

# The Power and Timelessness of Ritual

John Nash

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## Summary

This article examines the broad subject of ritual—a behavior that extends to many facets of the human experience. The article's focus is on ceremonial magic and religious ritual, which have common roots. Perhaps for reasons of prejudice, they have taken separate paths over the last millennium. However magical ritual and religious ritual share many characteristics, and more than one authority has recommended that the efficacy of religious liturgy could be enhanced by a cross-fertilization of understanding and methodology. Religious ritual has gone through a long period of decline due to the intellectualization of western culture. But it is likely to recover and become more popular now that seventh ray is coming into manifestation.

## Background

Ritual is not unknown in the lower kingdoms, but it is so pervasive in the human kingdom that our species could well be called *homo ritualis*. Ritual is found in almost every area of human activity, from religious observances, to sports events and political rallies, to the observance of birthdays and the ways we greet one another on the street. A ritual is a prescribed set of actions or rhythmic pattern of behavior with symbolic associations and sacred, social or psychological value. Rituals are performed for a variety of reasons that include compulsion (“step on a crack, break your mother’s back”), habit, and reverence for tradition, up to and including belief in their causal efficacy.

The notion of *order* is central to ritual. The word “ritual” comes, via the Latin *ritualis*, from the Sanskrit *rita*, a divine principle that preserved cosmic order. Rituals can be private or public. The latter are important in preserving social order by affirming a society’s tradi-

tions, norms, etiquettes, and expectations. By observing the correct rituals we behave appropriately on different occasions, fitting in and feeling comfortable and secure in our roles. From an early age we learn that the rituals appropriate to professional wrestling are different from what might be acceptable at a dinner party or a graduation ceremony. Mastering ritual is demanded of people who aspire to leadership positions in enterprises ranging from the military to fraternal organizations, to the church.

Public ritual is closely related to ceremony, pageantry and liturgy. *Ceremony* denotes secular or religious activities invested with symbolic importance and possibly serving to reaffirm communal identity. Pageantry denotes an elaborate or impressive ceremony; significantly, “pageant” is derived from “the Middle English *pagyn*, or *pagent*, which referred to a scene in a mystery play—or even the stage on which it was performed.<sup>1</sup> *Liturgy* (Greek: λειτουργία, “public work”) refers to acts of public worship performed in accordance with established tradition. In each case there is some overlap with drama, and at least one commentator commented that “liturgy is theater.”

This article focuses on religious ritual and on “high,” or “ceremonial,” magic; and there is evidence that they had common origins. A major objective of the article is to identify and

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## About the Author

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discuss areas of overlap. For example, common elements of religious and magical ritual are purposely chosen actions and words, a sanctuary or sacred space, furnishings and implements, and careful preparation on the part of celebrants and other participants. A second objective of this article is to examine the Christian sacraments and their relationship to traditional forms of ceremonial magic. Religious leaders are reluctant to concede the connection; but the hope is that prejudice can be broken down. A further hope is that greater understanding of sacramental ritual could enhance its efficacy and help restore it as a centerpiece of religious practice.

### **Religious Ritual in History**

Ritual is the oldest known religious practice, dating back far into prehistory. In ancient societies rituals were performed to secure the favor of deities associated with the tribe or clan, with species of animals, with natural features such as rivers or mountains, or with forces of nature. The intent might be to guarantee victory in battle, a good hunt or harvest, or family or agricultural fecundity.

In Celtic society fires were lit at the festival of Beltaine to honor the god Beul and invoke his help in procuring fertility.<sup>2</sup> Many fertility rituals sought to enact the cosmic drama of impregnation by performing the sex act in the fields. At the Maytime festival the king and queen of the May symbolized the powers of vegetation. Russian peasants performed a fertility ritual in which oil was poured onto the soil while an invocation to the Earth Mother was made to the four points of the compass.<sup>3</sup> This ritual was intended to exorcise evil aspects of the earth and promote beneficent ones.

Rituals were often performed to avert natural disasters and plagues. They served both to affirm trust in divine favor and to unify the group. Celebratory rituals were enacted to mark survival of a disaster, a victory in battle, an important anniversary or jubilee, or the accession of a new king. In the event of large-scale setbacks, rituals helped revitalize the group and restore faith in its deities. Rites of passage marked transitions from childhood to adulthood to old age, from single status to marriage, from life to the tomb or funeral pyre.

Such rites were significant not only for the individuals and their families, but for the stability of the social order. Many rituals included the sacrifice of crops, animals or even human beings, demonstrating a willingness to invest resources to secure good fortune or divine favor in the future. Selected participants might imbibe intoxicants or hallucinogens to enhance a sense of divine presence in themselves or to enable them to serve as spokespersons for gods, totem animals, or other entities.

During the Vedic period in India, and in ancient Egypt and China, public rituals were performed to ensure the smooth running of the universe: the rising of the sun, the progression of the seasons, and so forth. In the *Atharva Veda* we read:

Towards whom does the fire that rises shine with longing? / towards whom does the wind with longing blow?

Tell me of the Support of the universe: who, the One among many, is he towards whom all the pathways turn?

Where do the half-months and the months with the year / proceed in unison together?

Tell me of the Support of the universe: who, the One among many, is he towards whom the seasons and the groups of seasons move?<sup>4</sup>

Many ancient rituals recalled and reenacted the sacred stories of their cultures, particularly creation stories. A popular creation theme was the victory of order over chaos. For example the Vedic god Indra, champion of *rita*, created the world by defeating the dragon Vrtra who represented chaos.<sup>5</sup>

Concern for the success of the tribe or for the smooth operation of the cosmos gradually gave way to emphasis on the spiritual transformation of the participants. Indeed that was a major consequence of the Axial Age. The Axial Age, which lasted from roughly 800 to 200 BCE, gave us the great sages like Plato, Jeremiah, the Buddha and Confucius.<sup>6</sup> In few areas was change more obvious than in rituals involving human sexuality. Crude fertility rites and ritual orgies gave way the symbolic, sublimated sacrifices of modern religious practice and to the transcendence of Indian tan-

trism.<sup>7</sup> However the change in emphasis was by no means uniform across cultures. Even in earlier times rituals occasionally were motivated by more “modern” religious concerns; for example a verse in the *Yajur Veda* calls upon the deities to “Drive away our sins.”<sup>8</sup>

Elaborate rituals evolved to facilitate the transition from earthly life to the hereafter.

Among the earliest examples were the elaborate funerary rituals of ancient Egypt.<sup>9</sup> Another notable one was the ritual described in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* to guide the soul through the intermediate state of existence, or *bardo*, prior to re-birth. A prescribed prayer for the departed addressed the deities as follows:

O Compassionate Ones, this person [name] is going from this world to the other shore, he is leaving this world, he is dying without choice, he has no friends, he is suffering greatly, he has no refuge, he has no protector... he is pursued by the powers of karma... he is terrified by the mes-

sengers of the Lord of Death... Be a refuge to him... turn him aside from the great hurricane of karma... do not let him go to the three lower realms... but quickly send out the power of your compassion.<sup>10</sup>

Despite increasing emphasis on the transcendent, interest in the raw power of prehistoric ritual survived in the cult of Cybele that remained popular even into the Common Era. Cybele was originally the Phrygian Great Mother Kybele, but in 204 BCE she was imported into the Greco-Roman pantheon to inspire the legions in their war against Hannibal. According to myth, Cybele’s young lover Attis castrated himself under a pine tree and bled to

death. At the cult’s spring festival, celebrated March 22, a pine tree decked with violets was carried into the sanctuary with the effigy of a man tied to its trunk—a kind of pagan crucifix. In some accounts, Attis even rose from the dead. Cult members engaged in ecstatic singing and dancing, but many of her priest-initiates castrated themselves and engaged in gruesome rituals in remembrance of Attis’ mutilation and death.<sup>11</sup> Castration was an extreme form of bodily mutilation, but more moderate

forms were common in ancient—and some modern—societies.<sup>12</sup> Circumcision became of central importance to the Israelites in affirming ethnic identity and acceptance of the Covenant; it was required of all male infants eight days after birth.<sup>13</sup> Female circumcision is still practiced in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere. Less permanent in its injury, but perhaps equally distasteful to modern sensibilities, ritual flagellation was common in the Middle Ages and, again, is still practiced today.

