

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY*Rome's Dilemma:
Are We Not Men?*

"Between Man and God: Sacrifice in the Roman Imperial Cult" by S.R.F. Price, in *Journal of Roman Studies* (vol. 70, 1980), Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, 31-34 Gordon Square, London, WC1H 0PP, United Kingdom.

After the coronation of Augustus in 27 B.C., rites of emperor worship surfaced in Rome's eastern provinces. To many historians, they symbolized the "convulsions" of dying Hellenistic theology or the Greeks' craven efforts to curry favor with their new overlords. Yet Price, a Cambridge historian, argues that the imperial cults scattered throughout the Hellenistic communities of Greece, Asia Minor, and Egypt revealed this culture's surprising vitality.

The Greek city-states of the region had offered animal sacrifices to their kings ever since Alexander the Great established his monarchical rule in the fourth century B.C. Thinking of royal power in divine terms evidently eased the Greeks' adjustment to this new political system. For 200 years before the Roman conquest, they dutifully honored their rulers.

These habits died so hard that the Greeks asked permission to honor their new Roman conquerors with offerings of bulls and burnt incense. But the Romans, who also invoked the emperor in their ceremonies, balked at deifying their rulers. They felt no pressing need to justify im-



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Sacrifices to emperors made the Romans uneasy.

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perial authority. Roman governors sought to satisfy the Greeks by ingeniously blurring the distinction between man and God during the sacrifices. They saw to it that the rites were supervised not by true priests but by civic officials. The animals were offered "on behalf of" the emperor, rather than "to" him. And where the Greeks traditionally slaughtered white animals to worship gods and darker beasts to honor heroes and the dead, the imperial "priests" used speckled animals.

Price believes that a dispute over such rituals largely explains why the Romans singled out the early Christians for religious persecution. Until their revolt against Nero in A.D. 66, even the Jews willingly sacrificed animals "on behalf of" Roman rulers as they had always done for their own kings. Christians, however, would go no further than praying for them. They claimed that Christ's Crucifixion represented the ultimate sacrifice and ruled out all future blood rituals except for the symbolic Eucharist. Infuriated by this slight to their gods (and perceiving an insult to the emperor), Roman authorities drove the Christians underground until the Emperor Constantine's conversion in 313.

The Third Form of Love

"Compassion and Transcendence of Duty and Inclination" by Alan R. Drengson, in *Philosophy Today* (Spring 1981), Messenger Press, Carthagen Station, Celina, Ohio 45822.

When Christ implored man to love his neighbors and enemies, what did he mean? Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), the great German philosopher, concluded that Christ spoke of "practical love" stemming from a sense of duty (surely he was not referring to "pathological love," or passion). Drengson, a philosopher at the University of Victoria, Canada, contends that Kant neglected a third form of love—compassion.

Kant was influenced by Plato and Aristotle, who held that right living is the product of reason and self-discipline. Both Greeks believed that individuals could bring their emotions and appetites into harmony with the just dictates of the intellect—thereby reaching an understanding of the "ways of nature, society, and self." But where his mentors emphasized a "balance of one's natural capacities," Kant argued that emotions could never be tamed by the mind. To him, the most moral actions were precisely those that conflicted with natural inclinations but were propelled by a commitment to ethics grounded in reason.

Kant's philosophy seems well-suited to a secular society, notes Drengson. There, "laws and rules become necessary substitutes for the large heart" of Christian charity, and actions become all-important. But religion demands a spiritual transformation. In his Sermon on the Mount, Christ asked his followers to suffer (empathize) with real people in their personal plights. Those who act out of duty alone, says Drengson, can only love abstractly. Worse, a sense of duty fashioned by the mind can lead one to cast judgments and value "consistency" without wisdom or mercy. Compassion summons up forgiveness and acceptance.