It was about 1988. A whole group of us went to the Pink Floyd World Tour concert at Thebarton Oval in Adelaide. We were part of a community of people gathering together for an incredible event that touched us on so many levels. There was the social aspect with everyone excited to be there, anticipating an amazing experience, and joined together by this occasion in some sort of mystical communion of old hippies and wannabe young hippies. There was the emotional experience aided by lots of illegal green weed smoked openly and copiously by me and my friends and by a large percentage of the 20,000+ crowd. There was the physical and sensory experience in what was the very early days of quadriphonic sound, video montages and laser light shows. We swayed to the songs, we sang along in unison, our hearts overwhelmed by this incredibly powerful experience. I think we hugged each other and strangers when it was all over, grateful to have shared this experiences together. We talks for hours after about it.

Many years later I often wonder how this differs from what many in the church today call “worship”? Sure, the pot smoking is missing, but all of the other elements of the Pink Floyd pagan festival of song are there. There’s the people up the front with their instruments, and there is the singers with the lead singer out front. There’s the amazing lights, the visuals on the screen. There’s the darkness of the venue, people swaying etc. There’s the boost that you get form the event and the wow factor stays with you. Sure, the songs are about God. But is it possible that worship has become a clone of the pagan festival with a thin veneer of Jesus painted over it? One writer has said, somewhat controversially, that many churches are like crack houses where junkies come to get their “fix” of God. If worship is going to be transforming, then I suggest that worship itself, as we now understand it, needs to be transformed. In what follows, various authors flesh out some dimensions of worship that help give a bigger picture and deeper understanding of just what is Christian worship.

Nicholas Tuohy

Exploring the Psychology of Worship

It is important that the church understand the psychology of worship. Participation in worship impacts believers emotionally and psychologically. Although worship is corporate, it is made up of individual acts. It is not only something taking place outside the self but is also something occurring within the self. The entries in this section discuss impediments to worship and look at worship as a psychological phenomenon that relates to the struggles and passions of the inner person.

◆ WOUNDS THAT HINDER WORSHIP

The person who brings a wounded spirit into the setting of worship often finds it difficult to enter into the experience of worship. Paradoxically, it is the very act of worship that offers healing for those wounds, even though the pain may hinder the hurting Christian’s full participation in it.

Worship comes alive when it becomes relational, when through it we encounter both the God with whom we are acquainted and our fellow believers with whom we are united as a body. The corporate encounters with God enrich our personal experiences with him, while our private ones invest the corporate with new life. This level of worship is not an unreachable ideal, but a vital reality to many believers. Unfortunately, there are many others for whom worship is an intellectual and behavioral routine which never rises to the level of relationship.

It is possible for sincere Christians to be limited in their worship experiences because they have, over a period of time, built emotional barriers around themselves to protect wounds they have sustained

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in the course of personal relationships. A person who has been hurt by a relationship will find ways to protect himself or herself from further hurt. Sometimes these protections are consciously chosen and are appropriate to the situation. But much self-protection is unconscious and serves to restrict and defeat rather than to free.

It is generally true that the height and thickness of the protective fence (i.e., the strength of the defense and its power to control relationship experience) are related to the period of life in which the wounding occurred and the severity of the damage inflicted upon the person's sense of safety and trust. Wounds that hinder worship can occur in adulthood, but usually the original and most damaging wounds are those of childhood.

Because we are made in the image of God, we are designed as children to be parented as God himself would parent us, as we see him relating to his children, Adam and Eve. No human parent can perfectly follow the model of the Father God, and every parent makes mistakes. In the life of any child, a combination of traumatic events and unhealthy and ungodly relationship dynamics can leave scars which accompany that person into adulthood.

Some of the more obvious antecedents of wounds which carry over into later life are familiar: divorce, physical or sexual abuse, alcoholism, drug addiction, abandonment, and neglect. But other, less obvious dysfunctional patterns result in woundedness as well: perfectionism, emotional neglect, conditional love based on performance, marital strife and disunity, emotional abuse, and harsh, inconsistent, or arbitrary discipline.

Early childhood relationships, particularly those with parents, are deeply formative and exert an influence in adulthood long after specific memories have faded or disappeared. Patterns of relating are established early, through modeling and experience, long before we have the ability to be aware of what we are learning. We form expectations of ourselves and others that particularly affect intimacy and authority relationships. These powerful beliefs from childhood can persist in direct opposition to the conscious thought-flow of the adult.

In a sense, the person who has been wounded has two minds: the adult or conceptual/rational mind and the childhood or experiential/emotional mind. For example, the adult mind may firmly believe that God is loving and good, but the child mind has been trained to expect judgment and rejection. The adult may fully understand the concept of grace and agree that worship is a response of joy and thanks, but to the child who has never experienced unmerited favor and radical forgiveness, the emotions of joy and thanksgiving are foreign.

If we approach Christianity exclusively through the intellect, as a compartmentalized belief system alone, we do not encounter our relational wounds and self-protections during worship. A purely cognitive faith presents no challenge to our struggles with anger, fear, and distrust. But Christianity, including worship, is grounded in relationship. If we allow it to touch us, it will touch us fully at all levels, including our pain.

Expressions of Woundedness

A. W. Tozer reminds us in The Pursuit of God that "God is a Person, and in the deep of His mighty nature He thinks, wills, enjoys, feels, loves, desires, and suffers as any other person may. In making Himself known to us He stays by the familiar pattern of personality. He communicates with us through the avenues of our minds, our wills, and our emotions" ([Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, Inc., 1948], 13).