Age-old ritual forms survive in many religious practices. The religious use of hallucinogens is common among shamans in many parts of the world. The Jewish *bar mitzvah* and *bat mitzvah*, respectively “son” and “daughter of the commandment,” are important rites of passage.<sup>14</sup> “First communion” and confirmation play similar roles in some branches of Christianity. Sacred stories are preserved in the Jewish *Seder*, which recalls the deliverance from Egypt, and in the Christian Mass or communion service that recalls the Last Supper. Catholic doctrine regards the Eucharist as the “sacrifice of the new covenant;” and—in a throwback to Pre-Axial Age practices—Evangelical Christians interpret redemption in terms of blood-atonement.

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Ritual continues to play a major role in the Roman and Orthodox churches, and their practices will be discussed in greater detail later. The Protestant reformers downplayed the importance and relevance of ritual. Martin Luther did not object to ritual *per se*; he was outraged when, upon returning to Wittenberg after hiding at Wartburg Castle, he found that his followers had gutted the Mass of its traditional ceremony.<sup>15</sup> Rather, Luther wanted to break the power of Rome that used sacramental ritual, particularly the Eucharist, to establish itself as an essential intermediary between the faithful and God. Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin were opposed to elaborate ritual altogether. The outcome was that the Protestant churches replaced most of the traditional ritual by Bible study, preaching, and congregational hymn-singing. Following the Enlightenment, ritual became even less popular, viewed increasingly as superstitious or empty of meaning. The intent of religious ritual, where it survives at all, may be nothing more than a vague sense of seeking a blessing, inspiring participants, providing a channel for piety, and instilling a sense of religious identity.

Significantly, over the last 150 years, small factions within the Anglican and Lutheran churches have sought to recover the richness of pre-Reformation liturgy; even within Catholicism there is pressure to revive the Latin Mass discarded in the 1960s.<sup>16</sup> The pendulum is swinging back, and we are seeing a yearning for more traditional forms of worship. A likely cause is the increasing influence of the seventh ray of Ceremonial Order, and we can anticipate increasing interest in ritual in the decades and centuries to come.

### **The Mystery Tradition**

The mystery tradition also goes back thousands of years.<sup>17</sup> Egyptian mystery cults, based on the temples, developed around Osiris, Isis, and other deities. The Greek mysteries were modeled on Egyptian, and possibly Persian, antecedents. Greek mystery cults were devoted to Dionysus and Orpheus and to the goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone. Demeter and Persephone featured in the famous Greek mysteries conducted each year in the city of Eleusis.<sup>18</sup> Initiates into the mys-

teries took oaths of secrecy, violation of which was normally punishable by death. In consequence, little definitive information has survived; but it is believed that the ancient mysteries evoked powerful physiological and psychological experiences through a combination of ritual, music and drama. Altered states of consciousness may have been induced by fasting, sensory deprivation or overload, and the use of hallucinogenic stimulants.

Initiation rites were among the most important ceremonies in the mystery tradition. "Initiation" referred both to the admission of candidates, inductees or "initiands" to a cult or school and to promotion to a higher grade. Successive grades permitted access to more powerful ceremonies intended to promote personal transformation and eventual union with the Divine. At each grade initiates received privileged teachings. Initiation required long preparation, culminating in rituals which commonly symbolized death and rebirth. An initiand might be given a ritual burial and then "raised from the dead" to begin life as a new personality, at a higher level of consciousness. The biblical story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead may have described the conclusion of an initiation rite.<sup>19</sup> Supplementing the familiar gospel account, an early Christian text included this informative passage:

And after six days Jesus told [Lazarus] what to do, and in the evening the youth comes to him, wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the Kingdom of God.<sup>20</sup>

The linen cloth was the typical garb of an initiation candidate. Evidently Lazarus' initiation was followed by the receipt of esoteric knowledge.

An initiand into the Roman cult of Mithra was subjected to various tests of courage and fortitude, followed by the familiar death-rebirth ritual. Later in the ceremony the initiand used percussive breathing to produce altered states of consciousness. The initiand recited prayers to the gods and chanted long strings of meaningless sounds—a kind of scripted glossolalia.<sup>21</sup> One ritual that promised visions of the gods included the following instructions:

[M]ake a long hissing sound, next make a popping sound, and say “PROPROPHEGGE MORIOS PROPHYR PROPHEGGE NEMETHIRE ARPSEM TEN PITETMI MEOY ENARTH PHYRKECHO PSYRIDARIO TYRE PHILBA.”<sup>22</sup>

The Mithraic cult had a secret handshake, or grip, which foreshadowed modern Masonic practice. Mithraism offered seven initiatory grades, although the higher grades may have been restricted to a professional priesthood. They ranged from the Raven (*Corax*) to the Father (*Pater*), this last apparently reserved for the spiritual leaders of important temple, or *mithraea*.<sup>23</sup> Each grade was associated with the influence of a planet.

Many magical rituals were developed during the late Middle Ages, built upon the Qabalistic and Hermetic lore flooding into Europe from Moorish Spain, North Africa, and the Middle East. One of the most famous rituals allegedly was obtained from an Egyptian magus named Abramelin. Described by the 15th-century Abraham of Worms, its purpose was to contact the Holy Guardian Angel, or Solar Angel, the entity assigned to each of us to urge us forward on our spiritual path through the fourth initiation.<sup>24</sup> Abramelin’s ritual will be referred to later in this article. Abraham’s work, along with the central role of the Qabalah and the widespread use of Hebrew terms and names, remind us of the debt the western mystery tradition owes to its Judaic heritage. However western occultism soon became Christianized—to the point where the Qabalah was shunned by mainstream Judaism.

The Greco-Roman mysteries provided antecedents for the rituals performed in the secret societies and Masonic lodges of later times. Modern Freemasonry is of uncertain origin, but lodges were definitely in existence in the 17th century. It shared important features with the Rosicrucian movement, also of the 17th century, but evidence of direct institutional contact is less than persuasive. Masonic organizations were intended to be secret societies, but much has been published about their structure, grades, symbols and rituals.<sup>25</sup> Sev-

eral branches of Freemasonry evolved, all with at least three grades or degrees: Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason. But the Scottish Rite has 33, and branches have existed with as many as 96. Initiation rituals, which may vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, primarily address entry to the three basic grades. Traditionally, Freemasonry required that members believe in a Supreme Being, often referred to as the Great Architect of the Universe; but belief in the Trinity is normally not a requirement, and some commentators have pointed to similarities between Masonic theological underpinnings and Deism or Unitarianism. Most Masonic organizations are restricted to men, but Adoption Freemasonry and Co-Masonry, which date from the 19th century, admit both men and women on essentially equal terms.

Masonic principles influenced occult groups like the Hermetic Society of the Golden Dawn<sup>26</sup> and even the Esoteric School of the German Theosophy Society.<sup>27</sup> Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) secured a charter from the Memphis-Misraim Rite of Masonry to establish an occult lineage for the ES’s ritual work.<sup>28</sup> When Steiner transferred the school to the newly formed Anthroposophical Society, he changed the initiatory rituals because certain members allegedly violated their oaths of secrecy.<sup>29</sup> Upon initiation, individuals often receive new names to signify their new personalities. For example, Golden Dawn initiate Violet Mary Firth received the name *Deo non Fortuna* (“[Trust] in God, not luck.”), later shortened to “Dion Fortune.”

In all these cases ritual served to reaffirm the shared identity and behavioral imperatives of the group. It also serves to raise the consciousness of participants; it reaffirmed higher values and helped bridge the gap between the mundane and the transcendent, between the secular and the sacred. However the ceremonial rituals in use today by occult societies do not all come not from Egyptian, Greek, Roman or Qabalistic sources; some are derived from Celtic, Slavonic, Norse, Hindu, Chinese, or Native American origins.<sup>30</sup>

## Fundamentals of Ritual

Ritual has both an exoteric and an esoteric dimension. The former relates to the sequence of actions performed on the physical plane, while the latter relates to the inner, deeper or higher meaning of those actions. Ritual establishes a connection between different levels of reality, so that what occurs on one level is associated with, influences, or directly causes changes on another level.

