

## THE REAL PRESENCE

Presidential Address by the Rev. JOHN HERON, M.A., B.D., S.T.M.  
Read at the Annual Meeting of the Church Service Society on Monday  
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It would be most ungracious of me, and also most dishonest, if I were to fail to express to you my deep sense of appreciation of the honour you have done me in calling me to be president of the Church Service Society for the past two years. It now falls to me to pay my debt, in so far as I can, by delivering my presidential paper.

The published records of the Society contain many learned and distinguished papers by scholars who were acknowledged theological or liturgical experts. I feel myself unworthy to follow in their train. When thinking of what I might say to you today, I felt that I should not pretend to be anything other than I am – not a theological expert but a working Minister, whose experience has not been entirely within the bounds of Scotland, having included service in India, first of all in the Scottish Church College in Calcutta, and then as the Scots Padre at Rawalpindi and Murree in the Panjab (now in Pakistan). This means that I cannot see things with the eyes of a little Scotlander! Thereafter I have been in two parishes in Scotland: in the first for 19 years, and in my present one for over 10 years.

During these years in Scotland I have been permitted to share in some of the most important work done by Committees of the Church – I speak especially of the Special Commission on Baptism, the Panel on Doctrine, the Church Hymnary Revision Committee, and the Liturgical Sub-Committee of the Committee on Aids to Devotion. In these Committees I have been privileged to work with some of the best theological and liturgical scholars in our Church. What I may have contributed I cannot say, but what I have learned will make me ever in their debt.

It is therefore as a working Parish Minister who is concerned with the doctrine of the Church, and with its worship, that I speak to you today, and try to share with you my vision of the task which this Society should be seeking to fulfil in the life of our Church.

I suppose it must be at least 45 years since I first became aware of the existence and worth of the Church Service Society. At that time I was still at school, but I remember accompanying my father to a Communion Service – I can't remember where – at which I was deeply impressed by the liturgical seemliness and theological significance of the language used. After the Service I asked him what order

had been followed, and he told me that it was the 'Euchologion'. It made an appeal to me which has remained with me ever since.

What was it that appealed to me as a boy in the Euchologion Communion Service? It was certainly its beauty, its dignity, its seemliness; but surely there was something more. I had been brought up in the Evangelical tradition which cared very little for set forms of worship, which disapproved of read sermons and still more strongly of read prayers; yet I found myself naturally drawn to the beauty and dignity of a form of worship which I recognized to be deeply evangelical and yet to draw on the great richness of the world-wide tradition of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

I have always felt that there is no reason why any Evangelical should be suspicious of what are often called 'Catholicizing tendencies' in worship. In fact I would go so far as to say that every Evangelical, if his spiritual growth is not to be stultified, must go on to become, in the full sense of the word and not in any partisan sense, a Catholic.

Some years later, when I was in the United States as a Probationer, I saw examples of the harm that can be done to the worship of the Church when efforts are made to 'improve' it by men who do not understand its basic principles.

American Church life as I experienced it then (before the Second World War) seemed to me clearly to show that the attempt to 'beautify' worship, when made by men without any liturgical or theological scholarship, always produces a most unhappy pastiche.

I have given to this paper the title 'The Real Presence' because I felt that this title is an indication of the essential thing in worship, the thing without which all attempts to improve it, or develop it, or make it more meaningful, or more popular, are bound to lead into the sands of the desert where the water of life will be lost as are the waters of Abana and Pharpar.

On this point I would like to say how much I appreciate and agree with the Reports which our General Assembly had in 1970 and 1973 from the Working Party on the Doctrine and Practice of Worship in the Reformed Churches, set up in 1967. The 1970 Report clearly emphasizes that Christian worship is, first of all, the worship of Christ, which He offers to the Father in our name, and secondly, our sharing by grace in His worship through union, by faith, with Him. The 1973 Report clearly brings out that Worship can be truly Reformed, truly Evangelical, truly Catholic only when the central act of worship, and the one which we hope in the not too distant future will become the main service of Parish Worship on the Lord's Day, is the ministry of the Word *together with* the celebration of the Lord's Supper.



I do not suppose that there can be many in the membership of our Society who do not share this conviction, and I think that in the next few years it may well be a major responsibility of our Society to work for the spread throughout our Church of an understanding of the reasons behind the main thesis of these Reports. We all realize that, if it was impossible for the first Reformers to restore the celebration of the Supper to its due place as the main act of the worship of the Lord's people on the Lord's Day, it is going to be a very difficult task for us, and those who agree with us on this, to persuade the Church of Scotland in our day that this is the right way forward.