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No intimate relationship can be said to be healthy unless it is so in three aspects of personality: mind, will, and emotion. Since the personalities of wounded people are shaped by their reactions to painful experiences, the results can be expressed as difficulty in any or all of these areas.

Emotional Experience. The fruits or evidence of the presence of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, and so on—involve processes of the mind as well as behaviors chosen by the will. But to be fully experienced as relationship, they must also involve the emotions. Believers whose emotions are numbed by pain and buried under patterns of self-protection miss the emotional component of love, joy, peace, grace, and forgiveness, and therefore miss the vitality and satisfaction of intimacy, both in relationship with God and in the experience of worship.

Some of these Christians look with secret amazement at deep, spiritual experiences in the lives of others. They are envious when people talk of being refreshed, nurtured, strengthened, and cleansed through worship. They are mystified or skeptical about worship being a love encounter—an experience of loving and being loved. Their longing for love, joy, and peace is intense, but their experience could be described as dry, empty, cold, frustrating, or boring.

Unlike the believer who flows through cycles of intimacy and distance in the course of developing a relationship with the Lord, this person knows intimacy only as a concept. No matter how hard he or she tries through discipline, study, service, participation, and any other means available, the emotional/experiential aspect of the worship relationship remains remote and unsatisfying.

There are those who experience primarily painful or negative emotions during worship. Sadness, fear, anger, frustration, and irritability seem to be stimulated by the attempt to draw near to God and to fellow believers. The evidence of woundedness is not that negative emotions occur, but that they occur with great intensity and that they persist without relief or are relieved only by periods of emptiness.

Thoughts and Attitudes. People wounded in childhood tend to live with an underlying, uneasy feeling that something is wrong and that someone is to blame. They often flip-flop between blaming themselves as bad or wrong and blaming someone else. As a result, they are critical and faultfinding, either toward themselves or others.

This pattern can be expressed as a habitually critical attitude; the feeling is one of chronic irritation. The focus of attention during worship becomes preoccupation with the shortcomings of fellow worshipers, frustration with those in authority, and dissatisfaction with the way things are being done. It can also occur in the form of persistent thoughts of guilt and unworthiness, a concentration on one's own failings and inadequacy, and a perception that God and fellow believers are disapproving and critical. The healing, restoring experience of being unconditionally accepted by God and by the members of his body is lost in a sea of self-doubt and anxiety.

The Will and Behavior. When old wounds affect behavior, it is often in the form of chronic struggles with discipline. In spite of volumes of accurate information, heartfelt surges of desire, and many pledges and recommitments, these persons cannot seem to make their wills cooperate. Efforts to bring behavior into line with Scripture, whether stopping the negative or beginning the positive, go through cycles that end in failure and frustration. The experience of worship suffers as self-image is battered and discouragement sets in.

Reactions to Old Wounds. Some believers, unaware that their struggles with worship are a result of woundedness, become discouraged after years of effort and disappointment. They cannot find satisfaction in a relationship with God no matter how hard they try, and they conclude that either God

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is not real or that he has rejected them. Ultimately, they withdraw completely from the church and the painful reminder of failure and loss. Quietly, with no fanfare, they may simply drift away. Or, in a burst of pain, they target someone or something to blame.

Other unfulfilled believers stay faithful in attendance but keep themselves safe from intimacy by remaining uninvolved and refusing to invest in the life of the community. Intimacy with fellow believers is as threatening to them as intimacy with God. They do not want to risk rejection and disappointment, even though they long to be deeply connected, loved, and accepted. Physically present, they remain in the spectator role, often going unnoticed by those who are actively involved.

Church-hopping can be a manifestation of protective withdrawal. When the challenges of relationship become too intense, wounded people may pull out and move on, searching for a different format, a different philosophy of worship, different leadership, or some other external condition to change their disappointing inner experience. Sometimes a change is helpful and productive, but if personal healing is needed, repeated changes will not solve the problem.

Probably the most tempting and frequent form of withdrawal is retreat behind a mask. Somehow church life, with its high standards and expectations, seems to promote this wearing of facades as a defense against the frightening reality of woundedness. People in leadership roles are particularly vulnerable. As their natural gifts propel them into positions of responsibility, they become increasingly reluctant to reveal their weaknesses. No one reaches in to find out who they really are or holds them accountable for genuine growth and personal healing. Burnout and dramatic plunges into sin are sometimes the result. But an outwardly successful life of service that drags on and on, masking an inner life of spiritual emptiness, can be just as devastating.

Attack. Every worshiping body has had the experience of members who are continually on the attack. Nothing seems to please them, and someone else is always to blame. Often church leaders will handle these attacks by responding to the content, changing or defending policies, procedures, people, or whatever is being targeted. Sometimes, if they become frustrated because the critical person is impossible to satisfy, they will discount him or her and push the individual away. Unfortunately, the pattern of attack is not often understood, either by the church or the individual, as a self-protective defense resulting from old wounds. Because the real problem is not being addressed, no resolution occurs.

Control. When one's inner life (thoughts, emotions, behaviors) is out of control, it is easy to try to get a handle on things, by attempting to control others. People who have been hurt live, either consciously or unconsciously, with the expectation and dread of being hurt again. They cannot rest or relax in their relationships. They are compelled by anxiety to manage or control other people. Different personalities will choose to control with different styles: aggressive and direct, compliant and indirect, through guilt, by obligation, with kindness, by withdrawal, or through attack.