Aside from the initiatory rituals already discussed, a common purpose of magical rituals is to channel particular types of energy or to attract particular classes of nonphysical entities. Magic has long been divided into two categories according to the type of energy manipulated and the purpose for which the ritual was enacted. By the Middle Ages, “good,” “high,” “ceremonial,” or “white” magic received the approval of religious and other authorities. “Bad,” “low” or “black” magic, also referred to as *sorcery*, was condemned. In “low magic,” the motivation may be the magician’s desire for power or the intention to harm another person. Energy may be drawn from a level below that of normal human consciousness, and entities from the lower reaches of the deva evolution may be forced to participate by exercise of the magician’s will. In addition to raising ethical questions, low magic carries substantial risks, and there is always the possibility that the magician will be unable to control the energies or entities evoked.<sup>31</sup>

In “high” or “ceremonial magic,” which is of greater concern to us here, the energies are drawn from a higher level of consciousness, and the entities are higher devas who can only be invited to participate. They may decline to do so; but if they choose to participate there is little doubt that the effects will be beneficial. Much will depend on the wisdom and motives of the magician. A ritual motivated by selfless concern for others is likely to receive a more favorable response than one tinged by ego-gratification. Gabriel Naudé (1600–1653), who served as librarian to a number of cardinals, expanded the two broad categories of magic into four: “divine magic,” “religious magic,” “natural magic,” and “witchcraft.”<sup>32</sup> The inclusion of “divine” and “religious”

magic in his list leaves little doubt that any difference between ceremonial magic and religious ritual was considered minimal.

The intent of religious ritual is to draw down divine power for the benefit of the participants. For example, the traditional sacraments of the Roman and Orthodox churches were regarded as divinely sanctioned channels through which “grace” descended onto the recipients. Most obvious in its magical associations is the consecration of the sacred elements in the Mass or ceremony of Holy Communion. Practitioners of ceremonial magic view the Mass as a magical ritual *par excellence*. Renaissance scholars noted strong correspondences between the Eucharist and alchemy. Sacramental healing, which has been enacted for 2,000 years in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, is once again becoming popular in the west.<sup>33</sup> The sacraments will be discussed in detail later.

### Purpose and Setting

In both magical and religious ritual the intent is usually stated in proclamations, prayers, invocations, and words of power. But the intent may also be encoded in the ritual setting and the procedures. For example, in our culture, black affirms the intent of a funeral, or a young woman’s dance may signify the joy of spring.

Religious or magical rituals traditionally have been performed in a sacred space set aside for that purpose. The sacred space is purified and consecrated, and secular or “profane” use may be forbidden. Access to the sacred space is restricted to approved participants. For example, in the Jewish temple, access to the Holy of Holies was restricted to the high priest, or *kohen gadol*, who entered it once a year, on the Day of Atonement, or *Yom Kippur*. In Masonic lodges, a door-keeper, sergeant, or *tyler* knocks on the door and requests permission to admit prospective initiands.<sup>34</sup> Only when authorized by the worshipful master or hierophant is the door opened. Christian churches do not normally restrict access to the building; but the doorway still symbolizes passage from the mundane world to the inner sanctum.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, in medieval western churches and in Eastern Orthodox churches today, attendees are not permitted to enter or even see into the chancel, which is separated from the

nave by a screen, or *iconostasis*. Only clergy and designated acolytes are permitted to approach the altar.

The sacred space, or sanctuary, is considered to lie in a different reality or dimension from its environment. It may be the place where a deity either resides or can be contacted.<sup>36</sup> In much the same way, the chakras connect the various subtle bodies in the human entity, the sacred space—or a ritual performed there—is believed to connect different planes of reality. A sanctuary may be consecrated when it is put into service; but additional purification may be performed immediately preceding a ritual. Typical methods of purification include preliminary banishing rituals, smudging, asperging, or censuring. A common banishing ritual, used in the western mystery tradition, involves tracing a pentagram with the tip of a sword.<sup>37</sup> This may be repeated, facing the four points of the compass. The banishing ritual may be accompanied by the words of the Qabalistic “sign of the cross”:

Touching the forehead: *Ateh* (Thou art)  
 Touching the breast: *Malkuth* (the Kingdom)  
 Touching the right shoulder: *Ve Geborah*  
 (the Power)  
 Touching the left shoulder: *Ve Gedulah* (and  
 the Glory)  
 Clasping the hands: *Le Olam* (for ever).  
*Amen.*<sup>38</sup>

Smudging, popular in Native American cultures, consists of traversing the boundaries of the sacred space with a smoking ember, often sage or grasswood. Asperging, familiar in the Catholic High Mass and Orthodox Solemn Liturgy, consists of sprinkling water which may have been blessed or magnetized in an earlier ritual. Incense has long been used in Catholic and Orthodox religious services and is also utilized in some Masonic rituals. Banishing rituals traditionally have been used to dispel negative energies, but Charles Leadbeater asserted that incense has a positive influence on participants’ astral bodies.<sup>39</sup>

The sanctuary may be enriched by visual, olfactory, auditory, or other stimuli. Visual stimuli may include decorations, furnishings, flowers, vestments, colors and lights. The colors of vestments or draperies may be changed

according to the liturgical season or from one type of ritual to another. Candles or lamps may be lit, and symbols or sacred implements exhibited. Symbols like the crucifix or the Masonic blazing star have specific meanings; but, like the sanctuary, they also provide links between different levels of reality. The most common olfactory stimulant is incense, which, as noted, is also used as a banishing agent. Other olfactory stimuli include perfumes or other fragrances. Auditory stimuli include music, chanting, the ringing of bells, drumming, and loud noises.

Music has long played a supportive, and sometimes a more direct, role in ritual. Chanting was a major feature of many ancient religions and it continued into Judaism and Christianity. The Ambrosian and Gregorian chants became standard in the west, while Byzantine chant has remained almost unchanged for a millennium in eastern Christianity. In the late Middle Ages, monophonic or polyphonic singing, with or without instrumental accompaniment, became a staple of Christian worship. Settings of the Mass became the great challenge for composers of the Renaissance, Baroque and Classical periods. Well-known composers, including Mozart and Haydn, also wrote music for use in Masonic rituals.<sup>40</sup>

Sensory stimulation may not be the only—or the most important aspect—of the ritual setting. For part or all of the ritual, participants may be subjected to sensory deprivation, including darkness and silence. Sensory deprivation, simulating death, are familiar elements in initiation rituals. In the Catholic service of *Tenebrae*, enacted during the week before Easter, the church is progressively darkened to symbolize the death of Jesus. Similarly, for certain rituals the absence of decoration may be as significant as the rich decorations used at other times. Interludes of silence are becoming more common in regular worship services to allow participants to turn inward.<sup>41</sup>

Preparing the settings for a ritual of ceremonial magic can require weeks or months of work. Sacred objects and implements may need to be acquired and consecrated: an altar, a chalice, a wand, a sword or dagger, a flail, a pentacle, or other tools appropriate to the work to be per-

formed. Symbols, talismans and sigils may have to be drawn, vestments sown, furnishings acquired, and a specially designed sanctuary built and equipped. Authorities on magic stress that, wherever possible, the instruments should be made personally by the practitioner. The reason lies in the effect produced upon the maker: "They bring to life the man that was asleep."<sup>42</sup> The care taken by magicians in this work recalls the fasting, penance, and consecration of materials practiced by Eastern Orthodox monks preparing the sacred icons. Both magical instruments and icons, in their separate contexts, are regarded as manifestations of divine archetypes, serving as "windows" between the nonphysical and physical worlds.

In 1893 Golden Dawn initiate Florence Farr performed a "private ritual" for the purposes of receiving an "inner message from the Higher Will."<sup>43</sup> The ritual was performed in a seven-sided chamber, each of whose walls was painted a different color representing a planet. Each wall also displayed 40 symbols. Let into the ceiling was a large rose whose 22 translucent petals allowed a diffused light to enter the chamber. We are also told:

On the altar, surrounding the Hebrew letter *Shin*, are pictures representing the four fixed signs of the zodiac, a green lion for Leo, a purple human head for Aquarius, an orange eagle for Scorpio, and a white ox for Taurus; also a carved rose with twenty-five petals and cross in its center, a red lamp, a cup of water, a dagger, and an incense censer.<sup>44</sup>

### Participants in a Ritual

Like characters in a play, many individuals may play distinctive roles in a ritual. One or more priests, priestesses, magi, hierophants or lodge officials may play leading roles, assisted by acolytes, sergeants, liturgists, choristers and musicians. Also present may be an "audience" or congregation of more passive observers.

