

"The third and most influential form of the moral types of religious faith is Old Testament Judaism. Like every faith, it has a broad sacramental basis, the idea of the elected nation, the covenant between God and the nation, and the ritual law in all its richness and abundance of sacramental activity."

-DYNAMICS OF FAITH
(TILLICH 1958:67)

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INTRODUCTION:

One of my children, after performing the temple ordinances for himself for the first time, exhibited great shock afterward. I had done little to prepare him for the experience, so immediately felt guilty, that I had failed him somehow. But when I asked him what concerned him, I saw that there was little I could have done to prepare him because his response was totally unexpected to me. He said, "I didn't know we believed in rituals! Seminary teachers told us we didn't believe in rituals!!" How unfortunate! And how untrue!

It appears that within SMD there is a sort of rigid, Calvinistic reaction to some sort of paganistic strawman termed "rituals and imagery" in general. The most common item that is referred to disparagingly by this mentality is The Cross. "We don't believe in such stuff!!"^[1] Why are LDS young brain-washed with this mentality, which unfortunately contains an element of disdain for other faiths?^[2] I don't know. It's unnecessary at the least, harmful in the middle as shown by this anecdote and dishonest at worst.

SMD actually contains as rich an inventory of rituals as any faith, complete with special attire in some circumstances. In fact, SMD even extends further the pomp and imagery surrounding the majority of its rituals by requiring that they only be performed in a special building, The Temple, to which are admitted an exceedingly small number of elite, etc.^[3] LDS most definitely DO believe in rituals and have fully incorporated them into their lives.^[4] The very core of the theology revolves around the

¹ I am sure no one intends to promote snobbery but this type of doctrine does promote it. It somehow communicates the sense to kids that "We know better, don't we! We're smarter, aren't we!" That is NOT the purpose of the doctrine -if it even is a doctrine.

And, perhaps more importantly, no one intends to create fear or anxiety in the young for The Cross. Personally, I can think of no more fitting reminder of the struggle of the Savior than a cross. One hangs in my bedroom, and I was greatly flattered when a Catholic friend at work was brave enough to offer it to me as a gift.

² Could this self-righteous perception be related in any way to beliefs about political systems that also exhibit religious characteristics, and which probably merit disdain? We don't know, but Jung noted the similarity between the rituals practiced by religious and political groups:

"Even a dictator thinks it necessary not only to accompany his acts of State with threats but to stage them with all manner of solemnities. Brass bands, flags, banners, parades and monster demonstrations are no different in principle from ecclesiastical processions, cannonades and fireworks to scare off demons."
(1957:37)

³ A fascinating parallel between the SMD temple ordinance and the temple ordinances of pre-Christian Egypt can be drawn from Nibley (1976). These parallels are more than minor because they encompass some of the central doctrines, so one is left with the question of why this parallel exists between something so ancient and something so new.

⁴ Along with the rituals themselves, with their prescribed actions and language and settings, there are the predictable associated behaviors exhibited by those who participate or who observe these rituals. The individuals who undergo the experience have learned ritual responses, both verbal and non-verbal that they exhibit in a fairly compulsive, un-resistant manner. For example, an individual being married for eternity, expresses appreciation for this gift with a set of stock phrases, and usually tearfulness. Hugs are passed out generously to the officiator, all family members present and friends present. And those who observe this

mysteries in the temple.^[5] Any who deny this are out of touch with the fundamentals of their faith. To clarify that ungracious comment, let's dig around in the orchard of ordinances. The presence of so many rituals in SMD suggests that they must in fact have a profound meaning for us individually. What is that meaning within this model?

