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## CHAPTER 14

### The Worship Service and Liturgy

Assorted models facilitate the body of Christ as she gathers to connect with God and with one another. Liturgical and most non-liturgical traditions offer a predictable format that provides familiar repetition with anticipated options. Some religious models offer less structure to accommodate spontaneous, creative, and spirit led expressions. In a secure atmosphere that draws attention to God’s presence, each model serves those in attendance by stating and reinforcing the truth about God and the truth about us. Within parameters prescribed by each tradition, participants respond by confessing sin, affirming faith, and offering prayers, praise, gratitude, worship, and financial gifts. They also strengthen, encourage, and comfort one another.

In “Putting an End to Worship Wars”, Elmer Towns describes six distinct paradigms of worship. He readily admits, “Some might argue that none of the six types of worship (see chapters 5 through 10) are in fact worship”.<sup>1</sup> He provides the following clarification.

- The Evangelistic model is not worship; it’s evangelism
- The Bible Expositional model is not worship; it’s teaching
- The Renewal model is not worship; it’s revival
- The Body Life model is not worship; it’s fellowship
- The Liturgical model is not worship, for worship is internal
- The Congregational model is not worship; it’s an assembly of the church<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Elmer Towns, *Putting an End to Worship Wars*, Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN, 1997, p.60.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.60.

Expressions of “worship” vary depending on prescribed protocol, personal preference, and corporate dynamics. Demonstrative gestures depend on one’s scope of understanding and depth of experience. They reflect how well we know God and how authentically we encounter His presence. Though most biblical narratives emphasize expressions of facedown worship both in heaven and on earth, Jesus’ closest disciples worshiped Him in a boat saying, “*You are certainly God’s Son!*”<sup>3</sup> They may or may not have bowed; the Bible does not specify a clarifying gesture to *proskuneo*, the Greek word for worship.

### **Attending to God’s Presence**

In “Leap Over a Wall”, Eugene Peterson defines worship as, “the strategy by which we interrupt our preoccupation with ourselves and attend to the presence of God.”<sup>4</sup> He adds, “Worship is the time and place that we assign for deliberate attentiveness to God—not because he’s confined to time and place but because our self-importance is so insidiously relentless that if we don’t deliberately interrupt ourselves regularly, we have no chance of attending to him.”<sup>5</sup> After establishing an appropriate time and place to attend to the presence of God, Peterson cautions that we not presume control over that time and place or confine God to any particular time and place.

Christ-centered gatherings offer practical guidance and spiritual direction for those wanting to connect with God. They provide an atmosphere for both God’s word and Spirit to build up His church through impartations of strength, courage, and comfort.

Attending to God’s presence offers indispensable benefits—for us. Gathering for prayer, praise, and confession heightens spiritual awareness. By rehearsing doctrinal imperatives, we restrain heresy, deter apostasy, and promote unity in the faith. Familiar liturgies reaffirm our beliefs, spark and sustain hope, and rekindle devotion. Singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs inspires peace, joy, love, reverence, and intimacy. Preaching, teaching, admonitions, and exhortations reinforce sound doctrine with an inspirational and educational bonus—they escort us toward spiritual maturity. When guided and administered by sensitive leadership, holy sacraments and symbolic rituals convey the truth about God and address the

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 14:33 NAS

<sup>4</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Leap Over a Wall: Earthly Spirituality for Everyday Christians*, Harper San Francisco, 1997, p. 152.

<sup>5</sup> Peterson, *Leap Over a Wall*, 1997, p. 153.

truth about us. Corporate gatherings prime worshipers to notice God’s awesome eminence and realize His glorious distinction.

While God may find immense pleasure in our gatherings, He does not participate to meet His own needs—God doesn’t have needs. He exists in a state of self-sufficient perfection, transcendent and complete. Nothing we think, say, or do will ever improve His character or enhance His welfare. Participating in a sacred ceremony or celebration blesses God in His desire for communion. He does not need our money, ministry, or music, but He enjoys interacting with us as we share volleys of mutual interest, love, and affection. True love transcends feelings; it evokes expressive affection from us to God and from God to us.

