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Papers and reflection questions prepared by
THE WELLINGTON INSTITUTE OF THEOLOGY
for ministers within
the Anglican Diocese of Wellington

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THE THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP

Introduction: the purpose of this paper

This paper is primarily to help those licensed Lay Ministers who are worship leaders to understand their ministry theologically. Others may also find it helpful. Worship is central to the life of the Church – indeed if people were asked ‘what is it that Christians do?’ a common and likely response would be ‘they go to church’. And so, while the initial ‘audience’ for this paper is those who are licensed as worship leaders, most, if not all, in it applies to all Christians – for worship is something that all Christians engage in: it is not ever a ‘spectator sport’.

This paper therefore looks at what it is we are doing (or think we are doing) when we ‘go to church’, and what that says about God and about us. We should remember the universality of worship – it is not something on which we Christians have a monopoly. The impulse to reach out, or up, to a Creator, to something or someone greater than ourselves occurs in so many cultures and religions. But this paper explores various theologies of worship within the Christian tradition, ways of regarding what it is we do when we seek to encounter the divine in the company of others. It does not touch (except possibly in passing) on the mechanics of worship, on the skills we need as worship leaders or on the resources available to us. Nor it is (except possibly in passing) a history of worship or of various liturgical movements. It is important to begin by noting that we Anglicans tend to keep our theology in our prayer books. For those of us in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia, much of our theology of worship is expressed in *A New Zealand Prayer Book / He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa*.

Worship in the Bible

Christian Worship has its roots in the Scriptures, both in the sense that many of the texts we use in our worship (the passages that are read and the images on which we draw) come from the Old and the New Testaments, but also because in Scripture we find the command to worship, the examples of others who have worshipped, and, above all, the God whom we worship.

Worship is a core theme in the Old Testament. We see the rituals of worship in Genesis and Exodus (the building of altars and cairns, the offerings of grains and fruit, the sacrifice of animals). Exodus 20:5 demands that God alone is worshipped, and this command is repeated (Deuteronomy 5:9). Moses is ordered to bring the people out of Egypt to worship God ‘here on this mountain’ (Exodus 3:12). The Book of Leviticus gives elaborate instructions for the conduct of worship, as do the later chapters of Exodus (details of the bronze basin, the recipe for anointing oil etc). The Psalms were the songs sung in worship by the Hebrew people and through them we get a sense of different liturgical practices (for example, the ‘songs of approach’ sung by pilgrims going up to the Temple). People worshipped in various places: in tents (or the Tent), in the wilderness, in synagogues, in shrines at the top of every high hill. The

Temple on Mount Zion was particularly important in the southern tradition: when it was built it became a centre of worship, and one to which the exiled people will return (Isaiah 27:13). Worship in the Old Testament was to do with honouring God. The Hebrew word for worship is *shachah* – this is a physical action: falling low before what is worthy of honour and worship. It is only used in a religious context. But, as will be noted, worship was linked to ethics: there could be no authentic worship unless there was justice.

- *Many of the Old Testament passages dealing with worship consist of instructions about ritual. Why might this be important? Why might this become too important?*

In the New Testament the Gospels bear witness to the participation of Jesus in worship in the Temple (Luke 2:41sq; 19:45-47), and in the synagogue (Luke 4:16). Thus Jesus models for us the habit of regular corporate worship as well as personal private prayer. After his death and resurrection, the disciples continued the custom of attending the Temple (Acts 2:46), and possibly the reference in Acts 2:42 ('They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.') is to the synagogue prayers as well as individual prayers at various times of the day. The breaking of the bread is a reference to the bread of the Communion – a glimpse of the liturgical life of the early Church. Likewise Paul refers (in 1 Corinthians 11:23) to the Eucharistic traditions which were passed on to him, and which the Church has handed on ever since. When we gather for worship, remembering that we are part of such a long-standing tradition gives an added richness to what we do. Some of the material that is part of our liturgy appears first of all in the New Testament, including the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4) and the cry Maranatha 'our Lord, come' (1 Corinthians 16:22 and Revelation 22:20). Paul describes services of worship in 1 Corinthians 14:26-33: from this we can glean details of what was done – as well as the knowledge that in the early Church (as in our own day) sometimes worship did not quite go according to plan, sometimes worship was not carried out 'decently and in order'.

