

The Ritual Unity of Roman Catholicism and Hinduism

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[Page 1] Two of the great religions today have as their fundamental theme the sacrifice of God for the sake of man. Hinduism clearly bases its sacrificial ritual on the sacrifice of Prajāpati, the Lord of Creatures, who created the universe by a dismemberment of his Person. In Christianity the idea appears slightly changed, but in the dogma of the *Word made flesh*, the Son of God sent to be crucified as an Atonement for man, we have fundamentally the same mystic root.

Hindû ritual and that of the Roman Catholic Church have much in common, as both are intended to commemorate the sacrifice of the Deity. The Mass, as performed in the Roman Church, when studied in its occult aspects, leads us into deep mystic realms where we join hands on the one side with Hindûism, and on the other with Masonry.

Many, especially non-Roman Christians, little understand ritual and symbolism. They have an idea that ritual is so much mummery invented by priesthoods to hypnotise ignorant worshippers, and has no [Page 2] part in any true worship of God. When a Theosophist has trained himself to put aside religious bias, his knowledge that there are many paths to God puts him in an attitude of sympathy with a form of worship that satisfies millions today.

HIDDEN SIDE OF RITUALS

The mystic truth underlying true rituals is that what is done on earth is only symbolic of what is eternally taking place in the heavens. A rite as such has no efficacy unless it corresponds with some reality in the heavenly worlds. A ceremony to be of efficacy must be performed intelligently with a full understanding of the symbolism. When it is so performed, step by step a stately thought-form is built up in invisible matter, and this is utilised, sometimes directly by the Logos, and more often by Devas and others, to send to the celebrant and worshippers an outpouring of blessing and strength. Those even slightly sensitive will feel something of this outpouring in a heightened sense of spiritual things, and the few with clairvoyance of the invisible will see its tremendous nature.

THE WORSHIPER

Though a ritual is a common act of worship by a celebrant and congregation, yet it is only the priest that performs the mystery, and the worshipers have only an indirect part in it. The ceremony is done for them and they must follow with their thought [Page 3] what is taking place and help in the building of the invisible thought-form. Even if they do not intelligently follow each step, but yet believe heart and soul in the

mystery at its culminating moment, that act of faith at-ones them with the outpouring from above.

THE CEREMONY OF THE MASS

The Mass, as performed in the Roman Church, has as its corner-stone the idea that God, as Jesus Christ, offers Himself a Victim and a Sacrifice to God in His undivided nature. The descent of the Son of God to be the Atonement is the one mystery in life, and there can be nothing more stupendous to contemplate daily. It is this sacrifice that is commemorated in the Mass, which is the sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ offered by Him to the Heavenly Father under the veils of bread and wine. Though the sacrifice on the cross was made in a *manifest and bloody manner*, the daily sacrifice on the altar is made in a mysterious and unbloody manner.

The ceremony crystallizes in a brief ritual, by means of symbolic acts, the life and ministry of Christ. Within the space of half an hour is symbolically enacted the whole life-history, and though the Mass, as a ritual, has been slowly built up, it is nevertheless one of the most splendid creations of the religious imagination. The culminating point of the life is the Last Supper and the Crucifixion, and the Mass enacts them over again. [Page 4]

THE CHURCH AND THE ALTAR

The church is dedicated to God and freed from any harmful magnetism by a long and elaborate ceremony of blessing and consecration. The nave is strewn with heaps of ashes on which with the end of the pastoral staff the consecrating bishop draws the letters of the Greek and Roman alphabets, and the walls are asperged with holy water.

The altar symbolically represents the table of the Last Supper. In a Roman church an altar is not such unless there be on it a stone slab consecrated by a bishop. Five crosses are hammered on the stone by him to represent the five wounds. Under it are placed relics of saints and other objects of good magnetism. The altar is covered with three cloths to represent the linen towels in which the body of the Lord was shrouded. The altar is covered throughout the year, except on Holy Thursday, when after Mass the altar is left bare, to symbolize the stripping of Christ's body and His abandonment during His passion.

