

Seminar C18: Worship and Mission after Christendom
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The issue: do we design services primarily to communicate with visitors and unbelievers? Or do we shape worship to glorify God and form the members and the church for the sake of mission? Is it possible that the experience of the pre-Christendom church (first three centuries), which didn't allow outsiders into worship services, is relevant to us today?

Pre-Christendom (non-baptized excluded): Worship and Mission integrated. Worship glorifies God and equips Christians for mission.

Christendom (everyone a Christian): Worship and mission divided. Worship as the church's central purpose; mission was unnecessary or peripheral.

Late Christendom (19th-20th centuries)(reclaiming the backslider): Worship as an instrument of evangelism. Worship becomes instrumental; minimizes God's larger mission.

After Christendom (21st century): Worship and Mission can be re-integrated.

Dynamic Cycle of Worship and Mission - handout.

Sources of this vision of integration

- 1. Church history: the Pre-Christendom Church integrated worship and mission.** Church closed doors to outsiders but grew rapidly despite persecution; worship formed Christians to be interesting people, attracting non-Christians.
- 2. Theology: the *missio Dei*.** Karl Barth begins "mission of God" thinking.
 - a. God is the actor** in mission – God's passion is to reconcile all things in Christ. God is constantly at work, inside and outside the church.
 - b. Christians are alert** to God's actions **and collaborate** with God.
 - c. Missional action is for all Christians**, not for specialists.
 - d. Glorification/edification:** Worship glorifies God for God's saving story and edifies Christians so they will participate in it.
- 3. Biblical studies: recovery of 1 Corinthians 11-14 as a description of worship in the Corinthian church. Two part Greco-Roman banquet: meal and symposium.** Chapter 11 – meal: Lord's Supper; chapter 12 – gifted body; chapter 13 – post-dinner oration on love; chapter 14 – symposium, with prophecy, testimony, and opportunity for "each one" (14.26). Paul's emphasis: edification of the body. Giving voice to the people empowers them fit in with the great story, the *missio Dei*.

Integrating worship and mission forms a missional people, edified to be hope-filled, attractive Christians doing “more interesting” things.

Examples of “more interesting” action: growing out of worship

1. Welcoming immigrants as neighbors
2. Living in the church’s neighborhood, seen walking or cycling
3. A radical donation: giving a kidney
4. Bringing and sharing food in local hospitality house
5. Marty’s Laundromat: free washing, listening, food

Outsiders are attracted to conversation and friendship, and eventually to the Christians’ homes and worship services. Outsiders will come to the services not because the services are attractive but because the Christians are attractive. Outsiders observe what Christians do when they worship God, and accept these because they respect the Christians who receive them with sensitive hospitality. They may sense that “God is truly among them” (1 Cor 14.24) and come to faith.

True worship glorifies God and edifies people and congregations involved in the *missio Dei*. So we ask of every action/practice of worship. Does it:

1. Tell the big story – example, Eucharist: narrates, dramatizes, and involves us in enacting the story. Early Church Eucharistic prayers retold and celebrated the whole sweep of God’s creating and saving action.
2. Tell the little stories – example, Testimony. Brings the voice and experience of the multivoiced body (1 Cor 14.26). God’s story is going on. “Reports from the front” build faith that the story is happening and give hope that the story will go on.
3. Wrestle and engage with reality – example, Prayer. The Lord’s Prayer; struggling against principalities and powers for God’s reconciliation to come (Eph 6.10ff). Tertullian, prayer as wrestling with God (*Apol* 39). God’s people recognize and takes part in the activity of God whose mission is reconciliation.

Breathing in/out: “The Church’s existence is a continual alternation between two phases. Like systole and exhalation in the process of breathing, assembly and mission succeed each other in the life of the Church. Discipleship would be stunted unless it included both the centripetal phase of worship and the centrifugal phase of mission.” (Avery Dulles, S.J., *Models of the Church*, 220).

This presentation follows the argument of Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider, *Worship and Mission After Christendom* (Herald Press, 2011)