- *How is our worship similar to that of the New Testament communities? How does it differ – and why?*

What is worship?

'Worship is the highest activity of the human spirit.'¹ It is the deepest expression of the relationship between us and God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The word 'worship' comes from the Middle-English *weorth-scipe*: when we worship we ascribe to God the worth and honour which is due to God by right, due to God because God is God. Indeed we worship because God is God. Our worship is part of our service to God.²

- *A number of different 'models' and theological approaches to worship are presented here. Why do we need a diversity of models?*

¹ *A New Zealand Prayer Book / He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa*. The Church of the Province of New Zealand. Collins. 1989. xv

² This is not to imply that worship is the only means of service to God: what we do for others, and our use of the gifts and talents we have received from God is also service.

As you go over the various models,

- *try to identify phrases from our liturgies that seem to you to relate to each particular one.*
- *How might that model contribute to our spiritual formation – ie if your Sunday worship came out of that particular model, how would that affect the way you live your Christian life Monday-Saturday?*
- *Which model(s) attract you most? Least?*

Worship as service to God

A theology that sees worship as service to God says that when we worship we are offering to God 'all that we have and are': our hearts and minds, our time and our talents, our money and our material possessions. When we do so, we acknowledge to God that we have these things to offer only because God gave them to us first. Thus our offering of these things to God is a kind of 'first fruits', as our Hebrew ancestors were commended to offer the first fruits of their harvest. (Deuteronomy 26:1-11) Worship, as service to God, is an expression of profound gratitude.

But worship is also God's service to us. Christ's washing of his disciples' feet is a wonderful symbol here. In worship we respond to the God within us, between us and beyond us, recognising as we do so that it is God – as always – who makes the first move towards us. The German word for worship, *Gottesdienst*, ('God's service') makes this clear: it is God's service to humans and human's service to God.³ This is particularly true of the Eucharist. 'Holy Communion itself is – by the power of Jesus' sacrificial body present in it and by the power of the end-time forgiveness – the opening of the door, through which God's consummation of all things begins to enter into this world.'⁴ In worship God acts to give God's life to humanity and to bring us to partake of that life.⁵ For our part, we render thanks and praise to God: there is a mutual giving and taking about all worship, and especially about the Eucharist, in which God surrenders God's being to us in Christ and in which we through Christ surrender ourselves to God. In worship God's service and God's offer of Godself to us is met by our service and our offer of ourselves to God.

- *How do you feel about the idea of God offering something to us when we worship?*

Worship as Communion

And it is *our* offering to God: we come before God – whose being is community – as members of a community ourselves. One of the things that worship does is to

³ See, for example, James F White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*. Revised edition. Abingdon Press. 1990. Nashville., 26

⁴ Peter Bruuner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, originally published 1954. translated MH Bertram. Concordia. 1968. Saint Louis., 186

⁵ See James White, *op.cit* , 26, referring to the work of Paul W Hoon.

form and sustain the essential relationships within the Christian community: our relationships with each other and our relationships with God. Worship (even non-eucharistic worship) is thus **'communion'** – a translation of the biblical word *koinwnia* (*koinonia*), meaning fellowship, sharing. This is one of the words we use to talk about the nature of the relationship of the three Persons within the Holy Trinity: it has to do with love, mutuality, interdependence. When we worship, we strengthen the bonds of love between us and other Christians, just as much as we strengthen our relationship with God.

