

# Liturgy and the Incarnation

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## I

In the West the word 'liturgy' is used to cover a considerable number of acts addressed *ideally* to God, but the very multiplicity of forms which it subsumes tends to obscure what might seem a fact too obvious to comment on. Sometimes the question is put in a rather naive way: Who is the object of our worship as Christians: God or Jesus Christ? (distinction of persons); Has Jesus Christ, in whom is certainly the fulness of the godhead, 'taken over' from the God of the Old Testament as the centre of our liturgy? Before dismissing such a naive formulation too hastily we might remember that exegetes are not always unanimous on who the *kyrios*, addressed here and there in the prayer of early Christians as recorded in the Acts, really is—whether Yahweh (as in the Septuagint translation) or Jesus raised to the right hand of the Father. For the Christians of the great age who worshipped beneath the glowing images of the apsidal mosaics of Rome and Ravenna, an art which made it easy to contemplate God in Christ, this false dichotomy would not have arisen. Much water has, however, flowed under our bridges since then; later ages of faith, discovering unexplored depths of devotion in the earthly life of Jesus with its 'mysteries', the Stations of the Cross and emphasis on the details of the passion and death together with an ever-increasing devotion to particular saints, tended, though not from conscious theological deviationism, to substitute something different for this divine 'cult-mystery' of the God-Man. We can contemplate one end-product of this tendency in the statues of our Lady and the saints propped on top of the tabernacle, so common in some parts of the Church. For the Eastern Church the area of misunderstanding is narrowed through liturgy referring exclusively to the great eucharistic act, but there is always need for both to keep referring back to the Scriptures in order to take and keep firm cognizance of what is central in the acts which we perform and the part which liturgy must play in the life of the Christian today.

To take the second point at once since on it depends our answer to the first. The current qualification of a 'good Catholic' is the fact that he goes to church. But why does he go? Does he go because he feels he

is performing a function vital for his whole life? The truth is that we cannot really go on to a fruitful discussion of the relations, in biblical terms, between liturgy and God incarnate in Jesus, until we see the former as a function of life taken in the widest sense. It is not always apparent that the man-in-church has any ascertainable relation with the man-out-of-church. If we start by eschewing conceptual definitions of liturgy and try to see it in its broadest possible aspect, as a phenomenon of man's historical existence, in the framework of comparative religion, we find that one important point stands out at once: namely, that it is *the* expression of the community's collective religious aspiration and response. It was *the* way of establishing contact with the divinity, of entering into the world of the sacred at the other pole to the community's secular and profane everyday life, and thus of securing a degree of authentic status and existence. This is reflected in the manner of carrying out liturgical actions, for all were actors, none spectators. Thus in Greece the *orchestra* is the original arena (primitively a threshing-floor) where all the citizen body foregathered and where the liturgical action took place, and it is only later as ritual or liturgy passed into drama that the *theatre*, with its stone benches for spectators, was added. Liturgy was the only channel through which a community could express the totality of its religious experience and aspirations. This is also true of the Hebrews and, in fact, nowhere so much as here (in the Old Testament) is there found continuity with the general religious experience of mankind.

What is Hebrew man and man in general trying to achieve through liturgical action? He offers a gift; but he knows that this gift must be inadequate except as a symbol of his own self-offering and a means to help him in the task of consecrating the whole of his life. This is the kernel of truth in every 'false' religion: the attempt to enter the world of God, possible through liturgical action. We can quote an eminent historian of religion speaking on the basis of a wide comparative study: 'The more religious a man is the more real he is, and the more he gets away from the unreality of a meaningless change. Hence man's tendency to consecrate the whole of his life'.<sup>1</sup> When he offers his gift he says in effect: 'With this gift I offer myself' and is thus taken into the meaningful world of God. It is here especially that our *opus operatum* formula is less than useful if it leads us unconsciously to assume that the act we perform has a life and a meaning of its own apart from the meaningful intentionality that we who carry it out give it. Why is the

<sup>1</sup>Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 1958, p. 459.

sacrifice of the new Covenant repeated at all if not to facilitate and indeed make possible our own self-offering? That is why, after offering the species at mass, we pray at once: *In spiritu humilitatis et in animo contrito suscipiamur a te Domine . . .* Before going on to make the great request of God contained in the Canon we remember in time how the psalmist, in what was perhaps his moment of truth after a lifetime of liturgical formalism, is made to grasp the point through suffering:

For thou hast no delight in sacrifice;

Were I to give a burnt offering thou wouldst not be pleased.

