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CHAPTER 11

Worship and Praise

Merged in the Marketplace

When God’s people gather, the performing arts help us connect with the truth about God, the truth about ourselves, and the truth about this world. With audio and visual enhancements, expressions of praise inspire gestures of worship. Astute praise leaders illuminate God’s presence by extending reverence in their stage presence. They magnify God’s performance by venerating His achievements through their own performance. Bowing below popularity ratings and bending beneath reputation indicators, artists shine like stars as they radiate a far reaching and unquenchable influence.

Commercial Manipulation and Exploitation

“Gospel Music”, “Praise and Worship Music”, and now “Worship Music” have become the marketing label for an affluent industry that targets a discerning and sometimes impulsive audience. The economics associated with Christian music and its musicians depend in part on chart rank and approval ratings.

In 2004, singer, songwriter, and record producer Charlie Peacock observed that commercial entertainment corporations owned “all the major Christian record companies”.¹ With the sale price of worship music tied to corporate stocks, the business model had shifted, “from long-term potential to short-term profit.”² Peacock lamented, “It’s all about meeting or exceeding corporate projections.”³

¹ Charlie Peacock, *At the Crossroads, Inside the Past, Present, and Future of Contemporary Christian Music*, WaterBrook Press a division of Random House, Inc., Colorado Springs, 2004, p. 188.

² *At the Crossroads*, p. 188.

³ *At the Crossroads*, p. 189.

Capturing thirty percent of a multimillion-dollar U.S. market, Peacock notes that the quarterly earnings report had domesticated worship music.⁴

Commercial music producers once influenced a diverse and finicky audience. They elevated public interest in Christian music, but they also controlled the lyrical message and musical score. Peacock sounded a note of prophetic optimism:

Anyone who has studied world history, or church history, knows that thirty-five years of misdirected musical stewardship is but a blip on the screen of the history of human failure. We will recover from this as better and more faithful people, eager to make great music as caretakers of God's creativity.⁵

Alas, affordable digital technology has transformed the music industry, along with internet access and mobile apps. Recording, marketing, and distribution no longer depend on elite music producers. Nonetheless, consumer consumption at the checkout counter/cloud remains a bias driven business. Fiscally accountable outlets favor and filter choice talents and select songs.

Religious Accommodation

In the church, "*worship leaders*" perform "*worship music*" in "*houses of worship*" during "*worship services*" for a discriminating congregation of "*worshippers*". In this diversified religious environment, stage-presence affects attendance, which influences offerings, which pays the bills and supports salaries. Tithes, offerings, fund raising, and compensation hinge on satisfaction quotients. Consequently, the urge to accommodate popularity ratings escalates proportionally. Of course, music ministry shouldn't affect giving to the Lord and vice versa, but reality dictates otherwise. As elders, deacons, pastors, board members, and investors monitor outcome performance, job security presents a potential conflict of interest.

Local church and parachurch ministries design buildings, programs, and "*worship teams*" to attract visitors and retain ongoing participation. They compete, some more subtly than others, with each another and more importantly, with other religions. While attempting to please the Lord, they labor to save the lost and minister to His people both in their local niche and their extended virtual community. Successfully operating in a healthy and sometimes not so healthy competitive environment requires God's influential presence. Jesus is building His Church, as promised, with spiritual distinction and prominent relevance.

⁴ At the Crossroads, p. 153.

⁵ At the Crossroads, p. 204.

Career praise artists endeavor to honor the Lord by ministering with professional excellence. They develop vocational talents with refined performance skills, they acquire sensitivity and cultivate discernment, they pursue accurate revelation with progressive vision, and they become effective communicators with God and His people. Nonetheless, when their ministry caters to market-driven forces, they fall short as worship leaders. Entertainment trends and stylish techniques are often tainted with competing interests. They may attract crowds, but they are not the gold standard for leading others in praise that inspires worship. Posing under the spotlight contradicts the unassuming deportment of facedown reverence.

During His Sermon on the Mount Jesus addressed public service, which also applies to staged praise leaders. He said,

“Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don't make a performance out of it. It might be good theater, but the God who made you won't be applauding. “When you do something for someone else [e.g., leading them to praise and worship God], don't call attention to yourself. You've seen them in action, I'm sure—‘playactors’ I call them—treating prayer meeting and street corner alike as a stage, acting compassionate as long as someone is watching, playing to the crowds. They get applause, true, but that's all they get. (Matthew 6:1-2 MSG)

Jesus continued teaching with reliable insight based on the behind-the-scenes example of our Heavenly Father.

When you help someone out, don't think about how it looks. Just do it—quietly and unobtrusively. That is the way your God, who conceived you in love, working behind the scenes, helps you out. (Matthew 6:3-4 MSG)

Unlike our Heavenly Father, praise leaders are visible and audible. Therefore, the advice Jesus offers applies predominately to their heart attitude—so they avoid making a scene out of themselves. Paul put it this way:

For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake (2 Corinthians 4:5 NAS)

True worshipers ensure that God dominates the stage and that He remains the clear focal point.

Jesus also warned His followers not to put on an ostentatious show for God to watch. He said:

“And when you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat? (Matthew 6:5 MSG)

Worshippers utilize the performing arts for a variety of reasons aimed at various outcomes. They sing, play, perform, and create with both provocative and evocative intentions. Sometimes they convey appreciation, acclamation, and affectionate gratitude directly to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. With evangelistic designs, they may target a seeker sensitive audience by enunciating the truth about God’s steadfast love, amazing grace, and reliable mercy. With pastoral designs, their message may nurture, guide, enrich, inform, and heal. With prophetic designs, they may extend an inspired message with uncanny timing—one that imparts specific strength, courage, and comfort along with church-wide edification.⁶ With a deliberate notion to inspire worship, they extol and magnify God’s incomparable attributes, achievements, and promises.

The Big Picture

God seeks and He intends to find multitudes of worshippers on earth converging with worshippers in heaven.⁷ They will gather on this world’s stage to convey unanimous veneration. From a platform of highest praise, they will bow with reverent humility before His glorious majesty.

All the earth will worship You and will sing praises to You; They will sing praises to Your name. Selah. (Psalm 66:4 NAS)

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⁶ I Corinthians 14:1,3,4

⁷ John 4:23 and Matthew 6:10