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**WHAT MAKES WORSHIP MOST MEANINGFUL
TO THE WORSHIPER?**

By

KENT KELLER

A PROJECT/DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

2007

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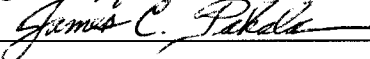
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand what makes worship most meaningful to the worshiper from the perspective of pastors and other worship leaders in Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) churches in Miami.

This study utilized a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with nine pastors and other worship leaders in PCA churches in Miami and beyond. The review of literature and analysis of the nine interviews focused on three key areas of corporate worship that make for maximum impact on the worshiper. These three areas of focus were: intellect, affect, and will.

In the area of intellect, the findings of this study revealed intellectual engagement, long a strength of the Reformed tradition, is absolutely essential for meaningful corporate worship. This intellectual engagement is not confined to the sermon but must extend to the lyrical content of the songs and hymns we sing, the affirmations of faith we choose and all other aspects of the service. Meaningful worship, worshiping God in spirit and in truth, requires our highest and most robust mental involvement throughout.

In the area of affect, the findings of this study revealed the importance of allowing genuine emotional involvement for meaningful corporate worship. In order to offer services that are truly inspiring and uplifting, people must be given the opportunity for authentic affective investment in all aspects of corporate worship – not cheap, superficial emotionalism, but real, heartfelt emotion. The God of the Bible is an emotional God, with the full range of feelings we who are his Image-bearers possess. Meaningful, holistic worship can only take place when accompanied by vigorous affective engagement.

In the area of will, the findings of this study revealed the critical role of volitional participation for meaningful corporate worship. Worshiping God calls for a response, an authentic reaction to his saving love and the gospel of grace. Those who meet with God in an open, sincere posture of praise, thanksgiving, confession, and supplication, and who engage other worshipers openly and sincerely in an attitude of encouragement, comfort, and admonition will experience change and growth. Absent such volitional engagement, worship services can become empty, meaningless rituals. Meaningful, life-changing worship can only take place when our wills are fully engaged.

This study concluded that for meaningful corporate worship to take place, we must at minimum engage the intellect, affect and will. It is crucial for worship to involve and impact the worshiper in significant ways during the service itself and throughout the week. Otherwise, despite the fact that those services may be models of depth and cohesiveness, the music sung and the sermon delivered with authenticity, authority and passion, and those in attendance enjoy the experience, if our people attend but never grow in grace, these services are at best just religious entertainment and at worst stale ritual. Meaningful worship must issue forth in lives changed for the glory of God, the building up of the church and the advancement of Christ's kingdom.

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That this effort would somehow, in some small way, glorify God, build up the Body of Christ and advance his Kingdom into the kingdoms of this world is the desire of my mind, heart and soul.

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CHAPTER ONE

An Introduction

By almost any objective measure, PCA churches in Miami are in trouble. Statistics from the Presbytery of Southern Florida show that most of these churches are experiencing declining membership and attendance. With that comes shrinking budgets and diminishing impact on the community. There are evident reasons for this decline, perhaps the most significant being the radical shift in Miami's population from largely Southern Anglo and Protestant to overwhelmingly Hispanic¹ and heavily Roman Catholic.² PCA churches have had difficulty adapting to this change. Another possible explanation has surfaced from numerous conversations I have had with people who have either left PCA churches or visited one once or twice. I have been told, sometimes rather bluntly, that they find the worship services in these churches irrelevant, boring, or both. This is particularly true with younger people and Hispanics with whom I have spoken. In this day and age, in a culture like ours, with so many other worship options available, many people will not accept a dull, lifeless, non-engaging service of worship.

What is it that makes some worship experiences moving, memorable, and even life-changing? What causes others – at least in PCA churches in Miami – to be perfunctory, mechanical occurrences with those in attendance glancing frequently at their watches? As one who has attended, participated in, and led worship services in South Florida and elsewhere for many years, this question is not merely academic to me. I

¹ http://www.miamidade.gov/plazone/Library/Census/demographic_profile.pdf. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Miami is now 57.3% Hispanic, 42.7% non-Hispanic; of those with a stated religious affiliation, 24% are Roman Catholic; 7% Evangelical.

² Ibid.

consider it vital that worship experiences rise above the mundane and touch people in an authentic way. What makes corporate worship in Miami meaningful to the worshiper?

Some might believe the question of meaningful worship to be merely pragmatic. However, I believe in the theocentric, Christocentric nature of worship.³ Worship exists primarily for God's glory and pleasure, and believers derive benefits from this primary purpose.⁴ However, participation in corporate worship certainly does benefit believers, both directly and indirectly, as Paul explains to the Colossians:

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.⁵

The Bible obviously places great emphasis on worship. In John 4, Jesus, conversing with the Samaritan woman, gives this succinct, dynamic description of the kind of worship God expects his people to offer:

Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."⁶

The Father seeks worshipers who worship him in spirit and truth. It would behoove all Christians, then, to strive to be that kind of worshiper.

In March 1994 at the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, Dr. James Boice spoke on "Worship in Spirit and Truth." In the plenary address, an exposition of John 4, Dr. Boice articulated the biblical basis for

³ I am much indebted to Tim Keller's article, "What it Takes to Worship Well," *Leadership* 15 (Spring 1994).

⁴ D.A. Carson et al., *Worship by the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2002), 38-42.

⁵ Colossians 3:15-16, New American Standard Bible (NAS).

⁶ John 4:21-24, New International Version (NIV).

engaging the mind and the rest of the human personality in worship.⁷ He stated that in John 4, Jesus calls for worship that truly engages the whole person. He understood “in spirit” not to mean the Holy Spirit; in the Greek text there is no definite article with the word “spirit.”⁸ Rather, he took it to mean the human spirit. Based on this understanding, worship certainly engages the mind;⁹ however, that is only one aspect of engaging the whole person, which includes intellect, emotions, will, body, relationships, and spirit. At least three major human capacities can be drawn from this passage to explain what corporate worship must involve if it is to be meaningful to the worshiper: the intellect, the affect, and the will.

If it is important for corporate worship to touch at least these three areas, what implications does this have regarding the traditional concern of Reformed theology for the Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW)? The RPW describes what are traditionally considered the biblical elements of worship. They are set forth in the PCA’s *Book of Church Order (BCO)*¹⁰: the reading and preaching of Scripture, singing, prayer, offerings, confessions of faith, observing the sacraments, and (on occasion) the taking of special oaths. I believe the Bible prescribes these elements for worship. However, I do not believe that it gives precise instructions as to their expressions, circumstances and applications. Indeed, the BCO also says, “The Lord Jesus Christ has prescribed no fixed

⁷ James Boice, *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, Ft. Lauderdale, FL, March 21-23, 1994.

⁸ John 4:23-24: 23 ἀλλὰ ἐρξεται ὥρα, καὶ νῦν ἐστίν, ὅτε οἱ ἀληθινοὶ προσκυνῆται προσκυνήσουσιν τῷ πατρὶ ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ; καὶ γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ τοιοῦτου ζῆτει τοὺς προσκυνούντας αὐτόν. 24: πνεῦμα ὁ θεὸς, καὶ τοὺς προσκυνούντας αὐτόν ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ δεῖ προσκυνεῖν.

⁹ James White, *Protestant Worship – Traditions in Transition* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 60. White says, “... it cannot be ignored that Reformed worship has always seemed the most cerebral of the western traditions.”

¹⁰ Presbyterian Church in America, *Book of Church Order* 47.9.

forms for public worship but, in the interest of life and power in worship, has given His Church a large measure of liberty in this matter” (BCO 47-6).

Hughes Old writes:

Reformed theology has always made a very clear distinction between Scripture and tradition. Scripture has authority, and tradition has the value of witnessing to that authority. ... In the last analysis we are not so much concerned with what tradition tells us about worship as with what tradition tells us about what Scripture has to say about worship. ... The basic acts of worship we perform because they are clearly commanded in Scripture. The ways and means of doing them we try to order according to scriptural principles.¹¹

John Calvin’s advice regarding worship “customs” and “practices” is well taken here:

[T]he Lord has in his sacred oracles faithfully embraced and clearly expressed both the whole sum of true righteousness, and all aspects of the worship of his majesty, and whatever was necessary to salvation; therefore, in these the Master alone is to be heard. But because he did not will in outward discipline and ceremonies to prescribe in detail what we ought to do (because he foresaw that this depended on the state of the times, and he did not deem one form suitable for all ages), here we must take refuge in those general rules which he has given, that whatever the necessity of the church will require for order and decorum should be tested against these. Lastly, because he has taught nothing specifically, and because these things are not necessary to salvation, and for the upbuilding of the church ought to be variously accommodated to the customs of each nation and age, it will be fitting (as the advantage of the church will require) to change and abrogate traditional practices and to establish new ones. Indeed, I admit that we ought not to charge into the innovation rashly, suddenly, for insufficient cause. But love will best judge what may hurt or edify; and if we let love be our guide, all will be safe.¹²

Outside Reformed circles, the RPW does not seem to be of much concern. In fact, non-Reformed worship leaders and thinkers are probably not even aware of the issue.¹³

¹¹ Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship: Reformed according to Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 171-72.

¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), 4.10.30.

¹³ While attending a conference on worship led by Robert Webber in 1995 in Miami I, along with two other local PCA church worship leaders, had a casual conversation with him wherein he asked if the RPW was a big issue in the PCA in South Florida. I replied that in my opinion it was a very big issue for a few, and not as much for most. The other two leaders (not teaching elders) did not know what we were talking about.

As previously stated, some might question whether it is even valid to ask what makes corporate worship meaningful to the worshiper. After all, if worship is primarily for God's pleasure, what difference does it make whether worshipers find it meaningful or enjoyable? As Old points out:

Some people today justify worship for any number of other reasons. We are told that we should worship because it brings us happiness. Sometimes worship does make us happy, but not always. We are told that we should worship because it will give us a sense of self-fulfillment. Surely worship does fulfill the purpose of our existence, but we do not worship *because* it brings us self-fulfillment. We are often told that we should worship in order to build family solidarity: "The family that prays together stays together." The high priests of the Canaanite fertility religions said much the same thing. All kinds of politicians have insisted on participation in various religious rites in order to develop national unity or ethnic identity. Queen Elizabeth I was not the first or the last who tried to consolidate her realm by insisting that the worship be in some way English. One can always find medicine men and gurus who advocate religious rites for the sake of good health, financial success, or peace of mind. True worship, however, is distinguished from all of these in that it serves, above all else, the praise of God's glory.¹⁴

It is understood that anything transcendent, memorable, and life-changing in a worship service happens as a result of God's gracious presence in the midst of his people. It is not merely a result of human efforts to structure good worship times. Yet, if that were the whole story, there would be no reason to plan corporate services. Believers would simply gather at a designated time, ask God to meet with them, and see what happens. In fact, there would be no need to designate a time, or even a place, to gather. This may sound facetious, but it is the logical outcome of an over-emphasis on the theocentric nature of corporate worship.

(My subsequent conversations with and surveys of other TEs on this issue tends to confirm my observation.) I asked Dr. Webber if it was an issue in other denominations, and he replied that with very few exceptions they were as unaware of it as my fellow worship leaders.

¹⁴ Old, p.2.

As previously stated, worship is to be theocentric and Christocentric. However, if leaders are going to put time, prayer, money, and effort into planning corporate worship services, then it makes sense to put this effort into planning the most meaningful experience possible. In the worship "event," there are, in essence, only two participants: God and man.

Larry Roff concurs: "Worship is two-sided. God acts first, then humanity answers. God reveals, then humanity responds. Jacob's ladder (Genesis 28:12) portrays this pattern. Angels descend, bringing God's revelation. They also ascend, carrying humanity's response."¹⁵

God does not change.¹⁶ Human nature does not change. But everything else about human life changes constantly from generation to generation and culture to culture. Therefore, it is important for pastors and worship leaders of PCA churches in Miami to know what makes worship most meaningful for the worshipers in their churches.

However, another potential roadblock stands in the way of meaningful worship. Pastors, worship leaders, and seminary professors all know the expression "worship wars."¹⁷ In an attempt to accommodate churchgoers with radically different tastes, preferences, and ideas, some churches have split their worship gatherings into two services – "traditional" and "contemporary." Making changes in worship styles has, on occasion, actually split congregations into two churches. I recently did a survey of the Christian Book Distributors' (CBD) website on the topic of "worship." The search yielded 288 pages (containing 5743 entries) on the subject. Four years earlier, a similar

¹⁵ Larry Roff, *Let Us Sing* (Suwanee, GA: Great Commission Publications, 1991), 11.

¹⁶ Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 1:12; 13:8; James 1:17.

¹⁷ Elmer Towns, *Putting an End to Worship Wars* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1997).

search yielded 101 pages of entries.¹⁸ Worship is clearly a hot topic, and interest in it shows no sign of cooling off. Dr. Larry Roff, former Chairman of the Practical Theology Department at Knox Theological Seminary in Ft. Lauderdale, writes:

Satan has succeeded in invading this most precious privilege and has turned worship into a battleground! Who among us has not heard the phrase, ‘Worship Wars’? Just the sight of those two words placed side by side ought to cause us to weep! Over the last few years, there have been many forums for public discussions about worship in the PCA.¹⁹

Dr. Mark Dalbey, Adjunct Professor of Practical Theology at Covenant Theological Seminary, adds:

In the midst of this [recent] surge of interest in worship in the evangelical church there has arisen great tension and even division within local churches as well as denominations. In the opening paragraph of his book *The New Worship* Barry Liesch states: “Nothing short of a revolution in worship styles is sweeping across North America. Worship leaders, pastors, and trained musicians face new and powerful forces of change – forces that bring renewal to some churches and fear to others. No denomination or group can sidestep the hot debate between the benefits of hymns versus choruses, seeker services versus worship services, choirs versus worship teams, organs versus synthesizers, and flowing praise versus singing one song at a time.”²⁰

If you ask pastors or worship leaders in Miami what happens when they introduce any change into their worship services, they will tell you that the reactions range from shouts of joy (“Finally!”) to sighs of resignation (“Is nothing sacred?”) to charges of heresy (“We’ve never done it that way before!”).

All too often, a discussion of “meaningful worship” exposes tension and conflict rather than unity and joy. It is clear that many people have strong passions and

¹⁸ www.christianbooks.com/Christian/Books/ (August, 2003; August, 2007).

¹⁹ Larry Roff, “It’s Not Enough For Worship To Be Right ... If It’s Not Rich,” PCANews.com, 2001.

²⁰ Mark Dalbey, “A Biblical, Historical and Contemporary Look at the Regulative Principle of Worship” (D.Min. dissertation, Covenant Theological Seminary, 1999), 2. Dr. Dalbey has been kind enough to give me a copy of his dissertation.

convictions about their worship experience. This brings us back to our original question: What makes corporate worship in PCA churches in Miami meaningful to the worshiper?

Statement of Problem and Purpose

As a pastor, preacher, and worship leader in a PCA church in Miami, I have a vested interest in offering the most meaningful and engaging corporate worship services possible. How, then, do I find the right balance in worship styles, expressing both God's transcendence and immanence while leading God's people to wholeheartedly worship in spirit and in truth? How do I help our people worship with their hearts, souls and minds?²¹ The purpose of this study was to determine what makes Christian worship most meaningful to the worshiper from the perspective of pastors and other worship leaders in the context of PCA churches in Miami. The research questions framing this study were:

1. How do we best engage the intellect in corporate worship?
2. How do we best engage the emotions in corporate worship?
3. How do we best engage the will in corporate worship?

Significance

If PCA churches in Miami are to reverse the current numerical decline and concomitant slide into marginal cultural relevance and impact; if we are to minister to our congregations the awe-inspiring, life-changing grace of our Triune God in a real, life-impacting way; if we are to truly worship God in spirit and in truth, we need to take a serious look at our corporate worship practices. We owe it to our people, those who profess Christ as Lord, to make sure they understand that following Jesus is more than giving intellectual assent to a set of theological propositions. It is an all-encompassing way of life, a life in which head, heart, will, body, and every other aspect of our lives is

²¹ Matthew 22:37.

yielded to the Lordship of Christ. It is a lifestyle punctuated by weekly worship services that are all-encompassing experiences of offering up to the Lord “our utmost for his highest.”

We owe it to those not-yet-Christians in attendance who need to hear the gospel to present it to them in the most compelling, gripping manner possible (while maintaining faithfulness to the biblical text). Men, women, and young people in our communities are dying of spiritual hunger and thirst, and we know the One who is the Bread of Life and the Living Water. They are dying for what we have. Someone has said that merely presenting a doctrinal treatise to a lost person is like giving a starving man a cookbook. We owe any lost people who might be in our midst the opportunity to watch us worship God in an authentic, holistic way, “So [they] will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’”²²

Most of all, we owe it to our sovereign, covenant God to come before him as the Body of Christ and, “Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.”²³ Anything less is unworthy of him, and ultimately, unsatisfying to him and to us.

Definition of Terms

It is necessary to define the following terms as they are used in this study::

1. **Worship:** the term worship will refer to the corporate gathering of Christians wherein we engage God intellectually, emotionally, and volitionally – in other words, holistically – in an open, sincere posture of praise, thanksgiving, confession, and supplication, and engage one another openly and sincerely in an

²² I Corinthians 14:25, NIV.

²³ Psalm 29:2, NIV.

attitude of encouragement, comfort, and admonition. This definition assumes the theocentric / Christocentric nature of worship as well as Reformed distinctives.

2. **Meaningful:** Having significant immediate and longer-lasting impact on the lifestyle of the worshiper (as reported by the worshiper).
3. **Worshiper:** A person who knows Christ as Lord and Savior, who has received the payment Jesus made on the cross for his or her sins, and who trusts in that alone for salvation, in attendance at a corporate worship service. No presumption is made on the purity of motivation, level of maturity, or actual state of the spiritual condition of the worshiper at the time of the service, but these all have an obvious impact.

PCA churches in Miami are experiencing significant challenges, both from external, cultural forces and the internal dynamics of trying to offer worship services that are theocentric, biblically faithful and meaningful to those present. In order to more fully understand this problem as well as address it effectively, it is necessary to consult the relevant literature. In the next chapter I will review significant thinkers and writers on the subject.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to understand what makes worship most meaningful to the worshiper. In order to understand this, it is important to situate this study in the literature of worship. In particular, we will be looking at the literature as it addresses the three primary areas of intellect, affect and will.

Intellect

Biblical worship calls for our highest, most engaged intellectual efforts. When Jesus was asked, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" – he responded, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'"²⁴ Paul tells us, "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. 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."²⁵ If there is one area of the corporate worship experience in which Reformed people have historically excelled, it is this.

Commenting on worship in Geneva under Calvin, White says:

God has gathered all the chosen in the church where they might be instructed, disciplined, and joined together in praising their redeemer for gratuitous mercy in choosing them. ... So great was the imperative to teach that each service contains a condensed course in theology and ethics. This became a lasting characteristic of Reformed worship, contributing to its overwhelmingly cerebral character.²⁶

²⁴ Matthew 22:36-37, NIV.

²⁵ Romans 12:1-2, NIV.

²⁶ White, 64-65.

White says this tendency has continued in the intervening years:

For the most part, the Reformed tradition had served highly literate people. Even today, it attracts largely professional people and tends to the cerebral. The Reformed tradition has placed a high value on an educated ministry and has done more than any other to raise the intellectual standards of theological education in the United States. ... Much of this focus is probably due to the fierce devotion to scripture that has been the dominant factor in Reformed piety.²⁷

Robert Webber agrees, but goes farther:

The Reformers reacted to the monastic movement and the superstitions of lay spirituality and turned toward a spirituality of understanding objective truth. It was enough to grasp the notion of justification by faith. But the Reformers did not neglect the inner experience of spirituality. They spoke of the heart finding great joy and gladness in God's truth. Calvinists, for example emphasized the objective nature of truth and developed a spirituality based on an affirmation of a biblical framework of thorough and strict adherence to its teaching.²⁸

If we are to worship God in spirit and in truth, we must activate and engage our minds to the fullest extent possible. Paul tells us in I Corinthians 2:16 that "we have the mind of Christ." It is incumbent upon us as worshipers and worship leaders that we bring all of our intellectual abilities to bear on this highest of all activities. Dawn stresses the importance of communicating truth rigorously with clarity and depth:

In the face of the relativizing of truth, some pastors and musicians are offering less truth instead of more, becoming therapeutic instead of theological. No wonder people are bored with "church" – and the preachers themselves are bored. ... We perceive that we have to give more content and not less, especially with the biblical illiteracy that characterizes the United States. ... Furthermore, our worship must contain nothing but the truth. ... Worship can never give us the whole truth, but worship must never give us untruth or less than truth. ... It is essential that worship carefully equip the saints with the truths of faith so that they can witness to, and serve, their neighbors. ... Let us make sure that the worship services we plan and conduct present that Truth in all its clarity and beauty and goodness.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid., 73-74.

²⁸ Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 122.

²⁹ Marva Dawn, *A Royal Waste of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being Church for the World*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 63-69.

We impart truth, most obviously, through the spoken word, primarily by reading Scripture, preaching and teaching, and by singing songs and hymns with faithful content.

But the communication of truth is not restricted to the spoken word alone. Gore writes:

Truth then, can be communicated in worship not only through verbal explanations, but also through movement, posture, music, drama, art, and the wise use of sacred space and sacred time.³⁰

Lamar Boschman writes that this primacy of truth in Reformed worship impacts the sermon and the singing:

The reformed tradition of worship is mostly focused on singing and preaching. The high point of worship is the preaching of the Word. ... The songs were “doctrine heavy” in content because the paradigm in this culture focused on principle and purpose. They wanted to remove mysticism and focus on the doctrine of the Christian faith. That caused many of the songs to have a horizontal focus; their purpose was to testify, reason, and proclaim principle. It was in essence “singing the sermon.”³¹

Frame argues that all aspects of a worship service must be harnessed to advance the cause of truth:

Scripture plainly teaches that God’s people are not only to speak, but also to sing, the truth of God (e.g., 1 Chron. 16:9; Ps. 33:2-3; Col. 3:16). ... [I]t is evident that the words of hymns should be both scriptural and understandable to the congregation. Only such words can fulfill the vertical and horizontal purposes of worship: honoring God and edifying people. ... In the contemporary church, we have a great need to learn to think and feel as the psalmists did as they approached God. ... Therefore, if we are to pursue the biblical goal of intelligible worship (1 Cor. 14), we should seek musical settings that speak the musical languages of our congregation and community. To do this is not to cater to human taste, but to honor God in his desire to edify people in his worship. We should not selfishly insist on using music only from our own favorite tradition. Rather, in the spirit of Christ the servant, we must be willing to sacrifice our own preferences in order to reach others with the truth.³²

³⁰ R.J. Gore, *Covenantal Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 2002), 156.

³¹ LaMar Boschman, *Future Worship* (Ventura, CA: Renew Books, 1999), 113-115.

³² John Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1996), 111, 135, 140-141.

Edwards points out that a greater grasp of God's truth leads to a greater appreciation for God's glory, which in turn leads to a greater affection for God's grace:

Gracious affections do arise from the mind's being enlightened, richly and spiritually to understand or apprehend divine things. Holy affections are not heat without light; but evermore arise from the information of the understanding, some spiritual instruction that the mind receives, some light or actual knowledge. The child of God is graciously affected, because he sees and understands something more of divine things than he did before, more of God or Christ, and of the glorious things exhibited in the gospel; he has some clearer and better view than he had before, when he was not affected.³³

John Piper, a devoted student of Edwards, says much the same thing: truth is the very fuel that fires our worship. Notice, however, his insistence that fuel by itself does not produce heat. It must be acted upon by other forces:

The fuel of worship is the truth of God, the furnace of worship is the spirit of man, and the heat of worship is the vital affections of reverence, contrition, trust, gratitude and joy. ... The fuel of truth in the furnace of our spirit does not automatically produce the heat of worship. There must be ignition and fire. This is the Holy Spirit. ... The fuel of worship is a true vision of the greatness of God; the fire that makes the fuel burn white hot is the quickening of the Holy Spirit; the furnace made alive and warm by the flame of truth is our renewed spirit; and the resulting heat of our affections is powerful worship, pushing its way out in confessions, longings, acclamations, tears, songs, shouts, bowed heads, lifted hands and obedient lives.³⁴

Writing from a secular perspective, Csikszentmihalyi notes:

The good things in life do not come only through the senses. Some of the most exhilarating experiences we undergo are generated inside the mind, triggered by information that challenges our ability to think, rather than from the use of sensory skills. As Sir Francis Bacon noted almost four hundred years ago, wonder – which is the seed of knowledge – is the reflection of the purest form of pleasure. Just as there are flow activities corresponding to every physical potential of the body, every mental operation is able to provide its own particular form of enjoyment.³⁵

³³ Edwards, 192.

³⁴ John Piper, *Desiring God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1996), 77.

³⁵ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1990), 117.

While it is well beyond the scope of this paper to examine the issue in depth, the idea that God may actually be a product of and “reside” in the intellect bears mention in this dissertation. There have been recent attempts to explain belief in God, and in fact the very existence of God, in terms of genetics and neurobiological function – in other words, there have been claims that we are genetically and biologically “hard-wired” to be religious. Perhaps the best-known effort in this field is *The God Gene* by Dean Hamer. In that book the author asks:

Why is spirituality such a powerful and universal force? ... I argue that the answer is, at least in part, hardwired into our genes. Spirituality is one of our basic human inheritances. It is, in fact, an instinct. ... I propose that spirituality has a biological mechanism akin to birdsong, albeit a far more complex and nuanced one: that we have a genetic predisposition for spiritual belief that is expressed in response to, and shaped by, personal experience and the cultural environment. These genes, I argue, act by influencing the brain’s capability for various types and forms of consciousness, which become the basis for spiritual experiences. The term “God gene” is, in fact, a gross oversimplification of the theory. There are probably many different genes involved, rather than just one. And environmental influences are just as important as genetics. ... One major new finding ... is our discovery of a specific individual gene associated with the self-transcendence scale of spirituality. ... The specific gene I have identified is by no means the entire story behind spirituality. It plays only a small, if key, role; many other genes and environmental factors are also involved.³⁶

Hamer identifies the specific gene in question, designated VMAT2, as the one that plays such a significant role in belief in God (or a god or gods), which he calls self-transcendence:

There was a clear association between the VMAT2 polymorphism and self-transcendence. ... Somehow, this single-base change was affecting every facet of self-transcendence, from loving nature to loving God, from feeling at one with the universe to being willing to sacrifice for its improvement. ... While this one gene might not make one a saint, a prophet, or a seer, it was enough to tip the spiritual scales and predispose one toward spirituality. ... regardless of whether a person was male or female; the power of the gene was the same.³⁷

³⁶ Dean Hamer, *The God Gene* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 6, 8, 11.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 73-74.

Others, however, are not as impressed by the evidence Hamer and his colleagues produced. Francis Collins, head of the Human Genome Project, includes in his *The Language of God* this assessment of *The God Gene*:

The question of the genetics of spirituality has recently achieved wide attention with the publication of a book called *The God Gene*, by the same researcher who has also published findings on novelty seeking, anxiety, and male homosexuality. The book grabbed headlines, and even the cover of Time magazine, but a careful reading indicated that the title was wildly overstated. ... A reviewer in *Scientific American* quipped that the appropriate title for the book should have been *A Gene That Accounts for Less Than One Percent of the Variance Found in Scores on Psychological Questionnaires Designed to Measure a Factor Called Self-Transcendence, Which Can Signify Everything from Belonging to the Green Party to Believing in ESP, According to One Unpublished, Unreplicated Study*.³⁸

Another effort to find a materialistic explanation for belief in God is Newburg, D'Aquili, and Rause's *Why God Won't Go Away*. The authors asked if there was something in the human brain that caused people all over the world, in every culture and at every stage of human history, to generate a belief in God (variously defined), or if our brains are the way they are and work the way they do because they are biologically designed that way:

Gradually, we shaped a hypothesis that suggests that spiritual experience, at its very root, is intimately interwoven with human biology. That biology, in some way, compels the spiritual urge. ... Whatever the ultimate nature of spiritual experience might be – whether it is in fact a perception of an actual spiritual reality, or merely an interpretation of sheer neurological function – all that is meaningful in human spirituality happens in the mind.³⁹

Like a good mystery, the authors first seem to lead one way, then another:

Can all spirituality and any experience of the reality of God be reduced to a fleeting rush of electrochemical blips and flashes, racing along the neural pathways of the brain? Based upon our current understanding of the manner in which the brain turns neural input into the perceptions of human experience, the simplest answer is yes. ... Are we saying, then, that God is just an idea, with no

³⁸ Francis Collins, *The Language of God* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 262-63.

³⁹ Andrew Newburg, Eugene D'Aquili and Vince Rause, *Why God Won't Go Away* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001), 8, 37.

more absolute substance than a fantasy or a dream? Based upon our best understanding of how the mind interprets the perceptions of the brain, the simplest answer is *no*.⁴⁰

Ultimately, the authors acknowledge that science simply does not have the tools to provide a definitive answer:

There is nothing that we have found in science or reason to refute the concept of the higher mystical reality. ... The best that science can give us is a metaphorical picture of what's real, and while that picture may make sense, it isn't necessarily true. In this case, science is a type of mythology, a collection of explanatory stories that resolve the mysteries of existence and help us cope with the challenges of life. ... All knowledge, then, is metaphorical; even our most basic sensory perceptions of the world around us can be thought of as an explanatory story created by the brain. ... Science, therefore, is mythological, and like all mythological systems of belief, it is based on a foundational assumption: All that is real can be verified by scientific measurement, therefore, what can't be verified by science isn't really real. ...

As long as our brains are arranged the way they are, as long as our minds are capable of sensing this deeper reality, spirituality will continue to shape the human experience, and God, however we define that majestic, mysterious concept, will not go away.⁴¹

Truth as apprehended by the intellect is an essential part of Reformed worship.

Again, this has historically been a strength of the Reformed faith. As is often the case, however, a strength can become a weakness. The danger of such highly cognitive, "left-brained,"⁴² worship services is that they can turn the sanctuary into a classroom. Old writes that Calvin took this intellectualizing to an extreme:

What surprises the modern reader of Calvin's sermons is the simplicity of his sermons. We find no engaging introductions, no illustrative stories nor anecdotes, no quotations from great authors, no stirring conclusions. ... According to T. H. L. Parker the primary characteristic of Calvin's style is his clarity. Compared to Luther, Calvin is bland and colorless. One has to say the reformer of Geneva lacks imagination, the flair for the dramatic, and the emotional appeal. He seems to be

⁴⁰ Ibid., 143.

⁴¹ Ibid., 169-172.

⁴² I am aware that the traditional "left brain - right brain" dichotomy is not nearly as "black and white" as it was once considered. See, for example, Newburgh *et al*, 20-21.

concerned about one thing alone, presenting the Word of God simply and directly. This he does with great ability.⁴³

Gore offers this analysis of the worship practices of our Puritan forebears:

The first area in which the Puritan regulative principle of worship went astray is demonstrated in, and highlighted by, the Puritan tendency toward rationalism. "Briefly, the puritan theory is that worship is a purely mental activity, to be exercised by a strictly psychological 'attention' to a subjective emotional or spiritual experience." The problem here addressed is described by the philosophical and psychological concept often labeled the "primacy of the intellect." This position argues for the necessary primacy of reason and intellect in the pursuit of truth. Cornelius Van Til, however, has demonstrated the pagan origin of the concept and has argued, instead, that the primacy of the intellect should be viewed as an unfortunate consequence of the fall into sin. ... To their detriment, many Puritans were influenced by ... the Cartesian shift from objective truth to personal truth, from the primacy of revelation to the primacy of reason. This intellectual environment was conducive to the intellectualizing of worship. ... the Puritan is apt to place too much importance upon the reason and the intellect, and, in consequence, is in danger of becoming dogmatic and hard." Similarly, John New, while speaking of the Puritan "fixation upon the Word", notes that the biblical emphasis of Puritanism often obscured an underlying rationalistic bent. ... To involve the body in worship, to do anything other than engage in simple, spiritual worship, was considered an act of idolatry.⁴⁴

Even Jonathan Edwards, who is often caricatured as the very personification of a humorless, lifeless, monotone-speaking curmudgeon, agrees that an overwhelmingly intellectualized approach to our faith will not do:

Hence it appears, that the spiritual understanding of the Scripture, does not consist in opening to the mind the mystical meaning of the Scripture, in its parables, types, and allegories; for this is only a doctrinal explication of the Scripture. ... It is possible that a man might know how to interpret all the types, parables, enigmas, and allegories in the Bible, and not have one beam of spiritual light in his mind; because he may not have the least degree of that spiritual sense of the holy beauty of divine things which has been spoken of, and may see nothing of this kind of glory in anything contained in any of these mysteries, or any other part of the Scripture. ...⁴⁵

⁴³ Old, 76-77.

