

The High Calling

a bimonthly publication of The Francis Asbury Society

A Lot of Bull

By Stan Key

So Aaron received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." (Exodus 32:4)

Just six weeks after the wedding, Israel committed adultery with a bull! At Sinai, the establishment of the covenant between God and Israel cemented a relationship of love that was intended to last forever. But hardly had the couple returned from the honeymoon when Pastor Aaron led his congregation into spiritual adultery. Building a golden calf, he introduced a form of worship that apostatized the faith and brought God's people to the edge of destruction. Ever since that moment at Sinai 3,400 years ago, there has been a lot of bull in church!



I picture it happening like this: Pastor Aaron is sitting in his clergy office, wearing his clergy robe, surrounded by his clergy books and diplomas. He is avidly reading an article in the most recent edition of the magazine, *Clergy Today*, entitled "How to Grow Your Church." The article begins with these words:

Marketing experts tell us that people today are turned off by a God of rules and laws who comes

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Liturgy and Holiness

By Jonathan Powers



Jonathan serves with his wife, Faith, and daughters, Audrey and Elizabeth, as the director of student ministries for World Gospel Mission at Asbury University. Jonathan is also an adjunct professor of worship at Asbury University, Asbury Theological Seminary, and United Theological Seminary. For the past ten years, Jonathan has assisted with musical leadership and worship design in the Offerings Community of First

United Methodist Church, Lexington, KY. Jonathan is the author of *12 Days of Christmas Sermons*, and co-author with Jason Jackson and Teddy Ray of *Echo: A Catechism for Discipleship in the Ancient Tradition*, both published by Seedbed.

Every service of Christian worship has a liturgy. Simply put, the word liturgy means the work or service of the people. The words we say, the songs we sing, the actions that we do in worship all compose the liturgy. Whether we worship in a very formal or an informal context, a liturgy is present in the worship. Through the liturgy, we are led into the presence of the Triune God and participate in the worship of the Church. It is important to consider the liturgical components of every service of worship, because liturgy acknowledges and measures the truth of the Christian faith. The liturgical elements included in Christian

worship serve as a source of theology for the church whereby worship forms belief, desire, and behavior. Historically, this idea has been demonstrated in the following axiom: *Lex orandi, lex credendi*, which translates in English as, "the law of prayer is the law of belief." In other words, prayer shapes belief. As we learn to pray, or as we learn to worship, we also learn more about God, the world, and ourselves. I would add to this idea of *lex orandi, lex credendi*, the phrase *lex vivendi*, so the full axiom becomes "the law of prayer is the law of belief, which is the law of life." Or to put it another way, prayer and worship shape both Christian belief and life. Consequently, bad liturgy shapes bad Christians.

The idea of worship shaping both belief and life is what is called liturgical catechesis. In other words, the liturgy of worship has important formational value regarding what the church believes and how the church lives. The hymns and choruses we sing, the scriptures that are read, the creeds we recite, the prayers that are prayed, the confessions that are made, the sermons that are given, our participation in the Eucharist meal—each

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The Loss of the Sacred

By Donald G. Bloesch



From *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), this article is an abridgment of chapter 7, “Worship in Spirit and Truth” (116–46).

If there is anything that characterizes modern worship, it is the loss of the sacred. Whether the service of worship is low church or liturgical, the sense of the holy too often appears to be missing. Edward Farley trenchantly observes that although the worship event is meant to celebrate a sacred presence, this reality is “neutralized by the prevailing mood, which is casual, comfortable, chatty, busy, humorous, pleasant and at times cute.”

Biblical religion endorses not any kind of worship but only that which is done “in spirit and in truth” (Jn. 4:23–24). Worship that glorifies God is animated by his Spirit and informed by the truth of his revelation in Jesus Christ. What is acceptable to God is not “ritual sacrifices” and “burnt offerings” but the sacrifice of broken and contrite hearts (Ps. 51:17; see I Sam. 15:22–23; Amos 5:21–24; Mic. 6:7–8; Hos. 6:6; Rom. 12:1). The apostle warns in II Timothy 3:5 against embracing the forms of godliness without the power. This same note is found in Isaiah: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men” (Isa. 29:13 NIV).

Scripture warns us not to make a graven image of the divine because of the omnipresent danger that the image itself may become an object of worship (see Ex. 20:4–6; Deut. 5:8–10; Ps. 78:58; Isa. 40:18). Reformed worship will always contain an iconoclastic element because of its astute perception that images and paintings open the door to idolatry. Aaron’s golden calf was intended as a visible symbol of Jehovah, but it came to supplant Jehovah in the minds of the worshipers. I would not go as far as J. I. Packer in prohibiting all symbols in the act of worship, for most of them do not purport to embody the sacred reality they are meant to represent. Yet even symbols that have been acceptable in the Reformed tradition, like the empty cross, can become the object of our veneration. We need to remember that only Jesus Christ is the image or icon of the invisible God (Col. 1:15). This is an image, moreover, that is known only through proclamation, not through artistic representation.

The God of Scripture is both hidden and manifest, but he is manifest only to the inward eye. Even in his self-revelation he remains hidden (*deus absconditus*). He remains out of the reach of our senses and imagination even when we are in communion with him. To try to see

God reveals an unwholesome desire to control God. Faith comes by hearing and hearing comes by the preaching of the gospel (Rom. 10:17). Luther wisely perceived that the point of contact with God is the ear, not the eye: “In order to see God we must learn to put our eyes into our ears . . . Christ’s kingdom is a kingdom of hearing, not a kingdom of seeing.”

While by no means ruling out artistic depictions of the historical characters and events in the Bible, I have serious reservations about pictorial representations of God. Symbols in worship can point beyond themselves to the invisible God. But my Puritan allegiance makes me extremely wary of incorporating artistic depictions in the service of worship, aware as I am that symbols as well as images are likely to distort the human perception of God more than guide the imagination toward a true understanding of God.



