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Atonement and Worship

TREVOR HART

Introductory

What are we doing when, as Christians, we gather together to worship God? Why do we do it at all? And how is what we do here related to what Jesus Christ did in making atonement for the sins of humankind? What I hope to do in this essay is to suggest a way of answering these and other closely related questions which may prompt us to consider again our thinking both about worship and the atonement by bringing the two into the closest possible relation to one another. What I shall argue is that the logic of atonement and worship are basically the same; that they are things of the same essential sort, if not the same degree or significance. In both cases, I will suggest, we are dealing with a trinitarian event in which the Father's name is hallowed in the power of the Spirit: first (and foremost) by the eternal Son; second by the incarnate Son Jesus of Nazareth; and then third by the Church as she participates actively in the 'priestly' worship of the human Jesus through the Spirit's indwelling and thereby anticipates the end of creation in which the whole world will fulfil its *telos* and hallow the Father's name.

Worship as the goal of creation

Why did God create? Part of the answer given to this question in the traditional Christian doctrine of creation is that God called the universe into existence in order that it might glorify him. This, I think, has to be interpreted carefully or else it can seem to suggest a certain smugness on God's part which is not what is intended at all. The image of God as a sort of cosmic Caesar, basking with self-satisfaction in the worship and adulation of his people is as erroneous as it is repugnant and must be dismissed. But the creation, Christians believe, does glorify God, and this is part of its purpose and end.

Here as elsewhere, of course, there is a sense in which humans, as a part of the natural or created order, are also set apart quite decisively from that order. The particular distinguishing feature which I have in mind is the capacity of humans for conscious relation to God, considered response to him, articulate worship and intercession. So, in the tradition, humans have been deemed the priests of creation, gathering up the worship of the whole and offering it to God in a representative act of praise.

God enjoys what he has made

But just what is it that glorifies God? If God is glorified equally by the starry heavens and the rising and setting of the sun, the snow capped mountains and green valleys, the birds and beasts and insects, as well as by human beings, then what common element can we discern which serves to glorify him in all this creaturely diversity? For an answer to this question we might refer back to the narrative of creation in the priestly account in Genesis and the repeated refrain 'And God saw that it was good'.[1] In this divine judgment upon the world we may identify a basic sense of satisfaction, of contentment with what has been made, the perception within it all of a goodness or rightness which directly reflects the goodness of its divine fashioner. There is something decidedly helpful and healthy in the deployment of the metaphor of play or artistic creativity here. God enjoys his creation. It issues not from any sense of lack or incompleteness in God, but from an overflow of his fulness and joy. And, having expressed himself creatively, he stands back and views it with a deep sense of satisfaction. It is indeed something 'good'. And it is its essential goodness, its correspondence to God's creative intent and purpose, its reflection of his own nature and character, which serves to glorify him. It is this which gives him joy and pleasure as he surveys it.[2]

In the case of the mute and inanimate creation, of course, this 'goodness' has no specifically moral content. But in the case of the human creature this dimension enters decisively into the picture. The heavens may well declare the glory of God simply by their natural majesty and wonder, but when the psalmist turns to humankind just a few verses later it is to a consideration of the perfect law of God that he directs our thoughts, and reminds us that human thoughts and words (and, we might suppose, actions) which are pleasing to God are those which are blameless and free from the rule of sin.[3] Humans are distinct from the natural order not only or primarily by virtue of their articulateness or rationality, but supremely in as much as they are moral beings who are called to reflect not just God's majesty and wonder, but above all his holiness. Humans are distinctively moral creatures. Mountains may glorify God by their awesome and rugged beauty. The planets and stars may glorify him by their majesty, and by their reliable conformity to the laws of nature which he has woven into the fabric of the universe. Animals may glorify God by their diversity and beauty, and their correspondence to his divine fashioning in and through the evolutionary process. But in the case of humans alone the categories of cause or law or process will not suffice. Here for the first time we encounter a further factor which comes closest to the heart of God's own being: moral action. Thus the command comes to them as to no other creature, 'Be holy, for I am holy'.[4]

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1 Gen. 1:4,10,12,18 etc.
2 So, e.g., Ps. 104:31.
3 See Ps. 19:1,7,13-14.
4 So, e.g., Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2, 20:26 etc.

