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Number 13

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## Worship and Ethics

### *Confession, Character, and Conduct*

Michael R. Weed

Personality is shaped by the liturgy, by the bowed heads of family and friends acknowledging the transcendence of God, by hymns expressing the prayers of the heart, and the hearing of the Word of God.

John H. Leith

At present a tremendous amount of attention is being given to worship and the need for renewal or reform of various traditions and practices regarding worship. While motivations for change vary, a common theme is that worship must be freed from strictures that render it unattractive to the modern mentality and irrelevant to modern needs. Clearly such concerns reflect underlying assumptions about the fundamental meaning of Christian worship.

The following comments call attention to the function of worship in the life of the church. More precisely, I want to address a crucial aspect of worship that appears to have gone largely unnoticed in the current discussions about “change,” “relevance,” and “renewal.” It is my thesis that worship and ethics are integrally and inescapably related; character and conduct are correlative to confession.<sup>1</sup> While many recognize a connection between private devotion and ethics, the role of public worship in shaping Christian moral identity has not been sufficiently recognized.<sup>2</sup> The gathered church’s actions in worship renew and refocus hearts and minds for faithful living; worship stands at the very center of Christian faith and life.

<sup>1</sup> Neglect of this area has constituted a serious and telling omission in Protestant ethics. Fortunately, the shift of attention from decision-making to character formation has produced some works in the area. One of the earliest Protestant discussions of the relation between worship and ethics is James Gustafson’s “Spiritual Life and Moral Life,” *Theology and Ethics* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim, 1974) 161–176. Also helpful are William H. Willimon, *The Service of God: Christian Work and Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983); Don E. Saliers, *Worship and Spirituality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984); and, more recently, Timothy F. Sedgwick, *Sacramental Ethics: Paschal Identity and the Christian Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> Curiously, some who recognize the crucial importance of the disciplines of personal piety—and even of ritual and tradition in this context—do not admit a similar necessity for discipline in corporate worship or see any value in ritual and tradition.

A second thesis follows: efforts to alter, reform, or revitalize worship must be undertaken with considerable care and deliberation. To misunderstand (and thus to distort or weaken) the role and function of worship inevitably damages—distorts and weakens—Christian identity and Christian life. While extreme distortions of worship more seriously affect the life of the believer, even the trivializing of worship critically diminishes Christian resources for faithful living.

At the outset it should be noted that the issue is not whether change is possible and perhaps occasionally necessary. Traditional forms of Christian practice, including worship, need to be reexamined from time to time. Rather, this essay is concerned with the criteria which are deployed to assess and guide proposed change or renewal. In order to avoid the temptation of simply reflecting the spirit of the age, responsible evaluation and renewal of worship practices must closely attend to the nature and purpose of biblical worship, its central importance in the life of the church, and its critical role in forming and guiding faithful lives.

### Worship

Worship stands at the very center of the church's existence. It is this fundamental characteristic which distinguishes the church from other human gatherings which "meet for pleasure, study, or to plot a course of action. The church meets to worship."<sup>3</sup>

In the first instance, biblical worship is defined by the nature of the God who is worshiped. The God of the Bible is the Creator and Sustainer of heaven and earth. The universe is not merely an expression of his power; even more fundamentally, it is an expression of his covenant love. Having created humans with the unique capacity to know him and to enter covenant relationship with him, God has pursued his goal of reconciliation in spite of human rebellion against him.

Biblical worship is essentially doxology; it ascribes praise and adoration to God in response to who he is and what he has done for his creation. Worship reflects the greatness of God and remembers his faithfulness to his creation in the history of Israel—faithfulness which culminates in the event of Jesus Christ.

In its rites and practices, Christian worship remembers and rehearses God's gracious acts of deliverance. At the heart of Christian worship is the Lord's Supper. Here the worshiping congregation unites in the sacrificial death of Christ, acknowledges his continuing presence in the church, and confidently awaits his return and the full reality of his reign.

