

## MISSIONAL WORSHIP IN THE GATHERED CHURCH

It is not for nothing that the label “worship wars” has arisen. Worship has been the fodder for many a church discussion and not a few church splits. Tradition is set against change and success against failure. Great is the opposite of boring, and relevant is the opposite of reverent. The old guard holds strong against the young bucks. The young crowd cries out against the legalism. Indeed, worship is a battlefield not for the faint of heart.

Yet because the Father desires worshippers (John 4:24), the church is obligated to discern what God is looking for, and what that looks like in a given culture. It is not an easy task to be sure, but it is a vital one because it is part of the mandate of the church in making disciples.

It is clear to all but the most isolated that we live in a constantly changing culture in a world brought closer by travel and technology. No longer is the world separated by thousands of miles and a weeks- or months-long postal system. Gone are the days when a trip around the world was a lifetime commitment. Today, people from all nations mingle and mix their cultures both through physical presence in places such as metropolitan areas as well as through electronic presence by means like the internet, satellite TV, and speedy travel. The world of the Bible is long gone; the age of the cosmopolitan is here.

Yet the task of the church—her mission—is unchanged: Go under the authority of Jesus and make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching (Matt 28:18-20). As a church, we must discern how best to carry out the disciple-making mandate in a diverse

culture. This incorporates a number of different aspects of church life—from preaching and proclamation to prayer and relationships; from sharing the Lord’s Supper to sharing family dinner; from private prayer and study to public service and assistance. All of these are aspects of the biblical life of a disciple that take on new dimension in a multi-cultural existence. The disciple of Jesus is to bring all of life into submission to the call of God. He or she must live life on task—on the mission that God has set out for us.

This takes places corporately in the gathered assembly of believers committed to one another in a local church. It takes place individually in the scattered lives of believers interacting in their context. However, it should be fundamental to the existence of a church that the experience of gathering informs and fuels the scattering. What we do when we come together teaches us what to do when we go apart. Gathered worship proclaims the gospel, instructs holiness, increases love, and motivates service.

The specific concern of this paper is, therefore, the corporate worship of a church that is serious about “living on mission.” How do disciples worship God together in their culture? What should that worship look like and sound like? What should that worship accomplish? This paper will try to give a framework for answering these questions. It will give my understanding of what missional worship leaders (primarily pastors who should be the chief worship leaders) need to pursue without telling them what it looks like in their context.

### *What Is Missional?<sup>1</sup>*

The idea of missional is based on the idea that God is a missionary God. This incorporates a number of facets that center on the fact that God is active in the world through

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<sup>1</sup>Since the idea has received ample discussion elsewhere, and the length and purpose of this paper cannot interact with all of them, this paper rather will build on what I believe is the best understanding of the idea of “mission” and how that applies to the topic of corporate worship in the church.

both his incarnation and his people. Missional thinker Alan Hirsch says “By his very nature God is a ‘sent one’ who takes the initiative to redeem his creation.”<sup>2</sup> Gibbs and Bolger say “God is a God who redeems, a God who seeks and saves . . . there is only one mission—God’s mission.”<sup>3</sup>

Mission embraces an even larger point. It is not simply that God sends, but that God is at work (on mission) accomplishing his purpose which is to bring glory to himself through the redemption of sinners, the building of his kingdom, and the restoration of creation. In his mission, God has taken the initiative to come to man to reconcile him, and now God calls man to join Him on His mission. “Fundamentally, our mission (if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation as God’s people, at God’s invitation and command, in God’s own mission within the history of God’s word for the redemption of God’s creation.”<sup>4</sup> To be missional means to participate with God in God’s mission.

Mission is closely connected to the biblical theology movement which emphasizes the storyline of the Bible: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration (or sometimes consummation). Since God’s mission is redemption with a view to restoration, so the disciple’s mission is to participate in God’s work of redemption in anticipation of the ultimate restoration. In this sense, mission emphasizes the Kingdom of God and is consequently inseparable from eschatology.

