

♪ Worship Notes ♪

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THEME: Defining Our Terms

A Confusion of Terms

Just What Is Worship?

Everybody's talking about it, but are we talking about the same thing? C. E. B. Cranfield points out:

We may distinguish three uses of the word "worship"; (i) to denote a particular element of what is generally referred to as worship, namely, adoration; (ii) to denote generally the public worship of the religious community gathered together and also the private religious exercises of the family and the individual; and (iii), in a still wider sense, to denote the whole life of the community or of the individual viewed as service of God ("Divine and Human Action," *Interpretation* 12 [October 1958], 387).

Part of the confusion may stem from the fact that a number of different scriptural words are translated as "worship." Many, many works build their definition of worship on the derivation of the word from the Old English

"Praise and Worship" tends to be used as a synonym for contemporary worship or contemporary worship music

"worship." But of course, to derive a truly biblical meaning one must explore the biblical terms themselves, not just the preferred English translation.¹ For more on the nuances of these terms, see the extended treatment in David Peterson's definitive *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*; also see below in the "Quotables" section for a collection of richly varied yet largely complementary definitions of worship offered by authors from many different traditions.

Praise and/or Worship?

The confusion is compounded when it comes to the ubiquitous use of the phrase "Praise and Worship." This grouping of words is commonly used nowadays as a synonym for contemporary worship or contemporary worship music. For instance, the [Wikipedia](#) gives this explanation:

"The phrase praise and worship is normally used within Christianity. It can refer to:

¹ This seems to be the problem with I. Howard Marshall's contention that the early church did not gather to "worship," in spite of the fact that activities of worship are clearly attributed to New Testament gatherings (Marshall, "How Far did the Early Christians Worship God? *Churchman* 99 [1985]:216-29).

- * The overall praise and worship of God — see *Christian worship*
- * A style of music — see *Contemporary worship music*
- * A time of congregational singing — see *Contemporary worship*

Thus we see many churches offering a “Praise and Worship Service” as either their regular fare or as a new, alternative service; Praise and Worship albums are being released by the truckload; Word Music and other publishers produce collections of song/hymns/ arrangements “for Praise and Worship.”

In fact, the words “praise and worship” are used together with such frequency today that few are aware anymore of the origins of the construction and its original implications. Common use of the phrase developed in the early days of the charismatic movement in the 1960s, and at that time reflected carried with it a quite specific understanding of the worship service and its structure.² Some charismatic articulators of worship theology claimed that certain Psalms suggest a structure for corporate worship that involves a movement through the service from louder, more boisterous singing (which they termed “praise”) to an eventual level of quiet, meditative engagement with God characterized by slower, more reflective songs (“entering into His presence,” and designated as “worship”). Advocates for this kind of progression claim support for their view in such passages as Psalm 95, 96, and 100. And so we read statements such as these:

Praise prepares us for worship . . . The order is praise first, worship second [citing Psalm 95:1-2 and 96:4-8]. . . . Praise is

often loudly exuberant while worship is more apt to be quietly exultant. . . . Praise puts love into words and action while worship puts love into touch and relationship. . . . Praise . . . is the route to worship. . . . We do not desire to remain in praise when God’s presence makes worship a distinct possibility (Judson Cornwall, cited in *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, 3:121-22).

Praise can be conceived of as a gateway to worship. . . . Starting with worship will help worship flow more easily. . . . Praise is horizontal in its purpose, while worship is primarily a vertical interaction. . . . Praise can sometimes be distant, but worship is usually intimate. . . . Worship is different. It brings us close to the heart of God (Bob Sorge, *Exploring Worship: A Practical Guide to Praise and Worship*, 68-69).

This understanding was sometimes carried over into publications that were intended for a broader audience:

The worship service becomes a journey into His presence. “Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise (Ps 100:4). Thanksgiving and praise move us into His presence. Worship occurs when we are before Him. . . . Songs of thanksgiving are usually fast, lively, loud and joyful. . . . The personality of praise is one of joyful celebration, exaltation and majestic splendor. . . . The character of worship is one of quietness, reverence, tenderness and serenity (Ken Barker, *Songs for Praise and Worship*, 474).

The function of worship is to express love to God. The function of praise is to celebrate the works, ways and character of God (Don McMinn, “The Praise Transi-

² While this article questions on biblical grounds the understanding of “praise and worship” as used by some charismatics, this author nevertheless acknowledges gratefully how God used this movement to restore to the larger church an appreciation of worship in all its expressions.

tion” in *The Celebration Hymnal: Worship Resource Edition*, 16).

