

MYSTICISM AND MAGIC

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TODAY, just as it was in Balzac's or Nietzsche's day, the world is full of mediocre Christianity and gregarious Christians, religionists seeking the niches of saints through the tactics of vulgarians and philistines. If their religious spirit was not weak and worldly their flesh would not be so willing to join in the ribald jubilee of jazz triumphant; nor would they find it necessary to develop that herd instinct which is used to replace a higher faculty's development—mystic exaltation and spiritual communion. The modern age is seemingly set on that specious spiritualization of sensuality and commercialism which stops at nothing too sacred for spoliation, nothing too noble for debasement, and nothing too pure for adulteration or ravagement. This fake anagogy, this sham social uplift and phoney religious hypothecation, in practically every modern effort toward valid theological hypotheses, is the very antithesis and ultimate nemesis of both spirit and spiritual religion. It makes much over the delinquent delicacies of decadent art, the popularity of problem-plays, sex literature, Sadist love-science and matrimonial bliss, but wholly lacks the mystic faculty, energy and ambition which alone can secure us in an actual spiritual triumph and a consequent moral hegemony over the world's physical despotism and materialistic slavery.

There is no coward's valor, no sophist irenic, no philosophy by magic nor fiat science wherewith to obscure the issue, for we do not intend to be seduced by the rewards nor frightened by the punishments held imminently over our heads by a lot of sacerdotal soothsayers. Our one chief conviction and confessional finds the only valid source of spiritual security now and hereafter in the simple fact that man was meant to stand erect by his own volition and effort, not meant to be eternally propped up like a straw man with

external threats and penalties, seductions and rewards. It is no sign of virtue or spiritual achievement to always require the bolstering of outside discipline and dispensations, for these are cold institutional measures and do not function as direct congenial aspirations toward divine communion and enlightenment. True mysticism is spiritual exaltation and is not gotten like material acquisitions by addition from the outside world, but by inward effort, integrity and expression of soul. It has no magic formula for realizing spiritual truth or benediction, but rests its final goal on the merit of industry, the courage of faith, the innocence of piety and the *con amore* desire to live the life of Nature and know by direct contact and willing submission the laws of God and Cosmos.

Christianity is too often a negative religion; it is more often a vague and indeterminate renunciation of this world's duties and devotions than an intentional and whole-hearted embracing of whatever life awaits us in the next. It is also negative of humanity's best achievements because of its seeking to preserve the weak, helpless, afflicted, ignorant and foolish; in fact, it is really negative of the best possibilities of human life when it insists on limiting the genius and energy of exceptional personalities in order to maintain its mediocre ideal of a commonwealth of creed-foolish gregarians. It would set up a soft sort of artificial polity to replace the hard genuine provisions of Nature, and this negation of Nature is what will eventually prove its failure as a durable religion making perennial and priceless contributions to the world's future progress. It already effects but little persuasion on men of other mood or caliber than those of imbeciles and prebendary saints. Mystics, on the other hand, are neither conceited nor stupid, neither dogmatic nor negative in matters religious; they have no weak mercy nor maudlin sympathy for things worldly nor for delinquent people, for if these are corrupt they are to be shunned, while if they are malicious they are to be rendered harmless. Mystics have no sham ethics to hold them in emotional leash, and certainly no magic social hypothesis to give them a neurotic sense of freedom and happiness. Whenever they read the Old or New Testament they keep a good clear discrimination between the two gospels, appreciating the former for its patterns of human justice and the latter for its vicarious promise of Divine Mercy; but they read no external combination of Grace and Vicary into the Scripture that is now printed and published in a single binding—this being as ambiguous and misrepresentative of the original chroniclers' intentions as the Pocket Bibles which Cromwell

distributed amongst his soldiers, the so-called Murderers' Bible, or the Sunna exegesis of Zoroaster's creed.

