

The Psychology of Worship.

A MINISTER of the Church of Scotland once remarked in my hearing that the problem of Public Worship was quite simple. If psychologists told us the way in which the mind moves, then it would rest with the minister to shape his service accordingly. But I fear the question is not so simple. A company of worshippers is made of people of diverse moods, with varying outlook and with differences in education and in emotional responsiveness. When there is such variety in individual outlook, and when the "attrait" of each soul varies, there is no stock mind that can be applied. For the unity of feeling that exists between the worshippers comes to reality only through the apprehension of faith, and that in itself lies outside the sphere of psychology. Further, we have inherited a form of service built up in answer to human needs, which has behind it not only the authority of usage but the power of tradition. We have to relate the inheritance of the past to the immediate demands of the present.

Owing to the unlikeness of outlook and temperament between worshippers, there is a factor of variation which accords with the differences between individuals. It is not simply a case of varying degrees of spiritual apprehension; there is a diversity of temperament and nature that alters the significance of worship. What a Church Service meant to John Bunyan, or Dr Samuel Johnson, was not identical; the mystical temperament and the ethical outlook alike find in worship a satisfaction and a strength; they both find in it a control and therefore a support, but there is a dissimilarity in what a public act of worship expresses or achieves. A congregation met together for worship is not then a simple thing, for it is a unity made up of many strands and much unlikeness. Also the form of service strikes different chords in different hearts. The rite, even though it remains unchanged, carries with it different associations for each generation. "The eternal light of revelation," says Karl Adam, "is differently reflected in the prism of each age with different angles of refraction."

Psychology also has earned for itself in certain quarters a dubious reputation. It has sometimes magnified unduly its office and spoken as though with it rested the arbitrament of truth and the evaluation of spiritual experience. Its true scope is surely much more limited—the description of states of mind and of feeling and the statement of the laws of working of the conscious and the subconscious mind. It does not pronounce on the ultimate validity of the spiritual experience or concern itself with the reality of the Being worshipper or the truths of God's nature. Psychology does not pronounce on the fact of Revelation ; it considers the ways and means of Revelation if such there be. We who are of the Faith do not look to psychology to make more cogent the facts of inner experience or more real the communion of God with the soul created and redeemed by His Power and Grace. We seek only to see how the Presence of God operates in the mind and will and feeling of man.

Thus every service of public worship implies three things. There is first the nature of the worshippers with their individual differences, and there is also the effect that the presence of other worshippers has on the worshipping soul. From this standpoint there is not a little to be learned about public worship. Secondly, there is the method of worship. Some form and sequence are always present in the offering of communal devotion. It may be a form deliberately selected and an order carefully chosen ; it may be a form not consciously employed and a sequence scarcely noticed. But there is no escape from a liturgy, whether used of intent or present without the consciousness of the worshipper. For a liturgy is but a way of worship and an order is as really used in a Quaker meeting as in the Roman Mass, and a sequence is present alike in a meeting of the Salvation Army and in the service of an Anglican Cathedral. Here, too, psychology is not without its value. There is the need of finding out what is the form best adapted to the requirements of the human spirit, and of considering the value of the means employed in worship. Finally there is the Being to Whom worship is offered. Worship from this point of view, with all its ritual and ceremony, with all its words, is quite meaningless unless it is primarily an act of faith, however indefinite that faith may be, and however hesitating its certainty. Public Worship is therefore in its very essence the assertion of faith, implying not only the seeking heart of man but the presence of God,

the object of devotion; and the worship of the Christian Church rests on the fact that God's Grace seeks man and the very impulse to worship is the work of the Spirit of God within the soul. It is not in this sphere we look to psychology for help or guidance.

