

Spirituality and Transforming Worship – Dr Bruce Theron

Introduction

“Spirituality without the balance of corporate worship can be misleading. Then too, corporate worship that is not undergirded by an individually disciplined spiritual life is shallow and lacks influence.” These must be held in healthy tension.

This past Sunday – Trinity Sunday reminded us of the synergy, cooperation and balance within the Trinity. Children moment lesson, KFC – chicken, chips and drink. Genesis reminds us – “Let us make human beings in **our** image.” And also John 1:1ff

Two stories of being comfortable. ***Long beard and comfortable shoe.***

“Reforming and transforming worship” is a loaded phrase. Transform = renovate, change and convert. To re-form lets us ‘re-do.’ Worship in a sense is transient and changes, often unintentional. For this reason leaders must also be ready to adapt and be “reformative’ (Noko). As we re-interpret worship, I share with you my experience and exposure to Calvin Institute for Christian Worship. I wish to hold that up for us to look at, reflect on and see what we can learn from it.

My church secretary, in logistics, likes to say; “success is measured in numbers, be it money or percentage or attendance.” In the case of CICW it seems to be working. They host a worship conference every year where they invite up to 1500 people from across the globe. I have had the privilege of taking a group of sixteen in 2016 and then a group of ten in 2017. My observation taught me;

- CRC take worship seriously
- They worship in diverse ways
- Leading worship no longer left to the minister
- Liturgy no longer printed on the back of the Sunday bulletin
- They experiment with different forms of liturgy
- They make use of different and rich styles of music and alternative ways of celebrating the sacraments

Protestant Worship in USA

In the 60’s the CRC reviewed their worship and a report was compiled in 1968 (after Vatican II - 1963-65). Later we will see a parallel reform taking place in the Roman

¹Transformworship.Winter2017

Catholic Church also in 1968. The CRC report said;

1. Worship is dialogue
2. Worship has four motifs, from the 1965 *Gereformeerde Kerke* in Netherlands. This was taken as basis for evaluating and reforming contemporary worship.
 - Biblical - it remains the basic orientation and authority, though it does not prescribe or define worship
 - Catholic - the church at worship is connected with the body of Christ that has gone before – Dr Noko.
 - Confessional – every church that gathers for worship has certain beliefs which it expresses in different ways
 - Pastoral – a congregation always worships as a specific people where they are located

After 1968 a 2nd report was adopted in 1997, named *Authentic Worship in a Changing Culture*. This report was a fresh approach and did away with traditional and contemporary worship. Some of the cultural, historical and ecclesiastical forces that brought change about, were;

1. World Wide Ecumenical Liturgical Movement

- discovering the riches of the gospel, with full emphasis on the death and resurrection of Christ
- encouraging the full conscious and active participation of the congregation in worship
- rediscovering the RCL as a narrative celebrating salvation history and to encourage Christians to read portions of scripture systematically

2. Charismatic Movement

- influenced worship in many churches, seen to be similar to the outpouring in Acts
- lay participation increased as did contemplative and exuberant worship

3. Front Door Evangelism

- worship was seen as strategic to evangelism
- services geared towards non-Christians
- sociological analysis was done to understand American culture
- Harry and Sally Seeker sensitive terminology was used

4. Cultural Diversity

- cultural diversity brought about growth
- worship services offered in various languages

- congregations borrowed from other traditions and cultures
- various forms of worship
- marketing strategy informed outreach
- hymnals were changed for more contemporary singing
- annual worship conferences took place with focus on worship

CRC Adapting in the USA

1. Church had to fit in

- having to adapt from Dutch, to America culture, with its ethnic diversity
- participating in local government and politics
- from homogenous background to a fragmented society with no brand loyalty

2. Church and consumer culture

- consumer cultural influence with many options
- entertainment value important
- market sensitivity – descriptive language becomes prescriptive “ boomers don’t like dressing up” so logical to say, “don’t dress up for church”
- at best know that culture informs the church a given
- at worst church may seem to recapitulate

3. Inevitable change

- change is a given in American culture – from rural to mechanical to digital
- increasing mobile society – no sense of place, but malls and fast food is that
- as a result, loss of memory and connection
- church seen as rigid and inflexible, yet change happens
- traditionalism being the dead faith of the living and tradition being the living faith of the dead

4. Up the entertainment

- society shifts from reading to watching
- culture change from discourse to entertainment and substance to image
- impact of television – influences values, distorts beliefs
- advertisers know sex, power and money sells and influences
- shorter concentration – rapid scene changes – down time
- visually and image orientated – raises performance standards and expectation
- spawned the polished look of the tele-evangelists
- temptation to be spectator rather than being active and involved