MORMON RITUALS:

The POS as revealed to Brother Joseph, contains a small set of ordinances that are practiced outside of the temple, some in homes and some in church buildings, as well as another set that is only performed in a temple. The former set includes baptism, confirmation for bestowal of the gift of the Holy Ghost, blessing of children, the sacrament, blessing the sick, consecration of oil^[6] for healing, consecration of graves, and anointing and blessing the sick. ^[7] The latter set, which is a large one, includes, for a living mortal, an endowment, consisting of a subset of ordinances, which confers keys and knowledge necessary to pass by destroying angels to return to God, as well as eternal marriage. These temple ordinances are also performed for deceased persons by proxy, the only variation being that baptism and confirmation, which are performed elsewhere for the living, are done in a temple for the deceased person.

As noted earlier, all ordinances consist of several basic elements. There is an individual who has the priesthood who is

ordinance, share feelings of community and refreshing which stimulate tears and verbal outpourings of gratitude and other emotions.

These responses are NOT prescribed in the theology, rather are ones that have developed through accretion over the generations and are passed unconsciously from generation to generation as the ordinances are repeated. So not only does the theology contain a richness of rituals, the community behaviors that attend these rituals, are equally formal and mandatory. These ritual responses can fairly be compared to the ritual responses that are associated with the ceremonial slaughter and distribution of pigs in Papua New Guinea or most any other religious rituals practiced around the world. Most LDS will be offended by this footnote. But this is the truth as far as a (reasonably) objective observer would see it.

⁵ See chapter 55. MYSTERY OF MYSTERIES for a detailed review of the role of mysteries in SMD. They are inextricably intertwined.

⁶ The use of oil, which must be consecrated through the priesthood, is found in various of the rituals. So, one asks, within the context of this model, what is its significance? How does it interact with our spirits? Why must it be used at all in any ordinance if the priesthood is actually operative? I see no simple answer to these questions. In the judaeo-christian tradition, use of consecrated oil dates back to before Christ. Egyptian of the 4th pre-Christian millennium employed unguents and oils, as did other cultures around the world. So there is a rich tradition of it being used as a medium of some sort, but how did it end up in SMD, and what does it mean and how does it make a difference?

⁷ There is another procedure that needs to be mentioned here. This is circumcision. Some in the Faith today view it simply as a minor, hygienic surgical procedure without any relevance to theology. Others, however, including Nibley (1976:216), maintain that there is, potentially, depending probably on the belief system of the individual, a profound meaning.

Nibley offers a cogent argument for circumcision being (1) a form of substituted sacrifice, and (2) a form of arrested sacrifice. Isaac's sacrifice and Adam's being accosted by Satan who smote him with a sharp stone causing him to bleed over the altar, are archetypes of these rituals. So anciently circumcision possessed profound meaning. The shedding of blood and the leaving of a scar were signs of sanctification and initiation. So, one asks, does or can circumcision have similar meaning to LDS today? I believe it can and does for those who understand this history.

thereby empowered to perform the ordinance on behalf of another.^[8] This person obviously must be prepared by training to understand the form of the ordinance so that it can be properly performed. All ordinances have at least a skeletal outline of elements that must be included when it is performed, with suggestions for the language to be used. However, some ordinances are given specific forms and language that must be rigidly adhered to.^[9]

PRESCRIBED vs. NON-PRESCRIBED PRAYERS:

For example, the baptism and sacrament prayers must be repeated without any variation from the prescribed texts. Deviations from the this given wording require that the prayer be repeated.^[10] There is always an individual or two, termed witnesses, who are specifically assigned the responsibility of comparing the words as they are spoken by the officiator, with the prescribed language. These individuals are also empowered to notify the officiator of the breach and to require him to be repeat the ordinance again.

Other prayers, such as the bestowal of the gift of the Holy Ghost, are not given a prescribed form. The only requirements that must be met by any confirmation prayer is that it be addressed to the Father, that it be done in the name of the Savior, and that it be performed by holders of the appropriate degree of the priesthood.

