eph. 1:20-23; Col. 1:18); (5) gave gifts to the body (Eph 4:7-13); (6) empowered the body, it is Christ in you the hope of glory (Col. 1:26-27); (7) intercedes for us (Rom. 8:34; Heb 7:25); (8) prepares a place for us (John 14:2); and (9) waits for the time when His enemies are made His footstool (Heb. 10:13).¹⁸

To this, some Seventh-day Adventists would add the work of pre-advent judgement and cleansing of the sanctuary.¹⁹ While these listed aspects of Christ's ministry are all true, there are some other features that have been little dwelt upon.²⁰ These elements portray little of the representation of God to humanity. While the typical high priest spent time officiating in the typical sanctuary, he also had roles to perform among the congregation in both the daily and yearly ministrations. Foremost among these was as a teacher, in word and example:

A statement in Deuteronomy reminds us that the priest or Levite also acted as a teacher: the Levites 'observe thy word . . . they teach thy precepts to Jacob, thy law to Israel' (33:9-10). It was the priests' duty 'to make a distinction between sacred and profane, between clean and unclean, and to teach the Israelites all the decrees which the Lord has spoken to them through Moses' (Lev. 10:10-11). Knowledge and understanding of God's laws (da'at) and the ability and authority to teach and guide (tôrāh) the people were essential if the priest was fully to discharge his function (cf. Lev. 14:57; Hos. 4:1-2; Mic. 3:11; Ezek. 7:26). Ezra would later be a model in this regard (Ezra 7:10).²¹

There was also a work that the high priest would do among the congregation on the Day of Atonement, reading from the Torah.²² If these things above are also duties within the typical priesthood, then we should expect the antitypical High Priest to perform them also.

The Work of the Spirit among the Congregation

Revelation presents Christ in the midst of the seven churches (Rev. 1:13 cf. 20; 2:1). Many have seen this as only a vicarious presence, with Christ unable to be personally present, but present through another person, the Holy Spirit:

Why would it be to their advantage to have Jesus leave and the Holy Spirit come to take His place? Because since Jesus had taken on human nature He was subject to the limitations of time and space. Therefore, He could be in only one place and with one group of people at a time. But the Spirit is not so limited. Hence, Jesus had to go away and return through the Spirit in order to be forever present. Our Lord also ‘ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill the universe’ with His presence (Eph 4:10, NEB).²³

What should become apparent is that if the Holy Spirit, as a separate personage, is seen as doing the work of the High Priest here on earth, then we are faced with not one, but two mediators. In light of statements that the Holy Spirit also intercedes (Rom. 8:26), there seems to be a paradox of one High Priest/Mediator, but two intercessory works.²⁴

A fresh look at the farewell discourse in the Gospel of John may go some way to harmonising these thoughts.²⁵ Typically, Christ’s statements about the ἄλλον παράκλητον have been taken ontologically – referring to another individual. It is proposed here that it is not a distinction in identity, but in economy that is meant in this passage.²⁶

Looking first at the passage in John 16, we see that the various roles described there equate to the work of the High Priest among the congregation: convict concerning sin, righteousness and judgement (8-11), teach truth (13-15). These have a parallel with the priestly work of distinguishing between sacred and profane, and instructing in the law. Thus the Holy Spirit is here described as doing the work of the High Priest.

It is in John 14 that we need to inquire as to the identity of the Paraclete. Before entering into that topic, Christ speaks of the exclusivity of His place in salvation in terms reminiscent of the sanctuary cultus. “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (verse 6.)²⁷ Christ’s opening statement about the Helper is found below:

¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

It is no wonder that many see a new individual being spoken of here, by the word ‘allos’. Typically, this word does connote a distinction of separateness, but in at least one other case, also involving the Spirit, it does not.²⁸ Even a casual reader will

have observed that Christ often refers to Himself in the third person, so it is within the realms of possibility that Christ is doing so here.²⁹

From verse 17 there are some allusions to the prologue of John - “the world did not know him” (1:10), “his own people did not receive him” (1:11). In the prologue, these clearly refer to the Logos. Perhaps the strongest indication as to identity is the last sentence of verse 17. The disciples did not at this point in time “know” another divine agency. In 7:38, Christ states that the Holy Spirit was not yet given, and it isn’t until 20:21 that it is given (after Christ is glorified), when He breathes on them and says, “receive the Holy Spirit.” For these reasons, it is evident that the Holy Spirit, if another individual, did not dwell with the disciples and was not known by them.³⁰

