

Chapter One

Christian Worship Considered as the Recapitulation of the History of Salvation

In this first chapter, we have three problems to take into consideration. We must begin by affirming the Christological basis of the Church's worship; we shall speak next of the presence of Christ in church worship and of the epiklesis, and finally we propose to expound, in greater detail, the profound meaning of the liturgical event, which is to sum up the history of salvation.

1. The Christological basis of church worship

(a) A superficial reading of the New Testament is sufficient to teach us that *the very life of Jesus of Nazareth is a life which is, in some sense, "liturgical"*, or, if the expression is preferred, priestly. One may even go so far as to say that the true glorification of God on earth, which is the perfect worship, has been fulfilled by Jesus Christ in His ministry. If the title of sovereign high priest (after the order of Melchisedek) is clearly supremely appropriate after His ascension,¹ it still remains true that His whole life also must be seen in this liturgical perspective. Moreover, it is probable that Jesus Himself understood His ministry in this way; since He came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3: 8) and to reconcile men with God through His death (Rom. 5: 10 etc.). His whole life has meaning only in terms of this liberation and reconciliation. We have only to think of the way in which He saw in Ps. 110 an allusion to His own

1. "The Lord says to my Lord: Sit at my right hand ... You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek" (Ps. 110: 1 and 4; and Heb. 5:10; 6:20 and again Acts 2:34; Heb. 1:3 and 13; Rom. 8: 34, etc.).

passion (Mark 12: 35ff. par.; 14: 62 par.), of the high-priestly prayer (John 17: 1-26), or of the deep meaning of the cleansing of the temple (John 2: 13ff.),² or above all of the way in which He willed, embraced and interpreted His own death. When the Letter to the Hebrews says that *He offered up Himself* (7: 27; cf. 9: 11), it does but confirm what all the evangelists attest, namely that Jesus did not seek to avoid death, that He was not caught unawares by it, but that He foresaw it and willed to undergo it as the culminating point of His ministry. To such an extent was this the case, in fact, that it has been possible to say, with reason, that the Gospels are “Passion narratives with a detailed introduction” (M. Kähler). It is indeed in this priestly sense that the New Testament understands the death of Christ, even though this is not always deliberately proclaimed – except in the Letter to the Hebrews and perhaps in the Johannine writings: otherwise what would be the meaning of the allusion to the rending of the temple veil at the moment of Jesus’ death? (Mark 15: 38 par.)³

Moreover, it is interesting, in this connexion, to note two further points: firstly, the regular allusions to the worship of the early Church made by the evangelists in the course of the witness which they bear to the life of Jesus. O. Cullmann has studied these allusions in the Fourth Gospel. A similar study could be made, in particular, in St. Luke’s writings. His two accounts of the appearances of the Risen Christ – to cite only these – seem to describe the very structure of worship in the infant church (Luke 24: 13-35; 36-53)⁴ and thus deliberately to refer the Christian cult to the life of Jesus, in which it finds both its basis and justification. Above all, it must be pointed out that the very plan of the synoptic Gospels corresponds to the order of worship which doubtless goes back to apostolic times and has become

2. If, as the Fathers thought doubtless with good reason, the Good Samaritan represents Jesus, one may wonder whether, in narrating this parable, Jesus did not wish to affirm that the ministry of the true cult consists neither of priest nor Levite, but of Himself, Jesus.

3. We may think also of the priestly seamless robe which He wore, according to John 19: 23.

4. Cf. also the eucharistie reverberation of the stories of the feeding of the multitudes.

traditional. Once the presence of Christ is assured, a first part – the Galilean ministry – is centred on the preaching of Jesus, on the appeal addressed to men, on the choice with which they are confronted. (This is what will later be described as the mass of the catechumens.) Then follows a second part which explains, justifies and elicits the true content of the first; it deals with the ministry in Jerusalem and is centred on the death of Christ, and the irruption of the eschatological resurrection, taking events up to the point when Jesus leaves His own, blessing them and sending them forth into the world to bear witness to Himself. (This is what will be later described as the mass of the faithful.)

There is no need for us to enter here into greater detail. It is sufficient to affirm that the New Testament shows us the historical ministry of Jesus and hence His whole life, as a liturgical process and in fact as *the* liturgy, *the* life of worship, accepted by God. In this sense, the Christian cult has its basis in the “messianic” cult celebrated by Jesus between His incarnation and ascension.

