

PRIESTHOOD IN ANCIENT ISRAEL AND THE NIGERIAN CHRISTIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

From time immemorial, Priesthood has been a well-recognized, requisite and an indispensable societal institution. In Ancient Israel, priests served as intermediaries between God and man, or between God and the nation. They were very influential in all national religious matters—in mediating for the people and atoning for their sins. They also preserved, interpreted and taught the law of God in order to uphold godliness and bring about peace and tranquility in the society. As a consequence, they were regarded as noble dignitaries; even though they were not absolute perfect humans. Today, history is giving a paradigm shift as the influence priesthood wielded in the past is waning; and this invariably calls for critical examination of the status. As a result, adopting inter-textual hermeneutics, a branch of contextual method, this paper is out to examine priesthood in Ancient Israel, paying attention to their functions, characteristics and activities. It explores and compares the nexus between the Ancient Israelite priesthood and the same in the Nigerian churches. The purpose of the study is to understand and inform readers of the present status of the institution. It also aims at sifting out some notable dysfunctional activities in the institution both in public and ecclesiastical domains. It, therefore, concludes and recommends inter alia that since God is holy, and can never be swayed or subjected to corruption; His priests, if indeed called, should follow suite and uphold the standard of their calling without being desecrated by unconsecrated figures and ephemeral materialism.

Keywords: Priesthood, Ancient Israel, Melchizedek, Levitical and Nigerian Churches

Introduction

The concept of כֹּהֵן *kohen* “priest” and the practice of priesthood in biblical history and religious world have been in historical progression. In the early period, it was a religious culture to appoint a certain person to the special services of the deity.¹ This feature was common to practically all known forms of religion. Particularly, during the primitive age of religious development, people believed that the beings whom they worshipped were peculiar beings with “awful sense of the numinous,” and they were believed to be dangerous; only to be approached by those who fully understand their ways and tastes.²

In the agricultural sector, it was believed by the nomad people that there must be some persons who must carry the divine emblems with them; and those whose duty was to attend to the moments of the sacred objects.³ The will of the gods was made known in obscure ways, and an interpreter was necessary to declare the meaning of the signs to the lay world. Furthermore, Alan adds that in early Israel, “priesthood was not confined to Levites; some lay individuals were consecrated to function in the priestly office.⁴ Priesthood of a kind was, then, a necessity in early Israel as elsewhere. The ministry of Moses practically postulated the activity of priesthood, who later ordained his brother Aaron, from whom Jerusalem priesthood traced its descent.⁵ There was also the priesthood of the order of Melchizedek whose origin cannot be ascertained by anyone. These personnel always stood between men and God, to minister carry, out special religious duties in the sanctuary and interpret the will of Yahweh to men. This lingers from one generation to the other.

The Christian priests in today's churches like their ancient counterpart serve in the same capacities: as intermediaries between men and God, they intercede on behalf of the worshippers and lead worshippers to atonement for sins. They are also expected to serve as custodians of the holy law, instructing the laity and caring for the less-privileged. Substantiating this, Obi says,

The modern priest carries out the ministry of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. He performs the functions that Jesus Christ, the Head entrusted to the church, His mystical Body for the salvation of souls. Thus, a priest is meant to be "another Christ" in both his actual behaviour (life of witnessing) and in the celebration of His grace to all and sundry.⁶

However, viewing the activities of so many of these personnel today, particularly in the Nigerian churches, there seem to be character discrepancies; for while some are faithful to their calling, a host of others seem to dent the noble image of the divine vocation. Their involvement in corruption, immorality and other acts that out-rightly challenge the standard of their calling are terribly alarming; hence, the need for this research and its recommendations for the transformation of the institution in the Nigerian milieu.

The Concept of Priesthood

The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines priesthood as the office, dignity, or character of a priest.⁷ From time immemorial, the concept of priesthood has been virtually obvious in every society of cultured man. The *Kohen* "priest" in history and in the religious world has been in historical progression. Among the oriental nations, the appointment of certain persons to the special services of the gods was a feature common to practically all known forms of religion.⁸ Particularly, during the primitive age of religious development, people believed that the beings whom they worshipped were peculiar beings that had the "awful sense of the numinous"⁹ Moreover, to the underdeveloped minds, gods are dangerous, for they are whimsical and capricious; only to be approached by those who fully understand their ways and their tastes.¹⁰

