

IS IT ONLY IN CATHEDRALS GOD CAN BE WORSHIPPED?

The quality of worship rendered to God Almighty is not assessed by the magnificent or otherwise of the house in which people meet to worship. It is not a sin to have a decent place for worship but what is important is whether we worship God in truth and out of a pure heart.

The word “cathedral” is defined in Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English as being “typically a large building for worship, usually ornamented inside and out with art and/or wood-and-stone work in beautiful patterns.” And “worship” means to express in word and act deep love and respect, gratitude, trust, loyalty and dependence upon a higher power, human or divine. This may involve prostrating oneself before the higher power or rendering sacred services or offering gifts and praises to him.

The Holy Scriptures show clearly that the Almighty God has a closer relationship with man than with any other creature in the earth. It is His purpose that man whom He made in His image and whom He endowed with such attributes as wisdom, power, justice and love, should worship and praise Him. He Himself said: “This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise.” – Isaiah 43:21

And of particular relevance to those of us living in this age of the last days of this evil world is the message of an angel of God whom St. John saw in his vision on the Island of Patmos. It is written: “And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.” – Revelation 14:6, 7

Before answering the question as to whether it is only in cathedrals God can be worshipped, let us look into how the ancient faithful worshipped Him and how the use of buildings for worship originated.

The Bible shows that the worship of God from the beginning required faith, obedience and sincerity expressed in certain acts of reverence. Cain and Abel, the first and second sons of Adam made offerings to God. While the offering of Abel was accepted, that of Cain was rejected by the Lord. (Genesis 4:1-8) Concerning Abel, Saint Paul wrote: “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.” – Hebrews 11:4

And the Bible states that as early as the time of Seth, the third son of Adam, “...then began men to call upon the name of the LORD.” (Genesis 4:26) Subsequent generations of the faithful

maintained these early forms of worship involving prayers and offerings. They kept their relationship with God faithfully. Thus Enoch “walked with God”, and Noah whom He found righteous before Him in that generation expressed his gratitude by building an altar on which he offered burnt offerings to Him after the Deluge. – Genesis 5:24; 6:9; 8:20

Indeed Abraham, the “friend of God” as well as his son Isaac, and even Jacob, his grandson, maintained that simple system of worship in their semi-nomadic pattern of life. They did not build any house for the purpose of worship. But wherever they pitched their tents for a period of time they built sacrificial altars and called upon the name of the Lord. – Genesis 12:7, 8; 13:4, 18 etc.

There is also the instance of the pillar of stone set up by Jacob at Bethel where he made offerings to God after he in a dream was assured of divine blessings. – Genesis 28:10-22; 35:1-3, 9-15

Israelites

When Israel had grown into a nation and had been delivered by God from the bondage of Egypt, they were commanded through Moses the prophet to set up the tabernacle. It was a tent building – a movable sanctuary – the pattern and even the furniture of which were prescribed by God. (Exodus chapters 25 – 31) And the details of its erection are recorded in chapters 35 – 40. This was done in the wilderness during their journey to Canaan.

In course of time, however, King David during his reign felt constrained by his high regard for God to build a permanent and fitting house of worship made of stone for him to supplant the tabernacle. This was after he had consolidated power and built a permanent place for himself. He told Nathan the prophet: “...See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains...” – 2 Samuel 7:1-3

It is noteworthy that God immediately made it clear that He did not request for such an house to be built for Him. He sent Nathan to tell the king: “...Thus saith the LORD, Thou shalt not build me an house to dwell in: For I have not dwelt in an house since the day that I brought up Israel unto this day; but have gone from tent to tent, and from *one* tabernacle *to another*. Wheresoever I have walked with all Israel, spake I a word to any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people, saying, Why have ye not built me an house of cedars?” – 1 Chronicles 17:3-6

Nevertheless, although God did not allow King David to build the house for Him, He was impressed with his good intention and so gave concession for his son Solomon to build it. (1 Kings 8:17-19) King David later stated to Solomon: “My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God: But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight.” (1 Chronicles 22:6-8)

And so the king gathered materials in abundance for the building and made adequate arrangement to have the work completed by Solomon. – 1 Chronicles 22:2-5

King Solomon began the work of construction in the fourth year of his reign, and the temple was completed seven years. – 1 Kings 6: 1, 37, 38

The splendor of the temple was great. Its description and the account of its dedication to God are recorded in 1 Kings chapters 5-8, and 2 Chronicles 2-6. But because of the unfaithfulness of the Jews from time to time God forsook them, and successive kings desecrated the temple. And when Jerusalem was sacked by the soldiers of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the temple was looted and destroyed. – 2 Kings 25:8, 9, 13-17

However, after the return of the Israelites from Babylonish captivity many years later through the help of God whose mercy is everlasting they built the temple in Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel of the tribe of Judah.