Many people are forever seeking some magic solution to their problems, some easy exit out of the struggle for a worthwhile life. They pursue a morbid patronage of mediums, fortune-tellers, soothsayers and other Nature-fakers who loudly advertise their claims to superhuman faculty, but little actual foresight or sincere advice is ever derived from this lazy pseudolatry. From the narrow wicket and cramped casement of their rhyomistic resort it is no wonder that they see only an increasing measure of misery, toil and trouble in the growing complexity of civilization, in the anxiety of modern restlessness and industrial revolts, in the very seductions contained in the new barbarism of liberty and its vulgar bed-fellow, sexual unrestraint and promiscuity, easy marriage and easy divorce. There are only two castes in the modern world, mystics and vulgarians; everyone is either a God-seeker or a world-seeker, either devout and saintly, wise and just, or else cunning and corrupt, ignorant and selfish. It is the business of moralists and social workers to distinguish them and try to give the spiritually poor something besides part of the rich man's pelf. The common instincts of religion do not sense this difference but mystics have the necessary clarity of vision, sympathy of feeling and chastity of judgment to understand why the vulgarians are interested in freedom more than in discipline, in recreation more than in restraint, and yet not be a companion to their debauchery nor be seduced by their fallacious bribe-tactics. Perhaps the most surprising feature of the whole vulgarian program is that your foolish worldling follows daily this looseness of moral fibre and still expects to avoid ultimate disaster; he spends his life gaming and expects to always win the last trick with extreme unction and viaticums to heaven. Whatever moral or religious distinctions he does happen to offer in an argument or other expression of his mental outlook are invariably based on values derived from *below*, from the downtrodden, the poor, the weak, the helpless derelicts of society. The fabric of the vulgarian's philosophy is coarse and shows many broken stitches, many faded and often ugly splotches on the design. Too much freedom and self-determination will prevent anyone from being humble, devout, sensible of spiritual things or mindful of the mystic phases of life and livelihood. The vulgarian always thinks some sort of magic formula is at the bottom of his success or failure, but the mystic knows that life's only art and magic consists in a conscientious attention to duty, a courageous

approach toward all problems and situations, a clear and readily applicable sense of beauty, virtue, wisdom, justice and generosity.

There is no magic door into any of the good things of life; no clever ruse ever fooled Nature into giving up her secrets or dropping her blessings promiscuously among the good and bad. We cannot find anywhere an effective sesame with whose power to charm we can pass instantly into either vocational success or a virtuous life, nor can we find that secret elixir which can in a twinkling give us strength of soul and purity of heart and with these, courage to love and intelligence to learn the truth. These are, true enough, the constant aims and aspirations of mystics the same as they are the ever-present test conditions demanded by philosophers in any life claiming to be religious and devout. With the sophist vulgarian, on the other hand, they are valued automorphically and judged to be merely the shrewd counters against the crass catchwords of finite interests, worldliness and their less innocent propaganda. If some of us didn't give endless voice in preachment of the good and by our own example show the proper sort of emotional response to the inspiration of heroism, justice, courage, beauty and genius, the world in no time would become a veritable hogwallow, if not a desolate vale of ravaging knaves and gullible fools. It is the exemplary function of mysticism to forestall the ignorant superstition that a good life is won by magic or that spiritual rehabilitation may be realized by miracle or mimicry. A certain amount of honest effort, persistence and idealism is necessary, but without some degree of noble spirituelle and kindly disposition to start with, little and but slow progress upward can be made.

In those classical anticipations of pragmatism which felt no anxieties over ideas, opinions and value-judgments so long as these continued to give men happy moods or share with them some mysterious power over life and progress we can read no little measure of shrewd ethical device, for their principal function was the more or less direct ordering of men into social relations with each other. No one seemed to object to false notions or self-sought religions so long as these were useful, well-argued or preservative of past tradition; but they did object strongly whenever anyone attempted to challenge their vital lies and fallacies. Some such a similar condition is necessary for any sort of pragmatic religion to take root and flourish; there must be a general tenor of cupidity among the people, a popular approval of whatever is foolish, ephemeral, promiscuous and illusory. It is fashionable to be low-aiming and mercenary,

trusting to luck and placing faith in whatever magic formula happens to be the most loudly advertised. Just now we are passing through an age of irresponsible rhyomism, everyone appears to be hellbent on some pet fallacy of will, some private perquisite of power, some personal adventure patterned after the wild opportunism of Fortunatus. No wonder there are so many pragmatic sponsors of religion, so many clever manipulators of rewards and retributions. But the situation is not unique; there have been a thousand previous vulgarian ages at certain intervals in the world's past history, and nearly every one of them has been a dismal repetition of its predecessor.

