

TWO VIEWS OF WORSHIP
-in Scotland today-

- I (a) The first view - probably the commonest and most widespread - is that worship is something which we do - mainly in Church on Sunday. We go to church, we stand and sing our psalms to God, we pray to God, we intercede for Northern Ireland, Middle East, etc., we listen to the sermon (too often simply an exhortation), we offer our money, time and talents to God. No doubt we need God's grace to help us to do it; we do it because Jesus taught us to do it and left us an example as to how to do it. But worship is what WE do.
- (b) In theological language, this means that the only priesthood is our priesthood, the only offering our offering, the only intercessions our intercessions.
- (c) But this is precisely the understanding of worship which the Reformers rejected, when they spoke about the Sole Priesthood of Christ, the once-and-for-all self-offering of Christ, the Mediator, on our behalf by which we alone can come to God, and when they spoke of our worship, and priesthood, and self-offering and intercessions as the gift of participating in the Priesthood and Self-offering and intercessions of Christ.
- (d) This first view of worship is in practice unitarian, has no doctrine of the Mediator, is man-centred, with no proper doctrine of the Holy Spirit and is basically non-sacramental - and can engender weariness. We sit in the pew watching the minister "doing his thing", exhorting us "to do our thing" in the pew, until we go home thinking we have done our duty for another week! This kind of "do-it-yourself-with-the-help-of-the-Minister" worship is what our forefathers would have called "legal" worship, and not "evangelical" worship - what the ancient church would have called "arian" or "pelagian" and not truly catholic.
- II (a) The second view of worship is that worship is the gift of participating through the Spirit in the Son's communion with the Father - of participating, in union with Christ, in what He has done for us once and for all on the Cross, and in what He is continuing to do for us in the presence of the Father, and in His mission to the world. The bread which we break, is it not our sharing in the Body of Christ? The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not our sharing in the blood of Christ? Our sonship and communion with the Father, are they not our sharing by the Spirit of adoption in His Sonship and Communion with the Father? Our intercessions for Northern Ireland and the Middle East, are they not our participation in Christ's intercession for Northern Ireland and the Middle East? Our mission to the world and ministry to the needs of men, are they not the gift of participating in Christ's mission to the world and His ministry to the needs of men? Is this not the meaning of life in the Spirit?
- (b) This second view is Trinitarian, Incarnational, takes seriously New Testament teaching about the Mediator, the Sole Priesthood of Christ, the Once-and-for-all Self-offering of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, life in Christ, with a vision of the Church as the Body of Christ. It is fundamentally "sacramental" - but in a way which enshrines the Gospel of grace, that God in the gift of Christ and the gift of the Spirit/

Spirit, gives us what He demands - the worship of our hearts and lives.

- (c) It was the concern of the Reformers to recover this New Testament understanding of worship in a world where the Mediaeval Church had tended to substitute the priesthood, the sacrifice, the merits, the intercessions of the church - the vicarious humanity of the ecclesia - (Mary and the Saints) - for the vicarious humanity of Christ, in a way that obscured the Gospel of grace, the Good News of what God has done for us in Christ. The Reformers saw clearly the significance of the Pauline teaching about justification, that we are accepted by God, not because of our "good works", but freely by God's grace received in faith. They also saw clearly what this meant for our understanding of worship, that God does not accept us because we have offered worthy worship. In His Love, He accepts us freely in the Person of the Son, who in our name and on our behalf has made the One Offering that alone is acceptable to God for all men, for all nations, for all times, and who unites us with Himself in the One Body, in His communion with the Father.

- (d) This second view is both catholic and evangelical. Whereas the first view can be divisive, in that every church and denomination "does its own thing" and worships God in its own way; the second way is unifying in that it recognises that there is only one way to come to the Father, namely, through Christ in the communion of the Spirit, in the communion of saints, whatever outward form our worship may take. If the first way can engender weariness, this second way - the way of grace - releases joy and ecstasy, for with inward peace we are lifted up out of ourselves by the Spirit into a world of praise and adoration and communion in Christ.

III (a) It might be argued that the distinction between these two views is drawn too sharply. Is there not a middle position, which is in fact the point of view of most of our good church people? I think this is true, but it is in fact a modification of the first view. It might be stated in this way. Yes, worship is what we do - but we worship God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we pray to Christ as God, we invoke the Holy Spirit, we respond to the preaching of the Word, we intercede for the world, we offer our money, time and service to God, we remember the death of Jesus in the Sacrament.

- (b) This view might be defended on the ground of "the priesthood of all believers" and as being Trinitarian, but it falls short of the New Testament understanding of participation through the Spirit in what Christ has done and in what Christ is doing. It is still man-centred, and can engender weariness. It is a do-it-yourself-in-response-to-Christ worship, and is to this extent a modification of the first view, though with more Christian content.

- (c) What is lacking here is an adequate understanding of the role of Christ and the role of the Spirit in our worship of the Father.

- (1) What is the role of Christ in worship? In the New Testament two things are held together. God comes to us in Christ, and therefore we pray to Christ as God. But on the other hand, Jesus is presented to us as our brother Man, praying for us and with us to the Father, and uniting us with Himself in His communion with the Father and His intercessions for the world. This is the aspect/

aspect of Christ's ministry emphasised in the New Testament and by the Reformers in the thought of the sole Priesthood of Christ (the so-called "vicarious humanity" of Christ). When the role of Christ in our humanity - in His life of worship and communion with the Father - is emphasised in New Testament fashion, then our worship is seen as the gift of participating through the Spirit in the Son's Communion with the Father. This is the significance of the "second view" of worship emphasised above. This second view disappears when we lose sight of the worship and ministry of the Man Jesus. In the New Testament witness, there is a God-manward ministry of Christ, and a man-Godward ministry of Christ. Both are fundamental for our understanding of communion with God - and therefore of the sacraments.

(ii) What is the role of the Holy Spirit in worship? In the New Testament, Christ is presented as uniting us with Himself by the Spirit in His two-fold ministry of bringing God to men and men to God. Correspondingly there is a two-fold ministry of the Spirit. There is a God-manward movement of the Holy Spirit, in creating, in revealing, in renewing us in worship, in giving gifts to the Church. But there is a man-Godward movement of the Spirit, a priestly, interceding ministry, where the Spirit leads us to the Father through Christ - "interceding for us" (Romans 8.26) - lifting us up into communion with God (as in the sursum corda). This "vicarious" priestly work of the Spirit is fundamental for our understanding of worship where Christ our Brother, our Advocate, our High Priest unites us with Himself in His self-presentation on our behalf to the Father. This vicarious role of the Holy Spirit is fundamental for the "second view" of worship enunciated above.

In Scotland today there is a widespread desire to recover the apostolic practice of frequent communion. How is this to be done? It is doubtful if this can be achieved simply by exhortation - especially in a land where we value freedom in worship. We can only do so by recovering the recognition that all worship is communion - participating through the Spirit in the Son's Communion with the Father. It is impossible to recover the centrality of the Lord's Supper, with ^{ov}a new vivid awareness of Who the Lord is who meets us at His Table, and what He has done and is doing for us in the power of the Spirit. WITHOUT

HOW we worship is controlled by our awareness of WHO Christ is.