Calvin Seminary Forum

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YOU CALL THAT CRC WORSHIP?

"You should have been at First Church Sunday. We were visiting, and I had taken my unchurched neighbor along. The minister dined on for thirty-five minutes about supralapsarianism. My neighbor fell asleep, and I wouldn’t be surprised if the Lord did too."

"At Geneva Church they must have an ecclesiastical Emily Post. Everything is so proper and precise and ordered and written down. If the Holy Spirit descended, they’d tell the Spirit He was not in the order of worship. "We should call New Life Church ‘Holy Jumping Jacks Church’. People hardly stay in their seats. They sing these endless screen ditties from California.

Everybody’s raising arms and some people dance around in the aisles too yet.

"Did you hear what’s happening at Happiness Community Church? They bring in actors and dancers, they have a little talk about some social problem, and they don’t even take a collection. No wonder they advertise on the Entertainment page of the newspaper."

If one listens to some worship reports, that’s what’s going on in the CRC. Let us take another look at the churches we just heard about. Perhaps we can get a fuller (and fairer) perspective on the worship life of these congregations.

The first congregation we’ll call “old Reformed.” The congregation has a worship service which has not changed substantially from the 1920s or ’30s. The order of worship is probably printed on the back of the bulletin. No one may be able to recite its sequence of worship acts, but all would know if something were done out of order. Part of this order are the votum and salutation and the reading of the full Ten Commandments, with the Apostles Creed in the evening. The organ is the main instrument, but at times the piano will be used. The blue Psalter Hymnal reigns supreme, with special love for “old familiar” hymns, notably during the hymn sing before the evening service.

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FEATURED ARTICLES

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The strength of this congregation is its adherence to tradition. The people have a strong sense of history, and their feeling of community with previous generations is always present. However, the church has difficulty keeping its young people interested in worship, and parents with young children complain that their children are virtually ignored during worship. Visitors attending the service feel as if they have entered a time warp, and there's virtually nothing in the worship that relates to their everyday lives.

The second church also honors tradition, but in addition to its basic Reformed pattern, this congregation has also borrowed from other liturgical Presbyterians and Methodists, as well as from Episcopal or Anglican churches. The bulletin of this congregation is tastefully printed, and the order of worship is followed meticulously. The Bach prelude on the pipe organ is played with proficiency: the robed choir in the choir loft sings Buxtehude with feeling and precision. The sermon is carefully crafted and the educated congregation appreciates the literary allusions. The Lord's Supper is celebrated eight times a year and Advent celebrations have become a joyfully dignified tradition.

The strength of this church is that it has retained its basic Reformed tradition, and has been influenced by the best of western culture. Its services are carefully planned, dignified, and reverent. One is always reminded that we worship a majestic and holy Lord. The downside of this worship is its selectivity. The music tends to appeal to those who have symphony tickets, and its planning and precision can easily become stilted. Good taste and propriety may be more a mirror of the congregation's upper middle class sensibility than of Biblical reverence. And Spirit-filled spontaneity would have a difficult time overcoming the good taste of the congregation.

The third congregation is in the more recent Praise and Worship tradition, which has borrowed heavily from the charismatic stream of worship. A worship team, complete with drums, guitar, and electronic keyboard, leads the enthusiastic singing. Most of the songs are recent compositions of Scripture songs, and other choruses. Clapping, arm raising and waving accompany the enthusiastic singing, which is an expression of Spirit-filled enthusiasm. The sermon is aware of the emotional side of our faith, and the monthly Lord's Supper recognizes the importance of the physical reminders of our faith and of joyful community. Tapping into Old Testament examples of worship, the congregation has recaptured the festive, colorful exuberance of Psalm 150.

Of course, the emotion-packed service can easily deteriorate into emotionalism and touchy-feely spiritual schmaltz. And the California NOW mentality will tend to treasure last week's latest transparency hymn over "O God, Our Help in Ages Past."

The last congregation conducts a Seeker Service. A full fledged Seeker Service is an evangelistic rally, aimed at winning over non-Christians to the Gospel. Many associations or symbols connected with Christian worship (such as hymn books or the communion table) are absent or minimized, and the emphasis is on finding connections with the secularized lives of un-churched Harry and Sally (to borrow from the Willow Creek Seeker Mecca vocabulary). In addition to these four worship models we also find a much smaller number of congregations that are heavily indebted to the modern liturgical movement. Weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper (which they prefer to call the Eucharist), and extensive borrowing from pre-Reformation liturgies characterizes this worship.