The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;

A broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.<sup>2</sup>

This idea of liturgy taking its place in the centre of the life of the community and engaging the whole man and all his potentialities is therefore based not only on religious experience in general but also on Old Testament and scriptural data in particular. There is certainly no support in the Old Testament for the idea of passing from liturgy to private prayer, the 'prayer of the heart', as from the imperfect to the perfect; indeed, we can say that if there was such a thing as a Hebrew mysticism of the latter kind as some have argued, it has left precious little trace in the extant literature. Liturgy recapitulates all of the religious life of man as the member of a community. It contains the two essential elements: liturgy as the movement of man towards God in the external expression of his experience of God, and liturgy as the vehicle of divine strength communicated in the encounter which is at the heart of liturgical action.

In the light of this we should not be surprised to find that, in the New Testament, the whole of the life of the Christian is described in liturgical terms even in writings which evince some distaste for and reaction against the ritualism of the old order. This we should indicate briefly before going on. The word *leitourgia* and the related verb are used very sparsely since they are connected with temple-worship in the Septuagint and therefore are subject to misunderstanding. In fact, where they are used in the New Testament, they more often than not apply to this superseded form of worship, as in the first chapters of Luke.<sup>3</sup> For the Christian, Christ is the temple of the new order which contains the divine presence (John 2. 21) and the Christian himself is the temple

<sup>2</sup>Ps. 51. 16-17. A spontaneous utterance which proved somewhat embarrassing for the very liturgical and sacrificially minded generation after the Return, as can be seen from the addition in v. 18-19.

<sup>3</sup>c.g. Lk. 1. 23; Heb. 9. 21; 8. 6; 1 Clem. 32. 2; 40. 2.

of the Spirit of Christ (Eph. 2. 21). St Paul, who is not particularly liturgically-minded in the narrow sense, sees his whole life, his sufferings, his 'solicitude for the churches' and the rest as a liturgy (*leitourgia*), a worship (*latreia*), a sacrifice (*thusia*), and even in thinking of his death he uses liturgical language—the offering of a sacrificial libation (2 Tim. 4. 6; Phil. 2. 17). His work as a missionary and preacher of the gospel is a spiritual worship of God (Rom. 1. 9) and the whole of the physical life of man, consecrated to God, he sees as 'a sacrifice living, holy and acceptable'—a spiritual worship as opposed to the purely external routine of slaughter which passed for the sacrificial idea in later Judaism. Indeed, the whole idea of the aim of life as becoming acceptable to God, of going to him, that is, having access to the divine presence (Rom. 5. 2) is, as we shall be seeing, expressed in explicitly cultic or liturgical terms. Nowhere is this clearer than in the well-known passage in the first epistle of Peter:

Draw near to him; he is the living stone which men rejected, which God has chosen and prized; you too must be built up on him, like living stones, into a spiritual house; you must be a holy priesthood, to offer up that spiritual sacrifice which God accepts through Jesus Christ. (2. 4-5)

Here the individual men and women who make up the Christian Church are seen as taking the place of the temple, now destroyed, of the old order, the visible symbol of the invisible presence within; and in place of the 'carnal' sacrificial system of the temple this people must offer the spiritual sacrifice which God can now accept through Jesus Christ. This is the worship 'in spirit and truth' foretold to the Samaritan woman and identified by St Paul, in a particularly polemical passage, with Christian as opposed to Jewish worship (Phil. 3. 3).

