

The Dynamics of Trinitarian Worship¹

ABSTRACT

Far from being a mere theological hurdle, the doctrine of the Trinity is central to the Christian community's understanding and practice of worship. We worship God by participating in the Son's communion with the Father through the Spirit, as we are in Christ and in the Spirit. Indeed, it is only through such "Trinitarian" worship that we appropriate the reality of the Son's relationship with the Father. This paper derives such an understanding of Trinitarian worship by thinking explicitly after the New Testament scriptures. Further, we summarise the practical outworking of such 'Trinitarian' worship in many areas of Christian life including the Eucharist, baptism, preaching, community worship, prayer and holy living.

Worship is about communicating with God-as-he-really-is, declaring God's glory to Him through our words and actions. So 'how we worship God must reflect who God is.'² The two are intimately connected, and cannot be divorced in theory or practice. Historically there is certainly a close correlation between the doctrine of God and the practice of worship. For example, LaCugna claims that rather than abstract belief, it was 'patterns of Christian prayer ... [that] provoked and sustained

1 My thanks to Myk Habets, Philip Hill, Robert Winthrop, Philip Church, Martin Sutherland, Paul Windsor and Brian Smith for stimulating correspondence and discussion.

2 J. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove: IVP 1996) 10.

various dogmatic controversies',³ including the Arian controversy that led to the Trinitarian statement of the Nicene Creed, and after Nicea (c. 325) that 'the doctrine of the Trinity came to constitute the law of worship'.

But on our own, we cannot worship God. Even after we have been saved any human efforts to communicate with Him are futile. We do not know what we ought to pray for (Rom 8:26) let alone how to live lives of worship and intimate communion, pleasing to the Father (e.g. Gal 5:16-21). If we are to pray and worship, God-as-he-really-is must not only be our object of worship, but its source and life. Consequently, the interrelation of our understanding of who God is (the doctrine of the Trinity) with our understanding of worship deserves attention.

So it is everyone's loss that many churchgoers neglect Trinitarian doctrine as merely a metaphysical problem,⁴ rather than indulging in its mystery. A metaphysical problem aims for solution; the mystery of the Trinity is inexhaustible. A metaphysical problem 'can be held at arm's length; [the] mystery [of the Trinity] encompasses us and will not let us keep at a safe distance.'⁵ A metaphysical problem is abstract and theoretical; the mystery of the Trinity is practical and unavoidable. The metaphysical problem of the Trinity (i.e. how can God exist as three and one?) is of minor interest; the mystery of the Trinity (i.e. how can we know, accept and experience God-as-he-has-been-revealed-to-us) is central to our understanding and practice of Christian worship.

We shall argue that we worship by participating in the Son's communion with the Father through the Spirit, as we are in the

3 See C. LaCugna, *God For Us* (San Francisco: Harper, 1999), 111 & 135.

4 Perhaps because this is the way it is often presented

5 D.L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 3.

Spirit and in Christ.⁶ More concisely, we worship by joining the life of the Trinity. Based on this understanding, the doctrine of the Trinity becomes a subject of immense devotional importance, because through 'Trinitarian' worship we appropriate aspects of Jesus' relationship with the Father that we wish to be true of us (e.g. intimate communion and prayer,⁷ obedience, indwelling presence etc.). We become like Jesus through participating in his intimate fellowship with the Father, through Trinitarian worship.

This understanding is similar to that of J.B. Torrance.⁸ Indeed, much of the following derivation is inspired by Torrance's masterful treatment of Trinitarian worship in these works. However, while the end definition of Trinitarian worship differs only in minor ways from that of Torrance, we approach the derivation of that definition from a different perspective.

While Torrance's work gives a brief explanation of why this model or understanding is correct, he focuses on why other models of worship are wrong. Particularly, he spends significant effort rejecting the models implied by much of contemporary worship, where it is we who worship God, not God who worships through us. (Torrance describes these models as Unitarian, but they may be more aptly termed merely monotheistic (as per Karl Rahner), given that Unitarian models usually reject the deity of Jesus.) Because of the emphasis Torrance places on debunking other models, he does not emphatically derive his understanding of Trinitarian worship

6 This profound understanding of worship is a slightly altered quote from Torrance, 15.

7 Given that prayer and obedience are thus subsumed into an understanding of worship, we use the NT texts that speak of prayer (not just those on worship) to assist us in understanding their nature.