### **Public Service**

The word *liturgy* comes from the Greek word *leitourgia*, which means public service. It is derived from two words: *laos*, which means people and *ergon*, which means work.<sup>6</sup> A liturgy therefore denotes the “work of the people”. City-States in ancient Greece established a “public service liturgy” where citizens and foreign residents financed the State from their personal wealth.<sup>7</sup>

Semantic shift changed this ancient Greek concept of liturgy. According to Merriam-Webster, *liturgy* now involves, “A rite or body of rites prescribed for public worship.”<sup>8</sup> A *rite* is “a prescribed form or manner governing the words or... ceremonial practices of a church or group of churches”.<sup>9</sup> The Roman Catholic tradition has adopted the term *Mass*, which refers to a celebration of the Eucharist or Holy Communion. Mass is derived from the Latin word *messa*, which literally means dismissal at the end of a religious service.<sup>10</sup> Eucharist comes from the Greek *eukharistia* or *eukharistos*, which means thanksgiving or grateful (*eu* means well and *kharizesthai* means to offer graciously).

Carefully designed liturgies and spirit-led celebrations promote gestures of worship, whether bowing the head, bowing the knee, bowing at the waist, or bowing facedown. Both religious formats focus attention on God while promoting a relational bond with Him. Whether standardized or spontaneous, each model enriches our understanding with knowledge of the truth. They provide opportuni-

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<sup>6</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liturgy\\_%28ancient\\_Greece%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liturgy_%28ancient_Greece%29) (accessed 9-13-12)

<sup>7</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liturgy\\_%28ancient\\_Greece%29#cite\\_note-1](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liturgy_%28ancient_Greece%29#cite_note-1) (accessed 9-13-12)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary> (accessed 12-11-11)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary> (accessed 9-11-12)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary> (accessed 9-11-12)

ties to consider and respond to the infinite value of God's worth. Using sights, sounds, and sometimes smells (incense), church gatherings emphasize spiritual priorities and experiences.

### **Worship—Not a Means to an End**

Properly understood, worshipers venerate God for who He is. Expressions of worship are not tools crafted to sustain systems of religion for generations to come. As important as faith may be, worship is not about enhancing anyone's faith. It is not about evangelism, satisfying legitimate needs, raising money, or generating feelings of well-being. To be sure, God has arranged effective ways to satisfy these crucial objectives both individually and when the church gathers.

Some choose to believe that worship makes a difference, and it may, but the Bible does not emphasize any such cause-and-effect relationship. Acts of worship may or may not change the spiritual climate. They may or may not affect spiritual strongholds or activate healings and deliverance. Venerating God may or may not enhance the quality of a worshiper's life or influence curious onlookers wanting to connect with Jesus. God operates with sovereign authority. He performs His will whenever, wherever, and however He chooses—with or without our worship.

Simply put, worshipers respond to God with reverence; they venerate Him for who He is, what He's done, and what He's promised—expecting nothing in return. Worship is not a *quid pro quo*—this for that arrangement. Whether informed by biblical revelation or enlightened by a spiritual encounter, worshipers assure their Heavenly Father that they esteem everything about Him. They initiate a posture of maximum deference because the truth about God literally sweeps them off their feet. No other expression conveys such extreme honor. No other person merits such radical distinction. Asking nothing in return, worshipers extend themselves with total abandonment. Based on an accurate estimate of God's worth, they bow before Him in spirit and truth. Each response conveys exclusive honor, respect, and deference, which perhaps nothing else can express.

### **Stronger than Words**

“Worship is not an optional extra for the Christian,  
a self-indulgent religious activity.  
It is the basic Christian stance...”<sup>11</sup>

N. T. Wright

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<sup>11</sup> N. T. Wright, *For All God's Worth*, Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K., 1997, p. 1.