The liturgy must, therefore, be in the centre-point of the length and depth of Christian existence as ordered to God. It is not only the expression of the desire for or the sign of man's incorporation into God through the incarnate Word, but it is actually a means towards this end. It is arguable that the Latin Church, with its severely beautiful and practical approach to man and his *munus* and *debitum* vis-a-vis his God, has not given so much emphasis to the divinisation of man as the purpose and end of liturgical action, although we might point to the ancient and very beautiful Leonine prayer said at the mixing of wine and water into which is built the key-idea of fellowship (*koinonia*) in the divine nature, taken from the second epistle of Peter (1. 4). But this ruling concept has always been uppermost in the conceptually

bolder Eastern rites as can be seen by a comparison of the above prayer with the *proskomidia* of the liturgy of John Chrysostom. And here we come to the point of this first part of our discussion; for the action which the *Deus qui humanae substantiae* accompanies has always had the double significance of the participation of man in the divine nature through Jesus Christ linked with the hypostatic union of human nature with the divinity in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup> In other words, we find here the real theological reason why the Incarnation is central to the liturgy—not because it places the person of Jesus Christ in his earthly passage before our eyes but because the Incarnation, apart from the character of *semel pro semper* which it possesses, has the universal significance of revealing and indeed creating a radically new possibility for our human nature which can be actualised with the help of the liturgical action. Our worship is therefore the worship of the one and eternal God and the approach to him is in and through Jesus Christ, incarnate Word of God.

## II

We want to go on from this point to show in what way this idea of liturgical approach to God is connected with the Incarnation in the New Testament, but before doing so it will be necessary to ask ourselves whether the idea of the Incarnation itself was prepared for in the scriptures which the early Church used. Incarnation is the Latin form of a Greek term, *sarkosis*, which betrays the fact that the idea of God becoming man was threshed out over the early Christian centuries with the intellectual tools borrowed from the workshop of Greek philosophy. This especially with reference to the key-terms *nature* and *person*, neither of which has a correspondent in Hebrew.<sup>5</sup> This kind of conceptual definition was in fact quite impossible in the Hebrew New Testament milieu, as we can well understand if we ask ourselves how the apostles could have conceived of Jesus as God, bearing in mind that God for them was Yahweh, 'the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'. Could Yahweh become man? In the strict sense of the word, unthinkable. A theophany or appearance in what seemed to be human guise

<sup>4</sup>The mixing of wine and water is primarily a symbol of the Incarnation in the Syriac rite; in the Armenian there is no mixing.

<sup>5</sup>If this transposition is legitimate which, *pace* Harnack, it certainly is, we might go on to ask whether it is final. That is, even given the fact that it has become, through the accident of cultural history, the 'received' formulation in the Church, is any other formulation possible? For example, in the category of the Buddhist *avatara*? A missionary problem of some importance today.

might have been possible to an age less sophisticated theologically and less jealous of Yahweh's transcendence (as in the theophany at Mamre in Gen. 18), but texts such as this which record these theophanies bear clear signs of revision and alignment with the theological exigencies and higher standards of a later age; and, in any case, such theophanies at shrines, not dissimilar from others granted to devotees of the local *ba'alim* of Canaan and Phoenicia, are momentary, and present God—or the local god—in incognito. Could a man become Yahweh? Equally unthinkable and blasphemous. Could a man, in particular the Messiah, be considered on the same level as Yahweh? We must remember that we are discussing not the whole and absolute truth contained in the scripture texts but the apprehension of that truth in circumstances of very great difficulty. It is well known with what delicacy exegetes deal with the title 'Son of God' in the gospels; the same psychological and theological barriers that we have been speaking of would have prevented any immediate formulation in terms of *filiatio naturalis*, as if Yahweh could beget in the way of human procreation, as with *El*, father of *Ba'al Hadad*, and other progenitor-gods.

