

THE INTRICACIES OF WORSHIP

BY

THE EDITOR

STUDENTS of the Christian way of worship have discovered increasingly that it has grown up like a large tree with its roots stretching hidden into distant fields of natural religion. The Christian Eucharist undoubtedly has its immediate source in Christ, but that is the point where the trunk appears above ground. Beneath the surface lies all the intricacy of Jewish worship which our Lord gathered into the simple rites of Baptism or of the Last Supper. The Jews themselves had adopted in part the religious customs of the nomads and in part those of the Hebrew agriculturalists. They honoured the true God with acclamations and symbols that they had derived from the worship of the pagan farmers and shepherds around them, who turned to the sun or moon at times when they hoped for fruitful fields or flocks. The Jew 'waved' the first sheaf of corn before the Lord's altar, giving it to, and receiving it from, the Almighty Source of life and livelihood. And later the Christian was to carry the little loaves of wheaten bread to the altar to receive them back as the life-giving Source of grace. So the action of the Mass had grown by God's grace from the soil of man's dependence on divine powers. And the whole Christian liturgy is rooted in customs that were not simply created neat and new and shining by the first followers of Christ but were taken as God had first taken the slime of the earth to fashion the new being of man.

In other words there is more than a general need in man's nature for an outward form of worship. This certainly does exist; and man who is body and soul and a member of a society of fellow men needs outward expression by gesture and word in order to hold converse with God. But there is far more to it than that; for if that summed up the whole question any man could settle down to invent a liturgy. An invented liturgy, however, would be no public act of worship but simply the concoction of the particular brain of the man who thought it up. The public acts of worship have themselves always followed something of the same pattern because that pattern is also consonant with the nature of man. It

was not as though primitive man sat down and thought out the most impressive way of symbolising his need for fertility in his crops and cattle. The world in which he lived provided him with such forms. The weather brought rain and rain brought green pastures and life for the tribe; and so the pouring of water became of great significance. When the Jews waved their green 'lulabs' in their processions to the temple they may not even have consciously considered that their greenery expressed their desire to receive from God green crops. They knew that such 'lulabs' had to be made in the spring and carried in the spring procession. Why? Because it was in the Law. But that Law was not merely the positive law formulated on Sinai, but the law of their life and livelihood which sprang from the barley and wheat that grew in the spring and from the sheep who fed on the green lands.

It is of the utmost importance to realise that our Lord is the 'recapitulation' of all things, that he took what he found among the Jews (rather as the Jews had taken what they found among their pagan neighbours) and purified all things of evil, making them vehicles of grace. His way of worship is the Cross, and he received that way from the Father in terms of the world of fallen man. This way is not an artificial structure of his own. He did not destroy the law and build again, he built on the same foundation and fulfilled the law. In the present issue of *LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*, dedicated as it is to the foundation of Christian worship and liturgy, this important groundwork is specially emphasised in the first two articles on the Bread of Life and on the Chalice.

But the difficulty for modern man when he begins to turn towards the worship of God lies in his present 'deracinated' condition, uprooted as he is from all the things which used to provide him with the natural expression of his dependence on God. He still celebrates events with 'parties', for example, and his fundamental dependence for the inception of his life even now is expressed annually by a birthday party. But the party is one of a few relics; and even that is now cut off in most men's experience from the celebrations of the Mass of Christ, i.e., the inception of the life of Christ (Christmas) or the weekly, indeed daily, 'party' of the mass. This latter is called sometimes a 'sacrificial-banquet', and how that name characterises it for so many men! A 'banquet' is not a normal way of celebrating intimate homely events; it is a vastly important artificial affair at which no one of the few

'superior' people who attend can behave naturally. And all the liturgy has taken on the same character of an artificial, intricate 'creation' of Christian men.

Modern man has fallen away from his rightful position in the universe, and in so doing he has fallen away from normal divine worship. Unhappily he fell away at a time when his way of worship had been developing, at least in the West, uninterruptedly for one and a half thousand years. He fell away, consequently, when his liturgy had reached a peak of solemn intricacy, which was yet still more or less in tune with his natural and supernatural way of living. To a Christian peasant living under the shadow of some great Abbey the thrilling display of an abbatial High Mass as the sun reached its zenith on a feast day, or of the be-coped ministers of the evening prayer of Vespers, worship was an experience. He did not know what it all meant, but he had grown up into it and he lived it—it fulfilled his natural need to worship God in a way that his supernatural religion had perfected without destroying. But now the factory worker or the journalist has grown up into a robot world that admits no dependence on God; so that these High Masses and these Vespers are intricate and artificial creations which he cannot understand.

Hitherto a great deal of liturgical enthusiasm has been used up in setting forth a detailed explanation of all that public worship is and does. And since there is so much—every hour of the day has its function veiled in symbols that move with the rise and fall of the sun—the explanation is endless. The liturgiologist sets out to explain all the details, with the result that the individual Christian or neophyte feels that he has to be a new kind of scientist in order to worship God properly. It becomes necessary to *know* an intricate system of symbols and their history rather than to live and act as the servant of God. That is why the 'liturgical movement' has so often been hampered by the element of the 'élite' or of the artistic or cultured 'high-brow'. The masses of the men in the street cannot face the Church as the continuation of school where they must be learning all the time.

It is not in fact necessary that he should know the meaning of all he does. It is necessary first of all that he should re-discover his natural need for liturgy; and having re-discovered that he should begin to fulfil that need according to the natural forms of public worship in their more primitive and more simple origins. This is

perhaps an impossible task, since it is one that nature herself should fulfil and which cannot be accomplished consciously 'by observation'. It is doubly difficult when the sense of such fundamental human needs is constantly being dulled by the drug of thoughtless amusement such as cinema or 'canned' music and entertainment.

But a liturgical revival will be useless unless it can once again tap the source of liturgical life in the hidden springs of nature. And it must move on also to the essential Christian worship where Christ has summed up all these natural gestures, has gathered them into the barn of his Church and continues to hand them out, matured now into the rich harvest of a supernatural and effectively redemptive way of worship. It is for this reason that a special 'Liturgical Number' of the LIFE OF THE SPIRIT has been regarded as expedient, that it may help to point the way to the true spirit of the liturgy, the way of worship which is essential to the way of the Christian's life and which is essential, too, to the neopagan's conversion to Christ.

UNFORTUNATELY the rising costs of production have forced LIFE OF THE SPIRIT to join its confrères in raising the charge for subscriptions and individual numbers. FROM OCTOBER (the next issue) LIFE OF THE SPIRIT will cost 1s. 6d. per issue, and 17s. 6d. per annum, from Blackfriars Publications, 34 Bloomsbury Street, London, W.C.1.