



Type: Book Chapter

Change in Public Worship - In the Ordinances of the Gospel

Author(s): B.H. Roberts

Source: *New Witnesses for God: Volume I - Joseph Smith, The Prophet*

Published: Salt Lake City; Deseret News, 1911 (2nd Edition)

Pages: 91-105

CHAPTER V.

CHANGE IN PUBLIC WORSHIP—IN THE ORDINANCES OF THE GOSPEL.

It yet remains to note some of those changes in the public worship of the church, and in the ordinances of the gospel, which contributed to the great apostasy.

The simplicity of the Christian religion was made a reproach to the Church of Christ by the pagan priests. "The Christians have no temples, therefore they have no gods," was an argument sufficiently convincing to the heathens. It was but natural, perhaps, to seek to cast off this reproach: but the effort to do so led to the introduction of many ceremonies quite at variance with the gospel. The early Christian Saints were accustomed to meet on the first day of the week for public worship; the meetings, during the first century at least, being held, for the most part, in private houses. The ceremonies were of the simplest character. They consisted of reading the scriptures, the exhortation of the president of the assembly—"neither eloquent nor long, but full of warmth and love,"^a—the testimony of such as felt moved upon by the Holy Ghost to bear testimony, exhort or prophesy; the singing of hymns; the administration of the sacrament and prayers.

But all this was soon changed. The bishops and other public teachers in the third century, framed their discourses and exhortations according to the rules of Grecian eloquence; "and were better adapted," says a learned writer,^b "to call forth the admiration of the rude multitude who love display,

^aJustin Martyr, First Apology to the Emperor Antoninus Pius.

^bMosheim.

than to amend the heart. And that no folly and no senseless custom might be omitted in their public assemblies, the people were allowed to applaud their orators, as had been practiced in the forums and theatres; nay, they were instructed both to applaud and to clap the preachers." This was a wide departure from the spirit of meekness and humility enjoined by Messiah upon his ministers. And when to these customs was added the splendid vestments of the clergy, the magnificence of the temples, with all the pageantry of altars, surrounded with burning tapers, clouds of incense, beautiful images, the chanting of choirs, processions and other mummeries without number—one sees but little left of that simple worship instituted by the Messiah and his apostles.

About the third century incense began to be used. The Christians of the first and second centuries abhorred the use of incense in public worship as being a part of the worship of idols.^c It first became a custom to use it at funerals against offensive smells; then in public worship to disguise the bad air of crowded assemblies; then at the consecration of bishops and magistrates, and by these steps its use at last degenerated into a superstitious rite.

In the fourth century matters became still worse. The public supplications by which the pagans were accustomed to appease their gods were borrowed from them, and were celebrated in many places with great pomp. To the temples, to water consecrated in due form, and the images of holy men, the same efficacy was ascribed and the same privileges assigned as had been attributed to the pagan temples, statues and lustrations before the advent of Christ.^d

In the third century also arose the worship of martyrs.

^cTertullian's Apology, ch. xiii.

^dMosheim's Eccl. Hist., vol. i, bk. ii, ch. iv.

It is true the worship or adoration paid to them was relative, and a distinction was made between the worship of martyrs and the worship paid to God; but by degrees the worship of martyrs was made to conform with that which the pagans had in former times paid to their gods.^e This was done out of indiscreet eagerness to allure the pagans to embrace Christianity.^f “Then Gregory [surnamed Thaumaturgus on account of the numerous miracles he is said to have wrought—born in Pontus, in the second decade of the third century] perceived that the ignorant and simple multitude persisted in their idolatry, on account of the sensuous pleasures and delights it afforded—he allowed them in celebrating the memory of the holy martyrs, to indulge themselves and give a loose to pleasure (i. e., as the thing itself, and both what precedes and what follows, place beyond all controversy, he allowed them at the sepulchres of the martyrs on their feast days, to dance, to use sports, to indulge in conviviality, and do all things that the worshipers of idols were accustomed to do in their temples, on their festival days), hoping that in process of time they would spontaneously come over to a more becoming and correct manner of life.”^g

While pagan rites and ceremonies were increasing in the church, the gifts and graces characteristic of apostolic times seemed to have gradually departed from it. Protestant writers insist that the age of miracles closed with the fourth or fifth century, and that after that the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost must not be expected. Catholic writers, on the other hand, insist that miracles have always continued in the church yet those spiritual manifestations which they describe after the fourth and fifth centuries savor of invention

^eHistorie de Manicheism, tom ii, p. 642.

