Better Art! Greater Accessibility!

Why Worship That Forms The Church Demands Both

By Dan Wilt

One crowd says worship expression needs to be *better art* (greater complexity for meaningful reach to today's world). Another crowd says worship must maintain *greater accessibility* (broader, meaningful service to the Church). Both crowds are right – and both need a good talking to.

The creative expressions of worship in our time are part of the Great Art of the Church, and therefore must never been minimized – even when critiquing today's worship subcultures. To diminish their necessity, vitality, or centrality to spiritual life – in its deepest human forms – is to lose our way in every single conversation about the topic.

What diminishes our conversations about worship? When we speak about worship as if it is a tool, a music genre or style, or even, simply put, a consumable art form for our personal devotion. This kind of language needs a hard core fix.
When we talk about the jewel of worship contextualizing it in such small stories we corrupt the conversation from the outset. Our conversation can't get anywhere from there.

The worship arts should be spoken of, and curated with, the highest of respect, attention, and devotion. The people of God are unceasingly moving through time, and every generation needs creative tools that nurture deep formation in both private devotion and public worship.

Worship is more than a devotional tool of a time or place; it is the central formational act of the trans-historic Church.

There Is Never A Place For Lazy Creative Work

From the outset let's just say it. If worship expression and formation is vital to the Church's health and growth, then there is never a place for lazy creative work.

Yes, the worship arts are alive and well in living rooms where spiritual sincerity is the loudest and most practiced instrument in the room.

But that doesn't mean anyone should wear lazy creative work, or an impoverished vision of worship's unshakeable place in the life of the Church, like a badge of honor.

Let's be at our best and most skilled when we shape words, mine melodies, or place paint for the spiritual formation of the beautiful Bride of Christ.

The Cry For Better Art

There are cries today for greater artfulness, complexity, poetry, refinement, breadth, and a raised aesthetic in our worship expressions. My voice has joined this choir again and again.

These cries are valid, as they have been in every generation. They must be heard and responded to.

But if arrogance accompanies those cries, and one expects that everyone else should access a living encounter with God through the same gateways that we ourselves crave, then those cries are out of tune, self-absorbed, short-sighted, and myopic.

To call others to compromise (or be ashamed of) the accessibility of some of our vital worship work – given its task to unify us in acclaim and prayer – is to diminish the very nature and purpose of that type of worship work in community connection and spiritual formation.

We need our artistry to continue to go through the roof in some of our most vital expressions of faith-in-process. We need art that halts us in our tracks, show us the ways of the dynamic heart, and moves us with more obtuse, specialty sounds and phrases (obtuse to some, accessible to others).

We need artists, who are devoted to Christ in private and communal worship, who allow their devotion to overflow in increasingly complex creative works that are contact points for many subgroups.

The Cry For Greater Accessibility

We also need for those who are creating cross-generational, cross-ethnic, and cross-background access points in worship to do what they do in a maturing and more poignant way.

Deep poetry and masterful lyricism stirs the waters of the worship within my spirit. For a 9-year-old child, who needs accessible words to help them begin to both ingest the Scriptures and engage with God in worship, he or she needs more simple language and melody.

And there are many living at various points on this continuum, at every age, in respect to these two needs.

Some of our worship and liturgical artists are at their best creating songs that everyone can sing – with a full heart – *together*. It is not a lesser art form because they choose to lift our corporate voice with intention and deliberation.

They don't need to be solo artists who can dominate a stage. These artists are doing their holy work by considering the breadth of ages and backgrounds sitting in the seats – and giving them words and melodies to revel in *together*.
And if I, even with my personal preference for more group-inaccessible art, cannot yield to the privilege of worshipping together through more accessible means, finding my personal access points through other opportunities, then I need to revisit just how precious Jesus' Church is to me.

We Need Both Running Side By Side

The punchline? Worship expressions can and should be great, curated, refined, and blessed in all their various forms for us to rise to our full stature together – not only as followers of Jesus, but also as His human ensigns working with Him as He furthers His Kingdom on planet earth.

And to continually become that Church, generation after generation, we must have both fine art and faithful art running hand in hand, forming us, as we worship.

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