The And The Worship

STEVE ROBBINS, PH.D.

As I approached middle age, I avoided wearing bifocals by getting eye surgery that changed the shape of my cornea so the light entering my eye gets to the retina, rather than being refracted and causing near-sightedness. That solved my near-sightedness; but now I have to deal with the far-sightedness typical of aging. However, I prefer wearing reading glasses when needed to wearing bifocals all the time. About 20% of the population cannot tolerate bifocals at all; and those who do wear them have to adjust to part of their vision bringing things closer, while the other part puts them farther away. In time, bifocal wearers learn to adapt, and everything seems somewhat normal. Their new perception becomes reality, but their view of the world has changed.

The Western Worldview

We who live in the western world have a worldview, made explicit by the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, that splits reality up like those bifocals. This worldview (Platonic Dualism) separates reality into two levels: the ideal in the realm of perfect ideas versus the phenomenal experienced by our senses - and the spiritual versus the physical. This dichotomy devalues the phenomenal or physical while exalting the ideal or spiritual; and it sees man's spirit as *trapped* in the body. This leads to a distorted view of man that affects the way we worship, think and behave.

The Biblical View Of Man

The Bible has a different, Hebraic view of man. Whereas the Greek views man as divided into two (or three) components, the Hebrew views man as a unity – an animated physical being (a psychosomatic unity).[1] This is why biblical faith demands the resurrection of the body for salvation, while Greek religion seeks liberation from the "tomb" of the body. Scholars have reminded us repeatedly that, although the New Testament writers wrote in the Greek language, the concepts are rooted in Hebraic thought. Paul, for instance, seems to think of man not as being divided into components, but as a unity having an inner and outer dimension (Eph. 3:16; 2 Cor. 4:16; Rom. 8:23). The inner dimension or core of man's being is his heart – the governing center of his thinking, feeling, willing being. It is the orientation of man's heart – toward God or the world – that determines his destiny.

Consequences For Worship

Western dualism has huge consequences for the area of worship. It causes Christians to either suppress the physical expression of their worship (contempt for the physical and esteem for the spiritual or ideal) or to indulge themselves in experience without self-control (since the body is of no spiritual consequence, it can indulge any impulse without concern).

In 1 Cor. 11-14, Paul issues a number of directions and corrections to the Corinthians in regard to their gatherings for worship. Paul was enjoining self-control while the Corinthians experienced revelatory gifts, inspired speech, powerful healings, communion, etc. – so that everyone could be edified (including non-believers; see 14:23-24). Their speech had to exalt Christ (12:3; orthodoxy); their behavior had to manifest Christ's love (ch. 13); and the result of their contributions had to build up the community of believers (ch. 14, esp. vv. 3, 12, 39-40). Paul's policy was not suppression, but regulation of spiritual gifts and experiences in worship.

John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard movement, used to comment on 1 Cor. 14:40 in an interesting way. He said that some emphasize "decently and in order" while forgetting that the first words of the verse say, "But all things should be done." It is easy to keep everything in order if nothing is allowed to happen. That is not what Paul was telling the Corinthians or anyone else in the New Testament. Paul commended all the gifts and the participation of all believers in worship (1 Cor. 12:7). Believers are to experience and express the full range of God's grace within the constraints of orthodoxy, love and edification of the community.

Paul also exhorted the Ephesians to be filled with the Holy Spirit with the result of them speaking and singing to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, and always giving thanks to God for everything (Eph. 5:18-20).[2] He said similar things to the Colossians (Col. 3:16-17).[3] To the Thessalonians he said to rejoice constantly, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, not quench the Spirit by despising prophecy, but rather to test the prophesies – holding on to the good and dismissing the bad (1 Thess. 5:16-22).[4]

All evidence points to New Testament worship being highly interactive. This should be no surprise to anyone who has read the Old Testament, as well. The Psalms are full of exhortations to worship by: singing, playing instruments, shouting, raising hands, giving thanks, vocalizing praise, kneeling, bowing down, falling down before God on one's face, laying prostrate, clapping, crying, dancing, composing and playing new songs, and even quieting oneself before God in silence. In his *Reflections On The Psalms*, the intellectual Anglican, C.S. Lewis, said that giving ourselves to praise results in a "glorious release of the inner being."

In the New Testament, the church experiences an explosive joy and praise (Greek *agalliaomai*; cf. Acts 2:46-47; 5:40-42; cf. Revel. 19:1-2, 4-7; Lk. 1:41-44, 46-55; 10:17-21) that is evangelistically contagious in the wider community.

Consequences For Mind Renewal

A second consequence of this dualism is two extreme positions Christians in our culture take toward mind renewal, or spiritual transformation. One position views Christianity as totally cerebral. This view claims that, once all the facts of Scripture are assembled in the way a religious tradition claims is correct, we have the deposit of truth once for all delivered to the saints. Since this position is committed to that codified Truth, any new experience becomes the enemy, because it may challenge the current understanding of the traditional view.