^fEccl. Hist. (Mosheim), vol. i, bk. ii, part ii.

^gNyssen's Life of Gregory Thaumaturgus.

on the part of the priests and childish credulity on the part of the people; or else what is claimed to be miraculous falls far short of the power and dignity of those spiritual manifestations which the primitive church was wont to witness. The virtues and prodigies ascribed to the bones and other relics of the martyrs and saints are purile in comparison with the healings, by the anointing with oil and the laying on of hands, speaking in tongues, interpretations, prophecies, revelations, casting out devils in the name of Jesus Christ; to say nothing of the gifts of faith, wisdom, knowledge, discernment of spirits, etc., common in the church in the days of the apostles.^h There is nothing in the scriptures or in reason that would lead one to believe that the miraculous gifts were to be discontinued. Still this plea is made by modern Christians—explaining the absence of these spiritual powers among them—that the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost were only intended to accompany the proclamation of the gospel during the first few centuries until the church was able to make its way without them, and then they were to be done away. It is sufficient to remark upon this that it is mere assumption and stands without warrant either of scripture or right reason, and proves that men had so far changed the religion of Jesus Christ that it became a form of godliness without the power thereof.ⁱ

^hI Cor. xii: 8-10.

ⁱ"It does not appear that these extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit (speaking of I Cor. xii) were common in the church for more than two or three centuries. We seldom hear of them after that fatal period when the Emperor Constantine called himself a Christian; and from a vain imagination of promoting the Christian cause thereby heaped riches and power and honor upon Christians in general, but in particular upon the Christian clergy. From this time they [the spiritual gifts] almost totally ceased; very few instances of the kind were found. The cause of this was not (as has been supposed) because there was no more occasion for them, because all the world was become Christians. This is a miserable mistake, not a twentieth part of it was then

It appears to have been the custom of the apostles in the case of members of the church grievously transgressing the moral law of the gospel, to require repentance and confession before the church; and in the event of a stubborn adherence to sin the offender was excommunicated, that is, he was excluded from the communion of the church and the fellowship of the saints. For the crimes of murder, idolatry and adultery some of the churches excommunicated forever those guilty of them; in other churches they were received back, but only after long and painful probation.

The manner in which excommunication was performed in apostolic times is not clear, but there is every reason to believe the process was very simple. In the course of time, however, this simple form of excommunication was changed, by being burdened with many rites and ceremonies borrowed from pagan sources.^j It was not enough that the fellowship of the saints be withdrawn from the offender and he left to the mercy of God, or the buffetings of Satan, according as he was worthy of the one or the other; but the church must load him down with anathemas too terrible to contemplate. The power of excommunication, too, eventually, passed from the

nominally Christians. The real cause of it was the love of many, almost all Christians, so-called, was waxed cold. The Christians had no more of the spirit of Christ than the other heathens. The Son of Man, when he came to examine his church, could hardly find faith upon earth. This was the real cause why the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost were no longer to be found in the Christian Church—because the Christians were turned heathens again and only had a dead form left.”—John Wesley (Wesley's Works, vol. vii, Sermon 89, pages 26, 27).