⁴⁴ White, 93-94.

⁴⁵ Edwards, 204.

Webber goes so far as to say: "People come to faith not because they see the logic of the argument, but because they have experienced a welcoming God in a hospitable and loving community."⁴⁶ Intellectual engagement is, of course, a critical component of biblical worship. Nothing written here should be seen as minimizing or trivializing the role of the mind in corporate Reformed worship; only that intellectual engagement alone is not enough. I turn now to another key aspect.

Affect

I use the word "affect" here instead of the more commonly used "emotion" primarily because in contemporary speech, the word "emotion" suggests a more transient, fleeting, and superficial state of being. "Affect," at least in the context of Christian worship, has a richer, fuller historical connotation. (Hereafter the terms will be used interchangeably.) This is not intended to imply a negative view of our emotions; we are emotional creatures, created in the image of an emotional God. Scripture portrays God as having a full range of emotions and displaying them on occasion:

The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.⁴⁷

Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and said, "Because this nation has violated the covenant that I laid down for their forefathers and has not listened to me, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died."⁴⁸

Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Webber, 72.

⁴⁷ Genesis 6:6, NIV.

⁴⁸ Judges 2:20-21, NIV.

⁴⁹ I Kings 10:8-9, NIV.

May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works – he who looks at the earth, and it trembles, who touches the mountains, and they smoke.⁵⁰

"Then my anger will cease and my wrath against them will subside, and I will be avenged. And when I have spent my wrath upon them, they will know that I the LORD have spoken in my zeal. "I will make you a ruin and a reproach among the nations around you, in the sight of all who pass by. You will be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and an object of horror to the nations around you when I inflict punishment on you in anger and in wrath and with stinging rebuke."⁵¹

Reggie Kidd writes:

The Writings – and especially the Psalms, which are the centerpiece of the Writings – show us the priestly side of God. In doing so, they bring integration to the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures' portrait of God. The Bible's God is one who loves, delights in, grieves over and with, listens to, fellowships with, possesses, and married his people. The Psalms communicate the passion of the God of Sinai – the God of the Torah – to be near his people, to indwell them. As such, these poets sing what the prophets preach: God is invading history with justice and for redemption. ... The presence of a hymnal in the Bible tells us something about ourselves as well as about God. Not only do we have minds that need to be taught by the kinds of things they find in the Torah and wills that need to be shaped by the priorities of the Prophets; we also have affections that need to be captured by the poets of the Writings.⁵²

God Almighty possesses and expresses a full range of emotions toward us. He has endowed his creatures with an equal range of emotions. Gore says:

Another way of explaining this would be to note that humans are rational beings, but they are more than rational beings. Humans consist of intellect, but they are more than intellect, for they have will and emotions as well. Humans are creatures of the senses as well as of the mind. No one is perfectly balanced, and some will inevitably give a greater role to the emotions, while others may limit their affections by giving reign to the intellect. Regardless of the particular orientation of an individual, the fact remains that the believer operates on all levels, seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching, thinking, rejoicing, sorrowing. Thus, a balanced service of worship will speak to the mind, but it will also speak to the heart, to the emotions, to the will.⁵³

What then is the appropriate role of the affect in corporate worship?

⁵⁰ Psalm 104:31-32, NIV.

⁵¹ Ezekiel 5:13-15, NIV.

⁵² Reggie Kidd, *With One Voice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 30-31.

⁵³ Gore, 155-156.

In his bestseller *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman says, “In a very real sense we have two minds, one that thinks and one that feels” – hence the concept of “emotional intelligence.” He goes on to say that the emotional mind works on a different logic than the rational mind. He also cites research that shows that this emotional mind processes input more quickly than the rational one: in other words, we feel before we think. The fight-or-flight response is a classic example of this.⁵⁴

Malcolm Gladwell argues that we make quick judgments about all kinds of situations – in many cases, within microseconds – as to their desirability or undesirability, pleasantness or unpleasantness, safety or danger, and that our “snap” judgments are remarkably accurate a great deal of the time. This process, which Gladwell calls “fast and frugal,” happens much too rapidly for normal, conscious, rational processes to take place.⁵⁵ Again, we feel, or sense, before we think.

In *The Other 90%*, Robert Cooper posits three “brains”: the one in the head, another in the “gut,” and still another in the heart. Cooper calls this second “brain,” which consists of the intestinal tract, the enteric nervous system. He writes that the enteric nervous system contains more neurons than the entire spinal column – approximately one hundred million of them. Cooper says that this intelligence works independently of the “cerebral” one (think of “butterflies” in the stomach, or a “knot”), functions faster, and informs our reactions and opinions in a multitude of situations, in a plethora of ways. We literally know things “in our gut.” The “brain” in the heart has forty thousand nerve cells, a highly complex system of neurotransmitters, and a very sophisticated computational ability. Like the “brain in the gut,” the one in the heart is able to act, learn, respond, and

⁵⁴ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1997), 8, 17-19.

⁵⁵ Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2005), 8-11.

remember independently of the one in the head.⁵⁶ It seems Pascal was right: the heart does indeed have its reasons of which reason knows nothing. The point is, we do not “think,” make decisions, or form opinions about anything strictly and exclusively on a cognitive basis – including our worship practices and experiences. Affect plays a key role in every case, whether we “know” it or not. How a person feels about, and during, the service is crucial, and that feeling arrives faster than rational, cognitive thought – even if we are unaware of it.

[John] Piper puts this in blunt terms:

The engagement of the heart in worship is the coming alive of the feelings and emotions and affections of the heart. Where feelings for God are dead, worship is dead.⁵⁷

Jonathan Edwards puts it equally clearly: “As there is no true religion where there is nothing else but affection, so there is no true religion where there is no religious affection.”⁵⁸ He defines that affection at considerable length. An abbreviated treatment of his thought follows:

It may be inquired, what the affections of the mind are? I answer: The affections are no other than the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul. ... The will, and the affections of the soul, are not two faculties; the affections are not essentially distinct from the will, nor do they differ from the mere actings of the will, and inclination of the soul, but only in the liveliness and sensibleness of exercise. ... That religion which God requires, and will accept, does not consist in weak, dull, and lifeless wishes, raising us but a little above a state of indifference: God, in his word, greatly insists upon it, that we be good in earnest, “fervent in spirit,” and our hearts vigorously engaged in religion: Rom. 12:11, “Be ye fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” Deut. 10:12, “And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord the God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul?” and chap. 6:4, 6, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy might.” It is such a fervent vigorous engagedness of the heart in religion, that is

⁵⁶ Robert Cooper, *The Other 90%* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001), 12-25.

⁵⁷ Piper, 79.

⁵⁸ Edwards, 49.

the fruit of a real circumcision of the heart, or true regeneration, and that has the promises of life ... And as in worldly things, worldly affections are very much the spring of men's motion and action; so in religious matters, the spring of their actions is very much religious affection: he that has doctrinal knowledge and speculation only, without affection, never is engaged in the business of religion.⁵⁹

Keller uses similar terminology in describing what must happen if genuine worship is to take place:

We are therefore only truly worshiping when we are serving God with our entire beings, including our hearts, which must be “affected” by God’s glory. The fullest definition of worship, then, is something like “obedient action motivated by the beauty of who God is in himself.” If this is worship, it is more than being moved “affectively,” but it is not less. For example, when we gather to listen, pray, and praise as a community, we are seeking to “remember” the gospel (c.f. I Cor. 11:25). “Remember” cannot simply be a cognitive action. It is talking about getting a “sense of the heart” of the truth so that our lives can be more conformed to what we believe. Corporate praying, corporate singing, corporate offering, and hearing God’s Word all do have a distinctive worship function.⁶⁰

It is common, at least in PCA churches in Miami, to encounter entrenched resistance to allowing the open, honest expression of emotion in Reformed worship services. This is nothing new. Old remarks, “The Great Awakening split the Presbyterian church. The Old Lights could not abide the enthusiasm of the New Lights, so they simply threw them out of the church. This had a sobering effect on Gilbert Tennent and the other New Light preachers.”⁶¹

Frame has observed this as well:

But there is little in this [Reformed] literature on the positive value of emotions in worship or the emotional content of the word of God. ... Reformed theology has always been rather uneasy about the emotions. It has sometimes advocated the “primacy of the intellect” In my view, this doctrine is unscriptural, an intrusion of Greek philosophy into Christian thought. ... It is the whole person

⁵⁹ Ibid., 24-30. The reader who questions whether or not this truly qualifies as an abbreviated treatment of Edwards' thought has perhaps never read much of Edwards' work.

⁶⁰ Carson et al., 204-05.

⁶¹ Old, 85.

who has fallen into sin and must be redeemed. ... but the model of worship as a teaching meeting has had great influence, especially in Puritanism.⁶²

But many biblical passages dealing with worship reveal raw, unvarnished emotion. For example:

While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites – men, women and children – gathered around him. They too wept bitterly.⁶³

They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read. Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is sacred to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."⁶⁴

In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.⁶⁵

In my distress I called upon the LORD, And cried to my God for help; He heard my voice out of His temple, And my cry for help before Him came into His ears.⁶⁶

My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.⁶⁷

My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you – I, whom you have redeemed. My tongue will tell of your righteous acts all day long, for those who wanted to harm me have been put to shame and confusion.⁶⁸

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.⁶⁹

I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; before the "gods" I will sing your praise. I will bow down toward your holy temple and will praise your name for your love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name

⁶² Frame, 77-78.

⁶³ Ezra 10:1, NIV.

⁶⁴ Nehemiah 8:8-10, NIV.

⁶⁵ Psalm 16:11, NAS.

⁶⁶ Psalm 18:6, NAS.

⁶⁷ Psalm 22:1, NAS.

⁶⁸ Psalm 71:23-24, NIV.

⁶⁹ Psalm 100:1-2, NIV.

and your word. When I called, you answered me; you made me bold and stouthearted.⁷⁰

Edwards, commenting further on this emotive aspect of Scripture, writes:

So the saints are called upon to exercise high degrees of joy: "Rejoice," says Christ to his disciples, "and be exceeding glad," Matt. 5:12. So it is said, Psalm 68:3, "Let the righteous be glad: let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice." So in the book of Psalms, the saints are often called upon to shout for joy; and in Luke 6:23, to leap for joy. So they are abundantly called upon to exercise high degrees of gratitude for mercies, to "praise God with all their hearts, with hearts lifted up in the ways of the Lord, and their souls magnifying the Lord, singing his praises, talking of his wondrous works, declaring his doings, &c." ... And we find the most eminent saints in Scripture often professing high affections. Thus the Psalmist speaks of his love, as if it were unspeakable It is plain from the Scripture, that it is the tendency of true grace to cause persons to delight in such religious exercises.⁷¹

Keller claims that Calvin would concur on the importance of the affective side of worship:

Calvin's gathered worship was famously *solī Deo gloria*. Worship was God-centered, and its purpose was to honor God. But nothing honors him more than the "fear of God." This "fear" is not servile scaredness, but rather awe and wonder. Calvin's theology shows a remarkable balance between objective and subjective knowledge. He taught that head and heart are coherently bound up in the act of worship Thus for Calvin the goal of gathered worship is to make God "spiritually real" to our hearts. That is where truths (that we may have known intellectually) now by the Spirit's influence become fiery, powerful, and profoundly affecting (e.g. Rom 8:15-16). They now thrill, comfort, empower (or even) disturb you in a way they did not before (Eph 1:18-22; 3:14-21). ... Only a joyful yet awe-filled heart – an exuberant decorum – can keep pomp and sentimentality from mimicking the two true poles of biblical worship: awe and intimacy. ... we should neither hide nor over-control our feelings behind a reserved, formal, and deadpan exterior. One sign of genuineness is that there is a full range of emotions.⁷²

Dawn agrees with Keller's understanding of Calvin: "The leap of faith is a leap from the order of the intellect to the order of the heart. We leap because we recognize the

⁷⁰ Psalm 138:1-3, NIV.

⁷¹ Edwards, 55-56, 91-92.

⁷² Carson et al., 210-211, 213-214, 223-224.

reality of the domain of the heart, not because there is a shortage of evidence.”⁷³ She then discusses at some length the idea that we are to bring all our emotions into the sanctuary, not just the happy, positive ones:

The reason why many hymns passed down through the ages have stood the test of time is that they give a full picture of who God is and how God is there for us in our suffering. Churches need to offer in their worship services genuine lament, the opportunity for thorough repentance and a clear statement of forgiveness, the truth of God’s character and interventions in the world, and earnest prayers for the concerns of members and guests and the world in order to be faithful in the face of so much suffering. ... In the confusions about what worship really is that characterize many churches in our times, worship services often suppress or ignore suffering in the singing of “happy songs” – rather than engaging in honest, genuine lament and rather than recognizing that God’s reign changes the way we approach and deal with suffering. If we could only learn a theology of weakness – one piece of the more comprehensive theology of the cross – rather than reverting to the theology of glory that pervades many worship services these days, we would be more faithful to the God of the Scriptures, the way of life of God’s people, the realities of our broken world, and the truth of God’s ultimate victory over pain and sin and death at the close of time.⁷⁴

Her admonition flies in the face of much of current church planting / church growth ideology, which often counsels church planters and other pastors to present only the bright, positive aspects of the gospel: love, joy, peace, purpose, forgiveness, grace, mercy, salvation, and heaven.⁷⁵ Thank God those are all true! But it is also true that on any given Sunday, a significant number of those in attendance are dealing with heartbreak. Marital problems, parenting problems, financial problems, doubts, depression, guilt, addictions, grief, and other difficult issues weigh heavily on their minds. Those dealing with such heavy matters may need something more than, *"Lord, I lift your name on high / Lord, I love to sing your praises"*⁷⁶

⁷³ Dawn, 48.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 236, 369.

⁷⁵ I speak from the experience of being a church planter in Miami for seven years.

⁷⁶ I am not being critical of this song; in fact, I happen to like it. I merely offer it as an example of a simple, upbeat contemporary song.

Edwards' words are on target here:

Now, it is out of such a heart as this [broken, humble, contrite], that all truly holy affections do flow. Christian affections are like Mary's precious ointment that she poured on Christ's head, that filled the whole house with a sweet odor. That was poured out of an alabaster box; so gracious affections flow out to Christ out of a pure heart. That was poured out of a broken box; until the box was broken, the ointment could not flow, nor diffuse its odor; so gracious affections flow out of a broken heart. ... All gracious affections that are a sweet odor to Christ, and that fill the soul of a Christian with a heavenly sweetness and fragrantcy, are broken hearted affections.⁷⁷

Kidd writes that songs (or psalms) of lament prepare us for the day when the Suffering Servant, who was well acquainted with sorrow and grief, sweeps them away and replaces them with songs of joy:

While God's people languished in exile they needed to understand what David had learned on the run: the Lord is present to the brokenhearted and the disenfranchised. The exiles' "harps hung on the willows" in the sense that robust, celebrative temple worship was closed off to them. Nonetheless, from David's life, they knew theirs was a God of mercy, who would draw near to those who adopted a posture of praise and contrition. It's the same for us: precisely when God's hand feels so heavy and his blessing so remote, songs of worship become the means by which we gain perspective and experience restoration of fellowship with the Lord. The generation of the return from Babylon remembers that joyful song had burst forth under David not just because he was a gifted singer-songwriter. Song had flowered because of a fulness of time in Israel's life under David's reign. Deliverance had reached something of a culmination: God had been near. ... David can embody both of these realities because he sang of Another who would drink more deeply than he the cup of suffering and dance more joyously than he the dance of deliverance.⁷⁸

He (Kidd) places our own feelings of despair and even abandonment, Christian and non-Christian alike, in a distinctively Christocentric context:

Now, Jesus, feeling the presence of the Father being withdrawn from him, calls up one of the laments David bequeathed to Israel. To know the God who is, is to look to him even when he won't make eye contact. To know the God who keeps covenant is to sing to him, even, perhaps especially, when you fear he may not be listening. On the cross, God's Son sings his loathing of what he had to become for us. Nonetheless, he sings. ... In that story Jesus's rejection becomes our

⁷⁷ Edwards, 66.

⁷⁸ Kidd, 71-72.

acceptance, his cursedness our forgiveness, his nakedness our covering, his ugliness our beauty.⁷⁹

Frame puts it poignantly: “One day he will make us ecstatic with unending joy.

But the road to that happiness is often paved with suffering, as we follow his footsteps to the cross.”⁸⁰

It is possible that, far from alienating people, dealing with these “darker” aspects of modern and postmodern life may actually resonate with and enable us to speak more meaningfully to those we would seek to reach in our increasingly isolated culture.

Csikszentmihalyi writes:

For people in our studies who live by themselves and do not attend church, Sunday mornings are the slowest part of the week, because with no demands on attention, they are unable to decide what to do. The rest of the week psychic energy is directed by external routines: work, shopping, favorite TV shows, and so on. But what is one to do Sunday morning after breakfast, after having browsed through the papers? For many, the lack of structure of those hours is devastating. Generally by noon a decision is made: I’ll mow the lawn, visit relatives, or watch the football game. A sense of purpose then returns, and attention is focused on the next goal. Why is solitude such a negative experience?⁸¹

The reason so many people find solitude so unpleasant, perhaps, is that it makes it more difficult to ignore or mask that “God-shaped vacuum” in their hearts. Unable, temporarily, to anesthetize their gnawing sense of emptiness or (to use Neil Postman’s phrase) “amuse themselves to death,” they are confronted with their own sense of unhappiness, of being lost. Again Dawn’s advice runs counter to the prevailing church planting and church growth mentality:

Let’s not simply give them phony pats on the back and manipulate their feelings into coziness. Let’s instead give them the true hope that is not entertainment, nor escapism, nor diversion, nor a consumerist appeal to taste, but that teaches us instead a realistic appraisal of sin and evil, that reminds us of the victory of Christ

⁷⁹ Ibid., 92.

⁸⁰ Frame, 102.

⁸¹ Csikszentmihalyi, 168.

over sin and evil at the cross and empty tomb, that enfolds us in the presence of God's reign in the world now, that challenges us to participate in that reign of ministry to our world, and that assures us of the truth that someday God will usher in his kingdom in all its fullness. Let us recover the Church's eschatological tradition, worship richly in light of that tradition, and thereby give such a hope to our neighbors who are yearning for it!⁸²

If we accept that honest emotions (all of them) are a valid part of Reformed corporate worship – emotions, not emotionalism – the question is raised: what then is to be the appropriate affective tone and tenor of the gathering of God's people? There is no "one size fits all" template, but there are some helpful guidelines.

In *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, Chapter Seven: "The Tone of Worship," Frame offers these observations, based on decades of study and first-hand experience:

How the Worshiper Should Feel: (1) Reverence. ... (2) Joy. ... (3) Sorrow for Sin. ... (4) Participation. ... (5) Faith. ... (6) Love. ... (7) Boldness. ... (8) Family Intimacy. ... All in all, it seems to me that the relevant considerations favor an informal service with a friendly, welcoming atmosphere and contemporary styles in language and music.⁸³

Goleman points to the influence that pastors and other worship leaders (among others) have on those in attendance: "... the forcefulness of a speaker – a politician or evangelist, say – works to entrain the emotions of the audience. ... emotional entrainment is the heart of influence."⁸⁴ Consider the impact of the following for our sacraments and preaching:

The logic of the emotional mind is associative; it takes elements that symbolize a reality, or trigger a memory of it, to be the same as that reality. That is why similes, metaphors, and images speak directly to the emotional mind, as do the arts – novels, film, poetry, song, theater, opera. Great spiritual teachers, like Buddha and Jesus, have touched their disciples' hearts by speaking in the language of emotion, teaching in parables, fables, and stories.⁸⁵

⁸² Dawn, 370.

⁸³ Frame, 79-84.

⁸⁴ Goleman, 117.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 294.

Along similar lines, Webber exhorts us to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the ways we typically communicate, as well as the communication methods that we do not often employ:

Communication specialists point out that we communicate in three ways. First, the language of everyday speech uses words to communicate; second, the language of science uses concepts to communicate ideas; and third, the language of religion uses symbols to communicate. In worship we use everyday words, we speak the language of faith, and we communicate symbolically. We evangelicals are strong on concepts, but weak in symbolism. ... “symbols are the ‘language’ and the vehicles ... of the supernatural. They deal with the intuition, with imagination, and with emotion rather than with thinking, sensations, or the will.” ... The role of symbolism in a postmodern world is ... to understand and apply the symbolism of atmosphere such as the sense of awe and reverence, to recover the beauty of space and the symbolic actions of worship, and to restore the sounds of music and the sights of the arts.⁸⁶

Probably no single aspect of corporate worship generates as much interest, passion, or controversy as music. Why does music engender such strong feelings? Especially when, if asked to explain why one style of music is better than another, very few Christians can defend their preferences.⁸⁷ An in-depth discussion of the psychological and aesthetic aspects of music is well beyond the scope of this paper, but a few selected observations on the use and impact of this powerful and volatile aspect of worship may be illuminating for worshiper and worship leader alike. Roff comments:

What is it that music can communicate? Music has the power to create and intensify our emotions. ... to engage our memory. ... to activate the imagination. ... to motivate our will. ... to comfort the soul. ... When combined with music, the poetry of good hymns will stimulate emotions appropriate to worship without resorting to undue sentimentalism.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Webber, 107.

⁸⁷ Once again, I speak from many years of pastoral experience, and countless rounds of discussions and debates regarding this issue.

⁸⁸ Roff, 24-25, 155.

Dawn adds a cautionary note:

First come the objectives of the religion, its language, doctrines, liturgies, and modes of action, and it is through these that passions are shaped into various kinds of what is called religious experience. ... That is why the content of our worship music and preaching must proclaim primarily the splendor of God, rather than our feelings about him. (I'm not excluding feelings; but they simply aren't as important as the One whose splendor stirs them.)⁸⁹

Many, perhaps most, Reformed pastors and worship leaders would agree.

However, it could also be said that "the content of our worship music and preaching [that] proclaim ... the splendor of God" simply is not as important as the One whose splendor it proclaims. The point is that both content and our emotional response to that content are important aspects of corporate worship. Frame concurs:

Of course, the content of music tends to be more emotional than conceptual. But Scripture itself appeals to both the emotions and the mind, as we have seen. Emotional communication, emotional edification, is as important in worship as intellectual communication, for God wants his people to be transformed in every area of their lives. ... [I]t is evident that the words of hymns should be both scriptural and understandable to the congregation. Only such words can fulfill the vertical and horizontal purposes of worship: honoring God and edifying people. ... In the contemporary church, we have a great need to learn to think and feel as the psalmists did as they approached God.⁹⁰

Webber uses stronger language on the role of music:

Music is an auditory stimulant that is capable of evoking an experience with the transcendent. In music we take ordinary sound and through its arrangement we are able to lift the hearer into the ineffable. This generally happens when the pattern of ordinary sound is interrupted by the sound of otherness.⁹¹

Many Christians have probably had the experience of being in attendance at a worship service – in a local church, at a conference, retreat, or seminar – and getting caught up in the experience to the point where they actually did forget about themselves and the time involved. Csikszentmihalyi writes (again, from a secular viewpoint):

⁸⁹ Dawn, 338.

⁹⁰ Frame, 130, 135.

⁹¹ Webber, 109.

One of the most common descriptions of optimal experience is that time no longer seems to pass the way it ordinarily does. ... The autotelic experience, or flow, lifts the course of life to a different level. ... In our studies, we found that every flow activity, whether it involved competition, chance or any other dimension of experience, had this in common: It provided a sense of discovery, a creative feeling of transporting the person into a new reality. ... In fact, flow and religion have been intimately connected from earliest times. Many of the optimal experiences of mankind have taken place in the context of religious rituals. ... This connection is not surprising, because what we call religion is actually the oldest and most ambitious attempt to create order in consciousness. It therefore makes sense that religious rituals would be a profound source of enjoyment. ... In the first place, when attention is focused away from the self, frustrations of one's desires have less of a chance to disrupt consciousness.⁹²

If my own experiences, those of my peers and fellow worship leaders in DM802 and here in Miami, as well as those of other people with whom I have spoken are any indication, music is a very significant part of such “flow activities.” Rudolf E. Radocy and J. David Boyle, professors of Music Education and Music Therapy at the University of Kansas⁹³ and the University of Miami, respectively, offer a detailed analysis of the psychological and aesthetic aspects of music in *Psychological Foundations of Musical Behavior*. The following is a brief summary of what they claim to be some of the functions and impact of music. Like Csikszentmihalyi, they write from a secular perspective:

For Merriam, *functions* denotes the reasons, particularly the broader purposes, for engaging in musical activity. ... [H]e maintains that music essentially serves the same functions regardless of the society, culture, or its level of sophistication. These functions include (a) emotional expression, (b) aesthetic enjoyment, (c) entertainment, (d) communication, (e) symbolic representation, (f) physical response, (g) enforcing conformity to social norms, (h) validation of social institutions and religious rituals, (i) contributions to the continuity and stability of culture, and (j) contributions to the integration of society. ... Music as *emotional expression* provides a vehicle for expression of ideas and emotions which might not be revealed in ordinary discourse. It can convey either individual or group emotions. ... In addition to their religious and entertainment functions, traditional Christmas and Hanukkah songs provide a certain stability across generations. ...

⁹² Csikszentmihalyi, 56, 69, 74, 76, 205.

⁹³ At the time of writing Radocy was at Kansas; he subsequently moved to the University of Miami.

Perhaps music's most important function from Merriam's perspective is its *contribution to the integration of society*. If nothing else, music draws people together: It invites, encourages, and in some instances almost requires individuals to participate in group activity. People who might otherwise never interact will work together in making music. ... In short, musicmaking brings people from differing sociocultural, religious, occupational, and musical backgrounds together for a common musical and social experience. ... Gaston's contention that music *is derived from the tender emotions* is reflected clearly in most popular music, as well as in most religious music, folk songs, art songs, and patriotic music. Most such music reflects a concern for other individuals, and the predominant theme is love in one of its various manifestations – love of one another, love of country, love of God, etc. Such music may also provide an individual with a feeling of belonging, thus providing a sense of closeness to others and the alleviation of loneliness.⁹⁴

Radocy and Boyle also address some of music's major uses and potential misuses in a religious context:

Perris's (1985, p.123-155) examination of music in major world religions focuses particularly on music's persuasive function:

"Music in all worship is expected to heighten the desired emotional effect in the listener, to emphasize the ritual text, especially certain significant words, and to focus the worshipper's attention on the rite. But the danger of so sensuous a phenomenon as music is that it may be more seductive than the rite itself, and that the musicians may evoke more interest than the priests. If the music in the worship service is "entertaining," is the religious ambience destroyed? How can the worshipper's attention be shielded from wandering?" (Perris, 1985, p.124)⁹⁵

The following touches on the intellectual, affective and volitional aspects of music:

Learning underlies all musical behavior, affective or otherwise. ... Words and music also have been combined to express and elicit affective reactions to all types of social, political, and religious issues. Music has been used as a persuasive tool throughout history. ... many of music's basic functions and application are to sway feelings. There is little doubt that patriotic, social protest, and religious songs can arouse strong affective response. Such songs are symbols, are perceived and reacted to accordingly, and serve a legitimate and important function (Reimer, 1989, p. 121).⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Rudolf E. Radocy and J. David Boyle, *Psychological Foundations of Musical Behavior*, Third Edition (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1997), 10, 13, 16-17.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 35.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 274.

And finally: "The affective and intellectual responses to music cannot be separated."⁹⁷

Music has tremendous potential for use and abuse. As Dawn points out:

People often leave churches that nurture deeper faith and Christian character because they long for the emotional high of "praise" worship. ... If churches respond to this need merely by turning their worship services into an emotional lift, however, they will have to increase the hype constantly in order for that to remain effective. Like drugs or alcohol, emotional highs need intensifying escalation to be made sufficient. ... Our churches instead must help worship participants to learn that objective truths about God give a more lasting high. To learn deeper truth might not seem to be so wonderful at first, but it is a Joy that stays. To become a person of more profoundly Christian character might not seem to give the immediate emotional boost that is sought, but it provides the spiritual resources necessary for dealing with the chaotic and tension-causing situations of daily life in the long haul.⁹⁸

While her cautions are well taken, the possibility of overly emotive worship seems not to have bothered Edwards very much:

And these expressions of holy affection, which the psalms of David are everywhere full of, are the more to our present purpose, because those psalms are not only the expressions of the religion of so eminent a saint, that God speaks of as so agreeable to his mind; but were also, by the direction of the Holy Ghost, penned for the use of the church of God in its public worship, not only in that age, but in after ages; as being fitted to express the religion of all saints, in all ages, as well as the religion of the Psalmist. And it is moreover to be observed, that David, in the book of Psalms, speaks not as a private person, but as the Psalmist of Israel, as the subordinate head of the church of God, and leader in their worship and praises; and in many of the psalms speaks in the name of Christ, as personating him in these breathings forth of holy affection; and in many other psalms he speaks in the name of the church. ... And the duty of singing praises to God seems to be appointed wholly to excite and express religious affections. No other reason can be assigned why we should express ourselves to God in verse, rather than in prose, and do it with music but only, that such is our nature and frame, that these things have a tendency to move our affections.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Ibid., 303.

⁹⁸ Dawn, 231.

⁹⁹ Edwards, 37, 44-45.

Frame adds, "In any case, there is no technique for insuring that such experiences [worship with depth and authenticity] will take place. All we can do is make sure that our own hearts, as worshipers, are seeking to honor the Lord."¹⁰⁰

Music will make an impact of some kind on the congregation. It is the responsibility of those who lead to see that it is offered authentically and appropriately for glorifying God, building up the body of Christ, and advancing his kingdom. I will say more about music's volitional impact in the next section. Before moving on to that, I conclude this brief treatment of the affective nature of worship with these words from

The Religious Affections:

How they can sit and hear of the infinite height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the love of God in Christ Jesus, of his giving his infinitely dear Son, to be offered up a sacrifice for the sins of men, and of the unparalleled love of the innocent, and holy, and tender Lamb of God, manifested in his dying agonies, his bloody sweat, his loud and bitter cries, and bleeding heart, and all this for enemies, to redeem them from deserved, eternal burnings, and to bring to unspeakable and everlasting joy and glory; and yet be cold, and heavy, insensible, and regardless! Where are the exercises of our affections proper, if not here? What is it that does more require them? And what can be a fit occasion of their lively and vigorous exercise, if not such a one as this? ... The glory and beauty of the blessed Jehovah, which is most worthy in itself, to be the object of our admiration and love, is there exhibited in the most affecting manner that can be conceived of, as it appears, shining in all its luster, in the face of an incarnate, infinitely loving, meek, compassionate, dying Redeemer.¹⁰¹

I turn now to a third critical aspect of meaningful corporate worship.

Will

Of the three key aspects of Reformed corporate worship considered herein, this third one, volition, is perhaps the most difficult to assess. How are we to determine whether or not the worshiper's will is engaged? There are some basic immediate

¹⁰⁰ Frame, 85.

¹⁰¹ Edwards, 52-53.

indicators, including whether or not he: willingly participates in fellowshiping and singing, and how enthusiastically he does so; contributes financially during the offering, and to what extent; pays attention to the sermon, and with what sort of attitude; willingly attends the service – is he there of his own accord, or under duress, perhaps compelled to attend by a parent or a spouse? All of these tell us something about the state of a person's will.