In its very essence, Christian worship is necessarily and inescapably theocentric, not anthropocentric. In focusing upon God and acknowledging his

<sup>3</sup> Donald G. Miller, *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (Richmond: John Knox, 1957) 104.

rightful place over the universe, Christian worship subordinates all other realities to the reality of God.

Further, biblical worship brings worshipers together as the people of God. While worship should occur in the private life of individual believers, it is especially in corporate worship that we more fully and visibly signify the redemptive and reconciling work of God in creating a new community which embodies his character and purpose. It is also in our corporate worship that we recognize and signify our solidarity with the people of God, with the prophets, apostles, saints and martyrs down through the ages. Through traditions, rituals, and time-honored practices, we acknowledge our indebtedness to those who have gone before us and we recognize that we are neither the first nor the last generation of believers.

In this fashion, Christian worship occasions what has been called "the precarious vision"; it momentarily locates the worshiper within a panoramic vision or interpretation of reality. For however fleeting a moment, the worshiper is permitted to see and understand the circumstances of his or her own life within the context of the Creator's deeper intentions and purposes. The worshiper is enabled to see life in light of Eternity—or, as the ancients would say, *sub specie aeternitatis*. Worship is central to both the very nature of the church and Christian life. Clearly, the extent to which the meaning of worship is misunderstood or distorted will be directly reflected in the life of the church and in the lives of individual Christians. To distort the meaning of worship weakens the church and cripples Christian lives.

### A Fundamental Distortion: "Spiritual Epicureanism"

The most fundamental and persistent distortion of Christian worship is the loss of its primary focus on God. By the very identity of God as the Ultimate Good, worship cannot "use" God in the pursuit of some lesser good without distortion or self-contradiction.<sup>4</sup> To forget, neglect, or diminish the theocentric nature of worship inevitably alters its basic meaning and purpose. One of the most common ways in which this shift occurs is when worship is viewed in a utilitarian fashion and becomes a means to an end. When God is no longer worshiped because he is God but because he is somehow useful, worship is no longer theocentric. Regardless of how often or sincerely "God" is invoked, worship becomes anthropocentric when it is employed as a means for manipulating divine power to attain human goals (even if these are seemingly worthy goals).

This shift is particularly visible in attempts to use worship to pursue the self's own interests. It is perhaps most deceptive and lethal when it is masked by pious

<sup>4</sup> Worship is not unlike virtue in this regard. While worship may have its "rewards," it becomes something other than worship if it is pursued in order to obtain these. C. S. Lewis observes that one cannot pursue "first things" ("seek ye first") in order to obtain "second things" ("all these things will be added") (C.S. Lewis, "First and Second Things," *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) 278–281).

concerns. While there is a superficial similarity, there is a significant difference between singing, "Crown him with many crowns" and "Will there be any stars in my crown?"<sup>5</sup> Further, this distortion of worship's focus inevitably promotes preoccupation with the subjective or emotional experience of the worshiper. Although the distinction between seeking God and seeking the experience of God may appear subtle, it nonetheless designates two fundamentally different approaches to worship.

Countless spiritual writers have called attention to this self-preoccupation as a fundamental distortion of Christian spirituality and a major impediment to spiritual growth. Francis de Sales, writing in the sixteenth century, refers to this phenomenon as a "doubling back" or a "bending back on the self." "There is a great difference," he warns, "between being occupied with God who gives us the contentment, and being busied with the contentment which God gives."<sup>6</sup> Francis warns that there

are souls who readily double and bend back on themselves, who love to feel what they are doing, who wish to see and scrutinize what passes in them, turning their view ever on themselves to discover the progress they make. And there are yet others who are not content to be content unless they feel, see, and relish their contentment . . . Now all these spirits are ordinarily subject to be troubled in prayer, for if God deign them the sacred repose of his presence, they voluntarily forsake it to note their own behavior therein, and to examine whether they are really in content, disquieting themselves to discern whether their tranquility is really tranquil, and their quietude quiet . . .<sup>7</sup>

What is true of individual devotion is true also for the worship of the church.