One of the fundamental principles of liturgy is that it is the work, not of individuals (still less of the worship leader alone!), but of the whole people of God. Indeed that is what the word 'liturgy' means: λειτουργία (*leitourgia*) from λεώς (*leos*) 'people' and ἔργον (*ergon*) 'work': liturgy is the work of the people. We recognise before God and before each other that we are part of a common humanity. This is one of the reasons why liturgy in all its aspects, including the language that is used, should be inclusive in terms of age, gender, class and culture, since we are all made in the image of the same God.

There is thus a vertical and a horizontal dimension to worship, as we act out of and express our relationship with God and our relationships with each other, those with whom we gather together around a table and those others whom we bring to that table in our hearts. 'Both fellowship with God and fellowship with other Christians are necessary components of Christian worship.'⁶

- *Which do you find most important – the vertical or the horizontal dimension to worship? Do they ever get in the way of each other?*

Worship and justice

Moreover, we cannot separate the way we treat God from the way we treat other people, for we are part of one community, and the God whom we worship is the God who is between us, present in our daily interactions with each other. 'We worship in response to the love of God and out of love for one another. ... It is only as we care for each other and care for our neighbours that our regular worship makes sense.'⁷

The Hebrew prophets of the eighth century BCE recognised the close connection between liturgy, ethics and social justice. What God demanded from Israel was right social behaviour and an end to oppression of the poor: it was this that constituted acceptable worship rather than burnt offerings.

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; ... take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5:21-24 NRSV)

⁶ Susan J White. *Groundwork of Christian Worship*. Epworth Press. 1997. Peterborough., 8.

⁷ ANZPB / HKMOA, xv

What these prophets were saying (and they echo, of course, themes central to the Torah, the law which God gave to Moses and the Hebrew people) is that liturgical actions lose their authenticity when those who come to worship do not also struggle for justice. There is a sense in which liturgy and ethics are virtually identical, because both are ways in which the Christian community lives out the gospel. For the New Testament church, the Eucharist – as an act of table fellowship – was essentially Christian economic ethics: sharing food as a family of brothers and sisters in Christ, without regard to who was Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free. This is another of the reasons why liturgy in all its aspects should be inclusive: because the God whom we worship is a God of justice, a God who cares for the excluded and the powerless. As New Zealand Church Leaders said in 1993: 'We seek social justice because we worship a just God. We act with compassion because we worship a God who is merciful.'⁸ Or as an even older authority put it, 'What does the LORD require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?' (Micah 6:8)

- *When have you experienced worship as an expression of justice? Have you ever felt it to be 'unjust'?*

Transcendence

In directing the people to walk 'humbly' with God, the prophet recognised that the God who calls us into community (the God between us) is also the God beyond us. 'Worship is an acknowledgement of Transcendence', as Evelyn Underhill said, it 'is the response of the creature to the Eternal'.⁹ In worship we encounter One who is infinitely greater than we are. We should never forget this. God is, in Rudolf Otto's phrase, the '*Mysterium tremendum et fascinans*', the fearful and fascinating mystery¹⁰. God is *Mysterium*, Wholly Other, God is *tremendum*, with an awefulness, a majesty, beside which we can feel as nothing, yet God is *fascinans*, with an attractiveness which draws us inwards in spite of this sense of awe. To enter the presence of the Living God, as we do when we worship, is to risk an encounter in which we may be overpowered. 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground.' (Exodus 3:5) Worship is thus the arena within which our encounter with the Transcendent, with the Divine, takes place, and we should be wary of anything which would domesticate it. 'Worship is not the pastor inviting us into his or her living room, but God welcoming us into a holy place set apart to honor him.'¹¹ As the characters say of Aslan (the Christ-figure in CS Lewis' Narnia allegories) he is 'not a tame lion'. How often do we come to worship expecting to encounter Someone greater than ourselves? How often do we come expecting Something to happen? When was the last time our worship led us to say with Isaiah 'woe is me! I am lost, for I am a [person] of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!?' (Isaiah 6:5)

⁸ *Social Justice Statement* New Zealand Church Leaders. 11 July 1993

⁹ Evelyn Underhill. *Worship*. Nisbet & Co. fifth impression 1943. London. 3.

