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Trans-Forming Worship

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Paul Detterman
Calvin Symposium on Worship 2014
C14 – “Trans-Forming Worship”

Renewal / Transformation – Almost Everyone likes the idea...

God is all about renewal / redemption / reclamation in the cosmic order and in every willing human heart.

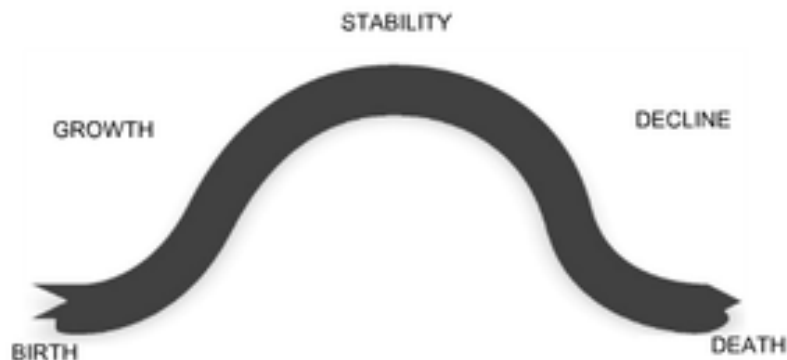
What is good is kept
What is harmful is cast away
Forgiveness is happening

We humans need to be saved from ourselves. Our hearts need to be opened to what can be. We also need to accept the reality that when this happens things will be different.

“Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of - throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.”

C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

Life Cycles



Patterns of Spiritual Renewal Transformation for a Congregation

1. Usually preceded by a time of spiritual depression, apathy, and sin in which a majority of nominal Christians are hardly different from the members of secular society, and the churches seem to be asleep.
2. An individual or small group of God's people becomes conscious of their sins, and vows to forsake all that is displeasing to God.
3. As some Christians begin to yearn for a manifestation of God's power, a leader or leaders arise with prophetic insights into the causes and remedies of the problems, and a new awareness of the holy and pure character of the Lord is present.
4. The awakening of Christians occurs: many understand and take part.
5. An awakening may be God's means of preparing and strengthening [God's] people for future challenges....¹

Significant Times of Renewal/Transformation in the Western Church

Sixth Century Monastic Communities
16th Century Reforms
17th Century Pietists
English Puritans (beginning in the 1550s)
American Puritans (beginning in the 1630s)
First Great Awakening (beginning in the 1720s)
Methodist Movement (beginning in the 1740s)
Second Great Awakening (beginning in 1799)
19th Century Revivals
Early 20th Century Pentecostal Movement
Mid-Century Neo-Evangelical Movement
Second Vatican Council (1962-65)

Patterns of Worship/Liturgical Transformation

1. Significant worship renewal is generally preceded by a prolonged season when worship is perceived to be outmoded, spiritually dead, or disconnected from / irrelevant to daily life.
2. A group of people realize there is more to worship than they are experiencing. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. This is a critical time – they will either become more deeply invested in addressing their concerns or they will disengage. Those who remain will often begin the process of renewal by repurposing existing / familiar forms of music and liturgy,

¹ "Patterns of Spiritual Renewal," *Christian History*, Issue 23, 1989,
www.christianitytoday.com/ch/1989/issue23/2307.html

3. A few people begin to explore biblical, historical, and theological dimensions of worship and, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, experiment with renewed forms of prayer and praise. This can lead to a period of disorientation.
4. People are drawn to these new musical / liturgical expressions.
5. Renewed worship nurtures a heightened awareness of our individual and corporate relationship with the Triune God, resulting in more robust and resilient discipleship and missional engagement.

CASE STUDY: 1690 - 1750

Isaac Watts (1674-1748) At age 16 he complained to his father (a Congregational Church elder) that Christians only sang psalms and were not allowed to sing much at all about their beliefs. His father is believed to have said, "Then, go write something better."

Behold the glories of the Lamb
amidst the Father's throne:
prepare now honors for his name
and songs before unknown.

Let elders worship at his feet,
the church adore around,
with vials full of odors sweet
and harps of sweeter sound.

Those are the prayers of the saints,
and these the hymns they raise:
Jesus is kind to our complaints.
He loves to hear our praise.

Eternal Father, who shall
look into thy secret will?
Who but the Son should take that book
and open every seal?

He shall fulfill thy great decrees,
the Son deserves it well;
lo, in his hand the sovereign keys
of Heaven, death, and Hell.

Now to the Lamb that once was slain
be endless blessings paid;
salvation, glory, joy remain
forever on thy head.

Thou hast redeemed our souls with blood,
hast set the prisoners free;
hast made us kings and priests to God,
and we shall reign with thee.

**The world of nature and of grace
are put beneath thy power,
then shorten these delaying days,
and bring the promised hour.** (1690)

Philip Doddridge (1702-1751) was heavily influenced by the writing of Isaac Watts. He was offered an opportunity to study for ordination in the Church of England but chose instead to be a Congregationalist pastor and teacher. This hymn, officially published in 1755, is thought to be the first hymn ever written about the social applications of the gospel.

Jesus, my Lord, how rich thy grace!
Thy bounties, how complete!
How shall I count the matchless sum!
How pay the mighty debt!

But thou hast brethren here below,
the partners of thy grace,
and wilt confess their humble names
before thy Father's face.

High on a throne of radiant light
dost thou exalted shine;
what can my poverty bestow,
when all the worlds are thine?

In them thou mayst be clothed and fed,
and visited and cheered,
and in their accents of distress
my Savior's voice is heard.

**Thy face with reverence and with love,
I in thy poor would see;
O rather let me beg my bread,
than hold it back from thee!**

(published 1755)

When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

See from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
save in the death of Christ my God!
all the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.

His dying crimson, like a robe,
spreads o'er his body on the tree;
then I am dead to all the globe,
and all the globe is dead to me.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were a present far too small;
love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.

Isaac Watts (1707)

Charles Wesley (1701-1788) was an ordained priest in the Church of England. As an Anglican shaped by the Book of Common Prayer, Wesley was more deeply committed to the liturgical life of the church than Watts or Doddridge, but was equally committed to proclaiming Jesus Christ and the power and work of the Holy Spirit. Yet, it is fair to say that this type of hymn might not have come into use in corporate worship without the ground-breaking work of the two earlier poets:

Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven to earth come down;
fix in us thy humble dwelling;
all thy faithful mercies crown!
Jesus, Thou art all compassion,
pure unbounded love Thou art;
visit us with Thy salvation;
enter every trembling heart.

Breathe, O breathe Thy loving Spirit,
into every troubled breast!
let us all in Thee inherit;
let us find that second rest.
Take away our bent to sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
end of faith, as its Beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.

Come, Almighty to deliver,
let us all Thy life receive;
suddenly return and never,
never more Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve Thee as Thy hosts above,
pray and praise Thee without ceasing,
glory in Thy perfect love.

Finish, then, thy new creation;
pure and spotless let us be.
Let us see thy great salvation
perfectly restored in thee;
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise. (1747)

What Does This Tell Us for Our Time?