

Worship

Part One

Worship. Many definitions abound for this word but here's a start: Worship is an act, intentionally or inadvertently done, of giving worth to a particular thing or person. One can give something worth by sacrificing time, energy, desires, resources, and even oneself.

With this beginning definition, it can be deduced worship is done not only on Sundays. A person can worship many things each day – sleep, a sports team, food, or a university. But in particular, Christians also worship God and the person of Jesus. We sacrifice time to attend a worship service each weekend; we sacrifice energy to stop rushing around in order to sit silently before the Lord; we sacrifice our own selfish desires and serve in a community as Christ's hands and feet; we sacrifice our money to tithe back to the Lord; and in certain instances, Christians sacrifice their own life for the sake of God's kingdom.

One can now see worship is a lifestyle. Not only is every day an opportunity to give of one's self, but there are many *moments* in a day in which one can worship. Christians who walk closely with the Lord may indeed use every activity as an act of worship. The more they realize how much God has given them, the more they tend to respond with thanksgiving, blessing, and sacrificing. In fact, doing so is an exhortation from Hebrews 13:15: "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name."

For many Christians, the most common place to offer the fruit of their lips is a weekend worship gathering. There they meet with other followers of Christ and collectively adore their Maker. After being gathered, the Word is proclaimed and the Lord's Supper is usually ministered. Finally, the worship presider sends the congregants back into the world, encouraging them to participate in God's activity within their homes, schools, and workplaces. The last part of the previous sentence is crucial to understand, hence this reiteration: Christians are sent from the gathering in order to participate in God's activity in the world. In other words, it's God's *mission* we act as Christ's hands and feet for the following six days.

That point greatly constitutes Clayton Schmit's description of worship from *Sent and Gathered*: "In its essence, worship is adoration and action. Adoration is observed as Christians gather on Sunday mornings and action is the living out of worship Monday through Saturday" (46). Indeed, Christians adore and act, adore and act. This interminable cycle supports the notion that worship is a lifestyle. And since I'm a musician, worship is also a lifestyle of sacrificing time to hone my talents for His glory and name's sake. On a much larger scale, we are God's instruments and part of God's missional orchestra in the world. Worship is our fine tuning, where we rehearse the language of faith and community before being sent out and exhorted to continue perform for the next six days.

Part Two

Worshipping our triune God - Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit - is also:

1. Expressing our love for Him
2. Ministering to God's heart
3. Humbling ourselves
4. An act of adoration and devotion
5. Drawing near to Him, and so He draws near to us (James 4:8)
6. An investment into our relationship with Him
7. Our primary purpose in life
8. An act of total surrender
9. Magnifying Him in our own psyche (Luke 1:46)
10. The means through which our highest attainment is achieved

Jack Hayford wrote about that last point in his book, *Majesty*: “Our highest attainment comes through glorifying Him who is worthy of all glory...one who worship the Lord – looking to the unseen rather than to the seen as we go through our present trials – will find what Paul calls an “eternal weight of glory” working in his life” (xiv).

We also become more like what we worship. This is the main thrust of Gregory Beale's book, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry*. He primarily employs Isaiah 6, but I also believe Psalm 115:4-8 exemplifies the same principle: “Their idols are silver and gold, The work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; Eyes they have,

but they do not see; They have ears, but they do not hear; Noses they have, but they do not smell; They have hands, but they do not handle; Feet they have, but they do not walk; Nor do they mutter through their throat. **Those who make them are like them; So is everyone who trusts in them.**”

But the inverse is also true. The more we worship God, the more we become like God in a non-narcissistic way. If I’m wrestling with sadness, I begin to worship the Father because joys are at His right hand forevermore. If I’m fighting off fear, I worship Jesus because He is the Prince of Peace. But here is a point of caution: what I’m sharing is only a by-product of worship. I firmly believe we shouldn’t position our heart so that we’re worshipping God to get something or to become narcissistic with power, beauty, et cetera. We worship God because He is worthy of our time, energy, presence attention, desires, and resources 100% of the time. Worship is all about God and not about us.

Another thing to establish is the concept of worship. The root word of worship of is **worth**. We lavish God with adorations of His **worth** when we express gratitude for His attributes and activity in our lives. Worship is also investing into our relationship with God and drawing near to Him (James 4:8). And we worship God because He allowed Jesus to die for our sins – to take our place on the cross – so that we may live eternally with Him. The savior of this world let Himself be sacrificed so that we could have direct access to the Father, have all authority over Satan and his demons, have the possibility of living in complete health and freedom – spirit, soul, and body – on this side of heaven, and help reconcile the Jews and Gentiles, among so many other reasons. This is the just the tip of the iceberg concerning worship.

Part Three

Due to escalating individualism and materialism in American society, combined with the ominous fact Christians, in general, are not keeping their alternative identity against these toxins - especially in their worship! - the healthy practices of building community and actively serving inside the church have corroded into a gluttonous passivity and consumerism. Put in another way, we have chosen Burger King over God's home-cooked food. This is the lament Marva Dawn describes and suggests remedies for in *A Royal "Waste" of Time*. Dawn asserts we Christians have lost the biblical God as the center of our worship, along with the language of faith and a secure understanding of our eschatology. Instead, we are exploiting and consuming Him, living in the here-and-now, oblivious to the wonderful traditions we've thrown into the trash can. Again and again, each Sunday we quickly eat our Big Mac, toss the wrapper away, and head back home.

