

Notes from James Torrance's *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*

- "The worship and mission of the church are the gift of participating through the Holy Spirit in the incarnate Son's communion with the Father and the Son's mission from the Father to the world" (9).
- "How we worship must reflect who God is" (10).

Introduction: The Place of Jesus Christ in Worship

- Humans created to be priests "to express on behalf of all creatures the praises of God, so that through human lips the heavens might declare the glory of God" (13).
 - Humans fall, but "Jesus comes to be the priest of creation to do for us, men and women, what we failed to do, to offer to the Father the worship and praise that we failed to offer. . . Whatever else our worship is it is our liturgical amen to the worship of Christ" (14).
- **Christian worship is:**
 - "our participation through the Spirit in the Son's communion with the Father, in his vicarious life of worship and intercession" (15).
 - "in **response** to the one true offering made for us in Christ, our response of gratitude to God's grace, our sharing by grace in the heavenly intercession of Christ" (15)
 - must "be said in the light of the gospel of grace . . . [it must] **convey the gospel**" (15).
- **Jesus' Role:** Since Jesus is the "leader of our worship" (Heb. 8:2), Christ's baptism is our baptism, Christ's sacrifice is our sacrifice, Christ's worship is our worship. **Jesus Christ is the real agent in all true worship.**
 - We do well to emphasize the continuing ministry of Christ as prophet (preaching) and king (head, church, community), but have neglected the continuing priesthood of Christ, "perhaps out of a negative reaction to rather Pelagian ways in which this has been interpreted in Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic theology" (17).

Chapter One: Worship - Unitarian or Trinitarian?

What makes worship Christian? Two views:

- 1. **Unitarian**
 - Worship is something we do, out of duty, we sing, we pray for the world, the sermon is exhortative - Jesus is our example, and "the only priesthood is our priesthood, the only offering our offering, the only intercessions our intercessions."
 - In practice this is unitarian because it "has no doctrine of the mediator or sole priesthood of Christ, is human-centered, has no proper doctrine of the Holy Spirit, is too often non-sacramental, and can engender weariness" (20).
 - Do-it-yourself, legal worship - basically Arian or Pelagian
 - Can be divisive since each church "does its own thing" to worship in its own way
- 2. **Trinitarian** - "the gift of participating through the Spirit in the incarnate Son's communion with the Father."
 - "**There is only one true Priest** through whom and with whom we draw near to God our Father. . . There is only one offering which is truly acceptable to God, and it is not ours. . . . That is why the Reformers, in their critique of certain medieval concepts of priesthood, stressed the sole priesthood of Christ, and reinterpreted the church as a royal priesthood participating in the priesthood of Christ" (21).
 - Hence *koinonia*

