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CALVINISM AND WORSHIP¹

Few of those who know will dispute that the public worship of God, its organising principle, its order and conduct, constitute a major religious problem of our time, and one for which the most variant solutions are proposed. There is great diversity in the worship of the churches, and curious and unmeaning liturgical forms are everywhere in use. The Apostles' Creed, sometimes complete, sometimes abbreviated and changed, is recited at various places in the service; the Gloria is chanted now here, now there; the offering may or may not be followed by prayer, and may or may not be accompanied by organ music or choral anthem; the Doxology may open the service, or come at the close of the offering, or at the end of the worship; the Benediction may be succeeded by a moment of silent devotion or by a jubilantly noisy organ postlude; the pulpit prayers vary from the recitation of set historical forms to familiar "chatty" informing conversations with Deity; the choir "selections" differ in religious appropriateness, and the organ music ranges from the fugues of Bach to the airs that blow from "tin pan alley." If, as Cowper wrote,

Variety's the very spice of life,
That gives it all its flavour,

the public worship of God today should not fail to be stimulating and agreeable.

But many do not find it so. They complain and criticise, but to judge from the differing and often contradictory suggestions offered, without precise knowledge of what is wrong and how improvement may be effected. Evidently some standard of evaluation is needed, but where is such to be had? This is the task before us, and in our attempt to accomplish it we shall follow this outline: First, we shall analyse *in situ* a typical worshipping situation, in an effort to determine the conditions which all human worship must meet; then we shall examine the two positive types of worship that have arisen in the history of the Christian Church, compare them, and endeavour to ascertain

¹ This is the fourth of five lectures on the L. P. Stone Foundation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1931, dealing with Calvinism and Modern Problems. The first, under the title, *What is the Religious Object?* was published in this QUARTERLY, October, 1930; the second, *Calvinism and Interpretation*, in the number for April, 1932; the third, *Calvinism and Preaching*, in July, 1932.

which fulfils better the conditions, and whether it can maintain itself in present circumstances.

Let us take any typical situation in which the activity called worship manifests itself and analyse it into its component factors. If we keep in mind Occam's razor, *Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*, it will be discovered that in all normal worship there are involved a worshipper, an object worshipped, and some means whereby the worship is carried on. The worshipper, whether an individual or a group, must be *religiously* conscious, must, that is to say, possess not a latent capacity for religious experience, but a functioning activity, and this means impression and expression. The object worshipped is always God or something connected with God, never the merely human nor the merely physical, and furthermore is always a *known* God, known directly by spiritual apprehension, or indirectly by implication or deduction. The means are always activities of the worshipper *and* the worshipped, with, of course, that by which the activities arise, or which the activities produce. The worshipper's activity may take the form of offering gifts, or singing praise, recalling some blessed memory, expressing hope or love, adoration or admiration, affirmation of faith or resolve. The worshipper may also inhibit all outgoing power in order to be still before the presence of God. The activity of the being worshipped may take the form of imparting knowledge, or bestowing favours, or producing beneficial effects in the worshipper or in his surroundings. The worshipper and the worshipped must be active together, and the activity must be in accord with the good if any real benefit is to result, since to worship a being whose activity is unethical spells moral ruin for the worshipper, while to adore and reverence that which cannot respond, some object of inorganic nature or some defunct and silent personality, is in the final analysis to worship one's own imaginings, and in the short run or the long to demoralise the religious consciousness and eventually to extirpate it.

In some such fashion, then, the conditions of genuine worship might be described. We pass on now, since our purpose does not necessitate any examination of the multitude of worship forms devised by man's religious inventiveness, to consider two positive types of worship that have arisen in the history of the Christian Churches, and which for ease of reference we may call *Worship by Sacrifice* and *Worship by Preaching*, in which the words

Sacrifice and *Preaching* refer to the major activity that organises the worship. The former is the type favoured by the Roman Church and those who sympathise with it; the latter is the method approved by Calvinism. The task before us is to determine the historical origin of each, and which fulfils better the conditions of worship discovered by our analysis.

