

# Public Worship and Human Society

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If we were to take a look at human society of some four and a half centuries ago, say, about the year 1500, we should see there a world that was still largely sacral. The whole of life was bound up with religion, the Church, the *Sacerdotium*, penetrating into every department of human life, and in the civil order the *Imperium* itself was regarded as sacred. The *Sacerdotium* may have been corrupt and the *Imperium* tottering but men still thought of the whole of society as sacred. Even the very processes of nature by which millions of men and women gained a painful livelihood were nearer to magic in their minds than we usually like to think they were. Nature was largely unpredictable, afflicted with mysterious calamities and marred from time to time by what were called 'Acts of God'.

On the other hand, there was an immense surge of new life throughout Europe. Men had rediscovered the ancient literature of Greece and Rome and were luxuriating in it. For more than a hundred years Italy had flowered with a new art in paint and stone, whose products we still admire. Great new buildings were going up, but above all, men felt that they were new beings. They were throwing off the restrictions of the old sacral order and were finding themselves, discovering new powers to which they could see no limit. Nature itself was being freed from the bondage of magic and within a hundred years Galileo would demolish the old picture of the cosmos and take the music out of the spheres.

If we turn to our own age, we find we too are living in a new era, but instead of studying the Greek and Roman classics, men today are rejoicing in new scientific and technological discoveries and are rapidly changing the face of the earth. Man is in the process of completing what he began in the sixteenth century and he has a like sense of power which again he sees to be without limits. All this vast revolution was welcomed by the Vatican Council in its great document called the Church in the Modern World. And we too should welcome it ungrudgingly for it is the manifestation of the almost inexhaustible invention of man who was made in the image of God and was put in this world to subdue the earth.

All this however has led to a reduction of the area of the sacred. Man feels more strongly than ever that he is master of the earth and that it merely awaits a further and more complete exploitation. There is nothing inherently wrong in this though I think there is a danger that