The variations are endless but have a universal result. Closeness and safety achieved by manipulation and control remain unsatisfying. Fear runs beneath the surface saying, "But what would happen if I stopped, if I let go? They would probably hurt me or leave me, and I cannot take that risk." When this fear and the patterns of control dominate a person's relationship with God, the peace of Christ is not a personal reality and worship is hindered.

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How Change Takes Place

We have described defensive reactions, attitudes, and behaviors as the protective fence surrounding wounding experiences. This fence serves to hide from others the existence of the painful reality inside. The difficulty is that the fence often hides that reality from the individual as well. The implications and significance of one's own personal history are unrecognized, and sometimes even the memories of the hurtful experiences are hidden.

As long as the individual and those around him or her are interacting only with the fence (i.e., the self-protective patterns of withdrawal, blame, attack or control) little progress will be made toward deepening the relationship dimension of worship. The beginning of significant, satisfying change is recognition of the real problem. The wounded person must be willing to look at the fence and take responsibility for what is there.

Self-discovery. Healing of old wounds begins by discovering that here is a link between the experiences and relationships of the past and those of the present. A common self-protective attitude in this regard is, "The past is the past; it cannot be changed, so there is no point in dwelling on it." This statement is both true and untrue. The past itself cannot be changed, but the lingering reactions (attitudes, expectations, feelings, and behavioral patterns) can, if they are looked at and understood in their original context.

The goal of self-discovery is not to dwell on the past or to assign blame. It is rather to erect instead a foundation from which real change can take place. Unhealthy relationship patterns that do not make sense in an adult framework may become clear when seen from the perspective of a child subjected to an unhealthy environment. It helps to discover how the child felt, what he or she perceived, what he or she learned, and how he or she responded.

Decisions or vows are made deep in a child's heart and remain hidden from the mind of the adult. "I will never get close enough for someone to hurt me like that again." "People will always leave me, so it won't hurt as much if I leave them first." "No one will ever love me." "You can't trust anyone." "There must be something wrong with me." These beliefs will drive a person's life until they are confronted as distortions and replaced with a new reality.

In the process of doing that, feelings associated with those early experiences will come to the surface. They are not the feelings of an adult, mediated by the rational mind; they are literally the feelings of the child, living within as if frozen in time. Simply expressing these feelings is not sufficient to bring about healing, but it seems to be an essential ingredient.

Safe Relationships. Self-examination at this level is rewarding, but difficult and painful as well. The decision to begin this journey is deeply personal and occurs in that private place of relationship to oneself. But walking the journey through must take place within safe, committed relationships.

An important part of the healing process is to open up and share deeply with a few people. That sometimes begins in counseling, when a person tells a painful story for the first time. But it can also take place or continue in committed friendships. Christian friendships can be the vehicle by which a wounded person risks being fully known and finally experiences unconditional acceptance. Grace becomes more than a theology—it becomes a healing interaction.

A church that takes itself seriously as a healing community will encourage the formation of committed, supportive relationships in which this kind of sharing can take place. Hurting people find it difficult to ask for help. But it becomes even more difficult, even prohibitive, if structures are not in place that

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encourage them to ask. Small groups, topical support groups, and discipling relationships can help, as can clergy and leadership who are alert to the need and the opportunities to bring people together.

Wounded people have often had hurtful experiences in churches, either because they initiate them or because they react more strongly to situations than do those people who are not in pain. It may be necessary for them to find a church community or format that does not remind them of either their wounding family or a previously wounding church. Finding a church in which to feel safe is good, but that is only the beginning. That safe environment must then be used to do the difficult work of healing, or the disappointment and hurt will only recur in the new context as well.

Forgiveness and Restoration. When a person moves toward acceptance and resolution of the past, it becomes necessary to sort out the issue of responsibility. Hurt children often assume the blame and guilt that belong to others and then grow up either blind to or confused about the implications of their own attitudes and actions. Christians committed to healing know that they are supposed to forgive those who have wronged them and seek forgiveness for their own wrongs. But they cannot do that in a meaningful way until they are clear about who bears responsibility for what.

Separating one's own wrongs from the wrongs of others is difficult work but can be greatly aided by the guidance of Scripture and the illumining witness of the Spirit. When people finally see clearly the wrong that was done to them, the world often leaves them with nothing but permission to be angry. It is the church that can take them deeper into healing with the call to forgive, in and through the Spirit of Christ, who was the ultimate victim.

And when people who have been victims finally see that they have at times followed the pattern they were given and have also wronged others, when they are able to cease to blame and to accept responsibility for their actions, then the church must offer confession, forgiveness, and restoration in and through the Spirit of Christ, the ultimate grace-giver.

Behavior Change. Working with the relationships of the past is important, but it is meaningful only as a foundation for change in the relationships of the present. Healing the past frees a person to engage more effectively in the process of change, including some hard work in the here and now.

The goal of behavior change is to replace problem attitudes and actions with healthier ones: to break old habits, to think differently about self and others, to adopt new beliefs, to learn to trust. But for change to take place, these general goals must be broken down into step-by-step, specific, short-term goals that are connected directly to current relationships and situations. Change cannot occur in the abstract.

Understand the old behavior. Familiarity with the old ways of relating is an unpleasant but necessary first step toward change. Some research may be required. "What exactly happened in that messy interaction with the choir director? What role did I play that caused or contributed to the problem? Is this a pattern in me that has led to problems before?"

Unhealthy patterns of relating that begin in childhood become habitual, a series of actions and reactions that occur automatically, like falling dominoes. Habitual behavior has to be approached systematically, broken down into its component parts so that the progression can be understood. The crucial question is where and how the habit track can be interrupted to insert a new behavior that will lead to a different outcome.