Let us glance then at worship from the two standpoints, the nature of the worshipper and the means of worship. I. (1) Since worship is something that concerns the whole personality of man, there must enter into it an act of cognition. There is some idea of the God of Whom the soul is aware. Of course all ideas of God are but symbolic, and worship must needs use the inadequate counter of man's thought. But also worship means that the nature of God has been revealed and therefore teaching belongs to Christian worship, for there is set forth the content and nature of that revelation. So also an act of will belongs to worship. We will to worship ere we worship, and our will expresses itself in the means of worship—the prayer, the praise, the reception of the Word. Finally, feeling belongs to worship, for to worship is not to think or to will. The sense of God awakes the emotions of awe and gratitude, as in turn through these emotions the soul realises the Presence of God. Thus, while all these sides of human nature are involved in worship, the variety of nature among the worshippers implies that they are not *equally* involved. Of course there are the universal needs of men and the common aspiration of us mortals. These must needs be expressed. There are the Truths of Revelation which meet the hesitating yearnings of man and which awaken the sense of reverence and mystery, the feeling of imperfection and sinfulness, the sentiment of praise and thanksgiving. Such truly are common to man. Yet we cannot forget the differences. There are those with a vivid experience of God, and those with a real yet vague sense of the Eternal, those to whom public worship is the acknowledgment of a Divine Reign that guarantees life's sanctities and enshrines human decencies, those whose response is largely ethical, those to whom worship is a sense of mystery, those of mystical temperament to whom worship is rest and joy. Now this variety of response does not break the fundamental unity of worship. The very fact for example that the celebration of Holy Communion cannot be the same to all, and that each makes his own interpretation and expresses his specific need, shows the value of public worship, for this concentration of soul creates the atmosphere in the service.

A variety of attitude belongs to public worship and it is our concern to help to unite this feeling. We have to remember that there are two uniting factors. There is the unity of belief and of will which is found in the conscious life. Behind all differences of culture and training there is the unity of the faith. It is perhaps difficult to-day to find a uniformity of belief in anything but in the simplest articles of faith. Doubtless in bye-gone days in Scotland when there was a great theological interest it was easier to find a common mind about certain doctrines. Sometimes public worship only attains the end of a common mood. It has always been the mark of the "sect" that in this respect, as compared with a church that sought to embrace all sorts and conditions of men, it more readily achieved a greater uniformity of belief and created a common mind. Yet to aim at the common mind as well as the common mood is part of the reformed heritage in worship. The other variety belongs not to self-consciousness. The dissimilarity of men is much less in the realm of feeling than in that of the activity of thought. Beneath the conscious mind lies the subconscious, and there the likeness of mankind to one another is much greater.

(2) Every congregation is made of people who each have their subconscious mind as well as their conscious, and the influence of the subconscious plays a potent part in worship. What then do we mean by this phrase? The subconscious is not to be thought of as a magical endowment, it is the result and counterpart of conscious attention. Because we concentrate we create our subconscious life. The strain of attention leaves out what is irrelevant to our immediate aim, and these neglected or repressed factors live in each of us. Now in the subconscious there is the distinction between what is simply ignored and what is repressed. The former is allied to our conscious mind, and though not in the form of consciousness it contains our memories, our inherited instincts, our habits, the results of our past acts of will—in short, our characters. It is obvious how public worship must make associations and forge links of connection with the background of our mind. But there is also the subconscious that is critical of our conscious mind, for it is stored with repressions we have deliberately driven underground—old habits, all that has been dropped from voluntary interest. We are always filling up the subconscious, and much of the strain of life arises from the disharmony between the conscious and sub-