This narcissistic shift, or "bending back on the self," radically alters the basic focus and meaning of Christian worship. Again, however much God is mentioned, worship becomes human- and self-centered, not God-centered; its focus becomes the experience of the worshiper rather than praise and adoration of the one worshiped.

Donald Miller states succinctly: "to evaluate worship by what happens in the experience of the worshiper is to make men, not God, the center of worship."<sup>8</sup> He astutely observes that in

modern worship services too much attention is directed toward what happens to the worshiper. Devices of sound, lighting, symbolism, liturgy, and pageantry are frequently utilized to produce emotional feelings in the

<sup>5</sup> John Frederick Jansen, *Let Us Worship God* (Richmond: CLC, 1966) 49.

<sup>6</sup> Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God* (New York: Catholic Publication Society, 1884)

259.

<sup>7</sup> de Sales, *Treatise*, 259.

<sup>8</sup> Miller, *Nature and Mission*, 107.

worshiper. Those who participate tend to evaluate the worship service in terms of how it “lifted them up” or gave them “a good feeling” or “inspired” them. . . . Religious entertainment is often confused with religious worship.<sup>9</sup>

Over three decades ago T. W. Manson similarly observed that we are inclined to focus on the effects of worship on the worshiper and “are too prone these days to think of acts of worship in psychological terms.”<sup>10</sup> He contrasts the modern mood to that of first-century Jews who were

much more concerned with whether or not these acts of worship would be acceptable to God. The punctual performance of religious duties, with due reverence and a turning of the mind and heart towards God, was an obligation and a privilege whether the worshipper felt like it before hand or not. . . . The question whether he wanted to go to the synagogue at a set time had nothing to do with the case. His business was to be there. The question whether he felt better afterwards was also irrelevant.<sup>11</sup>

Manson concludes by noting that in this manner the Jew was “set free” from the modern peril of “ceasing to worship because we are never in the mood” or because our worship provides “no immediate and exciting emotional result.”<sup>12</sup>

This observation brings us to a crucial point. Clearly, many factors contribute to defining and assessing worship which promote distortions of its true meaning. The issue is not whether worship has an effect on the worshiper or evokes a response. Rather, the issue is how worship affects the worshiper and what kind of effect it should produce in the worshiper’s life. Is worship a renewal of Christian identity? Or is it more of a refreshing and perhaps entertaining interlude in life’s tedium?

### **The Non-utilitarian Benefits of Worship: De-centering the Self**

Worshippers receive the true benefits of biblical worship only when worship is directed toward God. Paradoxically, it is in its irrelevance that worship is relevant; it is precisely in its “uselessness” that worship confers its richest benefits upon the

<sup>9</sup> Miller, *Nature and Mission*, 107. Regarding prayer, Miller states: “The value of prayer is not what happens to the one who prays. The value of prayer is that he has prayed. If he has prayed sincerely, he has thus acknowledged God to be God, and himself to be but a creature who belongs to God and who lives under His Lordship. If uplift comes to the one who has prayed, well and good. The end of prayer, however, is not human delight, but the glory of God. It is not God’s chief end to glorify man and to make him enjoy him forever. It is rather man’s chief end to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever. And this is the end of all true worship.”

<sup>10</sup> T. W. Manson, *Ethics and the Gospel* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1960) 37.

<sup>11</sup> Manson, *Ethics and the Gospel*, 37.

<sup>12</sup> Manson, *Ethics and the Gospel*, 37.



worshiper. Worship directed solely toward praise and adoration of God—without the intention of securing advantages or producing experiences—delivers the self from the tyrannies of this age.