Discover the new behavior. Healthy behavior patterns are a mystery to people who did not see them modeled as a child. They may know in general what healthy is, but they usually do not know how to make it happen. It takes time to discover and experiment with alternatives in real life situations.

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In both of these steps—understanding the old behavior and discovering the new—safe, committed relationships are valuable. Feedback about old behavior from caring and sensitive people helps the person develop an understanding of what needs to be changed. It is important to be able to go to someone and ask, “Have you ever seen me do this or react in that way? How did you feel when I did that? Help me understand how I come across and the effect I have on other people.”

Learning takes place best through modeling, that is, by observing and imitating new, more desirable behavior. Close, sharing relationships provide excellent opportunities to discover new ways of interaction. The goal is not to try to become another person, but to find out how a healthier person thinks, feels, and acts in specific situations. This sort of discovery helps to develop a mental model or vision of the new behavior. Without a vision, a concrete sense of the direction of change, the process will bog down in confusion and frustration.

Trial and Error. Learning to change relationship patterns is not very different from learning any new skill. Anyone who has ever learned to ski knows the feeling of being overwhelmed with stimuli. Information and instructions are flying in every direction, but somehow nothing works right. If you could not see people all around you successfully skiing, you would be certain it is impossible to whiz gracefully down a mountain with two sticks strapped to your feet.

New behavior starts out messy and confusing, with many false starts and falls. Trial and error, perseverance, practice, encouragement, and support are the essential ingredients of learning. The difference between relationship change and skiing is that in relationships the stakes are higher and the feelings deeper. The old patterns of relating, though unhealthy and self-defeating, are familiar, and to that extent comfortable. In the process of change a person feels awkward and very vulnerable. Time and a lot of support are needed to enable the person to continue braving those forays into the new behavior. Ultimately, after many dashes back and forth between old and new patterns, healthier ways of relating begin to feel more familiar and natural.

Effects of Healing on Worship

The relationships involved with worship change as healing progresses. Trust in God and fellow believers deepens, and a sense of closeness and belonging begins to grow. The level of energy for living and serving increases, but within an environment of inner calm. Familiar words of worship come alive and take on personal meaning. But the most poignant and powerful result is an overwhelming sense of gratitude to a healing God.

The Father has run with tears of love to the end of the lane to throw his arms around the estranged and broken child. He has removed the old, smelly garments of shame and alienation and has demonstrated unconditional acceptance and restoration in full. The overwhelmed child can only respond with gratitude as the loving Father continues to feed and nourish him or her with spiritual blessing from the riches of his table.

The Son, Jesus, who as a man knew what it was to be abused, and who as the Savior made healing and restoration possible, comes to life as friend. The Spirit takes shape as the ultimate counselor within, witnessing faithfully to the healing truth about Christ and his gifts: forgiveness, grace, hope, and love.

Nothing changes worship from black and white to living color, from routine to reality, and from the head to the heart, like gratitude. The worshiper whose heart is grateful sinks to his knees and pours forth praise and worship and then is grateful all over again for the privilege of doing so. The one who has experienced healing reaches out his or her hands to worship with others who also have been

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healed, and the unity that flows among them heals that much more in an ever widening circle of fellowship and love.

The challenges and risks of a path of healing cannot be denied. But for the believer, the rewards are beyond the level of human personality: mind, will, and emotion. When we sow to healing, which is by the Spirit, we reap the Spirit, and our rewards are eternal.

Margaret M. Webb

◆ TEN BASIC NEEDS MET BY WORSHIP

In worship a person gives to the Lord all of the conflicts, struggles, and disappointments that affect his or her life. Leaving them in the Father's hands, the worshiper focuses attention on the power and majesty of God. As we worship, the brokenness of our lives begins to be healed.

People have basic needs which can be met in worship. Augustine said, "Thou hast made us for thyself, O God, and our souls are restless until they find their rest in thee." In the depths of our nature, we have certain conscious needs which must be met. There are hungers of the human heart to be satisfied. These psychological necessities have been approached in various ways. Here is one attempt to express mankind's conscious needs for worship.

1. The Sense of Finiteness Seeks the Infinite. In worship people seek completion—communion with "ultimate being." Sensing our limitations, we go in search for the rest of ourselves. The psalmist said,

O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
. . . . . .
When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor. (Ps. 8:1, 3–5)

2. The Sense of Mystery Seeks Understanding. People stand in need of knowledge. We approach God as the source of all knowledge. This act of communion may be spoken of as worshipful problem solving. Paul exclaimed, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" (Rom. 11:33). Again, he prayed that his fellow Christians might "have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:18–19).

3. The Sense of Insecurity Seeks Refuge. In an age of uprootedness, people realize their need for refuge and stability. With the psalmist, we find ourselves saying, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (46:1).

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4. The Sense of Loneliness Seeks Companionship with God. In their estrangement and lostness, people feel the need to be loved. Worship is the search for this love that alone can satisfy our loneliness. Job cried, “If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling!” (Job 23:3). In genuine worship, a person comes ultimately to experience personal companionship with God. “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you” (42:5).

5. The Sense of Human Belongingness Seeks Mutual Fellowship with Other Worshipers. The children of Israel sang a song of ascent going up to the temple, “I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD” (Ps. 122:1). In worship the early church felt itself to be one body in Christ. Joined and knit together in Christ, each believer worked to contribute his or her part in building up the body in the love of Christ (Eph. 4:1, 4–6, 16). It is by the grace of God that a congregation is permitted to gather visibly for fellowship in worship.