Holiness and the hallowing of the Father's name

How, then, is God glorified in his human creature? The key lies, surely, in the opening phrases of the one piece of dominical liturgy which we have: 'Our Father in heaven hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.'[5] God's name is hallowed not by our telling him how great and majestic he is, legitimate and important though such verbal expressions of praise may be. God's name is hallowed rather by human activity in which his own holy love is reflected and reciprocated from the side of the creature, in his will being done 'on earth as it is in heaven'. Here we draw directly upon the thought of one for whom God's holiness was paramount, the Congregational theologian P. T. Forsyth. In the teeth of the Ritschlian liberalism of his theological training Forsyth insisted that it is holiness which is most basic in God's nature, and not the rather sentimental 'love' of so many nineteenth century theologies. Holiness, understood not in aesthetic terms, but as absolute moral reality and authority, is characteristic of all that God is and does, so that his love, while fundamental to his nature, is precisely holy love. When this same God creates, what he creates is marked by a moral, as well as a physical and natural, order. Morality is woven into the very warp and weft of the universe as a direct reflection of God's own moral nature. And what God finds supremely 'satisfying' in creation (or in history as its extension through time) is the reciprocation of his own holy love from the creature's side, a response which humans alone among his creatures are suited to render. Thus it is precisely the offering of holy love back to God which, in humans, glorifies him and hallows his name. What he desires most, and enjoys most, in his creation, is not its staggering beauty or its physical complexity and intricate eco-systems, but this reflection of his own inner nature; the rendering back to him of love in holiness from humankind. It is for this that he longs; it was in order to share and to enjoy this with another that he created at all, and it is this which he is determined to find. Holiness, Forsyth writes, 'is the eternal moral power which must do, and do till it sees itself everywhere',[6] not in any narcissistic fashion, but because it longs to share what is good with another, and will not tolerate that which would spoil or deface that goodness.

Thus the command to 'be holy, for I am holy' is no arbitrary command. It is the basic form of the command of God to humankind, a command which is at once a call to be what we were created to be and a call to worship, to be and to do that which is a hallowing of God's name and a delighting of his Fatherly heart. With this in mind we must recognise at once that our concept of worship needs to be broadened out beyond what takes place liturgically in our churches on a day by day or week by week basis to embrace all that human beings do which hallows God's name and embodies his will. Viewed thus, public worship is merely the point at which, on a regular basis, we draw aside from the busyness of life and focus our minds and hearts and wills consciously upon the business of our relationship to God, bringing to explicit

5 Matt. 6:9-10.

6 *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, 3rd ed., Independent Press, London 1949, p 240.

articulation or recapitulating the wealth of praise which we, together with the whole of creation,[7] constantly offer to God in all that we are and think and say and do.

Worship as trinitarian event

Worship, then, is the end of creation, that for which we and all else that is were made. Nature comes to fulfilment in praise. Human beings are never more natural, never more at one with the natural order, than when they voice the praise which it offers to its creator in various and diverse ways. We are never more truly human than when we reflect the God who made us by reciprocating his holy love. Yet creation, and the worship which it sets in process, is an act which takes place as an overflowing of the trinitarian life of God himself. That which the Father makes and declares that 'it is good' he makes in and through his Word or Son, and in the power of his own Holy Spirit which permeates it and holds it in existence from moment to moment. Thus to be a creature is to exist within this set of triune relationships, to relate to God as Father through the Son, in whom we live and move and have our being, and in the life-giving and life-sustaining power of the Spirit. There can be no other conclusion than this for a Christian doctrine of creation which seeks integration with a trinitarian doctrine of God.[8] In creation, in other words, what we are dealing with is the calling into existence of a created other in order to echo and share in the overflowing of that uncreated love and joy which echoes through eternity, and which is the Father's love for the Son and the Son's love for the Father in the Spirit. Creation is drawn into a dynamic of worship and adoration which is both logically and 'temporally' prior to it, a dynamic which is the eternal trinitarian *koinonia* of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in which each person reflects perfectly the being and character of the others in a supreme perichoretic[9] paean of praise.