(b) This cult offered by Christ, which culminates in the EPHAPAX of the “single offering by which He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (Heb. 10: 14) has nevertheless a far wider temporal dimension. If this is the ground and justification of all Christian worship, if it inaugurates the latter in the strongest sense of the word, it is not, for Christ Himself, accidental. It brings to concrete embodiment His whole work, which was prepared before the incarnation, has borne fruit since the ascension, and will be manifested in glory in the day of His appearing.

St. Peter speaks of the Christ as “the Lamb without spot and blemish, predestined before the creation of the world, and manifested at the end of the times” for the sake of the elect (1 Pet. 1: 19ff.).⁵ This is equivalent to saying that “With the fall and original sin there begins before God and in God the mystery of the bloody sacrificial death of Jesus

5. May we find a similar idea in Rev. 13: 8? E. Lohmeyer (*Hdb. z. N.T., ad loc.*) thinks that, according to position, APO KATABOLES KOSMOU should be connected with TOU ARNIΟΥ ΕΣΦΑΓΜΕΝΟΥ. But it should rather be connected with ΟΥ ΓΕΓΡΑΠΤΑΙ ΤΟ ΟΝΟΜΑ ΕΝ ΤΟ ΒΙΒΛΙΟ ΤΗΣ ΖΩΗΣ, as in Rev. 17: 8.

Christ” (P. Brunner). This heavenly cult, this predestination of the faultless and spotless Lamb provided as it were a screen, behind which and in whose shelter the world could continue to live without undergoing the threat of destruction which God had decreed against the sin of Adam (Gen. 2: 17) because already, by anticipation, its historical manifestation “at the end of the times” was efficacious with God.

This perfect act of worship which culminated in the sacrifice of the cross and the Ascension is – if one may dare to say so – exploited by Jesus Christ since His entering into glory: He is the ARCHIEREUS MEGAS (Heb. 4: 14) who has passed into the Holy of Holies, He is the LEITOURGOS TON HAGION KAI TES SKENES ALETHINES (Heb. 8: 2): He is the One who now appears on our behalf in the presence of God (Heb. 9: 24; cf. 7: 25; Rom. 8: 34): He is the sovereign high priest “for ever” (Heb. 7: 3), until the manifestation of the world to come (Heb. 6: 20).⁶ “Inasmuch as He is the great high priest, Jesus fulfils then a double ministry: on the one hand, that of the expiatory act accomplished once for all; on the other hand, the ministry of extending and exploiting the full benefits of this saving work which lasts unto eternity” (O. Cullmann).

We might ask ourselves whether the “liturgy” of Jesus of Nazareth, the unique work of His expiatory action, which already protected the world before the incarnation, and which bears fruit in the present reign of Christ, considered too as a priestly work will not reach its supreme glory and plenitude at the time of the *parousia*. We might indeed think so when we read in Heb. 9: 28 of the promise that Christ “having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him”. However, it must be pointed out that at the time of this second coming the sacerdotal ministry of Jesus will cease to be expiatory, will be merely hallowing and sanctifying; it will no longer concern the whole world but only those who have accepted the

6. Ought we to translate EIS TON AIONA by “until the final advent of the world to come” or by “for ever and ever”? Seeing that Heb. is familiar with the expressions EIS TOUS AIONAS TON AIONON (13: 21), EIS TOUS AIONAS (13: 8), EIS TON AIONA TOU AIONOS (1: 8) the first translation seems justifiable.

salvation which He secured by His death at Golgotha. This idea of a ministry of Christ which is sanctifying rather than expiatory appears again elsewhere in the Letter to the Hebrews (2: 10ff.; 10: 14). It seems related to the ministry which Jesus ascribes to Himself in the high-priestly prayer of John 17. Cautiously, we might perhaps see here an allusion to the sacerdotal ministry which the eternal Son of God would have exercised even if the Fall had not occasioned a radical disturbance of God's created order: then Christ would have come not to reconcile God and man but to enable men to dwell for ever where the Son abides that they may behold His glory (John 17: 24).

