

Sacraments and Ritual in the New Age

John Nash

1998

A sacrament is a ritual involving external symbols through which divine power can be transmitted to targeted recipients. The word “sacrament” is derived from the Latin word *sacer*, which means “holy,” and the Greek word *mysterion*, “a secret rite.” In Roman law, a sacrament was a legal sanction in which a man placed his life or property in the hands of a god to guarantee a solemn contract. Later, the term referred to an oath of allegiance sworn by a Roman soldier in a sacred place.

Today we normally associate the sacraments with Christianity, where they have played a central role in religious expression for more than a thousand years. However, analogous rituals were in widespread use long before the dawn of Christianity.¹ For example, bread and wine were offered to the Persian god Mithra, and ritual offerings of fruit, crops or first-born livestock were widespread. Agrarian rites to guarantee the success of the harvest, and fertility rites to promote a tribe’s survival and growth, were sacramental in nature. Similarly, rites of passage that mark an individual’s progress from birth to adolescence, adulthood, marriage, parenthood, old age, and death have the character of sacraments and have direct parallels in Christianity.

The sacraments also have counterparts in the ancient mystery schools, in other world religions, and in the rituals of modern occult societies. Also, although the churches are loath to admit it, the sacraments share many characteristics with the rituals of high magic. Indeed, most practitioners of high magic are probably more proficient than are typical Christian priests or ministers. On the other hand—to its very considerable credit—the churches have maintained a strict 2nd Aspect focus in the sacraments and have avoided the pitfalls of the left-hand path.

The 7th ray, which is coming into manifestation, is the ray of Ceremonial Magic, and it is likely that sacraments will become increasingly important in the Aquarian Age, but their form may change. Esoteric teachings of the last 150 years equip us to build upon traditional sacramental forms and develop new ones, particularly as we move toward the emergence of a synthetic New World Religion. We can also expect that the sacraments will be expanded from a strictly religious purpose, as we currently understand it, to purposes covering a broader spectrum of human concerns. The Tibetan tells us that 7th ray is concerned with the expression of spirit through form and will establish the new world order. At the same time, our responsibilities for appropriate use of the sacraments will rise dramatically as their efficacy increases and as more people acquire occult knowledge and skills and become active practitioners.

The objective of this essay is to examine the sacraments’ ritual and magical significance and to explore ways in which the sacraments may evolve as we move into the Aquarian Age and become sensitized to 7th ray influence.

The Sacraments in Christianity

Christian sacraments can be traced back to the 3rd century A.D., but their present form developed only slowly, and it was not until the 12th century that the church determined that there were seven sacraments. The number seven has always had mystic significance, and this determination, attributed to either Otto of Bamberg (d. 1139) or Peter Lombard (c. 1100-1160), suggests that Gnostic influence persisted in the Church long after its apparent suppression.

The Councils of Florence (1439) and Trent (1545-63) confirmed the notion of seven sacraments and stated that they were baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, holy orders, matrimony, and the

anointing of the sick (“extreme unction”). At the same time, the church proclaimed the doctrine of *transubstantiation*, which asserts that, at the consecration—the high point of the Mass—the elements of bread and wine in the Eucharist are changed into the body and blood of Christ. The Eucharist, or “Holy Communion,” is believed to be a sacrifice as well as a sacrament, involving participants in the sacrifice on Calvary, and replacing the animal sacrifices of the old Mosaic Law.

The Church of Rome defined a sacrament in terms of its beneficial effect on the soul and its alleged institution by Jesus Christ. Other rites, not thought to have been ordained by Christ, were relegated to the lower status of “sacramentals;” these included the sign of the cross, the use of incense and holy water, alms giving, and exorcism. The efficacy of sacramentals is held to depend on the participants’ devotional attitude, whereas that of sacraments is, in some sense, automatic or guaranteed. Performance of the ritual automatically brings about the flow of divine energy, or “grace,” to the recipient.

