

Trinitarian Sacramental Theology

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Calvin Symposium on Worship

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It is a remarkable Christian claim that God is active not only in receiving our worship, but also in inspiring, prompting, and perfecting it—drawing us into communion with God and each other. It is also remarkable that God would do this through embodied, material human actions of washing, eating, and drinking. Yet often this central Christian vision is forgotten, ignored, or distorted, and all sorts of believers are never given the opportunity to taste and see God's beauty in this vivid and nourishing way. This session will be a doxological session, full of praise to God for this gift. It will also be instructive, pointing to key resources in the Christian tradition for further exploring this vision. And it will be practical, suggesting ideas for teaching, preaching, and public worship that live into this rich vision.

SCRIPTURE TEXTS

1. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. (Rom. 8:14-17)
2. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. ¹³And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. (I Cor. 2:11-13)
3. When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. ⁶And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God. (Gal. 4:4-7)
4. 1 Peter 1:2 "(to the elect exiles) according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: may grace and peace be yours in abundance"
5. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. ⁹God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. . . ¹³By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. (I John 4:2, 9-10, 13-14)

INSTRUCTIVE TEXTS

(1) Sarah Coakley

What is so wonderful about Paul's admission that we do not even "know how to pray" is his simultaneous insistence that this painful sense of human blockage precisely allows space for the *Spirit* to intervene to do the praying in us... What seemed to be incoherence or helpless inarticulacy may actually be preludes to the Spirit's groaning in us, with "sighs too deep for words," and so searching and cleansing the human heart before God. This is therefore not just any old asking, but what we might call the *asking of asking*.

We should not be surprised if this seems like a disconcertingly weird "conversation" unlike any other: for God is not one more item in the universe to be cajoled, stroked, or manipulated in prayer. God is not *a* being, but Being itself, mysteriously sustaining me in being every moment of my existence.

It follows that my attempts to communicate with such a God will in some sense be unlike any other form of "relationship," however satisfying. I must first make space for the Godness of God to change my agenda, if need be, rather than *vice versa*.... Only then, through this interruption of the Spirit, will I know Fatherhood not as patriarchal threat, but as Jesus knew him in intimacy: I shall be standing alongside Jesus, and, as Paul puts it, being "conformed" to him. I shall in some mysterious way inhabit this *space* of Jesus in prayer.

—Sarah Coakley, reflecting on Romans 8:14-17, 26-27, "Teach Us to Pray: On the Impossibility of Christian Prayer," <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/teach-us-to-pray-the-impossibility-of-christian-prayer/10097302>

(2) James Torrance

To participate by the Spirit in the incarnate Christ's communion with the Father is to participate in the eternal Son's communion — a relationship which is both *internal* to the Godhead and *externally* extended to us by grace, established between God and humanity in the incarnation.... In this understanding of worship, we can discern a double movement of grace — (a) a God-humanward movement, from (*ek*) the Father, through (*dia*) the Son, in (*en*) the Spirit, and (b) a human-Godward movement to the Father, through the Son in the Spirit. This double movement of grace...is the heart of the "dialogue" between God and humanity in worship.

—James Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, 32

(3) Todd Billings

The Lord's Supper is a foretaste of the final heaven, not just of paradise, which is the intermediate state. At the Supper, the gathered have fellowship with Christ—but not in a disembodied way. Eyes should not be closed. Noses should smell the wine and bread. Hands should greet, bodies should embrace others in the covenant community, whether young or old; whether black, white, or brown; whether poor or rich; whether talkative or mute; whether mobile or immobile. Through the covenant of grace, the bodies of the gathered at the table will be fully and finally lifted up to participate in Christ, the eternal Son, sharing in his glory, as embodied sons and daughters of the King....

Thus, our relations with God and one another will reflect deep mysteries of knowing and being known: temple fellowship with God; marital fellowship with God; kin fellowship with others, of all nations and tribes. All these covenantal forms of fellowship are tasted at the table, and they disclose the hope of the embodied, God-centered, worship-focused, communally enacted life of the age to come. The many tongues of Babel spelled confusion. But at Pentecost, many tongues offered diverse praise to the ascended Savior. What sowed confusion now fits into a tapestry of beauty—all to praise the covenant Lord.