8 See 'The Vicarious Humanity of Christ' in T.F. Torrance (ed) *The Incarnation: Ecumenical Studies in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed A.D. 381* (Edinburgh: The Handsell Press, 1981) 127-147; 'The Trinity and Worship' (Lecture at St John's College Auckland 1989); *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*.

from a positive perspective. That is, he does not explicitly ground his understanding of Trinitarian worship in the NT scriptures in sufficient detail. Finally, while he certainly acknowledges the practical implications of Trinitarian worship for the 'normal' Christian life, he does not fully develop them, as they are not his area of focus. For example, while he notes the various methods by which we address God (e.g. praying to the Holy Spirit, praying to the Godhead collectively) he does not explain how his understanding of the Trinitarian model of worship allows us to do this.

Our analysis, in contrast, spends little time focusing on other models, attempting to build this profound understanding of worship by 'thinking [explicitly] after the NT scriptures'. We then consider the implications of this understanding for how we actually pray and worship (i.e. who we address) and the practical implications for what we do and what we think about what we do in contemporary worship. Taking such a different approach is not meant to suggest that Torrance's works are wrong, rather any 'weaknesses' merely stem from the focus he has chosen.

In this essay, then, we develop an understanding of Trinitarian worship by answering three key questions:

(A) What is the communion between the Son and the Father like? (What is the life of the Trinity like?)

(B) Why can we participate in the communion between the Son and the Father? (Why can we enter into the life of the Trinity?)

(C) How do we participate in the communion between the Son and the Father? (How do we enter into the life of the Trinity?)

We then examine the implications of this understanding, by exploring a further two questions

(D) Who should we address in our 'Trinitarian' worship?

(E) Which ways should we do our 'Trinitarian' worship?

What is the communion between the Son and the Father like?

We begin by describing the relationship between the Son and the Father, basing our discussion on a social Trinitarian analogy,

which distinguishes the Godhead's threeness, but requires a strong emphasis on each of the persons' mutual perichoresis to avoid Tritheism. The Son and the Father have a mutual knowing, loving and indwelling of each other. The eternal Son in his deity performs all actions jointly with the Father; he is an agent of creation, judge, redeemer and receiver of worship. But in his humanity Jesus is simultaneously a created man, a judged man (for our sins), the prototype of our redemption and the one true worshipper, our great high priest.⁹ Jesus has vicariously suffered our humanity, and learned obedience through this suffering (Heb 5:8).

Throughout the incarnation, and now in glory, Jesus' relationship with the Father was and is one of intimate communion, where the Son prays to and worships the Father, and at the same time sees, listens to and is (willingly) utterly dependent on, and obedient to the Father. Jesus prays to God, indeed he prays for us. He interceded for us during his time on earth¹⁰ and he continues to intercede¹¹ for us at the right hand of the Father (Rom 8:34). But as Jesus delights in only saying and doing what he hears from the Father,¹² his prayers and worship both originate from the Father, and are directed to the Father. How Jesus maintained this communion during the incarnation is extremely relevant to our discussion. Jesus in his incarnation always had the status of Sonship, but he chose not to

9 See Torrance, 'The Trinity and Worship' for a detailed understanding of these comparisons.

10 As can be seen in his high priestly prayer (John 17) and more specifically in his prayers for Peter (Luke 22:31)

11 The fact that Jesus (or the Spirit) intercedes for us to the Father does not mean that we pray to the Father. If I intercede for Joe I pray on his behalf, it is not his words, but mine. While the fact that Jesus and the Spirit intercede for us is a marvelous truth, we cannot claim that we have communion with the Father because of it.

12 Jesus only does what the Father does (John 5:19), he only says what the Father has commanded him to say (John 12:49), and by himself he can't do anything (John 5:30).

appropriate¹³ the 'divine' elements of his status independently.¹⁴ Rather, Jesus remained in active fellowship with the Father through the Spirit. All the words and actions of Jesus, including his prayers and his worship, were 'spoke[n] and performed not by virtue of his own power, the power of his own divine personality, but by virtue of the power of the Holy Spirit at work within him and through him'.¹⁵ Jesus' status was that of a son, and during the incarnation this sonship was appropriated in intimate fellowship with the Father as Jesus remained in the Spirit.

