

## II

### THE PLACE OF CHRIST IN THE LITURGY

LITURGY is a personal meeting with God, but “in and through Christ”. In treating this part of our definition we are touching on the aspect that makes our liturgy specifically Christian worship. It is characteristic of the contemporary movement, and a welcome feature of it, that people are endeavouring to determine the nature of the liturgy almost unanimously in conjunction with the person of Christ and of his saving action and his high-priesthood. Christ is generally seen as the great Liturge, as the Person who plays the principal part in the liturgical action.

The fruits of this endeavour were recognized and confirmed in 1947 in the Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, which defines the liturgy in terms of Christ and his redeeming work. In the introduction the christological conception of the liturgy is announced; it is stated briefly: “The Church continues the priestly office of Jesus Christ especially in the liturgy” (par. 3). But the conception becomes very prominent when Pius XII endeavours to give a definition of the nature of the liturgy. This definition runs: “The sacred liturgy then is the public worship which our Redeemer, the head of the Church, offers to the heavenly Father, and which the community of Christ’s faithful pays to its Founder, and through him to the Eternal Father; briefly it is the whole public worship of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, head and members” (par. 20).

In the paragraph that precedes the definition we find the motivation of its christocentrism: “In the whole conduct of the liturgy the Church has her divine Founder present with her. Christ is present in the august Sacrifice of the altar in the person of his minister, and especially under the Eucharistic species; he is present in the sacraments by his power which he infuses into them as instruments of sanctification; he is present finally in the prayer and praises that are offered to God in accordance with his promise: ‘When two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them’” (Matt. 18.20).

If the christocentric character of the liturgy is already so strongly emphasized in *Mediator Dei*,<sup>1</sup> it is not surprising that the Constitution on the Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council expounds the place of Christ in the liturgy still more pointedly and more deeply. Still more fully than in *Mediator Dei* the presence of the Lord in the liturgical actions is emphasized: "He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of his minister, the same now offering through the ministry of priests who formerly offered himself on the cross", but especially under the eucharistic species. By his power he is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ himself who baptizes. He is present in his word, since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. He is present lastly when the Church prays and sings, for he promised: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18.20). And the text continues: "rightly then, the liturgy is considered as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. . . . From this it follows that every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the priest . . . is a sacred action surpassing all others" (1.7).

### 1. Christ as liturgical mystery

Since we are defining the liturgy in its relation to Christ, we must first ascertain the liturgical aspect of Christ's Person and action, that is, the priestly character of his Person and action.

In the writings of the New Testament Christ is continually described as the invisible God become visible.

It is one of the key ideas of the Gospel of St John: Christ interpreted his Father here on earth. The conclusion of the prologue in which the Incarnation is described (1.14) runs: "No one has ever seen God: the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (1.18). When therefore Philip asks of the Master at the Last Supper: "Show us the Father!" he at once receives the reproof: "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father" (14.8-9). His works are the works of the Father, and by doing them he reveals the glory of the Father. Of his first miracle in Cana John expressly writes: "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did . . . and manifested his glory" (2.11). The

<sup>1</sup> Bibliography: A. Klawek, *Das Gebet zu Jesus. Seine Berechtigung und Übung nach den Schriften des Neuen Testaments (Neutest. Abhandlungen, 5)*, Münster, 1921; J. A. Jungmann, S.J., E. H. Schillebeeckx, O.P., *De sacramentele Heilseconomie*, Bilthoven, 1952; *id.*, *Christ, the Sacrament of Encounter with God*, London and New York, 1963.

raising of Lazarus is also described by John as the glory of God become manifest, visible: "If you would believe you would see the glory of God" (11.40).

St Paul is no less clear on the point. He calls Christ the "image of the invisible God" (Col. 1.15); who "was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" (Phil. 2.6). At the beginning of the Epistle to the Hebrews we read, with reference to the Incarnation: ". . . In these last days he has spoken to us by a Son . . . he reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature . . ." (Heb. 1.2-3). In the pastoral epistles of St Paul we meet with the same idea: "The grace of God our Saviour has appeared to all men" (Tit. 2.11); and again: "The goodness and lovingkindness of our Saviour appeared" (Tit. 3.4). It is significant that these last three texts were chosen for the epistles of the Christmas Day Masses. In them the liturgy gives us to understand that we must look on Christ as the visible form of God's grace and love for men. We find the thought stated still more explicitly in another passage of the pastoral epistles: "The grace (of God) which he . . . has manifested through the appearance of our Saviour Christ Jesus . . ." (2 Tim. 1.9-10).