The reason for this difficulty is not primarily theological: it is that in religion men have always been deeply conservative – conservative not in the sense of wishing to preserve what is best, but rather in the sense of the Scribes and Pharisees of whom our Lord said that they could not be persuaded to drink the new wine because, they said, 'the old is better'.

In other words this is the unthinking conservatism of those who are never willing to see any change in the practices with which they are familiar. When I was in Kirkintilloch I was told that in one of the neighbouring Congregations, many years before my time, a new Minister, in his desire to 'modernize' the worship, discontinued the Great Entry at the Communion Service, and had the elements on the Holy Table before the start of the Service. This unwise change naturally aroused a great deal of resentment on the part of the Congregation. But wait till you hear the rest of the story! When that Minister left, his successor rightly decided to restore the Great Entry as an integral part of the Communion Service. There was then an equal feeling of unrest and dissatisfaction in the Congregation. They did not like being disturbed by having any change made in the practice which, by then, had become their custom.

We have to work for a change in the worship of the Church which is not really a departure from our Reformed tradition, for it is what Calvin and Knox strove for, and were unable in their day to attain; and we must be prepared to work for it with patience, slowly and gradually; because, unless we can carry our people with us we shall do no good by attempting to force changes upon them.

During the past 30 years I have often felt that the Church today gives the impression of being unsure of its message. I do not mean so much that the Church shows lack of conviction in its manner of proclamation as that the Church shows lack of certainty as to *what* it has to proclaim. My mind goes back to a Holy Week Service some years ago at which the preacher was a D.D., distinguished in the service of the Church. He had retired from a highly esteemed ministry in the north of Scotland, and had occupied an important

Assembly Convenership. This man, given an opportunity to preach to a united Congregation on the meaning of the Cross, had nothing to say. He was, I believe, typical of a great many Ministers who were trained when the theological colleges were dominated by old fashioned theological liberalism. They had reacted against a form of preaching of the atonement which, following Anselm, seemed harsh and immoral, but they had not been able to find any better way of proclaiming the Work of Christ. In fact they tended, all too often, to be content with sentimental sermonizing. Instead of preaching the Gospel they had nothing better to offer than what the eighteenth century evangelicals named 'cauld morality'. In other words they had no Gospel to preach. They had a religion only of Law – of self effort, a Pelagian doctrine of auto-salvation by good works.

Do not we still have many such preachers? Is it surprising that in such a situation the Church should find itself able to make very little impact upon the Highland Dissenters, or that our theological colleges should in the last few decades have been unable to do much to mollify or diminish the not inconsiderable number of students who, in spite of everything, have been clinging desperately to what they call fundamentalism? It might not be too unfair to say that in the Church today the hope for the future lies with those groups that have been, often somewhat ignorantly, hanging on to old ways, and those groups, represented by this society, which, through their stress upon sacramental worship, have been inevitably giving greater place in the minds of their people to the Cross of Christ.

The malaise of which I have been speaking affects the Church not only in Scotland, but also in many parts of the world. I remember feeling this a number of years ago when the Panel on Doctrine had a working party studying a World Council of Churches document on 'The Finality of Jesus Christ'. That document seemed to us to show the same lack of conviction and uncertainty. We felt that the minds of its authors had been so bedazzled by the relativistic outlook of the modern world that they had lost a firm hold upon the affirmations of the New Testament.

The Church must recover its sense of indebtedness to Christ – of the uniqueness of His life, and death, and resurrection – of the great truths that the New Testament trumpets forth: that in Him God has taken our human nature and done for all men what we cannot do for ourselves, living a human life in perfect obedience to the will of the Father in spite of all the powers of evil, and triumphing over them in order that He might, without destroying our free will, elicit our faith and repentance, and, through uniting us to Himself, reconcile us to the Father and make us to share in His victory over evil. Thus understood the whole incarnate life of Christ is one with His Cross, and is part of His atoning work. This is His One Baptism for



us, which gives its meaning to Holy Baptism, to Christian education, to Confirmation, and to the Lord's Supper and to every act of Christian worship. The supreme function of the worship and teaching of the Church is to foster and develop the union of sinful men, through faith, with Jesus Christ their only Saviour.

