

RELIGION: FIXATED ON EXTERNALS

**Religion Plays Out in Costume:
All institutional religions develop some formalism
and ceremony**

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

The Kingdom of God is not measured, touched, seen, nor reached through travel. **Any practices which turn the focus of believers from the spiritual to the material needs to be questioned.** Traditions which emphasize or protect doctrines which externalize elements of faith ought to be subject to revision. I am speaking more about elements of worship in religion which might be externalized and less about the behaviors which express living out one's personal faith.

Costume does not make the man or the woman! Neither does costume portray true spiritual character or authority. It is the life within that person that distinguishes him/her. **Movies and television routinely portray "men of God" in special garb.** Religious garments are the only tangible way to denote rank or authority, just as in the military. The world goes along with this thinking, because it has been nurtured on religious terms (paradigms) and find it normal. But this attribute of religion is shallow, vain and erroneous. I assure you, priestly garb would find no acceptance with Jesus or any of 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 world that they have superior spiritual status and knowledge of God which sets them apart from the rest of us. Whether or not they believe they need to wear these kinds of costumes in order to be true to their calling, or perhaps honor God, I do not know. I do know, however, that Jesus never commanded for spiritual men to dress up in order to point to their status. This contradicts the principle of external things being less important than the internal. 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

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 should not be performance, but speaking the mind of Christ to persons in need edification. A man of God yielded to the Spirit, may well *appear* dramatic, persuasive and captivating but these qualities will not be achieved on account of rhetorical skills.

Religious performance is born out of highly regimented 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, tends to be viewed traditionally as either sacramental or performance. If the rituals are sacramental it does not matter too much whether the details are performed well or not. Ritual stands for itself from beginning to end. It

is very hard to introduce any personality or interpretation into it. Ritual is as relevant as we wish it to be. Ritual, in my opinion is a kind of counterfeit substituting revelation for priestly rites.

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