The situation that is unique is revealed when we think of the occasional flourish of philosophy, how the world manages to forget its mad folly long enough to now and then produce an age rich in righteousness and reflection, an age of justice, honor, sincerity, courage and reverence. Then it is that we find a fair number of saints, sages, heroes and geniuses who know how to think with clear vision and free faculty, who have intelligent faith and soon grow impatient with the crude fallacies of creed and deed which surround them. They have no manufactured pedigree because their true ancestry is all the struggles, hopes, thoughts, dreams and disappointments of humanity's past experience. They have no artificial pose to strike, no magic formula to apply, for their ambition is sincere and they play fair tourney in winning life and livelihood from the world. This is one good reason why they are often misunderstood by the multitude which confuses them with those no higher souled than their own vulgarian companions or with those no more exalted or devout than the average rabble-ranter. The general mass of people never come in contact with anyone but fools and fakers, knaves and nincompoops, so we shouldn't wonder at them when they look on philosophers and saints also as so many Cagliostroes and spiritual rat-catchers.

I feel quite fertile whenever a discussion is raised as to the relationship, even the dependence, of a man's religion to his interest in such subjects as Art, History, Science, Mvsticism, Government, Philosophy and Social Efficiency. I believe that whatever religious faith a man professes as well as the one he actually practices is vitally influenced if not almost wholly determined, by the amount of study or the degree of understanding he has of the principles and purposes of these great domains of human achievement. They are items in our cultural progress, our spiritual enlightenment and exaltation, so

why should they not be among the principal interests of anyone desiring to be religious and intelligent himself, or at least have a tolerant understanding of reverence and wisdom in others? Not being accomplished in *either* of these talents he is certainly a dunce and makes an unprofitable mate as well as a boorish companion.

True genius does not resort to things fantastical, false, mythical, uncertain or extreme in his attempt to work out a valid symbolism of life and art. It is the function of genius, the same as it is the purpose of art, to disprove and repudiate these very things, to certify the beautifully good and true in such a way as to inspire and teach others. It is only cynics like Nietzsche or La Rochefoucauld who regard art and religion as subtle narcotics to make us forget our cares and woes. *Some* consolation against this view may be had in remembering that other narcotic addicts like De Quincey, Coleridge and Poe have found more honorable security in art and religion than in the petty umbrage of a cynic philosophy. This phase of the question concerning magic and artifice in one's religious outlook cannot be ignored and evaded with empty cavilling or catch-worded ridicule. It is *live* enough to demand our attention and interesting enough to delight us with the advantage of understanding what it means. The mystic philosopher is no free-lance postichee, he works no magic tricks on his fellows, he is never the cheap miracle-monger who is forever spoliating the temple and obtaining an easy livelihood through his clever but fallacious manipulations. Instead of this he is a genius of genuine capacity, his unique nature is of noble origin and his loyal affections last through a lifetime. It is not because of fear, laziness or egotism that he often retires to a quiet refuge from the world, but because his superior spiritual powers reveal the utter vanity of worldly effort, the utter futility of all ephemeral aims and conflicts. His life then bears no petty spite or spoil, it does not exist for base utility or ease, but for the nobler cause of spiritual refinement, mystic exaltation and philosophic revery. He understands the true purpose of individuality, that it is the door to destiny, that its value is symbolic and its function is constructive, that its ultimate aim is to realize progressive transfiguration and its only justification is its power for happiness, for a wholesome life redeemed from meanness, folly, sin, mediocrity and the semi-animal poverty of our souls. The whole procedure is bound by a sense of piety and justice, feeling always responsible for what is done as well as accountable for what is not done. It is this piety perhaps which is the only really religious teaching which can be derived from mysti-

cism, but without it Christianity itself would be in need of salvation.