The central question, then, is not that the earliest Christians claimed divinity in an unspecified way as an attribute of Jesus and then adduced miracles, prophecy, a miraculous conception and the rest in substantiation of this claim—all of which would have to be explained in the context of contemporary biographical convention as, to take one example, in the *Life of Octavius* by Nicholas of Damascus written a few years before Christ's birth; the question is first of all to explain how the apostles came to see and acknowledge his real identity and formulate it in relation to the data of the faith according to which they already lived. We should not, therefore, be surprised to find that the earliest Christian 'theology' of the Incarnation speaks neither of the deification of a man nor of the descent of God but rather of a point where both God and man meet, and in a way which allowed the admirable and continuous line of divine revelation to be seen clearly. We might put it in another way by saying that we find here a dynamic rather than conceptual presentation of the Incarnation, drawing upon the categories most immediately available, namely, those of the Old Testament. This means that it will only be possible to study the texts which we think can provide the material for a primitive theology of the Incarnation or, better, which actually contain such a theology, after having had a closer look at the *praeparatio evangelica* for the Incarnation in the Old Testament. This would require much more space than is available here

even to sketch an outline, and so we will have to content ourselves with indicating what we take to be the main line of development.

The question which the faith of the primitive Church will answer in the affirmative is already formulated by Solomon in the prayer for the dedication of the temple: 'Will God indeed dwell with men upon earth?' (1 Kings 8. 27) The implication is, certainly, that God cannot dwell in a temple in the literalistic way in which people then believed that their god needed to be fed and given to drink, but there is something more here. Perhaps we shall best grasp it by seeing the whole context first. The fundamental article of the Hebrew *Credo* concerned the self-revelation of Yahweh in the Sinaitic covenant. This was in fact a theophany and was understood as such, but it was not just an ordinary theophany such as that granted to Jacob in the shrine of Bethel, implying nothing more than an oracle or a command to worship there or perform some act of cult. It implied a guarantee of the divine presence to the people, and it was that promise: 'I am with you', 'I will be your God' that enabled them to resist the gravitational pull of the land of Canaan already occupied by the *ba'alim* worshipped in shrines so many of which were taken over by the invaders. This here-and-now presence is expressed in the Old Testament in different ways by different theological 'schools' each with its own insights. The visible locus of this presence is the Ark and the Tent. The former, originally a throne-shrine of some kind, was the palladium which the Hebrews took with them in the desert period. Set up eventually at Shiloh, captured and recaptured during the Philistine wars and at last brought solemnly to the newly occupied Jerusalem by David (2 Sam. 6), it was finally transferred to the innermost sanctuary of the Solomonic temple in a liturgical ceremony in the course of which the above question was asked.

This idea of the abiding presence is seized on and constantly enriched with new insights, all drawing upon, elaborating and giving further depth to the original credal data. Thus the Deuteronomian reformers speak of the Covenant as the way Yahweh has chosen to *approach* his people and by which they can approach him. They also emphasise the idea of mediation (Deut. 6. 26-31), and thus prepare for the mediator of the new Covenant, the 'prophet like Moses' (Deut. 18. 18), who will, in his human nature, approach God as prophet and high priest. The Deuteronomian rule of unity of sanctuary is also intimately connected with this idea of an abiding presence. Far from being a product of the reign of Josiah or Manasseh, it goes back to the much older, traditional

idea of the spiritual affinity between Sinai and Sion, and strikes at the religion of the land with its acceptance of a plurality of theophanies at different shrines dedicated to different gods—Bethel, Beth-Shemesh and the rest. There is, it declares, but one theophany, this permanent presence here in the temple; his Name, his divine personality, is here. From this point radiates the whole development of Sion as the epicentre of Israel and the world, so well attested in the psalms and the eschatological passages in the prophetic books.