¹⁰ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*. Trans. John W. Harvey. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923; 2nd ed., 1950 [*Das Heilige*, 1917]):

¹¹ Marva Dawn. *A Royal "Waste" of Time: The Splendour of Worshipping God and being Church for the World*. Eerdmans. 1999. Grand Rapids Michigan., 153.

Indeed, we should come to worship with an awareness that we and God will meet there. As Richard Giles says, 'Worship is a God-centred activity, in which God is made real to us, is enfleshed among us. Far too often Christians have been under the mistaken impression that when we assemble in the church building, we are the only people showing up for worship, whereas the mystery and the wonder is that God shows up too.'¹²

- *Remember a time when you experienced God 'showing up': try to describe this as if to someone who does not know God.*

The mirror of heaven

And it is not just God who 'shows up'. When Christians gather for worship, particularly in the Eucharist, the whole community of the Church, past and present, gathers too:

'United in Christ with all who stand before you
in earth and heaven,
we worship you, O God,
in songs of everlasting praise.'¹³

Or, as an elderly liturgical assistant I know says when the midweek congregation is sparse, 'more room for the angels'.

Worship in this sense is 'the mirror of heaven': an attempt to duplicate the worship of God that takes place in heaven.¹⁴ Behind this is the idea that human beings were created to praise God: when we worship God here on earth we are preparing ourselves for an eternity of worship when we reach our ultimate destination. In this sense entering into worship means entering into a different dimension of space and time from that which we experience normally: it gives us an awareness of the cosmic.¹⁵ This is not escapism: running away into church and losing ourselves in worship in order to avoid the harsh realities of daily life. Instead this is a way of us participating in God's redemption of the world: we come to understand the true meaning of space and time in God's eternal purposes. Time and space are not for us to use for ourselves, but for God to use for the good of the world. In this sense, therefore, worship has an eschatological dimension, because it points forward to the end of time: when we worship we can fix our eyes on God's future, and be given a vision of the world as God intends it to be.

- *How does our worship prepare us for heaven?*

Worship as Affirmation and Oasis

¹² Richard Giles, *Creating Uncommon Worship: transforming the liturgy of the Eucharist*. Liturgical Press. 2004. Collegeville, Minnesota. 26.

¹³ *ANZPB / HKMOA*. 423.

¹⁴ See Susan White. *op.cit.*, 3-4.

¹⁵ In worship, we enter into heavenly space and heavenly time. This is why, for example, no clocks are allowed in Orthodox churches – for this theology of worship is particularly associated with the Orthodox and Eastern traditions. See Susan White, *op.cit.*, 4.

Worship is not only focused on the end times. It is also fixed in the present, in the 'time between' in which we are living, the time between (to use the theological shorthand) the Ascension and the Second Coming of Christ. For some Christians, worship functions particularly to support and inspire believers in their Christian life and calling. It is affirmation, a way of keeping the community together and getting it through the hard times. This acknowledges that to be a Christian is not always easy – and, just as the Christian life is sometimes difficult, so too can be life in general. Worship can thus provide an oasis of peace and refreshment for those coping with difficult times or living demanding lives. When we worship we reconnect with the God who is our reason for being, the source of our life and our energy. We are enabled to continue the struggle against all that seeks to deny the love and the power of God in the world in which we live. By reminding us that God is with God's people in their struggles, worship empowers us for more service and greater witness. Worship seen in this light brings before us again and again the stories of God's dealings with God's people in the past: images and stories of victory and hope from the Scriptures, the Christian tradition and the lives of the believers present ('testimonies'). We know that we can depend on God, for so many believers both past and present have found God to be dependable. Therefore we go out into the world comforted, refreshed and enlivened with new hope. There is a danger here, of course, that in depending on God so much we may 'forget' to act ourselves: if God is going to intervene to sort things out, where is the need for our own work for justice and peace? But it is when we acknowledge our need for God's help, our dependence on God's power, that we are most empowered to undertake our own actions.