^j“That it was proper for the Christian bishops to increase restraints upon the licentiousness of transgressors will be readily granted by all who consider the circumstances of those times. But rather it was for the advantage of Christianity to borrow rules for this salutary ordinance from the enemies of truth, and thus to consecrate, as it were, a part of pagan superstition, many persons very justly call in question.”—Eccl. History (Mosheim), book i, cent. ii, part ii, ch. iii.

body of the church into the hands of the bishops, and finally into those of the pope. At first excommunication meant the loss of the fellowship of the saints and such other punishment as God himself might see proper to inflict ; the church leaving the Lord to be the minister of his own vengeance. But gradually it came to mean in some instances banishment from home and country, the confiscation of property, the loss not only of church fellowship, but loss of civil rights and the rights of Christian burial. In the case of a monarch, excommunication absolved his subjects from their allegiance ; and in the case of a subject, it robbed him of the protection of his sovereign. No anathema was so terrible but it was pronounced against the excommunicated, until the sweet mercies of God were overshadowed by the black pall of man's inhumanity.

The outward ordinances of the gospel consisted of baptism, the laying on of hands for the imparting of the Holy Ghost, and the Lord's supper. The laying on of hands was also employed in ordaining men to the priesthood and in administering to the sick. In the latter case it was accompanied by anointing with oil.

Baptism was administered by immersing the candidate in water. The only prerequisites were faith in Jesus Christ and repentance.

As soon as the candidate professed these he was admitted into the church by baptism.^k In a short time, however, the simplicity of this ordinance was corrupted and burdened with useless ceremonies. In the second century the newly baptized converts, since by baptism they had been born again, were taught to exhibit in their conduct the innocence of little infants. Milk and honey, the common food of infants, were administered to them, after their baptism, to re-

^kActs ii: 41. Acts viii: 12, 35-40.

mind them of their infancy in the church. Moreover, since by baptism they were released from being servants of the devil, and became God's free men, certain forms borrowed from the Roman ceremony of manumission of slaves was employed in baptism. As by baptism also they were supposed to be made God's soldiers, like newly enlisted soldiers in the Roman army, they were sworn to obey their commander.^l A century later (the third) further ceremonies were added. It was supposed that some evil spirit was resident in all vicious persons and impelled them to sin. Therefore, before entering the sacred fount for baptism, an exorcist by a solemn, menacing formula declared them free from the bondage of Satan, and hailed them servants of Christ.^m After baptism the new converts returned home "decorated with a crown and a white robe; the first being indicative of their victory over the world and their lusts, the latter of their acquired innocence."ⁿ We have already noted the fact that baptism was administered in the days of the apostles as soon as profession of faith and repentance was made, but in the second and third centuries baptism was only administered twice a year, and then only to such candidates as had gone through a long preparation and trial.^o The times chosen for the administra-

^lMosheim, vol. i, book i, part ii, ch. iv.

^mThat exorcism was not annexed to baptism till some time in the third century, and after the admission of the Platonic philosophy into the church, may almost be demonstrated. The ceremonies used at baptism in the second century are described by Justin Martyr in his second apology, and by Tertullian in his book "de Coronatione Militis." But neither makes mention of exorcism. This is a cogent argument to prove that it was admitted by Christians after the times of these fathers, and of course in the third century. Egypt perhaps first received it.—Murdock's Mosheim, vol. i, p. 190. (Note.)

ⁿMosheim, vol. i, book i, part ii, ch. iv.

^oAccording to Schlegel, the so-called apostolic constitution (b. viii. ch. xxxii) enjoined a three years' course of preparation; yet with allowance of some exceptions.

tion of the ordinance were on the vigils of Easter and Whitsuntide,^p and in the fourth century it had become the custom to accompany the ceremony with lighted wax candles, to put salt—an emblem of purity and wisdom—in the mouth of the baptized, and everywhere a double anointing was administered to the candidates, the one before the other after baptism.^q