- increase in being biblically and theologically illiterate
- no more interest in ideas about God – instead want to experience God

5. Church Feels

- feelings become an essential part of one's being and personality
- self-fulfillment being absolutized becomes dangerous
- 'self' as in –culture, -help and -advancement proliferates, leading to individualism
- television focus shifted from informing to entertaining
- television plays on the needs – eating, health and wealth sells
- people come as consumers, wanting to “feel good”, not knowing what that is

6. Church Hurts

Thriving and prosperous 1st world country now gives way to;

- anxiety, fear, broken marriages abound
- addictive society – substance abuse, eating disorders, feel good drugs
- domestic, marital and societal violence on increase and death by guns
- hurt, emptiness and longing and search for meaning is brought into worship

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

On 4 December 1963, during Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church called for sweeping reforms. 'Vatican' is referred to as an “Ecumenical Council” yet comprised only members from the Roman Catholic community.

However, it was decided that churches could now worship in their own language and the Latin mass was no longer prescriptive. Worship became a joyful celebration. Vatican II looked for worship that was genuinely biblical, centred in Christ and fully congregational. With renewed interest and love they rediscovered the value of the old prayers and tradition – the prayer by Bishop Hippolytus and in particular ‘the great prayer of thanksgiving,’ 1700 years ago, was rediscovered. This was particularly meaningful, since these prayers were written before the break of the church between East and West.

Sadly, just as the old established churches were recovering their rich common worship heritage, the numbers grew and the church became strong and influential again, but not everybody felt moved by this rediscovery of the old.

Willow Creek

The busy, secular, individualistic and consumer culture vigorously and thoroughly rejected these ‘institutional and traditional’ former mainline churches and their predicative and staid worship. This was particularly true of the churches in America. Those who left

were not upset or angry, they just left quietly.

Church leaders were confused about this decline. It was not clear whether people were leaving because they were tired of spirituality or simply found the churches boring?

This new expression led to a new look at worship, new song and worship books and new expressions of worship. People no longer saw themselves as Methodists, or Lutheran, or Congregational. They were religious 'free people.' Some "visionary church leaders" (Willow Creek among the first) had these Harry and Sally Seeker in mind in their attempt to be innovative. The ordinary services were held in the week and 'contemporary' service on Sunday morning.

Not all migrated. Some people went back to their churches with these fresh ideas and lobbied for change. What began as a strategy in evangelism, became a movement. The change in culture always impacts on institutions, including the church.

In 1995 in PE, a new church was planted. State-of-the-art sound system, lighting, contemporary musical instruments and a dramatic and highly polished interactive worship. Young members could come to worship straight from surfing. Older people were sacrificed in favour of the young. It was 'adapt or die.' This, while the old stone churches did their thing. Maybe a Wal-Mart versus the corner grocery store?

Al Barth, working with **Tim Keller**, visited Stellies and told of the early beginning of the RCA church planting. Tim Keller spent weeks and months in NY meeting with people in coffee shops and where they worked, finding out their needs, and also what questions these often unchurched people asked. He reported on his findings, but the RCA felt him to be the best person to start such an inner city church. Despite city dwellers being transient, the church found a niche and people, many professional, found meaning in what Tim Keller had to share. He did not minister into their needs, but identified with their culture.

A Third Way?

Does the traditional church and the contemporary movement with its fresh expression have to be mutually exclusive? How can they best complement each other? Is there a third way, or should we speak of blended worship?

Very little can be done to the architecture and existing space. Many of our Congregational churches only have a space for sanctuary and two side rooms – council and choir with no consideration for families or children. The then LMS founded the church in the Eastern Cape. Many buildings resemble the British model, with high stepped pulpits and some with doors leading into the pulpit. This may signify the Word coming

from high, but it left the preacher appearing aloof. On the other hand the high pulpits may be justified by the sheer size of the sanctuary space, accommodating up to 000's. Fixed pews and balconies complete the space.

With current building costs, building new worship spaces is prohibitive. It may be best to make creative use of space. I've seen two such examples in the Lake District of England. One congregation used the pews to create fashionable chairs. The other used the recessed floor as worship space with loose chairs and the rest of the space as a gathering area with coffee bar.

I've followed the growth of one of the charismatic-pentecostal churches in America over three years. Many downtown churches faced decline as people moved in to the suburbs. The community type churches were quick to respond. South East Christian Church is one such church, in Louisville. Constantly outgrowing their existing building until eventually ending up with a 'mega plant' seating 000's, complete with shuttles to get worshippers to the sanctuary. Strangely enough religious symbols were non-existent and at communion, no consecration of elements. Effective leadership, yet a big turnover of membership.