The confession "Christ is Lord" locates worshipers within an all-inclusive and over-arching vision of reality. Herein worship unmasks and "slays the gods" of every age, delivering worshipers from bondage to fragmentary and distorting visions. In a world marked by uprootedness, worship delivers the worshiper from the modern affliction of living in frantic, impulsive pursuit of confusing and contradictory goals. Worship, with its appointed times, rites, and traditions, offers meaning and stability; it offers "ground to stand on" and a depth and breadth of perspective from which one "makes sense of things."<sup>13</sup> Worshipers are enabled to view their lives, both collectively and individually, within the context of a transcendent reality and purpose.

Ultimately, of course, worship that is truly theocentric protects the self from being "bent back upon itself" and thus dethrones the self. For it is the expansive self—the swollen ego with its illusions and fantasies—that distorts our vision of reality—of others, of the world, and of God.<sup>14</sup> Nothing short of acknowledgment of the transcendent reality of God and subordination of the heart and mind to the transcendent claims of God can release the self from being blinded by its own luminescence. Only when the self finds its true center in the transcendent one—not in the self's idea of transcendence, much less the self's experience of transcendence, but in the sheer reality of God—is it released from the countless deceits of self-encapsulation. In this fashion biblical, i.e., theocentric, worship frees the worshiper to see the world, the other, and the self as they really are.

In worship the self is reconstituted; character is reshaped in direct correlation to confession. In response to the reality of God disclosed in Christ, foundational attitudes and dispositions are evoked: gratitude, humility, reverence, penitence, obligation, and hope offer a new basis for action as the self reflects God's intentions in the world.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Willimon: "The liturgy must be the church's supreme skeptic in face of change, that one aspect of the church's life which continually honors the past and respects the wealth of the experience, the complexity of the church's Story in the face of modern manipulators of the liturgy who claim that past was too limited. These innovators endanger the church by imposing only purely contemporary standards. . . . In affirming the wealth of the church's tradition, the liturgy is not only holding on to what is important in our past, but is also prodding us forward to ever widening realms of importance. Tradition gives the church a fresh perspective which rises above the conventional folk wisdom of present culture and frees us from the tyranny of those who know only what they have personally experienced" (*Service of God*, 70–71).

<sup>14</sup> See Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Ark, 1985). Murdoch brilliantly analyzes the machinations of the ego in obscuring reality.

<sup>15</sup> Gustafson, "Spiritual Life," 167–168.

## Conclusion

I have argued that worship and ethics are crucially interrelated: worship is a constitutive act, forming Christian character and guiding Christian conduct. To adapt and modify worship inevitably affects its role in forming Christian identity.

We are presently living in a time when many of the pillars of our society are visibly crumbling. Ironically, it is to this confused and destructive climate that concessions and accommodations are energetically promoted in order to make Christian worship attractive to the modern mood and tempo.

To adapt or accommodate Christian faith and practices, especially worship, to the tastes and moods of a given era or culture is always dangerous. There is sober wisdom in the old adage that "he who marries the spirit of the age soon becomes a widower." Such a marriage is doubly alarming when the spirit of the age increasingly resembles the ghost of Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>16</sup> With no moral framework to restrain self-indulgence and guide the expression of "individual freedoms," modern society continues to deteriorate amid the debris of its self-destructive beliefs and aspirations.

Tragically, modern worshipers too frequently receive little more than inoculations of "small doses of Christianoid concepts," immunizing them against any real encounter with biblical reality.<sup>17</sup> Worship, like last evening's movie or tomorrow's tennis match, becomes an amusing interlude to the spiritual Epicurean, a *divertissement*; it becomes only one more distraction from facing life's real issues.

Paradoxically, Christian worship loses its meaning in direct proportion to its success in accommodating itself to contemporary culture.<sup>18</sup> Worshipers, perhaps entertained and amused, are nonetheless spiritually enfeebled and left ill-equipped to venture into a confusing and hostile world. Worship that enables us to live *sub specie aeternitatis*, that forms character and guides conduct, is not found by way of accommodation, but in the attitude of the century-old hymn, "Here at Thy Table, Lord":

Calling our thoughts away  
From self and sin . . .