—J. Todd Billings, *Remembrance, Communion, and Hope: Rediscovering the Gospel at the Lord's Table*, p. 190, 192

(4) C.S. Lewis

You may ask 'If we cannot imagine a three-personal Being, what is the good of talking about Him?' Well, there isn't any good talking about Him. The thing that matters is being actually drawn into that three-personal life, and that may begin any time—tonight, if you like. What I mean is this. An ordinary simple Christian kneels down to say his [or her] prayers. He is trying to get into touch with God. But if a Christian, he knows that what is prompting him to pray is also God: God, so to speak, inside him. But he also know that all his real knowledge of God comes through Christ, the Man who was God—that Christ is standing

beside him, helping him to pray, praying for him. You see what is happening. God is the thing to which he is praying—the goal he is trying to reach. God is also the thing inside him which is pushing him on—the motive power. God is also the road or bridge along which he is being pushed to that goal. So that the whole threefold life of the three-personal being is actually going on in that ordinary little bedroom where an ordinary Christian is saying his prayers.

—C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, chapter 2.

(5) John Calvin

I. The end of the whole Gospel ministry is that God, the fountain of all felicity, communicate Christ to us who are disunited by sin and hence ruined, that we may from him enjoy eternal life; that in a word all heavenly treasures be so applied to us that they be no less ours than Christ's himself.

II. We believe the communication to be (a) mysterious, and incomprehensible to human reason, and (b) spiritual, since it is effected by the Holy Spirit; to whom, since he is the virtue of the living God, proceeding from the Father and the Son, we ascribe omnipotence, by which he joins us to Christ our Head, not in an imaginary way, but most powerfully and truly, so that we become flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone, and from his vivifying flesh he transfuses eternal life to us.

III. That we believe the Holy Spirit to effect this union rests on a certain ground, namely this: Whatever (a) the Father [John 14:16] or (b) the Son does to bring the faithful to salvation, Holy Scripture testifies that each operates through the Holy Spirit [John 15:26, 16:7]; and that (c) Christ does not otherwise dwell in us than through his Spirit, nor in any other way communicates himself to us than through the same Spirit [Rom. 8.9].

IV. To effect this union, the Holy Spirit uses a double instrument, the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments.

—John Calvin, *Summary of Doctrine Concerning the Ministry of Word and Sacrament*

(5) C.S. Lewis

No Beauty We Could Desire

Yes, you are always everywhere. But I,
Hunting in such immeasurable forests,
Could never bring the noble hart to bay.

The scent was too perplexing for my hounds;
Nowhere sometimes, then again everywhere.
Other scents, too, seemed to them almost the same.

Therefore I turn my back on the unapproachable
Stars and horizons and all musical sounds,
Poetry itself, and the winding stair of thought.

Leaving the forests where you are pursued in vain
– Often a mere white gleam – I turn instead
To the appointed place where you pursue.

Not in Nature, not even in Man, but in one
Particular Man, with a date, so tall, weighing
So much, talking Aramaic, having learned a trade;

Not in all food, not in all bread and wine
(Not, I mean, as my littleness requires)
But this wine, this bread. . . no beauty we could desire.

[*Poems*, ed. Walter Hooper (Geoffrey Bles:1964), p. 124.]

On Another Theme from Nicolas of Cusa

[*De Docta Ignorantia*, III.ix]

When soul and body feed, one sees
Their differing physiologies.
Firmness of apple, fluted shape
Of celery, or the bloom of grape
I grind and mangle as I eat,
Then in dark, salt, internal heat
Obliterate their natures by
The mastering act that makes them I.

But when the soul partakes of good
Or truth, which are her savory food,
By a far subtler chemistry
It is not they that change but she,
Who lets them enter with the state
Of conquerors her surrendered gate,
Or mirror-like digests their ray
By turning luminous as they.

[*Times Literary Supplement*, Jan. 21, 1955, p. 43.]

(6) David Fagerberg

David Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima: What Is Liturgical Theology?* 2nd edition (Mundelein, IL: Hillenbrand Books, 2004)

From chapter 1, “Deepening the Grammar of Liturgy”

The liturgy is participation by the body of Christ in the activity of the Trinity; the Church’s ritual activity is itself theological; and asceticism is the capacitation of the baptized for that participation. I do not seek to add liturgy to asceticism or theology; rather I seek to enlarge our understanding of liturgy by discovering its very theological and ascetical dimensions. . . .