Among the nomad people, there must be some people who could carry the divine emblems with them; and those whose duty is to attend to the moments of the sacred objects. The will of the gods is made known in obscure ways, and an interpreter is necessary to declare the meaning of the signs to the lay world.¹¹ Furthermore, in early Israel, "priesthood was not confined to Levites; some lay individuals such as fathers of families, princes and kings were consecrated to function in the priestly office.¹² This was why some biblical characters such as Cain, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Melchizedek, Job, Isaac and Job offered their own sacrifices. In the days of Moses, the office of priest was restricted to the tribe of Levi, and the priesthood consisted of three orders, the high priest, the priests, and the Levites, and the office was made hereditary in the family of Aaron.¹³

The ancient Israelite religious tradition unfolds that priestly characters and priesthood were prominent entities in the nation Israel. Apparently, the same tradition was in operation in the oriental nations. Among the pagans, priests were persons whose appropriate business was to offer sacrifices and perform other sacred rites of religion. For instance, the ancient Assyrians had priests, as did the Babylonians. When Abram was returning from the rescue of his nephew, Lot, he encountered Melchizedek, who was only "King of Salem," who was also a "priest of God Most High." Abraham acknowledged the king's sacred office and paid tithes to him (Gen. 14:18ff). When Joseph was elevated into prominence in Egypt, he was given a wife whose father was an Egyptian priest (Gen. 41:45).¹⁴ The office of priest in Israel was of supreme importance and of high rank. The high priest stood next to the monarch in influence and dignity. Aaron, the head of the priestly order, was closely associated with the great lawgiver, Moses, and shared with him in

the government and guidance of the nation. Through the ministering of the priesthood the people of Israel were instructed in the doctrine of sin and its consequences, in forgiveness and worship. In short, the priest was the vital source of religious knowledge for the people, and the channel through which spiritual life was imparted.¹⁵

Officially, priesthood in the Old Testament got its recognition through the Aaronic priesthood lineage, because all the priests were required to be selected from Aaron's (Moses' brother). However, before the Aaronic priesthood was established, there happened to be some sorts of priesthood. After the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt, Moses led the people to the wilderness so that they could "sacrifice unto Jehovah". Wayne affirms that those who were selected by Moses were the "elders" (Ex. 3:16), or a selected group of "young men" (Ex. 24:5). This group of people was believed to be the "first-born" who were "sanctified" unto the Lord (Ex. 13:2).¹⁶ Easton holds that the name 'priest' first occurs as applied to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18) and under the Levitical arrangements, the office of the priesthood was limited to the tribe of Levi, and to only one family of that tribe, the family of Aaron.¹⁷ Certain laws respecting the qualifications of priests are given in Leviticus 21:16-23. There are ordinances also regarding the priests' dress (Exodus 28:40-43) and the manner of the consecration to the office (Exodus 29:1-37).

The priestly office holds the knowledge and techniques of worship. Throughout the long and varied history of religion, priesthood has been the official institution that mediates and maintains a state of equilibrium between the sacred and the human society and which exercises a stabilizing influence both on social structures and cultic organisations. In the Common Era, the term 'priest' is derived etymologically from the word *presbyteros* (elder). It was mostly used in the late antiquity to refer to the elders of the Jewish and Christian communities and as one who was duly authorized to minister in sacred things.¹⁸

Similarly, Funk and Wagnail opine that, a priest is one especially consecrated to the service of a divinity and through whom worship, prayer, sacrifice, or other service is offered to the object of worship, which is God in the context of this paper. Through him, pardon, blessing, or deliverance is obtained from God by the worshippers.¹⁹ He is a mediator who stands between God and man. He offers sacrifice to God on behalf of his fellow man and administers other worship obligations that people feel unworthy to offer personally.²⁰ Adding to the description of the term, Dunn, in his modern speculation opines that a priest is a person who is saddled with the responsibility to hear confessions periodically, give marriage counseling, provide pre-nuptial counseling, give spiritual direction, teach catechism, or visit those confined indoors, such as the sick in the hospitals and nursing homes.²¹

