

A Workshop on Worship with St. Luke's Church, Mount Waverley

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A QUICK SPIN THROUGH THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Origins in Jewish worship:

- **Temple:** The early Jerusalem Christians met in the temple courts, but there was very little ongoing temple influence on the Christian church as it developed. Temple worship encouraged little active participation from the congregation (they watched). Herod's temple also segregated worshippers according to ethnicity or gender.
- **Synagogue:** Here the Torah was proclaimed and taught, usually in the form of chanted readings and prayers. The whole congregation participated in this chanting. This had an ongoing influence on the Christian liturgy of the Word.
- **Home:** The evening Passover meal was especially influential for the development of the Christian Eucharist, with its use of bread, wine, and a chanted prayer of thanksgiving and blessing over the gifts. The connection between Passover and the death/resurrection of Jesus is a key theme in the New Testament. The wine was usually mixed with water to dilute it.
- Most Christian worship in the first century occurred in Jewish synagogues and homes. Christians began to leave after about 80 AD, when a prayer of condemnation was included in the synagogue liturgy.

Developments in the 2nd and 3rd centuries

- A recognisable order of service developed: Gathering, Scripture and proclamation, prayers for others, Eucharistic meal, missional rites. Many scholars believe that this pattern influenced the construction of the story of Emmaus in Luke 24.
- Met in the houses of the wealthy. Towards the end of the second century houses began to be acquired and converted into dedicated worship space. Different rooms were probably used for different parts of the liturgy. People faced each other for much of the liturgy.
- Prayers and readings were offered musically. Responsorial forms were preferred because of the early Christian preference for a communal spirituality and prayer. Psalms (not only biblical ones) were chanted.
- Hymns were composed in the style we are familiar with. These were probably sung as we sing them: with one voice. This means that the whole of Christian worship was musical.
- The bread of the Eucharist was usually preserved and sent to members of the church who could not be present at the communal worship. The community used a common cup, often a very large one. Sometimes water was mixed with the wine, and a theological meaning was given to this practise.
- Books began to emerge in the second century and early third century which contained guidelines for the order and conduct of worship. These include the *Didache* and the *Didascalia Apostolorum*. It is widely understood that these

codified existing patterns of prayer, which remained very flexible, rather than setting new ones.

- People were baptised after conversion and a public profession of faith. Conversion was seen as a process. The catechumenate sought to effect this conversion. Infant baptism by Christian parents only became common after Christianity had become the state religion.

Worship in Christendom

- Following the decision of Constantine, in 313, to privilege Christianity as the state religion, many things changed in Christian worship.
- Basilicas were built to house worship. These were long rectangular buildings based on civic and legal architecture. The bishop became a prince rather than a pastor. Vestments tended to reflect this. The presbyters, the communion table, and the liturgical action were progressively placed further and further from the faithful. Women were excluded from the sanctuary in some places. Eventually all but the clergy were excluded from the sanctuary. Helped develop a hierarchical understanding of both church and God.
- In the Eastern churches, the longitudinal form did not take on. They preferred round, domed, churches, in which the people, the ministers, and the liturgical action were brought together. A more communal understanding of both Church and God therefore persisted.
- Music gradually became more professionalized. Special choirs emerged to lead the congregational singing. In time, these took over the singing altogether in some places.
- At the same time, monastic communities were founded as an act of protest against the impulses of Christendom toward wealth and hierarchy. Preserved communal worship practices from earlier centuries. Still, by the time of Francis of Assisi, even the monasteries had become places of wealth and hierarchy.
- Liturgies became more fixed, and the Roman rite was eventually imposed on the whole of Europe by the Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne (d.814). Local liturgies survived, particularly in the Celtic lands of the far west.