As Don Hustad points out, under this view “thanksgiving, praise, and worship are *different, consecutive experiences* of the community of faith” (*True Worship*, 120).

Evaluation

1. A common pitfall in mining the Scriptures for guidelines for worship, and one that is not at all unique to the charismatic movement, is the tendency to confuse what is *descriptive* and what is intended to be *prescriptive*. In other words, just because something is done in the Bible or a particular pattern is found does not automatically mean that that act or form is intended by God to be normative for us. It may or it may not: we must carefully examine what the biblical writers (and the Holy Spirit) are intending to communicate, in the absence of an explicit command or “go and do likewise.” For instance, while Isaiah 6 can indeed provide a helpful pattern for a worship service, it is going too far to assert, as some do, that the passage provides *the* biblical pattern for worship; there is simply no warrant in the text for making that claim.

The same is true when it comes to the idea of a required progression from thanksgiving to praise to worship, based on texts such as Psalm 95, 96, and 100. Observing such a pattern in the text (or finding it helpful in practice) does not mean (without further support) that it is intended to be normative. It may be profitably used without making it a non-negotiable for faithful of meaningful worship.

2. There are plenty of biblical examples where “worship” involves outward acts and public displays. To define as “worship” as a merely inward act (though it can be, but always) simply does not do justice to the

biblical usage (in the original languages or as commonly translated).

3. While we must deal with the biblical terms themselves, as stated above, not merely with approximate English equivalents, yet it is safe to say that the biblical concept of “worship” encompasses a broader category (including aspects of corporate and private devotion, as well as lifestyle and indeed global implications), while “praise” (along with thanksgiving, confession, petition, intercession, etc.) is but one more focused subset of that broader concept of worship. Don Hustad concurs: “In historic Christian thought, worship is defined as the *overall activity* of believers in their . . . gatherings, and it includes every affirmative response to God: praise, thanksgiving, confession, dedication (submission), and petition” (*True Worship*, 120).

Conclusion

Bob Kauflin cautions:

Perhaps we can say that, according to Scripture, “worship” is our response to God’s self-revelation in ways that please him, and “praise” is an aspect of worship. But when biblical terms such as these become a mere verbal shorthand for different musical styles, we are much the poorer for it (*Worship Matters*, October 14, 2003).

Undoubtedly, the phrase “Praise and Worship” is here to stay. But let’s understand its limitations, and use more accurate designations for contemporary worship music and contemporary services. We need to acknowledge the vast reach of the Bible’s call to WORSHIP: “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31), and worship him with our lives, our relationships, our service, our repentance, our dependence . . . *and* our praise.

QUOTABLES

Definitions of Worship

“*Worship* is the proper response of all moral, sentient beings to God, ascribing all honor and worth to their Creator-God precisely because he is worthy, delightfully so. This side of the Fall, *human worship* of God properly responds to the redemptive provisions that God has graciously made. While all true worship is God-centered, *Christian worship* is no less Christ-centered. Empowered by the Spirit and in line with the stipulations of the new covenant, it manifests itself in all our living, finding its impulse in the gospel, which restores our relationship with our Redeemer-God and therefore also with our fellow image-bearers, our co-worshippers. Such worship therefore manifests itself both in adoration and action, both in the individual believer and in *corporate worship*, which is worship offered up in the context of the body of believers, who strive to align all the forms of the devout ascription of all worth to God with the panoply of new covenant mandates and examples that bring to fulfillment the glories of antecedent revelation and anticipate the consummation.”
(D. A. Carson)

“Christian worship is the full and authentic expression of our hearts towards God in response to the full and authentic revelation of God’s heart towards us in His word.”
(Matt Creamer)

“[Worship is] “the experience of conscious communion with God . . . the loving response of the creature to his Creator.”
(Franklin M. Segler)

“Worship is the celebration of being in covenant fellowship with a sovereign and holy Lord God, by means of the expressed commitment of trust and obedience of the cove-

nantal responsibilities, the spontaneous praise and adoration of His Persona and work, the memorial reenactment of entering into covenant through sacrificial atonement, with the confident anticipation of the fulfillment of His covenant promises.”

(Allen P. Ross)

“Worship is the act of magnifying God. Enlarging our vision of him.”