conscious mind. Worship heals this disharmony of man's nature and creates health of soul. In the first place, as bodily sleep relaxes the strain between the conscious and subconscious and gives freedom in a dream life, so worship provides the instinctive rest that is needed by man's harassed life. The discrepancy between the conscious will that follows its aim and all the unsatisfied yearnings and dreams of the soul that have been banished from consciousness disappears in this realm. For here life is not shackled by circumstance nor caged by its narrow lot; the soul is free beneath the open hand of God, and all that could not find outlet in the limitations of our existence, the soaring dream and the unfulfilled longing, have scope and range. In the second place worship gives release to the subconscious life in which are stored all the primitive instincts of race and blood, all that is condemned by the rigid standards of our moral code. Just as these instincts have their relief in moments of passion when the hidden feeling flames out, or in sport or in art, when the instincts unused in life come into play, so worship provides for the expression of this captive side of man's nature. "He descended into hell," says The Creed, and through the adoration of worship the secret things of the soul are made to praise and exalt the Creator. Liberation is given to those instincts in secular things through their sublimation, and this, too, the service of the Church performs. Perhaps it is a criticism on our services that they are too tame and too subdued, and lacking in that glow and colour which belonged to the early days whereby the ardour of devotion brought release and deliverance to the spirit in captivity. Clearly throughout the history of the centuries we find the rebirth of the spontaneous outburst of devotion, and the reason why certain sects have found a place in Christendom, and kept it, is that they have jealously guarded this expression of emotional life. In the experience of revivals room is made for this need. Yet if we study with discernment the historical liturgies of the Church we learn that they too had a place for such devotion. The origin of responses perhaps reflects this, and in the embolismus in its early Eastern form we surely recognise the heartfelt cry of the worshipper, "Deliver us from evil. Yea, Lord, Lord of all Power and Might, Who knowest our weakness, deliver us from evil and from the deceit and craft of our secret sins." Now it in no wise follows that spontaneity and freedom in worship break the ordered sequence of the service. All

that is needful is that the worshippers realise and are allowed to feel that the classic words of devotion are not inert phrases, but want only the touch of the Spirit to pulse with the tingling life of the soul. Especially it appears to me that adoration, which so often seems but a flat recital of formal words, is the aspect of worship which ought to liberate, as poetry and art and drama do, the feelings and emotions that are repressed by the civilised life we lead and the moral code we follow. The realm of adoration is in the phrase of Nietzsche "beyond good and evil," for the soul deals not with the relation of man to man but the relation of the soul to God, the Ineffable Source and Fountain of All Being, and to Christ the Glorious Victor.

Thirdly, worship brings release to the subconscious in which the fresh budding of new thought and vision abide and which the "conventional" self that our conscious standards have built up is loath to admit. Just as in the process of falling in love whereby the dream becomes the actuality and finds through passion its aim and goal in objective life, so in worship a new light falls on the familiar, and what was but a vague yearning becomes something that exists and has the vital force of reality. In every company of people gathered to worship there are those who are not yet conscious of the powers that are at work in their lives. There is a discovery to be made. Indeed it is no exaggeration to say that this bringing of new things out of the treasure of the subconscious is the constant work of the Spirit.

(3) Passing from the nature of the worshipper let us glance at the effect on him of the presence of other worshippers. A congregation met for public worship is not simply the sum of its members. There is something new. The mood of a crowd, as we well know, is not the same as the mood of any of its members. History relates how often a crowd can be more cruel than any of those who form it, and at times more generous in its feeling. The reason is that the presence of other people tends to emphasise what they have in common. The result is that a company of people is more emotional and less responsible. The repression of emotional feeling is partially removed and the sense of self-consciousness somewhat dimmed. This is why the crowd mind may tend to rash or unreasonable action. But if we believe that the promise of the Lord is fulfilled "when two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst," then this new factor in the crowd mind is no trivial happening. For two of the barriers of the soul are taken away.

The first is that emotional restraint, so essential to the work and concentration of life, disappears through contact with our fellows, and therefore is provided the means whereby there can be a real spiritual unity. This also means that the reserve, which befits the attitude of individual to individual, is lessened in the presence of others, and an attitude is induced appropriate to the soul's attitude to God. The second is that the sense of responsibility so vital to the moral life is lowered and an opportunity is thus made that lays the mind and the will open to suggestion. It is certainly characteristic of one aspect of worship and adoration—that the sense of self vanishes in the sense of God. Contact with our fellows prepares the way for this elimination of self. Now it is quite true, as psychologists point out, that the crowd mind is lower intellectually and morally than the individual mind. Let us admit it is lower in mental grasp and balance and in responsible judgment. It is also different in quality. "Gather men together," says Unamuno in his picturesque fashion, "and hold for certain that it is the feminine in them—what they have of their mother—that unites them." At least this we notice, the quick intuition of the crowd. Now if, as I say, we hold the Faith, then it is obvious that a channel is provided in corporate worship for the tides of the Spirit. "My belief," says Novalis, "has gained infinitely to me from the moment when another human being has begun to believe the same!" This, viewed psychologically, is but the effect of one mind on another, and is no guarantee in itself for the truth or falsity of the belief. "It does not help me," once wrote Matthew Arnold, "to think a thing more clearly that thousands of other people are thinking the same; but it does help me to worship with more emotion that thousands of other people are worshipping with me." And it helps because the presence of others delivers from self-consciousness. The group mind, where all the members have something in common, does not vouch for the truthfulness of the creed they hold; but it does provide the opportunity for grasping that truth in a more intimate and living way.