In Christ the invisible God comes among us in visible form. He is the personal, earthly appearance of the divine grace of salvation. Therefore we may call him *the sacrament of the Father*, that is, the living sign of God's fatherly love, which also as an effectual sign has brought this love of the Father to men. And as a sign at the same time veils and unveils, hides and reveals, so the humanity of Christ veils his Godhead, and at the same time reveals it. In him God's fatherly love achieved concrete form, in him it steps out to meet us. It becomes in him corporeally palpable, humanly visible. When we approach him with faith—for only through faith can we recognize the sign as a sign—we can gather from him, and at the same time experience, what God's fatherly love is for men. Christ lived God's redeeming mercy in the sight of men, as it were bodily. He is God in human fashion, and all that he does as a man is a deed of God in human form, is an incarnation, divine activity become human. The Incarnation is not a mystery that limits itself to the one moment of conception in the womb of Mary, but one that continues for ever in Christ; it is the mystery of the invisible God become bodily visible in his love for men.

Now how is this mystery which is Christ, a liturgical mystery?

We noted above, as characteristic of every liturgical celebration, a

double direction: a descent of God to man, and an ascent of man to God. The descending and ascending line can be seen in the entire divine-human activity of Christ.

1. The descending line is immediately plain. In Christ God descends to our level. God the distant becomes in Christ the graciously near; therefore Christ is the Pontifex, the great "Bridge-maker" who bridges over the infinite distance between God and man. Although himself God, he lowers himself to the utmost, and takes the form of a servant, the suffering servant of Yahweh, and subjects himself as a man in obedience to God (Phil. 2.6). He lays aside his divine riches, to become poor as we are. God's descent to man has gone in Christ to the uttermost limit, to the most complete emptying of self, whereby he not only brought himself down to the human level but also became the least of men and made himself small in ministering love that he might be at their service: "The Son of man came not to be served but to serve" (Matt. 20.28). On the Cross the emptying of self of the God-man attained its dramatic climax: obedience unto death for our sakes. There he was supremely the servant of men; Matthew therefore follows this up immediately with: "and to give his life as a ransom for many" (v. 28).

But for anyone who in faith approaches Christ as the sign of the Father and all his acts as so many signs of God's redeeming love for men, the sign is also an effectual and healing sign. The mystery of Christ's self-abasement then becomes at the same time the mystery of man's exaltation: God becomes man to "make us God", he becomes poor to enrich us, he takes the form of a slave in order to bestow on us the freedom of the children of God.

2. The mystery of the divine exaltation of man, of the Redemption, is, however, most deeply grounded in the fact that Christ is not only the living sign of God, but through the healing power which has issued from his Godhead to his human nature—in spite of his utmost self-abasement—he is also at the same time the first of the children of men, the new Adam, who as the representative of fallen mankind, as their Head and Leader, shows the way back to the Father. He comes to meet us from the Father, in order to lead us back to the Father. The Son of God, who by nature and from all eternity turns to the Father as a Son, becomes man so that he, a Son, can show us how to be sons also.

Through the hypostatic union, the union of the divine and human nature in one person, he is the one perfect man, the highest figure in the human race, who alone can offer the Father a fitting worship. So

he is the "highest worshipper of the Father", "the supreme realization of all religion".<sup>2</sup>

It is here that we encounter the priestly character of the Person of Christ. As the first, as the Head and Leader of men, his whole life was a recognition of God's overlordship, a surrender of himself to the will of the Father in dependent obedience, an ascent to him in homage and praise. The fundamentally liturgical attitude of Christ's life reaches its supreme moment in his death on the Cross. There the High Priest Christ celebrated his most sublime liturgy. For his dying on the Cross was the supreme act of religious surrender, was a rendering of worship to the Father. It is above all the sacrifice on the Cross that we must learn to see again as a *sacrificium laudis* (cf. the Eucharistic Prayer of the Roman liturgy of the Mass), as a sacrifice of homage and praise, whereby humanity through Christ, as its Leader and Head, recognizes its creaturely dependence on the Father. For though the community of the Church was not yet actively involved in Christ's sacrificial deed on the Cross, it was already present there in its Head and representative, Christ. He appeared in our name as our Mediator before the Father.