Worship in the Reformation

- The Reformation was in many ways a protest against the distancing of the faithful from the liturgical action of worship. The reformation wanted the faithful to be *participants* in worship rather than *observers of* worship.
- At the beginning of the Reformation the people no longer understood the liturgy because it was in another language. They no longer sang the prayers, not even the *sanctus*, because it had been taken over by choirs and professional ministers. Mostly they received only the bread at communion but not the wine (in many places, they received nothing at all). Baptism and Eucharist were no longer understood as symbolic participations in Christ's life of discipleship, but rather as magic ceremonies that sheltered the worshipper from hell.
- Initially, Protestant communities built simpler churches which enabled the community to participate in the whole of Christian worship. Early Lutheran, Anabaptist (Müntzer) and Anglican movements retained much of the existing liturgy, but brought the faithful more fully into the action. Luther translated the liturgy into the vernacular, and wrote singable hymns which were designed to teach the gospel. Communion was returned to the people.

- A significant development was the publication of the *Directory for the Public Worship of God* (1644) by the Puritan divines. It prescribed liturgical principles, but not specific prayers and rites. It remains the model for the Uniting Church.
- Eventually, however, medievalism made a return in the form of professionalised worship, especially within Anglicanism. In other reformation churches, particularly those influenced by Calvinism, Enlightenment principles began to take over. Services became mainly about preaching and doctrine. In some churches, music was banned and it was only the professional clergy who were allowed to utter a prayer. Communion was received only a few times per year. The people became passive in worship once again. Even Methodism, which was originally very sacramental, changed in America to become a word-centred movement (albeit one in which hymnody remained strong).

The Liturgical Renewal movement

- Various attempts at reform within the Roman rite were crushed between the 18th and early 20th centuries. Full renewal got underway when a 1909 paper by the French Benedictine monk, Lambert Beauduin, calling for the full participation of the faithful in the mass, was well received in the wider church. What followed was an avalanche of scholarship and creative practise which has become known as the *Liturgical Renewal Movement*. Although it began in the French catholic churches, the movement soon encompassed scholars and practitioners from all the major Protestant churches as well. The most influential document of the movement is the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (1963), which was issued by the 2nd Vatican Council. While written for Roman Catholics, this document became pivotal for the reform of worship throughout the Christian churches. Probably more than any other treatise, the *Constitution* articulated a theology of worship that has resonated with us all.
- That theology may, perhaps, be summarised in this manner:
 1. worship is understood as a human participation in the sacrifice of praise and service offered to God by Christ. It is, at the same time, the primary means by which God speaks to and touches human community today, calling forth and forming a community of disciples.
 2. worship tells the story of, and invites a symbolic participation in, the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Such participation is crucial for the living of a life of discipleship. Worship both forms and gives expression to such a life.
 3. worship represents a crucial conversation and covenant between the invitational, promising, Word of God (Christ) and the hearing, faith and mission of the human community. This conjunction is expressed in a fourfold movement within worship: summons/gathering; address/listening; embodiment/ transfiguration; and sending/mission.
 4. Pastorally, this means that both the proclamation of Christ and the communion of the people in Christ are crucial to worship. The Word must be authoritatively proclaimed and signified in material ways. But it must also become real in the world through the missioning body of the gathered disciples.
 5. In summary, worship is a complex of rituals which enables the Word of God, who is already a material sacrament or body, to be further and more completely embodied in the community of believers. All this for the sake of the world for whom Christ died. Therefore, the normative

service of Christian worship is one of gathering, scripture, Eucharist and missional rites. It is also one in which the corporal and communal nature of Christ's embodiment is emphasised over private and personal devotion.

The 'catholic' or Ecumenical Consensus

- Since Vatican 2, almost all the major Protestant churches have revised their service books and hymnals according to the principles of the Liturgical Renewal Movement. The Uniting Church is no exception. Our *Uniting in Worship* service-book reflects this influence strongly.
- The service we shall be participating in tonight can be seen, perhaps, as an even stronger radicalization of these themes, for it seeks to put aside some of those lingering legacies of Christendom (both Catholic and Protestant):
 1. there is no special place called a 'sanctuary' where special people called clergy hang out because it's somehow closer to God. Instead we all gaze upon the sacred in each other, across the communion table of Christ, in which we learn that God is with the least and most lowly;
 2. the passivity of the faithful while the clergy perform the liturgy and say the prayers is put aside in favour of a service where each takes their part in the corporate priesthood of Christ's body;
 3. the Calvinist emphasis on Scripture, words and ideas is brought into a truer balance with the Catholic emphasis on sacrament, the senses, and embodiment. This service listens carefully for the word of God, but also seeks to give that word an undeniably sensible form in icons, candles, banners, incense, singing and bodily movement.
 4. in contrast to both medieval Catholicism and contemporary evangelicalism, the prayer offered at public worship is understood primarily as a corporate act of the people rather than as a moment of private communion between God and the individual worshipper.

