international, practical principle of infinite importance, of which the world is only beginning now to see the possibilities. This also plainly shows Christ's thought of God as a life and Spirit, inspiring every human soul, and therefore demanding for every human soul our respect and reverence and love. We shall never wish to recur to the old elementary morality, the old sacrificial worship, the old hostile relations of men and nations to one another. As little ought we to wish to cling to the old thought of God from which they sprang.[1]

[1] J. M. Wilson, *Christ's Thought of God.*

The Use of Sign and Symbol in Worship.[1]

By the Reverend H. J. Wotherspoon, D.D., Edinburgh.

In the life of the Spirit, worship is an important element; and in worship symbolism is probably more or less necessary, and is presumably in some measure serviceable. In that aspect—of edification and of assistance to devotion, and not in the æsthetic or antiquarian—I propose to consider the subject assigned to me. Worship is communion with God. Public worship is also communion of man with man, involving, therefore, the psychology of the group. Is it, as such, helped by the use of sign and symbol? Can we by such use reach better expression towards God, or realize better a common consciousness in Divine things? Can we thereby find a greater joy, or obtain a closer fellowship with one another? That is, I take it, our question, and when it is put in that broad way, the answer would, I think, with all due precaution and qualification, be necessarily in the affirmative, and the question would remain a question rather of degree.

Certain distinctions might be necessary:—we must not confuse symbolism with ritual, or with ceremony, or with ornament. Ritual has to do with *rite*—and a rite is an act of Divine service (such as, *e.g.*, marriage or confirmation), and it may include the use of symbol, or it may not. Ceremony, again, relates entirely to the manner of doing things, which must be done somehow, and may be better done in a manner agreed. Ornament, on the other hand, is an attempt at beauty, generally unsuccessful. Ornament may of course be symbolic—for example, we may, very inappropriately, paint the cross on floor tiles, to be trodden under foot: but the symbolism has nothing to do with beauty, and decoration has no necessary connexion with symbolism.

[1] An address delivered at Aberdeen, September 19, 1919.

The criterion of symbolism is significance, and its significance is its whole value, which is more likely to lose by elaboration than to gain. Two bits of stick are tied together and set on a grave mound in France—there you have the symbol complete, and it means more thus than the marble which the Director of Graves may by and by substitute for it. *Sunt lacrimae rerum, et mentem mortalia tangunt.*

One should distinguish, too, between the symbol and the sign. The rude cross on the soldier's grave is a symbol—the dinted helmet which lies on the mound below it is not a symbol, but a sign. Both of them 'touch the mind,' but in different ways. The symbol is metaphorical—the sign is factual; the symbol implies something abstract—the sign reminds of something that has happened or that is true. In marriage, for example, the ring is a symbol—of perpetuity and fidelity: the grasping of hands is a sign, *de presenti*, of the covenant then made. The cross is a symbol of sacrifice, the crucifix is not a symbol, but a sign—it reminds of the actuality of the Atonement, that Christ bore our sins actually thus on the gibbet. A symbol signifies—a sign shows. A sacrament does both.

As for the legitimacy of symbol: its philosophic background is in the nature of things and in our constitution. '*The invisible things of God*,' says the Apostle, '*are from the creation of the world clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.*' Everywhere the material is expressive of the spiritual. The Divine thought repeats itself in more speeches than one, and on more planes than one; so the spiritual is echoed and repeated in the physical. '*Things made*,' are expressive of truths. Nature is one vast symbolism — the Universe is sacramental — it is the

outward sign of the inward and heavenly. The concrete and the abstract correspond and answer to one another. Light and truth, darkness and evil, these have more than analogy — they connote each other, something identical expresses itself in each of their languages. God, the God of truth, has said, '*Let there be light.*' We who are in God's likeness understand both forms of speech: the voice of creation and the voice of the Spirit, who bears witness with our spirit—both are intelligible to us, and both carry to us the same messages. In the speech which addresses itself to our senses, we recognize light as the same term which in the world of thought we know as truth or in the world of emotion as joy, while darkness is the material expression of ignorance, evil, sorrow. Again, the right line in some way describes the right action: the crooked line depicts the ways of crooked men. These correspondences are not fanciful—they are real: and on them depends our power of ordered thought and of communicated thought. All language is primarily symbolic—its terms are originally physical terms. *Rectus* means 'strong' before it comes to mean 'righteous.' We discover community of experience first in physical relations, and from that we obtain a nomenclature for community of experience in the abstract and subjective. And this primary characteristic of the vehicle of thought does not, at later points, lose its efficiency: we constantly return upon it to verify and to simplify our abstractions—as, for example, in our more recent metaphysic with its uncouth vocabulary of 'this-ness' and 'that-ness,' 'thus-ness' and 'otherwise-ness,' 'here-ness' and 'there-ness.' All poetry and all genuine art (*i.e.* all suggestive art) are made possible only by this sacramental-ness of nature. Take from us the simile and the metaphor and the consciousness of the *lacrimae rerum*, the vision of nature as symbolic—poetry and art would be somewhat crippled of apparatus. Consider any of our Lord's parables—what is it but a quotation from nature or from the fact of things? Yet He reasons from it.