The Introduction to the third edition of the Church Hymnary is well worthy of study, and of being used as a basis for the instruction of our people. I quote:

'Christ's earthly life and self-giving on the Cross was itself the one offering of perfect worship to the Father whose will he fulfilled. Through Word and Sacrament, as in daily obedience, his faithful disciples are united with him as his Body in the continuing offering of this worship.

'Hence each action in Christian worship has a double significance. It is indeed Christ's people who pray and who praise the Father. Nevertheless they do so as the baptized community whose life is so grounded in Christ and bound up with his life that in worship he, as Head, exercises always his authoritative office as Prophet, High Priest, and King.

'Through the Church's worship, therefore, Christ fulfils today in the life of his people what he did on earth "once and for all".'

This is the one side of Christ's continuing ministry.

The other side is His heavenly intercession for us. He in His glorified humanity, still bearing the marks of His Passion, makes the continual memorial in the presence of the Father of the one sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. This is beautifully expressed in Edward Wilton Eddis' hymn (CH3-575):

Thou standest at the altar,  
Thou offerest every prayer;  
In faith's unclouded vision  
We see thee ever there.  
Out of thy hand the incense  
Ascends before the throne,  
Where thou art interceding,  
Lord Jesus, for thine own.

For a fuller exposition of the heavenly intercession, the heavenly sacrifice, which is the heavenly memorial (anamnesis) of the *ef hapax* sacrifice culminated upon the Cross I would refer to the 1970 Report on the 'Doctrine and Practice of Public Worship in the Reformed Churches'.

However, for my purpose today I wish to concentrate upon the real presence of Christ in the worship of the Church, for if our worship is acceptable to the Father only through Christ, our High Priest, it is only through His real presence in the Spirit and our real

union with Him through faith that our worship can be taken up into, and made acceptable in, His perfect worship.

These two elements are wonderfully combined in John MacLeod's Communion Hymn (CH3-582)

Last Saturday (18/5/74) the *Glasgow Herald* showed a photograph of Pastor Jack Glass leading a group of demonstrators outside the offices of the Church at 121 George Street, Edinburgh, as the Right Rev. Dr. George Reid accompanied the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Bruno Heim, to his car at the close of his courtesy visit to the Offices of the Church of Scotland. In the photograph Pastor Glass is seen holding a poster with the words: 'Calvary Not The Mass'. This seems to me to pinpoint an area in which there is much misunderstanding and much bitterness between many Reformed Christians and Roman Catholics at the present time. Yet, the wording on the poster is clearly misguided, for the best Roman Catholic thinking today has moved from the position, attacked so bitterly by the Reformers, in which the Mass was understood to be a new and bloodless sacrifice of Christ, offered for the sins of men as an addition to the sacrifice upon Calvary.

The error of the Medieval Roman position was parallel to the error in the Medieval understanding of Baptism. In both cases the Medieval Church sought to find the meaning of the sacraments in the sacraments themselves rather than in Christ. But this situation has changed out of all recognition. The followers of Pastor Glass, and those who think like them, are trying to fight today the battles of yesterday, and fail to realize that the opposing armies, in so far as they still are opposing armies, are no longer in their old positions, nor are they any longer fighting with the weapons of 400 years ago.

The man who has done more than anyone to change this situation is the late Dom Odo Casel,<sup>1</sup> Monk of Maria Laach in Germany, with his theology of Mysteries.

In its simplest and broadest outline the teaching of Odo Casel is that the ultimate mystery is God Himself, 'inaccessible in his inner life to man as man' (p. 63).<sup>2</sup> But God has revealed Himself and communicated His love in Christ. 'For us, the mystery is the Christian mystery, the mystery of Christ. The action by which God saved us took place in Christ . . . all the saving acts of God in history are ordered to Christ and dependant upon what was realized in him. Christ, in what he was, in what he did, in what was realized in him, is the mystery in the basic sense; he is the divine reality present in history to save' (p. 63). 'The events of Christ, his saving work, are essential to the mystery and cannot be excluded from it. The mystery is a divine saving action achieved in Christ' (p. 63).

