

How to Avoid Priestcraft

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The purpose of this paper is to suggest the way by which one might avoid the practice of priestcraft in this world. We shall proceed to discuss this topic under the four following main headings.

First, the basic premises. Then we shall define priestcraft and priesthood. Thirdly, we shall suggest how not to practice it in various professions, and, finally, we shall assert some conclusions.

The context of this discussion is that of Latter-day Saints in this dispensation. The question is: how shall we, knowing the fullness of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, be able to avoid practicing priestcraft?

We make the following stipulations as part of the basic premises.

1. We are here on earth to become as the Savior. It is the intent of our Father that we should have the opportunity to acquire the Savior's knowledge, skills, values and powers in this mortality with the ultimate possibility of becoming fully as He is. The work of the Lord is calculated to encourage us to become as close to Him as we wish to become, and to become as much like Him as we wish to be.
2. The scripture warns us that the Savior is our God, and we are not to take counsel—that is to say, we are not to take wisdom,—from our fellowmen. We read the following in Section 1 of the Doctrine and Covenants which is part of a series of comments as to why the gospel has been restored in these latter days.

“That man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh, but that every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world.” (D&C 1:19)

We see, then, that it is not good for one man to try to tell another what is wise for him to do. We may teach each other. We may explain, but we should not pretend to give counsel to our fellowmen for that is the function of God, Himself.

3. We read in the scriptures that the Savior is the fountain of all righteousness. Quoting from Ether, chapter 12, verse 28:

“Behold, I show unto the Gentiles their weakness, and I will show unto them that faith, hope and charity bringeth unto me—the fountain of all righteousness.”

The Savior is indeed the fountain of all righteousness, meaning that if we wish to be righteous we must go to Him, for He is the only

source from which we can draw true wisdom. The scriptures also say that the wisdom of man is foolishness before God. For man does not know the beginning from the end. Man does not know very much about the complexities even of the moment which he is in the world. To know true wisdom, that is to say, to find out how truly to do the right thing at any given time, we must come to consult One who does know all, who is infinitely good and wise in all things, and this is our Savior, Jesus Christ, the fountain of all righteousness.

4. We need to understand something about basic human roles. There are three basic human roles, one of which obtains every human relationship. In any given situation I am someone's father, I am their brother, or I am their son. If you are a woman, in every situation you are either someone's mother, you are their sister, or you are their daughter. Special relationships obtain between people when they have these relations. For instance, the proper relationship between father and child is that the father is to bless the child. That is to say, to help the child to grow, to develop, to come to be as the Father is. It is the glory of fathers to share with their children, to help the children to have all that they have, even as does our Father in Heaven. It is the glory of brothers to share with each other. Not to lord, not to dominate, not to be keepers, but to share one with another. To share joy and sorrow, riches and poverty, understanding, skills, possessions, whatever we might have, it is our opportunity to share with our brothers and sisters.

Children have a special relationship with fathers: their role is to obey, for only as they obey and take counsel from those who are their fathers, either appointed by God or God, Himself, can they grow to their potential. Only in obedience to those instructions can they come to a fulness of what their Father would have them be. One of the great problems in the world is the confusion of these roles, of people assuming that they have the right to be fathers when they do not, assuming that to be a brother is to be a father, or keeper, which it is not.

Finally, we need to point out from 2 Nephi, chapter 26, verse 29, the Lord's definition of priestcraft as given through Nephi.

“He commandeth that there shall be no priestcrafts; for, behold, priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion.”

Without commenting further on this definition of priestcraft then we shall proceed to define the roles of the priest and then to give a refined definition of priestcraft in the context of true priesthood.

We will assert then that the true characteristics of a true priest are as follows. The priest is a righteousness person, he is a saint. A priest is called of God. He is a true light unto the world. That is to say, he dispenses truth and wisdom from God the Father and from our Savior, Jesus Christ, through the instrumentality of the Holy Ghost. The true priest does not speak of himself or his own wisdom, but he delivers to his fellow beings the wisdom that comes from God. To those who accept his message, he administers the ordinances of salvation. He also does suffering for the sins of his people; for in their weakness, in their ignorance, for they will sin, and the priest suffers with them and for them.

The Savior is our model in this matter of being a true priest. He, indeed, was righteousness and without sin. His Father sent Him into the world. The Savior did not call Himself but His Father sent Him and testifies to men of that sending. The Savior is the Light of the World. He is the Source of all Wisdom and all Righteousness to this world. He came and ordained and blessed and healed, thus administering the ordinances of salvation, both temporal and spiritual, to those who could profit from His blessings. He suffered for the sins of His people, indeed, for He performed the atonement in which He took upon Himself pain for the sins of all human beings, whoever had lived or would live on the face of the earth. In doing all this, He gave the glory to His Father, accepting none for Himself.

