

CHURCH GROWTH THROUGH EFFECTIVE AND QUALITATIVE CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

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Abstract

Church growth through effective and quality Christian worship analyses and describes effective and qualitative worship as an art which is revealed in dynamic, dramatic and dialogical encounter between the triune God and man. It goes further to discuss the fruits that metamorphosed from an effective worship.

According to the seasoned worship leader, Franklin M. Segler,ⁱ “without worship, the church will die”. This is axiom because worship is like the propeller which drives the engine of an automobile to accelerate. If the propeller is out of the place, the engine is redundant. Every other aspects of the engine are dormant and inactive. That is why the great theologian and worship leader E.C. Dorganⁱⁱ said that the “study of worship has no substitute if there is going to be a good understanding of the church ministry. The most crucial duty in the hand of any church leader is to lead, promote, and encourage worship. He himself must position himself in a way that is conducive to learn from the Holy Spirit the one who is able to animate worship. Everything done in the church can be made effective through worship. Worship is the power-house, where believers are strengthened for the ministry.

This truth has been living with the church and the church has survived by it, hence since the first century Christianity till date, the church has moved considerably from one type of tradition of worship to another form of tradition through the ages of several creed, beliefs and ecclesiastical orientation. Against this background probably, the worship expert, R.T. Kendal asserted, “nothing can help worship as much as tradition, and equally, nothing can hurt worship as much as tradition.”ⁱⁱⁱ That is to underscore that a man-made tradition would destroy the tradition of the Holy Spirit who alone is qualified to animate worship. Segler^{iv} quoting Karl Barth says that the worship of a church is the work of God, carried out primarily for His own purpose. Whenever worship deviates from this, then it is no longer worship but

something else. Against this background this work sees effective and quality Christian worship as an essential tool for church growth.

DESCRIBING AN EFFECTIVE AND QUALITATIVE WORSHIP

From its Anglo-Saxon root, the word worship is a combination of two words “worth” and “ship” meaning worthy to be honoured or revered. In worship, we are declaring the worthiness of God. When the angels sang, that was their song. “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain” and the chorus answer says: “To him who sits upon the throne and to the lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!” Then the four living creatures responded: “Amen!” and elders fell down and worshiped (Rev. 5:12; 13-14).^v

Blackwood has described it as “sacred drama, and man’s response to God’s revelation of Himself,”^{vi} but it should be noted that both the drama and the response cannot be meaningful in a vacuum. It must be within a context before it will be considered relevant. G. Dobbins asserted that worship is an art of “experiencing the divine presence in the company of fellow-seekers after God; and a means by which God provides His power to His people for the carrying out of His purposes.”^{vii} In his own submission, E. Underhill^{viii} argued that “worship is the total adoring response of man to the one Eternal God, self-revealed in time”, W.E. Hocking equated it with a renewal of our hope. For E.S. Brightman, it is “an inner posture of the individual, his attitude toward God” W.L Sperry equated it with the adoration of God, the ascription of supreme worth to God, the manifestation of reverence in his presence.” William Temple^{ix} idea is the submission of all our nature to God... the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose – and all of this gathered up in adoration...” Warren W. Wiershe^x qualifies it as “believer’s response of all that he is: mind, emotions, will, and body, to all that

