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MODERN PSYCHOLOGY
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THE MASS

By
REV. JOHN A. O'BRIEN, Ph.D.

Chaplain of the Catholic Students at the
University of Illinois

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A Study in the Psychology of Religion

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Modern Psychology and the Mass

IT is one of the characteristics of the Catholic Church which visitors at her services have often observed, that she does not speak to the faithful in words alone. She appeals to them through the glorious melodies of music which uplift the soul, through hymns and songs and chants. Through the subtle play of lights and shadows, and the mingled colors of the rainbow imprisoned upon the artist's canvas, not less than through the plastic beauty of the sculptured statue, does she render her message articulate. Especially does she appeal to them through the stately moving ceremonial of her worship which speaks directly to the eye. In myriad tongues she speaks and in the universal language of gesture and sign and pageantry. The untutored peasant and the erudite savant find themselves alike at home in her temple. No race or tribe is alien to the Esperanto of her liturgy. Pressing into her service all the senses as so many gateways to the soul, she enlists the whole man, mind and heart and soul in the worship of his God.

Visitors to her devotions who have been totally unaccustomed to any liturgical display in their own services, do not always understand, however, the significance of the religious ceremonies they witness nor the important rôle they play in the enrichment of the individual's spiritual life.

Accustomed to seeing only a pulpit within the four bare walls of a church, stripped of altar, statuary, paintings, flowers, lighted candles, and to a service devoid of the slightest touch of pageantry, they are naturally somewhat bewildered at the profusion of ceremony in Catholic devotions, especially in that central act of Catholic worship, the holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Besides those of our separated breth-

ren who express simply their lack of understanding of the meaning of the Church's liturgy, there are those who assert variously that the lavish use of such ceremonies distracts the worshiper from his primary purpose, smacks of superstition, and is an unconscious heritage from the days of tribal taboos and primitive magic.

Let us investigate then the function of ceremonies in religious worship to ascertain if there be a valid basis both in philosophy and in psychology for their employment in acts of worship.

The Philosophical Basis of Ceremonies

The philosophical basis is to be found in the twofold nature, psychical and physical, with which the Creator has endowed mankind. As a consequence of this, as St. Thomas Aquinas¹ points out, man must render to God a twofold worship which reflects his dual nature. The one, a spiritual adoration, consists in the interior devotion of the soul and implies the conscious recognition of God's supreme dominion over man, and his complete dependence upon Him. The other, a corporal worship, consists in the external acknowledgment through the agency of the bodily members of the Creator's sovereignty over man. While great emphasis may rightly be placed upon the interior dispositions of the soul, such as love and reverence, without which exterior worship would be so much meaningless rigmarole, yet it is folly to overlook the importance from the viewpoint of both religion and psychology of the participation of the physical members in the rendering of such conjoint worship.

The two natures of man are so closely knit together into an organic whole that every inward sentiment or feeling seeks to register its presence through some appropriate movement or posture of the body. The constant inhibition of

¹ *Contra Gentiles*, III, CXIX.

such external expression of the internal sentiments of homage, love, and reverence not only robs the act of worship of its important physical components but tends to strangle and ultimately to eradicate completely the sentiments themselves.

“Worship mostly of the silent sort,” as Rickaby² has observed, “worship that finds no expression in word or gesture—worship away from pealing organs and chants of praise, or the simpler music of the human voice, where no hands are uplifted, nor tongue loosened, nor posture of reverence assumed, becomes with most mortals a vague, aimless reverie, a course of distraction and dreaminess and vacancy of mind.”

Entirely aside, however, from the psychical reverberation of the physical expression of emotions, it is sufficient to point out here in the discussion of the philosophical basis of ceremonies that man cannot withhold that bodily manifestation of worship without depriving the Creator of a form of adoration to which He is entitled in strict justice. For the body is indebted both for its existence and for its capacity for movement, to the creative power of Almighty God. Therefore reason demands that the body participate in rendering worship to the Creator in express acknowledgment of a relationship rooted in the very laws of nature, namely, a relationship of absolute sovereignty on the part of the Creator and of complete and total dependence on the part of the physical nature of man. True, the body cannot render homage to God, independently of its vivifying principle. But it can act conjointly with the soul and contribute in a subordinate but important manner to such conjoint worship. “Man must pay tithes to God,” says Otten,³ “for soul and body by offering Him the love of the one and the obeisance of the other.” That is why St. Thomas Aquinas maintained that religious ceremonies in acts of worship are not only ap-

² Joseph Rickaby, *Moral Philosophy*, p. 193.

³ Bernard J. Otten, *The Reason Why*, p. 71.

propriate concomitants but that they are inevitable corollaries flowing from the composite psychophysical nature with which the Creator has endowed man. In that inspired treatise which penetrates at times into such dizzy heights that human reason falters behind, St. John points to the above-mentioned creative act as the fundamental reason underlying all religious worship. "Thou art worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power, because Thou hast created all things, and for Thy will they were, and have been created."⁴

The folded hands, the bowed head, the bent knee are so many efforts on the part of man's physical nature to share with the psychical principle in the articulate acknowledgment of God's sovereign dominion over all creatures. The hymns of praise, and words of prayer that rise as sweet incense from the hearts of His children to the throne of God in heaven, are they not acceptable and pleasing to our heavenly Father? Ask the human father if the fond caress of his little child who runs with outstretched arms and eager feet to greet him upon his return at evening from the day's toil mean anything to him. Ask him if the light of love that glows in those eyes and the tender play of those angel hands about the wrinkles in his toil worn countenance, are so much folderol, void and meaningless. Why they are the very breath of his nostrils, the manna for his hungry heart.