The Person of Melchizedek and his Priesthood in Israel

It is ideal to start with the personality of whom this order of priesthood is attributed. In progressive history, the person of Melchizedek is still considered as mysterious and mystifying for readers and interpreters of the Bible. The name 'Melchizedek' comes from the Hebrew root words: *Melek* (king) and *Zedek* (just/righteousness). Much research has been devoted to him and many very different opinions are held regarding him. One finds the first reference to him, which became the basis for the biblical and extra-biblical narratives in the book, Genesis (14:18- 20). It speaks of a meeting between him and the patriarch Abraham, one of the main figures and respected authorities of the ancient Israelites. Some Jewish interpreters identify Melchizedek with Shem, who survived Abraham according to the Massoretic chronology, for almost a century. In the Midrash on Genesis, it says: "When Abram, returning home to the south, approached the outskirts of Jerusalem, one of the greatest people of that time came out to meet. It was Shem, the son of Noah, known by the name of *Malki Zedek* (King of Justice), who regularly offered sacrifices to Ashem and led a *Yeshiva* in which they taught knowledge about the true God" (Rabbi Moshe

Veysman).²² Why these Jews see Shem in Melchizedek is yet to be known as it is still under debate in scholarship. Maybe this is due to the influence of the Targums and some rabbinical traditions in which Melchizedek is presented as a historical person, or maybe the blessing is transmitted from Noah to Shem (Gen. 9:26) and then from Shem to Abraham.

According to Bruce, Melchizedek is considered as an eschatological figure and a prototype of the great priest of the future century, while at the same time distinguishing him from the Messiah, who is mentioned in Psalm 110.²³ Still on the person of Melchizedek, Josephus Flavius describes him as a purely historical figure, a Canaanite ruler, the first priest, the founder of Jerusalem and the first temple who by virtue of his righteousness pleased God. "The king of Sodom went out to meet him at that place called the King Plain." Here Abram was received by the king of the city of Solima, Melchizedek. The name of the latter means "the righteous king," which everyone recognized him, so that for this reason he was also a servant of the Lord God."²⁴

Among the Christians, there are also several views regarding Melchizedek. One of the views that Christian interpreters hold partially overlaps with the second Jewish perspective. According to it, Melchizedek is a prototype of the great High Priest. Here, however, Christians went a little further and also considered Melchizedek as a prototype of Christ.²⁵ Still others consider him a type of the priest of the last days, while to another school of thought, he is a messiah, who is identified with Christ. Nonetheless, whosoever he might be is not our focus, rather our focus is on his order of priesthood.

The Melchizedek Priesthood in Israel

The Melchizedek Priesthood, also known as the "higher" priesthood, is named after the ancient patriarch and high priest Melchizedek, to whom Abraham paid his tithes. History reveals that at a point, His priesthood was called "The Order of the Son of God". But out of respect or reverence to the name of the Supreme Being, and in order to avoid a frequent repetition of his name, the church in ancient days called that priesthood after Melchizedek.²⁶

Paul, in his epistle to the Hebrews mentions it a number of times that Christ was "the high priest after the Order of Melchizedek" — the priesthood that was not corrupt (Heb.5:10). The Melchizedek Priesthood was given to every patriarch and prophet authorized by God, although this priesthood was taken from Israel as a whole during the time of Moses.²⁷

The Melchizedek priesthood bore no relationship with the priesthood of Aaron from which the priesthood of Israel was derived; though both priesthoods were instituted by God, but Melchizedek's was shrouded in mystery for "Melchizedek is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life, but he is like the Son of God he remains a priest forever" (Heb. 7:3). His priesthood has been a type of the eternal priesthood of Christ rooted in the very life of the Blessed Trinity; superior in every respect to the priesthood of the Temple.²⁸ The person of Melchizedek remains a mysterious in nature and whose genealogy could not be traced yet his priesthood is linked to the Priesthood of Christ which is eternal.

The Functions of the Melchizedek Priesthood in Israel

From our study above, Melchizedek is one of the most mysterious figures in the bible. His rule is apocalyptic. Little is known about him and much is made of the little that is known. He appears only once.

Melchizedek was appointed priest-king and was able to exercise the functions of both offices at time. As king of righteousness, he dispensed righteousness, pronounced God's effective blessings on his congregation (Abram) and unfolded the covenant of salvation with his people.²⁹ The action of Melchizedek portrays the legacy of blessing and righteousness. Melchizedek was the first priest to perform the function or doctrine of tithing (Gen. 14:18).³⁰ After collecting the tithe from Abraham, he pronounced blessing upon Abraham which is part of the priestly functions in Ancient Israel and the expectation from priests in the contemporary time.³¹ He administered bread and wine to Abraham, which is the symbol of care as it is required of the priests to care and cure for the souls of all, particularly, the downtrodden.