The Eastern Orthodox churches adopted the same list of seven sacraments and use them in essentially the same manner as does the Catholic Church. The possible exception is confirmation, or “chrismation,” which may be administered immediately after baptism, rather than at puberty or adulthood. However, the Eastern churches have never distinguished so rigidly between sacraments and sacramentals, referring to both as the “Holy Mysteries.” We shall adopt a similar position in this essay.

The Reformers retained the notion of sacraments but reduced their number to two or three. Most retained baptism and the Eucharist or “the Lord’s Supper,” although they differed over the interpretation of the Eucharist. In the Anglican and Episcopal Churches the doctrine of transubstantiation is replaced by *consubstantiation*: the joint presence of the physical and divine species. In other denominations the idea of a change in substance of the bread and wine is dropped altogether, and the Eucharist has no more than commemorative significance.

Sacraments as Ritual

From earliest times certain ritual dances, dramas, ceremonies, and mantras were considered to have sacred powers. Such rituals often involved sacred objects or symbols and were performed in sacred locations, and virtually all of them included prescribed words of power. Many sacred rituals were performed only on special occasions to emphasize their importance and perhaps to conserve their power. Also, performance of the rituals was often restricted to an elite priesthood. Priests and priestesses received special training and, in some cases, initiation by their elders before they were permitted to practice the rituals.

The Christian sacraments all use prescribed verbal formulas, and most can only be performed by ordained priests or ministers. Several of the sacraments involve the use of physical elements, including bread and wine, water, and oil. At one time, the sacrament of penance required ashes to be smeared on the penitent’s forehead. The Mass, which culminates in the consecration of the Eucharist, is highly ritualized, involving prayers, scriptural readings, elaborate ceremony, prescribed gestures, sacred vestments, and candles. Incense, music, chanting and singing may also be involved. The only elements of ancient ritual shunned in the enactment of the Christian sacraments are drama and dance.

A ritual combines symbols that are meaningful in terms of the participants’ beliefs and have emotional or psychological appeal. The symbols are in motion, perhaps enabling them to express higher levels of consciousness than can symbols at rest. Many religious or magical rituals are described in minute detail, leaving no action, gesture, or word to chance. Deviations from the prescribed format are believed to erode the power of the ritual or even to expose the participants to harm.

A ritual is a repository of energy, and over time it can develop a “soul.” Each repetition recapitulates the power experienced earlier and adds new power. A ritual has a resonant frequency, and repetition at regular intervals of time increases its intensity, like the rhythmic striking of a bell. An important belief, not only confined to primitive societies, is that ritual repetition enables the participants to transcend ordinary time.² Each performance of a ritual recreates the same moment in time as its antecedents. In this context, “reliving an experience” has a precise validity.

Sacraments and High Magic

Christianity has been magic’s severest critic. This negative attitude was based partly on fear, but nevertheless it was understandable because of a history of abuse. In the words of the French magician and Catholic priest, Éliphas Lévi, “sorcerers outraged the children of the Magi.” On the other hand, the churches failed to see the magical nature of their own sacraments and, in consequence, cut themselves off from a tradition from which they could learn much. However, Lévi predicted that a more favorable attitude lies ahead:

Religion... can no longer reject a doctrine anterior to the Bible and in perfect accord with traditional respect for the past, as well as with our most vital hopes for progress in the future... The crook of the priesthood shall become the rod of miracles.³

Magic covers a broad spectrum of activity from crude sorcery and shamanism to “high,” or ceremonial, magic. The sacraments correspond most closely to high magic. The various Masonic “rites” have long practiced high magic rituals. Indeed the fraternal tradition is claimed to be sacramental in its very nature:

Masonry is a sacramental system, possessing like all sacraments, an outward and visible side consisting of its ceremonial, its doctrine and its symbols, which we can see and hear, and an inward, intellectual and spiritual side, which is concealed behind the ceremonial, the doctrine and the symbols...⁴

Another important group in the western esoteric tradition was the Hermetic Society of the Golden Dawn, which flourished in the late 19th and early 20th century. Most of its members were familiar with the work of Helene Blavatsky, and some prominent ones also belonged to the Theosophical Society, whose influence peaked at about the same time. After the demise of the Golden Dawn, a number of members established derivative organizations, some which are still in operation. The activities of the Golden Dawn—in contrast to those of most Masonic lodges—were focused almost exclusively on the practice of high magic, and they have been documented and analyzed in considerable detail. Also, in contrast to Masonic lodges, the Golden Dawn accepted women as well as men into its highest degrees. The Society’s published objectives were praiseworthy, and most of its magical activities were, if not pristine “white,” no worse than a light gray.

