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978-1-107-42680-1 - The Real Presence: Or the Localisation in Cultus  
of the Divine Presence

A. C. Bouquet

Excerpt

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# THE REAL PRESENCE



## INTRODUCTION

The subject of this essay is the theory and implications of localisation in cultus.

(1) I would begin it with a plea that in philosophising upon religion we should not neglect the raw material which lies about us. It is not enough to shut our eyes with Descartes and examine our internal sensations and theorise about what ought to be outside. We must not exclude from our survey the habits and experiences of other religious persons than ourselves, nor must we restrict our attention to the New Testament, though that in itself should be better esteemed by the philosopher than it has hitherto been.

(2) In the second place it will be fairly obvious that my subject has been supplied by more or less recent controversy. I do not suggest that such controversy is the main

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cause of this essay, since the possibility of an enquiry of the kind which I now propose has occurred to me for a considerable time, and the stir of the last few months has only quickened my sense of the need for a discussion of the problems relating to worship in theory and practice which shall be conducted in an academic spirit and with an absence of bitterness and heat. On the one hand we hear of people being pained and shocked because their devotional practices are compared to those of educated Hindus, when it seems extremely probable that they do not know how educated Hindus behave. On the other hand we read denunciations of idolatry which leave the impression that those who utter them have not really thought out what idolatry means: there has been little or no attempt to undertake a serious study of the problem in a mood of philosophic calm.

I propose then for our discussion the nature and implications of the cultus of the deity by means of the direction of attention

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upon concrete objects, or in other words the localisation of worship. The word “idolatry” does not altogether express what I have in mind. Localisation will serve better as a label. We may also consider the causes of reaction against such localisation. Can they be traced to a common root? Is iconoclasm more creditable than iconolatry, or is the one as good as the other? Can we detect any laws governing the swing of the pendulum in either direction? Assuming that the cultus of a localised presence is agreed to have no specially divine sanction, and that the mechanism by which it satisfies the instincts of the worshipper is understood, should it be tolerated? What is the significance of the stern denunciation of images which characterises the utterances of the Hebrew prophets and their spiritual kinsmen? Are we to posit two equally permissible types of worshippers, who will nevertheless always tend to disagree? These are questions which my own Anglican (as much as my Huguenot) forefathers would hardly have allowed. They

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took it for granted that the matter had been settled in one way at the Reformation. We to-day of whatever denomination can hardly afford to dismiss the matter so lightly. We have a wider range of facts before our eyes. We need to ask these questions, and to frame our own answers to them. Even if in the end we arrive at the same position as the reformers we shall probably do so by a different path and for different reasons.

The problem which we are to consider is a special case of a more general problem which reappears in at least four other forms.

(*a*) The unique local incarnation of the deity in one special human being.

(*b*) The periodicity of the religious consciousness involving as it would seem seasons of temporary inspiration.

(*c*) The restriction of revelation to, or at least its intensification in, the recorded words of a sacred writing, book, or group of books, often the less understood the better.

(*d*) The conception of finality in religion as manifested at a particular point in history.

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A large part of our time will be taken up with the hearing of what various witnesses have to say on the subject.

### THE ATTITUDE WHICH WE HAVE INHERITED

Let us consider first the attitude which we have inherited. The reformed churches uniformly adopted the attitude of the Jews towards images, pictures, or localised sacramental worship. In general they may be said to have modelled their behaviour on the injunctions which are to be found in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts xiv. 15 ; xvii. 29 ; xix. 26), i.e. “to turn from these vain things to the living God.” This corresponds well with the Anglican appeal to the primitive church, though it does not fit in with an appeal to the church of the first six centuries or even of the first four. It is natural to compare the official Anglican homily (“against peril of idolatry”), a very elaborate historical survey based on the treatise by Bullinger on the same subject. The universal assumption in reformed

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circles is that localisation in cultus (except apparently in church buildings)<sup>1</sup> is wrong under all circumstances and is expressly forbidden by Almighty God.