Touch with Thy pierced hand  
Each common day.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991) 60—61.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies* (New York: Doubleday, 1961) 116.

<sup>18</sup> It has not been sufficiently recognized that efforts to accommodate Christian faith to a culture which is not only hostile to Christian faith but is also disintegrating into a number of very different sub-cultures can only lead to the balkanization of the church. Accommodation itself so dilutes Christian faith that the faith shared between different "sub-cultural versions" of Christianity becomes exceedingly attenuated. At best, accommodation produces "lifestyle enclaves," at worst the disintegration of the broader community of faith. Designating this process "incarnational" scarcely makes it desirable.

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## Obiter Dicta

These thought-provoking "other words" have been contributed by readers of *Christian Studies* and friends of the Institute. Our thanks for their efforts in calling them to our attention.

### *The Body of Christ*

The people of God who are a new creation, who share a common life together in Christ constitute His body. Christ is still present in the world, no longer physically and literally, but spiritually and mystically in His body, the church. . . .

A major problem affecting evangelicals is the failure to have an incarnational understanding of the church. This failure has caused many to view the church as a social institution, a psychiatrist's couch, an evangelistic tent, or a lecture hall. The current attempt to bring renewal by putting chairs in a circle, singing with a guitar, meeting in homes, and studying the Bible in small groups without the rediscovery of the incarnational nature of the church may be less the beginning of renewal than the last gasp before death.

Robert E. Webber, *Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity*

### *Breaking Away*

Much apostasy from religion is strongly related to conflicts with one's parents. Many of those who think they are breaking away from their church in the name of enlightenment and freedom actually are at least partially working out conflicts with their mother and father.

Andrew Greeley, *Unsecular Man*

### *Change Agents*

The churchman . . . who accepts the injunction that he must change to mean that he must come up with something totally new, and that he must abandon everything from the religion of the past, is likely to find that he has surrounded himself with a small coterie of secular men, men who believe as religiously as he does that they are the wave of the future and that the evolutionary process assures their triumph as the most advanced and most progressive—and, yes, let's say it—the fittest of their species.

Andrew Greeley, *Unsecular Man*

### ***Church Music***

[M]usic especially belongs to the people, and theologically the burden of proof rests on those who support the case for a choir separate from the congregation. The congregation is the true choir, and all music should be conceived within this principle. . . . This rubric may well mean that anthems and solos be abolished and more hymns used instead so that the people can physically participate in the action of music; or that if an anthem is sung, it be in the spirit of a true "anthem," that is, an "antiphon" in which the people and choir join.

Paul W. Hoon, *The Integrity of Worship*

Before going to the theatre service I passed a Methodist church with a message on its bulletin board that explains many chapters in American church history. It was: "Good Friday service this afternoon. Snappy song service." So we combine the somber notes of religion with the jazz of the age.

I wonder if anyone who needs a snappy song service can really appreciate the meaning of the cross.

Reinhold Niebuhr, *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*

### ***Fashion and Novelty***

Substitute for the faith itself some Fashion with a Christian colouring. Work on their horror of the Same Old Thing.

C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*

The pleasure of novelty is by its very nature more subject than any other to the law of diminishing returns.

C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*

It looks as if they believed people can be lured to go to church by incessant brightenings, lightenings, lengthenings, abridgements, simplifications, and complications of the service...

Novelty, simply as such, can have only an entertainment value. And they don't go to church to be entertained... The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God...

But every novelty prevents this. It fixes our attention on the service itself; and thinking about worship is a different thing from worshipping...

There is really some excuse for the man who said, "I wish they'd remember that the charge to Peter was Feed my sheep; not Try experiments on my rats, or even, Teach my performing dogs new tricks."