THE PRIEST

It is the priest that offers the sacrifice for the people. He is an intermediary between man and God, and under divine sanction holds that position through ordination. He has a dual role, first as representing the people to God and offering up Christ to Him in their name, and then as Christ to the people. When the Mass is celebrated he wears the chasuble, [Page 5] that symbolizes the garment without seam torn from the Christ. On its front and back is a great cross, and as the priest celebrates Mass he is mystically the Christ bearing the cross. Except at High Mass, he has only an acolyte, representing the congregation, to serve him; but at High Mass he has assisting him the deacon, sub-deacon, and acolytes. Neither the deacon nor the sub-deacon, though they may be ordained priests, wear at Mass the chasuble with the

cross.

THE VESTMENTS

Before coming to the altar the priest robes himself in the sacristy. He first covers his head and shoulders with the amice, saying, "Place upon my head, O Lord, the helmet of salvation, that I may be enabled to repel all the fiery darts of the wicked one", and then ties it round his waist. Then the alb, with, "Cleanse me, O Lord, and purify my soul, that, sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb, I may be fitted for the enjoyment of perfect felicity". With similar prayers he puts on the girdle of purity, on his left arm the maniple of sorrow and affliction, the stole symbolizing the robe of immortality forfeited by the first parents, and lastly the chasuble with the cross, saying, "O Lord, thou hast declared that thy yoke is sweet, and thy burden is light; grant that I may carry that which thou now dost impose upon my shoulders in such a manner as to merit thy grace". [Page 6]

THE RITUAL

The priest enters the church with a chalice and a paten on which is a wafer of bread, the ostia or host, *the victim*. With the sacrificial vessels are three cloths, (1) the corporal, so called because the Body rests upon it, (2) the pall or square covering of linen which is placed on the chalice, and (3) the purificatory to be used to wipe chalice and paten.

After placing the vessels on the altar, the priest descends to its foot, to represent man fallen and driven from Paradise, and arrived there signs-himself with the cross, saying, "In the name of the Father, *[Wherever the asterisk is used in describing the ritual, there in the service the priest makes the sign of the cross] the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen". Next he repeats, "I will go in to the altar of God, to God who rejoiceth my youth". This is followed by the 42nd Psalm. He then prays, confessing his sins of thought, word and deed, and after this gives the people absolution. Then follow extracts from the Psalms, and later two more prayers.

INTROIT AND KYRIE

Now begins the Introit or Entrance, and the prayer is read at the right or Epistle side of the altar from the Missal or Book. Next comes the Kyrie, " Lord, have mercy", thrice, to God the Father; three times to Christ, "Christ, have mercy"; and to the Holy Ghost three times, "Lord, have mercy". The Kyrie [Page 7] is a cry for mercy from fallen humanity. "Said before the Gloria", says a Catholic manual, "it expresses the profound misery of the world, and the immense need it had of redemption". The priest then goes to the middle of the altar, to represent the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and recites the Gloria, the hymn the angels sang on Christmas eve. Here he kisses the altar to show he is united to Christ, the invisible High Priest, and turning to the people says, "The Lord be with you", and the response is given, "And with thy spirit". Seven times during Mass this salutation is given.

COLLECT AND EPISTLE

The celebrant says aloud, "Let us pray", but continues silently with the Collect, which is a prayer that collects the prayers of the faithful and is offered by the priest for them. Next comes the Epistle, and it consists of a reading from the letters of the Apostles or from the writings of the Prophets. As a part of the Mass it reminds the congregation of the Old Law. It is read with the face to the East, "because S. John the Baptist had always his eyes fixed upon the Messiah, whom the Scriptures and the Church style the true Orient".

During the epistle the people remain seated, to figure the sad state of the old world, "them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death". This is followed by a prayer called a Gradual or Tract, "the [Page 8] response of the faithful, the protestation of their good will and disposition".

