

# **We HAVE a PRIESTHOOD**

Written by William Albrecht

I've received a number of requests to respond to a certain Joe Mizzi who runs an Anti-Catholic website.

The question I received was such

**"Hello Mr. Albrecht. A certain Joe Mizzi claims that there is no warrant for a priesthood in the New Testament. Here are the comments he makes in contention to this. This is really challenging my faith. I was wondering if you could respond to this."**

As soon as I read something that says "This is really challenging my faith.." I don't care if I'm close to DEATH or on my DEATH bed, I'm gonna do my best to respond to the question posed to me. It is my complete goal to serve Jesus Christ till the very end of my life and even MORE in HEAVEN! To do so, I have completely dedicated my life to helping keep his flock together, under the banner of the Catholic Church.

I've collided with Mr. Mizzi in the past and have asked him to correct several glaring errors that he has made. Of course, any respectable anti-Catholic isn't gonna budge. I didn't expect Mr. Mizzi to be any different to be honest. Anyhow there are a number of issues that we must take into consideration with Mr. Mizzi. First things first. It seems as if Mr. Mizzi has a problem with the Biblical languages--but we'll get to that later.

Mr. Mizzi says this:

*It is simply not true that "presbyter" means "priest". The Greek terms used in the New Testament to describe the ministers of the church are: 1. presbuteros (presbyters, elders); 2. episkopos (bishops, overseers); and 3. poimen (pastors, shepherds). They are never called hierous, which is the Greek word for priest.*

*The change in the title of the ministers in the Catholic church corresponds to the change in their role. The Council of Trent defines the specific functions of the Catholic priest: "If any one saith, that there is not in the New Testament a visible and external priesthood; or that there is not any power of consecrating and offering the true body and blood of the Lord, and of forgiving and retaining sins; but only an office and bare ministry of preaching the Gospel? let him be anathema" (Council of Trent, Session 23, Canon 1). Thus the two main functions of the priest are:*

*The offering of the propitiatory sacrifice of the Mass;*

*The forgiveness sins by the sacrament of penance.*

*How does this compare to the teaching of the New Testament? In the apostolic church, the Eucharist was considered a "remembrance" and a "proclamation" of the Lord and His sacrifice, and not a carrying on, perpetuation, renewal and re-presentation of*

*the sacrifice of Christ, as the modern Catholic Church teaches. There is no place for a "visible and external priesthood" in the church since Christ, our Priest, offered one perfect sacrifice, and He ever lives to intercede for His own. "He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood" (Hebrew 7:24). The Greek word (aparabatos) translated "unchangeable" means "not passing away, untransferable, perpetual." Unlike the Levitical priests, who had to pass on their ministry from generation to the next because of death, Jesus Christ lives forever and therefore His priesthood is not transferred to anyone.*

**Alright let's go point by point in here our refutation of Mr. Mizzi**

Presbyter is indeed the word meaning elder--it simply becomes priest through the translation into English.

Mr. Mizzi has no basis when he implies that presbyter simply means elder when many times the Biblical terminology that is employed is terminology that is of the PRIESTLY functioning nature. The New Testament is very very clear, that priestly actions are associated with the presbyteroi terminology Biblically speaking.

One such example can be found in **Revelation 5:8**  
(Below is the NIV rendering)

**8And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.**

Here we have the Greek word PRESBUTEROI--the Greek PLURAL for elders here in a PRIESTLY SACRIFICIAL setting. The offering of incense was a purely priestly action. This completely shatters the misrepresentation by Mr. Mizzi that presbyter simply means elder. The function of the presbyters is quite clear throughout Scripture and in order for the Protestant position to hold water then Mr. Mizzi and everyone that objects to the Catholic position NEEDS to answer WHY the function of the presbyters is many times coupled with that of the function of a priest in the New Testament.