(c) The *Christological basis of the Church's worship* consists of the ministry of Jesus, the act of perfect worship which He made of His life. It is of this messianic cult that the Church is both a memorial and an effective echo. But it is not enough to link the Church's worship with the incarnation, to see it rooted in its historical institution through the words, life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. We have seen, in fact, in the Letter to the Hebrews and the Johannine literature in particular, that this earthly worship of Christ has repercussions in heaven, where its full value is elicited. The Ascension is not only a royal procession, as we are too easily inclined to believe. It is also a liturgical procession: in ascending to heaven, Jesus enters into the heavenly sanctuary. Hence when we affirm the Christological basis of the Church's worship, we must not – unless we are to set aside an important part of the New Testament witness on liturgy – restrict the cult of the Christian Church solely to Jesus' command: "Do this in remembrance of me". We must go further, in view of the heavenly repercussions of the one sacrifice, and see in the Church's worship a reflection of the perpetual heavenly offering of which Jesus Christ is the eternal and sovereign high priest.⁷

7. In. Revelation, the heavenly cult is not merely offered *by* Christ, but is supremely offered *to* Christ as the Lamb that was slain, and "is worthy to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing" (5: 12), following that adoration which was never refused by Christ and which already glorified His earthly ministry from His birth (Matt. 2: 11) to His ascension (Luke 24: 52).

There is thus a twofold Christological basis to the worship of the Church: there is the earthly cult celebrated by the life, the death and the glorification of the incarnate Christ; and the heavenly cult which, in glory, He celebrates until the time of the world to come. Or rather: the earthly worship which Jesus Christ offered from His birth to His death, and which the synoptic Gospels present in a structure that is to be commemorated by the cult of the Church, becomes, while Christians await the eternal liturgy of the Kingdom, the basis of a double cult: namely, the heavenly offering of Christ which is a prolongation and a harvesting of the Jerusalem ministry of Jesus – and secondly, the worship of the Church on earth, which is a recapitulation of both the Galilean and the Jerusalemite ministry of Jesus. Between these two recapitulatory cults there is not only a theological but also a chronological link, although the heavenly cult is without the interruptions of the earthly cult which are due to its weekly rhythm.⁸ That is what emerges from Revelation: even in heaven, there is a temple (7: 15; 11: 19; 14: 17; 15:5, 8) and an altar (6:9; 8:3, 5; 9:13; 14:18; 16:7) before the new Jerusalem comes, in which there will be no longer a temple (21: 22).

(The problem, posed by Barth and Paquier and not admitted by Hahn, of whether there is a Christological basis for the cult in the fact that the Church's cult illustrates and attests the two natures, can be considered when we come to examine the theological approach to the structure of worship. It still remains true that the problem of Christ, who is the foundation of the cult because He is the point at which God and man meet in union, as the cult is the point at which God and His people meet in union, is a problem that must be faced, and what an interesting one it is!)

2. The presence of Christ in Christian worship and the epiklesis

(a) Jesus Christ inaugurated the worship of the Church when He instituted the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Breaking bread, He said: "This is my body", and of the cup of the

8. Cf. the EIS TO DIENEKES of Heb. 7: 3 and the HOSAKIS EAN PINETE of 1 Cor. 11: 25.

new covenant He declared that it was His blood. Further, He promised to be with His own (Matt. 28: 20) even unto the end of the world, and to be in the midst of them (Matt. 18: 20) when two or three were gathered in His name. The presence of Christ in Christian worship is the subject which we must now, briefly, consider.

This presence was promised by Christ Himself. Hence the Church is not living on illusions when it assembles in the name of Christ. It is not remembering a beautiful hope that has faded – as were the disciples on that first Easter Day before the Risen Lord appeared in their midst. On the contrary, in every act of worship it experiences afresh the miracle of the coming of the Risen Christ to be with His followers; and if, as we have previously noted, the Lucan accounts of the appearances of the Risen Lord on the evening of Easter Day seem like a mirror reflecting the worship of the nascent Church, their essential feature is not the alternation between a part in which there is speech and a part in which a meal is shared: the essential feature is rather the coming, the presence and the action of the Risen Christ. Because of this presence, Christian worship is neither the outcome of an illusion, nor an exercise of magic, but a grace that is offered.

