

him, living in various parsonage houses but appointed for duty throughout the deanery, would be a team of clergy, as population and geography dictate. One man's principal place in the team would be as deanery youth leader, another the superintendent of lay visitors, another specializing in the old people's and social welfare work, in so far as the Church's duty still lies, another might be particularly a Bible teacher (they would all preach freely in the different churches). Another might be responsible, for his own and the neighbouring deanery perhaps, for building up evangelistic teams to operate now and again as called for in city parishes—what possibilities that opens up! The Old War Horse would have his place, and here and there a parsonage house would be free for the true specialist, the man serving a wider ministry, by his pen, or in a ministry of healing, or so on—the sort of man who can do so much, but for whom there is really little place materially in the Church to-day, now that most residential canonries are taken for diocesan workers.

Of course such a scheme would have many difficulties. Something like it was tried in a midland diocese some years ago, without success. Probably there can be no success until the scheme is adopted officially on a wide scale; it will meet massive prejudice, and needs fullest official backing.

A deeper difficulty is that it must upset patronage as it is now constituted. Personally I think patronage has done much to keep the Church of England free of ecclesiasticism, or domination by bishops. I'm not guying bishops, but one of the strengths of our national Church would be removed if all patronage fell into episcopal hands. And how we are going to get round that problem, in launching a scheme such as I outline, quite foxes me.

But surely we should think and pray about this whole problem of the countryside, and approach it with realism. We long that ordinary men and women in the villages should be convicted of sin, brought to the foot of the Cross, and find the Lord Jesus as Saviour and crown Him as Lord, and not be lulled into false security and selfishness.

The Lure of Magic

BY A. P. WATERSON, M.D., M.R.C.P.

THE nearer that a counterfeit approaches the reality which it simulates the more successful is it likely to be. The caricature of true religion which is known as magic is a far subtler counterfeit than any of the more or less extravagant variants of Christian orthodoxy. These are concerned with doctrine or Church order or ritual, while magic is an attitude of mind which can insinuate itself into any of these things. Evangelicalism is not exempt from it, and is indeed in some respects peculiarly prone to it.

THE ESSENCE OF THE MAGICAL

The essence of the magical attitude is that it starts with, and centres round, man rather than God. It is the desire and attempt by man to

use some power other than his own and greater than himself in such a way as to have it at his beck and call. The power must be available in such a way that his use of it is effortless. The results must be instantaneous and they must be complete. These results are the proofs of the working of the magic. They will be attributed to the working of supernatural agencies, but the emphasis all the time will be upon the material, for magic resents any prying into its working or its rationale. For this reason the results, or what are claimed as the results, appear to the observer as a series of isolated phenomena, with no apparent coherence save that of a supposed common cause. They seem to be entities, independent of, and unrelated to, all other phenomena. They are irrational and isolated. The magical community is withdrawn, secret and exclusive, though it may give the impression that it wishes to draw others into its ranks.

The mention of magic usually conjures up the picture of fairies and wands and startling metamorphoses, and it conjures them up with an effortlessness and an instantaneity which are themselves magical. But magic is not confined to the pages of Hans Andersen or the brothers Grimm, nor does it flourish only in the occult and bizarre world of little-known secret societies. In a minor, but none the less mischievous, form the magical attitude of mind is rife among Christians to-day. This is not surprising, for two reasons. The first is that magic has such a strong resemblance to true religion that to the unwary they may be difficult to distinguish from each other, at least at first sight. For example, miracles were effortless, instantaneous, completely effective events, with obvious material results, but they started with God and not with man, and they were not isolated happenings, for they were an integral part of God's revelation of Himself at various times in the past. There is a second reason, perhaps a stronger one. Every Christian makes his religion what it is, in the sense that he decides in what way he will work out his own salvation. There are often a number of ways at any turn, and sometimes the true and false seem to merge and blend in the most tantalizing and even baffling way. Sometimes he seems to be walking on a knife-edge, one error on one side and one error on the other. It is not to be wondered at if there are Christians who make mistakes, some of them persistently.

THE MANIFESTATIONS OF MAGIC

The magic of knowing. The revelation by God of Himself in the Bible is a supernatural one, and it is used by Him to enlighten the mind, to direct the life, and to mould the character of the Christian man. It is not for the dilettante, the idle, the disobedient, or the merely curious. To grasp the doctrines which it enshrines demands study, application and intelligence, unless the Christian is to remain a mere babe in these things. The magical approach to the Bible involves the random picking of texts for "guidance", the preoccupation with prophecy out of all proportion to its importance in the scheme of Christian truth, and the ignoring and distrust of scholarship. It is the desire to know, and to know effortlessly, instantaneously, infallibly, absolutely, completely, and even with the spice which exclusiveness lends to knowledge.