Yet that throbbing heart of his, aglow with happiness at the manifestation of his child's love and reverence, is but the image of God's own loving heart. It too throbs in happiness at the outpouring of His children's love and homage. He has not created His children only to set them adrift on life's ocean, with no solicitude for their welfare and happiness. He has fashioned their hearts after the likeness of His own, and has given to them the power of communicating with Him, of coming to Him with their petitions and their

⁴ *Apocalypse v. 9.*

love, even as they come to their own earthly fathers. His paternal heart rejoices at the outpourings of His children's love and praise, and is saddened by their indifference and neglect. That is why the performance of external acts of adoration, praise, and homage in which both mind and body participate, constitute the very essence of religious worship. That is the manner in which man renders a full measure of homage to Almighty God, to Whom St. John tells us, is due, "benediction and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving, honor and power, and strength, forever and ever." Such is the fundamental philosophical basis for external homage and for the use of ceremonies in religious worship.

The Psychological Basis of Ceremonies

Entirely aside from the philosophical propriety of such external worship, is there a sound psychological foundation for the employment of ceremonies in religious worship? In other words, even if worship be regarded as consisting essentially of the internal sentiments of reverence, love, and adoration, flowing from the mind and heart, would there not still be a justification for the utilization of corporal movements both for the excitation and preservation of these internal sentiments and mental attitudes? The findings of modern psychology demonstrate abundantly that bodily participation in religious worship is not only helpful in arousing the appropriate mental states but serves to strengthen and intensify the aroused religious feelings. The inhibition of all bodily movement expressive of such sentiments, serves on the other hand to render exceedingly difficult the evocation of the internal sentiments, to minimize their vigor and to strangle and atrophy them. There is consequently a sound basis in modern psychology for the use of ceremonies in religious worship.

The basis is to be found in the fundamental law of the

psychophysical relationship, namely, the law that mind and body exercise a reciprocal or mutually interactive influence on each other. There is no movement of a bodily member above the automatic or reflex stage that does not produce its corresponding mental correlate. Similarly, there is no internal sentiment or feeling that does not seek to find appropriate expression through some physical channel. There is no *psychosis*, modern psychology affirms, without its corresponding *neurosis*. The psychological principle, the soul in some inscrutable manner acts upon the body and it in turn is affected by the physical organism.

This fact finds abundant recognition in the ceremonies of that great religious drama in the Catholic Church, the central act of worship, the holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It is the teaching of the Catholic faith that the Mass is the continuation of the sacrifice begun at the Last Supper and completed on the Cross at Calvary. It is therefore the renewal in an unbloody manner of the sacrifice of Christ on Golgotha. It combines in itself the four great elements of religious worship, namely, adoration, propitiation, thanksgiving and supplication. Not only the celebrant but the faithful as well assist at this sublime sacrifice with the deepest sentiments of faith and devotion.

At the beginning of Mass, the visitor will note that the celebrant while still at the foot of the altar recites the Confiteor. This prayer is a confession of one's unworthiness, calling upon the members of the heavenly court to witness the acknowledgment that "I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word and deed, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault." The priest recites it in his own behalf as an act of profound humility and of his unworthiness to perform so sublime a function. The acolyte repeats it in behalf of the congregation. Note the posture assumed by the celebrant while making this act of humility. His erect posture changes instantly. He bows profoundly

with his face to the ground and remains thus during the recitation of the entire prayer. When in acknowledging the fact that he has sinned he utters the words, "through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault," he strikes his breast with his closed hand in additional external manifestation of his culpability.

Note how the physical posture thus assumed is well adapted to induce the corresponding mental attitude, a consciousness of one's unworthiness. The bent body, the face turned toward the ground, the downcast eyes, the striking of the breast, serve as so many powerful physical stimuli in arousing the desired psychical attitude of humility. The assumption of an upright posture, with head erect, eyes up-lifted to the skies, and chest expanded, would constitute a marked physical impediment to the evocation of the mental attitude of humility, and would be conducive to the arousal of an internal sentiment of pride and arrogant hauteur. Though the reason why certain physical postures tend to induce definite mental states lies deep in the history of the race and need not be traced here, yet the fact of such influence is admitted by psychologists of every school.

After the completion of the prayers at the foot of the altar, the first act of the celebrant upon ascending to the altar is to stoop and kiss it out of reverence for the relics of the saints which are imbedded therein. Mass in the early days of the Church was celebrated over the tombs of the martyrs. The historical identity of the Mass in the Church today with that enacted in the catacombs over the remains of the martyrs is thus dramatically expressed. The physical act of kissing the altar reverently is designed to manifest one's affectionate reverence for the martyrs and is well adapted to arouse in one the corresponding internal sentiments of love and devotion.

When the celebrant proceeds to the missal to read the prayers, it will be noted that he extends his arms and holds

them in this position until the prayers or supplications preceding the epistle are finished. Here again one will observe how splendidly adapted is this physical posture to evoke the desired conscious state of supplication. From time immemorial the suppliant has pleaded with outstretched arms for his petition. The physical posture has thus come to serve as a powerful stimulant for the arousal of the psychical attitude of entreaty.

