

TWO SERVICES: WHY?

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Introduction

Many churches might say that the reason they have multiple services of varying styles is to meet the needs of different types of people. At Cherry Creek, however, while we're very interested in being a place that meets people's needs (certainly this was Jesus' primary ministry!), this is not the top priority when we're asking the question, "What form should our worship take?" Instead, our principal concern is to ask, "What kind of worship is pleasing to God?"¹ In answering that question, we've come to the conclusion that God is primarily concerned with the content and *very secondarily* with the style or cultural expression.^{2,3} Though culture is neither perfect nor morally neutral, God is still its Creator and Redeemer. So as we think about the content of worship, we are perfectly comfortable with seeing that substance thoughtfully⁴ clothed in what would be our culture's natural expression of thanks and praise to its Creator. So after asking about the kind of worship that is pleasing to God, we can then ask how our culture would express historically-based, Christian worship unto God.⁵ The way people in our day and age might most naturally express their worship unto God is what I will call from here on out one's "cultural-heart expression."

To the average onlooker, the two questions "What style of worship meets certain people's needs?" and "What style of worship engages people's cultural-heart expression?" look similar, if not identical. And my criticizing the former while upholding the latter might appear to be a smoke screen style manipulation of phraseology. However, I truly believe that though this distinction divides on a thin line, the two approaches are worlds apart in approach and execution. The former is human-focused. The latter preserves a focus on God because it is predicated on the reality that He is culture's Author. The former is constantly concerned with whether people are pleased and satisfied. The latter is concerned with whether people are offering authentic expressions of worship to God versus merely going through the motions (in other words, its concern is whether *God* is pleased and satisfied). The former can cater to idols of selfishness. The latter expresses a theology of the wholeness of Christian life lived unto God.

This launches us into the burden of this essay: Why do we have our two services? We believe that our two services offer two viable cultural-heart expressions of worship. Before we launch into this discussion, it is important to say one more thing about the labels

¹See a recent sermon by our Senior Pastor, Don Sweeting, entitled, "Questions Before Cherry Creek: What Kind of Worship Does God Enjoy?" February 18, 2007.

²See, interestingly, the account in Amos 4 where God sarcastically thunders against the uselessness of the "style" of worship (offering worship and sacrifices at Bethel and Gilgal) without the proper heart and substance behind it (social justice).

³This is related to the helpful division in worship studies, especially discussed in Reformed circles, between the "elements" and "circumstances" of worship. For a helpful discussion of this, see John Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1996), 37-62.

⁴As opposed to indiscriminately, haphazardly, or carelessly.

⁵Notice the twin emphases: It is a *cultural* expression, but the fact that it is current and cultural does not negate the fact that it must be anchored in the history and practice of Christian worship throughout the ages. I make careful point of this time and again in our Order of Worship's "Worship Notes" section, noting that many of our liturgical elements are historically and theologically connected with the practices of Christ's church down throughout history.

“Classical” and “Convergence” to describe Worship I and Worship II, respectively. We shy away from using the words “traditional” and “contemporary,” not necessarily because they are poor descriptors but because they each carry so much baggage.

“Traditional” actually describes Worship I very well, in the sense that what most people picture as “traditional” (choir, organ, robes, formal liturgy, etc.) is fairly accurate. Unfortunately, the word has come to be associated with antiquation, being out of touch, stale, myopic, and un-missional. Because our traditional service is none of these (defended below), we choose to avoid the word in our descriptions. “Classical” is the best we could come up with so far, knowing full well that many of the stylistic elements of Worship I are not strictly “classical” or even from the era or style of “Classical” music.

“Contemporary,” even more than “traditional,” is a label frequently used without much consensus of meaning. Some use it to mean what it says—stylistically modern (especially in regards to the musical styles and instruments used). However, others may believe that “contemporary” means that type of style one would find in American evangelicalism in the 80s and early 90s.⁶ This label, too, is therefore worth avoiding, especially because Worship II is unlike any other “contemporary” service one might find in a typical evangelical church. Worship II uses hymns and liturgy which sweep across church history. It just happens to clothe those elements in a more modern style and flow. Worship II is therefore a “convergence” of worship expressions, which is why we give it that name.

Worship I: Our “Classical” Service

Why it's needed, permanent, and (surprisingly) relevant.