THE GOSPEL

The book or Missal is now carried to the left or Gospel side of the altar. "This reminds us that when the Jews refused to listen to the teaching's of our Lord, the Apostles preached the true faith to the Gentiles in their stead." Before reading it the priest prays at the middle of the altar for purity of heart and lips. Then he makes the sign of the cross first upon the missal, then upon his forehead and mouth and breast, and the people cross themselves likewise. While the Gospel is being read the people listen standing, for it is no longer prophets and apostles that speak, but Christ Himself. During the reading the priest faces the north, for there the rebel angel has established himself, and it is only the Word of God that can bring to an end his domination.

After the Gospel ends the "Mass of the Catechumens". In the old church the converts who had not gone further and become *the faithful* were now dismissed, for their unprepared natures could not grasp the mystery about to be performed. "Ite, missa est", "Go, you are dismissed", was the phrase used, and from it the term missa or Mass has been derived.

CREED AND OFFERTORY

Now begins the repetition of the Nicene Creed, and at the words describing the Incarnation, "and was [Page 9] made man", all kneel in reverence of the mystery. This is followed by the Offertory, when the priest offers bread and wine, still merely bread and wine, to God. The paten with the host is elevated up to his breast, and looking up at the Crucifix he prays. Lowering he makes with it a sign of the cross and deposits it on the corporal on his right. Wine and water are mixed now in the chalice to symbolize how for our sakes God the Son put on our human nature, and the chalice is elevated to the level of the eyes and a prayer is said. It is lowered again with a sign of the cross and placed on the corporal and covered with the pall.

Next the priest offers the hearts of the faithful, and after recites the 25th Psalm, while washing the tips of his fingers in memory of Jesus washing the feet of His disciples. Returning to the middle of the altar,

another prayer is said and offering is made to the Holy Trinity. Turning to the people, he says, "Brethren, pray that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Father Almighty". The people respond, "May the Lord receive the sacrifice from thy hands, to the praise and glory of His name, and to our benefit, and that of His entire Holy Church". This is followed by a prayer called the Secret, the priest leaning forward, the hands joined in humiliation, to remind us how Jesus prayed in the Garden of Olives. Then aloud, priest and people, " World without end — Amen — The [Page 10] Lord be with you — And with thy spirit — Lift up your hearts — We have lifted them up to the Lord — Let us give thanks to our Lord God — it is meet and just".

PREFACE AND SANCTUS

The Preface is the next prayer in the ritual. As the manual says, "We have entered into the way of the cross. Already the clamor of the multitude reaches us, the threatening of the tempest. Only a few hours now, and the Son of God will be bound, scourged, buffeted, put to death, and reckoned among the guilty". Next after the Preface comes the grand, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth. Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest". And now in the invisible world round the altar the hosts of the cherubim and seraphim gather to watch and adore the sacred mystery.

CONSECRATION

The heart of the mystery now begins. It is called the Canon of the Mass. Kissing the altar to show his union with Christ, lifting his eyes and hands towards heaven, with the sign of the cross three times over the oblation, the celebrant prays, offering "these * gifts, these* presents, these* holy unspotted sacrifices"; then follows the commemoration of the living, praying silently for those he wishes to pray for. Here are invoked the Virgin Mary, various apostles, martyrs and saints. [Page 11] Then, spreading his hands over the bread and wine, he offers the oblation, "which oblation do Thou, O God, vouchsafe in all respects to bless,* approve,* ratify, and * accept; that it may be made for us the body* and blood* of Thy most beloved Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Who the day before He suffered, took bread into His holy and venerable hands, and with His eyes uplifted towards heaven to Thee, the Almighty God, His Father, giving thanks to Thee, He blessed, brake, and gave it to His disciples, saying, Take and eat ye all of this. For this is My Body*".

The priest kneels, adores, and elevates for all to see that the Lord is present. The server rings the bell, for of old a trumpet was sounded at the moment of crucifixion; and tradition says it happened for Christ's crucifixion, and the bell commemorates this. The priest continues, "*In like manner, after He had supped, taking also this excellent Chalice with His holy and venerable hands, giving Thee also thanks, He blessed, and gave it to His disciples, saying, Take and drink ye all of this. For this is the chalice of My blood of the new and eternal testament, the Mystery of Faith, which shall be shed for you and for many, to the remission of sins. As often as ye do these things, ye shall do them in remembrance of Me*".