Why are some ordinances given prescribed language, and others not? One looks at the nature of the free-style prayers, which considerably outnumber the prescribed prayers, to see whether there is an explanation for the difference. These prayers are the

⁸ SMD only allows male holders of the two priesthoods. And as a result of this doctrine, the leadership of the church and congregations is also basically male. Over the last 20 years, there has been interest expressed by some females within the faith about the possibility of being granted the priesthood. To date, there has been no movement in that direction. But because of this doctrine, only males can perform ordinances as described here.

The parallel for granting priesthood to females is the granting of priesthood to African Americans in the mid-1970's. That action is subject to varying interpretation, depending on the bias of the individual. There are those who maintain that it was the fulfillment of an older SMD prophecy that said "in due time" blacks would receive the priesthood, that "time" being determined by prophet of the church. In contrast, another group maintains that there was nothing spiritual about the action, that it was basically an acquiescence to the pressures of the civil rights movement which was exerting profound pressure on the LDS Church, BYU, etc.

The question of granting priesthood to women is answered differently by these two same groups.

⁹ Why is there need for strict language in some ordinances and not in others? Lengthy Sanskrit prayers were tediously memorized so that not a single syllable was mis-pronounced, lest the efficacy of the prayer be minimized. So there is an honorable history for the fetish. But we still don't understand why specific language is necessary for any prayers, let alone why it is required for some but not for all. We willingly comply, so we aren't arguing against these concepts. We just note the peculiar contradiction.

¹⁰ This can be a source of great pain for the 16 year old saying the sacrament prayer. The entire congregation listens quietly to his words, and when he finishes the prayer, he looks to the Bishopric for approval. If it isn't forthcoming, he must kneel and repeat the prayer. I have seen an individual fail three times, after which a second person said the prayer. Very embarrassing to the boy, and disconcerting to the congregation. Oh, I know. Some hard-liners will just say, "That's tough. It's got to be done just right." I concur. But I also feel the pain of embarrassment of those young men.

confirmation after baptism (but NOT the baptism blessing), blessing of the sick (both with as well as without the oil), father's blessing for his children, blessing and naming of children, consecration of oil and blessing of graves.

Are there any similarities within these that suggest an explanation for their freedom of speech? Given the fact that one prayer actually involves a remarkably important ordinance, i.e. the bestowal of the gift of the holy ghost on a novitiate, while other prayers deal with rather mundane matters, i.e. a father's blessing of his children, it is difficult to identify any thing that would separate this group of ordinances from the group that has prescribed prayers.

FORMULAS AND COVENANTS:

One might also look at the effect of the different prayers on the spirit of those undergoing the ordinances to see whether there is an explanation for this difference. The group of prayers that are assigned specific language do seem to share a difference. They seem to serve as a means of arbitrating or covenanting between the individual undergoing the ordinance and the Father. Baptism certainly is that. Eternal marriage is that. Sacrament taken to renew baptism covenants is that. In contrast, most, not all, of the other group of ordinances seem to serve as a means for mortals to bless each other in some manner, as a means for the mortal to exercise their priesthood on behalf of another mortal.

This difference, then, personal salvation versus mortal blessing, do represent a difference in terms of the impact on an individual's spirit matter. When an ordinance is being done that will affect one's salvation, the language must be explicit and correct. The Lord won't recognize sloppy ordinances. But when a mortal is exercising himself and his authority on behalf of another, he is given latitude to seek inspiration and to try to express himself in such a manner that will be efficacious for the person he is blessing.

One asks, then, why it is that the bestowal of the gift of the holy ghost is not done through a specific prayer. Baptism itself is only done with a rigidly worded prayer, and confirmation is simply the second half of that process, the method to confirm one's membership. Why does the former require specific language while the latter doesn't? Does that make any difference on the spirit itself? But to return to the distinction, salvation versus blessing, we seem to have a distinction between the two groups of ordinances that might explain why one requires fixed prayers. But, left unanswered by this distinction, is the issue of why it should make any difference to the Lord and to the priesthood if the officiator, who should have the priesthood, uses the wrong words. Particularly in view of the fact that the rest of our lives is NEVER perfect, rather at best is only an approximation of the correct behaviors. Those behaviors nonetheless reap the rewards

associated with the laws that are obeyed. So what do the wrong words do?