A grace, because the presence of Christ is the presence of salvation. He gives Himself to us, He who is the Bread of Life which imparts life eternal (John 6:51-58), and He draws us and binds us to Himself by arousing and strengthening our faith. And the means by which He supremely attests His presence are the proclamation of the Gospel and the eucharistic communion: “He who hears you, hears me . . . (Luke 10: 16); “This is my body, this is my blood”. Hence Christian worship comprises the fact of salvation. We shall return to this point in the next paragraph when we see in the cult a recapitulation of the history of salvation.

Two things however must further be made clear: if the Christian cult is – to use the expression of A. D. Müller – “the most vivid, the most palpable, the most central and the plainest form of the actualization of Christ’s presence”, such presence is not directly apparent. To be sure, the Church may, by its conduct and discipline, effectually convince an

unbeliever of the presence of its Lord (1 Cor. 14: 23ff.), but such a conviction is engendered by faith, as it is for believers also. It is a question of “sacramental” presence. No more than one could without faith recognize in Jesus of Nazareth the Christ, the Son of the living God, can one, in Christian worship, be assured of His presence and behold His living reality. We have here a spiritual process analogous to the recognition of the Word of God in Holy Scripture, or to the recognition of the sacrificed body of Christ in the eucharistic elements. This means in effect – and we shall return to the point – that the Church has not this divine presence at its disposal, and cannot conjure it up by an automatic process which it might use as it pleases.

The second point is that this presence is imperfect, that it awaits its completion and fruition with the advent of the parousia. The worship of the Church, while effectively foreshadowing the Kingdom, is not yet the Kingdom itself. As compared with the presence of Christ at the Messianic banquet, His presence in Christian worship is, as it were, partial and broken. We are saying the same thing when we declare that this presence is perceptible only by faith.

(b) While the presence of Christ in worship is a real presence, on which the believer can count, as he can count on all the promises of his Lord, the Church, nevertheless, is not the dispenser of this presence. It springs out of the free action of Christ. Such freedom certainly does not mean that the Lord might weary of visiting His Church, or that He might grow indifferent to His promise, or that His presence in divine worship is subject to some dialectical fluctuation. If one thought this, the faith, hope and love of the Church would be jeopardized. Their place would be taken by anxiety, illusion and solitude. In celebrating its cult, the Church is not “waiting for Godot”! “Here is no room for dialectical doubt, here an inviolable certitude prevails” (P. Brunner). But it is not the Church which is the dispenser of this presence; it cannot be induced, it can only be besought. *Maranatha!* And here we are at the heart of one of the problems which, in a liturgical study, must be elucidated at the outset: *the problem of the epiklesis*.

Let us begin by considering it in a quite general way. What is its essential meaning?⁹ It is a question here – and this is already suggested by the etymology of the word – of an invocation (EPIKALEISTHAI) addressed to the Lord as free and sovereign. In other words, if the cult is epikletic, it means that those who celebrate it recognize that the Lord whom they serve is not at their disposal, that they are indeed His ministers and not technicians. This certainly does not mean that they have to distrust their Lord, as though He might fail to keep His appointments or might forget His promises; it means that they do not control the actualization of His presence, that they therefore recognize Him as their Lord. And this is so basic, not only for the liturgy, but for Christian life as a whole, that the New Testament calls Christians “those of the epiklesis” (Acts 9:14; cf. 9:21; 1 Cor. 1:2, etc.). By its invocatory character, Christian worship is open to the free and sovereign action of its Lord: it does not seek to manipulate it. In this sense, it is the antithesis of magic. Because of its invocatory character, the cult gathers together the Church in an attitude of hope and expectation which is quite the contrary of the unseemly gluttonous haste which St. Paul accused the Corinthians of showing when they celebrated, or rather falsified, the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11: 17-34).

The liturgical epiklesis, perhaps first manifested in the invocation *Maranatha*, has a long history on which I shall not dwell. This epiklesis was, from the second century, more and more addressed to the Holy Spirit that He might descend to make of the cult the promised and expected act of salvation and secure to the faithful the real presence and communion of Christ. Increasingly the epiklesis found its normal place at a particular time in the Church’s worship: at the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Although this “sacramental localization” of the epiklesis raises questions which do not necessarily honour ancient tradition, it does not imply that Christ, before such invocation, was not present in the cult: in apostolic times also, the *Maranatha* was probably not uttered at the beginning of worship, but

9. It will be noted that the noun EPIKLESIS is not used either in the NT or by the early church fathers.