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The Worship Architect

Calvin Symposium on Worship

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Recommended Citation

Calvin Symposium on Worship and Cherry, Constance, "The Worship Architect" (2023). *Symposium on Worship Archive*. 12.

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“The Worship Architect”
Rev. Dr. Constance Cherry

Session B9
Calvin Worship Symposium
January 28 & 29, 2011

Building architects are at work from the concept stage to the ribbon-cutting ceremony. Their job is not done with the blueprint. Likewise, worship architects have responsibility for more than the blueprint of an order of service. We are responsible for the concept of worship all the way through to being host/hostesses at the worship event.

Phase 1: the worship architect lays the foundations

- What is the purpose of a corporate service of worship?
- Who determines the purpose of worship?
- What is the service supposed to accomplish—biblically and theologically speaking?
- Who are the participants and what is the nature of their relationship?
- Ultimately, who is worship for?
- To what degree is our worship Christ-centered?
- What biblical principles are non-negotiable for your worship?

Practical suggestions to capture an appropriate conception of biblical worship:

1. Gather appropriate people together in your church and write a mission statement for worship.
2. Invite leaders to do an extended study on the biblical foundations of worship.
3. Itemize a list of foundational biblical principles for worship that you will consider to be “non-negotiable.”
4. Brainstorm what implications these hold for your ongoing worship practices.

Phase 2: the worship architect creates movements for conversing with God

Likewise, a worship architect will create large segments of the service—rooms, if you will, which usher worshipers through the conversation between God and people. Christian worship is dialogical in nature. Therefore the large portions of a worship service provide ample opportunity for people and God to encourage their relationship through conversation.

- Gathering with God
- Hearing from God
- Responding to God
- Commissioned to serve God

Practical suggestions to capture a dialogical approach to worship:

1. Examine the order of worship in your church for the last six weeks.
2. Identify the 2-4 LARGE sections of your worship service. What do the movements primarily consist of?
3. Within the order of worship, examine the direction of each worship element. Draw arrows up or down (or horizontally) to depict the direction of the flow of the conversation between God and people.
4. Does your worship order and content reflect a reasonably balanced conversation between God and people?

Phase 3: the worship architect creates avenues to directly encounter God.

Prayers and songs are very useful as doors and windows for worship. They enlighten us by the Spirit's power. As we pray and as we sing, light is shed upon the event. They are avenues for directly encountering God.

The worship architect will consider the breadth and depth of corporate prayer:

- The corporate nature of prayer
- Multi-directional prayer
- Lament
- Silence
- Written prayer
- Spontaneous prayer
- Trinitarian usage
- Historic prayers
- Prayer gestures
- Prayer postures
- Prayers with particular focus (illumination, invocation, confession)

Worship architects will also pay attention to the songs that are voiced.

- How much of the singing is done by the whole congregation at once?
- How much of the singing is done by individuals for the congregation?
- Are there varied types of song or limited types of songs used?
- What direction predominates?
- What pronouns predominate (corporate or individual)?
- Are there bountiful references to God and God's attributes?
- Is there abundant use of biblical allusion?
- Do the songs invite imagination through use of sound poetic devices?
- Does the song repertoire of your congregation represent the fullness of the Christian faith or are some themes missing (justice, Trinitarian ethos, lament)?
- Is there a sense of revelation/response in the song choices?
- Do the songs tell God's Story?
- Do they intentionally carry the conversation between God and people?

Practical suggestions to creating windows and door for encountering God:

1. Review past worship prayers (if in print or recorded) or take notes on the prayers spoken in the coming weeks. Do the words directly enable the community's conversation with God?
2. Examine your present repertoire of congregational song. On what basis are your choices for songs made? Are they made according to key? Tempo? Mood? Or are you carefully selecting songs on the basis of the soundness of the texts and their function in worship?

Phase 4: the worship architect finds the style appropriate to their community

Worship architects understand two very important things regarding style:

- style arises from the inside out rather than applied from the outside in;
- style is negotiable.

A definition of style: *Style in worship is the way a certain faith community expresses the content of their liturgy as a result of its given context. (The Worship Architect, p. 227)*

Practical suggestions when considering style in worship:

1. Evaluate the context of your people (socio-economic, age, ethnic, gender, denominational background, etc.)
2. Ask what style is the natural expression of your findings.

Phase 5: the worship architect is an active participant in the worship event

Worship architects don't just conceive of and plan worship events. They are co-participants in the event.

Worship architects will:

- Welcome people to worship in the name of Jesus Christ;
- Set the tone of the environment;
- Extend hospitality;
- Serve as a host/hostess for the worship event;
- Exhort others to participate through their own participation and enthusiasm.

Practical suggestions for leaders to function as participants

1. Practice the actual words you will say at the beginning.
2. Review/rehearse the order of service many times prior to leading.
3. "Pray" the order of service in advance.
4. Offer your leadership to God. Give your leadership to God as *your* worship.
5. Enjoy the moment.

A worship architect has a very important calling. They will diligently seek to create worship service for their faith community that are:

- +faithful to Scripture
- +historically conscious
- +relevant to God
- +Christ-centered
- +engaging for worshipers.

Resources by Constance Cherry available at the Symposium Exhibit (Covenant Fine Arts Center, 2nd floor)

Baker Books Exhibit:

- *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (a book to help churches and students join theological reflection and practice)

Hope Publishing Company Exhibit:

- *Selecting Worship Songs: A Guide for Leaders* (a rubric for evaluating songs theologically, lyrically, and musically)
- *Proclaim New Hope* (a solo collection of hymns by Constance)
- *The Contemporary Psalter* (contemporary antiphons by Constance)