In this modern era, many who look at churches that still have a “traditional” service probably think that it is just some vestige of long-forgotten days, still around because it “pleases the old people.” This is simply not accurate in describing Cherry Creek. You already read above that we are not so much interested in pleasing people as we are in offering up God-honoring worship through the cultural-heart expression of our people. Surprisingly, we believe that in many ways, traditional worship as expressed in our Classical service is the wave of the not-so-distant future. Sociologically, reports indicate that the coming age wave will constitute a major and unprecedented shift in the age distribution among the American population. The so-called baby boomers will move into retirement and we will see a graying of America like never before.⁷ And while many historians of modern worship cite this generation as being the first to embrace contemporary worship,⁸ we still believe that a large amount of this particular population prizes traditional worship and finds in its style their cultural-heart expression. Cherry Creek believes that, throughout the next few decades, we will have a significant mission opportunity among this older generation, and we believe that a Classical service like ours will provide the cultural-heart expression that will help eliminate the barriers that keep them from encountering the living Christ.⁹ Especially as traditional worship continues to go by the wayside in many churches,

⁶A style best characterized by recordings put out by labels such as Maranatha! and Integrity’s Hosanna! during *that* era (the labels have moved on since then).

⁷One example of many: CBS News, “The Graying of America: Census Shows Americans are Living Longer, Retiring Earlier,” <<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/03/09/health/main1387709.shtml>>, retrieved 2/11/08.

⁸Cf. e.g. Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), Chapter 2; John Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1997), 5-6.

⁹And we really *do* want to tear down unnecessary barriers between non-Christians and Jesus. We don’t want our worship style to stand in the way of them coming to know the Lord. We hope that the only thing potentially offensive and off-putting is the gospel of Jesus Christ itself (1 Cor 1:18ff).

we believe we will play an all the more vital role in being a pioneer among American churches in ministry to this largely under-appreciated cross section of our population.

Couple this observation with another sociological reality in American Christianity, which at first seems unrelated. In recent years, we have been hearing more and more that the younger generations of evangelical Christians are dissatisfied with the superficiality of contemporary worship. Many younger Christians desire theological depth, historical rootedness, and liturgical expressions that they had not found much of in the contemporary evangelical church.¹⁰ This explains why we are seeing an increased number of evangelicals moving over to Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. Recently, *Christianity Today* asked, “Will the 21st be the Orthodox century?”¹¹ Perhaps it will, unless more of the evangelical church wake up to the reality that theology, historicity, and tradition are all part of the lifeblood of Christ’s church. Being “in the now” may now ironically mean a reconnecting with the theological and historical ties we began cutting some thirty or forty years ago.¹² Note also the recent trend in how to “do church,” called the “emerging church” movement. One of their primary features is a reconnecting with the ancient and original church—the radical Christ-following movement that propelled out of the first century.¹³

All this makes sense with what we are seeing at Cherry Creek. We are fine admitting that one will see a fair amount of gray hair in Worship I on any given Sunday. But a closer look yields the sight of a growing number of young families, singles, and youth engaging in this supposedly antiquated worship style. So we believe that the style of worship in our Classical service—hymn-book driven, organ and choir led—will remain a relevant and vital part of the American church’s worship in the years to come. This is why we’re committed to our Classical service. It offers not only a current cultural-heart expression of worship, but a future one as well.¹⁴

Worship II: Our “Convergence” Service

Why it’s not your ordinary “contemporary” service.

The average contemporary service has, broadly speaking, a two-part liturgy: (1) a series of songs; (2) the sermon. Interspersed may be spontaneous talks, prayers, a testimony, Scripture readings, or other elements. Worship II has built on and morphed that structure,

¹⁰“When I hear many of these young people talk about the contemporary worship they grew up with in church (make note: they use that word not with its dictionary meaning, but quite accurately as a descriptor of the praise-and-worship styles of the past two decades), it is clear that the worship of their baby-boomer parents is as irrelevant to many of them as classical, European worship was to the baby boomers themselves.” From Sally Morgenthauer, “We Have a Choice: The Future of Contemporary Worship” in *Exploring the Worship Spectrum: 6 Views*, ed. Paul A. Basden (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 134.

¹¹Bradley Nassif, “Will the 21st Be the Orthodox Century?” *Christianity Today*, December 2006; <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/december/30.40.html>>.