High magic rituals serve a variety of purposes. The officiating priest or priestess may invoke a higher entity: God or an angel or archangel.⁵ Lower devas or elementals may also be invoked, sometimes in appreciable numbers. Among the documented Golden Dawn rituals were some designed to establish contact with “the Holy Guardian Angel,” or “Higher Genius,” equivalent to the Solar Angel of the Tibetan’s teachings. The language of one such ritual pointed to the Society’s ideals of personal transformation:

Come forth unto me, Thou that art my true Self: my Light, my Soul... Thou that art crowned with Glory... Thee I invoke. Come forth unto me, my Lord: to me, who am Thy vain reflection in the mighty sea of Matter... Without Thee I am nothing; in Thee am I All-Self existing in Thy Selfhood to eternity.⁶

Another included this prayer for courage:

Let the influence of thy divine ones descend upon my head, and teach me the value of self-sacrifice so that I shrink not in the hour of trial, but that thus my name may be written on high and my genius stand in the presence of the Holy One. In that hour when the Son of Man is invoked before the Lord of Spirits and his Name before the Ancient of Days.⁷

Other rituals focused on “occult research,” primarily exploration of the astral plane or manipulation of elemental power. We can criticize the Golden Dawn on the grounds that its rituals tended to have an individual, rather than a group, focus. On the other hand, we must realize that group consciousness was less developed at the turn of the 20th century than it is today.

The vibration established by the ritual evokes a resonance on other planes and provides an etheric form, or “physical body,” into which the invoked entity can enter and through which it can operate and communicate with the human participants. In some cases the priest or priestess seeks to identify with the deity, to “become the god,” so as to channel divine power. It is interesting to note that the word *enthusiasm* originally meant “having the god enter into the worshipper.” The rites of Christianity and high magic share the same basic process, particularly with respect to the Eucharist. As a manual of high magic technique explains:

Both the priest and the magician have to pass on the force of the invocation. The priest invokes a god to gain power in order to affect a transformation, and “earths” the force in a Sacrament which becomes (in Christianity) the blood and flesh of God. This then is passed on to the congregation who thereby receive the virtue of the invocation. The invocation of a blessing and the “laying on of hands” in the Christian rite pass the virtue of an invocation directly to the recipients without using a Sacrament. The magician does exactly the same thing although he may not limit his invocation to the most High God, but as well invoke those partial aspects which are formulated as the lesser gods of various Pantheons, that suit his purpose.⁸

The authors of this manual point out that the ritual, in either Christianity or magic, may channel the force directly to the recipients or direct it into some intermediate object. The object then becomes consecrated, or “magnetized,” storing the force for subsequent use. Annie Besant explains that magnetization causes a change in the wave motions of the object. Objects exist, not just on the dense physical plane, but on higher planes, too. The higher forms are more fluid—and therefore more readily affected by the ritual—than the dense physical actualization.⁹

To enhance their efficacy magical rituals typically make use of vestments, sacred symbols and implements, drama, music, lamps, incense, and similar aids. The rituals are normally performed in a temple or similar sacred space, specially consecrated and reserved for that purpose. The symbols, actions, words of power, music, and other content of sacramental ritual attract members of the devic kingdom, and these beings’ participation contributes much to the ritual’s efficacy. The Tibetan tells us that:

The angels... will again enter into the lives of human beings with more power than has lately been the case. The call has gone out for them again to approach humanity, and with their heightened vibration and superior knowledge unite their forces with those of the Christ and His disciples for the helping of the race. They have, for instance, much to communicate anent colour and sound.¹⁰

The less evolved devas may be swept unconsciously into action, but the angels and higher devas will come only of their own volition and can only be “invited” to participate. They can be expected to accept the invitation if the ritual’s objectives are consistent with a purpose that they recognize and support. The voluntary participation of the higher devas sets sacraments apart from “lower” forms of magic, where the celebrant’s own will—or perhaps his sexual energy—sweeps unthinking elementals into a participation of servitude.