The Bible shows vividly that the tabernacle and temples built in ancient times were typically significant. It was not that God came down from heaven to dwell in them. This was acknowledged by King Solomon in his prayer during the dedication of the temple. Said he: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" – 1 Kings 8:27

God Himself declared: "...The heaven *is* my throne, and the earth *is* my footstool: where *is* the house that ye build unto me? and where *is* the place of my rest? For all those *things* hath mine hand made, and all those *things* have been, saith the LORD: but to this *man* will I look, *even* to *him that is* poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." – Isaiah 66:1, 2

What is more, the martyr Stephen in his brilliant answer to the accusation of blasphemy against him just before he was killed, said: "But Solomon built him (God) an house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven *is* my throne, and earth *is* my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what *is* the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?" – Acts 7:47-50. See also Acts 17:24

Spiritual Temple

The ancient tabernacle and temples under the Mosaic Law and the Levitical Priesthood were types or shadows of things to come as clearly stated in the Bible. And the advent of Jesus Christ brought about a change of the priesthood and the law. Saint Paul stated: "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect." – Hebrews 10:1; see also Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 7:11, 12; 8:3-5

It is essential therefore to mention at this stage that the tabernacles and the temples that were built in those days foreshadowed Jesus Christ and the anointed Christians who are his body members. They make up the spiritual tabernacle or temple or house of God, the literal tabernacle and temples having been done away with as the places of communication between God and His people. God now speaks to men through Jesus Christ His Son and through His servants called to be apostles and anointed with the Holy Spirit. – Hebrews 1:12; John 17:18-20; Matthew 24:31; 2 Corinthians 5:19, 20; 1 John 2:27 etc.

When Jesus Christ told the Jews to destroy the temple and that he would raise it up in three days, he was not speaking of the literal temple but of the spiritual one which he himself is. (John 2:19-21) And Saint Paul stated: “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;” – Hebrews 9:11

Furthermore, with reference to the anointed Christians Saint Paul stated: “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, he shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are.” – 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17; see also Hebrews 3:6

Christian Worship

It is no longer necessary for the people of God to go to Jerusalem in the land of Palestine to worship God. This was made clear by Jesus Christ during his dialogue with a woman of Samaria, as it is written: “The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth.” – John 4:19-24

It becomes clear at once that what is important in the service of God today is not the place of worship but the quality of the worship in terms of righteousness reflecting His spirit, and firm belief in the truth of His word. Where people worship in cathedrals or magnificent buildings and the truth is absent their services will not be accepted by God. So too, if they have not truly repented of their sins as to put away evil doing, their services will be unacceptable. God said “...but to this *man* will I look, *even* to *him* *that is* poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.” – Isaiah 66:2

It is important, very important, that we hold firmly to the truth and eschew false doctrines and unwholesome traditions of men in our worship of God. Otherwise, our worship will be in vain. Jesus Christ said told the Scribes and Pharisees: “Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of

you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.” – Matthew 15:7-9

Christians are free to worship God anywhere, however small the place may be and however few they themselves may be provided the place is clean, there is sincerity, and the truth is with them. It could be in a home, a school hall or classroom, a town hall or any other available and convenient place. Jesus Christ said: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name (in truth of course – Psalm 145:18), there am I in the midst of them.” – Matthew 18:20

It is therefore wrong to look down on any church or group of Christians for not having a magnificent church hall in which to worship. Even the early Christians worshipped in their own homes. That was why St. Paul while writing to the Christians in Rome stated among other things: “” – Romans 16:3-5 (New International Version); see also 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2

A proper understanding of the Scriptures will make one know that the true worship of God is not to be confined to a particular place. It does not end with church service but covers every aspect of a Christian's life anywhere and at any time, including his dealings with his fellow man or woman, be it husband or wife, parent or child, master or servant or anyone else. Whatever we do, good or bad, will be rewarded us accordingly by God through Christ Jesus. – Ecclesiastes 12:14; Jeremiah 17:10; Romans 2:6; 2 Corinthians 5:10 etc.

It was Saint Paul who admonished: “...Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love *your* wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey *your* parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children *to anger*, lest they be discouraged. Servants, obey in all things *your* masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as men pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do *it* heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.” – Colossians 3:17-24

True worship, which is acceptable to God, must be devoid of envy, selfishness, strife and wrong use of the tongue, but should be a reflection of the wisdom from above which the apostle James described as being “...first pure, then peaceable, gentle, *and* easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy...” (James 3:13-18) The same apostle also stated: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself unspotted from the world.” – James 1:27

And so it is not in cathedrals only God can be worshiped.