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<sup>2</sup>Alan Hirsch, “Defining Missional,” *Leadership Journal* (Fall 2008), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2007/winter/2.34.html?start=1>, accessed 6 June 2010.

<sup>3</sup>Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), p. 50.

<sup>4</sup>Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), p. 23.

Yet at the same time, missional thinking does not demand a particular eschatological view. Though most missional thinkers embrace some form of the “already/not yet,” virtually all agree that the church is living in and speaking to the “not yet.”

This is seen in the common theme that exists in missional writing of living in a post-Christian era—a time and culture in which the Christian worldview is no longer dominant. This is often traced to Leslie Newbigen who returned to England after years of missionary work in India to find that British culture had changed drastically. This change meant that now Christians must be missionaries to their own cultures, just as “foreign missionaries” who went to a new country, learned a new language, new customs, and a new culture, and then preached the gospel into that culture in a way that it could be understood.

Christians are therefore to live in their culture as a missionary redeemed by God and sent by God to that particular historical and geographical context to be used by God in his work of redeeming and restoring his fallen creation to himself. In this, everything that the Christian does is a part of mission. For the believer, to live is to live on mission for God and the gospel. The church is to equip and encourage believers to live on mission, doing life together in the mission of God for the sake of the “not yet” by which they are surrounded. It is in this context that this paper addresses the topic of missional worship.

### *What is Worship?*

Worship, simply put, is the glad and necessary response of life to the truth about God communicated in his Word through the person and work of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup> Worship is both part of the mission as well as the way in which God carries out his mission. Missional lives

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<sup>5</sup>This section is condensed from my own unpublished article entitled, “The Conversation of Worship,” which can be found at [http://graceinrouge.org/articles/The Conversation of Worship.pdf](http://graceinrouge.org/articles/The%20Conversation%20of%20Worship.pdf).

are lives of worship that serve to call attention, not to themselves or to this age, but to God and the life transforming power of the gospel.

In the first place, biblical worship is inseparably connected with truth about God. Humans, by nature, are worshippers with an instinctive awareness of something bigger than themselves. This instinct to worship derives from the image of God in man. In every human, there is knowledge of the transcendent God, mediated both internally (through conscience; Rom 2:14-16) and externally (through creation; Psalm 19:1-4; Rom 1:18-20). This knowledge, however, is made intelligible only through special revelation that gives us propositional knowledge of God that can be understood and believed.

Yet man worships at the altar of lesser gods—people, pleasures, or ideas—because they have no compelling vision of the greatness of this one true and living God. Until such a vision is gained, man's instinct to worship will be poured out on lesser gods (cf. Romans 1:18-23). This great vision can only be gained through God's revelation, which makes God's word the foundation of all true worship.

In the second place, biblical worship is based on the person and work of Jesus Christ. Humanity's sin is an insurmountable barrier to the worship of God. Only the perfection of Christ combined with his work on the cross can deal with the sin problem, and therefore Christ in his person and work is the sole ground on which humanity can approach God in true worship.

In the third place, biblical worship is a glad and necessary response of man. Having received the truth of God, the only appropriate response is joyful belief and submission. Nothing less is reasonable, and nothing less will suffice. God and his truth are honored by joyful and complete submission.

In the fourth and final place, true biblical worship is the response of life. Worship is not only an hour on Sunday morning where the church corporately gathers with her guests to sing, pray, give, and hear the Word preached. The worship of Sunday morning is, in many ways, a continuation of what has occurred during the week—a life of submission to the Word of God. Corporate worship is a time for the readjustment of priorities and realignment of our lives so that mission can be carried out.