We must not discount the fact that words too can become an obstacle to spiritual worship. The word that comes forth from the preacher’s mouth is not necessarily the word of the gospel, and it may well be a false interpretation of the gospel. Words that signify the projection of the personal experiences of the preacher rather than the truth of the scriptural text must be deemed chatter rather than wisdom. I fully endorse J. I. Packer’s keen observation that the commandment against images extends to mental as well as molten images. Whenever we conjure in our mind what God really is in himself, we are in danger of confusing human conceptions with sacred realities. The specter of idolatry emerges when we rename God in order to bring God into conformity with cultural expectations. The reimagining conferences organized by feminists in the mainline denominations prove to be unwitting ventures in idolatry, since the new depictions of God stand in sharp contrast to God’s self-designation in Jesus Christ.

The crisis in worship today signifies a crisis in spirituality—the way we live out our faith. Traditional

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in thunder and fire. Worshipers today are looking for a gentler, more seeker-friendly deity. They want a style of worship that is engaging and culturally sensitive. In Egypt and in Canaan, many clergy have packed their churches with enthusiastic seekers by offering worship in the form of a bull. Worshipers feel comfortable and readily identify with the contemporary music, dance, and emotional expression that is typically generated by the presence of a bull in church. Pastor, give your people what they long for and bring a bull into your house of worship. Your church will soon be filled to the brim with people eager to worship with zeal and passion.

Pastor Aaron swallowed the message hook, line, and sinker and in the process gave us an unforgettable illustration of worship gone wrong! The seekers at Sinai were not worshipping another god (Apis, Baal, etc.). Oh no, they were much too orthodox for that! They were worshipping the God who redeemed them from Egypt, but worshipping him in the form of a bull.

Today, many pastors are taking a path similar to that taken by Aaron and his congregation. They want worship that is contemporary, culturally relevant, and emotionally engaging. This is good, of course. There's nothing virtuous about promoting a style of worship that is archaic, culturally out of touch, and emotionally dead. But when the desire for relevance brings a bull in church, we find pastoral malpractice of the worst kind. Something toxic has entered the sanctuary!

You might have a bull in your church if the pastors and worship leaders follow the people rather than lead them.

"C'm pastor Aaron, we wanna worship like they do in Egypt and in Canaan! Can't we have a bull in our worship too?" Like most pastors, Aaron wanted to please his congregation. But in giving them what they wanted, he led his people astray. God calls pastors to shape public opinion, not reflect it. A pastor is to be a thermostat, not a thermometer. It is the job of worship leaders to give people what they *need*, not what they *want*!

It wasn't long ago Katy and I attended a megachurch service in a southern city. The jumbo screens, the loud performance, and the darkened room with high-tech lighting were impressive and

obviously the people in the auditorium were enjoying the moment. But it was the smoke machine that caused me to ask, "Do we really need *this* to worship God?" At what point does market-driven cultural relevance become just a lot of bull? It's time for the church to stop entertaining the goats and get back to the job of feeding the sheep!

You might have a bull in your church if worship intends to make God in man's image rather than allowing God to make man in his.

The sin with the golden calf was not a violation of the first commandment ("You shall have no other gods besides me") but of the second: "You shall not make for yourself a carved image" (Ex. 20:3-6). Pastor Aaron and his worship leaders assumed that they could incorporate elements from pop culture into their worship without changing the truth of the gospel. They assumed that their concept of God was accurate and encouraged the congregation to passionately worship this concept. The word to describe this is syncretism: mixing truth with error. But a half-truth is always more dangerous than an outright lie! Mixing human error with God's truth is like mixing dog food into a meal at a five-star restaurant. The only ones happy with such a concoction are the dogs. If your concept of God is wrong, then the more passionately you worship your concept the more of a heretic you become! At Sinai, God gave his people the Tabernacle because he wanted them to worship the true God in the right way!

You might have a bull in your church if people think that the goal of redemption is to make them happy rather than holy.

The worship of the golden calf involved music, dancing, eating, drinking, and "playing"—a word that often has

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Nicolas Poussin [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

Lamentation in Worship

By Sally Morgenthaler



Sally Morgenthaler is a worship consultant, speaker, and writer. The following article is a slightly edited abridgment taken from her book, *Worship Evangelism: Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995, 109–117).

Good worship enables us to come to know God at the most intimate of levels. But as much as we want to *know* God intimately, we also long to be *known*. In our heart of hearts, we want to get *vulnerable* with God, to open the book of our lives and know that God loves us no matter what its “contents.”

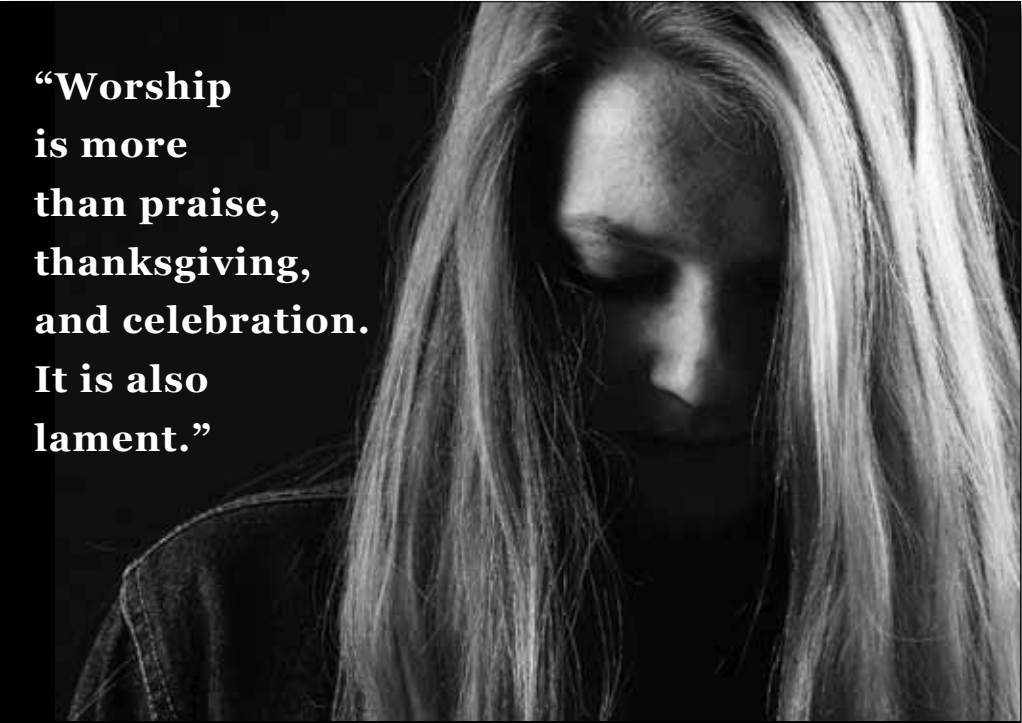
Maybe the real issue fueling our emphasis on the “positive and peppy” in worship is that we do not know how to let people be who and where they are. In other words, “It’s not OK to be ‘not OK.’”

