

# WORSHIP: MARKETING A PRODUCTION OR ENCOUNTERING GOD

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## INTRODUCTION

We find ourselves venturing into the unknown as we come to the close of this millennium. The hope for our denomination is that we will discover the features that are essential to faithfully living within the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition. A part of this journey into the unknown involves worship styles and forms. This is a wonderful time to be a worship leader within our tradition. Oh, don't get me wrong...this is not a time of agreement and harmony about the nature of true worship, but a wonderful time of study and debate.

The worship styles that are being practiced within Wesleyan-Holiness congregations are in great flux. Some people would go so far as to say that the tradition is in a liturgical crisis, and that this crisis may be the cause of an identity crisis. One thing that is for sure, this is a time of diversified forms of worship.

Many people are calling us into "contemporary" forms of worship. This contemporary form of worship has many expressions. It varies from Neo-Charismatic to Praise and Worship to Seeker Sensitive. There are others who are calling us back to the worship style of our liturgical great, great, grandmother, the Anglican Church. This is an attempt to recover the great "liturgical" traditions within the historic Christian Church. There are still others who are beckoning us back into the worship expressions of our denominational youth. Those who are hailing for this are calling for what most Nazarenes describe as a "traditional" service. The problem is that this traditional service has more than one look. It varies all the way from Gospel songs to Wesley hymns.

In a paper with a title like this one, you may be asking what worship style does it take to meet with God, and what style is marketing a production? I wish it was as easy as picking one style and denouncing the others. It is not! This paper is a humble attempt to speak into the dialogue that is taking place within our tradition. It will consist of a selective review of worship expressions within the historic Christian tradition, and a short theological explanation.

## Survey of Worship Expressions Through the Ages

### “Ancient Israel”

Like other nations in the ancient world, Israel expressed its relationship with God through sacrifice and ritual, using sacred enclosures, and depending upon the mediation of priests. In other words, it had a cult. The cult had a very important religious and social function. It distinguished between the areas of the sacred and the profane. It also integrated the individual within the community of God’s people, and reminded the community of the significance of God for their ongoing life.

The worship in ancient Israel was not a fixed and eternal form. There was a dynamic that seemed to move with the changing circumstances Israel found herself in. This does not mean that she did not long for liturgical expressions with permanence. She did, but continued change still won out. An example of this continued transformation is the sacred space used for worship. Once Israel established an identity beyond the patriarchs, the tabernacle became the symbol of sacred space. The tabernacle was initially in the center of the camp and always symbolized God’s rule over Israel and was a reminder of his special presence among them. This tent of meeting was mobile, and perfect for the nomadic life. Israel later moved toward a central place for worship, as she fought to keep her own unique identity. The final location of the tabernacle was in David’s city, Jerusalem. The tabernacle finally gave way to a permanent structure, the temple. With the destruction of the temple and the exile of the people, sacred space moved toward a synagogue style room. The transformation of the space used in worship also caused a transformation of the expressions of worship. The most significant long term manifestation of this is the move from being a cult of sacrifice to one of teaching.

### “The New Testament Church”

The study of worship in the New Testament is more difficult and complex than a study of worship in the Old Testament because of the fragmentary nature of the sources. There is no single highly developed statement on worship in the New Testament. Scattered throughout the New Testament documents are brief descriptions provided by hymns, confessions, benedictions, doxologies, and subtle hints in words descriptive of worship. Changing and somewhat confusing patterns force us to remember that this is a process of development.

In the Gospel accounts, it seems that Jesus supported Israelite worship. The narrated account of his relationship to the temple, the synagogue, and the feasts confirms this

conclusion. The Gospels tell of Jesus' teaching in the temple, and describe the cleansing of the temple. Jesus went regularly to the synagogue on the Sabbath. He also attended the feasts of Israel, and the detail with which he celebrated his last Passover displays his knowledge and appreciation of the major feast of Israel.

Even though Jesus endorsed Israelite worship, he re-traditioned the Hebrew institutions of worship. He saw himself as fulfilling the temple cult. A prime example of this can be seen when Jesus celebrated his final Passover, he viewed himself as the final sacrifice and the true Lamb of God. Other examples of his reinterpretation of the customs of Jewish worship can be seen in the confrontations Jesus had with the Pharisees over the Sabbath, the regulations that governed cleanness and uncleanness, and the rules regarding fasting and prayer.

The worship of the New Testament church was born in the crucible of those events surrounding Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Early believers interpreted these events as the fulfillment of the promises to Israel. At first there was no hint that a new people, of God, one including the Gentiles, was being formed as a result of these events. Therefore, early Christians worshipped in the synagogue until the growing conflict over Jesus as the Messiah. In this context, Christian worship developed characteristics that were distinct from Jewish worship.