Let us start our inquiry with Justin's description of a Sunday service in Rome about A.D. 150. After the reading of pericopes from the Gospels and prophets came the preaching by the "President." This concluded, the congregation arose to pray, and with the so-called "kiss of peace" was constituted a company for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Bread and wine, the offering of the congregation, were brought to the aforesaid presiding officer, who recited over them the prayer called *eucharistia*, in which God was thanked for His making the world and all things therein, specially for the creation of man, the redemption from evil, and the overcoming of the demonic powers through Christ's incarnation and passion. The people responded with Amen; the deacons distributed the elements, of which all present partook, a portion being kept out for those unable to attend. After this communion came an offering of free will gifts for widows and orphans; the sick and other needy persons, bestowed into the hands of the deacons for proper distribution. This eucharistic feast Justin seems inclined to regard as a sacrifice.

Notice in this service two parts: first, the reading of Holy Scripture followed by preaching; second, the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The names given later in the Latin Church were, to the former, *missa sicca* or *missa catechumenorum*, and to the latter, *missa fidelium*. Which of the two should be taken as the organising idea of worship?

If we attempt to trace the matter backward to the days of the Apostolic Church, it can be shown that the idea of worship by preaching predominated, but when we trace it forward, through the Middle Ages and up to the time of the Reformation, the notion of worship by sacrifice grew continuously in favour, so that it overwhelmed the other view. By the fourth century the *missa fidelium* has become a theatrical mystery performance, and as the centuries rolled onward, sculptors, painters, musicians and theologians vied in embellishing and explaining the notion of worship by sacrifice. In the Canons and Decrees of the

Council of Trent will be found the assertion that the whole substance of the bread is changed into the body, and the whole substance of the wine into the blood of Christ, only the appearance of bread and wine remaining. The elements thus transubstantiated were offered sacrificially, adored, partaken of, and a new infusion of divine life was experienced by the communicants. To quote the great hymn of Thomas Aquinas, the one that opens *Lauda, Sion, Salvatorem*, in the translation of the Rev. Alexander R. Thompson,

Of all wonders that can thrill thee,
And with adoration fill thee,
What than this can greater be,
That Himself to thee He giveth ?
He that eateth ever liveth,
For the Bread of Life is He.

How does worship by sacrifice fulfil the conditions of worship as analysed in the foregoing ? The being worshipped is God, and the means are the bread and wine as manipulated in the sacrament. The activity of the worshippers consists in presenting the elements to God, adoring them and partaking of them ; the divine activity is put forth in accepting them, changing them miraculously into the flesh and blood of the sacrificed Saviour, and in imparting to them the marvellous power of renewing and sustaining the spiritual life of worthy participants.

But the Protestants criticised this *missa fidelium* as both unauthorised by our Lord and His apostles; and filled with unintelligible acts and effects. What right have we to assert transubstantiation ? Why should the Aristotelian doctrine of form and matter be used to make intelligible what is *supposed* without adequate scientific proof to have happened, when Aristotle himself used it to make intelligible what scientific observation proved to have happened ? How can it be made plausible that the reception of physical things can *ex opere operato* produce high spiritual improvement ? Why should our reason; God's greatest gift to man, be left so completely out of the count in this the central act of worship and of religion ? These and a host of other doubting questions have always suggested themselves to the Protestant mind, but even if they could be plausibly answered, the other difficulty would be insuperable : worship by sacrifice is not the New Testament mode. Therefore, like all attempts not of his own choosing; to become near unto God, this manner of worshipping tends fatally to theurgy; and is helped

by an incorrigible impulse of human nature, more than usually in evidence at the time of the Reformation, to think much of magical expedients in salvation, but little of moral improvement, and still less of decent manners. No wonder, then, that our Calvinistic forefathers revolted from such a method, and endeavoured to re-establish *worship by preaching*.

What can be said in support of this view of worship? First, and this undoubtedly for the Calvinism of the sixteenth century was the chief reason, that it is in accord with Scripture teaching. This may be demonstrated by an attentive study of the surprisingly few references the New Testament makes to the *public* worship of God.