The 'post-modern' horizon of worship today

- I'd like to close this part of the workshop with just one or two comments about the cultural context in which we offer our worship today.
- Postmodernism can be seen as a new opening of the human heart and soul toward that which resists both our rational understanding and our individualism. It can be seen as a new human search for God or the sacred. That is not to say that it looks for a Christian God in particular. But the most philosophical voices of postmodernism recognise, quite openly, that it is a Judaeo-Christian God that fits the bill best, for only that God, amongst all the gods on offer, is primarily a God of mystery who *interrupts and re-forms* human desire. Other gods tend to pander to our individualised wants (many of which have been planted there by consumer culture).
- Of the two major forms of 'postmodern' worship on offer today, what we shall do tonight is (in my view) the form that is most open to the ever-strange God of Jesus Christ. It recognises that we can know nothing of Christ except through Scripture and the specifically sacramental and liturgical memory of the church. It therefore takes these two markers very seriously. Pentecostal worship, the other major 'postmodern' form, tends to pander to the individual, here-and-now, vision and desire of the worship-leader. Pentecostal worship effectively minimises

references to history or tradition in two ways: (1) by limiting the amount of Scripture that is read and reflected upon; and (2) by reducing the celebration of the Lord's supper to a memorial 'ordinance' of Christ which must be obeyed, even if no-one can say why (some have dubbed this 'a practise in search of a theology'). Pentecostal worship also tends to encourage a highly individualised encounter between a person and their 'personal Jesus' which runs counter to the radical communitarianism of the New Testament. Where the service we shall participate in tonight is perhaps closer to Pentecostalism is in the recognition that worship has to involve the body, the senses and the emotions, as well as just the head and the brain.

- For that reason, I believe this kind of worship will appeal to some in our community who are searching for 'deeper wells' of spiritual experience. Not all, by any means. Pentecostalism will still be the first port of call for many because of its similarity to entertainment culture. Nevertheless, there are others for whom the quiet contemplation and liturgical rhythm of tonight's service will become a welcome draught of cool water in what is otherwise a desert of need.

THE THEOLOGY OF THIS 'NEW' WORSHIP SERVICE

Sacred Space and Time

*"We claim this place and time for the worship of God.
Let us honour God's image, visible among us,
and lift our voices in praise."*

- A **threshold** needs to be crossed in order for worship to happen: we need to enter 'sacred time' and 'sacred space' [Lion, Witch and Wardrobe illustration]. The music, the lighting, and the arrangement of space and sacred objects all help that to happen.
- **Space:** The seating arrangement in a circle reminds us of our wider context in the Trinity and in the communion of saints. The font and the table at the center reminds us that we have died to sin and live with Christ. The stories take us into a sacred landscape which no longer exists, and never, in fact existed, but which exists everywhere.
- **Time:** The lighting is set for twilight, 'liminal time'; the calendar of the church is indicated by the colour of the banners. The liturgy and the preaching take us through the movement of sacred time: an inbreaking and 'taking up' of ordinary time into 'God-time' [examples: the Transfiguration; the liturgy in heaven, portrayed in *Revelation*].

The Gathering Rites

- **Lighting of the Paschal candle:** connection with the coming of light into darkness at the resurrection of Jesus. 'Paschal' meaning the Christian Passover at Easter.
- **Gathering litany:** reminds us that we gather in two overlapping contexts: (1) God as a Trinitarian community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit; (2) the communion of many saints who go before us and who continue to surround us today.
- **Prayer of approach:** calls upon the Spirit to gather all our humanity, the great bits and the heart-breaking bits, into God's salvation.