The Significance of the Gospel Ceremonies

Upon the completion of the epistle with its gradual and tract, the celebrant proceeds to the center preparatory to reading the gospel. In order that the holy gospel be worthily announced there are required not only a pure heart and pure lips, but the person proclaiming it must have a special mission with the approbation and blessing of God upon him. That is why the celebrant pausing at the center of the altar raises his eyes to the crucifix in external acknowledgment of the great source whence flow so many blessings and spiritual helps, namely, the death of Christ on the Cross. Then he bows low in outward physical acknowledgment of his spiritual unworthiness to announce the sublime truths of the gospel. While still bent in that posture of humility he articulates the moving prayer that is implicit in his whole bodily demeanor: "*Cleanse my heart and my lips, O Almighty God, Who didst cleanse the lips of the Prophet Isaias with a burning coal; and vouchsafe through Thy gracious mercy, so to purify me, that I may worthily announce Thy holy gospel. Amen.*"

When the celebrant begins to read the gospel he traces with his thumb the figure of the cross over the first words of the Evangel, to express in this external manner the fact that all the spiritual values contained therein have been rendered available to us through the merits of Christ's death

upon the Cross, and that it records the history of His life and sufferings. Both the congregation and the celebrant then make the sign of the cross upon their forehead, lips and breast. This is a threefold public profession of their reverence for the inspired word, believing it with their minds, proclaiming it with their lips, and loving it with their hearts.

It will be noted that when the priest crosses over from the center to begin the reading of the gospel, the entire congregation immediately arises and remains standing until its completion. Here again the visitor perceives that magnificent adaptation of bodily behavior to evoke the desired mental correlate. By standing the congregation immediately manifests its reverence for the gospel as the inspired word of God, worthy of a respect paid to no human proclamation. Furthermore, the physical posture thus assumed is well calculated to induce the mental attitude of alacrity in receiving the precepts of the gospel and in executing them.

At the completion of the gospel, the celebrant raises the missal to his lips, and kisses devoutly the first words of the gospel just read. Observe again how the Church utilizes the physical action most suited for the arousal of that psychical attitude of affectionate reverence with which the inspired word of God should be regarded. The kiss, which from time immemorial has been the motor expression of the sentiments of love throbbing in the bosom of the race, is pressed into the sacred service of religious liturgy in stirring anew the latent affection of the creature for his Savior and in enlisting the dynamic activity of the will in His sacred ministry. In order to secure that whole-hearted adherence to the gospel precepts that manifests itself in action there is required not merely the appeal to the cognitive faculty but to the motor one of the will as well. It is the arousal of the love of the creature for his Redeemer that carries over to the will and thus touches off the springs of human action. It is no pale or cold intellectual attitude that the ceremonies of Catholic worship

evoke, but an attitude in which the mind bows in reverent faith, and the heart is stirred with holy emotions that seek expression in appropriate movements of the will and in external deed.

Before concluding the discussion of the general manner in which the ceremonies of the Mass exemplify the wise utilization of the fundamental principle of physiological psychology, namely, that bodily postures and movements exercise a powerful influence in the evocation of definite psychical attitudes, let us scrutinize briefly the action at the consecration, which is the most important part of the sacrifice.

The Consecration

The acolyte has rung a little bell to summon the attention of all the congregation to the soul-stirring scene that is about to be enacted before them. Then the celebrant takes bread in his hands, blesses it and bending low over it pronounces the sublime words of consecration, which Christ Himself used at the Last Supper. Note how the whole corporal attitude of the priest, the bent body, the bowed head, the eyes focused intently upon the upraised bread soon to be changed through a miracle of divine power into the body and blood of Christ, induces a mental "set" of quivering attention and rapt absorption. What an effective antidote is found in this tense physical posture against distractions and daydreaming which come so readily when the corporal attitude is one of ease and relaxation. The bodily posture, the nervous set, the focusing of the senses, all converge as so many powerful stimuli to provoke the greatest possible mental concentration upon the significance of the momentous words of consecration which the celebrant pronounces so slowly and so deliberately: "*For this is My Body.*"

The celebrant genuflects immediately to manifest through

this corporal action the adoration which he renders with his whole heart and soul to his Eucharistic Lord. Then he raises the Sacred Host aloft before the eyes of the rapt congregation so that they too may adore and articulate the deep sentiments of faith and love which are stirring in their souls with the heartfelt ejaculation: "*My Lord and my God.*"

After replacing the Holy Eucharist upon the altar the celebrant genuflects again, thus emphasizing in an outward physical manner the adoration and worship which should now be rendered to the Eucharistic King. The same corporal postures and movements are reënacted in the consecration of the chalice of wine into the body and the blood of the Lord. During the consecration the faithful kneel, following with rapt attention and profound devotion the various acts in the consecration occurring before them. These instances will suffice to show that the fundamental law of the mind-body relationship finds generous recognition and splendid embodiment in the ceremonies of the Mass.

The Correlation of Ceremonies with Emotions

Religious worship implies not only a general mental attitude of reverence and adoration, however, but seeks also at times to enlist specific emotions which are coördinated with the four distinct acts embraced in religious worship, namely: adoration, propitiation, thanksgiving, and supplication. Each of these various acts of religion involves a different type of emotional correlate. Obviously the act of penitential atonement for the violation of divine law and the appeasement of divine justice implies a radically different emotional concomitant than the joyous act of singing hymns of thanksgiving in happy acknowledgment of blessings received. Let us scrutinize briefly then in the light of modern psychology a few of the major ceremonies of Catholic worship to ascertain the manner in which they are adapted to

evoke not merely an appropriate mental attitude in general but to arouse definite specific emotions and to enlist them in the organization of the composite act of worship.