This 'God with us' theology, however, carried with it its own danger of false security of using religion as a cover for irreligious conduct; and it was perhaps against this undesirable by-product of the reform which took place during his youth that Jeremiah warns in chapter 7. There was also the difficulty, felt keenly by the priests and scribes of the post-exile period, of reconciling the divine transcendence with this here-and-now presence in the sanctuary. That the priestly writings incorporated in the post-exilic 'last edition' of the Old Testament happened to be the most jejune and schematic and the most lacking in human and dramatic interest has rather tended to make them misunderstood and to conceal the truly momentous nature of the theology which these writings contain. For the solution to this dichotomy is found here in the representation of the covenant-presence as a sacrament of encounter—the focal point as between God and man, heaven and earth. The insistence that the Tent and, consequently, the Temple be made according to heavenly specifications and the intensification of the idea of mediation through the annual entry of the high priest and the high priest alone into the inner sanctuary on the Day of Expiation, *yom kippur*, constituted a real advance in theological insight and provided at the same time positive elements which, as we shall see, were worked into the earliest Christian thinking about the real identity of Jesus and are found dynamically re-interpreted in the New Testament, especially in the epistle to the Hebrews.

### III

In order to see this most primitive incarnational theology in context and perspective, the context and perspective of liturgy, we should bear in mind what had happened to Jewish liturgy and in what light it was seen at the time of Christ. We find a clue at once in the fact that the ministry is traced back to the Baptist whose own mission as messenger or precursor is presented within the tradition about Elijah, deriving



from the anonymous prophetic book of the fourth century B.C. entitled Malachy.<sup>6</sup> In this book the work of preparation for the messianic age is seen as a purification of worship and the ministers of worship, the sons of Levi, culminating in the sequel: 'The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple' (3. 1). In fact, the threatening language which the Baptist addresses to the Saducees, the Temple party who had been chiefly responsible for the corruption of worship, follows closely the prophet who is speaking of the sons of Levi (Mal. 3. 3 and Mt. 3. 7-12). Only after this cleansing can the offering of the nation be acceptable cult: irregularities must be set aside so that 'all nations will call you blessed for you will be a land of delight' (3. 12). Thus the end of the old order, centred on the temple, is already contemplated.

This process of degradation of temple-worship rendering the offering of a gift impossible had been going on long before the time of Christ. A long history of graft, venality, internecine strife, the misdeeds of Onias III and Jason the stooge of Antiochus Epiphanes, the disappointment of the hopes placed in the Hasmonean line after Simon assumed the high priestly office (141 B.C.), the complete secularisation which followed down to the Roman period explain the conviction, shared by many of Christ's contemporaries, that the old order was no longer viable. This state of affairs and this conviction can be found in most of the literature of the period, Josephus for example, but must be studied especially in the sectarian writings in which the inter-testamentary period abounds. Thus, according to the Psalms of Solomon, composed by a Pharisee, it will be the Messiah's chief duty to purify the city populated not only by the Romans but also by the presence of a venal priesthood. The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, also a Pharisee or Hasidic work and so important for primitive Christian theology, looks forward to two messiahs, a king and a priest, and also to a prophet, as do the writings of the Qumran Essenes. The priest-messiah will be without sin—in opposition to contemporary holders of office (Test. Judah 24. 1) while the king-messiah 'shall establish a new priesthood for all the Gentiles.' (Test. Levi 8. 14). Further back, the Book of Jubilees, also a work of strict Pharisee inspiration, testifies to a similar type of expectation during the heyday of the Hasmoneans who were both kings and priests.<sup>7</sup> For the Essenes, we have the Zadokite document

<sup>6</sup>The title is evidently taken from the passage 'I will send my messenger'—*mal'aki*. (3. 1).

<sup>7</sup>Ps. 110, *Dixit Dominus*, is generally taken to refer to one of the Hasmoneans and in fact to contain an acrostic on the name of Simon.

and the books of the Qumran sectarians which look forward, as we have seen, to a messiah from both Israel *and* Aaron, the latter of the line of Sadoq in opposition to the Levitical priesthood of the temple with which they would have nothing to do.