However, according to Romans 12:2, Christians "prove what the will of God

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is" by yielding and responding to God's Spirit while trying things out. The term "prove" here means both testing and approving; that is, verifying by experiencing. We test the leading we receive; and, if it warrants it, we approve it. The Christian's capacity for ethical decision-making depends, not just on rote memory of biblical laws, but also on spontaneous awareness of what God's will is in specific situations, as the Holy Spirit gives insight and ability.[5]

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This is how the Christian finds the Will of God that is "good and acceptable and perfect." The grace of God is upon the trial and error method. It's the only way anyone has ever learned. This consecrated search for pleasing God, while trusting and testing your spiritual leading, is the way you are to "present your bodies (i.e., our whole selves) as a sacrifice – living, holy, pleasing to God, which is your appropriate worship."[6]

The other extreme position of spiritual transformation is to see it as totally experiential. This position claims that thinking things through slows us down from experiencing everything we can possibly experience. One noted guest speaker at a Vineyard conference years ago advocated this position when he encouraged his audience to "put their brains in a rocket ship and shoot them to the moon." The mind, in this view, is a hindrance to moving forward with God.

Every time a Christian group has embraced this position throughout the history of the church, the results have been disastrous for the faith – whether it was the Corinthian enthusiasts who resisted Paul, or the Montanist's ecstatic prophecy and rigid asceticism in conflict with the early church, or the Albigensies and Cathari of the Middle Ages, or the "spiritualists" of Luther's day, who thought they did not need serious theological reflection because the Spirit spoke to them directly without need of scriptural correction,[7] or even Christians groups in our own time that have turned into cults. Neither of these extremes recognizes that for our Christian mind to be renewed we must balance our past understanding with critical assessments of new understandings of Scripture, better insights into the historical Christian Tradition, and fresh spiritual experiences. The integration of theological reflection and new Christian experience is essential to the long-term integrity of our Christian faith.

Conclusion

We need to overcome our cultural bifocals to be more biblical about our worship. We must think biblically and critically, on the one hand, and experience and promote responsive-expressive worship, on the other hand. When God's people are gathered for biblical worship, that worship does not occur only in the mind without physical expression; nor do experiences in worship exhibit themselves without theological reflection. Trial and error, testing and approving are all in order. As church leaders we have both a right and an obligation to judge how engaged our people are in worship by looking at how they express themselves. It may be wise to make adjustments in the way our corporate worship is led and in how we model, teach and encourage the members of our congregations to express themselves. Furthermore, it is very biblical to judge the integrity and depth of people's worship in the worship service by the spiritual growth (transformation) and ethical decisions they are making in their homes, work places and the market place – truly an integration of all facets of life in the worship of God.

1. See Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief*, rev. ed. (IVP, 1998), 120-122; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Zondervan, 1994), 472-486; etc.

2. James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (1975), called it "charismatic hymnody." We see this also in 1 Cor. 14:26 where the hymn brought by the believer may be spontaneously composed and sung as well as a song known to others but spontaneously sung as the Spirit led.

3. E. Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, Hermeneia (1971), 151, says that if the references to psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs do not clearly designate three distinct categories, then they at least "describe the full range of singing which the Spirit prompts."

4. Ralph Martin, in *The Spirit and the Congregation and in Worship in the Early Church*, says that the order of Paul's exhortations in 1 Thess. 5:16ff. follow the order of early Christian services. See FF Bruce, *1 Thessalonians*, Word Biblical Commentary, on 1 Thess. 5:19-22. Verse 22 refers to "every bad kind" of prophecy.

5. James W. Sire, *Discipleship of the Mind.*

6. This rendition of Romans 12:1 follows the order of words in the Greek text. The Greek word I have translated "appropriate," above, is *logiken*, usually translated as "spiritual" or "rational" or "reasonable" in most translations. This complete or wholehearted consecration of the believer to God and His leading is appropriate in light of the mercies of God described in Romans 1-11. This is the believer's appropriate/reasonable/spiritual worship.

7. This ended in followers of Jan Matthys and Jan of Leiden leading the Münster Rebellion where they received prophecies to reenact polygamy as the biblical Patriarchs did, bear arms against the Catholics until the Kingdom came to that city, and even run naked through the streets. This ended in great loss of life as well as moral and spiritual degradation.

8. 1 Cor. 7:1; see NIV footnote and verses 3 and 5.



Steve Robbins, Ph.D. is the director of the Vineyard Leadership Institute (www.vli.org) in Columbus, Ohio, and serves as the Educational Task Force head for the Association of Vineyard Churches US, missions pastor of Vineyard Columbus and as a board member for AVCUS. Steve has been married to his wife Nancy for 31 years and has two daughters, Karen and Krista, and one granddaughter, Janaiah.