Paul Evdokimov describes the kingdom of God in this way: ‘It is in the offering of the heart to God that the Spirit manifests itself and introduces the human being into the eternal circulation of love between the Father and the Son, and this is the Kingdom.’ I suggest that this is the only adequate definition of liturgy. Liturgy is living in that eternal circulation of love within the Trinity. For us to love God, our appetites must be put into control: *ordo amoris*. In the liturgy God presents Himself to be loved, and by loving we know Him, and knowing the Trinity is what Athanasius simply called ‘theology.’ It is liturgical theology, practiced by liturgists in the ascetical discipline of *theologia prima*.

[The Evdokimov quotation is from “Saint Seraphim of Sarov,” *The Ecumenical Review*, 15 (April 1963) 273.]

(7) Ashley Null

In Cranmer’s understanding, the Holy Spirit came directly to God’s people through his Word. As Scripture was proclaimed, the Holy Spirit wrote his promises on the hearts of believers, thereby nurturing in them a living, personal faith which alone united them to God. That is the reason why Cranmer urged the English people to feed on Christ continually, because they could strengthen their union with Christ at any time simply by meditating on God’s Word in their own hearts.’

Therefore, in Cranmer’s mature understanding, the sacraments were not the principal means of grace. Nor were they a second, separate channel on par with Scripture, as if the Spirit worked supernaturally through two different, but parallel, means, i.e., the sacramental ministry of an apostolically ordained priesthood and biblical preaching. Cranmer’s final view was far simpler. Since the Holy Spirit came to God’s people through the Scriptures, the sacraments were effectual means of grace

precisely because of their unique capacity for proclaiming the promises of God’s Word.

In the sacraments God has accommodated himself to the creatureliness of our nature. We have keen physical senses – sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste. But our spiritual senses are dim at best, so that we can struggle to perceive the Spirit’s working within us.

Consequently, Christ has commanded that the visible elements of water, bread, and wine be joined to the proclamation of his promises to save us and sustain us. As a result, in the sacraments we can encounter him with all our physical senses.

When we see, smell, touch, and taste the bread and wine in Holy Communion, the Spirit witnesses to us that Christ is at that very moment feeding our souls with the benefits of his passion, just as the elements are feeding our bodies. Naturally, the awareness that Christ is tending to our spiritual needs strengthens our faith in him. And, of course, true faith in God’s goodness towards us always engenders a hearty thankfulness in us which, in turn, goes forth from us as a renewed love for him and others. Indeed, the miracle of Communion isn’t the supernatural changing of bread and wine, it is the supernatural redirecting of our wills, away from a self-centred love of self towards a true love for God and others.

In short, according to Cranmer, the purpose of the Lord’s Supper is both as an expression of a believer’s living faith and as a unique means of strengthening it. In obedience to Christ’s explicit command, the Church celebrates this sacrament until he comes again. During its ministrations, those with living faith ascend in heart and mind to Christ’s presence at the right hand of God. Seated with him in heavenly places, they are spiritually nourished with the full power and benefit of Christ’s body and blood by Christ himself. With their faith strengthened, they continue to dwell in him and he in them, thereby enabling believers to love their neighbour as themselves.

(Found in this interview here: <http://acl.asn.au/resources/dr-ashley-null-on-thomas-cranmer/>)

TEXTS FOR SINGING AND PRAYING

(1) Charles Wesley

Maker, in whom we live, in whom we are and move,
The glory, power, and praise receive for thy creating love.
Let all the angel throng give thanks to God on high,
While earth repeats the joyful song and echoes to the sky.

Incarnate Deity, let all the ransomed race render in thanks
their lives to thee for thy redeeming grace.
The grace to sinners showed ye heavenly choirs proclaim,
and cry,
“Salvation to our God, salvation to the Lamb!”

Spirit of Holiness, let all thy saints adore thy sacred energy,
And bless thine heart renewing power.
Not angel tongues can tell thy love’s ecstatic height,
the glorious joy unspeakable, the beatific sight.

Eternal, Triune God, let all the hosts above,
Let all on earth below record and dwell upon thy love.
When heaven and earth are fled before thy glorious face,
Sing all the saints they love hath made thine everlasting
praise.

