

THE PHILOSOPHY OF WORSHIP

A Paper

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Dr. Tim Ralston

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by

Genesis G. Tinshu

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Definition.

Congregational worship is the public celebration of being in covenant fellowship with the sovereign and holy triune God, through the adoration and praise of God's nature and works, the commitment of trust and obedience to the covenant responsibilities, and a memorial (remembrance) reenactment of entering into covenant through ritual acts with the expectation of the fulfilment of the covenant promises in glory.¹

Parameters of Corporate worship

The Worshipped/Triune God

At the center of worship is the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God in three persons with unity that reflects the Trinity itself (Eph. 2:18; 6:18, Jude 20; John 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23, 26-26). God the Father is worshiped with the authority of God the Son, vindicated by God the Holy Spirit. As Gaddy has put it, “Worship that does not contribute to unity is not the worship embraced by Christianity.”²

The Worshipper

There can be no worship if there is no worshiper. God created humans (the worshipers) solely for the purpose of worship – that they would worship him forever (Rev. 22:9;

¹ Allen P. Ross, “Recalling the Hope of Glory: *Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation*”, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 2006), 67.

² G. Welton Gaddy, *The Gift of Worship*, (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 220.

Ecc. 12:13). Creation reveals the glory of God (Rom. 1:19-20; Psa. 8:3-4; Psa. 19:1-6) and humanity's chief aim is to worship him.

The Word of God

The reading, study, and preaching of God's Word must be at the center of worship because it is through the Word that God speaks to His church. When the word is neglected in worship, worship can very easily become human fabrication or invention done for the satisfaction of human being. When the Word is read, studied, or preached, it provides guidance for worship and builds boundaries so that the worship glorifies God and not any human being in the end (Joh 1; Psa. 119:105; Eph. 5:26).

Prayer

Prayer is never to be neglected in worship. Whenever and wherever the church gathers, it must gather in prayer. Prayer can be written, extemporaneous, or spontaneous as long as they are done in an orderly manner, following a clear liturgy (Eph. 6:18; Matt. 6:9-13).³ How we pray reveals and re-enforces our appreciation of God and his supremacy, the Trinity, his priorities and our dependency, relationship to each other, and response in every situation. It is a good thing to include litanies and collects in our public prayers.

The Eucharist

The bread and the wine have been at the center of public worship since the beginning of the church. The Eucharist is one of only two ordinances instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. They are to serve as a memorial of his death until he comes (1 Cor. 11:23-26; Matt.

³ Josef Jungmann said that a well-done liturgy is its own catechesis. Frank C. Senn, "*Christian Worship and its Cultural Setting*", (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), 69.

26:26; Luk. 24:30-49; Joh. 21). The bread symbolizes his body broken for the world while the cup symbolizes his blood shed for the forgiveness of sins. It is to be taken by baptized believers in good standing with the community of faith. In this 'memorial', Christ is present in the community, not in the elements. Individual distribution is preferred but 'intinction' and 'spooned' distribution is not objected. I believe that an open-table participation portrays a better picture of the body of Christ spread across varied denominations and expressions of faith.

Singing/Music

From the Old Testament through to the New Testament, music and singing have always been an integral part of the expression of worship to God (1 Cor. 14:26). Those who have the gift and training in music have the responsibility to lead the congregation by leading in singing during the public worship experience. The goal of music must not be sensuality or emotional arousal leading to an emotional response in worship but music should help the worshiper focus on the Triune God and contemplate his greatness and majesty. It is the responsibility of the worship and the lead pastor leader to ensure the theological soundness of the songs sung.

Dealing with tension over worship in the local church

An area of potential conflict in worship in the local church is that of biblical philosophy of worship. It is a failure to understand and design corporate worship along biblical principles and with biblical priorities in mind. This tension can be resolved through biblical teaching on worship in the local church with grace, love, and patience, understanding that any change with a local church needs time.