We must see the priestly function of Christ in the great context of the priestly task that is every man's, in virtue of his creation by God. The whole of the life of Christ, but especially his departure from this world to the Father, was a resumption of the priestly task for which God had created man. For God created all things for his glory and honour, for his own glorification. Simply by being as God created it the whole of creation proclaims the glory of God. It reveals his wisdom and omnipotence, and is a reflection of his glory. Man also has been created by God for his own glory, but in far greater measure. God made him a priest and a king of creation, and modelled him as a masterpiece in his own image and likeness. We gave him the mandate of gathering together as it were the hymn of praise of the irrational creation, and of consciously offering it, united with his own, before the throne of God. Came the fall, and man was no longer, in spite of all his efforts, in a position to testify before God to his dependence on him, and to that of the rest of creation, in a worthy or acceptable manner. A restoration and recreation was therefore necessary, with as its direct effect the redemption of man, but with as its ultimate aim the glorifying of God. The restoration was brought about through Christ, the new Adam, the first of the new humanity. What the old Adam had upset, Christ restored. The pure orientation towards God in the

<sup>2</sup> See E. H. Schillebeeckx, *Christ, the Sacrament of Encounter with God* (note 1), 19ff.

consciousness of creaturely dependence, in the surrender of obedience, in praise, adoration and supplication, in a word, in the glorifying of the Father, was lived anew by Christ as our example. The way to the Father was blocked in all its life-forms. Christ was the first to tread that way again, and so he paved the way for man in his dire need, the need of salvation. The song of praise to the Creator into which a jarring note had entered through the fall, was first sung again by him in all its fullness. Especially in the supreme reality of his life, in the Paschal mystery of his Passion, death and Resurrection, his turning to the Father attains its most telling expression: "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23.46). Christ's going out of this world was a going to the Father in which he wished to precede us: "I came from the Father and have come into the world; again I am leaving the world and going to the Father" (John 16.28).

Christ is accordingly at one and the same time:

1. A living sign of God: *a Patre*; coming from the Father, sent by the Father, to show his redeeming love to men.

2. A forerunner of humanity: *ad Patrem*; as the first of a new humanity he offers to the Father the worship that is due to him, and so he precedes mankind on the way back to the Father.

Treating of the cultic mystery which is Christ, the Liturgical Constitution of Vatican II likewise emphasizes the double orientation of Christ's Person: "In him the perfect achievement of our reconciliation came forth, and the fullness of divine worship was given us" (1.5). The Paschal mystery of his holy Passion, of his Resurrection from the dead and of his glorious Ascension is likewise typified as "the work of Christ the Lord in redeeming mankind and giving perfect glory to God" (*ibid*).

Both these realities are included in the name of Mediator or High Priest. Christ is the great meeting-point between God and man: in him God comes nearer to men, in him also mankind can return to the Father. The whole life of Christ, above all the Paschal mystery of his departure from this world to the Father, was a priestly, a cultic mystery which was simultaneously a Redemption mystery in its orientation towards man. Through offering to the Father the only worship that was worthy of him, Christ appeased the Father and thus brought salvation to mankind.

## 2. Christ's saving action in the liturgy

We have now seen how Christ, in his Person and in his salvific action during his earthly life, can be approached as a liturgical

mystery, as a sacrament. The outer signs of his humanity and of his human action conceal and reveal God's love to men and the attitude of worship of the new Man Christ towards his Father; at the same time we are concerned with an effectual sign, for it possesses redeeming power, because the worship Christ rendered the Father appeased him and became for us the basis of salvation.