6. The Sense of Guilt Seeks Forgiveness and Absolution. In worship the soul is laid bare before God. The worshiper acknowledges his or her guilt and pleads for cleansing. David cried out,

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
. . . . . .
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight
. . . . . .
Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me. (Ps. 51:1, 4, 10)

The more real a person’s sense of guilt, the more necessity there is for confession and dependence upon the atoning grace of God.

7. The Sense of Anxiety Seeks for Peace. Anxiety is a normal experience of human beings in their finiteness. In this deep threat of nonbeing, a person seeks in worship the courage to become his or her true self. As emotional tensions build up, the individual seeks release from them in worship, the deepest of all emotional experiences. This emotional experience can reach to the depths of a person’s need for rest and peace. In great distress the psalmist prayed,

As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, O God.
. . . . . .
Why are you downcast, O my soul?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God. (Ps. 42:1, 11)

8. The Sense of Meaninglessness Seeks Purpose and Fulfillment. The search for meaning is perhaps the deepest quest of modern men and women. In the depth of his or her soul a person realizes that he or she was created for a purpose. In the midst of life’s harassment, the believer affirms, “We know

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that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). The search for meaning finds its deepest significance in the will to worship.

9. The Sense of Brokenness Seeks Healing. God's people cannot grapple with the enemies of righteousness in the real world without becoming broken and bruised. In a broken world, the believer seeks to be made whole. And as Tournier has said, this can happen only as God becomes incarnate in us through the Holy Spirit. Isaiah writes, "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out" (42:3).

10. A Sense of Grief Seeks Comfort. A person's innumerable losses leave him or her with feelings of emptiness. Human beings grieve over their losses. " 'Comfort my people,' says your God" (Isa. 40:1). In the worship of the living Lord who overcame all grief and loss, the Christian hears the words, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.... Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:1, 27).

Another has summarized human psychological needs in the area of religious experience as follows: the need to find fulfillment, to make life useful, to find great moments of inspiration, to have a real encounter with another person, to know one's own identity, and to find superlative significance in a person, Jesus Christ, the ultimate meaning of life. These feelings of need are evidences of the presence of God, sure signs of his address to us.

Franklin M. Segler

◆ TOWARD A BIBLICAL PSYCHOLOGY OF WORSHIP

The renewal of worship in our era is largely concerned with the restoration of a God-centered focus in Christian celebration. By its very nature, however, the psychology of worship tends to reverse this focus, redirecting our concern to the worshiper and his or her needs. A biblical psychology of worship places the individual within the context of corporate celebration and covenantal responsibility. Worship celebrates the victory of Christ over authorities that place people in bondage. In this setting, the gospel of Christ brings healing and liberation.

A common approach to the psychology of worship attacks the issue from the standpoint of the benefits to the individual worshiper. These benefits may include the awareness of intimacy with God, the affirmation and healing that come through the experience of grace, the sense of identity and fulfillment which is communicated to the worshiper, or some other value which he or she perceives as a benefit resulting from the act of worship. Pathology in worship is described in terms of the failure of the worshiper to receive these benefits. If he or she remains in a state of alienation or boredom, unable to respond at any level of depth to what is being presented, and locked into destructive behavior patterns which prevent a genuine meeting with God or with other worshipers, then the experience of worship has not been successful.

While this worshiper-centered approach to the psychological aspects of worship yields much that is valuable in terms of understanding the emotional needs and behavioral characteristics of worshipers, it is, in our view, ultimately counterproductive in contributing to the renewal of Christian worship. Genuine Christian worship is not worshiper-centered but God-centered. Worship that is based on the biblical perspective must by definition be directed away from the worshiper and towards the proper object of worship, the God who has involved himself in the history of a people and who comes to them as Creator, Savior, and Lord.

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The foundation of biblical worship is the covenant graciously granted by the Lord to his servants, and worship in the biblical sense is the tribute the servants offer to the great King. When the psychology of worship is focused on whether or not the worshiper's needs are being met, the whole purpose of worship is reversed. The King becomes the servant, and the worshiper takes the place of the sovereign, expecting to receive the tribute of the servant-God and frustrated when it is not forthcoming. Such a reversal has much in common with the pagan cults of the ancient Near East—a sharp contrast to biblical faith. In the polytheistic religions, the worshiper's constant aim is to propitiate a capricious and reluctant deity, wresting from him or her the benefits associated with the seasonal fertility cycle or some other response to human need. Biblical worship, in contrast, is a response to the holiness and majesty of God and to his initiative in creating a people to declare the excellence of his redeeming work (1 Pet. 2:9–10).

Since psychology, by definition, focuses on the human psyche or "soul" with its perceptions and needs, can a psychology of worship be constructed in which the focus should be not on the worshiper but upon the Lord who is the true object of worship?

Redefining Psychology in Biblical Terms

The term psyche is a Greek term found often in the New Testament (the Old Testament Hebrew equivalent is nefesh). It refers to an individual life, or what we today call a person. Biblically, the "soul" represents the totality of a person's being—not only his or her emotional, mental, and spiritual side but also one's physical well-being, family and property, and place and reputation in the community (see, for example, the exhaustive treatment of the Hebraic concept of the soul in Johannes Pedersen, Israel: Its Life and Culture, vol. 1 [London: Oxford University Press, 1946]). Both the inward and outward aspects of an individual's life are bound up with the soul. Hence psychology, understood biblically, involves more than "personality" as we conceive of it; it has to do with a person's external behavior, one's speech and actions, and how the person is perceived within the context of the community of which he or she is a part.

