

## Origin and Development of Priesthood Institution

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### **Abstract**

*Present research study is an attempt to discuss about the important issue regarding origin and development of priesthood institution in the human civilization. Basically religion has an important role in the life of the people around the world and priests are one of the most important persons in any religion. They are the official representatives of a religion. Present research study is based on secondary data collection. In present study, it is found that there is no clear evidence to support that the institution of priesthood was present in the beginning of the civilization. Main reason for it is found that in early stages of cult, the rites are naturally very simple, and in consequence almost anybody is thought able to undertake the performance of the priestly functions. Regarding the question related to development of priesthood institution, it is found that because of the growth of the ritual observances and magical practices too complicated for the average man to master, so professional priests gradually became necessary. It is concluded in this study that there is the evolution of priesthood institution from the natural priesthood to the professional priesthood.*

### **Keywords**

*Priesthood, Religion, Origin and Development, Rites and rituals, Natural priesthood, Professional priesthood.*

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## **Introduction**

Religion has an important role in the life of the people around the world and priests are one of the most important persons in any religion. The priest is the official representative of a religion. He is a religious functionary whose role is to administer an established religion to celebrate the traditional rituals, practices and beliefs. The priest play an important role as mediator between God and humans. He narrate and interpret and also strengthens the divine will. He also regulates and strengthens the relation between divine supreme power and his fellow human beings.

Present research study is based on secondary data collection.

Basically priests are religious specialist, who are dedicated itself towards religious activities. These religious activities are like religious beliefs, traditions, rituals, ceremonies and sometimes magical elements.

According to Cambridge English dictionary, “A Priest is a person, usually a man, who has been trained to perform religious duties in Christian Church, especially the Roman Catholic Church or a person with particular duties in some other religions.”

Farley, John M. in his book “The parish Priest on duty : A practical manual for pastors, curates and theological students preparing for the mission discussed about the conditions, which are required for the priest, preparatory to the worthy administration of the sacraments. He described these conditions as following:

1. Purity of heart
2. Clean lines of body and of the materials which serve him in the administration of the sacraments.
3. A thorough knowledge of the ceremonies and of their significance.

According to Maguire, M.B. (2002), an essential characteristic of the priest is his relationship with an organized religion and his legitimacy by religious authorities.

So, it can be said that the priest is the official representative of a religion.

## **Origin of Priesthood Institution**

While discussing the origin of priesthood, Gunnar Land man (1905) explained that there is no clear evidence to support that the institution of priesthood was present in the beginning of the civilization. According to him “There is every reason to believe that in the earliest history of cult no proper priesthood existed. Although various kinds of priestly practitioners undoubtedly belong to a very early period of religious evolution, all conclusions point to the rule that originally everybody involved the gods each for himself. Cult has therefore existed in some

form or other before there were any professional men entrusted with the duty of conduction the different religious observances.”

The author provides some evidences from the history about the above absence of the priesthood institution. According to him “Information received from several sources, among certain people the custom that everybody performed his worship for himself without the assistance of any priests seems to have subsisted.”

Actually in early stages of cult, the rites are naturally very simple, and in consequence almost anybody is thought able to undertake the performance of the priestly functions.

So, if there is a sign of absence of priesthood institution in the beginning of society, then question arises that when the priesthood institution started? Regarding this question, Herbert Spencer has a view that the Union of King and priest in one person constitutes the usual origin of a priesthood. In the beginning, the kings were generally also priests. But, in the course of time they were for various reasons, unable to retain the priestly dignity, which therefore gradually passed over to a special class of men.

### **Development of Priesthood Institution**

Regarding the question related to development of priesthood institution, Thomas, K.D. (2004) discussed the evolution of priesthood in his research work on priests. He described that there are many strong proofs in the history of several religions as the evolution of priesthood from the natural to the regular or professional priesthood. According to him “In its evolution we note two phases, namely the phase of the natural priesthood and the phase of professional priesthood. There are indication to affirm that originally everyone involved the gods each for oneself. In the early times, was confined to the defined members of the kindred, and later to those of tribes. Then the head of families or tribes most spontaneously performed the priestly because they as the oldest and most experienced members of the family stood closest to ancestors. When power of nature also began to be worshipped and the group of worshippers extended beyond a family, the regular or professional priesthood was initiated. When rituals lost their simplicity, professional priesthood becomes even more necessary.”

So, we can say that because of the growth of the ritual observances and magical practices, too complicated for the average man to master, professional priests gradually became necessary. When the people were uncertain about the proper ceremonies, they applied to the more experienced practitioners i.e. priests asking them to perform the ceremonies on their behalf. In this way, the priests have become an important member in any society.

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