

RITUAL AND SACRIFICE IN WORSHIP.

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IF you tell a child a fairy tale, it takes delight in the story. But it does not believe that these things happened. It is aware, instinctively, of the absence of reality behind the tale. In complete contrast with this process is the attitude presented by a child to the idea of God. The child's attitude to God expresses an instinct for belief. It may ask for reasons why God does this, and does not do that; or whether God will do this or that. It may even occasionally ask for a definition of God. But it does not doubt your statement that God *is*, and confidently says its prayers, supported by the simplest, and at the same time, the purest faith. Jesus spoke with knowledge not only of religious psychology, but of child psychology, when He said "Unless ye become as little children, ye cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

The attitude of the child is characteristic of the early stages of most of the great religious systems of the world. In the first stage of religious development simplicity of belief and strength of faith are accompanied in the cultus or system of worship by few rites and a simple ceremonial. Religious life is sustained by clearness of conviction. God is a near Presence, and few aids to worship are required. A sense of sin is present, as in the Rig-Veda of the Hindus, or in the utterances of Old Testament patriarchs, but still more clearly defined is the conviction that God readily forgives the sincerely penitent heart, without the offering of elaborate sacrifice, or the maintenance of minute ritual, on the part of the individual or his priests. Then comes a change, the sense of God's nearness is lost. Consequently He appears to be hard to placate. The sense of sin becomes abnormally developed, and seems to demand a larger propitiatory effort on the part of the individual. The final result of these two developments is the institution of animal sacrifices and the elaboration of a system of ritual. The loss of simplicity in spiritual vision is followed by the paraphernalia of ritual and the devices of priestcraft.

Every one of the great systems of religion still existing, with the exception of Muhammadanism, manifests this development. Hinduism was purest in the age of the Rig-Vedas, when its conception of God was simple and spiritual. In the age of the Brahmanas a priestly system was introduced into it which indicated a lengthening and bedimming of the vision of God, a loss which the subtle philosophizing of the Upanishads failed to restore. In Old Testament religion the simple faith of the Patriarchs, and of the early Kings, was displaced by the elaborate sacrificial regulations of the priestly code. The simple faith of Apostolic Christianity in Europe, and of Irish Christianity in England, was displaced by the

elaborate system of the Italian ritual, which became hardened and militant, in that vital century, the eleventh after the birth of Christ. The work of Hildebrand in Europe, and of Lanfranc in England, secured the displacement, for five centuries, of Evangelic faith and practice. It is not denied that the work of the medieval church secured some benefits, such as a better organization of church life, and a better educated clergy, but by substituting the sacrifice of the Mass and the details of Benedictine ritual for a life of spiritual faith and a worship of praise and prayer, it undid the good results achieved in other directions. Sacrifice and ritual both concentrate attention on man's sin, whereas man needs rather to stress God's forgiveness. To be always thinking of sin in public worship, tends, by suggestion, to confirm us in our sins. The same criticism is to be levelled against the penitentiary of the Confessional. It is better to meet together to hear about God's forgiveness, and to go away and privately repent and amend our lives.

There is no more disturbing feature in the life of the Church of England to-day than the re-emergence of this phase of religious development. The Evangelical revival recalled the nation from the deadness of eighteenth-century Latitudinarianism. Simplicity of belief, strength of faith and plainness and heartiness of worship revived religion for two or three generations. Then began reaction, which in its first results achieved some good things, but which has ended to-day in an ever-growing spread of retrogressive teaching. The vision of God is obscured, and the splendour of ritual is taking its place. The Evangelical opposition to the Mass and its ritualistic accompaniments arises from no blind perversity which dislikes a change from the principles of the Reformation. The hostility arises from a fundamental conviction, as simple, yet as real, as the faith of the child, that God must be worshipped in spirit, and that the ritual of Jerusalem, or "this mountain," or Rome, or Oxford only obscures the vision outlined by Christ to the woman of Samaria, and developed by St. Paul in his epistles to the churches of the Empire.