Even a casual reading of the New Testament points to at least two different styles of worship. One style of worship would certainly be that of the synagogues. The other style of worship was more free flowing, and would include those who exercised "spiritual gifts" in worship. The church at Corinth is an example of this. Paul addresses many misuses of spiritual gifts, but does not demand that they cease using spiritual gifts within the context of worship. The church attempted to find room for the Corinthian enthusiasm and Jewish forms of order. There seems to be a contextual liturgical variety within the early church.

### "The Early Church"

By the end of the first century, the church extended throughout most of the Roman Empire. As the church grew, it became challenged by factions. These disagreements caused the young church to define itself more clearly. It did this in a variety of ways, which also included a more highly developed liturgical consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Webber, Worship Old & New. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994) 48.

To understand worship in the second and third century is best to see it against the background of a hostile culture. Christians continued to worship in homes and continued the practice of both hearing the Word and celebrating at the table. Worship remained relatively simple in an intimate context.

The conversion of Constantine in the early part of the fourth century resulted in a significant world view shift in the Roman Empire. The Empire was no longer the enemy of the church, but was its friend and ally. The church was the only official religion of the Roman world by the late fourth century. This world view shift put the church into a friendly environment where the worship of the church shifted from intimacy to theater.<sup>2</sup>

In the favored context of the fourth and fifth centuries, the church grew rapidly, formulated its theology in various creeds, and developed a more fixed form in its worship. This era was the period described as classical Christianity, the golden age of the Fathers, and the most creative and formative time in the history of the church.

One important factor was the emergence of ecclesiastical centers in the influential cities of the Roman Empire. These centers gradually developed a particular theological and liturgical style. Each area assumed, as it was, a special stamp.

Worship in the fourth century began to reflect local culture. This is particularly true of Eastern Christian worship. The Greek love for elegance shaped The Eastern world view. The great contributions of this culture were poetry, literature, art, and philosophy. All of these interests aided the development of a poetic mind and a sense of imagery and artistic expression. Eastern worship was highly ceremonial, gloriously beautiful, and deeply mystical.

Like the Eastern church, the Western church also reflected the local culture. The Roman world view was considerably different from the world view of the East. The Romans were characterized by a spirit of pragmatism. This is evident in their buildings and in the development of Roman laws. Early Roman worship reflects this spirit. It is not pretentious or highly ceremonial, but sober and simple.

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<sup>2</sup>ibid. ,95.

## “The Medieval Church”

The medieval period witnessed a shift in the meaning of worship...the church increasingly emphasized worship as a mystery. The change that occurred in worship was not in the way worship was conducted (the form), but in the function of the forms. Liturgical forms are the means through which worship takes place. However, when ceremonial forms become an end rather than a mean, they assume an enchanted character and tend to replace the message they bear.

There are a number of reasons why this change of understanding occurred. First, during the Fourth century, the church converted many pagan festivals and customs and invested them with Christian meaning. This missiological strategy had its definite advantages in Christianizing the Empire but also suffered the disadvantage of an unhealthy influence from the mystery cults. The mystery cults regarded cultic action as an end in itself. This notion influenced the church, making the action of worship a mystery.

Several other developments have augmented the idea of the church's worship as a mystery. The change in language, for example, was a factor. Although the church spread into remote areas, far from Rome, it retained Latin as the language of the Mass. Surrounding the Mass and the clergy was an aura of mystery, because most of the people did not understand what was happening. Furthermore, the church distanced itself from the people even more as it increasingly viewed itself as a hierarchical institution rather than a body. The church dispensed salvation. The liturgy, especially the Eucharist, became the means of receiving this salvation.

A major result of the mystical view of worship is that the Mass became an epiphany of God. An overemphasis on the action of God in the Mass tended to overshadow the corporate action of the people in worship. The Mass assumed the character of a sacred drama that was played out by the clergy while the people watched.

## “The Reformation and Early Protestant Worship”

The sixteenth century was a time of great upheaval in the world and in the church. New ways of seeing the world resulted in the collapse of the medieval synthesis of church and state. In this context, a great religious upheaval was taking place. Leaders like Martin Luther wanted to strip the church of unnecessary traditions and return it to the purity of the early church.

In the period beyond the Reformation (1700-1900), the Western world continued to undergo vast changes. The most significant of these changes was the Enlightenment. The modern period brought the desire to prove Christianity and the desire to

reinterpret Christianity. Individualism, tolerance, pluralism, and the American experiment all arrive on the scene of history within this context. In the midst of all these changes, worship underwent vast alterations of its own, and emerged in a variety of forms. Some groups retained continuity with the past, while others completely broke with tradition to forge new styles of worship.