Following the lead of James and Lange, modern psychology has continued to emphasize the intimate relation between emotions and reactions of the motor nervous system. While avoiding the extreme view of the James-Lange theory that the external bodily movement constitutes the emotion itself, the modern viewpoint finds in the nervous processes the central causes of the emotion and the resultant activities, but recognizes that the processes are essentially motor rather than sensory in character. It recognizes too the powerful influence of bodily posture and muscular activity upon the emotional state. The performance of physical actions which have usually been associated with a definite emotion will generally be instrumental in arousing that feeling. Thus if a person engaged in a friendly argument will suddenly assume a belligerent facial expression, speak in loud forceful tones, and gesticulate violently with his arms, emphasizing the point he is making by pounding his clenched fist upon the table, he will be surprised to discover that his previous mental tranquillity has disappeared and now his consciousness is shot through with poignant thrusts of angry emotions. The inhibition of all such movements tends, on the other hand, to choke the angry emotion, while the resumption of the quiet demeanor and the friendly smile will bring back the pleasant emotional glow of the original tranquillity.

Professor Bain⁵ traces with much acumen the neurological basis of the relationship between such external bodily behavior and the resultant emotion. "We find," he says, "that a feeble (emotional) wave . . . is suspended inwardly by being arrested outwardly; the currents of the brain and

⁵ *Emotions and Will*, pp. 361, 362.

the agitation of the centres die away if the external vent is resisted at every point. It is by such restraint that we are in the habit of suppressing pity, anger, fear, pride—on many trifling occasions. If so, it is a fact that the suppression of the actual movements has a tendency to suppress the nervous currents that incite them, so that the external quiescence is followed by the internal. The effect would not happen in any case *if there were not some dependence of the cerebral wave upon the free outward vent or manifestation. . . .* By the same interposition we may summon up a dormant feeling. By acting out the external manifestations, we gradually infect the nerves leading to them, and finally waken up the diffusive current by a sort of action *ab extra. . . .* Thus it is that we are sometimes able to assume a cheerful tone of mind by forcing a hilarious expression.”

In his treatise on the Sublime and Beautiful written with keen psychological insight, Edmund Burke presents the results of his own experience on this point: “I have often observed that, on mimicking the looks and gestures of angry, or placid, or frightened, or daring men, I have involuntarily found my mind turned to that passion whose appearance I strove to imitate; nay, I am convinced it is hard to avoid it, though one strove to separate the passion from its corresponding gestures.”

Fleckner,⁶ one of the great psychologists of Germany, in his classic *Vorschule der Aesthetik* bears similar testimony to the influence of the bodily demeanor in inducing a corresponding emotional mood: “One may find by one’s own observation that the imitation of the bodily expression of a mental condition makes us understand it much better than the mere looking on. . . . When I walk behind someone whom I do not know, and imitate as accurately as possible his gait and carriage, I get the most curious impression of feeling as the person himself must feel. To go tripping

⁶ Fechner, *Vorschule der Aesthetik*, p. 156.

and mincing after the fashion of a young woman puts one, so to speak, in a feminine mood of mind."

Let us see what use the Church makes of this psychological principle in the arousal of the appropriate emotional colorings of the various acts of worship at the Sacrifice of the Mass. Note here that there is question not merely of an appropriate mental attitude but of a definite emotional tone.

At the very beginning of the Mass, it will be recalled that the celebrant recites the Confiteor which is a confession before God and the members of His heavenly court of one's sinfulness. This public confession is primarily an act of penitential propitiation, since it implies the abasement of self in atonement for sin which is always an act of pride inasmuch as it places self-will above the will of God. In order to arouse appropriate feelings of humility and penitential contrition it will be remembered that the ceremony requires the celebrant to bow profoundly as he recites aloud the moving words of the Confiteor. His eyes are steadfastly fixed to the ground, and as he pronounces the words acknowledging that he has sinned, "through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault," he humbly strikes his breast in additional external admission of his own culpability. The prayer ends with the humble beseeching of all the saints to pray to God to grant him pardon and remission of all his sins.

The whole composite action, the bent body, the bowed head, the downcast eyes, the striking of the breast, the recitation of the moving confession of sinfulness, all these serve as powerful stimuli to arouse the definite feelings of humility and penitence. There is a suffused emotional undertone running through the whole psychical attitude that renders the celebrant conscious not merely in a coldly intellectual manner of his sinfulness but makes him feel his unworthiness through the emotion of sorrow tugging at his heartstrings.

That there is a world of difference between simply perceiving one's guilt and feeling sorrow for it, is evident. It was this difference that Thomas à Kempis had in mind when he said: "I had rather feel compunction than know its definition." It is the purpose of the ceremonies of the Mass to stimulate not merely the mental perceptions but to arouse the emotional correlates as well and thus to influence the will. For the latter is lured from its inertia not so much by abstract intellectual perceptions, as it is whipped into vigorous action by the driving force of various emotional urges.

If any reader should be inclined to question the influence of the previously described physical postures and bodily movements, let him test their efficacy by going through them and reciting the Confiteor with sincere devotion. He will then discover for himself the psychological truth that James has insisted upon at such length, namely, that the performance of certain external actions is closely correlated with the setting up of corresponding emotional reverberations in the whole psychophysical organism.

