

# THE REVELATION/RESPONSE DIALOGUE IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

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## Summary:

This paper defends the idea that biblical worship must include both the revelation of the Divine and human response. Included is a theology of worship and examples of Hebrew and Greek words commonly translated “worship” in English Bibles. Revelation of the divine is seen as a kind of presentation in the gathered community of faith. Response is seen as a kind of participation.

Length: 17 pages

Opinions concerning tensions within Christian worship are often the cause of many tensions within the church. Tensions between contemporary music as opposed to the traditional, the use of charismatic spiritual gifts in worship as opposed to a cessationist view, and other controversial issues have, for the most part in evangelical circles, overshadowed what should be one of the most pressing issues in modern worship: the tension between revelation and response in corporate worship. Western culture has deeply affected modern corporate worship, and has led to a much more presentation based than participatory. A thoughtful examination of scripture though seems to show that this should not be the case. Corporate Christian worship must be characterized by sacrificial, active, worship in response to God's divine self revelation in order to be biblical.

In order to develop a biblical theology of worship concerning the relationship of revelation and response in worship, it is important to understand the biblical words which are translated into our English word, worship. "The words of worship used by the biblical writers reveal several important aspects of Israelite religious belief and practice."<sup>1</sup> A working understanding of the biblical words for worship is extremely important to developing a proper theology of worship, especially with regards to the issue of presentation and participation in Christian worship.

God desires that his people come to him, and he reveals himself to them so that they may respond in worship. This concept is expressed in the Hebrew word, **darash**, meaning "'seek' or 'enquire'".<sup>2</sup> It expresses a heart felt desire on the part of the believer to seek and know God, knowing that he desires to reach out to them. "The God-seeker's quest is not in vain because the Lord responds to those who pursue him." Worship is conversational in a sense that God desires that we seek him, and he desires to reach out to us. Worship is a process of revelation and response.

The Hebrew word **histahawa** or **shaha** were often translated as the Greek **proskynein** in

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<sup>1</sup>Andrew E Hill, *Enter His Courts With Praise* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993), 2.

<sup>2</sup>ibid., 2.

the Septuagint.<sup>3</sup> **Proskynein** can be taken to literally mean “a kiss of respect or adoration blown towards one of a higher rank . . . [or] the widespread oriental custom of casting oneself on the ground . . . kissing his feet, the hem of his garment or the ground.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly the Hebrew word **histahawa** or **shaha** means to “bow down (lowly or deeply, Gen.18:2; 47:31), prostrate oneself or do homage (Isa. 49:7) . . . ”<sup>5</sup> Understanding these biblical words for worship gives the idea of worship a sense of an act of service and reverence. Worship in this sense is more than just a thought or observed experience, it is a participative action.

The next word which is important to a full understanding of biblical worship is the Hebrew, **‘abad**, basically translated “‘work’ or ‘service’”.<sup>6</sup> This word is often paired with the Hebrew, **histahawa** to express the act of “bow down and serve”, and should be understood as “spontaneous acts of adoration or . . . the expression of homage in obedience to his [God’s] commands.”<sup>7</sup> The word **‘abad** alone, or when paired with **histahawa** give the clear impression that worship is to be active and participatory and not just presentation based in nature. Worship involves acts of reverence directed towards God.

Another word, or word group, that is important to understanding worship, with regards to participation and presentation, is the Greek **latreuein**, **latreia**, and the Hebrew **‘aboda**. **Latreuein**, “to serve”, or **latreia**, are most often used in reference to “service rendered to God” in scripture.<sup>8</sup> The Old Testament word, **‘aboda**, which was translated into **latreuein** or **latreia** in the Septuagint, can denote “cultic service to the God of Israel.”<sup>9</sup> “When *latreuein* or *latreia* are applied to the service of God they almost always denote the worship of the people as a whole, not the specific work of the priests or Levites.”<sup>10</sup> This is extremely important to understand as it

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<sup>3</sup>David Peteson, *Engaging With God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 57.

<sup>4</sup>ibid., 57.

<sup>5</sup>Andrew E Hill, *Enter His Courts With Praise* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993), 6.

<sup>6</sup>Andrew E Hill, *Enter His Courts With Praise* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993), 4.

<sup>7</sup>David Peteson, *Engaging With God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 61, 63.

<sup>8</sup>ibid., 66.

<sup>9</sup>David Peteson, *Engaging With God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 66.

<sup>10</sup>ibid., 66.

shows that the congregation must have an active role to play in the service of God in a corporate setting.