Kneeling, the celebrant adores the sacred Blood, and elevates for the congregation to see. Then he prays, "Wherefore, O Lord, we Thy servants, as also Thy holy people, calling to mind the blessed Passion of the [Page 12] same Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, His resurrection from the dead, and admirable ascension

into heaven, offer unto Thy most excellent Majesty, of Thy gifts bestowed upon us, a *Victim, a holy *Victim, an unspotted *Victim, the holy *Bread of eternal life, and *Chalice of everlasting salvation. Upon which vouchsafe to look with a propitious and serene countenance, and to accept them, as Thou wast pleased to accept the gifts of Thy just servant Abel, and the sacrifice of our patriarch Abraham, and that which Thy high priest Melchisedec offered to Thee — a holy Sacrifice and unspotted Victim. We most humbly beseech Thee, Almighty God, command these things to be carried by the hands of Thy holy angels to Thy altar on high, in the sight of Thy divine Majesty, that as many as shall partake of the most sacred body* and blood* of Thy Son at this altar may be filled with heavenly grace and blessing, through the same Christ our Lord. Amen."

COMMEMORATION OF THE DEAD

The mystery of the Divine Outpouring affects all worlds, visible and invisible, of the living and the dead, and that the dead too may have part in it they are commemorated in the ritual. Then striking his breast to represent the repentance and confession of the thief on the right hand of Christ who acknowledged openly his guilt, the priest prays for fellowship with the apostles and martyrs for Himself and the people, "not in consideration of our merits, but of Thy [Page 13] own gratuitous pardon, through Christ our Lord. By Whom, O Lord, Thou dost always create, sanctify, quicken, bless, and give us all these good things. Through Him, and with Him, and in Him, is to Thee, God the Father Almighty, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, all honor and glory".

From the moment of consecration Christ is present with the people, not in any mystic fashion but as with the disciples in Palestine. Hence is now said the Lord's Prayer, which He Himself gave to the people. Using the words the Master gave, and with Him present, the people pray to God. It is only, perhaps, one who believes in the power of the Mass who can gauge the beauty and significance of this touching incident in the ritual.

The priest is now ready to *communicate* and breaks the Host from the right side into two parts, to commemorate the sacred wounds; and from one of the parts breaks a small piece which he puts into the chalice. As he puts the Host into the wine, he makes with it the sign of the cross on the chalice three times and says a prayer. The body and blood so joined symbolize the resurrection. Then he genuflects and strikes his breast, saying twice, "Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us". A third time he says it, but the last phrase is changed to *give us peace* .

Now follows a long prayer to Christ, and after it the celebrant takes the Host in his hands and says, [Page 14] "I will take the bread of heaven and call upon the name of the Lord". Three times now he strikes his breast and repeats those words full of faith of the Roman centurion, slightly changed at the end, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof; say but the word, and my soul shall be healed". Taking reverently both parts of the Host in his right hand, signing with it the cross on himself, he prays, "May the body of Our Lord Jesus Christ preserve my soul to everlasting life. Amen". Then he *receives* or *communicates* . Similarly he genuflects and adores and prays and communicates with the wine, and after, again prays, "May the blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ preserve my soul to everlasting life. Amen."

Lest any particles that remain in the chalice might be desecrated, he washes it twice and drinks the

contents, with each ablution repeating an appropriate prayer. Then he turns to the book again and reads the Communion. Turning round, he blesses the people, and begins the last action of the ritual, a reading again from the Gospel. It is usually the Gospel of S. John, the first fourteen verses of the first chapter, priest and people kneeling at the words of the eternal mystery, "And the Word was made flesh". The server responds, "Thanks be to God", and so the Mass ends.

THE OUTPOURING OF THE LOGOS

What is the real significance of the Mass ? It is that of a wondrous outpouring. As the Host and [Page 15] Chalice are elevated and priest and people adore the Lord, the Logos sends down an outpouring and blessing. The particles of physical substance glow with His fire and there shines a radiant Star flashing to all sides. There to one at the far end of the church a Ray will shoot out, and here to another at the altar not one. It is only to such as are at one in utter belief of His presence, then, that He can send His quickening — a quickening that touches the man in his inmost nature, for a moment making his causal body to glow as a new-born star, for a moment waking that of a child-soul out of its dreaminess to the reality of the Life of the Logos around. To many a child-soul after death the only touch of the heaven world will be from this quickening at the Mass, for it may be no other activities of his life of passion will give him an ideal that will flower in heaven.

