Toward a Theology and Practice of Missional Worship

Daniel W. Collison

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TOWARD A THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF MISSIONAL WORSHIP

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

DANIEL COLLISON
MARCH 2009
ABSTRACT

Toward a Theology and Practice of Missional Worship
Daniel W. Collison
Doctor of Ministry
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2009

It was the goal of this study to explore the role of evangelism in the context of corporate worship. It argues that evangelical churches in North America must rethink their current strategies for corporate worship in light of the Church’s increasingly liminal position in society and missteps concerning the Worship Evangelism movement, and proposes a theology and practice for missional worship that is intrinsically tied to the mission of Jesus Christ.

The first section focuses on the current profiles of worship in the American evangelical church. It compares key denominational and non-denominational statistics while specifically determining how worship contexts interact with mission. Also discussed is the relationship of generational identity to the expansion of worship styles and choices, the assessment of the Worship Evangelism movement and its statistical failure, key problems with embedded theology, and the impact of postmodernism on all aspects of worship design.

The second section concentrates on the biblical and theological foundations of worship and mission in an effort to establish their collaborative relationship. It draws from Scripture and Christian tradition, and it proposes a theology for twenty-first-century missional worship. The third section addresses the critical concerns of defining context and establishing a clear worship mission. Integral to this work are four “framing”
elements of missional worship to guide the whole process: a God Focus, a Kingdom
Expression, a Community Experience, and a Future Vision.

Statistics presented in this paper confirm that the “worship-driven” evangelism
philosophy is ineffective in reaching the unchurched, but successful in attracting transfer
Christians from neighboring churches not able to compete with expensive worship
productions. In response to this failure, the study challenges churches to pursue a worship
mission by refocusing key theological and philosophical rubrics. The project further
suggests that evangelical churches move toward a theology and practice of missional
worship by defining their mission, defining a specific worship mission, exploring the
worship spectrum, and expanding their overall worship paradigm.

Theological Mentor: Kurt Fredrickson, DMin

Words: 340
CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................................................... v

LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................................................................ vi

INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................................................. 1

PART ONE:
A PROFILE OF THE AMERICAN
EVANGELICAL CHURCH WORSHIP PARADIGM

Chapter

1. CURRENT FRAMEWORKS OF WORSHIP DESIGN IN THE
EVANGELICAL CHURCH .................................................................................................................. 9

   Denominational and Non-denominational Worship Profiles and Statistics

   Categorization of the Evangelical Worship Spectrum

   Generational Identity and the Expansion of Worship Styles

   Increasing Gaps between Mission and Worship in the Wake of Postmodernity

2. ASSESSMENT OF THE WORSHIP EVANGELISM MOVEMENT
AND ITS PURPORTED FAILURE .................................................................................................. 48

   Church Liminality and the Birth of Worship Evangelism

   The Numeric Success and Kingdom Failure of Worship Evangelism

   The Role of Embedded Theology in the Demise of Worship Evangelism

PART TWO:
TOWARD A THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY OF MISSIONAL WORSHIP

3. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF WORSHIP ...... 67

   Worship and Mission in Scripture: Six Period Profiles

   Worship and Mission in Christian Tradition

   A Theology of Missional Worship for the Twenty-first Century
4. TOWARD A TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY, MISSIONAL WORSHIP PHILOSOPHY ................................................................. 97

   Focus: New Testament Worship as a Postmodern Archetype

   Structure: Worship Leadership as Collaboration

   Action: The Church as a Visible Community of Faith

PART THREE:
THE CHARACTER OF MISSIONAL WORSHIP

5. THE FORMATION OF WORSHIPPING COMMUNITIES WITHIN MISSIONAL CONTEXTS ........................................ 113

   Defining a Church’s Missional Context

   Establishing a Worship Mission

   Generational Considerations

6. REFRAMING WORSHIP LEADERSHIP ........................................ 128

   Current Models of Worship Leadership and the Changing Landscape

   A Framework for Worship Design

   Creating Missional Worship Planning Systems

   Exploring the Worship Spectrum

CONCLUSION ................................................................. 140

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................. 148
FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>A framework for re-imagining worship</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The shape of a typical evangelical community</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The shape of missional community</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Solo pastor planning versus creative community planning</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Self-serving system: The church starts with a worship-driven perspective</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Mission system: The church starts with a mission perspective</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>The four-step process of implementing missional worship</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLES

Table

1. The convergence of worship traditions ............................................. 14
2. Worship stream overview .............................................................. 16
3. The liturgical worship form ........................................................... 20
4. Hymn-based worship order ............................................................ 23
5. Approaches to worship ................................................................... 37
6. Understanding the principles of worship ......................................... 44
7. The biblical story of worship ........................................................... 89
8. Integrating mission and worship ...................................................... 95
9. Innovation and worship design ....................................................... 106
10. Seven aptitudes of contextualization and worship considerations ......... 118
11. The balances of missional worship ................................................ 122
12. The shifting values of worship planning ........................................... 129
13. Shifting from worship artist to worship leader ................................ 130
14. Strengths and warnings for the six streams of worship ...................... 138
INTRODUCTION

The center of any missional community’s organized life is its corporate worship. Virtually every theological and confessional tradition represented in North America agrees with this proposition.

—Darrell L. Guder, Editor, *Missional Church*

Twenty-first-century Christian worship is more diverse and divergent than the worship at any other time in the history of the Church. A worship leader who attends one seminar on worship will be instructed to follow the Christian calendar with a eucharistic focus. Another seminar teaches the worship leader that the best worship plan is to choose theologically correct choral anthems, preach expository sermons, and avoid the syncretistic trap of contemporary music idioms. A third seminar will advise the worship leader to fire the choir, hire a great band, show more videos, and have the pastor preach only on current cultural topics that are marketable to the community through current print and digital technology. Yet one more cutting edge seminar will debunk the other three as being irrelevant to the postmodern shift and direct all worship design toward a more organic and unpredictable pattern of worship in which the fine arts draw people into community around couches, candles, and interactive stations. In the wake of all such discussion, and perhaps because of it, there are even some authors that propose the complete abandonment of corporate worship altogether. Frankly, the current onslaught of opinions, approaches, and consulting is nothing short of dizzying. As Paul Basden quips: “Worship is once again hitting the big time, getting its due, coming into its
own….Throughout Christian history, public worship has attracted attention, stimulated discussion, and even provoked contention.”¹

The good news is that such an array of conversations is proof that church leaders are talking about and working on worship. The bad news is that there are so many competing opinions that church leaders in their confusion have a tendency to reduce their corporate worship design to the use of tips, tricks, and popular methods. This sort of reductionism, in some cases, improves worship attendance numbers. However, statistics are beginning to reveal that these popular worship services are merely attracting transfer Christians from other churches while non-Christians continue to stay away from the church at alarming rates.

Researcher David Olson has assembled compelling data about the Christian Church in the United States in his book *The American Church in Crisis*. Olson writes:

> In reality the church in America is not booming. It is in crisis. On any given Sunday, the vast majority of Americans are absent from church. Even more troublesome, as the American population continues to grow, the church falls further behind. If trends continue, by 2050 the percentage of Americans attending church will be half the 1990 figure.²

Personally, I find this statistical summary troubling and even disorienting as I serve in a very large church that has experienced steady numeric growth for several decades. The broader developments of the Church in North America have compelled me to examine the type of growth that is occurring at the church I serve, Wooddale Church. Initially, I

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found mixed results. It is thrilling to learn of non-Christians giving their lives to Jesus Christ; however, it is an unmistakable reality that the majority of new participants in the Wooddale Church faith community are Christians transferring from other churches. The stated purpose of Wooddale Church is “To honor God by making more disciples for Jesus Christ.” Wooddale’s challenge is to not assess effectiveness based upon overall attendance, but rather to emphasize the assumption that the real fulfillment of our purpose is new people coming to faith in Jesus Christ, growing as disciples, and reciprocally reaching others for Jesus Christ. Missional churches penetrate the culture to make more disciples for Jesus Christ. They are not satisfied, but rather become dissatisfied, with growth by church transfer.

The church transfer growth phenomenon presents unusual paradoxes. For instance, it is possible for one or two high profile churches in a city to experience explosive growth in attendance and membership while several other churches are in decline or about to disappear. As missiologist Eddie Gibbs writes:

...despite the emergence of more mega churches and the development of the new paradigm networks, overall church attendance has not increased. In fact, the trend has continued to be one of decline. This means that either a smaller percentage of the population attends church, or the same percentage attends less frequently.4

Statistically and functionally speaking, the continuing progression of the Christian Church to the margins of Western culture is irrefutable. Pessimists are saying that the Church is headed for extinction in the West. Optimists believe that this new state of

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3 Wooddale Church Constitution, Eden Prairie, MN, revised February 2005, Article III.

liminality\textsuperscript{5} takes nothing for granted and is a remarkable opportunity to return to the core mission of Jesus Christ.

One response to this shift in the North American evangelical church was the Worship Evangelism movement best summarized by author Sally Morgenthaler in the 1990s. The concept of Worship Evangelism asserts that, while evangelism is one of the central tasks of the church, it is worship that “drives” evangelism, not vice-versa.\textsuperscript{6} The Worship Evangelism concept was a biblically motivated concept; however, many churches misinterpreted this premise when they retreated from the hard work of church wide evangelism in lieu of developing large attritional worship events. Morgenthaler writes:

The realization hit me in the gut. Between 1995 and 2000 I’d traveled to a host of worship-driven churches, some that openly advertised that they were “a church for the unchurched.” On the good occasions, the worship experience was transporting….Too many times, I came away with an unnamed, uneasy feeling. Something was not quite right. The worship felt disconnected from real life….It was unabashed self-absorption, a worship culture that screamed, “It’s all about us” so loudly that I wondered how any visitor could stand to endure the rest of the hour.

Were these worship-driven churches really attracting the unchurched? Most of their pastors truly believed they were. And in a few cases, they were right….In 2001 a worship-driven congregation in my area finally did a survey as to who they were really reaching, and they were shocked. They’d thought their congregation was at least 50 percent unchurched. The real number was 3 percent. By 2002 a few pastors of praise and worship churches began admitting to me that they weren’t making much of a dent in the surrounding non-Christian

\textsuperscript{5} Alan Roxburgh defines liminality as “…the conscious awareness that as a group (or individual) one’s status-, role-, and sequence-sets in a society have been radically changed to the point where the group has now become largely invisible to the larger society in terms of these previously held sets….The present liminality is one that offers the potential for a fresh missionary engagement in a radically changing social context.” Alan Roxburgh, The Missionary Congregation, Leadership, and Liminality (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1997), 24, 27.

\textsuperscript{6} Sally Morgenthaler, Worship Evangelism, Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1995), 41.
population, even though their services were packed and they were known for the best worship production in town. Several asked me to help them crack the unchurched code. One wanted to invest in an expensive VJ machine and target twentysomethings. The others thought a multisensory, ancient-future, or emergent twist might help. However, when I visited their congregations, it wasn’t hard to see that the biggest barrier to reaching the unchurched had little to do with worship technique or style. It had to do with isolation and the faux-worship that isolation inevitably creates.7

It is true that churches that use worship as a tool of attractional evangelism bring some non-Christians to Jesus Christ. However, throughout biblical and church history, it is obvious that the corporate worship event is not capable of replacing the broader work of church evangelism. Statistics presented in this paper establish that the “worship-driven” evangelism philosophy is ineffective in reaching the unchurched, but successful in attracting transfer Christians from neighboring churches not able to compete with expensive worship productions.

These missteps are evidence that evangelical churches, in their pursuit to understand worship and mission, are leaving unexplained the character of mission, the purpose of worship, and ways the two conceptually inform and functionally integrate with each other. This paper reasons that evangelical churches must rethink current strategies for corporate worship in light of the church’s increasingly liminal position in society and missteps concerning the Worship Evangelism movement. It proposes a framework for missional worship that is intrinsically tied to the mission of Jesus Christ.

Organizationally, this paper is divided into three sections with two chapters each. The first section focuses on the current profiles of worship in the American evangelical

church. It compares key denominational and non-denominational statistics while specifically determining how worship contexts interact with mission. Also discussed is the relationship of generational identity to the expansion of worship styles and choices, the assessment of the Worship Evangelism movement and its purported failure, key problems with embedded theology, and the impact of postmodernism on all aspects of worship design.

The second section concentrates on the biblical and theological foundations of worship and mission in an effort to establish their collaborative relationship. It draws from Scripture and Christian tradition, and it proposes a theology for twenty-first-century missional worship. This segment also surveys the New Testament church as a model for contemporary formation of missional worship.

The third section proposes a clear vision of how churches can develop worship leadership and design fueled by mission. It addresses the critical concerns of defining context and establishing a clear worship mission. Integral to this work are four “framing” elements of missional worship to guide the process: a God Focus, a Kingdom Expression, a Community Experience, and a Future Vision.

The focus of this dissertation’s research and proposals addresses what is happening in the evangelical Protestant churches of North America. The National Association of Evangelicals describes evangelical churches as those that value “growing biblical faith, witness to society, attending to human concerns, fostering cooperation, maximizing resources, ministry to the poor, nurturing communication, and cross-cultural
involvement.\textsuperscript{8} The various streams of evangelically framed worship (contemporary music-driven, traditional hymn-based, formal-liturgical, charismatic, blended, and emerging) will find several of these concepts broad enough to be transferrable to their respective contexts.

Current societal changes provide enormous opportunities for the Church to initiate an integrated movement of mission, which incorporates worship, to effectively reach more people for Jesus Christ. The ultimate goal herein is to present a new vision for worship design that is biblically based, theologically sound, and inspired by God to help churches connect their worship to their mission.

PART ONE:

A PROFILE OF THE AMERICAN EVANGELICAL CHURCH

WORSHIP PARADIGM
CHAPTER 1
CURRENT FRAMEWORKS OF WORSHIP DESIGN
IN THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH

Denominational and Non-Denominational Worship Profiles and Statistics

The organizational landscape of the Evangelical Church of the North America is complex and multifaceted. In his book *Handbook of Denominations*, Frank Mead lists four traditions of evangelicalism: Baptist tradition, Holiness-Pentecostal tradition, Reformed-Confessional tradition, and Anabaptist tradition.\(^1\) Also, according to Mead, within these broad traditions there exist fourteen sub-cultural evangelical groups: fundamentalist, dispensational, conservative, non-denominational, Reformed, anabaptist, Wesleyan, holiness, pentecostal, charismatic, black, progressive, radical, and mainline.\(^2\)

In regards to the organization and attendance trends of worship, the respected church futurist Lyle Schaller points out that the greatest shift in these evangelical traditions occurred in the 1950s and 1960s. He states:

> A persuasive argument can be made that the religious traditions in America that trace their origins back to western Europe peaked in terms of internal cohesion, numbers, capability to reach and assimilate newcomers, energy, creativity, vitality, enthusiasm for missions, a sense of institutional unity, and financial resources sometime during the 1950’s and early 1960’s. Their subsequent decline can be measured by the decrease in Sunday school attendance, the drop in the number of baptisms, the increase in the number and divisiveness of internal

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\(^2\) Ibid., 304.
quarrels, the decrease in the number of new missions launched annually, the shrinkage in membership, their withdrawal from the large northern central cities, the rise of annual death rate per one thousand members, the squeeze on the national denominational budgets, the decrease in the number of new members received each year, the reduction in the size of national staff, the emphasis on institutional survival, and the move from resourcing to regulating congregations.3

Schaller goes on to point out that the “Made in America” evangelical traditions have fared better than the European rooted denominations since the 1960s because they adopted more entrepreneurial practices.4

Missiologist Eddie Gibbs points out that, within the ranks of the entrepreneurial, the most successful churches over the past fifty years are what Gibbs and Donald Miller call the “New Paradigm” churches. Gibbs writes:

Those churches that are experiencing growth, in defiance of the national downward trends, are usually located in the new suburban areas. They are acutely market-sensitive and base their strategy on attracting the nonchurchoer into “seeker-sensitive” worship services…These churches are called by a variety of titles. Lyle Schaller terms them “New Reformation,” Donald Miller describes them as “New Paradigm,” and George Hunter and Peter Wagner label them “New Apostolic,” each applying the term with a different emphasis.5

Donald Miller defines the “New Paradigm” churches as being the “seeker sensitive” churches, such as Willow Creek Community Church and Saddleback Community

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4 Ibid., 24. Schaller lists the following denominations as “Made In America” examples: Christian and Missionary Alliance, the Seventh-Day Adventists, the Churches of Christ, the Wesleyan Church, the Church of the Nazarene, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, The Church of God in Christ, the Calvary Church Movement, the Vineyard Movement, the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.), the Assemblies of God, and at least a hundred Holiness denominations. Next to them are the fully “Americanized” religious traditions that carry their European heritage very lightly. Examples include the Southern Baptist Convention, the Evangelical Free Church of America, the Conservative Baptist Association of America, and the Evangelical Covenant Church.

Church, along with three other movements formed by different emphases and strategies for reaching non-Christians, including Calvary Chapel, Vineyard Christian Fellowship, and Hope Chapel.\(^6\)

The story of mainline evangelical churches, however, is very different. Mike Regele, whose company, Percept Group, Inc., provides demographic data gathering and mapping for churches and denominations in the United States, believes “the institutional church in America will look very different twenty-five years from now. Indeed several denominations may no longer exist. We are sure that there will be hundreds of local congregations that won’t.”\(^7\) Previously mentioned statistician David Olson did research on more than 200,000 churches and came to the conclusion that:

The Gallup Organization reports that more than 40 percent of Americans say that in the last week they attended a house of worship. The Barna Group, in a study released in May 2007, reports even better numbers: 43 percent of Americans attend each week. If these poll numbers reflected reality, between 120 and 129 million Americans should be in a worship service on any given weekend. However, these numbers do not reflect reality. When you start to do the math, the vision of a booming American church unravels. As we will see the actual attendance is less than half of what the polls suggest.\(^8\)

Olson organizes his trends and statistics around the three categories of evangelical, mainline, and Catholic. As will be argued later, some of Olson’s mainline denominations are clearly evangelical, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Presbyterian Church (USA). Regardless, those churches and denominations Olson lists as evangelical


\(^7\) Mike Regele, *Death of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1995), 11.

\(^8\) Olson, *The American Church in Crisis*, 26.
report these key facts. First, in 2000, 25.3 million people attended evangelical worship services on any given weekends. By 2005 that number had grown to 26.9 million.

Second, in 2000, 9.1 percent of the American public attended an evangelical church on any given weekend. In 2005 that number remained the same. Third, between 2000 and 2005, while the combined decline in the number of Protestant mainline and Roman Catholic churches was almost twenty-five hundred, the number of evangelical churches increased by forty-five hundred.\(^9\) Olson goes on to cite several major factors causing evangelical churches to outperform the mainline and Roman Catholic churches. Evangelical churches continually start new churches, they have more large churches with greater resources, and many mainline and Roman Catholic worshippers are switching to evangelical churches.\(^10\)

These statistics uncover several important aspects about the evangelical worship scene in North America. First, corporate worship is still the number one measure of people’s involvement in their church. Even the most cutting-edge postmodern, urban, decentralized church movements still gather for corporate worship to engage God as visible communities of faith. Second, the statistical proof that worship attendance has been flat from 2000-2005 reveals that, while many evangelical churches are successful at drawing the largest crowds when compared to non-evangelical churches, they are merely benefitting numerically from the movement of Christians from Roman Catholic and mainline denominations. Third, it is reasonable to say that, overall, by statistical

\(^9\) Olson, *The American Church in Crisis*, 57.

\(^10\) Ibid., 57-58.
deduction, the evangelical church is not reaching significant numbers of non-Christians in the American culture. Fourth, if popular evangelical worship services are drawing the biggest crowds of Christians but are not creating an ethos of evangelism and mission throughout the church, something has gone very wrong in our ecclesial practices of worship and evangelism.

**Categorization of the Evangelical Worship Spectrum**

Author Robb Redman asserts in his book *The Great Worship Awakening* that there are four major developments or trends that comprise what has happened in evangelical worship over the past ten to twenty years: the seeker service movement, the praise and worship movement, the Christian worship music industry, and the liturgical renewal movement.\(^{11}\) Worship theologian Robert Webber summarized worship traditions that he considered evangelical while reflecting upon the late twentieth-century period of time:

The main focus of worship in the first half of the twentieth century kept to either an educational focus of the rationalists or an enthusiastic focus of the experientialists. Some new groups like the fundamentalists, who were the product of both the Reformed tradition coming from Princeton and the dispensational tradition, managed to embrace both traditions, not necessarily as individual churches, but as a movement…. In the mid-forties the term evangelical was once again used to identify a group of churches. For the most part, evangelicals, like their fundamentalist parents, are split between the education and the experiential reviverist models of worship.\(^{12}\)

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In his book *Worship Old and New*, Webber organized his understanding of worship streams as demonstrated in table 1.

Table 1. The convergence of worship traditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Liturgical/Sacramental</th>
<th>Evangelical/Reformed</th>
<th>Charismatic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theology</td>
<td>Biblical foundation</td>
<td>Five-fold ministry and government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodoxy</td>
<td>Personal conversion</td>
<td>Power of the Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universality</td>
<td>Evangelism and mission</td>
<td>Spiritual Gifts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historic connection</td>
<td>Pulpit-centered</td>
<td>Charismatic worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liturgical worship</td>
<td>Personal holiness</td>
<td>Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social action</td>
<td>Biblical and reformational understanding of the church (pragmatic and rational)</td>
<td>Spiritual, organic, and functional understanding of the church (dynamic and informal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incarnation understanding of the church (based upon theology, history, and sacrament)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Robert Webber, *Worship Old and New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 133.

Contrary to Webber’s organizational map, though, the late twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century has witnessed a broadening of churches and denominations that consider themselves evangelical. The National Association of Evangelicals is the most recognized association of evangelical churches in North America. Their website states:

The National Association of Evangelicals has spoken as a united voice for millions of American evangelicals since 1942. But, the voice of NAE is clearer, stronger and more broadly heard now than ever before. The association is anchored in its 60 denominations with about 45,000 churches. However, the broader NAE constituency includes organizations, local churches and individuals numbering in the tens of millions.13

The NAE listing of members includes Adventists, Assemblies of God, Baptist (several), Brethren, Christian Reformed, Church of God, Nazarene, Congregational (several),

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Lutheran (several), Presbyterian, Free Methodist, Foursquare, The Salvation Army, Wesleyan, and Mennonite, to name only a partial list.

Keeping at hand what authors Meade, Redman, and Webber have said about the organizational landscape of church worship, a very recent resource Exploring the Worship Spectrum, edited by Paul Engle and Paul Basden, contains probably the most current and helpful organization of the ever widening evangelical worship streams. Basden organizes evangelical worship into six identifiable streams: formal-liturgical worship, traditional hymn-based worship, contemporary music-driven worship, charismatic worship, blended worship, and emerging worship. As table 2 demonstrates, the denominational listings of Meade, the four critical concerns of Redman, and the three major divisions of Webber all find a place within these six streams: Tracing these six streams in a conversation about missional worship is important for several reasons. First, each stream provides unique perspective and emphasis in the larger story of Christian history and tradition. Second, each stream can inform the other streams. Third, the confluence of the six streams in worship design has accelerated in the postmodern era.

