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resources to sustain our obedience. 'Starting then with the being of a God (which . . . is as certain as my own existence, though when I try to put the grounds of that certainty into logical shape, I find a difficulty in doing so in mood and in figure to my satisfaction), I look out of myself into the world of men, and there I see a sight which fills me with unspeakable distress. The world seems simply to give the lie to that great truth of which my whole being is so full, and the effect upon me is, in consequence, as a matter of necessity, as confusing as if it denied that I am in existence

myself. If I looked into a mirror and did not see my face, I should have the sort of feeling which actually comes over me when I look into this living world and see no reflection of its Creator.'

It was for souls which have something of that sensitiveness, something of that capacity for fear, for loneliness, for reflection, and for the consolation of faith, that the Church of Christ came into being; and it is by the force of the necessities of such souls, and in answer to their cry, that the Church survives and will survive.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Record of Christian Work*, Jan. 1913, p. 32.

## The Rationale of Corporate Worship.

BY PRINCIPAL E. GRIFFITH-JONES, D.D., UNITED COLLEGE, BRADFORD.

IN these days of lessened attendance at public worship, which seems to be a feature of all Western nations, the question has been agitating the minds of those interested in the subject—*Why men do not go to church?*—the postulate behind this question of course being the assumption that they ought to do so, but that, for some reason mainly connected with the unsatisfactoriness and unhelpfulness of the services usually rendered, they have ceased to find any help from them. But, is there not a prior question? *Why should men go to church at all?* Is there any reason in the nature of religion, or in human nature itself, why worship should be normally *communal*? Why, in a word, should the worship of God be more satisfactory by way of human fellowship rather than of individual meditation and aspiration? Can we give a rationale of corporate worship? This is a question which has not been sufficiently explored, and I propose in this paper to endeavour to throw some light upon it.

For it is undeniable that men in all ages and under the most diverse circumstances and conditions have found it helpful to worship in fellowship. So far as I am aware, there is no religion, ancient or modern, which has not had a more or less elaborate system of rites and ceremonies to be celebrated in common. The approach to the Divine has normally always and everywhere been made in the fellowship of like-minded people, who share the same beliefs, and who find their spiritual affinities reinforced and enriched through the

medium of this communal approach. Without for a moment forgetting that there is a place in religion—and a great place—for private devotion, meditation, and prayer, there must be some profound reason why men have thus instinctively (or intuitively) gathered together in groups, often in great multitudes, in a common effort to envisage spiritual realities, and to link themselves to the object or objects of their religious worship. The vast majority of men and women find it unquestionably easier to cultivate religion in company than in solitude. Why is this?

I am not satisfied that it is mere unthinking habit; or that it is one of the unreflective automatisms of human nature; or that the 'herd' or social instinct accounts for it. Such a universal phenomenon must have a deeper source in the constitution of human nature itself, and in the necessities of the case. 'Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus igitur' bears witness to a fundamental and irrepressible need in the soul of man. It is worth while trying to run this elusive something to earth.

### I.

Let it be fully conceded that the prime sources of religious inspiration are to be found not in congregations but in spiritually gifted individuals, whose grasp of spiritual reality is original and at first hand. Every great religion had its inception in the soul of a single seer or prophet, whose vision of spiritual reality owed little or nothing to

the influence of others, certainly not of the crowd, but who came forth from deep solitude to tell his message—a solitude where he had met God face to face. The *differentia* of the prophetic soul is his supreme confidence that he comes from the very presence of God with an authentic and authoritative Word carrying its own credentials, and bearing its own witness. The secret of such men is incommunicable; and it always dies with them.

The same is true in a lesser degree of all great religious teachers and preachers. They are men who are in touch with the sources of religious truth at first hand; their vision is immediate; they have been in touch with God Himself; they know Him for themselves, and their mission is to go forth into the world and to tell it to others. It is as impossible to account for this gift as it is to doubt its reality and genuineness. We have all met such men and women, whose very presence carries with it a sense of the nearness and cogency of spiritual realities. Unless we preachers possess something of this gift, and are able to make others feel it in all we say and do and are in our office, we are unworthy of it, and our efforts to help them will be in vain. For then we are not voices with a message of our own, but thin and substantial echoes of other and more authentic voices, and it is no wonder if our ministry is vain and unappreciated. Only by cultivating a genuine and first-hand acquaintance with God can we gain that experience of things Divine which alone will commend our ministry to our people.

