

# Chronicles of Diversity

*Your leadership weekly*



*St. Paul's Mission in NE Washington*

## Worship

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In Michael Horton's, "A Better Way, Rediscovering the Drama of God - Centered Worship," he introduces the concept that God's redemption of fallen humanity through the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the most colossal drama the world has ever seen. In that light the Sunday worship service in each and every local church should in some way bring about a remembrance and a celebration of that wonderful act.

I have seen little, if any, of this wonderful artistic portrayal in any of my personal worship experiences. I haven't been there, done that, but sometimes I have been encouraged to buy a shirt.

Francis Schaffer, has pointed out after the Reformation, the vitality of the church, changed the way the rest of western culture functioned, establishing in society, freedoms, scientific, and artistic achievements that are the basis of our modern world.

If we were to see a true artistic portrayal of the Christian message, appropriate to today's society, but still encompassing the drama and beauty of the historic parts of that incredible history, perhaps we would again see the church as the leader of positive change in society.

All churches have some sort of liturgy. "We've always done things this way," reduces everything to the liturgical common denominator. Some are better than others, but our standards are almost exclusively, "How does the worship make me feel?" That selfish question shows just how far our religion has ventured into the morass of contemporary, post modern, amoralism.

The important question should be, "*How does our worship make God feel (glorify Him)!*"

I grew up in the Lutheran church with a formal liturgy, reworked by Martin Luther from the Roman Catholic Mass and refined over the years. Every Sunday we would recite these lines with a sloppy boredom that gave meaning to the term "dead liturgy." It should be noted however, that the liturgy really wasn't dead. It was just presented that way. That is because the liturgy contained all the

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elements of the gospel message. That gospel message embedded in the words, did its saving work in many a life, and still does. This in spite of the fact that many of the pastors do not seem to believe this gospel themselves.

Much of the liturgy was set to music, in that Gregorian sort of way, but this was seldom used. When the words were sung, not only did the beauty of the service improve dramatically, so did the interest of those in the pews. I do not however, remember that happening over a handful of times, and only in churches we were visiting, or on very special occasions.

As I moved to churches with a more contemporary form of worship, I found it truly amazing that these worship services were a more structured liturgy, than the formal presentation I grew up with. When talking about this structure, I was always told that this was in some way controlled by the spirit to exacting standards.

Not being one to mess with this established order, I sang in the choir next to Dave, who began the worship service by leading the choruses. Since I knew that Dave was under strict orders from the pastor to not allow these choruses to exceed the allotted fifteen minutes, I felt led by the spirit to time this event, and upon his return to his place in the choir to report to Dave, the time actually spent in this form of worship. I think Dave knew I was just joking, but the pastor wasn't, and after some months, Dave found a new church in which to worship.

*So what should our Sunday worship liturgy include, and what should be its goal?*

I think that while Horton's focus on the role of our formal worship services is to point to God's actions in time and history as being necessary, I think there also needs to be a deeper understanding of this plan, in the lives that take place in the celebrants the rest of the week. Not just the hour and a half on Sunday morning. This adds another dimension that makes, the difficult much more demanding. In Sunday worship we need to experience the miraculous, brought into the common everyday terms of church and daily life.

If you look at the contemporary move of God in this generation, you have to be aware of the role of Calvary Chapel, and some of its unknown off shoots, has had on contemporary worship, and also this transference to daily service.

However, if you look at Calvary Chapel in the context of God's historical plan for His people, in both the Old and New Testaments, Calvary Chapel becomes a pimple someplace on a giant behemoth.

I have heard there are three rules that govern the liturgy of Calvary Chapel, 1. The music. 2. The presentation of God's Word. 3. There are no other rules. Let's look at these three highly regarded rules, to see if we might make some minor changes, as Emeril says on the Food Network, "to kick it up a notch."

**Music:** When God created man, He gave him a unique gift in music. While I have a difficult time remembering a single Bible verse with its location, I can remember the tune and the words to a song that was popular when I was a kid. I made little attempt to memorize the lyrics, but when the words and the music come together today, it all just flows out. Music is wired into our minds with a different conduit than our more verbal abilities.

Many of the great enduring hymns of the church are based on the music of contemporary, popular, and bar songs of the time. So what sets the true worth of music is not the score as much as the lyrics. Combined with the proper tune, music is not neutral. It reflects in Divinely inspired ways, the message that was important in the mind of the composer.

Therefore, a song centered in the life of a specific individual might have merit, as it relates to the application of the daily pilgrimage. It does little to add to the merit of the God inspired worship drama, except perhaps to add contrast. It might fill the auditorium with music, but it does not rise above the earthly realm.

The age of a song does not point to its value in worship. There are some very popular hymns that have continued over the last couple of hundred years that reflect this individual passion, but may be presented in the wrong context and significantly degrade the drama of the worship experience.