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Table 2: Worship stream overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stream</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Movements of Impact</th>
<th>Denominational Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal-Liturgical</td>
<td>- Prescribed/form based&lt;br&gt;- Christian calendar&lt;br&gt;- Eucharistic&lt;br&gt;- Word centered&lt;br&gt;- Formal</td>
<td>- Liturgical Renewal Movement</td>
<td>- Reformed-Confessional Tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Hymn-Based</td>
<td>- Sung text&lt;br&gt;- Responsorial&lt;br&gt;- Periodic communion&lt;br&gt;- Varied order&lt;br&gt;- Pulpit centered</td>
<td>- Liturgical Renewal Movement</td>
<td>- Reformed-Confessional Tradition&lt;br&gt; - Anabaptist Tradition&lt;br&gt; - Baptist Tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary Music-driven</td>
<td>- Contemporary music styles&lt;br&gt;- Modern instruments&lt;br&gt;- Occasional drama/video&lt;br&gt;- Pulpit centered&lt;br&gt;- Music and preaching as sequence</td>
<td>- Seeker Movement&lt;br&gt;- Christian Worship Music Industry</td>
<td>- Baptist Tradition&lt;br&gt; - Anabaptist Tradition&lt;br&gt; - Non-Denominational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charismatic</td>
<td>- Spiritual gifts and Holy Spirit emphasized&lt;br&gt;- Five-fold ministry and government (Wimber)&lt;br&gt;- Pulpit centered</td>
<td>- Jesus Movement&lt;br&gt;- Third Wave&lt;br&gt;- Christian Worship Music Industry</td>
<td>- Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blended</td>
<td>- Synthesis of liturgical and contemporary&lt;br&gt;- Four fold pattern of worship&lt;br&gt;- Music reflects church and contemporary culture&lt;br&gt;- Pulpit centered</td>
<td>- Liturgical Renewal Movement</td>
<td>- Reformed-Confessional Tradition&lt;br&gt; - Anabaptist Tradition&lt;br&gt; - Non-Denominational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerging</td>
<td>- Ancient-Future&lt;br&gt;- Interaction&lt;br&gt;- Emphasis on Fine Arts&lt;br&gt;- Symbols&lt;br&gt;- Digital&lt;br&gt;- Unpredictable/organic order</td>
<td>- Postmodern and Emergent</td>
<td>- Baptist Tradition&lt;br&gt; - Anabaptist Tradition&lt;br&gt; - Non-Denominational</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Formal-liturgical Worship

I believe in Bible-based verticality, which is another way of saying formal-liturgical worship.


The Liturgical Movement refers essentially to pastoral initiatives and efforts undertaken by groups and individuals to rediscover the meaning of the Church and the liturgy, and the place of liturgy in the Christian life, in order to encourage
“the active participation” of all the baptized and improve the quality of the celebrations; the liturgy is neither the monopoly of the clergy nor a private matter but the celebration of the whole Church.


Formal-liturgical worship at its core prescribes worship or service that is required for a given occasion. William Willimon describes liturgy as “the work of the people.”

Thus, liturgical worship asks the people of God to be actively engaged in the service of worship in prescribed patterns and forms to insure a faithful and complete experience of God in the corporate gathering. The liturgical renewal movement in the Protestant church first began in the Roman Catholic Church and spread quickly to Anglican and Lutheran churches, and then to other Protestant groups. Robert Webber notes that, “for the most part, churches that traced their roots to the Reformation had never undergone a thorough revolution in their worship. As Catholic reform in worship was studied by Protestants, new denominational worship commissions were founded to study worship.”


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17 Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 125.

every major denomination in the world has produced new worship materials, including a
new hymn book, since 1980.”19

In many ways, the liturgical renewal movement was a reaction to the practices of
American Protestantism that featured a more American way of life than a Christ-centered
life. Redman writes:

The Liturgical Renewal movement seeks to restore the centrality of Christ to
worship….Worship in the 1950’s magnified the values and preferences of the
surrounding society and culture more than of God. A secondary target for the
Protestant Renewal movement has been the revivalist worship, which crept into
many Protestant churches in the twentieth century. Both removed Christ from the
center of worship and replaced him with other concerns; American cultural
Protestantism replaced Christ with a celebration of the American way of life,
while revivalists worship made the spiritual state of the worshipper the center of
worship.20

James F. White’s *A Protestant Worship Manifesto* is highly regarded as the best summary
of the reforms that the liturgical renewal movement brought to the American Protestant
Church. White’s list of twelve reforms as published January 27, 1982, in the Christian
Century periodical is partially quoted here:21

1. *Worship should be shaped in the light of understanding it as the church’s
unique contribution to the struggle for justice* ….

2. *The paschal nature of Christian worship should resound throughout all
services.* Above all, Christian worship is rejoicing in what Christ has done for us,
a form of God’s self-giving in which the historical events are again offered to
us….


3. *The centrality of the Bible in Protestant worship must be recovered.* A curious link unites the worship of many liberal and fundamentalist congregations. Their use of Scripture in worship falls into the “when convenient” category.…

4. *The importance of time as a major structure in Christian worship must be rediscovered.* Many congregations are moving to a richer calendar as an unexpected by-product of the ecumenical lectionary.…

5. *All reforms in worship must be shaped ecumenically.* The widespread use of the lectionary and common calendar are the most important ecumenical developments of recent years.…

6. *Drastic changes are needed in the process of Christian initiation.*…

7. *High on the list of reforms is the need to recover the Eucharist as the chief Sunday service.*…

8. *Recovery of the sense of God’s action in other “commonly called sacraments” is essential.*…

9. *Music must be seen in its pastoral context as fundamentally an enabler of fuller congregational participation.* It is frightening to analyze honestly how music functions in most Protestant churches. Usually it ranges from entertainment calculated to make palatable an otherwise bland service to innocuous Muzak used to fill in gaps and awkward moments.…

10. *The space and furnishings for worship need substantial change in most churches.*…

11. *No reform of worship will progress far until much more effort is invested in teaching seminarians and clergy to think through the functions of Christian worship.*…

12. *Finally, it must be realized that liturgical renewal is not just a changing of worship but is part of a reshaping of American Christianity root and branch.* Liturgical renewal is not just window dressing, but a major force for justice, ecumenism, and rethinking of the whole Christian message and mission.…

White’s proposed reforms are clearly concerned about closing what he and other liturgical theologians believe to be major gaps in the forms of Protestant worship. All of the worship streams can benefit from this challenge and should consider, at minimum, the call to a more vertically focused worship experience.
The actual sequence of liturgical worship varies significantly depending upon each church’s levels of adherence to and application of the liturgical ideal. *The New Handbook of the Christian Year* accurately describes a typical liturgical service order in table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entering Into Worship</th>
<th>Gathering</th>
<th>The coming together of the congregation in differing and creative ways depending upon the seasons and calendar of the year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greeting</td>
<td>The first words spoken by the minister or sung by the choir to the gathered congregation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening Hymn</td>
<td>Customarily a Hymn of Praise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening Prayer</td>
<td>Varied based upon service theme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts of Praise</td>
<td>Anthem or responsorial song</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proclaiming The Word</td>
<td>Scripture Reading</td>
<td>According to lectionary cycle: Old Testament, Epistles, Gospels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interspersed with Musical Responses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Focused usually upon one of the texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to the Word</td>
<td>Invitation or Hymn of Response</td>
<td>Varied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creed</td>
<td>Varied/Optional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td>Time of petition, intercession, thanksgiving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Passing the Peace</td>
<td>Varied approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Offering</td>
<td>Usually with music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communion</td>
<td>Frequency of communion varies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Closing Hymn</td>
<td>Hymn of praise or doxological focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dismissal</td>
<td>Benediction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Worship services modeled in the liturgical form contain a breadth and depth of expression because of their all-encompassing nature. One of its chief advocates, Paul Zahl, believes that formal liturgical worship offers “setness, givenness, and direction and
yet it is not cold, confining, excluding, nor non-user friendly." Redman, however, believes that this stream’s weaknesses lie with:

1) The perception that it is a scholar led movement and not “grass roots,” 2) It can be bureaucratically driven and inadvertently connect with worship history and tradition, and 3) The movement is having a hard time shaking the perception that it cares more about liturgical texts and performance of symbolic ritual action than about an authentic encounter with God in worship.

Traditional Hymn-based Worship

Hymn-based worship cross-sects several denominational and non-denominational churches. It is rooted in a form of Protestant traditionalism that reflects a high value upon familiar hymns and text, established ecclesial leadership, and typically a traditional style of music with choral accompaniment. There are, without question, many liturgical churches that primarily use hymns in their worship services. However, the traditional hymn-based worship stream differs from the liturgical in that it uses the hymnbook as the primary worship planning tool and driving factor in the overall experience. When questioned about the purpose of hymnbooks, worship theologian Harold Best offered eight responses. First, the hymnbook is a temporal and artifactual servant of the Word of God. Second, the hymnbook is a remarkably diverse archive. Third, just as the textual content of a good hymnbook is stylistically diverse and poetically excellent, so is its musical content. Fourth, the hymnbook and hymn-based worship thrive on hands-on

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printed material. Fifth, the history of choral music, especially in the Protestant church, is tightly interwoven with the hymnbook. Sixth, the hymnbook is a working history of the creative struggle to go beyond the singing of pure Scripture. Seventh, the hymnbook is a magnificent instrument for private devotion. Eighth, the hymnbook is both a scholarly undertaking and a cleverly flexible musical resource.

The benefits of hymn-based worship are several. First, the theology and form of many hymnbooks are time tested. Second, thematic ties to the sermon can provide a cohesive experience of song and Word. Third, congregations can engage enthusiastically in music that they are familiar with.

There are, of course, also problems that can arise with hymn-based worship. The world is changing at an astounding pace, including the world of song writing. First, some hymnbooks reflect music and liturgy that was organized ten to twenty years ago. The expense of hymnbooks and their slow-to-change nature can miss the new hymn writers of the twenty-first century. Second, generally speaking, non-Christians in secular, popular culture have a hard time relating to the language, style, and delivery of hymns. Third, some forms of hymn-based liturgy in the Free Church tradition actually reduce the amount of congregational engagement because they operate functionally as pulpit-centered song services in the revivalist tradition. Robert Webber elucidated four concerns about this trend observing: “First, I began to see that much of our worship is dominated by the pastor. Second, I began to feel that the congregation was little more than an audience. Third, I began to sense that ‘free worship’ is not necessarily free but
rather fixed in a rut. And fourth, for me, the mystery was gone.”

G. Thomas Halbrooks describes some Baptist traditions where this is the case:

Their stress on preaching and the lack of any fixed liturgy have at times undermined congregational participation, but Baptists have tried to compensate in various ways. They have called on laypersons to pray and to lead parts of the service. They have emphasized congregational singing and used responsive reading of Scripture.

Best believes that solid hymn-based worship should be more engaging and elaborate than merely hymn singing and a sermon. He advocates following the worship sequence in table 4.

Table 4. Hymn-based worship order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Detail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sung Text</td>
<td>Congregational, choral, and solo, and instrumental music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional and responsorial sentences</td>
<td>Said or sung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected Scriptures</td>
<td>Various related to sermon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayers of Three Kinds</td>
<td>• Brief invocations/petitions/benedictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Congregational prayers of confession, praise, and intercession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pastoral prayer, offered on behalf of the congregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sermon or brief, interconnected homilies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offerings of temporal goods in a spiritual manner</td>
<td>Various methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Periodic celebrations of the Lord’s Supper</td>
<td>Sometimes self-contained musical, textual, instructional, and devotional actions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Basden, ed., *Exploring the Worship Spectrum*, 62.

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This sequence, Best argues, is a more fitting and classical hymn-based experience because the hymnody is a continuous part of the overall tapestry, an intrinsic part of the flow, and not merely songs inserted into slots.

Contemporary Music-driven Worship

Contemporary Worship endeavors to use modern instrumentation…contemporary musical styles…and freshly written or arranged songs…in the language of this generation to lead people into authentic expressions of worship and a genuine experience of the presence of God


Often wed to the seeker movement, the contemporary music-driven worship stream is characterized by contemporary language, informal atmosphere, and avoidance of denominational history and theological distinctives. Aspects of contemporary, corporate worship include short improvised prayers; preaching that assumes little congregational knowledge of Scripture and doctrine; and the use of drama, films, and multi-media to pose questions and illustrate answers. Joe Horness compares the contemporary music-driven worship to other streams when he writes:

For some, the goal of traditional worship may be to impart great theology through the hymns of John Wesley and others. Other traditionalists have expressed to me the desire to “preserve the classic music of our faith.” For some of my charismatic friends (some, not all) the goal of worship seems to be to experience the miraculous—to see healings, to receive words of knowledge, and to feel the Spirit of God move in tangible ways. But, for the contemporary worshipper, the main goal is relationship….It is a two-way communication between God and his people. We exalt God. He reveals his presence and changes our hearts. We pour out our hearts and remember his greatness. Refusing to be outdone, he meets our needs for intimacy and grace.27

The generally recognized form of contemporary music-driven worship consists of five elements: opening music set, welcome, special music/video/drama, sermon, and closing music. It should be mentioned, however, that certain aspects of the music sets can also include times of confession, interaction around the theme, Scripture readings, and other elements related to the preaching themes.

The music selected in contemporary music-driven worship services is often drawn from the contemporary worship music industry. Redman expressed some concern about this when we wrote:

> Since the late 1990’s, a few denominations have become involved in producing new worship, but most Contemporary Worship Music comes from commercial recording companies, not church-sponsored agencies. This is an important shift. Until the 1970’s, most Protestant churches received their congregational worship music—the hymnals—from their denomination, or at least from a denominationally approved publisher.28

The roots of the contemporary music industry lie in revivalist worship music, youth music, and the Jesus music of the 1960s and 1970s. Driven by a personal expression of worship and faith, and imitating a radio play format, much of the music is written in the first person singular—unlike many hymns that are theological statements about God—and the songs are short and designed to be listened to and sung repetitively.

Criticism of contemporary music-driven worship and the contemporary worship music industry has been and is widespread. Author John Frame lists eight critiques. First is subjectivism: being centered on feelings and experience, rather than on God. Second is humanism, in which God becomes “user-friendly” rather than transcendent. Third is anti-

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28 Redman, The Great Worship Awakening, 49.
intellectualism, excluding anything that would nurture and challenge mature believers. Fourth is psychologism, a preoccupation with the therapeutic and psychological-driven modern culture. Next is professionalism: Christianity is perceived as a “product” to be marketed like any other. Sixth is consumerism, aiming to give people what they want rather than what they need. The seventh, pragmatism, involves seeking worldly goals, such as big churches, fame, and fortune, and does whatever it can to draw people in, without asking what pleases God in worship. Eighth is temporal chauvinism: being anti-traditional and against establishments. 29 Citing Frame’s overall defense for contemporary worship music, Redman writes:

As John Frame discerns, Christians raised on Jesus music learned how to praise. Despite what critics have said about it, early Christian Worship (industry) Music was, for the most part, both God-centered and biblical in content. They also stressed a variety of worship themes (adoration, praise, confession, humility before God). Despite widespread negative feelings about traditional church music, many of these new churches used hymns regularly, though with new arrangements. 30

At its best, contemporary music-driven worship provides an experience of God in multifaceted ways amidst a mostly music-driven experience. At its worst, it delivers entertainment in a concert atmosphere in a therapeutic model.

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30 Redman, The Great Worship Awakening, 54.
Charismatic Worship

Charismatic worship may be defined theologically as worship where leadership and the gifts of the Spirit (charismata) are evidences or welcomed in personal and corporate praise, responding to a mighty act of God.

—Don Williams, “Charismatic Worship,” in Exploring the Worship Spectrum, ed. Basden

The charismatic worship stream history over the past one hundred years is dramatic and far-reaching throughout the Christian Church. The roots of charismatic worship originated in turn-of-the-century American Pentecostalism, spread to mainline denominationalism and Roman Catholicism in the 1950s and 1960s, gained a musical voice through the Jesus movement also in the 1960s, and spread exponentially to non-denominational networks of churches at a phenomenal rate in the 1970s and 1980s. The form of charismatic worship varies greatly depending upon the context.

The mainline and liturgical churches that embraced the charismatic movement tended to subtly add charismatic distinctives to their previously existing liturgical forms and more demonstratively engage charismatic expression in small groups, Bible studies, and special services. The typical Pentecostal liturgy is very similar to the contemporary worship-driven form with the major difference being the public demonstration of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Theologian Telford Work describes traditional Pentecostal liturgy in the following way:

Pentecostal liturgy is thoroughly social as well as thoroughly personal. It stresses full congregational participation by the widespread charismatic empowering of the Holy Spirit, an empowering that breaks down boundaries among ethnicities,

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genders, social classes, and clergy and laity. Yet, while Pentecostals and charismatics have a reputation for disorder, in fact church authorities typically exercise strong and even authoritarian pastoral and liturgical leadership to maintain communal order while encouraging congregational participation. A typical Pentecostal service has three phases: “worship,” sermon, and response.  

A major movement within the charismatic worship stream was what C. Peter Wagner of Fuller Theological Seminary defined as the *Third Wave*. This was called the Third Wave because, within the charismatic worship stream, Pentecostalism was the “first wave,” born in the Azusa Street Revival of 1906; the charismatic renewal was the “second wave” that swept through traditional churches in the 1950s-1970s, and then the “Third Wave” hit in the 1970s and 1980s. Don Williams describes the “Third Wave” in the following way:

It no longer demanded speaking in tongues as the sign of the Spirit’s baptism….In the early 1980’s a new group of Vineyard churches, branching off of the Calvary Chapels of the Jesus Movement, formed under the leadership of former jazz musician John Wimber. Abandoning the use of contemporary music for evangelism and “warming up the crowd,” Wimber saw worship as an end in itself. For him, it included both high praise and songs of intimacy, mostly directed to God himself rather than merely sung about him….This is Wimber’s formula for church services: worship (singing), the Word (preaching), and then the works of Jesus through prayer and the laying on of hands (ministry time).

During the opening musical worship time of the “Third Wave” worship, Wimber developed a five-phase model for worship: a call to worship, engagement, exaltation,  

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adoration, and intimacy. This form helped to bring a more consistent contour to the corporate experience.

The strengths of charismatic worship include highly interactive and deeply responsive congregational involvement, conversions, healing, deliverance, prophecy, visions, evangelism, and the expectation that worshippers will meet and experience God’s presence every time they gather for corporate worship. As with all streams, the critiques of the charismatic stream are multiple. Don Williams admits and Paul Zahl affirms that “the charismatic movement of the 1970s has become a spent force, empirically speaking….It is marginalized throughout the mainline…and now exists in institutional form within Calvary Chapels, Vineyard Fellowships, and nondenominational ‘cathedrals of praise’.” There are also continual concerns about the general absence of the historical Christian sacraments and the need for a more complete expression and experience of the Trinity (and not merely emphasis on the Holy Spirit). Author Sally Morgenthaler’s critique of this stream is telling:

In many ways, charismatic/Pentecostal churches in North America still tend to be bound up in their religions subcultures, cut off from the aesthetic, intellectual, and social contexts of the larger culture. Increasingly there are exceptions to this pattern, but they are intentional: hard fought and hard won….I predict that the most effective Third Wave churches in the U.S. will not simply be made up of churches with a more comprehensible, culturally sensitive worship experience. They will be composed of Spirit-filled churches that take Romans 12:1 “worship as life” out into their streets and homes; they will be gatherings of the faithful


who are driven not simply by Acts 2 (Pentecost), but also by Acts 17 (Mars Hill).36

The future of charismatic worship, like the other streams, will largely depend upon their ability to engage mission in their evangelism and worship.

Blended Worship

Blended Worship is a synthesis of the liturgical and contemporary worship renewal movements in the twentieth century.


The blended worship stream, also known as the worship convergence movement, represents the work of churches to bring together the best of both traditional and contemporary worship movements. Many church leaders felt that something was missing in both the traditional and contemporary worship environments. Convergence advocates believed that the traditional church lacked a vitality and relevance to contemporary culture and that the contemporary movement was missing substance. The movement was not openly recognized until about 1985 and was pioneered by people such as Robert Webber, Robert Stamps, Peter Gillquist, Earl Paulk, and numerous others.37 Redman summarizes Webber’s perspective on the historical development of blended worship:

A keen observer of evangelical church life, Webber believes the convergence movement began in the mid-1980’s, led by evangelicals who were moving toward the liturgical church or who embraced a more liturgically oriented approach to worship. Webber identifies six elements of worship that exhibit this convergence


phenomenon: The first is restored commitment to the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Second…the desire of many evangelicals to know more about the early church. Third…the unity of the church and a desire to overcome division. Fourth…embracing diversity and enculturation. Fifth…seeking to integrate form and freedom in worship. Sixth…hold a greater role for ritual gesture, symbol, and visual art in worship.38

“The Convergence Movement,” written in 1992 by Wayne Boosahda and Randy Sly for The Complete Library of Christian Worship succinctly chronicles the blended worship stream’s inception and development. In this article, Boosahda and Sly recognize the role of the charismatic stream in blended worship and point to a full combination of liturgical/sacramental, charismatic, and evangelical/Reformed as the working grid of converging practices.

The structure of order of worship generally follows the classic liturgical form; however, Robert Webber strongly argues for a fourfold pattern when he says that blended worship: first, gathers the people in God’s presence; second, tells and proclaims the story in song, in Scripture, in preaching, in prayer, and in the kiss of peace; third, enacts the story in water, bread, wine, oil (the symbols speak and act); and fourth, sends God’s people forth into the world to love and serve the Lord.40 In his book Mission Driven Worship, liturgist Handt Hanson describes this fourfold pattern as “Entrance, Word, Table, and Sending.”41 Working within this fourfold pattern, churches insert various

40 Webber, “Blended Worship,” 182.
41 Handt Hanson, Mission Driven Worship (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2001), 28.
musical styles; however, the style of music is secondary to the purpose of the work of form convergence.

The effectiveness of blended worship is very difficult to quantify. Listening to the ground level of some blended worship churches, Webber acknowledges the normal complaints like “there is something in blended worship to offend everyone” and “neither traditional nor contemporary is done very well.” However, as with all streams, the weakness of the blended stream lies in the actual planning and implementation of churches. Blended worship is not, on the one hand, merely using a mix of hymns and choruses and, on the other hand, just following the liturgical script with contemporary music. Quality blended worship requires meticulous and thoughtful planning to create actual convergence and not simply one particular style of worship with a few items tacked on.

Emerging Worship

More and more emerging generations who were raised in the church are saying that there must be something more to “church” than what they have experienced. The systems we use to teach them how to be disciples of Jesus are not connecting with them like they did for generations past. Emerging generations say it just doesn’t “feel right” or “fit right” anymore. They want to be disciples of Jesus, but how we approach disciple-making needs to shift right alongside their shifting values.


At their core, emerging worship services are encounters with God born out of a dual passion for theological rootedness and a deeply transforming connection with the radically deconstructed culture. At best, they are balanced responses to the person and works of God on the one hand and the contexts of their individual, postmodern communities on the other. At worst, emerging worship services are experiences for experience’s sake, replete with improvisation but devoid of the
The emerging worship stream is the most recent newcomer to the North American picture of corporate worship. The word *emerging* literally means “adj. newly formed or just coming into prominence, v. to come to light, being discovered.” The emergent church movement is a loosely bound network of people and churches in conversation about and trying experiments in Christian ministry amidst the cultural shift towards postmodernism. There are several theological, philosophical, and ecclesiological arguments swirling around this movement because of its tendency to be a postmodern movement of protest against the modern church in all of its forms. Author Dan Kimball published two manual style books called *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* and *Emerging Worship: Creating Worship Gatherings for New Generations*. In these books he summarizes the overarching beliefs of the emergent movement and worship stream.

In *Emerging Worship*, Kimball describes the corporate worship experience in a list of ten common values and themes.