The affinities which relate at least one side of early Christian thinking about Christ and what had happened in Christ to the above might be best illustrated at this point. Many scholars—we might mention Cullmann among others—claim to detect common ground and common viewpoints as between the inter-testamentary literature, especially that of Qumran, and some of the canonical writings. There seems to be, it is argued, a convergence of viewpoints in the matter of attitudes to worship and the temple between such compositions as Luke 1-2, some chapters of John especially where the Baptist and temple-worship are spoken of, the attitude of the Hellenist Christians represented in Stephen's discourse redacted by Luke (Acts 7) and the epistle to the Hebrews. Without attempting a rash search for all-inclusive formulae which would present these texts and the theology they contain *ad modum unius*, it might be useful to take a brief look at them in turn since we believe that they all have this at least in common: the contemplation of a new manner of approach (*prosagogé*) to God supplanting that of temple-worship; namely, Jesus the new temple or, in his own words, 'something greater than the temple' (Mt. 12. 6).

There is, certainly, to begin with, some affinity between Qumran and the source or sources which St Luke has worked over in the first two chapters of his gospel, and most clearly in the shared undertone of opposition to the old order centred on the temple of Jerusalem. The experience of Zachary from which follows the conception of the Baptist takes place in the temple and during a liturgical function of particular significance, namely, the renewal of the incense, the *sacrificium vespertinum* referred to during the offertory incensation (Mal. 1. 11; Dan. 9. 20). The messenger is none other than Gabriel who appeared to Daniel under identical circumstances (Dan. 9. 20) and announced the predetermined time that must elapse before the anointing (consecration?) of the most Holy Place and the renewal of priesthood and cult. The two scenes of annunciation are worked out with some elegance as a kind of diptych, with the purpose of bringing out the important divergences; thus, the appearance to Mary is quite different from the splendid scenario of the temple cult now in its last years, and whereas Zachary has to 'go in' to the temple, the messenger 'goes in' to Mary. In the words of Gabriel which describe the mission of the yet unborn

son there is one phrase which is vital for our argument: 'The power of the Most High will overshadow you' (I. 35). The verb is, in the Old Testament, a technical theological expression for the overshadowing of the cloud or nimbus over the tent and later over the *hilasterion*, the visible sign of the real presence of the invisible God, the *Shekinah*. It was the same cloud that filled the sanctuary during the dedicatory service of Solomon (I Kings 8), and since the incense which Zachary had to renew seems to have had the significance of the numinous cloud over the ark in the desert period, the contrast is very clearly made indeed: the old order—ark, tent, temple—gives way to a new dispensation in which Mary is the ark, tent and temple; the depository of the divine presence:

et antiquum documentum  
novo cedat ritui.

The worship of the one, eternal God remains, but the *medium* of this worship has changed. The undertones of opposition to the old liturgical form and the priesthood can be heard elsewhere in these chapters. Thus it might be considered interesting that one of the Old Testament passages which have influenced the form of Luke 1-2, namely the story of the conception of the prophet Samuel (I Sam. 1-2), contains a condemnation of the sons of Eli, the priests of the day, and a prophecy of the substitution of the Levitical by the Sadoqite priesthood, which in fact took place under Solomon. It will be remembered that it was the priestly line of Sadoq which was favoured in the sectarian Judaism of the Qumran and Essene type. Some scholars have even supposed that the explicit mention of the moral probity of Elizabeth and Zachary (Lk. 1. 6) and the fact that the child was given a name rare in Zachary's family but very common in the Sadoqite line point in the same direction. There is also the fact that John's education is not, as might be expected for the son of a priest, entrusted to temple teachers, but that on the contrary he is sent into 'the wilderness'—of Judaea, evidently (I. 80); not inconceivably in the care of Essenes. Whatever the case, the stage was set for a purification which would inaugurate a radically new approach to God. The old order represented by Zachary is centred on the temple soon to disappear for ever, the new is centred in Jesus, the divine presence in the temple of the virgin's womb. It is an apt figure of the passing of the old that, whereas Zachary asks his question and is dumb, Mary brings in the new with a song of praise.<sup>8</sup> In the closing scene of these chapters of the Infancy, the presentation in the temple, Luke tells us, in effect, that the Glory which, in Ezekiel, left the

<sup>8</sup>Dillersberger, *Gospel of St Luke*, p. 64.

temple before its destruction, now returns as to its native place. (Lk. 2. 32).

