

A worship leader's dilemma: Are consumers still able to worship?

Consumerism: the conviction that my conscious desires must be satisfied as quickly as possible. Ultimate result: *homo consumens*

Whom are we leading in worship?

"Our hearts are restless, Lord, until they find their rest in Thee." (Augustine) As worship planners/leaders we are pastors to a community that needs the Holy Spirit to help it repent of superficial, godless desires and wake up deeper, more true desires.

The Emmaus walk (Luke 24) - conscious desire: "We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel" (vs. 21). Deeper desire: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (vs. 32)

The woman at the well (John 4) -- conscious desire: "The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband." (vs. 18) Deeper desire: "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (vs. 29)

Conclusion: the worshipping community gathers with conflicted desires, conscious and unconscious. We are called to invite them into a 'worship space' where they are free to repent of ungodly desires and wake up longings for the Lord. "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5: 6).

How do I do this as a worship planner/leader?

Ordering three profound loves

If the songs I choose evoke the sounds of choirs of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I am able to incorporate the gifts of profoundly inspiring preaching and prayers that articulate the depths of human longing, but have not love, I am nothing. ³If I work tirelessly to prepare the most biblically grounded worship imagineable and all the worship furthers wonderful agendas of church renewal, and I work so hard that I even surrender my home-life to the flames,^[b] but have not love, I gain nothing.

The shape of love

Practical steps to implement this

- Remember the four layers: mechanics, style, flow/sequence, resting in the presence of God. The goal: excellent invisibility.
- Respect functions as the "demeanor-anchor" of all worship leaders.
- Godless desires can wake up godly desire
- Worship as learned discipline with many sub-disciplines
- Stretching the community's worship imagination
- Seeing the continuum vs. the "haves" and "have nots"

Syd Hielema,
Redeemer University
January, 2010

THE DISCIPLINES OF WORSHIP

NOTE: the activities on the right all take place “step by step,” that is, we don’t achieve excellence in them, but we grow into them gradually.

Characteristics of worship	Corresponding discipline
<i>Worship is inclusive but not consumerist</i>	I learn to give thanks when worship nourishes others, also when that nourishment may not specifically and immediately benefit me.
<i>Worship is blended in style but not unfocused or random; it is both contemporary and traditional</i>	I learn the skill of allowing many different voices (current and ancient) speak on behalf of my heart
<i>Worship is multisensory</i>	I learn the skills of worshipping with my ears, eyes, body.
<i>Worship invites us as we are and challenges us to ongoing transformation</i>	I prepare my heart to “come to worship to die with Jesus and rise with him.”
<i>Worship is time set apart but not dichotomized</i>	I learn the skill of bringing my entire life to worship and inviting worship to nourish me for the week ahead
<i>Worship builds up the community and reaches beyond the community</i>	I learn to balance seeking to be nourished and being part of a community that nourishes “the stranger”
<i>Worship is multigenerational but not “kid-cutesy”</i>	I learn to give thanks for the I Cor. 12 body that includes the gifts of every generation.
<i>Worship stretches comfort zones through playful trial and error</i>	I accept that living worship necessarily involves growing pains, and I encourage our leaders as they walk us through these “pains”
<i>Worship purposefully progresses through a carefully crafted liturgical rhythm</i>	I understand why the liturgy is shaped as it is, and I am able to place myself inside the liturgical rhythm

WORSHIPING IN OUR CULTURAL CONTEXT

Spirit of the age	Its most visible dark side – nourishing the old self	Potential opportunity for 'new self' growth
Consumerism	I search for worship that provides instant gratification because I like it; it makes me feel good.	Challenges the church to discern and address “deep needs,” to engage people in their deepest being.
Individualism	Focus on God and me, community primarily as a therapeutic place	Recognize worship needs a personal dimension
Visceral	Run on raw gut feelings, disparaging of the intellect and of spiritual disciplines	Deep passion that can be cultivated; growing sense of importance of disciplines
Generationalized	Each generation has its own needs and wants; most effective to keep them separate.	Challenged to re-learn how to be a multigenerational body; learn to “die to self” by making room for the “non-me” generations.
Fast paced, too busy	Worship must be short and less frequent and accommodate diminishing attention spans	Longing for Sabbath and spaciousness: “Be still and know that I am God.”
Ahistoricism	If it's contemporary, it's good. “History is bunk.”	Relevance matters, and the church is challenged to engage its best traditions in living ways (J.Pelikan: “Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.”)
Anti-commitment dynamics	LIAR (M. Dawn) syndrome, I am a passive receiver and worship is “done” to me. I decide if it suits my tastes or not. The LIAR paradox: I say, “wow, that was deeply challenging worship,” but I leave unchanged.	We rediscover the covenantal, commitment renewing character of worship, and intentionally connect focused worship to 24/7 all of life worship.