The ceremony and prayer at the recitation of the Angelic Hymn, or as it is often called, the Gloria in Excelsis exemplify a different act of worship and a distinct emotional correlate from the ones embodied in the ceremonies at the Confiteor, which have just been described. Instead of the propitiation and sorrow, this ceremony embodies an act of praise and thanksgiving with the corresponding emotions of joy and gratitude. This hymn of praise begins with the words which the angels sang at the most joyous event in the history of the race, when they came to announce to the shepherds on the hillsides of Bethlehem the glad tidings of the Savior's birth. To the people of Israel who had been waiting in anxious expectancy for the coming of the long promised Messiah, it was the happy fulfillment of their age-old yearnings. It was a song of triumph over the powers of darkness, a message of good cheer to men.

Note how the opening words sound the keynote of the whole hymn: "Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace to men of good will." It is probable that there is no other single sentence in all the tongues of Christendom that is so richly laden with cheer, and joy and hope for the race. It is the embodiment of the spirit of the most joyous season in all the year, the spirit of Christmas. It serves, therefore, to arouse from our early childhood all the joyous memories that cluster about the happy celebrations of the birth of the Babe of Bethlehem. While the emotions of joy and gratitude in their incipient stages are aroused by the recitation of this Angelic Hymn, it is probable that they receive much of their warmth and vigor from ideational associations, especially in the form of memories which are kindled anew by the glad-some tidings of the Angels' Song. The emotional processes in this case would appear to be largely ideo-motor in character, in the sense that they are stirred more by the internal ideational stimuli than by external sensory ones. The rich cluster of memories about the Savior's birth in the manger at Bethlehem are now revived, and they set quivering anew many a heartstring that had been lying dormant and start many an emotional reverberation through the whole diapason of consciousness.

At the recitation of the first words of the Gloria, the priest extends his hands and then raises them, to indicate that it is not sufficient to honor God with our lips only, but that we must do so by external deed as well. The lifting of the hands to heaven, is also intended to express our love for heavenly things and our yearning to hold them in our embrace. Note how the short clauses after the first sentence of the Gloria are admirably adapted to serve as quick staccato thrusts of the aroused emotions: "We praise Thee; we bless Thee; we adore Thee; we glorify Thee." Strong emotion does not vent itself in long involved sentences which hold it suspended, but in short staccato ones where the objective

is quickly reached. Note that each of these four clauses consist of but subject, predicate and object. Both in structure and in impulsiveness they are excellently adapted to serve as vehicles for the emotions of joy and gratitude.

These instances will suffice to show the manner in which the physical ceremonies are coördinated with the prayers at the different parts of the sacrifice to arouse the various mental attitudes of adoration, supplication, thanksgiving and propitiation together with their appropriate emotional correlates.

The Pedagogical Value of Ceremonies

Let us turn now from the consideration of the psychological significance of the ceremonies of the Mass as factors in the arousal of religious sentiment and emotions, and view them in their other rôle as media for the presentation of educational concepts. For, in addition to their important function in the awakening of appropriate religious sentiments, the ceremonies serve to translate into the languages of the senses, doctrines whose abstract verbal formulation would frequently prove less effective in conveying to the minds of the great masses of the faithful clear ideas as to their significance.

The visitor on crossing the threshold of a Catholic church perceives immediately the generous display of paintings, statues, frescoes, and pictorial representations woven into the stained glass windows. Beautiful impressions rain upon his senses from every object on which his eyes fall. The whole edifice with its paintings and sculpturings, its organ peals and lighted candles, become almost vocal in singing the praises and the glory of the Eucharistic King enthroned in the tabernacle of the altar.

Sometime ago the writer had the opportunity of conducting two non-Catholic professors of psychology at a State University on an inspection tour through a Catholic church, and

of explaining to them the symbolism of the sanctuary light, the altar, stations, and the other objects of devotion with which a Catholic church usually abounds. The writer has never heard from the lips of Catholics a stronger commendation of the important educative rôle of such plastic and pictorial art than fell from the mouths of these men thoroughly familiar as they were with the findings of modern psychology. "It is a splendid method," they said, "of appealing to the senses, enlisting them as so many vehicles bearing information to the mind. While some may grasp an abstract verbal presentation of a religious teaching, everyone, no matter how illiterate, will grasp it when pictorially expressed. Now we understand how the Church is able to imbue her vast millions of people of every race and tongue, and of every degree of education, with the spirit of her devotions and to provide them with sufficient apperception masses to appreciate their spiritual significance. Indeed, if the schools of our land were to copy this lesson from the age-old educational experience of the Catholic Church, and provide a more generous basis for sense impressions, the resulting imagery of the children would be less verbal and barren, and far richer and more vitally assimilative of objective reality."

Thus the Church has long antedated the findings of Comenius and of Pestalozzi in her generous use of the object method of teaching. In the formulation of this method, which revolutionized the educational technique of his day and which still serves as the fundamental idea pervading all modern methodology, Pestalozzi says: "The most essential point from which I start is this: Sense impression (*Anschauungsunterricht*) of nature is the only true foundation of human knowledge. All that follows is the result of this sense impression and the process of abstraction from it." The importance of sense impressions as the necessary basis for all mental concepts is likewise insisted upon by scholastic philosophy which has held as almost axiomatic the principle:

Nil in intellectu nisi prius aliquomodo in sensu. "There can be no concept in the mind which was not previously in some way in the senses."