God is and says and does”. According to A. W. Tozer,^{xi} when we worship, we are to feel something in our heart that we didn’t have before we were converted; that we’re going to express it in some way and its going to be a humbling but a most enjoyable sense of admiring awe, and astonished wonder, and overpowering love in the presence of that most ancient mystery” G. Kendrick,^{xii} summed up worship to be God’s enjoyment of us and our enjoyment of him. J. MacArthur, Jr., submitted that it is the “honour and adoration directed to God... ascribing to God His worth, or stating and affirming His supreme value” F. Beiser admitted worship to be “man’s response to God’s greatness, and love” while M. Luther asserted worship to be “that our Lord Himself may speak to us through His holy word and that we in turn may speak to Him through our prayers and hymns of praise” Donald P. Hustard defined worship as the “affirmative, transforming response of human beings to God’s self-revealing” R. Martin said it is the “dramatic celebration of God in his supreme worth in such a manner that his worthiness’ becomes the norm and inspiration of human living.”^{xiii} Martin’s definition is a reminder of the English word “worship” meaning “worth-ship,”. That is to say, we worship God because He is worthy to be worshipped. It is like saying: “God, you are worthy to receive glory and honour and power” like it is said in Revelation 4:11, and Revelation 5:12 where is exclaimed: “worthy is the lamb who was slain.” In other word, nothing, not man, idol, or angel is worthy of our worship. Only God does. So whatever a man worships is an indication of that which is valuable to them.^{xiv} C. Weaton Gaddy described it as a “gift between lovers who keep on giving to each other, and a conversation between the God of revelation and people in need of redemption, each of whom has been, and is, seeking the other” It should be noted that experience can be subjective; neither can worship be subjected to abstractness, but rather a concrete experience. Hence the entire wonderful definitions considered above have some loopholes, in that none of them has described worship in a concrete term.

Furthermore, the Greek word *leitourgia* translated liturgy is a combination of two words meaning work and people. When the two words are put together, it denotes the work of the people. It is also translated “ministry” or “service”. It is a picture of priestly office in the Old Testament (Lk 1:23; Heb. 9:21) but also the ministry of Jesus Christ (Heb. 8:6), and also the worship of the church (Acts 13:2). It follows then that the word liturgy is the “action of the people” especially services rendered by Christians to God through faith and obedience^{xv}.

In Paul the genuine work of the people to God is “a life of faith” that bears the fruits of the spirit (Gal. 5:22). Hence Segler has interpreted *leitourgia* in Paul to be his appeal in Romans 12:1 “I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living, sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual...” *leitourgia*. Much later liturgy has been equated with the order of worship in the church.

For Terry Wardle, “Worship is the submission of all our nature to God, the quickening of conscience by his holiness; the nourishment of mind with his truth; the purifying of imagination by his beauty; the opening of the will to his purpose, gathered in adoration, in the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable.”^{xvi} James D. Berkley posits worship as “the dramatic celebration of God in his supreme worth in such a manner that his worthiness becomes the norm and inspiration of human living.”^{xvii} Bob Sorge says: Worship is conversation between God and man, the outcome of the fellowship of love between the creator and man, in response to the love of God, as a dialogue that should go on constantly in the life of a Christian, and the first but the principal purpose of man’s eternal calling.^{xviii} Yet, these cannot be taken to be comprehensive.

Against this background we shall consider a summary of an effective and qualitative worship in the word by the indefatigable worship leader, Paul Davidson, “Worship is a dynamic, dramatic and dialogical encounter with the triune God, in which God speaks, and

man is responding positively to the effect that transformation is taking place gradually in the man. A close examination of this definition reveals three “Ds” namely Dynamic, Dramatic and Dialogical. The word dynamic means “fluidy”, “not static”, not stereotyped. It is moving. It follows then that when worship is dynamic, the worship is fluidy, it is not static, nor stereotyped. A drama is a combination of Acts, scenes and off the stage etc. in a drama; you see actors and actresses who are ‘engage in the performance. Their aim is to hold the spectator spell-bound. In that wise, hardly do you see a spectator sleeping off in a well-prepared drama show. The same way when the actor of worship positions himself well in the hand of the Lord of the worship, the Holy Spirit creates drama in worship for people to see.

The word “Dialogue” is a communication between two or more people. A dialogue will never be a monologue. That presupposes that when we worship, we engage in business that is far above the human instrumentality.

