

## *Chapter 1*

# UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUALITY FOR WORSHIP

**K**arl Rahner, a prominent twentieth-century Roman Catholic theologian, summed up well the spirit of our age when he suggested that “the Christian of the future will be a mystic or he or she will not exist at all.”<sup>1</sup> Rahner’s observation suggests a recognition of people’s yearnings for direct experience of God, aspirations that go hand in hand with the current interest in spirituality. Walk through bookstores, browse through book catalogs, witness popular discourse, both sacred and secular, and you will see evidence of the explosion of interest in spirituality. Spirituality has largely replaced religion as the category of choice to speak of themes of transcendence or religiosity, as captured by the popular phrase “I am spiritual, but I am not religious.” Furthermore, given the explosive growth of Pentecostal Christianity through the twentieth century and throughout the world, one might conclude that ours is the era of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. But what on earth is spirituality, and what is the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives? There are perhaps as many definitions and viewpoints as people and schools of thought employing the term and invoking the Spirit.

There is also great current interest in worship, indicated, for example, by exponential growth in the publication of worship books, hymnals, and various

resources supporting liturgical life in a number of Christian traditions. But what exactly is worship? In a similar vein to the use of the term *spirituality*, there are perhaps as many approaches to understanding and defining worship as there are worship styles and traditions. The explorations that follow offer insights that will enrich understandings of both terms, *spirituality* and *worship*. These insights will also serve to link the two categories, because I believe that current societal fascination with these two phenomena is likewise intimately related. Interest in spirituality gives birth to interest in worship and vice versa.

Exploring the connection between spirituality and worship enriches and reinforces the understanding and experience of each. Linking spirituality with corporate worship keeps the notion of spirituality grounded, tethered to worshipping communities. Otherwise, spirituality might be reduced to individualistic practice and idiosyncratic experience. Likewise, linking spirituality and worship serves to deepen our understanding and experience of worship, keeping worship lively, vital, passionate, and attentive to the Spirit's transformative power working in our assemblies.

I will not attempt to explore here comprehensive views of either spirituality or worship. To do so would go far beyond the scope and needs of this work. Rather, I wish to take up understandings of spirituality *for* worship, focusing particularly on aspects of spiritual experience that will help us engage the language of liturgy for deeper spiritual experience, for more transformative encounters with and experiences of the Spirit in worship.

### SPIRITUALITY AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

The word that may be translated "spirituality" does not as such appear in the Bible. However, the word translated "spiritual" (*pneumatikos*) does appear, for example, in the Pauline letters. In such Pauline passages, the referent concerning that which is spiritual is specifically the Holy Spirit, and life in and according to that Spirit. For example, in Paul's discourse in the first chapters of 1 Corinthians, he explores the wisdom of God that contrasts with the wisdom of the world, and employs the category *spiritual* to speak of that which in fact comes from God through the Spirit: "Now 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. And 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" (1 Cor. 2:12-13).

In this way, the word *spiritual* as used here does not refer to innate human capacity as much as it makes clear reference to the Holy Spirit as a focus for understanding what is spiritual. In other words, the content of the word *spiritual* is the Holy Spirit. This is a crucial feature of a specifically Christian understanding of spirituality. “Spiritual” comes to be connected with “spirituality,” and all of this has to do with the Holy Spirit.

An early appearance of the word translated “spirituality” (from the Latin, *spiritualitas*) occurred in the fifth century in Epistle 7 of Pseudo-Jerome, which reads, “So act as to advance in spirituality.” Pseudo-Jerome uses this term in a Pauline sense with reference to life in and according to the Holy Spirit of God.<sup>2</sup> This fragment from an ancient letter reveals significant aspects of an understanding of Christian spirituality. One such aspect is that Christian spirituality involves activity, practice, deeds, behavior—“so *act*” as the text from Pseudo-Jerome suggests. Additionally, Christian spirituality has to do with processes of change, growth, progress, maturation—“so act as to *advance* in spirituality.” Such activity and growth happen via the guidance and in the power of the Holy Spirit in terms of the Pauline theology that informed Pseudo-Jerome.

### SPIRITUALITY AND THE DAY OF PENTECOST

Any attempt to understand further Christian spirituality naturally involves considerations of the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit, the very power of God, descended upon the apostles gathered in Jerusalem: “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability” (Acts 2:1-4).