## II.

It is certain, however, that the vast majority of our fellow-men, while they are not devoid of the religious instinct, find it difficult, if not impossible, to cultivate this in solitude and in their own right. They lean on others. Only through the action of the social sense does the conviction that they are in real touch with the Divine come home to them with power. And there is a profound reason for this.

Those who have followed the recent movements of philosophy will recall the emphasis which is laid on what Professor James Ward calls the process of 'intersubjective intercourse' as the chief means whereby we arrive at the conviction that there is an objective world. By this process is meant our capacity of communicating with other persons. How this is done is not at all clear; the fact is

unquestionable that whereas each of us is, strictly speaking, locked up in his own subjective world, and cannot by any means get out of it so as to enter directly into the mind of other persons, we do as a matter of fact somehow share in experiences common to them and us. Without the *transeunt* act which is performed in every social experience, we should all be living in different worlds of our own, and there would be as many universes as there were individuals to experience them. As it is, we are convinced that though we view the universe from different points of view it is in effect the same universe for us all. And that it is a real universe, not a subjective phantom, is a conviction which could never be fully ours were it not that we are persuaded that others enjoy it in common with ourselves.

Professor Merz, for instance, says: 'The fact that we share with others certain of our personal experiences may be held to furnish us with the first and most important criterion of reality.' We can fully trust our individual impressions and experiences as having objective reality only when we find that they are shared by others. This is so even with our impressions of material objects; if we find that others around us do not see what we see in front of us, we first doubt *their* sanity, or, if the failure extends to several other persons, we begin to doubt *our own*. This becomes still more marked in the case of less tangible things, and especially is it so as we approach the highest realities. To quote Professor Merz again: 'It is in this way that such sensations as the beautiful, the good and the spiritual, which seem originally purely personal, acquire more or less of objective reality as we find that others share them with us. . . . The instances are numberless, especially in our emotional life, where we perceive how certain interests start from apparently small or passing beginnings, and through intercourse with others grow in importance, and in the end stand forth as definite objects of our contemplation or desire. And on the other hand, interests and things which at one time of our life commanded our full attention and governed our thoughts and actions, retire into the background through want of encouragement by others, and ultimately sink into insignificance and unreality' (*A Fragment of Human Mind*, pp. 113, 114).

Now it is acknowledged that, of all regions of reality, the human soul has least satisfactory and

certain hold on the spiritual world. Those who desire to cultivate close relations with the realities of that world find themselves in need of every possible help. In turning to God, therefore, we instinctively turn to one another in order that by this method of 'inter-subjective intercourse' we may reinforce our hold upon Him and on the delicate and dimly perceived realities of His Kingdom. True, we can do this partly by private devotion, but chiefly we do so by personal intercourse in ordinary life, or in gatherings small or great in which we seek His face together in public. When Jesus therefore said, 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them,' He was uttering a promise in intimate harmony with one of the fundamental laws of our spiritual being. And when worshipping congregations meet together under appropriate and helpful conditions for the purpose of Divine worship, we find that law in active operation. By common acts of prayer, meditation, song, and speech, the faith of all reinforces the faith of each, and the faith of each goes to swell the sum-total of faith in the whole fellowship or assembly. Thus, since we realize ourselves spiritually through and in others, the common act of worship becomes an incentive to each individual soul present; and in a properly conducted and effective religious service every worshipper should go away feeling that his whole spiritual nature has been reinforced and vivified by an experience which was all the more intimately personal, because so profoundly communal. Conversely, if the worship is cold, formal, and lacking in the note of corporate sympathy, each member of the congregation goes home feeling more or less depressed, and with a secret resentment against either the minister or his fellow-worshippers, the result being a lessened religious vitality in the faith of all concerned. The fault in any particular case may be partly or altogether with himself; at the same time there is a sound instinct behind this attitude. It shows a right conception of the purpose of public worship, which is to uplift each individual worshipper by communal fellowship into a sense of the validity and nearness of the spiritual world of which all are in search.