Corporate worship is therefore a conversation in which God speaks to mankind, through the public reading of Scripture, the preaching of the Bible, the singing of biblical truth by the body, and through the ordinances, and the gathered church responds by singing the truth of God, praying (both in song and in speech), giving, listening attentively to the preached Word and responding appropriately to it, and observing the ordinances.<sup>6</sup>

#### *What is Corporate Missional Worship?*

Given this definition of worship, we can now define missional worship this way:

*Corporate missional worship is worship in which God's people together hear and re-tell the story of God and his works and purposes as recorded in the Bible in a way that is culturally appropriate so that it is clearly understood and so that it brings forth a response of glad adoration and submission of those who hear leading to them to participate in the mission of God in their personal lives.*

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<sup>6</sup>Corporate worship as conversation has been explored in an unpublished paper by this author, found at [www.graceinrouge.org/articles/The Conversation of Worship.pdf](http://www.graceinrouge.org/articles/The_Conversation_of_Worship.pdf).

## Re-telling the Story

“Corporate worship is nothing more, and nothing less, than a re-presentation of the gospel in the presence of God and his people for his glory and their good.”<sup>7</sup> This succinct statement from Bryan Chappell highlights the foundation of missional worship—the retelling of the gospel in the gathering of the saints. The Word of God is the unchanging truth for all generations and all cultural contexts. It is the revelation from God to which all humanity in every time and every place is to respond. Therefore, worship is built on the story of God.

This retelling brings the necessity of first sitting under the Word of God so that they story is heard. Too often, worship is set against preaching, as if the music is the worship and the preaching is, well, the preaching. Biblical worship begins with hearing the voice of God. Mohler rightly says, “Preaching is indispensable to Christian worship—not only indispensable but central.”<sup>8</sup> Dever and Alexander say, “Music in the context of the corporate gathering is only a subset of corporate worship. Listening to the preached Word of God is one of the most important ways we worship God together; in fact, it is the only way we can learn how to worship Him acceptably.”<sup>9</sup>

The story of God and his mission has not been heard until the Word of God has been proclaimed because the Word of God is where we find the story of God and his mission.

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<sup>7</sup>Bryan Chappell, *Christ-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), p. 120. Chappell’s belief that all the Scripture is about Jesus (cf. p. 279) leads me to believe that Chappell would indeed include the whole story of God here, not merely the “gospel proper.”

<sup>8</sup>R. Albert Mohler, “Expository Preaching: Central to Christian Worship,” in *Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship*, ed. Philip Graham Ryken, Derek W. H. Thomas, and J. Ligon Duncan, III (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003), p. 109. He goes on to lament that “in far too many churches, the Bible is nearly silent. The public reading of Scripture has been dropped from many services, and the sermon has been sidelined, reduced to a brief devotional appended to the music” (p. 110).

<sup>9</sup>Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), p. 115. He includes this explanatory footnote: “God told Moses just before the Exodus that the Hebrews would worship God at Mt. Sinai; and when they got there, they heard His Word” (p. 209).

Thus, preaching is not after worship, or even prior to worship. It is an act of worship because it is an act submission to God and his Word to proclaim it faithfully and clearly and to sit hungrily and attentively while the Word of God is being proclaimed.

While preaching may take a number of different forms, and is certainly differs from personality to personality and from text to text, the central mode of preaching is the exposition of the Word of God—the clear declaration of a text of Scripture by means of explanation (What does it say?) and application (What should we do because of what the text says?). This directs the attention of the worshipper to the character of God and the story of God which is the foundation of worship. Thus, the biblical text provides the material for worship and the reason and instruction for mission.

In missional worship, preaching must be contextualized to the audience by applying it to the hearers in the context of their lives. Tienou and Hiebert say,

The task of the mission theologian is to translate and communicate the gospel in the language and culture of real people in the particularities of their lives so that it may transform them, their societies, and their cultures into what God intends for them to be. Missional theology seeks to build the bridge between biblical revelation and human contexts. It seeks to remove the gap between orthodoxy and orthopraxy, between truth, love, and holiness.<sup>10</sup>

This is most significant in two areas: how people understand and how the message of Scripture is applied. For instance, people from a highly educated suburb will learn differently than people in a poverty-stricken urban area. Single twenty-somethings will apply the message differently than retired seniors. Therefore, the telling of the story must take this into account.