The proposed *A Statement of Identity for the PCA* (Section V) addresses the issue in some detail:

Worship: The First Priority

1. We affirm that Christian worship is the priestly service (abodah, λατρεία) of the church in which we humble ourselves before the Almighty God as He is revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ (shacha, προσκυνεο). We do this by declaring His worth, confessing our sins and His lordship over us, hearing his Word attentively, and rendering to Him due honor and glory, according to His Word. We do all of these only by the power of the Holy Spirit and out of gratitude to God.
2. We affirm that worship is the very goal of salvation and therefore of all history (John 4:23; Rom. 15:8-11; 1 Peter 2:9, Rev. 5:13; 7-12), and that, as priestly service, it deserves our full attention, energy and participation. This priestly service is our highest joy.

We deny that worship is a peripheral or dispensable element of the Christian life, or that it serves simply as a preamble to the preaching of the Word. We further deny that God is glorified by worship passively experienced or grudgingly rendered.¹⁰²

Probably an even better indicator of the state of the will is that person's lifestyle and behavior between worship services. Many, perhaps most, churches have people who rarely miss a Sunday morning but seem to live no differently, and certainly no better, than the rest of society. Undoubtedly, we have all been in that camp more often than we

¹⁰² *A Statement of Identity for the Presbyterian Church in America*, n.p., 1994, 29-30.

would like to admit.¹⁰³ Ronald Allen agrees that it is important for worship to have an impact on the worshiper's lifestyle between Sundays:

[Based on Dt.6:4-9] True biblical worship concerns the whole of one's life; its ultimate meaning is rooted in one's wholehearted love for God. What we do in corporate worship has its prime significance in the context of our daily living. Participating in community worship apart from a full-hearted sharing in the foundational biblical attitudes and divorced from the anticipated biblical actions is to leave one under the sad judgment of a disappointed God: "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me" (Mark 6:6).¹⁰⁴

He [Allen] then gets more specific as to the relationship between affect and volition:

The reason God may *command* love from His people may be found in the nature of the Hebrew word, *`ahaba*, "love." The word is not simply describing warm feelings or romantic attachments. It speaks of both *emotional* and *volitional* concepts. The translation "love" is correct because the word does center on feelings of affection. But *`ahaba* also centers on one's volitional actions, one's *choice*. To love God is more than to have a warm feeling about Deity; to love God in the biblical meaning is to make one's *choice* in Him, as in the wonderful words of Joshua as an old man: "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.... But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15).¹⁰⁵

While reiterating that this is probably the most difficult aspect to measure in any meaningful way, nonetheless it is of utmost importance that corporate worship impact the worshiper in significant ways throughout the week. Otherwise, despite the fact that those services may be models of depth and cohesiveness, the music sung and the sermon

¹⁰³ This is not in any way intended to downplay the role of grace, nor to minimize or trivialize the reality that the church consists of real, flesh and blood sinners – including the pastor and other worship leaders. I freely acknowledge that I am never a better Christian than I am on Sunday mornings, surrounded by the family of God, availing myself of the means of grace. Addressing this very tension, Richard Baxter admonished pastors: "Take heed, therefore, to yourselves first. See to it that you be the worshiper which you persuade your hearers to be. Make sure first that you believe what you persuade others daily to believe. Make sure you have heartily entertained Christ and the Holy Spirit in your own soul before you offer Him to others. He that bids you love your neighbor as yourself implied that you should love yourself instead of hating and destroying yourself – and others too." Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor: A Pattern for Personal Growth and Ministry*, [first published 1656] abridged and ed. James M. Houston (Portland: Multnomah, 1982), 28.

¹⁰⁴ Ronald B. Allen, *The Wonder of Worship: A New Understanding of the Worship Experience* (Nashville: Word, 2001) 55-56.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

delivered with authenticity, authority and passion, and a good time had by all ... for the person who attends but never grows in grace, these services are basically just a religious entertainment act. Meaningful worship must issue forth in lives changed for the glory of God, the building up of the church and the advancement of Christ's kingdom. How can a person truly worship God in spirit and in truth if he is unengaged and unchanged by the experience? Rick Warren puts the issue in succinct terms in his bestselling *The Purpose-Driven Life*: “[S]urrendering to God is the heart of worship.”¹⁰⁶

Kimball, addressing the so-called “emerging church,” concurs in strong terms:

Worship gatherings are about the saints gathering to live out Psalm 95:6, which says, “[C]ome let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.” It is a multi-sensory approach of bowing, kneeling, listening, learning, looking, singing, caring, touching, and loving with our minds, our hearts, and our bodies. It is about seeing the results of worship, which produce in us a greater love for God and a greater love for people (Matthew 22:37-39). God forbid that we teach the people in our churches to view emerging worship as anything less.¹⁰⁷

While concerned primarily with individual experience, Newburgh *et al* hold that volitional involvement in spiritual activities is indispensable:

All mystical spirituality begins as an act of the will. ... Active types of meditation begin not with the intention to clear the mind of thoughts, but instead, to focus it intensely upon some thought or object of attention. A Buddhist might chant a mantra, or focus upon a glowing candle or a small bowl of water, for example, while a Christian might pray with the mind trained upon God, or a saint, or the symbol of a cross.¹⁰⁸

“All mystical spirituality begins as an act of the will” – and yet the will is the central theater of some of the fiercest fighting in the spiritual war. Harry Blamires, addressing the church in England over forty years ago, says this:

¹⁰⁶ Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 77.

¹⁰⁷ Dan Kimball, *Emerging Worship: Creating Worship Gatherings for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 11.

¹⁰⁸ Newburgh et al., 117, 120.

It is important never to confuse the notion in the head that a God probably exists with the motion of the will that flings a man on his mercy. Here is one of the Church's hardest tasks in the pseudo-Christian climate of our country. It has to deal with people who are quite ready to admit that there may be a God, but who have never felt the slightest impulse to abase themselves before him.¹⁰⁹

Donald Miller puts it this way in his recent bestseller, *Blue Like Jazz*:

More than the questions about the efficacy of social action were my questions about my own motives. Do I want social justice for the oppressed, or do I just want to be known as a socially active person? I spend 95% of my time thinking about myself anyway. I don't have to watch the evening news to see that the world is bad, I only have to look at myself. I am not browbeating myself here; I am only saying that true change, true life-giving, God-honoring change would have to start with the individual. I was the very problem I had been protesting. I wanted to make a sign that read "I AM THE PROBLEM!"¹¹⁰

Speaking about his home church in Seattle, Miller writes about how they attempt to address the issue:

[H]ere is what I love about Imago-Dei.

First: It is spiritual. What I mean is that people at Imago pray and fast about things. It took me awhile to understand that the answer to problems is not marketing or program but rather spirituality. If we needed to reach youth, we wouldn't do a pizza feed and a game night, we would get together and pray and fast and ask God what to do. God led some guys to start a homeless teen outreach downtown, and now they feed about one hundred homeless teenagers every week. It is the nuttiest youth group you'll ever see, but that is what God said to do. I love that sort of thing, because rather than the church serving itself, the church is serving the lost and lonely. It gives me chills when I think about it, because it is that beautiful of a thing.¹¹¹

The will is a particularly treacherous minefield in the battleground of spiritual conflict. How are we to negotiate it, subdue it, see it brought under the sovereign

¹⁰⁹ Blamires, 146.

¹¹⁰ Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 20.

¹¹¹ Miller, 136-137.

Lordship of Christ? Let us consider first the engagement of the will during a worship service. Carson writes: "Christian worship embraces both adoration and action."¹¹²

Later in the same volume, Keller expands upon the theme:

We are therefore only truly worshiping when we are serving God with our entire beings, including our hearts, which must be "affected" by God's glory. The fullest definition of worship, then, is something like "obedient action motivated by the beauty of who God is in himself." If this is worship, it is more than being moved "affectively," but it is not less. For example, when we gather to listen, pray, and praise as a community, we are seeking to "remember" the gospel (cf. I Cor. 11:25). "Remember" cannot simply be a cognitive action. It is talking about getting a "sense of the heart" of the truth so that our lives can be more conformed to what we believe.¹¹³

He then lists several specific areas in which this conformity will be manifested:

If we are truly receiving grace in the presence of the living God, three results should occur. [He then mentions and comments on (a) *Doxological evangelism* (as called by Edmund Clowney), and (b) *Community building*. The third:] (c) *Character for service*. Edwards, in his *Religious Affections*, said that the acid test of a heart with its affections truly raised toward God (his definition of worship) is love toward one's neighbor, working for the common good in society. Corporate worship is only true and effective when it leads us to the "all of life" worship of doing justice and living generously (Heb 13:16). Wolterstorff makes the point that God's action in the service perfectly mirrors his action in the world, so that if our hearts are truly forged anew by gospel reenactment, we will, like him, move out into the world in welcome of the poor, the stranger, the marginalized. This is one of the reasons that Calvin wanted alms for the poor incorporated into regular corporate worship.¹¹⁴

Frame says much the same thing. The fourth of his items listed under "How the Worshiper Should Feel" is Participation: "As we have seen, worship is a priestly service. It is *latreia*, 'labor, service.' Therefore, we should go to church to do something: to bring praise to God and to minister to one another. It should encourage us to sing from the

¹¹² Carson et al., 43.

¹¹³ Ibid., 204-205.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 217-220.

heart, to pray fervently, to hear God's word with the expectation that we will change our behavior in response; and to be grateful guests at the Lord's Table."¹¹⁵

Edwards applies this to preaching: "And as to a gracious leading of the Spirit, it consists in two things: partly in instructing a person in his duty by the Spirit, and partly in powerfully inducing him to comply with that instruction."¹¹⁶

Roff applies it to music: "What is it that music can communicate? Music has the power to create and intensify our emotions ... engage our memory ... activate the imagination ... motivate our will. ... Words alone do not affect us as deeply as when they are joined with the marching music of Christian soldiers."¹¹⁷

He follows with this analysis of the impact of congregational singing (note how much of this is directly related to the will):

Our singing accomplishes these goals:

1. Invitation.
2. Participation.
3. Inspiration.
4. Exhortation.
5. Motivation.¹¹⁸

Webber, as is consistent with the rest of *Ancient-Future Faith*, believes that the way for the church to best implement this lies in a return to ancient roots:

To preach Jesus Christ, then, is to preach the kingdom. ... Salvation is no mere assent to facts about the king, but an actualization of repentance, faith, and obedience. ... Because he is that king, he calls people to follow him, to live under his rule, and to establish him as the Lord of their lives. ... His rulership extends over all of life. ... The task of Christ's people in this world is to be God's redeemed community, embodying His love by worshiping God with confession, prayer, and praise; by proclaiming the gospel of God's redemptive love through our Lord Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth by word and deed; by caring for all

¹¹⁵ Frame, 79.

¹¹⁶ Edwards, 206-207.

¹¹⁷ Roff, 24.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 28.

of God's creation and actively seeking the good of everyone, especially the poor and needy. The early Christians did not think that Christ had defeated the powers of evil in his living, dying, and rising without leaving a means by which this redeeming action would continue in the world. ... The order of worship itself is active, not passive. ... In this pattern, we gather to tell and enact the story and to go forth to live by the Christian metanarrative.¹¹⁹

Anchored to our earliest new covenant roots, he then addresses the church and its mission to minister in a postmodern context:

The first and most crucial task of the church is to become a living model of a community that seeks to live out Christian belief and practice.¹²⁰

The essential teaching of the early church regarding how Christians live in the world is captured in this threefold tension: (1) the church is separate from the world; (2) the church is nevertheless identified with the world; and (3) the church seeks to transform the world. These three motifs are especially helpful to our understanding of the place of the church in the postmodern world. ... Its Christ-model is the crucified Lord, the suffering servant, and the one whose power is in the weakness of the cross.¹²¹

But the church in a post-modern world seeks to transform the world. ... Like Christ, the church will identify with the world, speak prophetically to the world, and minister to the world in a priestly fashion.¹²²

Kimball, again addressing postmodern worshipers who are often considered extremely self-centered and even self-absorbed, sounds the alarm in clear, uncompromising terms:

Worship is not about us. It is about sacrificing our lives for God and serving others. It's about recognizing who God is and standing, kneeling, and singing out our praises and adoration to him. This means that as a result of the Holy Spirit at work in our worship gatherings, we should be seeing the people who are part of them loving God more and loving people more. ...

You see, the ultimate goal of creating and designing emerging worship gatherings is to glorify God and make disciples; it's not about the cool things we do in worship. Yes, we should fully think through designing and creating multisensory

¹¹⁹ Webber, 55, 77, 106.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 160-161.

¹²¹ Ibid., 168-169.

¹²² Ibid., 171.

worship gatherings. But that is not the goal. The goal is to see those in our church community become disciples of Jesus and sacrificial worshipers. ...

We must constantly ask the ultimate question, “Do the emerging worship gatherings we create produce disciples or consumers?” I pray that we will teach those who are part of our emerging worship gatherings to love not worship but the One we worship.¹²³

Dawn concurs:

If our worship merely offers a diversion, we have lost the eschatological call to involvement in the world’s needs and investment of ourselves for the sake of God’s ministry purposes. Instead of being distracted from the needs of our society, eschatology plunges us into them because the reign of God gives us the courage, the strength, the tools, and the power of the Spirit at work through us already to care for our neighbors’ sufferings. Worship is not to escape, but to encounter. As we worship we are changed, so that when we leave the worship service we go out to change the world.¹²⁴

Then, echoing Neil Postman, she places this tension between what we know and what we do with what we know in the context of our media-dominated culture:

The problem with the media revolution that bothers me most is what Neil Postman calls the “Low Information-Action Ratio” (note acronym). ... Think what this L.I.A.R. training does to sermons and Christian education, as it turns us into L.I.A.R.s who know God’s will but don’t live according to his purposes, who know the needs of the world but don’t change our lifestyles to ameliorate them.¹²⁵

Later she adds these words, intended for the non-Christian, but which might be appropriate for the Reformed community in South Florida:

To those who chase after more and more information, only to discover in the end that they can never accumulate enough to satisfy the longing that burns within them, a vital Christian community has great gifts to offer in introducing them to the One who alone can appease their yearning as the Truth, the Way, and the Life. Then by its formational training, the community immerses those searchers in a Life that acts on the information of faith, in a Way that brings wisdom out of knowledge, and in Truth that infuses everything with meaning and hope.¹²⁶

¹²³ Kimball, 228-230.

¹²⁴ Dawn, 361.

¹²⁵ Dawn, 83.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 245.

Gore points out the scarcity of churches that seek to offer meaningful biblical worship while engaging the larger culture in a meaningful biblical way:

Finally, there are congregations that seek to maintain their theological integrity while exploring the possibilities of vibrant, creative worship. They pursue this goal with intentional awareness of their surrounding culture. Here a genuine desire to understand the principles regulating biblical worship is coupled with an equally intense desire to make worship meaningful to the worshiper. This, in my estimation, is the best of all possible situations. Honesty demands the admission, however, that this is all too infrequently the case in evangelical Presbyterian congregations.¹²⁷

Still, in spite of the difficulties from within and the challenges from without, Edwards asserts that the way to minister to our fellow man and to honor our heavenly Father is through humble, sincere Christian practice:

Christian practice is the most proper evidence of the gracious sincerity of professors, to themselves and others; and the chief of all the marks of grace, the sign of signs, and evidence of evidences, that which seals and crowns all other signs. ... There may be several good evidences that a tree is a fig tree; but the highest and most proper evidence of it is, that it actually bears figs. ... Christian practice is the sign of signs, in this sense, that it is the great evidence, which confirms and crowns all other signs of godliness. There is no one grace of the Spirit of God, but that Christian practice is the most proper evidence of the truth of it. ... Practice is the proper proof of the true and saving knowledge of God ... of repentance ... of a saving faith ... of a saving belief of the truth ... of a true coming to Christ, and accepting of, and closing with him ... of trusting in Christ for salvation ... of a gracious love, both to God and men ... of humility ... of the true fear of God ... of true thankfulness ... of a gracious hope ... of a truly holy joy ... of Christian fortitude ... of the truth of grace, so the degree in which experiences have influence on a person's practice, is the surest evidence of the degree of that which is spiritual and divine in his experiences. ... [W]e should get into the way of appearing lively in religion, more by being lively in the service of God and our generation, than by the liveliness and forwardness of our tongues, and making a business of proclaiming on the house tops, with our mouths, the holy and eminent acts and exercises of our own hearts ... and religion would be declared and manifested in such a way that, instead of hardening spectators, and exceedingly promoting infidelity and atheism, would, above all things, tend to convince men that there is a reality in religion, and greatly awaken them, and win them, by convincing their consciences of the importance and excellency of

¹²⁷ Gore, 11.

religion. Thus the light of professors would so shine before men, that others, seeing their good works, would glorify their Father which is in heaven.¹²⁸

Summary

The literature highlights many aspects of corporate worship, but three in particular emerge as prominent: the intellectual, the emotional and the volitional. However, because the literature does not address the specific issues and concerns of PCA churches in Miami, this study is necessary. In the next chapter we will review how the study was constructed in order to answer the research questions.

¹²⁸ Edwards, 363-382.

CHAPTER THREE: PROJECT METHODOLOGY

In this study we are examining the factors that make corporate worship most meaningful to the worshiper. A methodological plan using qualitative research was utilized to accomplish this. This chapter is to describe how this qualitative research was carried out. In this chapter we will review the design of the study; introduce the study participants and their personal backgrounds; describe the interview process; and describe the limitations of the study.

Design of the Study

The research design of this study has followed a qualitative approach. Sharan B. Merriam in her *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* defines the qualitative method as exhibiting the following characteristics:

1. "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world."
2. "The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Data are mediated through this human instrument, the researcher, rather than through some inanimate inventory, questionnaire, or computer."
3. Qualitative research "usually involves fieldwork. The researcher must physically go to the people, setting, site, institution (the field) in order to observe behavior in its natural setting."
4. "Qualitative research primarily employs an inductive research strategy. That is, this type of research builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than tests existing theory."
5. "Since qualitative research focuses on process, meaning, and understanding, the product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive. Words and pictures rather than

numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon.”¹²⁹

The qualitative research approach was best suited to my field of inquiry in that worship is a highly nuanced, largely subjective matter. While a quantitative approach would no doubt have yielded some valuable information, I think a more personal, inductive method produced more helpful, in depth information.¹³⁰

Introduction to Study Participants and Personal Background

This study has included pastors, worship leaders, and musicians in PCA churches in Miami, two seminary professors who are in other cities in Florida, and one seminary professor in Tennessee. The pastors are men who have been in their current positions from two to ten years. They have come to South Florida from areas across the United States and the Caribbean, bringing a wealth of knowledge and a breadth of experience to their ministries. I am not from Miami, but I have lived and ministered here for twenty-three years. My wife is a South Floridian, and our four children have all been born and raised here. I have served in a number of different positions in three very different PCA churches in this town. Miami is “home” to me.

I have also had the opportunity to preach and/or otherwise participate in worship services in nine of the PCA churches in Miami. I interact with other pastors and teaching elders on a fairly regular basis. In addition, I have had the privilege of participating in thirty-four short-term mission projects in Latin American countries or Caribbean island

¹²⁹ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 6-8.

¹³⁰ In the process of compiling information about actual worship practices in churches in our Presbytery, which includes churches in Miami and Ft. Lauderdale, I did record data of a quantitative nature about actual worship practices. This included data about church size, ethnic makeup, worship styles (traditional, contemporary, blended, ancient-future), use of drama, liturgical dance, worship technologies (projection screens, PowerPoint) and so on. This information is on file in my office.

nations. In the course of my travels, I have had the opportunity to meet, work, and worship with Christians of all kinds in Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Ecuador, Venezuela, the Abacos, Jamaica, Grenada, St. Croix, and Cuba. Many of those services were of a decidedly more upbeat, exuberant, emotionally expressive nature than that of a typical Miami PCA church – as well as much longer.

Outside the Reformed context, I have attended services in Miami (including weddings, funerals, and baptisms) in Methodist, Southern Baptist, Episcopalian, Congregational, and Roman Catholic churches, as well as an Orthodox Jewish synagogue. Including weddings and funerals, I have participated or preached in services that were Lutheran (ELCA), Southern Baptist, Episcopalian, and even Roman Catholic. I have also participated in a series of Evangelical – Jewish dialogues, a very enlightening experience. These experiences have, I believe, given me a fair breadth of understanding and appreciation for many of the diverse cultures that help to make up the melting pot that is Miami.

Other formative experiences that have contributed to my interest in corporate worship include studying worship under Dr. Reggie Kidd at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida (and ongoing contact and dialogue with Dr. Kidd in the intervening years); the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology, “Worship in Spirit and Truth,” led by Dr. James Boice in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, in March, 1994; a conference on worship led by Dr. Robert Webber in 1995 in Miami; DM802, Christian Worship, Covenant Theological Seminary; two Promise Keepers conferences; the opportunity to speak on the topic of worship before an MNA conference in Miami in January, 1999; a long-standing friendship and interaction on the subject of worship with

Dr. Larry Roff, General Editor of the *Trinity Hymnal* and teacher of the worship classes for several years at Knox Theological Seminary in Ft. Lauderdale; and many years of planning, leading, and participating in worship services in three different PCA churches in Miami. This combination of experiences and relationships has forged in me a passion for authentic, meaningful corporate worship, leaving me dissatisfied with anything less.

Interview Process

As stated above, in order to discern how various churches of different ethnic compositions strive for holistic worship, I interviewed four Miami PCA pastors, three seminary professors (two in Florida, one in Tennessee), and two local musicians with significant experience participating in and leading (instrumentally) corporate worship in Miami. Those interviewed cover the ethnic and racial spectrum of PCA worship leaders in Miami: five Anglos, two Hispanics, one African American, and one Haitian American. (The two musicians are female; all the others male.) That is not demographically representative of Miami, but it is fairly representative of the PCA in this city.

I conducted each of the interviews in person, on the phone or by email. The in-person interviews took place in my office at the Kendall Presbyterian Church in Miami; one phone interview was also conducted between my office and that of the interviewee. Each was recorded on audiotape or videotape and later transcribed by myself or someone else with better (faster) typing skills. Several interviews were followed up by additional phone calls and / or emails in order to clarify certain thoughts or remarks that seemed unclear upon review.

I had a list of twenty-two questions from which to work (Appendix A). I did not cover all of those questions with any of the interviewees; I asked additional questions that

did not appear on that list of most of them. I used that list as a basic format and freely departed from it as I felt each situation dictated. I tried to do more with the earlier interviews and learned to narrow the focus with the later ones.

Each interviewee was told ahead of time the basic thrust of the interview. Each one was informed of at least the three basic research questions. Actual interviews covered at minimum the three aspects of corporate worship in view: intellect, affect, and will. Additionally, I spent a significant amount of time with most of the interviewees examining their own histories, worship experiences, personal likes and dislikes, and positive and negative experiences. Where appropriate, I asked about their views of: the Regulative Principle; preferred frequency of the observance of the sacraments; and use of drama, liturgical dance, and worship technologies. I also asked, where appropriate, about their own experiences with the “worship wars” – struggles over worship styles, musical styles, drama, and dance. I asked the musicians to explain, in layman’s terms, what music is, how to define its basic components (melody, harmony, rhythm, tempo, volume, contrast, timbre), and what role those components play as regards each of the key research areas. I took more time with the musicians, as I am less knowledgeable about technical aspects of music than I am other facets of corporate worship.

After each interview I went back to the recordings, audio or video, and either transcribed them myself or had someone else transcribe them. Using the “constant comparative” method of analysis,¹³¹ I went back through each interview (some many times), looking for similarities, dissimilarities, and insights into the overall theme of what makes worship most meaningful to the worshiper. Eventually I color-coded the responses for the three major areas: blue for intellectual, red for affective, and green for volitional.

¹³¹ Merriam, 18, 159, 179, 191-92.

A rich, multifaceted profile emerged from these interviews. Of the ones who live in Miami, all but one come from other places, some from other countries. Most had come to the Reformed faith from other traditions, including Roman Catholicism. All had extensive exposure to a variety of worship styles, expressions, and liturgies. Most had memorable examples of wonderfully positive worship experiences, as well as some that were unremarkable or memorable for the wrong reasons. Hearing their stories helped “flesh out” their points of reference about corporate worship and what makes it meaningful for them as worship leaders. Eventually, however, each was asked to give his or her thoughts on three key questions:

1. How do we best engage the intellect in corporate worship?
2. How do we best engage the affect in corporate worship?
3. How do we best engage the will in corporate worship?

Without exception, each of them had a lot to say that went beyond the prescribed boundaries of those particular aspects of corporate worship. Perhaps the hardest part of the interview process with these individuals was keeping to the specific subjects and not veering off into other interesting but not directly relevant areas.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to pastors, worship leaders, and musicians in PCA churches in Miami, as well as the aforementioned seminary professors who are in other cities in Florida and Tennessee. (Most have experience in churches outside Miami, and beyond Florida.) As such, the findings of this study may have very limited applicability. Miami is very different than other cities in the United States, and Reformed churches in

this city “play by a different set of rules” than other churches, even other evangelical churches.

Reformed churches are committed to the Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW). Even though the understanding of the RPW varies – sometimes dramatically – from pastor to pastor, church to church, and presbytery to presbytery, there is a shared commitment to worship as the Bible teaches, and only as the Bible teaches (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter Twenty-One). Other churches, even evangelical ones, may not be nearly as concerned about keeping corporate worship within such parameters. (For example, see the plethora of worship styles and expressions in so-called “emergent churches.”¹³²)

As mentioned, Miami is a very different place than other cities in the continental United States. I have already touched on the cultural upheaval the city has experienced and continues to experience. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the population of Miami-Dade County is 2,253,000; 57.3% Hispanic, 19% Black; 23.7% non-Hispanic White. (For purposes of comparison, in 1970 the population was 1,268,000: 23.6% Hispanic; 14.7% Black; 61.7% non-Hispanic White.)¹³³ What is perhaps even more telling is that more than half of the present inhabitants were born in foreign countries – the only county in the United States of which this is true.¹³⁴

In Miami, non-Hispanic whites are often called, if not entirely accurately, “Anglos.” Anglos have historically been the strength of the PCA churches in Miami. As

¹³² Kimball.

¹³³ http://www.miamidade.gov/planzone/Library/Census/demographic_profile.pdf. I use the county statistics as opposed to those for the city of Miami – population 362,470 – mainly because the PCA has virtually no representation in the city itself. The majority of our churches are in the south-southwest parts of the county, with two Haitian churches in the north-northeast. Demographic statistics for the city of Miami proper would therefore be of little value for this study.

¹³⁴ http://www.sptimes.com/2003/09/03/news_pf/State/Born_in_USA_Not_in_Mi.shtml.

their “slice of the demographic pie” has diminished, so has the membership and attendance of our churches. We have not been very effective in our outreach and assimilation of non-Anglos, as evidenced by the above. However, this situation is improving somewhat with an increased number of church plants targeting Hispanics and Haitians as well as an increasing number of ordinations of Hispanic, Haitian and other Caribbean-born Teaching Elders (TE’s).

Of those Miami-Dade residents with a stated religious affiliation, twenty-four percent (543,000) are Roman Catholic and seven percent (160,000) are Evangelicals of all kinds. (Current membership of PCA churches is approximately 2600: 1.6% of the Evangelical population; .1% of the total. Clearly, we are not impacting our city in any numerically significant way.) Hispanics tend to prefer a livelier, more emotionally expressive style of worship than is typical of the PCA churches here.¹³⁵ I am not suggesting that differences in worship styles account for the whole disconnect between our burgeoning populace and declining church membership, only that it bears consideration.

Miami is a very different city than it was when many of our churches were founded. The church is not immune to those changes. While we must not capitulate to our culture or be identical to it, we have to reflect its personality and character enough to speak meaningfully to it, to engage it, and to transform it.¹³⁶ Therefore our worship services do not look and sound just like PCA services in Atlanta, Seattle, Dallas, or even “up the road” in Ft. Lauderdale and West Palm Beach. There are PCA churches in Miami that worship in Spanish, Creole, Portuguese, Korean, and English, and some that attempt

¹³⁵ Event Transcript, “Changing Faiths: Latinos and the Transformation of American Religion,” April 25, 2007, <http://pewforum.org/surveys/hispanic/>.

¹³⁶ See Richard Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture*.

to incorporate more than one language into a service. The differences go beyond language; each group also has its own preferred worship style. These styles tend to be much livelier, including more congregational involvement than is typical of primarily Anglo churches.¹³⁷

Another limitation of this study is that the findings reflect the subjective views of the interviewees, many of whom may have had a vested interest in making their worship experiences seem very positive. Actual participation in or observation of their respective services of worship might yield different impressions.

One final limitation is that my study sample was drawn largely from people I know personally, which may have skewed the findings in the direction of confirming my ideas. Those ideas have been formed partly as a result of my interactions with these people, and their ideas may have been influenced by me to some extent. In a study of this sort, that seems practically unavoidable.

Summary

In this chapter I described how a methodological plan using qualitative research was utilized to examine the factors that make corporate worship most meaningful to the worshiper. I reviewed the design of the study; introduced the study participants and their personal backgrounds; described the interview process; and described the limitations of the study. In the next chapter I will review some of the major research findings.

¹³⁷ Ibid., Event Transcript, "Changing Faiths: Latinos and the Transformation of American Religion," April 25, 2007. I also base this on the numerous experiences I have had worshiping with people of these other cultures.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

In this study we are attempting to understand what makes worship most meaningful to the worshiper. In order to better comprehend this, I interviewed nine individuals with a wide range of academic credentials (none lower than Master's level; all but three with earned doctorates) and a wide range of involvement with churches, mostly PCA, almost all Reformed. All had at least some experience working in churches in South Florida. All but two had experience worshiping and ministering in Miami. All of the pastors had at least eight years of experience serving in local churches; the one with the most experience has served 36 years. Each interviewee was asked, among other questions, the following:

1. How do we best engage the intellect in corporate worship?
2. How do we best engage the affect in corporate worship?
3. How do we best engage the will in corporate worship?

All those interviewed had strong opinions on the topic of corporate worship. All had years of practical experience as well as formal education from which to draw and on which to base their beliefs. All but one had been part of at least three different Reformed churches and so had ample basis for comparison; one had served seven churches. Three taught courses on worship in Reformed seminaries in addition to numerous other theology and practical theology courses. In sum, those interviewed brought an impressive amount of academic and practical experience to bear on the issue of worship. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have been able to glean from them the fruits of their knowledge and experience in the field.

Study Participants, Backgrounds and Credentials

“Jean” is a Haitian-American. He has BS degrees in Theology and Ministry, a Master of Divinity (MDiv), and a Doctor of Ministry (DMin). He has served on the staff of two PCA churches.

“Jose” is Hispanic. He has a BA from a private university and an MDiv from an evangelical seminary. He has served on the staff of four PCA churches.

“Kurt” is Anglo. He holds a BS in Education from a public university, an MDiv, and a DMin. He has served in various pastoral capacities at six Reformed churches all over the country. He has also taught a number of courses, including worship, at Reformed seminaries.

“James” is an African-American. He studied Missiology for two years before earning a Master of Theological Studies. He has served on the staff of four PCA churches.

“Ray” is a professor at an evangelical seminary. He has earned a BA, a Master of Arts in Religion (MAR), an MDiv, and a PhD. He has taught worship courses, along with other subjects, and has written and lectured extensively on worship. He is a trained musician and has led the chapel services at his seminary. He has served four churches in various capacities, including that of worship leader.

“Tom” holds a BA from a public university, as well as an MDiv and a Master of Christian Education (MCE). He has also done postgraduate studies at three secular universities. He has served four different Reformed churches in various pastoral capacities for a total of approximately twenty years. He has also served in one seminary

administration and as a professor of Biblical languages, Biblical theology, and practical theology.

“Lou” holds a BA, an MDiv, and a DMin. He has served as a professor at a seminary for several years, teaching several different classes in practical theology, including worship. He has served in various pastoral roles in seven Reformed churches. He is a highly trained musician and has served as minister of music in two of those churches.