Luther, in “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” called the Mass an “abuse” that brought “an endless host of others in its train, so that the faith of this sacrament has become utterly extinct and the holy sacrament has been turned into a actual fair, tavern, and place of merchandise.” He charged that the Mass had lost its original focus as a thanksgiving and had become a propitiation to please God. Furthermore, the theology of sacrifice in the Mass created a host of other problems. People expected all sorts of benefits and advantages from hearing Mass, including healings, the release of souls from purgatory, and other magical results. The Mass had even lost the idea of communion, because people did not have to be present at the Mass...it could be said on their behalf. Consequently, the priest saying the Mass took the place of worship by the people and became a legalistic means of buying salvation. For the Reformers these late medieval practices struck at the heart of the Christian message and perverted the essential nature of the Christian faith as a religion of grace.

The Reformers also insisted on the restoration of the Word to its proper place in worship. The imbalance between Word and sacrament that led to the falling away of preaching and teaching was regarded as a one-sided approach to worship. Zwingli, a Swiss Reformer, went even farther than Luther in insisting that the people were to give ear to the Word of God alone. He abolished organs as well as other music, vestments, pictures, and anything else that would detract from the centrality of the Word.

#### “The Wesley Brothers”

We do not have the time or space to trace the many branches that the reformation took. What we will do is look at the most famous revivalist of the eighteenth century, John Wesley. His approach to worship represented a blend of classical Protestant forms with the personal element of Pietism. The influence of the Moravians was strong on Wesley, and through them he learned to stress the importance of conversion and personal experience. It is important to notice that Wesley never personally left the Anglican Church. His intent was to organize the Methodists into small groups for prayer, Bible study, and worship. These groups would continue to worship in Anglican parishes on Sunday. Yet even with all of this desire to stay within the church and liturgy of his

time, there were great innovations that have shaped the church to this very moment.

Wesley's sacramentalism is well known, and he seems most Anglican precisely at this point. But his sacramentalism, like other aspects of his theology and practice, was a modified Anglican position strongly influenced by his evangelical convictions.

Wesley understood the sacraments as a means of grace. By "means of grace," Wesley said, "I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace."<sup>3</sup> Calling the sacraments a "means of grace" suggests both the use and limitations of such ordinances. The sacraments convey God's grace but are only instruments; they are means, not ends.

For Wesley, the Lord's Supper drew a person to God and was instrumental in his justification and sanctification. Thus it was useful and needed at every stage of one's life. The sacraments are for all who are seeking God, not just for truly converted. The only essential preparation or qualification is a sense of worthlessness, trusting in nothing but God's grace alone.<sup>4</sup>

Like the Moravians, the revivalists made significant contributions in hymnody. Their hymns stress conversion and a personal experience of the Savior. Mainline Protestant worship greeted the use of hymns with a great deal of skepticism. The classical Protestant and Puritan heritage prescribed only Psalms and Scripture. The notion that the church could write its own hymns of praise was an innovative suggestion met with some suspicion.<sup>5</sup> However, the ministry of the Wesley brothers made hymnody a mark of Protestant worship.

The literary world of the Wesley brothers was very different from today. Support for poets of that century came by patrons of social standing and wealth. Very few poets were able to support themselves through their writing. To be a poet in the eighteenth century, was to write for a comparatively small group of worldly people, largely of the upper class, who represented, for Methodists generally and Charles in particular, many of the things against which he preached.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Sermon, "The Means of Grace," Works, V, 187.

<sup>4</sup>Howard Synder, The Radical Wesley (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980)103.

<sup>5</sup>Webber, 118.

<sup>6</sup>Kenneth Shields, "Charles Wesley as Poet" in Charles Wesley Poet and Theologian ed. ST Kimbrough (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1992) 46.

Kenneth Shields believes that Charles Wesley could have become a significant poet as defined by the literary world of his time. Wesley chose not to pursue his talents in that direction. He chose to write hymns and poems for the common person. “The form Wesley’s writing took was influenced...by the audience for which he wrote and the occasions on which his hymns were to be sung.”<sup>7</sup> The verse form familiar to the generally uneducated and illiterate was the ballad, the poetry of the people.

Wesley used the ballad, and conformed it to the metrical demands of the limited musical settings available to him and his audience. The stanzas Wesley uses are not usual in poetry, and strike the ear most oddly when separated from their musical setting. He seems to have composed with the tunes running in his head, the music determining his meters and placement of accent or stress.<sup>8</sup> From the above information and from the many letters his brother John wrote concerning his poems, we can say that Charles wrote primarily for singing and not for reading.