And as the Logos gives His outpouring to the worshipers, it is linked by Him to His beloved Son, Jesus, the Master of Christianity. Wherever He be, though a thousand times the Mass be performed each morning, Jesus knows and adds His blessing, too, to that of His Father.

Twenty centuries have passed and step by step the ritual of the Mass has been made by many hands. Yet behind it all was surely One guiding, so that a Form might be made for men on earth that He and the Heavenly Father could use. The Form is there today, in the Roman Church. Though in the book of [Page 16] the Karma of the world are written the many dark deeds of that Church against men, yet so long as it keeps the Sacrament of the Mass will it be a channel for God. It may well be, who knows, that that Church will yet change in outer and inner ways to be a real Holy Catholic Church proclaiming a life of the Spirit based on nature and a study of her laws. There may yet be on the throne of Peter not a man, but a god, even an Elder Brother of our humanity. May these things be, soon !

THE REAL PRESENCE IN RELIGIONS

It is not only in Roman Catholicism that one finds the idea of the presence of the Godhead during a certain part of the ritual. Wherever men gather for a common ritual, with a priest or a Worshipful Master, that element plays a leading part. In rituals in Egypt, Greece, and India, the presence of God or of a god appears prominently. As with the Mass, so too wherever a ritual has been built up, in Christianity, in Hinduism, or elsewhere, and men in their inmost hearts believe that God is present, and give Him their worship, He knows and responds, utilizing the form the worshipers give. The Real Presence is the heart and soul of a ritual, and in all true rituals He is there.

MASONRY

As we study rituals, it is instructive to note the parallel there is between the Roman ritual and that [Page 17] of Masonry. Certain signs and symbols are the same; the mark of the 33° Mason is that on the pastoral staff of an archbishop, and the cross and crown of the Knight Templar may be seen in almost any Roman church. As a ritual, that of Masonry is yet in the making, but knowing the history of rituals in India and Egypt, one can construct the lines of future development. Surely the mystic idea will be brought out that the Master who has been killed and comes to life again at the mystic word is the Archetypal Man; and as in Egypt the candidate at initiation was the Logos on the cross of matter, as the Roman priest with his chasuble at Mass is the Christ crucified, so too will the candidate be understood in the Masonic ritual of a future day. As at the Sanctus, cherubim and seraphim gather round, so too will it be known that in Lodge the denizens of the invisible love to take part with those in fleshly forms. And perhaps these two organizations, Masonry and Catholicism, that are so hostile today, will join hands recognizing a common work under the True Orient, when He comes again.

HINDU RITUALISM

In the beginning of the article it was mentioned that Hindû ritual and that of the Mass have much in common, as both symbolically depict God's sacrifice for man. In Christianity it is the Son of God that both offers Himself a Victim and is offered a Victim by church and people to God. Daily, before food and [Page 18] drink may pass his lips, the Roman priest must commemorate the sacrifice on Calvary.

THE SACRIFICE OF PRAJÂPATI

In Hindûism the mystic idea of the Divine Sacrifice is as follows. Prajâpati, "the Lord of Creatures", is the name for God in the sacrifice. "He is himself this very universe. He is whatever is, has been and shall be. He is the lord of immortality. All creatures are one-fourth of him, three-fourths are that which is immortal in the sky " (Purusha Sûkta). But the universe became only because the Lord of Creatures offered Himself in sacrifice. "He toiled, He practiced austerity. Even as a smith, the Lord of Prayer together forged this universe; in earliest ages of the gods, from what was not arose what is". "By offering up his own self in sacrifice, Prajapâti becomes dismembered; and all those separated limbs and faculties of his come to form the universe — all that exists, from the gods and Asuras (the children of Prajapâti), down to the worm, the blade of grass, the smallest particle of inert matter. It requires a new, and ever new, sacrifice to build the dismembered Lord of Creatures up again, and restore him so as to enable him to offer himself up again and again, and renew the universe, and thus keep the uninterrupted revolution of time and matter." [Shatapatha Brâhmana, translation in *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 43, Introduction, page xvii. [Page 19]

