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THE PROCURING OF REVERENCE, PIETY AND DEVOTION: DETERMINED WORSHIP FOR A DETERMINED CHURCH

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Introduction

For the first Christians, the act of coming together in worship shaped the identity of the individual and community into a people who were distinct in character from all those existing around them. Worship also shaped the early church's understanding of God, where within a monotheistic faith, to worship Jesus was in fact recognising him for who he was—God incarnate. As the saying goes, *lex orandi, lex credendi*—the way you pray determines what you believe.¹ Moving from its less formal home-church beginning, by the mid-second century, Justin Martyr records in his 'First Apology' that the early church's gatherings became even more intentional, gathering on a Sunday morning as the first day of the week for praise, prayer, reading and exposition (what we might recognise as the ministry of the word), and to celebrate the 'Thanksgiving'/Eucharist (what we would recognise as the ministry of the sacrament).² The change to a more institutional structure with the development of the state church in the 4th century under Constantine and the Roman Mass, led to even greater liturgical structure, with the people becoming mere spectators rather than participants, sensing awe but also dread.

The Protestant Reformation attempted to return worship back to its roots of praise, prayer, thanksgiving and lifestyle in keeping with the Gospel.³ From the early Reformers to the Puritans, Pietists, and early Evangelicals, there was the expectation that faith produced a godly lifestyle, echoing Paul's words in Romans 12:1,

¹ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (3d ed.; Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), pp. 188, 360. Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd, 2001), p. 134.

² Ivor J. Davidson, *The Birth of the Church: From Jesus to Constantine, A.D. 30–312* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2004), pp. 117–20, 271, 79–81. Laurie Guy, *Introducing Early Christianity: A topical survey of its life, beliefs and practices* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), pp. 193–210. R.G. Rayburn, 'Worship in the Church,' in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (ed. Walter A. Elwell; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), p. 1310.

³ Frank C. Senn and Hans-Christoph Schmidt-Lauber, 'Worship: The Reformation and Its Fruits,' in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity Vol. 5* (ed. E. Fahlbusch et al.; Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 2008), p. 792.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.⁴

Within the Anglican Church, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer identified this desire in the ‘Prefaces’ (Of Ceremonies) of the Book of Common Prayer where he wrote to explain the changes in worship practices he put in place. As he wrote,

Our general aim therefore in this undertaking was, not to gratify this or that party, in any of their unreasonable demands; but to do that, which to our best understanding, we conceived might most tend to peace and unity in the church; the procuring of *reverence, and exciting of piety and devotion in the public worship of God.*⁵

Therefore, through worship as Cranmer describes, the nature of the church is determined in three ways: First, that the very nature of what we mean by church is determined by worship centred on the triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—producing *reverence*; Secondly, that public worship functions to determine the worldview and inner character of the people of God producing *piety*; Thirdly, that public worship is central in the life-long *devotion* to the moral life grounded in the will of God. The challenge is to recapture reverence, piety and devotion today.

Reverence: The Meaning of Worship

The word reverence captures the heart of what we mean by worship—to ‘ascribe to God the worth of which [God] is worthy,’⁶ a service rendered to God in praise, prayer, proclamation, hearing and sacrament.⁷ In biblical terms this is worshipping God for who God is as the Creator and as the God of saving love, and for what God has done for his people, especially centred on Jesus who is the focal point of God’s saving work. From the perspective of the worshipper, the act of worship is not about the ‘surface

⁴ All Bible references are taken from Michael D Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (3d ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁵ My italics.

⁶ Rayburn, ‘Worship in the Church,’ p. 1300.

⁷ Hans-Christoph Schmidt-Lauber, ‘Worship: NT and Early Church,’ in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity Vol. 5* (ed. E. Fahlbusch et al.; Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 786–87.

features,⁸ but is focused on the 'heart features,'⁹ a right relationship with God and others and a transformation of the heart so the worshipper can live as a 'living sacrifice' (Rom 12:1).