“Ana” is Hispanic, born in Central America. She came to the United States when she was young. Showing great promise as a budding musician, Ana worked hard to become an excellent pianist, eventually earning a Bachelor of Music (BM) degree and Master of Music (MM) degree at a highly regarded music conservatory. She later earned a Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA) degree. In addition to performing at venues across the country, she has served as an Adjunct Professor of Music at two universities, one private and one public. She worked for three years as an accompanist at a Baptist church before becoming the accompanist for, as well as a member of, a PCA church.

“Laura” is Anglo. She also showed great promise as a young musician and pursued music as a career. She earned a BM and Master of Education (MEd) at a public university and a PhD in Music Education from a private university. She teaches music at a Christian high school and has undertaken various other musical education responsibilities on a statewide level. She has been involved as a member and music worship leader in three PCA churches.

Intellect

When one considers what has been previously stated regarding the strongly cerebral character of Reformed worship, it comes as no surprise that the majority of the interviewees seemed most comfortable discussing the intellectual aspects of corporate worship. Indeed, as this was invariably the first research question asked, this area of discussion tended to dominate the others.

Jose observed that engaging the intellect is crucial in truly worshiping God as he intends us to: "I don't believe that worship is what it was meant to be when not engaged in intellectually. ... [E]verything that has been mandated as worship demands understanding Him as revealed. ... [W]e have a "religion" that incorporates the whole person interacting with the whole person of God. He is a thinking being gracing His creation, the likeness of Himself, with the ability to relate to Him."¹³⁸

The pastors tend to believe that this intellectual engagement is primarily the job of the sermon. Lou expressed this fairly traditional approach: "Intellectually, the sermon ... that's the heart of the service. It isn't always going to have that emotional impact"

James also began his observations with the sermon, but then moved beyond to other spoken portions of the service:

[The best way to engage the intellect is through] expository preaching that engages the full range of Scripture systematically. I like preaching expositionally through books, forcing me and the congregation to carefully examine what God has to say on a broad range of topics (even topics I would prefer not to preach). Also, using Creeds and Confessions reminds us of the big themes in the Bible that are basic to our faith. I also seek to preach apologetically so that we think about why we believe what we believe and hopefully are better able to articulate and defend the faith. In doing so I try to deal with trends (books; movies; ideas) that are challenging the Christian Worldview or supporting it. ... I also recommend excellent Christian books to the congregation in my sermons from time to time.

¹³⁸ Grammatical corrections were made by the dissertation author, but the meaning or intent of the study participants have not been changed.

The primacy of the sermon and the intellectual payload it carries as its most important component is a major characteristic of Reformed worship. It remains one of our greatest strengths, even in a postmodern culture that de-emphasizes and devalues the very idea of truth. Kurt addressed this tension: “We are coming out of a hyper-intellectualized world into an anti-rational world, but nevertheless it is through the renewing of the mind that we are transformed – preaching, Bible study, etc.” Notice that he also looks to the spoken word for the solution to this anti-rational worldview.

Jean added these observations from his perspective as a pastor ministering to Haitian people who are perhaps even less familiar with the Reformed faith than the typical American congregation: “[We engage God intellectually through the] creed, the Scripture reading (the whole church), the songs (printed). We train our members on what to say and how to say it, but they are free to engage the whole church through their personal individual prayer, testimony, and songs.” This church obviously takes a more hands-on, directive approach to worship than would likely be acceptable in most Anglo or Hispanic congregations. Still, the desired result is the same: the involvement of the mind through the spoken and sung word.

Ray also affirmed the importance of engaging the mind in worship while not confining it to the traditional slot, i.e., the sermon:

Part of the commandment is to love the Lord your God with your mind. Part of what worship is, is to understand God better (including preaching, etc.). ... I think that what makes everything good is also what makes good worship good. There is something for the Ph.D. and something for the middle school student; something to make you laugh, shout, get quiet. ... Same thing with the other parts of worship – worship helps people engage with the deep truths of the faith through using texts that are lyrically dense and texts that are using music – not just simply music

but music that challenges people and so I think it's a great place for us to construct our worldviews intellectually.

Tom also took a more descriptive, holistic approach:

The mind engages the promises of God, His work on our behalf, and His will for our ongoing relationship within the divine economy. We engage the mind by appealing to and strengthening its peculiar intellectual abilities: receive, analyze, compare, process, evaluate, and store information.

Ray, who has traveled a great deal to teach on the subject of worship, assessed how well PCA churches around the country are engaging people intellectually, traditionally an area of strength in the PCA:

I think our churches aim at the brain, but I'm not sure that just by aiming you're hitting your target. I think our services tend to be wordy and aim at the brain but not necessarily effectively. ... It's a lot of words but that doesn't necessarily mean we have done the intellectual well: really speaking meaningfully to worldview issues and a challenging message that goes deep in scripture and, in terms of culture, intellectual.

Ana addressed intellectual engagement from a musician's perspective: "There are many different elements that make up a great and a not-so-great song for corporate worship (no matter what genre). These elements (when communicated correctly by worship leaders) have the capability of positively affecting a worshiper emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually." She touches here on music's power to impact people on a number of levels, much of which is beyond the scope of this project. It bears mentioning at this point that music will make an impact on the worshiper(s), one way or another. This is part of the reason so much of the "worship wars" have been fought over musical turf, and why so many recent books and articles on worship focus so heavily on music. Returning to the topic of music and intellectual engagement, Ana continued:

It all depends on the song and how the song is led by the worship leaders. A song that is too complex (rhythm, melody, lyrics) and a song that is not communicated correctly by worship leaders (intonation, diction, tone quality) is likely to cause

distraction from the most important thing: to give praise to God. ... [T]he text/ lyrics of the song should not be too complex or sophisticated, either, because this could also cause distraction. Some of the old hymns contain old, poetic language that is hard to comprehend causing distraction to a lot of people (myself included).

It should be noted that this comes from a bilingual woman with an earned doctorate. Even so, she finds the archaic language in some hymns distracting and hard to understand.

Laura added this insight:

For me, there are certain styles, certain chords I like and have always liked and I appreciate when I hear them, because there is a complexity to it, and yet, it's so pleasing, it sounds so simple, and I really appreciate that. ... [S]ometimes I get too into the intellectual aspect of it [the musical structure of a song] and it gets in the way of the message or the heart of the person who's offering the music. ... it takes away from what I should be focusing on and that's the detriment [of being as knowledgeable about music as I am].

Laura was then asked to describe why, when a favorite song or hymn is introduced, and the congregation starts to sing, something happens beyond the emotional response to the beauty and familiarity of the song. She responded, "Without getting too technical: we have the text. As Christians, we have a love of Christ. ... There's something that you love, that you're attracted to and you are thinking about this – with Christ, our Savior, and what He is done for us, and we're thinking about this, and we're realizing how small we are and how great He is, and the music is helping enhance this because the music is supporting the text." Her answer indicates a belief that intellectual engagement, as critical as it is, is not enough. It is, to use an old expression from the counseling field, necessary but not sufficient.

Affect

The interviewees gave a wide range of responses when asked about the role of affect in corporate worship. The pastors' responses ranged from minimal to expansive. The professors' answers also varied widely. The musicians, while mostly confining their answers to the role of music in regard to the affective aspects of the worship service, had a great deal to say about it, much of it rather technical.

Tom gave a broad, concise, but thoughtful written response:

The heart engages the presence of God through joyous celebration, contrite confession and repentance, willing giving, bold confession, and exuberant singing. Music is indispensable to engaging the heart – and not just music we listen to, but music we sing (no commands in Scripture merely to listen to music; many to sing). But also silence, corporate readings and recitations, and the administration of the sacraments can appeal to the affections, summoning the right ones for the right moment, and focusing and intensifying them accordingly.

Ray's response, while much less succinct, also evidenced a high regard for the affective:

The role is, or should be, huge. ... you're dealing with the basics of the crucifixion and resurrection. The whole of the Christian life should be summed up in the power of the resurrection. I think you have to see that part of your goal in worship is to touch base, to know Christ in the midst of [the congregation's] sufferings, but the physical ability to be dealing with every kind of sickness and crushing disappointments, relationships, etc. Sin – there really needs to be an acknowledgment of our fallen-ness and the world's fallen-ness and the pain of life.

The other end of the spectrum: we really do celebrate One who was raised from the dead, is alive in our midst and has promised that even the sufferings are grounds for boasting because they are just better equipping us for glory.

There are no magic buttons, but a mindset in worship prep as well as preaching that people are called to know those two dimensions of Christ – suffering and celebration – and to do so authentically you have to try to ... give them permission to acknowledge whatever they are doing to mask those places in their lives and give them permission to feel the suffering side of it and be able to celebrate the joy of knowing the hope. ...

People resonate with reality without [someone artificially] trying to stir the emotions, but just ... trying to be real with the worship leader and preacher. [This is characteristic of the] postmodern mindset. They want reality, vulnerability that comes from strength vs. another kind that is pretty pitiful.

James has a similarly high view of authentic emotional involvement in the service. He began, naturally enough for a pastor, with preaching, saying, "I try to bring out the greatness of our God in my sermons. I want people to be moved emotionally ... not because of my "eloquence" but because they truly see the glory of Christ." He is calling not for man-centered, man-inspired emotionalism, but for genuine, God-centered, God-inspired emotional response. He continued, "I encourage music that centers on God; His character; power and glorious work for our salvation and His glory. I emphasize that worship is a meeting with God and I pray for His presence to be felt in the service. I don't think we can truly worship God without our emotions being stirred." His answer is thoroughly theocentric, beginning with the greatness of God and the glory of Christ. Those characteristics, however, have an impact on the worshipers: we should be "moved emotionally;" God's presence should be "felt in the service;" and, reminiscent of Jonathan Edwards, there is no true worship "without our emotions being stirred."

José also subscribes to the essentiality of affective engagement, saying, "God has created us as complex beings that do not have only a single measure of communication or response to him but a wonderful, multifaceted and holistic means of relating to him." He then, however, sounded a cautionary note: "I believe, though, that the emotion of our response to God in worship should be limited and circumscribed by what we read in Scripture."

Lou likewise expressed an appreciation for the importance of affective involvement, but was also careful to emphasize the distinction between the theocentric and anthropocentric approaches to corporate worship. Asked about his own personal recollection of particularly meaningful worship “experiences,” he spoke deliberately instead of worship “services.” With that distinction clarified, in response to the question, “How do we best engage the affect in worship?” he said:

... for emotional impact, singing. Not just music, but congregational singing, when it’s really good congregational singing. And some of the best that I’m part of is at General Assembly [Here he references singing *Before the Throne of God Above* at GA the summer before as a particularly powerful experience.] Great singing will invigorate a service.

In a follow-up telephone interview, Lou added that:

Emotionally, where there are more people present, and the room is full, it’s more meaningful. ... If you have great congregational singing, it covers a multitude of sins. Absent that, it takes an unbelievably powerful sermon to rescue the service. It’s a deflated balloon.

He also mentioned the Lord’s Supper as a particularly emotionally moving event for him, “If it’s done well, it will almost reduce me to tears. ... I design the whole service around the table.”

Kurt also affirmed the significance of affective participation, but took a slightly different approach in describing how best to engage it:

If you want to maintain those three [intellect, affect and will] ... in order to do that in a decent period of time, in a culturally acceptable way, the thing you have to do is de-emphasize the thing that has taken the lion’s share of time and energy in historic Reformed worship, and that is the intellect. You cannot move in a segmented way from the descriptive to the prescriptive to the affective You can’t do it that way. They’re all mixed up. But you have to, relatively speaking, de-emphasize the intellectual in order to emphasize the descriptive and the affective.

When asked if that is simply a function of the length of a typical PCA service, he responded:

In part; but when there is an overemphasis on the one to the detriment of the others, you don't have biblical worship. You have virtually absolutized one or two of the areas. Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism and the Reformed faith have basically emphasized the descriptive and the prescriptive. In order to bring balance, relatively speaking, if you're going to bring one or two of them up, you've got to bring the other one down.

It is not enough, according to this thoughtful, experienced pastor, to emphasize or accentuate the more emotive aspects of our faith; we must actively and intentionally de-emphasize the other, more historically dominant role of the intellect. Asked how he defines worship, Kurt responded, "Worship is the believing response to the presence of God." Asked what is the appropriate, believing response, he replied in affective terms, "We've got to order our worship in such a way that the Holy Spirit is felt in the carrying out of the service by the people of God." When asked how he attempts to do that in his current worship planning, he said, "I plan that [affective participation] in the course of the service in waves. They can't be high all the time, and they can't be low all the time."

Of course, ideas about the proper emphasis on the affective in worship will vary by pastor, church, and city. That there is a role, a place, and a need for such an emphasis on the affective is a consistent theme in these interviews.

The musicians had a lot to say about the subject. Understandably, they addressed primarily why and how music impacts affect, rather than the overall role of affect. I asked Laura several questions about that:

Kent: You can read the lyrics to a great hymn – *And Can It Be That I Should Gain*, or *Holy, Holy, Holy* – and say, "That's interesting." You could play the melody on the violin or have the orchestra play it on other instruments, and I can say, "That's really pretty." But then you put lyrics and music together, and something rather different takes place. ... Why does music do that to our brains?

Laura: If the composer has really studied the text [she mentions a piece her students had played recently] ... the text itself is just beautiful in talking about Christ. The music was also, but what the composer did ... as the text is gaining more and more emotion ... about the glory of Christ, the music itself is written and orchestrated with more depth and intensity, crescendos of sound ... the chord progression is building in intensity too, and ... Our ears, we Westerners, there is a certain kind of sound we like, that is pleasing to us, that we enjoy. It works for us.

Years earlier, Laura had introduced me to the concept of optimal complexity in music, i.e., that for each person there is a level of complexity in music we find most enjoyable, ranging from a toddler's nursery rhyme to a Bach oratorio or Mozart concerto. I wondered if the differing levels of desired complexity help explain the radically divergent tastes in music for praise and worship:

Kent: Your optimal complexity is probably a great deal more complex than mine.

Laura: I don't know that. I don't know what you listen to What I've noticed is that people, not that they haven't been trained in it, but that they haven't been exposed to it – they can't really appreciate it.

Kent: Robert Jourdain, in *Music, the Brain and Ecstasy*, says most of us end up preferring the music we were listening to as adolescents for the rest of our lives.¹³⁹

Laura: I didn't like opera or classical music, until I was trained in it. That's when I noticed it was *gorgeous*. ...

Kent: Using the old left brain-right brain dichotomy: let's say you're playing a beautiful piece on the violin, or the orchestra's playing it – your right brain is on fire because of all this beautiful, gorgeous sound washing over it. ... Let me ask: is your left brain kicking in because you know all the structure of that music?

Laura: Yes, exactly – that's what you have to do as a musician or a conductor. Working with the students, we'll have these moments, they're more like events, where it's just beautiful – and it's working, and I wish I could say, "Do that again." ... I'm enjoying the moment, but I'm also thinking, "It's working because" Someone else in the church might not appreciate all that, because they're just not that interested in it, but they enjoy the music, they appreciate it ... but maybe at a more [basic, pedestrian] level.

¹³⁹ Jourdain, 263.

She attributed some of the emotional impact of a well-loved hymn to our conditioning as Westerners. I asked about that in a slightly different way:

Kent: Sometimes when your orchestra is playing, you also have your choral group singing with them. What happens there? What's the difference between having just the beautiful sound, and now ... these words and concepts and images you are communicating, and I'm experiencing that on a real different level. Why is that?

Laura: I've just had a couple of times, where it is all working and I don't have to worry about the instruments. It's ... doing well, and then the voices come in, and I can almost step back from the intellectual part – I step back from being conductor and I take to heart those words, with the music – and it just blows me away. But it scares me a little bit and I feel like, “Whoa – don't lose control of it, don't let go of the reins.”

Her desire to “step back from being conductor” with her school orchestra and simply enjoy the experience conflicted with her need (as the one responsible for leading the musicians) to be in control. I put the question in a different context:

Kent: When you are sitting in [your church's] congregation – not the music teacher now, just a member of the congregation, and you begin to sing one of those hymns you love – and it has a good affect for you –

Laura: It makes a great difference if it's being performed well. If not, it's really distracting, but if it's being performed well, you can relax with it, get into it.

Now the issue of the proficiency and artistry of the musicians (or lack thereof) arises. I inquired further into that:

Kent: From God's perspective, the difference between you and someone's child who can barely play is minimal. But from our perspective, the difference is huge. So when we sing a favorite hymn, and the music is being played well, and you hear the introduction – then we start to sing, something is different. Can you unpack that more for me?

Laura: Without getting too technical: we have the text. As Christians, we have a love of Christ. ... There's something that you love, that you're attracted to – with Christ, our Savior, and what he is done for us, and we're thinking about this, and we're realizing how small we are and how great He is, and the music is helping enhance this because the music is supporting the text –

Kent: Let me ask you about that. [I would imagine that] you don't want to be singing Isaiah 53 as a little pop ditty. You want music to match the text, to match the lyrics. How do we know that they match?

Laura: Because the text is very serious, very somber. So we would automatically think that this would be in a minor key, maybe this would have more slow, rhythmic movement. As Westerners, this is what we grew up listening to, and we are a product of that. ... On the flip side, if it's something more joyous, like Handel's Messiah, we expect more movement, a lot of runs and leaps of intervals and so forth. It's what we as Westerners are used to. We've been trained to this and we didn't even know it.

Later I asked about the subjective experience of listening to music:

Kent: Music can impact a mood or set a mood. Can you, in layman's terms, tell me why music does that to us? Why, when you play an Irish jig or Irish reel, I get one response, one affect, and when you play something in a minor key, or even a cello piece, I get a very different one?

Laura: (Shakes her head; laughter.) It may move you and not even touch me, depending on your background, experiences ... I'm not sure. I don't think I can answer that.

Kent: But it does that the world over.

Laura: It sure does, and all I can say it is, it's the writing. ... the fast pace, a lot of the meters of the Irish jigs ... it's upbeat, it's movement, and I enjoy them too. ... It reminds me of things, of old movies I've seen, it just makes me think of a time that was very good.

Kent: Music also has a strong nostalgic component.

Laura: Yes! ...

She went on to elaborate on music's powerful ability to connect us to previous times and events in our lives, both good and bad. This explains, in part, why people have such strong preferences in, and emotional reactions to, the music they sing in worship services. I then asked her about sequence in music:

Kent: If we're singing three or four songs [in a row], assuming that some would be more familiar than others, how would you structure them?

Laura: I always like to start with something familiar, and then go to something maybe a little less familiar. If you have five pieces, you begin and end with the familiar. Even the familiar can be orchestrated in an unfamiliar way, say in a more contemporary arrangement.

Kent: What happens, when we're singing a contemporary piece that is maybe not as familiar, then you turn the corner and you take us back into "Amazing Grace" –

Laura: Everyone [says], "Ahhh, yes."

Kent: Why?

Laura: It's a known entity. We already have a relationship with that song.

Kent: So why do I care if I sing that after the less familiar song, as opposed to before the less familiar song?

Laura: Because we want resolution. ...

Kent: I thought that you would say that. Even if it's in the same song – you'd better not stop with [an unusual chord like a] minor seventh. Get your hands back on that violin and resolve that in a major key. Finish that song or I'm going to come after you.

Laura: [Laughter] Exactly ...

Kent: Why is that?

Laura: Our brains want resolution. I think that's an innate human thing. We want resolution, we want completeness. ... We like structure I think we're hardwired that way.

Kent: But if you end that song in a minor seventh, that's still structure, is it not?

Laura: But it's maybe not a structure that you and I have embraced. ...

There followed a discussion of the University of Miami School of Music and their rather avant garde approach to these things. Laura's conviction is that if everything is music, then nothing is music – random noises, knocking on a desk, or wolves howling. For it to qualify as music, it needs to have melody, harmony, rhythm, and tempo – all the traditional characteristics of Western music. This sense of returning to the expected (as in

completing a song in a major key, usually the same key in which the song began) and to the familiar (as in completing a series of songs with a well-known piece) is part of that structure Westerners have grown to embrace and prefer. To do otherwise in either case causes a sense of imbalance, disequilibrium, incompleteness, even strangeness.

Ana also had a lot to say about music's impact on the affective aspects of corporate worship. She was kind enough to follow up an interview with written comments, some of which follow:

There are many different elements that make up a great and a not so great song for corporate worship (no matter what genre). These elements (when communicated correctly by worship leaders) have the capability of positively affecting a worshiper emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually. ... I have come to the conclusion that it all depends on the song and how the song is led by the worship leaders. A song that is too complex (rhythm, melody, lyrics) and a song that is not communicated correctly by worship leaders (intonation, diction, tone quality) is likely to cause distraction from the most important thing: to give praise to God.

Ana then listed those elements she says "have the capability of positively affecting a worshiper emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually," gave a brief description, and listed examples of songs that work well under that rubric, as well as some that do not. I will leave out the examples, as well as the material already quoted under "Intellect":

1. Rhythm: The rhythmic pattern of the song should be repetitive and simple enough for everyone to follow as a group (young kids to old folks and first time visitors). Songs with complex and heavily syncopated rhythms are best left for a special music presentation – done by someone that has practiced it, of course – for a concert, or an offertory.

The way a song is accompanied rhythmically (drums, other percussion instruments, piano and guitar) plays a big role with one's emotions and reactions. How does the sound of an energetic drum make one feel? What about the slow strumming of an acoustic guitar? ...

2. Melody: The melody should also contain some repetition and be simple enough for everyone to sing as a group. Melodies with big intervals (the

distance between two pitches), melodies that abruptly change direction (ascending/ descending), melodies that are ambiguous or lack a definitive contour, and melodies that have a wide vocal range, are difficult to sing as a group.

5. Harmony: The harmony in a song plays a big role in affecting our emotions when we sing. The most basic example of this is the key or mode of the song. A song in a major key conveys happiness and joy whereas a song in a minor key is more emotional and poignant ... also expresses sadness, sorrow, nostalgia, and so forth. ... A song's harmony also plays a role in the emotions by its harmonic language, or chord progression, by way of harmonic tension and release.
6. Tempo: The speed also plays a role. A slow ... and solemn song brings peace and a fast one gives energy and makes one want to clap, sway, dance
7. Dynamics: The dynamic level of a song also plays a big role. Singing or playing an instrument softly requires more concentration and more attention.
8. Timbre: The type of voice or choice of instrument also plays a role in affecting the emotions. The sound of an acoustic guitar brings a different emotion than the sound of a trumpet. An out of tune singer or string/wind player has the potential of distracting some worshipers.
9. Form: This is the structure or outline of the song, like the Verse-Chorus-Verse-Chorus-Bridge-Chorus. Songs that have complex structures work best when done as special presentations, like a choir, for example.
10. Familiarity: This is a big one. Most of us like to worship with songs and types of music that are familiar with us. This of course is very difficult to achieve mainly because of cultural and age differences in the congregation. It is extremely important that the worship leaders (singers, instrumentalists) are well prepared for services. How can we expect for someone to even begin to like or accept a certain song or genre if we communicate it to them [*sic*] badly?¹⁴⁰

Without comparing notes or communicating with Laura in any way, Ana identified some of the same key factors impacting affect in worship: proficiency or competence of the worship leaders; optimal complexity (without using that term); rhythm and instrumentation; key (major versus minor); tempo; and familiarity. In addition, her

¹⁴⁰ Personal email with the author.

comments are instructive as to why it is often so difficult to create and maintain a worship environment that is positive and uplifting for everyone in attendance.

Returning briefly to the interview with Ray – himself a highly trained musician, as well as an experienced worship leader – I asked him to specifically address the role of music in worship's affective nature:

It does seem that music is very much a language of the heart and emotions. It's amazing how music can create and evoke passion and how far back we can go with the culture and music's power to our hearts.

I asked, “How are we doing with that in PCA circles?”

We don't do that real well. We have a distrust and we are pretty reluctant to go that way. One of the reasons Presbyterian churches will never say, “Amen,” is we have this eight-second delay on reaction, and we have to go, “Hmmm.” By the time you could say, “Amen,” the time is gone. It's pretty lethal to us. ...

[Our people] want to be encouraged by the grace ... to touch base with both of those sides of the Christian experience [suffering and celebration]. In worship design – there's got to be a certain relationship in the mind and heart [like breathing out and in]. ... It also means to have joy and bask in the truth.

Suffering and celebration: the two opposite poles of the Christian experience.

Mind and heart: like breathing out and breathing in. Ray and the others are calling for us to have a place in our times of corporate worship for those extremes and all genuine emotion in between.

Will

How do we best engage the will in corporate worship? This was by far the most difficult area for most of the interviewees to address. For some, the question seemed to strike them as somehow inappropriate, as if they were saying: “Why would I want the worshiper to *do* something as a response to having been part of a worship service?”

Perhaps the idea of engaging the worshiper on a volitional level seemed too

anthropocentric. One pastor attempted to answer the question, but in his response reverted to the area of the intellect. Another declined to answer at first, but did offer some insight in a subsequent interview. Still another said, quite honestly, "I don't know."

Nevertheless, the ones who did attempt to address this issue provided some valuable insights. Tom said:

Will – or may I call it conscience – deals with our priorities and values, what we cherish, how we use what we cherish in decision-making and acting. We have to appeal to the conscience in worship, challenging wrong priorities, inculcating new ones ("The best defense against false sentiments is to inculcate just sentiments." – C. S. Lewis). We have to hone the conscience by regularly exposing it to the Law of God (Romans 2:14, 15). And we have to point it in the way it should go: This is the way; walk ye in it – and not just leaving people on their own to figure out what they should do in response to worship.

His view of worship is that it is broader than a once-a-week gathering of God's people. It should challenge and change our thoughts, attitudes and behaviors as a result of having been in the presence of God together with His people.

José took a similar position, stating, "Worship should create a confrontation with God and the worshiper. That confrontation should conclude in the worshiper understanding that God has made certain decisions and that as a worshiper he too must relate. Opportunity in the service should allow for engagement between God and the individual. Worship should be orchestrated to be a dialogue and a continued relationship between God and man. Not allowing the individual to make choices is not worshiping." He goes so far as to say that to deny a person the opportunity to make choices – the realm of the volition – based on what he has heard and experienced is to deny him the opportunity to truly worship.

James concurred with the necessity of volitional involvement. He also provided practical instruction as to how that is to take place, saying, "Expositional preaching must

also be full of application. People must be helped to see how the Scripture and Christ are relevant to their lives. Since we are the people of God saved by His grace, we are called to action (Ephesians 2:8-10; 1 Corinthians 15:10). I believe testimonies are also helpful here as the church sees what God is doing in and through other people. This challenges everyone to trust God and walk by faith.” Consistent with his earlier comments, James says the catalyst for facilitating such willful transformation is the spoken word: preaching and testimonies. Like Tom and José, he believes that full, well-rounded, biblical worship must engage the will. It must go beyond Sunday morning to encompass every aspect of the believers' lives.

Lou agreed that a worship service should motivate the worshipers. Asked, "Motivate them to do what?" he replied: "To worship ... to apply the sermon." He went on to say that such application is an outflow of worship, that it is more intrinsically motivated (by the Holy Spirit in the mind, heart and will of the Christian) than extrinsically motivated by the words or actions of others. He then added these thoughts on what should happen in the lives of believers between Sundays:

They should:

- a. be overwhelmed at the greatness of the God they have met with that morning;
- b. express that love and devotion and affection to Him (as a direct application / demonstration of the sermon);
- c. have an inner passion to adore God (resulting in obedience, application).

When asked to elaborate further regarding what should be the lasting impact in the lives of those present, he said that they should:

- a. see more of His greatness;
- b. be thrilled by His magnificence; and
- c. express in words and actions that devotion of their whole lives to Him –

which corresponds nicely with the organizing schema of intellect, affect, and will. Lou summarized his remarks by quoting John 14:15: “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”

Jean did not have a lot to say on this subject, except to acknowledge, “Based on the understanding of the Haitian Church culture, it is a very delicate question for us at [our church].”

In contrast, Ana had a lot to say on the subject, some of it rather technical. The following is from an earlier live interview (this precedes her written comments):

Kent: Now – bridging over from the affective into the volitional: how does music do that?

Ana: Music should be tonal Corporate worship music (in the Western world) is more accessible and appealing to the ear if it is structured and balanced. The music should have some tonal center, in other words, it should not be atonal.

Think of the tonal center as the topic of one of your sermons. When you prepare a sermon, I assume you choose a topic, and everything that goes into that sermon will be related to the topic. You start with your topic, you elaborate on it and then you finish with the same topic. If you don't do that ... you could sound like you're rambling [S]ame in music. Music's topic is the tonality.

If you are in C, that is going to be your center, and everything is going to gravitate toward it. If it doesn't, it's going to be chaotic and you're not going to know where you are. You're not going to feel a sense of phrase, or of rest, a cadence ... so it needs to be tonal. A contemporary composer might disagree, but it has to be tonal.

Kent: Is there anything [you sing in your church] that is not tonal?

Ana: No Some [contemporary songs] are borderline (gives examples), are ambiguous. Most people in western culture feel very comfortable with tonal music. As babies, we begin listening to it in its most basic form: nursery rhymes. ... so we assimilate that modality, that tonality. So we respond to that, we know that tonality. So if something is foreign, like a pentatonic scale, for example, *Amazing Grace* – although its melody is based on the pentatonic scale, its underlying harmony is still tonal and traditional. ...

Kent: Let me ask again: what is it about music that moves me, that makes me want to get up and go do something? ... Think about a stereotypical altar call

where the preacher issues a gospel invitation (*a la* Billy Graham), and then we sing a bunch of verses of “*Just As I Am*.” Why do we need to sing that? Why do we need music at that point at all? Why not just let people come?

Ana: Imagine movies without music, a ceremony without music, a wedding, a funeral ...

Kent: It's pretty, and it fills in the gaps ... it makes [the transitions] less awkward, but that's all it's doing. You're not trying to motivate anybody there.

Ana: It could be that you remember the tune, it makes you teary Your heart beats faster ... it raises your blood pressure. Music is a language of its own. It's going to depend on [the] instrumentation ... how it was played. ...

Kent: Let me use another obvious example, the song “*I Stand In Awe of You*.” When we get to that chorus and we start to sing those words, “And I stand, I stand in awe of you; I stand, I stand in awe of you ...” – we don't have to tell people to get up on their feet. They just stand, spontaneously.

Ana: That's because the composer is using “word painting.” The pitch goes up [right at that point]. It doesn't go down. If it went down, you wouldn't want to stand. A good composer effectively uses what is called “text painting.” If you are going to have something uplifting, the melody is going to go up; if it is something sad, it is usually going to go down. There are some exceptions, of course, like *Joy to the World*, where all the pitches in the melody go down, but the reason this hymn still sounds uplifting is because the pitches go down the major scale. It would be a different story if the composer would have used the minor scale. Back to “*I Stand In Awe of You*” – When you get ready to sing, “And I stand – ” you go up, and it's a big up. You're going to go up, I think it's a sixth, a major sixth. You're going to jump six pitches.

Kent: What is text painting or word painting?

Ana: When the composer fuses the text with the music. The classic example would be a medieval madrigal – when the man goes up to the altar and back down again, the music changes pitch to match his movement. [T]ext painting can be a very effective tool to convey the text to the performer and/or listener.

Kent: In your opinion, how much of the music [your church sings] now does that?

Ana: Look at “*Before the Throne of God Above*”: there is a major elevation in pitch between the verse and the chorus. There are major peaks and valleys in it, with a major peak at that point. A good song tends to have this contour [references other songs that do this].

At this point, Ana suggested that I “Google” the phrase “text painting.” I found the following definition on Wikipedia’s web site. (I understand that Wikipedia is not an authoritative source; however, Ana agreed with this definition, as did other Internet sources, but in less of a summary fashion):

Word painting (also known as **tone painting** or **text painting**) is the musical technique of having the music mimic the literal meaning of a song. For example, ascending scales would accompany lyrics about going up; slow, dark music would accompany lyrics about death.