It can now be shown that the whole sacramental liturgy of the Church takes its meaning from Christ, the original Sacrament. There is really only one Sacrament, and that is Christ: *Non est aliud sacramentum nisi Christus*.<sup>3</sup> He is the great sacrament of God, and the Church's sacraments rate as such only because the sacrament that is Christ is present and effectual in them.

Because each sacrament is a sign, it presupposes something visible, something materially perceptible. It is definitely an outward sign, that veils, reveals and effects a divine reality. Such an outward sign was Christ during his earthly life, and has been in a sense still more since his Resurrection. For although he was a sign of God during his earthly life, his visible humanity was then actually more concealing than revealing; since his Resurrection, however, he has become the "life-giving Spirit" (1 Cor. 15.45), and radiates the divine reality in his glorified Body; since then he has been able as "the Son of God in power" (Rom. 1.4) to impart that power to others also. The sign of Christ's humanity has become more transparent since his Resurrection, and more effectual.

The Resurrection made Christ the glorified Lord, whose worship is accepted by the Father. He sits now for ever at his right hand in the attitude of worship. In him we have an Advocate and Intercessor with the Father (1 John 2.1; Rom. 8.34; Heb. 7.25; John 14.16; 16.23). He stands before the Father as our High Priest by virtue of his high-priestly deed on the Cross: "We have . . . a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent which is set up not by man but by the Lord" (Heb. 8.1-2). But this eternal attitude of worship of the glorified Lord towards his Father is also oriented towards humanity in its dire need of salvation: "He holds his priesthood permanently because he continues forever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7.24-25).

The new people of God, the Church, unlike the Old Israel, has no

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine, *Ep.* 187, 34, P.L. 38, 845. Translated in *St Augustine's Works*, Edinburgh, 1872, vol. 13.

use for many sacrifices (Heb. 7.27). Nor does it have many priests, but only the *one* High Priest, Christ, who, through his one and only perfect Sacrifice on the Cross (Heb. 9.25-28; 10.11-15) reconciled the Father. Now the one cult mystery of Christ's Pasch, which honours the Father and redeems us, is eternally present to the Father in heaven. This is possible, because the redeeming deeds of Christ were the deeds of a God-Man, of a divine Person. As such they possess a value for eternity and contain also a moment of eternity. This moment of eternity, this redeeming act of worship, the self-giving of the Son, is for ever present to the Father in the heavenly Lord.

Although the glorified Christ since his Resurrection and Ascension is a more effectual sign than during his earthly life, yet, as a sign, he is withdrawn from our eyes. Christ's risen life is hidden in God (Col. 3.3), and although remaining a sign, he cannot be directly approached as a sign by the pilgrim Church on earth. Therefore the Church has need of another sign in order to participate in the grace of Redemption. This new sign Christ has left us in the liturgy. Through the liturgy, viewed in its sacramental aspect, Christ's redeeming act is put within our reach. Christ came once to meet humanity as a Redeemer. He continues to do so in the sacraments. In them he continues his salvation-revealing action and in them the Church experiences her salvation—no longer under the outward sign of his humanity and of his human action, but under the outward signs of the sacraments. Through the sacraments he causes the priestly, redeeming worship of the Paschal mystery to continue in the Church: *Quod conspicuum erat in Christo, transiit in Ecclesiae sacramenta*—"And so that which till then was visible in Christ has passed into the sacraments of the Church".<sup>4</sup> In the condition of the Church here on earth the outward sign of Christ's humanity and salvific action is replaced by the outward sign of the sacraments, but both contain the same salvific reality: Christ's redeeming worship. Therefore every sacramental celebration is a meeting with Christ, according to this striking saying of St Ambrose: *Facie ad faciem te mihi, Christe, demonstrasti; in tuis te invenio sacramentis*—"Thou hast shown thyself to me face to face, O Christ; I find thee in thy sacraments."<sup>5</sup>

The sacraments are the personal saving acts of Christ, but in the liturgical form of ecclesial acts. Pius XII pointed out in his Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, it is Christ himself who in the sacramental liturgy

<sup>4</sup> Leo the Great, *Sermo* 74, 2 (P.L. 54, 398), quoted in E. H. Schillebeeckx, *op. cit.* (note 1), 54.