The above description is very useful for our consideration, yet it should be noted that something is also missing. When worship is dynamic, dramatic, and dialogical, it presupposes that the worship is not monolithic nor is it parrot-like, or stereotyped. That will suggest that worship is like a coin with many sides in which each sides has dynamic activities, which must be coordinated together to form a whole, just like the work of an art. When you see the work of an art, you are fascinated. Somebody, an artist has put-in several things to make a whole that can be admired by all. Hence we can add something to the above definition for our working definition to say that: worship is an art, a dynamic, dramatic and dialogical encounter with the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, in which God speaks, and man is responding positively to the effect that transformation is taking place gradually in the man.

FRUITS OF EFFECTIVE AND QUALITY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

When worship is animated by the Spirit of God, and it is dynamic, dramatic, and dialogical, few things will begin to happen according to the submission of William Temple.^{xix} They are briefly enumerated.

(1) Effective and quality Christian worship quickens the conscience by the holiness of God.

The scripture says: “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” I the Lord search the heart; I test the mind to give every man according to the fruit of his doings (Jer. 17:9-10). The heart is full of rottenness it is only a God-centered worship that can purge it, by the power of His holiness.

(2) Effective and quality Christian worship feeds the mind with the truth of God. Only the truth is the gem that gratifies the soul of man, without which he is impoverish, despondent and unfulfilled. That is why Christ says you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. A man is in bondage if he does not have access to the truth. Worship provides the truth which the minds need very badly when it focuses on God.

(3) Effective and quality Christian worship purge the imagination by the beauty of God. In an anthropomorphic expression in Genesis chapter 6:5-6, “And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and he was grieved in His Heart”. Thus “regret” came on the ground that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. This will underscore the fact that the heart is deeply rooted with evil intentions, but in an encounter with the beauty of God, the heart is purged and the imagination is beautified. “For the word of God is quick, sharp and powerful than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb., 4:12).

(4) Effective and quality Christian worship opens the heart to the love of God. The heart of a man is like a closed door against every good purpose of God. It is the word of God proclaimed in an atmosphere of true worship that God calls the attention of the heart to listen to God by opening the door. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and dine with him, and he with me (Rev. 3:20). In another passage, Jesus woos the heart of a man saying: “if anyone loves me, he will keep my word; and my father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him (John 14:23). Even in the Old Testament, a unique request from God is “son gives me your heart” and the proverbial Solomonic injunction says: above all that you can keep, keep your heart because out of it flows issues of life”.

(5) Effective and quality Christian worship devotes the will to the purpose of God. The tendency to be wayward is serious with any man, but when the word of God encounters a man, he is given a sense of purpose with which to live and to survive the storms of life. Lack of purpose can ruin a man’s career. When the Bereans heard the word of God in Acts 17:11 they turned their will to search the scriptures to be sure those things they were thought were so. “Those were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so (Acts 17:11).

CHURCH GROWTH THROUGH EFFECTIVE AND QUALITY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

The story is told of a man who had a very busy week in his place of work. He decided to rest and forgoes worship the Sunday following the busy week. He stayed at home and did not go to the church with the thought that he would have some rest, but alas, he never experienced rest.

Then what happened? His conscience started beating very hard. Something was blaming his decision from the subconscious. He was hearing his conscience saying: “why should you absent yourself before God on Sunday morning? Think of how many people will ask of you, and that will lay bad precedent for some innocent ones, who you may mislead? What will you tell them when they ask you questions?” Being bombarded with those thoughts, he locked all doors and hid his cars, locked the garage.

After the Sunday school class, some people decided to visit his home to know what is wrong, since the church did not have information about the why of his absence. Sunday school class members came to his house. He peeped to see them, then he hid himself under the bed, away from the people, so the men went away wondering where he went? Meanwhile, his wife and children attend different churches. When the service was over, more men came to look for him, now he could no longer hide himself because other members of the family had arrived. These men simply came to ask of his welfare. He started confessing what happened, and demanded that the church will please intercede for him for the forgiveness of sin. He felt he had committed a sin by keeping himself absent from the church. That will lead us to some probing questions about worship.