Furthermore, worship is an act that determines the very nature of the church, an *invitation* to share 'in the inter-personal Communion of love and self-giving in the life of God'¹⁰ through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. As James Torrance puts it,

Worship is rather the gift of participating through the Spirit in the (incarnate) Son's communication with the Father—the gift of participating, in union with Christ, in what he has done for us once and for all by his self-offering to the Father in his life and death on the cross, and what he is continuing to do for us in the presence of the Father, and in his mission from the Father to the world.¹¹

In terms of the church universal, worship is also an invitation for us to join in the worship of God that eternally continues in heaven (Rev 7), for us to realize the purpose for which we are made—to be in relationship with God that can only lead to praise.

Worship as invitation then leads to worship as *participation*, where the church as the body of Christ practises its own identity as the people of God who are participating in God's mission. Here the church exists in the present as a foretaste of the world as God intended it to be, a community characterised by *shalom*.¹² In contrast to our world's emphasis on individuality, worship as participation has always been centered on community.¹³ It is through worshipping in community that the character of the church is fully determined to both reflect the very nature of God

⁸ For examples see Psalm 50:1–15, Isaiah 29:13–14, Isaiah 58:1–9, Amos 5:21–24.

⁹ For examples see Psalm 33, Jeremiah 31:31–34, John 4:23–24, Romans 12:1–2, Hebrews 8:10–12, Hebrews 10:19–25, Revelation 7:9–12.

¹⁰ Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 135.

¹¹ James B. Torrance as quoted in Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 135 (footnote 78).

¹² In the Bible *shalom* means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight—a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, all under the arch of God's love. *Shalom*, in other words, is the way things are supposed to be. See Cornelius Plantinga, *Engaging God's world: a Christian vision of faith, learning, and living* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), p. 200.

¹³ George Stoup as quoted by Stanley J. Grenz & Roger E. Olson, *20th-century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 283. As Stoup says, the Church is 'a group of people who have come to share a common past, who understand particular events in the past to be of decisive importance for interpreting the present, who anticipate the future by means of a shared hope, and who express their identity by means of a common narrative.'

and to function as intended in God's world. The key principle embodied in Cranmer's liturgy for this communal understanding of worship is *edification*, where excellence in worship has nothing to do with the perfectionistic standards of our society but rather can be defined as:

1. [equipping] the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Eph 4:12).
2. [provoking] one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another... (Heb 10:24–25).

When worship produces reverence for who God is and what God has done, and when it edifies the gathered body of Christ through encouraging and equipping, the church is truly determined in nature to be the body of Christ as God intended.

Piety: Worldview Transformed through Worship

There has always been a link between faith, reverence and godly living that leads naturally to the second part of Cranmer's rubric for worship: the *exciting of piety*. As Ralph Martin suggests, worship is 'the dramatic celebration of God in his supreme worth in such a manner that his worthiness becomes the norm and inspiration of human living.'¹⁴ Worship of God, which is defined as reverence, leads to the inner transformation of the worshipper and the worshipping community, whereby the nature of God determines how the Christian, and more specifically the church lives in the world.

For Cranmer, it is this lived faith that is the meaning of *piety*, where belief in God infuses every aspect of daily life and people are transformed into a living sacrifice. Piety produces a different vision of 'have life, and have it abundantly' (John 10:10), where abundance (or fullness in other translations) is now centred on a living relationship with God. In our language today we might express this as the 'kingdom of God,' a realised eschatology where we can live now in the reality of the kingdom already present. Significantly, piety in this context is the result of a change in worldview,¹⁵ seeing the world and living in the world based on reverence for God, a transformation that occurs primarily in worship. So how

¹⁴ Ralph Martin as quoted in Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 2000), p. 491.

¹⁵ Worldview is defined as, 'an articulation of the basic beliefs embedded in a shared grand story that are rooted in a faith commitment and that gives shape and direction to the whole of our individual and corporate lives.' See Michael W. Goheen & Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), p. 23.

does public worship transform our worldview leading to piety and the determination to live out a Christian faith?

