

The ~~CO~~ ~~SD~~ ~~EL~~ ~~with~~ ~~out~~ RELIGION

By Charles Pinkney

GWR 11

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RELIGION: FIXATED ON EXTERNALS

Religion Plays Out in Costume

Institutional religion develops formalism and ceremony

Among all of the first principles to be emphasized is that God and his kingdom are not focused on the material world.

The Kingdom of God is not measured, touched, seen, nor is it a place. ***Any practice which turns our focus from the spiritual to the material needs to be examined and questioned.*** Just as costume does not make the man or the woman, neither should costume denote true spiritual character or authority. It is the life of the Spirit within the person that distinguishes them. In the media we routinely see "men of God" in special garb. Religious garments are used to denote rank or authority, just as in the military. The world has conditioned us to go along with this thinking, because it nurtures us with the religious pattern (paradigms) and finds it normal. But this attribute of religion is in fact, shallow, vain and erroneous. I assure you, priestly garb would never be the gauge of spiritual stature with Jesus nor his apostles.

Within **religion**, clerical garments (costume) is used to separate and denote those of various spiritual ranks. When men or women are able to wear spirituality as an ecclesiastical garment they are clearly saying to the flock that they possess superior spiritual status and knowledge of God, and are set apart from the rest of us. Likely, many of the clergy class believe they need to wear these kinds of costumes in order to faithfully execute their calling, or perhaps honor God. However, Jesus never commended spiritual men to dress up in order to denote their status. One of the things that Jesus noted about Pharisees was that there was pride connected to both their offices their costume. They wore them publicly and expected deference to be given to them.

Professional Performance

Both leadership skills and worship in the church world quickly can turn into performance. Worship should never become performance, but a communication of the heart. It is less for human approval than God's approval. It is directed only to the person of the Almighty. Preaching can surely be recognized as a gift which some possess more than others but can also be a snare when it becomes performance. When the congregants are more focused on oratory than understanding preaching and the preacher can become a kind of idol. Speaking the mind of Christ to persons in need edification is the key. A man of God yielded to the Spirit, may well *appear* dramatic, persuasive and captivating but these qualities will not be affected through rhetorical skills.

Religious performance is born out of time proven rituals. Activities which occur in church houses are broken into programs, including orders of worship. Each part of an order of worship, whether done by one person or several, can be viewed as sacramental or performance. If the rituals are sacramental it does not matter too much whether the recitations are performed well or not. Ritual stands on its own merit, from beginning to end. It is very hard to introduce any personality or interpretation into it. As far as the congregation is concerned, ritual is as relevant as we wish it to be. Ritual, in my opinion is a kind of counterfeit that has grown over time that substitutes revelation for priestly rites.

Ritualism in many non Christian religions bears a strong relationship to shamanism.

Ritualism may be said to actually be a **magic rite**.

In it, through a particular rite or ceremony using "sacred" elements or ingredients, God or Gods are supposedly invoked and appeased. In highly stylistic ceremonies the congregation is fixed upon - and watching. The focus is outward toward worldly forms but again, God is not found in these outward forms.

There are other kinds of worship services, in particular those that Protestant denominations follow, that are less sacramental. In such worship services every part of the order of service hinges on some kind of performance. Those congregations who have a more spiritual awareness make less of performance and stress the inner spiritual message. Part by part the elements of the Sunday or Sabbath ritual unfold. The congregation is either pleased (entertained) a little or a lot. If the choir sings well it is a good performance. If the soloist is doing a special number all of the congregation (audience) carefully scrutinizes every aspect of the performance, of course it is usually sub-par and amateurish but we tolerate sub-par because church does not normally have quality entertainment available (unless they are a very affluent church who can pay professionals.) Of course, it is the dream of most mega-churches to have all performances of professional quality.

From the opening prelude to the closing of the recessional with the organ pulling out all stops, the church has completed another program; another religious ritual. The performers have performed upon their respective stages, the audience has 'spectated' from their pews.

The less spiritual the church, the more the emphasis remains upon performance and show. The more the demand for performance the greater the performance pressure. The greater the self awareness, the less the ability to sense God in the parts. Conversely the more spiritual the ministry the less there is a sense that was performed. A transparent minister is God conscious and less self conscious.

What is the purpose of Christians coming together? I believe that it is to solicit God's manifestation among them. God wishes to reveal his glory but this will not occur with our focus and attention of vain religious performance.

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