From an esoteric standpoint, we may view the priest or magician performing a sacramental ritual as the mediator in a triangle of force. The priest is not the target of the energy to be invoked, but serves to facilitate and mediate the flow of energy. The priest's responsibility is to gather energy of the appropriate type, concentrate it to a high degree of tension, and finally channel the energy to the recipients or into a sacred object. As in any magical ritual, emotion provides the necessary propellant, accelerating the flow of energy toward its physical destination. Therein lies the main justification for the emotional content of sacramental ritual. However, in contrast with certain rituals of high magic, the sacraments are not occult experiments or exercises in which ambitious magicians can flex their occult muscles. They are sacred rituals, designed to invoke energies from the highest levels of consciousness and apply them beneficially in the three worlds of human endeavor.

Sacraments in the New Age

Seventh-ray energy, we are told, is beginning to come into periodic manifestation. The Tibetan reminds us that the cyclic ray manifestation—and indeed all other cosmic, solar, and planetary rhythms—are ritualistic in nature. In fact ritual underlies all ordered activity, human or otherwise; it enables groups to collaborate in response to a common vision. Of course, ritual in general is much broader than sacramental ritual. However, as a new sense of ritual takes hold, we can expect that increasing attention will be given to sacred ritual and the sacraments. The convergence of religion and occultism at this time naturally points to the sacraments as rituals of special interest. In a work of profound insight and synthesis, Caroline Myss has related the sacraments both to the seven chakras in the human body and to the seven levels of sephiroth in the Kabbalistic Tree of Life.¹¹

The Tibetan describes the 7th ray variously as the ray of “ceremonial magic,” “ceremonial order” and “organization.” The three terms differ in their connotation, but “ceremonial magic” is particularly significant, and we must assume that it was intentional. According to Charles Leadbeater the preservation of certain rituals over the centuries, and in some cases even over the millennia, was a deliberate act on the part of the Chohan of the 7th ray, the Master R.¹²

The Tibetan notes that “All service is governed by ritual,” and he goes on to outline specific ways in which magical ritual can be used as a service activity:

The mystics who are training themselves in the technique of occult motive and in the methods of the trained magician will increasingly find themselves cooperating intelligently with the Plan, and participating in those basic rituals which are distinguished by their power to:

- a. Harness the forces of the planet to the service of the race.
- b. Send forth those energies which will produce in some one or other of the kingdoms of nature effects of a desirable and beneficent aspect.
- c. Call in and re-distribute the energies which are present in all the forms in the various subhuman kingdoms.
- d. Heal through a scientific method of bringing together soul and body.
- e. Produce illumination through right understanding of the energy of Light.
- f. Evolve that coming ritual which will eventually reveal the true significance of water, which will revolutionise its uses and open to man the free passage to the astral plane.¹³

The essence of a sacrament is the use of a sacred symbol, sign, or object and the performance of a ritual which has deep mystical significance and which can impart definite spiritual benefits. The external aspects of a sacrament set it aside from such practices as prayer or meditation, although they too may be ritualistic. These aspects are intended to stimulate the imagination and other psychological processes. Imagination is important in this respect because it helps bridge the gap between the human and the divine reality. A sacrament temporarily links the lower and higher levels of consciousness allowing energy to flow down to the physical level. As Annie Besant expresses it:

“A sacrament serves as a crucible in which spiritual alchemy takes place... [it] forms the last bridge from the invisible to the visible.”¹⁴

The form of the traditional sacraments should not be discarded lightly because their energy has built up over the centuries—and also because the language involved, particularly the Latin or Greek Mass, has definite mantric value. However, the spiritual environment of the planet is not static, and new sacramental forms will likely be developed to augment, or possibly take the place of, the traditional ones. Moreover, this work of development may take place either inside or outside the structure of organized religion.