Even though most of us do not recognise it, we are all imprinted with worldviews that describe the world for us and direct our lives in that world.¹⁶ Paul Hiebert suggests that worldviews can be understood in two ways; *Diachronic* (the big picture or meta-narrative); and *Synchronic* (snapshot of time), where at a single point in time we can identify the affective (emotional), cognitive (knowledge), and evaluative (action) assumptions and frameworks that people make about the nature of reality that they use to order their lives.¹⁷ Using this framework I am suggesting we can understand how public worship is central in establishing a biblical worldview within a worshipping community leading to piety.

1. First, using the diachronic category, worship connects our lives with the meta-narrative of the biblical story. What makes the meta-narrative so powerful is the significance of the story that provides meaning, by penetrating and transforming the world and life of reader/listener. For Christians, this involves supplanting the worldview of our Western culture epitomised by individuality, pleasure, and consumerism, with a biblical worldview so that faith means,

The joining of our personal stories with the transcendent/immanent story of a religious community, and ultimately with the grand narrative of the divine action in the world. The divine story mediated by the community of faith transcends our individual, finite narratives; yet it is immanent both in history of the world and by faith in the ongoing story of the life of the believer.¹⁸

¹⁶ Goheen and Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*, p. 25. Worldviews function to: provide answers to ultimate questions; provide emotional security; validate the deepest cultural norms; provide integration in our culture; monitor cultural change; provide philosophical reassurance. See Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An anthropological understanding of how people change* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), p. 28.

¹⁷ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, pp. 25–26, 31–69.

¹⁸ Grenz and Olson, *20th-century Theology*, p. 271.

With particular reference to the Christian story,¹⁹ Michael Root proposes the notion of a ‘storied relation’²⁰ where the life and world of the reader/listener and the Christian story form one world and one story so that the reader/listener is included within the Christian story, resulting in a new sense of self and world.²¹ Cranmer’s revision of worship captures this diachronic meaning of worship by following the dramatic movement of scripture through the ministry of word and sacrament, all in the power of the Holy Spirit—with the aim of edifying the believing community into living out the Gospel. We experience this as the whole worship service connects us with the metanarrative of scripture through; theme, words, images, unity (all elements work together to help us worship God in both Word and Sacrament), and that balance between all aspects of a worship service.

2. The second category provided by Hiebert, the synchronic, helps us to further understand how public worship inspires piety when we see how worship embodies the affective (emotions/feeling), cognitive (thinking/knowledge), and evaluative (commitment to action) parts of a biblical worldview.
 - The affective elements in this context refer to the aspects of a service that relate to the emotional, enabling us to connect emotionally with God (music—tempo and words, the drama of scripture, open prayer/silence, confession, sacraments).
 - The cognitive refers to the aspects of the service that relate to thinking or attaining knowledge (theme for the day, confession/absolution, readings, sermon).
 - The evaluative refers to the aspects of a service that relate to promoting commitment and action—discipleship (sermon, intercessory prayers, communion, blessing).

¹⁹ For an outline of the biblical meta-narrative, see N.T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (London: SPCK, 2006), pp. 42–46, 51, 58, 139–44, 215–23 and 371–403. N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 139–44, 215–23 and 371–403. See also N.T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God* (London: SPCK, 2005), pp. 17–25, 84–86 and 89–95. A six-act model has also been described by Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding our place in the biblical story* (London: SPCK, 2006).

²⁰ Michael Root, ‘The Narrative Structure of Soteriology,’ in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology* (ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L Gregory Jones; Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), pp. 265–66.

²¹ Stephen Crites, ‘The Narrative Quality of Experience,’ in *Why Narrative?*, pp. 68 and 70.