Our Lord's practice was to attend the synagogue services, and as opportunity offered to preach or expound the Scriptures after reading aloud the passage chosen in the hearing of the congregation.¹ Preaching was therefore Christ's contribution, and was the essential element in the worship. His utterances concerning worship refer more to that carried on in private than in public, but His most significant saying is applicable to both.² In the conversation with the Samaritan, He remarks that really there are no "sacred" places as at that time believed; worship therefore is not bound to externals; the essential thing is sincere and genuine fellowship between God who is Spirit and our spirits. How this spiritual uniting is to be brought about is not here specified, but only, if there is to be worship, that it must occur.

It was also Paul's practice to attend the synagogues when possible, and where there was no synagogue, as at Philippi, to seek out the "place of prayer." At whatever meeting he was present he preached Jesus Christ, and thus again preaching is shown to be the chief feature of the service. But let us examine I Corinthians xiv. 26: *How is it then, brethren? When ye come together, everyone of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation.* It is remarkable that no mention is made of prophesying, and yet Paul had written, xiv. 1: *Desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.* Whatever the reason for the omission—and the exegetes offer many reasons—it seems clear that Paul considers prophecy as most important for the public worship of God, and that prophesying, with what

¹ Mark i. 21, 39; vi. 3; Luke iv. 16.

² John iv. 23 f.

other phenomena physical and mental it could be associated, had this as its centre, the making known of the salvation will of God. In this it is akin to the preaching of the Gospel, and this gives ground for the conclusion that the apostle valued in worship more the activity that announces to men the thought of God for their salvation, than the exhibition of charisms which might terminate largely in the self-glorying of the individual exercising them.

The advocates of worship by sacrifice would have us, nevertheless, take note of what the apostle has to say concerning the celebration of the Lord's Supper.¹ We may outline in imagination the picture and colour it with the exquisite bits of liturgical quotation found here and there in the Pauline letters. Think, then, of the Corinthian congregation assembled for evening worship. Each member has brought food and drink according to his ability. The service delays its opening until all are present, since exact punctuality is not possible with none or few time measurers, especially for the smaller tradesfolk and the slave class, who had no set hour for finishing the day's toil. Finally, all who are coming have gathered around the table, leaving without the doors the cares of daily life and the bustle of the heathen city. The exhortation, later called the *Sursum corda*, sounds forth, unfixed as yet in any formula, but living and still plastic, expressing as the leader wills the mood of the occasion. The bread is taken by the presiding officer, and over it are spoken the words of the Lord uttered in the night in which He was betrayed. The meal then begins, and the provisions that had been brought are eaten. This concluded, the presiding official takes a cup filled with wine, repeats the Lord's words spoken on that closing night of table fellowship with His own, and sends it round the circle, each, as the disciples had done, drinking from it. This act of worship, so those who do not believe that worship can be by preaching would have us think, came in time to be recognised for what it really was: a re-enactment of the never completed sacrifice of Christ, and since there is no mention of preaching, the essential element in worship must be sacrifice.

Nevertheless, those who are not convinced that the New Testament manner of worship was by sacrifice can point to evidence against this conclusion. The ceremony we have reproduced

¹ 1 Corinthians x.-xi.

in imagination was no sacrifice but a *sacrificial meal*, the repast that followed certain sorts of sacrifices and indicated thanksgiving for the offering and enjoyment of its benefits. There is no indication that Paul thought of the festival he mentions as a sacrifice; all the proof in the world that he regarded it as a sacrificial meal. The sacrifice of Christ took place once and cannot be repeated; but the sacrificial meal may well be a feast without ending either in this world or in that which is to come. But further, a sacrificial meal is always pervaded by some religious idea that organises it and imparts to it what meaning it has. The Passover Supper was thus permeated through words and symbols with the memory of the great typical salvation wrought in favour of His people by the ever-living God. The same was true of the Lord's Supper, in which, if we obey the apostle's command,¹ the entire performance must be so carried through as to show forth, announce or *preach* the Lord's death. As, then, the Calvinist studies the matter, the Lord's Supper referred to by Paul, so far from proving that worship must be by sacrifice, is conclusive for the view that worship conformed to the New Testament teaching must be *by preaching*.