This principle held alike by Pestalozzi and the Scholastics finds generous exemplification in the practice of the Church. The meaning of Pentecost, redemption, crucifixion, resurrection, and transfiguration are illustrated in paintings, sculpturings, frescoes and mosaics woven into stained glass windows. How rich and vivid even to little children becomes the meaning of the Savior's Nativity when shown by images of the Divine Babe in the manger at Bethlehem, attended by Mary and Joseph, with the cattle in the stable, and the shepherds and their flocks hurrying across the hillsides of Judea to pay homage to their new born King. In any appraisal of the psychological means used by the Church for the development of sense impressions and rich imagery upon which to build later the abstract concepts of religious dogmas, due recognition must be accorded the significant rôle played by the object method so universally exemplified in the Catholic Church.

The Mass—A Religious Drama

A kindred means of appealing to the senses in the imparting of religious truth is the drama. The Mass with its colorful vestments and vivid ceremonies is a dramatic re-enactment in an unbloody manner of the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. In its symbolism and liturgy it carries the mind of the spectator over the story of the Savior's passion, from the time of His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane as symbolized by the celebrant bending low and striking his breast at the Confiteor, to His death on the Cross as typified by the breaking of the Sacred Host. The recital of the *Ite, Missa est*, and the last Gospel at the end of the Mass typify the Savior's final Commission to the Apostles to go and preach the Gospel to all nations.

Note too the vivid symbolism of the colors of the vestments worn by the priest. White signifies joy and purity, and is used on the feasts of the joyful mysteries in Our Savior's life, and on the feasts of the Blessed Virgin, Confessors and Virgins. Red reminds the faithful of the blood that was shed for the faith of Christ. Red vestments are worn accordingly on the feasts of martyrs and of Apostles, on the feasts of the Savior's passion and on Whit Sunday in memory of the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles in the form of tongues of fire. Green is appropriately used as the symbol of hope, as the first signs of life in nature after the desolation of winter come in the form of blades of green grass and verdant foliage that echo forth the hope of the soul's life after the body's death. Green is worn at times that have no particular color of their own, such as the Sundays between Epiphany and Septuagesima and between Trinity Sunday and Advent. Purple which is emblematic of penance is worn during Advent and Lent. Black, the symbol of death, is used on Good Friday and in Masses for the dead. Thus does the Church portray to the faithful in the vivid and universal language of color the character of the feast and of the Mass which is being enacted before their eyes.

Likewise the meaning of Christ's suffering and death is depicted by the moving liturgy of the Mass, which reaches its climax in the dramatic elevation of the Sacred Host at the moment of consecration. Here is a wealth of drama and pageantry which speaks to the spectators in the oldest language of the race—the Esperanto of gesture and pantomime. Vivid, indeed, are the sense impressions and rich the imagery accruing to the congregation from the Church's generous use of the object method in the presentation of her teachings, from her use of the plastic and pictorial arts, from the exquisitely wrought symbolism and colorful ceremonial of the Mass, with its elements of moving drama, stately pag-

eant and impressive pantomime. Through these numerous avenues there flows a series of stimuli which impinging upon the mind, stir the emotions and enlist the whole psychophysical organism in the rendering of religious worship. Acts of religious devotion instead of becoming mere perfunctory physical gestures of a rote character, are thus kept vital and pregnant with emotion and meaning. In maintaining such vitality in religious worship, vividness of sense impression and richness of mental imagery are of basic importance.

The Æsthetic Influence of the Liturgy

Lastly, the liturgy of Catholic worship in its widest sense has a distinct influence in the development of the æsthetic sense in the worshipers. The most dramatic and impressive ceremonial possible to devise has sprung from the effort to translate the significance of the Mass into sign and gesture. Many of the supreme creations of music have resulted from the attempt to express through concords of sound the subtle religious emotions aroused by the unbloody renewal of the sacrifice of Calvary. The vast majority of the immortal masterpieces of painting have been inspired by the religious impulse. The Cathedrals of Europe, enriched with the priceless paintings of Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, Titian, Michelangelo, Fra Angelico, and Fra Bartolommeo remain to this day as the great art treasures of the world. The modern traveler is surprised to learn too that practically all the themes of these great painters are religious ones. In walking through the quaint old Dominican monastery of San Marco in Florence, where Savonarola presided as Prior, the writer observed on the wall of almost every cell a religious painting from the brush of the immortal Fra Angelico. Art thus served as the handmaid of religion, quickening the devotion of the individual and seeking to render the supernatural more vivid and real to him through the most beautiful pro-

ductions of the creative geniuses of the race. So, too, the great sculptors found in religion the stimulus to create immortal works. The traveler who will stand for fifteen minutes before the great statue of Moses, by Michelangelo, in St. Paul's Outside the Walls, in Rome, will receive an impression of the stern character of the great lawgiver of the Israelites, which for vividness and richness could be duplicated by probably no other means in the world.

The lavish use of the fine arts in the embellishment of Catholic worship exercises both consciously and unconsciously its influence in developing the appreciation of the beautiful. "This consciousness," says Horne,⁷ "is as truly emotional in character as it is intellectual or volitional. And the sense of beauty is the finest differentiation of the life of feeling in man. The coldness of intellectuality and the narrowness of practicality are warmed and widened through the love of the beautiful. To an intellectual soul beauty says there are values that can be felt which cannot be described; to a practical soul beauty says there are useless things which are also precious. The knowledge of the truth makes one discerning, but not tender; the volition of the good makes one correct, but not attractive; it is the love of beauty that unifies a life in one perfect whole.