The story of God and his mission is also told through the singing of the church. Much of modern worship music lacks solid biblical content that clearly re-tells the story of

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<sup>10</sup>Tite Tienou and Paul G. Hiebert, “Missional Theology,” in Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), p. 45.

Scripture. In an article entitled, “Where’s the Beef?” worship consultant Mike Zehnder quotes from several popular worship songs and says,

“Why sing about being “at a loss for words,” when such powerful words of truth can be sung? Why sing amazement that God “dances over them with love” when they can sing about the lengths to which his amazing love would go: “The wrath of God was satisfied when all our sins were laid on Him”? Now that’s beef.”<sup>11</sup>

The music of the church must first and foremost be doctrinally sound. The truth of Scripture should be easily recognizable. Music whose texts tell lies about God, whether by direct affirmation or by sentimental expression (i.e., “God is my girlfriend” type of lyric), must be avoided. Music whose texts are unclear about God must be explained. Musical settings should be appropriate for both the content of the song and the corporate gathering of the church.

In sum, missional worship is content driven: The message of God is central. Preaching in missional worship gives people something to think about before it gives them feelings and before it asks for a response.<sup>12</sup> The preaching of the Word is what calls forth the response of God’s people. Therefore, missional worship constantly retells the story of God and his mission.

### God’s People Together

A key part of corporate missional worship is understanding that worship is the responsibility of God’s people—believers. It is not a spectator sport, where a band, a soloist, or a choir performs for others, or where a speaker entertains the crowd. Since God is the both object and the subject of worship, those leading worship (whether in preaching or music)

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<sup>11</sup>Mike Zehnder, “Where’s the Beef?” <http://www.centerforusmissions.com/Portals/0/pdfs/articles/beef-zehnder.pdf>, accessed 6 June 2010, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup>For this reason, some churches such as Mars Hill Church in Seattle front load their service with preaching and place the singing, the offering, and communion at the end (Mark Driscoll, “Worship vs. Idolatry,” audio presentation).

should lead in such a way that they are only one of many. By directing attention away from themselves, they help to foster community and direct the congregation's attention toward God and the gospel.

Corporate worship should not be a collection of people having their own private moments with God. Though private intimacy with God is a needed spiritual discipline, corporate worship is a congregation together, in unity and harmony, responding to God and his message.<sup>13</sup> It is the congregation "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord" (Eph 5:16, NASB). Thus, people should be discouraged from merely watching. They should also be discouraged from overt displays of privacy or immodesty that call attention to themselves. They should rather focus on their role in singing to God and speaking to one another (which are both done at the same time).

Mike Breen, pastor Community Church of Joy near Phoenix, AZ, tells of the transformation of their church from seeker to missional:

"Back then," Breen explains, "we would say in worship, 'You don't need to stand or sing or give. Just relax, sit back, and observe.' Now, we say you do need to stand and sing and give. In effect, we are now much closer to a Reformation theology of worship in that worship is 'the work of the people' of God, not just observing and supporting the work of paid staff."<sup>14</sup>

Because worship is the task of God's people, missional worship should not be planned for unbelievers. Unbelievers cannot worship God. They cannot truthfully sing the songs of the church; they do not believe them (unless the church is singing songs that are not true). They are guests in Christian worship. They are not (yet) worshippers. While they may

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<sup>13</sup>Cf. Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, pp. 117-18.

<sup>14</sup>Hall, Chad. "Missional: Possible." *Leadership Journal* (Winter 2007), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2007/winter/2.34.html?start=1>, accessed 7 June 2010. Ironically, this corporate participation is something the tradition church never left, and therefore does not need to recover in the same way as the seeker church.

sing, understand, and be inspired to some sort of change, their worship does not begin until they confess Jesus as Lord and believe in their hearts that God has raised him from the dead (Rom 10:13). In fact, the first act of worship for an unbeliever is the act of listening to the gospel and turning to Jesus for salvation.