It must have been early in the third century that the form of baptism began to be changed. Up to this time it had been performed only by immersion of the whole body. But in the first half of the third century, Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, during a controversy respecting the re-baptism of those who in times of persecution had denied the faith, decided that those whose weak state of health did not permit them to be immersed, were sufficiently baptized by being sprinkled.^r The first case of this kind of baptism is related by Eusebius. The person to whom it was so administered was Novatus, a desperate heretic, who created a schism in the church and became the founder of a sect. He was among the number of so-called Christians who put off baptism as long as he dared, in order to enjoy a life of sin and then through baptism, just before death, obtain forgiveness—a custom very prevalent in those times. Novatus being attacked with an obstinate disease, and supposed to be at the point of death, was baptized by having water sprinkled upon him as he lay in bed; “if indeed,” says Eusebius, “it be proper to say one like him did receive baptism.”^s

^pThat is, in the evening preceding the day on which Messiah is supposed to have arisen from the dead, and the evening preceding the seventh Sunday after Easter, the anniversary of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost was poured out upon the Apostles in a remarkable manner. (Acts ii.)

^qMosheim, vol. i, book ii, part ii, ch. iv.

^rCyprian's Epistles, letter 76.

^sEusebius Eccl. Hist., b. vi, ch. 43.

This innovation continued to spread until now the general rule among Christians is to baptize by sprinkling or pouring. For this change there is no warrant of revelation. It destroys the symbol there is in baptism as taught by Messiah and his apostles—that of a burial and resurrection—of a death and re-birth—a death unto sin, a birth unto righteousness. It is one of those innovations which changed an ordinance of the everlasting covenant.¹

About the same time that the form of administering baptism was changed it began to be misapplied, that is, it was administered to infants. Just when this custom came into vogue may not be determined, but clearly it has no warrant for its existence either in the doctrine or practice of the apostles or any New Testament writer. No truth is more plainly taught by the apostles than that baptism is for the remission of sins, and must be preceded by faith and repentance; and as infants are incapable of sin, and of exercising faith, or of repenting, evidently they are not fit subjects for baptism.

Still it became the custom in the latter part of the second century or early in the third to baptize infants. In the

¹In writing to the saints of Rome, Paul says: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" (Rom. vi: 3-5). In writing to the saints of Colosse, the same apostle reminds them that they had been "Buried with him [Christ] in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God who hath raised him from the dead" (Col. ii: 12). In these passages the terms "buried" and "planted" are in plain allusion to the manner in which the saints had received the ordinance of baptism, which could not have been by sprinkling or pouring, as there is no burial or planting in the likeness of Christ's death, or being raised in the likeness of his resurrection in that; but in immersion there is:—"The Gospel" (Roberts), page 185.

year 253 A. D., a council of sixty bishops, in Africa—at which Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, presided—considered the question whether infants should be baptized within two or three days after birth, or whether baptism should be deferred until the eighth day, as was the custom of the Jews in respect to circumcision. The council decided that they should be baptized at once, within a day or two after birth." It will be observed that the question was not as to whether infants should be baptized or not, but when they should be baptized, within a day or two after birth or not until they were eight days old.

The matter was treated in the council as if infant baptism was a custom of long standing. This proves, not that infant baptism is a correct doctrine, or that it was derived from the teachings of the apostles—as some aver²—but that in a century or so after the introduction of the gospel, men began to pervert it by changing and misapplying its ordinances. The false doctrine of infant baptism is now practiced by nearly all so-called Christian churches, both Catholic and Protestant.

Much as the simple rite of baptism was burdened with useless ceremonies, changed in its form and misapplied, it was not more distorted than was the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The nature of the sacrament—usually called Eucharist—and the purposes for which it was instituted are so plain that he who runs may read. From Paul's description of the ordinance, it is clear that the broken bread was intended to be an emblem of the Messiah's broken body; the wine an emblem of his blood, shed for sinful man; and his disciples were to eat the one and drink the other in remembrance of him until he should return; and by this ceremony

¹Milner's Church Hist., vol. i, pp. 429, 430.