- **Prayer of confession:** recognises that we come as broken people, part of a broken world. Asks for God's mercy.
- **Absolution:** an assurance that God is ever merciful and ever willing to forgive those who confess their brokenness. Said by the minister as a representative of Christ who is, nevertheless, not Christ. Only Christ can utter God's forgiveness with authority.
- **Gloria:** perhaps the oldest Christian hymn of praise. A fitting response to the word of forgiveness.

The Liturgy of the Word

- **Introduction:** reminds us that it is the Word which is able to save us. The sung response names Christ as the Word. Calls upon the Spirit to make the Word real and effective as we listen.
- **Readings:** one each from the Hebrew Bible, the Psalms, the New Testament, and the Gospels. The three-year lectionary disciplines congregations to listen to a wide selection of the canon, and not only their favourite bits. The silence between readings allows us to really listen to what the Spirit might be saying.
- **Homily:** a talk in which the word to the ancient church is reinterpreted as a word to today's church. The preacher is usually an ordained minister, a person set aside to study and interpret the Scripture as a service to the rest of the church. The minister wears a stole as a sign of being 'yoked' to Christ. The minister is Christ's slave, and must therefore listen very carefully to the Word in study and prayer before he or she attempts to preach it to others.
- **Sermon of silence:** a chance to hear the Spirit in all that has gone before.
- **Affirmation of faith:** the ancient faith in contemporary words. Reminds us that faith is communal and historical as well as personal. The confession of faith is a reaffirmation of the faith we owned for ourselves at baptism/confirmation.
- **Prayers of the People:** prayers of intercession, sharing in the priestly prayer of Jesus for the salvation of the world. They follow the Liturgy of the Word in order that they may be directed primarily by God's desire and not our own.

The Liturgy of the Lord's Table

- **Invitation:** reminds us that we come to the table solely because of Christ's gracious invitation.
- **The peace:** having been forgiven by Christ, it is essential to make that reconciliation real in the assembly. Without such reconciliation, the body of Christ (the church) can never really be effectively broken anew for the life of the world. This act's origins are in the kiss of peace that welcomed the newly baptised into the community of faith.
- **Offertory prayer:** we offer our bodies, as well as the materiality of the bread and the wine, to become 'real and effective signs' of Christ's own body and blood.
- **Sursum corda:** a very ancient prayer to begin the Thanksgiving over the gifts.
- **Eucharistic Preface:** a prayer of thanksgiving which recalls the action of God in creation and redemption. Usually based upon the Scriptures of the day. Its origins are in domestic Jewish prayers at mealtime.
- **Sanctus and benedictus:** one of the oldest Christian songs we have. Has been part of the Eucharistic prayer for almost two millennia. A combination of the song of the angels at Jesus birth and the greeting of the people of Jerusalem in the week when Jesus was crucified. Glory and sacrifice all in one.

- **Prayer of thanksgiving for Jesus:** recounts the liberating deeds of Christ, just in case we have forgotten.
- **Institution narrative:** the crucial words of Jesus at the last supper, in which he declared the bread and the wine to be signs of his impending death, by which a new covenant with God would be made possible.
- **Memorial acclamation:** the substance of the faith, according to St. Paul.
- ***Epiclesis and Gloria Patri:*** calling upon the Spirit to make the bread, the wine, and the community into the body and blood of Christ. By eating and drinking the body of Christ we are transformed *into* the body of Christ. The final *Gloria* is a Trinitarian burst of praise to the God who makes all this possible.
- **The fraction and elevation:** A symbolic repetition of the breaking of bread and the pouring of wine at the Last Supper. Usually done by an ordained minister *in persona Christi*, recognising that it is Christ himself who performs these acts as host. The elevation of the bread and wine is based on the idea in John's gospel that 'if Christ is lifted up, he will draw all people to himself.' The song at the elevation is very ancient, declaring that we may only become holy by dying and hiding our lives in Christ's resurrection life.
- **The communion:** we receive what we are and become what we receive: Christ's body (Augustine). The words over the wine remind us that this is not just a memorial feast, or a feast which transforms the present. It is also a feast that looks toward a day when the hungry shall be fed, and the mourners comforted—at the wedding-feast of the Lamb. The references in the liturgy to water as well as wine go back to the mixing of water and wine in Jewish practise. Theologically, this may be interpreted as the presence of the Spirit in the making of the transformation.
- ***Agnus Dei:*** another very ancient hymn which may be found in the 1st chapter of John's gospel. It plays on the image of Christ as a Passover lamb whose blood is shed to bring peace to God's people.