The Levitical Priesthood in Israel

According to extant internal evidences, particularly in Numbers 16:5, the Levitical priests were separated and commissioned by God. The Levitical priesthood began with the tribe of Levi and proceeded through the family of Aaron (Numbers 18:1,8; Exodus 28:1), except the male descendant who were disqualified by physical blemishes (Leviticus 21:17-23).

The term Levitical is derived from the Israelite tribe of Levi. Levi was the third son of Leah and Jacob (Genesis 29:34) and the father of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of Moses and Aaron.³² Originally, it was the firstborn son of every family who was consecrated to God and inherited the birthright, leadership, authority, etc. (Exodus 13:2). We see this institution of "first" things being what God requires as far back as Genesis 4:4 when God was pleased with the firstborn of Abel's flock that he offered to God (Proverbs 3:9; Romans 11:16)). Later, when God made Israel into a nation, He called them His firstborn son (Exodus 4:22-23), and each individual Israelite was called to be holy, priestly, and royal (Exodus 19:5-6). Thereafter, out of the nation of Israel, God chose the tribe of Levi to serve Him and the sons of Aaron to be the priests. Thus, all priests were Levites, but not every Levite was a priest.

According to Watson³³, Levitical Priesthood is a rarely used term today, and it is sometimes applied to the Aaronic Priesthood (Heb. 7:11). Moses and his brother Aaron belonged to the tribe of Levi. Latter-day revelation indicates that before Moses died, the Melchizedek Priesthood was withdrawn from the Israelites because of their disobedience. Aaron and his sons were then given a lesser priesthood to administer the lesser Law of Moses as priests in Israel (Ex. 28:1). To assist Aaron and his sons, other worthy male members of the tribe of Levi were also given authority in the lesser priesthood, although they could not be priests. The keys of that priesthood remained with Aaron and his direct posterity. Hence, the lesser priesthood was called the Aaronic Priesthood—after Aaron, but is sometimes referred to as the Levitical Priesthood because all those who possessed it in ancient times belonged to the tribe of Levi (Num. 3:12-13).

Rabin substantiates this expressing that the Levitical priesthood was inaugurated due to sin. As such, it was a poor replacement for priesthood in the Order of Melchizedek. Exodus 32:25-31 gives a clear picture of the origin of the Levitical priesthood in the aftermath of the golden calf incident. Hence, the superior and more ancient priesthood of Melchizedek led to the lesser, limited priesthood of the Levites (Heb. 7:5-11).³⁴ Campbell opines that in the Levitical priesthood, the high priest could deliver edicts to guide the nation (Numbers 27:21). He was the only one permitted to enter the Most Holy Place (1 Chronicles 6:49; Leviticus 24:9). The high priest could only enter the Most Holy Place once a year on the Day of Atonement to offer sacrifices for all the people, including himself (Hebrews 9:7). There was only one high priest at a time.³⁵ Conversely, Albertz says, the Levitical priesthood was never intended to be permanent (Hebrews 7:11). The death of Christ put an end to the Old Covenant and the Levitical priesthood, as evidenced by the

rending of the temple veil (Matthew 27:51). Now Jesus Himself serves as the believer's Great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14), called according to the order of Melchizedek, not of Levi (Hebrews 7:11–17). Through His death and resurrection, one has access to God's presence, where he can freely enjoy Him forever (Heb. 6:19-20).³⁶

The Functions of the Levitical Priesthood

The high priest was the head of all the priests and the head of all religious matters and judge of the people. (Deuteronomy 17:8-12;). He entered the sanctuary once a year to make atonement for the sins of the whole people (Leviticus 16:2). But generally, other priests and the Levites belonged to the office of preserving, transcribing and interpreting the law. (Deuteronomy 17:9-12). Therefore, it is written: "And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. In controversy, "they shall stand in judgment; and they shall judge it according to my judgments; and they shall keep my laws and my statutes in all my assemblies; and they shall hallow my Sabbaths." (Leviticus 10:10). It may thus be deduced that the duties of the Levitical priesthood included: the teaching of the Law (Leviticus 10:11); offering the sacrifices (Leviticus 9); maintaining the Tabernacle and the Temple (Numbers 18:3); officiating in the Holy Place (Exodus 30:7-10); inspecting ceremonially unclean persons (Leviticus chapters 13 &14); adjudicating disputes (Deuteronomy 17:8-13) and functioning as tithe collectors (Numbers 18:21,26; Hebrews 7:5).³⁷

The Levites were selected by God to aid the priests so that they would not be overworked (II Chronicles 29:34). In addition to the above, the Levites usually preserved and transmitted the written Law (Lev. 10:11). They also taught the Torah (the word) and administered justice, (Deut. 33:10a). It was the will of God that the Levites should be fully devoted to their ministry, and so He made provision for their maintenance.³⁸ They had no territorial possessions, but they were to receive from the rest of their brethren the tithes of the produce of the land and took charge of other offerings as recognition of their higher consecration. Thus, the Levites educated the people and trained them in morality and religion as those set apart by God for that purpose (Malachi 2:7).