²Such is the opinion of Milner—Church Hist., vol. i, p. 430.

show forth the Lord's death.^w It was designed as a memorial of Messiah's great atonement for mankind, a token and witness unto the Father that the Son was always remembered. It was to be a sign that those partaking of it were willing to take upon them the name of Christ, to remember him always and keep his commandments. In consideration of these things being observed, the saints were always to have the Spirit of the Lord to be with them.

In this spirit and without great ceremony the sacrament was administered for some time. But in the third century there were longer prayers and more ceremony connected with the administration of the sacrament than in the century preceding. Disputations arose as to the proper time of administering it. Some considered the morning, others the afternoon, and some the evening the most suitable time. All were not agreed either as to how often the ordinance should be celebrated. Gold and silver vessels were used, and neither those doing penance, nor those unbaptized, though believers, were permitted to be present at the celebration of the ordinance; "which practice, it is well known, was derived from the pagan mysteries."^x Very much of mystery began to be associated with it even at an early date. The bread and the wine through the prayer of consecration were considered to undergo a mystic change, by which they were converted into and became the very body and the very blood of Jesus Christ: so that they were no longer regarded as emblems of Mes-

^w"The Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he brake it and said. Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner he took the cup, when he had supped, saying: This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." (I. Cor. xi: 23-26.)

^xMosheim's Eccl. Hist., bk. i, cent. iii, part ii, ch. iv.

siah's body and blood, but the body and blood itself.^y This is the doctrine of transubstantiation. This dogma established, it was but a short step to the "elevation of the host;" that is, the elevation of the bread and wine before it was distributed, so that it might be viewed and worshiped by the people. This was called the adoration of the symbols. It was idolatry—the worship of the bread and wine falsely taught to be the Lord Jesus.^z

^yProtestants combating the Catholic idea of the real presence of the flesh and blood in the Eucharist—transubstantiation—have endeavored to prove that this doctrine was not of earlier origin than the eighth century. In this, however, the evidence is against them. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, writing early in the second century, says of certain supposed heretics: "They do not admit of Eucharist and oblations, because they do not believe the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, who suffered for our sins." (Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrneans.) So Justin Martyr, also writing in the first half of the second century: "We do not receive them (the bread and wine) as ordinary food or ordinary drink; but as by the word of God Jesus Christ our Savior was made flesh, and took upon him both flesh and blood for our salvation, so also the food which was blessed by the prayer of the word which proceeded from him, and from which our flesh and blood, by transmutation, receive nourishment, is, we are taught, both the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh. (Justin's Apology to Emperor Antoninus.) After Justin's time the testimony of the fathers is abundant. There can be no doubt as to the antiquity of the idea of the real presence of the body and blood of Jesus in the Eucharist; but that proves—as we said of infant baptism—not that the doctrine is true, but that soon after the apostles had passed away, the simplicity of the gospel was corrupted or else entirely departed from.

^zAs evidence of the superstition which was connected with the Eucharist, note the following: "If any one through negligence, shall destroy the Eucharist, i. e., the sacrifice: let him do penance one year. * * * If he lets it fall on the ground, carelessly, he must sing fifty Psalms. Whoever neglects to take care of the sacrifice, so that worms get into it, or it lose its color, or taste, must do penance thirty or twenty days; and the sacrifice must be burned in the fire. Whoever turns up the cup at the close of the solemnity of the mass must do penance forty days. If a drop from the cup should fall on the altar, the minister must suck up the drop and do penance three days; and the linen cloth

Hence came the Mass, or the idea of a sacrifice being connected with the celebration of the Eucharist. It was held that as Jesus was truly present in the bread and wine he could be offered up as an oblation to his eternal Father. The death of the victim was not supposed to occur in reality, but mystically, in such a way, however, as to constitute a true sacrifice, commemorative of that of the cross and not different from it in essence. The same Victim was present, and offered up by Christ through his minister the priest. The sacrifice at the cross was offered with real suffering, true shedding of blood, and real death of the Victim; in the mass it was taught there was a mystical suffering, a mystical shedding of blood and a mystical death of the same Victim.