A true priest, one appointed after the order of Christ, will have similar characteristics to the Savior. The true priest strives to be righteous. He confesses and forsakes his sins. He loves his brothers and his sisters. He is one with his file leader and is a saint. He does not call himself or set himself up but is ordained and set apart by his file leader in the priesthood. He teaches the commandments of God, not his own wisdom. He helps people to be wise by delivering to them wisdom from God and thus helps them to come to happiness which is the fruit of true wisdom. He administers the ordinances of salvation. The power of God flows as the true priest administers the saving ordinances as he heals and blesses. He forgives all men their personal trespasses and against himself suffers the indignities and evils that men heap upon him because he is a servant of Christ, thus helping to bear their sins. He gives the glory to the Savior.

The false priest, in contrast to the true priest, covers his sins, gratifies his pride. His love for men waxes cold. He is an apostate: he stands apart from those who hold the true priesthood, and will not accept their counsel. He is not called of God but sets himself up to be a light unto the world. He pretends that his light is good and teaches men that they should do as he says, but he does not teach the commandments of Christ. He teaches doctrines of man and of devils and sorrow results. Sometimes, of course, he mixes what he teaches with the statements of the scriptures, giving some good along with the bad, thus confusing people.

He administers empty ordinances: most of the ordinances he performs, if they are saving ordinances, have pretended efficacy in the next life only. By this he shields himself from having to pay the consequences of ordinances performed without power. Should he heal, he likely will do so by Satan's power, surely not by that of Christ. When he has opposition, he will not suffer it, but he seeks to punish the opposition and thus brings persecution upon his enemies (as the history of religion has so many examples to offer). He gladly accepts praise and/or gain for his priesthood functions.

Having thus defined the true priest and the false priest, we can now say particularly what it is we are talking about. When any person has every characteristic of the true priest then he is a true priest. Should he partake of any one characteristic of the false priest, then that person is a false priest. Priestcraft is one subdivision of being a false priest. It is that subdivision wherein one sets one's self up as a light unto the world and takes praise or gain for doing so. Having thus defined priestcraft we will now proceed to show some examples of both priestcraft and the possibility of not practicing priestcraft.

Let us posit first of all the worst possible case. Let's take an LDS man who has grown up in the Church but rejects many of the teachings of the gospel and rejects the Brethren as his file leaders. Because he does not accept the gospel, he has not repented of his sins and he is selfish and unrepentant. He lies about his sins, perhaps even accepting the priesthood for social reasons. He goes to a university and there he gets what he considers to be "real authority" in this world, a Ph.D. and a M.D., and becomes a psychiatrist. As he goes out to practice psychiatry, he teaches and uses the theories of men. He perhaps teaches permissiveness, situational ethics, humanist doctrines, all of which are contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ. He conducts therapy sessions to relieve persons of guilt and of shame for sin by telling them there is no such thing as guilt and there should not be shame. He attacks and

belittles faithful people and priesthood authority in the true Church, and perhaps becomes wealthy and famous from his priestcraft.

Let us show now how this same person with the same occupational opportunity could proceed not to practice priestcraft. If the *psychiatrist* were a humble LDS person who fully accepted the priesthood authority in the Church, if he repented of all his sins, and sought to serve the Lord with all of his heart, might, mind and strength, then he might go to a university and learn much of the theories and practices and skills of man, receiving his Ph.D. and his M.D. Having learned all the good that he could from the wisdom of men he would search also into the things of God and would become skilled and knowledgeable in all the way of godliness. Then when people came to him with their problems, he would teach them both the understanding of the world and the understanding of the gospel; he would allow them to take their choice and select the kind of treatment they would like to have. He would make no pretense to cure. He would help people to repent, if they choose the Lord's way. He would administer appropriate therapy if they chose the world's way. He would not do anything that would be contrary to the teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He would be fully respectful of all persons, including his client. If someone were to abuse him for his faith in Christ or for any of his professional notions, he would accept that abuse without retaliation. He would charge modest fees, and those only for teaching and for administering therapy; never for telling people what they should do. He would reject the praise of man, giving the glory to God.

Let us now proceed to discuss a series of occupations showing how people in each of these occupations would act so as to avoid priestcraft. We shall assume that in all cases the person is a righteous LDS person and has received sufficient training from the world to be able to understand and practice the ways of the world.

Let us take then the case of the *lawyer*. The lawyer would learn the ways of law and then would teach his clients the ways and words of the law. He would teach probable options, probable outcomes, and possibilities that the client might choose. Then he would assist the client in executing whichever choice the client makes in preparation of documents, in trial procedures, etc. The lawyer would take money only for teaching and for applying his skills, never for telling people what they should do for that is the role of the true priest.