1) Emerging worship moves away from a spectator type of gathering. 2) There is an organic design to the worship gathering. 3) A sacred space is created for the worship gathering 4) A multisensory approach to the worship gathering 5) Freedom of movement in worship. 6) A different focal point (Jesus is the centerpiece, not the preacher or musicians). 7) A revival of liturgy, ancient disciplines, Christian seasons, and Jewish roots. 8) An emphasis on prayer. 9)  

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Communion as a central part of emerging worship. 10) Jesus as the centerpiece of worship.”43

To get more specific about what happens in emergent worship, Sally Morgenthaler writes:

Having shifted from “knowing-by-notion” to “knowing-by-narrative,” realignment in emerging congregations is experiential more than mental, sensory more than read. It is a whole-person and whole-community immersion into the lives and living Chronicles of God….What does emerging realignment look like, sound like, feel like?

- It is the hushed tones of a gathering prayer—the drama of John 1:1-5 recaptured in poetry and set to a video loop of a swirling galaxy.
- It is the hymn “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence” reconstituted in electronica and brought to life with a kaleidoscopic, digital backdrop.
- It is the mimed story of Jacob wrestling with God, followed by silent reflection and the option of “drawn” prayer…worshipers sketching images of the God-conflicts on large sheets of butcher-block paper taped to the walls.
- It is reciting the Apostles’ Creed together, each affirmation accompanied by scanned and projected “graffiti” art—children’s spray-painted interpretations of Creation, Fall, Redemption, Revelation.
- It is any whole-person, experiential avenue of seeing God, seeing oneself, and being caught up in the unfolding miracle of divine grace.44

To execute such complex worship experiences, both Kimball and Morgenthaler stress the importance of having teams of artistic and pastoral leaders working together to shape the corporate worship experience.

The emergent worship stream is currently the most imitated or adopted worship style for designing new worship services. There is much debate as to what is postmodern worship, emergent worship, youth worship, or just “new” worship. Regardless of how one classifies the multiplicity of explorative journeys into the emergent stream, all across


America, new churches are being birthed with worship services that have the look and feel of emergent. As well, medium to large churches are adding new worship service styles and times whose names are akin to “The Gathering,” “Ecclesia,” “Frontline,” “The Spirit Garage,” “The Upper Room,” “Next Level,” “Soul Purpose,” “Vintage Faith,” “Solomon’s Porch,” and “The House of Grace.” Amidst the emergent experimentation, contentious theological debates, trial and error, successes and failure, there is a renewed missional engagement with culture that is promising. Critics warn that emergent worship programming is too complex and multi-faceted to realistically organize on a frequent basis. If the emergent worship stream can, like all worship streams, find creative ways to ritualize the full spectrum of their ideals, they will successfully create the systems necessary to continue a sustainable worship model.

**Generational Identity and the Expansion of Worship Styles**

Paralleling the six streams of worship, there are philosophical conversations about generational identity and its impact on the worship. In regards to the broad classification of “Builder,” “Baby Boomer,” and “Millenial,” it is a sociological reality that people collectively identify with generational attitudes, learning patterns, lifestyles, understandings of religion, politics, institutions, morality, and culture as a whole. The effects of generational preferences on the corporate worship experience are remarkable. Historically, the evangelical church witnessed this firsthand in what has now been called the “Baby Boomerang.” Redman chronicled this phenomenon:

> In every generation, there are children who are raised in a church environment and who later drop out. But for the Baby Boomers, the dropout rate was unprecedented. More than one-third of all Boomers, some thirty million, left the
church they had been raised in...In the later 1980’s and early 1990’s, many of these unchurched Baby Boomers began returning to church. The “Baby Boomerang,” as it was termed, came as some Boomers began to experience a midlife crisis of relationships and family, career and material success or failure, and the death of their parents….Impatient with traditional worship, they came with an ear for their own styles of music and an eye for multimedia communication; they found a service still clinging to high-art church music and a traditional preaching style, and worshipers with their heads stuck in hymnals and bulletins….Not surprisingly, many (often older) lay leaders and members of established churches viewed the Boomerang as a mixed blessing. They wondered aloud, “Who are these upstarts to come here and demand changes to our church to suit their needs.  

The demands of the Boomers on worship styles are not unique to their generation. Millennials are making similar demands for change based upon their generational markers in regards to the emerging worship stream.

Robert Webber tracked the impact of the Millennial generation on the evangelical church in his book The Younger Evangelicals. Webber organized his generational categories around what he describes as three evangelical leadership movements that correspond to the Builder, Boomer, and Millennial generations. Unlike most generational timelines related to birth, he pinpoints the time frames in which generations move into church leadership. In regards to corporate worship Webber’s conclusions are summarized in table 5.

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Table 5. Approaches to worship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Style</strong></td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Contemporary</td>
<td>Liturgical, Ancient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>Future, Contemporary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
<td>Thematic</td>
<td>Topical</td>
<td>Triune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure</strong></td>
<td>Threefold: sing, preach, invite</td>
<td>Twofold: music set and preaching</td>
<td>Fourfold: narrative of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>gathering, hearing the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Word, Communion, dismissal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participation</strong></td>
<td>Primarily congregational</td>
<td>Singing of choruses</td>
<td>Highly interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>singing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arts</strong></td>
<td>Banners</td>
<td>Art as illustration, drama</td>
<td>Art as embodiment,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Environmental arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seating</strong></td>
<td>Rows</td>
<td>Theater seats</td>
<td>Relational configuration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Space</strong></td>
<td>Traditional turn-of-the-century</td>
<td>Theaters or theater-type</td>
<td>Homes, Warehouses,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>buildings</td>
<td>spaces</td>
<td>Churches, Modified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cathedrals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Christian Year</strong></td>
<td>Seldom followed</td>
<td>Almost never followed</td>
<td>Frequently followed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Symbols</strong></td>
<td>Stained glass, Pulpit and</td>
<td>No Symbols</td>
<td>Strong use of symbols,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>table, Baptist font or pool</td>
<td></td>
<td>Icons in many churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eucharist</strong></td>
<td>Quarterly or monthly</td>
<td>Quarterly, monthly, or</td>
<td>Weekly in many churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sporadic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technology</strong></td>
<td>Overhead projector in some churches</td>
<td>Widespread use of PowerPoint,</td>
<td>Restore authentic symbols,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>video, etc.</td>
<td>PowerPoint generally used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>for icon projection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instruments</strong></td>
<td>Organ and brass</td>
<td>Bands</td>
<td>Eclectic use of instruments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Music</strong></td>
<td>Traditional hymns</td>
<td>Contemporary Choruses</td>
<td>Eclectic use including</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ancient forms of singing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preaching</strong></td>
<td>Didactic</td>
<td>Therapeutic</td>
<td>Narrative with an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>emphasis on obedience and</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Christians living,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scripture Readings</strong></td>
<td>At least one Scripture reading</td>
<td>Very little Scripture reading,</td>
<td>One to three scripture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>often none</td>
<td>readings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intercessory Prayer</strong></td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>Weekly and usually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>engaging people in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>participatory prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Choir</strong></td>
<td>Traditional choirs,</td>
<td>No choir, Worship</td>
<td>Singing serves the text,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presentational</td>
<td>leader teams</td>
<td>Strong emphasis on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>congregational leadership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with all summaries of larger and complex topics, Webber generalizes much of what has happened and is happening in evangelical worship. It should also be noted that, in the *Younger Evangelical* category of table 5, Webber’s zealously for blended and ancient-future worship may be forcing items like the Christian calendar, the Eucharist, and the fourfold structure into the picture of current trends, when, in fact, emerging and postmodern churches do not adhere to any one specific pattern.

Interpretations of generational identity and allowances for impact on corporate worship in evangelical churches vary greatly. Gary McIntosh, an author known for his examination of generational issues, notes that churches generally follow five models of corporate worship design: the blended model—combining two or more style preferences; the seeker model—targeting the unchurched and driven by demographic research; the multiple-track model—offering different styles of worship for each generation; the satellite model—with worship services in different locations or venues with style based upon local demographics; and the rebirthed model—the abandonment of one generational style to begin another.46 A voice resonating with the church growth movement, McIntosh understands these five models simply as functional ways of organizing church. He states: “I’m not talking about doctrinal or spiritual compromise…but in reference to functional changes taking place in our churches, we need to take the wise approach. We should be

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willing to use whatever methods or models work best, without compromising our message or integrity."  

Some worship theologians strongly disagree with the notion of bifurcating corporate worship upon generational lines. Theologian Harold Best rages:

Here is where I unequivocally take a position. To divide congregations into age groups, style groups and preference groups is to be semi- or even pseudo-corporate. The body of Christ is as chronologically and stylistically whole as it is spiritually whole. It is ironic—worse, scripturally troublesome—to see local assemblies broken into groups, each doing their niche of worship, for that is all it really seems to be….The problem is not with any one style, but with the reluctance of people to rub up against a multiplicity of styles, for it is the rubbing—the creative friction—that could bring about the stylistic syntheses that the body of Christ so desperately needs.

Best believes that the crux of the matter is musical style choice. However, for Best, acquiescing to music choice raises the importance of music in worship to unacceptable heights. Author Marva Dawn also argues alongside Best that splitting the congregation amidst style choices is a danger to be avoided:

It seems unwise to me to create two different Sunday worship services utilizing two different styles of music because almost always that splits the congregation into two camps. Moreover, the split between “traditional” and “contemporary” usually divides the parish along age lines, and consequently younger and newer believers lose the opportunity to gain from the faith experience and maturity of older members. Such a split allows a congregation to escape talking about worship and types of music and precludes genuine communal conversation about the weaknesses and strengths of various styles.


This forceful argument has some weaknesses in regards to biblical precedent. Christian
tradition and history inform some aspects of corporate worship; however, the Bible does
not mandate specific worship times, attendance size, type of musical instruments, specific
order of worship, and locations for gathering the people of God. The deeper issue at stake
is the tendency of some churches to uncritically acquiesce to people’s preferences
without concern for theology and historical worship practices. Redman points out that
focusing too much upon homogenous units or generationally targeted worshippers is at its
best counterproductive and at its worst pandering:

Another problem with overreliance on generational targeting and marketing, as
we saw…with the seeker service movement, is the potential for pandering. A
desire to create identification with a generation’s perspectives often becomes
uncritical accommodation to its preferences. Churches that plan and lead worship
hoping to attract one generation can often wind up saying or doing anything to
keep them coming and holding their attention.50

The current evangelical worship landscape includes both churches that uncritically
pander to stereotypical generational choices, and others that more carefully consider
theologically informed processes as priority over sociological techniques for updating
their worship practices.

**Increasing Gaps between Mission and Worship in the Wake of Postmodernity**

Our postmodern society has come to regard worship as the private, internal, and
often arcane activity of religionists who retreat from the world to practice their
mystical rites. By definition, however, the *ekklesia* is a public assembly, and its
worship is its first form of mission. This is the emphasis that the covenant
community brings to worship. The reality of God that is proclaimed in worship is
to be announced to and for the entire world. The walls and windows of churches
need to become transparent…This worship cannot happen merely as a result of

liturgical innovation, nor will it be accomplished by converting the meeting into an evangelistic crusade meeting. Rather, the conversion of worship to its missional centeredness will come about as communities are gripped by their vocation to be Christ’s witness and begin to practice that calling.


One reason evangelical churches unwittingly use their worship services as marketing tools is because they are getting desperate. In the wake of postmodernity, North American church attendance is crumbling. The days of people “going to church” simply because there is a church building nearby are finished. Many evangelical leaders agree that the marginalization of the Christian Church in North American culture requires a significant shift in the way the mission of the church is to be lived out. Corresponding to these changes, the relationship between worship and mission also must experience significant change.

Fifty to seventy-five years ago, churches expected a continual flow of new people, Christians and non-Christians alike, visiting their worship services. At that time, the worship service was the “front door” of the church and, almost without question, the focus of evangelism and mission. Numerically speaking, the Pentecostal and Revivalist churches benefitted the most from a culture that considered church attendance a social norm. The American public responded in large numbers and at large gatherings to worship services that featured fiery sermons and altar calls. This evangelism-driven worship model is now by sheer statistical analysis, however, a broken model for reaching non-Christians. The twenty-first-century, postmodern turn requires churches to move the front door of the church to its smallest and purest form: the people of God as they live
their lives day to day in the world around them. Deconstruction of the failing worship-driven evangelism model begins by addressing the current theological and philosophical gaps that have widened over the past twenty-five years.

The first theological gap is between historical worship theology and current worship practice. The second theological gap is between historical theology of mission and current use of worship as evangelism. Regarding the first gap, Paul Basden points to five historic, non-negotiable elements of worship, regardless of style, that are rooted in historical Christian tradition: “music, prayer, the Word of God, ordinances and sacraments, and the offering.”

Going even further, the seminal work on the historical background of worship, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, describes eight principles of biblical and historic worship, shown in table 6.

Compared against these eight historic principles of worship, much of evangelical worship, especially in the Free Church tradition, finds itself negligent in several worship practices. Driven to be relevant and evangelize large crowds, many evangelical churches set aside important worship practices to focus more intently on the primary goal of evangelizing non-Christians in the worship experience. Ironically, in the twenty-first century, it is more Christians than non-Christians who are attracted to such evangelistically driven worship experiences. This is especially so when the worship

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experience is delivered with high quality production values and popular themes. William Willimon sounds a warning against this:

…the first and foremost purpose of our worship is to respond to God. In its most basic sense, worship has no other function than the joyful, ecstatic, abandon that comes when we meet and are met by God. Any attempt to use worship to educate, manipulate, or titillate can be a serious perversion of worship. As I noted earlier, much of our Sunday morning worship, especially in Protestant churches, has been flattened to a purely human enterprise in which people are the chief focus of our liturgy rather than God. While motivation for social action, comforting of grieving people, or education into a broader knowledge of the faith may all be worthy goals, if worship is viewed as only a technique of achieving these goals, worship is being used and thereby abused. God is not to be used for our own purposes, not even for our own good purposes.\(^53\)

Some evangelical leaders oppose Willimon’s position and defend evangelism-driven worship by demanding that our worship reflect the missionary nature of God. Second Peter 3:9b states “God does not want anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” There can be no argument against pursuing God-centered worship that reflects his missional nature. However, when the corporate worship event is burdened with the responsibility of being the starting point, and in some cases the only point, of a church’s evangelistic thrust, it will inevitably set aside the primary purpose of glorifying God. This misappropriation is, in fact, the second theological gap.

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Table 6. Understanding the principles of worship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Worship Celebrates Christ</th>
<th>In proclaiming God’s saving work through Jesus Christ in song, story, prayer, and thanksgiving, the church glorifies God and extols him for his acts of redemption. Thus it accomplishes Peter’s declaration that God’s people “may declare the praises of him who called [them] out of darkness into wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:0)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principle Two</td>
<td>Worship Tells and Acts Out The Christ Event</td>
<td>The order of worship is designed to reveal God’s action in history. Through that order, the worshipping community meets the God who has acted, and who continues to speak and act among his people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle Three</td>
<td>In Worship God Speaks and Acts</td>
<td>If worship is truly rooted in the gospel and celebrates Christ, then we can expect a divine action to occur in worship, revealed through words and signs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle Four</td>
<td>Worship is an Act of Communication</td>
<td>Communication takes place in worship when the Lord speaks and acts and the people of God respond. Worship employs both the spoken word and the symbolic act so that God can touch all areas of an individual’s life and communicate with people of varying personalities. By the same token, the worshipper uses both word and act to express devotion to God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle Five</td>
<td>In Worship We Respond to God and to Each Other</td>
<td>More than an intellectual assent to doctrine, creed, or prayer, worship is an experience of the presence of a holy God. Response to this encounter should touch the center of the worshiper’s being, creating a sense of awe and mystery. It should also result in an admission of one’s unworthiness and need for repentance, and in renewed commitment to a life of obedience to the might and merciful God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle Six</td>
<td>Worship Is an Act of the People</td>
<td>Worship is not a service or entertainment performed for the laity, but an act that requires the participation of all members in the body of Christ. For this reason there is a need to achieve a balance between order and freedom. An overemphasis on order can lead to ritualism; an overemphasis on freedom sometimes leads to chaos. Most churches suffer from an overemphasis on order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle Seven</td>
<td>Worship Makes Effective Use of God’s Creative Gifts</td>
<td>The Bible envisions worship as an offering of the entire person in living sacrifice to the Lord. Creative and thoughtful use of space and art, as well as attention to the traditional church calendar, combine to make worship an experience that involved body, soul, and spirit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle Eight</td>
<td>Worship Is a Way of Life</td>
<td>Worship is not only an action. It is also a way of life that the church experiences in each of its members day to day. When worship is central, all of life proceeds toward it and issues from it again, in blessed rhythm.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The historic work of mission and evangelism in the West is rooted in the practice of Christians reaching non-Christians with the gospel of Jesus Christ one-to-one. Yet, consistently, the evangelical church hijacks the corporate worship experience with its emphasis on large crowd evangelism techniques rather than the hard work of nurturing relational evangelism. On the surface, the numeric success of mass evangelism in the
twentieth century appears nothing short of spectacular. It is no secret, however, that success for events like the Billy Graham crusades centered on the work of the Holy Spirit motivating hundreds of thousands of individuals to invite and pray for their non-Christian friends and neighbors.

As the twenty-first century dawns, the archetypal, Western, postmodern person is highly resistant to the mass evangelism techniques of the previous century. One could even go so far as to say that the postmodern secular person is inoculated against mass evangelism because this person has experienced it in small enough doses to form elaborate philosophical and spiritual barriers against its methods. Thus, it is time for the evangelical church to view its corporate worship event differently than it has in the past. Church leaders must assume the baseline importance of maintaining complete accessibility for the non-Christian to attend the worship event. However, worship should focus on the primary purpose of glorifying God and experiencing his transforming presence. The missional character of worship is activated when churches posture the corporate event as a centrifugal experience that thrusts the people of God into the world rather than a centripetal model that asks the people of God to come to church. Unquestionably, evangelism must continue to occur in and around the worship event; however, the new front line of mission is the world outside of the walls of the church building.

The philosophical gaps of evangelical church worship are probably no better summarized than in Robert Webber’s and Phil Kenyon’s article “A Call to an Ancient Evangelical Future.”
...while we affirm the global strength and vitality of worldwide Evangelicalism in our day, we believe the North American expression of Evangelicalism needs to be especially sensitive to the new external and internal challenges facing God’s people. These external challenges include the current cultural milieu and the resurgence of religion and political ideologies. The internal challenges include Evangelical accommodation to civil religion, rationalism, privatism and pragmatism. In light of these challenges, we call Evangelicals to strengthen their witness through a recovery of the faith articulated by the consensus of the ancient Church and its guardians in the traditions of Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, the Protestant Reformation and the Evangelical awakenings. Ancient Christians faced a world of paganism, Gnosticism and political domination. In the face of heresy and persecution, they understood history through Israel’s story, culminating in the death and resurrection of Jesus and the coming of God’s Kingdom.54

Webber and Kenyon go on to point out that, today, like the time of the ancient church, the evangelical church and the gospel of Jesus Christ are confronted by several contrasting and competing master narratives. In light of the philosophical “accommodation to civil religion, rationalism, privatism, and pragmatism,” they call for six corrections: to turn away from modern theological methods that reduce the gospel to mere propositions, and from contemporary pastoral ministries so compatible with culture that they camouflage God’s story or empty it of its cosmic and redemptive meaning; to turn away from the kind of individualism that redefines the Church according to business models, separatist ecclesiologies, and judgmental attitudes toward the Church; to turn away from methods that separate theological reflection from the common traditions of the Church; to turn away from forms of worship that focus on God as a mere object of the intellect or that assert the self as the source of worship in which lecture-oriented, music-driven, performance-centered, and program-controlled models do not adequately proclaim God’s

54 Robert Webber and Phil Kenyon, “A Call to an Ancient Evangelical Future,” in Ancient-Future Worship, 179.
cosmic redemption; to return to a historic spirituality and disciplines like those taught and practiced in the ancient Church; to intensify their prophetic voice and counter-cultural stance against indifference to God’s gift of life, economic and political injustice, ecological insensitivity, and the failure to champion the poor and marginalized.  

The dramatic call for change proposed by Webber and Kenyon are signs that the evangelical church stands at a crossroads. Eddie Gibbs refers to this time as a “strategic inflection point in which local churches and entire denominations must not assume that they have divine immunity from the consequences of failing to move at the ‘kairos’ moment, which is a special God-appointed time when significant factors converge to provoke the need for decisive action.” The strategic inflection point for worship is the invitation to be honest about the failures of worship-driven evangelism, re-examine the theology and philosophy of worship, and reform it to be more missionally informed than market driven.


56 Gibbs, ChurchNext, 32.
CHAPTER 2

ASSESSMENT OF THE WORSHIP EVANGELISM MOVEMENT AND ITS PURPORTED FAILURE

Church Liminality and the Birth of Worship Evangelism

Liminality is a term that describes the transition process accompanying a change of state or social position. A group moves through what is described as a “tunnel” experience when it is shifted into a marginal situation within a culture.

—Alan J. Roxburgh, 
*The Missionary Congregation, Leadership, and Liminality*

The significant decline of the Christian Church in the West originated in Europe immediately following World War I. Eddie Gibbs notes that “North Americans had long considered themselves immune from such a fate because the United States had for so many decades been an anomaly in the Western World.”¹ It appeared that North Americans were incurably religious as reflected in both their orthodoxy of religious beliefs and the high percentage of their population that attended church each Sunday. Yet, beginning in the mid 1960s, a decline of the Christian Church in the United States began. The decline was slower than what had taken place in Europe and Canada and yet very real.

Sociologists Stanley Presser and Linda Stinson claim that worship attendance from the mid-1960s to the 1990s was about 26 percent of the population.\(^2\) Researcher David Olson notes that, while popular polling agencies like Barna and Gallup tout much higher attendance percentages, their numbers simply do not add up. Olson writes:

They (Hadaway and Marler) compiled data from more than 300,000 Christian congregations in the United States and found that churches totaled 52 million people in attendance, or 17.7 percent of the American population in 2004. These studies indicate a rather large halo effect for self-reporting church attendance.\(^3\)

The “halo effect” that Olson refers to is the untruthfulness of people about their church participation. Many Americans say that they attend church, but in reality do not. Of greater concern for Olson than the 17.7 percent of people participating in Christian churches is the widening gap between the general growth of the population and the basically flat growth of the Christian Church. He points out that, with flat church growth and a net population growth of fifty-two million people from 1990-2006, the Church is clearly falling behind in reaching new people for Jesus Christ.\(^4\)

Alan Roxburgh observed the causes behind these statistical trends and broadly refers to this crisis in terms of marginalization and liminality. He writes:

Marginalization is the new language used to describe the experience of the church in modernity. For George Hunsburger (1991),\(^5\) it is experienced as a crisis and loss of social function by churches. He suggests that this changed social location can be described in two parts: first, the caretaker days of the churches are over;

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\(^3\) Olson, *The American Church in Crisis*, 28.

\(^4\) Ibid., 35.

and second, modern culture—in which the churches find themselves—is itself undergoing fundamental transformation. The first element in Hunsberger’s analysis refers to the much-discussed end of Christendom. This means that churches can no longer assume that they are the priests and pastors of the culture. The second element is a much larger issue of modernity’s own transformations within which the churches are in a position quite different from that of the margins.6

Roxburgh further notes, “Liminality, as a threshold experience, places a group in a place of confusion. The state of betwixt-and-between is like death and loss.”7 In the midst of this confusion and loss, some evangelical churches fully embraced secular forms of entrepreneurialism. What ensued was sweeping and wholesale changes in the way they designed their church philosophies and the corporate worship event. One of the most talked about examples of this was the “Seeker Service” movement.