What lay in the apostle's mind in his allusions to worshipping actions leads us to the same result. *I thank my God through Jesus Christ²; Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ³; I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ⁴; and We have not received the Spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.⁵* In the Pauline idiom Father is the name for God as the bountiful giver, and that which is given is the Lord Jesus Christ. In every act of worship the worshipper must grasp this gift by faith. But how? By the eating of transubstantiated bread? This was not Paul's thought, but by the ideal reception of the Lord into the believing consciousness, and this through some action that *announced* the Saviour, and this is *preaching*.

In the second place, *worship by preaching* is not only in accord with the New Testament teaching concerning the public worship of God, but it fulfils in the highest manner the conditions of worship. However, before convincing ourselves that such is the case, it is necessary that we arrive at some notion of what

¹ 1 Corinthians xi. 26.

³ Ephesians i. 3.

⁵ Romans viii. 15.

² Romans i. 8.

⁴ Ephesians iii. 14.

should be understood by preaching in the present connection.¹ The preaching which the Calvinists had in mind as the organising principle of worship, was not some inspired utterance separated from the Holy Scriptures and intended to add to them or to supersede them. This has been the view of enthusiasts through all the centuries, but it contradicts what Scripture itself has to say about its own completeness and sufficiency. Nor was it an interpretation of Scripture to be in the future credited as of equal authority with Scripture, after the analogy of court decisions which become equivalent in binding power to the constitution they elucidate, or of the *ex cathedra* utterances of the Pope of Rome. Nor was it a series of disconnected comments carefully committed to writing to be read with Scripture after the manner of the Christian Scientists and their "Key" to the Scriptures. Nor was it a lecture on Scripture philology, antiquities, manners and customs, history or the like, nor any discourse on the scientific and philosophic insights of the day, or the recurrent social and political problems of the hour, after the manner of the positivist clubs and the societies for ethical culture. But the preaching which the Calvinists were thinking about bears some analogy to the interpretation of a musical composition by an artist. The composition, let us assume, is by a genius and exists in written form. But it is not only booty for the collectors, or material for the museums, or for the historians and the biographers, the critics and the writers of theses, "in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of so and so," but also and chiefly for the "music-makers," those who know how to take a given portion of time on such and such a day and fill it with the living loveliness of that which but for them would have remained silent notes enshrined in parchment. The rendering is soon over, but while it lasts it

may with sweetness, thru mine ear,
Dissolve me into ecstasies,
And bring all Heaven before mine eyes.

In some such manner ideal preaching should apprehend and represent the Word of God, which, as the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it, *is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments*. It is for the occasion only and must be ever repeated; it may be, like some musical renderings, a limping,

¹ This was the topic of the preceding lecture; therefore, what is written here will merely recall in a fresh application what was there explained.

halting, hesitating performance, but it may also, to quote Milton again,

to our high-raised phantasy present
That undisturbéd Song of pure concent
Aye sung before the sapphire-colour'd throne
To Him that sits thereon,
With saintly shout and solemn jubilee.

Such preaching as this is high and heroic, but not too high for earth nor too hard for our strength, if we but commune much with the Scriptures and submit to the manifold influences of the Holy Spirit. When it is present it completely organises the worship, in that through His Word of the Gospel made real in the preaching of His servants God comes into the consciousness of His people, to rouse their adoration, reverence and self-dedication, so that prayer, praise, offertory and whatever else may be included in the service become a unified expression of worshipping devotion. Thus God, the object worshipped, comes to His right, and His activities flow forth in blessing to His people; the means of worship are not unintelligible but are consonant with man's highest powers; the worshippers find their religious consciousness renewed and strengthened, and their ethical energies set free in normal channels.

Our final inquiry will be whether the view presented can maintain itself against the more refined notions of *worship by sacrifice* widely held today, and whether it can satisfy contemporary æsthetic tastes.

