

Foreword

It is in the worship of God that human beings realize themselves most completely. In worship, they fulfil their vocation as creatures. The worshipping vocation is a vocation shared with all other creatures, non-human ones included (which is why the Bible talks of trees, mountains, deserts, and seas giving glory to God). But there are distinctive ways in which worship works as human vocation. It provides the context in which humans grasp themselves in their deepest truth and potential, precisely as they find themselves grasped by God. Worship is the medium—best characterized using the language of *relationship*—in which full human personhood emerges. In worship, inward dispositions and outward actions are reciprocally related as part of a formative orientation to God by which we are shaped together for holiness.

There are plenty of ways in which Christian worship can be characterized and described using the tools of the human sciences: sociological, anthropological, historical, psychological, and more. Christian worship can be placed in a baggy common category entitled “ritual practices,” and the artefacts associated with it examined as forms of “material culture.” But from a Christian theological perspective, however illuminating these studies may be, the one thing needful for an adequate characterization of worship is a good doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

Ultimately, it is only the Holy Spirit who allows worship to be worship. Without the Holy Spirit, it is something less (a personal habit, a vehicle for the expression of spiritual aspirations, a mechanism of collective socialization, a solace-giving retreat from the demands of the world). Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit worship becomes more than any of these, and is protected from becoming what all of them could easily become: idolatry.

It is only the Holy Spirit who allows worship to be worship. When this affirmation is allowed the centrality that the Christian faith insists that it should have, then other things (which have at times seemed of huge importance to the churches) are put in a better context. The specifics of worship—the details of what is and isn't done—are properly secondary to this one thing needful.

It is only the Holy Spirit who allows worship to be worship. Elizabeth Welch's book is a sustained exploration of that central truth, and is the fruit both of careful scholarship and of a lifetime of dedicated service to ecumenical conversation. *The Holy Spirit and Worship* has all the hallmarks of a book by a seasoned ecumenist. The author is careful in the best sense: attentive, measured, hospitable to many perspectives, and generous-spirited in seeking points of connection rather than laboring differences. She cares deeply about this subject, and that care is evident on each page of the book, as well as in the fact that the book exists at all.

Moreover, her ecumenist's desire, and ability, to make connections is manifested in the multiple connections that the book's pneumatological approach allows her to make. These connections are at the center of this book's achievements.

First of all, she connects the Church past and present by her sustained comparison of one of the great (though often neglected) divines of the seventeenth century, John Owen, with one of the foremost theologians of the modern period, John Zizioulas. It is a bold connection to make, but it shows far more effectively than a series of generalized but free-floating claims could ever do that it is not a fantasy to claim that the Church (in the power of the Spirit) is one, in all times and places. The commonality of concerns across the centuries is one of the great revelations in the pages that follow.

In a similar vein, Welch explores with insight how the local is connected with the universal: universal claims about the Church are never adequate unless they are also locally evidenced and grounded. The Church is like the sacraments of which it is custodian in always being concrete. This book is alert to particular contexts and to how they are windows onto enduring truths.

Next, this is a book that connects head and heart. It astutely unveils the ways that the doctrines that shape and articulate what is going on in worship ought not to be divorced from the experiences and emotions that are at play in worship, but also that such affective and felt aspects of worship are "proved" by doctrine (in the traditional sense of tested, established, and demonstrated). The Spirit is one who both teaches the mind and warms the affections. In particular, Welch gives the lie to caricatures of Puritanism as resolutely intellectualist—focused on the saving power of right doctrines,

conceptually distilled from divine revelation in Scripture. She shows Owen, the Puritan, to be someone who has ample room for what she describes as experiential and relational knowledge, and here too finds profound affinities with Zizioulas's theology.

Zizioulas's is a theology of "persons in communion." Only in relationship with others are human beings persons at all, and only in relation with others are we participants in the eternal life of the Trinity. This allows Welch's comparative engagement with Owen and Zizioulas to make another connection: that between the individual and the community. She gives a pneumatological account of how worship makes a "we" out of many "I"s. It is in the power of the Spirit that the Body of Christ is bound together and all its parts coordinated. The gifts of the Spirit are for the sanctification of individuals only because they bestow social virtues. The fruits of these virtues are collectively known and held: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22–23). The supreme context in which these gifts of the Spirit are given is worship.

Past and present; local and universal; head and heart; individual and community: these connections are reestablished and renewed every time Christians worship. This book explores those connections as the work of the Holy Spirit, the divine connector, who binds all things.

And the final connection the book makes is between East and West—across a Christian denominational difference that on the face of it looks about as extreme as you could imagine: Reformed Protestantism and Greek Orthodoxy. In Welch's hands, the divide looks far more like a rich field of reciprocities, many of them being realized for the very first time in the groundbreaking chapters that follow. If these two church traditions can be brought so productively into dialogue, there is surely hope for a great many other divided traditions too. The human vocation will be fulfilled in such convergences. The wisdom needed to accomplish them is the wisdom that the Holy Spirit imparts when human beings worship in spirit and in truth.

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