SEQUENCING REQUIREMENTS:

Another interesting requirement of SMD that applies to ordinances is that of the order in which the salvation ordinances are applied to us. The non-salvation ordinances can be applied when the need arises without approval from the hierarchy of the church. But the salvation ordinances can only be done in a certain sequence by specifically assigned officiators.

For example, a generic father's blessing of a child by its father can be done anytime. There are no rigid limits. But the formal blessing before the congregation, that confers the official name, must be approved before the meeting by the Bishop, who also participates.^[11] But the ordinance of baptism can only be performed on an individual when he is 8 years of age, and not a day sooner. Both may be performed by the same father, but these differences remain. And in the latter case, the father must be approved by a bishop to perform the ordinances, while in the case of blessings, he doesn't require a bishop approval.

The conferral of the gift of the holy ghost must follow baptism. It can be performed immediately afterward or the next day, but it must always follow baptism. In a similar fashion, one must complete all of his personal temple ordinance work, which itself is rigidly ordered, prior to undergoing the ordinance of marriage for eternity. There are no variations.

EFFECT ON THE SPIRIT:

Apparently the performance of ordinances on individuals by officiators with the proper priesthood confers upon the recipient various advantages, which are related to the ordinances themselves. Are any of these advantages manifested in the spirit matter itself? It is difficult to say, but this model, that presumes alteration of spirit matter as the basic mechanism for the efficacy of the POS, suggests that there must be some such change.

In the section above on baptism, it was suggested that one of the major effects of this ordinance is to open new opportunities and possibilities to the spirit that would otherwise be closed to it. This same concept will be presumed to be true for all ordinances. Either they open new growth possibilities, or they will actually bestow on the spirit some sort of marker that it

¹¹ I have a difficult time rationalizing the need for the bishop to participate in ordinances where the father is authorized to preside, i.e. blessing and confirmation. I suspect that this is a central-stakes cultural thing. In Indiana and Michigan I performed ordinances in front of the congregation while the bishopric say in their chairs. That felt right. Their insistence in the west on participating has a rather self-serving quality in my mind. To me, they should participate when invited by the one in charge of performing the actual ordinance. Otherwise, sit still. Heresy, huh!

requires for success in this test.

It is assumed also that this process is true for all ordinances in all of our testing phases.

CONCLUSION:

Rituals are central to the faith. They are performed only by males who hold the priesthood. Most of them are performed in formal settings under the supervision of presiding officials. The effect of these rituals on the individuals depends, of course, on the specific ordinance being performed. In some cases, the effect is to open new opportunities to the spirit. Baptism, for example, enables the spirit to have the companionship of the holy spirit, which is otherwise not possible. In other cases, the ordinances may well alter something about the nature of the spirit itself, as in the salvation ordinances performed in the temple.^[12]

However, these rituals are not necessary for a successful mortal life. This is proven, to our mind, by the fact that less than 10% of the total population of this world will have undergone them, but will nonetheless have an equal opportunity at exaltation. The rituals will be done in a bureaucratic manner during the millennium when loose ends are wrapped up. But they will only be efficacious for those individuals who lived upright lives during the right portions of their metamorphosis. The mark of discipleship is "Love one for another", not rituals.

¹² We suppose that it is possible that some ordinances may neither bestow an immediate opportunity or make an immediate alteration in spirit matter. The analogy to this concept would be photographic film. This film is exposed briefly to light, and a latent image is made on the silver nitrate or dye substrate. But the image remains latent until it is developed in chemicals. Perhaps some of the effects of ordinances are comparable. They make a minimal change in spirit matter which only manifests itself at a later time, eg. the resurrection.