The posture of a worshiper goes beyond performing religious rites in a choreographed ceremony. Jesus did not choose a service-oriented word like *latreia* or a devotion-oriented word like *sebomai* to describe the kind of worshipers that our Heavenly Father seeks. He used *proskunetes* (pros-koo-nay-tace'), which appears only one time in the New Testament. In John 4:23, this Greek noun denotes “*true worshipers*”. Its associated verb form, *proskuneo*, means to do homage or make obeisance by kneeling or prostration.<sup>12</sup>

True worshipers deploy extreme body language to say what human words cannot express. From the earliest biblical narrative to the last reference in the Bible, worship remains essentially the same. From angels and demons to saints and sinners, individuals and groups alike extended similar kinesthetic gestures. From first-time encounters to seasoned patriarchs, from spontaneous expressions to organized events, worshipers responded with facedown reverence.

Transfixed by the glory of God, worshipers abandon religion as usual. They extend themselves beyond status quo liturgy, church service, and prayer meeting. Discerning the spiritual climate, worshipers stop functioning in their own strength and lunge headlong toward “*the substance of things hoped for*”.<sup>13</sup> They lay down their faith at Christ’s feet based on “*the evidence of things not seen*”.<sup>14</sup> This is not as good as it gets. The best is yet to come!

### **Beneath the Bow**

Worship is a big word—big enough to influence everything we think, say, and do, wherever we may be or go. Before, during, and after gestures of profound reverence, worshipers interact with Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and others. They integrate everything about themselves with God on a foundation of awesome respect. Worshipers may descend facedown but then they arise with a standing commission go and do. They think, say, and sing expressive words and plan, prepare, and perform service-oriented deeds. Besides bowing, worshipers also exhibit sentiments of love, joy, peace, hope, courage, and gratitude with an assortment of longings, feelings, needs, and questions.

As worshipers congregate under both liturgical and non-liturgical formats, they proclaim biblical truth, confess sins, celebrate sacraments, offer petitions, solicit comfort, profess creeds, and make intercession. While striving to live a devout

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<sup>12</sup> <http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/> (9-15-12)

<sup>13</sup> Hebrews 11:1 NKJ

<sup>14</sup> Hebrews 11:1 NKJ

and holy life, they attend to widows and orphans, visit prisoners, feed the poor, and serve the sick and homeless. Worship complements a variety of attitudes and activities; some are spontaneous while others are scheduled. With undertones of humility and overtones of reverence, worshipers offer so much more than exceptional bows. They convey intimate affection and effusive praise. Gratitude undergirds assorted offerings and devotion highlights sacrificial service.

Because worshipers know who they are, they serve their Heavenly Father with deep conviction. They go and do His will in every facet of society. Ordained as servant leaders, they grasp the urgency behind His eternal purpose. As co-laborers and fellow workers with Christ, worshipers recognize the passion behind His priorities. They serve His vision with dauntless courage and perseverance.

### **Knowing before Going**

Our Heavenly Father provides the Spirit of wisdom and revelation specifically that we “*may know him better*”.<sup>15</sup> If we are to live-out priorities based on what is truly important, knowing the truth about God is indispensable. Paul understood the vital importance of sacred knowledge derived from the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. With repetitive urgency He prayed:

*I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so **that you may know him better.*** (Ephesians 1:17 NIV)

Hearing what the Holy Spirit has to say goes beyond guidance, direction, information, and conviction. God wants us to *know and be* before we *go and do*. Worshipers that know the truth about God act accordingly. They respond instinctively to God’s eternal power and divine nature with all that they are—completely redeemed, forgiven, transformed, and filled with the Holy Spirit.

Psalm 46:10 emphasize *being* and *knowing* before *going* and *doing*.

“**Be still, and know that I am God.** ...” (Psalm 46:10 ESV)

NAS translators put it this way:

“*Cease striving and **know that I am God;** ...*” (Psalm 46:10 NAS)

Exclusive moments of veneration quiet the soul to revere God’s heart. As we devote protected time to consider and process reality, the truth about God emerges. Waiting on the Lord before doing with the Lord, marks a sacred rhythm.

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<sup>15</sup> Ephesians 1:17 NIV

It conditions the mind with volleys of hope and tunes the heart with the cadence of courage.

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