

## **Worship and Liturgy**

### ***Response to Canon Frank Lomax's Paper By Canon Rennis Ponniah***

Let me address the issues in liturgical worship from a pastor's point of view. In order to do so, may I propose a working definition of liturgy:

Liturgical worship is an ordered form of worship, with set prayers, readings and responses, that is Scripturally-sound, that retains what is best in the worship tradition of the church, and that enables in culturally appropriate ways the exaltation of almighty God and the edification of the gathered community.

There are four issues I would like to highlight.

### **Scriptural Balance vs. Contemporary Emphasis**

Even the church in its doctrine and practice, is not immune from fads and fashions. Liturgical worship can be a great tool for keeping Scriptural balance. For example, the pattern of Ps 95 (called the Venite in the Anglican Prayer Book) calls for rejoicing, reverence and response in worship. While the presence of evil and the reality of man's fallenness are not glossed over, the use of the Psalms in liturgical worship helps keep the focus on God all the time. We begin by exalting God and we end by responding to God. This checks for example a recent fad of habitually starting the worship service by 'binding Satan and the forces of evil'. This is not to deny the valid place of warfare in worship but to say that the principles of liturgical worship help place 'warfare' in the context of God's over-powering presence and His awesome salvation in Christ.

The positive use of liturgy is seen most vividly in the way it makes the Eucharist the centre-piece of Christian worship. For it is through the Eucharist, that the worshipper is drawn into the salvation event of Christ's finished work on the Cross, and drawn as well into the trinitarian relationships of our Triune God. It seems to me that good liturgical design offers the Eucharist as the central place of encounter with God.

### **The Purpose of Worship**

The different purposes of worship can compete for emphasis. Most would agree, in principle, at least that exaltation of God must be the primary purpose. However, how does that fit in with what is most helpful to edify the gathered community. And more recently, with the introduction of seeker-sensitive services, we need to ask what is the legitimate weightage to give to make our worship services accessible and meaningful to the non-believer. No easy answers, but it could be that liturgical worship helps us to get the sequence of priorities right: namely exaltation of God first, followed by edification and then evangelism.

## **The Dynamic Development of Worship Forms**

The design of our worship services must take into account the spirituality and language of discourse of our people. Perhaps, the hardest thing for a pastor is to suspend his own spirituality and way of encountering God in order to listen to the spirituality of the people he serves. A pastor listens in order to facilitate and to develop further his people's encounter with the living God revealed in the Scriptures. For example, the church in Singapore has grown in its use of 'a language of intimacy' in its songs of worship. There is also greater freedom in the exercise of gifts of the Holy Spirit during the services. How do pastors under-gird these developments with biblical roots as well as give these developments room to grow in our life as God's people? Such developments underline the need also for liturgical worship not to be thrown out but to be Spirit-directed.

## **The Practical Value of Liturgical Worship**

I find liturgical worship to be of immense value in today's frenetic, self-centred society. The practice of Morning and Evening Prayer, aided by the Lectionary (assigned Scriptural readings for the Church's Calendar) and the Prayer Book, helps me develop healthy rhythms in daily life – rhythms which help me rest in knowing that God is the great Initiator and Sustainer of life.

As a worshipper, liturgical worship helps me to be a participative, self-forgetful person caught up in adoring God. As C.S. Lewis puts it, liturgy helps us to enjoy the 'dance' because we don't have to keep learning the dance-steps each week.

And as a pastor, liturgical worship helps me to hold truth-in-tension in such a way that lives are built up for the glory of God. The challenge of course is to impart the principles of good liturgical design to a new generation while at the same time responding to the fresh work of the Holy Spirit in every generation.