

The Campus Minister as Worship Leader

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One of the numerous roles of the campus minister is that of leading in corporate worship. While this role may be assumed infrequently (in contrast with frequent administrative duties), its potential for being a vital role is inherent in the act of worship itself. Indeed, within the context of the ultimate purpose of worship (defined here behaviorally as "the ability to do something in the name of Christ which could not have been done prior to the experience of encountering God"), it may be the most crucial of tasks. From genuine worship students may gain strength to be about the business of the Great Commission.

A perusal of skill-development literature and training programs for campus ministers reveals minimal emphasis placed on this role. These few comments are offered not as a definitive guide, but rather as a tentative means of heightening awareness within our profession of the significance of corporate worship design and leadership.

As worship leaders, campus ministers are striving to encourage worship in individual and corporate experiences. Both have biblical models and are sources for life-changing encounters with God. This is evident in our strong programmatic emphasis on the development of spiritual disciplines and on stress on the importance of worshiping in a congregation of believers. Although the leadership of corporate worship is the focus of this discussion, this does not assume that private worship is any less significant.

Cecil M. Roper, professor of church music at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, suggests that Baptists' attitudes toward the study of corporate Christian worship are similar to earlier reservations toward formal theological education, perhaps out of fear that academic treatment will affect detrimentally the experience itself.¹ A growing number of denominational leaders, however, are attempting to close

the gap between the academic treatment of worship and its practical expressions. They are calling for serious consideration of the skills and techniques used in the planning and design of a public corporate worship service. No longer can those responsible for leading in worship be content to depend on "mere folk ritual—that is to say the type of Christian worship practice which is strongly dependent upon regional cultural patterns, no matter how pleasantly nostalgic for some of us . . ."²

Further, some are challenging the secure feeling that some Southern Baptist worship practices are truly in the biblical model. Robert W. Bailey writes:

Southern Baptists, like most American Protestant denominations, have substituted a call for renewal, speaking in tongues, a building program, busing, a glorification of numbers, a worship of the Bible, or a combination of these and more in the place of true worship of God . . .³

He further states:

The sad reality is that God's presence is not even acknowledged by some who gather in the worship room. The unfortunate merger of church programs (man-centered) with worship (God-centered) has created the cloudy thinking in the minds of many. Rather than entering into a unique setting of God's presence in order to praise and glorify him, numerous persons come to support a leader, 'pack a pew,' hear the music, enjoy a special promotion, or hear an inspiring sermon . . ."⁴

Could it be that these same criticisms of the local church in worship apply to Baptist student groups in worship on college and university campuses? The substitutions may take different forms, but the question of the centrality of God is at issue. Either as leader of worship or role model/teacher, the campus minister is charged with the responsibility of assuring the integrity of the worship service. C. S. Lewis writes, "Nothing should be done or sung or said in church which does not aim directly or indirectly either at glorifying God or edifying the people or both."⁵ Thus, the campus minister who seeks to fulfill this responsibility must be committed to a growing understanding of the theology of worship and to a perfecting of the skills and techniques needed to lead in worship. Certainly this does not imply that the worship leader is to guarantee for each individual an encounter with God. As Geddes MacGregor notes, worship is the "rhythm of God," hav-

ing its own laws and time dependent somewhat on the individual's preparation for worship.⁶

A Theology/Philosophy of Worship

How good it would be, if we could at this moment, give a simple definition of true worship in all its fullness, which could be understood and accepted by all true believers.⁷

The complexity of worship defies a definitive description. Perhaps one can only identify characteristics and elements. At best one can remain open to God's revelation of what constitutes true worship.

The simplest definition of corporate worship is an encounter with God that results in obedience from man. It is "the deliberate act of seeking to approach reality at its deepest level by becoming aware of God in and through Jesus Christ and by responding to this awareness."⁸ "Worship is to experience reality, to touch Life . . . to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community."⁹

Worship is encounter; worship is response; worship involves the totality of man. Anything less than the "I-Thou" experience (as recorded in Isaiah 6) or the act of drawing near to God, renewing faith in His promises, and being "stirred up" to love and good works (Hebrews 10:22-25) falls short of Christian worship.