The Missional Rites

- The missional rites encourage the faithful, having been remade in the image of the crucified and risen Christ, to go out and be Christ's body in the world—to live the baptised life, in other words. The whole point of the liturgy, in many ways, is to remind the community of its identity and vocation as Christ's disciples.
- **The covenant prayer:** this is a prayer of John Wesley which captures perfectly, I think, the happy submission of the disciple to Christ's will and way. Its presentation of the paradox of suffering and joy in the Christian way echoes a similar passage in 2 Corinthians 4.7-12.
- **Words of mission and blessing:** These echo the commissioning words of Jesus in the gospels and then the Scriptures for the day. According to Luke, the final act of Jesus at his ascension was to bless the disciples and to give them a ministry of blessing. This we hear from Jesus again at the moment. Again, it is usually the ordained minister who speaks for Christ at this point.

The Weird Stuff

- **Icons.** Icons are pictorial stories. They are like stain glass windows through which the glory of God takes form and substance. Colossians 1.15 says that Christ is the *ικον* of God. He gives the divine 'beyond' form and substance in historical reality. Just as computer icons open onto greater realities, so icons open onto the divine 'beyond'. Everything visible in worship, not just the icons themselves, functions in an

iconic way. The bread and the wine, the scripture and the seasonal colours, are icons as well.

- **Incense.** The use of incense in Christian worship draws its inspiration from the Jewish history and theology to which we are heir. Here are just some of the many resonances of meaning:
 1. The perfume of offering in the cult of Israel: **thanksgiving**
 2. The smoke at Sinai: the **holiness** of God
 3. The incense in Ezekiel's temple: **hides** God from our knowing
 4. The incense in Isaiah's temple: **forgiveness**
 5. In the Psalms incense is a sign of our **prayers rising** to God.
 6. In Malachi (I.II) incense is seen as a sign of **pure** worship, a **pure** offering to God.
- **Bodily Postures.** Whole body worship. The NT mentions many postures of the body, used in worship to express a range of responses to God's presence and activity. These range from the lifting of holy hands and the falling on one's face or knees, through to the offering of a holy kiss. In this service we recommend a wide range of postures. **NONE ARE COMPULSORY.**
 1. Our default posture is **standing**. This reminds us that Christ has raised us so that we can stand when the day of judgement comes. We stand to sing and to hear the gospel which raises us from death.
 2. We **kneel** as a sign of humility before God, especially in the prayers and during the sermon of silence.
 3. We **sit** for the readings and the homily, as per the practise of the earliest Jewish Christians. We sit to eat, but here it is the scriptures that are our nourishment.
 4. We **bow** as a sign of respect or honouring towards people or objects in which we discern the presence or image of Christ. We bow to icons. We bow to the one who censes us. We bow to the bible as it is processed in.
 5. We **raise our hands**. A classical sign of prayer, especially for thanksgiving. It signifies 'empty hands' waiting for God to give us all that we need. We use it during many parts of our service, especially the Eucharistic prayer and the prayers of intercession. We use a slightly different configuration during the epiclesis, the invocation of the Spirit. This is a palms facing down posture, which signifies blessing.
 6. We make the **sign of the cross**. You might see this done in two ways. First, you may cross *yourself* in blessing as a reminder that you are baptised, and that you therefore bear the scars of Christ. This action reminds you of your identity and vocation as a disciple of Jesus. The ordained minister may also *bless* you with the sign of the cross, as a way of reminding you to walk in the way of the cross. Crossing usually occurs whenever the threefold names of the Trinity are invoked in succession (and there are hand and finger configurations to symbolize that fact).

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