Willow Creek Community Church in suburban Chicago is widely regarded as the birthplace of the seeker movement. In 1993, pastor and author Ed Dobson commented on Willow Creek:

There is no question that the Willow Creek Community Church has radically challenged the thinking of traditional churches. The church in South Barrington, Illinois, offers a model of ministry that is “consumer oriented.” It attempts to relate the gospel in a culturally relevant way to unchurched men and women. And judging by the thousands who attend, the church has achieved unique results. People flock to its seminars, buy its materials, and emulate its model.8

The seeker worship service was central to the identity of the movement’s thrust. Redman described the seeker service in the following way:

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6 Roxburgh, The Missionary Congregation, 3-4.
7 Ibid., 32.
The seeker service approach builds on a basic assumption: unchurched people have dropped out of church or have stayed away because of traditional liturgy and music. Seeker churches create instead an alternative environment in which to hear the gospel by using styles of music and communication that the seekers already know….A seeker-targeted or seeker-focused service aims at the unchurched or unbelieving attendee; it avoids as much traditional liturgy and music as possible and adopts a high level of cultural relevance in music and communication.9

The seeker movement attracted thousands of people to worship services. In a very short amount of time, Willow Creek became one of the largest congregations in the United States. However, both the movement and the church also drew a large amount of criticism because its corporate worship experience prioritized evangelism over worship and performance over participation. Willow Creek rebutted the critics by pointing to their midweek worship service as the core gathering of committed Christians. However, much weaker attendance levels at the midweek worship service led many to believe that their weekend, self-described “Christian infomercial” was indeed their primary worship service. Redman noted that Willow Creek “scrupulously avoided using the word worship to describe the weekend service and used a variety of means to communicate the contract between ‘new community’ worship services and weekend events…yet the confusion between worship and seeker events continues among many attendees at Willow Creek.”10

Countless authors and theologians argued against the seeker movement, but none resonated with evangelical churches quite as deeply as Worship Evangelism written by author Sally Morgenthaler in 1995. Morgenthaler elucidated the focus of her book when she wrote in her preface:

9 Redman, The Great Worship Awakening, 3.

10 Ibid., 18.
The central paradigm of this book is that our worship of God either affirms or contradicts our message about God. Unbelievers (including those who are churched and unchurched) will draw lasting conclusions about the veracity and uniqueness of our God based on what they see or do not see happening in our weekly church services. Do they detect something supernatural and life-changing going on? Can they sense God’s presence and work among us? Are they experiencing something in our midst they have never seen before?  

Morgenthaler pointed out that the seeker movement churches were working off a “separatism script that said: ‘Seekers can’t relate to worship. It’s offensive to them. Seekers and worship are like oil and water. They don’t mix. Worship is a believers-only activity.’” Working against the separatist script, Morgenthaler detailed a biblically, philosophically, and culturally based argument for the worship service to be more focused on God but yet an important setting for evangelism. Her challenge to churches was to combine pure forms of worship with effective evangelism. She wrote:

> Just how does evangelism take place in a service that is “fully worship”? It happens in two ways: first, as unbelievers hear the truth about God (through worship songs, prayer, Communion, baptism, Scripture, testimonies, drama, and so on); and second—and more importantly—as they observe the real relationship between worshipers and God.

The basic tenet here is that unbelievers, currently identified as living in an experience-oriented culture, will see Christians in authentic worship and hunger after that kind of relationship with God.

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12 Ibid., 80-81.
13 Ibid., 88.
The Numeric Success and Kingdom Failure of Worship Evangelism

…the relationship between the traditional Christendom mode of church and the world around it can best be described as being fundamentally attractional. The church bids people to come and hear the gospel in the holy confines of the church and its community. Evangelism therefore is primarily about mobilizing church members to attract unbelievers into church where they can experience God. Rather than being genuine “outreach,” it effectively becomes something more like an “in-drag.” Now, we are not suggesting that people can’t experience God in a church service. Of course they can, for in the preaching of God’s Word and the worship of God’s people his true voice can be heard. But if the church limits God’s agency in this world to particular times and places that the vast majority of not-yet-Christians have no access to, or no desire to attend, then the gospel is effectively hobbled….If they won’t come to us, we have to go to them. This approach, being incarnational, is the opposite of being attractional.

—Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch in The Shaping of Things to Come

At the point Morgenthaler wrote Worship Evangelism in 1995, the praise and worship movement that had begun in the 1960s and 1970s was bourgeoning. The charismatic- and contemporary-driven music streams were peaking in growth. The Worship Evangelism paradigm resonated with many evangelical churches because they were deeply interested in evangelism, the praise and worship movement was successful at drawing larger numbers of people into church buildings, and the seeker model was difficult to transfer to many settings around the United States. Hundreds of churches across America began to view corporate worship as the new frontier for church evangelism. Morgenthaler chronicled seeker churches making wholesale changes to the Worship Evangelism paradigm including this church:

Recently a seeker-driven church in a fast-growing suburban area added several worship elements to its seeker event….When I asked the church’s pastor why his congregation made such a change, he responded: “The seeker event we were offering wasn’t cutting it for some of the seekers who were coming. They said that they were looking for something with more of a ‘spiritual feel’ to it. So, we
decided to provide a different kind of service, a celebrative time that both energizes believers and enlightens seekers."\(^{14}\)

The biblically motivated aspects of Worship Evangelism appeared to be having a very positive effect both for Christians and for seekers. However, some churches were abandoning the hard work of churchwide evangelism in lieu of making the corporate worship experience an attractional evangelistic event. Confronted by a colleague, Morgenthaler wrote about the realization in 2007 for *Rev! Magazine*:

In his view, Worship Evangelism had helped to create a “worship-driven subculture.” As he explained it, this subculture was a sizeable part of the contemporary church that had just been waiting for an excuse not to do the hard work of real outreach. An excuse not to get their hands dirty. According to him, that excuse came in the form of a book—my book. He elaborated. “If a contemporary worship service is the best witnessing tool in the box, then why give a rip about what goes on outside the worship center? If unbelievers are coming through the doors to check us Christians out, and if they’ll fall at Jesus’ feet after they listen to us croon worship songs and watch us sway back and forth, well then, a whole lot of churches are just going to say, ‘Sign us up!’”\(^{15}\)

Morgenthaler went on to explain in the article that, as she consulted across the United States, indeed a worship-driven subculture had formed in the likeness of what her friend described.

This was never the intention of Morgenthaler or the Worship Evangelism paradigm. For sure, Morgenthaler described ways for worship to be biblically based, culturally relevant, and accessible to both Christians and non-Christian. Without question, she described clear and practical aspects for faithful worship design like the “four essentials for worship evangelism” in chapter 5: “Essential #1: Nearness-A Sense

\(^{14}\) Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism*, 78.

of God’s Presence, Essential #2: Knowledge-Worship Centered on Christ, Essential #3: Vulnerability-Opening Up to God, and Essential #4: Interaction-Participating in a Relationship with God and Others.”

However, not once did Morgenthaler imply that this form of evangelism was intended to replace the broader work of evangelism in church life. Yet, it was clear that many churches highjacked the idea of Worship Evangelism for the purpose of creating large attractional evangelism events.

Morgenthaler lamented:

No, what my friend shared with me wasn’t news. He’d simply confirmed my worst fears. How ironic. When I wrote Worship Evangelism, I’d had no intention of distracting people from the world outside. I only wanted to give them another way of connecting to it. I certainly had never meant to make worship some slick formula for outreach, let alone the one formula. I’d only wanted to affirm that corporate worship has the capability to witness to the unchurched if we make it accessible and if we don’t gut it of its spiritual content on the way to making it culturally relevant.

But those were different times. To witness through worship, the unchurched actually need to show up. And back then, this was happening. Those were the days when a church start-up could simply put up a billboard sign, send out several hundred glossy mailers, and the unchurched-curious would come to check it out. The contemporary, user-friendly spin may not have been as factory fresh as it was in the ‘80s, but it was still interesting. To the religiously allergic who hadn’t been to church since grade school, it looked like religion had come of age.

The misinterpretation of Worship Evangelism became a problem in two ways. First, for the more savvy churches, the attendance in worship services grew enormously; however, as cited earlier, the people coming to the large attractional worship experiences were transfer Christians. Second, the spiritual culture of the United States was rapidly changing. Unlike the 1980s and early 1990s non-Christians were no longer taking the

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16 Morgenthaler, Worship Evangelism, 96-139.
initiative to visit churches. The modes of evangelism had changed without the worship-driven churches taking notice.

If summed up in one phrase, the Worship Evangelism movement could be called "a numerical success and a Kingdom failure." In Luke 13:18-21, Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to the mustard seed and the work of yeast in bread dough. In both cases, the core elements expand outward to produce fruit that far exceeds their original size. The fruit of Kingdom work is new conversions to Christianity, not merely the reorganization of Christians.

The Role of Embedded Theology in the Demise of Worship Evangelism

Questions continue to linger as to how evangelical churches could so egregiously misinterpret the Worship Evangelism concept. One explanation is the insidious effect of embedded theology upon the day-to-day decision making of church leadership. John Hull remarked about embedded theology in writing:

> Our embedded theology may seem so natural and feel so comfortable that we carry it within us for years, unquestioned and perhaps even unspoken. But occasions arise that require us to think about our embedded theology, to put it into words and then subject it to serious second thought.¹⁷

The embedded theologies of church congregations vary from context to context. The task of identifying specific embedded theologies requires a cross examination of multiple factors including, among many things, leadership practices, congregational demographics, church tradition, denominational impact, and both the written and unwritten rules of order.

¹⁷ John Hull, “Exploring the Contours of Ministry” (class notes, Fuller Seminary, 2005), 2.
The opposite of embedded theology is “deliberative theology.” Hull describes deliberative reflection and theology as the following:

Deliberative reflection questions what has been taken for granted. It inspects a range of alternative understandings in search of that which is most satisfactory and seeks to formulate the meaning of faith as clearly and coherently as possible. Like Solomon, the theologian wants to take all the testimony and evidence under advisement, press beneath the surface to the heart of the matter, and develop an understanding of the issue that seems capable—at least for the present—of withstanding any further appeal. This is deliberative theological thinking.18

Deliberative reflection and theology as a discipline is a safeguard against embedded theology. Deliberative reflection involves the examination of Scripture, tradition, and the specific context of individual churches. Upon close examination, the theological practices of worship-driven evangelism churches reflect four broad, problematic patterns of embedded theology.

The first problematic pattern was the often unstated belief that the work of evangelism is exclusively for professionals. The financial resources available to those living in the United States allow many people to buy goods and services that were not previously available to past generations. It is a commonly accepted practice for Americans to hire other people to clean their houses, manicure their lawns and landscaping, provide child care for their children, coach them in fitness, deliver groceries and clothing, and perform many other functions. The practice of paying for goods and services has also seeped into Church life. For instance, families with children expect churches to provide programs and childcare without having to volunteer in the execution of those programs.

In regards to worship-driven evangelism, it appeared that congregations were quick to turn over the work of evangelism to professional communicators and musicians. Movements like *Evangelism Explosion*, led by D. James Kennedy, and other one-to-one evangelism ministries evaporated in the 1990s while the shift in the evangelism emphasis was moved almost carte blanche to the corporate worship experience. Some churches were able to maintain a focus on God in worship and frame evangelism in more subtle ways. Others devolved their corporate worship experience to people-centered performances. Author Greg Ogden described this practice when he wrote:

> Institutional worship is something done to you, in front of you, for you, but not by you. The congregants come as passive recipients, unconsciously thinking, “I hope this is good today.” People arriving for corporate worship in this frame of mind can leave worship as unmoved as when they arrived. After all, pastors are paid to put together the order of worship, exude charisma, insert moving musical selections, and then preach a stirring message. Since the dynamic is essentially a performer-audience relationship, the worshipers are put in the position of being critics of the latest pastoral effort.¹⁹

Religion professor Donald Miller affirms Ogden’s assessment in stating that “a sign of routinized religion is that functions previously performed by ordinary members are delegated to specifically certified professionals.”²⁰ One has to believe that, indeed, something had gone wrong when all of the personnel leading in worship are paid professionals and the most promoted evangelism tool is inviting people to corporate worship.

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A deliberative reflection on such practices would have debunked the assumption that paying for goods and services was an acceptable practice in church life. The Bible teaches in many places that all of the people of God are called to service in the Kingdom of God. Most explicitly in 1 Peter 2:4-10:

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,” and, “a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Christian tradition grappled with this and other passages of Scripture, most notably during the Protestant Reformation. In the face of egregious leadership corruption, Reformation leaders called for a fresh examination of the “priesthood of all believers” and concluded that all of God’s people were called to be priests before God and each other, not merely those selected and ordained by the Roman Catholic Church. Moving forward to the twenty-first-century, postmodern world, many leaders are calling for a renewed examination of “the priesthood of all believers” in light of various hierarchical entanglements of professional clergy over the people of God. Ogden writes:

Nearly five hundred years after the Reformation, there are rumblings in the church that appear to be creating a climate for something so powerful that we can call it the New Reformation. The New Reformation seeks nothing less than the radical transformation of the self-perception of all believers so that we see
ourselves as vital channels through whom God mediates his life to other members of the body of Christ and to the world.21

Many leaders agree that the current cultural milieu of the West demands that Christian leaders equip and empower the entire laity to leadership and action in new collaborating and non-hierarchical ways. In assessing the practice of worship-driven evangelism, one must conclude that the work of evangelism is for everyone in the church and not merely those leading worship services. In a similar fashion, church leadership should continually look for ways to engage the congregation in broad, active participation and leadership of the worship experience.

The second problematic pattern of worship-driven evangelism was the broad decision to make the worship service the best setting for evangelism. Paul Basden pointed out:

Currently one of the sharpest debates in contemporary church life turns on the relationship of worship styles to church growth…The questions sound like this: “Does one particular worship style typically attract more non-Christians than another? Should a church change its worship style in order to reach more unchurched people? Should worship ever be considered an evangelistic tool?” The discussions can get heated, and confusion often reigns. But, there is no denying that worship and church growth are linked together in the minds of most ministers, either positively or negatively.22

The twentieth-century phenomenon of city-wide evangelistic crusades modeled the practice of worship-driven evangelism, with perhaps the best example being the Billy Graham Crusades. Graham’s revivalist events included stirring worship music, personal testimonies, powerful sermons, and an altar call. Many evangelical churches continue to

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follow this model today in local church settings. Robert Webber expressed concerns about this in writing:

We associate evangelism with a Billy Graham Crusade. In a crusade, there are acts associated with worship such as singing, praying and preaching. Nevertheless, evangelism is not worship because the thrust of the service is directed toward the people, particularly the sinner, with the intention of bringing the sinner to a personal relationship with God through Christ….Unfortunately, many churches have brought this evangelistic model into the Sunday morning service and called it worship. It is not worship; it is evangelism. The church must be about evangelism, but it also must be about worship—and worship is not primarily directed toward the people.  

Morgenthaler agreed with Webber and yet made an appeal to let God-centered worship evangelize in more subtle ways. She wrote:

The purpose and intent of worship is not evangelism. Glorifying God in spirit and truth—responding to God for who God is and what God has done for us, especially in Jesus Christ—is the purpose of Christian worship. In effective worship, worship that witnesses, the central purpose of worship remains unchanged. The focus remains on believers interacting with God, not on appeals for conversion. Yet, evangelism, like discipleship, should be one of worship’s dimensions or by-products. Evangelism is the natural and expected fruit of worship that is authentic and full of God’s presence and truth. Worship that edifies, witnesses; worship that witnesses, edifies.

As evidenced in Basden, Webber and Morgenthaler’s writing a more deliberative integration of worship and evangelism was the theoretical intent of Worship Evangelism at the turn of the millennium. Yet, it was pragmatism that influenced leadership decisions. Evangelism crusades drew huge crowds with thousands of people making decisions for Jesus Christ. Evangelical churches hungered for similar results and thus imitated the revivalist events. These choices, intentional or not, saddled corporate


worship with the burden of carrying the complete load of evangelistic activity for most churches.

The third problematic pattern was the assumption that numeric growth was a sign of spiritual health. Many evangelical churches assumed ministry success or failure is based upon worship attendance and money. Leith Anderson, the senior pastor of Wooddale Church writes:

> Producing disciples is what a healthy church seeks to do. It is an “outcome” approach to church life and ministry. The opposite is to define a church in terms of the number of people it brings in and keeps. Size means more than quality….Frankly, evangelical American Churches have heavily titled toward counting bodies and teaching truth as expressions of health. Both are part of health, but the outcome is more important than the process.25

Eddie Gibbs affirms Anderson in stating: “Social strength should never be confused with spiritual vitality. The presence of the one does not guarantee the existence of the other.”26

Os Guinness speaks to this matter even more forcefully:

> …what of the foundational maxim that “a healthy church will grow numerically”? Unless critiqued theologically, that maxim can slide from a proper emphasis on a healthy church presenting the gospel to unbelievers to an improper emphasis on the health of a church being judged according to unbelievers’ response to the gospel. Who, after all, is really giving the increase? Who is responsible for the response? Methodologically, the answers to these questions make little difference. A church grows either way. But theologically, they mean the difference between church growth as true faith and church growth as a form of streamlined humanistic engineering.27

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26 Gibbs, *Church Next*, 42.

Jesus never defined his effectiveness upon the numbers of people that followed him or listened to him speak. While in prison, and no doubt at a critical juncture in his life, John the Baptizer sent some of his disciples to Jesus asking if he was indeed the Messiah for which John had been preparing. Jesus might have replied “I am the one that you prepared for as proven by the number of people that attend my teaching sessions.” Rather, Jesus replied:

Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me (Luke 7:22-23).

Jesus defined his ministry by obedience to the Father’s will. He was never witnessed to be counting numeric results. The power of Jesus’ miracles and the authority of his teaching frequently drew massive crowds. Yet, Jesus never focused on the large crowds as a measure of success.

This line of reasoning is not an argument against keeping track of congregational trends and statistics. A significant part of discerning what God is doing in corporate church life is to understand congregation patterns. This is also not a statement against the size of church communities. The Bible contains many examples of very large gatherings of God’s people in the Old and New Testament and yet does not mandate a specific size for worshipping communities. Contemporary culture in twenty-first-century America places value on large crowds. However, the guiding principle of shaping ministry, if reflecting Jesus as the ultimate model, is to obediently follow the will of the Father and not to follow popular opinion or claim success based upon attendance.
The final problematic pattern was the implication that worshippers are consumers. Consumerism is the equating of personal happiness with the purchasing of material possessions and consumption. The attractive pull of consumerism has engulfed the United States in the twentieth century and drives almost every economic corner of our culture. People have more credit debt now than ever before in history because of their insatiable desire for more things than they can afford to make themselves happy. This is as true for Christians as for non-Christians. Author Diana Butler Bass comments: “From the Prayer of Jabez, television revivals, Christian theme parks, and The Purpose-Driven Life, to The Passion of the Christ, Christians are a target audience for spiritual products—all promising to lead the religious consumer into a more meaningful life.”

The corporate worship experience is a very real part of the consumer equation. Worship design in a consumer-driven culture has trended toward the wants and needs of people. Clearly, God is interested in the needs of his people; however, in a culture where consumerism, hedonism, and materialism frame daily life, the good intention of meeting people’s needs in corporate worship quickly devolves into giving people what they want. In the self-study by Willow Creek Community Church called Reveal, Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson describes their church’s confession of this failed approach:

Historically at Willow, no matter where someone is along the spiritual continuum, our message has been the same: “We know what you need, and we can meet those needs for you.” We now know that this approach hasn’t always served our congregation well. In many cases we have created unhealthy dependence and inappropriate levels of expectation among those who call Willow home….When Bill (Hybels) laid out the new strategic plan to the congregation in April 2007, he

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said, “We have been wrong. We need to rethink the coaching that we give you as you pursue your spiritual growth.”

Pointing out this major flaw does not necessitate an argument against meeting people’s needs or designing corporate worship that is irrelevant to people’s lives. The complete avoidance of modern culture and relevancy will make worship completely unintelligible to the non-Christian and devoid of personal application for the Christian. However, it should be pointed out that, in worship, the needs of people are met when their stories merge with God’s story. Focus on God rather than popular therapeutic practices will, in the long run, maintain a more biblical and thus more helpful model of corporate worship.

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PART TWO:

TOWARD A THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY OF MISSIONAL WORSHIP
Christian theology is an ongoing, second-order, contextual discipline that engages in critical and constructive reflection on the faith, life, and practices of the Christian community. Its task is the articulation of biblically normed, historically informed, and culturally relevant models of the Christian belief-mosaic for the purpose of assisting the community of Christ’s followers in their vocation to live as the people of God in the particular social-historical context in which they are situated.

—Stanley Grenz and John Franke

*Beyond Foundationalism*

**Worship and Mission in Scripture: Six Period Profiles**

The first step toward considering missional worship is for churches to articulate a biblical theology of worship. Some churches avoid this critical discipline and prefer to define their worship by what works rather than what is right. A biblical theology of worship assumes that what is right is what will work. However, defining a biblical theology of worship is not as easy as one might assume. There are dozens of historical accounts of worship in the Bible, and yet it is difficult work to discern what those accounts imply for worship today. The Bible is void of imperative commands regarding the use or not of organs, drums, video clips, violins, or electric guitars. Also, there are no commands in the Bible to include or not include announcements, dramas, responsive readings, events of the Christian calendar, or specific approaches to preaching.
Nonetheless, the Bible does have much to say about worship in broad theological and philosophical terms.

The biblical story of worship is chronicled in Scripture throughout six major historical periods. These six periods are: the nomadic, Mosaic, Davidic, temple, exilic, and New Testament periods. These periods contain six key theological and philosophical paradigm shifts directed by God that tell the story of worship. In exploring these shifts, we can ascertain what God asked of his people in worship throughout biblical history and what he continues to ask of us today as we gather corporately.

The Nomadic Period: What Do We Have to Offer in Worship?

The book of Genesis records the nomadic origins of God’s people. It was a common way of life to move from place to place while living off the land. In response to God’s provision, the people of God would frequently present offerings to the Lord. As early as the account of Cain and Abel, the practice of offering was ritualized. Genesis 4:2b-5a reads:

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.

The comparison between Cain and Abel is not based on the difference between plant life and animal life. Rather, it is between Cain’s thoughtless offerings versus Abel’s generous offerings of substantive value.

The act of offering in its simplest form was a matter of gratefulness in response to God’s blessings and occasional appearances at significant points of need. Following the
great flood and God’s miraculous rescue of Noah, the biblical writer summarized an account of offering:

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done” (Gen 8:20-21).

Responding to God’s goodness in the form of offering and sacrifice became more fully formed in the storyline of Abraham and his offspring. Ralph Martin described the emerging practice of offering in the life of Abraham:

At Hebron, Abraham built the first altar to Yahweh in thanksgiving for the promise of the land (Genesis 13:18). Worship was offered to Yahweh after Abraham defeated the four kings (Genesis 14:17-24). The worship was “led” by Melchizedek, “the priest of God Most High.” Bread and wine were part of the worship. Melchizedek pronounced a blessing on Abraham (cf. Hebrews 7:1-3). Abraham responded by giving the high priest a tithe of everything that he had. At this early offering of thankful worship to Yahweh, the basic elements of Israel’s worship form were present.1

In addition to offering sacrifices, it is noted that the patriarchs frequently built altars to mark the exact locations of God’s intervening action. Theologian David Peterson notes:

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob built altars throughout Canaan to mark the sites where God manifested himself to them under various names (e.g. Genesis 12:7-8; 13:14-18; 28:10-22). Sacrifice was not offered at any spot which might happen to be convenient, but only at those sites in particular. In this way, it was demonstrated that God’s promises were believed by those who received them, that the land actually belonged to him and that he would give it to his people at the appropriate time.2

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Offering and sacrifice were intentional practices of God’s people to mark, remember, and express gratefulness for God’s faithfulness.