<sup>5</sup> St Ambrose, *Apol. Proph. David*, 12, 58 (P.L. 14, 875).

baptizes, absolves and offers.<sup>6</sup> Each sacrament is the sacramental presence of Christ's eternally actual act of Redemption and therefore the sacraments are no mere means endowed with magic power, but meetings between us, earthly men, and the glorified God-Man, Christ. That is why one does not grasp the depth and riches of the sacraments if one approaches them merely juridically, exclusively intent on the strict minimum required to obtain the effect. The sacramental liturgy must on the contrary be conceived as a celebration of Christ's cultic redeeming mystery, accomplished in us now. Only when we once more approach the sacraments as a celebration of Christ's past but ever-enduring redemptive mysteries in the present, shall we do justice to the christocentric aspect of the sacramental liturgy. Then a definition of the liturgy such as O. Casel gave will find more understanding in the world of theologians. "It is the ritual accomplishment of the redeeming work of Christ in the Church, and through her the actualization of the divine redemptive act under the veil of symbols."<sup>7</sup>

The entire sacramental liturgy aims at the actualization of Christ's salvific act, even though the degree of this actualization differs according to the kind of sacrament. And ultimately this actualization is directed towards participation in the mystery of Redemption, towards living contact with the Person of the glorified Lord. The union with Christ that is brought about through the sacramental celebration is described by Christ himself as that of the vine and the branches. St Paul uses such images as Head and members, Bridegroom and bride. The role of Christ in the life of the Church differs fundamentally from that of St John the Baptist during Christ's earthly life. It was his task as the friend of the Bridegroom (John 3.28-30) to point away from himself to Christ. Christ however is not only the guide to the Father, he is himself the way; he is not a mere friend of the Bridegroom, who withdraws modestly when the Bridegroom appears; he is himself the Bridegroom. And for that very reason, he seeks contact, intimate living contact with the bride, his Church, and her members.

The celebration of Christ's redeeming work in the sacraments and

<sup>6</sup> *A.A.S.*, 35 (1943), 218; (C.T.S., Do. 266. *The Mystical Body of Jesus Christ*).

<sup>7</sup> O. Casel, O.S.B., *The Mystery of Christian Worship* (see Bibliography), *passim*. Comparing Casel's little work with Schillebeeckx' *Sacramentele Heilseconomie* ("Sacramental economy of Salvation"), one notes a surprising agreement in the general lines of the argument and becomes still more convinced that Schillebeeckx has given a theological extension to the patristic and biblical intuitions of Casel.

in the liturgical year effects a living contact with him, far more intimate than any conceivable contact in the human order. He bestows on us his own divine life, the risen life of the Son of God, that makes us in our turn children of God in him, the Son of God by nature, and has as its ultimate result that in him we can again call God our Father. Mysteriously subsumed in him, the infinite distance between God and man is bridged, and we are permitted to experience that the God of tremendous majesty is also our Father.

### 3. *Worship of and through Christ*

#### (a) *Christ as the object of the worship of the Church*

Because the celebration of the sacramental liturgy effects union with Christ in his redemptive mystery, it is not surprising that the Church in her liturgy of prayer makes Christ, her Bridegroom, also the object of her adoration. This is not the most profound side of the liturgy, but it has a regular place in the foreground; although it must be admitted that in later centuries under anti-Arian influence it has been sometimes too highlighted.

At any rate, direct adoration of Christ in the liturgy is fully justified and can certainly not be described as less liturgical or as a less pure form of liturgical style. For if God the Father has himself glorified his Son, and if the glorified Lord goes to meet his Church as a Bridegroom obviously the Church should show him honour and thank him directly for the gifts bestowed on her.

And so it is an inescapable liturgical fact that from the earliest days of Christianity Christ was an object of adoration in the worship of the Church. The tradition goes back to apostolic times. Already in the New Testament we find hymns borrowed from the liturgy of the early Christians, which are songs of praise to Christ.

Thus St Paul works the following hymn to Christ into the first chapter of his Epistle to the Colossians (1.15-20).

He is the image of the invisible God,  
the first-born of all creation,  
for in him all things were created,  
in heaven and on earth:  
visible and invisible,  
whether thrones, or dominions, or principalities or authorities—  
all things were created through him and for him.