If we are to participate in the Son's communion with the Father, then we too must have the status of sonship, and appropriate that sonship in genuinely intimate fellowship and communion with the Father.

Why can we participate in the communion between the Son and the Father?

The question of why we can participate in the Son and Father's communion¹⁶ is an issue of status. How can we be called children of God? Obviously we must look to Jesus, the sole mediator between God and humanity (John 14:26, Mat 11:27). Hebrews presents Jesus as the perfection of the

13 Appropriate in the sense we use it here means 'to take to oneself'. If Fred is the biological son of John, he has the status of sonship. If he has an active relationship with Fred he has appropriated this sonship. It must be distinguished from the sense it is used in the doctrine of appropriations (which we will refer to later).

14 C.H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996) 88. Note we are not saying Jesus was not divine during the incarnation, or that he did not have a divine nature (or divine elements in his nature). We are just saying that Jesus never chose to use those divine elements, that he 'shelved' them, or that they were 'pressed down' during this time.

15 G.F. Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus* (Dallas: Word, 199) 145.

16 As opposed to how we actually do participate in the communion.

priesthood that 'represented' the Israelites before God.¹⁷ We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place where God resides through Jesus' blood (Heb 10:19). We enjoy the status of Sonship because Jesus in his vicarious humanity has responded to God on behalf of humans.¹⁸ We are drawn into a relationship with the Father as we share Jesus' response for ourselves – our response to his perfect response.¹⁹

But to focus only on the upward path from our prayers to the Father is to present a one sided picture. Alone, it can imply we bumble around mumbling inconsequential and meaningless prayers²⁰ and performing useless sacrifices of worship, which Jesus modifies both in content and intent when conveying them to the Father. But we do not pray to the Father only through Christ, but in Christ.²¹ We have the opportunity of participating in the life of the Trinity not just through what Jesus has done and is doing for us, but because Christ lives in us (Gal 2:20). Jesus not only makes it possible for us to pray, he teaches us what to pray (e.g. Lk 6:9ff). Jesus not only presents our worship, he leads us into worship as our one true high priest.²² As we are in Christ, we ourselves minister to God, a holy and royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:5,9).

As an example, consider Jesus' one perfect sacrifice to God through his death and resurrection (Heb 10:10). As we are 'in Christ', what is true of Christ becomes true of us - we therefore join Jesus in his sacrificial death. We have died with him, through our baptism 'in Christ Jesus' (Rom 6:3,6-7). Having

17 See Torrance, *Worship*, 46-50 for a detailed description.

18 See Torrance, 'The Vicarious Humanity of Christ'.

19 Torrance, *Worship*, 29-30.

20 Recall that on our own we do not know what to pray for.

21 Or with Christ in us.

22 'The real agent in worship, in a New Testament understanding, is Jesus Christ who leads us in our praises and prayers ... He is the High Priest who, by his one offering of himself for us on the cross, now leads us into the Holy of Holies, the holy presence of the Father, in holy communion.' (Torrance, *Worship*, 23).

died with him, we now live with him, presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God as a spiritual act of worship (Rom 12:1), thus following the lead of Jesus, the one true high priest and perfect sacrifice.

But what does it mean to be 'in Christ'? In particular how does worshipping 'in Christ' contrast with merely being saved 'through Christ'? The majority of references to 'through Christ' refer to a past event, and are related to the effects of our salvation by grace (e.g. our reconciliation (Rom 5:11), death to the law (Rom 7:4), and our salvation itself (1 Tim 2:15)). In contrast, the majority of references to being 'in Christ' refer to a present, continuing action. The most explicit passage is Col 2:6-3:17, which says that if we are in Christ we are to be continually putting off the sinful nature (2:13), free from the petty regulations of the world (2:20-23), setting our hearts on things above (3:2), totally rejecting those things of a human nature (again) (3:5), and allowing the forgiveness of Christ (3:13), the peace of Christ (3:15) and the word of Christ (3:16) to consume us. Most other references specify some of the vast blessings that accrue from being 'in Christ', such as no condemnation (Rom 8:1), freedom (Gal 2:4) eternal life (Rom 6:23, 1 Jn 5:11) and community belonging (Rom 12:5). Note that these are things we are enjoying now, even if they are the result of our earlier salvation. Being 'in Christ', is thus much more than just the past event of our salvation. It refers to the way we live in the status of our salvation, continually allowing Jesus full control of our lives. Being 'in Christ' is where Jesus is invited to lead us entirely as he pleases, where we willingly let him live his perfect life through us, teaching us how to pray and leading us in our worship.