Deity indeed would seem to be the supreme symbolist, and we inevitably the imitators, as soon as we too begin to deal with things of God, whether to think of them or to speak. If one goes to Scripture—if one admits any prophetic origin to Old Testament systems of worship, any Divine prescription to the Old Testament methods of communion with God, or any foundation of inspiration to prophecy itself — then one finds oneself involved in the sanction of symbolism as the natural vehicle of worship, and in the conception of worship as a body of symbolisms. Set all that aside, if you feel free to do so, as obsolete and of another dispensation (though the Divine nature and human nature and the nature of things persist as they were)—come into the new age of realities in the Spirit: and you find that the central rites of the new life, the spiritual life, are symbols and much more—symbol and reality blent into sacrament; and in the sacrament (if our 'Confession' stands for true witness) you find the living Christ, and the flowing Spirit of God. So far as rite or worship are prescribed by our Lord, they are sacramental: and whatever else sacrament may be, it is first and on the face of it, *symbol.*

There is perhaps something besides in such suggestion as the Apocalypse supplies in its descriptions of the worship of Heaven. The worship there described is symbolic in setting and acts: the altar, the Lamb, the white garments, the crowns, the palms, the harps, the incense, the gestures are symbols: without them there would not remain much except the Tersanctus, the Ascriptions, and the responsive Amens. Of course the whole vision is symbolic, and therefore perhaps there is the less to be learnt from its details, so far as these illustrate our subject. Yet there is this, that one would hardly expect to find the harmful or the forbidden or the useless employed to describe for us what it is intended to represent as the pattern in the heavens. So far as a general review of Scripture may take us, the symbolic and the significant do not, in fact, seem to be proscribed. One might almost be carried so far as to suppose that their use was encouraged, or at least was regarded as natural—perhaps as in some degree requisite for the expression of things otherwise unutterable. For, as the sacraments imply, there is after all an irreducible minimum of symbolism; at least, if even that minimum is to be avoided, we must adopt the methods of Quakerism, and abandon what most Christians hold for normal and fundamental to Christian worship. And there are symbols of universal sanction, such as the uplifted hand of benediction, which comparatively few of us disuse. The question after all is one of degree.

And so I think it ought to be. No one can

very well contend that any frequent or extensive use of symbolism is *necessary* to worship. Mohammedanism demonstrates the contrary; for Mohammedanism excludes the use of symbol (except in gesture), and yet has a vivid and universally observed worship. On the other hand, it must be remembered that Mohammedanism has extremely little to symbolize. Its creed is a brief negative, '*there is no God but God*'—with as brief a citation of testimony, '*And Mohammed is His prophet.*' One cannot symbolize a negative, or a man. Mohammedanism is the religion of the *moyen homme sensuel*, be he Scot or Arab:—a belief that there is a God, and fate (or luck), and heaven for all but exceptional rascals, once they are dead. It is the common creed of the ordinary man—and it needs no symbol, for it has no mystery, nothing higher than the average sensual life which suggests it. Occasion for symbol arises in proportion to the richness of faith, the complexity of religious experience, and the apprehension of the mystery of God.

The power of the symbol, I repeat, lies in its significance. It can suggest so much, and so instantly, and to all simultaneously: and that without elaboration or the chilling pause which any attempt to say in words the same thing must impose. Take the commonest of symbols, one which I have already instanced — the uplifted hand of blessing; see how it moves a multitude, imposes a mood, bends all in one emotion as the wind sweeps the cornfield. Consider how much it summarizes—of God the Father, of the mission of Christ which in the act re-emerges from the heavens, of the communion of the Holy Ghost, of the forgiveness of sins, of the fellowship of the flock, of the presence of the supernatural in the Church. All that is implied, and those who are submitted to it feel together in thus meeting the thought of God, the faith of Christ, the pulse of the Spirit's life. Or, again, how long will it take to say what is said by those two bits of stick on the soldier's grave? how else could you say it to every passer-by? how else touch every heart to the message? There you have the power of the symbol to unite, to embrace in one atmosphere the whole group with which you desire to deal. The symbol creates its own atmosphere. It is able to suggest—it appeals to imagination and association. It brings together the distant in time and space—what it means to us it has meant to so many of all the ages—what it means to us it means to men of our faith the world over. And it has the power of allusion: on the moment it brings before the mind a world of recollection, and places the soul in contact with its beliefs and hopes. It finds the shortest way to the heart. I think again of the cross on the soldier's grave and its infinite implication — of sacrifice, redemption, peace, promise, of the 'body still united to Christ,'—could any inscription say as much? or say it and be felt, as all men understand this? Obviously the symbol has certain values of expression and appeal which words attain with difficulty. It is significant, and conveys its significance without the cumber of mental effort or the challenge to thought, which the intellectual statement provokes. Hence its restfulness, itself a great value.