### *The Place of Christ in the Liturgy*

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together,  
He is the head of the body, the church;  
he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead,  
that in everything he might be pre-eminent.  
For in him all the fullness of God  
was pleased to dwell,  
and through him to reconcile to himself all things,  
whether on earth or in heaven,  
making peace by the blood of his cross.

While the first stanza sings of Christ as the radiance of God and as the Mediator in the work of creation, the second celebrates him as Mediator of the Redemption, the re-creation: he is the first-born from the dead and the Head of the Church. Between the two there is a strophe which, as though swelling over from the first and bearing on to the second, briefly sums up the thoughts of both.

We find other hymns to Christ dispersed throughout the epistles of St Paul, among them the hymn to the humiliated and glorified Lord (Phil. 2.6-11) and a fragment from an old hymn of praise to his Incarnation and Resurrection (1 Tim. 3.16). The First Epistle of Peter also (1 Peter 2.21-25) has worked into it a hymn to Christ which celebrates Christ's patient and vicarious suffering. St John especially included in his Apocalypse, in the description of the heavenly liturgy, several hymns to Christ borrowed from the Christian liturgy in use in his time: among others, Rev. 5.9-14:

Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals,  
for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God  
from every tribe and tongue and people and nation,  
and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God,  
and they shall reign on earth.

Even a pagan, the younger Pliny, described Christians as men who assembled on Sundays, and in their assemblies sang songs of praise to Christ "as though he were a God": *carmen Christo quasi Deo dictum*.<sup>8</sup> The Church has continued this ancient Christian tradition throughout the course of her history. The hymns of the Breviary are today still generally addressed to Christ, especially the concluding

<sup>8</sup> *Ep. ad Traianum*, 10, 96, *Letters of Younger Pliny*, Penguin Classics, 1963, No. L, 127. See F. Dölger, *Sol salutis*, 2, Münster, 1925, 103-36. Pliny wrote this about A.D. 115.

stanzas, as for example: *Gloria tibi Domine, qui surrexisti a mortuis*: "Glory to thee, O Lord, who hast risen from the dead", etc.

Direct adoration of the Person of Christ is expressed with peculiar force in the celebration of the Eucharist.

At the culminating point in the ministry of the Word Christ himself speaks to his assembled people in the Gospel. The book of the Gospels is therefore honoured at Solemn Masses as Christ present in the midst of his community: it is kissed, accompanied by lights and incensed; before and after this proclamation of the Word acclamations resound, the glad shouts of the faithful to the Lord present in the word: *Gloria tibi Domine*: "Glory to thee, O Lord" and *Laus tibi Christe*: "Praise to thee, O Christ".

Also, all the hymns which are meant to be sung by the people during the celebration of the Mass (the so-called *Kyriale*) are hymns that for the most part address Christ directly. The *Kyrie* is not a supplication to the Holy Trinity, even though this is suggested by the triple invocations, but to Christ, the risen Lord, the *Kyrios*, to whom the Church appeals in order to recommend her needs to the Father. The *Gloria* is for the most part a homage paid to Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and now sits as mediator at the right hand of the Father. While the *Sanctus*, in its continuance of the Preface, still strictly addresses the Father, the Church in the succeeding *Benedictus* turns again to Christ: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." The *Agnus Dei* likewise, inserted by Pope Sergius in the seventh century to accompany the prolonged breaking of the Bread, is addressed to Christ, the Lamb of God, who was broken for our sins.

#### (b) Through Christ to the Father

Although the addressing of Christ in the liturgy is fully justified, a certain superficiality and impoverishment would result if this line were not taken through to the Father. The meeting with Christ is a deep reality in the liturgy, but it is not an ultimate reality.

When therefore the Encyclical *Mediator Dei* gives its definition of the nature of the liturgy (Par. 20), it makes Christ at once the object and the subject of worship: it is "the public worship which the community of Christ's faithful pays to its Founder and through him to the Eternal Father". In the Council's Liturgical Constitution these ideas are touched on, when it is said of the Church that she "calls to her Lord and through him offers worship to the Eternal Father" (1.7). Of Christ as an object of liturgical adoration I have already spoken. Now

I shall consider how Christ is as it were the chief celebrant even in the liturgy of prayer, and how the Church joins in his worship of the Father.