PRAJÂPATI AS VICTIM

If to the Christian the Cross of Calvary is a perpetual reminder of the great Sacrifice of the Son of Man, to be commemorated daily in the Mass, to the Hindû ritualist the Sacrifice of Prajâpati must be commemorated daily in the sacrifice in the fire-altar. For "in this primeval — or rather timeless, because

ever proceeding — sacrifice, Time itself, in the shape of its unit the Year, is made to take its part, inasmuch as the three seasons, spring, summer and autumn, of which it consists, constitute the sacrificial oil, the offering fuel, and the oblation respectively. Prajāpati the world man, or all-embracing Personality, is offered up anew in every sacrifice; and inasmuch as the very dismemberment of the Lord of Creatures, which took place at that archetypal sacrifice, was in itself the creation of the universe, so every sacrifice is also a repetition of that first creative act. Thus the periodical sacrifice is nothing else than the microcosmic representation of the ever-proceeding destruction and renewal of "all-cosmic life and matter". [*ibid*, page xv.]

THE FIRE ALTAR

In the West, it is the Son that offers Himself to the Father on the altar. Here in India it is the same. Agni, the son of Prajāpati it is who restores his dismembered Father the Arch-Sacrificer. The great commemorative ceremony takes place not at an altar [Page 20] symbolic of the table of the Last Supper, but on a fire-altar in the shape of a bird flying to the east gate of heaven. During a whole year, laying a brick for each day, the altar is built. Seven layers are laid, to symbolize severally earth, air, sky, the sacrifice, the worshiper, the heavenly world and immortality. Four priests take part in the ceremony, the Adhvaryu who does the manual work, and two chanting priests, the Udgātr and the Hotr. The fourth priest is the Brāhmana, or superintending priest, who takes no part physically in the ceremony, but performs the whole in his mind.

AGNI THE SON

At the bottom of the fire-altar is put a lotus leaf for the waters of space, from the womb of which son Agni and the human worshiper shall be born during the ceremony. For both are one, Agni the God and the mortal man. On the leaf is placed a gold plate symbolic of the Sun, which the worshiper has worn round his neck during the initiatory ceremony. On the Sun is laid a little gold man. This man is The Man, Purusha, in the Sun, the Logos. But He is, too, the worshiper, and it is the latter, through his image at the bottom of the altar, that shall rise at death through the three worlds of earth, air and sky to the realm of heaven.

On the last day but one of the year are sung the Great Chant and the Great Litany, whose verses are arranged to suggest the form of a bird. When the [Page 21] ceremony is over, Agni the Son has given up his body, the fire-altar, to build up anew his dismembered Father, to reconstruct the All. Though he has made the Many the One again, yet it is only in order that the Lord of Creatures might sacrifice Himself once again for our sakes, might once again crucify Himself on the cross of matter, that some day we may sit on His right hand "to judge the quick and the dead".

One further mystic truth comes in the ceremony in the identification of the Lord of Creatures with the human worshiper. As Prajāpati is Lord of Time, so He is Lord, too, of Death. When the worshiper becomes one with Him through the sacrifice, he is one with death also. Death thenceforth ceases to have sway over him, for the Lord of Creatures, Life and Death, and man, are one.

THE ESSENCE OF ALL RITUALS

"Even as a grain of rice or the smallest granule of millet, so is the golden Purusha in the heart; even as a smokeless light it is greater than the sky, greater than the ether, greater than the earth, greater than all existing things; that Self of the spirit is my Self. On passing away from hence I shall obtain that Self. And, verily, whosoever has this trust, for him there is no uncertainty.

It is that trust in the truth, "I shall obtain that Self" that is ever given to men in Christian, Hindû, Masonic and other rituals, world without end.