

DIVINE VENERATION AS A THEOLOGICAL BASE: THE PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP AS A MINISTRY FOUNDATION

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INTRODUCTION

A valid beginning point for Christian theology, an authoritative theological base, is a prerequisite in the formation of biblically sound practical ministry. As Christian ministers and theologians, ontological and teleological arguments have less practical import than a Christ-centered, theistic starting point, but what is the exact founding position or theological base for doing Christian theology? Where does Christ-centered theology start? What trait of Christ or act of God through Christ constitutes a basis for understanding God and forming ministry? The Cross is a ready target for theological inspection and speculation. The absurdity of the crucifixion and the mysterious work of the Cross (e.g., 1 Cor 1:18) appear incompatible with human logic. If the Cross is the foundational act of God in Christ, then understanding the work of the Cross is vital in the discovery of a theological base. Yet, like Oz's Scarecrow, the Cross points several directions simultaneously; redemption, reconciliation, sacrificial suffering, and more.¹ However, any foundation for theology, philosophy, or ministry must be unidirectional, in order to facilitate uncompounded thought.

The essence of practical ministry is its theological base. A functional theological base produces all direction or movement in every aspect of ministry. Ideally, theological base is free of the influence of social inclination or the cyclic (self-generated) stimulus of its own

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¹Ellen T. Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Oxford, 1997), 244.

ministry's inertia. Although an unaffected theology is improbable, theologians strive for the purest, most unalloyed theological base. Accordingly, the penultimate goal of Christian theology is to find a primary theological base, the principle underpinning the ultimate product of theology, the understanding of God. For Thomas F. Torrance, "The ultimate end of Christian theology is the knowledge and enjoyment of God for his own sake."² An understanding of *God for his own sake* is the end product, but the process to produce that product must possess a *for-his-own-sake* contiguity. Yet, much that is called theology today is self-validated in process and product. That is to say, "the dogmas of the church ultimately form the basis of all theological statements."³ Cynically or pragmatically, Van Huyssteen sees an impoverished contemporary theology void of Torrance's construction for *God's sake*. "Theology is about discovery, not invention. We do not make up God; we discover the God who is there."⁴

Theological base creates Christian ministry *movement*. That *movement* diversifies into various disciplines; preaching, teaching, counseling, worship awareness, philosophy of missions, and more. These exist and move only within the parameters of a specific ministry's theological base. The base is a model and vector for the direction of ministry. All planning and execution of Christian ministry is produced from that theological substructure.

Although doctrinally cultic, the Mormon Church has a concerted ministry movement, because the church recognizes that the theological base is the impetus of every church ministry. For the Mormon Church, theological base is not an ethereal theological speculation in search of pragmatic application. Theological base is directly and inexorably connected to every ministry of the church.⁵

Theology forged and formed in 19th-century postmodernism fosters many contemporary ministries. These often center on humanistic

²Thomas F. Torrance, *The Ground And Grammar Of Theology* (Edinburgh, U.K.: T&T Clark, 1980), 1.

³Wentzel Van Huyssteen, *Essays In Postfoundationalist Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 123.

⁴Kevin J. Navarro, *The Complete Worship Leader* (Manila: Lighthouse Books, 2002), 20.

⁵Garth Mangum, and Bruce Blumell, *The Mormons' War on Poverty: A History of LDS Welfare, 1830-1990* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993), 3.

values, touting the benefit of Christian living and the physical value of attachment to God. Man-centered ministry is the outgrowth of postmodernism and a graphic example of ingrown theology. This ingrowth has been called the modern “theological collapse.”⁶ The collapsed theology has imploded upon the church, yielding utilitarian theology for the sake of man and not God. Barth asserts that the plan of God is not subject to human preferences. Therefore, only ministry that reflects the plan of God is serious and earnest.⁷

Understanding of God is usually derived from man’s experience within God’s mighty acts. Although God may be present within these experiences, they require human interpretation. Any such analysis is one step removed from the purity of theology produce without interpretation. The step of interpretation increases the theological margin of error. It may be argued that life is an interpretation of life, and man is never free of interpretation. If man is enslaved to interpretation, the best possibility is to lessen its effect. Accordingly, is there a theological base that is less interpretive than others; a position that requires less input from man’s contaminated reason and corrupted understanding? Three positions are examined here.