Truly to be a creature of God, therefore, to fulfil one's creaturehood, is to participate, to be drawn into this divine liturgy, to share in the fulness of the joy of the life of God. But something which this section of our paper has so far ignored is the stark and obvious fact that empirically it is not thus. Humans have not and for the most part do not reciprocate the holy love of God; their lives are characterised not by holiness and praise but by its precise opposite, sin and recalcitrance. God's name is not hallowed but trampled in the dust and spat upon. Even the natural order does not truly praise God as was his intention, but groans and travails, longing for the sons of God to be revealed.[10] Yet this is not because anything that we have said about creation is untrue, but because humans, in their sinfulness, have denied its truth and

7 For the theme of creation 'praising' God see e.g. Ps. 70:34; 98; 148.

8 On this see Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1991, pp 5f.

9 *Perichoresis* is the term employed in classical trinitarian theology to refer to the interpenetration of the three persons within the Godhead by virtue of which they are nonetheless one God, so that to refer to one of the three is, by implication, to refer also and equally to the other two.

10 Rom. 8:19-23.

lived life as if it were not so. The priests of creation have spurned God's holy love, and worshipped idols of their own fashioning instead. As a result, they stand under judgment and sentence of death, alienated from their creator and enslaved to sin. They stand, as the Bible from beginning to end testifies, in need of redemption. What form, then, does this redemption take?

Worship is at the heart of the atonement

Discussions of atonement are resourced by a rich variety of biblical imagery and metaphor, much (but by no means all) of which focuses upon the death of the man Jesus on a cross outside Jerusalem. It is in this portion of this particular human story, the apostles indicate, that we are to seek some decisive event in God's story, and in the story of his relationship with humankind.

There is not scope here to explore even most of the significant imagery. What follows, therefore, lays no claim to the status of a balanced or comprehensive discussion of atonement; it is intended rather to provoke reflection on specific motifs and questions which have, perhaps, received rather less attention than they deserve from evangelical writers. By focusing in particular upon one biblical metaphor (sacrifice) and one extra-biblical (satisfaction) and exploring each in relation to the complex of themes uncovered in the paper so far, I hope to suggest the possibility of a new perspective on such questions as the relationship between Jesus' death on Golgotha and the larger context of his life of obedience and holiness, the place of this death within God's larger purpose for creation, and the nature of the death of Jesus as an event within the trinitarian life of God.

Worship and sacrifice

If there is one place where the essence of worship and atonement are closely linked in Christian theology then it is in the deployment of the metaphor of sacrifice in relation to each. In old Israel it was impossible to isolate either the idea or the reality of atonement from the context of worship, for atonement lay explicitly at the very heart of the cultic life of the nation. The annual bearing of the nation's sins into the holy place on the shoulders of the high priest and the ritual shedding of blood which signified the covering of those sins was a focal point in the liturgical life of the covenant people before God.[11] Here in this sacrament of divine grace both God's holy anger in the face of sin and his merciful acceptance of the sinner found expression. 'The effect of atonement was to cover sin from God's eyes, so that it should no longer make a visible breach between God and His people.... Sacrifices were not desperate efforts and surrenders made by terrified people in the hope of propitiating an angry deity. The sacrifices were in themselves prime acts of obedience to God's means of grace and His expressed will.'[12] For Israel, then, worship and atonement were integrally linked at the very deepest level. A substantial part

11 See, e.g., Lev. 16 and 17.

12 P. T. Forsyth, *The Work of Christ*, Independent Press, London 1946, p 90.

of her worship was concerned precisely with the mode of atonement for sin prescribed by God. Atonement was, she believed, a present and ongoing reality.

If the gospel accounts of Jesus' own reflection upon his forthcoming death are to be taken at face value, the category which he most often employed to make sense of it was that of sacrifice. At least we must admit that it was so in the faith of the early Christian community. Jesus' death is construed (to cite just one example) as the sacrificial offering which secures forgiveness of sins for many, and in which the establishment of God's new covenant with Israel is ratified (Matt. 26:26f.). This particular instance is helpful for our purposes, focusing attention, as it does, upon the notion of covenant as the social, political, cultic and theological context for the language of sacrifice in relation to Jesus' death. It is within the context of God's choosing of Israel as a special people, of course, that the demand of holiness emerges in the specific form of torah.[13] Israel is to be a priestly people, a holy people whose holiness reflects that of Yahweh. In this she is to be representative rather than exclusive of the nations, and, ultimately, of the creation as a whole in its common calling to hallow God's name. The covenant is established by the grace of election, and the obligations of covenantal existence are clearly spelled out in the law's precepts. Yet Israel is representative of humankind in another, more tragic, sense also, in that, from one generation to the next, she fails to fulfil the covenant from the human side.