How would the *M.D.* act? The M.D. would learn all he could about the functions of the human body and

the nature of the diseases which are common to human beings. When someone came to him with a malady he would teach them the ways of their body and the options for treatment and probable outcomes. When the patient had made a choice that seemed to the patient to be wise, then he would help the patient execute the choice, performing surgery or therapy according to the patient's instructions. He would take money for teaching and performing professional skills, but not for telling people what they should do.

Let us then take the case of the *teacher*, say a teacher in a university. The teacher would learn and then teach skills and knowledge. He would never force his values or any values on students, leaving them the honor of being agents unto themselves to make their own choices. But he would teach them the knowledge and skills which they came to him to receive and requested of him. He would teach parents and students options for education so that they could understand the various possibilities and then would proceed to help them implement those options as chosen. He would take money for teaching, never for telling people what they should do or what they should believe, leaving that to their own personal agency.

How would a *financial counselor* operate? A financial counselor would make himself very much aware of the possibilities available for his clients, and then would teach his clients the options for investment plus probable consequences. He would assist his clients to understand what they needed to know to make wise decisions. When the clients had decided what to do, then he would assist them to execute their choice, if requested. He would take money for teaching and for executing choices, but never telling them what they should do.

How would an *architect* operate? The architect would learn the possibilities for beauty and utility in buildings. When a client came to him he would make proposals showing the client various options. When the client was prepared to make a choice and did make one, then he would prepare specifications and detailed drawings and assist with architectural supervision in the construction of the building as the client desired. He would apply his skills and teach, but would never take money for telling people what they should do.

The *engineer* would learn and teach cost effectiveness' options in accomplishing various kinds of practical projects in the world. He would acquaint his clients with options available, possible costs, and the probable effectiveness of various projects. When the client had made a choice of a system, he would design and perhaps build the system to fulfill the

client's choice. He would take money for teaching, designing and building, but not for telling his clients what to do.

As a *scientist*, a person would learn all he could about the current sciences of his time, about the hypotheses on which people were working. He would then propose to various people projects where he might further explore these hypotheses to either add to their confirmation or to try to falsify them, to add somehow to the store of human capability. He would use the very best of hypotheses available for experimentation. He would take money only for teaching, for his technical accomplishments, and for his ideas in creating new hypotheses. He would never take money for propounding truths or for telling people what they should do or what they should believe.

The *farmer* would operate by learning the options for effective farming. Then he would farm effectively and would take money for produce, not for telling people what to do. The case of the farmer is relatively a simple one, and is matched by that of the artisan in many professions.

The *senator* is a more difficult case. The senator would learn and teach the options and probable outcomes for public policy. He would make it his business to inform his public as fully as possible on the problems that face them and the possible options for action. When called upon to make a decision as to what policy to follow, he would either execute the people's choice or if delegated to make the choice himself would go before the Lord and seek from the Lord that which was most wise and would vote for or enact that which the Lord asked him to do. He would take money for teaching and for implementing, but never for telling people what they should do.

Admittedly, this problem of the senator is more complex than most of the rest. There is much yet here to be explored. For the senator gets into moral difficulties because he must vote to force people to do and not to do certain things. He thus begins to act in the role of the priest or in the role of God, which is, of course, always a dangerous business. We will leave that exploration to another time and place.

The final case that we will draw is that of the *salesman*. The salesman will learn all he can about the options available to his buyer, to fill to buyers needs. Then he will help his client to understand all the options available and will help the client to procure the clients choice. This would involve sometimes, of course, featuring the goods of some other person rather than the goods the salesman might be wishing to sell himself. This means that salesmen might have to

become buying agents rather than representatives of particular products if they were to avoid unrighteousness in being salesmen. They would take money for teaching, not for psychologically forcing someone into what they did not want or need, nor for telling them what they should do.

Now, let us sum up and conclude on the matter that we have been discussing. The pattern shows up plainly. It is the glory of mankind to share with one another, to teach one another both skills and knowledge. But men should not try to counsel one another, nor to pretend to be one another's keepers or priests, unless we have been personally appointed by God to the true priesthood to preside. Everyone might thus see the importance of becoming a highly-skilled learner and teacher since this is what the professional life of many people would consist of doing. It seems then that to love God is to take His counsel, never the counsel of man, and to learn all of Gods thoughts and ways that we can. To love our neighbor is to share our learning and skill with our neighbor but never to force or lord it over our neighbor by practicing priestcraft. To be a good neighbor is also not to demand or even to submit to priestcraft.

We Latter-day Saints give glory to God and hearken carefully to the voice of his true priests who represent the presiding authorities of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For they truly represent Jesus Christ, who is the fountain of all wisdom and all righteousness. By our own revelation, each of us can know that what they say is the word of the Lord. Because of the goodness of our Lord, who gives liberally to all who ask for wisdom in faith, each of us can be wise.