- *How does your Sunday worship help you move into the week ahead? Try to describe this: is it peace? energy? courage? something else?*

Worship as proclamation

Another way of looking at worship is to see it as proclamation. When the Church gathers for worship it gathers to proclaim the good news of God's love and grace. It gathers to tell and to re-tell the story, for it is the continual telling of the story that has allowed the community to survive and to reach out to others. In worship Christians declare publicly their faith in the God who is revealed in Scripture, in creation, in history, and most of all in Jesus Christ. Worship thus not only reinforces the Christian identity in individual believers but is an act in which those believers bear witness to others. As Susan White has noted, 'the proclamation of Christ, crucified and risen (the Christian *kerygma*) is the power that creates the worshipping community itself.'¹⁶

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

Worship is therefore not something done for the 'benefit' of the worshippers themselves but done by them for the benefit of others, of those as yet outside the worshipping community. In this context there is an educative component to

¹⁶ White, *op cit.*, 10.

worship connected with this telling and retelling of the central story: 'the worship service is part of the entire educational process of the Christian community by which God's people are equipped to introduce others to his worthiness'.¹⁷

- *Is this just about 'seeker services'? How does it relate to an ordinary parish Eucharist?*

Worship as drama

The link between worship and drama is an ancient one. Indeed the roots of theatre are in religious ritual. Fifth century Greece produced the first theatre out of the cult of Dionysus: 'a drama played on hallowed ground, but not in temples; and by actors, not priests'¹⁸. Although there has been a somewhat uneasy, and often tense, relationship between the Church and the Theatre over the centuries, it can be useful to think of worship – liturgy – as a type of drama. Indeed the architecture of our church buildings often encourages us to do just that: the rows of seats facing towards a raised area upon which the key players – in our Anglican tradition, wearing special 'costumes' called 'vestments', and holding various 'props' – appear to speak their lines. There is much of the dramatic about good liturgy. If ritual is considered to be (as one definition has it) 'actions accompanied by words' then it matters that the actions are visible and the words clear and audible. But we should be wary of putting the emphasis on the worship leaders as 'actors' (or on the choir as 'chorus'): liturgy is indeed a drama, but one in which all are involved. There are no spectators – no 'audience': instead all are participants.

- *How does thinking of the congregation as 'members of the cast' change things?*

Incarnation

Worship is an acknowledgement of the incarnation in its widest sense. Our human world is valued, and so we take things from ordinary human experience, things we see or have made – water, light, bread, wine, oil – and use them to express the presence of God. 'In the sacraments, the encounter with God is made concrete not only in words but also in perceptible or tangible elements (water, bread, wine, and so on).'¹⁹ This breaks down any notion of a vast unbridgeable gulf between the special and the ordinary, between the divine and the human, between sacred and secular, just as Christ's taking on human flesh in the Incarnation brought humanity and God forever closer. Worship and the rest of life are thus parts of an integral whole: liturgy is not an isolated act that the Church does on Sunday mornings, but is connected with the daily events of

¹⁷ Marva Dawn., *op.cit.* 123. 'Proclamation' is not to be equated with 'evangelism'. Indeed Dawn draws a distinction between worship and evangelism, but adds 'the distinction is not total, for if believers worship with gladness and passion, anyone not yet a part of the community certainly will be attracted to the One who is the object of their worship. But to focus the worship on evangelistic introduction deprives believers of deeper nurturing toward Churchbeing and deprives God of the intimate and involved worship due him from the Church.' (124.)

¹⁸ Paul Bayes, 'Drama and Worship', in *A New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, edited by JG Davies. SCM Press. 1986. London. 214-16., 214.