On the other hand by far the largest organised bodies of Christians have for centuries practised a form of localised worship, and have a defence of it to offer. We may briefly recall that the period 725–847 in the Eastern Church, during which the iconoclastic controversy raged, ended in an alliance between the Pope and the Byzantine Christians, the Pope advocating in unmistakable terms the use of images for instruction of the ignorant and encouragement of the faithful. The distinction however was drawn by the orthodox theologians between the worship due to God alone which is called “*λατρεία*” and that which is due to holy objects such as images of Christ and the

<sup>1</sup> Even here the passage quoted from 1 Kings would doubtless have been quoted as signifying that what happened in a church or chapel was not a localising of God’s Presence, but of human attention to His Universal Presence.

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Saints, the book of the Gospels, the Cross and Crucifix and holy pictures or Icons. To these was to be accorded “σχετική” or “τιμητική προσκύνησις,” or, as perhaps we should say in English, reverence rather than worship. At a later date a further distinction was drawn between the reverence due to be paid to the humanity of Christ Himself which was described as “ὑπερδουλεία” and that which might be offered to the Saints which was described as “δουλεία.” Later still in the thirteenth century it was further determined that Christ was to be worshipped with *λατρεία* (a word which in good classical Greek is used to express the service due to the gods); while *ὑπερδουλεία* might be paid to Blessed Mary the Mother of Christ. These distinctions obviously qualify the nature of the *προσκύνησις* paid to symbols of the various persons respectively referred to. It is to be noted at this point that *προσκύνησις* is not an unknown word in the Gospels, but is applied to the young man who came and knelt before Jesus. It is

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not really in origin a religious term but means the act of making a profound obeisance before one's superior. Josephus speaks of the Jewish High Priests as *προσκυνούμενοι*. *Προσκύνησις* was given to the Byzantine emperor, who was solemnly censured and received prostrations and kissing of the feet. On the other hand in 1 Cor. xiv. 25 and Revelation xi. 16 we get the verb used with reference to *τῷ θεῷ*; so that the usage is not precise or consistent. The Roman Catholic Catechism says that we should give to relics, crucifixes and holy pictures a relative honour as they relate to Christ and His Saints and are memorials of them, but it adds: "we do not pray to relics or images for they can neither see nor hear nor help us." It further declares that the first commandment does not forbid the making of images but the making of idols; that is, making images to be adored or honoured as gods. The theory therefore would seem to be that *προσκύνησις* is the technical equivalent of relative honour, but that *λατρεία* is not to be accorded



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to any localised object except the divine presence in the Eucharistic symbols, which, according to the view summarised in the decrees of Trent, is in an entirely different category. The Anglican Church, as Jeremy Taylor has clearly pointed out<sup>1</sup>, has not officially accepted this theory, but has until recently followed the rigorous line of the Puritans, both as regards images and as regards the sacramental elements.

#### ICONOCLASM

The opposition to localisation in cultus which we sometimes call iconoclasm derives to all appearance solely from the prophetic element in Judaism<sup>2</sup>. There is no sure evidence of any independent source. Some have even thought that the reforming Egyptian king Ikhnaton may have come under the influence of Hebrew ideas, and that Islam in India may have influenced Sankara. It is

<sup>1</sup> In *Ductor Dubitantium*.

<sup>2</sup> The pagan philosopher of late antiquity might scorn image-worship for himself, but like the modern Hindu philosopher he would allow it to the proletariat.

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therefore desirable to consider a little the reaction of Hebrew religion against localisation. Popular pre-exilic religion localised the divine presence freely, and the distinction between the popular and the higher prophetic view shows that the latter was far from being universally accepted. The Semitic temperament is not universally iconoclastic, as may be seen from the pages of Robertson Smith. Irrespective of the bull images and other emblems there was the cloud which was believed to rest on the mercy seat above the ark. Whatever the nature of this phenomenon there can be no doubt that some localised presence was connected with it. Nevertheless the prophets are steadfastly opposed to the conceptions underlying these practices and seldom lose an opportunity of testifying to their inadequacy. It may fairly be said, however, that in the documents which have come down to us the Hebrew race is represented as recognising varying types and degrees of intensity in its experience of the divine pre-

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