The congregations described above are types and models. They show us some of the history and pattern of CRC worship. And there are congregations whose worship is very close to the types I described. But there are also many congregations that are blends and mixtures of various traditions. One only has to look at the wide variety of supplementary hymnbooks in the pew racks (the green book or the purple book). To realize the breadth of borrowing. At times such mixtures seem to be a grab-bag of liturgical items borrowed willy-nilly to provide worship gimmicks that seem to "work." However, other congregations have adopted a conscious "convergence model," in which the riches of various worship traditions are molded into a harmonious mode of worship that is biblically-based, honors the Reformed tradition, and is enriched with treasures from other Christian traditions.

Unlike the uniformity of seventy-five years ago (no hymnbooks, communion lorries, times a year), today we find great variety and flux. In the brief sketch above I have traced some patterns and traditions. There are those in the church who find such variety disturbing. I share some of that apprehension in terms of confessional integrity, as well as denominational identity and unity. I also am uneasy about frequent unreflective borrowing and imitation. At the same time, I do not see liturgical diversity as a sign of the decline of the church. The time of ferment is part of the broadening of the CRC (ethnically and geographically) and openness to other Christian worship traditions.

No one can foresee the liturgical shape of the CRC fifteen years from now. My hope is that the ferment will have an enriching effect and open us to the working of the Spirit. But then I also hope for a measure of denominational consensus, so that the shape and contours of biblical and reformed worship will be recognizable.
How Shall We Worship?

According to your tastes or according to mine? Shall we use the organ or the piano, violins or guitars, and how about drums? Shall we sing from a book or use an overhead projector? Psalter Hymnal (old or new?) or contemporary songs? May we clap and raise our hands? Who is going to decide or does everyone act on the basis of personal taste?

Changes & Conflict

A uniform style of worship exists no longer in the Christian Reformed Church. Does that really matter? In principle. No; in practice. Yes, for some congregations are literally torn apart by changes in worship style, especially in music. Changes in musical style seem often to be viewed as an attack on one’s person and even on one’s religious values.

Is there an easy way to avoid such conflict? I don’t think so. Could there be a principle lurking somewhere that will solve it once and for all for everyone? I doubt it. If it is any comfort, we should be aware that the changes affecting us are affecting the church worldwide.

England also

My wife and I have just returned from a short sabbatical leave in Cambridge, England. To gain some insight into the state of the Church in England, we decided to worship in various churches: Baptist, Presbyterian, and Anglican. The worship style of one Anglican Church, St. Andrew the Great, surprised us the most, and our experience there caused much reflection about principles of worship.

But first a bit of history. In Cambridge outside the University Church (Great St. Mary’s) stands a sign which reads: “It is said that on this spot Oliver Cromwell had a copy of the Book of Common Prayer destroyed in his presence.” Now the Book of Common Prayer shapes the liturgical practice of most Anglican churches still today. It is filled with biblical quotations and prayers informed by Scripture. There is nothing unbiblical in it. Yet Cromwell had it destroyed. Why?

In Cromwell’s eyes, the Book of Common Prayer was a symbol of a worship style to which he objected in principle. It symbolized a worship in the hands of the priest and the choir, a worship in which neither preaching from the Word nor direct congregational response had virtually any role at all. During the revolt which he led, Cromwell wrote a letter to the Bishop of Ely warning that he could not be responsible for the conduct of his soldiers if the Bishop refused to change the style of worship and preaching (his soldiers did knock the heads off statuary in a chapel attached to the cathedral at Ely). Cromwell pleaded with the Bishop to preach from the Word and to discover its power. When the Bishop did not change, Cromwell closed the cathedral.

In the past wars were fought over styles of worship. Hopefully, those wars were not about personal taste but about principle. In fact, the principles articulated by Cromwell and the Puritans were deeply rooted in the Reformation: worship centered on God and His Word and a worship in which the congregation itself actively participates.

A reformation heritage

This Reformation heritage lives on in the Calvinistic Baptist Church we attended. There one finds none of the symbols, banners, medieval wood carvings and statuary at home in the medieval parish churches and cathedrals of Anglicanism. Instead, barren walls (not a banner in sight), a projection screen on the wall behind the pulpit for contemporary songs, a semi-circular seating arrangement with the congregation facing a pulpit with a Bible. Sounds familiar, doesn’t it? The preaching was dynamic (expository and lengthy) and the singing enthusiastic, whether a psalm or a contemporary song. And the church was full.