THE POSITION OF SALVATION AS THEOLOGICAL BASE

Amphictyonic life in Canaan revolved around the central sanctuary. Worship was centered on three annual feasts: the Feast of Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles. Although the Shema (Deut 6:4) called God’s people to the simplicity of monotheistic worship and worship *for God’s sake*, “Ancient festivals celebrated Yahweh’s acts in behalf of his people, not worship to God because he is God.”⁸ The “Israelites do not appear to have been philosophers.”⁹ Yet, their propensity to center worship on God’s acts rather than his existence set a theological trend. Israel identified God with his mighty

⁶Paul R. Sponheim, *God The Question And The Quest* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 13.

⁷Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, (Edinburgh, U.K.: T&T Clark, 1960), 4.1:271.

⁸Henry Jackson Flanders, Jr., *People Of The Covenant* (New York: Knopf, 1973), 208.

⁹W. S. LaSor, D.A. Hubbard, and F.W. Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 181.

acts of redemption more often than his essence. The resulting difficulty in separating God from life circumstances perpetually inhibited Israel's ability to worship in unadulterated monotheism. Israel repeatedly preferred the gods of Canaan, the gods of pleasure and plenty. Theology based on circumstance (even when that circumstance is the redemption of a nation) is circumstantially utilitarian. Such theology is oriented on a human plane and not Godward. Utilitarian theology necessarily rejects a sovereign God.

The Messiah changed Judaism forever, but emphasis on the benefits of faith and the correlation of faith and blessing still thrives within the contemporary Christian church. A recent study of global religious ideologies identified the dominant fabric of Christian faith as the gift of salvation. According to the study, Christian faith and salvation are nearly synonymous in the contemporary mind. Contemporary faith equates with belief for salvation, deliverance, and blessing.¹⁰

It is obvious that man's salvation is in the center of God's will. Paul clearly records that God desires all people to be saved (1 Tim 2:4). Perhaps it is the clarity of God's will regarding redemption that gives salvation the appearance of theological primacy. However, salvation points to the needs of man, the blessing of man, and the redemption of man. In itself, salvation does not point Godward. Though rendered by the grace of God to the need of man, the object of salvation remains man.

Many 19th-century philosophers considered religious faith to be experiential. One writer called this understanding "anthropocentric theology."¹¹ However, man cannot be the centerpiece of theology, mind, body, or spirit. When man is studied, anthropology is produced, but not theology. Man cannot be the chief figure in a ministry's theological base. Anthropocentric ministry reflects man's centrality in every facet. If redemption of man is the anthropocentric substructure of ministry, that ministry will continually be eccentric to God.

¹⁰Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 21.

¹¹Gerald S. O'Collins, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 213.

THE POSITION OF RECONCILIATION AS THEOLOGICAL BASE

Not only was man broken and in need of deliverance from sin, but the God-man relationship was also shattered and in need of reconstitution. Man is delivered from sin. Still, the greater truth is that man is delivered to God. A Godward movement is easily observable in the theological base of reconciliation.

The Jewish concept of redemption and reconciliation are man's approach to God. "The fundamental innovation that Paul made in the Jewish idea of reconciliation . . . [was that] it is not human beings who reconcile an angry God to themselves, . . . rather, it is God who reconciles human beings to himself through the atoning death of Jesus Christ."¹²

Reconciliation is a Pauline hallmark that partially turns the azimuth of theology away from the anthropocentric blessings of man. He said, "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18). The two biblical terms for reconciliation connote an exchange or payment as well as reunion. Man's lacking spiritual account is reconciled in the manner a checkbook is reconciled or balanced. Plus, man is united with Father God through Jesus Christ. The twin concepts of payment for sin and reunion with God make a compelling case for reconciliation as the theological base. Furthermore, reconciliation is recognized as a foundation for ministry. Reconciliation has a theological mandate, Godward movement, and releases ministry from the anthropocentric grip of the salvation theological base.

When reconciliation becomes the foundation for ministry, the emphasis is no longer on man alone but includes the restoration of man's relationship with God. God and man appear to be joint beneficiaries of reconciliation. Man and man's deliverance is no longer exclusively accentuated. The position of reconciliation as a theological base regards the fellowship of God with man and vice versa as the central driving force underwriting Christian ministry. It appears to be more biblical, and an emphasis of reconciliation seems to benefit both God and man. Reconciliation is a dual-faceted theological base, stronger than a lone salvation base.

¹²Miroslav Volf, "The Core of the Faith," *The Christian Century* (115), 4 March 1998, 239.

