

The Magic of the Christian Church

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(Originally published in The Theosophist, September 1910. In this article, published ten years before the publication of his major work, The Science of the Sacraments, CWL presents his original clairvoyant vision of the power and spiritual reach of the Holy Eucharist. His vision would be an important contribution to the teaching of The Liberal Catholic Church and to the understanding of its Liturgy.)

THE possibility of what we should now call the Theosophical interpretation of Christianity was by no means unknown within the early Church, although it has been entirely forgotten in these later centuries. Origen, for example, the most brilliant and learned of all the ecclesiastical Fathers, speaks very plainly with regard to the difference between the ignorant faith of the undeveloped reasonable faith which is knowledge. He draws a popular irrational faith which “somatic Christianity” (that is form of the religion) and the by the Gnosis or Wisdom. He by somatic Christianity he based on the gospel history. this historical narrative he could be devised to assist the



multitude and the higher and founded upon definite distinction between the leads to what he calls to say, the merely physical spiritual Christianity offered makes it perfectly clear that means that faith which is Of a teaching founded upon says: “What better method masses?

In these days the Church that she has produced the of her saints as a proof of the teaching. But in those earlier the final goal of her effort, was only an introduction to it. Then she had three great orders or degrees, through which her children had to pass, and these were called respectively purification, illumination and perfection. Now she devotes herself solely to producing good men, and she points to the saint as her crowning glory and achievement; but in those days when she had made a man a saint her work with him was only just beginning, for then only was he fitted for the training and the teaching which she could give him then, but cannot now, because she has forgotten her ancient knowledge. Her purification led the man to saintship; her illumination then gave him the knowledge which was taught in the Mysteries, and this led him up towards the condition of perfection and of unity with the Divine. Now she contents herself with the preliminary purification, and has no illumination to give.

Nevertheless, and in spite of all this, the old Magic which was instituted by her Founder is still working and effective, and even in these days of her decadence she is still definitely under guidance and control. There is still a real and a vital power in the sacraments when truly performed—the power of the Logos Himself—and it comes through Him whom we call the Master Jesus, because this is His special department.

It was not He, but the Christ—the Lord Maitreya—who founded the religion, but nevertheless the special charge of Christianity has been given into the hands of Him who yielded His body for the work of the Founder. Belief in His personal interest in the Christian Church has almost died out in many branches of it; the members think of Him as a teacher who lived two thousand years ago rather than as an active power in the Church today. They have forgotten that He is still a living force, a real presence—truly with us always, even to the end of the world, as He has said. Not God in the idolatrous sense, yet the channel through which the Divine power has reached many millions—the official in charge of the devotional department of the work of the Christ.

The Church has turned aside widely from the course originally marked out for it. It was meant to meet all types; now it meets only one, and that very imperfectly. The reconstruction of the links must come, and as intellectual activity is the sign of our time and of the latest sub-race, the intellectual revival which shows itself in the higher criticism has for its very purpose that of enabling religion to meet another type of mind. If only the priests and the teachers had the advantage of direct knowledge, they would be able to deal with and to help their people in this crisis—to guide their intellectual activity by means of their own knowledge of the truth, and to keep alive in the hearts of their flock the spirituality without which the intellectual effort can be but barren.

Not only has the Church almost entirely forgotten the original doctrine taught by her Founder, but most of her priests have now little conception of the real meaning and power of the ceremonies which they have to perform. It is probable that the Christ foresaw that this would happen, for He has carefully arranged that the ceremonies should work even though neither celebrants nor people have any intelligent comprehension of their methods or their results. It would probably be very difficult to explain the outline of His plan to the average Christian; to the Theosophist it ought to be more readily comprehensible, because he is already familiar with some of the general ideas involved in it.

We who are students have often heard of the great reservoir of force which is constantly being filled by the Nirmanakayas in order that its contents may be utilised by the Adept Hierarchy and Their pupils for the helping of the evolution of mankind. The arrangement made by the Christ with regard to His religion was that what we may call a special compartment of that reservoir should be reserved for its use, and that a certain set of officials should be empowered by the use of certain special ceremonies, certain words and signs of power, to draw upon it for the spiritual benefit of their people. The scheme adopted for passing on the power is what is called ordination, and thus we see at once the real meaning of the doctrine of the apostolic succession, about which there has been so much of argument. I myself held strongly to that doctrine while officiating as a priest of the Church; but when through the study of Theosophy I came to understand religion better and to take a far wider view of life, I began to doubt whether in reality the succession meant so much as we of the ritualistic party had supposed. With still further study, however, I was rejoiced to find that

there was a real foundation for the doctrine, and that it meant even more than much our highest schools had ever taught.