**Let's delve deeper in Revelation 5:8 before moving on**

In Revelation 5:8 the Greek rendering for the incense is THUMIAMATON as well as in Revelation 8:4 which reads

**Rev 8:4**

**4The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand.**

The usage of incense was STRICTLY that of a priestly function. We can find such in the Septuagint.

For instance

**Exodus 29:18** reads

**18 Then burn the entire ram on the altar. It is a burnt offering to the LORD, a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the LORD by fire.**

Such reads the NIV, but the literal

Greek Septuagint renders the passage as such **THUMIAMA KURIO esti** literally INCENSE to the LORD which is offered in the passage.

There are other passages in which Incense is either mentioned or directly implied of being in usage

(Gn 8:21--Lv. 1:13, 17, 26:31--Numbers 15:3-24--28:2-27

1 Chronicles 13:11)

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Let's continue with our presentation of the arguments of Mr. Mizzi on the subject of the Greek term presbyter.

It is common knowledge that in the NT era the Greek terms presbyter and episkopos were used interchangeably. But nowhere at all does the Bible even come CLOSE to hinting that the offices were equal.

One good example of this that speaks volumes for the Catholic position can be found in the Pastoral Epistles (Titus, 1 and 2 Timothy)

In the Pastoral epistles episkopos (Bishop) is ALWAYS singular, and presbyteroi plural.

IN the pastoral epistles we find EPISKOPOS (referring to the office of the BISHOP-the OVERSEER)

mentioned five times--each time in the singular form.

When we switch over to the Greek term presbyter we find the term mentioned in Titus 1:5, in the appointing of numerous presbyters. The term is used in the plural form. We also find this term in 1 Timothy 5:17.

The two terms may have been interchangeable, but the offices are never shown as

equivalent.

In Acts 15:36 We find the term EPISKEPSOMETHA for Paul and Barnabas to "visit" the brethren in the Ekklesias that they established--their goal in doing such was to make sure things were going as in the correct order that they set them to go in. Clearly the role of shepherds making sure the FLOCK is in line with the teaching of Christ.

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Mr. Mizzi objects:

*They are never called hierous, which is the Greek word for priest.*

Is there ANYMORE evidence for a Priesthood in the NEW TESTAMENT?

**ABSOLUTELY!**

in **Romans 15:16** we have a stunning revelation.

**"That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of GOD, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost."**

In this passage Paul uses a VERB form of being a priest. The term for ministering is actually

**HIEROURGOUNTA**

More evidence that we do not need the Bible to straight out call ANY of the Apostles a HIEREUS, when the clear evidence points to the fact that the whole ministry of the Apostle had priestly functions that are clearly outlined for us in the Biblical text and Paul even uses a verb form of priestly ministrations for himself!

**Let's not forget that we Christians have an altar. On altars there are actual sacrifices.**

**Hebrews 13:10**

We read that we have an **ALTAR**, in the Greek PRESENT tense

**"We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle."**

This is a key passage that we want to examine.

The Greek term for altar here is THUSIASTERION

and many Protestants have attempted to foist a symbolic understanding upon this text, yet there is nothing in the context that warrants such symbolism.

Furthermore the Septuagint is of great importance to us here, for we find ALTAR in passages such as

<sup>KJV</sup> Genesis 8:20 And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

<sup>JV</sup> Genesis 12:7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

<sup>KJV</sup> Genesis 12:8 And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, *having* Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD.

<sup>KJV</sup> Exodus 20:24 An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.

<sup>NAS</sup> Leviticus 3:2 'And he shall lay his hand on the head of his offering and slay it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall sprinkle the blood around on the altar.

<sup>NAS</sup> Deuteronomy 33:10 "They shall teach Thine ordinances to Jacob, And Thy law to Israel. They shall put incense before Thee, And whole burnt offerings on Thine altar.

In fact, I spent many a good hour examining EACH and EVERY single usage of the Greek term for altar listed in the Septuagint and NOT once, that is correct NOT ONCE is it used in a SYMBOLIC fashion. The same can be said of the Greek term in the NEW TESTAMENT. It's simply not symbolic.