How does the church combat this growing obesity epidemic? How do we keep our worship diet from deliquescing into fat and carbs? From the Enlightenment period through Modernism into current-day Postmodernism, civilization in general has resorted to relative truth and, just as detrimental, lost the idea of a meta-narrative. To build back the foundation of our food pyramid, the church needs to restore its language of faith and eschatology by rehearsing the story of God's faithfulness throughout history each week in worship. We must realize our place in the over-arching drama of humanity and strengthen our hope in Jesus' return. How? By enacting the Word through our liturgy, and this is where Russell Mitman would agree with Dawn. In *Worship in the Shape of Scripture*, he argues worship is "a corporate liturgical action that in its entirety intends to become a proclamatory event in which the Word of God is enacted

and experienced" (15). Notice the key word in both sentences is enact. The Word must be enacted by the corporate body, not just the preacher. In fact, all of liturgy, which in Greek means "work of the people," should be communal. "Liturgics is about how the Word-event is crafted and enacted communally with the aim that ultimately God in Christ through the Holy Spirit will be engaged in conversation with the people of God" (27). Dawn would gladly assent to this definition, and add that the reason why enacting the Word is so effective is because it's absolute truth, not relative truth. The Word, indeed, is the Bread of Life. In worship, we must place our focus on the Word in order to be fed with truth, or else we feed ourselves with subjectivity and sentimentalism. Only once we have accomplished this, then we can provide the world with the whole-grain bread of absolute truth.

Lastly, a worship service according to Dawn is like a symphony in which there are "numerous possibilities for the score - thousands of symphonies to choose from, a wide range of texts. However, the performers must be faithful to the musical score, even as pastors must be true to the text." But at the same time, there is room for inclusivity because "symphonic music encompasses a wide diversity of sounds and flavors from all eras and areas" (198). Selecting hymns from different eras and using varied genres, or "flavors," in the same service will concoct a meal everybody can partake in. That, in effect, will build community around the Word, the "musical score," while successfully blending the "sounds" of each generation together in one mixing bowl.

Part Four

Art can be closely connected with Christian worship. Despite the current-day, growing cross-pollination of denominations affecting believers, the distinctive visual practices of the three religious traditions – Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant – display a remarkable persistence. William Dyrness explores this idea in *Senses of the Soul*. In general, most Orthodox believers will interpret visual art in association with the liturgy; Catholics will connect most art somehow with the Eucharist and the worshipping community; Protestants will have a personalized, narrative-based lens through which they view art.

Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant traditions are embodied in particular sets of physical and visual practices. In other words, throughout the centuries these denominations have issued practices and expectations in which the arts play a significant role – in fact, they actually embody the commitments of the traditions. For example, icons have been quite significant to the Orthodox Church throughout the ages, but they have always been significantly used in service to the liturgy. “The spiritual power, Orthodox believers would say, lies not simply in the narrative of the gospel story, nor in the images of saints by themselves, but from the placement and role of these in the movement of the liturgy” (56). Part of the reason icons are used in worship is to provide a visual context in which the worshiper does not need to expend energy focusing their attention during the liturgy. One of the important factors of the Orthodox faith “is to avoid any distress - the main thing is awareness and awakening” (56).

Protestants, on the other hand, have been known to shy away from incorporating art inside services. This may have stem mostly from Calvin’s beliefs that “Whatever men learn of God in images is futile, indeed false, the prophets totally condemn the notion that images stand

in the place of books” (Calvin, *Institutes* 1.11.5). The narrative of the Gospel story is key for Protestants. In fact, “the arrangements of worship - its furniture, its drama and its flow - were all oriented to the centrality of this spoken word. The Protestant focus on the sermon, on teaching, and especially in the early period, on catechism, followed naturally from this emphasis” (163). Hence, this practice from the Protestant tradition and general expectation of art (or lack of it!) resulted in *personal* appreciation of religious art (if it, indeed, even occurred) instead of communal.

Catholics, in contrast, direct the liturgy toward the Eucharist. “The Roman Catholic tradition has come to believe Christ is specially presented in the elements and in the performance of the Mass. For Catholics, in contrast to Protestants, the focus of worship is not on the narrative of Christ’s death and resurrection, though that is certainly not ignored, but on Christ’s continuing presence among those gathered” (13). And those gathered may indeed include angels and saints. The Catholic tradition of praying to saints - and honoring the ecstatic visions of those saints! - has no doubt impacted the way Catholics interpret art. Dyrness writes, “One wonders: does the richly furnished environment of Catholic worship provide the conditions and the imagery that stimulate religious visions? If so, it would be consistent with the long Catholic tradition, in which the visions of saints have frequently featured liturgical and Eucharistic imagery” (85). In conclusion, it follows that art is usually interpreted and connected to the Eucharist and the saints for Catholics.

Bibliography

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