¹²Powerful cases-in-point are two twenty-somethings on our music and worship staff, both deeply committed to and passionate about traditional worship—Zac Hicks and Stephanie Price.

¹³See, for instance, the probably now dated book by Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003). N.B.: I don’t believe that the emerging church movement has all the answers, especially in their unguarded adoption of aspects of postmodern philosophy. I do believe, however, that the movement makes several key and salient points in their critique of modern evangelicalism.

¹⁴Some great cases for the continuance of “traditional” worship are made in Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); Dawn, *A Royal “Waste” of Time* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Harold Best, “Traditional Hymn-Based Worship,” in *Exploring the Worship Spectrum: 6 Views*, ed. Paul A. Basden, pp. 57-75 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

incorporating elements of historic Presbyterian worship¹⁵ as well as ancient Christian worship at large, such that it may no longer feel like a typical contemporary worship experience.

Aside from drawing from the best of the wells of modern worship music,¹⁶ we are engaging in a new movement of congregational music that is perhaps the hallmark of Worship II. This movement we have called the “new hymns movement,” which seeks to take the texts of old hymns and set them to new music. This is different than what one may see in the majority of contemporary circles that attempt to reach back down the halls of ancient hymnody, where you often find the hymn, *along with its original tune and chord structure*, rather jarringly reset into a modern instrumentation. In some cases, this works.¹⁷ In many cases, it feels wooden, overly contrived, even tacky.¹⁸ Neither lovers of traditional hymnody nor those passionate about modern worship seem satisfied with this approach, anyway! On the other hand, the new hymns movement is finding a growing number of people embracing it for its beautiful convergence of the ancient and modern. Its style mixes the experiential vibrancy of modern worship with the theological depth and reflection of history’s best hymn writers.¹⁹ For the same reasons cited in the previous section above for why a new generation is embracing traditional worship over contemporary worship, we believe that this new hymns movement will be in many ways be a new and lasting *via media* in the ever-changing landscape of worship in the West. Furthermore, we are also noticing in our Convergence service a similar dynamic to that of our Classical service—a blending of the ages. We see not only young faces, but peoples of all ages, including a sizeable amount in our older population, embracing this expression of worship.

In Worship II, we are firmly committed to many liturgical practices not often associated with contemporary worship, such as the recitation of creeds, confession of sin, responsive readings, extended readings of Scripture passages, to name a few. At the same time, our

¹⁵As Presbyterianism falls under the Reformed heritage, a great book outlining and defending the biblical and historical integrity of Reformed worship is Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship: Reformed According to Scripture*, rev. ed (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

¹⁶E.g. Chris Tomlin, Matt Redman, Vicky Beeching, etc. For a thorough explanation of my sources for and philosophy of song selection for Worship II, see “How I Choose Songs for Worship II,” Appendix 3 of *Worship II Musician’s Handbook*. I’d be happy to email or print a copy for anyone interested.

¹⁷I think it works well for hymns in a triple meter with potentially slower-moving chord progression, such as “Immortal Invisible, God Only Wise,” “O Worship the King,” and “O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus.” I’ve also seen it work occasionally on 4/4-metered songs either of a slower nature (such as “Take My Life and Let it Be”) or one that can textually allow for a more synchopated folk-style groove (such as “Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy” to the tune “Arise”). And I’m sure the more I think about this, the more exceptions I’ll come up with to make my parameters seem nonsensical!

¹⁸One is almost certainly headed down this direction when the suggestion is made: “Why don’t we just take that hymn and throw a beat on it?” I’ve heard this many times (and even admittedly done this myself), but we must remember that we need to be musically and aesthetically responsible. “Throwing a beat” on a carefully-crafted tune and chord structure many times offers a devastating blow to the musical integrity of a piece. “Contemporizing” a hymn alongside its original or primary tune must be done with great care and often requires some skillful rearranging of chord structures and changes. One of the best examples I’ve seen of this skillful reworking is in the beautiful work of Fernando Ortega.