The present *nuance* of the sacrifice view may be exemplified by the following¹: Have you ever wanted to give something to God? But hasn't God everything; so what is there to give Him? But it is not quite right to say this, for God may not possess *us*. He wants us, then, to give *ourselves* to Him, and worship is the way in which we make that offering. Canon Bell then connects this with Christ's sacrificial self-giving by pointing out that our Lord loves God the Father perfectly; that He died on the Cross to show His love, and that consequently His offering was the offering of perfect love. But as Saviour He takes men to Himself, and thus makes it possible for them to offer themselves to God. Before He came, men could only offer something *instead of* themselves, but now Christians can offer themselves in and through the perfect offering of Christ. Christian

¹ C. C. Bell, *Worship*, No. 7 of *God and Everyman Papers*, 1927.

worship is all in and through the perfect offering of Christ, and consequently it is all by the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. But further, the Lord Jesus has given us a special way in which we are to offer the worship of perfect love to God, for on the same night in which He was betrayed, He took bread and said, *This is My body which is given for you ; do this in remembrance of Me.* Also He took the cup of mixed wine and water, saying, *This is My blood of the New Testament which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins. Do this, as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of Me.* This means that at the altar, in the Holy Communion Service, we show forth the perfect worship of love which Jesus offered on the Cross, and is ever offering in heaven. The principle of worship, therefore, is the renewing of the offering of Jesus, and Christians should never let a Sunday pass without sharing in the worship-offering of love to God which the Christian Church makes through Jesus the Redeemer.

While quite willing to recognise the winning way in which the idea of worship by sacrifice is here presented, and to acknowledge that there may well be certain truths which his own view either omits or does not allow to come to their right, nevertheless the Calvinist confesses himself unable to see how, on New Testament grounds, there can be any actual *renewing* of the sacrifice of Jesus, although the remembrance of it can be and should be continuous. Still less can he convince himself that the crucifixion of a person who worshipped made the crucifixion itself an act of worship and, if his conviction is well founded; the Christian's remembrance of the crucifixion is not of an act of worship but of a penal act of satisfaction to justice. This view therefore confuses the subjective feeling of the Lord with the objective realities of the Passion, and would have us believe that our imitation of the former in our acts of worship implies the constant renewal of the latter. It is not easy to see how this can be true, and even if it were, how it could be superior to the conception of worship held by Calvinists.

The gratification of the sense of beauty has never been an influential motive in the activities of Calvinism, because of the conviction that if the thrill caused by *human* art creations is mistaken for the presence of God, religious and moral degeneration result. For this reason the Calvinist has worshipped God largely without regard for æsthetic norms. Nevertheless, as Calvin himself pointed out, there is no inherent reason why art

should not be made to express and serve the glory of God. The matter is therefore worth our attentive consideration.

One function of art is that of which Shelley wrote :

Spirit of Beauty, thou dost consecrate
 With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon
 Of human thought or form,

Thy light alone, like mist o'er mountains driven,
 Or music by the night wind sent
 Through strings of some still instrument,
 Or moonlight on a midnight stream,
 Gives grace and truth to life's unquiet dream.

This humbler office of art, the adornment of the existent, falls below its creative action, but is not therefore to be despised. In order that it may accomplish itself something must already be there, and one objection to the Calvinist's manner of public worship is that it is so bare that there is little to ornament, and that consequently all attempts at embellishment tend to introduce adventitious decorations, the effect of which is to destroy the simple unity of the service. There is some basis for this complaint. The first Calvinists, like the early Protestants generally, found difficulty in adding to the service any other part than the sermon, a difficulty which not a few have also experienced.

The reading of the Scriptures was justified as a necessary preparation for preaching. Luther's language¹ sounds extravagant, *When God's word is not preached, it is better neither to sing it nor to read it nor to come together.* But he was thinking of the Latin Bible, which without translation and explanation was quite unintelligible to the majority of the congregation. He also wrote,² *Because the preaching and teaching of the word is the greatest and most important part of all worship, we maintain in it preaching, and therefore the reading.* This was also the Calvinistic and the Puritan reason for Scripture reading as an integral part of the service, in which connection let us recall what is said in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, No. 89, *The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith unto salvation.*

It was not so easy to vindicate congregational singing. It is said that Zwingli³, although personally very fond of music,

¹ *Von Ordnung Gottesdienstes in der Gemeine*, 1526. WA 19, 78.