However, songs either old or new, that represent the plan of God's redemption, seem to rise from the services, converting that same room into a sanctuary. A place of safety, a place that is sacred. As

we said a couple of weeks ago, the theology of the cross, covers, or washes away a multitude of sins. This is true in music as well as proclamation. The psalms speaks of God inhabiting the praises of His people. Praise is a term that must reflect on what God has done in history and over history, including the present. Godly praise is not bless me Lord, for whatever particular reasons. The grace of the cross may cover these selfish requests, but music used to promote our desire to remain sinful, must be carefully watched and eliminated where possible.

**The Word:** Calvary Chapel teaches the Word of God, precept upon precept, line upon line. This is probably the major reason for the rise of Calvary Chapel. Pretty much anyone who is called to be a pastor can do it. It doesn't take a seminary education. The Word itself, supplemented with limited helps and the desire to use the Word to say, what God wants to say to His people is the major passion. The Word of God changes people's lives, not the eloquence, training, or gifts of the pastor.

Teaching is not preaching however, at least at times. Teaching involves the presentation of the Bible in context. Preaching however, should add to the drama of worship. The presentation of the requirements of the law of God, contrasted to the grace offered in Jesus Christ, miraculously leads God to provide the gift of faith to all who believe. Believers need to hear this at every opportunity, and this is the mechanism by which many are brought into the family of God through saving faith. Many times the context of the Word of a particular segment of scripture is either law or grace and may not naturally promote a gospel presentation. Therefore, it is also important to keep the indicative and the imperative in proper perspective.

This points to a weakness throughout contemporary evangelicalism. People may carry their Bibles, but rare is the individual who truly reads his or her Bible. This too limits the discernment of the individual, who does not have the full council of God written upon their heart. This again is reinforced by the fact that many times it takes ten to twenty years for the pastor to teach through the entire Bible.

There remains then, in the worship service a need to teach the flock of sheep supplementary materials to help them grow. The Lutherans that I grew up with called this catechism, I might call it fertilizer. But really it is nothing but making and teaching the essential points of Christianity an important priority. This could be done by using some of the Reformation Creeds and Catechisms, which also add to the historic context of worship, or it could be developed afresh, emulating history. The discussion of how these truths were forged over time is critically important to add context to our present shallowness.

In the context of history, the Word of God, with rare exceptions, was written by Jews, for Jews. The epistles of Paul broaden this context to include gentiles. In Jesus Christ there are neither Jew nor Greek. The way the church has dealt with this historically is to eliminate the Jew. We make them a distinct class to be dealt with either in the future Great Tribulation, or a class forsaken by God essentially as the church age began. Without the understanding however, that except for the grace of God in Jesus Christ alone, we are no better than, present or historic Jews, then our worship service's concept of the drama of God's eternal plan suffers in depth and complexity. That is just an obtuse way to say we need some Jewish influence in our services, and this is required to understand both the past and the present.

**No other rules:** Just because something works, or worked at one time is no excuse to cast it in concrete or make an idol of that occurrence. Growth is something that should be present in the lives of all persons. To cast a liturgy, a created art, in such a process eventually seals its death and the freshness of the worship service. Pastor's often use the analogy that if you are not growing you are dying. That same idea needs to work with worship as well as in personal living, but even more so. Someone once said, "Blessed are the flexible, for they can be used by God." This truth needs to become the freshening agent not only in personal lives, but also our worship service.

This does not mean that we must follow the trend of more hype, more media, more drama. It means that the job of the worship service is to bring those in attendance into a fuller role of their understanding of who God is, what He requires, and how those requirements were met in grace in Jesus Christ. That is the greatest story ever told. It is not found in seeker seeking sleaze. On the contrary, it requires our best efforts to portray the theology of the cross with unambiguous truth. It is centered in sound doctrine and the word of God, more precious than gold in this age. This is what the

world really needs to hear, and it needs to be preached, proclaimed, taught, and sung about from the moment the clock passes the advertised starting time, until the congregation is blessed and sent out into the world to live another week, among those who live lives under the sun, in quiet desperation and without the hope of an eternal future filled with love.

As you can tell I have some definite ideas about how this new worship might take place, but it is not something I could do on my own, because I think that possibly new and varied music needs to be composed for certain parts of a dead liturgy. That might be contemporary worship, or traditional. If you would like to become involved in such an adventure, I would like to hear from you.

## **Seeds for Prayer**

Limits. I never have had to deal much with personal limits before. To achieve rapid and lasting recovery from my surgery, I need regular exercise, building on the day before. For the first time I just should not, or can not just gut it out. This and other things take time, and I am more aware than ever that this is a slow recovery process. It is a very valuable lesson that I need to learn, but at the same time there are days when the progress seems to be at least frustrating, if not non-existent. Please continue to intercede for continued physical healing and development, as well as the development for planting new ministry seeds.

The announcements on the media is that the war in Iraq is nearly over. What I find amazing is the lack of combat casualties. If you subtract the equipment accidents, and the friendly fire deaths, it becomes actually miraculous. Please continue to pray for God's will, for the troops and the families, as well as building a new government in that Islamic area.