### III.

The reality of religion is thus immensely deepened in all of us according as we find our own

sense of it echoed and ratified by the experience of others. Apart of course from personal intuition, we should be unable to enter at all into their experience, nor could they enter into ours; but the intuition in most of us is vague and uncertain; it needs reinforcement by every means in our power; and without some means of testing its validity, we should be haunted with doubt whether our impressions are not purely subjective and hallucinatory. That reinforcement and test come through the 'intersubjective intercourse' of religious communion, meaning by the term in this connexion not only the fellowship of living persons but the agelong experience of earlier believers, whose testimony comes to us along the channels of history. That testimony has been a cumulative one, and each generation as it comes and goes adds something to the pile. The Church universal is thus in a very literal sense the 'pillar and ground of the truth.' Its experience is cumulative and constantly growing; those who come under its inspiration and shelter find themselves surrounded by a massive body of 'objective truth' which has come down from past ages, to which they add their own contribution, while at the same time providing a corrective or critical element of their own. As we make ourselves acquainted with the records of this past faith we are often made to feel the poverty and insignificance of our own individual share in the process, but the final result is vastly to reinforce such faith as we have. This reinforcement is increased by the intersubjective religious intercourse we have with living believers both in our personal relations and in the common worship of the Church, which is the normal channel of its action. Without it, most of us would be quite unable to maintain our spiritual balance; and it is a fact beyond question that most of those who give up the habit of public worship gradually lose touch with religion altogether, and what in their youth was to them a living reality gradually becomes a vague memory and finally a forgotten chapter in experience. Only the gifted few can retain the vitality and warmth of their religious life when out of touch with the larger life of the Church. The very fact that they can do so throws on them a serious responsibility; for it is from such self-poised and seminal personalities that the Church itself largely derives her own vitality and warmth, and they have no right to deny others the benefit of their

richer and ampler contribution to the corporate life. The Church of to-day is suffering greatly from the defection of thousands who if they had been faithful to their duty would be among the most potent members of her fellowship, and it is reasonable to suggest that their own life would be reciprocally fuller and happier as well.

#### IV.

If all this is true, then certain results follow.

1. In the first place, it proves the *tremendous importance of the preacher's function* in the conduct of public worship. The fountain-head of inspiration lies in his prophetic function and depends on the reality of his religious experience, and on his capacity to pass on its contagion to others; and if he is himself insensitive to the august realities whose influence he is there to bring to bear on his people, or if he fails to direct them into paths of true edification, his responsibility is great. When we consider how all present depend on him for the orientation of their thoughts, and on the temper in which they together approach their common objective, it is difficult to exaggerate this responsibility. With a cold, formal, insensitive preacher in the pulpit, how can the congregation arrive at the goal to which he professes to lead them?

'Whenever the pulpit is invaded by a formalist,' wrote Emerson in his 'Divinity Address,' 'then is the worshipper defrauded and disconsolate. We shrink as soon as the prayers begin, which do not uplift but smite and affront us. We would fain wrap our cloaks about us and secure as best we may a solitude that hears not. I once heard a preacher who sorely tempted me to say I will go to church no more. Men go, I think, because they are wont to go, else had no soul entered the temple that afternoon. A snow-storm was falling around us. The snow-storm was real; the preacher was merely spectral; and the eye felt the sad contrast in looking at him, and then out of the window at the beautiful meteor of the snow.'<sup>1</sup> It is no wonder that when this tragic thing occurs, harsh and often bitter criticisms are passed by worshippers on the charlatan in the pulpit, and that they complain of the coldness and formality of a service to which they had gone with such high and legitimate expectations. None of us can be equally inspiring to every one at all times; but we should always be able to give those

<sup>1</sup> Bohn's Ed., ii. p. 198.

who come to hear us in a mood of sincere receptivity some sense of the solemn opportunity of the occasion, and send them away with some crumb of truth to meditate over and live by. Especially is this so with those of us who lead a 'voluntary' form of worship, and on whom those present have to depend for the prayers as well as the sermon. When such a service is adequately and reverently rendered, the opportunity of leading the congregation into the very holy of holies is at its highest; and a total failure to do this makes the case tragic and terrible. Better a fully liturgical service in which the preacher has no chance of expressing his individuality except in a brief sermon or address than that such a paralysing experience should be inflicted on the congregation; for they have at least the privilege of being borne up into the presence of God on the wings of prayers consecrated by the usage of centuries and emanating from the hearts of some of the great saints of the ages. In the face of such a danger it is no wonder that most congregations are beginning to ask for a service which contains a modicum of liturgy which will safeguard the situation from disaster. A truly prophetic soul in the pulpit will, however, never be at a loss now to bring his people into the authentic presence of God; and in such a case a 'free' form of worship will always have its place in the ministrations of the sanctuary.