Into such absurdities was the simple sacrament of the Lord's Supper distorted! When attended with all the pomp and ceremony of splendid altars, lighted tapers, processions, elevations and chantings; offered up by the priests and bishops clad in splendid vestments and in the midst of clouds of incense, accompanied by mystic movements and genuflections of bishops and priests, the church could congratulate itself on having removed the reproach at the first fastened upon the Christians for not having altars and a sacrifice. The mass took away the reproach; and the new converts to Christianity were accustomed to see many of the same rites and ceremonies employed in this mystical sacrifice of the Son of God as they had seen employed in offering up sacrifices to the pagan deities.

In time the idea became prevalent that the body and blood of Messiah were equally and entirely present under each "species"—that is, equally and entirely present in the bread and in the wine; and was equally and entirely given

which the drop touched must be washed three times, over the cup, and the water in which it is washed be cast into the fire."—Decisions of Pope Gregory III.—Harduin's Concilia.

to the faithful which ever they received. This idea, of course, rendered it unnecessary to partake of both bread and wine—hence the practice of communion in one kind. That is, the sacrament was administered by giving bread alone to the communicant. To remark that this was changing the ordinance of the sacrament as instituted by Messiah—suppressing half of it in fact—can scarcely be necessary, since it is so well known that he administered both bread and wine when instituting the sacred ordinance.^a

Thus, through changing the ordinances of the gospel; by misapplying them in some cases, and adding pagan rites to them in others; by dragging into the service of the church the ceremonies employed in heathen temples in the worship of pagan gods; by departing from the moral law of the gospel, until the pages of Christian church history are well nigh as dark in immorality, as cruel and bloody as those that recount the wickedness of pagan Rome;^b by changing the form

^aLuke xxii. Matt. xxvi.

^bThe wickedness of the Christian world in the dark ages and during the progress of the "Reformation" was such that the author of the "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," in closing his famous sixteenth chapter which deals with the persecution of the Christians during the first three centuries of our era, can say, and his arraignment cannot be successfully contradicted: "We conclude this chapter by a melancholy truth which obtrudes itself on the reluctant mind; that even admitting without hesitation or inquiry, all that history has recorded, or devotion has feigned, on the subject of martyrdom, it must still be acknowledged, that the Christians, in course of their intestine dissensions, have inflicted far greater severities on each other, than they had experienced from the zeal of infidels. During the ages of ignorance which followed the subversion of the Roman Empire in the west, the bishops of the imperial city extended their dominion over the laity as well as the clergy of the Latin church. The fabric of superstition which they had erected, and which might long have defied the feeble efforts of reason, was at length assaulted by a crowd of daring fanatics, who from the twelfth to the sixteenth century assumed the popular character of reformers. The church of Rome defended by violence the empire which she had acquired by fraud; a system of peace and benevolence was soon

and departing from the spirit of government in the church as fixed by Jesus, coupled with the corrupting influence of luxury which came with repose and wealth, together with the destruction visited upon the noblest and best of the servants and saints of God by the pagan persecutions which continued through three centuries—all this, I say, contributed to bring to pass the destruction of the Church of Christ on earth.

disgraced by proscriptions, war, massacres and the institution of the holy office (the Inquisition). And as the reformers were animated by the love of civil as well as of religious freedom, the Catholic princes connected their own interest with that of the clergy, and enforced by fire and the sword the terrors of spiritual censurers. In the Netherlands alone more than one hundred thousand of the subjects of Charles V. are said to have suffered by the hand of the executioner; and this extraordinary number is attested by Grotius (See Grotius *Annal. de Rebus Belgiers*).
* * * * If we are obliged to submit our belief to the authority of Grotius, it must be allowed, that the number of Protestants who were executed in a single province and a single reign, far exceed that of the primitive martyrs in the space of three centuries, and of the Roman Empire.”—“*Decline and Fall*,” vol. i, ch. xvi.