This brief passage from Acts throws a window wide open for revealing numerous aspects of Christian spirituality that are pertinent to understanding its relationship to worship. First of all, spirituality, the power of God known in the Spirit, joins heaven and earth, things human with things divine—the rush of wind comes from heaven, the realm of God, after all. Spirituality and worship involve human encounter with the divine.

Next, the sound, the wind, the Spirit “filled the entire house.” That is to say, the Spirit did not find a particular or secluded niche in which to roost. The Spirit of God infuses all of our surroundings and gets into everything

where it would go. Spirituality, then, involves the whole of human life. It cannot be reduced to practices and experiences that are compartmentalized or segmented away from our ordinary routines and from what we commonly experience. Spirituality does not require a separate or distinct form of consciousness. Rather, it is part and parcel of our everyday sensate experience. Likewise, Christian worship that is spiritually oriented focuses on what we commonly do in assembly as we gather to hear the Word, share the meal, and be sent into the world to do God's work. Worship can be quite routine, even as it can also result in extraordinary experiences, as suggested by the events of the day of Pentecost itself.

Even so, and this may seem paradoxical in light of the Spirit's sharing in ordinary things, the Spirit interrupts business as usual and comes from without. The sound of the violent wind was sudden. The Spirit descended upon and filled the apostles. It did not well up within them. Christian spirituality, informed by reflections on the day of Pentecost, has to do with God coming to us *extra nos*—from outside of ourselves, even as the Spirit works through ordinary means and also dwells within us. Worship is an occasion when God breaks into our lives to address us and to bring about change.

"[The apostles] were all together in one place." The apostles had assembled. Pentecost was a communal event. Likewise, Christian spirituality has primarily a communal orientation in assembly, though popular understandings of spirituality can reduce it to individual and interior experiences. Moreover, reinforcing the communal dimension of the experience of the Spirit, when the Spirit comes, other people begin to arrive as well. "At this sound the crowd gathered" (Acts 2:6). So it is that we assemble for worship as the Spirit gathers us, and others also find their way to our assemblies to see what is going on.

Even though the context is communal, the experience of the Spirit is individual and particular. "Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them." Christian spirituality touches our unique identities as children of God. As the apostle Paul writes, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. . . . Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:1, 4-7). We worship God in community, but according to the particular gifts given to us by the Spirit.

"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability." The coming of the Spirit, symbolized by tongues as of fire, unleashes tongues, *glossa* in the Greek, meaning the

tongue as physical organ, but also language and speech. The Spirit's power gives birth to discourse, to proclamation, the telling of stories made intelligible and understandable by the same Spirit. In short, the Spirit makes possible effective communication. Prior to the day of Pentecost, Jesus' followers remained in Jerusalem and were silent, speechless at least in terms of their public witness. God's sending of the Holy Spirit released the apostles' own tongues to give forth the public proclamation of the gospel. Visitors attracted by this commotion heard and understood in their own native tongues speech about "God's deeds of power" (Acts 2:11b). Peter was moved in the power of the Spirit to give an address that drew this conclusion: "This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear" (Acts 2:32-33). Peter's en-Spirited proclamation is about Jesus Christ, whom God, the One both Jesus and we know as Father, raised from the dead. An understanding of Christian spirituality rooted firmly in the proclamation of the gospel has particular content—namely, the saving work of the God whom we confess as Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The language of worship centers on this proclamation, rehearsing again God's deeds of power throughout history.

To be human is to be a creature of language, speech, and narrative, which is arguably a distinguishing characteristic of Christian theological and spiritual anthropology, an expression of *imago Dei*, that we are created in God's image. We confess that as God seeks to relate to human beings, God speaks, reveals Godself via narrative. God speaks order into the formless void at the beginning of creation. God establishes covenant and law in the language of the commandments. God's voice and will are known in prophetic discourse. God's very Word (*logos*) is offered to us in the flesh for our salvation. Jesus whom we confess as Christ is the fullest revelation of God, and that revelation is known now through the language and stories of Holy Scripture, a centerpiece of Christian worship. God's Holy Spirit at Pentecost gives birth to apostolic proclamation of the gospel. So from beginning to end, God has chosen natural means, speech and story, to communicate with human beings, creatures who have voice and who likewise offer up narrative accounts of our experience. This is a crucial point in the context of this exploration of spirituality and worship. Both rely on the centrality of linguistic experience.