Surprisingly (to us), this heritage was equally alive in the congregation at St. Andrew the Great. Although we were aware of the historic difference within Anglicanism between High Church (more Catholic and sacramental) and Low Church (more Reformed and Word centered), we were very surprised by how little the worship service in this congregation was shaped by traditional Anglicanism: no use of the Book of Common Prayer, no priestly blessing, prayers led by members of the congregation, songs (traditional and contemporary) projected on screens, singing accompanied by a small student orchestra, and expository preaching— even the Bishop of Ely on his visit to St. Andrew’s preached a lengthy expository sermon. Cromwell would have been pleased.

There is a sense of excitement in the worship at St. Andrew’s. The church is packed. At least 70% are either young persons of university age or young married couples with children. The congregation is very much family oriented and even the little children are considered active participants in the first-half of the service. The preaching too is very alive, usually expository and sometimes lengthy but eagerly received by the congregation. Truly the Spirit is at work.

Of course, not all evangelical Anglicans wish to rid themselves of as much Anglican tradition as has occurred at St. Andrew the Great. Many evangelical Anglicans still value the Book of Common Prayer and have a more traditional view of the priestly office. In part, this reflects a difference in generations, but not entirely. One member of St. Andrew’s, about my
SEEKING THE LOST THROUGH THE SEEKER SERVICE

A recent development in North American church life the past few years is the emergence of the seeker service. Pioneered by the Willow Creek Church in Chicago under the leadership of Bill Hybels, this methodology for reaching lost people with the gospel is being adopted by increasing numbers of congregations.

How are we to understand the seeker service? Is it a corruption of Christian worship, as some critics claim, or is it to be understood as corporate evangelism being carried out by a local community of God's people?

This debate is presently being held within the Christian Reformed Church on a variety of levels. Feelings run strong on all sides of the debate, most likely, because worship holds such a high value in our church, and the seeker service concept appears fundamentally to impact our practice of worship. It is the purpose of this brief article to provide some perspective on the core issues inherent within this debate.

We will do this around three themes, which are: (a) understanding the context out of which the seeker service arose; (b) understanding the seeker service from the perspective of the mission of the church; and (c) understanding the value and place of a seeker service within the life of a local congregation.

But prior to addressing these issues, it might be helpful to provide the reader with some basic definitions of what is meant by the concept of the seeker service. Presently the concept is being used in two ways, with different implications for local churches.

SEEKER DRIVEN SERVICE

An evangelism service to which members can bring their unchurched or underchurched friends where the Gospel is present in clear and uncompromising terms through presentations of music, drama and evangelistic preaching.

SEEKER FRIENDLY SERVICE

A worship service designed to make unchurched or underchurched persons feel accepted by God's people as they are confronted by the Gospel through God's people engaging in meaningful worship using contemporary forms of music, drama and life-relevant preaching.

Background to the Debate: A Changing Cultural Context

One driving force behind the rise of the seeker service appears to be a fundamental shift in the cultural context. It is becoming increasingly clear that the broader North American culture, which was substantially shaped through the influence of biblical morals and the prestige of the church in society, is now changing. It is perhaps an overstatement to refer to this earlier culture as "Christian."

But it was more common then for unchurched persons to be aware of Christian values and to share a common language with the church about what was right and wrong. This has now evaporated in the public media and is eroding in most local communities.

In light of this shift, the evangelistic challenge to the local church today is substantial. Non-believers are now two steps removed from the gospel. How are we to make contact with persons who no longer think of the church as having relevant answers to life's questions? And if we can make contact, how are we to present the gospel to such persons who no longer possess even a rudimentary knowledge of God and the Bible?

In addressing these questions, many congregations have incorporated the seeker service into their ministry as a way both to make contact with non-believers and to confront them with the gospel in a meaningful and vital manner.

Biblical-Theological Foundations for the Seeker Service

Another driving force which is giving shape to the development and use of the seeker service in many congregations is some fresh biblical insights into the mission of God in the world. The common way in which this is being expressed is that "God has a passion for lost people." This is a simplified theological expression of a very important biblical truth which has been gaining more credence in the past few decades. This concerns God's missionary character. The Triune God is a sending God. God the Father sent His Son into the world to seek and to save that which was lost. Together, the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit into the world to carry out this work of seeking and saving. The Spirit accomplishes this work by sending the church into the world to seek out persons who do not know God and to invite them into a relationship with Him. The church in this context becomes a missionary church living out on earth the missionary character of the Triune God.

