

What is the Nature of Worship and Will it Have a Place the  
Coming Age?

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The changes of thought and attitude through which we now are passing bring to bear a very practical and searching question in regard to worship. The practice of public worship, which has been a part of our heritage seems to be subjected to a very searching criticism. Many people claim to stay away from public worship because it seems to them a meaningless ceremony from which they receive no benefit; others find difficulty in sharing in public worship because its forms and ceremonies with which it is associated no longer seem to them intelligible. These attitudes of mind, together with the manifest fact that in all religious bodies, with the possible exception of the Catholic Church, the attendance upon services of public worship is very much less a custom than it formally was.

One of the difficulties, perhaps the main difficulty in this, is the fact that we fail to distinguish between the real nature of worship and the forms in which the attitude of worship may find expression. I take it that all forms of worship, even from the most primitive to the most perfect and adequate, rest upon an inherent quality of human life. Regardless of race, color, religious prejudices and conditions of servitude, every human being seems charged with an impulse which urges him, propels him forward, out of the "here-and-now" towards the "there-and-tomorrow." Even the restless, grumbling soul, undisciplined and irresponsible as he plunges from his frying pan of often unfulfilled desire into his fire of burning remorse, is a living witness of that quality and need in human life upon which worship in all its forms rest. All of us, from the most ignorant and irresponsible to the most intelligent and thoroughly disciplined, live upon the basis of a faith that the world has for us something better than we have yet attained. Upon the

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<sup>1</sup> This manuscript has no explicit date. However the paper on which the manuscript is written is identical to paper used for manuscripts that can be dated to this period.

basis of that faith we live and move and have our being. It is upon this faith that all forms of worship, even the most primitive and personal rest.

How are you going to get the better life that you believe is in store for you tomorrow? One answer to that question is to get it by offering up endless prayers and gifts to God and try to secure from Him such a change of attitude on God's part as will give you what you yourself think you want. That is one form of worship. We are all very primitive and natural and crude, and yet we are all of us at times inclined to become victims of the notion that we can bribe life and the universe and God.

The other attitude toward worship is quite different. I have a plot of ground which I call a garden and I have a desire to develop a more beautiful garden than the one that I had last year. I study my garden; I study the laws of flower culture, and I select seeds that I want and then develop a plan for planting the seeds and plants that, during the season, are to constitute the changing panorama of a garden. I can't change the laws of nature; I can arrange the flowers and plants according to color and size so that I may have a succession of flowerings harmoniously related and placed. I gather together what knowledge I have about plants and the laws according to which they grow; I have the fixed place of my garden plot and some memories of other gardens. With these as raw materials, I draw in my mind a picture of a garden that exists only in my mind and, even in my mind, is subject to change. I make the realization of that garden, that exists in my mind, the basis of a season's activities; it becomes a purpose, and to the realization of that purpose, my activities are bent. In the realization of this purpose there are certain factors which I cannot change and there are others which I can change and do change.

If I take the attitude which I have towards my garden and transfer it to the world at large, I shall have an illustration of what worship, in its truest and best sense, is. The world in which we live is dominated by a unifying power that we call God. To most successfully live in such a world it is necessary for us to discover all that we can about the nature and the laws according to which we have to live; then, to create out of the raw materials of our knowledge and experience a life purpose that may be realized in the years that are ahead of us. There is

a lot of hard work; hoeing, weeding in the garden of life, as there is in the flower garden, but it all contributes to the realization of the end in view. Here you see clearly of what worship, both public and private, is. It is stopping in the midst of daily toil and drudgery, dirt shoveling and weeding, to recall the picture that we are trying to make; to see if what we are doing fits into the picture as a whole; to see if we have the right amount of knowledge and energy to carry the plan through; to check up on the whole thing and our relation to it. That is the nature of intelligent and vital worship. It is not a question of choice. Worship is a necessity of life. Of course, worship, as a part of human life, will continue in the age that is to come, as it has always existed in the ages that are past. Doubtless many forms of worship that are now in use will be left behind. We no longer think it necessary to sacrifice our first-born child in an act of worship; we no longer sacrifice the dove and other animals as they did in ages past. We are constantly leaving behind forms of worship as useless and meaningless. The forms which we now use and constantly undergoing changes. That is also a part of the natural divine order.