Religion may be of the Medici, the Grammatici, Physici or Mystici, but it is as Prof. Gilbert Murray so charmingly shows, a poor *religio* if it does not "free us from imprisonment in the rancor and wreck of the external present." Its aim is spiritual salvage and its method is heroic sacrifice, renunciation and intelligent self-control. The general attitude is one of reverence and responsibility, aspiration and sympathy with Nature, God and the Cosmic Consciousness. Pure religion is essentially a lifetime search for some means of establishing communication between man's mind, nature and experience with those divine existences which we call Nature, God, the Universe. It was the clear vision of this possibility and ideal achievement which inspired all the great saints and mystic philosophers of antiquity; it encouraged their speculations on divine things and ennobled their dealings with their fellow-men. It was a recognized fact which gave both foundation and validation to the mystic realism of Plato's ideal types and Spinoza's eternal forms; it is the constant cementing element giving coherence and inter-functional relation to Doctor Wallace's hierarchy of demi-gods and angels, cell-souls and exalted spiritual agencies. Many and various religions throughout the world's past history have found unity at least on this one feature of cosmic emotion, reverence and mystic exaltation. Among them may be mentioned those esoteric cults of theurgy and theosophy, Mithraic magic and Kaaba lore, mystic ecstasy and Neoplatonism, doctrines of creation and redemption such as Chaldean cosmogony and Logos-power, Gnostic Demiurgos and Byzantine Eucharist, oriental meditations and occidental industry.

The actual trend of religious progress and enlightenment has been away from miracles and magic toward normal experience and honest achievement. It has been a slow and laborious culture of man's soul, his mind and heart; not a sudden mysterious transfiguration or wheedler's promise of vicarious merit. It has been a natural process of time and effort, not a mythical emprise after imaginary golden fleeces. One of the first impulses toward religious feeling and aspiration was when some shaggy anthropoid began to wonder what made the stars shine or why the sun made him feel warm; then, after untold ages of vague observations, weird wonderings, superstitions and fetich-worship, the ancient peoples became self-conscious and adopted a veneration of heroes, tribal leaders and medicine men which soon gave rise to philosophies of man-made postulates and automorphic predications, to social theories of class, occu-

pation, government, customs and creeds. Two examples of what was perhaps the world's most unique program of mysticism are to be found existing contemporaneously in India and Greece during the days of ancient glory. Without making any close sectarian distinctions we find that there was a general practice and ritual built up in ancient India on the religious significance of a meditative asceticism which renounced all physical activity whether good or bad and which was supposed to give one power over the natural law of Karma which meant that one was enabled to evade the pernicious cycle of fate and all attachment to the seductions of sentient existence. Not only did the Hindus aim to free themselves from the vain exigencies of the external present, but they even went so far as to propose repudiation of the whole process and procurement of worldly life. In contemporary Greece we find the Eleusinian Mysteries offering their astonished devotees, who were usually erratic of mind if not erotic in emotion, a more or less enigmatic program of intellectual mystification under which (the flesh being willing and the spirit weak) was also given a teasing taste of emotional persuasion. The ultimate creed aimed at was a shrewd device of oracular manipulation whose only spirit and courage for good found expression in a specious ambiguity of advice which aimed to secure political power at a time when several states were jockeying for leadership in Greek sovereignty. In reality they were the feminine cults centering around the worship of Persephone and derived from the Egyptian cults of Isis; thus acting as correlatives to the masculine cults (Dionysaic Mysteries) centering around the Bacchanalian hedonism which Orpheus brought over from the Egyptian devotees to Horus. Very few of their rites were either religiously devout in the strict sense or sensually pure in the latitudinarian sense, and we should not reveal our own corrupt persuasion by considering them less devoted to cheap magic than to a hard-won sincerity in spiritual purity and mystic exaltation. Greek talent was more worldly than that of the ascetic Hindus.

Is it not a strange coincidence and commentary on our modern situation to find that among those who seek to minimize and extenuate religious fallacy and hypocrisy are reverend gentlemen hiding behind sackcloth frocks and rosaries de Cluny? How can a confessed casuist like Hastings Rashdall admit that the plain truth is not always the highest propriety and yet claim to be devout and loyal to a creed which frowns on all mischief and mendacity? Non-committal assent to a falsehood will sooner or later prove to be culp-

able of greater wrong whether at the time found formal and literal or active and intentional. Neither casuist nor formulist can work up an eclectic relish for all that is good in even the major religions of the world, and still have such high respect for his petty "reservations" that he practically repudiates his cumulative credo. Twenty years ago an Anglican majority refused to change the Rubric, and although admitting a vast moral chaos in their own ranks, still decided to continue groping about their cavern of hypocrisy until such time as Divine Guidance chose to succor them.