What, then, are the qualities that help create an environment in which the worshiper can encounter God, make a response, and become totally involved? What are the conditions in corporate worship that lend themselves to propelling the worshiper into a greater obedience? What are some of the catalysts in worship through which God can work out his will in an individual's life?

Several propositions essential to the ordering of corporate worship to meet these ends are offered by Roper:

1. Corporate worship should be based upon the positive truths and doctrines of the good news of the redemption. The gospel is good news—not bad news.
2. The biblical scriptures are the clearest revelation of God and should be the central event in corporate worship. Hymns, anthems, sermons, etc. should all grow out of the scriptures and should reflect creative communication.
3. The corporate worship of God should concern itself first and primarily with God. Worship is about God and man; however, man is secondary. Shaping a worship service

to accommodate man's self-conscious desires or preferences is fatal.

4. The essential nature of corporate worship should be Christian content. Fellowship, emotional support, aesthetic experiences, etc. are by-products, not the substance of worship. Worship occurs because man must worship, not because of some sensual gratification to be gained.
5. Corporate worship should not be a performance by the worship leaders; rather, it is what the congregation does. Soren Kierkegaard compares worship to drama in which the people are the actors, God is the audience, and the leaders are simply the ones giving cues.
6. Worship must have a proper balance between form and content. Any meaningful worship service has form, and the form must be developed to the point at which it will be subservient to the content; i.e., form exists to communicate content.
7. The immediate essential goal of Christian corporate worship is the commitment of believers and their consequent actions.
8. In corporate worship, corporate expressions are superior to individualistic expressions. Emphasis should be on congregational actions and expressions.
9. The worship service should be characterized by an obedient reverence and respect for the presence of God.
10. The specific acts in worship should have significant interrelatedness characterized by a balance between variety and unity.¹⁰

Using these general statements as a framework for the design of a corporate worship service, let us turn our attention to some specific qualities and responsibilities of the worship leader.

Qualities and Responsibilities of the Worship Leader

The worship leader is like the skilled craftsman or artist, concerned both with form and function. The final product is a reflection of his inner vision and creativity.

Obviously, the worship leader, like the craftsman/artist, must first personally be schooled in the basics. To be an effective worship leader requires a continual seeking to live in the "I-Thou" relationship. In that spirit the worship leader is humbled to the truly awesome responsibilities of leading others in worship.

Furthermore, as a craftsman must have sensitivity to the composition of the structure so that it produces both func-

tional and aesthetic beauty, so must the worship leader be attuned to elements that facilitate the progressive nature of the act of worship and also kindle the highest quality of involvement on the part of man.

As in the design of a piece of art, the design of worship must be in the context of the totality of life, involving physical, mental, spiritual and emotional considerations.

From this analogy, one who is responsible for the design and leadership of corporate worship may ascertain some basic directions.

1. The worship leader should give thoughtful and prayerful planning to the worship experience. Worship that is well planned will be aimed at directing man's attention solely on God and will be reflected in a service that is unified and varied. Scripture readings, prayers, music, sermon, transition statements and even order of worship will be interrelated, cohesive and dynamic. Effective worship must have both variety and unity. It must also have order and spontaneity.

Order without spontaneity becomes dull and lifeless; spontaneity without order becomes subjectivity and license.¹¹

2. The worship leader should recognize and include the congregation of followers in active participation. The emphasis here is two-fold. First, leaders are leaders—not performers. In an era of mass media and a show business mentality, worship leaders must insist upon their roles as prompters and that every aspect (from prelude to postlude) be part of the worship experience, worthy of reverence and freedom from shallow faddish influences.

If every aspect is part of the worship experience, then leaders must lead out in communication that worship is not the "preaching hour" and that worship has no "preliminaries." Music is not to be seen as "setting the mood;" nor is it to mask the movement from one part of the service to another. Thus, music must not be a performance by the music leaders.

In addition, the effective leader must love and be sensitive to language. This quality of leadership may well be the distinguishing factor between excellence and mediocrity in a worship service.