'What was done in Christ must be done also in us. We too have to pass from the order of this world of sin and death to the order of the



Resurrection' (p. 65). But this passage 'cannot be a new salvation; it is the one salvation achieved by Christ. We must be taken up into the movement of Christ. We must share in his death and resurrection for only in Christ can we be saved. If so, we must make contact with the mystery of Christ. Although it took place in history, it must in some way be made present to us, so that we can be inserted into it. It is made present to us in the liturgy. The liturgy is, then, a further level of the mystery. It is the mystery of Christ made present to us in the Church so that we can share in it. The mystery of Christ becomes present sacramentally. By a symbolic representation of the saving work which Christ accomplished historically in the past, it makes that saving work really present; it reactualizes it, so that we can join ourselves to it and thus reach salvation. Hence the theology of mysteries, in considering the liturgy, considers it above all as a mystery and means by this that the liturgy is a symbolic re-enactment of the mystery of Christ which brings present the one, unrepeatable reality of the mystery itself. Through the symbolic representation, we enter into the unique mystery" (p. 65).

Compare with this what Charles Davis says in another place (op. cit. p. 44);

'The Eucharist connects us with the past. "Eucharist" means "thanksgiving". To give thanks to God is to recall with gratitude all he has done. The Jews were always telling of the mighty deeds which God had done on their behalf. We have an even greater reason to look back to the death and resurrection of Christ from which our salvation flows. The Eucharist is therefore the memorial of Christ. But an empty commemoration is not enough. A presence is demanded. We are saved by being joined to Christ and to the actions by which he saved us. For this we need the presence of Christ and of his saving deeds. This is brought about.

'Christ is present in the Eucharist. The risen Christ is there with all the power he possesses as the conqueror of sin and death. But more than this, He brings his sacrifice. . . . The Eucharist carries the past into the present and so continues the history of salvation. The sacrifice of Christ becomes the sacrifice of the Church. And Christ in the Eucharist gathers around himself the new People of God. This sacred meal makes men the one body of Christ. Since the design that governs history is to unite men in Christ, the Eucharist is the carrying out of that design, and by it redemptive history is sent forward to its final end' (p. 45).

An indication of the extent to which Casel's theology has penetrated official Roman Catholic teaching may be found in the following quotation from Vatican II: *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (De Ecclesia)*, chapter 3, §28: 'in the sacrifice of the Mass, until the coming of the Lord (cf. I Cor. 11:26) they make present again and

again and apply the sole sacrifice of the New Testament, the single offering Christ makes of himself as an unspotted victim to the Father (cf. Heb. 9:11-28)'.

How close this is to Reformed doctrine! Compare, for example, the passage in the 1970 Report on the Doctrine and Practice of Public Worship in the Reformed Churches on the meaning of *anamnesis*:

'The word does not simply denote an act of recollection of some remote date of bygone history. . . . Rather it means remembering in such a way that we see our participation in the past event and see our destiny and future as bound up with it. . . . "In cultic remembrance . . . the past is rendered present: there is a re-present-ation of the past so that it lives again in the present time. This, for lack of a better word, we may call a *presentifying* of the past" (Professor J. K. S. Reid, *Church Service Society Annual*, May 1960, p. 10.)

'So at the Lord's Table we do not merely remember the Passion of our Lord as an isolated date from 1900 years ago. Rather we remember it in such a way that we know by the grace of God, *we* are the people for whom our Saviour died and rose again, *we* are the people whose sins Jesus confessed on the Cross, *we* are the people with whom God has made a New Covenant in the blood of Christ, *we* are the Israel of God, to whom God has said, "I will be your God and you shall be my people". We today are the people whose sorrows and cries Jesus bears on His Kingly heart as He intercedes for us and constitutes Himself the eternal Memorial for all His creatures before God. We are what we are today by the grace of God, because of what God did for us then.

'This work of memory, of realising our participation and fellowship in the sufferings of Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit, who brings these things to our remembrance, in interpreting to us the meaning of these events. We remember Christ – yet it is not so much we who remind ourselves of these events, but Jesus Christ who brings the things of His passion to our remembrance through the Holy Spirit, as our ever living and ever present Lord, who is in His own Person our Memorial in the presence of the Father. In other words, our memorial is the earthly counterpart of the heavenly Memorial. Christ in constituting Himself as our Memorial before the Father by His Spirit lifts us up with our action of presenting our memorials before God. So the Lord's Supper, like the Passover, is both a memorial to us, and also a memorial before God.'<sup>3</sup>

If time permitted, it would be possible to bring forward from our Scottish Reformation writers evidence that would show that the change which Odo Casel has brought in Roman Catholic thinking is one which brings it very close to the teaching of the Reformers. The centrality and uniqueness of the Sacrifice of Christ is no longer in dispute. Nor is the reality of the presence of Christ in worship and



in the Sacraments, though there may still be some variation in the modes of describing this.