How have we as the church typically responded to people’s mistakes, hurt, and pain? Judgement. Guilt. Yet I do not know of anyone who wants or needs more of either. Like the woman caught in adultery, what most of us desire is truth in the context of God’s unconditional love in Christ. Deep down, we want God’s standards in the package of grace. Of all places we should expect to find such a package, it should be the church. The gospel is specifically meant for people who do not measure up. Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick... I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matt. 9:12–13). Yet, according to George Barna, “the unchurched in America see churches throwing out the sinner with the sin.”

If our worship is going to evangelize, we need to be at least as sinner-friendly as we are user-friendly. Hopefully more so. There are not very many acceptable places in our society for people to express inadequacy and need. To admit failure, sadness, grief, or hurt is to be a loser. And America does not reward losers; it rewards winners. But the heart of Jesus runs counter to this kind of superficiality. He says; “Blessed are the poor in spirit... Blessed are those who mourn...” (Matt. 5:3–4). More than ever, the church needs to be a refuge for those who have made mistakes and are in pain. And worship needs to be one of the first “landing-places” for these refugees, a place where guilt and hurt can be expressed to God in an atmosphere of loving acceptance.

The expression of hurt and pain to God is not foreign to the Scriptures. In fact, most of the so-called heroes and heroines of the Bible cried out to God with incredible honesty. Abraham, Moses, David, Hannah, Elijah, and Jonah are but a few who opened their wounded hearts to God. Pastor Mark Hiiva of Community Church of Joy in Glendale, Arizona, believes that opportunities for biblical lament—the “heartcry to God of a person in trouble”—are long overdue in our churches.

To lament, and to give others permission to lament, is Christian. . . . Roughly two-thirds of the psalms are laments. . . . Jesus himself wept, went sleepless, homeless, and laid down his life on account of the reality of human suffering. Isaiah 53 describes Jesus as “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with



“Worship is more than praise, thanksgiving, and celebration. It is also lament.”

grief.” . . . To resist or forbid lament is un-Christian, dishonest, and unhealthy.

It is no accident that lament and vulnerability go hand in hand. No one would want a whole service of it, but worship that is real makes room for all the colors of the emotional spectrum, not just those that are rapturous and effervescent. Gerrit Gustafson writes, “We need to know—do we buy tambourines or Kleenex? The fact is, as we approach God’s awesome presence, we need a greater capacity to do both: to leap with unspeakable joy, and to weep in prayers of supplication and repentance.” Worship is more than praise, thanksgiving, and celebration. It is also lament.

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Songs of Heaven

By Robert E. Coleman



Robert E. Coleman's influence as an author, professor, and preacher has been felt all over the world. His books include *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, *Dry Bones Can Live Again*, *One Divine Moment*, *Written in Blood*, and many more. *Songs of Heaven* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1980) is a beautiful devotional treatment of the songs of worship heard around the throne in the book of Revelation. The following slightly abridged article is a summation of that book taken from *Journey into Holiness* (edited by Norman G. Wilson, Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2001, 20–23).

The poet, Carlyle, wrote, “Let me make a nation’s songs, and I care not who makes their laws.” His point is well taken, for those things we spontaneously sing about have a way of shaping our minds, just as they reveal what is uppermost in our thoughts.

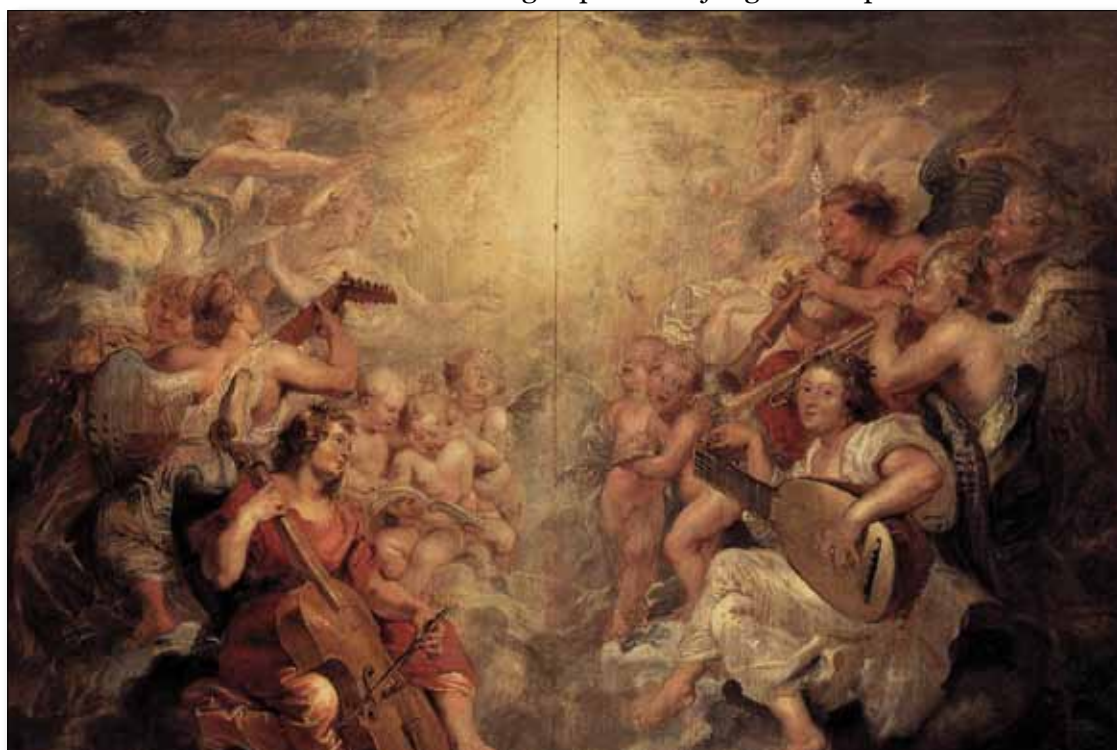
That’s why, in my quiet moments of meditation and prayer, I like to join the choirs of heaven and, as it were, sing along with that vast worshipping host gathered about the throne of God. The words of their songs are recorded in the Book of Revelation, beginning in chapter four and continuing intermittently through chapter nineteen. If we would learn to sing with them, they could teach us the values of the New Jerusalem. I know of no more uplifting exercise to the soul.

