

Dr. James Hart
B.H. Carroll Colloquy: Right Worship and Beauty

I. Right Worship: What is it?

The mission of IWS: “The Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies forms servant leaders in Christian worship renewal and education through graduate academic praxis, grounded in biblical, historical, theological, cultural, and missiological reflection in community.”

- A. A primary key to reading the entire biblical narrative: God is calling his creation to right worship (over and over again).
- B. Prof. Jeff Barker: “The fourfold order is the framework of a story in which God gathers, acts, feeds, and entrusts. Worshipers join in, remember, eat and obey.”
- C. Dr. Greg Wilde: “Regardless of how rule-oriented or flow-oriented we tend to be by virtue of our individual personalities, all of us have that Pharisee-instinct. If we know we have a goal, we never leave it at that, but we construct additional rules to follow to help us meet the goal, and then we construct more additional rules to help us keep the first rules to help us meet the goal, and on and on. Much of our denominationalism in Christianity just boils down to which set of rules makes the most sense to us. The problem, of course is that every time we make [additional] rules for ourselves we unwittingly distance ourselves a bit further from the goal. . . . We are not built for the sake of being built - no, we are built for fire! Maybe the question is...are we setting people on fire?”
- D. When things are set right, the created order is re-Edenized, brought back to its original intent and order in the Garden of Eden. Fellowship, Word, Table, Mission, all elements of right worship serve that end—the reconciliation, or Edenization of the created order.
- E. Irenaeus: “God did not ask us to follow him because he needed our help, but because he knew that loving him would make us whole.”
- F. Augustine: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in You.”

G. One of the seminal ideas from scripture and the Church Fathers is that humans were created to offer right praise to God.

- a. The Garden of Eden: Edenize the world.
- b. Tabernacle/Temple: Israelize the world.
- c. Christ: Christify the world.
- d. Right worship is at the very core of the Christian faith!

H. Bad worship:

- a. What is “your ultimate concern,” or what do you worship?
- b. What is the original, primal sin? The arrogating to ourselves the prerogative, which is rightly God’s alone, of determining what is good and what is evil.

I. Story of the God: calling creation to right worship

- a. Participation in God’ saving work in Jesus Christ.
- b. Submission of humankind to God
- c. Send into the world in mission **with fire** to love the world to God.

II. Reframing the Conversation – Content, Structure and Style

Reframe conversation to a more theologically informed taxonomy: content, structure and style. Content=Gospel, structure=dialogical call and response, or revelation and response, style=balancing cultural relevance with the counter-cultural nature of the Gospel.

A. Robert Webber: “Worship does God’s story.”

- a. John Witvliet: “Just as the Christian doctrine of God should be rooted in the divine economy, so too Christian worship should rehearse the divine economy. God’s actions in history are the basis for both the knowledge and worship of the triune God. Liturgy, like theology, must not “float off into abstractions” about God. In other words, Christian liturgy is fundamentally an act of anamnesis, an act of rehearsing God’s actions in history: past and future, realized and promised. Christians identify the God they worship by naming God as the agent of particular actions in history. Worship proceeds better by rehearsing eventful narratives of divine action—viewed iconically as

reliable windows into divine life—than by re-stating rational deductions or abstract ideas.”¹

- b. Robert Webber: Worship (of God as subject) is the key to the renewal of the Church.

B. Content of worship=Gospel (more later).

C. Structure of worship=dialogical and relational.

- a. God speaks (Deus Dixit)
- b. God invites us into his mystery (mysterion (Gr), mysterium (Latin)).
Mystery: “...a concrete something that, when you bump into it, it puts you in contact with the divine reality.” Jeremy Driscoll
- c. Webber: Worship structure=historic 4-fold order
 - i. Acts of entrance
 - ii. Service of the Word
 - iii. Service of the Table
 - iv. Acts of dismissal or sending
 - v. Dinner party
- d. Balances remembrance and anticipation, anamnesis and prolepsis: “already but not yet.”
- e. Location of God’s presence: gathered community, Word, table, praises, conversion, etc.
- f. “Lex orandi, lex credendi, est.”

D. Style(s) of worship:

- a. Taxonomy of worship elements not necessarily hierarchical.
- b. Relevance of style a significant missiological issue
- c. Bahkti
- d. Acts 17:22-33 Paul on the Areopagus connected with the Athenians
 - i. A hymn to Zeus by Epimenides of Crete (c. 600 BC)
 - ii. Stoic poet Aratus.
- e. Heart devotion plays a prominent missiological role in worship of
- f. James K.A. Smith in ‘Desiring the Kingdom’: *The liturgy is a “hearts and minds” strategy, a pedagogy that trains us as disciples precisely by putting our bodies through a regimen of repeated practices that get*

¹ John D. Witvliet, *“The Trinitarian DNA of Christian Worship: Perennial Themes in Recent Theological Literature,”* *Colloquium Journal* (Yale Institute of Sacred Music), 7-8.