2. But the preacher is not the only source of inspiration in worship. *The individual worshipper has his duties no less than the minister.* He is there not only to receive, but also to impart, some 'spiritual gift.' He must, if he is to fill his place, come prepared in mind and heart for the occasion. He has no right to expect that he should be automatically inspired. His receptivity and his responsiveness must be cultivated. He should remember that his condition of mind and heart not only determines the extent to which he can be benefited, but that these react strongly on both the preacher and his fellow-worshippers. A cold hearer makes a helpless preacher. Even our Lord could do no mighty works in Capernaum and Bethsaida, 'because of their unbelief.' The individual worshipper should remember that he is there not only for his own sake but for the sake of others; that his spiritual temper will inevitably make it either easier or harder for those near him to enter into the sanctities of the occasion.

This is an aspect of communal worship which I am afraid is not often thought of, and the consequences are sometimes disastrous. It is not too much to say that one thoroughly unsympathetic hearer makes it profoundly difficult for those around him to enter heartily into the service; while an incandescent soul will create a little centre of warmth and vitality which will pass like a stimulating breath into other hearts around him. We preachers know how greatly we are helped by the presence and help of certain members in our congregations, and how we miss them when they are not present. Do not these glowing faces haunt us even in our hours of study-preparation, and draw out the best of which we are capable when we deliver our message? In looking back on my own ministry a galaxy of such faces gather round the walls of memory, and fill my heart with gratitude that I was once privileged to take them with me into the 'secret place of the Most High.' Doubtless all of you have some such memories to cheer you on your way. We thank God for those blessed faces, many of which are now praising God around the Great White Throne.

3. But even this is not all. *The congregation as a whole also has its part to play*, and that not a small one, in successful worship. For every congregation is a kind of entity with its own characteristic spiritual quality. It is easier to preach and worship in some churches than in others, not merely (or chiefly) because of the building—though that too has its influence—but because of the habitual temper of its attendants. As time goes on it acquires an atmosphere, an 'ethos' of its own. This is partly created by the preacher; but *it is also partly the result of the reciprocal influence of the regular hearers* on one another. If the one acts on the many, the many react on the one, and

in time they all find themselves 'keyed' to the same note of spiritual responsiveness or the opposite. They tend to lift each other unconsciously into the mood and practice of true worship; or to depress each other into coldness and lethargy. This largely accounts for the success or failure of particular ministries; it also largely determines whether the church is well or ill attended, according as occasional worshippers find the atmosphere helpful or inhibitive to their own spiritual response. Here also is an aspect of our subject that does not receive the study it deserves. The infusion of a right spiritual temperature into his people should be one of the first duties of a minister when beginning his work in a new pastorate. If it is already high and helpful he should do his utmost to maintain it at that level; if it is low and uncertain, he should do all that in him lies to raise it to the point of incandescence. By cultivating a prayerful habit of life in private and public; by solicitous care in the choice of hymns and in giving an organic unity to each act of worship; by stimulating the spirit of brotherhood in the community to which he ministers, he can do much to ensure this result. But here also must be active response in the congregation. Formality and triviality of spirit should be sedulously discouraged. Every habitual worshipper should be encouraged to take an active and hearty part in all the exercises of worship, and to realize that the service is one communal act, and not a series of individual and isolated acts. When such a feeling is attained, and all join as one heart and one voice in approaching the throne of heavenly grace, the fountains of praise will be unsealed, and all will realize that they are truly in the House of God, and at the very gates of Heaven.

## Contributions and Comments.

### Romans iii. 26.

ONE may without fear of contradiction say that for distinctively Pauline theology there is no more fundamental passage than Ro 3<sup>21-26</sup>. The last two verses of that passage contain a theodicy, rendered necessary because God forgave men under the former dispensation, as He does also under the

present dispensation. In the course of that theodicy occurs an expression—*ἐν τῇ ἀνοχῇ τοῦ θεοῦ*—which has met with somewhat varied interpretations at the hands of expositors. Thus Gifford says that *ἀνοχή* signifies a temporary suspension of anger; Shedd, that it signifies indulgence, which itself requires to be set right by some method that satisfies the principle of justice.