Sooooooooo...

What kind of sacrifices are laid upon the Christian altar?

The Catholic says that the Eucharist is our sacrifice, our eternal giving of our LORD JESUS CHRIST to us, in his FULL divinity. Every single precious piece and drop is our eternal GOD.

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The next round of Mr. Mizzi's attacks come in this form:

*How does this compare to the teaching of the New Testament? In the apostolic church, the Eucharist was considered a "remembrance" and a "proclamation" of the Lord and His sacrifice, and not a carrying on, perpetuation, renewal and re-presentation of the sacrifice of Christ, as the modern Catholic Church teaches. There is no place for a "visible and external priesthood" in the church since Christ, our Priest, offered one perfect sacrifice, and He ever lives to intercede for His own. "He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood" (Hebrew 7:24). The Greek word (aparabatos) translated "unchangeable" means "not passing away, untransferable, perpetual." Unlike the Levitical priests, who had to pass on their ministry from generation to the next because of death, Jesus Christ lives forever and therefore His priesthood is not transferred to anyone.*

Actually Mr. Mizzi is quite incorrect and we will cover in depth the whole meaning of the Greek term anamnesis in another article, but for now we have to object that Mr. Mizzi has not studied this term carefully.

An anamnesis was a remembrance brought about by a sacrifice that was offered, therefore the Eucharist CAN rightly be called a MEMORIAL SACRIFICE.

Furthermore we'd have to ask Mr. Mizzi to attempt to refute the information we've presented and to show us where the Bible says we do NOT have a visible and external priesthood.

Mr. Mizzi is quite correct that Christ is our HIGH PRIEST. Are high priests without any other priests in their ministry? We'd like Mr. Mizzi to show us the evidence that the ARCHIEREUS is alone in his ministry!

In Hebrews 7:24 Mr. Mizzi tries to squeeze all that he can out of a Greek term of APARABATOS. APARABATOS indeed does indicate that Christ's priesthood would NOT pass away, he would NOT TRANSFER HIS PRIESTLY POSITION to anyone.

Does the Catholic Church claim that Jesus will lose his position of high priest? No! We'll ask Mr. Mizzi for the Catholic teaching that says that Jesus would or DID lose his high priestly office.

Mr. Mizzi is simply confused with the Greek and is attempting to squeeze water out of his huge rock that he holds in his tiny palms. Nowhere in this Greek term is the Catholic position threatened at all and it's simply another example of a Protestant trying to use Greek to make their arguments look fancy.

We can't forget that the Bible is Catholic and there is a response to every attack that can be thrown our way.

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Mr. Mizzi goes on and on

*The other key aspect of the Catholic priesthood, auricular confession, was not*

*practiced in the Western church until after the seventh century. The apostles and elders in the early church did not hear confession, give absolution or prescribe penance for the remission of sins.*

**We RESPOND by actually allowing the Early Church to speak:**

**DIDACHE(Dated as early as the FIRST CENTURY)**

**"Confess your sins in Church, and do not go up to prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of life. On the Lord's Day gather together, break bread, and give thanks, after confessing your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure. "**

**The Early Patristic evidence of Confession and Penance is abundant. But notice the red herring by Mr. Mizzi in his emphasis on the fact that this was not present in the WESTERN Church. Unfortunately for Mr. Mizzi early Christianity was united under ONE banner. The schism between west and east had not yet occurred. We were united to our brothers in the east stronger than ever at this period, therefore it's ridiculous to simply attempt to separate the Church by only mentioning the WESTERN part. What if such was only true of the EASTERN part? Would Mr. Mizzi have a point? Not at all, which is the point of showing that this is completely misleading on behalf of Mr. Mizzi.**

**Needless to say we have enough proof in the western Church to show that Mr. Mizzi simply isn't aware of the Patristic information regarding this topic:**