- This worship "enshrines the gospel of grace . . . We are baptized into a life of communion." It unifies because there is only one way to come to the Father. And rather than weariness, it "releases joy and ecstasy".
 - "In his love, [God] accepts us freely in the person of his beloved Son" (23).
 - "In worship Christ himself comes to live in our hearts by the Spirit and draws us into the very life of God" (24).
- **Three Theological Models Today**
 - 1. Harnack (Hick) Model - Liberal Protestantism, Unitarian, Jesus is our example, individualistic
 - 2. Existential, Present-day Experience Model - early Barth, Bultmann, evangelical experience
 - "Faith means contemporary immediacy . . . The center is "God and me," today. But this response in faith is only made possible by the work of Christ on the cross" (26).
 - "As Bonhoeffer saw, we then become more interested in the blessings of Christ than Jesus Christ himself. It is a failure not to recognize that salvation is not simply through the work of Christ, but is **primarily given to us in his person**. . . Once again, as in moralistic approaches to the gospel, in such a 'theology of experience,' the doctrine of the Trinity can recede and be regarded as metaphysical speculation which cannot be verified by religious experience. . . . As such it is Sabellian, as in Schleiermacher, and in practice unitarian. Indeed the latent or explicit unitarianism of this approach is what gave rise to Sabellianism in the early church, and often again in 19th Century theology . . . both liberal and evangelical, in its preoccupation with individual religious experience, subjectively interpreted." (28)
 - "[So later Barth and Bonhoeffer] criticized the attempt to reconstruct theology from the starting point of 'religious experience'. . . He pleaded for following the biblical pattern of giving priority the question of who over what and how - that we interpret the atonement and personal faith in terms of the incarnation (the triune God of grace) and not the other way around. The pragmatic, problem-centered preoccupation with the question of how in our Western culture can so readily reduce the gospel to the category of means and ends" (28-9).
 - "**Although it stresses the God-humanward movement in Christ, the human-Godward movement is still ours!** It emphasizes our faith, our decision, our response in an event theology which **short-circuits the vicarious humanity of Christ and belittles the union with God**. . . . it is to imply that God throws us back upon ourselves to make our response. It ignores the fact that God has already provided for us that response which alone is acceptable to him" (29).
 - 3. **The Incarnational Trinitarian Model**
 - "Christ is presented to us as the Son living a life of union and communion with the Father in the Spirit, presenting himself in our humanity through the Spirit to the Father on behalf of humankind. . . . He receives the Spirit from the Father for us, vicariously, in his humanity, that out of his fullness he might baptize the church by the Spirit at Pentecost into a life of shared communion, mission, and service" (30-1).

- **Twofold relationship:** "between God and humanity realized vicariously for us in Christ, and at the same time a relationship between Christ and the church, that we might participate by the Spirit in Jesus' communion with the Father in a life of intimate communion" (31).
 - Thus, **worship is a double movement, from the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit and to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit.**
 - What He was by nature, we become by grace.
- **Threefold relation of being in Communion,** mutual indwelling, perichoretic unity:
 - 1. Between Jesus and the Father in the Spirit, into which we are drawn to participate
 - 2. Between Christ and his body in the communion of the Spirit (i.e., Eucharist)
 - 3. between members of the body by life in the Spirit (i.e., marriage)
- "We are never more truly human than at the Lord's Table, when Christ draws us into his life of communion with the Father and into communion with one another" (39).

Chapter Two: The Sole Priesthood of Christ, the Mediator of Worship

- Day of Atonement, where all Israel entered in the High Priest
- Ancient Church doctrine of recapitulation: "the unassumed is the unredeemed"
- "God not only speaks the word of forgiveness to us. HE also provides for us one, in
- Jesus Christ, who makes the perfect response of vicarious penitence" (56).
- Parallel between Paul's doctrine of justification by faith (vs. works) and the Hebrews author's contrast between true worship ("reposing on and participating in the self offering of Christ who alone can lead us into 'the Holy of Holies') and false worship ("with its false reliance on what we do by following our own devices and traditions").(58-9).
 - "[OT provisions of sacrifice] were God-given covenantal witnesses to grace - that the God who alone would wipe out their sins would be gracious. **God is always the subject of propitiation, never its object**" (60).
- One of Arius' arguments against the deity of Christ was that Jesus could not be God because he was a man who prayed to God! "Athanasius' reply was: 'Arius, you do not understand the meaning of grace!'" (64).
 - "Fear of Arianism and the Arian argument - putting the praying humanity of Jesus against the deity of Christ - led the church, while asserting powerfully the deity of Christ, to **play down the priesthood of Christ!** What was the result? The church, the ecclesia, took over the vicarious role of being the high priest for humanity! While strongly asserting the divinity of Christ and his kingly, prophetic role, the church assumed the role of being the mediator of grace" (64).
- **Two hands of God** - Irenaeus - "the God who created this world (and Adam) has redeemed this world (with Adam) by the same Word and the same Spirit. The one by whom and for whom all things were created has taken our humanity to redeem us" (66).
 - "As in the mediatorial ministry of Christ, the Spirit is the interceding Spirit, through whom Jesus Christ our ascended high priest presents us to the Father" (67).