¹⁹ Sofia Cavalletti. *Living Liturgy: Elementary Reflections*. Translated by Patricia A Coulter and Julie Coulter-English. Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. 1998. Chicago., 35.

our lives. This is particularly important in an age such as ours which is becoming increasingly secular. '...If worship today is to have any meaning in the face of secularization, it has to be redefined as an activity which springs out of life in the world; it is a celebration of that life. Instead of involving a divorce from the secular, it takes the secular or common as its basis, and so the cultic action is a means whereby we express the unity of the sacred and the secular.'²⁰ Worship connects us to the rest of our lives in a profound way.

Because of this incarnational aspect, the way in which worship uses ordinary things as a means of encounter with the holy, it's important to acknowledge that prayer and worship involve the whole of us, our bodies as well as our souls. And so worship can use and appeal to the full range of our senses. This is one of the reasons why candles, icons, incense, gesture, music and dance are part of worship, so that we can encounter God not just with our ears and our lips but with our minds, bodies, souls, hearts, feelings: with our whole being.

- *Choose an ordinary object that is close to you as you read this. How might you use that in worship?*

Components of worship

Worship is an integrated experience – integrated with our bodies, with the rest of our lives, integrated within itself. But it is useful to focus for a moment on the various components of worship, to ask ourselves: what is it we are doing at different points in a service, and what is that saying about God and about us?

Gathering: We gather for worship, converging on a particular place (often, but not always, a building set aside for the sole or the principal purpose of worship) at a particular time. This gathering is, as Richard Giles notes, 'itself a mark of the counter-culture which is Christianity'.²¹ Our surrounding culture (particularly within Tikanga Pakeha) emphasises the virtues of individualism. We are a collection of individuals, each 'doing our own thing' 'trying to get our own needs met'. So when we gather for worship we are doing something which goes against the values of the society in which we live. We are coming together as a community. The 'gathering' at the beginning of a service reminds us that we are putting aside not our individuality (with all the God-given diversity of gifts and experiences which that implies) but the individualism which exalts 'I' and 'mine' before 'you' and 'us'. We are acknowledging that we are a community *because God has called us together*: God, and not our own likes and dislikes, our interests or our preferences in certain areas (eg music). So the gathering helps us connect with the God who has called us together and is forming us into the community of the saints.

Praise: We come to worship to praise God, to focus on and celebrate the qualities of God that we know and have experienced. The experience of God's holiness, love and compassion calls for a response from us. The congregation comes before God saying 'We are here because we love you. We

²⁰ JG Davies. 'Secularization and Worship' in *A New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*,. 481-84.,483.

²¹ Giles. *Op.cit.* 19.

love you because you are the kind of God you are.²² We encounter the prayer of praise or adoration in the psalms (eg 149, 150), in the Book of Revelation ('Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude ... crying out "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory ..." 19:6-7), and in our Eucharistic liturgies ('Glory to God in the highest'). So when we praise we are saying something about God; we are also saying something about us. We acknowledge our creaturely dependence on God who is the Creator of all things, God who is Transcendent, Other – and yet who loves us.

Confession: When we met God in worship we also encounter ourselves – and that can be uncomfortable. We are brought up against the distance between God's goodness and our own lack of goodness, our unworthiness to receive all that God would offer us. So we acknowledge where we have fallen short, 'where we have failed to support one another and to be what we claim to be ... where we have failed to serve' God, and we ask forgiveness for these failings. It is not that we have to grovel before we can come to God, but that meeting God we become aware of how far we have fallen short – as individuals and as a community – from what God intends for us, and we are re-inspired to pick ourselves up and have another go at it, leaning on God's forgiveness, love and help.

Listening and learning: We come to worship to listen. We listen to God, as God speaks to our hearts through words, through music and through silence, and we listen to the story of God's dealings with God's people throughout history. And as we listen, this story becomes again and again our story. This is the re-telling which builds up the community, the looking back into the past in order to live more richly here in the present, and to focus more on the future into which God is leading us. So listening is accompanied by learning, as we integrate the story into our lives and get a greater sense of who God is and what God is wanting us to do with our lives until we next come to worship. As part of this listening and learning (principally, though not exclusively, in the readings and the sermon) we are invited to make our responses. Some of our responses are in the actions we take as individuals or as a community, but we also response collectively as we affirm what it is that we believe, about God, about us and about God's dealings with the world.