Ultimately the Church experiences the meeting with Christ as the start of a journey with him to meet the Father. Just as Christ through his Incarnation descended to us in order to precede us to the Father in an attitude of service, so in each liturgical celebration he is in the midst of his community not merely turning to us in Redemption, but also to the Father in worship, that we through him as our Leader may be able to direct ourselves to the Father. In the liturgical celebration we meet Christ, but as a way to the Father, as a Leader unto life. Therefore the full reality of the worship of the Church is not expressed through the marriage relationship of bride and bridegroom. Christ is also the Head, the Leader of his Church, who as it were turns his back on us in order to precede us on the way to the Father. We go to the Father through Christ, our High Priest and Mediator, into whose risen life we are assumed in mysterious fashion. Through him we all have access to the Father (Eph. 2.18).

For this reason the prayer of Christendom was from of old addressed to the Father through Christ the Mediator. This is the original Christian style of prayer. St Paul more than once expressly admonishes Christians that all praise and thanksgiving of the community must take place through Christ the Lord: "Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3.16-17). Not less plainly he writes in the Epistle to the Ephesians: "Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father" (Eph. 5.18-20). This is the practice of St Paul himself; nearly every one of his epistles begins with praise or thanksgiving directly addressed to the Father through Christ the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 1.4-9; 2 Cor. 1.3-5; Gal. 1.3-5; Eph. 1.3; Col. 1.3; 1 Thess. 1.2-3).

From the post-apostolic period we have a very beautiful rendering of the idea in the prayer of St Polycarp before his martyrdom: "Lord, omnipotent God, Father of thy beloved and blessed Son, Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained knowledge of thee, God of the Angels and Powers and of the entire creation and of the whole race of the righteous, we live before thy face; I bless thee because thou

hast deemed me worthy, in this day and hour, to be numbered with the martyrs and to receive my part in the cup of thy Christ unto the Resurrection to eternal life of soul and body in the immortality of the Holy Spirit; may I today be received among them before thy face as a rich and well-pleasing offering, even as thou hast prepared me, hast shown to me beforehand and now hast fulfilled in me, O infallible, true God! Therefore I praise thee for all, I bless thee, I glorify thee through the eternal and heavenly High Priest Jesus Christ, thy beloved Son, through whom to thee, with him and the Holy Spirit is honour both now and for all future ages. Amen."<sup>9</sup>

The prayer of Polycarp is in accordance with the early Christian tradition addressed to the Father, and ends in pure prayer style with praise to him through the High Priest Jesus Christ. A still older prayer, the one to be found in the well-known letter of St Clement of Rome to the Corinthians<sup>10</sup> (chaps 59-61), likewise issues in a doxology, praise of the Father through Christ; after having addressed a great many petitions to the Father, the prayer ends: "Thou, who alone hast power to do this, and still more good also among us, we praise thee through the High Priest of our souls, Jesus Christ, through whom is to thee honour and glory both now and from generation to generation and through eternities of eternities. Amen."<sup>11</sup>

A century later the tradition is confirmed by Origen, who says in his book on prayer that it should always be concluded "with a glorification of God through Christ in the Holy Spirit".<sup>12</sup>

The tradition is in a sense weakened by the struggle against Arianism in the fourth century, for in reaction against this heresy which denied the divinity of Christ people began to turn in prayer more directly to Christ. By addressing prayer indifferently to the Father or Christ, they wished to give expression to their conviction that Christ is God, on the same level as the Father. However justified this practice, it made a break in the centuries-old tradition by which, without ever denying the divinity of Christ, one went with him as Mediator to the Father. There was therefore a desire, particularly in the interests of the liturgical style of prayer, to maintain the old tradition; which explains the pronouncement of the Council of Hippo in 393 (a Council in which St Augustine must have taken part when still an ordinary priest): *Cum altari assistitur, semper ad Patrem dirigatur*

<sup>9</sup> *Mart. Polycarpi*, 14.

