

Training a Primitive People in Christian Worship.

IN training any primitive people in the nature and practice of Christian worship one has to take note of two things: the psychological outlook of the people on the unseen and spiritual in their life, and the form in which that outlook expresses itself in their own heathen worship. The former subject is too large to be more than mentioned in this paper. The latter is my concern now. And this, too, only in so far as it concerns the training of such a people in Christian worship.

As regards the attitude towards the unseen world of the native with whom I have had to deal, I would merely say that he is a being of great capacity for spiritual things. Despite appearances, he lives in an atmosphere in which the spiritual and the magical are intense realities. He feels himself at every stage and event of his life surrounded by unseen forces that have their origin in sentient beings or powers beyond the grave. And his worship takes the form of getting into touch with these beings or powers who, he believes, are able to influence him and the world about him for good or bad. These are the spirits of his dead ancestors, or chiefs, or that which he calls 'God.' How far his conception of a Supreme Being is that of a distinct personality, or only of an aggregate of the denizens of the spiritual world, I am not prepared to state now. Suffice it to say that when he makes approach to these unseen forces or beings in the other world, he calls it 'worshipping God.' And it is the missionary's task to lead him from this heathen worship to the worship of the Christian God.

Primitive heathen worship takes two forms—thanksgiving and propitiation. Thanksgiving on a large scale is offered on the occasion of the great village festival of the 'first fruits.' On such occasions the whole village community gathers for worship at some local specially built 'shrine' or hut, erected in or near the village. Individual thanksgiving may be made at the grave of the dead father or other relative, or it may take the simple

form of a 'grace before meat'—a 'gesture' expressed by throwing a bit of the food about to be eaten on the ground or at the foot of the nearest tree. Propitiation is usually made on a large scale, when an elaborate service takes place at the 'shrine' of some local deity or the grave of some noted ancestor, chief, or headman. Such act or worship is performed in time of famine, or drought, or other public calamity, to ward off the anger of the offended spirit or deity.

In both thanksgiving and propitiation two elements enter—sacrifice and prayer. The sacrifice may take the form of food or beer, or of a piece of cloth, or of any instrument of daily life such as a hoe, a pot, or a basket. The food offered is divided. Part is offered to the spirit by being placed at the shrine or grave, and part is consumed by the worshippers. Cloth is offered by being torn in pieces, a pot is broken, a hoe is stuck in the ground. The offering is made by the officiating 'priest,' who is generally the village headman or a relative or clansman of the spirit to be propitiated.

When the sacrifice is being made prayer is also offered by the priest-headman, followed or accompanied by the responses of the people.

Here is a specimen of a native prayer sent me by my friend, Mr M'Alpine, of the Livingstonia Mission at Bandawe, on the shore of Lake Nyasa. It is addressed to a spirit who is supposed to have influence with the Deity, and is offered along with a meat sacrifice, to propitiate the wrath of the divine being who has sent a disease into the chief's country that is afflicting both his subjects and their flocks.

"Stand for me to God! Let this disease pass away that my people and my cattle may be well. Let God pass on elsewhere, for the land is very great and wide," at the same time naming other lands which God might afflict instead of his. The people respond, "Pepa! Pepa!" "Be appeased! Be appeased!"

At a time of thanksgiving the headman offers beer. "O Father, receive this beer of thanksgiving. We give thanks for what we have received from you this year. Let all the people live well and eat their food in peace with all their families. Stand up for us to God that nothing may destroy us." And the people respond, "O! O! O! O!"

The normal form of primitive worship, therefore,

consists of a sacrifice or offering, with prayer by the headman-priest, followed by the response of the people. The response may be combined with hand-clapping—the polite way of approach to chief or headman. The attitude of the worshipper is bending or half-sitting on the heels—never sitting or standing.

From this thought and practice of primitive worship it does not take the people a long way to reach the ideal of Christian worship—prayer with or without an offering followed by the audible response of the congregation. If, therefore, Christian worship is to be the reality of which the primitive worship is but the foreshadowing, then both elements of offering and prayer, with the response of the congregation, must enter into it. How far we have succeeded in attaining this ideal in our Blantyre Church worship I shall endeavour to show.

In the Blantyre Church, ever since its dedication in 1891, and before that date in the little wattle-and-daub church that was the first House of God in all Central Africa, common prayer has been offered twice daily. The Congregation on week-days is made up of scholars, teachers, apprentices, and other residents in the Mission, together with any visitors or passers-by. The services follow a fixed rule, with opportunities for extemporary devotions if thought needful. The rubric heading each day's Order of Service calls attention to the events in Scripture history that fell on that day:—

Sunday.—The First Day of Creation; the Resurrection; the coming of the Holy Spirit; the Apostles gathering to Break Bread.

Monday.—The Second Day of Creation; the return to work in the spirit of the Lord's day (Col. iii. 17).

Tuesday.—The Third Day of Creation; the gift of food (Psalm lxxvi. 7).

Wednesday.—The Fourth Day of Creation; Judas covenanted to betray his Lord—a warning against covetousness (Luke xii. 15).

Thursday.—The Fifth Day of Creation; institution of the Holy Sacrament of the Supper; the Ascension of our Lord.

Friday.—The Sixth Day of Creation; the Crucifixion and Atoning Death of our Lord.

Saturday.—The Seventh Day of Creation; the resting in the grave and the preaching to the spirits in prison.



A Native Shrine, British Central Africa.



Interior of Blantyre Church.