It is crucial to note here that while we are making a theoretical distinction between the meaning of being saved 'through Christ' and being 'in Christ', they cannot be separated in practice. The New Testament authors make no suggestion that we can accept Jesus as Saviour (i.e. be saved through participating in his perfect response to the Father) yet not accept Christ as Lord (i.e. be in him and with him, or have him in us).

What they do speak of is the process by which we ‘press in’ to Christ, allowing him increasing reign over our lives, working out our salvation with fear and trembling for God is at work in us (Ph.2:12-13).

So we have the opportunity of participating in the Son’s communion with the Father not just through Jesus (participating in his communion with the Father), but in Jesus (opening our lives to his reign in us). Because we are in Christ what is true of Jesus is true of us. We are children of God, co-heirs with Jesus, sharing his suffering, his glory and his status of Sonship (Rom 8:17-18). The Father hears Jesus’ prayers; so he hears our prayers (as we are in Christ Jesus). Jesus’ offering of worship is acceptable to the Father; so our offering of worship is acceptable to the Father (again as we are in Christ Jesus). Just as it is only in participating in the death of Jesus that we can be saved, it is only in participating in the life of Jesus that we can worship God.

How do we participate in the communion between the Son and the Father?

While our status in Christ *relates* us to the Father like Jesus, we are not yet *relating* to the Father like Jesus. How do we appropriate the sonship in a reality of fellowship, an active relationship? Paul explains how by noting that ‘because [we] are sons [i.e. our status], God sends the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out ‘Abba, Father’ [i.e. our relationship]’ (Gal 4:6). So we appropriate our Sonship through the Spirit. We participate in the intimate communion between the Father and the Son, calling the Father ‘Father’ because the Spirit testifies to us that we are actually children of God (Rom 8:16). Just like Jesus during the incarnation, we remain in active fellowship with the Father through the Spirit.

But again this is only half the picture. If we are to pray or worship, Christ has to teach us and lead us. He does this as we

are in the Spirit.²³ Being in the Spirit not only enables us to experience our status in an active fellowship where we can pray to and worship the Father; it allows us to hear the words of Jesus as he guides us. The Spirit speaks only what he hears (John 16:13), he takes what is Jesus' and makes it known to us (John 16:15). He teaches us all things (John 14:26), convicts us of sin (John 16:8), guides us into truth (John 16:13) and reveals the mind of Christ to us (1 Cor 2:15-16). It is through being in the Spirit; open to his guidance and aware of his presence, that Christ tells us what to pray for and leads us in our worship. Note that Christ does this only as the Father directs him, for the Son does only what he sees the Father doing (John 5:19), and says only what the Father tells him to say (John 12:49).

So when we pray, we are to pray (or worship) 'in the Spirit' (Jude 21, John 4:24), listening for Jesus' directions, just as Jesus listened to the Father in the Spirit (John 13:49-50). As we obey Jesus' directions, through the Spirit we commune with the Father just as Jesus did, participating actively in the perfect response Jesus gives the Father. Trinitarian prayer and worship has Jesus giving directions through the Spirit 'into our unclean mouths that we may pray through him and with him and in him [by the Spirit] to the Father, and be received by the Father in him.'²⁴

The 'perfectness' of our discernment and obedience (i.e. the extent to which our prayer and worship matches the will of God) is limited by our humanness (we still suffer the effects of the fall), our finiteness (we may not have the capacity to understand or the language to express what Jesus reveals for us to pray) and our unconscious sinfulness (we are still growing into Christ, he does not yet have full reign over us). To the extent that our prayer and worship is limited, however, we should feel

23 Note that the Greek prepositions make it ambiguous as to whether in, by or through is the correct word to use here.

24 T.F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (2nd ed.) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992) 87-88.

encouraged that the Spirit, like Jesus, searches our hearts and intercedes for us 'with groans that words cannot express' (Rom 8:26).