Composers began experimenting with word painting in Italian madrigals of the 16th and 17th centuries. Word painting flourished well into the Baroque music period. One well known example occurs in Handel's *Messiah*, where a tenor aria contains Handel's setting of the text:

Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low; the crooked straight, and the rough places plain. (Isaiah 40:4)

In Handel's melody, the word "valley" ends on a low note, "exalted" is a rising figure; "mountain" forms a peak in the melody, and "hill" a smaller one, while "low" is another low note. "Crooked" is sung to a rapid figure of four different notes, while "straight" is sung on a single note, and in "the rough places plain," the final word "plain" is extended over several measures in a series of long notes.

A modern example of word painting from the late 20th century occurs in the song "*Friends in Low Places*" by Garth Brooks. During the chorus, Brooks sings the word "low" on a low note. Similarly, on The Who's album *Tommy*, the song "*Smash the Mirror*" contains the line

Can you hear me? Or do I surmise
That you feel me? Can you feel my temper
Rise, rise, rise, rise, rise, rise, rise, rise, rise, rise, rise, rise....

Each repetition of 'rise' is a half-step higher than the last, making this a clear example of word painting.¹⁴¹

Tonality, specifically Western tonality, peaks and valleys, word painting, or text painting – Ana says these are specific ways music impacts volition.

¹⁴¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Word-painting>.

Laura also had quite a lot to say about music and the will, a very brief portion of which follows:

Kent: I want to ask you about ... the volitional area. We've put the music together with the lyrics and we're singing, "A Mighty Fortress" or "Onward Christian Soldiers," and so my head is engaged, my heart is engaged ... why does that make me want to go do something, or not do something? Why does it move me? How does it impact my volition?

Laura: Music engages you, it makes you want to do things. It may be short-lived, but it does make you want to do things.

Kent: What kinds of music make you want to get up and go do something? Is there a style of music that moves you more?

Laura: "Amazing Grace." ... [Asked if that is simply a personal taste:] It's the way it's written. Good quality music.

Kent: How would you define that?

Laura: Chord progression-wise; if it has an opening, and it develops; if you state something, then maybe change keys and state it again. Rhythmic interest [optimal complexity again]: studies show us that people like rhythmic activities. We like contrast; a lot of contrast tends to be more exciting. You have the lower portions of the orchestra (percussion, the basses, the cello, etc.) – say it's pulsing, you've got something like that, but then, contrast: you flip-flop, and you have the upper portions – the strings, the trumpets, etc. – [kick in], and it's very exciting.

Kent: If you're going to do that in a worship service, you're going to have a lot of music [and instruments]. That's hard to do with three [songs].

Laura: Yes. ... But to do that [in a concert setting], you would have your first piece be like an overture, something big. ... The second piece is something much more relaxed, more calm, maybe just a string piece, something that gives everybody a break. And then the last one – a big, big piece, something orchestral. You go out with a bang. That's very typical [in a performance setting, like what her orchestras do]. ... But I don't want to go to a worship service to see someone put on a show. I want to see people being genuine in worship.

Kent: Worship is not a spectator sport So, if we want to touch people intellectually, affectively, and volitionally, contrast is key.

Laura: Yes – contrast keeps people engaged.

Kent: ... Is rhythm the most important component of music when it comes to touching the volition?

Laura: ... for excitement and for motion, I would think so. When you're performing, the judges always say, "Make sure you bring out the melody." But rhythmic integrity ... you are right. That really does a lot. You'd still want the other, but it [rhythm] is probably more exciting. That's why for years, church officials were very worried about rhythm and that those driving beats Think what happens when you watch a movie without the music [references Braveheart as an example].

Kent: So you would say that volitionally, the two most important aspects of the musical experience are: contrast and rhythm?

Laura: Contrast and rhythmic movement.

Kent: Other aspects of music you think that address us volitionally, in terms of the motivational aspects of the service? ... Depending on what you want us to do, volume?

Laura: Yes ... build it up, then ... bring it down. They build it up, and they bring it down.

Laura's doctorate in music pedagogy enables her to break music down into components (melody, harmony, rhythm, and tempo) the same way that a mechanic can break down an automobile engine or a doctor can describe muscle, bone, organ, and blood. However, like the mechanic or the doctor, she does not view this knowledge as an end unto itself or a tool for simply deconstructing or dissecting. She uses it to instruct others, to bless them, and to glorify God, who gave her the gifts she has honed over the years. The mechanic wants an engine to run well in order to get the driver to his destination more smoothly and reliably; the doctor wants her patient to feel better and live a longer, healthier life; Laura wants people to enjoy music, to be blessed by it, and to bless God with it.

Ray likewise had a great deal to say on this issue:

One thing ... educators have taught us ... is that there are different learning styles. Some people learn in a cerebral way, some visual, some tactile. One way we engage the will is by doing ... doing liturgy: "*The Lord be with you,*" etc.

Then, reminiscent of Lou's comments regarding what he finds moving, he turns to the subject of the sacraments:

The Lord's table is a place where the whole drama of redemption is acted out and somehow actually touches our world with His body, etc. There's an amazing intersection of God's world and ours. Jesus invites us to his Table (it's the *Lord's* table, after all!) where we experience "fellowship" with him through his body and blood. By some mystery I don't understand, His body becomes the bread that goes on my tongue. His blood becomes more than an abstraction: it is on my tongue and goes into my system. It presses home to me: my God came into my world to save me.

Baptism – the more physical that can be the better. God bless the Baptists. The more active [it] is, [the more it] helps us understand the drama. When you can include a baptismal and renewal vow by the whole congregation you give people a chance to say, *I, too, renounce sin and the world. I, too, once again accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior and declare my intentions forever.*

When the church does an offering, it can be a symbol, it is a commitment to give in service of Jesus, we help engaging people's wills. You're not all the way home, but you've started on the journey by helping: people are doing faith, [not] just saying. [These actions] show my actual belief reflected by what I do, the wholeness of our being. ... Sacraments go hand in hand with the will.

Then, he turns to the issue of music:

There are songs that are commitment songs and some songs in their content help to orient us to the task at hand. Another thing the song does, it helps the truth come into a deeper place. The songs become a resource to us when we memorize them and they come back to us while we are just going about in our living. I remember on more than one occasion walking down the halls at Duke, surrounded by unbelief, and songs that were a part of our church were coming to my mind. Any number of scriptural commitments in a song that were in me because I had sung them in the fellowship of the saints reminded me that I am a part of a [community] and God's army, [called] to live differently and to proclaim the world's King has come and is coming again. I felt encouraged to the task I was called to The truths are ... rooted more deeply in me by having sung them with the saints and [that] keeps me accountable and helps me prepare to take my place in His army.

At this point I mentioned to Ray that in classical homiletics, preachers are told that within each sermon there should be certain parts explanation, certain parts illustration, and certain parts application. I asked if there is perhaps a missing element in Reformed preaching, that of motivation:

We're happy if we get people to do [whatever the sermon is about] even if they don't want to, but we should be aiming at getting people to *want* to do it. What makes good worship makes good preaching. What makes good preaching makes good worship.

Summary

In this chapter we have considered what nine interviewees with pastoral, theological and / or musical expertise in corporate worship had to say about the role of the mind, heart and will in PCA worship services in Miami. In the next chapter we shall discuss the study and findings in light of the literature review and the interviews and make recommendations for further research related to the purpose of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand what makes worship most meaningful to the worshiper from the perspective of pastors and other worship leaders in PCA churches in Miami. In chapter two, the review of literature gave insight into various kinds of worship, as well as definitions, elements, expressions, and components thereof. It also addressed the centrality and essentiality of intellectual, affective, and volitional engagement. Chapter three described the methodology for interviewing four pastors, three seminary professors, and two musicians with significant experience and expertise in corporate worship. Chapter four contained some of the most significant findings gathered from the interviews that were conducted. This chapter will discuss the study and findings in light of the literature review and what the interviewees had to say, and make recommendations for further research related to the purpose of this study.

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The Challenge and Complexity of Corporate Worship

This study has sought to provide insight into some of the many challenges involved in defining, designing, and leading meaningful corporate worship. In a file in my computer, I have fifty-three (and growing) different definitions “worship” – sometimes more than one from the same person, sometimes different definitions contained in the same book – not including the various biblical words we translate as “worship” such as *histah^awâ* from the Old Testament and προσκυνεῖν from the New Testament. Worship has both vertical and horizontal dimensions, as well as numerous elements, aspects, and expressions. Biblically faithful worship occurs in an astonishing

variety of settings and circumstances across countless cultures. This study has attempted to examine what makes corporate worship most meaningful to the worshiper in PCA churches in Miami at this time.

In the course of studying relevant literature and interviewing a number of persons with expertise in the field of corporate worship, three characteristics were identified as indispensable in offering significant, meaningful, and inspirational worship experiences: intellectual, affective, and volitional involvement. There are many others that could be named: in another file I have an additional twenty-nine qualities or traits of meaningful worship, including flow, physical involvement, sensation, leadership, and space. Choosing the three on which to focus was not easy.

Intellect

This was the most dominant of the various qualities of Reformed worship covered in the literature, and it was by far the most readily and easily discussed by the majority of the interviewees. It was also the first of the three major aspects I asked each one about, perhaps a research design error on my part. (Had I asked about, for example, will first, then affect, and then intellect, perhaps each one would have had more to say about the volitional elements of corporate worship.) It is also, by similar consensus, the most distinctive, defining feature of current worship in PCA churches in Miami.¹⁴² I have heard countless times that if you want lively, exuberant worship, you must go to the charismatics; if you want evangelism, you go to the Southern Baptists; and if you want theology, you go to the Presbyterians. As with most stereotypes, there is probably an element of truth in this.

¹⁴² White, 64-65, 73-74; Webber, 122.

This intellectual emphasis is, for the most part, a good thing. Jesus, echoing Moses, says we are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, and mind.¹⁴³ Paul tells us we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.¹⁴⁴ Worshiping a God who is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient calls forth our highest and loftiest cognitive efforts. Those who seriously study the Bible, especially those who try to honestly present biblical truth to others, realize the arduous, even overwhelming task of trying to comprehend the width and length and height and depth of the love of God in Christ.¹⁴⁵ I suspect that I am not atypical in feeling totally inadequate to accomplish this as I prepare to preach and lead worship, echoing Paul's anguished cry: "And who is adequate for these things?"¹⁴⁶

Preaching

In any given sermon, the conscientious preacher struggles earnestly to present to his congregation (and others in attendance) some portion of the whole counsel of God – something that will honor and glorify the living God, instruct and edify the body of Christ, and minister grace, admonition and the message of salvation to those who are not (yet) part of the body. Of course no single sermon can accomplish all those things in equal measure. The beauty – and the challenge – of preaching Sunday after Sunday, month after month, and year after year to the same congregation is that we who stand behind the pulpits in our PCA churches get to try to proclaim the manifold excellencies of our triune God, knowing that we never do so adequately, but also knowing that there will, Lord willing, be another Sunday, and we will try again.

¹⁴³ Matthew 22:37; Deuteronomy 6:5.

¹⁴⁴ Romans 12:1-2.

¹⁴⁵ Ephesians 3:18.

¹⁴⁶ 2 Corinthians 2:16 (NAS).

In light of this (and drawing from many years of my own pastoral experience), I believe pastors should rely primarily on preaching expositionally through entire books of the Bible as the main “diet” for our people. This system forces the preacher to confront issues and themes he might otherwise avoid. That, in turn, pushes the preacher further into areas beyond his own comfort zone, which forces him to dig more deeply, taking the congregation along with him as he grows and matures and helping to prevent pastoral and congregational stagnation. Diligence in the areas of continuing education courses, conferences, seminars, broad reading, and interaction with a broad spectrum of people will also help the pastor to grow.

This is in keeping with our great Reformed heritage. White writes:

Preaching was an inevitable part of the Reformed service. The use of lectionaries was abandoned in favor of continuous reading of books of scripture as preaching pursued its way through each in turn. Biblical texts were expounded and then applied to contemporary life, particularly in terms of doctrine and morals. Calvin’s theology was largely an exegetical theology, and many of his later years were spent in producing commentaries on most of the books of the Bible.¹⁴⁷

I am not suggesting that we eschew topical preaching. I believe that can be done very effectively as an occasional break in the routine, as “raisins in the oatmeal.” There are times when I believe topical messages are virtually required: times of national tragedy, such as the September 11, 2001 attacks; natural disasters that impact one’s community (here in South Florida, we are likely to deal with the aftermath of hurricanes at least periodically); the congregation’s personal losses and tragedies, usually in the form of the unexpected death of a child, young person or other member of the church; and Christmas, Easter, anniversaries and / or other special occasions within the church.

¹⁴⁷ White, 68.

I do, however, maintain that topical preaching should not be the main diet, as that tends to foster an anthropocentric attitude and posture on the part of the church, a “What’s in it for me?” mentality. This works against the overall, primarily theocentric focus which I have argued should be characteristic of biblical, Reformed worship. Biblical worship is not primarily a “how-to” session.

Transcendence versus Immanence

This touches on a subject with which every preacher who desires to be faithful to the Scriptures must struggle: how to do justice to the glory and transcendence of our holy God, and at the same time apply the Scriptures to the daily lives, hurts, fears, needs, and desires of those in attendance. I have no magic formula to resolve this tension, no percentage to suggest as to how many sermons should focus on God’s transcendence versus his immanence, or how much of any one sermon should be dedicated to either. I would offer the observation that the Bible teaches both, and that if we are to be faithful exegetes, we must also teach both. Any passage, if studied with sufficient care, offers limitless insights into the character of God, as well as countless applications to our daily lives. Perhaps the best rule or guideline is to simply let each individual passage, and the preacher’s knowledge of the needs of his congregation, instruct us as to where the emphasis should lie.

Depth and simplicity

While the Bible is, as Augustine says, “a stream in which children can wade and elephants can swim,” it is incumbent on those who preach and lead worship in PCA churches that we offer the elephants a place to go swimming, where “deep calls to deep” (Psalm 42:7). Without meaning to sound pejorative, I am convinced that there are plenty

of other (non-Reformed) churches that offer the shallows. In the interest of meeting the needs of the entire body of Christ, as well as those we hope to evangelize, that seems to be a good thing. Few churches can hope to present the kind of diversity needed to minister to people at every level of theological appreciation.

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In presenting the truths of the gospel to our congregations, we must strive to communicate these truths in ways that do not create unnecessary barriers. The Reformed faith has a beautiful, rigorous internal logic and cohesiveness. It is theocentric through and through. The challenge we face, and especially here in Miami, is in presenting this faith to a radically sensate, anti-rational, thoroughly anthropocentric postmodern culture that worships at the altar of self. It is imperative that we remove any unnecessary barriers that would hinder us from communicating effectively with biblically illiterate people, for that is what makes up the vast majority of the population of South Florida.¹⁴⁸

For a role model of a person who was able to communicate great truths effectively to a biblically illiterate culture, we can look to John Calvin, the great intellect and systematizer of the doctrines of the Reformation. Calvin was also a pastor who preached to common people every week. In his sermons, he took great pains to speak in such a way that even the simple and uneducated could understand. Old says:

He seem[ed] to be concerned about one thing alone, presenting the Word of God simply and directly. This he [did] with great ability.¹⁴⁹

Tim Keller adds:

The Latin of the medieval Mass was only accessible to “the learned” classes schooled in the “high culture,” but Calvin would not choose high culture over intelligibility to the common person. The preaching and the singing were to be done so that they were accessible even to the unlearned. Calvin went so far as to

¹⁴⁸ I refer again to the U.S. 2000 Census statistics cited in chapter 3 that showed that only 31% of the population of Miami-Dade County is even nominally Christian.

¹⁴⁹ Old, 77.

write that the liturgy the presented to the church was “entirely directed toward edification.”¹⁵⁰

But Calvin refused to pit “the glory of God” against the “edification” of the participants. The basic elements of gathered worship are laid out by God in his Word, but our arrangement and utilization of them is strongly controlled by what helps and touches those who come.¹⁵¹

Keller himself, who ministers to largely professional, highly educated urban professionals in Manhattan, writes:

... language should not be too archaic. It is dangerous to seek transcendence and dignity by using antiquated language, which can be stuffy, preachy, grandiloquent, pedantic, and over-stated rather than simple, immediate, clear, vivid, and direct.

Jonathan Edwards was another great intellect who could communicate profound truths in a simple and compelling way. His image of sinners being suspended over the mouth of hell as if by a spider web in his sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* is perhaps his best-known use of imagery, but consider the following from *The Religious Affections*:

[God’s way] is high above the other way, as the stars are higher than a glow worm.¹⁵²

Many hypocrites are like comets that appear for a while with a mighty blaze ... and their blaze soon disappears, and they appear but once in a great while. But the true saints are like the fixed stars, which, though they rise and set, and are often clouded, yet are steadfast in their orb, and may truly be said to shine with a constant light.¹⁵³

There may be several good evidences that a tree is a fig tree; but the highest and most proper evidence of it is, that it actually bears figs.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Carson et al., 202.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 203. cf. Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, Chapter X, 29-32.

¹⁵² Edwards, 211.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 300.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 363.

The Apostle Paul, of course, was a master of communicating the gospel to a pagan culture. His sermon on the Areopagus, while not given in a formal worship context, is a masterpiece of culturally appropriate language and imagery that interested and engaged his listeners.¹⁵⁵

Kidd writes, “With not the slightest hint of self-consciousness, New Testament writers – all of them – laid out their thoughts in the Greek of their audience rather than in the Hebrew of their faith’s deepest roots. They chose to use not the heritage language of Israel but the universal language of the world into which they were being sent.”¹⁵⁶

For that matter, we can look to Jesus, who was the Master at communicating profound, life-changing truths to the common person. Jesus was not afraid to engage the intellect. Using commonplace, familiar images, analogies, and illustrations he uttered the most life-changing, world-impacting words ever spoken:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden¹⁵⁷

Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two.¹⁵⁸

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.¹⁵⁹

The sower went out to sow his seed¹⁶⁰

So He was saying, "What is the kingdom of God like, and to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his own garden; and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches."¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ Acts 17:22-34.

¹⁵⁶ Kidd, 166.

¹⁵⁷ Matthew 5:14 (NAS).

¹⁵⁸ Matthew 5:41 (NAS).

¹⁵⁹ Matthew 6:19-21 (NAS).

¹⁶⁰ Luke 8:5 (NAS).

¹⁶¹ Luke 13:18-19 (NAS).

Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ... Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"¹⁶²

We can communicate the deepest and most profound truths of the Reformed faith in language that is understandable to persons who are unfamiliar with those truths. If we are serious about reaching out to our highly secularized culture with the good news of the gospel, we must learn to communicate in this manner. Could it be that one of the reasons the PCA has historically flourished in areas that were suburban, Anglo, highly educated, and affluent, but that it has not flourished in the inner city, among those with less education and lower incomes, is that we have made our faith sound elitist and exclusive?

One of the key tenets of our faith is that of "accommodation," that in order to communicate to us the necessary content of the story of redemption, God used methods and means that were understandable to his creatures. He spoke to the biblical writers in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. He used forms such as covenants, specifically Ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaties, to give structure to his relationship with us. In the fullness of time, when he was ready to make his complete disclosure of who he is and what he is like, he sent forth his Son to be one of us.¹⁶³

If God Almighty, in his infinite splendor and glory, saw fit to accommodate himself to us and to communicate with us in ways we can understand – why should we be reluctant to accommodate our biblically illiterate culture and even our non-Christian friends and loved ones in order to speak meaningfully to them? I am not advocating that we compromise our message. I am advocating that we find culturally meaningful and appropriate ways to communicate that message.

¹⁶² Luke 10:30 (NIV).

¹⁶³ Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 1:1-5.

The point of corporate worship it is not to communicate the gospel to the biblically illiterate, the nominal Christian, or the non-Christian. Likewise, the primary goal of worship is not the instruction and edification of the Christian. The goal of worship is to glorify the God who, by his grace, saves the non-Christian and builds up the Christian.¹⁶⁴

Music

The music we sing and play in corporate worship also carries intellectual weight. Laura and Ana addressed some of the issues of music's impact in terms of its structure and technical merits. Presumably, most of those in attendance at a Sunday morning service will not have those ladies' knowledge and expertise. For the rest of us, it seems music's intellectual import is primarily a matter of its lyrical content.

The Reformed faith embraces a large and wonderful body of worship music. Soaring, majestic hymns such as *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*, *And Can It Be*, *O Worship the King*, *Holy, Holy, Holy* and many others have enriched the lives of countless saints throughout the centuries. Their deep, well-written lyrics and beautiful melodies have stood the test of time.

We are witnessing a tremendous outpouring of new worship music in our time. Much of it has made its way into our times of corporate worship, to the delight of some worshipers and the dismay of others. Some of this new music is shallow, superficial, and even unbiblical. Hopefully it will be forgotten as quickly as it has appeared. ("Popular" music, by its very definition, is largely disposable. What is popular today is likely to sound dated, awkward, and even ridiculous a few years hence.) There is, however, a significant portion of this new music that is thoughtful, well-written, and solidly biblical.

¹⁶⁴ Again, I am indebted to Tim Keller's article, "What It Takes to Worship Well."

I hesitate to offer any list of artists whose music I believe meets those criteria; suffice it to say that there are quite a few, and the number is growing.

To shut such music out of our times of corporate worship is to resist the winds of renewal that the Holy Spirit periodically blows through the church. By the same token, to abandon the time-honored traditional hymns of our forebears is to cut ourselves off from our liturgical and ecclesiastical past, in effect making ourselves liturgical and ecclesiastical orphans. I believe we should both embrace the great hymns of the faith and leave the doors and windows of the sanctuary open for the winds of renewal to blow good, God-honoring, biblically authentic new music into our worship. We should of course insist that this newer music be well-written musically and lyrically, as well as rigorously biblical. Every pastor, session, worship leader, and congregation must also decide which songs are appropriate for their worship services.

Those dear saints who believe that we should sing only "traditional" hymnody must confront certain issues: what makes a hymn "traditional" – over fifty years old? One hundred? Written by Charles Wesley? Isaac Watts? Bach or Handel? King David? If we sang it in the church back home? If it sounds good on a pipe organ? One person's "traditional" favorite is another person's musty relic. Some older hymns are treasure troves of biblical truth and theological depth, but some are shallow and saccharine sweet, disconnected from reality. And while some people do find older offerings easier to sing, primarily due to familiarity, others have the opposite reaction.

In other words, the style of music employed during a service is not a right-wrong matter. It is simply a matter of taste. Perhaps the biggest problem with the "traditional hymns only" position is that every song we sing was at one time contemporary music.

Even the Psalms were brand new, fresh and contemporary as they were first sung by the older covenant people of Israel. It is quite possible that some criticized them when they were first introduced because they were not old and familiar.

At this point, I anticipate the protest against the “dumbing down” of worship. I have said that it is incumbent upon us to offer corporate worship that challenges and inspires our most rigorous intellectual efforts. Humility and honesty, however, compel us to acknowledge that from God's perspective, the difference between the world's brightest person and the world's dullest is minimal. From God's vantage point, Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, Calvin's *Institutes*, and the collected works of Jonathan Edwards must seem like a kindergartner's first attempt at writing a story. Those who most stridently decry the “dumbing down of worship” would do well to remember that, from a theocentric point of view, all of our worship is "dumbed down."

I have heard people in PCA churches speak derisively of what they call contemporary “7-11” songs: seven words repeated eleven times. I often ask those people if they are familiar with Psalm 136, where the words “His love endures forever” (Hebrew: *ki la-olam hasdoh*) are repeated twenty-six times.

Similarly, I have heard others complain about songs that do not have, in their opinion, sufficient theological content. I ask them if they are familiar with Psalm 150:

Praise the LORD.
 Praise God in his sanctuary;
 praise him in his mighty heavens.
 Praise him for his acts of power;
 praise him for his surpassing greatness.
 Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,
 praise him with the harp and lyre,
 praise him with tambourine and dancing,
 praise him with the strings and flute,

praise him with the clash of cymbals,
 praise him with resounding cymbals.
 Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.
 Praise the LORD.¹⁶⁵

If those songs were written today and offered to the typical Miami PCA church, I question whether they would be considered worthy of acceptance – and yet our sovereign, omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient God saw fit to include them in his inspired worship song book.

Even the notion that all of our worship songs must contain deep theological insights runs aground on the principle of *Sola Scriptura*: where does the Bible itself say any such thing? We may prefer songs with great depth, and if that is our preference, it is fine for us to sing those songs. However, having a preference for that kind of music is not the same as saying, "Thus saith the Lord."

At all costs, we would do well to remember the admonition Paul delivered to the church in Philippi:

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ 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

¹⁶⁵ Psalm 150 (NIV).

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.¹⁶⁶

Let us, then, have our preferences in music: classical, traditional, contemporary, lively and upbeat or somber and contemplative. Let us also, however, also strive to “be like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose, doing nothing out of selfishness, humbly considering others better than ourselves, looking not only to our own interests, but also to the interests of others; having the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus.”

Other aspects of the worship service

I will not further address the other elements, circumstances, aspects, and expressions beyond general admonitions toward biblical fidelity, intelligibility, simplicity, accessibility, and cultural appropriateness. Some time-honored traditions may need to be reconsidered in the interests of greater intellectual stimulation for those in our churches. For example, the use of the same affirmation of faith every Sunday (usually the Apostles’ Creed), while offering familiarity and a comforting sense of ritual, may become dull and routine. Incorporation of different creeds and affirmations that maintain biblical fidelity, such as the Nicene Creed, the *Te Deum*, and creeds taken directly from the Scriptures, has the effect of awakening people and challenging them mentally.

If we are truly to be a church that is serious about giving our utmost to glorify God, edify his church, and multiply his disciples, we must remember that we minister to those raised in the Reformed faith, as well as to those in other Protestant denominations, in the Roman Catholic Church, and, increasingly, those raised with no faith at all. In

¹⁶⁶ Philippians 2:1-11 (NIV).

Miami we minister to those for whom English is their only language, to those for whom English is a second, third, or fourth language, and to those who speak little or no English. For their sake, for ours as a viable denomination and force for the gospel in Miami, and for the glory of God, we must bring our highest and noblest intellectual efforts to bear in our times of corporate worship.

Affect

Reformed thinkers, pastors, and worship leaders generally feel themselves on solid footing when discussing the intellectual aspects of worship, but they feel much less so with the affective. It has been my experience that Reformed people have a general mistrust of the emotions in worship. Going all the way back to Calvin in Geneva,¹⁶⁷ the overriding ethos of Reformed worship is that it must be conducted “decently and in order.”¹⁶⁸ The emotions are often treated as an unwanted drag on the truly important parts of the worship experience, which are primarily preaching and teaching, or as an outright unwelcome intruder. The label, “God’s frozen chosen” is too well-worn to be funny any longer, but there is undoubtedly a reason it became so common.

God’s emotions

Even if Reformed people are afraid of emotional involvement in the worship of God Almighty, he does not seem to be afraid of emotional engagement with us. The Bible presents a picture of a God with a full range of emotions:

The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.¹⁶⁹

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

¹⁶⁷ White, 118.

¹⁶⁸ I Corinthians 14:40.

¹⁶⁹ Genesis 6:6 (NIV).

from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.¹⁷⁰ [This is the first of dozens of passages referring to burnt offerings and other sacrifices as “pleasing to the Lord”.]

"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God"¹⁷¹

Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and said, "Because this nation has violated the covenant that I laid down for their forefathers and has not listened to me, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died."¹⁷²

Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel.¹⁷³

If the LORD delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with his hand.¹⁷⁴

May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works—he who looks at the earth, and it trembles, who touches the mountains, and they smoke. May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the LORD.¹⁷⁵

"Then my anger will cease and my wrath against them will subside, and I will be avenged. And when I have spent my wrath upon them, they will know that I the LORD have spoken in my zeal. I will make you a ruin and a reproach among the nations around you, in the sight of all who pass by. You will be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and an object of horror to the nations around you when I inflict punishment on you in anger and in wrath and with stinging rebuke."¹⁷⁶

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept.¹⁷⁷

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁰ Genesis 8:21 (NIV).

¹⁷¹ Exodus 20:4-5a (NIV).

¹⁷² Judges 2:20-21 (NIV).

¹⁷³ 1 Kings 10:9 (NIV).

¹⁷⁴ Psalm 37:23-24 (NIV).

¹⁷⁵ Psalm 104:31-34 (NIV).

¹⁷⁶ Ezekiel 5:13-15 (NIV).

¹⁷⁷ John 11:33-35 (NIV).

¹⁷⁸ Ephesians 4:30 (NIV).

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.¹⁷⁹

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.¹⁸⁰

In Scripture, we have a portrait of a God with all the emotions he has placed in his creatures: grief, pleasure, jealousy, anger, delight, and others. This should not come as a surprise to us. Where else would we get our emotional composition? We are made in the image of God, and part of that image-bearing role is mirroring back to him the emotions he expresses toward us.

Kidd puts it this way:

For centuries, the Hebrew Scriptures have been known among Jewish people as "The Law, The Prophets, and the Writings." This is not by chance. I think of these as revealing God's mind, God will, and God's heart. ...

The Writings – and especially the Psalms, which are the centerpiece of the Writings – show us the priestly side of God. In doing so, they bring integration to the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures' portrait of God. The Bible's God is one who loves, delights in, grieves over and with, listens to, fellowships with, possesses, and married his people. The Psalms communicate the passion of the God of Sinai – the God of the Torah – to be near his people, to indwell them. As such, these poets sing what the prophets preach: God is invading history with justice and for redemption.¹⁸¹

Preaching

The Bible contains countless stories full of human pathos. What father can hear the story of Abraham and his intended sacrifice of Isaac¹⁸² without having some sense of Abraham's fear and dread at the horrific act he had been commanded to perform?

¹⁷⁹ Romans 12:1 (NIV).

¹⁸⁰ Hebrews 13:20-22 (NIV).

¹⁸¹ Kidd, 30.

¹⁸² Genesis 22.

Likewise, the account of David weeping over the death of his rebellious son Absalom is heartrending.¹⁸³ The book of Job is a portrait of a man in mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual anguish. The Psalms are extremely emotive, including both highs (Psalms 8, 19, 96, 100) and lows (22, 38, 102). Isaiah gives us a gripping portrait of the “Suffering Servant.”¹⁸⁴ We have an entire book entitled, “Lamentations.” Abraham Kuyper once wrote: “The rationale for the diverse literary forms in Scripture is that revelation strikes all the chords of the soul, and not just one, e.g., the rational one.”¹⁸⁵

Paul was no stranger to suffering (2 Corinthians 11:16-33), yet he would fairly burst when speaking of his joy (Romans 16:19; 2 Corinthians 7:2-7; Philippians 1:3-11; 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20). James, Peter, and John, likewise well acquainted with persecution, also have much to say about joy.

Jesus certainly had no qualms about aiming for the hearts of his listeners. Countless prodigal sons and daughters have been brought to tears, as well as repentance, by the parable Jesus told in Luke 15. One can only surmise how many prodigals were in attendance when the Master first told the story – and how many fathers of prodigals. I do not think it melodramatic to imagine that there were many moist eyes in the crowd, along with many pierced hearts. Perhaps a few long-overdue family reunions took place following the telling of that story.

When he cleansed lepers, they were often, but not always, grateful.¹⁸⁶ When he forgave the sins of a woman with a loose reputation, she responded with an extravagant

¹⁸³ 2 Samuel 18.

¹⁸⁴ Isaiah 53.

¹⁸⁵ David L. Larsen, *Telling the Old, Old Story* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995), 22.

¹⁸⁶ Luke 17:11-19.

display of gratitude and devotion.¹⁸⁷ When a condemned criminal hung dying on a cross next to him, Jesus provided hope.¹⁸⁸ Jesus provoked people to amazement,¹⁸⁹ consternation,¹⁹⁰ fear,¹⁹¹ outrage,¹⁹² thoughts of murder,¹⁹³ pity,¹⁹⁴ sadness,¹⁹⁵ astonishment,¹⁹⁶ disbelief, shock, awe and worship¹⁹⁷ – but never boredom or apathy.

Preachers need to take direct, bold, and unapologetic aim at the hearts of their congregants. We know we are commanded to love the Lord with our heart, soul and mind.¹⁹⁸ Why then should we be averse to seeking to connect with our hearers on all those levels? Why should we shy away from saying things in a way that will produce a smile, a laugh, a sigh, anger, discomfort, or even a tear?