(Max Lucado)

“The essence of worship . . . is the inner act of the heart treasuring God as infinitely valuable. . . . The outer forms of worship are the acts that one does which show or reflect how much the heart treasures God. Therefore . . . all of life, biblically, is supposed to be worship. Because the Bible says, “whether you eat or whether you drink, or whatever you do” — all of life—do it such that the value you put on the glory of God is plain. . . . [In whatever you do,] magnify the worth of God in the way you do it.”

(John Piper)

“Worship is] an encounter between God and his people, in which God graciously initiates the relationship, and the people respond with praise, thanks, and love.”

(Mary L. Conway)

“Our worship is a thankful, joyful appropriation of Christ and of His Worship of the Father, through the Spirit, so that all that is of Christ is ours by Grace through the Spirit.”

(David W. Torrance)

“Worship has been defined as being preoccupied with God.”

(Karen Burton Mains)

“[Worship] is to seek to give to God the glory which is due to his name. Indeed, the best biblical definition of worship I know is to “glory in his holy name” (Psalm 105:3), that is, to revel in the unique wonder of who he is and has revealed himself to be.”

(John R. W. Stott)

“Hebrews 13:15-16, a passage that comes close to giving a definition of Christian worship:

‘Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.’ The sacrifice of praise and the sacrifice of good works are two fundamental aspects of the Christian way of being-in-the-world. They are at the same time the two constitutive elements of Christian worship: authentic Christian worship takes place in a rhythm of adoration and action.”

(Miroslav Volf)

“Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose—and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy for that self-centeredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin.”

(William Temple)

“A child . . . said, ‘Daddy, what does worship mean?’ The father replied, ‘It means to go to church and listen to the preacher preach.’ Could there be a more horrible definition? Yet that is the sum total of worship to millions American today.”

(William J. McRae)

“Worship is the natural expression of faith. . . . Worship is essentially a dialogical activity in which we stand over against God even when we draw near to Him, distinguishing His transcendent nature from ourselves, while relating ourselves appropriately to His holiness and majesty and responding thankfully to the mercy He extends towards us.”

(Thomas F. Torrance)

“Worship is our response to what God has revealed about himself. The Scriptures are the written record where we receive God’s special revelation. Through the Scriptures, we learn about God; we learn about his love for his people; and we discover his redemptive plan. Worship is our response to this foundational truth.”

(Kevin J. Navarro)

“Worship . . . is the response of the creature to the Eternal.”

(Evelyn Underhill)

“Worship is man’s response to God’s revelation.”

(Andrew W. Blackwood)

“Worship is a conversation between the God of revelation and people in need of redemption.”

(C. Welton Gaddy)

“Liturgy [the ‘work of the people’ in worship] is an intentionally gathered community in mutual dialogue with God’s self-communication.”

(Don Saliers)

“Christian worship is grounded in the reality of the action of God toward the human soul in Jesus Christ and in man’s responsive action through Jesus Christ.”

(Paul Waitman Hoon)

“[Worship is] communion with God.”
(Geoffrey Wainwright)

“Gospel-driven biblical worship is worship from the hearts of believers in union with Christ by faith and filled with the Holy Spirit. It is worship according to the Word of God and includes the biblically commanded elements of preaching and reading the Word, prayer, singing, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s supper, the presentation of offerings, confessions of faith, vows, and testimonies of God’s grace in people’s lives. Biblical worship is to be in the power of the Holy Spirit and through the glorified God-man Jesus Christ who prays for us, declares God’s Word to us, sings with us (Hebrews 2:11-12), and perfects our worship as He presents it to the Father who is worthy of our praise, receives our worship through Christ, and rejoices over us with singing (Zephaniah 3:17).”
(Bryan Thomas Schmidt)

“Worship is an act of the understanding, applying itself to the knowledge of the excellency of God, and actual thought of his majesty. . . . It is also an act of the will, whereby the soul adores and reverenceth his majesty, is ravished with his amiableness, embraceth his goodness, enters itself into an intimate communion with this most lovely object, and pitcheth all his affections upon him.”
(Stephen Charnock)

“Worship is the acts and attitudes of giving ourselves wholeheartedly to God—spirit, soul, and body. If it’s not wholehearted, it’s not worship. Romans 12:1 is the closest thing we have to a biblical definition of worship: ‘giving ourselves.’”
(Gerrit Gestafson)

“Worship is the celebrative response to what God has done, is doing, and promises to do.”
(John E. Burkhardt)

“Worship is the gift of participating through

the Spirit in the incarnate Son’s communion with the Father.”
(James B. Torrance)

“[Worship is] to narrate in word, act, and song the community’s memories and hopes, glorifying the God who redeems, enables, and sanctifies.”
(Fred Craddock)