Priests or magi may be selected, trained and initiated to perform a specific class of rituals. Initiation typically is performed by an individual of the same, or a higher, rank. In the process an initiatory lineage develops. In some cases the priesthood is hereditary. For exam-

ple, in the Judaic tradition, the temple priests, or *kohanim*, were all descendents of Aaron, brother of Moses and Miriam. In the Christian tradition, priests receive their authority and power through ordination by bishops who claim the apostolic tradition from Christ.<sup>45</sup> Acolytes may receive lower levels of ordination. In the Masonic and similar traditions, important ceremonial roles are assigned only to initiates of appropriate degree.

Just as the sanctuary is prepared for ritual, participants may undergo appropriate preparation before performing a ritual. Purification is commonly required, involving ritual bathing, a banishing ritual, or censuring. The number of swings of the censor often acknowledges the rank of the particular official; for example the worshipful master in British Co-Masonry is stated to receive three triple swings.<sup>46</sup> Shortly before, or at the beginning of a ritual, a shaman may ingest intoxicants or hallucinogens.

Longer-term preparation may include fasting or sleep deprivation, abstinence from sex, purification, penance, or prayer or meditation. The French magus Éliphas Lévi advised: "He who decides to devote himself seriously to magical works, after fortifying his mind against all dangers of hallucination and fright, must purify himself without and within for forty days."<sup>47</sup> Recommended preparations for Abramelin's ritual, mentioned earlier, consisted of 18 months of dietary restriction, solitude, daily scriptural readings, chastity and prayer. With respect to chastity, the narrator explained:

[D]o not concern yourself about your wife. It is only important that she should not interfere with your work because of arguments or uncleanness. You may have sex so as to conceive children, but only in your bed and with the fear of God. You should flee from all sexual indecency and promiscuity, because this is repugnant to Adonai.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, one's servant should "wear neat and tidy clothes" and refrain from adultery.

In contrast to the emphasis placed on ethical preparation in Abramelin's ritual, the Christian church plays down the issue of possible moral weakness on the part of its priests. In the fourth century Aelius Donatus, bishop of Car-



thage, argued that sacramental validity depended on the priest's state of grace. That opinion, which became known as *Donatism*, was condemned by the Synod of Arles in 314.<sup>49</sup> The Arles decree was not binding on the church as a whole, but western Christianity accepted it as dogma. Even then there were lingering doubts. Among doubters, the Cathars of the 12th and 13th centuries looked at the worldliness and corruption of Roman priests and voiced serious doubts that the sacraments they administered could be valid.

### Ritual Procedures

A ritual normally involves words and gestures, and may also require elements like the bread and wine used in the Eucharist. Words, prayers or invocations can play a variety of roles in a ritual. The purpose of the ritual may be announced or explained. Participants may be questioned or directed to take certain actions. Or words of power may be uttered in the expectation that they will accomplish a desired purpose.

At initiation ceremonies the candidate normally takes an oath of allegiance to the lodge and pledges secrecy. In a Masonic tradition initiation of the Third Degree, the candidate makes the following pledge:

I [name] most solemnly swear that I will always hail, ever conceal, and never reveal any of the secrets, arts, parts, point, or points of the Master Masons' Degree to any person or persons whomsoever, except it be to a true and lawful brother of this Degree, or in a regularly constituted Lodge of Master Masons ...<sup>50</sup>

Often the candidate is humiliated, blindfolded and/or bound during the ceremony.

A basic assumption in magical work is that events on the various planes of nature are governed by laws which, at least potentially, can be understood and utilized.<sup>51</sup> Accordingly, magic is regarded as an exact science, or technology. Emphasis has traditionally been placed on procedural precision, and procedures may be spelled out in considerable detail. No action, gesture, or word is left to chance. Deviations from the prescribed format are believed to erode the power of the ritual or make

it more difficult to experience the energies it is intended to engender. Moreover, according to traditional belief, modifications could have undesirable side-effects in the form of unwanted energies, bringing harm to the participants or even to others.<sup>52</sup> A notable exception—placing it in a special category in the western mystery tradition—is Abramelin's ritual. While it prescribed a long period of ascetic preparation, the instructions for the ritual itself are relatively simple. The magus was instructed to light a lamp, burn incense, don a white robe, and bow down to Adonai. The narrator continued:

[T]urn your prayer from God to your Holy Guardian Angel. Plead and beg that in future—and for the rest of your life—he will not remove his guardianship from you. Ask that he will guide and control you on all the roads and byways of Adonai. Ask him especially to stand by you in this work of sacred wisdom and magic and advise you, so that you can overcome, tame and urge the unredeemed spirits—for the praise of Adonai and the benefit of all creation.<sup>53</sup>

The preparation and use of tools, rituals, symbols, and temple settings, and the recitation of prescribed words of power may aid the practice of magic; but they cannot guarantee success. Would-be magicians may follow an elaborate choreography but fail to produce results. Indeed showy externals may even hide a lack of real occult proficiency. One authority identified three essential ingredients of success: need, emotion, and knowledge.<sup>54</sup> Efficacious magic also requires a strong will and the ability to create strong thought-forms. Interestingly, Alice Bailey referred to the slogans and catch-phrases, which prove so powerful in modern secular society, as “embryonic... Words of Power” and suggests that, by studying their tonal values and numerological significance, much could be learned about their inherent potency.<sup>55</sup>

Religious rituals vary in degree of anticipated effectiveness. Generally there is less emphasis on precision and more on faith. However, in the case of the Christian sacraments, the outcome is believed to be guaranteed—even allowing for possible unworthiness on the part of

the priest—by the sacrament’s institution (or “ordination”) by Christ. In other religious rituals, the outcome may be vague or uncertain. Much depends on participants’ demeanor. In the best of circumstances, esotericist Dion Fortune (1890–1946) explained:

When a group of devout worshippers are gathered together, their emotions concentrated and exalted by ritual, and all holding the same image in imagination, the out-poured force of all present is formed into an astral simulacrum of the being thus pictured; and if that being is the symbolic representation of a natural force, which is what all the gods are intended to be, that force will find a channel of manifestation through the form thus built up; the mental image held in the imagination of each participant in the ceremony will suddenly appear to each one to become alive and objective, and they will feel the inrush of the power that has been invoked.<sup>56</sup>

Whether or not a specific outcome, like a healing or deliverance from an impending misfortune, is achieved, participants may feel more general benefits, such as the receipt of grace. In addition, the community of participants may be drawn closer together.

The potential efficacy of ritual can be understood in various ways. One is the belief in a correspondence, perhaps even an accurate resemblance, between the microcosm and macrocosm. Performance of a ritual in the microcosm, this world, can have corresponding effects on the macrocosm, the cosmos where ultimate power resides. Another explanation is based on the recognition that a symbol can capture some aspect of higher consciousness. A ritual, which is a dynamic set of symbols,

provides a more complex form or vessel into which higher consciousness can flow, or into which higher entities can take up residence. Deities, devas or saints may respond to the ritual and can be influenced to take desired actions.

It is well-known that devic entities are attracted to rituals of suitable vibration,<sup>57</sup> and they can be swept into action by color and sound, the latter including both words of power and music. Moreover, devic presences can convey and mediate more powerful ener-

gies. A beautiful pagan ritual includes the following invocation of nature spirits:

O Queen of magic and silence, we have gathered the sprites of nature to help us delve into that which lies beyond, We ask that you make strong and keen our inner eyes as we search through the veil, and let only influences which are good enter within this circle. This rite is yours, oh Lady of Mystery. Be with us, we ask. Blessed be! Blessed be!<sup>58</sup>

In his *Science of the Sacraments*, Charles

Leadbeater described in some detail the attraction of devic entities during the Mass. Elsewhere he compared the levels of consciousness of the entities invoked in the Mass and in Masonic rituals. “In Christianity,” he states, “we invoke great Angels who are far above us in spiritual unfoldment.” “In Freemasonry... we invoke angelic aid, but those upon whom we call are nearer to our own level in development and intelligence.”<sup>59</sup>

Yet another explanation for the efficacy of ritual rests on the extent to which a ceremony—with its setting and decoration, sacred implements, music and words—can foster creative imagination or visualization. Powerful thoughtforms can be generated and directed

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**The sacred space, or sanctuary, is considered to lie in a different reality or dimension from its environment. It may be the place where a deity either resides or can be contacted.<sup>1</sup> In much the same way, the chakras connect the various subtle bodies in the human entity, the sacred space—or a ritual performed there—is believed to connect different planes of reality.**

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toward a target, manifesting in changes on a physical, emotional or mental level. Furthermore, participants invest their own energy in the ritual, and that adds both to the immediate effects and to the accrual of energy over time.