It is clear that God intends for those who are saved to come to full maturity in Christ. This is also part of the Spirit's work within the church. But the church must never lose sight of its being sent, and that this sentness means the church must seek to find the lost. The seeker service is one vehicle which churches are finding helpful in carrying out this work of mission.

Cont. next page
Non-believers are now two steps removed from the gospel.

Rethinking the Role of Church in Finding Lost People

In our confessional history, we placed an emphasis on God's work in gathering the elect. As stated in Article 16 of the Belgic Confession, "God is merciful in withdrawing and saving from this perdition those whom He has elected and chosen in Christ." In Article 17, it is noted that God "seeing that man had plunged himself in this manner into both physical and spiritual death set out to find him." What many congregations are increasingly coming to understand is their part in God's work of finding him. God has a passion for lost people. God uses the church, led by the Holy Spirit, as His primary agency to find lost people. The seeker-driven service is proving to be a viable means of doing so for many congregations.

One reason why the seeker service is proving to be effective for this task of seeking and finding the lost is that it is a corporate activity. It is a ministry of believers who collectively work together to present Christ to their lost friends and neighbors. Many of the evangelistic methods used by the church in the past have focused on individual Christians witnessing to their lost friends in the highly individualized world in which we now live. These approaches are proving less effective. By engaging in corporate evangelism through a seeker service, a congregation is demonstrating the importance of the Body of Christ within the very act of presenting the gospel. Persons converted to Christ in this context are also being naturally converted into a relationship with a local community of the Body of Christ. Follow-up and discipling become natural extensions of the act of evangelism.

Some Cautions Regarding the Use of a Seeker Service

There are some cautions which churches should be aware of when considering the development of a seeker service. First, the seeker service is a methodology and is only one way of carrying out the task of evangelism. As with any method, there are limitations in applying it to different contexts. Churches which want to use it need to be careful to study their communities and identify what style of service would best represent the gospel in their context. It will take time and experimentation to find a format which best fits one's community.

Second, the seeker service is designed to engage in corporate evangelism. Churches will find, however, that some persons may attend the service who see it as their worship service. This is particularly true of families with teenage children and for young adults. Churches can best serve these persons by allowing them time to experience the meaning of the gospel at this level and to grow in their walk with the Lord. Given time many of these persons will find it more meaningful to rotate back into the regular worship service.

Third, there is the matter of scheduling. One of the interesting aspects of the current cultural context is that many seekers are willing to come to a seeker service which is scheduled on Sunday morning. This can create confusing for many church members who think of any service scheduled on Sunday morning as worship. It is possible to conduct both an evangelistic seeker service and a regular worship service on Sunday, but this will require regular communication and clarification to maintain the distinction between evangelism and worship.

Fourth, some churches are using a seeker-sensitive service to reach lost persons. This type of service modifies the practice of worship to incorporate more contemporary styles. A congregation needs to be careful not to compromise the integrity of its worship. While public worship takes place before the world and is always conscious of lost persons, its primary focus is on developing the relationship between God and His people. Careful attention should be given to nurturing this relationship while welcoming the guest and the seeker.

SUMMARY

We live in a time when the church is increasingly becoming an alternative community within the broader society. As this changed relationship continues to develop, the church is discovering new ways to present the gospel as good news to lost people. These are exciting and challenging times.

Many unchurched persons today are seeking for answers to their personal struggles and pain.

Many unchurched persons today are seeking for answers to their personal struggles and pain. The seeker service approach appears to be a viable methodology for reaching many of these persons with the gospel. Rather than engage in criticism of the perceived inadequacies of the method, I would encourage all of us to find better ways to develop this approach, and others like it, with sound biblical foundations and effective church practices.
Worship throughout the CRC has changed significantly over the last two decades. Many of the changes are welcome; for example, in many churches the time and variety of praise offered to God has greatly expanded. No longer is the pipe organ the only instrument to which God’s people sing. Other positive changes include an effort to involve children in the worship, the use of litanies and responsive readings, increased attention to the church year. Worship is different than it used to be, and many of the changes are helpful.

A recent Banner article carried the headline, “Worship: It’s Mostly a Matter of Taste.” Since tastes may differ, and since the author argues that worship may follow taste, he concludes that worship styles may differ. So far, so good. But the author only deals with a fairly narrow band of possibilities for worship, such as whether organs or electronic keyboards are better. The author is right in claiming that worship may be adjusted to taste. But only within limits. Clearly some possibilities are beyond the pale. Not just any taste is acceptable. Showing a movie of E.T. is not right worship, nor is a Willie Nelson concert. There are limits. However, these limits don’t mean that every church must do everything like every other church. It does mean that every church must make sure that it is worshipping within the boundaries.