"The sense of beauty is cultivated when the eyes and ears and soul are open to the perfections of the work of man and nature; when a badly constructed building offends; when the eye rests with content upon a perfect statue or a splendid picture; when the ear enjoys a symphony, and the soul is thrilled with the meaningful message of literature; when the hills give strength, and the sky exultation; when the mountain lake gives peace and the ocean stirs a divine discontent within; when the rainbow gives promise, and the sunset, vision, and the evening time, light; when the

⁷ H. H. Horne, *Psychological Principles of Education*, Macmillan Co., pp. 245, 246.

night brings no terror, and the storm a sublime awe; when all the visible and audible forms of nature quicken in man the sense that the perfect is here about us in the material world and only waiting to be enjoyed; when, in short, man's nature is offended at all ugliness and rejoices in all beauty."

It is æsthetic sentiments of this nature aroused and fostered by the sublime stirrings of religious experience, which find portrayal in the matchless lines of Wordsworth—lines which echo the feelings of every devout worshiper at the great drama of the Mass.

"I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man."

Students of the psychology of æsthetics from Edmund Burke, who attempted to correlate the feeling of beauty with a general physiological relaxation and that of sublimity with physiological strain and tension, down to Fechner who has attempted to place it on an experimental basis, and reduce it to an exact science, have recognized the kinship of the æsthetic and the moral sentiments. George Eliot gives apt expression to the intimacy of the relationship between these two sentiments when she writes in *Romola*: "It seems to me beauty is part of the finished language by which goodness speaks."

The liturgy of the Mass drawing the congregation into an active participation in the action instead of allowing them to remain mere passive spectators, affords suitable expression for the aroused emotions, thus completing what is called in

technical psychology the sensori-motor arc. In providing appropriate modes of reaction the ceremonies of the Mass play an important psychological rôle in the efficient conduct of these subtle emotions. For, as James has pointed out, emotions involve not merely perceptions but appreciable organic reverberations along the motor paths which if impeded, clog the emotion and bring it to an untimely end. Thus "an object," says James in tracing the genesis of an emotion on its physiological side, "falls on a sense-organ, affects a cortical part, and is perceived; or else the latter, excited inwardly, gives rise to an idea of the same object. Quick as a flash, the reflex currents pass down through their preordained channels, alter the condition of muscle, skin, and viscus; and these alterations, perceived, like the original object, in as many portions of the cortex, combine with it in consciousness and transform it from an object-simply-apprehended into an object-emotionally-felt."⁸ It becomes obvious therefore that in providing expression for these bodily reverberations, ceremonies play an important part in the genesis and development of even the subtler emotions of an æsthetic character.

From what has been said thus far, it becomes evident even to a visitor from outside the fold that the ceremonies of that central act of Catholic worship, the Sacrifice of the Mass, are by no means so much meaningless jargon, so many idle gestures. Much less do they savor of superstition or represent an unconscious heritage of tribal taboos or primitive magic. On the contrary they represent the supreme achievement of the human mind in the enlistment of the whole human personality in the rendering of public worship to Almighty God. They induce a mental attitude and an emotional tone that harmonize admirably with the overt act of homage, giving to it an inner depth and a resonance with-

⁸ William James, *Principles of Psychology*, Vol. II., pp. 473, 474

out which it would be merely a mechanical gesture of rote character. Just as there is a world of difference between the discord produced by the novice who thwacks away clumsily upon the cords of the violin and the rare melody teased from the strings by the deft touches of a master artist, so there is a corresponding difference between the clangorous reverberations produced on the bodily sounding board by the haphazard movements and bodily swaying of the amateur evangelist, and the delicate concord of emotional tones that swell into a great psychic symphony from the carefully planned harmonium of prayer and ceremony that constitute the sublime drama of the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary.

Sometime ago the writer stood in a mosque just off The Street Called Straight in the ancient city of Damascus witnessing the performance of the Howling and Dancing Dervishes. The violent physical capers, the continued whirling with its consequent disturbance of the semi-circular canals and incipient vertigo, the incessant howling frequently of a single phrase, indicate the utter abandon with which the devotee works himself into a religious frenzy. While in this state of *majdhub* or frenzy the Rifa'ites or howling dervishes cut themselves with knives, eat small serpents and handle live coals and red-hot irons. Here is a religious ceremonial which by the violence of its gyrations unleashes such a riotous tumult of organic reverberations as to overwhelm reason, hurling it into a sort of hypnotic daze.

In the Mosque of Santa Sophia in Constantinople the visitor sees exemplified the ritual which regulates the manner of praying of the vast majority of Mohammedans. While kneeling, the person in prayer sways back and forth repeatedly, and bends so low that at times he touches his head to the floor and at other times touches merely his hands to the floor. As the writer studied carefully the exercises which the Mohammedans were going through before him, he became conscious that they were really splendid calisthenics.

but nothing more. Indeed upon investigating their genesis one discovers that this was apparently the primary purpose for which Mohammed had designed them—to serve as a wholesome antidote for the natural indolence of this people living, as they were, in a warm climate which strengthened their aversion to physical exercise. There is, however, no aptitude in these rather systematic calisthenic exercises to induce an attitude of religious devotion.