My attention was first called to this by watching the effect produced by the celebration of the Mass in a Roman Catholic Church in a little village in Sicily. Those who know that most beautiful of islands will understand that one does not meet with the Roman Catholic Church there in its most intellectual form, and neither the priest nor the people could be described as especially highly developed; yet the quite ordinary celebration of the Mass was a magnificent display of the application of occult force. At the moment of consecration the Host glowed with the most dazzling brightness; it became in fact a veritable sun to the eye of the clairvoyant, and as the priest lifted it above the heads of the people I noticed that two distinct varieties of spiritual force poured forth from it, which might perhaps be taken as roughly corresponding to the light of the sun and the streamers of his corona. The first rayed out impartially in all directions upon all the people in the church; indeed it penetrated the walls of the church as though they were not there, and influenced a considerable section of the surrounding country.

This force was of the nature of a strong stimulus, and its action was strongest of all upon the buddhic plane, though it was also exceedingly powerful upon the three higher sub-planes of the mental. Its activity was marked upon the first, second and third sub-planes of the astral also, but this was a reflection of the mental, or perhaps an effect produced by sympathetic vibration. Its effect upon the people who came within the range of its influence was proportionate to their development. In a very few cases (where there was some slight buddhic development) it acted as a powerful stimulant, doubling or trebling for a time the amount of activity in those buddhic bodies and the radiance which they were capable of emitting. But forasmuch as in most people the buddhic matter was as yet almost entirely dormant, its chief effect was produced upon the causal bodies of the inhabitants. Most of them, again, were awake and even partially responsive only as far as the matter of the third sub-plane was concerned, and therefore they much of the advantage that they might have gained if the higher parts of their causal bodies had been in full activity. But at any rate every ego within reach, without exception, received a distinct impetus and a distinct benefit from that met of consecration, little though they knew or reeked of what was being done. The astral vibrations also, though much fainter, produced a far-reaching effect, for at least the astral bodies of the Sicilians are thoroughly well developed, so that it is not difficult to stir their emotions. Many people far away from the church, walking along the village street or pursuing their various avocations upon the lonely hillsides, felt for a moment a thrill of affection or devotion, which assuredly they never dreamt of connecting with the mass which was being celebrated in their little cathedral.

It at once becomes evident that we are here in the presence of a grand and far-reaching scheme. Clearly one of the great objects, perhaps the principal object, of the daily celebration of the Mass is that everyone within reach of it shall receive at least once each day one of those electric shocks which are so well calculated to promote any growth of which he is capable. Such an outpouring of force brings to each person whatever he has made himself capable of receiving; but at least even the quite undeveloped and ignorant cannot but be somewhat the better for the passing touch of a noble emotion, while for the few more advanced it means a spiritual uplifting, the value of which it would be difficult to exaggerate.

But I said that there was a second effect, which I compared to the streamers of the sun's corona. The light which I have just described poured forth impartially upon all the just and the unjust, the believers and the scoffers. But this second force was called into activity only in response to a strong feeling of devotion on the part of an individual. At the elevation of the Host all members of the congregation duly prostrated themselves—some apparently as a mere matter of habit, but some also with a strong upwelling of deep devotional feeling. The effect as seen by clairvoyant sight was most striking and profoundly impressive, for to each of those latter there darted from the uplifted Host a ray of fire, which set the higher part of the astral body of the recipient glowing with the most intense ecstasy. Through the astral body, by reason of its close relation with it, the buddhic vehicle was also strongly affected; and although in none of these peasants could it be said to be in any way awakened, its growth within its shell was unquestionably distinctly stimulated, and its capability of instinctively influencing the astral was enhanced. For we must not forget that while the awakened buddhi can consciously mould and direct the astral, there is a great storehouse of force in even the most undeveloped buddhic vehicle, and this shines out upon and through the astral body, even though it be unconsciously and as it were automatically.

I was of course intensely interested in this phenomenon, and I made a point of attending various functions at different churches in order to learn whether what I had seen on this occasion was invariable, or, if it varied, when and under what conditions. I found that at every celebration the same results were produced, and the two forces which I have tried to describe were always in evidence—the first apparently without any appreciable variation, but the display of the second depending upon the number of really devotional people who formed part of the congregation.