This language-oriented experience of the Spirit effects change. The ones formerly known as disciples, students of Jesus Christ, now become apostles, teachers if you will, the ones sent to proclaim the message of the gospel. The Spirit's activity in the apostles' proclamation makes the message intelligible to

the hearers: “In our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power” (Acts 2:11). This Spirit-filled proclamation provokes reactions: “All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ But others sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new wine’” (Acts 2:12-13). Spirituality involving the Spirit’s activity in speech about God’s deeds of power provokes responses, positive or negative—amazement, perplexity, even sneering. In worship, a language-oriented experience from beginning to end, our thoughts, feelings, memories, and imaginations are likewise evoked and provoked by divine-human discourse. We respond and thus participate in the Spirit’s activity in us.

Moreover, the Spirit’s birthing of proclamation leads also to hearers’ curious engagement with the message being proclaimed: “What does this mean?” the onlookers asked. Here the Spirit’s work at Pentecost is significantly located in dialogical engagement, in discourse, that is, holy conversation. This dialogue also involves the interpretation of current sacred events in light of previous revelation in sacred writ, for example, in the words of prophets. Peter, in his address to the crowd, invoked well-known prophecy to make sense of the Pentecost event: “This is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams’” (Acts 2:16-17). Christian spirituality and worship focus on holy conversation, dialogue between God and humans. Christian spirituality and worship make sense of this experience by further invoking and meditating on God’s Word.

This Spirit-led conversational engagement with proclamation effects still more change in the lives of receptive hearers. “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart” (Acts 2:37a). The hearers were filled with compunction. They welcomed the message, repented, and were baptized, and they themselves, some three thousand persons, also received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:37-41).

All of this is to say that God’s Word in the power of the Spirit is effective. It accomplishes change in our lives, as suggested by the promises in Isaiah: “So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isa. 55:11). God’s Word is thus performative. It forms us, conforms us to the will of God and to the mind of Christ, reforms us when we go astray, and ultimately transforms us, bringing to birth new creations in Christ. Liturgical worship is a primary school for this work of formation, conformation, reformation, and transformation. Liturgy as the locus for

encounter with God's Word is the pedagogy, the method through which Christ the teacher teaches us, disciples us in the power of the Spirit, and sends us forth to share in apostolic proclamation.

### SPIRITUALITY, CHRISTIAN PRACTICES, AND DISPOSITIONS

The Spirit's work is by no means finished on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit's outpouring that birthed proclamation and the reception of the gospel likewise issued forth in devotion to basic practices in community described in a passage following the Pentecost event: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). The Spirit's work also resulted in generous acts of communal self-giving: "All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:44-45). In this brief passage the rudiments of the *ordo* of Christian life are revealed—the basics of the pattern of Christian life. Christian spirituality involves what would become our liturgy and the whole of Christian life. In these very revealing moments in Acts, we see the basic, foundational Christian spiritual practices: proclamation of the gospel, evangelization and making of disciples, baptism, study of apostolic teaching, the Lord's Supper, the practice of prayer, fellowship (*koinonia*) or participation in Christian community, the exercise of stewardship of possessions, and works of charity on behalf of those in need. These are practices that begin in and grow out of the power of the Holy Spirit working, for example, in liturgical assembly.

The Spirit's work also bears the fruit in us of attitudes and dispositions central to the understanding of Christian life in the Spirit. "Awe came upon everyone. . . . They broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people" (Acts 2:43a, 46b-47a). Awe, gladness, generosity, praise, and goodwill—all are characteristics of en-Spirited Christian life. Or, as the apostle Paul elaborated elsewhere: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23a).

All of this is the Spirit's work. This process happens daily over the course of a lifetime, or as Acts puts it, "day by day" as the followers engaged in the community's work. The activity is all quite ordinary. Christian spirituality, in this way, does not focus on the exotic and the extraordinary in terms of practice and experience. Rather, it is about awe and praise cultivated in the mundane but sacred routines we undertake in Christian community. Christian spirituality reclaims the commonplace, especially in terms of liturgy, the Ordinary of

the Mass, the regular segments that comprise the pattern for liturgy, that is, the *ordo*, what we ordinarily do in assembly and how we do it; we come to see the extraordinary in what is common and routine.

