Rituals & Ceremonies

Down in adoration falling  
Lo! The sacred Host we hail;  
Lo! o'er ancient forms departing,  
Never rites of grace prevail:  
Faith for all defects supplying,  
Where the feeble senses fail. *(St. Thomas Aquinas)*

In a small victory for cleanliness, England’s medieval King Henry IV required his knights to bathe at least once in their lives – during their ritual knighthood ceremonies. *(Liza Lentini & David Mouzon, in Discover magazine)*

Brahmanism thus sagely resolves the Western dispute as to the necessity or advisability of ritual. It affirms it for those who have not attained the end of all ritual. It lessens and refines ritual as spiritual progress is made upwards; it dispenses with it altogether when there is no longer need for it. *(John Woodroffe, in Sakiti and Sakta)*

The foundations and institutes, just as once the new Christian chapels and congregations stood side by side with pagan temples and heathen shrines, may oust their rivals, and assume the monopoly of ritual. *(Louis Berman, in The Glands and Human Personality)*

Difference of rite ought not to involve differences of faith. *(Christopher Dawson, in The Judgment of the Nations)*

In our Episcopal church, I came across a prayer book that obviously had been used by a novice server to prompt himself during Holy Communion. At appropriate places, he had written in directions to “sit,” “stand,” and “go to the altar.” At one stage of the ritual, he had added the instruction, heaving underlined” “Incense the people.” *(Mrs. L. E. Arthur, in Reader’s Digest)*

We ought to do in due order all things which the Lord hath commanded us to perform at appointed times. The offerings and services he has commanded to be performed carefully, and not to be done in a haphazard or disorderly way, but at fixed times and season. *(St. Clement of Rome, in First Epistle to the Corinthians)*

Ritualism: A Dutch Garden of God where He may walk in rectilinear freedom, keeping off the grass. *(Ambrose Bierce, in Devil's Dictionary)*

Ritual may be man-made in the sense that human hands fashioned it. But what inspired these hands to do their work is the Divine Influence.  
*(Ben Zion Boksar, in Perspectives on a Troubled Decade)*

Many of us go through undefined, unmarked and unnamed rites of passage without realizing it. Our society has no rituals for honoring a true inner passage of transformation. *(Barbara De Angelis, in How Did I Get Here?, p. 90)*

But, whatsoe'er they do or say, I'll build a Christian hope on incense and on altar-lights, on chasuble and cope. *(Bret Harte, in The Ritualist)*

The Jewish ritual is the expression of the history of a people that, when faithful to Judaism, sees history as a manifestation of God's will. *(Maurice Samuel, in The Professor and the Fossil)*

A new take on placebos: The “placebo effect” – pills with no active ingredients causing patients’ conditions to improve – has always been thought to rely on subjects thinking they’re getting the real thing. But that belief may be misplaced, a Harvard Medical School study suggests. Researchers recruited 80 people with irritable bowel syndrome and told them that they’d receive either no pills or placebos as part of a study into a “novel mind-body” therapy. Some of the subjects were instructed to take pills twice a day from bottles labeled “placebo pills” and were repeatedly reminded that the pills were inactive. “They were told so many times, they had it coming out their ears,” lead author Ted Kaptchuk tells ScienceMag.org. Yet after three weeks, 59 percent of people who took the placebos said their symptoms had improved – far more than the 35 percent who’d taken nothing. This suggests, Kaptchuk says, that the body’s own healing mechanisms can be triggered by simple attention from another person; placebos serve as an acknowledgment that a person is sick and wants to be well. Beyond “mere positive thinking, there may be significant benefit to the very performance of medical ritual,” he says. “My personal hypothesis is this would not happen without a positive doctor-patient relationship.” *(The Week magazine, January 14, 2011)*

Granted that ritual in any realm from courtesy to worship can become formal, empty, and stiff. Nevertheless, with all its dangers it is an absolute necessity. We cannot train children in the spirit of religion if the appropriate activities of worship and devotion are forgotten. *(Harry Emerson Fosdick, in World's Work)*

Who is to say what shall have lasting value? My fiancee didn't want a diamond ring. As a joke, I bought a simple ring with a knock-your-socks-off stone. The best Woolworth's had: $2.98. I put it in a box from a fancy jeweler and gave it to her on our wedding day. She was nonplussed. But when I gave her the receipt so she could return it, she all but bowled me over with a laughing embrace. She still loves that stupid ring, 23 years later, as if it were real. And it is real, isn't it? *(Robert Fulghum, in From Beginning to End: The Rituals of Our Lives)*

Symbols are useful to the extent that they serve to point man to the realities for which they stand. When understanding and realization of Truth is attained the symbol may be dropped. A continual use of the symbol after the realization of the Truth back of it has come arrests spiritual growth and progress. *(Charles & Myrtle Fillmore, in Unity Communion Service)*

I realize that ritual will always mean throwing away something.  
Destroying our corn or wine upon the altar of our gods. *(G. K. Chesterton, in Tremendous Trifles)*

The ceremony of toasting comes from the custom of dropping a piece of toasted spiced bread into a glass of wine to improve its flavor. When we toast a person we are in effect saying that his presence adds flavor to the party. The custom of clinking glasses is an ancient practice whose original purpose was to scare off evil spirits so that they wouldn't enter the body through the liquor. *(Paul Stirling Hagerman, in It's a Weird World, p. 13)*

Any ritual is an opportunity for transformation. To do ritual, you must be willing to be transformed in some way. That inner willingness is what makes the ritual come alive and have power. *(Starhawk, in Utne Reader)*

The fact, however, that Christian ritual and its accompanying theology is a living culture pattern gives it a functional value as a rallying point of the emotions, hopes and fears of mankind through two thousand years of religious experience. *(E. O. James, in Christian Faith and Ritual: A Historical Study)*

On August 4, 1753, 21-year-old George Washington was declared a Master Mason in a Masonic ritual performed by his fellow Freemasons during a secret ceremony. Washington was initiated into the Masons in 1752. *(MOMENTS IN TIME – The History Channel)*

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