Summary

Trinitarian worship can be understood as a dynamic process, from God to humans and from humans to God. We know, experience and accept the fullness of God-as-he-has-been-revealed-to-us, because all three persons of the Godhead are intimately involved in our worship and prayer, albeit in distinct ways. The Father directs Christ as to how we should pray, and Christ in turn directs us as we are in him (opening our lives to the reign of Jesus) and in the Spirit (aware of him guiding us according to the directions of Jesus). Because we have an intimate relationship of a son with a father through the Spirit of sonship God has given to us, as we obediently follow the guiding of the Spirit, the Father accepts our prayers as if they were from Jesus. Essentially, Jesus takes our prayers and gives them to the Father as if they were his. We actively participate in Jesus' perfect offering of worship to the Father.

Who should we address in our 'Trinitarian' worship?

We have understood worship as our participation in the Son's communion with the Father. It might seem natural, then, to always address prayers and worship to the Father. While historically this has been their characteristic and central direction, prayer and worship has certainly not been exclusively directed to the Father. The New Testament only specifically commands prayer and worship be directed to the Father, but in practice Jesus was prayed to (Acts 7:59-60, 1 Cor 16:22, 2 Cor 12:9) and worshipped (2 Pet 3:18, Rev 1:5ff). There is, however, no evidence that the early church worshipped or prayed to the Spirit. Erickson²⁵ points to the coordinate development of the

25 See M.J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) 326-328.

recognition of the Spirit's deity and the practice of addressing prayer and worship to the Holy Spirit as implying probable causal effect. Given the Spirit is a person and God, surely we must agree with this development and similarly worship and pray to him²⁶.

The B.C.C. report²⁷ on 'The forgotten Trinity' summarises by outlining three ways that Christian worship is Trinitarian. First we pray to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit, second we pray to each of the three persons of the Trinity individually, and thirdly we pray to the one triune God. How does our understanding of Trinitarian worship account for this diversity of methods and recipients?

First we note our formulation began with the Godhead's threeness as a basis for his unity. For clarity, we attributed specific roles to each of the persons of the Trinity. But our appropriations²⁸ cannot be exclusive. 'What is appropriated belongs in fact to all the modes of existence, and the real distinction between the modes of existence cannot really be achieved by any appropriation'²⁹. We must temper our need for clarity by recognising the persons of the Godhead act through mutual *perichoresis*, each is involved in the other's activity.³⁰ So there is no reason the Father (the original source of our prayers) cannot direct us through the Spirit's guidance to

26 See G. Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life* (London: Epworth, 1980) 93-103 for an extended discussion of the worship of the Holy Spirit.

27 British Council of Churches, 1989.

28 Our use of the word 'appropriations' here is slightly different to that elsewhere in this article. We refer here to the doctrine of appropriations, whereby each of the persons of the Godhead is attributed a different activity.

29 K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol 1, Pt 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960) 429.

30 The NT certainly suggests such a dynamic indwelling relationship. For example, the gifts we receive are sometimes seen as gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians), sometimes as gifts of Christ (Ephesians), and sometimes gifts of God (Romans).

address our prayers to the Spirit or the Son. Particularly when the Father wants us to thank them or request from them something closely associated with their appropriated roles. Our (albeit limited) knowledge of the economic Trinity includes a revealed order that can certainly be imaged in prayer and worship.

Second, we also began by acknowledging that God-as-he-really-is is the object, source and life of our worship. But if revelation is true, God-as-he-really-is (immanent Trinity) is the same as God-as-he-has-been-revealed-to-us (economic Trinity) whom we experience and accept through worship³¹. So we do not have to address each person individually, but we can (and should) worship the collective Trinity in its unity. This does not mean we disregard or ignore the personhood or role of any of the three *hypostases* in worship, but rather that we acknowledge their unity. Such a balanced practice enables us to avoid the opposite errors of 'practical mere monotheism' (evidenced through the interchangeable use of Father, Jesus, Spirit for the same individual deity) and 'practical Tritheism' (evidenced when one person of the Trinity is emphasized at the others' expense).

Which ways should we do our 'Trinitarian' worship?