Sacramental forms can celebrate the divinity in nature, in an individual or group, or in humanity at large. They can capture acts of praise or thanksgiving, celebration of group communion and oneness. Ritual celebrations of oneness could be viewed as generalization of the sacraments of baptism or the Eucharist. Shared ritual meals have been enacted since antiquity, but the sacrificial aspects of the Eucharist—at least as usually interpreted—may become less important. With regard to “real presence,” Rudolf Steiner complains that an unfortunate materialism has crept into Christianity over the last several centuries:

Instead of the Last Supper... being apprehended from its higher spiritual aspect, it has become materialized and has been represented as a transubstantiation of gross physical substance.¹⁵

Besant also asserts that the doctrine of transubstantiation is secondary to the reality of changes occurring in the sacred species on higher levels and the changes that take place in the participants.¹⁶

Other rituals might celebrate commitment to a relationship or to a life of service or ministry, generalizing the sacraments of confirmation, matrimony and holy orders. Healing rituals have increased in popularity in recent years, and we can expect them to become more potent as we master “scientific method(s) of bringing together soul and body.” The sacrament of extreme unction, or the anointing of the sick, is no longer restricted for use in anticipation of imminent death and is now used in healing services. Further generalization would allow the sacrament to be offered for distant groups, such as the victims of terrorist attacks, wars, or natural disasters. In the case of imminent death, the objective is somewhat different. DK foresees a development of the sacrament of extreme unction to include recitation of mantras, careful placement of the body, and use of incense. In a passage reminiscent of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, he states:

Mantric phrases will also be employed and definitely built into the consciousness of the dying person by those around him, or employed deliberately and mentally by himself... The steady use of the Sacred Word, chanted in an undertone or on a particular key (to which the dying man will be found to respond), may later constitute also a part of the ritual of transition, accompanied by the anointing with oil, as preserved in the Catholic Church. Extreme Unction has an occult, scientific basis. The top of the head of the dying man should also symbolically point towards the East, and the feet and hands should be crossed. Sandalwood only should be burned in the room, and no incense of any other kind permitted, for sandalwood is the incense of the First or Destroyer Ray, and the soul is in process of destroying its habitation.¹⁷

Sacramental rituals to “produce illumination” could usefully be built around the Great Invocation. Daily recitation of the Invocation is a ritual act, as is celebration of the Full Moon festivals. Christianity has provided a wealth of rituals for the celebration of Easter. The Catholic rite of Tenebrae is particularly meaningful, and the Easter Sunday sunrise service has significance that, as yet, is only partially recognized. An elaborate ritual enacted by the assembled Hierarchy already marks the Wesak Festival. The Tibetan explains the mantric component of this ritual:

Once a year the entire Hierarchy employs a composite mantram that creates a vacuum between the highest and the lowest members of that Hierarchy and on up—via the seven Planetary Logoi—to the Logos Himself. It marks the moment of intensest spiritual effort and

vitalisation during the year, and its effects last throughout the intervening months. Its effect is cosmic, and links us up with our cosmic centre.¹⁸

In the future, a greater measure of conscious participation by the mass of humanity is likely to be permitted in the Wesak Festival. The third major festival of the Full Moon in Gemini is relatively new and provides fertile ground for the development of sacramental rituals that can be performed either locally or globally. Alternatively, we may learn of rituals already in use by the Great White Lodge and be invited to participate in them.