Engineering and artistry

If you were to visit one hundred PCA churches this Sunday, it is quite likely you would hear ninety-eight or ninety-nine sermons that follow the same basic format: a reading of the biblical text, a statement of the overall theme or purpose of the sermon, three or four supporting points, possibly alliterated, and a conclusion. We are, often by nature and overwhelmingly by training, pretty good at the “engineering” aspects of preparing sermons: grammatico-historical concerns, grammar and syntax, coherent and cohesive thesis statements, linear development of the major and minor supporting points, and other such concerns. We are (typically) good at the exegetical task.

¹⁸⁷ Luke 7:37-50.

¹⁸⁸ Luke 23:39-43.

¹⁸⁹ Matthew 7:28.

¹⁹⁰ Mark 2:6-7.

¹⁹¹ Mark 4:41.

¹⁹² Luke 22:71.

¹⁹³ Matthew 12:14.

¹⁹⁴ Luke 23:27.

¹⁹⁵ Matthew 19:16-22.

¹⁹⁶ Matthew 19:23-25.

¹⁹⁷ John 20:28.

¹⁹⁸ Matthew 22:37.

There is nothing wrong with this. We should work hard at the “engineering” or structural aspects of the homiletical task. Even though content and organization are not the most memorable parts of a sermon – at least to the listeners¹⁹⁹ – they directly impact the assessment of the preacher’s ethos, competence, and compassion. These, in turn, have an enormous impact on the preacher’s perceived credibility and effectiveness.

I have been trained largely in the traditional Reformed model of homiletics: original meaning – legitimate summary – central theme – supporting ideas – illustrations – applications. My mentors in the ministry have primarily been men who do this kind of preaching, and they do it very well. While not trying to imitate them, I am well aware of the impact these men and others have had on my style of preaching. I once thought that this homiletic model was almost the only legitimate way to deliver a sermon.

I now realize how much cultural conditioning is involved in such an approach. This style is very common in North America, but it is not often used in the Caribbean or Latin America, an observation which has obvious implications for us in Miami. I have also realized that one can search the Bible from cover to cover without finding a sermon that looks or feels like the ones normally delivered by the typical PCA pastor. Again, I am not suggesting that the model be discarded; it has served the Reformed church well since the days of John Calvin in Geneva. I only mean to suggest that it is not the only way to faithfully and effectively communicate Reformed biblical truth from the pulpit.

In his groundbreaking work *as one without authority* [sic], Fred Craddock writes:

“When he begins to ask himself why the Gospel should always be impaled upon the frame of Aristotelian logic, when his muscles twitch and his nerves tingle to mount the pulpit not with three points but with the Gospel as narrative or parable or poem or myth or song in spite of the heavy recollection of his training in

¹⁹⁹ See Bryan Chapell’s *Using Illustrations to Preach With Power* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 141-42.

homiletics, then perhaps the preacher stands at the threshold of new pulpit power.”²⁰⁰

Reading that quote began a paradigm shift for me in terms of my beliefs and practices as a preacher.

There is an old expression: “When your only tool is a hammer, you treat everything like a nail.” At one time I treated every text as a launching pad for a deductive, Aristotelian treatment of biblical truth, with cohesive outlines, illustrations, and applications. That is a fine, time-honored way to approach hermeneutics and homiletics. I have done it that way many times, and soon I will do it again. However, at least for PCA pastors in Miami, it is perhaps not always the best way.

Warren Wiersbe writes of pastors who “took skeletons into the pulpits and ended up with cadavers in the pews – undernourished saints who had nothing to chew on but outlines.”²⁰¹ I have never heard a person say, upon leaving a PCA worship service (or at any other time), “Wasn’t that sermon outline something? Did you notice how linear and logically cohesive it was? That outline changed my life.” I have heard (and been told), “That analogy about ____ really helped me.” “That quote from ____ really hit home with me.” “That story you told about the rebellious teenager / abandoned child / heartbroken wife / alcoholic man – you must have been reading my mind”

I wholeheartedly affirm that those analogies, quotes, and stories need a coherent structure to which they can adhere, or they will become little more than a jumbled mess of sentimental, albeit interesting, word pictures. They need, especially for our Western (Aristotelian-oriented) ears, direction and purpose if they are to take us to a biblically

²⁰⁰ Fred Craddock, *as one without authority* (Enid, OK: Phillips University Press, 1978), 45.

²⁰¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 60.

valid destination along a textually faithful route. Still, once we have utilized the tools of the “engineer” (original language studies, grammar and syntax, historical cultural concerns, systematic and biblical theological considerations) we must take the product of that engineering process and ask the “artist’s” questions: “Now that I know (or at least have a good idea) what this passage is about, what literary genre it represents, and what theological and revelatory function it serves in the Word of God, how should I then preach? What approach would be both most faithful to the text and most meaningful to my people?”

I am suggesting that we take what have traditionally been the strengths of the Reformed approach – a high view of the Scripture’s authority, a high view of the homiletical task – and combine them with something which has not always been a strength of this approach, sensitivity to congregational and cultural dynamics. I am urging a conscious, intentional marriage of the engineering and the artistry of preaching. When done faithfully and wholeheartedly, this can be an extremely potent and powerful way to proclaim the gospel, as it will appeal to the intellect, emotions, and the will.

Music

While music can and often does carry great intellectual and theological weight, it was the overwhelming consensus of the authors reviewed, as well as the opinion of those interviewed, that music is by far the most intensely affective part of the worship service. The pastors and professors stipulated as much, and the musicians went into extensive detail explaining why this is the case. Those who prepare and lead corporate worship have likely encountered strong emotional reactions, both positive and negative, in response to the music incorporated in a given service. Why does music affect us so?

Webber puts it this way:

Music is an auditory stimulant that is capable of evoking an experience with the transcendent. In music we take ordinary sound and through its arrangement we are able to lift the hearer into the ineffable. This generally happens when the pattern of ordinary sound is interrupted by the sound of otherness.²⁰²

Physicist (and Anglican priest) John Polkinghorne had this to say:

“The poverty of an objectivistic account [of the origin and design of the universe] is made only too clear when we consider the mystery of music. From a scientific point of view, it is nothing but vibrations in the air, impinging on the eardrums and stimulating neural currents in the brain. How does it come about that this banal sequence of temporal activity has the power to speak to our hearts of an eternal beauty? The whole range of subjective experience, from perceiving a patch of pink, to being enthralled by a performance of the Mass in B Minor, and on to the mystic’s encounter with the ineffable reality of the One, all these truly human experiences are at the center of our encounter with reality, and they are not to be dismissed as epiphenomenal froth on the surface of a universe whose true nature is impersonal and lifeless.”²⁰³

The professional musicians interviewed have already explained a great deal about the technical aspects (melody, rhythm, and key changes) of why music impacts us the way it does. I will now share a few additional thoughts on some of the more subjective aspects of the use of music in corporate worship. As Ray said: “It does seem that music is very much a language of the heart and emotions.” How shall we best speak this language?

Content versus repetition

One need only mention such classic hymns as *"Immortal, Visible, God Only Wise"* and *"When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,"* or some songs of more recent vintage such as Graham Kendrick’s *"Amazing Love,"* Michael Kelly Blanchard’s *"Be Ye Glad,"* or Rich Mullins’ *"If I Stand"* to know that music can convey great theological content. Such songs engage the intellect in a deep and marvelous way. Songs like these have

²⁰² Webber, 109.

²⁰³ Collins, 228.

repeated refrains in order to give the brain a chance to "catch its breath" between verses so as not to be cognitively overwhelmed.

Repetition (teamed with beauty and accessibility) also allows our emotions to engage in worship. Kidd writes:

I've noticed that worship songs that come from so-called "praise and worship" sectors are inclined to address God in the second person. This is a refreshing complement to hymns that more often (though not exclusively, of course) sing about God in the third person. Pastor John Piper rightly argues that though praise choruses are often musically simple, many of them articulate a hunger for transcendence. While hymns are rather linear and content-laden, and while linearity and content are good, praise songs are more modular (focused on a single idea) and directly affective. Modularity and affect have their own virtue. It is simply off task to critique a praise song for not being a hymn. The power of any particular praise song has a lot to do with what it is teamed up with. To my mind, craftsmanship in worship design has as its first task the wedding of "right brain" and "left brain" elements, largely through the juxtaposition of thoughtful hymns and expressive choruses.²⁰⁴

As mentioned, there are those in PCA churches in Miami who chafe at the simplicity and repetitiveness of much contemporary "praise and worship" music. However, younger worshipers (that is, of course, a relative and rather expansive term – perhaps beginning with those who grew up in the rock 'n roll era and extending to consumers of today's popular music) are unlikely to be as bothered by those traits. In fact, many prefer this type of music.

One seminal event that led to more popular acceptance of highly repetitive songs was the release of The Beatles' "*Hey Jude*" in August, 1968. As the highest-selling Beatles single, this song was far longer than their other songs, clocking in at seven minutes, eleven seconds. The last four minutes of the song consisted of Paul McCartney and his band-mates, along with quite a few others, singing the chorus (Na-na-na, na-na-na-na, na-na-na-na, Hey Jude) repeated 18 times. As testimony to the staying power of

²⁰⁴ Kidd, 175.

such simple fare, McCartney closed the halftime show of the 2005 Super Bowl by singing “*Hey Jude*,” choruses and all, to the enthusiastic approval and with the overwhelming participation of the over seventy-eight thousand in attendance and (presumably) countless hundreds of millions more watching on television all over the world.

Anyone who has followed popular music for the last fifty years could no doubt easily list dozens of songs that are similarly, sometimes almost mindlessly, repetitive – call it the “*Hey Jude*-ification” of music – and also well-loved. To use just one notable example of a slightly more recent vintage, consider U2’s “*Bad*” from their album, “*The Unforgettable Fire*.” The album was released in 1984, but “*Bad*” continues to be a crowd favorite at live concerts to this day. The song, like much of U2’s music, is musically very simple, built around three or four dominant chords (played on electric guitar and bass, backed by drums), using a repetitive, staccato triplet rhythm. The first verse is as follows:

If you twist and turn away
If you tear yourself in two again
If I could, yes I would
If I could, I would
Let it go
Surrender
Dislocate

The band members make no secret of their Christian faith, especially their lead singer, Paul Hewson, better known to the world as “Bono.” A video of the band performing this song in Boston in 2001 on their “Elevation” tour shows Bono, as he sings the word, “Surrender,” closing his eyes and raising his hands, reminiscent of someone praying in a “charismatic” worship service. The entire song has a reverent, worshipful

feel to it. As it moves toward its conclusion, Bono walks around a heart-shaped walkway, grasps the arms and hands of many members of the audience and sings:

If I could, you know I would
 If I could, I would
 Let it go ...

He then sings, reverently, hypnotically, repeatedly:

This desperation
 Dislocation
 Separation
 Condemnation
 Revelation
 In temptation
 Isolation
 Desolation
 Let it go

And so fade away
 To let it go
 And so fade away
 To let it go
 And so to fade away

I'm wide awake
 I'm wide awake
 Wide awake
 I'm not sleeping
 Oh, no, no, no

The relative merits (or lack thereof) of the lyrics aside, the audience, hands raised, sways and sings along devotedly. The entire performance of that one song lasts over six minutes, ending as Bono segues into another crowd favorite, the song "40." "40" is an adaptation of the 40th Psalm, the chorus of which (U2's song, not David's) says repeatedly:

How long to sing this song?
 How long to sing this song?
 How long...how long...how long...
 How long...to sing this song?

Watching the concert video, one gets the impression that the crowd in Boston would have stayed there, mesmerized, singing along repetitively until exhaustion set in for either themselves or the band.²⁰⁵ (I witnessed very much the same phenomenon when, in 1987, I attended U2's "*Joshua Tree*" concert in Miami's Orange Bowl, including the ending chorus of "*40.*")

This same phenomenon, abandonment into the emotion of the song, is happening more and more in contemporary Christian music. One notable example of this is Chris Tomlin's music. Tomlin burst onto the scene with his 2001 album, "*The Noise We Make,*" and has found continued success with 2004's "*Arriving*" and 2006's "*See the Morning.*" He has received numerous Dove awards and was nominated for two 2007 Grammy awards. Lyrically, his music is fairly simple, highly worshipful, thoroughly theocentric, and very repetitive. Consider his best-selling "*How Great Is Our God*" from the album, "*Arriving*":

The splendor of a King / Clothed in majesty
Let all the earth rejoice / All the earth rejoice
He wraps himself in light / And darkness tries to hide
And trembles at his voice / And trembles at his voice

Chorus:
How great is our God – sing with me
How great is our God – and all will see
How great, how great is our God

Age to age he stands / And time is in his hands
Beginning and the End / Beginning and the End
The Godhead, Three in one / Father, Spirit, Son
The Lion and the Lamb / The Lion and the Lamb

Chorus

The chorus is then repeated twice, with the following lyrics sung canticle-style over it:

²⁰⁵ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbhYwseHcyQ>

Name above all names
 You are worthy of all praise
 And my heart will sing
 How great, how great
 Is our God

The chorus is then repeated three more times, the last time *a cappella*, for a total of two verses and six choruses (not counting the canticle separately).

Here are the Top 20 Praise and Worship songs (“so far”) as reported by 20, The Countdown Magazine, a contemporary Christian music (CCM) index of many years²⁰⁶:

Top 20 Praise and Worship Songs ... So Far		
	Title	Writer(s)
1	<i>How Great Is Our God</i>	Chris Tomlin
2	<i>God Of Wonders</i>	Third Day/Caedmon's Call
3	<i>You Are My King (Amazing Love)</i>	Newsboys
4	<i>He Reigns</i>	Newsboys
5	<i>We Fall Down</i>	Chris Tomlin
6	<i>Here I Am To Worship</i>	Phillips, Craig & Dean
7	<i>Blessed Be Your Name</i>	Tree63
8	<i>Breathe</i>	Michael W. Smith
9	<i>Indescribable</i>	Chris Tomlin
10	<i>You're Worthy Of My Praise</i>	Jeremy Camp
11	<i>Friend Of God</i>	Phillips, Craig & Dean
12	<i>Holy Is The Lord</i>	Chris Tomlin
13	<i>How Can I Keep From Singing</i>	Chris Tomlin
14	<i>Open The Eyes Of My Heart</i>	John Tesh
15	<i>Shout To The Lord</i>	Darlene Zschech
16	<i>Forever</i>	Chris Tomlin
17	<i>Lord I Lift Your Name On High</i>	Petra
18	<i>Come, Now Is The Time To Worship</i>	Phillips, Craig & Dean
19	<i>The Heart Of Worship</i>	Matt Redman
20	<i>Made To Worship</i>	Chris Tomlin

²⁰⁶ <http://www.20thecountdownmagazine.com/chart> (July 14, 2007).

All of these songs are lyrically rather simple and highly repetitive, as is typical of most popular Western music today.

I stated that this is a relatively recent phenomenon, perhaps largely a byproduct of the popularity of simple and/or simplistic popular music and rock'n'roll. While I do believe this repetitiveness has had a major impact, I do not believe that it is entirely new. Consider the following from Händel's *Messiah* – written in 1741 by George Friedrich Händel – universally considered one of the most glorious pieces of music ever composed. The *Hallelujah* Chorus's lyrics are as follows:

Hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah
Hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah

For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth
Hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah
For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth
Hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah
For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth
Hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah

Hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah
Hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah
(For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth)
Hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah

For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth
(Hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah)
Hallelujah

The kingdom of this world;
is become
the kingdom of our God,
and of His Christ
and of His Christ

And He shall reign forever and ever
And He shall reign forever and ever
And He shall reign forever and ever
And He shall reign forever and ever

King of kings forever and ever hallelujah hallelujah
 and Lord of lords forever and ever hallelujah hallelujah
 King of kings forever and ever hallelujah hallelujah
 and Lord of lords forever and ever hallelujah hallelujah
 King of kings forever and ever hallelujah hallelujah
 and Lord of lords
 King of kings and Lord of lords

And He shall reign
 And He shall reign
 And He shall reign
 He shall reign
 And He shall reign forever and ever

King of kings forever and ever
 and Lord of lords hallelujah hallelujah
 And He shall reign forever and ever

King of kings and Lord of lords
 King of kings and Lord of lords
 And He shall reign forever and ever

Forever and ever and ever and ever
 (King of kings and Lord of lords)

Hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah
 Hallelujah

As this demonstrates, lyrical repetitiveness is neither new, nor necessarily indicative of music or theological shallowness. As previously referenced, some of the Psalms (like Psalm 136) are highly repetitive. Others (like Psalms 117 and 150) cannot be described as having great theological depth. Still, God Almighty was pleased to have them included in his inspired, inerrant, infallible Word.

There is something powerfully affectively compelling in such repetition. One sees very much the same phenomenon in religious rituals the world over, including repetitive movements such as swaying or rocking, repetitive words spoken, sung, or chanted, and repetitive rituals like daily or weekly worship services and annual pilgrimages. Such

repetition is neither good nor bad on its own terms because the value of the action's repetition is determined by the value of the action itself. (Taken to physical extremes, repetition can lead to altered states of consciousness like that of the Sufi Whirling Dervishes, but we are not talking about such extremes.) It is, however, a universal aspect of powerful, meaningful religious experiences, as well as other types of events. Think of a sporting event with the crowd "doing the wave," or chanting "We will, we will rock you" as they stomp their feet and clap their hands in that familiar rhythmic pattern.

Newburg, D'Aquili and Rause discuss this from a neurological and physiological perspective, stating, "We've already seen how the rhythmic behaviors of religious ritual can set the mechanism of deafferentation in motion, and how that process can lead to moments of transcendent spiritual unity. The same chain of events can be set in motion less formally by patterns of behavior that have no spiritual intent but are, nonetheless, ritualistic In each case, rhythmic behaviors can lead to unitary states by causing the orientation area to be blocked from neural flow."²⁰⁷

I contend that we need not fear nor disdain songs of a repetitive nature in our services of corporate worship in Miami. Instead of seeing content versus repetition as an "either-or" proposition, it would be better to see it as "both-and." Conscientious, committed, and sensitive pastors and worship leaders will adjust the levels of each and the balance between the two according to the needs of their churches.

Cultural and congregational sensitivities

This raises another issue that is relevant to the amount of repetition desirable in any given service for any given church. I previously stated that sensitivity to congregational and cultural dynamics has not always been a strength of our churches,

²⁰⁷ Newburg et al., 114-115.

helping to explain, at least in part, our decline in numbers and influence in Miami.

Pastors must exegete their cultures and their congregations as carefully as they exegete the Scripture in order to apply the Word of God as effectively as possible.

I believe there is a generational aspect to the amount of repetition a congregation will find most appealing and meaningful. Generally speaking, the younger the congregation, the more repetition they will desire and appreciate, whereas older congregations will likely have a lower tolerance for highly repetitive music.

There may also be cultural dynamics at work in this regard that need to be considered. From what I have observed, Anglos have less appreciation for highly repetitive music than Blacks and Hispanics, although this does not necessarily apply to all aspects of the service. Some primarily Anglo PCA churches get very uncomfortable or even indignant if a service fails to include the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and/or the traditional *Doxology* – none of which are biblically mandated as weekly observances. Again, much of this is simply taste and understanding of what is appropriate for one's congregation. If it helps promote a worshipful atmosphere, repetition can be a very good thing. If it does not, it should be avoided or minimized.

Keller addresses this:

The Bible simply does not give us enough details to shape an entire service when we gather for worship. When the Bible calls us to sing God's praises, we are not given the tunes or the rhythm. We are not told how repetitive the lyrics are to be or how emotionally intense the singing should be. When we are commanded to pray corporate prayers, we are not told whether those prayers should be written, unison prayers or extemporaneous. So to give any concrete form to our gathered worship, we must "fill in the blanks" that the Bible leaves open. When we do so, we will have to draw on tradition; on the needs, capacities, and cultural sensibilities of our people; and on our own personal preferences. Though we cannot avoid drawing on our own preferences, this should never be the driving force (cf. Rom. 15:1-3). Thus, if we fail to do the hard work of consulting both

tradition and culture, we will – wittingly or unwittingly – just tailor music to please ourselves.²⁰⁸

Other aspects of the worship service

As with the preceding section on Intellect, I will not examine every other element of worship, nor will I consider all the manifold aspects and expressions that obtain in Reformed worship. However, one other tension needs consideration.

Emotion versus emotionalism

Reformed people, along with all serious, mature Christians, are understandably wary of emotionalism. Webster's defines emotionalism as "undue indulgence in or display of emotion."²⁰⁹ Many people who have been Christians for a long time have heard about or even participated in worship services or other activities in which the speaker(s), musician(s), or other leader(s) played upon people's emotions in an underhanded or manipulative manner. We have witnessed the emotional excesses and even abuses of the so-called "charismatic" movement, and we want no part of it.

However, there is a vast difference between cheap emotionalism and genuine, heartfelt emotion. I am convinced that a lack of authentic affective involvement in worship is not a sign of spiritual maturity, but rather a sign of spiritual neurosis, which a psychologist might in other contexts call a "blunting of affect."

Even though I came to this conclusion on my own, the idea is far from new. More than two hundred and fifty years ago, Jonathan Edwards said the same thing in much more eloquent terms:

If true religion lies much in the affections, hence we may learn, what great cause we have to be ashamed and confounded before God, that we are no more affected

²⁰⁸ Carson et al., 198.

²⁰⁹ <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/emotionalism>

with the great things of religion. It appears from what has been said, that this arises from our having so little true religion.²¹⁰

How they can sit and hear of the infinite height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the love of God in Christ Jesus, of his giving his infinitely dear Son, to be offered up a sacrifice for the sins of men, and of the unparalleled love of the innocent, and holy, and tender Lamb of God, manifested in his dying agonies, his bloody sweat, his loud and bitter cries, and bleeding heart, and all this for enemies, to redeem them from deserved, eternal burnings, and to bring to unspeakable and everlasting joy and glory; and yet be cold, and heavy, insensible, and regardless! Where are the exercises of our affections proper, if not here? What is it that does more require them? And what can be a fit occasion of their lively and vigorous exercise, if not such a one as this?²¹¹

The glory and beauty of the blessed Jehovah, which is most worthy in itself, to be the object of our admiration and love, is there exhibited in the most affecting manner that can be conceived of, as it appears, shining in all its luster, in the face of an incarnate, infinitely loving, meek, compassionate, dying Redeemer.²¹²

When Christians can hear about the passion, compassion, mercy, betrayal, arrest, trial, suffering, crucifixion, death, and resurrection of the Lord and have no emotional reaction at all, no matter how many times they have heard it, that is not a sign of spiritual maturity. Rather, it is a sign that something is seriously amiss in their hearts, minds, and souls, and it needs to be brought before the Lord in confession and repentance.

I have previously stated my observation that Reformed people have a general mistrust of the emotions in worship. As I was nearing the end of the process of writing this dissertation, a good friend familiar with my topic, a wise and seasoned Christian, sent this to me by way of email:

A good worship quote to digest, incorporate, and perhaps include in your dissertation, from John Piper's *A Hunger for God* (pages 132-133):

This is a very relevant warning for us in a day of great worship renewal. Many people are discovering the joy of meeting God in extended times of emotionally charged singing to the Lord. I personally find such seasons of lingering before the

²¹⁰ Edwards, 51.

²¹¹ Ibid, 52.

²¹² Ibid, 52-53.

Lord a very rich communion with him. But I see a danger. The danger is that we will subtly slip from loving God in these moments into loving loving God. That's the way one of my colleagues put it recently. In other words, we begin to savor not the glory of God but the atmosphere created by worship. When this happens we open ourselves to hypocrisy. And under the cloak of great religious fervor, deadly inconsistencies can emerge in our lives.

I reiterate that this is from a person for whom I have great respect and whose opinion I highly value. Having said that, here is my response (also sent via email), edited only to remove any personal identifiers:

Thanks for the quote.

I have to tell you – brother to brother – the idea that in your typical PCA church there is a real danger “that we will subtly slip from loving God in these moments into loving loving God ... begin to savor not the glory of God but the atmosphere created by worship ... [and fall] under the cloak of great religious fervor” seems about as likely as the proverbial uprising in the graveyard. I *wish* we had to worry about too much such “discovering the joy of meeting God in extended times of emotionally charged singing to the Lord,” “lingering before the Lord,” “savoring the atmosphere created by worship” and “great religious fervor.” How many times have you ever seen that happen in one of our churches? Ever even heard of it?

I'd any day rather have to figure out how to tone down a fire or re-direct it, than how to build a fire under wet wood. I know – I don't have to do it at all, the Holy Spirit will – but you get my drift. That warning, not to worship worship, is undoubtedly necessary in some circles. We're not in those circles.

When that happens in our churches here in Miami, and that's all my dissertation is allowed to describe with any authority, I will gladly call you / email you and say, “Quick! Where's that Piper quote again?!?”

I turn now to the third and final of the three key factors this study considered, the engagement of which is crucial for meaningful worship.

Will

If those interviewed for this project and the experts whose works were consulted seemed more tentative covering the subject of affect than that of intellect, they were still more uncertain when speaking to the issue of volition. It is unclear why this should be so.

To be a Christian involves submission of one's will to the Lordship of Christ.

Sanctification is a lifelong process, motivated by God's grace, of daily submission to his will as revealed in his Word. We do not undertake this journey alone, certainly, nor under our own power. As Paul wrote to the Philippians:

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.²¹³

Many other biblical passages directly address matters of the will:

You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the LORD your God. Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD²¹⁴

These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you.²¹⁵

But from everlasting to everlasting
the LORD's love is with those who fear him,
and his righteousness with their children's children –
with those who keep his covenant
and remember to obey his precepts.²¹⁶

Give me understanding, and I will keep your law
and obey it with all my heart.²¹⁷

For when I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not just give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices, but I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you. But they did not listen

²¹³ Philippians 2:12-13 (NAS).

²¹⁴ Leviticus 18:4-5 (NIV).

²¹⁵ Deuteronomy 6:1-4 (NIV).

²¹⁶ Psalm 103:17-18 (NIV).

²¹⁷ Psalm 119:34, (NIV).

or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward.²¹⁸

Those who are far away will come and help to build the temple of the LORD, and you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you. This will happen if you diligently obey the LORD your God.²¹⁹

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.²²⁰

Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.²²¹

Even the text that is probably most often consulted in articulating the doctrines of grace,

Ephesians 2:8-10, addresses the will of the believer:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.²²²

Jesus certainly had no compunction about aiming for his listeners' wills:

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.²²³

Why do you call Me, "Lord, Lord," and do not do what I say? Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great.²²⁴

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,

²¹⁸ Jeremiah 7:22-24 (NIV).

²¹⁹ Zechariah 6:14-15 (NIV).

²²⁰ Philippians 4: 8-9 (NAS).

²²¹ James 2:17 (NAS).

²²² Ephesians 2:8-10 (NAS).

²²³ Matthew 7:21 (NAS).

²²⁴ Luke 6:46-49 (NAS).

baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."²²⁵

Why, then, should this be “off-limits” as part of corporate worship?

One suspects that our reluctance to seek to connect with our hearers on a volitional level may stem from abuses committed by other preachers and churches (or one’s own), sermons and services that over-emphasized the believer’s responsibility and downplayed or outright neglected the role of grace. Many pastors and worship leaders have been on the receiving end of the homiletical guilt trip, when words such as “You must / must not,” “You should / should not,” far outweighed the words describing what God has graciously done and continues to do in the lives of his people. Such anthropocentric moralization is crushing and enervating, bordering on a plunge into deadly legalism. We want to steer clear of the kind of hypocrisy of which Jesus accused the Pharisees:

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them."²²⁶

However, worship itself is a volitional response to God who, in his grace, reaches out to us unconditionally, saves us from our sins and from hell itself, adopts us into his family, and gives us a place and a purpose. Gore observes, “The two sides of worship may be viewed as (1) God’s initiative of grace, as proclaimed by the minister of the Word, elders, or laypersons on God’s behalf to the congregation, and (2) the response of

²²⁵ Matthew 28:18-20 (NAS).

²²⁶ Matthew 23:1-4 (NIV).

the people to that initiative, as led by the worship leader or leaders.”²²⁷ God graciously calls us to set aside one day in seven to meet with him and our adopted brothers and sisters in corporate worship. Whether or not we do it is largely a matter of will.

Preaching

The question has been raised as to why we in the PCA seem reluctant to connect with our fellow worshipers on the volitional level. Numerous texts have been cited giving biblical precedent for doing so. If seeking to engage the will of the worshiper is a legitimate goal of worship – and I suggest that it is – how then shall we preach?

Edwards says:

And as to a gracious leading of the Spirit, it consists in two things: partly in instructing a person in his duty by the Spirit, and partly in powerfully inducing him to comply with that instruction.²²⁸

Webber amplifies:

To preach Jesus Christ, then, is to preach the kingdom. ... Salvation is no mere assent to facts about the king, but an actualization of repentance, faith, and obedience. ... Because he is that king, he calls people to follow him, to live under his rule, and to establish him as the Lord of their lives. ... His rulership extends over *all* of life.²²⁹

The Reformed faith provides those of us who preach with the best possible platform from which to proclaim the “already and the not-yet” aspects of the kingdom of God. We can confidently encourage and admonish our people to live out their faith between Sundays. Webber goes on to assert:

Because the Reformed framework demonstrated how God was active in history, in national affairs, and in the life of the family, spirituality was returned to the people. Every person’s vocation was a calling from God, a calling that, when followed, was a “lived out” spirituality. ... In the seventeenth century modern evangelical spirituality made a decisive shift toward the subjective. ... (Exception

²²⁷ Gore, 153.

²²⁸ Edwards, 206-07.

²²⁹ Webber, 55.

to this shift into subjectivism is found in those groups today who distinguish themselves as Reformed, i.e., the Presbyterian Church of America.)²³⁰

Consistent with the rest of *Ancient – Future Faith*, the author anchors this vision of the church as an agent of transformation in a model from the past:

One of the earliest figures to espouse the transformational model was Augustine who, in his vision of society, saw two cities existing side by side, the city of man under a secular rule and the city of God under a sacred rule. ... But the church in a post-modern world seeks to transform the world. ... Like Christ, the church will identify with the world, speak prophetically to the world, and minister to the world in a priestly fashion.²³¹

In a city like Miami, there is no shortage of opportunities to act in such a transformational manner. Our PCA churches can, individually and collectively, offer the following: Gospel proclamation and biblical worship in the city; regular body life / fellowship opportunities; discipleship opportunities (Bible studies, prayer groups, other small groups); service opportunities (Habitat for Humanity work days, mission trips); support for other gospel ministries; to pray for and invite to our worship services local mayors, city council members, county commissioners, state representatives and senators, and write letters informing them of our prayers; to pray for and invite firemen, police officers and other public servants; group opportunities to write letters to the editor (primarily the *Miami Herald*, *New Times*, *Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel*) on a monthly or weekly basis; to host discussion groups at Borders and/or Barnes & Nobles book stores; to tutor needy kids (ESOL, math, GED); to help support campus ministries at local Middle Schools, High Schools and colleges; ministry to the homeless, needy, single parents, at-risk youths, recovery groups; web sites that will minister on a deep level to

²³⁰ Ibid., 122.

²³¹ Ibid., 170-71.

those who look to the Internet to find spiritual fulfillment; to help plant other churches in Miami; and to help with relief efforts after hurricanes or other natural disasters.

Probably no single PCA church in Miami can offer all those ministry opportunities. Individually and collectively, however, we can challenge those in our congregations and within our spheres of influence to see themselves as agents of transformation and to invest their lives in one or more of these gospel-based initiatives.

Lou affirmed the notion that motivation plays a role in corporate worship. Asked what they are to be motivated to do, he replied: “To worship ... to apply the sermon.” Asked to describe more specifically how that might impact the worshiper, Lou said that he (the worshiper) would: see more of God’s greatness; be thrilled by his magnificence; express in words and actions that devotion of my whole life to him.