“Field preaching” became another major innovation in the shaping of worship for the future. The services took place in public places outside the church dwelling. These services developed a unique style of praying, singing, and preaching. The main concern was communicating the gospel of Christ to the unconverted. Consequently, the design of the services appealed to the unconverted. These services were the forerunner of mass revivals and camp meetings.

#### “The Holiness & Pentecostal Movement”

The Holiness movement traces its origin to John Wesley and to his conviction that a conversion experience should be followed by a second work of God’s grace. The people who sought this experience of practical holiness gathered in camp meetings to hear teaching, sing, and through agonizing prayer, break through to the second work of grace. These people desired an intense religious experience in worship. The camp meetings, in particular, were characterized by spontaneous freedom in worship accompanied by shouting when they broke through and experienced the Spirit of God. It was not unusual for people to weep and wail, to groan out loud, and enter a near convulsive state as they sought God.<sup>9</sup>

Singing was a part of camp meeting services. Participants in the meeting brought their own songbooks. In Beulah Christian (July 1896), an announcement of the Douglas Camp Meeting

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<sup>7</sup>ibid., 48.

<sup>8</sup>ibid., 48.

<sup>9</sup>Webber, pg. 122

read: “Rev. B. Caradine, and many other prominent ministers will be present. Rev. A. Hartt will lead the singing. Voice of Triumph will be used.” Congregational singing, however, was not the only singing that occurred. The characterization of Singing was freedom of expression and spontaneous emotion. One of the participants reported: “There was great liberty in the Spirit, and at times the songs and shouts of victory would for some moments sweep over the meeting. Glory to God forever!”<sup>10</sup>

Modern Pentecostalism cannot be understood apart from its roots in the nineteenth-century Holiness movement. Worship among Pentecostals, like that of their Holiness predecessors, is characterized by freedom, spontaneity, individual expression, and joy. One strong characteristic of early Pentecostal worship was its singing and music. Pentecostals drew their music lyrics and forms from songs that had emerged among the Holiness movement. From the beginning, it has used the musical idiom of popular culture to present the Gospel. These songs tell stories of how people came to faith and received Jesus.

### A Theological Explanation

What are we to make of the above survey? The one thing that we can say about the worship of Israel and the church is that it has no fixed universal form. It seems that the situations that people find themselves in, shape the forms of worship. This constant re-traditioning takes place in the unfolding circumstances of history. Worship traditions seem to need to continually transform themselves. Why? Life is ever changing, and a component of worship is the actual idiom of human community in praise to God. Genuine praise is always “Koine”...the common language of consciousness.<sup>11</sup>

The problem is that consciousness is shaped by a variety of narratives and world views. This means that consciousness is never an uncontaminated narrative. Even though all worship is in some way contaminated by other narratives, this should not keep us from attempting purity in worship. Purity in worship centers on God and his Christ our Lord! This is the heart of the story of God. The people of God are to worship him and him alone. Worship is the present tense activity, of the people of God, enthroning him.

When worship revolves around any concern other than God, it lacks the central element that makes it worship. This does

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<sup>10</sup>Brad Estep, “A Holiness Model of Worship” *Twenty Centuries of Christian Worship*, Vol.2, ed. Robert Webber (Nashville: Star Song Pub. Group. 1994) 253.

<sup>11</sup>koine is the Greek language commonly spoken and written in eastern Mediterranean countries in the Hellenistic period.

not mean that worship can not be beautiful, moving, and even enjoyable, but it must center on God. It also means that worship centered on worship is not the worship of God, but the worship of worship. It is so easy for a service of worship, in any style or form, to move away from the true worship of God. Marketing a production, rather than meeting with God take's place when anything other than God himself is the central object of worship.

This moves me to the final thought of this theological rationale...worship is the activity of the people. God is the audience, and not the congregation. The congregation is called to praise the Creator, who is witnessed to in the Christian narrative. This means that the elements of worship are to enable the congregation to enthrone the Living God! The reason worship is in the common language, is not to please the congregation, but to enable the congregation through translation to please God in their worship.

Marketing a production is having the wrong center. Usually, the wrong center is the congregation itself. It is a desire to please, bless, encourage, entertain, impress, and a variety of other motives. Encountering God is daring to have the focus/center set on him. The use of "koine" is to enable a genuine encounter of worship to take place. The genres used in worship are to enable the worshippers to the Living God, and confess their need before him. We may think that people come to worship for a variety of different reasons, but ultimately all of us come to meet with the mystery called God!