One charismatic-pentecostal church in Cape Town once made use of huge space for worship, only to decline. Is this migration not a case of 'flavour of the month?'

For worship to be meaningful, it must be sensitive to the tradition, culture and depth of spirituality. Consideration must also be given to intergenerational needs as well as a sensitivity for those who seek an encounter, while not forgetting young people. These are factors that must be taking into consideration in evaluating its mission and ministry.

Worship must become that well of living water. The church is a work in progress and rather than copy, borrow or steal the church must adapt, adjust and experiment. One of the lessons I learnt early on in my ministry, was the **"let's try and see if it works"** attempt. Though I made the suggestion, I asked for permission

As a form of evangelism or outreach and with varying success, various programmes like 'Alpha' and 'Willow Creek' and Rick Warren' been 'imported' and imitated. Unlike the UK, we are a relatively churched community and not un-churched, as the community that Nicky Gumble focused on.

Thomas Long – *"Beyond the Worship Wars"* - writes of visiting twenty congregations, urban and suburban, large and small, as well as cross cultural. He worshipped with them, spoke to their leadership. He suggests the following **9** characteristics for faithful and vital congregations.

1. Make room, somewhere in worship, for the experience of mystery - Noko
2. Plan and make concerted efforts to show hospitality - Mouton

3. Recover and make visible the sense of drama inherent in Christian worship
4. Emphasize congregational music that is both excellent and eclectic in style and genre
5. Be creative in adapting the space and environment of worship
6. Forge a strong connection between worship and being missional
7. Maintain a stable order of service and a significant repertoire of worship elements and responses that the congregation know by heart
8. Move to a joyous festival experience toward the end of the worship service
9. Have strong charismatic leaders to lead worship
- 10. Have and show integrity**

Act of worship

CICW took a long and in-depth look at their calling and missional outreach. It was a lesson in being mutually enriched. There are also others we can learn from. This gives one a place to start from and to learn what to do and how not to do it.

Is worship not like a Mothers' and Fathers' day breakfast? Burnt bacon, over done eggs, burnt toast and beans? At worship our best attempts however poor, is a feast before God.

The opposite is also true. A sure way to kill worship is the 'we've-always-done-it-this-way before,' syndrome." Pause and check, who is the 'we,' how is the 'done' and the 'that way' and when is the 'before' in that statement on worship? This creates an "us" and "them" tension. There should preferable not be a division between old and new and tradition and modern or contemporary. What is "old" to some is not "old" for others.

From Word and Worship

In the preparation of WW, we use the pattern of;

- ✚ Gathering – establishing a relationship in the form of the call to worship
- ✚ Proclaiming – prayer, reading, preaching and then a response through a creed, hymn and offertory
- ✚ Celebrating the Lord's Supper (baptism too?)
- ✚ Sending out – dedicating people for service

Once the structure is in place, the creativity of worship can flow from there. It's like having an entrée, starter, main meal followed by dessert. It's just the proper flow of things.

My UNISA professor and a group of friends left the DRC and started an independent

church free from constraints and boundaries. However, their numbers grew and eventually they reverted back to a specific time and space.

About worship

The lectionary was called into being, also to encourage Christians to read sequential and substantial portions of scripture. The seasons of the liturgical reminds us of the holy and how to observe the rhythms and rituals of the church. It keeps worship current. As we have discovered, people are now more visual. Dr Noko reaffirmed the role of the pastor leader based on Eph 4:11, “to teach and equip the believers for their gifts and ministries.” But what happens if Christians miss out on worship, does that continuity not lack?

So often exposure to teaching is limited to that one hour on a Sunday morning. We can teach people how to work their way through worship. **Dorothy Bass - Christian Practices** says that, we often tell people what to do – pray, read, give, sing, fellowship and practice hospitality. But we neglect to teach them ‘how to’.

This connects with prof Mouton in speaking of a lifestyle of belonging and of being loved. To do this, we must be intentional in teaching people to be more intentional and purposeful in their approach to worship. Avoid a casual attitude to worship. In Genesis we see the how the Israelites in the absence of Moses being there to remind them of their duty in worship. They fashioned their own idol of worship. We have been created to worship.

Genesis: 7:14 – Ark closed when the “Lord was in.” Moses – “remove your sandals – holy ground.” Matthew 1 & 28 – “fear not.”