Public worship is central in shaping a biblical worldview leading to piety in daily living. In order to have public worship that is edifying in developing a Christian worldview, it is necessary to identify these different elements to ensure that each service has these in balance: to include the diachronic and the synchronic (feeling, thinking, action); while remembering that different elements can be 'feeling/thinking/action' to different people. As a result, public worship can be seen as an intentional event that is central in determining a Christian worldview producing piety in daily living.

Devotion: Life-long Commitment Shaped through Worship

Of critical importance for the church is to recapture the central role of public worship, as the gathered community embodies the biblical meta-narrative leading to the shaping of the person, the shaping of the community, and coherence in life.²² The result is a 'community capable of hearing the story of God we find in the scriptures and living in a manner that is faithful to that story.'²³ Within such a view, Cranmer's emphasis on *devotion* identifies the life-long commitment leading to a moral life that is lived in response to God's call in Christ, a call most clearly heard within the context of public worship as the event in which God makes himself known. Through this life-long devotion inspired through public worship, the old life is put off and the new life put on, all within a framework of relationship so that, 'whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.'²⁴ This emphasis on devotion highlights the connection between public worship, community and Christian ethics.²⁵ The indwelling of the Holy Spirit grounds this relationship between worship and praxis, enabling the people of God to recognise God at work, shaping and empowering them to reflect God's character in the world, since Christian behaviour is 'an

²² As such the test for any narrative is the sort of person it shapes. See Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell, 'From System to Story: An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics,' in *Why Narrative?*, pp. 177–80 and 85.

²³ Grenz and Olson, *20th-century Theology*, p. 280.

²⁴ Colossians 3:17.

²⁵ 'Christian ethics is therefore a discipline that seeks to help Christians fulfil all righteousness from and within the Trinitarian God of Jesus Christ. And it is a practice that takes place in the context of need and in the spirit of expectation that God will make himself known through the faithful pursuit of his will.' See Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, 'Studying Ethics through Worship,' in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 15. The first four chapters outline the editor's approach to ethics in the context of a worshipping community.

act and actualisation of faith'²⁶ because 'we become what we do.'²⁷ Public worship then produces a summons to live in God's new world now, a new world begun with the resurrection of Jesus and continued by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the

thoughtful encounter between Christ-followers, bound together in community, already practiced in a discerning way of life dedicated to seeking the kingdom, with the new issues demanding Christian responses based on the moral vision and character of the Christian faith.²⁸

As indicated however, this devotion inspired by public worship is not an individual response but is a corporate response, and as such *unity* built on worshipping together as the body of Christ becomes a central moral requirement. We can identify this in the Pauline epistle to the Ephesians, which was written to 'bolster the self understanding and thereby guide the behaviour of the churches of the Pauline mission,'²⁹ in which 'unity' and 'holiness' are inextricably linked through two central images. First, is the predominant image of the church as the *body of Christ* that provides a universal picture of church; where the church exists as a 'living organism'³⁰ under the headship of Christ, grows under Christ's Lordship and love, and where the unity of the 'body' builds up the church.³¹ Second, as a letter

²⁶ Samuel M. Powell, *A Theology of Christian Spirituality* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), p. 9.

²⁷ William C. Spohn, 'Christian Spirituality and Theological Ethics,' in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality* (ed. Arthur Holder; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 274.

²⁸ Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2002), p. 254. Also see Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God*, p. 77.

²⁹ A.T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), p. lxiv.

³⁰ R.Y.K. Fung, 'Body of Christ,' in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (ed. G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin, and D.G. Reid; Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 79.