Every ritual has a characteristic vibration, a resonant frequency, and can accumulate power through repeated enactments. Performance of a ritual with a definite periodicity—daily, weekly, monthly or annually, as the case may be—can be likened to the rhythmic tolling of a bell. Each enactment is a recapitulation, recreating an eternal moment in time and giving the term “reliving an experience” precise validity.<sup>60</sup> The most highly developed rhythmic pattern may be monks’ recitation of the divine office, or “canonical hours.”<sup>61</sup> But the annual liturgical cycle, with its prescribed scriptural readings, the changing colors of vestments and draperies, its days of penitence and great festivals, is an important pattern too. Even rituals enacted at irregular intervals, like the coronation or death of a monarch, build upon what has gone before.

The notion of the accrual of energy through repetition is important not only for ceremonies, but for a wide variety of other phenomena. For example, Hella Wiesberger made the interesting comment that the value of a great work of art rests less on the investment of energy by the artist than by the subsequent investment of energy by countless admirers who view the work.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, scripture may have initial sacred value, but that value is multiplied in its recitation by devotees over the millennia.

It is common in high magic for the priest or priestess to identify with a deity, or to “become the deity,” so as to channel the divine power. The process is shared by traditional Christianity and high magic alike. As Francis King and Stephen Skinner pointed out:

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.<sup>63</sup>

The two authors added that power invoked by the magician can be applied for purposes of prophecy, benediction, or the laying-on of hands.<sup>64</sup> Charismatic Christians would say the same about the “gifts of the Spirit.”

The authors of this account pointed out that the ritual, in either Christianity or magic, may channel the force directly to the recipients or direct it into some intermediate object like a sacramental substance, a talisman, or some magic symbol. The object then becomes consecrated, storing the force transmitted to it. The vibration of the object is raised, and the object is said to be magnetized. Those same authors also make some intriguing suggestions as to the different forms which a sacrament might take when different personifications of God are to be invoked. For instance, a corn wafer could be used if the invocation were directed to Ceres, wine if it were directed to Bacchus, or a pomegranate if it were directed to Persephone.<sup>65</sup> But in all cases, after the sacred object has been consecrated it can be used to convey the force to its ultimate recipients.

## The Christian Sacraments

### Evolution and Function of the Sacraments

Most Christian rituals were based on precedents from Judaic tradition or from the ancient mystery tradition. But the concept of a sacrament was derived from Roman precedents. In Roman law, a “sacrament” was a legal practice in which a man placed his life or property in the hands of a god to guarantee performance of a contract. Later, the term referred to a ceremony in which Roman soldiers, most likely members of Mithraic orders, swore oaths of loyalty to the emperor and one another. In Christianity a sacrament came to be understood as a ritual practice or object

through which the divine presence could be invoked in time and space. The word “sacrament” was derived from the Latin word *sacer*, which meant “holy,” and the Greek word *mysterion* (“a secret rite”). The Greek Orthodox Church still uses “mystery.”

Christian sacramental forms probably began to evolve as soon as nascent Christianity emerged from the synagogues.<sup>66</sup> The first such ritual was almost certainly baptism. Through baptism, converts were initiated into Christianity, just as initiands were inducted into the ancient mysteries.<sup>67</sup> Jesus himself was baptized in the Jordan.<sup>68</sup> Baptism drew upon rites of lustration or washing found in numerous ancient religions.<sup>69</sup> Church father Tertullian (c.160–c.225 CE) commented on ancient purificatory rites, explaining that water was “the seat of the Divine Spirit, more pleasing to Him, no doubt, than all the other then existing elements.” Referring to the biblical story of the pool at Bethesda, he added that, in baptism, waters that once healed bodily ailments now “heal the spirit.”<sup>70</sup> Baptism was seen as a rite of rebirth: “born again of water and the Holy Spirit.”

Baptism became the first of the several Christian sacraments that numbered between two and ten during the Middle Ages.<sup>71</sup> In due course the Church of Rome and, much later, the Eastern Orthodox churches, settled on a canon of seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation or “chrismation,” holy orders, matrimony, the Eucharist, penance (“repentance” or “reconciliation”), and the anointing of the sick. The Protestant reformers rejected the canon and regarded only baptism and the Eucharist, or “Lord’s Supper,” as authentic.

The seven canonical sacraments can be divided into three groups. The first, the *initiatory sacraments*, includes baptism, confirmation, and holy orders, corresponding to successive grades in a mystery school. Matrimony may also be included. The second group, the *healing sacraments*, may include baptism; but its principal members are penance and the anointing of the sick. For centuries the anointing was treated as part of the “last rites.” However, liturgical ritual did not end with death; and Christianity devised elaborate rituals to seeking divine mercy on the recently departed.

A 10th-century *offertory* from the Requiem Mass, that recalls the passage from the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, quoted earlier, pleads:

O Lord Jesus Christ, King of Glory, deliver the souls of all the faithful departed from the pains of hell and from the deep pit; deliver them from the jaws of the lion, lest they fall into darkness and the black gulf swallows them up. But let thy standard-bearer, blessed Michael, bring them into that holy light which of old thou didst promise to Abraham and his seed.<sup>72</sup>

The third group consists of the single sacrament of the Eucharist (Greek: *eucharistia*, “thanksgiving”). *Luke* relates that the risen Christ “took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to [the apostles],” adding that Christ would be known to his followers “in breaking of bread.”<sup>73</sup> Jesus’ followers celebrated the Eucharist from Pentecost onward.<sup>74</sup>

The Eucharist was viewed as a communal meal and, more specifically, as a commemoration of the Last Supper.<sup>75</sup> In turn the Last Supper was modeled on the Jewish *Seder*, or Passover meal.<sup>76</sup> The Eucharist can also be related to the Jewish *Toda*, which was a rite of thanksgiving offered by someone who had narrowly escaped death or been delivered from his enemies.<sup>77</sup> The offering of bread and wine had many precedents. Christian apologists pointed to the passage in *Genesis*: “Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.”<sup>78</sup> And in *Proverbs* Chokmah/Sophia, or “Wisdom,” invited the townspeople to her feast: “Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.”<sup>79</sup> Offerings of bread and wine were important Mithraic rituals.

Two important developments occurred in the evolving doctrine of the Eucharist. One was the concept that, through consuming the bread and wine, the faithful received the body and blood of Christ. The other was the notion that the Eucharist represented a sacrifice, a continuation of Jesus’ death on the cross. Both doctrines built on rich antecedents. “Eating the god” was an ancient practice, as was sacrifice of the god. Moreover the eucharistic sacrifice was described as the sacrifice of the new

covenant, superseding the animal sacrifices of the Jewish temple.

By the fourth century the consecration of the eucharistic elements had evolved into the ceremony of the Mass, or in the eastern churches, the Liturgy. What “consecration” means varies from one branch of Christianity to another. The Church of Rome and a few small derivative groups teach that the bread and wine are literally transformed into the body and blood of Christ. Mainstream Anglicanism and Lutheranism teach that, through the Eucharist, participants *receive* the body and blood of Christ, though there may be no transubstantiation of the elements. The Eastern Orthodox churches lean toward the notion of transubstantiation but allow the mystery of the Eucharist to be probed by mystical insight.

Efforts by Anglo-Catholics, Neo-Lutherans, and others to restore liturgical ritual to its proper place pay tribute to its timeless relevance and power. For example, the Anglo-Catholic and Neo-Lutheran Mass uses Roman-style vestments, incense, candles, and gestures like genuflection and the sign of the cross.<sup>80</sup> Skillfully choreographed and enacted by dedicated participants, a religious ceremony can be powerful indeed—offering rich nourishment to all. The Christmas or Easter High Mass, or the office of *Tenebrae* (Latin: “shadows”) performed on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday, surely can compete in psychological impact with the Eleusinian mysteries. The solemn High Mass combines pageantry, music, choral and congregational singing, and procession. The eastern churches add the ritual veneration of icons.