The anthems begin with the celestial creatures unceasingly exclaiming, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, Who was, and is, and is to come” (Rev. 4:8). It is an affirmation that God is self-existent and separate from all other beings, and also utterly undefiled by any impurity in his nature. As the song of the cherubim swells through the courts of heaven, the white-robed elders fall down and worship him who lives forever, saying, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being” (Rev. 4:11). The hymn attests the incomparable worthiness of him by whose pleasure all things have their being.

The creatures about the throne then unite to sing of the Lord who has redeemed the world by his blood (Rev. 5:9–10). It is called a *new song* because that which Christ has accomplished is wholly different and superior to

the old covenant. No sooner have they concluded than myriads of angels lift their voices in antiphonal praise, declaring, “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” (Rev. 5:12). Reaching a climax, every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth, join the refrain, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, forever and ever!” (Rev. 5:13).

With the cosmic triumph of Christ resounding throughout eternity, Revelation then proceeds to describe the events that are actually to transpire before the consummation of the Kingdom (Rev. 6:1–17). It is a woeful story of one calamity after another in an accelerating sequence of judgments upon the earth.



Peter Paul Rubens [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

Yet, at decisive points through the unfolding narrative, the scene shifts briefly to heaven, and John sees the worshipping hosts about the throne of God.

A longing cry to the Lord is heard from those who have been martyred for their testimony, after the breaking of the fifth seal (Rev. 6:10). Again, before the final seal is removed from the book of destiny, the Revelator has a vision of heaven, in which “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, are seen about the throne, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands” (Rev. 7:9). They cry out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb” (Rev. 7:10).

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Worship in Spirit and Truth

By A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)



A. W. Tozer was an American pastor, preacher, author, and spiritual mentor. His published works are still read today by those hungry for a deeper experience with Christ. The following article is a slightly edited abridgement taken from the brochure *Worship: The Missing Jewel* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1992).

The Westminster Shorter Catechism begins this way: “Question: What is the chief end of man? Answer: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” This is the great purpose for which we were created: to be worshipers of the Most High God. He doesn’t *need* our worship, for he couldn’t be a self-sufficient God and need anything or anybody, but he *wants* it. But while God wants us to worship him we cannot worship him just any way we will. The one who made us to worship him has decreed how we should do it. I want us to look at some kinds of worship that God has ruled out.

The first false worship is *Cain worship* (see Gen. 4:1–16), which is worship without atonement. This kind of worship rests upon three basic errors. One is the error that assumes God to be different from what he is. He who seeks to worship a God he does not know comes without having first been cleansed by the coals from off the altar. But this kind of worship will not be accepted by God. The second error is that man assumes he occupies a relation to God which he does not occupy. The man who worships without the blood of the Lamb and without forgiveness and cleansing is mistaking error for truth, and spiritual tragedy is the result. The third error is that sin is made less serious than it is in fact. Psychologists, sociologists and liberal theologians today have taken the terror out of sin. To worship God acceptably we must be freed from sin. Cain worship is worship out of an unregenerate heart.

Then there is *Samaritan worship* (see II Kgs. 17:24–41). It is heretical worship in that it picks and chooses what it wants to believe and rejects, or at least ignores, the rest. This is what the Samaritans did. They worshiped Jehovah but they didn’t worship in Jerusalem; they worshiped at Samaria. Though they had been taught orthodox theology they mixed it together with pagan theology so that it was neither fish nor fowl but an unholy mixture of both. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, “You worship what you do not know” (Jn. 4:22).

Then there is *nature worship*. That is the worship of the natural man, only on a very poetic and philosophical level. It is an appreciation for the poetry of religion. It’s a high enjoyment of the contemplation of the sublime. People may mistake the rapt feeling they have in the

presence of trees and rivers for worship but I want to warn you against the religion that is no more than love, music and poetry.

Authentic worship has a sharp theological definition. There must be truth in it. “God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth (Jn. 4:24). Only the Holy Spirit can enable a fallen man to worship God acceptably. I believe that all the gifts of the Spirit not only ought to be but have been present in the Church down the centuries. You cannot account for Augustine, Chrysostom, Luther, Wesley and Finney except they were men gifted by the Holy Spirit. I believe that the Holy Spirit distributes his gifts severally as he will to the Church and that they are in the Church and have been in the Church all along. We can only worship in the Spirit, we can only pray in the Spirit, and we can only preach effectively in the Spirit. Worship must be offered to God in the Spirit.