The magic of praying. The lengths to which such a sacred a thing as prayer can be perverted are seen in the story of James and John asking Our Lord to do whatever they wanted (Mark x. 35), and in the similar and only slightly less shocking story of the disciples who wished the offending Samaritan villages to be burnt by fire from heaven (Luke ix. 54). These are examples of men regarding prayer as a way of getting God to do what they wanted or saw fit. They are very far removed from the humble "nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done . . ." of Gethsemane. Prayer is one of the occasions when the Christian is most exposed to the temptation to magic, for "it is the desire to use the power of God, His promises, His grace, magically, and even in His own cause; it is claiming to have God at one's service, instead of putting oneself under His authority; it is the claim to penetrate His secrets".¹ The Biblical view of prayer is that it starts not with man but with God, and that true prayer is always made with reference to Him. The elements of personal committal and of faith are integral to prayer, whereas the surrender of the will to God is entirely alien to the idea of magic. Faith is essential in prayer because its mechanism and even its rationale are not revealed in Scripture, at least not explicitly, and hence the Christian must act in faith. But faith which can see immediate results is not faith, and so faith is alien to the magical, for it is one of the props of magic that it expects and sees results.

The magic of healing. The healing miracles of Scripture stand out in solitary splendour against the fables and counterfeits of later years. But it is not surprising that the field of healing was invaded by the magical in the earliest times and is still to-day a happy hunting ground for the application of the methods of magic. There is no doubt that the majority of "faith healers" are well-meaning people with a real desire to help the suffering, but there is no mandate in the Bible for any attempt slavishly to imitate the miracles of Christ and the Apostles. It is true that Christ healed with little obvious effort, healed instantaneously, healed completely, healed with results which, as phenomena, are isolated from all other cases of similar diseases, and healed in defiance of what was the expected course of events, for example in raising from the dead a man who had been four days in the grave. But this does not make it magical, for Christ was God incarnate. A few men, like Elisha and Peter and Paul, performed similar miracles, but it is nowhere taught in the Bible that this gift is men's for the asking. On the contrary, the Holy Spirit is represented as the Author of spiritual gifts, dispensing them to men as and when He sees fit. The Biblical miracles of healing are integrated into the whole divine revelation in that they attest the divinity of the Messiah, and also the mission and special status of the Apostles.

The magic of sanctification. For the Christian the new birth is effortless, though his accompanying conversion may not be so. It is something which takes place at some moment of time, though that moment may not be known with even reasonable certainty. It is complete, and it is for him and him alone. Not so with sanctification.

¹ Paul Tournier. *A doctor's casebook in the light of the Bible* (1954), p. 115.

True, he may take a startling step forward now and again, but sanctification is a process and not even a series of steps. There may be occasions of new consecration, but that is the manward side of it; he does not and cannot compel God thereby to respond. The sudden acquisition of faultless holiness in this life has never been a part of Christian doctrine, though the Bible may have been misused in support of the idea. It is interesting that most of the false ideas of the nature of holiness and of the means for its attainment partake of the magical. The gate, said Christ, was narrow and demanded a struggle to enter in. By the grace of God man may attain to some measure of true holiness in this life. Any conception which eliminates the need for human effort and determination is less than Christian. Even worse is any conception which offers instantaneous holiness to be received once and for all, as the gift of salvation is received. Many a Christian has been led to the brink of despair by discovering, after thinking that there was such a step and that he had taken it, that he still knew the power of indwelling sin. There is no promise in the Bible of the eradication of the old nature, which is to be annulled or neutralized rather than destroyed (see Rom. vi. 6, R.V.). The Christian who seeks such a holiness and in such a way will almost certainly become introspective and self-centred. His Christian life may become pure, but it will be pure as opposed to applied, not pure as opposed to impure. He will live increasingly in spiritual isolation from other men. The idea of man taking the initiative and seizing the power of God for his use is a *sine qua non* of magical Christianity. In a sense it is true that a man is the author of his own sanctification, but only in so far as he removes barriers and yields his will. It is a dangerous idea that sanctification is his to command as and when he will. Our Lord Himself said that there were limits to grace, that it was possible for a time to come when a man would seek and *not* find (John vii. 34).

The magic of feeling. One of the hallmarks of magic is that it demands concrete results. Thomas was rebuked by Christ for demanding proofs before he would believe, and the same pitfall lies in the path of Christians to-day. The difference is that while Thomas demanded literal sight, it is the feeling of spiritual realities which is sought now. The demand for a conscious communion of the soul with God is the essence of the form of religion known as Mysticism, that is, Mysticism used in its narrow sense, not in the sense of all that is immaterial in religious experience. The Christian appreciates God by faith, not by sight. It is a real danger to the young Christian that he may think that because he has known no heights of ecstasy such as some great souls have translated into hymns or devotional writing, he is therefore either not a child of God or is missing some essential experience. Christianity involves the apprehension by faith of what "now we see in a mirror dimly", rather any conscious sensation of supernatural phenomena. "Blessed are they," said Christ, "who have not seen and yet have believed".

THE MEANS OF MAGIC

The means by which magic seeks to achieve its ends are manifold, but most of them involve some combination of words, ritual or decision.