However, both movements from sin and toward God are man's movement facilitated by God. The benefits for humanity are obvious. God's benefits remain nebulous and undefined. Delineation of God's benefits is only seen in a more detailed plan. By partially orienting Godward, the reconciliation position becomes less contaminated than the salvation position alone. However, it is not totally Godward, and Torrance's definition of theology of *God for his own sake* is not attained.

Why does God save man? What benefit does God derive from man's salvation? Why is reconciliation important to God? Is there an etiology to God's acts of redemption and reconciliation that is more foundational? If there is a more rudimentary objective in the plan of God, then such an objective is a more suitable theological base than the mere means to that objective. Redemption and reconciliation are precious acts of God and crucial to the eternal destiny of man, but they are not oriented totally toward God. Consequently, these acts will never yield theology for *God's sake*.

THE POSITION OF VENERATION AS THEOLOGICAL BASE

"The term *worship* is sometimes applied to all of a Christian's life; and it is rightly said that everything in our life should be an act of worship, for everything we do should glorify God."¹³ Secular and sacred anthropological studies deduce that man has an insatiable appetite for worship.¹⁴ This hunger is constant throughout a breadth of religions. "The Bhagavad Gita and the Heidelberg Catechism illustrate the centrality of worship."¹⁵ Across the spectrum of beliefs, worship is an innate irresistible human expression.

Worship, veneration to God, is a basic impulse of humanity. In its pure form, worship occurs beyond the comfort of understanding and outside the framework of theology. In his opening of the Letter to the Ephesians, Paul simply articulates the plan of God. God's plan is to be worshiped. "Before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4) man was to

¹³Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1003.

¹⁴Franklin M. Segler, *Christian Worship* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 7.

¹⁵Robert S. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 227.

be cleansed and set aside (holy) to be a worshipper of God; "To be (to exist) to the praise of His glory"(Eph 1:12). Man was created to worship.

In the veneration theological base, there is place for the foundational work of both salvation and reconciliation, but these are subordinate to worship as the *means* are to the *end*. God's desired end is worship.

The Lord said, "Do not worship any other gods besides me." (Ex 20:3, NLT). Moses recorded this as the first commandment of God. Faithful patriarchs regarded worship as the primary centerpiece of communal and family living. Worship defined headship in the family group. "The patriarch heads this family with worship centered in the kin group."¹⁶

Did worship require understanding of God, a rational concept of God, or even agreement with God? Moses worshipped at a burning bush. He didn't understand or agree with God's plan for him (Ex 4:10), but he worshipped barefoot, covering his face, in obedience. Abraham worshipped a God who did not appear to be rational. His act of sacrificial obedience identifies worship as the litmus test of faith (Heb 11:17). Job worshipped a God whom he did not know correctly (Job 42:3). Yet his worship was accepted, and he was accounted to be perfect in his time. God brought Job a greater understanding of his being, but Job worshiped perfectly before he understood God (Job 1:22).

Which came first, theology or worship? Job proved that worship stands before understanding, and Abraham showed divine adoration goes beyond rational thinking. Moses worshipped a God with whom he had disagreement. These worshippers did not need to understand God to venerate Him. It was not necessary to analyze God in order to praise Him. In other words, worship was their theological base. They did not need a greater theological base to worship God. Worship is a theology for its own sake. The patriarch's theology was Torrance's theology *for God's sake*. Man's understanding is contaminated by the human condition, the flesh. Therefore, worship beyond understanding is a purer, less defiled theological base.

¹⁶Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, rev. ed. (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1993), 131.

The outline of man's purpose in the opening of Ephesians speaks of redemption, forgiveness, holiness, and blamelessness. The allusion to priestly sacrificial offering is easily envisioned. Man was created to worship in a priestly capacity. In the manner of the Hebrew priestly predecessors (Ex 30:20-21), man must be cleansed before entering the Holy Place. Only a cleansed priest may enter into communion and offer sacrifice. Man is cleansed (saved) as a priest who will offer sacrifices (1 Peter 2:9). Worship is intimate communion (reconciliation) with God. God will not commune with the unclean or the sinful. Salvation is necessary to cleanse man in preparation to commune with God (1 Jn 1:9). Properly aligned communion elevates God as sovereign and abases man as God's subject (Ps 22:29). The natural response of the created to the Creator is intimate communion (Philp 3:10). This intimate communion is worship and is expected from every breathing thing (Ps 150:6).