It is noteworthy, in this connection, that the biblical narrative seldom probes into the inward "feelings" of the people involved; where we today would describe an incident in terms of how the participants felt about what was happening, the Scripture tends simply to record what they said and did. In 2 Kings 4 we find the account of a boy, taken ill, whom Elisha restores to life; whereas we would say the boy felt pain in his head and his father became alarmed, the text simply says that the boy said to his father, "My head! My head!" and the father said to the servant, "Carry him to his mother" (2 Kings 4:19). A classic example of this biblical reticence about inward emotions is the narrative of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22:1–14), in which the feelings of father and son are never expressed but can only be inferred from such things as Isaac's question about the lamb for the offering or the silence as "the two of them walked on together." The Gospels record the passion of Christ with a similar restraint, rarely giving us a glimpse into his personal anguish in such expressions as "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (Mark 14:34). In the context of the sweep of salvation history and the working out of God's plan of redemption, personal emotional "needs" appear to be largely irrelevant. In the Jewish culture of biblical times, they were certainly downplayed.

The biblical worshiper may testify to his or her longing or frustration, in such expressions as "My soul yearns, even faints for the courts of the LORD" (Ps. 84:2) or "My soul is downcast within me" (Ps. 42:6), but such outbursts are not the anguished cry of one for whom God has ceased to be a reality. Indeed, they are a pledge of loyalty on the part of a servant who, although surrounded by enemies, is

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determined to hold on to the one sure thing in his life: the Lord's faithfulness to his covenant. The worshiper's enemies are not inner hurts and dysfunctional personality patterns have warped his or her response to the worship of God, but other people, people unfaithful to the Lord, who are pressuring the worshiper in some way. Even Jeremiah's complaint, "You deceived me, and I was deceived" (Jer. 20:7) is a response to the indifference of other people to the message that is "like a fire" in the prophet's inner being (Jer. 20:9).

Set against Scripture, therefore, the psychology of worship must not remain focused subjectively on the worshiper and his or her needs. More is at stake here than our internal struggles. There is, or should be, an objectivity to what occurs in Christian worship. Biblically informed worship is, in the first instance, an act through which God is establishing his dominion through the praises of his people (Ps. 22:3). Enthroning God means dethroning ourselves, like the worshiping elders in the Revelation of John, who lay their own crowns before the throne of God (Rev. 4:10). The growth of the kingdom of God, in our personal lives or in our social context, can occur only when God is on the throne, receiving the honor that is due him as sovereign Lord; otherwise, what is taking shape is a rival kingdom.

Worship is an act of spiritual warfare, the proclamation of Christ's victory on the cross over spiritual forces that would hold the people of God in bondage to instruments of self-justification (Col. 2:14–15). Warfare requires the enlistment of soldiers, albeit wounded ones. Since the soul encompasses the whole person, not just the emotions, the psychology of Christian worship sees people in the totality of their being, with many strengths as well as weaknesses, with many gifts as well as defects. These gifts and strong points may still be used in the battle, even where hurts and faults persist.

Ultimately, the psychology of worship has to do not primarily with the worshiper's interaction with himself but with his or her interaction with God. The psychology of worship thus involves how God benefits from worship as well as how the worshiper receives benefits and fulfillment of needs. In terms of biblical psychology, worship is the enlargement of the "soul" or life of God as his being reaches out to touch and envelop the "selves" of his worshipers. What else can be the meaning of the psalmist's invitation, "O magnify [giddel, "make great"] the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together" (Ps. 34:3, NASB)? In worship we "bless [b□rekah] the LORD" (Pss. 103:1; 104:1, NASB), contributing to the welfare of his being. Granted, such expressions are poetic rather than ontological; nevertheless, in biblical worship we see the great King receiving the tribute of his covenant partners and benefiting therefrom.

Recovering the Primal Worship Experience

The primal experience of worship is the sense of awe in the presence of the holy, the one who is infinitely greater than ourselves and beyond all comprehension (see Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, [New York: Oxford University Press, 1946]). The encounter with the holy comes as something which grips the worshiper at the intuitive level, filling him or her with a sense of awe and mystery before the massive presence of the sacred. (The Hebrew word kavod, translated "glory" or "honor," carries the basic meaning of "mass" or "weight.") There is a wonder, dread, or trepidation in the presence of a reality that cannot be comprehended within the framework of finite existence; an awareness of creaturehood and immeasurable smallness in the face of the Creator who is all. A biblical record of such an encounter with the Holy is recorded in Isaiah 6; Jacob's experience at Bethel (Gen. 28:10–22) and the appearance of the Lord on Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:16–25) are other important instances, together with the transfiguration of Christ (Mark 9:2–8 and parallels). In such an encounter we have no choice but to worship in the biblical sense of "bending the knee" (both the Hebrew and Greek

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words translated “worship” have this meaning), doing obeisance before the overwhelming majesty of the Creator, revealed as an absolute value.

The pathology of many contemporary worshipers is related to the loss of capacity for this intuitive response. The humanistic, technological thrust of western culture “flattens out” our world view so that it has no depth, while the relativistic philosophy of our era destroys any sense of absolute values. This lack of depth and absolutes is the cultural source of alienation and dysfunctional behavior patterns, since without a philosophical and spiritual anchor the human personality is cast adrift. Having lost all cosmic referents, a person has no choice but to become self-centered; the search for depth often becomes only a search within oneself—or into some allegedly transcendent realm which in reality is only a projection of the conscious or unconscious self, as in the “new age” philosophy. When self-centeredness becomes a cultural norm, and indeed a religious value (as has been well documented by writers like Paul Vitz, in Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977]), it is easy to understand how the unrestrained self continually inflicts hurt upon others and receives damaging blows in return.