Intercession: We come to worship a God who loves and cares for us, and so we acknowledge this again in our prayers of supplication or petition (for ourselves) and intercession (for others). Intercession brings the community together, both those who have gathered at that time and place and those people and concerns that they bring in their hearts. We bring before God the needs of others, in situations of danger or difficulty, as we pray for the world and our nation, for those in need, and for our own ministries. We acknowledge the community of the Church, both universal and local, the Church on earth and the community of heaven. We do all this because we know God to be both loving and powerful.. Prayer like this is not a mechanical or magical procedure designed to produce an automatic effect; it is communication between a believer and God which accepts the freedom and integrity of both. When we pray for a person or about a situation we are associating ourselves with what we know of

²² Susan White. *Op cit.* 33.

God: there is a tacit acceptance that God may choose to answer our prayer *through us*.

Peace: In the Eucharist there is an invitation for the community there present to share the Peace. This is a ritual enactment of the New Testament exhortation to 'greet one another with a holy kiss' (eg Romans 16:16), but it is also more than that. It is a living out of the reconciliation with one another that Jesus said was a prerequisite for coming to worship.²³ The Peace is about relationship. It says something about God: that God is relational, being a holy community of Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and so there is something sacred about relationships. And it says something about us and our tendency to fracture relationships, to hurt and anger each other, and yet to want to put this right. And it allows the Church to be a sign to the world at large that Peace is how it is supposed to be. If only we could more often come away from worship with the feeling that Peace is somehow a virus that everyone else should be able to catch from Christians!

Thanksgiving God has blessed us richly, and so 'it is right to offer thanks and praise'. As we give thanks for our personal and corporate experiences of God's goodness we are relating what we know of God to our experience in daily life. We do this at many times in a service of worship, and we do it especially in 'The Great Thanksgiving' in the Eucharist – and indeed, the very word 'eucharist' means 'thanksgiving'. Here we are giving thanks for God's mighty works of the past, in creation and redemption, especially for what God has done for us in Christ, and we are proclaiming our faith in the continuance of God's care for us in the future and our willingness to continue to be 'the people of God'. 'We thank you for his cross and rising again, we take courage from his ascension; we look for his coming in glory and in him we give ourselves to you.' As we re-member what it was that Christ did for us, and the way he is present amongst us in bread and wine, we acknowledge the community of which we are a part. The Eucharistic prayer is normally offered to the Father (the 'Abba' of Jesus) through Christ, and in the Holy Spirit: thus we recognise the community that is within God. We then go on to share that bread and wine amongst us, as members of a community.

Sending out: The community – the ἐκκλησία (ekklesia – from a word which means 'called forth') – has assembled, has worshipped, and must now return to the world from which it was called. There is work to be done. And so every service of worship ends with an acknowledgement of this: God's blessing go with you, as you go and do God's work. It should come as no surprise to learn that the words 'mission' and 'dismissal' are related: we are dismissed – sent out – to fulfil the mission that God has entrusted to us.

- *Think about it: what is your favourite moment in a worship service? What might that be saying about you and about how you relate to God and to other people?*

And so what we say and what we do when we come to worship speaks to us again and again of who God is (what God is like) and who we are (our calling as

²³ Giles, *op. cit.* has a useful discussion on the Peace, 135-39.

the people of God, and what we are like). The fifth century Latin saying, '*lex orandi, lex credendi*' – as we pray, so we believe (literally 'the law of believing stands on the law of praying') is right: for liturgy and doctrine are closely connected – our liturgy shapes our beliefs, our worship forms us as the people of God. Why do we worship? Because God is God – and because we are us: created by God and restless until we find our rest in that God whom we encounter when we come to worship.

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2005