More generally, Christian ritual has greatly decreased in power. Ritual gestures too often are performed perfunctorily or with embarrassment. And whatever knowledge may have once existed of the esoteric significance of color, sound, symbols, and liturgical prayers has been lost. That significance includes mantric, numerological and astrological correspondences. Christianity has failed to retain a satisfactory understanding of the energies flowing through, and manipulated, by the sacraments—retreating at most to vague statements about “grace.” Finally, despite a long tradition of

angelology, Christianity pays little or no attention to the participation on angelic beings in liturgical ritual.

### The Sacraments and Magic

Most likely the Christian sacraments once were viewed as magical rituals or, at least, that there was little difference between them. No admission of such a relationship has been made since the Renaissance. However a few brave souls have recommended that the relationship not only be acknowledged but that expertise from ceremonial magic be tapped to enhance the efficacy of the sacraments. One of the first to do so was “Éliphas Lévi,” whose real name was Alphonse Louis Constant (1810–1875). Born in Paris, Lévi attended a Catholic seminary, only to be dismissed before his ordination. Subsequently he was initiated into a Masonic order but resigned his membership.

Lévi’s principal interest was ceremonial magic, and he wrote a number of books and articles and claimed the title of *magus*. But a lifelong ambition was to see a rapprochement between magic and Christianity. Lévi understood that magic had often been corrupted and turned to profane ends. But he lamented that in failing to see the magical nature of the sacraments, the churches had cut themselves off from rich traditions. He predicted that a more favorable attitude lay 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.”<sup>81</sup>

Also in the western mystery tradition, Dion Fortune felt that the original view of the sacraments as magic rituals was forgotten, with the result that they had degenerated into “vain observances in the hands of those who regard them with superstitious awe rather than an understanding of their psychological and esoteric significance.”<sup>82</sup> She added: “[T]he Mass of the Church and the ceremonies of the Freemasons are... representative types of magic, whatever their exponents may like to say to the contrary. The Mass is a perfect example of a ritual of evocation.”<sup>83</sup>

Within a few decades of Éliphas Lévi's death, members of the Theosophical Society began to take increasing interest in Christian sacramental ritual. Political activist and spiritual teacher Annie Wood Besant (1847–1933) and former Anglican clergyman Charles Webster Leadbeater (1853–1934) sought to integrate Christianity into Theosophical teachings. Among their numerous books were Besant's *Esoteric Christianity* and Leadbeater's *The Science of the Sacraments*.<sup>84</sup> Sharply contrasting with liberal Protestant attempts to "demystify" and "demythologize" Christianity, Besant argued for revival of its esoteric traditions. The churches, in Annie Besant's words, had "vulgarised Christianity [and] presented its teachings in a form that...repels the heart and alienates the intellect."<sup>85</sup>

An important outcome of those sentiments was Theosophical involvement in the Liberal Catholic Church. The LCC was founded in 1916 by James Ingall Wedgewood (1883–1951), a former ministerial student in the Church of England who was influenced both by Theosophy and by "high-church"

Anglo-Catholicism. He was consecrated bishop in the Old Catholic Church, thereby securing the apostolic succession.<sup>86</sup> Charles Leadbeater (1854–1934), who, like Wedgewood, had been influenced by Anglo-Catholicism,<sup>87</sup> became the church's second presiding bishop. The LCC's name stemmed from a desire to avoid the doctrinal constraints of the Catholic and Anglican Churches.

The stated mission of the Liberal Catholic Church was to combine "Christian sacramentalism of which the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican Churches have long been the

principal custodians" with "the esoteric Wisdom Tradition."<sup>88</sup> Wedgewood, Leadbeater and others drew upon the age-old lore of ceremonial magic, helping fulfill Éliphas Lévi's hopes for a rapprochement with religion. The church's liturgy was modeled after that of the Roman church.<sup>89</sup> But Leadbeater explained that the LCC selected "for our psalms only verses which bear some intelligible meaning, and [avoided] all those which complain, grovel or curse."<sup>90</sup> The reference to "groveling" reflected dissatisfaction with the emphasis on confession of sins in the Roman and Anglican

liturgies. For example, in preparation for the Eucharist, Anglicans "acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness" that provoke "most justly thy wrath and indignation against us... The burden on them is intolerable."<sup>91</sup>

Charles Leadbeater's *The Science of the Sacraments* provided a manual of sacramental ritual viewed and interpreted from an esoteric perspective. Leadbeater's clairvoyant abilities allowed him to see angelic presences in religious rituals. He spoke of an Angel of the Eucharist present during the Mass. With the collaboration of the cele-

brant(s) and congregation, the angel builds a thoughtform encompassing the whole sanctuary. Its intensity depends on the congregation's piety and devotion and the priests' skill in focusing the energy for the angel's use. Viewed with clairvoyant sight, the completed thoughtform has a central dome surrounded by spires, calling to mind the architecture of the basilica of Sancta Sophia in Constantinople.<sup>92</sup>

Geoffrey Hodson, another gifted clairvoyant and priest in the Liberal Catholic Church, shared his own experience while celebrating the Mass: "I saw the Christ Presence in the

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**[S]acramental ritual has the capacity to speak to the heart and soul in a way that other forms of worship cannot. While it may be grasped by the mind, its impact is not confined to the mind. Furthermore, ritual can serve as a vessel for divine energy—a form into which the Divine can flow and reside. There is an urgent need to restore ritual to its former glory—or perhaps propel it to new heights.**

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Host flashed out as in golden darts or rays of Himself in each one of the people and became linked thereto, awakening, arousing the Christ consciousness and power.”<sup>93</sup>

Esoteric teachings provide new insights into the doctrine of transubstantiation. Material substances are viewed simply as the lowest forms of realities that extend over a range of levels of being. Transubstantiation can be explained as a transformation of the eucharistic elements on higher planes; physical appearances may stay the same, but their higher reality is changed. Leadbeater, who firmly believed in transubstantiation, remarked that the Mass can indeed be regarded as a sacrifice, not because the bread and wine are separately consecrated, but because Christ descends into the physical elements, recalling what must have been his painful descent into incarnation two millennia ago.<sup>94</sup> The physical world may not be evil, as the Gnostics claimed, but it is an unpleasant place for evolved beings to visit.

However esotericist Rudolf Steiner took a broader view of the Eucharist. Christ in Steiner’s depiction is the spirit of the earth. When Jesus’ blood spilled onto the earth during the crucifixion, that spirit flowed into the fabric of the planet; from then on the earth and its lives became the body of Christ. As a result, anything we eat constitutes a kind of eucharist. Steiner’s Christ explains to his inner group of disciples: “When you behold the cornfield and then eat the bread that nourishes you, what in reality is this bread you are eating? You are eating My body. And when you drink the plant sap [it is] My blood.”<sup>95</sup>

## Concluding Remarks

Ritual is a very broad field, and this article has only been able to examine a few aspects of magical and religious ritual. But this review may stimulate greater attention to ritual at a time when esotericists affirm that the seventh ray of Ceremonial Order, or “Ceremonial Magic,” is coming into manifestation.

Religious ritual is performed in houses of worship around the world. A large proportion of the estimated two billion Christians attend services in which ritual plays a still-conspicuous,

if declining, role. Christian ritual has been degraded both by post-Reformation and post-Enlightenment skepticism in the Protestant churches and by misguided attempts to “modernize” the rituals of the Roman church. Abandonment of the Latin Mass was well-intentioned but misguided, and it is unclear at this time whether efforts to restore it will be successful.<sup>96</sup> More seriously, Catholic ritual has been eroded by carelessness and lack of sensitivity to its sacred purpose. Only in the Eastern Orthodox churches, which were relatively insulated from western currents of thought, has ritual survived in its traditional richness.