**St. Augustine(350s-430s)**

**"Let this be in the heart of the penitent; when you hear a man confessing his sins, he has already come to life again; when you hear a many lay bare his conscience in confessing, he has already come forth from the sepulchre; but he is not yet unbound. When is he unbound? By whom is he unbound? "WHATEVER YOU LOOSE ON EARTH," He says, "SHALL BE LOOSED IN HEAVEN"(Mt 16/John 20:23). Rightly is the loosing of sins able to be given by the Church.(Psalms 101:2:3)**

**"Yet those who do penance in accord with the kind of sin they have committed are not to despair of receiving GOD's mercy in the HOLY CHURCH, for the remission of their crimes, however serious. (ENCHIRIDION 17:65)**

**The list can go on and on in the West, BEFORE the 7th century! And of course, logically, the same can be said in the Eastern part of the Church.**

**We find, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Origen, Athanasius, and many many others that can show that this was a very common practice from the Church--an APOSTOLIC tradition that could also be found OUTLINED in Scripture!**

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## THE POWER THAT JESUS CHRIST GAVE TO THE APOSTLES OF FORGIVING SINS IS ALSO AN ASPECT OF THE PRIESTHOOD

### **Matthew 18:18**

**"Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."**

The Greek term for BIND, we are told by the **FRIBERG LEXICON** actually is

a) according to Jewish rabbinic custom: to declare what is forbidden and permitted

Thayer's Greek Lexicon tells us that it's a:

rabbinical idiom (equivalent to **rs;a]**), *to forbid, prohibit, declare to be illicit*

The famous **BDAG** tells us:

[Mt 16:19; HYPERLINK "BwRef\('BGT\\_MAT.18:18'\)"18:18](#). On the meaning de,w has here cp. J

20:22f (cp. 1QH 13:10). Another interpretation starts fr. the rabbinic viewpoint. Aram. **rs;a]** and

**ar'v**. are academic language for the decision of the rabbis as to what was to be regarded as

'bound' (**rysia]**), i.e. forbidden, or 'loosed' (**yrev.**), i.e. permitted

Such is in reference to the Binding, and the loosing is also an aspect of the priesthood that we are shown.

## THE APOSTLES HAD THE ABILITY TO FORGIVE SINS OR TO HOLD SINS BOUND!

Let's not forget the passage where Christ actually gives this amazing gift to the Apostles:

### **John 2:21-23**

<sup>NAS</sup> John 20:21 Jesus therefore said to them again, "Peace *be* with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

<sup>NAS</sup> John 20:22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

<sup>NAS</sup> John 20:23 "If you forgive the sins of any, *their sins* have been forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they have been retained."

**NAS 2 Corinthians 5:18 Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,**

**NAS 2 Corinthians 5:20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.**

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**Joe Mizzi concludes his anti-Catholic rant by saying:**

*"The Catholic priest is a stumbling block to the soul who is seeking God. The way is wide open to all who come by faith Jesus Christ. "Through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."*

**We have thus concluded that the Biblical evidence is abundantly clear for that of the NEW TESTAMENT priesthood in it's early form. The early patristic evidence also speaks in favor of the Catholic position--but in this paper we've decided to stick mainly with the Biblical texts that outline the Priesthood. It seems to us that Mr. Mizzi actually has the BIBLE as his stumbling block. He refuses to correct any of his errors and his inability to cite any patristic source for proof of his claims is also evidence that Mr. Mizzi is NOT in this for the truth.**

**We hope that our evidence not only helps Mr. Mizzi, but helps any Catholics out there so that they be more able to defend the ONE TRUE FAITH.**

**This is the FAITH that Jesus Christ left us. Jesus Christ did NOT leave the Church as orphans, and each time we go to that wonderful heavenly sacrifice, we consume him. We consume the DIVINITY of Jesus Christ. We take GOD into our hearts and allow him to penetrate our very soul. This is the most beautiful FREE GIFT that anyone could get.**

**GOD BLESS**

**In Christ,**

**William**