Mostly a Matter of Taste

What are the borders for worship? What defines the limits within which we may make our adjustments to taste?

In the second commandment God outlawed the use of graven images. No doubt such images would help us focus our attention—giving us an object to look at, to reverence, to bow before. But God does not want our attention focused on images; he wants it focused on himself. He wants us to see the beauty of his creation, to listen to our praise and prayers, to hear our confession, to receive our offerings; and He wants to forgive us, to encourage us, to instruct us, to bless us. Worship should be an awesome communion of God with His people. This is not a matter of taste; this is what God’s word requires. Yet more and more often our worship is cluttered with words and events that distract us from focusing our minds and hearts on God. Such distractions rub against the second commandment.

The second commandment implies that the worship of God must never intentionally center on, be directed towards, draw attention to, anything other than God. Worship should never distract us from God, yet that is what it often does. Worshipers are sometimes distracted by crying babies, cuddling couples, or whispering brothers. Too many churches plan and encourage distractions in the worship services: announcing the details of the church picnic, noticing Henry and Jo’s 50th wedding anniversary, introducing new members, appealing for money, promoting a political cause, or pausing to shake hands with those sitting near you. Announcing the Sunday School classes. These and similar activities are not part of proper worship; they are distractions from worship.

Another serious potential distraction from the worship of God is the conduct of the pastor or worship leader. Too often, worship leaders draw attention to themselves by talking about themselves too much. They should not draw attention...
themselves; they should draw attention to God and His Word. Virtually everything a worship leader says should either speak to God on behalf of the congregation, or speak to the congregation on behalf of God. I think the worship leader should say as little as possible as a mere person simply talking to people. Sometimes one needs to explain something, such as the meaning of baptism. In most cases it is less distracting and more accurate to use the approved forms than to ad lib. When someone says, the prayer should be an address to God, not a news broadcast or homily for congregants. Prayers should not be spoken in the first person singular; a them one person is praying on behalf of the rest. The text of songs used should be either a prayer to God or a true profession about God. Worship leaders should lead God's people into his presence and help them direct their attention to Him.

What is new or unexpected the order of worship is distracting. Good changes should be made, if necessary, and then stick with them. Of course, the worship should include different songs, different prayers, and a different sermon each week; but the sequence of elements should be relatively constant. C. S. Lewis once wrote that worship is like dancing in this respect—as long as you are looking at your feet, you aren't dancing. When the order of worship changes too frequently, the worshipper is wondering what's next, not worshiping. A church should have a liturgically sound order of worship and generally stick to it. Then those who worship there can become accustomed to it and actually worship using it. Worshiping the same way over many years ties generations of worshipers together. Some may defend changes in the worship order as raising the interest level. In an important sense worship services should not be interesting. They should be transparent to what is of real interest. God Himself. An interesting worship service is like a dirty window; it gets in the way of seeing what you want to see.

Focusing attention on God, meditating on His presence, His attributes, His majesty and His love, his power, glory, goodness, faithfulness, etc., takes some effort. Thinking about the transcendent One does not come naturally or easily to most of us. We are of the earth, and our spirits find it hard to soar. We need all the help we can get, not thoughtless distractions. Hand shakes, applause, announcements, jokes, introductions, movies, pleas for money, and the like distract us from the hard and necessary work of worship.

**THREE CONCERNS**

This understanding of proper worship raises three important concerns. First, some may argue that all of this sounds as if it is against fellowship, against koinonia. If there is little fellowship during worship services, doesn't that eliminate an important part of the body life of the church?

The purpose of a congregation at worship is not to socialize.

Fellowship is important to the life and ministry of the church. It is not the primary purpose of public worship. We worship as a community of believers. Certainly we are aware of one another as we worship. We sing together, pray together, profess together, give together, listen together. But these liturgical actions are not mixers intended to help us socialize. They are directed to God, and we do them as one. A congregation at worship is like a choir in concert. Certainly church members are aware of one another, but their purpose in joining together is a common musical effort for the audience. So the purpose of a congregation at worship is not to socialize, but a communal worship of the Lord.

Other church events intentionally encourage fellowship. Events such as Bible studies, potlucks, picnics. Since it is often difficult to get people to come to church for potlucks, meetings, and such, consider this suggestion. On Sunday morning, before (or after), but not during, the worship service, design a short time of fellowship in which announcements are said, hands are shaken, introductions are made, and the like. Then, if this fellowship is before the worship, have a short prelude or introit. Such an arrangement would allow both fellowship and worship to take place without mixing the two.