¹⁹The new hymns movement is best understood not so much by verbal description but by listening and participating in its music. My first suggestion is to attend Worship II and pay attention to the dates of composition of certain songs. My second suggestion is to visit two websites which are (in my opinion) propagating some of the best of this movement’s music:

(a) Indelible Grace: www.igracemusic.com

(b) Red Mountain Church: www.redmountainmusic.com

Convergence service finds commonality with other contemporary worship services in aspects such as instrumentation (our congregational music is led mostly by modern instruments such as guitars, percussion, keyboard, etc.), song selection (we do pull from sources more typical to broader evangelicalism), and use of screens to project our song texts.

To sum up all of these thoughts in consideration with the themes and ideas expressed earlier, the answer as to why Worship II exists is because we believe that it, just as in our Classical service, constitutes a style of worship consonant with the cultural-heart expression of many in our current population.

Two Services: The Pitfalls and How We Combat Them

Pitfall #1: Division in the Body of Christ

Most writers and thinkers on worship agree that church services marked off by stylistic differences end up creating a hideous division in the body of Christ. We take this seriously at Cherry Creek, because of Scripture's crystal clarity on the unity of the church,²⁰ and because nothing hurts the mission of Christ more than a church characterized by infighting and quarreling. Churches with two different services run the risk of creating two churches within a church—the one body having nothing to do with the other, no common vision and mission, and no mutual love and respect.

We also have to be honest about an additional dynamic at Cherry Creek. We are finding many people now regularly attending our Classical service who were originally part of other churches that abandoned traditional worship altogether for a wholesale adoption of contemporary worship. These "traditional worship refugees" find a home in Worship I (for which we are glad), but such people often come with deep scars and wounds associated with things modern and contemporary. This could potentially lead to a spirit of bitterness against what goes on in Worship II, and foster an us-versus-them, divided church mentality. We must pray against such a spirit and continually check our hearts to seek renewal in this area, because we know that as more "refugees" might come our way, the sentiment has more potential to increase.

Interestingly enough, we have seen the same issue on the other side as well with those who find a deep, heartfelt expression of worship in the styles of our Convergence service. There can be an unhealthy snobbery which is unwilling to recognize the validity and beauty of traditional worship and unwilling to see its aesthetic and missional benefits. This, too, is a real danger.

For the reasons cited above, however, we are grateful that both services do not seem to be strictly divided along generational lines and that we have a remarkably wide cross-section of ages and generations in each service. This helps us know that we are at least someone on the right track in casting vision against division in the church.

But division is still possible, and we seek to combat this in several ways, firstly through the example of our leadership. Our pastors and music/worship staff are all equally passionate about and committed to the fullness of the expression of worship we find in both services. Furthermore, both worship services are coordinated by a single person—myself—with the creative input of the rest of the music staff. This provides a solidarity of vision and mission that is rare in churches with different services (which are most often coordinated by different people). We also seek to combat this in our teaching. Addressing this issue is one of the principle parts of my *Worship II Musician's Handbook*, and I bring this issue up with

²⁰Eph 4; Phil 2:1-11; Col 3:12-15; Jas 4:1-12

every new members class. Often when I am asked in the church to lead or talk on worship, I will speak directly to this issue first and foremost. Finally, we seek to combat this in occasional joint endeavors (services and events where the styles join hands in one place and at one time), to remind ourselves that we are all one body of Christ and that compromise and bearing each other's burdens are part of what it means to be the Church.

Pitfall #2: An Unequal Distribution of Energies and Resources

Much like the case of twins in the womb where one receives the lion's share of bodily resources while the other is left undernourished, churches with two services can be tempted to point their resources and attention toward one service while leaving the other high and dry. The vast majority of times, it is the traditional service that is left to fend for itself and "die off," so to speak. But because of the reasons cited above, Cherry Creek is not one of those churches. We simply value and believe in the perpetual benefit of both expressions of worship, and we intend to encourage and foster both. We believe that there is a future for our Classical service, and we believe the same for our Convergence service. Each service and musical leader seeks to offer the best of art unto the Lord, striving for the utmost in integrity and skill, and creative energies are channeled into both services week after week, month after month, year after year.

Conclusion

Why two services? Because Christ's mission calls Cherry Creek in both directions. We believe that the Holy Spirit has led us to this point for a purpose, and we will therefore not abandon that sense of call. We recognize that there are dangers associated with such a course, but we seek to navigate that storm with wisdom and courage in order to remain faithful to the route God has laid out for us. And knowing that God is worth the utmost of intention and care in the planning and execution of His worship, we will continue to move forward in prayer and praise.