

**METHODS OF PRIVATE
RELIGIOUS LIVING**



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METHODS OF PRIVATE RELIGIOUS LIVING

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PREFACE

THESE methods undertake to show how religion can be made to produce definite observable results in improvement of human living. Under the title of *Experiments in Personal Religion* they were prepared during the year 1927-8 for the monthly bulletin of The Institute of Sacred Literature published at the University of Chicago. The bulletin was sent to people in all parts of the continent and many used it to guide them in personal experimental ventures of religious living to the end of discovering how to achieve an increased measure of human good. The writer and others have lived by means of the methods here described and have found them helpful, sometimes to a startling degree. Each of the ten chapters describes a distinct method, excepting the chapter on mysticism, where several methods are considered.

It must be emphasized that these methods are not the result merely of theoretical reasoning and logical inference. Of course reasoning has played

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its part as it must always do in any experimental process which yields knowledge. But the methods have been forged in the fires of experimental living. For the writer the experiments have extended over many years. They have been tested by the experiences of life lived in the open amidst all the difficulties and complexities which confront us in the great struggle. Methods adapted to the conduct of human living can never be discovered and tested in the laboratory. They must be found in the midst of the serious business of living with all its tragedy and comedy and with all the tremendous issues at stake. It is out of such experience that these methods have come.

While the writer believes they are the most precious harvest of experience the years have brought him, and for that reason is eager to communicate them to others, yet he knows full well they are not perfect nor final. They will be improved and multiplied. Indeed their chief feature is that they provide for constant retesting and reconstruction. There is nothing rigid and fixed about them. They are not a set of rules. Therefore, if they are accepted and practiced, they will in the course of time be transformed beyond all recognition. It may be that some of

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them are adapted only to certain types of personality—other types requiring other methods. But the principle of them is the principle which any method of private religious living must incorporate, we believe. In this belief they are offered to all men for fair and honest trial. In at least one man's experience they have never failed in any time of need.

Private religious living does not exclude the social; it is just as social as public religion. Indeed it is more so. Society is simply the interaction of individuals upon one another. We can study this process of social interaction from the standpoint of the interaction taken in the abstract. Then we are dealing with society as distinct from individuals. But we can also study it from the standpoint of individuals interacting. Every individual is involved in interaction with his fellows which reaches down to the innermost recesses of his private life. Hence social and private religious living are identical. Therefore fellowship is one theme we consider in our present study.

Our central theme is worship; for worship is the way we ride the winds that lift the highest. The welfare of collective humanity, the solution of our "social problems," and the historic march

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of society toward whatever good the ages have in store, depend more upon the right conduct of private religious living than upon anything else. Hence the present study deals with that phase of religion which must be the means to social salvation if society is ever to be delivered from its great ills.

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CHAPTER I

PRIVATE WORSHIP

WHEN we try to describe any vital process explicitly and in detail it sounds impossibly complicated. Try to tell another how you swim. Any man who jumped into deep water for the first time and tried to carry out your instructions would be like the centipede who began to think about his legs. Such a man will learn to swim more quickly if he simply flounders around as best he can, regarding, perhaps, only one or two of your simplest suggestions.

Is a detailed description of a vital process worthless, then, to one who wants to improve his methods? Not at all. One cannot adopt all at once the whole technique of swimming as the experts have developed it. But he can acquire

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first one point and then another until he may himself swim the English Channel. Only in recent years has any man (or woman) done that. Is this because modern men have spent more time in the water, or are more powerful, than men of other times? No, it is because men began to exchange suggestions about the method of swimming and by this accumulation of experience, sifting and selecting the suggestions, they perfected a technique which enabled them to achieve what no men of any other time could do.

Suppose we begin to exchange suggestions on methods of worship, suggestions not based merely on theory but drawn from our own experimental efforts? Is it inconceivable that in the course of time we should discover a technique that would enable us to accomplish more through worship than men of any other time? Technique is not all in worship any more than it is all in swimming, but it is one of the necessary factors.

There are no experts as yet in worship as there are in swimming. There has not been enough interchange of suggestion for that. But some of us have been practicing worship from childhood and, what is equally important, some of us have not been content to do this according to

Private Worship

an unchanging formula, but have been seeking in every quarter to learn how best to do it, and experimenting in it. None of us even begins to be an expert, but many of us can exchange suggestions and can learn from one another.

The following proposed method for private worship is such a suggestion. It may sound artificial and complicated, but that is the fault of our language and our mental machinery. A description of swimming would also, even though it was a literal statement of what one actually does. The several stages here described flow into one another naturally and quite unconsciously. They do not always follow the same order. They are not all practiced in every case. One does not carry out every point in the complete technique of swimming every time he jumps into the water. Sometimes he merely kicks around and comes out. Many times one will jump into the waters of worship and fling about a little and come out. But there is a complete program which may be carried out in part or whole when one enters deeply into worship, just as the full technique of swimming comes into play when he goes into deep water. We are going to suggest such a technique. Some time we hope

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it will be greatly improved by the suggestions of others. Also we shall not forget that in worship as in swimming one cannot learn merely from the instruction of another. He must learn by personal practice.

1. Preconditions of Worship

There are three preconditions which must be met before effective worship is possible. The first is that one must go out into deep water. He must take life seriously. He must not shirk the heavy responsibilities. He must venture out to depths where wading is difficult. No one ever worshiped profoundly and with largest results who was not struggling. That does not mean that he must do something conspicuous before the world; much less does it mean that he must seek trouble. It merely means that he assume the tremendous responsibilities that inevitably fall upon every one who lives earnestly and has sufficient insight to discern the tragedies in the lives of men. It means, for example, if one is a parent, that he treat his child not as a plaything only, but shall assume the enormous responsibility of that child's highest development. If he has any direct access to the industrial process,