Conclusion

Faced with the paradox of one Mediator/High Priest, yet two intercessors (Romans 8:26 cf. verse 34) we have noted that the High Priestly office involved dual intercessory roles – representing man to God and God to man. The High Priest is an individual office which is fulfilled perfectly and solely by Christ. Christ upon His ascension is spoken of as filling all things.³¹

Christ’s bodily presence in the heavenly sanctuary is engaged in representing man to God. The farewell discourse in John seems to suggest that Christ’s own spiritual presence remained behind in order to draw alongside believers in the high priestly role of continual Teacher and Reprover. Thus Paul could write of “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

The furnishings in the holy place, representing the functions of Christ and the Holy Spirit, reinforce this paradox. The Holy Spirit is represented by the oil, but it is directed by the High Priest. The bread represents Christ, Who is to be partaken by the believer. Finally, the incense represents the merits of Christ which make the prayers of believers acceptable to God.

The Bible portrays this dual role dichotomy between Christ and the Holy Spirit as temporary, that is, to endure only until the eradication of sin. The role of a mediator is to bring two parties together. Therefore, when those parties are united, there is no more need for a mediator. Revelation describes a geographic reconciliation. In the closing scenes of the visions of John is a description of two persons dwelling with humanity, “God and the Lamb” (Rev. 22:1-5). It appears that

the Spirit is still there, but no longer as a separate personal manifestation, but as the life of God, flowing out from the throne as “the river of the water of life” (verse 1).³²

¹ This paper focuses on both the *roles* and *function* of the work of Christ and the Spirit. For the purposes of this paper, ‘roles’ signifies the *active work* performed by either party, while ‘function’ speaks of the *passive provision* that has either already been made by previous salvific acts, or available by virtue of their very being.

² Walter F. Specht, "Christ's Session, Enthronement, and Mediatorial and Intercessory Ministry," in Arnold V. Wallenkampf, W. Richard Leshner, eds., *The Sanctuary and the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Studies*, (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1981), 351.

³ Dale Ratzlaff, *Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists* (Glendale, AZ: Life Assurance Ministries, 1996), p 265. Quoted and agreed with by Clifford Goldstein in *Graffiti in the Holy of Holies: An Impassioned Response to Recent Attacks on the Sanctuary and Ellen White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2003), p. 17. A consensus statement of Adventist scholars also demonstrates this centrality. “The belief that Christ is our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary is not a relic from our Adventist past; it illumines all other doctrines.” Frank B. Holbrook, ed. *Doctrine of the Sanctuary: A Historical Survey* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1989), 227.

One reason it takes such a prominent place in our belief system is that “SDAs view the Hebrew sanctuary service as a symbolic representation of how God deals with sin.” Arnold V. Wallenkampf, *The Sanctuary and the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Studies*, (Washington, DC: Review and Herald), p. xiii. In light of this, the Sanctuary doctrine furnishes us with a model of God’s solution to the Great Controversy drama. “This doctrine also opens a new perspective on the world. We see it as part of a cosmic struggle, the ‘great controversy’ between good and evil. The heavenly sanctuary is the divine headquarters in this warfare; it guarantees that eventually evil will be no more, and God will be all and in all (1 Cor. 15:28). His work of judgment that issues from the sanctuary results in a redeemed people and a re-created world.” Consensus statement, in Holbrook, ed., *Doctrine of the Sanctuary*, 227.

⁴ “It is therefore apparent that, while we may affirm the *reality* of the heavenly sanctuary in the book of Hebrews, we have comparatively little hard data about its appearance.” William G. Johnsson, "The Heavenly Cultus in the Book of Hebrews—Figurative or Real?" in *ibid*, p. 375. See also Johnsson’s similar article, "The Heavenly Sanctuary-Figurative or Real?" in Frank B. Holbrook, ed., *Issues in the Book of Hebrews* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1989): 35-52.

⁵ Angel Manuel Rodríguez, "The Sanctuary," in George W. Reid and Raoul Dederen, eds., *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 389.

⁶ Frank B. Holbrook, *The Atoning Priesthood of Jesus Christ* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1996), 107-111.

⁷ The only furnishing in the Most Holy Place was the ark of the covenant on top of which was the mercy seat, which “symbolised God’s *throne*.” *Ibid*, 120.

⁸ *Ibid*, 108-110. These points are: 1 – The design of the menorah suggests “a life theme” based upon ancient Near Eastern culture as well as the Old Testament; 2 – Zechariah 4:1-14, focussing on the oil identifies as the Spirit in its omnipresence and omniscience (“eyes of the Lord”); 3 – The symbol of the Almond tree (upon which the menorah is styled) as a “watch-tree” reinforcing point two; 4 – The identification in Revelation 4:5 of the seven lamps of fire as the “seven Spirits of God.” Some of this symbology comes together in Revelation 5:6 where the seven Spirits are said to *be* the seven eyes/horns which the Lamb has. This identification of the Spirit as a part of Christ further supports the hypothesis of this paper in the section on the High Priest.