Not reaching such extremes in frenzy as the dervishes but similar in kind are the antics at many Negro camp meetings, at meetings of the “holy rollers” and at some revival meetings where the evangelist jumps and shouts and works the audience into a state of great religious excitement where they are shouting ejaculations with partial incoherence. Indeed at times they reach a stage of utter nervous exhaustion, foaming at the mouth and losing consciousness.

Contrast the antics at such religious meetings with their wild abandon and lack of all restraint with the calm, dignified, studied and restrained liturgy guiding the worship at the august drama of the Mass. Instead of the submergence of reason beneath the waves of emotions lashed into a tempest, there is the dignified curbing of emotion which keeps it always under the rein of reason. Instead of the chaotic arousal of all the religious susceptibilities of the individual into a near frenzy there is the careful selection of the emotional tone that harmonizes best with the particular part of the Mass that is being enacted and its evocation only to such a gentle degree that it does not befog in any way the rational aspect of the act of worship. In other words, reason is always maintained upon the throne of consciousness in the various acts of worship in the Mass, instead of enthroning the emotions to the enslavement of reason in the excitation of religious frenzy and hysteria. Instead of the mere thumping upon all the notes in the bodily diapason with the resultant discord there is the intelligent selection of different notes

and their deft grouping into measured cadences and moving symphonies.

Perhaps no one has described the psychological potency and exquisite charm of the ceremonies and prayers of the Mass with such haunting beauty as the great scholar of Oxford, Cardinal Newman. "To me," he says, "nothing is so consoling, so piercing, so thrilling, so overcoming, as the Mass, said as it is among us. I could attend Masses forever, and not be tired. It is not a mere form of words—it is a great action, the greatest action that can be on earth. It is not the invocation merely, but if I dare use the word, the evocation of the Eternal. He comes present on the altar in flesh and blood, before Whom angels bow and devils tremble. That is that awful event which is the scope, and the interpretation, of every part of the solemnity. Words are necessary, but as means, not as ends; they are not mere addresses to the throne of grace, they are instruments of what is far higher, of consecration, of sacrifice. They hurry on, as if impatient to fulfill their mission. Quickly they go, the whole is quick, for they are all parts of one integral action. Quickly they go, for they are awful words of sacrifice, they are a work too great to delay upon, as when it was said in the beginning, 'What thou doest, do quickly.' Quickly they pass, for the Lord Jesus goes with them, as He passed along the lake in the days of His flesh, quickly calling first one and then another; quickly they pass, because as the lightning which shineth from one part of the heaven unto the other, so is the coming of the Son of Man. Quickly they pass, for they are as the words of Moses when the Lord came down in the cloud, calling on the name of the Lord as He passed by, 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.' And as Moses on the mountain, so we too 'make haste and bow our heads to earth and adore.'"

It may prove helpful to the reader to summarize briefly

here the principal points of this discussion. They are as follows:

1. The philosophical basis of the use of ceremonies in religious worship is found in the composite nature, physical and mental, with which the Creator has endowed man. Since religion consists essentially in the acknowledgment of God's supreme dominion over us and our absolute dependence upon Him, it follows that man should utilize his bodily members to participate in the rendering of complete homage to the Creator by acts of religious worship.

2. The psychological basis of the use of ceremonies is found in the fundamental law of the mind-body relationship, namely that bodily postures and movements exercise an influence upon the mental state, and are in turn influenced by it.

3. This relationship of bodily movement and mental state is not one of parallelism which regards the physical and psychical phases as running parallel but independently of each other. On the contrary, the relationship is one of mutual interaction, that is clearly casual in character.

4. Ceremonies assist in the evocation of appropriate mental attitudes in religious worship.

5. Ceremonies are likewise effective in the arousal not only of appropriate mental attitudes in general, such as the attitude of reverence, but also in the arousal of distinct emotions which are coördinated with the four different acts of religious worship, namely: adoration, thanksgiving, supplication and propitiation.

6. There is a symbolism and a definite meaning attached to every ceremony in the Mass.

7. In Catholic worship in general, and in the Mass in particular, there is a generous use of the Pestalozzian object method of teaching.

8. There is a deepening of sense impressions, an enrichment and vivifying of mental imagery, and the establishment

of sufficient apperception masses for the subsequent assimilation of abstract religious dogma, through the appeal made to the senses by the generous use of pictures, statues, frescoes, sculpturings, and representations woven into stained glass windows, as well as by music and song in Catholic worship.

9. Profound religious concepts are carried to the minds of the worshipers through their dramatization in the Mass, which combines in it the elements of drama, pageantry and pantomime.

10. There is a stimulation and fostering of æsthetic sensibilities through the use of gorgeous vestments, graceful and dramatic ceremonies, beautiful paintings, delicate sculpturing and exquisite music and song, which are all inseparably interwoven into the warp and woof of Catholic worship.

Thus it will be seen that the ceremonies of Catholic worship and especially of its greatest action, the sacrifice of the Mass, representing as they do the ripe fruits of nineteen centuries of the experience and the strivings of the human soul to articulate its love and devotion to its God and Savior, stand out as among the supreme achievements of the human mind in the field of religious worship. They exemplify in a superb manner the basic principles and the latest findings of modern psychology in the domain of religious worship. They are the finished language through which the heart of the creature speaks to the heart of his God.

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