It is within this situation of election, covenant, and failure that the distinctive understanding of sacrifice within Israel arises. As a divinely furnished sacrament of grace, a means of atonement for that sin which otherwise threatens to render her relationship to God impossible, sacrifice enabled Israel to continue within the covenant. But this was a provisional arrangement, and the fulness of Israel's hope lay not in the existing imperfect covenant with its sacrificial provision, but in the decisive eschatological action of God himself in establishing a new covenant in which the relationship would finally be perfectly fulfilled from both sides, the law being engraved no longer on stone, but on the flesh and blood reality of human life. This expectation corresponds to the divine promise of the covenant formula, a formula which, we might suppose, contains as much God's promise to himself as to Israel, 'I will be your God and you shall be my people'.[14]

The prevalence in western theologies of atonement of forensic and legal metaphor (under which the language of sacrifice has all too often simply been subsumed) has encouraged an essentially passive notion of Jesus' death. The cross is something which happens or is done to Jesus, either by the Jewish and Roman authorities, or else by God. Whatever the specific merits or difficulties attaching to forensic imagery, I wish to suggest that by teasing the language of sacrifice out from entanglement with it an aspect of Jesus' death which is otherwise too readily obscured comes to our notice; namely, its nature as ethical action.

13 See, e.g., Exod. 20:2 where the delivery of the ten commandments is prefaced by a statement of Yahweh's electing and redemptive activity.

14 Jer. 31:1; Ezek. 36:28.

In the ritual symbolism of sacrifice, as prophetic denunciations of the mere ritualism sometimes associated with it make clear,[15] what is manifest is the self-offering of the participant. The offering up of something of supreme value betokens that complete offering of self to God which is the proper response of humanity to his gracious initiative in creation and election. As we have observed, Israel, like the Church, repeatedly failed to make this offering in practice in her daily life. But here, sacramentally (and in the case of Israel proleptically), it was shown forth and treated by God as made. Without this ethical aspect the symbolism of sacrifice was quite empty of meaning. Sacrifice, one might say, was no *ex opere operato* manipulation of God, but a sacramental covering of the people's sin by the sign of that reciprocal holiness in which God's name is truly hallowed in his creature and covenant partner.

Worship and the satisfaction of God

How, then, does this affect our understanding of the atonement? Setting aside the sacrificial metaphor momentarily let us explore instead the characteristically Latin terminology of Christ's death as a 'satisfaction' for sin. What precisely, we may inquire, would 'satisfy' God as an atonement for human sin? Most answers to this question have focused on the suffering and death of Jesus *as suffering and death*, as if these things were in themselves in some sense pleasing to God. Without challenging the necessity of Jesus' suffering and death, what I wish to suggest is that these elements considered in themselves or in abstraction from the specific moral context of Jesus' life are insufficient.

Forsyth suggests that the only thing which could truly satisfy a holy God is the provision of an adequate holiness, an adequate confession of holiness from the side of the human, from within the context and condition of sin itself.[16] In Christ, he avers, what this entailed was perfect holiness, the perfect conformity of his will to that of his Father, a conformity which was never automatic, but achieved rather through moral struggle and suffering, and culminating in his practical ratification of God's righteous judgment upon sinful humanity by actively submitting to the dark consequences of that judgment in our behalf. Thus, Forsyth contends, while Jesus' death was certainly the atoning thing, it was so precisely and only because by submitting to this death Jesus was, on behalf of humankind, making the only fitting response to divine holiness from the side of the sinful creature. Here, at last, was to be found a human in whose life and death the covenant was perfectly fulfilled not only from God's side, but equally from ours. Here was one in whom, morally speaking, 'man's centre and God's coincide'.[17] Here was one who, in this response as in the rest of his life, was pleasing to God, who glorified his creator as no other, on whom God looked and once more as of old 'saw that it was good'.

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15 So, e.g., Amos 5:21f.
16 See, e.g., *The Work of Christ*, p 126.
17 *The Work of Christ*, p 184.