Therefore, salvation is a necessary cleansing step in God's plan of reconciliation, and reconciliation is a necessary union, if one is to commune with God. In the final analysis, salvation and reconciliation are byproducts of God's desire to be intimately worshipped. Accordingly, worship is the common denominator in God's plan for the world. Redemption and reconciliation are necessarily subordinate in his plan. Any benefit that man receives is incidental.

No other theological base is as divinely sovereign, allowing God to remain holy and separate, yet intimate. Salvation and reconciliation, grand as they may be, do not escape subjugation to worship by the scope of their value. Salvation and reconciliation are mere servants in the larger plan, the worship of God.

Criticisms of the Veneration Theology Base

In the veneration base God is the beneficiary. Historically, this has been a debatable issue. The production of theology from a foundation where God is *in need* or *in want* creates an impotent God. Conceptually, the hypothesis of God being subject to the need of worship renders God vulnerable to the absence of worship. One solution is the suggestion, "Our response to God can alter the 'texture' or 'flavor' of his life, but

not its depth of bliss or satisfaction.”¹⁷ In other words, God benefits from our praise, but the lack of worship does not diminish him. Philosophically, the veneration position withstands the criticism of a God *in need*.

What of God’s love for mankind? Is not love the defining character of God and the driving force behind salvation? Yes! The evidence of God’s love is this. God does not regard mankind’s inability to worship because of sin. God so loved the world that He provided a cleansing agent for humanity. God genuinely loves man, no matter how sinful man becomes (Rom 5:8). God’s love restrains him from destroying man and creating an alternate means of receiving intimate communion (2 Thess 2:7). Accordingly, God has regenerated man and reconciled him to a state of intimacy where true worship can occur.

APPLICATION OF THE VENERATION THEOLOGY BASE

The fundamental and dominant issue of Christian ministry is worship. Worship is the theological base that is least contaminated by human understanding, as demonstrated in Moses, Abraham, and Job. Worship centers on the sovereignty, not the utility, of God. Therefore, worship is the most acceptable foundation for theology and subsequent production of ministry.

To produce ministry reflecting this theology, at every juncture of every facet of every ministry the question must be asked, “How does this ministry facilitate divine worship?” In the ministry of church worship, “It would be appropriate for us to reevaluate the various elements in our Sunday services – the preaching, public prayer, leading of worship, special music, celebration of the Lord’s Supper, and even the announcements and the offering. Are they really bringing glory to God in the way they are done?”¹⁸ Using worship as both compass and road map for ministry, all specific ministries are fostered with the conviction that these ministries are God-centered and born from theology *for God’s sake*.

¹⁷Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 87.

¹⁸Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1005.

The Worship Ministry

Although, worship can be defined as an event during a church service (i.e. musical praise and worship), it is worship in its broadest application that is foundational to theology and to all resulting ministries. Biblical worship focuses on the concept of “being” to the praise of God’s glory and not the doing of worship activities. The veneration position is not based in the event of communicating verbal or musical praises to God. Being or existing to God’s praise is restated in Matthew (Mt 5:16) where Christ admonishes Christians to let their light so shine before men, that men might see their good works, and glorify the Father which is in heaven. God receives glory (worship) when our light is accepted as good works.

If good works are directed to the world, they cannot be acts directed inwardly or within a believing community. This eliminates the personal spiritual disciplines of good works such as church attendance, Bible study, prayer, and fellowship. In fact, the above good works are often disdained by the world. Jesus speaks of good works that the world appreciates and attributes to the Father. Good works that shine into the world, yielding glory to God, are most often works reflecting the character of God not the disciplines of Christians. The character of God so appreciated by the world is love.

To worship is to bring glory to God. Works of love and good works bring glory to God. God is love. Consequently, part of worship is the sincere imitation of God’s loving character. In one sense, worship is being imitators of God to His praise and a continual, living sacrifice of love toward the world (Eph 5:1-2). Worshipers are lovers of God and sacrificial lovers of people (Mt 22:37-39).

In a church of loving imitators of God, worship is not anthropocentric. Music and the order of worship respect the sovereignty of God above the needs of individuals. Praise and hymnody that focus on the blessings of God yield to frequently to venerating hymns of adoration. Disconnected, disjointed or political orders of worship are overcome by a focus on the Almighty. In a veneration theology church, worship is a continuous individual lifestyle that is celebrated in community. Worship is not the church’s responsibility to present. Worship is the church’s nature to represent to the entire community with self-sacrificing works of love.

