

The Altar

Many and various are the forces that actuate a human being. We have the power to embrace the whole of nature, its stars, mountains, seas and great rivers, its trees and animals, and the human world in which we find ourselves, and by love and appreciation to draw it all into our own inner world. We have the power of love, the power also of hate and repulsion. We can oppose and repudiate our surroundings or refashion them after our own mind. Impulses of pleasure, desire, trust, love, calmness, excitement course through the heart in multitudinous waves.

But of all powers we possess none is nobler than the ability to recognize that there is a higher being and to bind ourselves to the honor of this Higher Being. We have the power to know God, to worship him, and devote himself to him in order "that God may be glorified."

But if the majesty of God is to illuminate us wholly, if we are to adore the Divine Majesty to free ourselves from self-seeking, then we must exert a still higher power.

In our quiet depths of being there is a region of calm light from where we send up sacrifice to God. The external sign of this strong region of calm is the altar.

The altar sits in the holiest spot in church. The church has itself been set apart from the world of human work with the altar elevated above the rest in a spot as remote and separate as the sanctuary of the soul. Its solid base is the human will that knows that God created us for his worship and we will perform that worship faithfully. The table of the altar that rests upon this base stands open and accessible for the presentation of sacrifice. It is not in a dark recess where the actions may be dimly glimpsed, but uncurtained, unscreened, a level surface in plain sight, placed open in the sight of God without reservation, as our heart's altar is.

The two altars, the one without and the one within, belong inseparably together. The visible altar at the heart of the church is but the outward sign of the altar inside the human breast, God's temple, of which the church with its walls and arches is but the expression and figure.