C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*

Old is not better. Old can be worse. The apostolic criterion is not whether something is old or new. The criterion is whether it is truthful—truthful in the sense of true to the apostolic testimony to God's revelation, the truth personally incarnate in Jesus Christ. There was a great suspicion of novelty in the first five centuries [of the church].

Now, modernity has turned that around and said the opposite: If anything is old we reject it. Novelty has become a criterion for truth. So there is as great a phobic response to anything antiquarian in modern consciousness as there was a resistance to novelty in classical Christian consciousness. . . . Believers perennially need and have a right to a living tradition of preaching, worship, and discipline.

Os Guinness and John Seels, eds., *No God But God*

### *Preaching*

Classically, preaching has arisen out of the substance of what is proclaimed. The Christian message determined the pattern and form of preaching. . . . Today increasingly form and style take precedence over substance. . . . There is an incongruity between the gospel and a pretty sermon. . . . There must be something rough-hewn about the sermon. . . .

The development of the communications industry, as well as the entertainment industry, jeopardizes good preaching by tempting persons to subordinate content to form and to practices which may be humanly effective but which are theologically destructive.

Great preaching depends on the integrity of the human heart and mind, on the part of both the preacher and the congregation. It is not through the practice of magic or the communication arts, but through the integrity of the proclamation itself which under God creates the Christian community.

John H. Leith, *From Generation to Generation*

### *Relevance*

Any institution remains "relevant" as long as it has something distinctive to offer. Religious institutions are no exceptions. The religious institution that becomes indistinguishable from other institutions . . . in very short order has great difficulties answering the question of why it should exist as a separate institution at all; at this point it has become "irrelevant" in the strictest sense of the word—the sense of redundancy and obsolescence.

Peter Berger, *Religion and Society Report*, January 1988

If one is to understand the rise of neo-orthodoxy in the 1930s in Europe, it is most important to remember that "modern" at this time meant, above all, to be in accord with Nazism—in the parlance of more recent Protestantism, it was the protagonists of Nazi ideology within the church, and not the "Confessing Church," who were "relevant" to their secular situation.

Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*

### *Success*

Success is determined by the statistics regarding such things as membership, attendance, giving, budget, staff, facilities, and activities. Success equals the number of participants multiplied by the degree of their satisfaction and support. . . . "Fidelity," on the other hand, is faithfulness to the gospel, conformity to the mind of Christ, being what the biblical revelation calls the church to be. . . . The two are not so nearly alike or so intimately connected that *one* choice can include *both*. No, if the congregation chooses success *over* fidelity, then that choice is itself an infidelity, an act of unfaithfulness. If, on the other hand, the congregation chooses fidelity *over* success, success may follow *or it may not*—there is no guarantee, no promise, no assurance, and no connection. Success can and does come to churches that are completely unfaithful, and success can be created through factors that have nothing to do with fidelity.

Vernard Eller, *The Outward Bound*

Jesus commanded us not to succeed, but to obey; not to sell the gospel, but to proclaim it. Jesus was not found "acceptable"; he was nailed to a cross. And he told his disciples to expect the same kind of reaction, for human nature will not change and the proclamation of the gospel should not change. It is not our job to convert the world or to fill churches; that is God's job. Ours is to sow the seed, without sugar-coating it; God's is to make it take root and grow.

Peter Kreeft, *Back to Virtue*

### *Technique*

[I]n our lust for success we overlook the fact that it takes two different conditions to make techniques right. Not only must the technique be an effective one in and of itself, it must also be appropriate to the content it is intended to promote. . . .

What so often happens in the church's experience is that a technique of worldly effectiveness looks good and is adopted. And then, because success is the only consideration (techniques have no other purpose), the gospel message is subtly pruned, shaped, and contorted until it fits the technique. "Please all men in all things," yes; but if the gospel is falsified in the process, men will not be saved. It is quite possible for Christ to be taken captive by a technique rather than the technique being taken captive for Christ.

