

in Spirit and in Truth

extract of Proposition XI §xv, xvi, xvii

§ xv. Fourth, the nature of this worship, which is performed by the work of the Spirit while the natural man is silent, is apparent in these words of Christ (John 4:23-24): “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth; for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is a Spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in Spirit and in Truth.” This testimony requires particular obedience because it is the first, most important, and fullest testimony which Christ gives us about his Christian worship, as different and distinguishable from worship under the Law. First, he shows that the time has now come in which worship must be “in Spirit and in Truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.” So then it is no longer a worship which consists of outward ceremonies, performed by man at fixed times or occasions, which man can do in his own will and by his own natural strength; if that were so, it would not be substantially different from worship under the law, but would only differ in some details. Next, we don’t need to give any other reason for this worship, and indeed no one can give a better reason than the one Christ gives, which I think should satisfy every Christian: “GOD is a SPIRIT, and those who worship him must worship him in Spirit and in Truth.” This ought to be accepted because it is the words of Christ, and also it is based on a so clear demonstration of reasoning that it shows its veracity. Christ argues from the analogy that ought to exist between the object of worship and the kind of worship offered to it:

Argument: God is a Spirit;
Therefore God must be worshipped in Spirit.
This is so certain that it cannot be contradicted. . . .

Since, as Christ argues, “God is a Spirit,” he now wants* to be worshipped in the Spirit where he reveals himself and dwells with those who are contrite in heart. It is the heart of man that has now become the temple of God in which he wants to be worshipped, and no more in specific outward temples (as blessed Stephen said to the professing Jews of old, quoting the prophet, “The most High does not dwell in temples made with hands”¹). Just as it was proper to purify and cleanse the outward temple before the glory of the Lord descended to fill it, and all polluted stuff was removed from it, and the place for the tabernacle was covered with gold, the most precious and cleanest of all metals — in the same way before God can be worshipped in the inward temple of the heart it also must be cleaned of all its own filth, and all its own thoughts and imaginations, so that it may be fit to receive the Spirit of God and to be moved to action by that Spirit. Doesn’t that directly lead us to that inward silence which we have spoken about and described so clearly? And further, this worship must be “in Truth” which intimates that this spiritual worship, done in this way, is the only true worship, because this worship (as was said previously) cannot be counterfeited by the enemy, nor performed by the hypocrite.

§ xvi. Although this worship is indeed very different from the many kinds of invented² worship which are established among Christians, and therefore it may seem strange to many people, nevertheless the most pious of all groups in all ages have testified about it, commended it, and practiced it,

¹ Acts 7:48 RB. (Citing Isaiah 66:1-2)

² The Latin word is *commentitius*: invented, devised, fabricated, false, pretended, imaginary.

as can be proved by many clear testimonies. The name of *mystics* has emerged from this teaching and practice, as if of a certain sect which is generally commended by everyone, whose writings are full of the praise of this kind of worship and explanations about it. They describe this turning inward, this abstraction of the mind from all images and thoughts and from the prayer of the will and they consider it the height of Christian perfection. Some of them, though they are professed Papists, do not hesitate to affirm (in a book called *Sancta Sophia*, published by the English Benedictines, printed at Douay in 1657, tract. I, sect. ii, cap. 5) “Those who have attained this method of worship or are aiming at it need not and ought not to trouble or busy themselves with frequent and unnecessary confessions, with corporal labor and austerity, voluntary vocal prayers, hearing many masses or set devotions, or prayers to the saints or prayers for the dead, or anxious and distracting efforts to gain indulgences by going to this or that church, or joining confraternities, or entangling oneself with vows and promises. That kind of thing prevents the soul from observing the work of the divine Spirit within, and from having freedom to follow the Spirit wherever it leads her.” ...

§ xvii. *Objection*: First, it seems to be a worthless activity for someone to be doing nothing and thinking nothing; one might be much better occupied in meditating on some good subject or otherwise praising or praying to God.

Answer: I answer that something is not worthless when it is absolutely necessary before any other duty can be performed acceptably; we have shown that waiting is necessary in that way. Moreover, people have only a carnal and gross understanding of God and of the things of God’s kingdom if they imagine that human beings please God by their own processes and actions, whereas, as has been

shown, the first step towards fearing God is for a person to abandon his own thoughts and imaginations and allow God's Spirit to work in him. We must "cease to do evil" before we "learn to do good."³ This meddling in spiritual things by man's own natural understanding is one of the greatest and most dangerous evils that happens to humankind; it is the thing which caused the fall of our first parents, that is, a presumptuous boldness which desires to know things, and which meddles with them contrary to the Lord's command.