Occult societies, dating back to the mysteries of antiquity, have used elaborate rituals to mark the initiation of candidates to successively higher degrees. Often the candidate had to undergo a “death” experience, followed by a period of entombment—typically three days. These exoteric rituals correspond, in however crude a manner, to the esoteric initiations performed by the presiding Hierophants: the Christ or the Lord of the World. In the future, along with the planned externalization of the Hierarchy, we are told that “(the) Mysteries will be restored to outer expression through the medium of the Church and the Masonic Fraternity.”¹⁹ One day, the major esoteric initiations may be accompanied by rituals that extend down to the physical plane. This exciting prospect raises to new heights the significance of sacraments in the Aquarian Age. However, we must not forget that initiation marks a change of inner consciousness and is not conferred from outside. “(A) man is an initiate, prior to any initiation ceremony. The ceremony concerns hierarchical recognition of the disciple and does not concern the candidate's fitness.”²⁰

Enactment of the Sacraments

The external form of sacramental rituals is less important than their inner reality. As we strive to reinvigorate the traditional Christian sacraments or the ceremonial rituals of occult societies, or to develop new ones, we must avoid the pitfall of “empty ritual” that was all too common in late Piscean-Age spirituality. The Master M warns: “Living rhythms, spiritualized by the power of consciousness, will produce varying combinations of subtle energies. But... (b)eware of repetitions devoid of spirit!”²¹ Nevertheless, the outer forms complete the link between the higher energies and the physical plane and still require careful consideration and preparation. A defective vessel cannot be expected to receive the wine of divine perfection. The symbols or sacred objects used must correspond to the energy that is to be invoked.

Similarly, past emphasis on the need to enact sacramental rituals in a specially consecrated location may now seem to be exaggerated. The most important sacred space is now recognized to be within the individual and the group. Nevertheless, the sacraments are intended to bring higher power down to the physical plane. Performance in a consecrated space may add to the sacrament's efficacy, although this space may not necessarily be the conventional church or temple. Many people, like their counterparts in antiquity, are drawn to certain outdoor locations. Whatever type of location is selected, music, lighting, flowers, and incense can also play important roles in ceremonial ritual.

A sacrament requires appropriate words of power. These words can be spoken, chanted, or sung, all three of which utilize the throat chakra—the “power chakra.” We can look forward to further esoteric training in mantras for use in sacramental rituals and elsewhere:

When the race has reached a certain point of development, and when the higher mind holds greater sway, these occult mantras—rightly imparted and rightly enunciated—will be part of the ordinary curriculum of the student. He will start his meditation by the use of his ray mantram, thereby adjusting his position in the scheme; he will follow this with the mantram that calls his Master, and which puts him en rapport with the Hierarchy. Then he will begin to meditate with his bodies adjusted, and with the vacuum formed that may then be used as a medium of communication.²²

The Roman or Orthodox Mass and the traditional Masonic rituals took centuries to evolve to their present forms. Initiates of the Golden Dawn took days or weeks to prepare the temple environment for their rituals, selecting the symbolism of vestments, tools, images, lamps, and so forth in minute detail. Perhaps the degree of attention was excessive, but preparation for the enactment of new sacraments should not be rushed or trivialized. Expertise in choreography, script-writing, set design, and musical composition—and performance—must be accompanied by sensitive occult knowledge. Collaboration between experts in complementary fields will be a great asset. A classical example of such collaboration was the association of occultist Arthur Waite and Pamela Coleman Smith, an artist and theatrical designer, to produce the Waite tarot deck.²³

Types of sacrament involving consecration of an object or substance are likely to be used extensively. The 7th ray governs the mineral kingdom, and the Tibetan tells us that “the prime cosmic function of the seventh ray is to perform the magician’s work of blending spirit and matter in order to produce the manifest form through which the life will reveal the glory of God.”²⁴ Materials should be selected whose associations are appropriate to the type of energy imparted to them. The energies pass to the recipients, raising their consciousness in accordance with the sacrament’s objectives. The potential for work on these lines is enormous, and guidance from the Planetary Hierarchy—and possibly from the Devic Kingdom—will be forthcoming as we enter the Aquarian Age.

We have said that sacramental forms must be appropriate for the energy to be invoked, but where will this energy come from? Clearly, the higher the consciousness of the priest or priestess, the greater the range of energies that can be invoked. Unless the celebrant has attained soul contact—or a higher entity gratuitously collaborates in the ritual—energy above the mid-mental plane will be inaccessible.

