

Holy Trinity REC: Adult Catechism Class **Week 3: Church Buildings, etc.**

It's good to have a place set aside for worship!

Solemn worship of God should be carried out in places selected and prepared appropriately for that purpose.¹

Part of the preparation is setting the building aside

- The solemn dedication of churches not only serves to make them authorized places of worship, but also transfers to God any right to them that their founders might otherwise claim, and makes God Himself the sole owner of the Church. So it is that at the erection and consecration of both the Tabernacle and the Temple at Jerusalem it pleased the Almighty Himself to give a clear sign that He had taken possession of both of them.²
- Therefore, when we sanctify and hallow churches all we are doing is testifying that we intend them to be places of worship, that we are turning them over to God, and that we are severing them from ordinary uses. Any particular ceremonial observances we may use on occasions of dedication are only those that are decent and appropriate for such an event.³

Why do we name our churches the way that we do?

The very ancient custom of giving churches the names of angels and saints was no more harmful to the Church when first instituted than it has been throughout history or is in our own day. That churches have always been consecrated to our Lord alone is clear from the fact that the very etymology of the word 'church' confirms it to be the 'Lord's House'. Because there have been so many churches, particular proper names were devised to differentiate them—much as we do with particular human beings. In selecting proper names the intention of founders of churches was to remind people of what they regarded as important events and persons in the life of the Church. Some church names were chosen as memorials to peace, some to wisdom, some to the Trinity. Some churches use Christ's various titles, not a few are named in honour of the Blessed Virgin, many are named for an apostle, saint or martyr; and

¹ Richard Hooker, *Richard Hooker on Anglican Faith and Worship: Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity: Book V*, ed. Philip B. Secor, A Modern Edition. (London: SPCK, 2003), 43.

² Richard Hooker, *Richard Hooker on Anglican Faith and Worship: Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity: Book V*, ed. Philip B. Secor, A Modern Edition. (London: SPCK, 2003), 46.

³ Richard Hooker, *Richard Hooker on Anglican Faith and Worship: Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity: Book V*, ed. Philip B. Secor, A Modern Edition. (London: SPCK, 2003), 47.

many in honour of all the saints at once (Socrates Scholasticus, c. 380–450, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 1.16; Cassiodorus, c. 485–c. 580, *Historia ecclesiastica tripartite*, 69.965).⁴

Why worship in Church?

I trust that my opinion concerning the special importance and virtue of church buildings is without the blemish or stain of heresy. Like everything else, churches acquire their perfection from the purposes they serve. Since the major purpose of churches is to provide for the public worship of God, they are of greater dignity than houses that serve lesser ends. When churches are denied their due pre-eminence and honour by not being properly sanctified, they seem to mourn as if injured and defrauded of their proper status. So it seems that the worship of God lacks the perfection of grace and attractiveness when there is not the concurrent dignity of place for which it longs.

Of course, the true worship of God is in itself acceptable to Him because He cares not so much where it takes place as with what sincerity He is worshipped. Thus Moses in the midst of the sea, Job on the dung hill, Ezekiel in bed, Jeremiah in the mire, Jonah in the whale, Daniel in the den, the children in the furnace, the thief on the cross, Peter and Paul in prison, all calling out to God were heard.

Nevertheless, the majesty and holiness of the place of worship, as St Basil noted, can have a good impact on us when they have the emotional effect of stirring up devotion and enhancing even our best and holiest acts of worship (St Basil, c. 330–79, Bp of Caesarea, *Exhortatio ad baptismum*, p. 538). We exhort everyone to worship God everywhere. But we hold that no place is so good for the performance of worship by God's assembled people as the Church, and that no exhortation is so appropriate as David's, when he said: 'O worship the Lord in the *beauty* of holiness' (Psalms 96:9).⁵

⁴ Richard Hooker, [Richard Hooker on Anglican Faith and Worship: Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity: Book V](#), ed. Philip B. Secor, A Modern Edition. (London: SPCK, 2003), 48.

⁵ Richard Hooker, [Richard Hooker on Anglican Faith and Worship: Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity: Book V](#), ed. Philip B. Secor, A Modern Edition. (London: SPCK, 2003), 55.