The test of Abraham’s faith in Genesis 22 is considered by some the apex of sacrificial practices in the nomadic period. Foreshadowing the work of Jesus Christ, Abraham’s event shows the power of offering as an expression of faith and means for maintaining a right relationship with God. In Genesis 22 and throughout the entire nomadic period, it is clear that worship offerings are to be substantive in that they demonstrate our thankfulness for what God has done and will do in the future.

The Mosaic Period: How Are We Involved in Worship?

Worship became more formalized in the period beginning with the book of Exodus. This period, surrounding the life of Moses, is marked by the institution and formalization of feasts, festivals, and increasingly complex forms of worship infused with symbolic meaning. The Exodus event ushered in a new era of worship with the Festival of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Passover as its first significant additions. Moses wrote in Exodus 12:

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, “This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household”….“This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance. For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel. On the first day hold a sacred assembly, and another one on the seventh day. Do no work at all on these days, except to prepare food for everyone to eat—that is all you may do. “Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come” (Exod 12: 1-3; 14-17).
After the Exodus, more feasts and festivals were established as a way to root the
daily existence of God’s people in God’s will. Historian Carmine Di Sante writes:

The feasts of Israelite and Jewish worship, like those in other religious traditions,
were occasions on which worshippers might transcend the shortcomings of
ordinary life. The festivals served as “windows” into a higher order of hope and
positive values. In Israel the agricultural feasts took on added meaning as
celebrations of the Lord’s historical acts of blessing and deliverance and as tokens
of the covenant.3

The feasts included the Passover commemorating the Lord’s deliverance of Israel in
Exodus, Pentecost associated with the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, and the Feast of
Tabernacles commemorating the time that Israel spent in the wilderness. The festivals
included weekly Sabbath observances and numerous annual events, including Rosh
Hashanah and The Feast of Trumpets celebrating the New Year, and the Day of
Atonement marking the annual offering by the high priest on behalf of all the people.

This period of biblical history was pivotal in describing the central experience of
the Hebrew people. It also provided a clear indication that God wanted his people to
approach worship with intentionality, organization, and personal involvement.

The Davidic Period: Is God’s Presence Manifest in Our Midst?

The journey of the nation of Israel from Egypt through the wilderness and into the
land of Canaan was a mixture of military movement, intense struggles with idolatry, and
syncretism with the pagan religions of Canaan. Ralph Martin commented:

Israelite worship was constantly threatened by the foreign aspects of Ba’al
worship that conflicted with Yahweh’s prescribed law. Syncretism was a serious

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issue for two major reasons. First, the Israelites settled in the land with the Canaanites and often intermarried with the Ba’al worshipers.…Second, the fact that Yahweh was viewed as the god of the wanderings posed a threat. The Ba’al worshipers’ polytheistic background caused them to view the gods as having power along geographical lines. Since the Israelites were dependent on the land once they settled in Canaan, it might have seemed wise to pay homage to the god of that land, a feature recognized in David’s confession (1 Samuel 26:19) and Naaman’s request (2 Kings 5:17-19).4

Amidst several movements of apostasy and reform, the Davidic monarchy represented the pinnacle of national Hebrew worship in the Old Testament. King David united the kingdom in Jerusalem under a central government and linked Israel’s political identity to its worship identity by bringing the Ark of the Covenant as a national symbol back to Zion. Ralph Martin detailed some of the changes that King David initiated:

In Jerusalem David organized the functions of the priesthood, placing special emphasis on the use of music in worship.…David becomes the example par excellence of a true worshiper, the traditional author of “the psalms of David” that express cultic acts of worship (for example, Psalm 24:150).5

Additionally, based upon biblical accounts, David appointed teams of worshipers who served in rotating shifts, day and night. Their duties consisted of praising the Lord with singing, prophesying, and playing musical instruments before the ark (1 Chron 16:4; 25:1-31).

There were several differences between Mosaic period worship and Davidic period worship. Whereas worship in the time of Moses was ritualistic and ceremonial, Davidic worship was more spontaneous and ecstatic. Mosaic worship was based upon set times and seasons. Davidic worship pulsed with around-the-clock corporate worship at

4 Martin, “History of Israelite and Jewish Worship,” 97.

5 Ibid.
the Ark of the Covenant. Worship theologian Richard Leonard described Davidic
worship as including pilgrimage, the call to worship, the procession, the ascent, the
entrance, the praise of the King, the preparation for the appearance of the Lord, and the
renewal of the covenant. He points out, though, that “the festival was to reach its climax
at the point when the Lord ‘appeared’ in the midst of his people: ‘from Zion, in perfect
beauty, God shines forth’ (Psalm 50:2).”\(^6\)

The manifest presence of God was what King David longed for most of all. In
writing Psalm 63, David described how his soul is nourished by the very real presence of
God:

O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body
longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in
the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better
than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your
name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of
foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you (Psa 63:1-5).

David fed his soul by pursuing the real presence of God. He did not settle for rote
worship experiences but rather passionately expected God to make an appearance and
nourish the souls of his people.

The Temple Period: Is Our Worship Focused on God?

King David’s son and successor to the throne was Solomon. David began building
a central temple for worship in Jerusalem, but it was Solomon who completed it. First
Kings describes the grandeur of the temple completed by Solomon.

Initially, Solomon was careful to dedicate the temple and his work to God. However, foreign influences and faulty civil policy eventually led to the demise of the Israelite commonwealth and the destruction of the temple. Ralph Martin wrote:

Solomon emphasized beautifying the temple not only because he was dedicated to the worship of Yahweh and he desired to show his gratitude, but because he had also begun to be influenced by surrounding foreign powers. The temple and its ornamentation were a sign to foreigners of the wealth and cultural strength of Solomon’s court....Solomon often allowed civil policy to dictate ecclesiastical practices….The religion of Israel before the Exile is depicted as a headlong, spiraling decline leading to disasters. The essentials of worship had been lost. The Word of God, prayer, praise, confession, and forgiveness had become empty rituals that had lost the inner meaning and therefore impeded access to Yahweh.

Solomon was corrupted by power and wealth, and his leadership led to the corruption and decline of Israel’s worship as well.

The Exilic Period: Is Worship Finding Its Way into Our Homes and Communities?

Several times during the time period of 605-586 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire waged war campaigns against the nations of Israel and Judah in particular. These campaigns climaxed with the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. The Holy City was ransacked and burned. Numerous high officials were executed, the temple furnishings were broken up and carried off, and the people of Israel were exiled.

As with many people groups forced to assimilate into new cultures, the Jews adapted to life in exile. The Psalms speak to the discouragement of those in exile and the longing for Zion (Psa 137:1-6); however, not all Jews held this position. When granted permission to return to Jerusalem in 538 BC, many Jews did not do so because they had

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become well established in Babylon. The thought of journeying as immigrants back to a place that was decimated and occupied by divergent and conflicted people groups was not an appealing proposition. Additionally, the cultic identity of the Hebrews drastically changed in Babylon with the emergence of synagogue worship as the center of spiritual activities. Catholic Theologian Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, understood the time of Israel’s exile as a positive community development:

   In pre-exilic Israel one constantly hears voices warning about the rigidifying of the sacrificial system and its degeneration into externalism and syncretism. The Exile came as a challenging opportunity to formulate clearly a positive doctrine about worship and the new thing that was to come.8

Ralph Martin offered further explanation as to what was changing in exilic worship:

   Nehemiah and Ezra played important roles in the gradual return of the exiles and the rebuilding of the community of faith. Although the temple was rebuilt and worship, priestly sacrifices, and pilgrimages were reestablished at the cultic center, the enthusiasm was never to be of the same intensity. The frailty of a faith focused on a central location had been demonstrated in the fall and destruction of the temple one-half century earlier. The non-cultic aspect of the faith, particularly as expressed through emerging synagogue worship, developed greater importance during the Exile, and Ezekiel and the prophet of Isaiah 40-55 had known God’s presence in a strange land without the use of the temple.9

Martin goes on to describe synagogue worship as having a distinct pattern focused on wisdom and the study of Torah, the five books of Moses.

   The term synagogue is derived from the term for any gathering of people for religious or secular purposes. It is derived from the common verb meaning “together,” “to gather together,” or “to bring together.” William White elucidated the evolution of the Jewish synagogue in the following way:

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9 Ibid., 99.
After the dispersion of the Jews at the time of the Exile, places of assembly rose up to maintain Hebrew culture and to serve as centers for education and for the social and religious life of the Jews. These institutions came to be designated by the Greek word synagogue….The collapse of the old religious state means a great increase in personal, rather than official, religious functions—a trend seen in the great prophetic voices, Isaiah’s and Jeremiah’s, even before the collapse, and a theme renewed in Daniel.  

The net effect of the exile was the people of God being forced to reorganize their worshipping community into more intimate and local settings. This was a significant contribution to the biblical story of worship and is strangely concurrent with what is happening in Western Christianity in the twenty-first century. As institutional Christianity languishes in the West, new faith communities are emerging in the form of the house church movement and other types of smaller gatherings held together by organically designed networks.

The New Testament Period: Are We Continually Shaping Our Worship with Jesus as the Center?

The Gospel accounts thoroughly detail the interaction of Jesus and his disciples in various synagogues and at the temple. Therefore, it was only logical that the early Christians continued to worship at the temple, in the synagogues, and in ways consistent with the established liturgical patterns. Gradually, however, the New Testament church shifted from the Jewish institutions of worship into new forms of Christian worship. Theologian David Peterson described this transition:

The Gospels indicate in a variety of ways that the God-given cult with its centre in the temple at Jerusalem is fulfilled and replaced by the person and the work of

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Jesus. A related theme, particularly highlighted in the narrative of the Last Supper, is that Jesus is the inaugurator of a new or renewed covenant by means of his death. He establishes a new basis of relationship with God for Israel and the nations and thus a new pattern of worship. The worship of the eschatological era is essentially a relationship with God on the basis of the redemptive work accomplished by Christ. Paradoxically, however, there are also indications in the Gospels that Jesus himself is worthy of divine honors. He is not simply the means by which a new allegiance to the Father is initiated and maintained. The Son himself is to be accorded the homage and service due to the Lord God of Israel.11

The book of Acts and the Epistles reflect this major shift of Jesus to the center of the biblical worship paradigm. By example, the works of God through Jesus are a theme of praise in Ephesians 1:3-14, pleas for forgiveness are centered on Jesus in 1 John 1:7-9, and Jesus is confessed as Lord through the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:3.

The centralizing of Jesus Christ in worship may be best summarized in the Apostle Paul’s letters to the churches in Philippi and Colossae when he described Jesus:

>Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:6-11).

>He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all

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things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross (Col 1:15-20).

In addition to Christ as the center of worship, a second significant addition to worship in the New Testament period was the role of the Holy Spirit. Jesus brought with him the specific ministry of the Holy Spirit as detailed in Gospel passages like John 14:15-17 and further in the writing of the epistles like Romans 8:26-27 and Ephesians 5:18-20.

These theological shifts inevitably led to cultic changes. Geoffrey Bromiley discussed these changes in writing:

Though the New Testament does not give any detailed information on the structure of the first Christian services, it leaves little room for doubt concerning the basic elements of primitive worship: prayer, praise, confession of sin, confession of faith, Scripture reading and preaching, the Lord’s Supper, and the collection. Early descriptions of Christian worship, such as that in Justin’s Apology, reveal a close similarity to the practice of the synagogue. Even without the synagogue model, however, the fundamental elements would surely have found a place, and distinctive features would have their own origin.12

It is hard to imagine the impact of these remarkable changes on the Jewish synagogue model. The willingness of the New Testament Church leaders to fashion new models of worship out of the older forms was based upon and driven by the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. The New Covenant necessitated a missional reach beyond Judaism to all the people groups and cultures of the world.

Evangelism and Worship in the Six Periods

The biblical story of worship contains a subplot that draws attention to the relationship between outsiders and the corporate worship experience. The Old Testament

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refers to outsiders or non-Hebrews as *strangers*. The call of Abraham in Genesis includes God’s will for all people of the earth to worship him. Genesis 12:2-3 states, “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” This passage and the affirmation of this passage by the Apostle Peter in Acts 3:25-26 leads one to conclude that it is God’s desire that everyone on the earth be drawn into a worshipping relationship with him.

The worship of God was never intended to be an exclusive activity for any one culture or people group. The Israelites continually struggled with this notion. Yet, it is interesting to note that, as early as the time of Abraham, the Israelites were aware of their own heritage of being strangers without rights in a foreign land (Gen 23:4). However, after the settlement of Israel in Canaan, the term *stranger* acquired a more specialized meaning because Israel had become established. *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* detailed the Old Testament history of strangers in the following way:

No doubt because the Israelites were keenly aware of their own heritage as strangers without rights in a foreign land, they developed specific laws governing the treatment of strangers (Exod. 22:21; 23:9; Deut. 10:19). Since the temporary guest was protected by the rather strict conventions of Near Eastern hospitality (e.g., Gen. 18:1-8; cf. Heb. 13:2), the laws more directly affected the resident alien who had no inherited political rights. Strangers were to be treated with kindness and generosity (Lev. 19:10, 33-34; 23:22; Deut. 14:29). They were included in the Israelite legal system (Lev. 24:16, 22; Num. 35:15; Deut. 1:16) and were subject to most of the religious requirements, such as the laws of ritual cleanliness (Lev. 17:8-13; but cf. Deut. 14:21) and the keeping of the Sabbath and fast days (Exod. 20:8-10; Lev. 16:29). They could celebrate Passover if they were circumcised (Exod. 12:48-49) and could offer sacrifices (Num. 15:14-16, 29).
Ezekiel even envisioned a time when they would be granted an inheritance in the land as a sign of full citizenship (Ezek. 47:22-23).\textsuperscript{13}

Author M. Daniel Caroll refers to the Old Testament concept of \textit{stranger} as \textit{sojourner}.

He also describes how outsiders were assimilated into the religious patterns of the Hebrews:

Expectations and responsibilities were placed on sojourners as well. They were to be present at the periodic reading of the law (Deut. 31:10-13). This makes sense. It would be in listening to the law that sojourners could learn more about what it meant to be a member of that society. Listening together with the rest of the people at the Feast of Tabernacles would be a public demonstration of their solidarity with Israel and, in turn, Israel’s acceptance of them.\textsuperscript{14}

It was expected that outsiders choosing to live with the Jews would conform to the Jewish way of life with the exception of some dietary laws as described in Deuteronomy 14:21.

The temple period initiated with the reign of King Solomon also understood provisions for strangers. As a part of Solomon’s dedication of the temple, he prayed:

As for the foreigners who do not belong to your people Israel but have come from a distant land because of your name—for they will hear of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm—when they come and pray toward this temple, then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Do whatever the foreigners ask of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name (1 Kings 8:41-43).

Concern for outsiders continued into the exilic period. Zechariah served as a priest and prophet during the rebuilding phase of Jerusalem 520-480 BC. He made a bold prophecy describing the appeal of God’s people as thy gather to worship him:


\textsuperscript{14} M. Daniel Caroll, \textit{Christians at the Border} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 105-106.
This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come, and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, ‘Let us go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the Lord Almighty. I myself am going.’” And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty and to entreat him. This is what the Lord Almighty says: “In those days ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, ‘Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you’” (Zech 8:20-23).

In agreement with Zechariah the prophet, Isaiah spoke for the Lord saying “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Isa 56:7b).

The New Testament Church continued the Old Testament usage of *foreigner* (Luke 17:18; Acts 26:11). However, as alignment to Jewish nationality became less of a guide to religious affiliation, terms such as *foreigner, sojourner, or stranger* developed a new theological identity. For instance, in Ephesians 2:19-20 the Apostle Paul wrote:

> Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

The early Christian community, which began as a Jewish movement, was profoundly affected by the success of the Gentile missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul and others. The Harper Bible Dictionary describes the expansion by stating:

> The Jerusalem conference of about the year A.D. 49 determined that Gentile converts to Christianity did not have to become Jewish proselytes (Gal. 2:1-10; Acts 15:1-35), thus opening membership in the Christian community to those who might otherwise have remained “God-fearers.” Paul fought efforts to distinguish between Jew and Gentile in the Christian community (Rom. 3:29-30; Gal. 2:11-21; 3:26-29). He was opposed by the Judaizers or “circumcision party” (Gal. 2:12), Christians who insisted that Gentile converts become Jewish proselytes. Paul’s practice furthered the success of Christianity within the empire and led to its emergence as a distinct religion by the end of the first century.  

\[^{15}\text{Achtemeier, Harper’s Bible Dictionary, s.v. “strangers.”}\]
The New Testament Church, more than any other time in biblical history, was a dynamic model of how worship, mission, and evangelism integrate. At the time of Jesus’ ascension, there were about 120 Christians in the church (Acts 1:15). On the day of Pentecost about three thousand new Christians were added to the church in what appeared to be a fairly chaotic scene of preaching, conversions, and supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Integration of new believers into the faith community was understood as a daily occurrence (Acts 2:47) because the mission of Jesus Christ was unfettered by entrenched traditions, institutions, and hierarchies.

**Worship and Mission in Christian Tradition**

Biblical history ended with the completion of the book of Revelation (AD 96) and the death of the apostle John (AD 98). However, the story of Christian worship continued to be written through three major eras. The first period is ancient and medieval worship, which focused on the mystery of God and the Mass. The second period, Reformation and Free Church worship, ushered in seismic changes with its focus on the Word of God. The third period, inaugurated at the start of the twentieth century, reflected expansive worldwide missionary efforts that manifested increasingly diverse worshipping communities.

**Ancient and Medieval Worship: Mystery and the Mass**

The centuries immediately following biblical history feature the Christian Mass as the primary form of corporate worship. This was true until the time of the reformation. Ralph Martin describes the origins of the Mass:
The conclusion seems inescapable that the Church is moving out of a situation in which the pattern of worship is pliant and free, under the direct afflatus of the Holy Spirit and with each believer making a contribution as seems good to him (with all the attendant perils which surround such a liberty) into an area of experience that comes with organization and development, and where the worship (though no less Spirit-inspired and real) will be offered according to recognized "canons."\(^{16}\)

The persecution of Christians in the second and third centuries forced many to worship in houses or other intimate contexts. When Christianity moved from the shadows of persecution into the limelight of state religion in the fourth century, several aspects of the worship liturgy changed. Robert Webber wrote:

> A political world previously at enmity with the church was now courting the favor of the church and in the late fourth century decreed the church to be the only legitimate religion of the Roman world. This worldview shift put the church into a friendly environment where, with the gift of buildings in which to worship, the worship of the church shifted from intimacy to theater. Because of the subsequent fall of Rome and the continuation of the Empire of Constantinople, two major histories of worship emerge: in the East (Byzantine) and the west (Roman).\(^{17}\)

In a position of significant power and influence, the Christian Church formulated its theology in various creeds and developed a more fixed form in its worship: the Mass.

Webber studied the differences between Eastern and Western worship liturgies and described them in the following manner:

> Worship in the fourth century began to reflect local culture. This is particularly true of Eastern Christian worship. The Eastern worldview was informed by the Hellenistic love for the aesthetic….Byzantine worship was highly ceremonial, gloriously beautiful, and deeply mystical….Like the Eastern church, the Western church also reflected the local culture. The Romans were characterized by a spirit of pragmatism. This is evident in their buildings and in the development of


\(^{17}\) Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 95.
Roman laws. This spirit is reflected in early Roman worship. It is not ostentatious or highly ceremonial, but sober and simple.\textsuperscript{18}

Entrance into these worshipping communities was through the act of baptism. The church required that people complete specific initiation rites established by the church before they were baptized and allowed to participate in communion. Author Patrick Keifert believes that “a chief source for our knowledge of the method and content of evangelism in the early church is Hippolytus’s \textit{Apostolic Tradition}.”\textsuperscript{19} Webber’s research confirms this when discussing the early church practice of initiation:

These rites, which flowered in the third and fourth centuries in particular, carried the person coming for baptism through seven steps, four of which were periods of development and three of which were passage rites laden with rich symbolism. The entire process took up to three years in some places.\textsuperscript{20}

Non-Christians were welcome at the Mass, but were prohibited from participating in certain aspects until their personal beliefs were proven to be consistent with the church.

The medieval period marked a subtle shift in the focus of the Mass. The institutional church increasingly emphasized worship as a mysterious encounter with God while the monastic movement stressed the personal devotional character of worship. In one sense, the idea of worship as a mystery (an epiphany of God) was in sync with the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 18:20 and 28:20. Webber believes, however, that the shift towards the Mass as mystery was a dysfunctional combination of local mystery cult influences, a shift of power to the clergy to control the meaning of the Mass, and


\textsuperscript{20} Webber, \textit{Worship Old and New}, 101.
outlandish claims that participating in the Mass ensured personal salvation.  

William D. Maxwell agreed with Webber when he wrote about worship services in the late medieval period:

…at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the celebration of the Lord’s supper in the Western Church had become a dramatic spectacle, culminating not in communion but in the miracle of transubstantiation, and marked by adoration, not unmixed with superstition, at the elevation. Said inaudibly in an unknown tongue, and surrounded with ornate ceremonial and, if a sung mass, with elaborate musical accompaniment, the rite presented only meager opportunity for popular participation….The sermon had fallen into a grave decline, most parish priests being too illiterate to preach; and the place of scripture lections had been usurped on a great many days by passages from the lives and legends of the saints.

The monastic movement stood in sharp contrast to these trends of institutional Christianity. It emphasized the coming kingdom of God and the importance of personal piety.

One specific Catholic monastic movement of the West that is currently getting resonance in twenty-first-century settings is the Celtic liturgy. John Brook Leonard wrote about the Celtic Liturgy:

The Celtic liturgies show the wide-ranging influence of the Irish missionary-monks, who tended to appropriate liturgical elements from all parts of the Greek and Latin churches. The Celtic liturgy emphasized a strong personal relationship with Christ and the Trinity…. The devotional practices and original texts of the Celtic authors reflect a lifestyle that is centered more on a personal than on an ecclesial relationship with Christ and the ever-present Trinity.

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21 Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 103-104.


The practices of the Celtic liturgy resonate with postmodern-minded people because they are moving away from the institutional church and toward the person of Jesus Christ.

Reformation and Free Church Worship: The Word of God

The Reformation was principally a reform of theology; however, it was inevitable that new theological beliefs would have a major impact on existing worship forms.

Lutheran theologian Gordon Lathrop summarized these developments in writing:

The sixteenth-century Reformers regarded the worship model of the Roman Catholic Church in varying ways. The liturgies of Luther and of the Anglican Church retained more elements of the Catholic mass. Calvin and Hubmaier made more radical attempts to “purify” worship and discarded much of the Catholic liturgy. Unfortunately, none of the Reformers had available to them the knowledge of ancient Christian worship accessible to scholars today. Nevertheless, the Reformers sought to remain faithful to what they believed to be appropriate worship in keeping with Scripture and Scripture-based traditions.24

The most significant changes to worship instituted by the reformers was the rejection of the doctrine of transubstantiation, the restoration of the Word of God to its ancient and proper place in worship, and an emphasis on experiencing worship in the vernacular of the people while maintaining a twofold structure of Word and sacrament.

The Free Church tradition originating with the Anabaptists and English Puritans followed Ulrich Zwingli’s emphasis on the Word only. The Anabaptists and other emerging Free Church traditions refused to allow any form of worship that could not be substantiated by Scripture. Webber asserted that another distinct feature of the Free Church movement was its understanding of how salvation was received. In the past,

salvation had always been connected with baptism. In the Free Church tradition, however, the emphasis was placed on personal appropriation of faith through understanding and experience. Webber wrote about this shift towards personal experience and its impact on worship forms:

> Faith in Jesus Christ and the worship of God were to happen in the mind or in the heart. Consequently, signs, symbols, bodily postures and gestures, and the forms and ceremonies that accompanied traditional worship rituals were feared as idols and images that turned the heart away from God…Examples of these new convictions can be seen in the anti-liturgical movements, the rise of pedagogical worship in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the rise of the evangelistic approach to worship in the nineteenth century.