But a congregation is not a sporadic crowd assembled by chance and haphazard; it is a group with a common belief and faith and met together for a definitive end. Now it is the mark of the group mind that it bestows upon the member of the group a sense of security. This psychological fact becomes in public worship a symbol of God's security. It is easier to have confidence and reliance upon God because

of the mood induced in us by contact with our fellows. Another trait of the group mind is that satisfaction is felt when the likeness of the members is felt. Now the resemblance between the lives and the conditions of a congregation is by no means apparent if we keep our eyes fixed on the circumstances of this life. The resemblance lies in a common faith and obedience to One Master and Lord Who is the pattern for each and for all. In this respect also public worship furnishes a sense of joy and of satisfaction that belongs not to private meditation and devotion. Finally the very fact that in contact with others we are conscious of something outside and beyond our own will, and the confines of our nature makes it simpler for us to feel the reality and the objectivity of God. The sense of something external in the lives of others becomes the symbol of God's Presence.

II. Let us glance briefly at the psychological aspect of the liturgy and form of worship. Let us scan hastily three things about a service from the point of view of their psychological significance. (1) Let us begin with what is most external. A service such as ours in the Church of Scotland makes very largely an auditory appeal. The sound of words or of music is the main external medium. There is little in it to awaken the interest or to hold the attention of a deaf person. To some minds our service appears too exclusively limited in its appeal. But setting aside the range of appeal that belongs to the ideal service, we note the fact that our service mainly uses words, whether spoken or sung, whether they be used in praise or in prayer, in Scripture lesson or in sermon. (a) Now words are sounds with a meaning, and of course the meaning is the chief value of the sound. The meaning is a direct appeal to the intelligence, and thereby it awakens common thought and common emotion. Words, however, as we learn from the analysis of modern poetry, play a threefold part. As we have seen the most significant is the word as the symbol of thought ; (b) But a word is not a bare symbol like x in algebra ; it carries with it associations and has the power of evoking images. It is possible to use in prayer a word that is quite accurate in meaning but is divested of all association with holy things, or carries with it images that do not belong to the House of Prayer. Not infrequently the worshipper can be flung from the pitch of devotion by the use of language, whether taken blindly from the storehouses of past devotion or from the current speech of the day,

that is unsuited to this high use because of the associations of law-court, or market, or secular interest that clings to it. In the choice of words, therefore, as the medium for worship we have to give weight to their imaginative appeal. Just as there is good music which is not religious and not conducive to worship, there are words noble and great whose associations do not belong to the offering of the soul's devotion to the Eternal Father, and which evoke images scarce in accord with the creature before the Creator. (c) A third trait characterises the use of words. A word has a tonal quality, and words make or do not make a rhythm. The appeal of old collects rests largely in this—the measure and balance of the rhythm. This is of course not consciously present. We do not realise the words as such in a prayer nor detect the measured beat of the rhythm, but none the less there is an appeal to the subconscious. In the Roman rite we find that at Low Mass the prayers are recited in secret so quietly that they form an accompaniment to which each worshipper prays his own silent prayer. This is a function—doubtless a minor one—of spoken prayer in our Church. The prayer said in Church is not uncommonly the occasion and the accompaniment of the worshipper's private aspirations and desires. This is not wholly to be condemned; and the choice of words in prayer and their rhythmic arrangement helps to minister to this need as it also assists in creating a devotional atmosphere. How does it do so? Is it not because the balance of the prayers gives to the worshipper the sense that he is not simply communing with his own soul but is in communion with what lies beyond his own life? This tonal quality of words supplies in part the sense of the objective in worship.