“Worship is the activity of the new life of a believer in which, recognizing the fullness of the Godhead as it is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ and His mighty redemptive acts, he seeks by the power of the Holy Spirit to render to the living God the glory, honor, and submission which are His due.”
(Robert G. Rayburn)

“The essence of worship . . . is the inner act of the heart treasuring God as infinitely valuable. The outer forms of worship are the acts that one does which show or reflect how much the heart treasures God.”
(John Piper)

“Worship is the echo in the human heart of the excellency and the supremacy of God.”
(John Piper)

“Worship is both an event and a lifestyle in which believers, by grace, center their mind’s attention and their heart’s affection on the Lord, humbly glorifying God in response to His greatness, His mighty acts, and His Word.”
(Dave Hall)

“True worship involves reverential acts of submission and homage before the divine Sovereign in response to His gracious revelation of Himself and in accordance with His will.”
(Daniel I. Block, “The Joy of Worship: The Mosaic Invitation to the Presence of God (Deut. 12:1–14),” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162 [2005]: 131-49)

“Worship is, fundamentally, a declaration that God is worthy. Worship declares how inherently worthy God is to be praised, to be confessed to, to be preached about, to be served. . . . We not only lift God up, we affirm the high place in which God already and inherently is. We act in a way that is appropriate toward someone of infinite worth. As Psalm 96 says, ‘Ascribe to the Lord the glory due [God’s] name.’”
(Nathan Bierma)

“In historic Christian thought, ‘worship’ is the overall activity of believers in their cultic gatherings, and includes every affirmative response to God: praise, thanksgiving, confession, dedication (submission), and petition.”
(Don Hustad)

“The word ‘worship’ itself has been redefined to mean ‘the intimate encounter of an individual with God.’”
(Mark Earey)

“Worship is the response of the believing heart to God.”
(William Dyrness)

“[Worship is] faith expressing itself in obedience and adoration.”
(David Peterson)

“Worship is an active response to God whereby we declare His worth. Worship is not passive, but is participative. Worship is not simply a mood; it is a response. Worship is not just a feeling; it is a declaration. . . . It is the celebration of God!”
(Ronald Allen & Gordon Borrer)

“Worship is an act of ascribing ultimate value to something that engages your entire being. . . . What you worship is what you value so much that you fall apart when something happens to it.” (Tim Keller)

“[Worship is] gladly recognizing and celebrating the fact that this God is who he is and does what he does.”
(N. T. Wright)

“Worship is the totality of our grateful, obedient response to God’s initiative in revelation and redemption.”
(Ron Man)

“Worship... is nothing but the outworking of God-centeredness in the individual and corporate experience of the people of God.”
(D. A. Carson)

“Christian worship is not only offering all that we are to a Holy God (spirit). It is an intentional response of praise, thanksgiving, and adoration to The God, the One revealed in the Word, made known and accessible to us in Jesus Christ and witnessed in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”
(Sally Morgenthaler)

“In worship, we acknowledge God’s transcendent greatness in reverence and awe..., in praise and adoration, in humble recognitions of our need for his forgiveness.”
(John Frame)

“Worship defines a way of life—a continual response of obedience, love, awe, adoration, and service to the triune God who has made Himself known through His Son and His written Word.”
(Bob Kauflin)

“Worship is a lifestyle of humble service that culminates corporately at least once a week, where God’s chosen people join with the heavenly chorus to praise Him for His vast attributes, confess our inabilities, affirm His grace, yield to His instruction, celebrate His mercies and respond to His covenantal call.”
(Bryan Chappell)

SING TO THE LORD

Reflections on Congregational Song

Music sullies the Divine Service, for in the very sight of God, in the sacred recesses of the sanctuary itself, the singers attempt, with the lewdness of a lascivious voice and a singularly foppish manner, to feminize all their spellbound little followers with the girlish way they render the notes and end their phrases. Could you but hear the effete emotings of their before-singing and their after-singing, their singing and their counter-singing, their in-between-singing and their ill-advised singing, you would think it an ensemble of sirens, not of men; and you would be astounded by the singers' facility, with which indeed neither that of the parrot or the nightingale can compare, nor of whatever else there may be that is more remarkable in this kind, can compare. Indeed, such is their glibness in running up and down the scale, such their cutting apart or their conjoining of notes, such their repetition or their elision of single phrases of the text — to such an extent are the high or even the highest notes mixed together with the low or lowest ones — that the ears are almost completely divested of their critical power, and the intellect, which pleasurable of so much sweetness has caressed insensate, is impotent to judge the merits of the thing heard.