Words and magic. The temptation to suppose that if only we can master some technical terms we shall know all about a subject, or at least be able to convince others that we know all about it, has always been a strong one, and perhaps never greater than in this present technological age. Familiarity with jargon, the adroit manipulation of long names, the reduction of conversation to a series of abbreviations, and the gratuitous Latinity of the second-rate scholar, are all signs of the magical attitude of mind. They are the modern equivalents of "Abracadabra" and "Open sesame". It is wrong, too, to suppose that the words of Scripture will work "like a charm". Unless they are used by the Holy Spirit they will certainly be as St. Paul's sounding brass or tinkling cymbal. Nor is the age of the shibboleth past. To use various catch-phrases or trite texts on appropriate occasions does not make a man holy, nor does it necessarily imply even that he is a Christian, though it may well make him accepted unquestioningly in certain coteries of Christians, among whom he will be passed as "sound" for so doing. In fact, of course, his real motive may be to make himself accepted in a society where he fears he may not otherwise be.

Ritual and magic. Ritual is by no means the exclusive preserve of those who practice ornate ecclesiastical ceremonial. Christ's condemnation of vain repetition applies to any form of words which by repetition has lost its meaning. A studied but repetitive informality can be much more deadly than the competent use of a well-framed liturgy. Dignity and order and symbolism and some degree of repetition are essential parts of Christian worship, but the danger is always present that they may become things on which the Christian relies to produce a state of mind, or to stimulate the emotions, rather than remaining the spontaneous but formalized expression of a worshipping body. There are even those who demand a ritual for conversion and regeneration. Men must pass through exactly the same steps of experience and enlightenment as they themselves did, and must seek for and pass through similar crises to their own after they have become Christians.

There is a strong sense of locality about magic. The Old Testament story of the mistaken supposition of Ben-hadad that the God of the Israelites was localized to the hill-tops (I Kings xx. 23-30) may be interpreted as an illustration of God's indifference to the difficulty or otherwise of earthly circumstances, but, taken at its face value, it carries the lesson that God is not limited by locality. There are some Christians who can only function as such in the company of certain other Christians or in a certain spiritual environment, or even in certain places. They have yet to learn that their God is one to whom locality is of no consequence, that "faith has still its Olivet, and love its Galilee".

Decision and magic. To make a decision is easy and effortless, but to implement it may vary from the trivial to the supremely difficult. The idea of accomplishing spiritual feats by a series of magical fiats is, of course, immensely attractive to a certain type of person, but it is peculiarly demoralizing for the Christian. When the reality of the decision is tested in experience it may be seen just how real it has been.

If it was magical, that is, the attempt to compel the divine power to work for him, the Christian will soon come to grief. If it was a real decision, it will be implemented by a choice of those things which are right. "In the hours of crisis it is often the Peters who have sworn loyalty to Jesus with big gestures and fullness of self-confidence, that disappoint, and it is the secret and quiet followers of the Master . . . that do not hesitate to serve Him in love—at whatever cost."¹ Temptation, like the mercies of God, is new every morning; so must be the decision to personal consecration. There is no single "second step" of sanctification which corresponds to the "first step" of conversion. It was not for nothing that the word "daily" was added in the Lukan account of Our Lord's call to take up the cross and follow Him.

THE EFFECT OF MAGIC

Magic of this kind is the enemy of all that is essential and ideal in the Christian life. It is the enemy of the grace of God, because it magnifies the power and initiative of the individual in achieving spiritual ends. It is, on the other hand, equally the enemy of that right and proper human effort which is vital to a healthy Christian life, because it is by its very nature a way of getting things done effortlessly. It is the enemy of faith, because its working is instantaneous and must be manifested in, and proved by, material results. It is the enemy of knowledge, because it is inevitably obscurantist; it recognizes desires and results, but not much in between. It is the enemy of humility, because it produces self-centred and power-conscious Christians, and exclusive Christian communities. It is the enemy of a realistic attitude to life, because it ignores the everyday realities of the world, or mistakenly regards them as being under its control. It is, then, at its worst, an outlook that is selfish, idle, proud, obscurantist, and unrealistic. Of course, all these qualities are just the opposite of what is required in the Christian, and yet oddly enough they are caricatures of some of them. It is in the closeness of its outward resemblance to true religion that its subtlest snare is concealed.

THE LURE OF MAGIC

It may be asked why this perversion of Christianity, in its various forms and to varying degrees, should have such a hold as it obviously does. The answer may not be far to seek. All men have a desire for the touch of power and the sense of absoluteness, some more than others. Magic promises these. If a Christian finds the way harder than he had imagined it would be, he may do one of three things. He may face the challenge, he may abandon his faith, or he may attempt to condition his faith to his own requirements. To do the last of these he must move into a world of fantasy, an unreal world, but a world where he is monarch of all he surveys. This is the counterfeit of the unseen but real world in which the man of God lives by faith. Of these two worlds, the Christian who is romantic, insecure and egotistical will be tempted to choose the shadow rather than the substance. If he does so he will turn from God to self. The magic will have worked.

¹ N. Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, pp. 619, 620.