

1. All christians would agree that the death of Christ is a unique event, never to be repeated or even imitated. At a certain moment in history, Christ, the word of God, became incarnate, lived as man amongst us, was crucified, died, was buried and rose again. This is the event which forms the basis, and always has formed the basis, of all christian life and hope. For it is this act of God in Christ which has won salvation for all men; by the Christ event, man is ransomed and made free, (from sin, from the law), pronounced righteous (i.e. justified), sanctified (some theologians would say 'deified'; or again 'justified'; cf. Hans Kung, 'Rechtfertigung' who notes that when God by his word pronounces, then what he pronounces comes to pass; hence when a man is pronounced righteous, the work of making him righteous begins.) By Christ, man is 'illuminated', given an example to follow and the strength to follow it.
2. Most christians would agree that Our Lord Jesus Christ not only was, but is today, the personal saviour of all who accept him as Lord and to whom it is given to have faith in him. The event in the past somehow has a present effect; Our Lord's saving work may be appropriated now; and even now we may know that our sins are forgiven, that we have peace with God, the assurance of salvation and a sense of newness of life - all through the free gift of God in Christ and his saving work.
3. And yet the Christ event is unique; it happened once, at a moment in history. Does this therefore mean that at the moment when it took place, there was a change in the cosmic order, after which God enters upon a new relationship with man, and man with God? In one sense of course, the coming of Christ did open the way to a new relationship of God with man. The God, who had called Israel into fellowship with him, in Christ called all men to know him and to serve him; but on the other hand this unique event which happened 'ephhapax' i.e. once has still to be appropriated by the individual christian today, if he is to be saved. The question is, how?
4. Oscar Cullman in his book 'Christ and Time' notes that there are two possible interpretations of 'ephhapax'; it can either mean 'once, at a moment in history' but it can also mean 'decisively unique for the salvation of all men and all times'. It is this second meaning, he notes, which pervades the New Testament writings. The coming of Christ is an eschatological 'happening'; in the light of this event the whole of past history is to be interpreted as leading up to it; and similarly the whole of history yet to come is to be seen in this light. We live between the first and the second comings of Christ; and yet it is the same Christ who will judge us in the Last Day as judges us now and indeed judged christians and all men in the time when the Fourth Gospel was written. Christ therefore (Cullman would assert) stands at the mid-point, illuminating all that went before and all that is now and all that is to come.
5. Most christians would agree that we encounter Christ now, in the present and do not simply look back to a historical person (though we do this as well). I don't suppose many would limit the presence of God in the world today to the activity of the Holy Spirit though I suspect that the mode of God's presence in the world may be a subject on which there can be disagreement. Not many would hold that God is wholly transcendent, waiting to rescue man out of his involvement in matter. Most would agree that God is, by virtue of his being the Creator, both immanent in his creation and at the same time transcends it. If then a further step may be taken to suggest that God manifests himself to man now through the tangible and the visible (as he did in Christ) then it would seem reasonable to suggest that since Christ's redeeming activity is 'once, decisively unique for the salvation of all men at all times', then there is today some visible and tangible manifestation of Christ at work amongst us today. If on the other hand it is felt that God's activity among us is essentially invisible and intangible, like the wind which 'bloweth where it listeth', then the notion of a 'sign' or 'sacrament' must be dismissed.

6. Let us just suppose that the idea of a 'sign' or 'sacrament' is admitted; what signs do we look for. The universe itself is of course a sign in the broader sense; the believing christian is also a sign, and in the more theological sense, the christian community gathering for worship is also a sign of God amongst us. The theology of F.D. Maurice may help here. For Maurice, the Kingdom was already a reality and the sacraments were not devices to bring God down or to lift man up, but simply signs that God was always and eternally present and active, and God's way of helping man both to perceive and to enter into the constant redeeming activity that was going on all the time in the world. In this sense, we can call the Eucharist a sign or a sacrament or the 'actualisation' of God's redeeming activity. The Eucharist is a sign of Christ, eternally present, eternally active, though perceived through the eucharistic action of the whole congregation (not conjured up by the priest). Hence (with Bishop Butler) I would suggest that at the Eucharist we encounter Christ, not static (like being received in audience), but dynamic and active. We meet Christ living, crucified, risen and ascended - the whole Christ.

7. Our Lord left to the apostles the task of performing his memorial (anamnesis) - 'Do this in remembrance of me'. God's signs or sacraments require the involvement and cooperation of man (though God is their author and takes the initiative in all things). By the grace of God, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, christians today assemble and enact what the Lord commanded them to do. At his command they bring bread and wine and in an action commemorate the Lord's own action; so in Justin Martyr's words, 'we make (poein) the memorial (anamnesis)...' Christians therefore have a part to play in the sacramental activity of God in the universe. That in doing this they encounter the ever present Christ in his redeeming activity (as God made man, as the obedient Son, giving himself in perfect sacrifice) has led perhaps to the notion that the priest 'has power' to turn bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, or 'the power' to offer his sacrifice. All that this means, I feel, (and I may be judged heretical by all parties) is that the priest as duly appointed member of the community assembles the community in the performance of the action God has commanded them to perform, and through the action <sup>Christ</sup> manifests himself as present and life giving in the sacrament of bread and wine, and as eternally redeeming by his sacrifice. We perceive at this sacrament that we live 'in the redeeming Christ' and we experience his redeeming activity among us. We don't bring God down, we don't offer him up; we enter into Christ, the mid-point of all time, the omega point if you like of the universe; and we are lifted up in him as he enters into us.

8. I feel also that the devotional attitudes of offering ourselves souls and bodies, are in fact just that - attitudes of response and not the sacrificial life itself which we encounter in the Eucharist. The same would apply to the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; this is our 'bounden duty and service'. Which is why in the new Anglican rite it is so correct (it seems to me) to remove the expression of this kind of offering to the postcommunion prayer.

I must acknowledge a debt to some of the points made by Bishop Butler in his paper. So too to Cullman's theology (Christ and Time) as to Alexander Schmemmann (Introduction to Liturgical Theology). I trust that this may provide some points for discussion.