Second, leaders and followers both have important active roles. Too often only the leaders actively participate, but in true corporate worship all participants (leaders and

followers) should be actively involved in all aspects of the service. This may be facilitated through responsive readings, corporate confessions of faith, the singing of hymns and psalms, and similar activities. The emphasis should be on corporate expressions as opposed to "solo" expressions.

3. The worship leader should view worship as form with specific ingredients. One of the most sensitive and misunderstood areas concerns form and the confusion of form with rigidly prescribed rules of order. The presence of form is a given; its shape may reflect one of three traditions: (1) "liturgical"—in which the order is rigid and in which no physical sense is unassaulted; (2) "non-liturgical"—in which any planned order is rejected; (3) "free worship"—in which there is a planned structure with a flexible order.

Each tradition has its strengths. As Baptists with a tradition of free worship, we would do well to draw also upon the strength of other traditions. For example, ours is basically a non-visual worship tradition, yet an essential element of the totality of man is his ability to participate through the visual. Some visual symbols could become an effective tool to facilitate drawing near to God. From the non-liturgical tradition, we could learn something of the appropriateness of silence, solitude, and spontaneity in the worship service.

There are specific ingredients in the corporate experience as recorded in Isaiah 6. These include the following: the gathering of the congregation, praise, confession, assurance of forgiveness of sin, prayers, proclamation and challenge, devotion and introspection, acts of commitment, and the going out into the world. John Skoglund categorizes these elements as Preparation, Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of the Table, and Into the World.¹²

4. The worship leader should work to involve the total person. Worshipers (leaders and followers) are individuals capable of thinking and feeling, seeing and hearing, listening and speaking. Worshipers bring with them the whole of life, including the joys and problems of living. Consequently, the worship service should be designed to involve every sense in its highest, most qualitative manner, for the worshiper is called to give his best. This means that every aspect of one's being must be challenged to focus on God so that spiritual healing and strength may be received. It also means that the wor-

ship leader is accountable for excellence in every word spoken or sung and every tune sung or played.

5. The worship leader should seek to objectively evaluate the worship experience. In the evaluation process the primary questions to ask and answer are: "Is the order of worship theologically sound?" "Does it enable the worshiper to experience a genuine encounter with God?"¹³ "Does it reflect the quality of excellence and subsequent glorification of God?"

Conclusion

Opportunities to lead in worship in the college and university scene are not always in the context of a Sunday worship hour; however, weekly worship times and other special gatherings (such as commissioning services and dedication ceremonies) provide significant times for the campus minister to lead in worship and teach students about worship. The student who observes a campus minister committed to living in the "I-Thou" relationship and the serious pursuit of studying, planning, and evaluating corporate worship will have at least been exposed to "the deliberate act of seeking to approach reality at its deepest level."¹⁴ One can hope that this same student will respond with a deepened reverence and obedience to God and mankind. In that regard, the role of worship leader is crucial to an effective campus ministry.

FOOTNOTES

1. Cecil M. Roper, "The Worship of the People of God: A View from the Pew," *Search* (Fall 1979), 22.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Robert W. Bailey, "A Theology of Worship," *Search* (Spring 1983), 17.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.
5. C. S. Lewis, "On Church Music," *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Cooper (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), p. 94.
6. Geddes MacGregor, *The Rhythm of God* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974).
7. W. J. Berry, *Tracing the True Worship of God* (Elon College, N.C.: Primitive Publications, 1971), p. 8.
8. James F. White, *Newforms of Worship* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1971), p. 40.
9. Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1978), p. 138.
10. Roper, pp. 22-25; class lecture notes, "Philosophy of Church Music," Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fall 1978.
11. Franklin Segler, *Christian Worship, Its Theology and Practice* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1967), p. 177.
12. John Skoglund, *Worship in the Free Churches* (Valley Forge, PA.: The Judson Press, 1965), pp. 81-82.
13. Bailey, p. 27.
14. White, p. 40.

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In addition to the resources listed above, a study of worship bulletins and services from a variety of Christian worship traditions will stimulate thinking and often produce fresh and creative ideas.