Objection: Secondly some people object that if your worship merely consists in inwardly retiring to the Lord and feeling his Spirit arise in you, and then to do outward actions as you are led by the Spirit, what need do you have for public meetings at set times and places since everyone may enjoy this at home? Or shouldn't everyone stay at home until they are particularly moved to go to such and such a place at such and such a time, since meeting at set times and places seems to be an outward observation and ceremony, contrary to what you claim at other times?

Answer: I answer, first, that to meet at set times and places is not a religious act nor a part of worship, but is only an outward convenience which is necessary so that we can see each other while we are clothed with this outward tabernacle.⁴ Therefore meeting at set times and places is not a part of our worship; it is just a preparation for the sake of our outward human needs, to facilitate public, visible worship. When we meet together, we do not begin with any visible acts of worship until we are led to it by the Spirit of God.* Secondly, as long as his children are in this world God has decided to use the outward senses as a means of conveying the spiritual life, by speaking, praying,

³ Isaiah 1:16-17 RB

⁴ While we are in this physical body

praising, etc., which can only be done for mutual edification when we hear and see one another; this also maintains an outward visible testimony for his Name in this world. God also makes his inward life (which is not conveyed by the outward senses) more abundant when his children diligently meet together to wait on him. “Iron sharpens iron,”⁵ and when people are inwardly gathered into the Life, seeing each other’s faces helps the Life to rise secretly and pass from one vessel to the other. Many lighted candles in one place greatly increase the light and make it shine out more; in the same way when many are gathered together into the same Life, there is more of the glory of God and his power refreshes each individual because he not only receives the Light and Life which is raised in himself, but also in all the others. That is why Christ specifically promised a blessing to those who assemble together in his Name, that he will be “in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). The author to the Hebrews specifically prohibits the neglect of this duty, saying it is very dangerous and has dreadful consequences (Hebrews 10:24-26): “Let us consider one another to stimulate each other to love and to good works, not neglecting our meetings with one another, as some do, but exhorting each other . . . for if we sin willfully after receiving the knowledge of Truth there will remain no more sacrifice for sins.” Therefore the Lord has shown that he particularly cares for* those who assemble together in this way, because it gives a public testimony for him on earth, and glorifies his Name. And so those who are upright in their spirits are naturally drawn to attend the meetings of God’s people, and they always feel a spiritual influence leading them to it. And if anyone does it only as a habit, they will no doubt be condemned for it. Arranging set places and times cannot be considered a ceremony or

⁵ Proverbs 27:17 RB

observance which is done by human will in the worship of God, because no one can say it is an act of worship, but rather it is just showing up physically in order to worship, as has been said before. And all our adversaries acknowledge that this was done in the primitive Church and by the saints.

Objection: Finally some people insist that this way of worshipping in silence is not found anywhere in Scripture.

Answer: I answer that we do not consider that the whole substance of our worship is silence; as I have said before, there are many meetings which are seldom if ever completely silent. One or another person is moved to preach, pray, or praise. And so in this respect our meetings must be like the meetings of the primitive churches recorded in Scripture, since our adversaries confess that they preached and prayed by the Spirit. Would it be absurd to suppose that sometimes the Spirit did not move them to these outward acts, and that then they were silent? We can reasonably conclude that they did not speak until they were moved, and so no doubt they sometimes had silence before the Spirit came upon them. In Acts 2:1 it says “They were all in one place with one accord” and then it says “The Spirit suddenly came upon them” but no mention is made of anyone speaking at that time, and I would like to know whether our adversaries can call it absurd to conclude that they were silent for a while.

*Inst.*⁶ But perhaps they will insist* that a whole silent meeting cannot be found in Scripture.

Answer: I answer that even if such a thing is not commanded,* that doesn’t mean that it is not lawful, because it naturally follows from other scripture precepts; we have proved this, because the Scripture commands us to

⁶ The abbreviation “Inst.” may mean something like “insistence.”

meet together, and when we are together the Scripture prohibits prayers or preaching except when the Spirit moves us to do it, so that if people meet together and the Spirit doesn't move them to such actions it logically follows that they must be silent. In addition, there might have been many such things among the saints of old which are not recorded in Scripture, yet we have enough evidence in Scripture to show that such things happened. Job sat silent with his friends for seven days;⁷ that was a long silent meeting! See also Ezra 9:4, Ezekiel 14:1 and 20:1. So I have shown the excellence of this form of worship, and have proven it from Scripture and from reason, and have answered the objections which are commonly made against it. This might be enough to explain and prove our thesis, but I will add something more specifically about preaching, praying, and singing, and then move on to the next thesis.

Source: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition XI § xv, xvi, xvii (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 317-324; and Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiae verè Christianae apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676) pp. 242-248.

⁷ Job 2:13 RB