The same hostility to the old order of worship but in a much more intransigent form we find in the discourse of Stephen the Hellenist in Acts 7. It is, in fact, a dynamic and utterly consistent re-interpretation of sacred history in a sense directly opposed to that of his hearers, the representatives of 'normative' Judaism. The main point of the argument lies in the fact that Stephen traces the fundamental error of Judaism, the point where it began to go wrong, to the apostasy in the desert abetted by the Aaronic priesthood, consisting in a refusal of faith in the divine presence—'make us gods to go before us' (v. 40). The climax of this apostasy is seen in the building of the temple as a permanent 'house' for God, built as we know it was by a non-Hebrew and doubtless on a Canaanite prototype, and given over almost at once to idolatrous worship. It was this rejection of the temple and its worship which was responsible for the death of Stephen as it had been for that of Christ some few years before (Mark 14. 58), and this also doubtless explains why the Hellenists were forced to leave Jerusalem in the persecution which followed while the apostles, whom we know did not break away from temple worship, were allowed to remain (Acts 8. 1).

The exact situation of the Hellenists in the early Church has been the subject of much discussion and conjecture. If the themes of the discourse in Acts represent, as has been claimed, a sort of Hellenist theology, we might be tempted to look to ideas current in the Dispersion for parallels, such for example as Paul's diatribe against 'temples made with hands' at Athens (Acts 17). But we do not need to go outside Palestine to find these ideas, and it is of interest to note that such a polemic against the temple would have been well received in Samaria, the evangelisation of which by the Hellenists follows at once in the Acts. We know of their special attachment to Moses, the key type of Stephen's speech, and their belief in the messianic restoration beginning from their holy mountain, Garizim, in which, according to their folklore, was buried the Ark of the Covenant. This would lead us, in its turn, to look a little more closely at the third and fourth gospels which show the greatest interest in Samaria and the Samaritans.

This brings us to the heart of the matter, for the scriptural incarnation formula is found in John and is couched in liturgical idiom:

The Word was made flesh  
 And placed his *tent* among us  
 And we have seen his *glory* . . . (John I. 14)

The Prologue of John reflects the same *milieu* as that which we have been talking of and in fact there is the same contrast with the Baptist that we find in Luke 1-2—he was not the Light, the Logos was the true Light, a contrast found elsewhere in the gospel; there is also the added contrast between the old and the new order, Moses and Christ (v. 17), the *torah* and the grace and truth which Christ brings. In the sign of the temple which is almost certainly in its right place in John, at the beginning of the early Judaeen period (2. 14-22), the risen body of the Lord is to take the place of the temple soon to be destroyed; that is, the risen Lord is the depository of the real presence among men, the place of meeting, in and through which alone man can approach the eternal God. He is the tent and the temple of the new order for, in the words to the Samaritan woman, 'the hour is coming (the hour of the glorification of Christ's human nature) when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father . . . the hour is coming—and now is—when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth' (4. 21, 23). And it is strictly in keeping with this that the same John, in looking round the messianic city, could see no temple in it (Apoc. 21. 22).

Something of the same thing but presented far more systematically we find in the epistle to the Hebrews. Here, however, the going is really rough: there is hardly a single conclusion on the background, author, date and destination of this writing which could muster a majority—except perhaps the now generally held view that it does not come directly from St Paul. Was the author the Apollos, native of Alexandria, eloquent, learned in the scriptures, who came to Ephesus knowing only the baptism of John, was re-catechised and went on to Corinth to play a part only second to Paul in evangelising that city? This would explain compendiously the evident affinities with the fourth gospel, with Baptist ideas (and, therefore, probably Essene also) and with Luke. Was it written for converts from the Jerusalem priesthood, perhaps for the 'multitude of priests' mentioned in Acts (6, 7) converted as a result of the preaching of the Hellenists? This would explain the plan and structure of the epistle and the similarity to the ground plan of Stephen's discourse. What is certain is that it contains what Fr Spicq in his commentary could call a treatise *de Verbo Incarnato*<sup>9</sup> presented however not so much conceptually as liturgically. The end of the liturgical, sacrificial order is to perfect the worshipper (9. 9) and to give him access in the fullness of his human nature to God, to enable him