—John of Salisbury (d. 1180), on early polyphony

GLOBAL WORSHIP

Ground-Breaking Course Connects Worship and Mission

“[Introduction to Ethnodoxology](#),” a course that breaks new ground in the history of graduate education, was held in the first week of June, 2008, at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. This course brought together a diverse group of students—seminarians, musicians from three continents, missionaries, and worship leaders from churches including Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis and Louisville’s St. Stephen Baptist and Sojourn Church. Students as well as professors from Liberty University, Asbury Seminary, and Kentucky Mountain Bible College enrolled in the course. Southern Seminary students were from the Billy Graham School and the School of Church Music and Worship.

The course equipped students with practical skills to encourage culturally-appropriate Christian worship in local church contexts both at home and abroad. A collaborative team of six experienced teachers from the [International Council of Ethnodoxologists](#) (ICE) crafted this course in consultation with Dr. Esther Crookshank, Southern Seminary professor of hymnology, who remarked, “The instructional resources, passionate vision, and networking connections that this teaching team brings to our campus are phenomenal. I can think of few better investments of our energies at Southern Seminary than to equip musicians, pastors, and missionaries to facilitate mature, biblical worship that connects with God’s people at the deepest level, whatever their cultural context.”

The teaching sessions, corporate worship, and group song-writing projects were supplemented with other interactive learning events. Students worshiped at a variety of local churches, joined in a shape-note singing on campus led by Bob Meek and the Ohio Valley Shape-Note Singers, and spent an evening with Brazilian hymnwriter Hiram Rollo, worship pastor of the multi-ethnic Walnut Street Baptist Church in downtown Louisville. They participated in a moving Global Hymn Festival based on the Lord's Prayer led by internationally-known speaker and author on world congregational song Dr. C. Michael Hawn, who is a Southern Seminary graduate.

Students engaged with the subject of the course on a deep level, as their enthusiastic responses showed. One student described global worship song as foreshadowing the heavenly scene in Revelation where believers from all languages and cultures worship before God's throne with distinct expressions of praise. Others wrote:

- "This course will challenge you to see the world with new eyes."
- "The course was great! Instructors phenomenal! Thank you for sensitizing me more to God's Great Commission."
- "The Ethnodoxology course is perfect for those interested in cross-cultural ministries: pastors, mission committee members, worship leaders and coordinators of short term mission trips. It has definitely broadened my horizons while equipping me better for ministry here in my local home church as well as cross-culturally."
- "My excitement over the class has not waned. My new phrase is: 'Something I learned from my class last week was . . .' Thanks again."

Dr. Thomas Bolton, Dean of Southern Seminary's School of Church Music and Worship, thanked the ICE team for coming to the seminary: "I have heard nothing but rave reviews from this class, and I hope and pray this was but the first of many such collaborations. I would like to see SBTS at the forefront of an ethnodoxology movement. God bless you as you continue your work."

What comes next? A Worship Renewal Grant from [Calvin Institute of Christian Worship](#) (Grand Rapids, MI) with funds provided by Lilly Endowment, Inc. will enable ICE to develop a workshop version of the course to be taught at several church venues across the U.S. during 2009. At Southern Seminary, Deans Chuck Lawless of the Billy Graham School and Tom Bolton of the School of Church Music and Worship met with the ethnodoxology faculty and other professors to discuss new curricular possibilities, including a worship option for students in the seminary's Hands On semester abroad missions program.

ICE Coordinator Robin Harris commented, "The 'Introduction to Ethnodoxology' course is on the cutting edge of 'best practice' for churches and missions; we're delighted to see the positive responses from Southern Seminary and the support of the Worship Renewal Grant program. We look forward to further partnering with them to help people connect with God's heart for worship and mission."

* * * * *

Check out a fascinating presentation about heart music on YouTube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBmRzC-rK3E>

(you can find it easily by typing in "ethnomusicology"—it's the first thing that comes up)

A clear 10-min presentation on the essence of ethnomusicology
and ethnodoxology in missions

UPCOMING WORSHIP EVENTS

Beginning Fall 2008, The Bethlehem Institute at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota will be offering a rigorous, two-year graduate apprenticeship program in worship studies. For more information, click [HERE](#).



July 22-25, 2008 Baylor University
Info [HERE](#)



This year's theme: "Rediscovering the Psalms"
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COMING NEXT MONTH:

The Tyranny of Taste



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