The notion of 'satisfaction', so often construed in primarily mercantile or forensic terms, can be enriched and deepened here, I suggest, by introducing an aesthetic and moral dimension. We certainly cannot overlook or underplay the darkness of the crucifixion, and the words of Jesus 'My God, why have you forsaken me?' must be allowed their full weight. But when we consider the ethical dimension of the cross, its place as an active embracing of the divine will, as an aligning and reconciling of divine and human consciences in the person of the human Son of God, we must also recall those other words, spoken first at the baptism and then again at the transfiguration, and recalled, surely, in the judgement beneath the cross of the centurion in Mark's gospel: 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased'. It is precisely because Jesus embraces the awfulness of Godforsakenness willingly, as a concurrence in the divine judgment upon human sin, and because he does so as a human being, from the side of fallen and broken humanity, that his death (of a piece with his life) is supremely 'satisfying' to the Father. It is the love, the reciprocal holiness, the worship implicit within this action which heals and perfects a broken humanity, and thereby invites again the ancient divine judgement 'it is good'.

The New Testament metaphor of sacrifice, I think, enables us to lay hold of this sense in which worship lies at the heart of the atonement. The attitude of Jesus in his death, its relation to his entire life of obedient service wrought through moral struggle, its nature as a perfect confession of God's holiness, is bound up with its value as an atonement which covers the sin of humankind. Not only is the atonement a 'payment' for the history of human sin. It is at the same time much more. It is precisely the point in human history where an actual reconciliation or at-one-ment of divine and human existence is to be identified. In the particular history of Jesus of Nazareth the history of the covenant, and thereby of creation itself, is both overturned and paradoxically fulfilled. The old Adam dies as he must, and the new humanity is established in his place. But the old dies only as he offers himself to death willingly, and thereby fulfils his createdness, subverting the order of sin and death, and introducing a new order of holiness, being raised up into a new existence in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Viewed within its proper christological context, of course, what we must say is not that here at last God finds a human who makes the long-desired response of faith and holiness which fulfils creation and atones, but that *God himself* has here finally acted to fulfil his covenant promise to Israel: 'I will be your God, and you shall be my people'. In the humanity of God himself we find the perfect atonement and *koinonia* between God and humankind which is the writing of the law on flesh and blood, and the goal of creation in which God is perfectly glorified.

Outside the former parish church of St Paul's in Worcester there is a startling crucifix commissioned earlier this century by the then parish priest Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy. What is striking is the fact that the dying Christ, instead of hanging limply on the tree with head downcast, is gripping the cross, visibly embracing the death which it entails, and has his head thrust

heavenwards, a look of triumph and doxological joy on his face. In this telling image and the alternative reading of the cross which it provides the whole complex of theological motifs treated in this paper are bound together.

In death, as in life, Jesus offers to his Father the perfect response from the human side of the Creator-creature relation. But what he thus does humanly is nothing less than an earthing at the level of the human of a relationship which he enjoys eternally as God with the Father in the Spirit. He is the *Christos*, the anointed one, whose human life glorifies the Father, in whom the Father is well pleased, and who, even in his submission to death in solidarity with sinners, satisfies his Father in a perfect sacrificial offering of himself. He who has received the Spirit from his Father here offers the same Spirit back to the Father in love and praise (cf. Matt. 27:50 and John 19:30 where the absence of a possessive genitive at least creates a suggestive ambiguity), reproducing the inner trinitarian holiness among human beings, and thereby bringing the divine self-realization in creation to a glorious fulfilment.

Atonement is at the heart of worship

What I have suggested thus far is that both creation and atonement manifest what might be called a 'liturgical' character. But if this is so then the matter certainly cannot stop there. For God's purpose in creating and redeeming is not to establish a new covenant, a new creation, the boundaries of which might be reckoned identical with those of the particular history of the man Jesus of Nazareth. Christ is what he is and does what he does not to the exclusion of others but precisely in order that others might be redeemed and drawn in to share in this new reality. If so, then the worship which we offer to God as the church is fundamentally related to the twin 'liturgies' of creation and atonement, related not simply as cause and effect, stimulus and response, but because *they are fundamentally the same sorts of thing*. I certainly do not intend in saying this to suggest that Christian worship has any capacity to atone for human sin, nor that it somehow supplements the atoning value of Jesus' self-offering. What I mean is simply that the thing which when Jesus does it atones for the sins of the world is nonetheless the precise thing that we are each called to do, both as creatures and as participants in the covenant, namely, to make that response of reciprocal holiness which hallows God's name, even when what this entails is the putting of self on the cross.