(2) Matt Redman

This is a gifted response
Father we cannot come to You by our own merit
We will come in the name of Your son
As He glorifies You
And in the power of Your spirit

We have come to something so mysterious
Too deep for minds to comprehend
Through the open door
Where the angels sing
And the host of heaven are antheming

And we'll sing the glory of Your name
Celebrate the glories of Your grace
We will worship You, We will worship You
And we'll make Your praise so glorious
Singing songs of everlasting praise
We will worship You, we will worship You

(3)

(4) Lutheran Chorale

Lord Jesus Christ, be present now,
our hearts in true devotion bow,
Your Spirit send with grace divine,
and let your truth within us shine.
Unseal our lips to sing your praise,
our souls to you in worship raise,
Make strong our faith, increase our light
that we may know your name aright.

Until we join the hosts that cry,
“Holy are you, O Lord Most High!”
And in the light of that blest place
fore’er behold you face to face.
Glory to God the Father, Son,
and Holy Spirit, Three in One!
To you, O blessed Trinity,
be praise throughout eternity!
—Lutheran Chorale, 1651

(4) John Bell

Today I awake and God is before me.
At night, as I dreamt, he summoned the day;
For God never sleeps, but patterns the morning
with slithers of gold or glory in grey.

Today I arise and Christ is beside me.
He walked through the dark to scatter new light.
Yes, Christ is alive, and beckons his people
to hope and to heal, resist and invite.

Today I affirm the Spirit within me
at worship and work, in struggle and rest.
The Spirit inspires all life which is changing
from fearing to faith, from broken to blest.

Today I enjoy the Trinity round me,
above and beneath, before and behind;
The Maker, the Son, the Spirit together—
they called me to life and call me their friend.
—John L. Bell

Prayer for Illumination

Blessed are you, God of all creation.
You spoke in the beginning, and all things came to be.
You spoke, and your Word came to live with us,
full of grace and truth.
Bless this place where we would hear your voice.
Bless this place where we would hear your story.
As we listen, may our ears be attuned to you.
As the Word is spoken, may you speak to us.
May all we hear lead us to you.
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

—Worship Sourcebook, p. 143 (many other examples)

Baptism Prayer

Blessed are you, O God, maker and ruler of all things. Your voice thundered over the waters at creation. You water the mountains and send springs into the valleys to refresh and satisfy us and all living things.

Through the waters of the flood you carried those in the ark to safety. Through the sea you led your people Israel from slavery to freedom. In the wilderness you nourished them with water from the rock, and you brought them across the river Jordan to the promised land.

By the baptism of his death and resurrection, your Son, Jesus, has carried us to safety and freedom. The floods shall not overwhelm us, the deep shall not swallow us up, for Christ has brought us over to the land of promise. He sends us to make disciples, baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Pour out your Holy Spirit, wash away sin through the cross of Christ, clothe the baptized with Christ, and claim your daughters and sons, no longer Jew or Greek, no longer slave or free, no longer male or female, but one with all the baptized in Christ Jesus, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

—Worship Sourcebook, p. 273 (several other examples)

Lord Supper Prayer Excerpts (Epiclesis)

Heavenly Father, show forth among us the presence of your life-giving Word and Holy Spirit, to sanctify us and your whole church through this sacrament.

Grant that all who share the body and blood of our Savior, Jesus Christ, may be one in him and may remain faithful in love and hope. And as this grain has been gathered from many fields into one loaf and these grapes from many hills into one cup, grant, O Lord, that your whole church may soon be gathered from the ends of the earth into your kingdom.

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Send your Holy Spirit upon us, we pray, that the sharing of the bread that we break and the cup that we bless may be for us the communion of the body and blood of Christ. Grant that, being joined together in him, we may attain to the unity of the faith and grow up in all things into Christ, our Lord.

And as this grain has been gathered from many fields into one loaf, and these grapes from many hills into one cup, grant, O Lord, that your whole church may soon be gathered from the ends of the earth into your kingdom. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

—
Eternal God, let your Holy Spirit move in power over us and over these earthly gifts of bread and wine, that our sharing of them may be for us the communion of the body and blood of Christ, and that we may become one in him. May his coming in glory find us ever watchful in prayer, strong in truth and love, and faithful in the breaking of the bread. Then, at last, all peoples will be free, all divisions healed, and with your whole creation we will sing your praise, through your Son, Jesus Christ.

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God of all power, send your Holy Spirit upon us, that in sharing the bread we may share in the body of Christ, that in sharing the cup we may share in his blood. Grant that, being joined together in Christ Jesus, we may become united in faith and in all things become mature in the one who is our head.

—Worship Sourcebook, p. 324