Whether these values can safely and profitably be appropriated to the service of worship is an open and fair question. Something certainly may be lost by disuse of the symbolic and significant: we may fall into dulness—we may lose ourselves in a dry intellectualism: worship may perish in dialectic—it may find itself left with only one side of human nature to which to appeal, and with only one method of addressing even that. Instead of worship, we may end in discussion; instead of communion we may have criticism. In the sum of it, we may reach a certain staleness; we may become wearisome to one another; we may find ourselves alone with the few who are capable of interest in discussion, or are equal to the sustained effort of intellectual appreciations. It is again an open and fair question whether we have not already reached this condition.

On the other hand, symbolism in worship has its undoubted dangers. It may be dangerous by excess, or by its fascination, and the pursuit of it for its own sake. It may overlay the understanding. It may drift into complication, multiplication, triviality. It may obsess worship. It may overtax the imagination and memory. It may become spiritually obsolete—for symbolism is always open to this risk, that its origin and sense may be forgotten in habit. The cross itself—it can be used meaninglessly, superfluously, commonly—without recollection: floriated and distorted and powdered about as a decoration for blank spaces: none considering its grimness or its glory.

That, however, is no more than to say that symbols are only for significance, and that, if they

lose significance, they are nothing at all. To conserve them as being anything, they had perhaps need to be few, simple, obvious, and very carefully protected for significant use—if it were practicable, I should wish to say, regulated use. The unauthorized symbol may be as irksome as fancy ritual can be.

A symbol is no symbol unless it is significant; and to be significant, it must be understood. Even the Sacraments need constant exposition—it is a sound canon of our practice that with the ordinance must go the Word—else the Sacraments themselves may become merely conventions (as Baptism, for lack of the Word to go with it, is in danger of becoming). A symbol, therefore, has the less value, unless it is vernacular to the people's thoughts, and unless for its meaning it is acceptable. In order to unite in one mind and impulse, the symbol must mean the same to all and be received of all. The Union Jack is an example of such a symbol. The Red Flag, on the other hand, is intelligible enough, and it may be trusted to move any assemblage—but it will not unite: there are those whom it is pretty certain to provoke.

This consideration is, I think, of importance when the question is one of symbolism in worship. The purpose is to edify—what cannot be done to edification had better not be done at all. Things may be lawful which are not expedient.

One may discuss such matters *in vacuo*, as I have been doing, considering symbolism simply on its merits and as it is in the nature of things. And if one does so, symbolism may certainly appear to have philosophic basis and scriptural sanction; one may recognize that it answers to a human instinct, even to a human need. One may think it to be a congruous aid to worship, holding as it does in presence of the mind beliefs which should never be absent from consciousness, yet do not admit of constant verbal repetition. One may see that it supplies a language for worship in which those may agree, whom dialectic statements would set in antagonism. One may even think that symbolism has this peculiar power because of a certain intrinsic spirituality, which gives it a universal appeal. And for such reasons one may wish that its use were native to our habit of mind, and that it could be freely and happily utilized in our spiritual life. I am doubtful, however, how far under present conditions any such free and happy use is possible. All things must be with a view to edification—and edification cannot be compulsory. There can be little process of edification within an atmosphere of nervousness, suspicion, or antagonism. I am therefore no advocate of the use of symbol or sign in worship beyond the understanding and the sympathies of our people. There are, however, canons of common sense which they will always appreciate. That which has to be done in some way, let it be done in a way which is significant of truth. That which has to exist in some form, let its form be expressive rather than meaningless. These simple rules cover a good deal, and most men will approve them. For the rest, if one desires a symbol, let him see that it is understood; but also, let him see that what it expresses is already in the people's heart. Our first task is to *teach the faith*. Where the faith is held in power and fulness, it will seek expression in all forms that offer themselves.