<sup>9</sup>C. Spicq, *Épître aux Hébreux*, 1952, p. 214.

to go in (10. 19-20). But the old order of the tent followed by the temple, with its endless round of liturgical action and its endless butchery of sacrificial animals was powerless to create such an opening for its worshippers; it remained void precisely because it was of this earth. The true tent of which that of the old order was only a shadowy sign is heaven which contains the throne and into which Jesus has passed in his Ascension, penetrating the veil in his passion and crucifixion. Here the sacerdotal theology which was mentioned above is pressed into service with hellenistic philosophy of platonic inspiration to present this new intuition. Thus the object of Christian existence is 'to serve the living God' through the self-offering of Christ made 'once for all at the end of the age' (9. 14, 26), and thus to enter the sanctuary.

Perhaps we could sum up here briefly. We have seen that liturgy cannot be a marginal or specialist occupation. It is a function of life as a whole and therefore must be of Christian life as a whole. The Old Testament revelation evolved, in response to the divine purpose, different models of the sacramental idea of a vital and fecund meeting between men, that is, a people and their God. The central fact and point of departure was the Covenant which became the subject of a prolonged and loving meditation and which was presented according to different theological insights, all of them rich in promise but none definitive. Already in Jeremiah (31. 31ff) it is seen that the disastrous reality of sin had thwarted the divine purpose with the result that the basic need had to be met through a new order of mediation. The first Christians, living under the lengthening shadows which finally engulfed the temple, symbol and centre of the old order, saw the fulfilment of these requirements in Jesus as the new temple, the new high priest, the *Kabod*, the *Shekinah*, the ineffable divine Reality. Here is the point of dynamic unity between human nature which seeks fulfilment through liturgical action and the divine movement in its direction; the only point. 'No one comes to the Father except through me'.

## IV

Because, finally, this radical new possibility was created at the centre of human nature it meant that there was no more question of a narrow, sectional approach, there are no more barriers. The people of God is now ideally commensurate with the whole of mankind, which also explains the absolute necessity for salvation, 'approach' to God, of sacramental contact with and through Christ of some kind. The history

of the early Church is really the history of the assimilation of that truth. There is an incident in the life of Paul, touching in a way, which brings this out very well and which evidently became a symbol in his mind of this new situation. In the autumn of 58, after an absence of nine years, he was back in Jerusalem and lodging in the house of a Cypriot fellow-Christian. One day, when in the temple court after the rite of purification following a vow, he was set upon by a mob and only a last-minute intervention by Roman troops who carried him bodily into their barracks saved him from lynching. It was claimed that he had been seen bringing a certain Trophimus, an Ephesian, into the temple, beyond the four and a half foot high wall which divided the Court of the Gentiles from the inner court and to pass which for the uncircumcised meant death.<sup>10</sup> Just as the veil of the temple became a symbol in the early Church for the old order of worship which passed away with Christ's death, so did the temple wall for the apostle of the Gentiles; writing to the fellow citizens of Trophimus three or four years later he still bears the incident at Jerusalem in mind:

But now you are in Christ Jesus; now, through the blood of Christ, you have been brought close, you who were once so far away. He is our bond of peace; he has made the two nations one, breaking down the wall that was a barrier between us.

(Eph. 2. 13-14).

The wall was indeed broken down together with the rest of the temple in the climax of the war which started before Paul was put to death in Rome; but by that time the new approach to God in Christ had already been worked out.

<sup>10</sup>The notice or inscription can now be read from actual finds in 1871 and 1938. It goes: 'No foreigner may enter within the balustrade and enclosure around the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will render himself liable to the death penalty which will inevitably follow.'