⁹ *Ibid*, 109.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 110 (emphasis in original).

¹¹ *Ibid*, 110, 111. Holbrook also implies importance in the word “daily” bread.

¹² *Ibid*, 108. Some might also see in Romans 8:26 that the smoke of the incense might represent the Holy Spirit. This verse will be touched on below.

¹³ All Bible quotations are from the *English Standard Version*, unless otherwise stated.

¹⁴ Act. 7:55, 56; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet. 3:22.

¹⁵ In the book, *The Shekinah Glory*, George L. Miller presents seven reasons that the Father is represented by the Shekinah in the Hebrew sanctuary. As such, this would fit with the terminology of 1 Timothy 6:16, which describes God as “dwell[ing] in unapproachable light.”

¹⁶ Specht, 327, 328.

¹⁷ Ibid, 328

¹⁸ Mal Couch, ed., *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1997), 58.

¹⁹ For example, Rodríguez, *The Sanctuary*, 398. Specht, 342-351, also describes in greater detail Christ's priestly office and the benefits of Christ's intercessory work, covering both those ideals unique to Adventism as well as those recognised by evangelicals.

²⁰ These aspects of the work of atonement have been sufficiently covered by Seventh-day Adventists to do more than review them. For more information about these aspects of the High Priestly ministry, see Holbrook, *The Atoning Priesthood of Jesus Christ*, and Edward Heppenstall, *Our Great High Priest* (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1972).

²¹ Christoph Barth, et al., *God With Us: A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 154, 155. See also Eugene H. Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Exegetical Commentary* (Dallas, TX: Biblical Studies Press, 2003), 350, 351.

²² "On the Day of Atonement the high priest read from the Torah as part of the Temple liturgy. This process is described in m. Yoma 7:1 and Sotah 7:7." Steven Fine (ed.), *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction During the Greco Roman Period* (London: Routledge, 1999), 48.

²³ Specht, 351. Also, "Jesus (through His Spirit) is spiritually present with His church on earth." Richard M. Davidson, "Sanctuary Typology," *Symposium on Revelation: Book 1*, in Frank B. Holbrook, ed., Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, Volume 6, (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 109.

It is interesting that Specht speaks of Christ's limitations since taking on humanity while using Ephesians 4:10, which points out that, "He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things."

²⁴ In the context of Romans 8, the Spirit is spoken of interchangeably as the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ (verse 9-11), both in the possessive.

²⁵ Many of the symbols used in John have sanctuary significance. Christ's claims to be the door (10:7), the bread (6:35), and the way (14:6), all point to the Sanctuary (the last of which immediately precedes the discussion on the paraklēte).

²⁶ Wayne Brouwer, in his doctoral thesis, proposed John 13-17 as a macro-chiasm. In his structure, John 14:15-26 parallels with 16:4b-15. John 15:1-17, on the vine and the branches, is seen as the centre of the chiasm. We will consider the first two of these passages.

²⁷ The Word Biblical Commentary on John says of this verse, "It is evident that v 6 presupposes the teaching on the Christ as the Logos, the Word of God made flesh. The latter clause of v 6 must then be related to the Prologue..." George R. Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John* (: Nelson Reference and Electronic, 1999), 252.

²⁸ See 1 Sam. 10:6 in the LXX. Here, it connotes a change in demeanour or manner. Not only does this passage involve the Spirit but anointing of a person to a new office.

²⁹ Some examples in John include: 1:51; 2:19; 3:13, 14; 4:19-27, etc.

³⁰ This passage of John faces us with a conundrum. Either Christ was being cryptic to begin with, when speaking of "another helper," and then made it clear through a subsequent explanation, or He was being plain to begin with (meaning another person in an individual sense) and then obscured this identity in his following description.

The Word Biblical Commentary considers verses 18-20 and 21-24 to be part of separate pericopes to verses 15-17. This paper has gone along with that distinction for brevity, however, if verses 18-26 are allowed to elaborate on the same issue, then verse 18 would offer a plain statement of who the Paraclete is, "I will come to you." Compare with verses 19 and 23.

³¹ Another Pauline statement says that Christ, as the second Adam, "became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45).

³² See John 7:38, 39 where the Spirit is spoken of as living water.