

4 Important Characteristics of Christian Worship

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- Four essential aspects of a weekend service.



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While each church must find a form of worship that fits its particular mixture of people, gifts, and resources, the following characteristics would seem to be important (if not essential) for any worshipping, community regardless of their style.

1. Theocentric Worship

Our worship must be relentlessly theocentric. God deserves and demands our reverent attention and our, often, frantic existence needs to be regularly and formally drawn back to its reason for being: to honor and bring glory to God. Hymns and choruses that emphasize our human pilgrimage and reactions can be perfectly appropriate responses, but only *after* God has been lifted up and magnified in our midst. Worship thus infused with the wonder of God is also uniquely appropriate to prepare people's heart to hear and receive the preaching of the Word of God.

2. Thematic Worship

A single theme for the time of worship and singing (which may or may not be related to the theme of the sermon) directs the devotional thoughts of the participants. This theme may consist

of an attribute of God (love, holiness, faithfulness, etc), a particular aspect of worship (prayer, praise, thanksgiving, etc.) a theological concept (access to a holy God through Christ, the Second Coming), or a special biblical component of redemptive truth (the Lamb of God, the Cross). It is the theme which governs the selection of all music and readings employed in the service. Hymns, choruses, responsive and choral readings, anthems and even portions of anthems can be drawn upon (with the aid of the various thematic and Scripture indices currently available).

This type of worship obviously takes a great deal of planning – but I believe that is a responsibility incumbent in worship leaders. Liturgical churches need not put as much planning into their services because the story of redemption is beautifully and powerfully related in a standardized form, but there is incredible potential for dynamic worship in the nonliturgical church if we are willing to give it the forethought and planning it deserves.

3. Participatory Worship

Another crucial aspect is that of participatory worship. Kierkegaard’s perceptive portrayal of worship as having God as the “audience,” the congregation as the “performers,” and the worship leaders (music minister, choir) as “prompters” deserves careful consideration. The flow of the service in our church incorporates a sort of dialogue between choir and congregation. Our trained musical force offers a musical invitation to the people to approach God in reverent worship, but the congregation is never left for long to sit and listen: they are regularly brought in to respond and participate by singing or reading.

The great biblical and reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers must be lived out in the full participation of all God’s people in the act of corporate worship.

4. Reverent Worship

Worship befitting its divine Object will be *reverent worship*. This does not—I repeat, does not—mean dead or dull worship. But the primary goal will not be to produce giddy or even warm feelings in the participants. The goal will be to glorify God in all of His transcendence and majesty, so that His people are transfixed by the contemplation of the matchless beauty of His person and the unsurpassed wonder of His redeeming love. Some of our people regularly find themselves weeping as they join in worshiping their Lord in all His splendor

There is plenty of room in dignified worship for joyful and exuberant expression – not as an end in itself, but rather as an appropriate *response* to the Giver of all good gifts.

Ron Man, M.M., Th.M., was Pastor of Worship and Music at First Evangelical Church in Memphis, Tennessee, for twelve years. Since 2000 he has served as Director of Worship Resources for Greater Europe Mission and teaches on worship in Bible schools, seminaries and churches throughout Eastern and Western Europe, as well as in the U.S. Other articles and resources may be accessed at worr.org.

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