A really welcome relief is to be had in the revival of Doctor Browne's practical interpretation in his *Religio Medici*. This revival appears in Canning Schiller's acceptance of Christianity as "an essentially human product like any other social phenomenon; it is a thoroughly pragmatic religion in which faith and reason perform mutually serviceable functions showing us that we must hold fast to the principle that the truest religion is the one which issues in and fosters the noblest life." Schiller's great friend and mentor, Wm. James, was another who looked at religion through similar spectacles and saw a similar sort of spiritual utility as its only valid excuse for taking up so much of our time and attention. In many ways like that famous neo-Spinozan who subscribed neither to casuist hypocrisy nor to formulist fantacism (Haeckel), James loved Nature and Nature's code, whence he affected no artificial theology because he had natural talent and a lovable character, and where these are neither artifice nor theology can long endure. There was nothing tender-minded about James' scientific temperament; he advocated a *tough* sort of mystic attitude which was able to doubt miraculous traditions and champion the possibility of plural religious situations at a time when literal theology and personal idealism were dividing the specious honors of a mutually eristic controversy.

Professors Royce was another protégé of William James. In "a constructive approach to the philosophy of religion" in his two great series of Gifford Lectures entitled, "The World and the Individual," he seeks to interpret Reality and Divine Being in a way that will solve the dilemma set forth in Bradley's "Appearance and Reality." Life is essentially the struggle to establish some sort of external validity for our spiritual outlook, our ideas and our talents, our wills and aspirations. That for the first or intellectual group is proven by the success or advantage of scientific discovery and invention, engineering projects and material achievements; that for the second or religio-moral group is proven by the *balance* of edu-

cation, social service, altruistic welfare, personal integrity and spiritual exaltation. Honesty in either mystic or pragmatic religion means that the motive or purpose behind our conduct qualifies the moral product of our activity as being acceptable to social justice and welfare, in the same way that the meaning or significance behind ideas validates them to take part in the intellectual content and philosophical tendency of our thoughts and plans. These also are the ultimate grounds on which to decide the good or evil of an action as well as the truth or fallacy of an idea. Religion and morality, science and philosophy, start with these first principles and erect their common barriers against man's mischief, folly, debauchery and delusion. Intelligent and purposive action, like discerning and teleological thought, is capable of realizing its aim only when and because it is grounded in reality and keeps company with truth and goodness. Both, in order to be whole and wholesome, to be of advantage to the individual and of benefit to society, must consider the three essential aspects of life; the supreme Sovereignty of God, the unity of the Universe or natural world, and the integrity of human personality. As Lotze once said, there is no universal integrity if we look on everything as separated or as lost from God. Religion is the emotional response while philosophy is the intellectual content to be found in our experience of these three orders of reality. While the laws and loves of the natural world share the same justice and inexorableness as those of the divine, we often find that the human spiritual world is plastic and appreciable enough to allow for a variety of interpretations, novel situations, spontaneity and initiative, numerous delicate variations and expressions of that piety and virtue which responds to law, that love and heroism which looks on beauty, truth and goodness with all the devout emotion of religious faith. Contrast and identity, plurality and unity, strife and harmony, sin and sobriety, iniquity and integrity—these are but different aspects of the ever-present conflict and antithesis between the ephemeral and the eternal, the finite and the infinite, the artificial and the real, the false and the true. And when we err in placing our confidence in the illusory rewards instead of the actual principles and duties of life, we cannot fail to be also wicked, miserable, ignorant, selfish and corrupt. And with these as sources to our further failure and unhappiness we are mad and vengeful because our petty purposes have been thwarted and overcome by others more ruthless or more diabolically determined. The whole finite scheme of falsehood, ignorance, pettiness, rhyomism and revenge must be

cast aside, and a more noble spiritual attitude assumed, a more devout piety, a more discerning disposition toward the good developed before one's life can be associated with the mystic nobility or even aspire to be divine.

As I said before, the proper conduct of life may be any of several sorts of mysticism, but there is no philosophy by magic nor any fiat science wherewith to solve the problems which so often stump us, thwarting our best efforts and ambitions.