³¹ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 79. See Ephesians 4:11–16. The use of 'body' is also distinctively Christological, with Christ being the beginning and end, as well as the source and goal of the Church's growth; see Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. xc–xci. Sampley suggests there are four ways in which the 'Body of Christ' functions in Ephesians. See J.P. Sampley, 'Ephesians,' in *The Deutero-Pauline Letters: Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus* (ed. G. Krodel; Proclamation Commentaries; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 8–10.) First, the 'Body of Christ' shows how the Ephesians relate to Christ as being 'in the body of Christ' (Eph 2:15–16, 5:30). This develops the Pauline claim as an image of the 'body in relation to head' (Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. xciv. Second, the 'Body of Christ' outlines how the Ephesians relate to each other (Eph 4:15–16, 25) in a similar way to that in the Pauline epistles (1 Cor 12:12). Here the body is to live in 'unity' built up in love; they are to grow in maturity in to the 'full stature of Christ' (Eph 4:13).

'to former outsiders who are now insiders'³² the church is seen as a new humanity in place of Gentile and Jew.³³ This new race is characterised by holiness in which their conduct is distinct from the world (Eph 4:17–32, 5:3–14) and characterised by unity built on love (Eph 4:1–16).³⁴ This new race also has a cosmological role as a witness to the heavenly powers of Christ's reign when everything will be united in Christ (Eph 3:10).³⁵ Therefore the church is a community with a future in the world (realised eschatology) within God's plan in Christ.³⁶

As we seek to live as the new people of God, the emphasis of the 'body of Christ' is on the ability to hold the differences between people together through a uniting bond in Christ, rather than our personal preferences, thus achieving a 'harmonious discord'.³⁷ This provides a spiritual focus for our life together as a worshipping community, grounded in the church as the chosen partner of God, through the presence of the Holy Spirit.³⁸ As the church community lives out its unity centred on Christ and enacted in worship, it can also become a prophetic voice to the world, challenging the standards of society with the holiness of God, living as the symbol of the eschatological community already present.

Within this corporate view of Christianity the body is to be built up and grown [E. Best, *Ephesians* (New Testament Guides; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p. 68. Third, the 'Body of Christ' locates Christ as the head of the Church. As E. Best suggests, 'head' (*kephalē*) means that which 'rules' (Eph 5:23–24) and the 'source' (Eph 4:15–16; see Best, *Ephesians*, p. 67), thereby identifying 'body' as a 'metaphorical signifier' so Christ and the Church are one in Spirit (see G.L.O.R. Yorke, *The Church as the Body of Christ in the Pauline Corpus: A Re-examination* (London: University Press of America, 1991), pp. 110–11.) The headship of Christ also implies that the Church is to submit to Christ, who is Lord over the body (see A.T. Lincoln, 'Ephesians,' in *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul* (ed. J.D.G. Dunn; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 137.) Finally, The 'Body of Christ' identifies the place of the Church in the universe, in which the Church has a special revelatory role (Eph 3:10). Sampley, 'Ephesians,' p. 25.

³² 'Gentiles' (Eph 2:11; 3:1, 6). Also see Sampley, 'Ephesians,' p. 23.

³³ See Ephesians 2:15. Also see Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. xciv; Best, *Ephesians*, p. 69.

³⁴ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. xciv; L.T. Johnson, 'Paul's Ecclesiology,' in *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul*, p. 209.

³⁵ E. Best, *One Body in Christ: A Study in the Relationship of the Church to Christ in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul* (London: SPCK, 1955), pp. 145, 52–53. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. xciv.

³⁶ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. lxiv.

³⁷ P. Fisher, 'Koinonia and Conflict,' in *Theology* 104 (2001): 422–423.

³⁸ S. Hauerwas, 'What would it mean for the Church to be Christ's Body? A question without a clear answer' in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 48:1 (1995): 17; J. Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), pp. 53–54.

Conclusion

As Thomas Cranmer suggested, gathering for public worship is a central activity for the church, an activity that determines the very nature of the church through reverence, and an activity that makes the worshipper and community determined to live for God through piety and devotion. For us, if we want a church committed to living out its God-given calling in this world, a church willing to live and move and have its being in the mission of God—then our starting point is also with public worship; bringing ourselves, our strengths and weaknesses, our similarities and our differences all before God, and together being transformed into the body of Christ.

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