The Preaching Ministry

The Old Testament prophet was a spokesman (aybn). A prophet was the anointed, spirit-led man of God (abn) whose was called to distill (@tn) the essence of God's Word for God's people while admonishing them to respond to its pertinence. The words aybn, abn, and @tn may all be rendered as "prophet."¹⁹ The position of the prophet was arduous. Often the prophet was a mediator between the rebellious children and their Father, God. Contemporary Christian preachers maintain a similar position. The preacher stands between God's people and God's Word, calling the people to obedient change. Although proclamation of the Word, in itself, may not be a worship event, obedience is always worship, and God regards obedience as a higher form of worship than sterile sacrifice (1 Sam 15:22).

Thus, love is a pure form of worship and obedience is also an evidence of highest worship. These two integral parts of worship are coexistent. One facet of worship cannot exist at the expense of the other. It is the preacher's responsibility (through the guidance of the Holy Spirit) to preach messages that balance obedience with love. When a sermon's subject matter demands obedience, the balance of God's reconciling love must be present. Likewise, messages expounding God's love and mercy cannot be devoid of God's expectation for the worship of obedience. Love and commandments are inextricably connected in scripture (Jn 14:21). Building homiletics on the balanced veneration base, preachers cannot indict congregations on charges of failing the commands of God without extolling the loving clemency in the cross of Christ. Grace is cheapened by "sloppy-agape" messages, void of the requirements of God's commands. There are no commandments without the loving cross and no loving cross without the commandments. The theological base of worship demands a balance of obedience and love. Preaching from this base is symmetrical. Fire and brimstone preachers become anointed in love more than anger, and love-centered pastors discover the great love of the Law of God (1 Jn 5:3).

¹⁹*Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. W. L. Holladay (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1971), 291.

Social Ministry

The production of both community revival and cultural renewal is a defining moment in any ministry. Although personal and social change is outlined in the writings of Paul, it is rare to see a ministry operating in such a holistic manner. However, the Wesleyan Revival in 18th century England brought sweeping change that affected not only individual lives and communities but also entire social structures.²⁰

Wesley's ministry had total integrity. It was contiguous and not compartmentalized. He was a passionate worshipper who discovered God both intellectually and spiritually. Worship of God and the resulting love of God's creation moved Wesley into the streets. At the height of his revival fame, Wesley continued to personally witness and care for the lost. Wesley had a love lifestyle, a worshipper's lifestyle. He was an imitator of God, and that imitation produced social change.

True worship's hallmark is love of mankind, a compassion that moves man toward man. God's worshippers love God's handiwork (1 John 4:20). True brotherly love meets brotherly needs. Christ is our example. He was consistently moved with compassion as he met the needs of the thronging crowds (Mt 9:6). Love moved him. A theological base of veneration projects the worth of God onto his creation and naturally produces ministry in service of humanity.

In the area of social or political justice, a worship-centered foundation generates divine and not human definitions of justice. In the non-anthropocentric veneration position, man is not the protected centerpiece of God's creation. The activity of God is not ultimately directed at man. God's love activity stops him from destroying man, as he elects to redeem man for the purpose of the praise of his glory, but man is not the purpose of redemption. Man is simply the object of redemption. Divine worship is the purpose. In fact, man may be required to sacrifice beyond human understanding. In this worship-centered model, human suffering is much less problematic. There is far less tension between the love of God and the sufferings of humanity. The activity of God is ultimately about God. Divine justice is also about God and, therefore, beyond the understanding of man.

²⁰C. T. Winchester, *The Life of John Wesley* (New York: Macmillan, 1934), 212.

God's sovereignty is preserved in this model. However, man's ability to define the parameters of social justice is impaired. Man is not the center of the universe, and justice does not revolve around man. Divine justice is past the scope of human understanding or inspection of its implications. He sends the same blessings to good and evil men irrespective of righteousness (Mt 5:45). If God's sovereign justice is not regulated by human need, then social justice is purely a human concern and perspective.

God's justice is often the converse of human justice. For example, sinful man does not pay for his transgressions against God. God pays. The death of God's son is reparation for the offense of man. Man's simple confession of sin and guilt, an admission of the obvious and inevitable, is not payment. Man's confession releases the faithful justice of God (1 John 1:9). God's justice is instantaneous forgiveness, simultaneous spiritual cleansing, and immediate intimacy with God. God's justice is not the system of weights and measures of human social justice. God's justice is not based in equity, fairness or restitution. In return for humanity's injustice toward Him, God offers his mercy without hesitation. Man cannot understand God's justice system. However, with wisdom, he can operate within it.