Failing to make clear the distinction between “in the church” and “outside the church” may present a false gospel that causes people to think they are saved because they go to worship rather than because they trust Christ alone. Dawn provides a helpful reminder here: “If the Church's worship as a royal “waste” of time will result in equipping its members to be missional in their daily lives, it cannot be planned according to what will appeal to those who do not even know the One who calls us into mission, those not yet committed to a life of Christian service and outreach.”<sup>15</sup>

Churches should certainly be sensitive to the fact that unbelievers are in their midst and should help guests understand what is going on.<sup>16</sup> 1 Corinthians 14 reminds us that we need not do things differently because when churches do what churches are supposed to do, unbelievers see that there is a difference. Marva Dawn has a helpful paradigm for this:

We need both words, *alternative* and *parallel*, for describing the church. To be parallel will deter us from being so alternative that we do not relate to our neighbors; to be alternative prevents our parallelism from moving closer and closer to modes of life alien to the kingdom of God.<sup>17</sup>

### Cultural Appropriateness

Missional worship takes place in a cultural context, and therefore should be appropriate to that context. Culture, at least in part, “shapes how people learn, communicate,

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<sup>15</sup>Marva J. Dawn, “Worship to Form a Missional Community,” *Direction* 28/2 (1999): 149.

<sup>16</sup>See Tim Keller’s excellent article entitled “Evangelistic Worship,” (June 2001), <http://www.redeemer2.com/resources/papers/evangelisticworship.pdf>, accessed 6 Jun 2010.

<sup>17</sup>Dawn, “Worship to Form a Missional Community,” p. 141. Dawn highlights the need for churches to teach people how to worship in the language and customs of the new life, something with significant implication with cultural issues.

and express themselves.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, a church must know its culture well enough to know how to teach the gospel to them, and how to lead them to express the gospel in worship.

This does not mean thoughtlessly adopting the popular cultural expressions of the community. It is easy to look at what’s popular and plug it in at church. It is harder to understand why something is popular. Yet the latter is what is necessary. The reality is that not all cultural forms and expressions are equal. Some are the result of or expression of fallen values.

It is sometimes said that culture is like air; it’s all around and everyone breathes it. This is certainly true, but it begs for the other side of the analogy: Culture is like air, and some of it is polluted. People who live in areas filled with smog, soot, and pollution often think it’s normal. It’s not until they are away for a while and return that they notice the problem. Often, the worst evaluators of culture are the people who live in it, whether it’s the holdovers of the 1950s church culture, or the participators in the twenty-first century popular culture. Disengagement from the culture to some degree is a necessary step for evaluation of the culture.<sup>19</sup>

Tim Smith of Mars Hill Church in Seattle presents three questions about the use of cultural artifacts: What can we receive? What must we reject? What can we redeem?<sup>20</sup> While these three questions are good places to start, missional worship must ask deeper questions

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<sup>18</sup>Dan Kimball, “Emerging Worship,” in *Perspectives on Christian Worship: Five Views*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson, (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009), p. 298.

<sup>19</sup>We should remember the old philosophical story that one does not ask a fish what it means to be wet, but a fish has nothing to which to compare it.

<sup>20</sup>Tim Smith, “Continuous Worship: Missional Worship,” audio presentation, [http://theresurgence.com/tim\\_smith\\_2007-09-18\\_video\\_cw\\_missional\\_worship](http://theresurgence.com/tim_smith_2007-09-18_video_cw_missional_worship), accessed 31 May 2010.

like, Why does a particular segment of culture use a particular artifact? Why did they reject previous artifacts? Or what does this artifact communicate below the surface?

We must recognize that in a given culture, communication takes place beyond the mere level of words. Music, dress, art, colors, design, etc. all communicate in ways that are sometimes more subtle than we might imagine. Consider the simple example of Goths. Their appearance alone, long before any words are spoken, communicates something about them. We may not know what it communicates, which is why we must ask the questions.