<sup>10</sup> Clemens Romanus, *Ad Corinthios*, 29-61.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 61, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Origen, *Prayer. Exhortation to Martyrdom* (Ancient Christian Writers, 19), London, 1954. (P.G. 11, 557.)

*oratio*: "At the altar prayer is always to be addressed to the Father."<sup>13</sup>

In the first ten centuries the Roman liturgy conformed to this maxim much more strictly than any of the other liturgies. In the Leonine Sacramentary almost all the prayers are addressed to the Father; it has as yet no knowledge of our long concluding prayer formula, but uses at all collects, secrets and postcommunions the shorter: *Per Christum Dominum nostrum*. This position—only slightly mitigated—is as good as maintained in the Gelasian Sacramentary. It is only when the Roman liturgy takes over elements from the Gallican liturgy that prayers creep in that are addressed directly to Christ. While up to that time, entirely in accordance with biblical usage, the term *Deus* was only used for God the Father, in these new *orationes* it is also applied to Christ. Besides this, in *orationes* that addressed Christ directly, people saw themselves obliged to change the concluding formula. Thus originated a new formula: *qui vivis et regnas*, which we meet for the first time in the Gregorian Sacramentary in a series of *orationes* for the Advent Masses.

Yet in our Roman liturgy the original prayer style of the *per Christum ad Patrem* always remained dominant. This is still the case. Jungmann, in his book on the place of Christ in the liturgy, has drawn up a balance sheet for the Roman Missal: in a total of about 1,000 collects, secrets and postcommunions, there are only 64 prayers of this new kind, and among these 64 there are still 17 old *orationes* originally addressed to the Father, but later interpreted as addressed to Christ. Thus we can safely say that as a general rule, when in our Roman liturgy the celebrant utters a prayer as president of the assembled community during the celebration of the Eucharist, he addresses the Father directly, invoking Christ as Mediator. The liturgical prayer *par excellence*, the Eucharistic Prayer, is the most beautiful example of this.

Not only petitionary prayer, but also all praise and thanksgiving went through Christ to the Father. The original concluding doxology was not our present *Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto*, in which the three divine Persons, because of the one divine nature which all three possess equally, are linked in complete equality. It ran: *Gloria Patri per Filium in Spiritu Sancto*: "Glory to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit." When in the fourth century Arian propaganda began to interpret this as though Son and Holy Spirit were subject to the Father, the traditional formula was not immediately

<sup>13</sup> Can. 21; J. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima Collectio*, 3, 922; Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, Graz, 1960.



abandoned as it was pointed out that it was not suggesting intratrinitarian relationships, but the relationships of the three divine Persons in their outwardly directed work of Redemption. But the formula was eventually abandoned in order to prevent wrong interpretations.

We have a similar case in the *Te decet laus* of the monastic Breviary. The oldest wording is found as far back as the *Constitutiones Apostolicae* (VII, 48.3): "*Te decet laus, te decet hymnus, tibi gloriae Deo Patri per Filium in Sancto Spiritu, in saecula saeculorum. Amen*": "To thee be praise, to thee be hymns, to thee God the Father be glory through the Son in the Holy Spirit, through ages of ages." Under anti-Arian influence and once again to avoid a wrong interpretation the three Persons were linked in equality: "*Te decet . . . tibi gloria Patri et Filio cum Sancto Spiritu . . .*"

#### 4. Conclusion

What gives the liturgy its christocentric character is the presence in it of the Lord acting for our salvation and offering worship to the Father. The Church may celebrate his saving mystery and subsumed in him offer worship to the Father. Viewed thus the liturgy is a participation in the high priesthood of Christ, who offers himself in a continuous attitude of worship to his Father and makes intercession for us.

# INTRODUCTION TO THE LITURGY

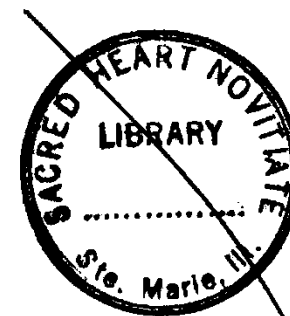
*Towards a Theology of Worship*

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