Priesthood in the Nigerian Context

Christian priesthood emerged in the soil of Nigeria as the European Christian Missionaries launched out to christianize Nigeria in the 19th century after the first attempt by the Portuguese Missionaries in Benin/Warri areas of Niger Delta in the 15th century failed as a result of the involvement of the missionaries in slave trade.³⁹ However, Christianity came to stay in 1842 by the efforts of Thomas Birch Freeman of the Methodist Mission in September, 1842.⁴⁰ and Henry Townsend of the Church Missionary Society (of the Anglican Church) in December, 1842.⁴¹ The emergence of Christianity thereafter produced Christian priesthood in Nigeria, which has existed till date.

Thus, the concept of priesthood in the modern age is not far different from it culture and tradition in the primitive era. Similar to what it was in the ancient Israelite period is what it is today apart from the intensive ritual performance in the ancient times, which the body of Jesus Christ has represented (Col. 2:16-23). The Christian priest is a Christian religious leader authorised or ordained to perform sacred "rituals" or carry out assignments associated with both Christian tradition and religion. By ordination, the desire for priesthood is confirmed. Priests are ordained for the service of Christ, who is the Teacher-Priest and King. They are given a share in His ministry through which the church on earth is being ceaselessly built up into a people of God.

The Christian priests in today's church like their ancient counterpart serve as intermediaries between men and God, officiating the prescribed offering and leading worshippers for the atonement for sin. They also serve as custodians of the holy law, instructing the laity and caring for the less-privileged. In other words, the priests are understood to dispense several ecclesiastical and civil duties. They are expected to carry out the ministry of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit and perform the functions that He (Christ) entrusted to the church, which is His Mystical Body for the salvation of souls. Therefore, a priest is meant to be "another Christ" in both his actual behaviour (life of witnessing) and in the celebration of His grace to all and sundry.⁴² This category of persons may equally carry out the duty to hear confessions periodically, give marriage counseling, provide pre-nuptial counseling, give spiritual direction, teach catechism, visit those confused indoors, such as the sick in the hospital and nursing homes.⁴³ They uphold moral conduct and excellence. By and large, they are human figures of reverence who have the spiritual responsibility to minister to others and themselves in the beauty of holiness.

Dysfunctional Activities in the Priesthood

From the above exegetical analyses, we could deduce that the standard of priests is distinguished and clearly channeled towards upholding holiness, morality, godliness, integrity and dignity. They are oracles of God — the liturgical and prophetic voices of generations, who by their calling are to live above board, and whose messages and teachings, are to build the society and reconcile men to God.

But it is disheartening today that many have lost focus and the dignity of the office for the sake of vain glory and popularity. Like the political demagogues, the involvement of priests in the worldly trend has consequently lured so many away from their calling. It is obviously noticeable today that much of the concern of some of them are centered on money. They focus much on how to enrich their pockets through and by political touts, making them their associates in quest for ill-gotten wealth. Their mission for the cure of souls is becoming infinitesimal and their call to teaching the word of God is receiving lackadaisical responses. The nitty-gritty of Christian tradition has been neglected by so many priests and religious leaders, placing much attention on casual Christianity. Thus, their actions tend to bring ridicule to the name and house of God.

Some of the crops of ministers that are coming to the ministry today in most of the Nigerian churches are very raw. They seem not to undergo thorough training which would prepare them for the challenges of the 21st century ministry. Some of these personnel are local breed, who are locally picked and ordained at the leaders' discretion and intuition; hence they are bloodily immature to handle the noble priestly office. Imagine a roadside vulcanizer, 'mechanic' or welder, who can read the bible fairly, is thus eligible for ordination; all by the virtue of his ability to read fairly. The jobless class of citizens claims to be called into the priesthood giving his jobless condition as a reason or license for his calling. On the other hand, the well-baked professionals and other set of public figures are being ordained as part-time priests or pastors. In most cases, people care-less to trace their past records in their secular sectors. Many church authorities in the Nigerian churches who are guilty of this, go extra miles to deceive their victims and followers in justifying their actions under the religious mantra: "The harvest is plenty but the labourers are few".