In such a state, the decision to turn to God for help may be futile, since (in evangelicalism especially) so much emphasis is placed on conversion as an act of individual choice, made in order to secure certain benefits for the self. What the alienated person needs—and all members of our culture partake of this alienation—is to be taken captive (to use the apostle Paul’s metaphor, Eph. 4:7), caught up in the grip of the sacred. **Worship that focuses on meeting human needs will never break the destructive cycle of self-centeredness. Only worship that lifts up a transcendent God, calling people to commit themselves in his service and to abandon themselves in fascination with his glory, will break this cycle and bring healing.**

Corporate Worship and Personal Identity

The prevailing psychology of worship focuses upon the aspects of worship that concern the individual. The main concern is the response of the individual worshiper to the worship experience itself. One issue addressed by the psychology of worship is the worshiper’s sense of identity. Loss of identity is less of a problem in traditional cultures, where strong family or tribal bonds exist. A person always knows who he or she is, along with the proper role to assume in a given situation. In a technological and mobile culture, in contrast, the forces of social change contribute to the breakdown of these steady relationships and to a sense of alienation. The personal response is often to search for identity within the self, to “be all you can be” or to “have it your way.” Another avenue of response may be seen in the contemporary stress on ethnicity—the search for identity in ethnic “roots.” The psychology of worship focuses upon the pathology created when the individual worshiper is struggling with the loss or fragmentation of identity. In some persons, the struggle may be so intense that worship is weakened or blocked altogether. Also there can be a loss of identification with the other participants.

Loss of personal identity becomes an issue in worship as long as worship is viewed as an individual act. Worship in the biblical tradition, however, is never an individual act; it is always corporate worship, the celebration of the gathered assembly of the covenant community. The worship of Israel, the celebration of Yahweh’s mighty acts, was organized around annual festivals at the sanctuary “where the tribes go up” (Ps. 122:4) as a group. When an individual speaks in worship (as in the Psalms), he does so as the representative of a group, those faithful to the Lord; the individual’s offering of praise to the Lord and his testimony to answered prayer are set within the framework of the assembly (e.g., Ps. 22:25). The prophets of Israel were, even in times of rampant apostasy, representatives of a

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community of faithful worshipers of the Lord, epitomized by the "seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal" (1 Kings 19:18) of Elijah's era. The prophets took their stand not upon some esoteric revelation from the Lord but upon the traditions of the covenant, declaring the judgments against apostasy and immorality inherent within the covenant structure (see "The Concept of Covenant in Biblical Worship" in volume 1). The ability to declare these judgments with force was their prophetic gift or "inspiration."

The corporate nature of the church, the "body of Christ," is a corollary of the biblical stress on covenant and is evident in Paul's teaching concerning the Lord's Supper, the basic act of Christian worship. The bread we break, he reminds the Corinthians, is a koinonia ("participation, sharing) in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16–17); Christians are not to receive the Lord's Supper as an individual exercise, but are to recognize the body (1 Cor. 11:29) or worshiping community in this act.

Viewed in this perspective, concern with one's individual identity is a side issue. Introspective focus upon one's inner struggles is a diversion from the worshiper's true calling. Christian worship offers a genuine and satisfying sense of identity, but one that comes from commitment to the corporate identity of the people of God, a people called into being for the purpose of clarifying not who they are as individuals, but who he is and what he has done: "that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." In pledging themselves to the covenant, worshipers assume membership in a new family or "nation" from which their identity is derived: "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God" (1 Pet. 2:9–10). In short, healing comes through commitment of self to a cause greater than the self. Deliverance from sickness and agitation within the soul begins to come when the worshiper confesses that struggle itself as sin and, laying it aside, takes up the proclamation of God's greater glory in corporate celebration.

Worship and the Organizing Principle of Self

The question of the emotional needs of worshipers can be approached from the angle of the fragmentation of personality. This is perhaps another way of looking at the issue of identity. The anonymity of contemporary society makes it possible for people to act in one area of life in a manner inconsistent with the set of values they employ in another area. For example, a person who is a professing Christian may vote for a candidate for public office who opposes biblical principles or who may conduct himself in the home in a way he would never behave in church, at work, or in another public setting. People may go through life without being confronted with their own inconsistencies; because a person is really one psyche, however, internal dissonance may build up and may result in great emotional pain.

The search for an organizing principle of self which will silence the dissonance can be an agonizing one, especially if this search is undertaken with the premise that values are relative and that the answer must come from within each individual. "Self-esteem" has been viewed as such an organizing principle, enjoying wide popularity in our technological culture precisely because it avoids the introduction of absolutes. Even Christian thinking has co-opted the concept of self-esteem; we are told we have to love ourselves, because Jesus said "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). The issue of self-esteem is grist for the mill of the psychology of worship; lack of self-love has been seen as an impediment to worship, and the renewal of worship has been viewed in terms of how worshipers may be restored in self-esteem and released to express their "gifts."