But we must also worship in truth. I can’t worship God acceptably unless I have accepted what God has said about four things. First, I must accept what God has said about himself. We must never edit God. We must never, never apologize for God. No man has any right to get up in the pulpit and try to smooth over or amend anything that God has said about himself. Second, I must believe what God says about his son; not what some philosopher or theologian says, but what God says about Jesus. Third, I must believe what God says about me. I must believe all the bad things God says about me but I must also believe all the good things he says he’ll do for me. I must believe I’m as bad as God says I am and I must believe his grace is as great as he says it is. Finally, to worship rightly, I must believe what God says about sin. Our trouble today is that we’ve listened to the

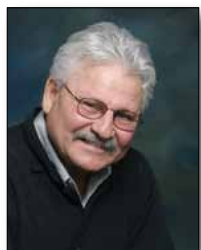


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Worship Is a Verb

By Robert E. Webber (1933–2007)



Robert E. Webber was an American theologian known especially for his work on worship and the early church. The following article is a slightly edited excerpt from his book, *Worship Is a Verb: Eight Principles for Transforming Worship* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992, 2–7, 217–19).

It was about ten to fifteen years ago that I first became aware of my need for a deeper worship experience. I was no longer satisfied to sit passively in the Sunday morning service. I wanted to be more involved, to be more than a mere observer, to do something more than watch and listen. I felt the need to participate—to see, hear, feel, taste, smell, and move as I worshiped the Lord. This growing feeling of inner dissatisfaction caused me to reflect on my feelings. And, after some pondering, I was able to identify four things that were disturbing me about so many of our worship services.

First, *I began to see that much of our worship is dominated by the pastor.* From early childhood, I have been accustomed to the pastor doing everything. Whenever I worship or speak at a church where the pastor is the focal point, I feel dominated and stifled. I find myself longing to participate, to be involved. I feel as

though I'm not worshipping; I'm not actively participating. Rather, the pastor is doing everything for me. I'm simply a receiver, a passive recipient.

Second, *I began to feel that the congregation was little more than an audience.* It is true we live in an "audience society." We sit passively and are entertained by television or radio or stereo. As spectators, we listen and watch, but we seldom participate actively. This same mood is often carried over into our church services. We simply transfer what we do at home in front of the television set to what we do in church and let the pastor become our entertainer.

Third, *I began to sense that "free worship" is not necessarily free.* I have a great deal of respect for the tradition of "free worship." Originally, it was a reaction against cold, dead, and fixed liturgical forms. But I feel that somehow the pendulum has swung to the other extreme. In many of our churches, what was once free has now become a fixed form with little life and spontaneity.

Fourth, *for me, the mystery was gone.* I can remember times in my life when I've experienced the mystery—the awe and reverence—of the woods, or of the desert, or of a snow-capped mountain far above the timber line, a sense of the creation "telling the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1). But, unfortunately, we so seldom experience awe and reverence in our churches. All too often the atmosphere seems to work against reverence. Our churches are characterized by a feeling of overfamiliarity. The sense of transcendence and the otherness and holiness of God seems to be missing. A kind of secularization has taken place.

One way in which secularization has permeated the church is in our music. Many of our contemporary popular songs are not directed to God, nor do they glory in the cross of Christ. Rather, they concentrate on personal experience and self-realization. They participate in the narcissism of our culture, in what writer Tom Wolf has called the "me-generation." Our religion has followed the curvature of a self-centered culture.

The mystery also seems to be gone from the Communion Table. We pay little attention to how God communicates to us through signs and symbols that reach down into the very depths of our being and touch us where words cannot go.

I am keenly aware that it is one thing to talk about worship renewal and another thing to actually experience

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An Audience of One

By Soren Kierkegaard (1813–1855)



Soren Kierkegaard was a Danish philosopher, theologian, and social observer. He was a fierce critic of the established state church in Denmark, exposing the hypocrisy of those who professed to believe the gospel but didn't live by its precepts. This short article is excerpted from his book, *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing* (New York, Harper & Row, 1956. See Chapter 12, "The Listener's Role in a Devotional Address," 177–84). This article has been abridged and edited so that it is more understandable for modern audiences.

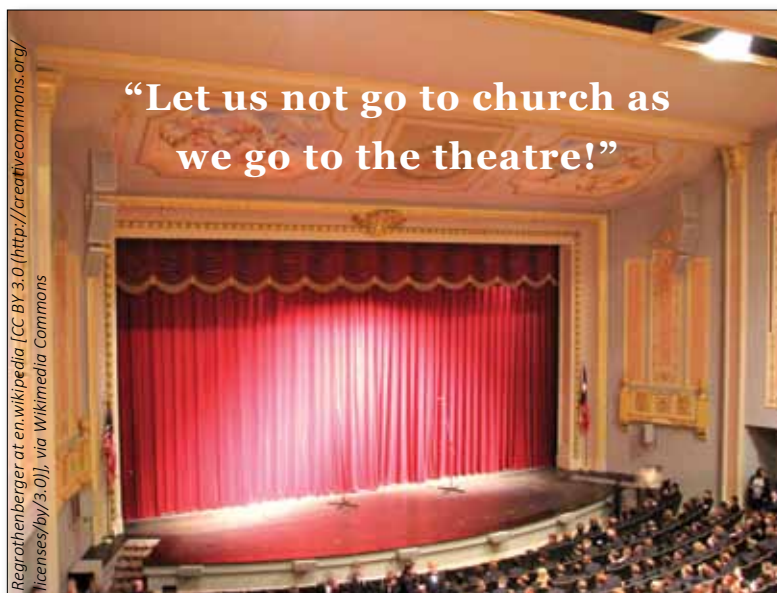
I want to illustrate what is supposed to happen in public worship by borrowing a picture from worldly art.

When you attend the theatre and see people on a stage,

you realize that someone is sitting behind the curtain prompting the performers by whispers. The prompter is inconspicuous and certainly wishes to be overlooked. It is the actors and actresses on stage who are prominent. Every eye is fixed on them. No one is so foolish as to regard the prompter as more important than the actors.

