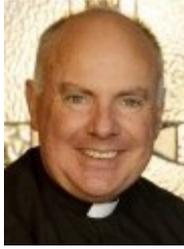


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Understanding Anglicans with a different view of the Sacraments

In my last column, I said that a long accepted tenet of Christianity is that "**we live in a sacramental universe** where God chooses to use material things in order to be present to people and where these material things function as vehicles of grace". My argument was made with reference to Genesis, including the episode of the burning bush.

However, some Anglicans reject this idea because they argue that any talk of a real presence or eucharistic sacrifice is problematic and creates divisions.

For example, a recent resource produced in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney called **Better Gatherings**, says that:

Reference to the Holy Spirit in some modern liturgies has suggested an effect on the bread and wine, rather than the transformation of believers. Including certain petitions in 'The Great Thanksgiving' has sometimes introduced a hint of 'eucharistic sacrifice' - the idea that we offer the consecrated bread and wine to God, together with our praise and our selves, in the one action. Such developments move away from the theology of the Prayer Book and create divisions amongst Anglicans.

Those who take the position being argued here are sometimes known as nominalists. Nominalists argue that there is no realist connection between Christ's presence or sacrifice and the Eucharist since they reject the idea of a sacramental universe.

Some Anglicans, usually from the Evangelical tradition, deny the realist analysis of sacramental instrumentality and argue that all we have are particular signs which only function to remind us to give thanks for a past and completed transaction, that is, the saving fleshy presence of Christ on earth occurred at a certain point in time and his sacrificial death, without any real participation in or instantiation of these signs or events in what they signify in the present in the Eucharist.

Paul Zahl in his book *A Short Systematic Theology* argues in this way against the idea that Christ can ever be present in any objective manner in the elements of the Eucharist on the grounds that 'no physical object can be impregnated with divinity' (p. 29).

Likewise, Archbishop Peter Jensen, speaking some years ago at the Law Service in St James King's Street in Sydney, describes the Eucharist as a meal that takes place at millions of places around the world on a weekly basis where the aim is to 'share a meal in memory of a certain man'. This meal is described as 'a sort of perpetual wake' which 'has lasted for two thousand years so far'. He also describes the Eucharist as 'a projectile

launched from antiquity into our own time; it constantly turns up amongst us and says, "never forget this man".

Dr Jensen's central thought here seems to concern remembering and eating and drinking as an act of faith, will and mind. He speaks of 'remembering' in the sense of bringing to mind an event, completed in the past but remembered in the present with thanksgiving but without sacramental instrumentality or dynamic remembrance and without the idea of any real presence of Christ in the elements of bread and wine but not of course that Christ is present spiritually.

For Dr Jensen, the Eucharist is 'a perpetual and effective reminder of the sheer stature of Jesus Christ'. The Eucharist therefore functions principally as a reminder, acting as the moment of remembering a past and completed action and the giving of thanks and praise for the benefits of that action in people's lives without any realist linking between the signs and what they signify in the present in the Eucharist such as a realist would argue.

By Reverend **Brian Douglas**