There are, however, certain primary and inevitable symbolisms to which either with a positive or else with a negative implication we cannot avoid being committed: those, namely, of *place*, *speech*, and *gesture*. For if we meet, we must meet somewhere; and being met, we must either speak or be silent; and some gesture of body we must assume. And these things are significant.

As to the first of them, our places of religion, there is comparatively little difficulty. Edifices expressive of worship are welcomed, often demanded. Now the edifice is itself the chief vessel of worship and in a sense its primary symbol. It means much that from the people themselves there comes the requirement that it should speak less exclusively of man and his need of instruction, more of God and of His glory and praise.

We less readily apprehend or appreciate the symbolism of united speech. Our people are without active vocal part in profession or in prayer. They are slow to assume it, and the ministry is slow to invite them to it. Yet what else gives expression to the priesthood of believers, or permits the sense of fellowship in faith and worship? Where responsive worship is heartily practised, it has certainly remarkable emotional value.

The most important, however, of all symbolisms, the simplest and the fundamental, is, I think, that of the personal gesture of the worshipper. That counts for more in the truth of the spirit than any apparatus of furnishing, and more than any action

which is not the man's own, but is the gesture or act of the officiant on his behalf? Apart from the divinely instituted Sacraments, as to which there is no question, this is the only department of symbolism which seems to me to be of immediate and inevitable importance. Because it is a symbolism in which we have no choice but every one of us to engage—we must worship in some attitude, and all attitudes are expressive; but much more, because attitude of body has intimate reflex influence on the attitude of mind and soul. As to this influence of body upon mind in our organism, modern psychology is clear. A threatening gesture awakes in us a threatening mood; a submissive gesture evokes a submissive mood. As the soldiers' song taught us (and it was scientifically accurate), the way to feel cheerful is to 'smile, smile, smile.' It helps then to reverence, if we place ourselves in a posture of reverence; it helps us to pray, if we assume an attitude of prayer. A grave mistake was (I humbly think) made, when about the sixties of last century we left our ancient and indeed primitive custom of standing in public prayer—religion lost more by that than it has gained or could gain by the acquisition of organs or insertion of painted windows. These are really 'externals' to worship, and to the worshippers; gesture of body, on the other hand, is no more external to him than gesture of soul—one's body is not external to oneself; gesture is of the man, and it affects him in the spirit. From the point of view of the spiritual life, nothing else within this range of consideration seems of comparable importance. Everything that is pretty, and even some things that are edifying, might profitably be sacrificed, if thereby it were possible to recover that which is reverent. It is by example rather than by precept that the recapture may be effected.

Contributions and Comments.

'No one shall snatch them out of my hand.'

It does not seem to have been recognized (there is, *e.g.*, no reference in R.V. or W.H.) that Jesus was quoting or echoing an O.T. prophecy when He said, 'They shall never perish, and *no one shall snatch* (ἁρπάζει) *them out of my hand.* My Father, which hath given them unto me, is greater than all; and *no one is able to snatch* (ἁρπάζειν) *out of my Father's hand.* I and my Father are one' (Jn 10^{28-30}).

It seems clear, however, that our Lord must have been referring definitely to Is 43^{13}. 'Yea, from everlasting I am He, and *there is none that can deliver* (*lit. snatch*) *out of my hand*' (ואין מידו מציל). הציל, which is one of the many words for '*deliver*' in Hebrew, has the particular significance of '*pull away*' or '*snatch.*'

The quotation appears to have been made directly from the Hebrew, rather than through the LXX, which is somewhat colourless (καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν μου ὁ ἐξαιρούμενος).

The recognition that our Lord had this Scripture in mind throws some light on that hard saying in Jn 17^{12} . . . 'that they may be one even as we are. While I was with them I kept them in thy name, which thou hast given me, and I guarded them, and not one of them perished, but the son of perdition, *that the Scripture might be fulfilled.*'

It has generally been taken for granted that the words 'that the Scripture might be fulfilled' were concerned with the 'perishing' of the 'son of perdition.' The R.V., *e.g.*, refers to Ps 109^{8}: 'Let his days be few and let another take his office.' Westcott prefers to take Ps 41^{9} as the Scripture in question: 'Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.' Now these two passages are quite apposite, even though perhaps superficially so, in Ac 1^{20} and Jn 13^{18}, where they are respectively cited. But neither of them is sufficiently relevant to the only point here raised, namely, the 'perishing' of the 'son of perdition,' to justify the advertisement of them as Scriptures that had been fullfiled. To drag them in is, in fact, far-fetched.

It seems much more probable that the words 'but the son of perdition' are parenthetic, and that the fulfilment of Scripture spoken of has no connexion with them at all, but with the main thoughts in the verse 'I kept them . . . I guarded them, and not one of them perished.'