Now forget this talk about the theater and think about spiritual realities. The foolishness of many who

worship in church on Sunday is this. They look upon the pastor as the actor and themselves as the spectators. Indeed, they assume that they are present to pass judgment on the artists who are performing on stage. But the pastor is not the actor—not in the remotest sense.



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No, the pastor is the prompter! The actors are the people in the pews! The prompter whispers to the actors what they are supposed to say. But it is the actors' repetition of what they are told that is the main concern. The liturgy and sermon is not given for the speaker's sake, in order that men may praise or blame him. It is the listeners' repetition of what the pastor is saying that is aimed at.

In a secular theatre, the play is staged before an audience who are called spectators. But in church, the audience is God! Yes, God is the one who has come as a spectator to church and he sits in judgment on what is happening

before him. He is listening intently as the pastor prompts the congregation by giving them the lines they are supposed to say. But it is the men and women on the pews who are the actors. God has come to watch the performance!

Oh, let us never forget this. Let us not go to church as we go to the theatre! Everyone must pay attention to himself. Yes, the pastor, as prompter, must make sure that his

words are right and that he is whispering to the actors what they need to hear. And the people in the pews, as actors and actresses, must make sure they repeat their lines accurately and from their heart. But God's presence is the decisive thing and this changes everything! ✨

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sexual implications (Ex. 32:6, 18–19). I'm sure people left church that day saying, "Thanks Pastor Aaron, the worship today was awesome!" But true worship can't be measured by how it makes us feel or whether we like it. The point in worship is to see God *as he is*. We become like what we worship. If you worship a bull, don't be surprised if you start acting like one! But if you worship the Holy One, you will become holy. You simply cannot worship the one who is holy, holy, holy and continue to live in unholiness and sin. "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2). The purpose of worship is not happiness. C. S. Lewis said it memorably: "I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of port (whiskey) would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity."

This issue of *The High Calling* is devoted to worship. Yes, there is a lot of bull in church today. But this is not a new situation. It is as old as Moses! The question is, what will you do about it? Our purpose is *not* to encourage you to form some vigilante crusade to cleanse the temple in an effort to take the church back to some former era when worship was more to your personal tastes! No. Our prayer is that you will respond like Moses and become an intercessor (Ex. 32:7–14; 30–35). It was only after he had stood in the gap and prayed for the congregation that he destroyed the idol and called for a decision: "Who is on the Lord's side?" (Ex. 32:26). Such a response may be just the opportunity God is looking for to reform his church and revive his people. Amen. ✨

of these is a source of theology for the Church. Liturgy makes a claim about God's nature and character; it remembers and recites God's mighty acts of salvation; it anticipates and proclaims his promises for the future. The natural result, then, is that the liturgy increases the faith of the Church, gives comfort and hope to the world, and teaches and challenges God's people in ways of holy living

Another way to consider the importance of liturgy is that liturgy cultivates orthodoxy. The word "orthodoxy," is best understood when broken down into its two original roots: *ortho* and *doxo*. The prefix *ortho* means "right" or "correct." (Think of the root *ortho* through familiar terms such as *orthodontics* or *orthopedics*, which focus on correcting particular areas of our bodies.) Secondly, the term *doxo* means "glory" or "praise." Put together, then, the word *orthodoxy* means "correct praise," or a little more simply stated, "right worship." This is the purpose of liturgy: to guide the church in right worship of God, to correctly display his glory.

It is important to remember that every service of worship has a liturgy. Whether the liturgy is highly structured and formal or more informal and spontaneous, the words and actions of worship are formative to the Church. Because the liturgy of worship serves as a source of theology for the Church, we must realize that no matter how formal or informal our liturgy is, it must be both biblically and historically grounded. When worship is not based upon the biblical and historical truth of the Christian faith, the Church instead draws from alternative sources.

More often than not, when the Church draws from alternative sources in worship, it turns toward a cultural-based liturgy rather than historical-based liturgy. Images and symbols in song, sermon, or worship space are drawn primarily from entertainment media rather than scripture. Historical Christianity is set aside for the sake of innovation and progress. The focus of worship is on

Worship in Spirit and Truth *continued from page 6*

psychologists and their talk of a guilt complex so that we are afraid to see anybody get on their knees and get really scared about his sin.

Yes, it's possible to have a religious experience without Jesus Christ. It's possible to have worship without Jesus Christ. Cain had a religious experience, but God did not accept him. Brethren, it is not an experience that saves us; it is the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Worship is not simply having a solemn feeling about the vastness of the heavens and the smallness of our bodies. That may be beautiful but it's not worship. To worship acceptably is to be born anew by the Holy Spirit through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ so that we are enabled to worship him rightly. ✨

individual pleasure rather than communal engagement. As a result, the unique and distinct voice known in the church's liturgy is lost. Identification shifts from the kingdom of God and toward cultural imitation. The focus of worship shifts from God-oriented prayer to human-oriented satisfaction.

In his book, *Who Gets to Narrate the World?*, Robert Webber states that much of worship in the twenty-first-century American church has become an entertaining program that presents Jesus in a winsome way. As worship becomes more focused on appeal, attraction, and human experience rather than God-oriented prayer, worship falls victim to cultural liturgies of entertainment. This should be very concerning for church leaders, if for no other reason, because the axiom still holds true: *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*. When the law of prayer changes, so does the law of belief and the law of life. If worship imitates culture, belief and life will follow suit.