*hold of our heart and “aim” our love toward the kingdom of God. Before we articulate a worldview, we worship. . . . Before we theorize the nature of God, we sing his praises. . . . Before we think, we pray. That’s the kind of animals we are, first and foremost: loving, desiring, affective, liturgical animals who, for the most part, don’t inhabit the world as thinkers or cognitive machines. . . . **My contention is that given the sorts of animals we are, we pray before we believe, we worship before we know—or rather, we worship in order to know.**²*

g. We must be prophetic-growing multiculturalism

III. Centered on the Gospel

The Bible is the very foundation and, we can even say, soul of worship. Likewise, the entire biblical narrative is summed up in the Gospel, the essential content of Christian worship. Christian worship should be rooted in scripture, specifically the summation of God’s story in the Gospel.

- A. Stanley Jones: a thin or mild understanding of the Christian faith can inoculate us, making us immune to the real thing and “safe” from the radical claims of Christ, radical reliance on Christ, and the full meaning and significance God can bring to our lives through Christ.³
- B. Recover the biblical understanding and the ancient church’s perspective on God’s story. Robert Webber stated, this story is “. . . handed down to us in tradition [through] the canon of Scripture, the great ecumenical creeds, the liturgies, the catechumenate and the ethics of faith. By recovering this ancient narrative, we will be able to speak once again to the world about its own history, telling the truth about the Triune God who creates and who becomes involved in his own creation to restore it.”⁴

² James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2009), 33, 34, emphasis mine.

³ I was introduced to this perspective by my colleague Mark Murray, who found the idea in the following book: Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 90.

⁴ Robert E. Webber, *Who Gets to Narrate the World? Contending for the Christian Story in an Age of Rivals* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 117-118.

- C. Webber: the gospel=God’s story of the reconciliation of the entire created order through the work of Jesus Christ, his only Son: non-negotiable content of worship.
- D. Webber’s definition of the gospel related to the “divinely authorized canonical story of the Triune God. This story—Creation, Incarnation, and Re-creation—was effected by Christ’s recapitulation of human history and summarized by the early Church in its Rules of Faith.”⁵
- E. Recapitulation: Eph. 1:9,10: “For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite (Gr.: “*anakephalaioo*,” meaning “recapitulate”) all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.”⁶ Jesus recapitulates Adam. Jesus is the second and final Adam, summoning the human family, in fact the entirety of creation, back to union with God.
- F. Irenaeus: Jesus “...became what we are (human), that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself (divine).”
- G. Two passages of scripture to help us understand God’s story.⁷
- a. Mark 1:1--*euongelion*
 - b. 1 Cor. 15:1-8--the resurrection!
- H. Kerygmatic preaching: “You killed Jesus Christ, God raised him.”
- a. First implication: Jesus is Lord! Get in **his** army.
 - b. Second implication: Jesus is the perfect union of God and man bringing all humankind to union with God.

⁵ Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God’s Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 180.

⁶ RSV, parentheses mine. All following passages are from the RSV.

⁷ I am thankful to Bp. Robert Barron for his insights into the essence of the gospel, taken from various sources of his. His perspectives are exactly in line with the perspectives of my mentor Robert Webber, revealed in his many writings.

- I. The resurrection affirms: Jesus is the perfect coming together of divinity and humanity. The Church Fathers universally believed that God became human so humans could become God. Athanasius: “The Son of God became the Son of Man, so the sons (and daughters) of men could become the sons (and daughters) of God.” We don’t become the “I AM,” but we can become *like* him, transformed into his likeness revealed in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit. (divnization, theosis)
- J. To be saved: transferred from death into life. That is the Gospel.
- K. In his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, Joseph Ratzinger: “...prayer, the self-opening of the human spirit to God, is true worship. The more man becomes “word” –or rather: the more his whole existence is directed toward God—the more he accomplishes true worship.”⁸ He goes on to say, “True worship is the living human being, who has become a total answer to God, shaped by God’s healing and transforming word.” He says that the ministries of word and sacrament “...transform people into an offering to God and make the cosmos into praise and thanksgiving to the Creator and Redeemer.”⁹
- L. Right worship, true worship, forms us into Christ-likeness and calls us and empowers us to mission by the Holy Spirit. As we are spiritually formed in worship, we “must decrease” and God “must increase.”
- M. The story of God: the Son of God became the Son of Man, so the sons and daughters of men could become the sons and daughters of God.
- N. Worship is centered around the content of the Gospel.

IV. Leading the Praise of Creation

In worship, we have the great privilege of leading the praise of all of creation.

- A. Genesis 1 and 2: A great liturgical procession

⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth, Part Two: Holy Week From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), p. 238.

⁹ Ibid.

- a. The celebrant: leading the praise creation comes at the end. The apex of creation is humankind, uniquely created in the image of God, the celebrants of this great liturgical procession of creation.
- b. Humankind: the priests of creation through worship.

B. We shouldn't worship creatures.

C. Purpose of humankind: be the priests of creation, the biblical vision of the rightly ordered life, and life oriented around right worship.

D. Giving praise to God on behalf of all creation, for the life of the world. Alexander Schmemmann (read this gender neutral): "The first, the basic definition of man is that he is the priest. He stands in the center of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God—and by filling the world with this eucharist, he transforms his life, the one that he receives from the world, into life in God, into communion with Him. The world was created as the "matter," the material of one all-embracing Eucharist, and man was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament."¹⁰

E. Priestly role: give voice to the voiceless creation.

¹⁰ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1963), p. 15.