Having developed a comprehensive understanding of Trinitarian worship, we now consider its implications for our contemporary view and practice of worship. In particular, we contrast 'Trinitarian worship' (where it is God who initiates and guides worship as we are in Christ and in the Spirit, and we participate in the Son's communion with the Father) with the theology implied by much of contemporary practice where

31 This is the same point as the famous quote of Karl Rahner 'The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity ...' as quoted in D.L. Migliore 'The Trinity and Human Liberty', *Theology Today*, 36, 1980, 488-497, 495.

worship is our response to God for his saving work, something that we do.

The Eucharist

If worship is seen as our response to God for his saving work, then the Lord's Supper is merely a remembrance feast. If, in contrast, worship is seen as participating in the life of the Trinity, then the Eucharist becomes the supreme act of our worship, a sign (in its deepest and most meaningful sense) of the 'communion' we now have with the Father. We are still reminded of Jesus' sacrifice and his sharing of our humanity through the elements. But further, in partaking of Christ's 'body' and 'blood', we both participate in his sacrifice and become one with him, so through him and in him (respectively) we share Jesus' communion with the Father through the power of the Spirit. 'In the poverty of a symbolic meal, God grants the divine glory to human beings'^{32&33}

Baptism

Viewing prayer and worship as something we do, baptism is merely a public act that announces our allegiance with and acceptance of Jesus. The only reminder of the Trinity is in the creedal formula. Upon recognizing how we are drawn through our worship into the life of the Trinity, baptism becomes much more significant. First, it is a sign of how we are 'in Christ'. We have died with him (in the 'one baptism' of Eph 4:2), and will be raised with him by the power of the Spirit. Second, it is a sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, where we become so immersed in the Spirit of Sonship that we participate in the intimate communion with the Father that Jesus enjoys. Seeing baptism as the 'body' part of salvation, the Trinity's involvement in

32 M. Welker, *What Happens in Holy Communion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 176.

33 Welker 167-176 gives an eloquent and detailed explanation of the place of the Trinity in the eucharist.

baptism is an eloquent portrayal of the Trinity's involvement in all our past, present and future salvation; a salvation we 'work out' as God works in us, through worship, prayer and obedience (Php 2:12-13).

Practice of Worship

The view of worship implied by much contemporary practice places the responsibility for worship on us, and consequently may quickly lead to weariness. The Trinitarian view suggests, in contrast, that true worship ultimately originates from God. Our job is to ensure we are in the Spirit and in Christ. So worship is not a chore to be endured, but a glorious joy to be reveled in. Further, a Trinitarian view of worship suggests the never-ending arguments about styles of worship are significantly less important than whether our worship is in the Spirit and in Christ. 'Who' matters much more than 'How'.

Preaching and Teaching

If worship is our response to God, then preaching is not worship. It is, at best, an individual testimony shared among others, encouraging them to consciously recall the saving work of Jesus, and to respond in kind. But if worship is our participation in the life of the Trinity, then preaching itself can be a part of that worship. The Spirit is involved at every level of such preaching: inspiring the text, anointing the preacher, illuminating the audience and convicting the world³⁴. Spirit-filled preaching always focuses on Christ, for the role of the Spirit is to bring glory to Jesus, and convey to us his words (John 16:14). Spirit-filled preaching is always influential, because even if our words are weak and implausible, the Spirit confirms them with demonstrations of power (1 Cor 2:3). Spirit-filled preaching is always truthful and insightful, for the Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and in him we search the deep things of God, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual (1

34 See P. Windsor, *Homiletics Lecture Notes* (unpublished 2000).

Cor 2:10-13). It is not merely human wisdom, because if Christ is in us, we have his mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16). Spirit-filled preaching 'comes from God, centers on Christ and is stimulated by the Holy Spirit'³⁵, truly the 'word of God'.

Attitude to Sin

The Spirit has a vital role in our worship, being (in one sense) our 'immediate point of contact' to the Father and the Son. Seen this way, grieving the Spirit (Eph 4:30) through our sinfulness and selfishness does not just sadden a member of the Godhead (bad enough that this is); it affects our present ability to communicate with God. Sin becomes not just legal separation from God, but real, practical hindrance to our prayer and worship. This view of worship strongly emphasizes the need for daily confession, repentance and acceptance of forgiveness.