No one could be more emphatic in his rejection of the errors in the Medieval Church's doctrine of the Mass than Robert Bruce. He goes out of his way to attack the doctrine of transubstantiation, but he also goes on to say of the elements: 'I call them signs because they have the Body and Blood of Christ conjoined with them. Indeed, so truly is the Body of Christ conjoined with the bread, and the Blood of Christ conjoined with the wine, that as soon as you receive the bread in your mouth (if you are a faithful man or woman) you receive the Body of Christ in your soul, and that by faith. And as soon as you receive the wine in your mouth, you receive the Blood of Christ in your soul, and that by faith.' (Robt. Bruce, *The Mystery of the Lord's Supper*, annotated and translated by T. F. Torrance, London, James Clarke, 1958, p. 44.)

In giving this paper the title 'The Real Presence' it was never my intention to discuss the mode of the presence of Christ in the Sacraments or in worship, but I was anxious to emphasize that the worship of the Church can never be what Christ means it to be until it is imbued, from beginning to end, with the conviction of the reality of His presence where two or three are gathered together in His Name.

In its 1955 Interim Report, the Special Commission on Baptism had a very important passage on 'The Analogy of Christ', in which, following a line of thought found in Calvin, a very simple clue was given which can help preachers and worshippers alike to come to a greater reverence, and a more meaningful participation in every aspect of Christian worship – not only the Sacraments, but the reading of Scripture and the preaching of the Gospel.

In the early centuries heresies of two opposite kinds threatened to destroy the faith. One type of heresy confounded or confused Christ's Divine nature with his Human Nature. The effect of this was to make Him less than truly man. (Apollinarianism and Eutychianism.) The opposite type of heresy made such a separation between His Divine and Human Natures as to depreciate His deity. (Arianism and Nestorianism.)

The orthodox doctrine of the Person of Christ sought to guard against both these errors by affirming that in Him God and Man are united in such a way that there is neither confusion between the two Natures nor separation between them. He is very God and very Man.

The same principle helps us to avoid error when we consider the ways in which Christ is present in His Church.

He is present in Holy Scripture, yet in such a way that the words of the writers are not to be confounded with the Divine Word (as in fundamentalism) nor separated from the Divine Word; for it is in

and through the fallible words of the human writers of Scripture that the Divine Word speaks to us, as the inner witness of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer testifies.

The same thing is true of the preaching of the Gospel. The preacher is not supernaturally preserved from error, yet in and through his words the Divine Word speaks, and is acknowledged by the 'testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti'.

In Holy Baptism the outward action does not magically carry with it the reality of a true union with Christ, nor is it a mere empty sign. 'Baptism in water and Baptism in the Spirit, through which we are baptized with Christ's Baptism, have been joined together by God's command and promise'. The grafting into the Body of Christ is a reality, but for its full fruition the baptized must respond in faith.

In the Lord's Supper the elements are not to be confounded with the real presence, which can be grasped only through faith, but the real presence of Christ is not created by faith, but is an objective reality by grace. The living Christ takes the elements and makes them means whereby he conveys to the faithful the divine reality which they signify: His body broken for us and His life which was once sacrificed for us and is now alive for evermore.

In conclusion I return to the Introduction to the Church Hymnary, Third Edition: 'When Scripture is read and preached, it is not the words of the Minister the congregation awaits but the Word of Christ who is the Word of God. Through the rites of initiation, Holy Baptism and Confirmation together with Holy Communion, Christ calls his people and establishes them in the covenant of grace. In Baptism he makes the person, whether infant or adult, a member of his Body. In Confirmation he strengthens and blesses the baptized, who profess their faith, as members of his Body with both privileges and responsibilities. In the Holy Communion Christ's eternal self-giving is present still in and through his Church. So in every action of worship, including what is sung, Christ fulfils his ministry as Prophet, Priest, and King in order that through his Church he may be known as Lord by the world he came to save.'

JOHN HERON

#### NOTES

1. Odo Casel; *The Mystery of Christian Worship and other writings*. Edited by Burkhard Neunheuser, O.S.B., with a preface by Rev. Charles Davis (London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1962). See also Charles Davis: *Liturgy and Doctrine*. Sheed & Ward 1960.)
2. Quotations from Charles Davis, op. cit.
3. *Modern Eucharistic Agreement* (S.P.C.K., 1973).