There is a contrast to be drawn between ceremonial and ritual. Ceremonial is a way of performing acts of worship to preserve order and to guide devotion. A surpliced choir and a fixed liturgy are parts of ceremonial, and are necessary to prevent untidy and slipshod methods and habits. As details they have small significance. Their efficacy lies in retaining attention upon the whole act of worship of which they form parts. They offer no distraction of a symbolic character to the mind of the worshipper. But the minutiae of ritual, while organizing excitement, as Mrs. Humphry Ward said, at the same time distribute attention and prevent it from concentrating upon God as the object of worship. The thoughts are never relaxed from the details of the symbolism, and it becomes psychologically impossible to obtain that unification of the spirit, which brings with it the harmonizing of caprice and motive and fancy, on which again, depend the healing and inspiration of the soul.

A system of ritual is a system of art. Art is most spiritual when the hand of the artist is most completely hidden. Music and poetry lift us to loftier spiritual heights than painting or the drama, because the artist's message rather than his method and technique predominates in our view. Preaching saves or loses according to the presence or absence of a message. Mere personality will not carry it along. Ritual is art, but unlike the stage-representation of the drama it is art at second hand, for it is mediated by a voice and action which submerge personality. Between the soul and God glide the dumb artists and the manifold details of their representation. There may be a psychology of ritual. It is rightly claimed that the eye must be used to assist the heart to God. But this is justified only if the eye dwells mainly upon objects created by God, upon the flowers and the sunset and the landscape, and not upon artificial details of colour and motion, which had their origin in primitive untutored human instincts. Ritual was originated from that most human of all instincts, which also produced the drama—the desire to edify and to amuse man by exhibitions of man's ways of doing and living. But this is not religion. It is of the earth earthy. It is humanism, but a humanism of man's clothes—not of his spirit. In the course of its development, ritual made large borrowings from the drama directly. The symbolism of the miracle-play has entered into some of the later stages of ritualistic development. A ritualistic interpretation of worship, like a sacrificial interpretation of the Holy Communion, represents an attempt to orientate our religion from the wrong pole, from a human and not from a divine centre. The end of such a process is the rank superstition of certain phases of both Hindu and Roman Catholic history, or a vague and barren attempt to vindicate faith by the philosophic treatises of the Upanishads or some twentieth-century modernists. Our need as a church to-day, is to return to the religion of the child, to the religion of the apostles, and to seek help by developing the religion of the Spirit, revealed to us by Christ, and not to set up a sacrificial idea which He came at once to fulfil and to end, not to adapt a system of ritual, which, as in India and the Latin countries, only marks the bankruptcy of faith and of the religion of the Spirit. The relationship between the ritual systems of Hinduism and Buddhism on the one hand, and the ritual of Rome on the other, has never yet been fully worked out, although every visitor to the East must have been impressed by the prevalence of the wayside shrine, and hill temple, and by the singing of plainsong themes by cooks' boys along the roads. If these details, as well as others prevalent in the religious externals of Catholic countries in Europe, receive their inspiration from the decadent religious systems of the East, then the revival of a similar system in our midst is the more to be deplored, because the East has recognized its mistake, and although, accepting facts as it finds them, it may be content that the illiterate multitudes should continue to be attracted by the methods of Brahmanic priestcraft, yet it is attempting, in the Samajes, to develop more ancient

and more spiritual ideas. A large amount of help is offered to it by the Christian missions, but from the same source also issues confusion. In so far as the Western missionary introduces the details of the Catholic cultus, and the sacrificial teaching of the Mass, he is attempting to rivet the old chains upon the religious consciousness of the East, which the Oriental is seeking to remove. Of course, the illiterate classes like these things, and their natural instinct for ritual was exploited by the priests of the Brahmanas, and successfully, because they offered that which ministered to natural instinct. So also, in England, the growth of the Anglo-Catholic Movement is to be attributed largely to the use made by its leaders of these instincts. But in neither East nor West can any system of religion or worship possess permanent value which rather ministers to instinct than restrains it. From the days of St. Paul onwards the instincts of the natural man and the religion of the Spirit have been in conflict, and from the beginning it has been the function of the Evangelical tradition to point out this contrast, and to seek the development of religion along the spiritual lines outlined by the Apostolic Church.

