

The Renaissance of Worship.

IN the new preface to his recently re-issued *Mystical Element of Religion*, Baron von Hügel reaffirms his characteristic conviction that all valid and vital religion begins, proceeds, and ends with the Given. "The Otherness, the Prevenience of God, the one-sided relation between God and man, these constitute the deepest measure and touchstone of all religion." The words may stand here at the outset as indicating the thesis of this condensed essay, namely, that the genesis of Christian worship is the sense of debt to God awakened by the realization of His grace toward us, and deepened by increasing knowledge and experience, until it becomes (in the phrase of Juliana of Norwich) "a holy, marvelling delight in God." From this standpoint it may be seen that the ultimate problem which faces us in any attempt to restore the true spirit of Christian worship is how to revive and re-awaken this sense of debt which has become dead or dormant in so much of our present-day religious life and thought. There are, indeed, signs of a sincere desire to cultivate an atmosphere of reverent devotion in our corporate worship, but our danger is that we may approach the problem from the wrong end, and only achieve a dull formality, or an aesthetic sentimentality, attitudes which are as far removed from that joyful adoration which is the differentia of Christian worship as cold reflected moonlight is from warm vivifying sunlight. Our primary and urgent need is a rediscovery of the dynamic of Grace.

Such is the conclusion to which this brief article tends as it moves among certain outstanding facts with a view to interpreting them and suggesting some applications to the problem of worship as we meet it in our churches.

I.

The facts of the situation, both outside and inside organized religion, are challenging and disturbing, but they must be faced. In this matter of Public Worship we cannot afford to ignore the psychology of the Present, and the most rapid and superficial survey reveals two marked characteristics—the attraction of the super-normal, and the appeal to the senses. The former is apparent in the spread of superstitious

customs, the multiplication of mystical cults, particularly the vogue of the séance; and the latter chiefly in the popular influence of picturesque methods adopted to arrest the eye. Commerce makes its appeal by means of pictorial advertisement; journalism through the illustrated paper, literature is popularized by the cinematograph, and education aided by objective demonstration. For six days in the week most men and women live in an environment which is rapidly developing the avenue of approach to mind, heart, and will along the pathway of sight. Both these tendencies are being reinforced by present-day science and philosophy. The discovery of radium initiated a revolution in the scientific interpretation of the material universe, so that to-day we have (to quote Evelyn Underhill) "a huge vision of time and motion, of a mighty world which is always becoming, always changing, growing, striving, and wherein the word of power is not Law, but Life."

In Philosophy the older materialism is being slowly eclipsed by the newer vitalism, and Life is more and more interpreted in terms of Energy. As regards the appeal to the eye, the new psychology is rediscovering and re-emphasizing the immense part played by sense-stimulations in sub-consciously shaping character. Modern thought is thus providing a situation favourable to belief in the supernatural and miraculous, and to a revival of the ministry of Symbolism in Worship.

When we turn to the sphere of organized religion, we discover further significant facts in those various tendencies towards free and fuller devotional expression which are doubtless symptomatic of a deepening experience and a wider vision among the younger minds of our churches. "The Free Church Fellowship," for instance, is showing a healthy spirit of devotional venture in discovering the value of group-thinking, the ministry of silence, guided intercession, and the combining of free and liturgical prayer. "The Student Christian Movement" represents a wider constituency, and reveals a more adventurous and challenging spirit. The "Book of Prayers for Students" issued by the Movement, is a remarkable compilation. Along with forms of devotion from such Free-Church sources as Martineau, J. R. Miller, and John Hunter, and established churchmen like Lancelot Andrewes, Bishop Wilson, and B. F. Westcott, it includes prayers drawn from the Liturgy of the Greek Orthodox Church, and the Roman Breviary. Many of our Free Church Students are familiar with this little volume, which is acting like leaven in some minds and hearts. "The Society of Free Catholics," a fellowship of clergy, ministers, and lay men and women drawn from

from all branches of the church, has naturally provoked prejudice and opposition, partly through its use of the much misunderstood term "Catholic," and its association (in the public mind) with the ritualistic innovations of Dr. Orchard at the King's Weigh House Church. Whatever the views and practices of individual members may be, the ideals of the society must be judged by its published "Basis." The third of the eight points defining its position states:—"We would foster the mystical development of the soul; we uphold the sacrificial significance of Worship; while recognizing the worth of the simplest forms of sincere worship, we believe in the grace of sacraments, the necessity of expressing devotion in visible forms, and the value of appeal through the senses to the soul; and all this we shall seek not by imposing our will upon others, or by hasty innovations, but by labouring to secure an appreciation of their spiritual right and their adoption by common consent." It is impossible to overlook the recent revival of "Anglo-Catholicism," which to an outsider appears to be the most vigorous section of the Church of England just now.

This hurried glance at some main currents flowing in or around the churches reveals a very strong tide moving in the direction of liturgical and ritualistic forms of Worship. We may regard it as an extreme re-action, a temporary phase, a dangerous tendency, but even if we view it with distrust we should endeavour to diagnose the situation so as wisely to determine our attitude towards it.