From the above story, we can deduce what may have probably happened to the man. He may not have won his family to the Lord. There is spiritual pollution in that home. The family of six goes to about six different churches. It appears that the man rejected the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit prompting him to the church. He rejected the call of God to go to the church.

Now we talk about those who are already in the church as members of the body of Christ. What then become those who are outside the fold, who are still to be led to the Saviour? On Sunday morning, or during any worship service, you see brethren coming in to

the church for worship. Who ask them to come? Those believers who do not come, why do they stay at home? What is the punishment giving to those who are not regular in the church? Does the pastor beat-up anybody or tongue- lash them? Of-course no.

St. Augustine says: “Oh God you have made us for yourself and our restless soul will not find peace until they are completely reposed on you.” Just like that, people go to the church because worship initiative begins with God. He invites and calls people into worship. Those who come to the church come as an obedient response to the call of God upon them to go for worship! Those who do not go are simply rebellious to God. They choose to discard the urge impressed upon their heart.

When you discard the promptings given to you by the Holy Spirit, it results in regret. When God wants to make you a clean billionaire or trillionaire, it begins with an idea. If you miss it you may remain a pauper for life! You may not even be happy with yourself, because man is incurably religious, he cannot do without it. That is why some people ended up worshipping images, and man-made gods just to satisfy that urge to worship! But sorry, they miss the God of the universe. Worship is not a man’s invention it is a divine offering prescribed by God for man to offer unto His creator. When we worship God, it presupposes that God has already located us. Through His worship, we can realise our full potential, because we are made to be complete in Him.

When you miss or you discard the promptings given to you by the Holy Spirit it may end up in regret. You will not be happy with yourself. A man is incurably religious, he cannot do without it. That is why some people end up worshipping images, and man-made gods just to satisfy that urge! But alas they miss the worship of the God who calls them for worship. Worship is not a man’s invention; it is a divine offering of the very God of the universe in loving relationship that elicits our worshipping response. When we worship God,

it presupposes that God has already located us. Through his worship we can realize our full potential because we are made to be complete in Him.

We live in an age where pastoral leadership is hotly challenged both constructively and destructively, but hardly does anybody argue with the pastor on how he will go about the order of worship. The leader must see this as a unique opportunity to disseminate the good-news. Here lies the authority of the servant of the LORD. His authority is actually in “thus says the LORD”, and that, he can reflect in the Bulletin Sunday after Sunday. The people will follow naturally, because the church is always eagerly looking to its leaders for leadership in planning worship in all history of the church.^{xx} Therefore, quality time should be spent in this all important preparation.

Most people are depressed, as a result of one thing or the other especially on existential issues like matters on which the LORD of worship might have confronted them personally. The pastor is not aware of that, yet some will personally express the feeling that they have not done certain things well in the previous days or weeks, months or years. They may have disobeyed the inward still small voice giving them direction on which way to go about certain issues, which has now turned regret because of sluggishness in taking decision or an outright rebellion. This may constitute a pillar of regret and guilt.^{xxi} Such people are healed in worship, because the LORD of worship will always send his word to heal, save and rescue. This is natural especially when worship is effective. The LORD of the church would always meet the needs of his people.

CONCLUSION

This paper has identified worship as a dynamic, dramatic and dialogical art in which God is speaking, and man is responding positively to the effect that transformation is taking

place in the man. It analysed, and discussed the results of such dynamic encounter between God and man namely: it quickens the conscience by the holiness of God, it feeds the mind with the truth of God, it purges the imagination by the beauty of God, and it opens the heart to the love of God, and devotes the will to the purpose of God. The paper advocates that when the above dividends of worship are realized, the church will grow, and God of the church will be glorified.

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ENDNOTES

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- ^v Segler, 6.
- ^{vi} Blackwood, 13-14
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