Worship And Cultural Transformation



When God moves on people's hearts it always seems to release worship and creativity. When passionate worship and creativity are released, communities are transformed.

Although I don't fully understand it, the resulting expressions often have the appearance of being a blend of both the human and divine – something inspired by God, created through man, to give glory to God. It is a mystery. When this circular equation occurs, God's movement resulting in a creative response given back to Him, we may be uncomfortable with the high emotion and uniqueness of the interchange. We may want to place the response of worship and art "under control," or bring a predictability to the experience which we may call good order – but may not be God's good order. Let me illustrate with some brief vignettes from Church history.

The first illustration comes from Martin Luther, who said, "Let God speak to his people through the scriptures; let his people respond by singing their hymns." Interestingly, there weren't many hymns (as we know them today) at that time that weren't written by Luther. In essence, what he was saying was that as we encounter God, creativity is released and music and worship are a vital part of our response. It was interestingly noted of Luther, and this by his opponents, that he won more converts through his singing than through his bold preaching.

Our second illustration comes from the Welsh Revival just one hundred years ago. One of the criticisms of that revival was that all they did, gathering after gathering, was to spontaneously break out into song. Meetings were often without a leader or a preacher, and were as long as eight or nine hours in duration. They would consist of spontaneous outbreaks of exuberant singing. Music seemed the best available vehicle for heartfelt expressions of praise, and old hymns were sung over and over. The consensus was that the singing, more than any amount of preaching, stirred hearts and won converts.

As the singing continued in Wales, something began to happen in the community. One historian notes how significantly the world around these "singing saints" was affected:

"Alcoholism, a major social problem in southern Wales, it was significantly reduced. Miners voluntarily taxed their wages to build libraries and recreation halls which would provide alternatives to the saloons. As the numbers of arrests declined drastically, the 'magisterial bench' expressed 'keen gratification' for the movement. Many stories of repentance followed by restitution circulated. The effect of it all was itself in sobriety, industry, repaid debts, and healed relationships – as well as in evangelism."

To God be the Glory. Our response to the movement of the Holy Spirit in creative worship is a gift from and for God. It can, or shall I say will, touch a broken world with the healing hand of God.

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