A Balanced Practice

By affirming both the unity of the Godhead, and the distinct roles of its hypostases, we can maintain a balanced approach to worship and avoid the distortions that occur when one person of the Trinity is emphasized at the others' expense. An overemphasis on the Father leads to such reverential awe of God that he becomes distant and impersonal. An overemphasis on the Son so stresses our sinfulness and need for forgiveness that God seems to have no interest in us beyond our salvation. An overemphasis on the Spirit so seeks experience that doctrinal truth and spiritual discipline get neglected. Following the guidance received in the Spirit, Trinitarian worship walks the fine line between these distortions allowing worship to be 'an informal dignity, ... challenging and direct ... while

35 This comment is used by John Stott (in *God's Book for God's People: Why We Need the Bible* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1982) 42) of the Bible (the Word of God), although he used 'inspired' instead of 'stimulated'.

interruptibly flexible.³⁶

The impact of prayer and worship

An understanding of Trinitarian prayer and worship resolves the dilemma of how our prayers achieve anything if God does not change. As we hear and obey the Spirit's guidance about what to pray for and how to pray, we are reinforced in our obedience by seeing God act in accordance with those prayers³⁷. We have not changed God's mind; God is only doing what he willed us to pray for. But neither are our prayers ineffective for by God's own choosing they release his power. In this way, Trinitarian prayer and worship develops an action / reflection model in which our obedience to the Spirit's guidance is reinforced through seeing God's action. As we increasingly follow the Spirit's guidance, our obedience grows to mimic that of Jesus, who only did what he saw his Father doing. So prayer is entirely about changing our hearts to match God's passions and longings, not changing God's heart to match ours.

Community in Worship

While allowing for individual capability, Trinitarian worship emphasises community. First, God himself is a community in worship. As we are drawn into the life of the Trinity, we become part of that community. We become one in nature. Second, no individual has a perfect ability to discern the guidance of the Spirit as to how we should pray and worship. As a community we can both gain confidence in our discernment through the confirmation of others, and also learn and teach each other how to be more completely in the Spirit (able to discern

36 D.G. Hawkins, 'There's a Wideness in God's Mercy' *Expository Times*, 1996 108(3), 74-76, 76.

37 We should note here the possibility that God will not move in response to our prayers even if we pray according to his directions in the Spirit. Even this though, will be 'planned' by God to grow our faith and develop in us the mind of Christ. Our understanding of God's response to our action of praying does not mean that we are not learning and growing through it.

God's guidance) and in Christ (willing to obey God's guidance). In this, we are one in need. Third, as children of God, we all receive similar guidance. Others are in Christ, just as we are. All the instructions are coming from the same source. As we are in the Spirit, then, we become one in purpose. So through worship and prayer we become one in nature, need and purpose; one in Christ, just as Jesus prayed (John 17:20-24).

Conclusion

In the infinitely gracious condescension of God, through our worship and prayer we are drawn into the life of the Trinity, participating in the Son's communion with the Father through the Spirit, as we are in Christ and in the Spirit. We have the status of Sonship as we are in Christ, opening our lives to his reign within us, and through participating in the saving sacrifice and perfect response of Jesus. We experience that Sonship, genuine intimate communion and fellowship with God, through the Spirit of Sonship the Father gives us. In this Spirit, we become aware of Jesus guiding us, teaching us what to pray and leading us in our worship. Such an understanding of Trinitarian worship has profound and practical implications for how we should worship and pray, ranging from a deeper significance of Baptism and the Eucharist, through to the need for balanced practice in our Sunday-morning communal worship times. At its heart, Trinitarian prayer and worship is something of a soliloquy³⁸, with God as source, life and object. The wonder is that he should choose us as an intermediary. C.S. Lewis puts it well

They tell me, Lord that when I seem
To be in speech with you
Since but one voice is heard, it's all a dream,
One talker aping two.
Sometimes it is, yet not as they

38 C.S. Lewis, *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm* (London: Fount, 1964) 71.

Conceive it, Rather I
Seek in myself the things I hoped to say,
But lo! The wells are dry.
Then seeing me empty, you forsake
The listener's role and through
My dumb lips breathe and into utterance wake
The thoughts I never knew.
And thus you neither need reply
Nor can; thus while we seem
Two talkers, thou art One forever, and I
No dreamer, but thy dream.³⁹

Greg Liston

39 Lewis 70 – Note that Lewis believes (accurately) that the word 'dream' in the last line is too pantheistic.