Vernard Eller, *The Outward Bound*

### *Tradition*

We not only hold on to what is important through our tradition but also through memory gain imaginative new constructions for the future. A church without memory, without some "Jerusalem" to return to for guidance and blessing, is destined to become the prisoner of the status quo, a people without vision who can see no further than merely present arrangements, slaves to the opinions of those who happen to be walking about.

William Willimon, *Acts*

In an age of "anything goes," virtue is a revolutionary thing. In an age of rebellion, authority is the radical idea. In an age of pell-mell "progress" to annihilation, tradition is the hero on the white horse.

Peter Kreeft, *Back to Virtue*

Those who are liberated from tradition generally become slaves to fashion.

Basil Mitchell, *How to Play Theological Ping-pong*

### *Worship*

I wonder why it is that so many of the churches which go in for vaudeville programs and the hip-hip-hooray type of religious services should belong to the Methodist and Baptist denominations. The vulgarities of the stunt preacher are hardly compatible with either the robust spiritual vitality or the puritan traditions of the more evangelistic churches.

Reinhold Niebuhr, *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*

Boredom with our liturgical ruts has led some of us into creative and innovative experiments that too often mistake liveliness for life and "lit-orgy" for "lit-urgy." In typical American fashion, we assume that if people say that they don't get anything out of Sunday worship, that must mean that they are merely bored with the old and can be turned on with a "new and improved model" that follows the latest style. Pastors frequently long for some new thing to do in worship without questioning the source of their peoples' boredom and disengagement from worship or their own ministerial motivations for seeking the new... A well-led, skillfully interpreted, carefully structured worship service on Sunday morning in the traditional mode would be a radical innovation for too many congregations! Why do we desire newness in worship, and what form should that newness take? Are we substituting the experience of newness for the experience of worship?

William H. Willimon, *Worship as Pastoral Care*

Suppose that in your worship planning you try to keep seekers in mind, and suppose you assume that these are largely non-religious people. Suppose you further assume that if you are to appeal to these non-religious people, your contemporary services must also become increasingly non-religious, at least in any traditional way. Of course, it's hard to make a church service non-religious—it's like making a basketball game non-athletic—but for the sake of appeal to the secularists, suppose you try...

In general, you assume that the non-religious like things simple and upbeat. . . . so away with lament, away with hard questions, expressions of anguish, dark ambiguities of any kind. While you're at it, away with creeds and confessions, away with explicit references to Christian doctrine, or to the history of the Christian church.

On the other hand, seekers are interested in improving themselves, so you maximize promises of personal growth and self-realization. Secularists do like pop music, so here it comes into the sanctuary, along with semi-celebrity music performers and audience applause for their performances. . . .

Troubling questions arise: How much of this really has anything to do with the Christian faith? ... What if by offering popularized religion as an appetizer for unbelievers we should accidentally spoil their appetite for the real thing? Suppose your ten-year-old does not like your heart-healthy dinner menu, so you arrange a seeker meal for him in which you offer some non-threatening Pringles. You do this in order to set up his taste buds for baked potatoes. I wonder how often that would work.

Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Perspectives*, May 1993

What wisdom is gleaned for worship planners from these prototype churches and their surveys of unchurched America? Keep the mood and tempo of worship upbeat. Resist the minor keys, they're too somber. Discard "churchy" anthems and hymns. . . . Provide sermons with catchy "How to ..." titles. Encourage casual dress and informal ambiance. Drive the beat of worship with percussion, conclude songs with a flourish of high notes and loud dynamics (no one feels compelled to clap after slow or soft music). . . . "We don't allow any music in our church to which you couldn't rollerskate." The new model for efficiency and friendliness and enthusiasm is Walt Disney World.

Alan W. Walworth, *Journal of the American Academy of Ministry*, Fall 1992



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