The safety of sacramental rites is an obvious concern. Forces could be unleashed that the participants are unable to handle or which they abuse or direct to inappropriate targets. The annals of ceremonial magic include reports of near-disasters, and perhaps the most serious incidents went unreported. Similar concerns about safety were expressed, and continue to be expressed, about nuclear energy—whose relationship with the products of magical ritual has escaped wide recognition.²⁵ Speaking of experimentation with the invocation of devas, the Tibetan warns:

This development must be approached with caution, for to the unprotected it leads to disaster. Hence the necessity to inculcate pure living, the learning of protective invocations and formulas, and the power of the church and of Masonry to protect. Forget not that evil entities exist on other planes than the physical, that they can respond to analogous vibrations, and that the invocations that call a deva may, if sounded inaccurately, call a being that will work havoc. In ritual lies protection. Hence the emphasis laid upon church forms and on the Masonic rituals,—an emphasis which will increase and not grow less as the years slip by. The force of invocations will be known later.²⁶

Nevertheless, attempts to discourage sacred ritual or to confine it to a few “safe” individuals, locations, or institutions can only backfire. Humanity senses the empowerment that has flowed from the Planetary Council and demand to be “all that they can be.” The Tibetan also tells us:

There is no question therefore that the work to be done in familiarising the general public with the nature of the Mysteries is of paramount importance at this time. These Mysteries will be restored to outer expression through the medium of the Church and the Masonic Fraternity... The race has now reached a point where many souls are on the Probationary Path and need but the heightening of their vibration (made possible by His Presence) to reach the portal of the Path itself.²⁷

Mistakes will inevitably be made, but humanity will survive and learn from experience. Education will play a major role in this regard. Dignity should be observed so as to promote a proper sense of reverence and to discourage the involvement of lower-astral entities. The use of consciousness-altering drugs should definitely be avoided, and possibly meat should be avoided, for the same reason. People must be warned that invoking astral forces, even the higher ones, may produce spectacular effects but could result in addiction or possession. Importantly, magical rituals should have a group focus, because a group can safely absorb a greater surge of energy than can an individual magician. The best protection lies in the purity of participants' intentions as well as in the invocation of soul guidance, divine blessing, and Hierarchical involvement in the work at hand.

Conclusion

The Christian churches, and particularly the Catholic Church, have preserved the sanctity of the sacraments but have neglected or ignored their magical nature and often enact them in a perfunctory manner. Practitioners of high magic have perfected techniques of ritual but often have misused them. With the dawning of the Aquarian Age and the influx of 7th ray energies, there is a unique opportunity to bring together these two traditions to reinvigorate existing sacraments or develop new ones that will be more meaningful and appropriate to the modern world.

Sacred ritual has not been popular of late. On the one hand, the iconoclasm that began with the Reformation has been intensified by the materialism of recent centuries to produce resistance to "empty ritual" in religion. And the pageantry of coronations and other royal events—in the few countries where they are still preserved—now merges, in the mass consciousness, with Hollywood extravaganza. On the other hand, the rituals of ceremonial magic, with their pentagrams, daggers, and litanies of Hebrew elementals, attract scorn from modern rationalists. However, attitudes inevitably will change as 7th ray influence increases. Many people fail to recognize the pervasive nature of ritual. The very people who reject ritual in church or temple may be among its most fervent participants in sports, politics, or business. Acknowledgment of ritual's rightful place in sacred expression is likely to come soon, and with it renewed interest in the sacraments.

Sacramental rituals can transcend the linearity of time, raise our consciousness, add to our physical and psychological health, and promote spiritual growth. As the Tibetan points out, ritual can be an important service activity and a significant way to further Divine Purpose. Increasing esoteric knowledge, Hierarchical impression, and involvement by the Devic Kingdom can give direction to these efforts and protect practitioners. Safety is an obvious concern, but it cannot excuse inaction. Among the qualities which the Tibetan states are needed "by those who choose the path of occultism," including "consecration of motive, utter fearlessness... (and) a willingness to experiment." He adds: "These... tendencies, coupled with purity of life and regulation of thought will lead to the sphere of achievement."²⁸

Greater involvement with the sacraments is appropriate in the New Age as activities previously restricted to an elite priesthood become the prerogative of all people of good will. Many people will be moved to enact sacramental rituals, although their efforts will be more or less effective, according to the level of consciousness attained. Esoteric training is available to help people and to warn against abuses.