The number of people drawn to the practice of ceremonial magic is likely to remain relatively small. However sacramental ritual has the capacity to speak to the heart and soul in a way that other forms of worship cannot. While it may be grasped by the mind, its impact is not confined to the mind. Furthermore, ritual can serve as a vessel for divine energy—a form into which the Divine can flow and reside. There is an urgent need to restore ritual to its former glory—or perhaps propel it to new heights. Nobody would argue that ritual should remain unchanged from millennium to millennium; but “innovation” is not something to be undertaken lightly. Experimentation may be needed, guided always by wisdom and selfless intent; but due attention to tradition is of major importance.

If Christianity is to rebuild its rituals it should not ignore the accumulated wisdom and expertise of the western mystery tradition. Negative views of magic, which developed after the high Middle Ages, need to be set aside. Such views may have been justified because the lack of a secure ethical base allowed ceremonial magic to be abused. But Christian leaders should recognize that its sacraments and magical rituals came from common origins. Consecration and purification of the sanctuary, participants’ preparation for ritual, use of sensory stimulation or deprivation, and insightful understanding of words of power are prime ingredients. Ritual gestures should be made with profound feeling, sensitivity and devotion. Self-consciousness, boredom or resentment

will detract from their effectiveness. Poorly or carelessly performed ritual can easily become “empty” and meaningless. It might even attract negative energies.

Not all Christian denominations are obliged to take an interest in ritual; there are other valid spiritual paths.<sup>97</sup> But in those that do, clergy need to be better trained and more proficient. A useful step would be to include the study of ceremonial magic in seminary training. The minutiae of constructing sacred instruments and evoking elementals—the stuff of countless magical grimoires—is of little concern.<sup>98</sup>

Rather, training should focus on understanding the esoteric significance of Christian religious practices, developing the mind to create useful thoughtforms, and handling the powerful energies that can be invoked. Attention should also be given to the role of devic entities in ritual and to the means, including color and sound, of attracting them. Most importantly, anyone involved in magical ritual must be aware of the ethical responsibilities entailed. Ritual, religious or magical, must be directed to the group good and never to self-interest. To enter into such work without a strong commitment to a life of discipleship could spell disaster for the individual and anyone else that the rituals might affect.

Alice Bailey stresses the role that Masonic organizations—in which most likely she included Rosicrucian, Golden Dawn, and other occult fraternities in the western mystery tradition—can play in a future world religion. The Masonic movement, she asserted, “is the custodian of the law; it is the home of the Mysteries and the seat of initiation. It holds in its symbolism the ritual of Deity.”<sup>99</sup> She added:

In its ceremonials lies hid the wielding of the forces connected with the growth and life of the kingdoms of nature and the unfoldment of the divine aspects in man. In the comprehension of its symbolism will come the power to cooperate with the divine plan. It meets the need of those who work on the first Ray of Will or Power.<sup>100</sup>

In return, Christianity can provide the ethical base that the western mystery tradition has often lacked. The synthesis of Christianity and

the mystery tradition will help orient the latter toward positive work and away from the left-hand path.<sup>101</sup> To integrate the mystery tradition—particularly the various branches of Freemasonry—into Christianity may be as important as healing the sectarian divisions within Christianity and reaching out to other world religions.

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<sup>1</sup> The medieval Latin *pagina* apparently had also acquired this meaning in addition to its classical meaning of “page.”

<sup>2</sup> Lewis Spence. *The History and Origins of Druidism*. Aquarian Press, 1949, p. 100.

<sup>3</sup> See Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird. *The Secret Life of Plants*. Avon, 1973, p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> *Atharva Veda*, X.7. *Hymns from the Vedas*. (Transl: A. C. Bose.) Asia Publishing House, 1966, pp. 317-318.

<sup>5</sup> Indra and Vrtra can be compared with the Mesopotamian sun god *Marduk* and *Tiamat*, god of the salty sea. See for example: Karen Armstrong. *A History of God*. Ballantine Books, 1993, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Karl T. Jaspers. *The Origin and Goal of History*. (Transl: M. Bullock.) Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949/1953. For an in-depth study of the Axia Age see also: Karen Armstrong. *The Great Transformation*. Alfred Knopf, 2006. Zoroaster is often included in the list of Axial sages, although the best evidence is that he lived in the second millennium BCE.

<sup>7</sup> Mircea Eliade. *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*. Princeton University Press, 1958, pp. 200-273.

<sup>8</sup> *Yajur Veda*, 16.48. *Hymns from the Vedas*. (Transl: A. C. Bose.) Asia Publishing House, 1966, p. 41.

<sup>9</sup> E. A. Wallis Budge. *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*. Dover Publications, 1895/1967.

<sup>10</sup> Francesca Fremantle and Chogyam Trungpa. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Shambhala, pp. 96-97.

<sup>11</sup> Marvin W. Meyer. *The Ancient Mysteries*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987, pp. 113-154. See also: James G. Frazer. *The New Golden Bough*. S. G. Philips, 1959, pp. 309-316. It must be noted that accounts of the most gruesome rituals came from Christian historians.

<sup>12</sup> We might cite the popularity of tattoos and body-piercing in today’s society.

<sup>13</sup> *Genesis* 17:11-12.



- <sup>14</sup> Given when a boy is 13, or a girl 12, the rite signifies that the child has reached maturity and is now obligated to observe Mosaic Law.
- <sup>15</sup> Luther had gone into hiding at Wartburg Castle after he was condemned by the Diet of Worms.
- <sup>16</sup> Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI have gradually lifted restrictions on the Latin Mass, but it remains of interest to only small groups of traditionalists.
- <sup>17</sup> Charles W. Leadbeater. *Glimpses of Masonic History*. Theosophical Publishing House, 1926, pp. 25-191.
- <sup>18</sup> Walter F. Otto. "The Meaning of the Eleusinian Mysteries." Joseph Campbell (ed.). *The Mysteries*. Princeton University Press, 1955, pp. 14-31.
- <sup>19</sup> Rudolf Steiner. *The Gospel of St. John*. Anthroposophic Press, 1908/1940, pp. 64ff. See also: Manly P. Hall. *The Mystical Christ*. Philosophical Research Society, 1951, pp. 126-127.
- <sup>20</sup> Clement of Alexandria. *Letter on the Secret Gospel of Mark*, 1st fragment. (Transl: M. Smith.) Early Christian Writings.
- <sup>21</sup> Glossolalia is commonly referred to as "speaking in tongues." See for example: E. Glenn Hinson. "History of Glossolalia." *Glossolalia*, Abingdon Press, 1967
- <sup>22</sup> Marvin W. Meyer. *The Ancient Mysteries*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987, pp. 214-215. Capitalization in original.
- <sup>23</sup> Manfred Clauss. *The Roman Cult of Mithras*. (Transl: Richard Gordon). Routledge, 2000, pp. 131ff.
- <sup>24</sup> John Nash. "The Solar Angel." *The Beacon*, March/April 2001, pp. 7-14.
- <sup>25</sup> See for example: Leadbeater, *Glimpses of Masonic History*.
- <sup>26</sup> See for example: Israel Regardie. *The Golden Dawn*. Llewellyn, 1937/1961.
- <sup>27</sup> Rudolf Steiner. "*Freemasonry*" and *Ritual Work*. (Transl: J. Wood.) Steiner Books, 1904-1924/2007.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97. The validity of the charter was disputed by a number of Masonic organizations.
- <sup>29</sup> Hella Wiesberger. "Preliminary Remarks, II." "*Freemasonry*" and *Ritual Work*. Steiner Books, 2007, p. 144.
- <sup>30</sup> Israel Regardie. *Ceremonial Magic: A Guide to the Mechanisms of Ritual*. Aquarian Press, 1980, p. 59.
- <sup>31</sup> A famous example in which precautions were only barely successful is cited by David Conway in *Ritual Magic: An Occult Primer*. Dutton, pp. 199-201.
- <sup>32</sup> Gabriel Naudé. *Apology for Great Men Suspected of Magic*, 1625. Quoted in: Frances Yates. *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*. Routledge, 1972, p. 146.
- <sup>33</sup> John Nash. "Esoteric Healing in the Orthodox, Roman and Anglican Churches." *Esoteric Quarterly*, Spring 2007, pp. 37-50.
- <sup>34</sup> Malcolm C. Duncan. *Masonic Ritual and Monitor*. David McKay, (undated), pp. 9-13.
- <sup>35</sup> The main doors of medieval churches often resembled a vulva, providing an interesting perspective on sacred space.
- <sup>36</sup> Mircea Eliade. *The Sacred and the Profane*. (Transl: W. R. Trask.) Harvest Books, 1957, pp. 20-65.
- <sup>37</sup> Francis King and Stephen Skinner. *Techniques of High Magic*. Destiny Books, pp. 186-200. These authors point out that the pentagram must be traced in a clockwise direction to accomplish banishing.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159. Similarity with the ending of the Lord's Prayer will immediately be apparent.
- <sup>39</sup> Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, pp. 121-122.
- <sup>40</sup> Jacques Henry. *Mozart the Freemason*. Inner Traditions, 1991/2006, especially p. 3.
- <sup>41</sup> See the discussion in: Hal Taussig. *A New Spiritual Home*. Poleridge Press, 2006, pp. 14ff, 56.
- <sup>42</sup> Israel Regardie. *The Golden Dawn*. Llewellyn, 1937/1961, p. 92.
- <sup>43</sup> Mary K. Greer. *Women of the Golden Dawn*. Park Street Press, 1995, p. 126.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> The apostolic succession has always been claimed by the Roman, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglican churches. However, it is interesting to note that, with increasing emphasis on sacramental ritual, Neo-Orthodox Lutherans have re-established an apostolic succession with the help of the Old Catholic Church.
- <sup>46</sup> Quoted in Charles W. Leadbeater. *The Hidden Life in Freemasonry*. Kessinger, 1926/1991, p. 118.
- <sup>47</sup> Éliphas Lévi. *Transcendental Magic*. (Transl: A. E. Waite.) Weiser, 1896/1981), p. 209. Lévi goes on to explain that "the number forty is sacred, and its very figure is magical."
- <sup>48</sup> Gorg Dehn (ed.). *The Book of Abramelin: a new Translation*. Ibis Press, 15th century/2006, pp. 91-92.
- <sup>49</sup> The ruling supposedly relieved the laity from the burden of trying to assess a priest's state of grace.