Still, the church often attempts to overlay the principles of divine justice upon social justice issues. These two justices are simply incomparable. For those who persist in comparing divine and social justice, the incomprehensible inequity of the Crucifixion is a sobering clarification. If the church desires to meld social and divine justice, it must begin at the Cross. Who could pay such a debt? What equity or human justice is seen there (Ro 5:8)? It is inconceivable that man could intelligently seek application of divine justice to any social circumstance.

Under the veneration model, Christian social justice proponents realize that God is not accountable, responsible, or liable for the world's social order. Neither is He the measuring stick for its equity. Christian social activists are freed from theological debate on the definition and depth of Christian social justice. The intellectual and spiritual distance between Christ and human justice precludes such debate. Christian social justice breaks from the notion of equity as godly.

Paul admonished believers to examine any selfish motive behind the concept of equity. He wrote, "Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?" (1 Cor 6:7). Regarding social justice, Paul's theology is clear. Earthly justice is of little consequence when that justice threatens the justice of God. The preservation of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness to God's sovereignty is infinitely more valuable than social justice. The quest for human justice consumes personal peace and feeds anger. Where God is sovereign, it is not necessary to lose peace in pursuit of repayment for injury (Rom 12:19).

Therefore, Paul encouraged believers to find their joy in the sovereignty of God and the fruit of his Spirit, not in human equity. In this model, every Christian is free to pursue justice according to his conscience and personality rather than as a theological mandate. Any apparent diversity in Scripture regarding social issues is harmonized with the sovereignty of God and becomes more palatable.

Veneration based social ministry is moved by compassion to meet all human need. The love of God and an understanding that His creation is an extension of His being drives Christians to serve others in every area at every opportunity, without quickly assuming that human perspectives of equity and fair play are on the same stratum with the justice of God.

Missions and Evangelism Ministry

"When missions is divorced from worship, the human need can become more important than the divine glory; and the strategy used might be the result of human observations rather than a God-given spiritual vision."²¹ Evangelism and missions is the global spread of the message of salvation and the ministry of reconciliation. Those with a passion for lost souls have invested their lives in far-away places as missionaries or in the streets as evangelists. The centrality of worship in missions transforms missiology from the 19th-century analogy of a rescue ship, saving the perishing, to a picture of a cruise ship with

²¹Warren W. Weirsbe, *Real Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 15.

multitudes sharing one common direction in an atmosphere of continual celebration.²²

Because worship of God is a personal participation in a universal event, every new convert or newly reached people group is experienced personally, as an expansion of personal worship. Worshippers gain fulfillment when more and more believers worship God. The excitement builds as the cruise ship gains more new passengers. As the collaboration of cosmos-wide worship expands, true worshippers experience the event individually as an expanding personal worship. This is not worshipping vicariously through others. It is experiencing the full nature of worship as part of a global worship community, moving in one direction with one destination, worship! During the 20th century, mission interest has declined. Waning missions emphasis is transformed when those issues are personalized in the context of global worship.

As a theology of worship replaces the dogma of doctrine and denomination, contextualization occurs more naturally and rapidly. Worship is more indigenous than doctrine. In the mission context, pre-existing worship reflects a social norm. Most mission contexts have some pre-existing worship culture. An emphasis on what is contextual (worship) over that which is Western (doctrine) has historically proven to facilitate missions growth.²³ Anthropocentric doctrine is much more foreign to the mission context than true theocentric worship.

CONCLUSION

What trait of Christ or act of God through Christ constitutes a basis for understanding God and forming ministry? God's creation and man's recreation declare the same glory, the veneration of God.²⁴ The veneration theological base naturally heals ministry maladies caused by anthropocentric or semi-anthropocentric theology bases such as salvation or reconciliation. A veneration theological base provides the most Godward vector and echoes Torrance's theology for *God's sake*.

²²Fanny J. Crosby, *Rescue The Perishing*, (Public Domain)

²³Phil Parshall, *Understanding Muslim Teachings and Traditions*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 29.

²⁴Kevin J. Navarro, *The Complete Worship Leader*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 45.

Karl Barth declared, “The church’s worship is the *Opus Dei*, the work of God, which is carried out for its own sake”²⁵ A true Godward foundation will always produce a Godward ministry. Such is the veneration theological base, producing the knowledge and enjoyment of God for his own sake.

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²⁵Segler, *Christian Worship*, 5.

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