If it is not God and the holy, we worship, then it will be other - things and idols. Timothy Wright says; “people crave intimacy.” They want to be known and loved and come with the hope that someone will love them. It’s about relationships and belonging.

Jamie Smith also argues that philosophers have over emphasized that we are what we think – “I think therefore I am.” We are people of the heart and we are created to love and to connect.

Thomas Long as part of his research went around visiting twenty churches and asked the question “Why do people come to worship?” This is what he found.

a. The presence of mystery

It is good that people get up and to come to worship. More so if people find meaning and purpose. There are different reasons why people come. Worship must be the prominent and most significant reason. Often it is not.

It is essential to get the disorder and clutter and poor form of worship and being ill-

prepared out of the way. For me it is about awe and reverence and being in a hallowed space and place. “When I in awesome wonder consider...” Matthew 14:33 – amidst the storm, the disciples worshipped “You must be the Son of God.”

Avoid the antics of the televangelists portraying a staged message that says worship is a performance. In worship we meet to break bread and to live in the presence of the holy.

b. Sense of belonging

Story – Zimmern was an agnostic Jew. He took his son along religiously every Shabbat. The son knew his father did not believe anymore, but was intrigued why he would religiously go the synagogue. When he had his bar mitzvah, he felt courageous enough and asked his dad. Zimmern told him people go to synagogue for many reasons. “Cohen goes to pray and Goldberg goes to meet God.” “I go to meet up with Cohen and Goldberg”

There is this constant need for fellowship, connection and belonging. Often our coming and experience of the holy, comes from being in relation to others. This comes from the Father, Son and Holy Spirit being in relation and harmony.

When I look at the current imbalance of creation – earth, humanity and nature, I am reminded by the words from Chronicles - If my people...

We are relational beings. Clergy breakfast – Leon Klate

c. Worship on a stage or staged worship?

Often worship takes the form of drama. While modern culture desires entertainment, reflect on whether worship is to entertain or praise God. CICW at their conference offers a variety of styles – music, Taize, drama, dance, jazz and poetry and various other workshops. Andre Bartlett and I spoke on worship in Africa. Their emphasis spiritual on excellence stood out.

One has to balance what appears to be opulent and lavish with one’s own tradition and background and be careful to not leave with a defeatist attitude. We may not have the world class musicians and presenters, but work with what we have. Worship presented, must always be fresh and original and not staged. There must never any doubt that in all things, the purpose is to honour God.

d. Challenge of music

Thomas Long says; “Change the order of worship and you set off a debate. Change the style of music and you may spilt a congregation.” *Oom Arrie in PE – no guitar. Exodus of*

young people. Communion change and debate – dialogue and experiment.

My experience has been that young people are attracted to the more modern contemporary music style – this borders on the entertainment level rather than participatory.

The supply of musicians and specialists in CICW is astounding. This is both rewarding and fulfilling. What makes music special is if it is 'local' and from the body of the church, rather than being imported from outside. It is worth experimenting and discussing.

Middle Church agreed to a 6 month trial period at 9.30am (contemporary) and 11am traditional. This continued, with no compromise. Rather than vote or legislate such a matter should be explored and together decide on a middle ground. This has to be possible for the sake of the love of God.

e. Worship Space

As with music, space and splendour can distract. Worship is foremost about the Holy, the reverence and awe. A "homecoming," if you like, from Prof Mouton.

The early immigrants that planted the Christian Reformed Church fled the oppression and wars in their countries. Together with immigrants from other countries, "the New World" (non-conformist and early puritans on the Mayflower) new cultures and an integration of and exposure to cuisine, education, sport and political influences was spawned. This integration became mutually enriching.

They may at first have settled in homogeneous communities; Wauwatoza – Catholic fishing community with their Friday night fish n chips, the French quarter in New Orleans, together with strong West Indian influence and then the Cubans in Florida. As a result, culture evolved as did worship. Many of the more recently erected places of worship places is more modern as they benefitted from the modern and contemporary influence.

Our existing buildings on the other hand are old, fixed brick and mortar structures. Many are bound by historical rules as in the requirements of the national monument act. For this reason it is important to work within that given space and place.

Over the ages, Christians have worshipped in many spaces and places in structures that have been transformed for worship. Langa – rudimentary; Bethelsdorp – wood and iron shack; African traditional – open space. Furthermore, the Ark of the Covenant was housed in a tent.