Here, then, are the questions I set before church leaders: What theology does the liturgy of your worship provide for your congregation? How does the liturgy produce the fruit of holy life and love? If we fail to see growth in holiness in our congregations, there may be important deficiencies in our practices of worship that need to be addressed. Bad liturgy shapes bad Christians, but it is also true that holy liturgy shapes holy Christians. Therefore, as we join in prayer and praise, let us take to heart the words of Psalm 96:9, "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." ✨

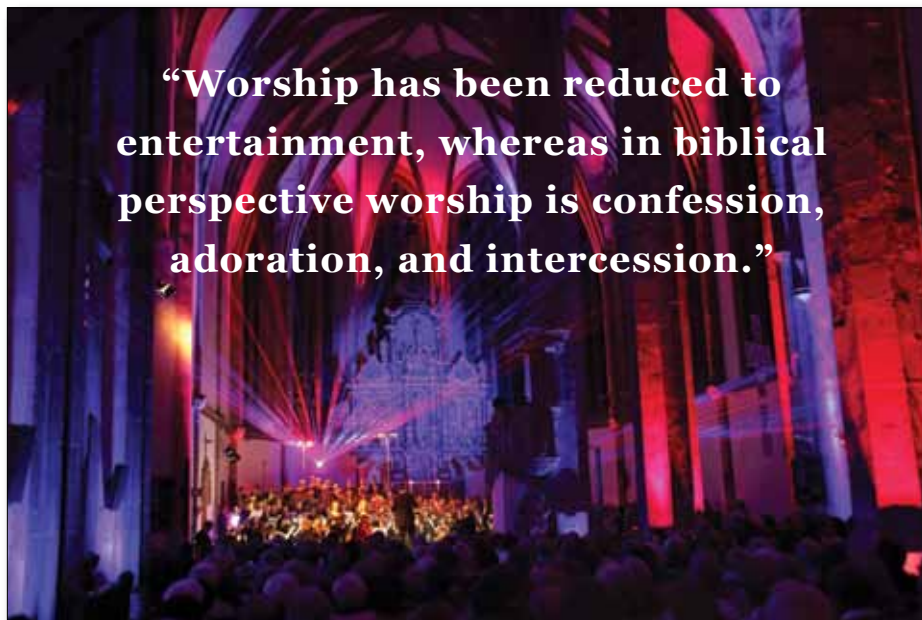
Worship Is a Verb *continued from page 7*

it in the local church. We are dealing with sacred and holy ground when we attempt to bring about change in worship. Even if members of the congregation will admit the need to change the worship of the church, that change will not happen easily or quickly. In some churches, present traditions are so sacred that many pastors will decide to preserve them, even if they believe change is needed. For some, the resistance to change may be rooted in satisfaction with things as they are. Many people simply like passive worship. My own impulse is to suggest that a church move slowly but deliberately into worship change. I've seen the disaster that can result from change that comes too suddenly. It is probably best to introduce change slowly after prayerful study and discussion has taken place.

Renewal in worship will take time and effort on the part of pastor and congregation. But the result of truly worshiping God is well worth it. God has called us to worship him, and worship him throughout all eternity is what we will do. Let's break through the passive mold of being observers or recipients. Let's become active participants and doers. Let's discover that *worship is a verb*. ✨

worship has become formalistic; contemporary worship is Gnostic and secular. The first clings to the past, the second seeks the approbation of the present. The first makes worship an obligation; the second converts worship into therapy. The first is intent on preserving continuity with the tradition; the second severs the ties to tradition in the search for novelty.

The new spirituality seeks to cultivate an experience with God that bypasses the forms and rituals of church tradition. Ecstasy rather than doctrinal purity or biblical fidelity is the primary concern in contemporary worship. We no longer hear from the pulpit the clarion call to repentance but an invitation to discover the spirit of the divine within us. Mysticism prevails over prophetism, naturalism over supernaturalism, Gnosticism over biblical personalism. Worship is now a means to tap into the creative powers within us rather than an



occasion to bring before God our sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. Hymns that retell the story of salvation as delineated in the Bible are being supplanted by praise choruses that are designed to transport the soul into a higher dimension of reality. Fellowship with God is based not on the incarnation of God in materiality but on the capacity of the soul to rise above materiality into the realm of pure spirit. No wonder that Harold Bloom calls Gnosticism the real religion of America.

While contemporary worship is marked by considerable diversity, there are certain common features that I find deeply troubling. One of these is eros spirituality. This is especially evident in so-called contemporary music in which love is portrayed in terms of passion and longing for God. Whereas the great hymns of the church were characterized by adoring love, the new emphasis is on sentimental or passionate love. Even though much attention is given to the praise of God, the motivation tends to be egocentric—the satisfaction of the heart’s desire.

Again contemporary worship is marred by an excessive individualism. New style worship is concerned not with the people of God who unite their voices in a tribute of gratitude and adoration to God, but with the seeker after God who aspires to rise above the pressures and trials of living in the world in order to be lost in wonder, love, and praise.

The focus of contemporary worship is not on content but on method. The aim is to create the right mood rather than to teach revealed truth. The praise choruses often take the form of mantras in which there is extended repetition of certain phrases which are deigned to calm the soul rather than to enlighten the mind.

The sermons for the most part are practical rather than theological or doctrinal. Scriptural texts may be used, but they prove to be only points of departure for discourses on themes that pertain to daily living. Typical sermon topics are “What the Bible Says about Friendship” and “Ways to Draw Near to God.”

A common description of the worship service is that it is “user-friendly,” meaning that it is easy to learn. It makes few demands on the celebrants other than rising and sitting. It is designed not so much for those who already believe as for those who are seeking.

The music that enlivens the services does not readily lend itself to congregational singing. It often takes the form of solos and ensembles. The congregants for the most part remain spectators even though they may join in singing the praise choruses. New style worship is essentially a performance; the congregation is generally passive, assuming the role of onlookers who add to the air of theatricality by providing applause.

In contrast to much traditional worship, the emphasis is not on the story of salvation but on cultivating intimacy with God. It is not on obedience to God’s will but on the experience of God’s presence. The search for ecstasy takes precedence over the cost of discipleship. When discipleship is talked about, the reference is usually not to the model of the suffering servant but to that of the possibility thinker. Being a disciple is how one finds happiness and fulfillment.