The elevation of the Host immediately after its consecration was not the only occasion upon which this display of force took place. When the benediction was given with the Blessed Sacrament exactly the same thing happened. On several occasions I followed the procession of the Host through the streets, and every time that a halt was made at some half-ruined church and the benediction was given from its steps, precisely the same double phenomenon was produced. I observed that the reserved Host upon the altar of the church was all day long steadily pouring forth the former of the two influences, though not so strongly as at the moment of elevation or benediction. One might say that the light glowed upon the altar without ceasing, but shone forth as a sun at those moments of special effort. The action of the second force, the second ray of light, could also be evoked from the reserved Sacrament upon the altar, apparently at any time, though even that seemed to me less vivid than the outpouring immediately after the consecration.

A third effect is that which produced upon the communicant. He who receives into his body a part of that dazzling centre from which flow the light and the fire becomes himself for the time a similar centre and radiates power in his turn. The tremendous vibrations which he has thus drawn into the closest possible association with himself cannot but very seriously influence his own. For the time they probably raise his vibrations into harmony with themselves, thus producing a feeling of intense exaltation. This however is considerable strain upon his various vehicles, and they naturally tend gradually to fall back again to their normal rates. For a long time the indescribably vivid higher influence struggles against this tendency

to slow down, but the dead weight of the comparatively enormous mass of the man's own ordinary vibrations acts as a drag upon even its tremendous energy, and gradually brings it and themselves down to the common level. But undoubtedly every such experience draws the man just an infinitesimal fraction higher than he was before. He has been for a few moments or even for a few hours in direct contact with the forces of a plane far higher than any that he himself can touch.

Naturally I then proceeded to make further investigations as to how far this outflowing of force was affected by the character, the knowledge or the intention of the priest. I may sum up briefly the results of the examination of a large number of cases in the form of a series of axioms, some of which will no doubt seem surprising to many.

First, only those priests who have been lawfully ordained, and have the apostolic succession, can produce this effect at all. Other men, not being part of this definite organisation, cannot perform this feat, no matter how devoted or good or saintly they may be. Secondly, neither the character of the priest, nor his knowledge nor ignorance as to what he is really doing, affects the result in any way whatever.

If one thinks of it, neither of these statements ought to seem to us in any way astonishing, since it is obviously a question of being able to perform a certain action, and only those who have passed through a certain ceremony have received the gift of the ability to perform it. Just in the same way, in order to be able to speak to a certain set of people one must know their language, and a man who does not know that language cannot communicate with them, no matter how good and earnest and devoted he may be. Also his power to communicate with them is not affected by his private character, but only by the one fact that he has, or has not, the power to speak to them which is conferred by a knowledge of their language. I do not for a moment say that these other considerations are without their due effect; I shall speak of that later, but what I do say is that no one can draw upon this particular reservoir unless he has received the power to do so which comes from a due appointment given according to the direction left by the Christ.

I think that we can see a very good reason why precisely this arrangement has been made. Some plan was needed which should put a splendid outpouring of force within the reach of everyone simultaneously in thousands of churches all over the world. I do not say that it might not be possible for a man of very exceptional power and holiness to call down through the strength of his devotion an amount of higher force commensurate with that obtained through the rites which I have described. But men of such exceptional power are always excessively rare, and it could never at anytime of the world's history have been possible to find enough of them simultaneously to fill even one-thousandth part of the places where they are needed. But here is a plan whose arrangement is to a certain extent mechanical; it is ordained that a certain act when duly performed shall be the recognised method of bringing down the force; and this can be done with comparatively little training by any one upon whom the power is conferred. A strong man is needed to pump up water, but any child can turn on a tap. It needs a strong man to make a door and to hang it in its place, but when it is once on its hinges any child can open it.

Having myself been a priest of the Church of England, and knowing how keen are the disputes as to whether that Church really has the apostolic succession or not, I was naturally

interested in discovering whether its priests possessed this power. I was much pleased to find that they did, and I suppose we may take that as definitely settling the much disputed Parker question, and with it the whole controversy as to the authenticity of the Orders of the Church of England. I soon found by examination that ministers of what are commonly called dissenting sects did not possess this power, no matter how good and earnest they might be. Their goodness and earnestness produced plenty of other effects which I shall presently describe, but their efforts did *not* draw upon the particular reservoir to which I have referred. I was especially interested in the case of one such minister whom I knew personally to be good and devout man, and also a well-read Theosophist. Here was a man who knew very much more about the real meaning of the act of consecration than nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand of the priests who constantly perform it; and yet I am bound to admit that his best effort did not produce this particular effect, while the others as unquestionably did. Once more, of course he produced other things which they did not—of which more anon. That at first somewhat surprised me, but I soon saw that it could not have been otherwise. Suppose, for example, that a certain sum of money is left by a rich Free-Mason for distribution among his poorer brethren, the law would never sanction the division of that money among any others than the Free-Masons for whom it was intended, and the fact that other poor people outside the Masonic body might be more devout or more deserving would not weigh with it in the slightest degree.