II.

How, then, shall we interpret the situation? Most of us have our personal affinities or prejudices, but these must be brought to the criterion of the New Testament. A true doctrine and development of Worship will spring from a root firmly planted in apostolic principles; that root is the grace of God realized in experience. To state this is to suggest the most crucial problem of Christian theology, namely, the application of Divine Grace to human need; is it normally received directly, or mediated through human channels and material elements? The question divides Christendom into two main camps, but each side acknowledges that, however it comes to men, the source of Grace is the redeeming love of God, and its symbol is the Cross. "He loved me and gave Himself for me" is the marvellous confession that conditions the whole of apostolic and primitive worship; there is not a page from "Romans" to "The Revelation" from which that note of humble gladness is absent. Outside the Scriptures it is echoed in many writings of the early Fathers. "On the so-

called day of the sun," wrote Justin Martyr (about 100-167 A.D.S "there is a meeting of us all who live in cities or the country, and the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time allows. Then when the reader has ceased, the president gives by word of mouth his admonition and exhortation to follow these excellent things. Afterwards we all rise at once and offer prayers. . . . When we have ceased to pray, bread is brought, and wine and water, and the president likewise offers up prayers and thanksgivings to the best of his powers, and the people respond with Amen." This adoring gratitude clearly expressed itself in primitive Christianity in three ways—in speech, song, and sacrament, giving to the Church the sermon, the hymn, and the Eucharist.

From this fact and these forms almost all subsequent elaborations in Christian thought and worship have sprung, passing and re-passing through three stages—the evangelistic, the scholastic, the ritualistic. The form of primitive worship was at first a spontaneous development of the simple synagogue service, but when the Lord's Supper was added, by degrees the Sacrament became a holy Eucharist, and the chief medium for expressing reverent gratitude. It will probably be found that the source and sanction of Christian ritualism, particularly in Protestantism, spring from a developed doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Round this central act of worship has gathered a wealth of ceremonial elaboration that has too often obscured its essential significance, but the fact of such manifold development is a witness to the mighty devotional impulse which sought to express its gladness in so many symbolic and picturesque ways. "It is only a living tree that puts forth too many branches."

III.

What shall be our attitude in view of these things?

Protestantism has always realized the peril of this ceremonial overgrowth, and it has been one of the special ministries of Nonconformity to bear witness to that primary experience and those primitive sources from which all valid developments have sprung, and apart from which they lose their vitality. In doing so, it has been necessary to limit ourselves so that our witness might be vivid, but that need not imply our denial of the value of symbolism and the validity of ritualism *for some souls*. One of our most loyal and scholarly Baptists, the late Professor Medley of Rawdon, writing concerning the abnormal revival of ritual in the Anglican Church admitted that "in some respects it is fitted to meet those spiritual sensibilities which are an integral part of human

nature, and which claim their satisfaction in acts of worship and communion with the Unseen." Nevertheless we realize that in a divided Christendom Nonconformists have a special calling to preserve primitive apostolic values and perspectives.

Baron von Hügel analyses modern church consciousness into three elements:—the Historical and Institutional, for which most types of Catholicism and Ritualism stand; the Rational and Speculative, expressed in scholasticism and modernism; the Experimental and Mystical, represented in various forms of Evangelicalism, and especially characteristic of Nonconformity. A re-united Christendom may perfectly combine the essentials of all three elements, but we shall not further such unity by a superficial copying or enforcing of elements which are not natural to any particular branch of the divided Church. For this reason attempts to enrich our Free Church services by introducing symbolic ceremonialism must ultimately prove disappointing. If it be true that ritual is related to dogma, and that a high doctrine of the Real Presence in the Sacrament is the chief source of most ceremonial elaborations, then Nonconformity at present does not provide the doctrinal soil in which such symbolism can take root and develop. Its strength lies in other directions, and we shall best revive the spirit of worship in our services by recovering the note of apostolic joy in our preaching, the spirit of apostolic praise in our singing, and the attitude of apostolic gratitude in our sacraments. "It is the highest and holiest of paradoxes that the man who really knows he cannot pay his debt will be forever paying it," writes Mr. Chesterton in his delightful essay on St. Francis of Assisi. "He will be always throwing things away into a bottomless pit of unfathomable thanks." The renaissance of worship will come through the re-experience of that sense of infinite debt to Divine Grace.

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Wolverhampton has seen many varieties of Baptist life. The earliest was a mixture of Unitarian and Seventh-day beliefs, which hardly paved the way for ordinary work. At the end of the eighteenth century, when Pearce of Birmingham was rejuvenating the Midland Association, ground was broken in Horseley Field. The staunch old Calvinists countered two years later at Noah's Ark yard. Ever since, there have been these two types, while the New Connexion provided a third in 1831. Mr. Leslie Chown has given a readable sketch of the two older causes, in the *Express and Star* for November 23, to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the present building in Waterloo Road.