For the best part 'church' is where the people of God gather to praise and bring God glory and to break bread. It must be 'local' it must 'fit' and it must be 'owned.' But this is not where it ends. People are summonsed and then in turn are sent.

f. Being missional

There has of late been a greater discovery of a focus and emphasis on a Missional Ecclesiology. 2017 being the celebration of the 500th commemoration of the Reformation, a conference on Missional Ecclesiology was held recently. The message was clear. We should take the reformation as a church reform movement very seriously and learn from it, as CICW did.

Thomas Long says worship is like going into a shop and immediately knowing what they sell. And in a restaurant, one must be able to describe the cuisine. In the vital congregations that Long visited, he found each of these congregations focused on their missional identity. One church, a diverse and integrated congregation, had members with varying differing views, yet they felt of equal worth, and dignity.

As a church it is very important for us to know our mission as the salt of the earth and light of the world. How that is expressed depends on space and place. To do that requires that there must be both energy and passion.

g. Memory and celebration

Long found over the years that the people could not articulate their order of service, or what follows when. All, but the organist. Often the liturgy is followed by rote, as we are conditioned. We listen and we hear, then through recall it comes back. Maybe in our subconscious we participate.

Ek erken en bely... nagmaal by my opgroei gemeente en Ons min U huis o Heer

Seminary and Anglicans.... Dear Lord **In penitence we confess...**

Twaalf artikels van die Geloof...vs Apostles Creed

From sounds of worldly strife and then I greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For worship to be effective, there must at least be three factors present.

- Stable order of service

Constant changes may be exciting and entertaining, but surely we often find the familiar powerful and meaningful. Cong hymn sandwich – yet the more independent churches may have a chorus sandwich. Soon new rituals are developed. Strange how people react negatively to the former mainline worship as being too predictable.

Yet, see how the ball boys and girls are trained in ritual.

- A liturgy that is dramatic, meaningful and suspenseful.

It's like learning dance steps, bearing in mind there are different steps. This adds to the drama and suspense. Anticipate something is about to happen. I love the golden oldies on 567 over weekends. I sing along and get lyrical when I think of the days. Yet

my choice of music is always 101.3 classical. As a coloured from Cape Town? We may be mindless of the steps (not as in forget) but because we are absorbed, in our attempt to focus on the holy and drawn into the gospel narrative.

- An active bank of congregational responses.

Often these responses have been committed to memory. These responses will differ between congregations, but it becomes special nuances peculiar to that congregation. I discovered a greeting in my congregation; “I greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...” Plan to have more than one familiar response. Modern day overhead makes it easier. It also helps to prepare and practice for worship – a response, a new hymn or new actions. I’ve been able to introduce many such innovations. I find them very pliable – Take, O take me as I am

h. Leadership

How often do people gravitate from one church to another based on the personality of that person? The awareness of the holy must not come from the antics or charisma from the leader in front. I guess in a way the personality of the person does make a difference. The quality of congregational worship is a major factor in the effectiveness of the worship.

Within the congregational tradition we believe in the priesthood of all believers. Which corresponds with the WCC document on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry(ies). The document says all Christians are ministers – and the purpose of the ordained ministry in accordance with Ephesians 4 is “to teach for the building up the community of faith.” Dr Noko also emphasized this. Everybody else contributes to worship and the life of the church through their various gifts.

Responses and participation in worship adds to the meaning in meaningful worship. People come prepared and responses are bold and proud. The awareness of the holy must always prevail.

i. Revitalizing worship

Long further identifies four insights that can reform worship

- Pastoral leadership is key to worship renewal

Renewal of worship rests on the shoulders of pastoral leadership of the church’ Of cause it helps to communicate this with and through all courts of the church. I have found great success in communicating my vision and plan with leadership and wider, with no decisions having to be made. Then agree to do a trial period.

- When worship is renewed, some congregational conflict is inevitable

Sometimes people just react to change in a bad way, for the sake of reacting and possibly without understanding what is happening. I have found that people are comfortable if they know what follows.

Be a strong leader and not a strong arm leader. Conflict is inevitable, especially when unilateral changes are made. People feel themselves uninformed and thus unprepared and often that change is unrehearsed. Avoid arrogance. The worship must reflect the presence of the holy.

- To change worship, some congregational participation is necessary

As alluded to earlier, consult and communicate widely. John McClure's Roundtable Pulpit encourages a consultative look at preparing for as well as for assessing and reflecting on worship.

- Educate and publicize the way for worship renewal

"Tell them what you are going to tell them. Then tell them. Then you tell them what you told them." Communicate and educate on matters of worship as a matter of cause, with no agenda or change in mind. The RCL and WW is a good tool in this regard. This may help to teach the urgency of worship, as well as the presence of the holy.