- <sup>50</sup> Malcolm C. Duncan. *Masonic Ritual and Monitor*. McKay, [undated], p. 94.
- <sup>51</sup> See the discussion in: Alice A. Bailey. *A Treatise on White Magic*. Lucis, 1934, pp. 10-12.
- <sup>52</sup> Éliphas Lévi. *Transcendental Magic*. (Transl: A. E. Waite.) Weiser, 1896/1981, pp. 238-239.
- <sup>53</sup> Gorg Dehn (ed.). *The Book of Abramelin: a new Translation*. Ibis Press, 15th century/2006, pp. 106-107.
- <sup>54</sup> Scott Cunningham. *Earth Power*. Llewellyn, 1983, pp. 5-6.
- <sup>55</sup> Alice A. Bailey. *The Destiny of the Nations*. Lucis, 1949, p. 131.
- <sup>56</sup> Dion Fortune. *Applied Magic*. Aquarian Press, 1962/1979, p. 19.
- <sup>57</sup> Alice A. Bailey. *Letter on Occult Meditation*. Lucis, 1922, p. 129.
- <sup>58</sup> *A Book of Pagan Rituals*. Samuel Weiser, 1974, p. 18.
- <sup>59</sup> Leadbeater, *The Hidden Life in Freemasonry*, p. 132.
- <sup>60</sup> Mircea Eliade. *The Myth of the Eternal Return*. Princeton University Press, 1954, pp. 34-35.
- <sup>61</sup> The traditional divine offices are: Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline.
- <sup>62</sup> Hella Wiesberger. "Preliminary Remarks, II." *"Freemasonry" and Ritual Work*. Steiner Books, 2007, pp. 133-134.
- <sup>63</sup> King & Skinner. *Techniques of High Magic*, p. 159. [Emphasis in original].
- <sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159-160.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.
- <sup>66</sup> Joseph Ratzinger. *Feast of Faith*. (Transl: G. Harrison.) Ignatius Press, 1981, pp. 40-41.
- <sup>67</sup> The practice of infant baptism came later, but it has never been accepted universally.
- <sup>68</sup> See for example: *Mark* 1:9.
- <sup>69</sup> Annie Besant. *Esoteric Christianity*. Theosophical Publishing House, 1953/1977, pp. 236-241.
- <sup>70</sup> Tertullian. *De baptismo* ("On Baptism"), chs. III, V. (Transl: S. Thelwall.) Christian Classics Library.
- <sup>71</sup> Timothy Ware. *The Orthodox Church*. Penguin Books, 1963/1997, p. 275.
- <sup>72</sup> Alec Robertson. *Requiem*. Cassell, 1967), p. 21.
- <sup>73</sup> *Luke* 24:30-34.
- <sup>74</sup> *Acts* 2:42-46.
- <sup>75</sup> *Matthew* 26:20-30; *Mark* 14:17-26; *Luke* 22:14-38; *John* 13:4ff.
- <sup>76</sup> However elements of the Seder, like the use of bitter herbs or the cup of wine for Elijah, were not recorded in the gospel accounts of the Last Supper and never passed into eucharistic liturgy. Furthermore, the Eucharist was celebrated weekly in the early church whereas the Seder was observed only at Passover.
- <sup>77</sup> This insight, due to H. Gese, is discussed in: Ratzinger, *Feast of Faith*, pp. 51-60.
- <sup>78</sup> *Genesis* 14:18.
- <sup>79</sup> *Proverbs* 9:5. *Chokmah* (Hebrew: חִכְמָה) and *Sophia* (Greek Σοφία) both mean Wisdom, which in late-biblical Judaism was taking on the character of a feminine aspect of God.
- <sup>80</sup> In Anglo-Catholicism and Neo-Lutheranism some pre-Reformation doctrines have also been recovered, along with devotion to the Virgin Mary.
- <sup>81</sup> Éliphas Lévi. *The History of Magic*. Samuel Weiser, 1913, p. 374.
- <sup>82</sup> Dion Fortune. *The Training and Work of an Initiate*. Aquarian Press, 1930, pp. 88-89.
- <sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.
- <sup>84</sup> Both are published by the Theosophical Publishing House.
- <sup>85</sup> Annie W. Besant. *Esoteric Christianity*. Theosophical Publishing House, 1914/1953, foreword. The foreword to the more generally available 1901 edition is shorter and does not include this quote.
- <sup>86</sup> Wedgewood's ordination to the episcopate was performed by Bishop Willoughby of the Old Catholic Church, shortly before the latter submitted to Roman obedience.
- <sup>87</sup> Leadbeater attended All Saints Church, Margaret Street, London, one of the "mother" churches of the Oxford Movement.
- <sup>88</sup> Source: The Liberal Catholic Church Worldwide.
- <sup>89</sup> Grape juice is typically preferred over wine because of Theosophy's insistence on abstinence.
- <sup>90</sup> Charles W. Leadbeater. *The Science of the Sacraments*. Apocryphile Press, 1920/2000, pp. 61, 75-86.
- <sup>91</sup> *Book of Common Prayer*. General Confession in the rite of Holy Communion, 1945.
- <sup>92</sup> Leadbeater, *The Science of the Sacraments*, especially pp. 23, 119.
- <sup>93</sup> Sandra Hodson (ed). *Light of the Sanctuary*. Theosophical Publishers, 1988, p. 162.
- <sup>94</sup> Leadbeater, *The Science of the Sacraments*, especially pp. 198-199.
- <sup>95</sup> Rudolf Steiner. *The Gospel of St. John*. Anthroposophic Press, 1908/1940, p. 114.
- <sup>96</sup> This is not to say that the Mass should always be celebrated in the vernacular. But occasional use of the Latin—and with it, Gregorian

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Chant—will preserve 1,500 years' of tradition and the energy invested in it.

<sup>97</sup> Ritual does not necessarily demand elaborate or affluent settings. However, given the importance of a dedicated sacred space, it is hard to see how religious groups that meet in bars, warehouses, truck-stops, and skate-board facilities can develop successful ritual traditions.

<sup>98</sup> Fortune, *The Training and Work of an Initiate*, pp. 99-107.

<sup>99</sup> Alice A. Bailey. *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy*. Lucis, 1957, p 511.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Fortune, *The Training and Work of an Initiate*, p. 89.