Consequently, some calibers of priestly personnel we find in the Nigerian churches today are plaguing the priestly vocation and denting its identity. This is buttressed by the statement of Oke as he remarks:

"The national dailies are replete with stories and news of prophets, priests, pastors... and a host of Holy Spirit tricksters who prowl about priestly cassocks to rob their victims and household property worth of millions of

naira. They often lure victims into parting with their hard earned money or valuables or both.”⁴⁴

So, it is not just surprising but also disheartening to hear that there are cases of pilfering, looting and misappropriation of funds that are entrusted to the care of some Christian ministers. Recently, a certain priest was alleged of removing some higher denomination in the offering basin and kept them behind the decoration altar linen in the chancel. What about the case of a pastor that was dragged to court on twenty count-charges of forgery, stealing, looting etc. some of these characters have turned the church into a den of robbers? For reasons of these kinds, Obiora bitterly remarks that: “Today in Nigeria, there are buoyant commercial priests who grew big and heavy through gross exploitation of the poor and ignorant masses.”⁴⁵ Today, nobody wants to serve as evangelist. Everybody wants to be a pastor or priest. Virtually every home in Nigeria has produced a pastor or priest. Thus the priestly office is in its dwindling tendency and its nobility seems to be fading so fast that politicians can hire priests to perpetuate their political ambitions.

It has been rightly said that many activities of so many politicians are disgusting following their promised-and-failed syndrome, vain promises and deceptive ideologies; and these are strictly condemned by religious leaders, who know their onions. Yet a quite number of worthless priests still register their begging-kneels before these political touts singing their praises, garnering them confidence in their vicious expeditions, all for financial returns. A typical example was the recent incident of the hired fake pastors and bishops who disguised as real religious leaders in a particular political arena in preparation for 2023 presidential election; an attempt to deceive the entire nation for party and personality jingoism.

Priesthood today in Nigerian context has been molested and drastically reduced to an insignificant point by the unworthy ones. The spate of abnormalities in the Nigerian churches and other houses of God has continued to draw comments and reactions from both spiritual and other well-meaning leaders in the society. For example, Archbishop Okogie of the Roman Catholic Church once said “It is more than obvious today that carrying the Bible is one of the quickest means of getting money”⁴⁶, while Bishop George Lasebikan (rtd) of the Anglican Communion lamented the falling standard of the church. He said, “The church which ought to mediate between God and the society has unfortunately lost her original focus, all because her ministers are confused about their divine mandate for the kingdom assignment.”⁴⁷ Still on this, the former prelate of the Methodist Church of Nigeria, His Eminence, Sunday Mbang also on another occasion, said, “The church has turned to a den of rubbers. He was reported as saying that marketing God has led to high level of corruption, immorality and other forms of indiscipline in our society.”

Worse than the aforementioned, it is appalling to hear that some priests are not only on curing mission for widows and female orphans but go extra miles to play immoral games of sexual satisfaction with the careless victims amongst them, hence the witty mantra: “The priest is the husband of the widows”. This was a taboo in the Melchizedek and Levitical Orders of priesthood in ancient Israel. It is only the replication of the character of the sons of Aaron, Eli and Samuel; the lifestyles that made the sons of Eli to be referred as sons of Belial—sons of “worthlessness” or wickedness.”⁴⁸ Though they were priests, yet they did not know the Lord and all that their office required (1 Sam. 2:12).

Concluding Remarks

While we do not deny the fact that the priestly office in Ancient Israel was not without blemishes following the evidences that abound through the messages of the prophets of their days (Amos, Micah, Jeremiah and a host of others), yet the modern priesthood should be properly checked and rebranded. Authorities of different church denominations in Nigeria should do all they could in their power to regain the holy identity of the priestly office from its present mess, and restore its glory and dignity in the public corridor. There is

need to create a forum through which corrupt priests could be habilitated. Such a forum may include periodic seminars and retreats for spiritual renewal. Priests with high integrity and experience should be asked to deliver lectures on issues that are affecting priesthood in the church, particularly, in Nigeria. Historically, it is abominable for a priest to indulge in any form of immoral expeditions in the priestly orders of Melchizedek and the Levitical. Such decency should be a progressive tradition for the men of the holy order, as they are special breeds who are pledged to sanctity, morality and decency. This would help in transforming sound doctrines and teachings into practical lifestyles characterized by discipline, honesty, justice, truth and self-control.

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