(2) The second remark I would make about liturgical form is that we must not forget its function. The function of a liturgy and form of service is two-fold. (a) It is the expression of the faith, of the praise, of the penitence, of the desires and aspirations of the worshipper. It is the utterance of the common mind and the expression of the common mood. Of course I do not intend to say that a service is merely the expression of the moods of feeling, —somewhat irrelevant as they may be—of those who are met to worship. But if there be worship, a service must be the expression of what is in the heart of the worshipper. Public worship, at least on the Lord's Day at the morning service, is the expression in that particular parish and in that particular building of the worship which the Church

gives to the God and Father of her Lord and Head. Psychologically the worship is the expression of what the worshipper came to offer. (b) This brings before us the second function which a service fulfils. It is not only the expression of the feeling and the devotion that are in the hearts of the worshippers, it is also the means of inducing the spirit of worship. "If a religious man," writes Dr Thouless, "desires to develop a devotional habit of mind, it is certain that he can only do this by carrying out the same form of prayer whatever his feelings may be." The liturgy is thus the instrument for creating devotion. It is, I imagine, but rarely that a congregation meets for worship of God when all minds are fully awakened to the meaning and all hearts wholly filled with the spirit of worship. It is the function of the form of service to help to make alive the latent faith that lies dormant in our soul and to kindle the devotion that is not yet alive to the Presence of God. There is one truth embedded in the behaviourist philosophy, and that truth is that action creates thought and feeling. Nowhere is this truth more evident than in the sphere of the soul's devotion. It is praying that creates the mood of prayer. The will to worship as a rule precedes the act of worship, but there are cases when the form of worship calls forth the desire to worship and results in the will and mood of worship. The ancient liturgical forms are so shaped that they minister to this end. In the service of the catechumen we trace the accomplishment of this purpose. To-day a service needs therefore to have this aim as well as the purpose of expressing the worshipper's devotion.

In order to voice the immediate mood the service must touch the life of the present time, and to this end something directly concrete and particular in its appeal is needed. There must be a clear and definite relation between the service and the situation and circumstance of the worshippers, for we are children of our own generation and native to the spirit of our age. But since worship relates the dweller in time, bounded by the horizon of his little day, to the Eternal God, in communion with the great cloud of witnesses from all ages, there must be in the service that which encourages, if it does not create, the stillness and peace of Eternity. Here is the value of forms that are not fashioned by our restless generation, and expressions of faith that have not been minted by the modern mind.

(3) The third remark about liturgy and form relates to the order and sequence. There is a psychological develop-

ment in a complete act of worship. The sequence of the service is partly conditioned by what is the apex of the service. In a service like the Eucharist the apex is either the act of consecration or the act of communion. In either case there is an ascent to this highest point. Such a service of Holy Communion follows the line of the classical order. This has a fairly definite movement of spiritual ascent which the great mystics brought to conscious observation, the passage through purification to enlightenment and from enlightenment to union. The apex then of such a service is the adoration in which the sense of self is lost. Prayer of penitence and petition leads to the final prayer of adoration in which God and the sense of God fills the whole foreground of the soul. There is, however, another psychological movement in worship. This is not the ascent of the soul but the descent of the Spirit. There is the recognition of God before Whom man is a thing of naught. This realisation of God is not adoration in which the sense of self vanishes ; it is rather that obeisance of soul in which the soul is conscious of its needs, of creatureliness. It is not the union with the Divine that here is emphasised, but the exceeding difference between God and man. The first movement aims at an expectance of union in feeling and in being. The second moves to the sense of obedience of will to the Will of God. The original Reformed Service is built on the lines of the second movement. It is not impossible to hope that the Church will some day find a form of service that does justice to the two movements in which the pilgrim ascent of the soul to God, the God of Mystery, and the reception by the soul of the Word from the God of Revelation are blended, for in truth they belong the one to the other, since the God in Whom we live and move and have our being is also the God Who has spoken.

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