These rubrics are from Professor Cooper's 'Prayers for Family Worship.' The Service for each day contains a Collect bearing on the event of the day commemorated.

The Service of Morning Prayer for Sunday opens with a Gathering Psalm or Hymn, followed by Sentences calling to worship taken chiefly from the Book of Common Prayer. Then follows the General Confession repeated by the whole Congregation along with the Minister, the Prayer for Pardon, and the Lord's Prayer, repeated by all.

The Ten Commandments follow, with their appropriate Responses sung by the Congregation. A Psalm follows, then the Old Testament and New Testament Lessons with a Hymn between. Then comes the Creed, a Prayer of Thanksgiving and Self-dedication, and General Intercession with special Collects for the King, Chiefs, the Governor, and all in authority, and for the conversion of the heathen around them.

Then follows a Hymn, with extempore prayer; then the Sermon with ascription.

The Offering is taken by the Elders and Deacons, and is received by the Minister at the Holy Table with Prayer of Dedication.

The Service concludes with a Hymn and the Benediction.

The rubric for the Evening Service recalls the Walk to Emmaus and the Appearance to the Disciples in the Upper Room. The Service is simple in form, consisting of a Call to Worship, a Psalm or Hymn, with a short Litany and Responses from the Appendix to the Book of Common Order. A New Testament Lesson, a Hymn, a Collect and Benediction close the Service. There is no Sermon.

In Daily Prayers those in the Morning are in the Native tongue, those in the Evening are in English. The Morning Service lasts for twenty minutes. It consists of an Introductory Collect, Psalm, Prayers with Collect bearing on the Event Commemorated by the day, Lesson, Hymn, and Benediction.

On Wednesday the Prayers consist of the Litany in an abbreviated form, with Responses by the Congregation.

On Friday, in view of the Crucifixion commemorated on that Day, the Prayers consist of Confession of Sin with a Short Litany for Pardon.

Holy Communion is celebrated at the Morning Service on the first Sunday of the Month. The Service consists

of the Order for Morning Prayer as far as the Sermon, with the Epistle and the Gospel for the Day instead of the New Testament Lesson. The Sermon is followed by a brief Collect. Thereafter the Offering is received by the Elders and Deacons and laid on the Communion Table. A Communion Hymn is then sung—the 35th Paraphrase or “Come take by Faith, &c.” During this Hymn the Elders bring in the Elements and place them on the Table alongside the Offering. The warrant for the Sacrament is then read and the Offertory Prayer said, embracing the Elements, the Offering on the Table, and the self-consecration of the worshippers. The Creed is then repeated as the Offering of the people’s Faith. The Salutation follows with the People’s Response:—

The Lord be with you ;
And with thy spirit.

Lift up your hearts ;
We lift them up unto the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord ;
For it is meet and right so to do.

Then follows the Thanksgiving, the Consecration of the Elements, and the Intercession as in Dr Cooper’s ‘Manual.’

Then follows a Hymn, “I am not worthy, Holy Lord,” or “Bread of the world, in Mercy broken”; the Prayer of Humble Access; closing with the Lord’s Prayer.

Holy things to the Holy ;
 There is but One Holy, One Lord, One Jesus Christ in whom
 are we to the glory of God the Father.
 O taste and see how gracious the Lord is ;
 Blessed is the man who trusteth in Him.

Thereafter the Communion is distributed with the usual words—the Minister first communicating himself and afterwards giving the elements to the Elders. Then follows the Communion of the people.

The service closes with the Salutation “Peace be with you all,” a Prayer of Thanksgiving from Dr Wotherspoon’s ‘Divine Service,’ the Doxology, and the Benediction.

The Administration of the Sacrament of Baptism follows after a course of instruction in Christian faith and truth—lasting not less than two and a half years, six months in the Hearers’ Class, and two years in the

Catechumenate. The Candidates for Baptism are then examined by the Minister and two of the Elders in their knowledge of Scripture and the Christian Faith. Their names are thereafter submitted to the Kirk Session, who take knowledge of their character and conduct. On Baptism Sunday—which in Blantyre is generally Whitsunday—the Candidates appear in the face of the Congregation, repeat the Creed as the confession of their Faith, and take vows of fidelity to Christ and His Church. Kneeling one by one at the font the Sacrament is administered to them with the Blessing of the Minister, and their solemn admission to the Table of the Lord. The Right Hand of Fellowship is then given to them in turn by the Elders and afterward by the Congregation.

In the case of those baptised as Infants—the Children of Christian Parents—the same period of instruction is given them. At the service of Confirmation of their Baptismal vows the Candidates are received individually, and each receives kneeling the blessing of the Minister, followed by the Right Hand of Fellowship from both Session and Congregation.

We make much of the Harvest Thanksgiving, when gifts of food as well as of money are brought to the Service. By a time-honoured practice in the Blantyre Presbytery the Offerings on that day are given to the Native Mission Hospital, an object that has an appeal to a new-born sense of the brotherhood of humanity in suffering as in other things.

It is no hard task to teach the African the sense of reverence. The silence that comes over a band of noisy carriers as the path approaches or leads past a native shrine or grave, shows an inborn instinct to be awed by the presence of the unseen. Where he has adopted irreverent and indolent habits at worship, it is only where he has witnessed the same habits in the European worshipper—alas, too common among our own Scots folk, who carry their own indifferent manners into their worship in Central Africa, where example counts for so much.

Where such foundations already exist of an inborn instinct and reverence for the spiritual and unseen, the future of the Church in Central Africa should lack nothing of seemliness and reverence in its worship of God.

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