Our worship is not ours alone

But there is more to be said even than this. For the whole point about Jesus' perfect self-offering to God is that it obscures and displaces our sinful failure to make this offering. This does not mean that we are no longer called to make any response, but rather that in making it we no longer do so in isolation from his perfect offering of it on our behalf. The Church's worship is offered 'through Christ' not simply in the sense that his atoning death makes it possible for us to approach God in worship, but because, being of the same essential kind, our offering and his are fused together, the imperfections and

partiality of ours being lost in the perfection and completeness of his. The call to worship, to 'be holy', therefore, is not the call to make an independent response to what God has done in Christ, but rather to share actively in that hallowing of God's name which he has offered and continues to offer in the flesh on our behalf.[18] Atonement is at the very heart of Christian worship, therefore, in as much as in worship we share actively in what Christ is and does atoningly for us. It is the Church's hallowing of the Father's name which does not and cannot take place apart from the presence in its midst of the one whom the writer to the Hebrews calls our *Archiereus*, our High Priest, who offers to the Father an atoning liturgy in his life and death in our place and on our behalf.[19] In Christian worship there is an *anamnesis*, an act of recollection in which the boundaries between past and present are somehow transcended, and the same Christ who was crucified and raised once for our redemption, and the same Spirit in whose power he was crucified and raised, make themselves present in the Church's midst in transforming power.

This theological realisation has some very practical and pastoral consequences.

Worship: our response to Christ's response made on our behalf

First, the fact that our every act of worship is 'covered by' and united with the one perfect human response of Jesus, in whom the covenant is perfected and fulfilled, lifts from our shoulders the burden of responsibility of feeling that, God having done all that he has for us, we must now make an appropriate and fitting response to him. For we know ourselves to lack the moral resources needed to make any such response. If we try to make it we inevitably fall into one of two traps: either that of self-righteousness (having persuaded ourselves that we have after all succeeded in making it) or guilt and fear (because in truth we know that our outward words and actions very often veil a sinful, weak and inadequate inner response which we hope will remain hidden from our fellow Christians). But God knows that we are not able to bring to him the sort of perfect holiness which hallows his name, to conform our lives at every point to his life and will. And his command 'Be holy' is a call simply to present ourselves just as we are, both good and bad, and to unite our offering with Jesus' once-for-all offering of worship on the cross and his ongoing worship of the Father in our midst as the great High Priest. Our worship is precisely a sharing in his worship through the presence of the Creator and Redeemer Spirit in and among us. If we once lose sight of this fact, if the linkage between our response to God and that wrought by the same Spirit in Christ is broken, then it will not be long before guilt and fear come to characterize all that we do in the sanctuary, as we don the veneer of liturgical purity and respectable piety together with our Sunday best, and

18 On this theme see the extremely helpful discussion by James B. Torrance, 'The Place of Jesus Christ in Worship' in R. S. Anderson ed., *Theological Foundations for Ministry*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1979, pp 348-369. See also in the same volume pp 370-389, T. F. Torrance, 'Come Creator Spirit for the Renewal of Worship and Witness'.

19 See Heb. 4:14-5:10; 7:23-25.

prepare to participate in the great conspiracy of silence in the Church.

Worship as the offering of our complete humanity to God

Secondly, there is in many quarters (and not least among evangelicals) a nervousness about bringing all that we have and are to God as a sacrifice of praise. For we are only too aware of our limitations, of the way in which our gifts and skills and our creativity are tainted by sin in one way or another. Thus we are uneasy about bearing such things into God's presence as a fitting tribute. We prefer to adopt an essentially passive stance in worship whenever possible, allowing the minister to preach the word, to administer the sacraments while we, somewhat timidly, make our approach to God and wait to hear him speak to us or to bless us in some way. The model of worship here, that is to say, is one in which the chief dynamic is directed from God to humanity. Now this, of course, is rooted in a very important half-truth — that all that we are and possess and do falls short of that which is truly fitting as a response to God. But it is only a half-truth. And we must set it firmly in the new context created by Christ's atoning offering of himself *which was a human offering of a complete and perfect humanity to God.* [20]