Modern Protestantism is faced with a paradigm shift of immense proportions. The key sacrament is no longer the Word or even the Eucharist but the inward experience. Feeling takes priority over hearing. Worship has been reduced to entertainment, whereas in biblical perspective worship is confession, adoration, and intercession. ✨

Lamentation in Worship continued from page 4

Lament is not only the heart's cry of desperation and need. It is also the acknowledgment of wrongdoing before a Holy God. It means doing a spiritual reality check on our lives, confessing sin and repenting from it. In Psalm 51 we see David doing a heartrending reality check after his adulterous affair with Bathsheba.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love. . . Blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight... (Ps. 51:1-7)

Because "it's not OK to be 'not OK,'" many of us as evangelicals regard what David did as one of the most negative, depressing things that can possibly happen in a worship service. We avoid reality checks at all costs. They may be okay for Catholics, Episcopalians, and Lutherans who seem to think they need to get that stuff off their chests, but somehow we are "above all that."

Confession and repentance are two of the most scriptural, life-giving, positive things we can do in a worship service. It is no coincidence that, after unburdening his heart to God and experiencing again the joy of God's salvation (Ps. 51:12), David's heart wanted to burst forth into joyful

acclamation: "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise" (Ps. 51:15). True joy is the result of having been vulnerable with a great, holy, and awesome God and having been loved in spite of who we are.

Worship that makes a difference helps both believers and unbelievers, church and unchurched, face the "bad stuff." It provides opportunities for them to say, "God, I've blown it. My life is a mess, and I'm feeling empty, hurt, and confused. Please forgive me. Change me. Here I am, wholly available." It enables people to be honest about who they are and offers them Christ, the power for becoming who God wants them to be. If we really made a place in worship for people to get real with God and for God to make them whole through the gospel, our services would never be the same. ✦

"To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God."

—William Temple—

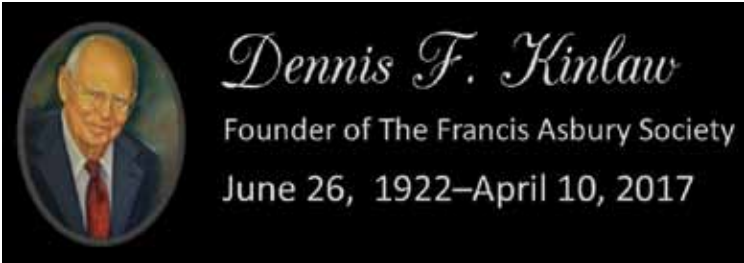
Songs of Heaven continued from page 5

Assured that the Great Commission will be fulfilled, the account of the coming tragedies upon the earth continues until the seventh trumpet sounds. Then great voices are heard again in heaven, declaring the certainty of the Savior's rule: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). A shout of victory is heard again from heaven in the next chapter, reminding the harassed church on earth that salvation has come, and that Satan has been cast down. Therefore, God's people should rejoice, realizing that, in Christ, they are more than conquerors (Rev. 12:10-12). Then, before the seven last plagues are poured out, the praise service about the throne is described in detail, and those who have been faithful join in singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb (Rev. 15:3-4).

There follows in rapid succession the unleashing of God's terrifying wrath upon the rebellious world. The end has come. Babylon is destroyed. A great multitude is heard in heaven, shouting, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants." (Rev. 19:1-3). The elders and cherubim, falling down in worship, shout, "Amen, Hallelujah!" (Rev. 19:4).

Imagine the crescendo of heaven's hosts, unrestrained by any selfish inhibitions, united as a single voice of adoration to God. It is likened to the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God Almighty reigns" (Rev. 19:6). He, not Caesar, rules in undisputed control. Yet, wonder of wonders, this great King of glory, the Lord God omnipotent, is *our* God—we are his, and he is ours. Enraptured with the contemplation of this blessing, members of the heavenly throng exhort themselves, "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready" (Rev. 19:7). At last, the Savior will gather his Church to himself in eternal wedlock.

For our part, we should be getting ready to meet him when he comes. However limited may be our comprehension of his will, he expects us to give all that we know of ourselves to all that we understand of him—to love and trust him with all that we are, all that we hope to be. This is the reality in which the Christian lives. Though our bodies are still held by the earth, our spirits can soar with the angels in the city of unceasing song. There, we are at home. In the inner sanctuary of our beings, we are already beginning to know something of that praise in which the King of heaven dwells. And the singing grows sweeter with the years. ✦



Dennis F. Kinlaw passed away peacefully Monday morning, April 10, 2017. A video recording of the funeral service, held Saturday, April 15, is available on Asbury University's YouTube page. The FAS website (www.francisasburysociety.com) provides a link directly to that video.

Tell Your Story

It seems that almost everyone who knew Dennis Kinlaw or sat under his ministry has a story to tell! We need to share these stories! The Francis Asbury Society has dedicated a blog post to that purpose:

<http://www.francisasburysociety.com/dennisfkinlaw>

Donations and/or Cards in Memory of Dr. Kinlaw

Donations in memory of Dr. Kinlaw can be sent to FAS at PO Box 7, Wilmore, KY 40390. Sympathy cards may be sent to the family care of FAS as well. Thank you for your prayers for the family during this time.

The July-August issue of *The High Calling* will be a tribute edition in memory of Dr. Kinlaw. ✠

Te Deum
*We praise thee, O God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.
 All the earth doth worship thee, the Father everlasting.
 To thee all angels cry aloud; the heavens,
 and all the powers therein;
 To thee cherubim and seraphim continually do cry,
 Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts;
 Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of thy glory.
 The glorious company of the apostles praise thee.
 The goodly fellowship of the prophets praise thee.
 The noble army of martyrs praise thee.
 The holy Church throughout all the
 world doth acknowledge thee;
 The Father, of an infinite majesty;
 Thine adorable, true, and only Son;
 Also the Holy spirit, the comforter.*

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The Francis Asbury Society
 P.O. Box 7 · Wilmore, KY 40390 · 859-858-4222
FAS@francisasburysociety.com | www.francisasburysociety.com
*Managing Editor: Stan Key
 Editing/Design/Layout: Jennie Lovell
 Contributors: Donald G. Bloesch, Robert E. Coleman, Stan Key, Soren Kierkegaard, Sally Morgenthaler, Jonathan Powers, A. W. Tozer, Robert E. Webber*

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