A second concern is that such focused worship will drive away members. We live in an era of diminishing loyalties and of ecclesiastical competition. So if the church down the street has "exciting" worship it will draw off members. Some claim that if we worship in "user unfriendly" ways which don't meet "felt needs," even we won't come back. A new generation of worshipers seems to be demanding worship services that are more interesting, more engaging, more "relevant," and... I say it—more entertaining. Compared to television, CRC worship is snail paced and dull. Compared to MTV, church music is flat. So worship committees which fail to satisfy the middle aged and younger generations, the baby boomers and hustlers, fear dwindling interest and attendance.

A third concern is that the kind of worship required of us will repel spiritual seekers. This arises out of a renewed concern for the lost, and an evangelistic strategy which uses worship-like occasions for evangelism. Certainly, the increasing interest in evangelism is something for which we should be grateful. For too long we have hidden the treasure of the kingdom. Some of the most successful evangelistic ministries use Sunday morning as an occasion for attracting those seekers looking for meaning and purpose in life.

**WORSHIP AND CHURCH GROWTH**

These last two concerns have in common the fear that worship as required by the second commandment won't be popular. This is a real fear. Some CRC churches are experiencing dwindling membership. Few churches are effectively attracting new members from the community. Perhaps these facts are due to worship which isn't entertaining...
enough. Maybe in this postmodem television era worship must be more "consumer" oriented. Yet such ideas should give us pause. In ancient times, Israel was inclined to worship God using idols. After all, the people living around them were fond of idol worship. Every other religion was doing it, and many of them had far more adherents than Israel’s religion did. Baal “services” seem to have been very well attended, even in Israel during Elijah’s time. (Remember only 700 had not bowed to Baal and kissed him.) One can imagine some Israelite-growth priest arguing that using idols in worship would be a great idea for attracting seeker proselytes. It would be real effective. People would really like it. But the truth is that God Himself says “no.” He has norms for worship, and He insists that we worship Him as He wants and has instructed us to. The use of idols is beyond the limits. The second commandment condemns such use and offers no conciliatory word to those who feel this prohibition will put off some Israelites or some potential converts.

We are told, and it may be true, that our members and our evangelistic prospects, the baby boomers and busters, are different than earlier generations. Baby boomers and busters are impatient and want immediate gratification. Thus, the argument goes, if we do not give them the worship they want we won’t be able to get them into church and so minister to them. And what they seem to want is entertainment and practical advice for their problems. They want contemporary, upbeat music. They want techniques for coping with the effects of sin, such as relationship problems or identity confusions. Initially, at least, we are told, they don’t want to hear about lifetime struggles against selfishness and sin, or difficult, long-term solutions involving godly sorrow and confession, self-denial, and Christ-centered living.

So boomers and busters have some characteristic flaws and the church is now called to accommodate herself to those flaws and give them what they want— as if God can’t raise up for Himself a people who will worship Him the way He wants to be worshipped in a generation of television addicts! The claim that innovative, entertaining, and up-to-date worship will result in better church worship attendance may or may not be true. What is certainly not true is that growing attendance at a church’s worship services confirms that it is worshiping properly. Judging the propriety of a worship service by the numbers it generates is like judging the morality of a business by the amount of cash it generates. Worshiping properly is more important than being successful in drawing a crowd of witnesses.

I think the attendance fears will have a short life span. Those Christian people who now want their felt needs satisfied will in time come back to churches that really worship God, just as children after trick or treating may do for a while prefer to skip their family’s healthier meals, but soon return. They want real food. So God’s people want real worship, not self-gratifying quasi-worship experiences.

As for evangelistic concern, the idea that a worship service is a good occasion for doing evangelism is a bad one. It isn’t that using worship to do evangelism won’t work for a time to bring people into the church; perhaps it will. But using worship for any extraneous purpose whatever is a violation of the very nature of worship. Maybe Sunday morning is a good time for evangelism. Fine. Then have a gathering for seekers on Sunday morning. But let us never confuse such a gathering with worship. The fact that it is sometimes hard to tell seeker services and worship services apart shows how far worship has been diluted. The worship service is the meeting of God with His people, holy encounter, not an occasion for ecclesiastical recruitment.

We need to grasp the value of worship as a meeting between God and His people in which we devote our attention to God alone as we praise, pray, give God listen. An hour or two a week of our undivided attention to God isn’t too much to ask, is it?