The emphasis on personal experience continued with Pietism, Moravianism, and Revivalism movements that swept across the West and into the newly formed United States of America. The ecclesial functions of evangelism and worship, in dramatic fashion, were merged in the revivalist tradition. This is most evident with field preaching and the rise of the sermon as best characterized through the work of Charles Finney, Jonathan Edwards, and George Whitefield.

**Worship in the Twentieth Century: Diversity and Convergence**

The twentieth century represents one of the most accelerated periods of change in modern history. The Newtonian worldview established during the Enlightenment was assailed by waves of new ideologies. Contrary to its promises, the mechanistic, rationalistic, and empirical approach of the Enlightenment had not made the world a better place. Movements of thought ranging from quantum physics to new age religion

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26 Ibid.
challenged the Enlightenment’s presuppositions and created a breeding ground for a focus on the supernatural, multiple forms of spirituality, and the rediscovery of mystery.

Webber described the changes that took place in Christian worship during this period:

At the same time that all these worldview changes have been taking place, worship has undergone an unprecedented revolution. Worship changes of the twentieth century began with the rise of the holiness Pentecostal movement, which, in its rediscovery of the supernatural is regarded by many as the first post-Enlightenment approach to worship. Next, the Roman Catholic Church, which had been locked into a rigid rubricism since the sixteenth century Council of Trent, underwent an upheaval of enormous proportion with the publication of the “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy” in 1963. The impact of worship renewal soon affected the mainline Protestant church.27

From the 1960s until the present, the six streams of worship as described earlier are demonstrations of the complex and diversified landscape of Christian worship. As the twenty-first century dawns, the challenge facing evangelical churches is to understand a broad theology and practice of worship that considers the biblical rubrics of worship, is informed by the twentieth-century worship traditions, and yet is increasingly relevant to diverse postmodern contexts.

A Theology of Missional Worship for the Twenty-first Century

The formation of a twenty-first-century, missional worship theology requires reframing the biblical story of worship, reimagining the practices of Christian worship tradition in postmodern contexts, and looking closely at how the Kingdom of God integrates worship and mission. The work of reframing the biblical story of worship centers on cross-examination of the biblical rubrics with an eye for what God is doing

27 Webber, Worship Old and New, 121-122.
today. Reimagining the historical practices of Christian worship in postmodern contexts asks worship leaders to exegete the culture and look for inroads in which updated practices can be inserted. Finally, the co-mingling of worship and mission is fully realized when considering what the Missional Church movement refers to as *missio Dei*, or “the mission of God.”

Reframing the Biblical Story of Worship for Today

The biblical story of worship spanned several thousand years and followed the storyline of God’s people. The six historical periods outlined above offer the twenty-first-century worship leader a set of broad theological concepts that inform our corporate worship planning decisions. Table 7 is an overview of these concepts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Theological Concept</th>
<th>Key Scripture Passage</th>
<th>Imperative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nomadic</td>
<td>Offering</td>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>Worship must afford people the opportunity to bring and give offerings of personal, spiritual, and communal significance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosaic</td>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>Exodus 12</td>
<td>Worship as a lifestyle and corporate experience includes meaningful ritual, remembrance, and personal involvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davidic</td>
<td>God’s Presence</td>
<td>Psalm 63</td>
<td>Worship is an experience of the divine mystery of God’s manifest presence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple</td>
<td>God Focus</td>
<td>1 Kings 8</td>
<td>Worship is to be preeminently focused on God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exilic</td>
<td>Worship in Homes and Communities</td>
<td>Isaiah 40-55</td>
<td>Worship needs to find its way into our homes and communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Testament</td>
<td>Continually fashioning with Jesus at Center</td>
<td>Colossians 1:15-20</td>
<td>Worship is to be continually refashioned with Jesus Christ at the center.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In one sense, these six imperatives are markers for each historical period. However, the six imperatives are not mutually exclusive, but rather exist to varying
degrees in multiple periods. There are several biblical examples of inter-period applications. First, in the nomadic period, as in the Davidic period, the patriarchs engaged God’s manifest presence. One such experience took place with Jacob at Bethel when he had a dream of heaven and, as he awoke, said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God: this is the gate of heaven” (Gen 28:17).

Second, Mosaic worship, like exilic worship, includes worship designed to find its ways into the lives and homes of God’s people. Moses commanded in Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Next, Davidic worship, like the New Testament period, continually refashioned worship models with a desire to be more focused on the God. Looking back to the Old Testament, the writer of the book of Hebrews interpreted Psalm 8 Christologically in Hebrews 2:6-9:

But there is a place where someone has testified: “What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor and put everything under his feet.” In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Fourth, King David was described by the Apostle Paul as a “man after God’s own heart” in Acts 13:22 because of his passion for God alone. Next, worship in the Temple period
reflected the continuation of the Mosaic period’s emphasis on institution and involvement in the corporate worship experience.

Finally, the New Testament period included the work of offering in worship as described by the Apostle Paul in Romans 12:1 “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.” This interconnectedness between the nomadic period and the New Testament period, and indeed the overlap of all six periods, encourages us to consider these imperatives as six “framing” principles for worship design.

Reimagining the Practices of Christian Worship Tradition in Postmodern Contexts

Of course, we cannot simply replicate the past. Every age must discover and express the essence of the liturgy anew. The point is to discover this essence amid all the changing appearances.

—Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger
*The Spirit of the Liturgy*

There are innumerable lessons to be learned from biblical history and Christian tradition. The early church development of the Mass with an emphasis on mystery teaches us the importance of understanding what one believes and creating systems to express those beliefs. However, it is of note that devastating consequences ensue when church leaders use those systems of belief to create hierarchies and diminish the involvement of people in the act of worship. The Reformation period teaches us the importance of the Word of God and our personal acquisition of faith and salvation. However, stripping corporate worship of visual beauty, symbolic richness, and liturgical depth influences congregations to become overly focused on the performance of
preachers and musicians. Twentieth-century history of worship teaches us that human philosophies are frail and transient but God, who never changes, faithfully reveals himself to every generation in new ways. Now, at the turn of the millennium, the time to re-imagine worship practices for the twenty-first century has come.

The world of the twenty-first century is very different from that of the twentieth. Many philosophers and theologians alike consider the twentieth century to be the age of modernism. The turn of the millennium; however, delivers convincing proofs that we now live in a postmodern age. Stanley Grenz wrote:

The term postmodern may have first been coined in the 1930’s to refer to a major historical transition underway and as the designation for certain developments in the arts. But postmodernism did not gain widespread attention until the 1970’s. First it denoted a new style of architecture. Then it invaded academic circles, originally as a label for theories expounded in university English and philosophy departments. Eventually it surfaced as the description for a broader cultural phenomenon.28

In *The Postmodern Organization*, educator William Bergquist notes four sources of postmodern thought:

A first source of postmodernism is the intellectual debates and dialogues in Europe (primarily France) regarding structuralism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, postcapitalism, critical theory and feminism...The second source of postmodern thought is the much more accessible (some would say popularized) critique of contemporary art forms (particularly architecture, literature, and painting) and contemporary life-styles (for example, advertising, fashion, and the colloquial use of language)...A third source is social analysis of the workplace and economy...and finally, postmodernism is beholden, in a somewhat more indirect manner, to work in the physical sciences that is usually labeled chaos theory.29

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The impressions of the postmodern shift on church ecclesiology and corporate worship are nothing short of remarkable. Churches now face cultural waves of pluralism, secularism, and relativism. In answer to these surging challenges, Stanly Grenz proposes that churches adopt a postmodern interpretation of the gospel that: “a) Relates to the individual-in-community, b) Moves beyond propositional emphasis, c) Faces the tough questions of life, d) Moves from dualism to holism, and e) Focuses not just on accumulating knowledge, but the attainment of wisdom.” These five recommendations are helpful considerations to re-imagine corporate worship in postmodern contexts, especially in light of lessons learned through biblical and Christian history.

Engaging the work of re-imagining twenty-first-century worship is not a zero-based experience. The church has thousands of years of biblical history and church tradition that should be re-interpreted and applied to the current postmodern context. Figure 1 outlines this idea visually. This framework reminds us of key biblical and philosophical markers that worship design needs in the twenty-first century. For example, when leaders work to organize individuals in community, they should examine and apply the lessons learned in the early church and the exilic period. Or if exploring the move from dualism to holism, leaders will benefit from studying and not repeating the mistakes of twentieth-century worship and the temple period.

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Worship and the Kingdom of God: A Theological Framework for Worship and Mission

The biblical and theological foundations of worship include a conversation about the integration of worship and mission for the twenty-first century. A promising development in ecclesial thought exists in what is now being called the missional church movement. In the 1980s The Gospel and Our Culture Network initiated a discussion, primarily through the writings of Lesslie Newbigin, about the changed nature of Christendom in the West. The overarching conclusions of these discussions were twofold. First, what had been a Christendom society was now clearly a post-Christian, and in many ways anti-Christian culture. Second, a missiological response to this
challenge was emphasis on the term *missio Dei*, “Mission of God.” The first chapter of the book *Missional Church* provides a brief summary of what the Mission of God means for churches:

The subtle assumption of much Western mission was that the church’s missionary mandate lay not only in forming the church of Jesus Christ, but in shaping the Christian communities that it birthed in the image of the church of western European culture. This ecclesiocentric understanding of mission has been replaced during this century by a profoundly theocentric reconceptualization of Christian mission. We have come to see that mission is not merely an activity of the church. Rather, mission is the result of God’s initiative, rooted in God’s purposed to restore and heal creation. “Mission” means “sending,” and it is the central biblical theme describing the purpose of God’s action in human history.  

The writers of *Missional Church* go on to propose five fundamental affirmations as the basis of missional ecclesiology. They believe a missional ecclesiology is biblical, historical, contextual, eschatological, and practical.  

The five affirmations of the *Missional Church* are opportunities to integrate mission with corporate worship. These implications are listed in table 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Missional Concept</th>
<th>Worship Implication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biblical</td>
<td>Six epochs in biblical history ask six diagnostic questions of worship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical</td>
<td>Twenty centuries of worship history, from the early church until today, instruct and inform that worship should fuel mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual</td>
<td>Worship that is missional connects local churches to their cultural context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eschatological</td>
<td>Worship <em>does</em> God’s story and projects God’s future into the present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical</td>
<td>Worship will shape God’s people for their faithful witness in particular places</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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32 Ibid., 11-12.
Missiologist Craig Van Gelder wrote about the concept of contextualization when he stated: “Change is the very nature of life, and it is important for congregations to anticipate change in their contexts so they can intentionally continue to re-contextualize their ministries to address new conditions as they emerge.”33 Worship is contextual when it considers its local cultural context and interacts with teaching, communication, and social norms. Worship is eschatological when it enacts God’s story, past, present, and future, with an emphasis on the consummation of God’s reign. Webber wrote:

The content of eschatological worship has to do with God’s rescue of the entire created order and the establishment of his rule over all heaven and earth. The eschatological nature of worship has to do with the place and time when God’s rule is being done on earth as it is in heaven.34

The practical nature of the missional church is simply that it works and is accessible, not merely a set of unattainable theories. This is true for missional worship, as well, in that it is intended by God to have a very real and transformational effect on the lives of those that engage in it.

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34 Webber, Ancient-Future Worship, 57-58.
CHAPTER 4

TOWARD A TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY, MISSIONAL WORSHIP PHILOSOPHY

Focus: New Testament Worship as a Postmodern Archetype

The foundations for all subsequent Christian worship were laid in the decades in which the New Testament books were being written and edited, roughly the century following the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Every period of renewal since then has aspired to reach back to the principles and practices of the first Christian century….The churches of the apostles and their immediate heirs have an authority for the Christian imagination that no other period can match. Golden age or not…all things liturgical are still tested by the standard of the earliest worshiping Christian communities.

—James F. White

_A Brief History of Christian Worship_

The New Testament worship paradigm will, for all time, be a model to discuss, explore, and emulate in Christian worship practices. If for no other reason, this is true because of the intimate relationship between the New Testament Scriptures and the formation of Christian worship. New Testament worship was inspired by apostolic leadership and vision, created to shape community, and designed to be a sending experience.

Christian leaders of twenty-first-century, western culture are looking with a renewed interest at the first century model of apostolic leadership. The early church, like the twenty-first-century church, was marginalized and existed in a first-century version of liminality amongst pervasive secularism and pluralism. Living in a pre-Constantinian world and facing these challenges, the apostles of the New Testament sought the
empowerment of the Holy Spirit and demonstrated courageous missionary zeal.

Missiologist Eddie Gibbs pointed out that the twenty-first-century role of apostle does not contain the same authority as those that were eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ in the first century; however, “all Christians are apostles in that they are sent out into the world to share in Christ’s apostolic mission (see John 13:16, where messengers translates the Greek term apostolos).”1

Church consultant Reggie McNeal applied the concept of apostolic mission to the contemporary church when he challenged churches to shift from being a place of refuge to a center for mission. He asserted:

Refuge congregations try to hang onto or even recreate the past. They insulate themselves from the world around them, which they view as hostile and threatening to survival.…A Mission mentality, on the other hand, is turned outward in its thinking and in its agenda.…They not only risk involvement in the world, they strategize for it.2

This is exactly how one could describe the missionary journeys of Paul and the other apostles in the New Testament. They fully understood church life in terms of mission and maintaining an outward focus.

Modeling twenty-first-century worship after the early church requires the missional mindset that McNeal and Gibbs discuss. Like the apostles of the New Testament, worship leaders must adopt an “outpost” mentality, embody courage, and

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1 Gibbs, Church Next, 76.

maintain follow-through on core convictions with an unswerving dependence upon the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

A second mark of the New Testament Church was worship as community formation. Acts 2:42-47 describes the nature of their worship gatherings:

They continually devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to times of prayer. A sense of fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All the believers were together, and they shared everything with one another. They made it their practice to sell their possessions and goods and to distribute the proceeds to anyone who was in need. They had a single purpose and went to the temple every day. They ate at each other’s homes and shared their food with glad and humble hearts. They kept praising God and enjoying the good will of all the people. And every day the Lord was adding to them people who were being saved.

These gatherings were rooted in significant personal relationships and a holistic community approach. Evangelical churches of the West struggle to emulate the first-century model for community because of rampant individualism and stultifying institutional systems.

Addressing these current barriers, the authors of the book *Missional Church* present a model of Christian community that has significant bearing on corporate worship and discipleship in the twenty-first century. The writers argue that “today people enter churches with undifferentiated assortments of beliefs—some often quite vague—garnered from a mixture of sources. They enter also as individual consumers looking for churches that meet personal needs.”3 As evangelical leaders attempt to address this complex situation, they generally assume but rarely reflect on the nature of the church. The church

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3 Guder, ed., *Missional Church*, 201.
as a whole is viewed more as a vendor of religious goods and services to the wider social context rather than a true, outward-focused missional organization. Figure 2 provides a picture of this philosophical framework:

![Figure 2. The shape of a typical evangelical community.](image)

This diagram illustrates several realities. The core constituents of churches are generally composed of people serving as officers, on committees, in choirs, or in other groups. Generally speaking, they spend most of their time attending to the needs of those that currently attend the worship services or participate in the community. The congregational circle includes the core, but is composed of a larger group of people that have little or no ownership in the mission of the church. Congregational affiliates are involved in church life primarily because of personal needs and interests. The dotted line between the congregation and the context circles reflects the often indistinguishable nature of some congregational affiliates and the unchurched people that may periodically...
visit the church worship service. The outer circle represents the context surrounding the
church. This circle includes the various types of unchurched people.

Figure 2 is a picture of dysfunction in its inward and individualistic focus. Church
leaders in the committed core spend most of their time keeping the congregation happy
and engaged while struggling to attract the unchurched from the surrounding context to
their particular brand of church. The Missional Church authors discussed this in stating:

When leaders are shaped primarily by contextual needs, they fail to connect the
ergospel in a specific setting with its eschatological nature. The gospel’s
eschatological horizon makes leaders aware that the church is always more than
context. The needs of the churched and unchurched are not the primary agenda of
leadership. The reign of God in Christ, the social reality of the redeemed
community, determines the church’s direction.4

This struggle to steer away from a sociological agenda and focus worship and
discipleship and on the kingdom of God is not new.

Jesus often talked about the reign and Kingdom of God (Matt 4:17, 6:10, 10:7,
Mark 1:15, Luke 11:2). The early church often reoriented its focus on the reign of God
(Acts 8:12; 19:8, Phil 3:20-21, Rev 11:15; 12:10). In figure 3, the Missional Church
writers offered a twenty-first-century picture of how the kingdom of God can be re-
centralized in worshipping communities.

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4 Guder, ed., Missional Church, 204.
This model directs all aspects of Christian community and worship to God’s reign. The authors further explained:

In this model, the orientation of leadership is transformed. In the professional model that currently prevails in our churches, leadership orientation goes two ways: inwardly towards servicing multiform congregations of expressive individuals, and outwardly toward developing strategies for reaching the religious market. The model here also has a twofold direction required of the leadership. First, the leaders call into being a covenant community second, they direct its attention out towards their context. But the location of the leadership in this process is at the front of the pointer. In other words, the leadership plays primarily an apostolic role. Pastoral gifts remain critical but are relativized by the nature, purpose and directional movement of the missional community.  

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5 Guder, ed., *Missional Church*, 212.
In this model, Christian community and corporate worship are formed dynamically with believers and seekers alike being drawn into the broader horizon of God’s reign.

Worship focused on God’s reign will, as a missional expression, continually function as a sending experience. Worship liturgy that is God-focused will resonate with his missionary nature and intuitively become a sending modality. Reformed theologian Klaas Runia states it this way:

Does the worship in the services on the Lord’s Day inspire the members of the congregation to be active in the world and to engage in the service of God and their fellow human beings in society at large? However important the Sunday services may be for the mutual up building of the congregation, their purpose should not be restricted to this mutual edification. The congregation meets also for the adoration of God, which in turn should lead to action in the world, which is another form of worship.6

Stated in an even more emphatic voice, Missional Church writers asserted: “Above all, the public worship of the missional community always leads to the pivotal act of sending. The community that is called together is the community that is sent. Every occasion of public worship is a sending event.”7

**Structure: Worship Leadership as Collaboration**

Team-based ministry is the most effective model for leading and organizing Christian ministry for the twenty-first century. There has never been a more important time for the Church of Jesus Christ to be led by sincere, dedicated teams of disciples who labor together in God’s fellowship to live the Gospel in a turbulent world.

—George Cladis

*Leading the Team-Based Church*

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7 Guder, ed., *Missional Church*, 243.
Life in the twenty-first century is marked by discontinuous change, accelerating technological advancement, increased information accessibility, rapid economic shifts, religious and philosophical pluralism, and the exponential expansion of global networks. The impact of these cultural markers upon the Christian Church is irrefutable. One response of church leadership to rapidly changing circumstances is a corresponding shift from solo pastor leadership to a team-based approach. A single person cannot continuously acquire and appropriately apply all the necessary leadership acumen necessary to deliver prudent decisions in such a volatile world. It requires the wisdom of numerous people working in collaboration to consistently form appropriate contextual ministry.

Collaborative worship design teams are best formed around specific core values. Amongst a sea of possibilities there are four core values worth emphasizing. First, teams are to be learning-postured. Next, it is critical that design teams are excellence-committed. Third, continually relevant worship requires that teams are innovation-focused. Finally, church leadership teams must be volunteer driven.

The first value is learning-postured. This is a critical value for artistic leaders because fine arts functionally provide commentary on the ideas of culture, society, and theology in the setting of corporate worship. Music, art, dance, digital design, and drama raise questions, reflect perspectives, and model the emotions of the congregation. To stay in touch with the congregation, culture, and changing forms of communication, teams must constantly maintain a learning posture. As church consultant George Cladis asserted: “The learning team is not satisfied with its present state but seeks to grow
spiritually and to know more about doing ministry in more effective and meaningful ways.”

The second core value for teams to consider is being excellence-committed. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossian Church: “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men….It is the Lord Jesus Christ you are serving” (Col 3:23-24). One aspect of glorifying God is to “make him look good” or “enhance his reputation.” Excellence for God’s honor creates an environment where the congregation is confident that every worship experience is the best offering that the community of faith has to give to God.

A value often associated with the arts is the work of being innovation-focused. As culture changes, so do the means by which human beings experience their daily lives. This includes the forms with which people worship God. Thus, it is imperative that worship design teams continually innovate new ways to experience God’s presence through contextually appropriate means. In their book The Art of Innovation, Tom Kelley and Jonathan Littman outline a proven method of innovation based upon the experiences of the design firm IDEO:

In fact, we have a well-developed and continuously refined methodology…: 1) Understand the market and current perceptions. 2) Observe real people in real-life situations to find out what makes them tick. 3) Visualize new-to-the-world concepts and the people who use them. 4) Evaluate and refine the prototypes in a series of quick iterations. 5) Implement the new concept.9

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8 George Cladis, Leading the Team-Based Church (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 141.
These five principles of innovation are practical guides for worship design teams to apply in their work as discussed in table 9.

Table 9. Innovation and worship design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Innovation Concept</th>
<th>Worship Design Concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand the market and current perceptions</td>
<td>Utilize current perceptions as metaphors and hooks alluding to God concepts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observe real people in real-life situations to find out what makes them tick</td>
<td>Use real life illustrations to raise questions and illustrate answers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualize new-to-the-world concepts and the people who use them</td>
<td>Design new worship practices based upon cutting edge experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate and refine the prototypes in a series of quick iterations</td>
<td>Prototype new worship experiences in safe experimental environments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement the new concept</td>
<td>Implement new worship concepts in corporate worship settings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data adapted from Kelly and Littman, *The Art of Innovation*, 6-7.

If engaged in a disciplined manner and through a systematic method, the work of remaining innovation-focused will energize worship teams with new ideas and projects. These innovations will, in turn, create new means for the congregation to experience God in fresh and relevant ways.

The final collaborative team value is to be volunteer driven. This value drives artistic leaders to empower, equip, and strategically place the unpaid staff of our churches into ministry settings where they can serve with passion and excellence. Speaking polemically to this issue Donald Miller recognized that “a sign of routinized religion is that functions previously performed by ordinary members are delegated to specifically certified professionals.”10 Periodically, evangelical churches fall into this trap in regards to hiring professional musicians. Launching a new worship service style or time often

requires the assistance of professional artists; however, church leaders are susceptible to the lure of continually hiring professionals because of the benefits of their high performance levels. As a church’s community of artists grows and volunteers make themselves available to participate in leading worship, it is critical that they be given a voice, even if they are not as proficient as a hired professional. To assign a professional to do what an unpaid staff member can and should do is to deny a church’s artistic community a voice and their part in the priesthood of all believers.

**Action: The Church as a Visible Community of Faith**

A vigorous theology of worship that encounters the living God of heaven and earth is never escapist. It’s never about forgetting the neighbor, not the least the neighbor who is blind and poor, or oppressed and hungry.

—Mark Labberton  
*The Dangerous Act of Worship*

The church gathers for worship to experience God. Mission-minded churches also recognize the fact that, as they gather, they embody a visible witness to the work and redemptive plan of God. There are three tangible ways churches both experience God-focused worship and are a visible witness to the surrounding community. First, visible communities of faith create bridges to their surrounding culture. Next, they utilize the fine arts as a communication method. Third, church leaders hold several key tensions in balance to integrate worship and mission.