Failure to understand cultural artifacts can lead to manipulation of people through mere sentimentalism, the arousal of passions through illegitimate means. This amounts to little more than the feeding of humanity's idols. Dawn rightly warns, "We are called away from the idolatries of the world to gather with our fellow believers in worship and fellowship and education, and then we are called out from that gathering, having been equipped and empowered by it, to go back into the world to serve it."<sup>21</sup> We must be careful not to bring the idols of the world into the church as a gateway.

Gordon Houser says that worship is a way to resist the alternate realities that the world creates and "to be shaped by the reality of God's presence and reign ... Being missional begins by listening to God, paying attention to God's work in our world. Only when we are shaped by our worship of God can we share the good news of Jesus Christ."<sup>22</sup> It meets a culture in its context, but it seeks to shape a people for another reality—the reign of God in Jesus.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Dawn, "Worship to Form a Missional Community," p. 140.

<sup>22</sup>Gordon Houser, "Missional Worship," in *The Mennonite* (September 4, 2007), [http://www.themennonite.org/issues/10-17/articles/Missional\\_worship](http://www.themennonite.org/issues/10-17/articles/Missional_worship) accessed 17 May 2010.

<sup>23</sup>Whether this reign is already or not, there is certainly a "not yet" to it, and as previously stated, it is the "not yet" into which the missional church speaks, and for which speaking missional worship equips.

In the effort to contextualize, the church must constantly be aware that being understandable and accessible in the culture is different than being driven by culture. Relevance can easily become an idol, even among sincere people. While these questions of culture and contextualization need not necessarily be answered all in the same way, the questions must be asked and thoughtfully interacted with.

### Clear Understanding

Part of contextualizing worship is striving to help people clearly understand what is being said. One need not listen long to some pastors and teachers today before declaring, “I have no idea what he or she is talking about!” It’s not merely a problem for the emergent “say nothings,” who are desperately trying to say spiritual things without actually using the Bible as anything more than a prop.<sup>24</sup> It is also a problem for the “conservatives,” whose admirable allegiance to the text of Scripture and conservatism leaves them using terms and ideas that contemporary culture cannot comprehend or apply.

The “seeker-sensitive” movement was, at least in part, a move toward simplifying the liturgy of the church. It desired to remove the anxiety of unfamiliarity and the threat of formalism by casting church in a sort of “everydayness.” It used popular music, topics of popular interest, and the communication forms of popular life such as drama, top-ten lists, and humor. One result, among others, was that congregational worship was lost. It was traded for relevance.

Rather than “seeker-sensitive,” Stetzer prefers the term “seeker-comprehensible.” He says, “The real issue is to be understandable to seekers. The primary means for creating a

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<sup>24</sup>Cf. John S. Bohannon, *Preaching and the Emerging Church*. N.P., 2010, for a critique of some of leading pastors in the emerging movement.

welcome atmosphere for unbelievers is designing worship that's sensitive to their needs, building bridges by beginning where they are."<sup>25</sup> While "designing" needs to be clarified, the principle stated here is valid. Churches should strive to make sure that what they are doing is intelligible and accessible to everyone present. Tim Keller's excellent article on evangelistic worship provides helpful examples of how worship can be made comprehensible.<sup>26</sup>

Bob Kauflin of Covenant Life Church in Gaithersburg, MD says, "We shouldn't expect everyone who walks in on a Sunday morning to be able to comprehend every word to songs we've sung for years. But we should consider whether the lyrics we're singing sound like a foreign language to anyone outside the family."<sup>27</sup> The same can be said of preaching. We cannot avoid the offense of the cross, but we can make sure that people understand the service, and therefore understand the offense of the cross.

