

Some Conditions of Improved Worship.

I do not believe that our public worship can be made really effective, unless there be in the hearts of the worshippers a conception of God, vivid, vital, spiritual, but above all, awe-inspiring. For surely reverence and godly fear are the psychological foundation of an acceptable service of God. Reverence, it is true, is not enough : but where sincere awe is felt, there, despite every kind of fault, *something* of dignity and worthiness characterizes public worship.

Now unhappily in our day reverence has been menaced by popular misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the Faith. Take for instance the popular theology which has made Christianity to centre in the teachings of Jesus : and which has declared that these teachings centre in the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man. It is not often recognised that this version of the Christian faith is hostile to reverence. But the hostility works thus : No "teachings" can be admired and accepted without a certain element of self-flattery on the part of the admirer. "Ah, this now," he says, "*this* is what I have all along thought, though I could never express it as Jesus does. What insight !" This subtle self-flattery injects into the admirer something which ultimately breaks down his reverence, causes him to forget his sin and gloze over his unworthiness to appear before God.

Further, the translation of the "Fatherhood" as proclaimed by the Semitic Jesus into the smiling "grand-daddyhood" of our western version of Christianity, and the thoughtless broadening of "brotherhood" from the Christian *κοινωνία* to mankind as a whole : this substitution of an unguarded universalism for a careful regard for "a philosophy of the discrete" : this type of thinking has issued in what I may call a pseudo-domesticism in our religion, and in a familiarity with God which is really sheer insolence.

I once went into a church in S. Louis, Mo. The minister, a Scots Canadian from Canada's spiritual base, Prince Edward Island, began the service by the solemn invocation : "Most High God." One accustomed to the easy manners

of American religion was startled by the sudden call to awe : and one realised that if worship is to be what God would have it be, there *must* be a return to reverence for a God Ultimate but intimately near, our Judge and Moral Opposite.

Now if we recognize this (and one needs not to be a Barthian to see the point), we may perchance be willing to abandon the pseudo-adulthood of intellectual Protestantism and reopen certain questions which we have prematurely assumed to be closed. For example: Are we sure that by denuding our churches of all external aids to worship we have secured a real *interiority*: a real worship in spirit? Whatever introversion has been secured, has that introversion produced ethical and devotional results among us which put to shame, *e.g.*, our friends in the Roman Church? Or, to put it otherwise: Are we quite sure that external objects do not assist sometimes those who pray confronting them? At the height of one of the great crises of his career, Father (later Cardinal) Newman is said to have "remained day and night, almost without interruption, before the Tabernacle." Conceding the strength of Father Newman's belief, *was he wrong*? Was he acting *really* inconsistently with the belief that God is everywhere? A friend of mine tells me that during his long and brilliant ministry his practice was to re-enter his Church on Sunday night after the last visitor had gone, and there on his knees before the Blessed Sacrament he chose the subject of his discourses for the following Sunday. *Was he wrong*? We smile at his "mediaevalism"; but may not the smile be a little premature and unjustifiably superior? Are we backed in our amusement by modern psychology? Are we sure that we have not permitted ourselves to become slaves to the mediaeval infallibilities (now somewhat shopworn) of earnest but narrow "Reformers"?

It is to be remembered that if human nature be too long insulted, under the name of Puritan piety, by an enforced abstinence from the use of external aids to worship drawn from the beauty of God's world and from symbols which are the result of agelong association with divine things, the outcome may be that human nature may revolt and avenge itself: and the revolt will take either a worthy or a grotesque form, according to the conception of God still left with the worshippers.

May I illustrate from the recent history of the city on the mission field, in which I live?

One hundred and fourteen years ago, bodies of missionaries began to arrive in these islands to convert the people to Christianity. The work was superbly done, and flourishing churches were built up. But the mistake was made of endeavouring to impose on the people, who loved laughter, and flowers, and music, the austerities of New England Congregationalism, as though only to the Puritans had been revealed the final expression of the mind of God on the organisation of the religious idea. Revolt was inevitable, and took two forms. (1) The first rebellion came from the native royal family, who, having travelled to England and seen the splendour of the traditions of the Church of England, felt they had been *taken in* by the Congregationalist missionaries, who perhaps had not taken pains to explain to their royal converts that there were other organisations than their own of the religious idea and life. The King himself translated and published the Book of Common Prayer in Hawaiian: and the Anglican Church became solidly entrenched in the Hawaiian territory, and to-day has a pronounced Catholic bias.

(2) In one of the Hawaiian Churches, severely Congregational and Puritan in form, a young Hawaiian minister, seeing the secularism and irreverence into which his people were falling, took the matter boldly into his own hands. The organ set up by the missionaries was removed from its position as chief "object of worship," and relegated to the back gallery, where, if anywhere, mechanism of the sort belongs. A stark marble Cross was fixed high on the exposed wall. On the floor before this wall was raised a structure, the back of which served as robing room and prayer "closet," the front being a high pulpit surmounted by steps. Seven candlesticks (*candles always lit*) surmounted the structure; a little oil lamp flickered before the open Bible: the minister was vested in mauve, and for the Eucharist in white: and the whole structure was "tabu," none being allowed upon it but the minister and his ministerial guests, and even they, unshod. Simultaneously the pews were readjusted to practices of devotion: prayer pads being introduced, and the pews re-spaced: and best of all, the Church was opened day and night, and the prayerless habits of the people changed to habits of devotion. The minister was unhappily snatched away by death last year in the midst of his work, and his place has not yet been taken: but the reverential awe of the people and their quiet, ordered joy in worship are still as marked

as ever. I have noticed no great difference in the cultus from our ordinary "orders of worship," unless it be that more place is given to silent prayer and to vocal music. But what I have seen is that the people evidently appreciate the privilege of praying, either in their pews, or, after a public service, at a prayer-rail provided before their altar. For, though the church is congregational, the altar, word and thing, has been restored.

And why not? Is not the altar the oldest symbol and instrument of sacrifice? And ought not sacrifice to be the centre and focus of our worship?

But now this picture from the mission field and of the action of converts, has a grotesque counterpart. I have said—it is a venerable platitude—that without awe and reverence there can be no improvement in worship. In this same city I have seen in a Congregational Church at a week-night service no fewer than 32 candles ceremonially lit around and above the Communion table, as a symbol of the coming of light to the seeker after truth. In another Church candles are lit in silence during what used to be called the "long" prayer, in token of the advent of the radiant spirit of God in response to human prayer. Is the cause of righteousness advanced by this kind of thing? "Certainly," says modern education, or rather one of its transient theories. "For we have erred in surrendering to a dualism between the external and the internal. We must renew the harmony between nature and spirit. They are not two, but one: and a man has to live in both worlds at once." Is this true? *Quien sabe?* If it be true, then the defence of Puritan bareness is in a bad way. Not by the ignoring of nature, not by angry sweeping of flowers out of the Church—(this was done not long ago in a Presbyterian Church in New York by a woman who had out of untold wealth given largely to foreign missions and said she *had the right* to put the flowers away)—not by banning God's gracious gifts of beauty or ignoring the ways in which the eye affects the heart: not thus is reverence restored: but by humbling ourselves before the God who is insulted when we sin in the worlds both of nature and of spirit, and who in the tenderness of His solicitude for us has never abdicated His Throne as Judge.

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