The work of creating bridges to the surrounding culture begins by establishing a high level of transparency between the gathered church and its context. Creating and maintaining transparency in worship is an arduous and ongoing task. Robert Lewis,
author of *The Church of Irresistible Influence*, contends that churches fail to maintain bridges to their surrounding culture because of three factors. First, the larger a church grows, the more it tends to be most concerned with itself. Next, building bridges between churches and cultures requires a balance of public proclamation with congregation incarnation. Third, obstacles to making bridges to culture include: fear, confusion, lack of direction, questions of impact.\(^{11}\) To create bridges and remain transparent as a visible community of faith, evangelical churches must assess what is being said and communicated on a weekly basis in their corporate worship against the three factors that Lewis describes. Furthermore, leaders must have the courage to identify whether or not their congregational members are doing the work of mission beyond the walls of the church building.

A second consideration for visible communities of faith is the utilization of the fine arts for worship and mission. J. Nathan Corbitt and Vivian Nix-Early assert that visual art “has power to translate emotions and intellect into form…power to express personal and community beliefs and values through concrete symbols…power to transform—to change one’s vision, quality of life, and life circumstances.”\(^{12}\) The end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century has marked a significant elevation of the importance of the fine arts in North American culture. Some evangelical churches have taken note of this and are working to better activate and engage the fine arts in their

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worship and outreach. Artwork, dance, multiple musical disciplines, dramatic presentations, and digital design are emerging as concrete means of communication in the worship event.

Critical to the application of the fine arts is author Dan Kimball’s challenge to leaders to go beyond merely embracing the arts to expressing worship as a multi-sensory event:

(John 1:14) The Word became three-dimensional, living breathing, able to hear, to see, and to touch. The Word himself ate, drank, tasted, had a sense of smell, felt emotion. The Scriptures present a multisensory, multidimensional Word, but some evangelicals in the modern church have reduced him to mere words and facts to learn. Couldn’t our worship involve much more of our senses than we are allowed in a typical modern contemporary worship service? What does Scripture say about multisensory worship? Sense of Smell (Exodus 25:6, Malachi 1:11) Sense of Touch (Acts 6:6, 8:38, 1 Corinthians 11:23-24), Sense of Taste (Psalm 34:8; 119:103, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26) Sense of Hearing (Psalm 150, Matthew 26:30, Acts 2:14) Sense of Sight (Exodus 25:3-7; 26:1-2, 1 Kings 6:29-30).

The utilization of the fine arts and all of the senses creates powerful experiences of God in worship. Even more, multi-sensory use of the arts in worship is a relevant way to model contemporary communication experiences and thus create bridges of understanding with our surrounding culture.

North American culture is being dramatically shaped by the role of experience. Pine and Gilmore describe the world of commerce as an experience economy. Applying this concept to the coffee bean, they state the following:

Consider…a true commodity: the coffee bean. Companies…at the time of this writing receive $1 per pound, which translates into one or two cents a cup. When

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a manufacturer grinds, packages or sells those beans in a grocery store, turning them into a good, the price to the consumer jumps to between 5 and 25 cents per cup….Brew the cup in a run-of-the-mill diner, that service now sells for 50 cents to a dollar. Serve that same coffee in a five-star restaurant or espresso bar and the consumer will gladly pay anywhere from $2 to $5 for each cup.14

People hunger for experience in all aspects of their lives. As Leonard Sweet stated: “It is one thing to talk about God. It is quite another thing to experience God.”15 Multi-sensory use of the arts in worship is one tangible way to help create that experience.

A final consideration for churches to be effective, visible communities of faith is the work of maintaining a clear internal understanding of how worship and mission integrate. Lutheran theologian Patrick Keifert provided helpful discourse on this topic in his book *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism*. The purpose of his book was to explore the public character of Christian thought and life in a culture of pluralism. Specifically, in regards to worship, he discussed the biblical metaphor of hospitality to the stranger.

Keifert challenged the assumption that corporate worship must express a level of intimacy akin to being a close-knit family. He asserts that such intimacy prohibits the possibility of the stranger being welcome in worship:

In our contemporary setting, it is easy to domesticate hospitality by imagining it to be simply a way to invite a few select persons into our private space, making of them intimates….In the biblical narrative (of Abraham, Sarah, and the Strangers in Genesis 18) the threat of the stranger physically, emotionally, and spiritually is fully recognized. Indeed, when the biblical characters encounter the stranger face-

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to-face, they encounter not only another person who cannot be reduced, without remainder, to analogies to themselves, but they encounter the ultimate Stranger, the irreducible Other, God.16

Keifert goes on to discuss the primary motivation for the Christian’s fear of strangers: threat to personal integrity. He comes to this conclusion by examining Jean-Paul Sartre’s work Being and Nothingness. In this work Sartre understood the presence of strangers as a threat to personal integrity wherein the possibility of violence—both physical and emotional—is real. Keifert turns this notion on its head by stating:

Whereas Sartre sees this decentering as a threat to personal integrity, the biblical vision presents it as a summons to take the other into account. My egocentricity—that is, my location of my self as the decisive and controlling reference point for meaning and value of the world—is called into question on behalf of the others….In contrast to the ideology of intimacy, which ultimately wishes to nullify plurality, hospitality to the stranger recognizes Sartre’s decentering shock as the opportunity for plurality, abundance of meaning, and value. Rather than pronouncing us intimates, I must approach the world of another’s meaning with a willingness to learn, to be taught, and finally to recognize the other precisely as other, not to reduce that one to an experience, a moment in my education of maturation.17

This poignant line of reasoning is critical for pastors and leaders to understand, teach, and model for their congregation in the context of corporate worship. It provides a clear picture of how Christians and non-Christians can healthfully interact in a public setting and models true integration of worship and mission.

16 Keifert, Welcoming the Stranger, 76.

PART THREE:

THE CHARACTER OF MISSIONAL WORSHIP
CHAPTER 5

THE FORMATION OF WORSHIPPING COMMUNITIES
WITHIN MISSIONAL CONTEXTS

The relationship between a congregation and its context usually works between the two polarities of, on the one hand, being under contextualized or, on the other hand, being over contextualized. The former leans heavily, if not exclusively, toward privileging the congregation; in the latter, the congregation tends to become subsumed under its context.

—Scott Frederickson

*The Missional Congregation in Context*

The value of the word *contextualization* is that it suggests the placing of the gospel in the total context of a culture at a particular moment, a moment that is shaped by the past and looks to the future.

—Lessle Newbigin

*Foolishness to the Greeks*

**Defining a Church’s Missional Context**

In 1995, Rick Warren wrote the book *The Purpose Driven Church*. In his book, Warren outlined a broad system for organizing church around biblical purposes and core values. In part three, Warren described the Saddleback Church strategy for reaching their community based upon a tightly defined target audience.\(^1\) This tactic of using target evangelism as a form of contextualization has been highly criticized because of its emphasis of niche marketing rather than broader evangelical missiology. These criticisms carry increasing weight as the twenty-first century unfolds. Changing demographics,

racial and cultural diversity, and emerging sociological trends in the United States require
churches to move beyond niche marketing to more missiologically grounded conclusions.

Ethnomusicologist Roberta King is one of the voices calling for a deliberate shift
towards missiological embodiment in church life and corporate worship. Regarding a
missiological approach to worship music, she wrote:

The global tapestry of Christian music in the twenty-first century is weaving the
strands of our lives together in stunning new ways….Centuries ago the Psalmist
declared, “All nations will come and worship before you, O God” (Ps. 86:9). Increased travel, large numbers of immigrants, and the changing sociological
make-up of the evangelical church in North America make the Psalmist’s long-
anticipated reality one that is literally emerging within our churches as never
before. Whether we approve of its processes or not, we live in an era of increasing
globalization….Shifting boundaries and exposure to peoples from the nations are
interacting with one another in dynamic and fluid ways.2

King goes on to discuss what she calls the “theory of reflexivity.” Quoting Stackhouse,
Dearborn, and Paeth, she defines reflexivity as the several moments in which “what
happens ‘out there somewhere’ has an impact on what happens here—in our schools,
homes, and churches…and what happens here reflects back on what happens there.”3

Based upon this definition of our increasingly global reality, King believes that
the role of eclectic global music in corporate worship must “first, link people and their
surrounding culture. Second, expand the church music repertoire, and third create new

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theological expressions in global song lyrics that engender a more expansive understanding of God.”4  At the climax of her argument, King asks a series of questions:

As the church in North America plans for the effective ministry of music that weaves global Christian music into worship, the following questions are suggested as guidelines in our discussions and consideration:
1. Does our music express and reflect the diversity of peoples who worship with us?
2. Does our music welcome newcomers in our midst?
3. Does our church music encourage each cultural or socio-economic segment of believers to authentic worship?
4. How do we incorporate global Christian music in ways that go beyond tokenism or exploitation of merely exotic sounds?
5. How do we employ global Christian music in ways that are respectful and honoring to Christ and his bride, the Church universal?5

Worship music is merely one aspect of corporate worship, and yet it is powerful because it carries the weight of cultural expression, the theological meaning of the words, and the emotive and stylistic elements of contextual identity.

Sanctuary Covenant Church of Minneapolis, Minnesota, is an example of a church that has embraced a missiological approach to worship. Alongside commitments to urban ministry mentoring, multi-cultural congregational demographics, and pervasive social justice action, Sanctuary Church also implements worship that reflects their context. This is particularly so with the hip-hop worship services every third Sunday of the month. Their website states: “If hip hop is your sound and your style, join us for Hip Hop Sunday on the 3rd Sunday of every month at both services. Dj’s, MC’s, Graffiti,

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4 King, “The Impact of Global Christian Music in Worship.”

5 Ibid.
breakdancing, popping, media, spoken word....”\textsuperscript{6} At Sanctuary Covenant, they intentionally engage the surrounding culture and music of the greater Minneapolis context.

Missiologists are quick to point out that mere musical adaptation to cultural context is more of a surface change than deep identification with and understanding of a particular culture. Indeed, the work of defining a church’s missional context, while accomplished partially through efforts like worship music, requires a thorough process that touches the entire identity of a church’s existence. In “Missiology and the Missional Church in Context,” theologian Craig Van Gelder outlined seven aptitudes that churches should consider in fully defining their context.\textsuperscript{7} First, a missional congregation must learn to read a context. This includes an analysis of both sociological and theological assessments. Churches should ask both what people are doing and what God is doing. Second, missional congregations should anticipate new insights into the gospel. As worship and proclamation finds their indigenous voices, fresh perspectives on the work of Jesus Christ will emerge. This occurred for the New Testament Church as the gospel was contextualized into the Hellenistic world at Antioch. Likewise, we should expect new ecclesial forms and methods to be, by necessity, created in our contexts.

Third, missional congregations anticipate reciprocity. Van Gelder writes: “Reciprocity occurs when the cultural group that has brought the gospel into another

\textsuperscript{6} Sanctuary Covenant Church Website: http://www.sanctuarycovenant.org/joomla/index (accessed October 30, 2008).

context is itself changed by those who have received the gospel.\textsuperscript{8} This is King’s theory of reflexivity at work and implies that the missional church must be open to the impact of more and different people integrating into the life of the church. Next, missional congregations understand that they are contextual, and thus also particular. This aptitude speaks to the changing nature of contexts. Churches and their contexts are continually changing, requiring leadership to create a system of analysis so that they are regularly reviewed and discerned.

Fifth, missional congregations understand that ministry is always contextual, and thus always practical. The practice of ministry is always normed by Scripture, but must reflect the patterns and shape of the culture in which a congregation is ministering. Next, missional congregations understand that doing theology is always contextual, and thus also perspectival. Grenz and Franke discuss this aptitude when they write:

Yet, while acknowledging the significance of \textit{sola scriptura} as establishing the principle that canonical scripture is the \textit{norma normans non normata} (the norm with no norm over it), it is also true that in another sense \textit{scriptura is never sola}. Scripture does not stand alone as the sole source in the task of theological construction or as the sole basis on which the Christian faith has developed historically. Rather, scripture functions in an ongoing and dynamic relationship with the Christian tradition, as well as with the cultural milieu from which particular readings of the text emerge.\textsuperscript{9}

This is a call to recognize that, while theology begins with Scripture, it is fully formed in the crucibles of tradition and context.

\textsuperscript{8} Van Gelder, “Missiology,” 40.

The seventh and final aptitude for missional church is to understand that organization is always contextual, and thus also provisional. The way in which churches organize must be adaptive and flexible as they continually take context and culture into consideration. Denominationally affiliated churches are wise to treat polity as guiding principles and not prescribed practices. The specific organizational practices of a church in Pella, Iowa, are not going to work in a suburb of Miami, Florida.

The seven aptitudes described by Van Gelder have corollary implications for worship design as described in table 10.

Table 10. Seven aptitudes of contextualization and worship considerations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contextual Aptitudes</th>
<th>Worship Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learn to read a context</td>
<td>• Form learning teams that focus on assessment of context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Involve a cross section of creative people in the planning process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipate new insights into the Gospel</td>
<td>• Capture and communicate new insights in worship events through forms such as faith stories, video stories, and dramatic elements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipate reciprocity</td>
<td>• Encourage continuous and open methods of recruitment for ministry and worship leadership to ensure new people access to the life of the church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual ministry is particular</td>
<td>• Model elements of worship after the particulars of the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual ministry is practical</td>
<td>• Deliver worship through the learning styles and languages of the context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual ministry is perspectival</td>
<td>• Address issues of local concern in worship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual ministry is provisional</td>
<td>• Organize worship planning around models that reflect the local culture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Van Gelder, “Missiology,” 38-43.

In every instance, the work of contextualization has bearing on the corporate worship experience.
Two fascinating examples of these contextual aptitudes and considerations exist, ironically, in divergent cultural contexts. The first is a remote island in the Sea Tribe region of Indonesia and the second is the First Evangelical Church of Saint Paul, Minnesota. The gathered Christian Church on a remote island among the Sea Tribe of Indonesia was best described by a local missionary as loose but interconnected gatherings of very small groups of believers. The Sea Tribe people are a highly social and ostensibly casual demographic. Existing in an almost completely Muslim context, the only real way Christians form a communal identity is through small gatherings, informal meetings, and a very fluid pattern of worship shared by everyone present. The missionary earns his living by running a tourist resort and fulfills his mission by evangelizing, organizing, and empowering the believers to meet in various informal settings. Rather than sermons presented by the missionary, the small gathered groups have spiritual conversations and share stories that intersect Jesus Christ and their everyday life.

The second example of a contextually missional church is First Covenant of Saint Paul, Minnesota. Founded in 1874, it was one of the first churches established in Saint Paul. At the turn of the millennium, it was primarily an aging Caucasian congregation in a culturally diverse context. Tackling many of the contextual disconnects, the leadership team completed a contextual analysis and came up with the following mission statement:

We live out our Covenant history as a mission church by partnering with our neighbors to identify and help meet the needs of the Payne-Phalen community. Entering into the life of the Payne-Phalen neighborhood, we open

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10 This description was taken from an interview on October 27, 2008, at Wooddale Church. Anonymity was requested.
wide our doors and venture out into the community, developing authentic relationships by sharing the love of Christ with those we meet. We are an inter-cultural, inter-generational, and economically diverse congregation, gathering from the East Side and greater Metropolitan communities, uniting as the body of Christ. We communicate the truth of the Gospel to all our neighbors in a manner readily understood, while reclaiming cultural traditions and symbols in a Christian context.11

In an interview with Richard Voth, the Minister of Worship and Creative Arts, he described several actions in worship that engaged their mission.12 First was collaborative music projects with the public school adjacent to the church’s property. Next, they work assiduously to express multiple music and generational learning styles. Third, they involve volunteers in the planning process; and, fourth, they use the liturgical calendar to create inflection points for social justice and broad community concerns. For example, November 2, 2008 is All Souls Day, and First Covenant launched a “Living Out Love” campaign against hunger.

Author Nathan Corbitt would affirm both of these churches as strong examples of the missional church in worship. He wrote: “The kingdom of God is not limited to the sanctuary, but extends to city streets and beyond; it is past, present, and future; it includes every part of life.”13 This holistic understanding of church and worship is a core characteristic of the missional church paradigm.

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11 First Covenant Church of Saint Paul, MN, Website: http://www.first-covenant.org (accessed on October 30, 2008).

12 Richard Voth, interview by the author at Wooddale Church on Tuesday, October 14, 2008.

Establishing a Worship Mission

Writing an organizational mission statement is a standard leadership discipline of many secular and religious organizations. Mission statements are usually brief and designed to establish a clear institutional vision. This is true for worship mission statements as well; however, a brief and memorable statement may not provide enough missiological direction and impetus to guide the overall worship design process. Churches will benefit from broadening the concept of a worship mission statement to form a full-fledged worship mission. The purpose of writing a worship mission is to clarify exactly what a church is going to do in its corporate worship in light of its context. The document must be comprehensive enough to encompass several concerns for missional worship planning, but concise enough to be accessible and interesting to the casual reader.

A worship mission should include summaries of a church’s theology of worship, philosophies of worship and context, and a missiology of worship. A framework for theology, philosophy, and context has already been discussed herein. The remaining statement to define is a missiology of worship. The missional church movement that began in the early 1980s discusses numerous ecclesial concepts that one should consider when writing a missiology of worship. Seven specific characteristics deliver counterbalancing emphases that are applicable for corporate worship. This is detailed in table 11.
Table 11. The balances of missional worship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Missional Concept</th>
<th>Worship Implication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Called Out of the World…and Sent Into the World</td>
<td>Worship invites people to holiness and commissions missional action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing the Voice of the Congregation…and Discerning the Voice of the Community</td>
<td>The congregational ethos is expressed in worship leadership and participation while concerns of the surrounding community are engaged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present…and Future (Sacrament and Sign)</td>
<td>Worship is celebrated in the present moment and in light of God’s promised future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humble…and Bold</td>
<td>Worship is where God’s truth is proclaimed through imperfect vessels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask Questions…and Proposes Answers</td>
<td>The worship experience is the place to ask the hard questions and propose answers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local…and Global</td>
<td>The work of worship should reflect the local context and God’s work on a global level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete and Abstract</td>
<td>Critical theological imagination moves between abstract and concrete expressions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First, missional worship calls people out of the world and into the work of holiness. The apostle Paul wrote to the Roman church, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom 12:2). Simultaneous to the work of holiness and separateness, the missional church also thrusts holy people into the world for the work of mission. The apostle John recorded a stunning prayer of Jesus that both called his disciples to holiness and sent them into the world: “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (John 17:15-18).

Next, missional worship expresses the voice of the congregation and discerns the voice of the community. This counterbalancing principle centers on the importance of
fully expressing the identity of our local faith communities while continually remaining
in conversation with our contexts. Finding the voice of the congregation in worship
requires the recruitment, discipleship, and empowerment of worship leaders on multiple
levels to create maximum engagement in worship. Discerning the voice of the
community requires active listening and engagement with the concerns of the
surrounding culture. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: “The church is the church only when it
exists for others…. The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life,
not dominating, but helping and serving.”14

Third, missional worship is both present and future, sacrament and a sign.
Augustine of Hippo defined a Christian sacrament as “a visible sign of an invisible
reality.”15 The worship service dwells in the present when it engages the sacraments as if
participating in God’s immediate and present work. Missiologist David Bosch wrote:
“Preaching and the celebration of the sacraments call people to repentance, to baptism, to
membership of the church, and to participation in God’s activity in and with the world.”16
Worship also must be a sign pointing to God’s ultimate future. Music, sermons, readings,
and Scripture should reflect upon and discuss the ultimate consummation of God’s reign
for all eternity. Bosch goes on to make a subtle but important point about the focus of our
expression of sacrament and sign: “When the church, in its mission, risks referring to

382.


16 David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY:
itself as sacrament, sign, or instrument of salvation, it is therefore not holding itself up as
model to be emulated. Its members are not proclaiming, “Come to us!” but “Let us follow
him!”17

Fourth, missional worship also must reflect a balance of humility and boldness.

Our worship is humble because as Lesslie Newbigin wrote:

There is a true sense in which we are—with others—seekers after the truth. The
apophatic tradition in theology has always insisted on the fact that no human
image or concept can grasp the full reality of God. Christians are—or should be—
learners to the end of their days.18

Our worship is also bold. Christians have reason to be bold in light of God’s complete
power over all evil and sin. The worship experience best engages in boldness as it
experiences the work of Doxology (right praise). In Ancient Future Worship Robert
Webber wrote:

Doxology is our response to God’s story. It receives God’s story as God’s way of
disclosing his intention for creation. So, Christian creation doxology is a way of
knowing and affirming God’s way in the world. Doxology is the way to
momentarily experience the eternal kingdom of God’s perfection over all creation.
The vision of the world, first revealed to us in the Genesis liturgy, now becomes
continually recast in worship. When worship remembers the past, it praises God
for God’s work in history whereby he has already begun the restoration of the
world. When worship anticipates the future, it looks for the culmination of all
God’s works in the complete transformation of the world, the consummation of
God’s work in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit, whereby worship witnesses
to the victory of Christ over all the powers and principalities and proclaims he
now rules over all creation as the Lord of the universe.19

17 Bosch, Transforming Mission, 376.

18 Lesslie Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans

19 Webber, Ancient Future Worship, 60-61.
As the power of God is emphasized in specific worship actions, confidence and faith will expand courage and increase boldness. A faith built on humble boldness is potent fuel for the work of mission. Tied to humility and boldness, there exists the missional balance of asking hard questions and proposing daring answers. The postmodern thinker is a person who asks many hard questions. These questions should be welcomed in our worship experiences. Some churches may even consider adding question and answer segments that permit dialogue.

Sixth, missional worship is both local and global. The final words of Jesus before leaving his disciples were: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Jesus recognized the need to have a multiple layered perspective of the gospel. Likewise, it is critical that churches view the horizon of their corporate worship in terms of local and global perspectives.

Finally, missional worship is both concrete and abstract. Worship theologian Patrick Keifert discussed this balance in what he called maintaining a “critical theological imagination.” He wrote:

First, and foremost, worship planners must have a critical theological imagination. Such an imagination must fight against monolithic programming; it must draw together physical images, abstract ideas, and emotional undercurrents into a creative whole. While the task sounds daunting, the Christian tradition serves up numerous examples of this holistic approach to worship. For example, the theological imagination of worshippers in the Middle Ages effectively connected the doctrine of the incarnation, an abstract idea, with the specific and concrete baby Jesus through various presentations of the Madonna and child. Around the image of mother and child, many threads of a complex culture and the faith experience of both community and individuals were woven together. As it moves between the abstract and the concrete, the theological imagination writes the many variations that are God’s people together into a unified score; it binds the many
into one worshipping community gathered around word and sacrament. Good worship planners sit willingly on the razor’s edge created by philosophy and art. On one extreme, if the planner allows the specific and concrete to dominate worship, the good reasons for faith, hope and love will remain disconnected from those who so desperately need them….At the other extreme, it is also common to find worship planners and leaders all caught up with abstract ideas of faith, hope, and love, abandoning those who need God’s presence in their daily lives to make what they hear specific by themselves.20

The postmodern mind is keenly interested in more abstract forms of expression, particularly as they relate to the fine arts. However, it would be wise to maintain the balance of concrete and abstract worship and avoid dissolution of meaning into total subjectivity.