² *Deutsche Messe.*, 1526, WA 19, 78.

³ *Thesen.*, 1523, No. 44.

was so opposed to church singing that his followers banished all song and organ from the worship, so that it was not until 1598 that a hymn book was introduced into the church of Zürich. It was argued that since preaching with prayer was the *chief* component of worship, it might well be the only part. But those who did not accept this argument finally won, and in the *Erlauthal Confession* of 1562 expressed the conditions of church singing, (a) The songs must be taken from the Scripture, or must express the spirit of Scripture ; (b) they must work for edification ; (c) they must instruct and strengthen the people (i.e. be in the vernacular) ; (d) they must express faith and be for the honour and praise of God. In Calvin's *Ordnances* of 1537,¹ psalm singing is recognised as in general necessary for worship ; without psalm singing, prayers are too cold ; psalm singing rouses us to lift up our hearts to God, to call on Him and to praise Him. Thus the singing of psalms vindicated its place as an integral portion of the programme of worship.

The same theoretical difficulty arose in connection with the celebration of the sacraments, but we shall not pause to discuss it. Suffice it to remark that the difficulty was largely due to an erroneous limitation of the meaning of preaching whereby it was identified with *sermonising*. It may be true that the sermon is the most excellent mode of preaching, but in our definition of the term it is not the only way by which God through His word comes into the consciousness of His people united for collective worship. That the restriction was finally overcome may be seen in that Calvinistic programme of worship presented to Parliament, January 3rd, 1645, by the Westminster Assembly.² It is the following :

1. Prayer.
2. Lessons from both Testaments.
3. Psalm.
4. Prayer.
5. Sermon.
6. Prayer.
7. Lord's Prayer.
8. Psalm.
9. Benediction.

¹ CR 38a, 12.

² Cf. *The Westminster Directory*, Thomas Leishman, Edinburgh, MCML.

The sermon occupies, as it should, the central place, and gives the entire service its unity. In the parts that lead up to it and down from it, there is ample material for embellishment. Exactly how this should be carried out, we may not venture to say, because, as Nietzsche somewhere wrote, art is the child of *can*, not *will*. But we know that when he who has from God the gift of art expression applies it to the "meagre" programme of Calvinistic worship, something happens analogous in religious effect to that which Bach achieved when his mighty genius added harmony to the simple chorales of the Reformation. It is not that there is lack of æsthetic opportunity in our plain Calvinistic public worship; it is the want of desire, the perverse pursuit of the meaningless, and ignorance of how the possibilities already there can be realised.

But the Calvinist's manner of worship by preaching does not merely give material for adornment; its organising principle is and has always been capable of becoming an inspiration for the *creation* of beauty. By way of illustration consider an analogy from Greek nature worship.¹ Travellers fortunate enough to visit Paestum tell us that the builders of the noble edifice so contrived the approach that those about to enter had all at once before their view the element of Poseidon, an immense expanse of blue and wind-tossed sea, over which the temple presided and to which it owed its being. The Calvinist also has built for God a house, but not to superintend nature, nor to derive existence from nature. For in that house God manifests Himself through His Word as preached by His servants, in all the fulness of His outgoing spiritual saving energy. He who in faith receives the Word knows what the Psalmist meant when he said, *Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined,*² and if he will but *let the beauty of the Lord his God be upon him,*³ he will have found the way to do all things not merely well but *beautifully*.

In closing, let us not forget that we are

heirs of the past so grand,
To build a grander future.

An attempt has been made to define and defend the view of worship by preaching, but it is not in accord with the genius of

¹ The suggestion, not the application, is due to Lic. Dr. Curt Horn. *Kultische Möglichkeiten moderner Kunst*, p. 101, in *Grundfragen des Evangelischen Kultus*, 1927.

² Psalm l. 2.

³ Psalm xc. 17.

Calvinism to admire merely and try to repeat the concrete and specific activities of past generations, but rather to grasp the principle and apply it courageously to our own problems. This we should do with our own task of public worship as Providence indicates the way and opens the opportunity, confident

That what began best, can't end worst,
Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst.

GEORGE JOHNSON.

Lincoln University, Pa.