I noted above that this corresponds with the schema of intellect, affect and will. Lou then went on to say that such application should be an “outflow of worship,” and that it would be more intrinsically motivated, activated in the life of the believer by the grace of God. Pressed further as to what that application might look like between Sundays, he said God’s people should: be overwhelmed at the greatness of the God they have met with that morning; express more and more that love and devotion and affection to him (as a direct application / demonstration of the sermon); have more of an inner passion to adore God (resulting in obedience, application). Lou concluded his thoughts on the subject by referencing Jesus’ words, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”²³²

No serious, Bible-believing Christian would disagree with Jesus’ statement. The dividing line among us runs through the area of motivation. We can obey because we

²³² John 14:15 (NAS).

have to, or because we want to. To put it bluntly, it is the difference between legalism and biblical, grace-driven Christianity. Ray addressed this issue in the course of his interview, saying, “We’re happy if we get people to do [whatever the sermon is about] even if they don’t want to, but we should be aiming at getting people to *want* to do it. What makes good worship makes good preaching. What makes good preaching makes good worship.”

I mentioned above that classical homiletics calls for a sermon to contain certain amounts of explanation, illustration, and application. This is a time-honored approach, and I would not be so presumptuous as to suggest that it is flawed. However, on the basis of this study as well as years of pastoral experience and observation, I would propose a fourth ingredient to meaningful, life-impacting preaching, one that I believe to be somewhat lacking in Reformed preaching here in Miami: motivation.

Our first order of business, as men who are called to communicate the timeless, life-changing truths of the Bible to men, women, and young people who do not know what God’s Word says, is to explain as clearly as possible what the passage under consideration means. Most of them will not have a clear understanding of what the Bible (or any given passage) says, and I believe biblical illiteracy is only going to increase in this postmodern era.²³³ Most preachers find that using stories, analogies, and word pictures help them to illuminate the text because they give the listeners a more immediately accessible point of reference. The homiletical task is not complete if we have not given our congregations some idea how to apply the newly apprehended truth(s) in some practical, realistic way.

²³³ I base this on over 30 years of experience as a youth pastor, single adult pastor, and senior pastor; countless discussions with other Christian leaders; and especially the last few years of leading the Inquirers’ classes for my church, where the overall level of biblical illiteracy is breathtaking. And, given the very nature of postmodernism – including its rejection of absolute truth, or truth altogether – it seems unlikely those who subscribe to such a worldview would spend time and effort getting familiar with the Scriptures.

In addition, I maintain that something else is needed in order to make preaching effective beyond the constraints of Sunday morning. In order to "bring the message home," we need to supply incentive to respond to the message in some meaningful way. Absent such motivation, people may leave our services educated, enlightened, entertained, and possibly intrigued, but without the slightest inclination to change as a result of what they learned.

This is not a new challenge. Blamires addressed this more than 40 years ago in words that are remarkably applicable to our churches in Miami today. He said, "It is important never to confuse the notion in the head that a God probably exists with the motion of the will that flings a man on his mercy. Here is perhaps one of the Church's hardest tasks in the pseudo-Christian climate of our country today. It has to deal with people who are quite ready to admit that there may be a God, but who have never felt the slightest impulse to abase themselves before him."²³⁴ To meet this challenge, preachers need to think beyond explanation, illustration and application and think also in terms of motivation to get our people to respond to our preaching in biblically appropriate ways. As a baseball fan, I find it helpful to think of this in terms of a baseball diamond:

²³⁴ Blamires, 146.

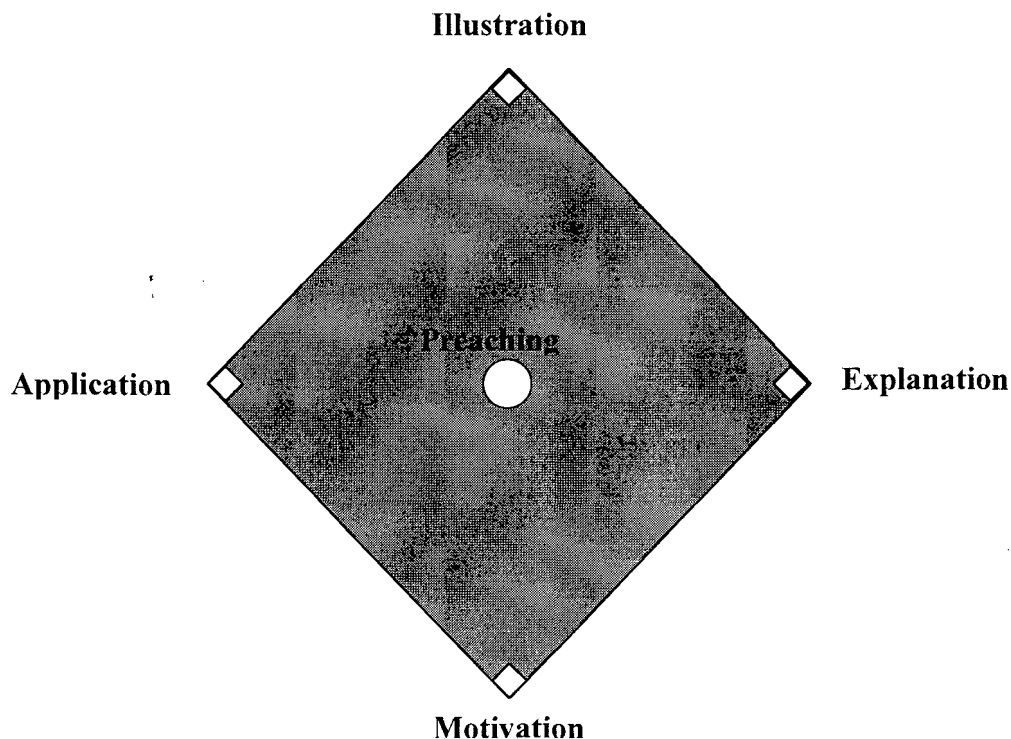


Illustration #1

Explanation (first base), illustration (second base), application (third base), and motivation (home): if we touch all these bases, we have much better prospects of seeing significant, positive, long-term results from our proclamation of God's Word. Of course, there is no guarantee that sermons constructed in this manner, however expertly delivered, will hit home with everyone in attendance, or for that matter, with anyone in attendance. However, I believe that this kind of preaching will connect with our congregations in a way that preaching which ignores or disdains speaking to them on a volitional level will not.

Music

Laura and Ana went into significant technical detail about how music impacts us volitionally. I will add just a few comments of a less technical nature on the subject.

The lyrics of a hymn or contemporary song must be biblically faithful and situationally appropriate. As to the former, Frame's words are on target: "... it is evident that the words of hymns should be both scriptural and understandable to the congregation. Only such words can fulfill the vertical and horizontal purposes of worship: honoring God and edifying people."²³⁵ As to the latter, it would probably be unwise to ask a church filled with primarily young people and Gen-Xers to sing all 17 verses of Charles Wesley's *"And Can It Be That I Should Gain."* It would likewise be equally inappropriate to ask a congregation made up primarily of retirees to sing the Newsboys' *"He Reigns."* However, when chosen wisely, music has tremendous power to impact a service and a congregation. Roff writes:

What is it that music can communicate?

Music has the power to create and intensify our emotions

Music has the power to engage our memory

Music has the power to activate the imagination

Music has the power to motivate our will. ... Words alone do not affect us as deeply as when they are joined with the marching music of Christian soldiers.

Music has the power to comfort the soul²³⁶

Later, the same author adds:

Singing is an aid to worship. Our singing accomplishes these goals:

1. Invitation.
2. Participation.
3. Inspiration.
4. Exhortation.
5. Motivation.²³⁷

Music is a powerful motivational tool. It is not an accident that schools have "fight songs" for their sports teams, that athletes use music to get themselves "psyched up" for a game, or that armies march off to war accompanied by the strains of a "battle

²³⁵ Frame, 135.

²³⁶ Roff, 24-25.

²³⁷ Ibid., 28-29.

hymn.” The annals of church history record similar motivational use of music. Many Christians know, and some churches sing every Sunday, the song we call the "*Gloria Patri*":

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be
World without end. Amen.

Most of those Christians and churches probably do not realize that this song was written as a kind of ecclesiastical "fight song" in response to the Arian heresy, after the Council of Nicea declared Arius to be a heretic in 325 A.D. Arius had denied the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, saying that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were not co-equal as Persons of the eternal God-head. The "*Gloria Patri*" was written, and sung, as a direct confrontational response to that challenge. Against that background, the words take on an entirely new meaning.

Ray speaks to this very issue in his interview remarks:

There are songs that are commitment songs and some songs in their content help to orient us to the task at hand. Another thing the song does it helps the truth come into a deeper place. The songs become a resource to us when we memorize them and they come back to us while we are just going about in our living. I remember on more than one occasion walking down the halls at Duke, surrounded by unbelief, and songs that were a part of our church were coming to my mind. Any number of scriptural commitments in a song that were in me because I had sung them in the fellowship of the saints reminded me that I am a part of a colony and God's army to live differently and proclaim the world's King has come and is coming again. I felt encouraged to the task I was called to but simply the truths are being rooted more deeply in me by having sung them with the saints and keeps me accountable and helps me prepare to take my place in His army.

As worship leaders, we must never use music (or any other part of corporate worship) in any kind of psychologically illegitimate or emotionally manipulative way. However, there is no reason to avoid music's proper use in motivating God's people to affirm God's truth or obey God's will.

Other aspects of the worship service

I will not dwell on all other elements of the worship service. However, the subject of the sacraments does merit brief consideration. The sensory and physical nature of the sacraments help move worship beyond the auditory and visual experience, bridging into the realm of the volitional. Ray addresses this:

One thing I think is that educators have taught us these days is that there are different learning styles. Some people learn in a cerebral way, some visual, some tactile. One way we engage the will is by doing. In the first place, it's very active. Doing liturgy: "*The Lord be with you,*" etc. provides ways we engage the people in doing. The Lord's table is a place where the whole drama of redemption is acted out and literally touches our world with His body, etc. His body becomes the bread that goes on my tongue, His blood becomes more than an abstraction: it is on my tongue and goes in my system. It presses home to me: my God came into my world to save me.

Baptism – the more physical that can be the better. God bless the Baptists. The more active the whole action is, the more it helps us understand the drama. When you can include a baptismal and renewal vow by the whole congregation you give people a chance to say, *I, too, renounce sin and the world. I, too, once again accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior and declare my intentions forever.* When the church does an offering, [it is] a symbol, it is a commitment to give in service of Jesus – we help engage people's wills. You're not all the way home, but you've started on the journey by helping people: they are doing the faith, not just saying it. We show our actual belief reflected by what we do, the wholeness of our being. There's a dynamic feedback between our will and we will act differently, talk differently, just by acting out. Sacraments go hand in hand with the will.

Carson concurs:

Christian worship embraces both adoration and action.²³⁸

Adoration and acting go hand in hand in the worship of God.²³⁹

If we are truly receiving grace in the presence of the living God, three results should occur. ...²⁴⁰

(c) Character for service.

²³⁸ Carson, et al., 43.

²³⁹ Ibid., 67.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 217.

Edwards, in his *Religious Affections*, said that the acid test of a heart with its affections truly raised toward God (his definition of worship) is love toward one's neighbor, working for the common good in society.

Corporate worship is only true and effective when it leads us to the "all of life" worship of doing justice and living generously (Heb 13:16). Wolterstorff makes the point that God's action in the service perfectly mirrors his action in the world, so that if our hearts are truly forged anew by gospel reenactment, we will, like him, move out into the world in welcome of the poor, the stranger, the marginalized. This is one of the reasons that Calvin wanted alms for the poor incorporated into regular corporate worship.²⁴¹

As Edwards says in his own pithy way:

Now from all that has been said, I think it to be abundantly manifest, that Christian practice is the most proper evidence of the gracious sincerity of professors, to themselves and others; and the chief of all the marks of grace, the sign of signs, and evidence of evidences, that which seals and crowns all other signs. ... There may be several good evidences that a tree is a fig tree; but the highest and most proper evidence of it is, that it actually bears figs.²⁴²

Entertainment versus Edification versus Exaltation

Much has been made, and legitimately so, of the church's recent attempt to make corporate worship more entertaining. Some churches seem to feel a need to compete with television, Madison Avenue, and Hollywood in how they present their worship services. While there is no specific merit in keeping our times of worship dull, and many Reformed churches could no doubt benefit from a little lightening up, we must keep in mind that our priority in worship is not to entertain. It is not to evangelize the non-Christian. Nor, for that matter, is it to edify the Christian. The Bible emphasizes that worship is to glorify God. If people come to our services of worship and are mightily entertained and powerfully educated, but they are not offered the opportunity to encounter the God who is transcendent, "high and lifted up," but also immanent, closer

²⁴¹ Ibid., 220.

²⁴² Edwards, 363.

than a brother, then they have been robbed of the most important reason to attend a worship service in the first place – an encounter with our living Lord.

Dawn says as much:

If our worship merely offers a diversion, we have lost the eschatological call to involvement in the world's needs and investment of ourselves for the sake of God's ministry purposes. Instead of being distracted from the needs of our society, eschatology plunges us into them because the reign of God gives us the courage, the strength, the tools, and the power of the Spirit at work through us already to care for our neighbors' sufferings. Worship is not to escape, but to encounter. As we worship we are changed, so that when we leave the worship service we go out to change the world.²⁴³

The most important question we must always ask about any element in our worship is whether it keeps God as the Subject and Object of our corporate fathering. This will never change: our fundamental criteria must always be how what we do in worship enables us to encounter the true and living, reigning God.²⁴⁴

Old concurs:

The greatest single contribution that the Reformed liturgical heritage can make to contemporary American Protestantism is its sense of the majesty and sovereignty of God, its sense of reverence and simple dignity, its conviction that worship must above all serve the praise of God.²⁴⁵

Keller has a lot to say about to how to practically convey this sense of the transcendent:

How can we bring people into transcendent awe and wonder in God's presence when Calvin forbade the most obvious way to "create" that sense of awe – the use of the spectacular or the maudlin? This is accomplished in the following ways.

First, the sense of transcendence is dependent on the quality of speaking, reading, praying, and singing. Sloppiness drains the "vertical" dimension out of gathered worship immediately. ...

The second way we get transcendence with simplicity is the demeanor or heart attitude of those leading in the gathered worship. ...

²⁴³ Dawn, 361.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 365.

²⁴⁵ Old, 176.

Transcendence is served best when both delight and awe are evident in the leaders' demeanor and heart. Then the congregation will sense that it is being ushered into God's presence. ...

If we have a more antinomian view of salvation There will be no awe. That can lead to the exclusively warm, "folksy" demeanor. If, on the other hand, we have a more legalistic view of salvation There will be no wonder. That can lead to an overly stiff and dignified manner. ...

While an exclusively warm and happy attitude by the worship leaders can give a good sense of unity and community in the Lord ..., an exclusively dignified and serious attitude does not bring a sense of transcendence and the fear of the Lord. Rather, it creates an atmosphere of remoteness, grimness, and severity. I make this additional comment because many writers and church leaders who rightly disdain the loss of transcendence (especially in "contemporary" worship) may move to the other extreme. They encourage dignity and seriousness but without a deep joy mixed in with it. Such a spirit will not help people into the presence of God. ...

Of course, all terms such as "dignified" are somewhat culturally elastic. ...

Only a joyful yet awe-filled heart – an exuberant decorum – can keep pomp and sentimentality from mimicking the two true poles of biblical worship: awe and intimacy.²⁴⁶

Our people need to have both God's transcendence and immanence

communicated to them. Many passages emphasize the togetherness of our relationship with Jesus. The New Testament says we have been crucified together (Gal. 2:20), dead together (Col 2:20), buried together (Rom 6:4), made alive together (Eph 2:5), raised together (Col 3:1), made to suffer together (Rom 8:17), and glorified together (Rom 8:17).

Jesus himself said:

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ Carson et al., 211-214.

²⁴⁷ John 15:13-15 (NIV).

Seeking to maintain a balance between God's transcendence and his immanence is an overwhelming task. It can paralyze worship leaders. Therefore, we must continually emphasize the overriding goal of God's grace in corporate worship and for us as worship leaders. We will never attain that perfect balance between transcendence and immanence, but we must see that as our goal. Anything less is a disservice both to God and to our fellow worshipers, and will not issue a compelling call for lives changed to the glory of God. Dawn writes:

Sometimes the rejection of the sacred is more obvious in the elimination of all awe and reverence from worship, in reducing God to his immanence without any sense of transcendence. ...

What churches must do, in the face of our culture's rejection of the sacred, is offer worship that gives the largest vision possible of the full splendor of God. This requires careful attention to what the Church has learned over time about how worship can do that, and it requires the best use of all the tools – new and old – for displaying God's splendor and immersing worshipers in it.

Moreover, what we must do instead of reducing worship is continually teach people more and more of the meaning of what we do in worship and immerse them in the beauty of its practices.

Most of all, however we should not reduce the splendor of worship; instead, we must make sure that we have found balance of both accessibility, and richness, mystery and instruction.²⁴⁸

If our worship merely offers a diversion, we have lost the eschatological call to involvement in the world's needs and investment of ourselves for the sake of God's ministry purposes. Instead of being distracted from the needs of our society, eschatology plunges us into them because the reign of God gives us the courage, the strength, the tools, and the power of the Spirit at work through us already to care for our neighbors' sufferings. Worship is not to escape, but to encounter. As we worship we are changed, so that when we leave the worship service we go out to change the world.²⁴⁹

The most important question we must always ask about any element in our worship is whether it keeps God as the Subject and Object of our corporate fathering. This will never change: our fundamental criteria must always be how

²⁴⁸ Dawn, 233-34.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 361.

what we do in worship enables us to encounter the true and living, reigning God.²⁵⁰

Edwards unites God's transcendence, his immanence, and the changed lives of God's people in typical compelling fashion:

Only the beauty of God's holiness changes lives: But the saints and angels do behold the glory of God consisting in the beauty of his holiness; and it is this sight only that will melt and humble the hearts of men, and wean them from the world, and draw them to God, and effectually change them. A sight of the awful greatness of God, may overpower men's strength, and be more than they can endure; but if the moral beauty of God be hid, the enmity of the heart will remain in its full strength, no love will be enkindled, all will not be effectual to gain the will, but that will remain inflexible; whereas the first glimpse of the moral and spiritual glory of God shining into the heart, produces all these effects as it were with omnipotent power, which nothing can withstand.²⁵¹

Christian practice is the sign of signs, in this sense, that it is the great evidence, which confirms and crowns all other signs of godliness. There is no one grace of the Spirit of God, but that Christian practice is the most proper evidence of the truth of it. ...

Practice is the proper proof of the true and saving knowledge of God; as appears by that of the apostle already mentioned, "hereby do we know that we know him, that we keep his commandments."²⁵²

I offer this diagram as an illustration of how this might be visualized:

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 365.

²⁵¹ Edwards, 190-91.

²⁵² Ibid., 364-65.

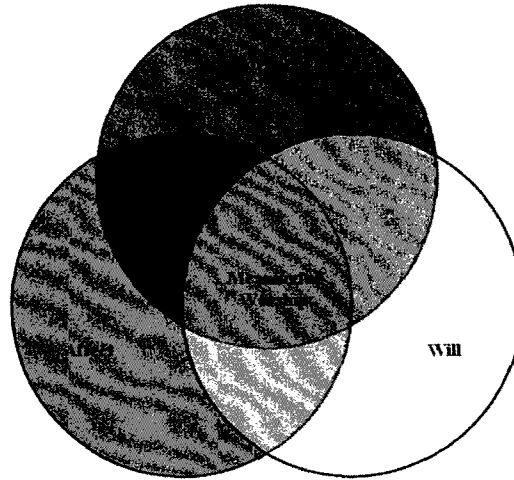


Illustration #2

If we engage our people intellectually, they are enlightened.
 If we engage our people affectively, they are encouraged.
 If we engage our people volitionally, they are empowered.
 If we engage our people on all three levels, they are transformed.

Gore says something very much to this effect:

I found myself longing for an experience of worship that went beyond either emotionalism or intellectualism.²⁵³

Another way of explaining this would be to note that humans are rational beings, but they are more than rational beings. Humans consist of intellect, but they are more than intellect, for they have will and emotions as well. Humans are creatures of the senses as well as of the mind. No one is perfectly balanced, and some will inevitably give a greater role to the emotions, while others may limit their affections by giving reign to the intellect. Regardless of the particular orientation of an individual, the fact remains that the believer operates on all levels, seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching, thinking, rejoicing, sorrowing. Thus, a balanced service of worship will speak to the mind, but it will also speak to the heart, to the emotions, to the will.²⁵⁴

Dalbey agrees, stressing the primacy of biblically sound, theocentric worship:

What does it mean to worship the Father in spirit and truth? While true worship must be empowered by the Holy Spirit, the use of spirit here most likely refers to the human spirit or affections. Worship must come from the core of one's being. The affections orients [*sic*] the worshiper's mind, will, and emotions toward God.

²⁵³ Gore, 14.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 155-56.

God's people are to worship in humility while fully engaged with God Himself. Worship in truth means in full harmony and doctrinal soundness of what God has revealed in the Bible. Jesus defines worship. Worship involves grasping the truth of God's revealed Word and then letting it strike the center of one's being.²⁵⁵

Dawn sounds this same note, anchoring worship in the character of God, with our faithful response as a byproduct:

To be the sort of people who will gladly fulfill our responsibility for witness and mentoring and nurturing care we need meaty worship – worship that engages us deeply in an encounter with the God whose splendor is illimitably beyond our understanding, worship that shakes us out of our narcissism and consumerism, worship that disciplines us and thereby equips us for the work of the kingdom in witness and vocation and suffering.²⁵⁶

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Style

Style of worship is not a new problem. Disagreement over liturgy and worship style goes back hundreds of years (if not more), as White notes:

During the first four days of October 1529 occurred one of the great moments of truth of the Protestant Reformation. To Protestant leaders meeting at Marburg came the clear recognition that they could not agree on all matters of worship, although they could reach unanimity on every other important item. Thus, despite their best efforts, a pattern was established that has ever since been a prominent characteristic of Protestant worship – disparate traditions. Such a development was probably inevitable, but it was not deliberately planned by the movement's leaders. A generation later, by 1563, such variety had been made an article of belief by the twenty-fourth of the Anglican "Articles of Religion." Today, unlike the sixteenth century, diversity does not seem to be the result of failure but is recognized as a positive good in itself; the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* echoes the Thirty-Nine Articles in commending the idea that peoples and attitudes be reflected in worship by "variations and adaptations to different groups, regions, and peoples."²⁵⁷

Old concurs. His insight into what occurred at the time of the Reformation is not only enlightening, it actually sounds remarkably familiar:

²⁵⁵ Dalbey, 14.

²⁵⁶ Dawn, 127.

²⁵⁷ White, 58.

With the Reformation the praises of the church took a very different direction. The Reformers wanted the whole congregation to sing the praises of the church. They wanted the people to sing in their own language and in music simple enough for the people to learn. This meant, quite practically speaking, the production of a wholly new church music. One could not really expect the whole congregation to sing what the trained monastic choirs had been singing, nor could one simply translate the Latin texts into German or French and sing the new text to the old music. Besides that, taste in music was changing rapidly. The average Renaissance musician regarded the liturgical music of the late Middle Ages with disdain. Even the sophisticated Erasmus would rather hear no music in church than hear the music of the monks. This often happens to even the best of music; people simply get tired of it. Those who sing it get tired of it, and those who hear it get tired of it. The music was not bad as much as it was stale. The Reformation was amazingly successful in refreshing the praises of the church.²⁵⁸

Sadly, “worship wars” have been going on for generations. I would not be surprised to learn that there were arguments over musical style and instrumentation in the Tabernacle as Shimea and his sons brought in their songs,²⁵⁹ and in the Temple as David introduced some of the Psalms. I do not believe that PCA churches in Miami should practice exclusive psalmody, utilize traditional hymns exclusively, or sing only contemporary songs to the neglect of the others. I have heard countless arguments in support of each of these positions, but find them all unpersuasive for various reasons.

Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs

Old observes that the early church did not practice exclusive psalmody, attesting that the earliest Christians sang praises other than the 150 canonical psalms: the Song of Mary (Luke 1:46-55), the Song of Zechariah (Luke 1:68-79), and the Song of Simeon (Luke 2:29-32). Old refers to Philippians 2:5-11 and Colossians 1:15-20 as early Christian hymns.²⁶⁰ He then adds:

There is little question that the first Christians wrote hymns to Christ and sang them in their worship side by side with psalms they sang as fulfilled prophecies of

²⁵⁸ Old, 42.

²⁵⁹ 1 Chronicles 6:30.

²⁶⁰ Old., 37-38.

the coming messiah. In fact, very shortly after New Testament times, we read in one of the letters of the Roman governor Pliny the younger (61 – ca.113) to the Emperor Trajan (53-117) a short description of a Christian worship service. It clearly says that the Christians sang hymns to Christ.²⁶¹

Exclusive hymnody cuts a congregation off from what the Spirit of God is doing today in renewing his church. Frame writes:

Periods of revival, when great numbers of people profess Christ and believers are renewed in their faith, almost always produce new developments in hymnody. ...

Both Lutherans and Calvinists borrowed musical styles and occasionally whole tunes from secular sources. ...

It was important to the Reformers (as to the apostle Paul in Rom. 14) that worship be intelligible and meaningful to the worshipers, as well as honoring to God. Predictably, of course, people outside the Reformation movement sometimes argued that the new music was irreverent. ...

The evangelical awakening of the 1700s, led by the Wesleys and George Whitefield, produced a great outpouring of new music These hymns tended to stress the personal experience of redemption more than the older hymns did, though of course reference to such experience in worship is as old as the Psalms. Think of "*And Can It Be That I Should Gain*" and "*Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me.*" Some Presbyterians, however, resisted the new music, either on the ground that psalms alone are appropriate for worship, or as part of their general resistance to revivalism. Many of them thought that these hymns, like the revivalist preachers, were too subjective, too popular in musical style, and not doctrinally reliable.²⁶²

Kidd concurs:

Churches and artists who express their praise in the musical language of popular culture are following the example of the writers of the New Testament. "Nothing is more socializing than common speech; nothing more clique forming than jargon," contends Eugène Peterson. Early Christians saw God building a church, not putting together a clique, and so they reached out with common speech. When Christians today worship God in musical Koine, whether they realize it or not, they are following the same script.²⁶³

Exclusive use of contemporary music cuts us off from the beauty, depth, and richness of almost 500 years of Reformed history. Keller adds:

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Frame, 115-16.

²⁶³ Kidd, 167.

But several problems attend the promotion of strictly contemporary worship. ... First, some popular music does have severe limitations for corporate worship. ... Second, when we ignore historic tradition, we break our solidarity with Christians of the past. ... An unwillingness to consult tradition is not in keeping with either Christian humility or Christian community. ... Finally, any corporate worship that is strictly contemporary will become dated very quickly.²⁶⁴

All three positions contain at least an element of selfishness, arrogance, superiority, and lack of concern for Christians who do not share that particular preference – none of which are commendable gospel-based, grace-driven, Christ-centered attributes. In the end, all three of these options advance little more than someone’s personal preference. Frame addresses this problem:

Nobody can prove from Scripture or statistics that formal worship generates depth and authenticity more than informal worship, or vice versa. ... In any case, there is no technique for insuring that such experiences will take place. All we can do is make sure that our own hearts, as worshipers, are seeking to honor the Lord.²⁶⁵

Therefore, if we are to pursue the biblical goal of intelligible worship (1Cor. 14), we should seek musical settings that speak the musical languages of our congregation and community. To do this is not to cater to human taste, but to honor God in his desire to edify people in his worship. We should not selfishly insist on using music only from our own favorite tradition. Rather, in the spirit of Christ the servant, we must be willing to sacrifice our own preferences in order to reach others with the truth. The Great Commission turns us outward, rather than inward: it calls us even in worship to reach out to those who are ignorant of Christ and of our musical traditions. ...

There are people who will say that they just “cannot” worship using music of one style or another. Sometimes, such complaints are legitimate. But in the typical dispute, some people argue that contemporary music sounds cheap and unworthy. (Perhaps it sounds too much like the secular music that they associate with their sinful past.) Others argue that traditional music seems dull and formal, so that it doesn’t seem to amount to “real worship.” I believe that Scripture would classify both of these groups as “weaker” believers (Rom. 14). Paul urges believers in such disputes to stay together, loving one another in Christ, neither despising nor judging one another. But, as we know, sometimes these disputes do lead to divisions. ...

²⁶⁴ Carson et al., 184.

²⁶⁵ Frame, 85.

Such divisions are defeats, not triumphs. The goal of history is the gathering of a vast multitude from every kingdom, tongue, tribe, and nation, joining in praise to God together. ...

One way God works among us, then, is when we learn one another's music.²⁶⁶

For these and other reasons, I advocate a blended musical format for worship.

Using songs from a variety of musical genres, while not always easy, provides a satisfactory answer to the concerns mentioned above. It allows a congregation to benefit from the richness of songs taken directly from the Psalms and other scriptures, the depth and beauty of traditional hymns, and the freshness, vibrancy, and intimacy of contemporary praise and worship music. (This presumes that a church has the requisite musical skill to offer all the above.)

Dawn has much to say about this:

I want the best from both [traditional and contemporary] sides, since the Church's treasure house is filled with both new and old. Since our congregations are linked to all God's people throughout space and time, we need both continuity with our heritage and constant reformation using faithful new forms and words and musical styles.²⁶⁷

I believe unremittingly that it is utterly dangerous for churches to offer choices of worship styles. By doing so we reinforce the idolatrous way of life that worship is intended to expose, disarm, and conquer (see three-fold work of Christ against the powers in Colossians 2:14 -15).²⁶⁸

Style is not the issue. The genuine worship of God is. ... The reason that worship in the Christian heritage always begins with the invocation, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," is so that we remember we are part of the whole company of believers since the time of the Gospels who have been baptized into the triune name, who believe in that triune God, and who are gathered together across space and time to worship him.²⁶⁹

The division into "Traditional" and "Contemporary" seems to match the tension of truth and love in the Scriptures. ... Older music, written in eras that were more

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 140-142.

²⁶⁷ Dawn, 66.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 98.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 155.

objective in orientation, most often stresses content, whereas new music is frequently more directed to loving God. Both are needed, so they ought not to be separated. ... To split a congregation into traditional and contemporary worship services deprives the “traditionalists” of new expressions of faith. They do not learn anything fresh and lack the nourishment of reformation and renewal. Similarly, splitting the congregation robs the “contemporaryists” of continuity with the Church throughout time. It steals from them their roots in Judaica and the early Church and takes from them the wisdom of all the ages of the developing Church.²⁷⁰

It is important to learn to sing songs I might not like for the sake of the community. If tunes are interesting and singable and if the words are theologically sound, then a Christian should be willing to sing it for the sake of brothers and sisters for whom it might be especially useful spiritually.²⁷¹

The worst result of turning worship into a matter of taste is that to do so is to lose sight of the fact that it is God we are worshipping – not ourselves. And God, I hear, has widely eclectic tastes! ... All of the dangers above contribute to narcissism, to preferring ourselves, which in turn prevents witness, concern, and outreach to the neighbor.²⁷²

Perhaps we have to rewrite Galatians 3:28 these days to stop this division of our churches according to tastes. Instead of “there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, bond nor free,” now perhaps Paul would declare, “there is neither boomer nor X-er, neither traditionalist nor lover of jazz, neither guitarist nor organist, neither old nor young, neither black nor white, but everyone has gifts to contribute to the praise of God and the well-being of the communion of saints.”²⁷³

Keller also addresses both sides of the traditional (he prefers the term “historical”)

/ contemporary tension, also advocating a blended approach:

Hidden (but not well) in the arguments of CW [contemporary worship] enthusiasts is the assumption that culture is basically neutral and that thus there is no reason why we cannot wholly adopt any particular cultural form for our gathered worship. But worship that is not rooted in any particular historic tradition will often lack the critical distance necessary to critique and avoid the excesses and distorted sinful elements of the particular surrounding culture. For example, how can we harness contemporary Western culture’s accessibility and frankness but not its individualism and psychologizing of moral problems? ...