Clearly, biblically informed worship cannot pander to the worshiper's perceived lack of self-esteem, for reasons that have been discussed above. Jesus' iteration of the "great commandment" was not a

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recommendation of self-love; he (and Moses before him) assumed an adequate degree of "self-love," in the sense of concern for one's personal needs (cf. Eph. 5:29) and simply used it as an example of how to treat one's fellow human beings. In actuality, the "neighbor" of whom Moses and Jesus were speaking is really one's fellow member of the covenant with the Lord—a covenant which the New Testament views as expanding to embrace people of all ethnic and socioeconomic groups, people "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). The organizing principle of "self" is the pledge of loyalty to God, a commitment which brings other loyalties—including loyalty to self—into proper perspective.

Worship and Personal Discipline

Christian worship is not the self-expression of an aggregate of individual worshipers, but the act of a redeemed people expressing honor to whom honor is due (cf. Rom. 13:7). Worship involves the subordination of individual concern to the larger concern that the name of the Lord should be lifted up. It is choreographed behavior which takes the spotlight off the worshiper and puts it on the Creator—yet, paradoxically, in so doing allows for the abundant release of individual gifts as worshipers move into the flow of praise in prophetic, musical, and artistic activity.

Participation in worship in the biblical tradition is an act of self-control; it involves the personal discipline of laying aside private concerns for the sake of the corporate witness to our sovereign Lord. Self-control, understood biblically, is submission to the will of God. As an act of self-control, worship is a vehicle for personal healing with self-control as the "bottom line" which anchors every fruit of the Spirit—joy, peace, and love itself (Gal. 5:22–23). Lack of self-control cuts us off from access to spiritual and psychological healing. To a Samaritan woman who evidently had some problems in this area, Jesus spoke of worship "in spirit and truth" (John 4:23), that is, spirited worship in visible manifestation of self-abandonment before the Lord, and truthful worship in conformity to scriptural patterns. To worship the Lord as an act of obedience, regardless of personal "feelings" of the moment, is a therapeutic, restorative act because it is an act of sacrifice—what Scripture calls the "sacrifice of praise" (Heb. 13:15).

A biblical psychology of worship recognizes the need to maintain worship in the Spirit, to understand worship from God's viewpoint—the tribute due him as the great King—and to view the worshiper's role as the controlled abandonment of self-concern. It would be sad indeed if in worship, as in all aspects of Christian life, having begun in the Spirit we should seek to complete it in the flesh (cf. Gal. 3:3). In the context of Paul's warning, "the flesh" means the effort to justify oneself through performance of the Mosaic law. Thus, "the flesh" is emblematic of all attempts to prove oneself, instead of to prove or demonstrate "what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom. 12:2). As members of the body of Christ, the corporate assembly of the Lord's worshiping people, we are not to indulge ourselves in the quest for self-pity or self-esteem; rather we are to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to satisfy its desires" (Rom. 13:14, RSV).

Worship and the "Performance Principle"

In the final analysis, that which lies at the root of most pathologies of personality in our culture is the replacement of unconditional familial love by the "performance principle"—the constant need to prove ourselves, to justify our right to exist. Millions live in this bondage, many perhaps outwardly self-assured, successful, and complacent but inwardly insecure and uncertain of their acceptance by

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others. The “self-esteem” movement largely ignores this cultural exchange. Our lives are constantly being measured by imposed or internalized standards: the values of peer groups, the pressures of economic expectations, the conventions of our various ethnic or ideological communities. To compound the problem, none of these perceived sources of value has any final arbiter who can certify that we have passed the test and validated ourselves; there is no mechanism by which we may receive the official stamp of approval. Having no definite finish line to cross, we can never know if we have won the race.

The “performance principle” of our industrial and technological age is simply the modern secular version of “the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2) from which Christ came to release us. However “holy, righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12), the Judeo-Christian law nevertheless pandered to “the flesh” in this respect: it set up an unattainable standard of behavior and so challenged the worshiper to commend himself or herself in relationship to its achievement. Under such a system, worship became simply one of many acts intended to make a statement about the worshiper: his or her faithfulness, righteousness, or spirituality. Within such a system there is no release from the inherent curse of judgment.

Against the background of the “performance principle,” the gospel proclaims:

> So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father” (Gal. 4:3–6).

In other words, redemption is effected through a change of family loyalty and status: from being slaves of the “performance principle” to being children of the Father, children who no longer need to perform in order to be accepted, but who are accepted in virtue of the relationship. The outcome is becoming a member of Christ the Son; to be “in Christ” is to be part of a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Christ in his death has borne the curse of judgment (Gal. 3:14–15); by union with him in his death (Rom. 6:3–5; Col. 2:12) we have “crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24; cf. 1 John 3:14).

This is the significance of the new (or renewed) covenant in Christ. The basic condition of the covenant—absolute loyalty to God—remains in force; but Jesus, our high priest and intercessor, satisfies this condition in our behalf (Heb. 7–8), setting us free from the curse. Thus Paul could proclaim the gospel of Christus Victor:

> When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature [Greek sarx, “flesh” or self-justifying behavior], God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross (Col. 2:13–15).

Christian worship is the celebration of Christus Victor, interpreted here as God’s act of redemption liberating us from the bondage of unrelenting self-justification. Christian worship is also our response to God’s act, as we bow the knee to renew our confession of covenant loyalty: “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor. 12:3; cf. Phil. 2:10–11). In the setting of worship, our personal struggles are dwarfed by the victory of Christ over the forces of sin, death, and all that would enslave us to the constant need to prove ourselves, with all its accompanying pathology. In the setting of worship, barriers to communion with our Creator are broken down as God comes to dwell among his people, to wipe away every tear, and to make all things new (Rev. 21:3–5).

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