Missional worship should also consider the teaching role of worship. Just as a parent understands that a child must be taught how to speak, how to behave, and how to live, so a church must understand that people should be taught how to worship, how to speak to God, and how to live. This is part of the formative work of discipleship. Again, Dawn says,

We must understand that the work of the Church is to teach people the language, the habits, the practices of Christianity, so that people are both formed by the canonical texts of Scripture at the heart of the language of faith and then also sent out to bear the fruit of the discipleship thus nurtured.<sup>28</sup>

Speech (whether set to music or not) that is not clearly understood will rarely if ever be transformative. While it is true that the Spirit prays for us with groaning that are too deep

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<sup>25</sup>Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2006), p. 262.

<sup>26</sup>Tim Keller, "Evangelistic Worship," June 2001, <http://www.redeemer2.com/resources/papers/evangelisticworship.pdf>, Accessed 6 Jun 2010.

<sup>27</sup>Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), p. 191.

<sup>28</sup>Dawn, "Worship to Form a Missional Community," p. 147.

for words (Rom 8:26), that should not be relied upon in corporate worship as an excuse for lack of intelligibility, accessibility, or comprehensibility. Missional worship must be understood.

#### Response of Glad Adoration and Submission

When the story of God is told through preaching and singing, God's people are reminded that we have received the cleansing of sin brought by Christ and have received the truth of God in Scripture. There should, therefore, be a response of glad adoration and submission from the heart of man that employs his whole being—mind, will, and emotions. This response must be elicited by the truth, not worked up by manipulation. Many worship services depend heavily on the ability of the worship leaders (whether the pastor or the musicians) to elicit a response from the hearers. This is dangerous because it can bypass the mind. Before one jump too heavily on the use of certain types of music or humor, we should not fail to acknowledge that emotional stories and thirty-seven verses of “Just As I Am” with the choir humming softly in the background is scarcely different. When someone in whom the Spirit of God is working comes face to the face with the truth *about* God *from* God, the response will not need to be manipulated. It will be drawn forth irresistibly and joyfully. Only truth can break the heart and the will. The truth about God clearly communicated will compel the tender heart to submission.

The response of worship should also be glad or joyful. Worship is designed by God, not only to bring glory to himself, but to bring confidence and joy to the worshipper. Psalms, the hymnbook of ancient Israel, is filled with constant references to the effect that truth rejoiced in and reflected back to God has in the life of the worshipper. Joy (Psa 92:4), gladness (Psa 30:11), comfort (Psa 86:17), and assurance (Psa 118:6) are just a few of the

legitimate effects of worship on the worshipper. Thus, the pursuit of personal joy through genuine worship is a valid biblical pursuit, provided that the soul finds this joy in the incomparable greatness of God as revealed in Scripture.

Joyful worship should not be confused with loudness and energy, physical demonstration, or gladness of heart, though it may include all of those things. It must also not be confused with happiness or giddiness and light-heartedness. Joyful worship can also take place in times of quiet reflection, in times of mourning and repentance over sin, in times of difficult life circumstances, or in the tension of wrestling through the sovereignty of God in the midst of tragedy. Gladness in worship is the state of the heart overwhelmed with the sovereign control of a loving and just God who is at work in the world. Such a heart may clap and shout or it may grieve and cry, but it will be glad in God as the story of God is told in terms of God's loving sovereignty working in "mysterious ways" (to quote William Cowper) to bring about his glory and our ultimate good.

#### Leads to Participation in the Mission of God

Finally, missional worship leads people to participate in the mission of God. It is, in the words of Sally Morgenthaler, a realignment as people are moved from religious consumers ("those simply seeking to get their felt needs met") to those who participate in the mission ("those seeking to take an active part in the story and ongoing activity of God").<sup>29</sup> Clay Schmit even talks of the end of a service being a "sending" rather than a dismissal, because dismissal implies the end of something which should really be continuing.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Sally Morgenthaler, "Emerging Worship," in *Exploring the Worship Spectrum: Five Views*, ed. Paul Zahl (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), p. 223.