If worship and atonement are essentially linked to creation, as I have argued, and if Jesus offers what he offers precisely as a priest of creation, thereby fulfilling the vocation of humankind as a whole within the created order, then the call to worship is not a call to an essentially God-humanward event, but to an event in which there is both a humanward and a Godward dynamic, both of which are decisively focused in Christ's person and the activity of the Spirit there. Here, in union with the human Son of God, we offer to God a sacrifice of praise which represents the goodness of his creation, all that we are and have as his creatures; gifts of music, drama, dance, administration, practical skills, personal skills; all of these, our created humanity in all its fulness (and not our financial gifts alone!) we bring to the Lord in an act of complete self-dedication and praise. Of course these things are tainted with sin; they are not unblemished. Yet, offered together with the offering of the one who is the only true Lamb of God, they form an acceptable and pleasing sacrifice to our Father in heaven. We offer them in solidarity with Jesus and his offering; our offering of them is enabled and undergirded by the very same Spirit with whom he was anointed, and who enabled and undergirded his once for all response for us. Thus they are offered only in and through the transforming realities and power of both the cross and the Spirit. They must be crucified together with Christ in order to be redeemed. But they are offered. We do not hold them back from God, afraid that they may not be good enough for him; as if anything that we have to offer could be, apart from its assumption and redemption in Christ. To continue to view worship instead in terms of an ultra-Protestant 'sit up, shut up and listen up!' model is surely to ignore and to deny on the one hand the essential connexion

20 For an extended discussion of this point and its importance see T. F. Torrance, 'The Mind of Christ in Worship : The Problem of Apollinarianism in the Liturgy', *Theology in Reconciliation*, Geoffrey Chapman, London 1975, pp 139-214.

He will receive blessing from the Lord,
and vindication from the God of his salvation.
Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob. (Ps. 24:3-6)

That passage shows the cultic use of the phrase 'face of God' — going up to the temple could be described as seeking the face of God. There is a strong association of the terminology with the community and in particular its worship in which its relationship with God is most concentratedly expressed. But it is also used individually and in many different settings, and indeed takes up the communal and the individual aspects of salvation in a mutually reinforcing way. A whole way of life could be summed up in these terms:

Seek the Lord and his strength,
seek his *panim* continually. (Ps. 105:4)

The desire of God meeting the desire of his people is caught in this imagery:

Thou hast said, 'Seek ye my face'.
My heart says to thee,
'Thy face, Lord, do I seek'. (Ps. 27:8)

It also expresses the fulfilment of desire:

As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness; when I awake,
I shall be satisfied with beholding thy form. (Ps. 17:15)

At its simplest, my thesis about salvation in the NT is that it can fruitfully be explored by seeing how that desire for the face of God is fulfilled through the face of Jesus Christ.

One of the advantages of the focus on the face is that its associations combine simplicity with complexity — in common experience we know how a face both has a distinctive shape, a *Gestalt* that a cartoonist can catch, but also endless expressions, nuances and multifaceted life. The Psalms, and many other strands of the OT, evoke the complexity of salvation through their use of *panim*.

The most radical idea is that of the hiddenness of God's face and the associated themes of God's absence, rejection, forgetting, silence, remoteness and abandonment.[1] There is uncertainty, doubt, despair and overwhelming bewilderment in relation to the face of God in its turning away and hiding. The psalms of lament (which are where most references to the face of God occur in the Psalms) perhaps articulate this most vividly in their persistent questioning:

Why dost thou hide thy face?
Why dost thou forget our affliction and oppression? (Ps. 44:24)

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1 For an excellent study of this in the Old Testament see Samuel E. Ballantine, *The Hidden God. The Hiding of the Face of God in the Old Testament*, Oxford University Press, 1983.

between this weekly congregational event and that wider 'liturgy' which is the rest of our lives, and on the other its nature as an active sharing by the Spirit in the priestly humanity of God himself.

Christian worship a sharing in God's life

For, finally, Christian worship is a thoroughly trinitarian event. Rather than construing it as the point at which a grateful humanity offers its response to a gracious creator and redeemer, or else as the point at which God acts and we allow ourselves to be acted upon, not wishing to obtrude our sinful humanity and thereby to defile the event, we must learn to construe worship as the point at which the Church shares actively in an ongoing event within the life of God, as the Father pours out the Spirit of sonship upon those who, together with the one true and eternal Son, respond in holy love and joy, liberated from their fears and inadequacies by the healing presence of Christ in their midst and the redemptive anointing of the Holy Ghost who transforms our dross into riches. Here the dynamic of inter-personal love and glorification which may be identified eternally within the triune life, and which we find earthed in a once for all manner in the history of the man Jesus, is reflected and echoed abroad within the church, as individual men and women are taken up by the Spirit and given to participate in that liturgy in which all creation declares the glory of God.

The Revd Dr Trevor Hart is Lecturer in Systematic Theology at Aberdeen University