Another point which interested me greatly was the endeavor to discover to what extent, if at all, the intention of the priest affected the result produced. In the Roman Church I found many priests who went through the ceremony somewhat mechanically, and as a matter of daily duty, without any decided thought on the subject; but whether from ingrained reverence or from long habit they always seemed to recover themselves just before the moment of consecration and to perform that act with a definite intention.

I turned then to what is called the Low Church division of the Anglican community to see what would happen with them, because I knew that many of them would reject altogether the name of priest, and though they might follow the rubric in performing the act of consecration their intention in doing it would be exactly the same as that of ministers of various denominations outside the Church. Yet I found that the Low Churchman could and did produce the effect, and that the others outside did not. Hence I infer that the ‘intention’ which is always said to be required must be no more than the intention to do whatever the Church means, without reference to the private opinion of the particular priest as to what that meaning is. I have no doubt that many people will think that all this ought to be quite differently arranged, but I can only report faithfully what my investigations have shown me to be the fact.

I must not for a moment be understood as saying that the devotion and earnestness, the knowledge and the good character of the officiant make no difference. They make a very great difference; but they do not affect the power to draw from that particular reservoir. When the priest is earnest and devoted, his whole feeling radiates out upon his people and calls forth similar feelings in such of them as are capable of expressing them. Also his devotion calls down its inevitable response, as shown in the illustration in *Thought-Forms*,

and the downpouring of good influence thus evoked unquestionably benefits his congregation as well as himself; so that a priest who throws his heart and soul into the work which he does may be said to bring down a double blessing upon his people, though the second class of influence can scarcely be considered as being of the same order of magnitude as the first. This second influence which is drawn down by devotion itself is of course to be found just as often outside the Church as within it.

Another factor to be taken into account is the feeling of the congregation. If their feeling is devout and reverent it is of immense help to their teacher, and it enormously increases the amount of influence poured down as a response devotion. The average intellectual level of the congregation is also a matter to be considered, for a man who is intelligent as well as devotional has within him a devotion of a higher order than his more ignorant brother, and is therefore able to evoke a fuller response. On the other hand in many places of worship where much is made of the exercise of the intellectual faculties—where for example the sermon and not the service is thought of as the principal feature—there is scarcely any real devotion, but instead of it a horrible spirit of criticism and of spiritual pride which effectually prevents the unfortunate audience from obtaining any good results at all from what they regard as their spiritual exercises. Devotional feeling or carelessness, belief or scepticism on their part makes no difference whatever to the downflow from on high when there is a priest in charge who has the requisite qualifications to draw from the appointed reservoir. But of course those factors make a difference as to the number of rays sent out from the consecrated Host, and so to the general atmosphere of the Church.

The power of the ordained priest is a reality in other ceremonies than the celebration of the eucharist. The consecration of the water in the rite of baptism, or of the holy water which is to be distributed to the faithful or kept at the entrance of the church, pours into it a strong influence, which enables it in each case to perform the part assigned to it. The same is true of other consecrations and benedictions which come in the course of the regular work of the priest, though in many of these it seems that a somewhat larger proportion of the effect is produced by the direct magnetism of the priest himself, and the amount of that of course depends upon the energy and earnestness with which he performs his part of the ceremony.

Perhaps I ought to explain, for the benefit of our Indian readers, that there are three orders among the Christian clergy—bishops, priests, and deacons. When a man is first ordained he is admitted as a deacon, which means, practically, a kind of apprentice or assistant priest. He has not yet the power to consecrate the sacrament, to bless the people or to forgive their sins; he can however baptise children, but even a layman is permitted to do that in case of emergency. After a year in the diaconate he is eligible for ordination as a priest, and it is this second ordination which confers upon him the power to draw forth the force from the reservoir of which I have spoken. To him is then given the power to consecrate the Host, and also various other objects, to bless the people in the name of the Christ, and to pronounce the forgiveness of their sins. In addition to all these powers, the bishop has that of ordaining other priests, and so carrying on the apostolic succession. He alone has the right to administer the rite of confirmation, and to consecrate a church, that is to say, to set it apart for the service of God. These three are the only orders which mean definite grades, separated from one another by ordinations which confer different powers.

You may hear many titles applied to the Christian clergy, such as those of archbishop, archdeacon, dean or canon, but these are only the titles of offices, and involve differences of duty but not of grade in the sense of spiritual power.