<sup>30</sup>Clay J. Schmit, "Sent and Gathered: A Musical Metaphor for Missional Liturgy." <http://www.clayschmit.com/articles/Sent and Gathered-A Musical Metaphor for a Missional Liturgy.pdf>, accessed 6 June 2010.

This sending out on mission happens in several different ways. First, as the Word of God is preached, people are taught what the mission of God is and how it looks in daily life. It gives them information and avenues of application. Second, as the Word of God is preached and sung, it reminds them of the greatness of God as the sovereign ruler of the universe who has entered into a loving relationship with his creation. It gives them motivation.

In this sense, worship is a formative experience. It teaches the Word of God and therefore the mission of God; it forms in believers right affections for God and for mission; it motivates or inspires believers to a life of mission and worship outside the corporate body of the church. “The goal of our worship must be ... to give a clear vision of the reign of God so that participants are formed with the communal, coherent, comprehensive way of life that enables us to deal constructively with the perils of modernity and postmodernity.”<sup>31</sup>

Worship rightly done also calls unbelievers to the mission of God by the entryway of salvation through Christ alone. While much of the missional conversation has devalued the idea of personal salvation from sin in favor of a societal consciousness about brokenness in the world, true worship exalts God not only as the ruler over the creation, but also as the Savior of sinful individuals.

Keller says, “Churches would do best to make their "main course" an evangelistic worship service, supplemented by both a) numerous, variegated, creative, even daily (but not weekly) seeker-focused events, and b) intense meetings for Bible study and corporate prayer for revival and renewal.”<sup>32</sup> However, he believes that worship and evangelism can be

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<sup>31</sup>Dawn, “Worship to Form a Missional Community,” p. 145.

<sup>32</sup>Tim Keller, “Evangelistic Worship,” p. 5.

combined only when “preacher and leaders understand that the gospel is not just the way people are justified, but also the way they are sanctified.”<sup>33</sup>

In such a mindset the gospel is what gathers us out of the world into the church and her worship (from unbeliever to believer), and the gospel re-preached is what sends us back out into the world on mission, to show and share the love of God as revealed ultimately in the gospel (from spectator to “mission-er”). Or to put it differently, the gospel proclaimed is what calls unbelievers to faith in Christ. The gospel re-proclaimed is what sends believers back into the world as missionaries.

The gospel narrative does not simply form the structure of our worship; it simultaneously stimulates mission on behalf of the One we worship ... As we retell his story in our worship, our hearts are moved by his love and we want to tell the world of it ... More and more we understand that our worship is part of God’s mission to make known his Son to our hearts and to the world.<sup>34</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Missional worship is worship that retells the story of God and his work in this world. It is purposely and clearly word-centered, being driven first and foremost by what the Bible reveals worship to be and by what the Bible reveals God and his mission to be. The great problem of humanity is that we have traded God’s mission for our own because we are unwilling to listen to God’s declaration. The solution is to listen to what God says and realign ourselves with his mission in the world.

Missional worship is worship that leads and enables God’s people to praise God together for his character and his works and purpose. It is intentionally self-denying, not self-seeking. It calls us out of a narcissistic culture into a life of total love of God with all that we

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<sup>33</sup>Tim Keller, “Preaching in a Post-Modern City, Part 2” in *The Movement* (August 2004), [http://www.redeemer2.com/themovement/issues/2004/august/postmodercity\\_2\\_p1.html](http://www.redeemer2.com/themovement/issues/2004/august/postmodercity_2_p1.html), accessed 18 May 2010.

<sup>34</sup>Chappell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, p. 135.

are and love of others as a demonstration of the gospel. Missional worship is a call to act, to participate in worship.

Missional worship is worship that encourages people to go out and live on mission because of the greatness of God towards us. Missional worship reminds of the parallel but alternate reality that believers inhabit. It is not a reality divorced from this age, but it is a reality that sourced somewhere other than this age. It forms pilgrims on a mission for the Creator.

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