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 190.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 191.

²⁷² Ibid., 192.

²⁷³ Ibid., 367.

But problems also attend the promotion of strictly traditional, historic worship. First, HW [historical worship] advocates cannot really dodge the charge of cultural elitism. ... any proponent of “historic” corporate worship will have to answer the question, “Whose history?” ... Do we really want to assume that the sixteenth-century northern European approach to emotional expression and music (incarnate in the Reformation tradition) was completely biblically informed and must be preserved?²⁷⁴

I have mentioned that most PCA churches in Miami were begun as primarily Anglo congregations, with typically Anglo preferences and tastes in worship styles, especially music. As time has passed, those congregations have aged and become more set in their ways. Miami has changed dramatically. Many of those original members have died, and many have moved away. For the ones who remain, adapting to our changing community has been difficult – and that includes the way we worship.

In order to offer corporate worship services that are most meaningful to the largest number of people in a culturally diverse city such as Miami, it is imperative that we utilize a variety of musical styles. To exclude any one (Psalms, traditional hymns, contemporary songs of a variety of styles) is to say to a significant segment of our population, “We do not care about ministering to you. We do not care if you can join in with us in the worship of our living God. We do not care if you ever become a participating part of this church.”

It is difficult to change that mindset. Old preferences, like old habits, do not give way easily. Gore speaks to this issue frankly:

Finally, there are congregations that seek to maintain their theological integrity while exploring the possibilities of vibrant, creative worship. They pursue this goal with intentional awareness of their surrounding culture. Here a genuine desire to understand the principles regulating biblical worship is coupled with an equally intense desire to make worship meaningful to the worshiper. This, in my estimation, is the best of all possible situations. Honesty demands the admission,

²⁷⁴ Carson et al., 195-96.

however, that this is all too infrequently the case in evangelical Presbyterian congregations.²⁷⁵

Frame, a classically trained musician as well as an experienced worship leader, agrees:

Such change, however, can be painful to some. To younger generations, it represents an increase in intelligibility, but older generations, it may represent a loss. Some complaints of the older generations may be petty, creating unnecessary conflict over matters of musical taste, but generally their complaints are more serious than that. One's hymnody is his language of worship; it is the language of his heart's conversation with God. To lose the hymns one has grown up singing is, therefore, no small thing. The younger generations should learn to sympathize with this sense of loss and to accommodate their desires to the spiritual needs of their fathers and mothers in Christ. But the opposite is also true: if the older do not bend somewhat, the younger will be deprived of their own language of worship – those forms of God's word intelligible to them, by which they can best grow in Christ. In this respect, both sides should defer to one another in love, in the Spirit of Christ (Matt. 20:20-26).²⁷⁶

As Reformed Christians, we must always remember the principle of *Sola Scriptura*. We must allow Scripture to guide us in worship, as in all of life, and to overrule our own preferences and habits when necessary. Old speaks directly to this:

Reformed theology has always made a very clear distinction between Scripture and tradition. Scripture has authority, and tradition has the value of witnessing to that authority. ... In the last analysis we are not so much concerned with what tradition tells us about worship as with what tradition tells us about what Scripture has to say about worship.

The basic acts of worship we perform because they are clearly commanded in Scripture. The ways and means of doing them we try to order according to scriptural principles.²⁷⁷

As Reformed people, as Christians, we must rise above the pettiness that often accompanies disagreements over musical styles. We will not always love one another's music, but we must always love one another. If the Samaritan in the well-loved parable

²⁷⁵ Gore, 11.

²⁷⁶ Frame, 117.

²⁷⁷ Old, 171-72.

could go out of his way to help the injured Jew,²⁷⁸ surely we can cross over to the other side and sing one another's music. Once again, we do well to heed Calvin's advice: "If we let love be our guide, we are safe."²⁷⁹

C.S. Lewis addressed the necessary kind of mindset in his own inimitable, poignant way:

When I first became a Christian, about fourteen years ago, I thought that I could do it on my own, by retiring to my rooms and reading theology, and wouldn't go to the churches and Gospel Halls I disliked very much their hymns, which I considered to be fifth-rate poems set to sixth-rate music. But as I went on I saw the merit of it. I came up against different people of quite different outlooks and different education, and then gradually my conceit just began peeling off. I realized that the hymns (which were just sixth-rate music) were, nevertheless, being sung with devotion and benefit by an old saint in elastic-side boots in the opposite pew, and then you realize that you aren't fit to clean those boots. It gets you out of your solitary conceit.²⁸⁰

May that spirit increase in our churches.

Flow

I have already addressed at length music's role in the worship service. It remains to make a few observations as to what kinds of music, how much of each, in what order and so forth. Years ago in the DM802 class on Worship which I took at Covenant Theological Seminary, the group of pastors (from around the country and from various denominations) that took that course together identified several key factors that make for meaningful worship. The top four factors were:

1. Robust, heartfelt congregational singing.
2. Meaningful, well-prepared messages.
3. A sense of flow and seamlessness.

²⁷⁸ Luke 10:25-37.

²⁷⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.x.30.

²⁸⁰ C. S. Lewis, "Answers to Questions on Christianity," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 61-62.

4. A sense of abandonment into God's presence.²⁸¹

I have found in my own pastoral experience, and I have confirmed by the testimonies of other pastors and worship leaders, that the best way to facilitate numbers one, three, and four on that list is to allow the congregation to sing for an extended period. (As to number two, we pastors and preachers must rely upon study, preparation, prayers, and God's grace.) While each congregation is different, we have found that singing at least three songs in a row helps achieve that sense of flow. This allows people to enter into an attitude and posture of praise. We try to do this with as little verbal direction as possible, so as to not distract our people from focusing on God. For the same reason, we also try to segue from one piece of music to the other as seamlessly as possible.

In addition, we make it a point to only introduce one new piece of music on any given Sunday. Further, we do not introduce new music several Sundays in a row, as that tends to make our people feel overwhelmed and disoriented. We have also found that repeating a new piece two or three weeks in a row is helpful. This means that over a year's time we might introduce our congregation to approximately 20 new songs.

Based on my own experience and the input from my interview subjects, I have found that during the course of a service it is best to move from the familiar to the less familiar and back again to the familiar as the congregation sings. Frame agrees:

One general pattern that I have found edifying has been to sing one or two traditional hymns (taking advantage of the greater theological richness of that genre) and then follow them with a simple contemporary praise chorus, in which the people can meditate on the rich truths and give childlike adoration to the God who has done such wonderful things.²⁸²

²⁸¹ DM 802, class discussion.

²⁸² Frame, 149-50.

So did Ray in our interview:

They want to be encouraged by the grace, to find a way to touch base with both of those sides of the Christian experience. In worship design – there's got to be a certain relationship in the mind and heart (like breathing out and in). I'm looking to content in our musical repertoire that people are learning to think better. It also means to have joy and bask in the truth ... to stay under the savvy or conviction of a single idea. I like the songs that are relatively rich textually alongside songs that are simple. It is really important to go to both types of songs.

Laura gave some technical structure to this idea:

Kent: Back to the music: if we're singing three or four songs, assuming that some would be more familiar than others, how would you structure them?

Laura: I always like to start with something familiar, and then go to something maybe a little less familiar. If you have five pieces, you begin and end with the familiar. Even the familiar can be orchestrated in an unfamiliar way, say in a more contemporary arrangement.

Kent: What happens, when we're singing a contemporary piece that is maybe not as familiar, then you turn the corner and you take us back into "Amazing Grace" –

Laura: Everyone goes like, "Ahhh, yes."

Kent: Why?

Laura: It's a known entity. We already have a relationship with that song.

Kent: So why do I care if I sing that after the less familiar song, as opposed to before the less familiar song?

Laura: Because we want resolution.

I have often observed that sense of resolution, that feeling of "coming home," when the singing moves from the less familiar to the more familiar. This congregational involvement is a crucial part of meaningful worship, as my fellow pastors noted. Another key ingredient in helping our people stay engaged as we sing is contrast:

Kent: Worship is not a spectator sport So, if we want to touch people intellectually, affectively, and volitionally, contrast is key.

Laura: Yes – contrast keeps people engaged.

Kidd confirms this:

I've noticed that worship songs that come from so-called "praise and worship" sectors are inclined to address God in the second person. This is a refreshing complement to hymns that more often (though not exclusively, of course) sing about God in the third person. Pastor John Piper rightly argues that though praise choruses are often musically simple, many of them articulate a hunger for transcendence.²⁸³

He then adds a new dimension:

While hymns are rather linear and content-laden, and while linearity and content are good, praise songs are more modular (focused on a single idea) and directly affective. Modularity and affect have their own virtue. It is simply off task to critique a praise song for not being a hymn. The power of any particular praise song has a lot to do with what it is teamed up with. To my mind, craftsmanship in worship design has as its first task the wedding of "right brain" and "left brain" elements, largely through the juxtaposition of thoughtful hymns and expressive choruses.²⁸⁴

Psalms and hymns are more stand alone entities, praise songs are more satisfying in juxtaposition. It is less the individual songs that matter but the flow that sets side by side different elements of worship. There may often be a richness to a set of songs that is greater than the sum of its parts – the songs cannot be evaluated, much less appreciated, atomistically. I am reminded of the way Psalm 108 uses portions of previous psalms (Psalm 57 is an individual complaint that ends with trust; and Psalm 60 is a corporate complaint that ends with assurance) to say something new: Psalm 108 weds the confidence sections from both psalms and "produces a particularly powerful message of conviction in the midst of conflict" (*Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible*, 924).²⁸⁵

It is to this new dimension I would briefly turn my attention.

Holistic Worship

Earlier I referred to the fact that human beings have other ways of "knowing" and perceiving beyond what takes place in the brain. I referenced Cooper's research showing that we have, in his words, "three brains," including the "brain in the gut," or the enteric nervous system, the "brain in the heart," and the traditional "brain in the head." Each of

²⁸³ Kidd, 175.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 203.

these, according to Cooper, provides distinct but complementary input and feedback that contributes to our overall way of knowing and experiencing.²⁸⁶ I also referenced the idea that, according to Cooper, Gladwell, and others, these other "brains" – the ones in the "gut" and the heart – often sense and perceive things more quickly than the brain that is nestled within the cranium. I contend that when it comes to corporate worship, people form impressions and opinions as to whether they like, enjoy, agree with, are comfortable with, interested in, and edified by what is taking place around them in ways other than rational, cognitive processes.

This has profound implications for the way we worship in PCA churches. This is not to suggest that we overlook or deemphasize the cognitive aspects of our services, especially preaching, but rather that we should pay more attention to the more affective, aesthetic, artistic, and volitional aspects.

I have also referenced the old left brain / right brain dichotomous model, where the left cerebral hemisphere is linear, logical, and analytical, and the right hemisphere is artistic, poetic and creative. This model appears to have some validity. Gladwell writes: "Your brain has a part (the left hemisphere) that thinks in words, and a part (the right hemisphere) that thinks in pictures"²⁸⁷ However, this view of the brain has given way to one in which we understand that linear, analytical functions are not exclusively the property of the left hemisphere, and artistic, creative functions not solely those of the right.

Consider the following from Newburg, D'Aquili and Rause:

At the same time, however, there are important differences in the way the hemispheres work. The classic understanding is that the left hemisphere is more

²⁸⁶ Cooper, 12-25.

²⁸⁷ Gladwell, 119.

analytically inclined and is recognized as the center of verbal language and mathematical processes. The right hemisphere works in a more abstract, holistic way, as a center of nonverbal thought, visual-spatial perceptions, and the perception, modulation, and an expression of emotions. But we want to emphasize that both hemispheres can contribute to similar mental functions.²⁸⁸

We believe that the orientation association area is extremely important in the brain's sense of mystical and religious experiences, which often involve altered perceptions of space and time, self and ego. Since the orientation association area is instrumental in shaping these basic perceptions, it must somehow be an integral part of spiritual experience.²⁸⁹

Neurology makes it clear: There's no other way for God to get into your head except through the brain's neural pathways.²⁹⁰

The similarities between these intentionally and unintentionally triggered states point to a clear link between the autonomic nervous system and the brain's potential for spiritual experience. We suspect that the autonomic nervous system is, in fact, fundamental to religious experience.²⁹¹

The human limbic system interweaves emotional impulses with higher thoughts and perceptions to produce a broad, flexible repertoire of highly complex emotional states such as disgust, frustration, envy, surprise, and delight. ... Studies have also indicated that the limbic system is integral to religious and spiritual experiences. ... Because of its involvement in religious and spiritual experiences, the limbic system has sometimes been referred to as the "transmitter to God."²⁹²

It therefore seems highly likely that something is happening in the hypothalamus during spiritual experiences and religious practices. Located in the middle of the temporal lobe, the amygdala is also one of the oldest structures of the brain and controls and mediates virtually all high-order emotional functions.²⁹³

Any idea might trigger a myth if it can unify logic and intuition, and lead to a state of left-brain/right-brain agreement. In this state of whole-brain harmony, neurological uncertainties are powerfully alleviated as existential opposites are reconciled and the problem of cause is resolved. To the anxious mind, this resonant whole-brain agreement feels like a glimpse of ultimate truth. The mind seems to live this truth, not merely comprehend it, and it is this quality of visceral experience that turns ideas into myths.²⁹⁴

²⁸⁸ Newburg, D'Aquili and Rause, 20-21.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 29.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 37.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 39.

²⁹² Ibid., 42.

²⁹³ Ibid., 44.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 73.

For most worshipers, ritual provides a much milder degree of transcendence – the uplifting sense of togetherness shared by the members of a congregation as they finish a hymn, for example, or the sense of an intimate closeness to Jesus, felt by individuals during the ritualistic rhythms of the Catholic mass.

Religious rituals have occurred, in virtually every human culture, with an almost infinite variety of form. But in every known case, a singular principle appears to hold true: When religious ritual is effective, and it is not always effective, it inclines the brain to adjust its cognitive and emotional perceptions of the self in a way that religiously minded persons interpret as a closing of the distance between the self and God.²⁹⁵

Science and common sense, on the other hand, tell us such a thing is not possible; nothing can be more real than the material universe within which all real things are contained. Our own scientific inquiry, in fact, began with this assumption. But science has surprised us, and our research has left us with no choice but to conclude that the mystics may be on to something, that the mind's machinery of transcendence may in fact be a window through which we can glimpse the ultimate realness of something that is truly divine.²⁹⁶

In the opinion of biologist Edwin Chargaff, all real scientists are driven by the mysterious intuition that something immense and unknowable dwells in the material world: "If [a scientist] has not experienced, at least a few times in his life, this cold shudder down his spine, this confrontation with an immense, invisible face whose breath moves him to tears, he is not a scientist."²⁹⁷

Jourdain contributes these insights on music:

But melody is too complex to reside in a lone brain center. ... In the last chapter we witnessed a right-brained superiority for identifying tones. This expertise applies to melody too. ... It turns out that the left ear, which channels primarily to the right brain, displays clear superiority. So the right hemisphere excels in making sense of melodies.²⁹⁸

More important, the left hemisphere is prominent in analyzing the rhythmic patterns found in melodies Research shows that professional musicians favor not the right, but the *left* hemisphere for perceiving melodies.²⁹⁹

Rhythmic skill, however, favors the left brain.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 80-81.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 141.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 154.

²⁹⁸ Jourdain, 83.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 84.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 149.

Recent work with brain scans has confirmed what had long been suspected: imagery “occurs” in parts of the brain concerned with perception. Visual cortex fires up during visual imagery, auditory cortex during auditory imagery.³⁰¹

Such observations tend to confirm the notion, long held by many philosophers, that imagery is sort of “perception” in the absence of sensation.³⁰²

We do not have to agree with these researchers’ materialist/evolutionist philosophical biases (in fact, I reject them wholeheartedly) or even completely understand the terms and the science involved in order to agree with and understand one salient fact: an activity as overwhelming, inspiring, uplifting, and demanding as biblical worship engages much more than the left cerebral hemisphere. In fact, the same action or event (singing, speaking, or listening) will activate different parts of the brain in different people. For example, according to Dr. Jeffrey Horstmyer, a neurologist at Miami’s Mercy Hospital: “Speech has bilateral representation. The vast majority of right-handed people are left hemisphere-dominant; the majority of left-handers, although not as high a percentage, are right hemisphere-dominant. But when it comes to speech inflection, prosody [the rhythmic and intonational aspect of language] is a function of the right brain.”³⁰³

That addresses only one aspect of the human experience. Others, like singing and comprehending complex theological and philosophical constructs, are vastly more complex, stimulating different parts of the brain for different individuals.³⁰⁴ We would be wise to offer worship experiences that reflect this reality. Practically, this means that robust, heartfelt congregational singing, meaningful, well-prepared sermons, a sense of

³⁰¹ Ibid., 162.

³⁰² Ibid., 163.

³⁰³ Phone conversation with the author, January 11, 2008.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

flow, and an abandonment into God's presence all contribute to meaningful worship, but they contribute in different ways for each of us.

Larsen agrees:

If we want to break ranks with the gray, colorless legions who have become comatose conformists in our culture, we need to jump-start imagination and creativity. Edward de Bono has helpfully urged us to use lateral thinking. If we hold to a bicameral theory of the brain, then we want to use not only the left hemisphere, which is logical, sequential, and analytic, but to utilize the right hemisphere also, which is pictorial and imagistic. In other words, we should want not only to think more deeply but to think more broadly. This kind of thinking is not the private preserve of people with high intellectual endowment or extraordinary education. Random input, the creative pause, and sensitizing techniques are all part of the picture. We need to break out of the stifling routines that stultify creativity.³⁰⁵

Piper concurs:

It follows that forms of worship should provide two things: channels for the mind to apprehend the truth of God's reality, and channels for the heart to respond to the beauty of that truth – that is, forms to ignite the affections with biblical truth, and forms to express the affections with biblical passion.³⁰⁶

When the people of God – and especially the lead worshipers – begin to pray in this hedonistically God-centered way, then the form will both express and inspire authentic worship.³⁰⁷

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

I began this dissertation by advocating the theocentric and Christocentric nature of corporate worship. I further stated that the Bible greatly emphasizes worship, and that in John 4 Jesus gives this brief but dynamic description of the kind of worship God expects from his people:

Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.

³⁰⁵ Larsen, 250.

³⁰⁶ Piper, 92.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 94.

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."³⁰⁸

The Father seeks out those who will worship him in spirit and truth. This study has been an effort to discern what makes corporate worship in PCA churches in Miami most meaningful to the worshiper. I have stipulated that truly significant, consequential times of worship must engage the worshiper on an intellectual, emotional, and volitional basis. This, I believe, is an essential part – but only a part – of what it means to worship God in spirit and in truth.

I believe the reason this kind of all-encompassing, holistic worship is the most satisfying and meaningful for us is that this is the kind of worship for which God designed us. Our Creator is an intellectual, affective, and volitional Being. We are his Image-bearers. It makes perfect sense that we would find worship encounters most fully satisfying when they engage us intellectually, affectively, and volitionally.

Toward an Incarnational Principle of Worship

As this project developed, I felt overwhelmed by the amount of information I had amassed – what one friend who has walked this path before called "cranial saturation." I began to wonder if there were some relatively succinct organizing principle I could put forward that would clarify, and at the same time do justice to, all the information and insights I was collecting, much the same way that the RPW has served as a beacon and a compass for Reformed worship.

It also occurred to me that Jesus participated in corporate worship in the synagogues, and that we have no evidence that he ever raised his voice in protest against what he experienced during those times of worship. To be sure, first-century synagogue

³⁰⁸ John 4:21-24 (NIV).

worship was not then nor is it now to be seen as normative, even though it did heavily influence early Christian worship.³⁰⁹ The particulars of synagogue worship are not important to this project, but it is notable Jesus apparently participated in it before he, through his life, ministry, teachings, atoning death, and resurrection, revolutionized it.

It seems to me therefore beyond dispute that the incarnate Son of God participated in public worship, worship that can only be described as austere in comparison with,³¹⁰ and yet foundational for,³¹¹ Christian worship. It also seems inescapable that he did so holistically: intellectually, affectively, volitionally, visually, auditorily, tactilely, and more. He did, in fact, worship God in spirit and in truth, and he did so with all of his humanity engaged. He took his entire human nature with him into the house of worship.

After all, what higher purpose would the Inventor of the eye have for his creatures' visual capability than for us to lift up our eyes in worship, to behold his manifold perfections? As David expressed:

One thing I ask of the LORD,
this is what I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to seek him in his temple.³¹²

What greater good would the Creator of the ear have for his creatures' auditory facility than to listen to his voice, as well as the voices of our fellow worshipers, as we "Ascribe to the LORD ... glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his

³⁰⁹ Old, 36.

³¹⁰ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1896, 2003).

³¹¹ Webber, 102.

³¹² Psalm 27:4 (NIV).

name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness”?³¹³ What better use would the One who designed our hands have for them than to “Lift up [our] hands in the sanctuary and praise the LORD”?³¹⁴ What would be more pleasing to the One whose feet once trod our earth than for us to use them to “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name”?³¹⁵ What would honor him more than to be able to say of them:

How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those who bring good news,
who proclaim peace,
who bring good tidings,
who proclaim salvation,
who say to Zion,
"Your God reigns!"?³¹⁶

In fact, what could be more appropriate than, “in view of God's mercy, to offer [our entire] bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God [as our] spiritual act of worship”?³¹⁷

What nobler calling for our minds than to have them transform us as they themselves are renewed,³¹⁸ than to realize the reality that “we have the mind of Christ”?³¹⁹ What could please the heart of God more than to receive worship in which “with one heart and mouth [we] glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”?³²⁰ What better response can we make to him “who is at work in [us] both to will and to work for His good pleasure,”³²¹ than to sincerely pray:

³¹³ Psalm 29:1-2 (NIV).

³¹⁴ Psalm 134:2 (NIV).

³¹⁵ Psalm 100:4 (NIV).

³¹⁶ Isaiah 52:7 (NIV).

³¹⁷ Romans 12:1 (NIV).

³¹⁸ Romans 12:2 (NIV).

³¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 2:16 (NAS).

³²⁰ Romans 15:6 (NIV).

³²¹ Philippians 2:13 (NAS).

"Our Father in heaven,
 hallowed be your name,
 your kingdom come,
 your will be done
 on earth as it is in heaven"?³²²

I submit that it is only fitting and proper that we who are the Image-bearers of God, with every faculty we possess and every fiber of our being, with everything that makes us human, everything that makes us uniquely like God, reflect back to him whose Image we bear that he alone is worthy of our praise. I would propose to call this an Incarnational Principle of Worship. As Jesus, during the incarnation, in the synagogues in Nazareth and the surrounding towns, worshiped his Father, engaging his full humanity, so we should seek to worship the risen Christ in his ascended and glorified state, engaging our full humanity.

Webber suggests that such an understanding would greatly enhance our ability to worship:

In summary, the root of the problem of our confusion over spirituality may be found in the failure to understand the implications of the incarnation. When the humanity of Christ is overemphasized, spirituality concentrates almost exclusively on personal experience. When Christ's divinity is overemphasized, spirituality concentrates on the otherworldly. The hope for the future lies in the recovery of an incarnational spirituality that affirms both our experience of the other world and our experience of this world.³²³

The liturgy of the Protestant church shifted from the faith handed down through proclamation and enactment to the didactic sermon. While the didactic approach to education has dominated the entire period of modernity, the new revolution in communications is shifting from didactic education toward a more immersed and participatory, audiovisual way of learning. In the postmodern world education will shift from the passing down of information to the passing down of wisdom through experience. Christian truth, which was regarded as propositional, intellectual, and rational, will be experienced as an embodied reality. Faith will be communicated through immersion into a community of people who truly live the Christian faith. This corporate community will communicate through its depth of

³²² Matthew 6:9-10 (NIV).

³²³ Webber, 125.

commitment, through hospitality, and through images such as baptism, the importance of Scripture, the significance of Eucharist celebration, and the feasts and fasts of the Christian year. These events will shape the imagination of the believer and provide transcendent points of reference that bring meaning to the cycle of life. The meaning of the stories, symbols, cycles of time, and audiovisual experiences of faith may become the center for thoughtful discussion and application in the small group and stimulate both an intellectual and emotional knowing.³²⁴

Kidd agrees:

My point is this: a spirituality that is dependent on only one dimension of the whole Person risks truncating Jesus Himself. That kind of spirituality leaves us with shriveled spirits, and it leaves the world with a dreadful misrepresentation of who it is we seek to represent. If we know Jesus only as Teacher, we succumb either to cold dogmatism or driven moralism. If we know Jesus only as Evangelist or Reformer, we reduce the church to a distribution center or a political party. We need the whole package – the whole Person. In our struggle with sin and doubt, our Savior sings us his grace. When we are overcome with sorrow and with the ugliness of the world, our Savior brings to our ears "the clear though far-off song that hails a new creation." When the faith threatens to become bare propositions, the Savior turns it to poetry.³²⁵

Christianity is an embodied faith, not a mere collection of ideas and beliefs.³²⁶

Gore echoes the sentiment:

Truth then, can be communicated in worship not only through verbal explanations, but also through movement, posture, music, drama, art, and the wise use of sacred space and sacred time. While there should be no compulsion in the matter, many in the church have experienced humility and submission through the act of kneeling in prayer. Others have rejoiced and exulted in the Lord by lifting up their hands to heaven, acting out what is transpiring at a deeper level. The bright, flowing banners used in some churches emphasize important aspects of God's redemption or highlight special seasons in the Christian year.

The positioning of the pulpit, table, and font often tells as much about a church's worship as does the sermon or bulletin. Robert Webber has commented on the important of the symbolic, particularly the return of aesthetics to worship.³²⁷

³²⁴ Ibid., 154-55.

³²⁵ Kidd, 117-118.

³²⁶ Ibid, 156.

³²⁷ Gore, 156.

Jonathan Edwards concurs:

Spiritual understanding consists primarily in a sense of heart of that spiritual beauty. I say, a sense of heart; for it is not speculation merely that is concerned in this kind of understanding; nor can there be a clear distinction made between the two faculties of understanding and will, as acting distinctly and separately, in this matter. When the mind is sensible of the sweet beauty and amiableness of a thing, that implies a sensibleness of sweetness and delight in the presence of the idea of it: and this sensibleness of the amiableness or delightfulness of beauty, carries in the very nature of it the sense of the heart; or an effect and impression the soul is the subject of, as a substance possessed of taste, inclination and will. There is a distinction to be made between a mere notional understanding wherein the mind only beholds things in the exercise of a speculative faculty; and the sense of the heart, wherein the mind does not only speculate and behold, but relishes and feels. That sort of knowledge, by which a man has a sensible perception of amiableness and loathsomeness, or of sweetness and nauseousness, is not just the same sort of knowledge with that by which he knows what a triangle is, and what a square is. The one is mere speculative knowledge, the other sensible knowledge, in which more than the mere intellect is concerned; the heart is the proper subject of it, or the soul, as a being that not only beholds, but has inclination, and is pleased or displeased. And yet there is the nature of instruction in it; as he that has perceived the sweet taste of honey, knows much more about it, than he who has only looked upon, and felt of it.³²⁸

A sense of true divine beauty being given to the soul, the soul discerns the beauty of every part of the gospel scheme. ... And the opening to view, with such clearness, such a world of wonderful and glorious truth in the gospel, that before was unknown, being quite above the view of a natural eye, but now appearing so clear and bright, has a powerful and invincible influence on the soul, to persuade of the divinity of the gospel.³²⁹

I would humbly suggest that this is the kind of worship our omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, holy, transcendent, immanent God desires to receive from his people. He deserves holistic, all-encompassing worship that engages our minds, our hearts, our wills, our hands, our feet, our senses, and every other aspect of our humanity. This is the kind of worship that his people will offer him in eternity. It is the only kind of worship that will truly satisfy us here and now.

³²⁸ Edwards, 198-99.

³²⁹ Ibid., 228-29.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

This study focused on what makes corporate worship most meaningful for the worshiper from the perspective of those who currently lead worship in PCA churches in Miami. As with any study, there are limitations as to how extensive the focus can be. Therefore, I recommend the following areas of study for further research.

One further research study could deal with physical involvement in worship. What are the differences, if any, for traditions that utilize a great deal of physical activity during a worship service such as kneeling, standing, clapping, swaying, or raising hands, versus those which are largely sedentary? If my notion of an incarnational principle of worship is correct, people who attend churches with a lot of physical involvement would find this more fulfilling than those who do not. Of course, there may well be generational and cultural factors involved. Would there be a point at which the law of diminishing returns would set in, and more physical activity would prove to be a distraction rather than an enhancement? What implications are there for people with disabilities in such churches?

Similarly, a further study could consider the amount of sensory involvement included in worship. Do people involved in churches that utilize a lot of sensory stimulation – auditory, visual, olfactory, and tactile – report more or less satisfaction in their worship experience than those that are predominantly auditory? What implications are there for people with disabilities?

A third possibility for further research could be a study of the use of worship technologies. While most churches in the United States utilize some sort of microphone and voice amplification system, many are now also making use of video projection

technologies and other sophisticated electronic systems. Do those who attend such churches report higher or lower levels of satisfaction? Is there a point at which the use of such technologies becomes a distraction or even an impediment? What implications are there for people with disabilities in such circumstances?

A fourth area of study could consider space and architecture. Winston Churchill famously said, "First we shape our buildings, then our buildings shape us." What impact does the actual shape of the worship facility have on those who enter it? What of the arrangement of the room itself? Is worship changed by the type and arrangement of the seats, size and placement of the pulpit, whether a pulpit is used, size, style and placement of a communion table, or distance from the pulpit or platform area to the people?

A fifth possible field of study could consider different styles and uses of liturgy. Do those who attend churches with a set liturgy that does not vary from week to week, or one that varies only a little, report more or less enjoyment than those who attend churches with a highly flexible liturgy?

A sixth study could consider the use of liturgical dance and drama. Does the use of such art forms add or detract from the impact of the service on those in attendance? Do they violate the RPW?

Still another area of study could consider homiletics. What impact does preaching style have on worship? Does it matter whether the preacher uses expository, topical, or narrative style? Does it matter how the preacher uses humor, illustrations, quotes, original languages, references to church history and current events? What is the impact of sermon length?

Each of these recommendations for further study differs in some way from this study and therefore could not be addressed in depth as part of it. However, understanding the impact of these issues and others like them would be of benefit to pastors, worship leaders and churches. The goal of such research is to further equip us to offer God the kind of worship he deserves, for his honor and glory, for the building up of the body of Christ, and the advance of his kingdom into the kingdoms of this world.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following interview guide was used when conducting personal interviews of pastors, theologians and worship leaders. I used these questions as a semi-structured interview protocol. From interview to interview, some questions were left out and additional questions added if discerned they would be beneficial to the purpose of this study.

General information

1. How many churches have you worked for / pastored?
2. How long have you been involved in your current church?
3. How would you describe your current worship style (traditional, contemporary, highly liturgical, blended)?

Worship experience

1. What past corporate worship experiences do you consider to be the most meaningful, and why?
2. What types, aspects and elements of corporate worship services are most meaningful to you, and why?
3. What types, aspects and elements of corporate worship services are least meaningful / most objectionable to you, and why?

Theological understanding

1. What is your view of the Regulative Principle of Worship?
2. What is the place of evangelism in corporate worship?
3. What is the place of edification in corporate worship?

4. What is the place of drama in corporate worship?

Practical considerations

1. Do you prefer a traditional, contemporary, highly liturgical or blended style of worship? Why?
2. Who structures the worship services?
3. Is there tension or conflict over worship styles in your church?
4. What kinds of technology do you use / would you like to use in your services?
5. How often do you / would you like to celebrate the Lord's Supper?
6. How long should the sermon be?
7. How long should the service be?
8. What one thing most needs to change in order to make your worship times more meaningful?
9. How should we as worship leaders seek to offer the most meaningful possible worship experiences?

Key Questions:

4. How do we best engage the intellect in corporate worship?
5. How do we best engage the affect in corporate worship?
6. How do we best engage the will in corporate worship?

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