Finally, the Spirit's work is directed outward, to the nations and peoples who would hear and respond to the proclamation of the gospel. The whole point of the Pentecost event recorded in Acts is the telling of God's deeds of power in raising Jesus from the dead in many different languages, the languages of varied nations and cultures. Christian spirituality thus also has an outward focus, embraces the gift of cultural diversity, and serves the church's mission in and for the sake of the world, to be the body of Christ broken for the world. It may well be that Christian spiritual practices enrich our inner lives, and that is well and good. But if spirituality ends in interiority, its true end is in fact missing altogether. Varied spiritual practices, including liturgical worship, build us up in the power of the Spirit for the sake of mission among the many diverse peoples of the world.

#### SPIRITUALITY AND DEEPER UNDERSTANDINGS OF LITURGY AND WORSHIP

The Spirit's work involves us in liturgy and worship, two words common in discourse about what Christians do when they assemble, often used interchangeably and sometimes with inadequate attention to precision about definitions and word origins. Liturgy is distinct from worship. Briefly, liturgy can be seen as the agenda of activities that may result in worship, worship having a more dispositional quality than liturgy. Liturgy is what we do. Worship is how we do it, in what manner or spirit. Liturgy results in worship and is best undertaken worshipfully. We can well speak of worshipful liturgy and also liturgical worship.

The word *liturgy*—from *leitourgia* in Greek—is derived from the word *latreuo*, meaning “to serve,” or *latreia*, “service.” *Latreuo* means “to work for reward” and then, by extension, “to serve.” Literally, this has to do with physical service but also figuratively involves cherishing. In terms of New Testament usage, *latreuo* and related words imply service to God, sacrificial ministry, the ministry of prayer and praise, righteous behavior with interior and outward dimensions.<sup>3</sup>

In the New Testament, a common Greek word translated as “worship” is *proskynesis* as a noun and *proskyneo* as a verb, meaning “to bow down,” or perhaps more graphically, “to stoop and to kiss the earth,” either literally as an outward gesture or metaphorically as an inward impulse. It can more generally

mean to love and to respect. In the New Testament literature itself, *proskynesis* is common in the Gospels, Acts, and Revelation. While it can refer to the worship of idols or false gods, *proskynesis* is often seen in reference, for example, to persons kneeling before Jesus, seeking his intervention in their circumstances, as in Matthew 15:25, where the Canaanite woman kneels before Jesus, pleading, “Lord, help me.” Quite significantly, *proskynesis* is the response to signs and wonders performed by Jesus. In response to Jesus’ walking on the waves and his rescue of Peter, the disciples “worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God’” (Matt. 14:33). It is instructive that this attitude of worship in bowing down is connected with a kind of creedal affirmation, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Worship is also the response to encountering the risen Lord. “Suddenly Jesus met [the women] and said, ‘Greetings!’ And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him” (Matt. 28:9). Such worship can indeed include elements of holy fear, as suggested by Jesus’ reply to their gesture, “Do not be afraid” (Matt. 28:10a). When Jesus meets the disciples on the mountain in Galilee as he instructed them, their response is also that of worship, of bowing down: “When they saw him, they worshiped him” (Matt. 28:17a). And it is curious that the response of worship also includes doubt: “but some doubted” (Matt. 28:17b)—how very true to human nature.

These explorations begin to capture the tone of what it means to worship in a spiritually qualitative sense. It is this attitude of awe, wonder, holy fear—of experience so dramatic that we fall down in praise and adoration—that we are called upon to cultivate in Christian assembly. Liturgical worship as ever-deepening holy encounter evokes and provokes the experience of worship, of bowing before the Holy One and that One’s gracious acts in the Word and in the sacraments in the power of the Spirit. Liturgy, again, is the agenda of activity that gives rise to worship even as the activity is done worshipfully. Liturgy is the activity we engage in, such as devotion to the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and the prayers. Worship is the quality of experience that results from the activity, the awe and the glad and generous hearts. The deeper this liturgical encounter, the more profound the experience of worship.

How do we move from simply doing the liturgy to worshipping God? What happens between liturgy as activity and worship as disposition? What occurs between hearing the proclamation of the gospel and its effects in changing our lives, in prompting us to bow down in awe and holy fear? The answer to each question has to do with ever-deepening holy conversation, and it is to these dialogical dimensions of liturgical worship that we now turn.