Disciples on the spiritual path are likely to be called upon to take a leadership role in the enactment of sacraments. The science of invocation is usually identified with meditation, and most forms of meditation are ritualistic to some degree. However, the ritual forms through which that science can be expressed should be extended. Sacramental rituals are needed to link the material and the subtle worlds and provide a more tangible channel through which higher energy and impressions can flow to the physical plane. Expressing light and love are not enough; we must also learn to express *power*.

The prospect of renewed interest in sacramental rituals is exciting, to say the least. We will have the opportunity to participate consciously in work of far-reaching implications:

Men and women, who are beginning to live as souls, can undertake the magical work of the new age, and can inaugurate those changes and that rebuilding which will bring about the manifestation of the new heavens and the new earth, to which all the Scriptures of the world bear eloquent testimony. They can then work with forces in etheric matter and so bring into being those physical plane creations and organisations which will more adequately embody the life of God in the Aquarian Age which is now upon us... These words mark the consummation of the magical work, and are equally true of the magical work of a solar Logos, of a planetary Logos, of an incarnating soul, or of that advanced human being who has learnt to work as a white magician under the plan of the great White Lodge.²⁹

¹ James Frazier. *The Golden Bough*. Phillips, 1959.

² Mircea Eliade. *The Myth of the Eternal Return*. Princeton University Press, 1954, pp. 34-35.

³ Éliphas Lévi. *The History of Magic*. Samuel Weiser, 1913, p. 374.

⁴ Quoted in Charles W. Leadbeater. *The Hidden Life in Freemasonry*. Kessinger, 1925, p. 116.

⁵ Israel Regardie. *The Golden Dawn*. Llewelyn, 1937, pp. 193-276.

⁶ Francis King and Stephen Skinner. *Techniques of High Magic*. Destiny Books, 1976, p. 151.

⁷ Israel Regardie. *Op. cit.*, pp. 239, 264.

⁸ Francis King and Stephen Skinner. *Op. cit.*, p. 159.

⁹ Annie Besant. *Esoteric Christianity*. Quest, 1953, p. 234.

¹⁰ Alice Bailey. *Externalization of the Hierarchy*. Lucis, 1957, p. 508.

¹¹ Caroline Myss. *Anatomy of the Spirit*. Harmony Books, 1996.

¹² Charles W. Leadbeater. *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

¹³ Alice Bailey. *Esoteric Psychology I*. Lucis, 1936, p. 363.

¹⁴ Annie Besant. *Op. cit.*, pp. 236-241.

¹⁵ Rudolf Steiner. *The Gospel of St. John*. Anthroposophic Press, 1940, p. 160.

¹⁶ Annie Besant. *Op. cit.* p. 246.

¹⁷ Alice Bailey. *Treatise on White Magic*. Lucis, 1934, p. 505.

¹⁸ Alice Bailey. *Letters on Occult Meditation*. Lucis, 1922, p. 164-5.

¹⁹ *Externalisation of the Hierarchy*, p. 514.

²⁰ Alice Bailey. *Discipleship in the New Age II*. Lucis, 19??, p. 70.

²¹ *Agni Yoga*. Agni Yoga Society, 1929, p. 257.

²² *Letters on Occult Meditation*, p. 164-6.

²³ Mary K. Greer. *Women of the Golden Dawn: Rebels and Priestesses*. Park St. Press, 1995, p. 319.

²⁴ *Esoteric Psychology I*, p. 369.

²⁵ One of the few discussions of this topic can be found in Kenneth R. Johnson's, *The Fulcanelli Phenomenon*. Neville Spearman, 1980.

²⁶ *Esoteric Psychology I*, p. 126.

²⁷ *Externalisation of the Hierarchy*, p. 514.

²⁸ *Treatise on White Magic*, pp. 343-4.

²⁹ *Treatise on White Magic*, p. 610.