**Generational Considerations**

Leading congregations in missional worship requires an understanding of, but not pandering to, generational distinctives. A person from the builder generation will understand and interpret missional concepts differently than a millennial will. Likewise, every generation has a distinctive view of church, of God, and of spirituality that is no better or worse than the others. Many of the specific generational considerations and programming ideas related to builders, boomers, and millenials were already discussed in chapter 1 of this paper. However, in regards to the philosophical alignment of generations to the character of missional worship, Robb Redman provided helpful advice and warnings when he wrote:

> First, generational differences do not explain everything. Any description of a generation is a generalization that can reinforce caricature, comparison, and segmentation. The more we pay attention to people in sweeping, abstract terms,

20 Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 139-140.
the more tempting is the conclusion that one generation is greater or lesser than another, or better or worse….Second, although good generational analysis helps us understand who we are, we should be cautious about using it to say who we will become…Generational analysis can’t answer every question about beliefs, attitudes, and behavior, particularly when it comes to worship, so we need to forecast the future of a generation carefully….Third, too much emphasis on generations can cause us to lose the proper focus on worship of God. As Sally Morgenthaler observes, worship is primarily for God, not for a target market of any generation.21

Churches that offer a single style of worship have the immense challenge of keeping all three generations of people engaged. Churches that offer multiple styles of worship have the immense challenge of keeping all three generations of people integrated. Redman’s advice encourages us to, on the one hand, understand the general characteristics of generations, and, on the other hand, use them as points of reference and not narrow targets.

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21 Redman, The Great Worship Awakening. 120-121.
CHAPTER 6

REFRAMING WORSHIP LEADERSHIP

If a solo pastor thinks of starting something new and designs and plans the gathering by himself, the heart of what emerging generations are seeking in worship and in church will probably be missed….the days of the solo leader are gone. We still need leadership. We still need decisions to be made. But we need to approach all emerging worship gatherings and ministries with much more of a community approach. It can’t be based on the gifts of one or two people. Instead, you’ll want to form several teams that will be involved from the beginning.

—Dan Kimball
Emerging Worship

Current Models of Worship Leadership and the Changing Landscape

The two phases of worship leadership are advance creative planning and actual leading of corporate worship. Historically, the creative planning phase in most evangelical churches focused on the work of two people: the senior pastor and the music director. The senior pastor provided sermon information, and, if there was enough advance notice, the music director chose thematically aligned congregational songs and perhaps special music. The real time work of leading corporate worship, at least from the 1950s to the 1980s, frequently featured music directors conducting the choir and congregation from the front of the worship space. The music director role evolved from the 1980s through the early 2000s by shifting the music director role from choir director to contemporary, “up front” singer with a microphone and perhaps an accompanying instrument like a guitar or piano. These models of worship leadership are currently undergoing significant revisions amidst the missional conversation because, if for no
other reason, it is abundantly clear that one or two people alone cannot fashion worship that embodies all that missional worship needs to accomplish.

In *Emerging Worship*, author Dan Kimball described the nature of planning as a collaborative process done in community. He emphasized a method of leadership that shifts from hierarchical top-down style to a team-based, interconnected, and empowering style. He notes the following shifting values of worship planning in table 12.

Table 12. The shifting values of worship planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modern</th>
<th>Emerging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The senior pastor determines what is taught in the worship services</td>
<td>The lead pastor involves both the church community and the staff in determining what is taught in the worship gatherings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sermon is the center of the worship service, music and anything else are “extra”</td>
<td>The combination of many creative elements experienced in community points to Jesus as the centerpiece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The senior pastor gives the worship leader direction for enhancing the sermon with music and other creative elements</td>
<td>The worship team (including the lead pastor) direct the design of the worship gatherings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The weekend service team consists of the senior pastor and worship leader alone</td>
<td>The weekend service team includes the teacher, the musical leader, the artists, the photographers, the video and PowerPoint team, the sacred space team, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity causes stress to the pastors who own it. They must always outdo what they did last time in order to please people</td>
<td>Creativity causes relief and lack of stress as worship gatherings become more fluid, more naturally creative, thanks to the efforts of the team of people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Adapted from Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 104.

Whether or not a church is technically considered “emerging” is irrelevant here. These shifting values reflect the need for larger teams of congregational members to be engaged in the creative planning process from beginning to end.

The team-based approach to worship leadership also challenges previously held assumptions about how corporate worship can actually be led. The notion that the lead pastor and lead musician are the primary personalities on the platform can potentially
distract the congregation from their focus on God. Shared and broad leadership is a better way to express the voice of the congregation. Unfortunately, most staff worship leaders are hired to be the central figure or leading artists on the platform during worship. It is possible, however, to make a subtle change in orientation that will empower broader leadership. This involves shifting from a ‘worship artist’ orientation to a ‘worship leader’ posture. There are subtle but critical comparisons between these two postures as laid out in table 13.

Table 13. Shifting from worship artist to worship leader

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worship Artist</th>
<th>Worship Leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talent-artist-displays personal gifts</td>
<td>Recognizes other’s gifts-catalyst &amp; equippier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trained in music-creates appreciation of music</td>
<td>Creates appreciation for various means of worship accessible to a larger percentage of the body’s gifts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluated by personality &amp; performance and its impact upon mood, and responsiveness in a particular event</td>
<td>Evaluated by empowerment and use of other’s gifts and its impact upon drawing people into whole-life worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visible, up front presence</td>
<td>Decreasing personal visibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on the worship event</td>
<td>Emphasis on whole-life worship throughout the week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centers on specific talent of hired staff, usually music driven</td>
<td>Experiences God through all the arts as multiple teams are empowered to lead in their respective disciplines</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table is not an argument for decreasing artistry in the worship event. Rather, it reflects the need to place the artist archetype within the context of team-based leadership to create maximum engagement of the congregation in the corporate worship event.

A Framework for Worship Design

In chapter 3, figure 1 provided a framework for re-imagining worship in postmodern contexts. This included Scripture, Christian history, and current postmodern concerns. Likewise, the work of worship leadership requires a framework. Four
considerations include: A God Focus, A Kingdom Expression, A Community Experience, and a Future Vision. In many ways, these framing concepts are core values for missional worship. As values, they are broad enough to function in multiple church settings, however, specific enough for leadership teams to use in evaluating their missional effectiveness.

First, missional worship has a God Focus. Congregations and worship teams have many people, but an ‘audience of One.’ Executing this concept is harder than one might think. Worship teams can lose focus on God if they adopt a performance orientation. Codependent with worship teams, congregations move off-center when they become enamored with the talent of the preacher and musicians. The Danish theologian and philosopher Søren Kierkegaard became extremely critical of churches in his time because of this problem. It was his observation that worship leadership was turning into a show of talent. His solution was to completely turn the worship perspective around:

In the theater, the play is staged before an audience who are called theatergoers; but at the devotional address, God himself is present. In the most earnest sense, God is the critical theatergoer, who looks on to see how the lines are spoken and how they are listened to: hence here the customary audience is wanting. The speaker is then the prompter, and the listener stands openly before God. The listener ... is the actor, who in all truth acts before God.¹

With God as the focal point, the worship leaders who include the preacher, become coaches or prompters for the congregation. However, it is the congregation that is to be fully active in the worship event with God as the audience.

Next, missional worship is led as a Kingdom expression. Pastors and worship leaders who focus on the Kingdom of God as a core value will assume the role of missiologist. In many church traditions, “missions” is a program led by a committee on Tuesday nights and highlighted once a year at a missions event. David Bosch asserts, “In the emerging ecclesiology, the church is seen as essentially missionary….The Church is not the sender but the one sent.”

Bosch is not asking people to set aside cross-cultural mission work, but rather that, in light of the church’s position in society, all work shall be viewed as missional, whether close culture or cross-culture. To this end, pastors and worship leaders must become aspiring missiologists that better integrate global motifs, understand surrounding multiculturalism, raise contextual awareness, and form disciples of Jesus with an apostolic mindset.

Third, missional worship is a community experience. In the planning phase this ultimately means, as Dan Kimball asserts, corporate worship is a community-designed event. Kimball visualized this through comparison in figure 4. In Kimball’s model, the creative team works together to map out the worship experiences. Then, as the leadership team moves toward implementation, the worship event is framed with both existing congregational members and new people, including non-Christians, in mind. The physical community of corporate worship is always a blend of existing and new people. Missional worship provides equal access for everyone to the experience.

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Solo Pastor Planning

A. The solo pastor focuses on preaching and instructs music leader in very linear and black—and-white approach

B. The worship gathering is one-dimensional, linear, and reflects one personality

Creative Community Planning

- Art
- Teaching
- Music
- Sacred Space
- Poetry/video

The worship gathering is colorfully designed from a palette of multisensory ideas

Figure 4. Solo pastor planning versus creative community planning.
Source: Adapted from Kimball, Emerging Worship, 110.

Patrick Keifert explains it this way: “First, there must be justice, or equal access to that company of strangers, equal opportunity for each center of meaning and value to speak. Without justice, the search for truth is impossible. Truth must be viewed from various angles of vision.”3 Equal access implies a close scrutiny of worship vocabulary and practices that may become rote, embedded, and indiscernible to a new person participating in the corporate event.

Fourth, missional worship maintains a future vision. Joseph Ratzinger described the future focus of worship when he described the liturgy in the following terms:

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3 Keifert, Welcoming the Stranger, 79.
What is liturgy? What happens during the liturgy? What kind of reality do we encounter here? In the 1920’s the suggestion was made that we should understand the liturgy in terms of “play”….Play takes us out of the world of daily goals and their pressures into a sphere free of purpose and achievement, releasing us for a time from all the burdens of our daily world or work….Children’s play seems in many ways a kind of anticipation of life, a rehearsal for later life, without its burdens and gravity. On this analogy, the liturgy would be a reminder that we are all children, or should be children, in relation to that true life toward which we yearn to go. Liturgy would be a kind of anticipation, a rehearsal, a prelude for the life to come, for eternal life, which St. Augustine describes by contrast with life in this world, as a fabric woven, no longer of exigency and need, but of the freedom of generosity and gift.4

Worship as ‘play’ is a delightful image. Like children at play, missional worship is filled with abandon, innocence, joy, and freedom. Theologically speaking, this implies a direct focus on the promised future of God. Elements of the worship liturgy must imagine God’s ordained future existing with us right now. On a philosophical level, the image of children at play is rife with the practices of creativity and innovation based upon future hopes and dreams.

Creating Missional Worship Planning Systems

Planning missional worship requires a different kind of leadership than what is typically found in most evangelical churches. William Willimon expressed discontent about existing models of evangelical worship when he wrote:

Finally, some of our present concern undoubtedly stems from our basic Protestant free-church insecurity about worship. Having been nurtured on the watered down, antiseptic grape juice of Protestant austerity, verbosity, didacticism, and staid middle class respectability, we now find ourselves coveting the richer wine of fancier liturgies. Our worship seems so shallow, sterile, and contrived when compared to their worship. As one layperson remarked to me: “You can’t keep having revivals fifty-two Sundays a year. Something more has to happen.”…

Willimon is frustrated with the lack of imagination that many churches have in their worship design. While he may be inappropriately calling all churches to become fully liturgical in their form, he nonetheless reflects a core need for evangelical worship to move beyond the simple revival practices of music and preaching. Missional worship in the twenty-first century will include multiple worship forms designed by teams of people operating in deliberate, creative planning systems.

Churches are becoming increasingly aware of the power of systems thinking. Systems theory is by definition “a framework by which one can analyze and/or describe any group of objects that work in concert to produce some result.” A worship planning system is a framework by which teams of worship leaders can work in concert to analyze their context, apply the theological and philosophical commitments of their faith community, and form missional worship experiences. A missional worship planning system is one way to create certainty that a church can remain missional in its work. The major flaw of worship-driven churches as described earlier by Morgenthaler was their self-serving planning systems. Figure 5 visualizes their approach.

![Diagram of self-serving system: The church starts with a worship-driven perspective.](image)

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5 Willimon, *Worship as Pastoral Care*, 18.

A missional system begins with mission and designs worship to be relevant to the community in which God has placed the church. This approach is visualized in figure 6.

Figure 6. Mission system: The church starts with a mission perspective.

This is not, however, the target / market-driven worship model that was discussed earlier. Rather, this is a contextual model built upon the missional notion that churches focus worship on God but also couple the voice of the congregation with that of the surrounding context. The key to coupling mission to worship is to expand our worship planning systems to reflect a bigger view of what God is doing in our contexts and a broader engagement of the people whom God has called us to reach for Jesus Christ.

Practically speaking, a missional worship planning system must also include regularly scheduled meetings. One possible system is a rotation of weekly implementation meetings, monthly strategy meetings, and yearly vision meetings. Weekly implementation meetings include reviewing of the previous weekend’s worship experiences, planning for the coming weekend, and management of multi-step worship projects. Monthly strategy meetings involve long range planning for the purpose of mapping out more expansive creative ideas. These meetings are designed to dig deep into specific Scriptures and themes while also brainstorming possible creative elements for worship services that are several months away. Yearly vision meetings are best
accomplished in a retreat format. The vision meeting is an opportunity to bring renewal to the leadership team and provide an annual alignment to the worship mission of the church.

**Exploring the Worship Spectrum**

Wisdom suggests that we permit in worship anything that connects people to God in a vital way and that we forbid only what tarnishes God’s reputation or violates Christ’s love or glorifies human egos. This cannot be easily codified, but requires discernment and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

—Paul Basden

*Exploring the Worship Spectrum*

Modern communication is transforming the world into a globally connected and networking community as never before seen in the history of human beings. One result of increased connectivity is an emphasis upon learning from one another. Churches around the world are in conversation with each other about ecclesial methods, theology, and approaches to evangelism. This should be true of worship. The twenty-first-century, evangelical worship spectrum includes formal-liturgical, traditional hymn-based, contemporary music-driven, charismatic, blended, and emerging streams of worship. Each offers particular emphases and strengths that, together, comprise the essential qualities of worship for today.

In the conclusion of his book *Exploring the Worship Spectrum*, Paul Basden provided a list of strengths and warnings for the six streams. These are listed in table 14. As churches focus their worship on missional modalities, these six streams become immense resources for expanding and transforming corporate worship. If a formal-liturgical church is failing to reach younger generations of people, it should access the
potential of emerging worship to be relevant and more accessible. Traditional hymn-based worship would benefit from exploring the power of spirit-infused, charismatic worship. Charismatic churches, if struggling to bring depth to their worship, could drive their worshipping into a deeper experience of God by exploring the blended stream emphasis on the sacraments, creeds, and other traditional disciplines. The worship spectrum offers endless combinations of possibility.

Table 14. Strengths and warnings for the six streams of worship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worship Stream</th>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Warning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal-liturgical</td>
<td>Worship should be vertical, biblical, and ‘God-ward’</td>
<td>Can be user-unfriendly, needs to adapt stylistically to reach changing culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional hymn based</td>
<td>Centered on the ‘texted song’, where biblical truth is expressed in musical form</td>
<td>Hymnody is not a litmus test for wholesome worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary music-driven</td>
<td>Uses the language of this generation to lead people into authentic expressions of worship</td>
<td>Avoid the trap of planning worship or evaluating effectiveness solely by pragmatic or popular standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charismatic</td>
<td>Experiences the full life of the triune God, including the Holy Spirit</td>
<td>Charismatic theology and sign-based worship has a built in bias to celebrate the Spirit’s visible outward manifestations over the Spirit’s quiet inner working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blended</td>
<td>Synthesis of the liturgical and contemporary worship renewal movements.</td>
<td>Tends to be liturgical with a few contemporary window dressings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerging</td>
<td>Engages postmodern people on multiple levels</td>
<td>Can become porous and exhausting if it uncritically adopts art forms as vehicles of God’s voice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Basden, Exploring the Worship Spectrum, 252-256.

There are some risks involved in ‘cross stream’ exploration because of possible theological and philosophical entanglements. However, churches that seek to be missional in an increasingly complex world must move beyond the comfortable pragmatics of personal preference and single stream approaches. This requires risk
taking, counteracting inappropriate embedded theology, and casting a new vision for worship ideation.
CONCLUSION

Instead of just counting the people and the offerings, now we look for evidence that people are breaking out of their private, cocooned lives and are fully engaged with God and serving him. We want them to do more than grab a cup of coffee in the lobby or meet someone new during the worship gatherings. We want them to go deep with one another….In the old days, we protected people’s anonymity; today we thrust them into community, doing life together. We used to invite them to attend church; now we invite them to be the church. I used to ask “What can we do to get more people to attend our church?” Now I ask “How can I best equip and empower the people to go be the church in the marketplace where God has called them to serve?”

—Walter Kallestad
“Showtime No More,” *The Leadership Journal*

In 1938 Hoagy Carmichael and Frank Loesser composed the popular song “Heart and Soul.” This simple song has been played by countless children on millions of church pianos across America for the past seventy years. Usually performed as a duet, the repetition of the chords and the linear shape of the melody are easy enough for even remedial pianists to play. Exuding vigor and abandonment, the first child, sitting on the left side of the piano bench, begins the chordal accompaniment in a bouncing and loud dynamic. After four introductory measures the second child on the right side of the piano bench hammers out the melody line with the same two index fingers they would use to perform the second most popular children’s song on church pianos: “Chopsticks.”

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The work of evangelism and worship in church life is similar to performing “Heart and Soul” in three simple ways. First, like rhythm and melody, churches need both evangelism and worship to work in balance together. The character, nature, and purpose of rhythm and melody are very distinct from each other. So it is with evangelism and worship. However, they are inextricably tied to one another. Like rhythm, evangelism provides the introduction to the Christian faith and continues the pulsing framework for all of church life. Similar to melody, corporate worship is the congregation’s unique and penetrating experience of God which reflects the voice of the congregation and discerns the voice of the surrounding community. The combination of evangelism and worship create a temporal experience the same way that musicians collaboratively utilize rhythm and melody. The specific disciplines and functions of evangelism and worship are distinct and require deliberative technical attention.

Second, it is a surety that rhythm and melody’s impact would be lost if the specific musicians failed to perform their perspective parts in tandem with one another. Akin to children with simple skills sitting side by side on a piano bench, churches must collaborate as teams to produce a harmony of mission work that is impossible to perform as a soloist. The twenty-first-century world is an increasingly complex and discontinuous reality. Only strategic ensembles of leaders with multiple competencies will guide the evangelical church toward opportunities and away from pitfalls. This is particularly true for designing the corporate worship experience. Third, like “Heart and Soul’s” simple and accessible form, the missional church movement is a clarion call for the evangelical church to return to the basics of the gospel mandate.
Evangelical churches are answering the missional church call for reformation in differing degrees. Some are moving incrementally toward missional models of worship and evangelism. Others, such as Pastor Walt Kallestad and the Community Church of Joy in Phoenix, Arizona, have made wholesale changes to reflect the urgency of the North American church’s situation. In a recent article titled “Showtime No More,” Kallestad recounted his church’s regrettable commitment, in the 1980s, to the worship-driven evangelism approach:

It was an epiphany, a breakthrough understanding for me. So our church strategy revolved around the gravitational force of entertainment for evangelism. We hired the best musicians we could afford; we used marketing principles and programming specialists—for the gospel’s sake. Attendance skyrocketed. More people meant more staff, more programs, more facilities, more land, and of course the need for more money. We became a program-driven church attracting consumers looking for the latest and greatest religious presentation….Not that any of this is wrong in itself—people coming to faith in Christ isn’t bad. I told myself it was good—I told others it was good…But something was missing. We weren’t accomplishing our mission; we weren’t creating transformed, empowered disciples.²

It was the tragic experience of a physical heart attack that forced Kallested to slow down and recognize the performance orientation of their worship-driven evangelism. Upon deep theological and philosophical reflection, Kallested and the leadership of Community of Joy concluded that their attractional, worship-driven model of evangelism was producing Christian consumers rather than Christian disciples. In response to these conclusions, they made a wholesale commitment to becoming missional as a church and in their worship.

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The journey to becoming a missional church is a lengthy process requiring theological and philosophical commitments similar to what the Community of Joy engaged in. Without question, the decision to become a missional church is made prior to pursuing missional worship. After all, it would be nearly impossible to form missional worship if not a missional church. However, once the commitment is made and the leaders of a church embrace the missional mindset, there are four steps whereby leadership teams can move toward a theology and practice of missional worship.

The first step is to define the church’s mission. As described earlier, this requires an honest examination of what the church’s mission is, even if none currently exists. It is essential that leaders be completely honest about failures, disconnects to mission, embedded theology, and all practices that are self-serving. Armed with a strong self-awareness, the leadership team must next study the gospel mandate, the church’s specific cultural context, the characteristics of the missional church movement, and the discernable strengths of the particular faith community. This step is completed when the leadership team synthesizes and summarizes into a clearly written document the purpose and mission of the church.

The next step toward missional worship is to define the church’s specific worship mission. This should include making decisions about worship theology based upon the biblical story of worship, Christian history, and the church’s specific ecclesial affiliations. Also, the leadership must come to conclusions about a missional philosophy of worship based upon the church’s context, artistic abilities, and interpretation of postmodern
issues. After theology and philosophy are established, the team should develop a planning process to create, implement, and evaluate the design of corporate worship.

The third step for engaging missional worship is to explore the entire worship spectrum. One element of being missional is connecting to and with the big picture of what God is doing in worship. Ultimately this requires crossing denominational, stylistic, cultural, and socioeconomic boundaries in order to learn and share frameworks of worship. This is visualized in figure 7.

Figure 7. The four-step process of implementing missional worship.

The first goal of this step is to expand knowledge of the current worship landscape. As one learns about practices of streams other than one’s own, it is possible to obtain a bigger view of God and a wider range of methods to experience his presence in worship. The second goal is to mine the worship spectrum for worship philosophies and practices that have direct bearing upon the context in which the church is seeking to live
out its mission. The third goal is to create a possibility list that explores new high potential worship elements that are relevant to the specific missional context of the church.

The final step toward the practice of missional worship is to expand the church’s worship architecture. The word *architecture*, by definition, evokes images of building design or style. However, the word can also be applied to the framework of worship design. The architectural design of a congregation’s worship is abundantly clear in the actual act of worship. Without question, physical gathering spaces contribute to the overall feel of the corporate worship experience. (E.g. worship in cathedrals, warehouses, and theaters invoke differentiating and specific visceral responses.) However, it is the behind-the-scenes structure with which churches plan their worship that clearly defines the culture of congregational worship.

The work of expanding worship architectural design includes the formation and reformation of leadership teams as well as continually adapting implementation strategies. As visualized in figure 7, the entire four-step process for implementing missional worship is an open loop feedback system wherein learning and missional realignment is a continual process. Summarized, the ultimate goal of moving toward a theology and practice of missional worship is to infuse evangelical churches with biblically based, theologically sound, and missionally inspired corporate worship that is unequivocally focused on God and yet strategically connected to evangelistic mission.

The goal of this study has been to articulate a theology and practice of missional worship. Key to the success of this undertaking was the exploration of the relationship
between evangelism and corporate worship. Unquestionably, evangelical churches in North America must rethink current strategies for corporate worship in light of the Church’s increasingly liminal position in society and missteps concerning the Worship Evangelism movement. Statistics presented in this paper confirm that the “worship-driven” evangelism philosophy is ineffective in reaching the unchurched, but successful in attracting transfer Christians from neighboring churches not able to compete with expensive worship productions.

The profiles of worship in the American evangelical church are a study of the successes and failures within current church life. They are also used to determine how worship contexts interact with mission. The relationship of generational identity to expansion of worship styles and choices, the assessment of the Worship Evangelism movement and its statistical failure, key problems with embedded theology, and the impact of postmodernism on all aspects of worship design all point to a need for a new era of corporate worship.

Drawing from Scripture and Christian tradition, the missional theology proposed herein addresses the critical concerns of defining context and establishing a clear worship mission. Integral to this work were the four “framing” elements of missional worship used to guide the process: A God Focus, A Kingdom Expression, a Community Experience, and a Future Vision. Finally, there results a concluding challenge for evangelical churches to deliberatively move toward a theology and practice of missional worship by defining overall mission and seeking a specific worship mission through
exploration of the worship spectrum in order to continually reflect the “Heart and Soul” of corporate worship.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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