Conversely, the Greek **leitourgein** or **leitourgia**, and the Hebrew **seret** or **sharat** emphasize the importance of Priestly ministry in worship.<sup>11</sup> In Old Testament worship, “the priest stood as God’s official representative in the covenant community to teach, interpret, and enforce God’s covenant law.”<sup>12</sup> It’s true that the congregation needs to be actively involved in responding to God’s revelation in order for worship to be biblical, but there needs to be a revelation of God to the people in order for them to be able to respond. The biblical words **leitourgien**, **leitrougia**, and **sharat** show that there is a necessity for a minister of God to present the congregation with the revelation of God in order for them to respond in worship. This kind of priestly ministry is taken extremely seriously by God and needs to be done in the proper respect. “[T]he priest who acted presumptuously in ministry before God risked the death penalty (cf., the story of Aaron’s sons in Lev. 10:1-11).”<sup>13</sup> This has great significance for New Testament worship as well as Peter refers to Christians, as a “royal priesthood.”<sup>14</sup> Proper worship in the form of revelation and response is essential.

This idea of propriety in worship is also expressed in the Hebrew word **yare**, meaning “fear and awe for the Lord of Israel by his people”.<sup>15</sup> The closest English word to this is “reverence”, but it lacks certain aspects and intimations that **yare** has. “This fear of the Lord is tinged with a reverence bordering on terror and dread . . . [t]his fearful reverence for God Almighty motivated both worship and service on the part of the righteous . . .”<sup>16</sup> Quite often evangelical worship tends to lack this fear of the Lord and replaces it with a more comfortable idea of a friendly God. In the process of revelation and response in worship shown in

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<sup>11</sup>ibid., 66.; Andrew E Hill, *Enter His Courts With Praise* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993), 5.

<sup>12</sup>Andrew E Hill, *Enter His Courts With Praise* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993), 5.

<sup>13</sup>ibid., 6.

<sup>14</sup>1 Peter 2:5 (RSV)

<sup>15</sup>Andrew E Hill, *Enter His Courts With Praise* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993), 3.

<sup>16</sup>Andrew E Hill, *Enter His Courts With Praise* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993), 3.

presentation and participation, worshipers need to display a healthy fear of God.

A study of the biblical words for worship clearly show that worship needs to be interactive in nature, expressed in acts of service and reverence. Biblical worship is based on the process of the believer's response to God's divine self-revelation. Worship needs to be active in nature and include aspects of presentation of God's revelation and a response on the part of the congregation. This is exemplified in the worship practices of believers in the Old and New Testaments.

In the Old Testament worship it is apparent that Israel can only worship because of God's revelation. It is literally impossible to worship without having something to worship, so God's revelation is necessary for worship. "Israel could only know God and proclaim his character themselves because of the Lord's initiative."<sup>17</sup> This is apparent in Moses encounter with the burning bush, Moses encounter with God on Mt. Sinai, and Moses encounter with God while the people of Israel were in captivity to Pharaoh.<sup>18</sup>

God's divine self revelation to his people is necessary for them to worship him, and thus it is imperative that corporate worship services include aspects of revelation or presentation. God reveals himself in numerous ways. God presences himself through his word. Deuteronomy 4:12-14 shows God speaking to Moses, and commanding him to teach the ten commandments to the people of Israel so he would go with them into the promised land. In western culture the word of God is generally thought to be synonymous with Scripture. Although this is not necessarily the case, it is the most common form in which God speaks to his people. Thus it is extremely important that Scripture is read within the context of corporate worship.

Similarly God also revealed himself to his people through his promises. The promises he made to Abram in Genesis 12:1-3;15:12-21 show how God reached out to humanity in self-revelation with the desire that they should respond to him in obedience and worship.<sup>19</sup> He made

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<sup>17</sup>David Peterson, *Engaging With God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 35.

<sup>18</sup>Ex. 34:6-8; 3:1-15; 6:1-8

<sup>19</sup>Andrew E Hill, *Enter His Courts With Praise* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993), 33.

covenants with people to establish relationship with his creation so they could come to know him and how to worship him.

God also reveals himself through the renewing of his covenants with his people. In Joshua 8:30-35 and 24:1-15, Joshua repeated, and the Israelites re-enacted the covenant with God. Through the reading and re-enactment of the covenant ceremony, God was revealed to his people to enable them to worship him.<sup>20</sup> The Israelites responded as the covenant of God was read aloud to them. The repeating of the word of God was an essential ministry by the priesthood in temple worship as it reveals God to his people so they can worship him. “Decisive for understanding the Old Testament view of worship is the idea that the God of heaven and earth had taken the initiative in making himself known, first to the patriarchs of Israel and then, through the events of the exodus from Egypt and the encounter on Mount Sinai, to the nation as a whole.”<sup>21</sup>

The names which God made himself known by were also essential to Old Testament worship. These names, “revealed his character, personality, and purposes to the Hebrew patriarchs.”<sup>22</sup> Knowing the subject of worship is essential to worship itself and the names of God revealed things about God that enabled his people to worship him more fully.

The theophanies recorded in the old testament were also essential in the formation of Hebrew worship. God’s appearance before Abram in Gen. 17:1-26, his appearance before Isaac in Gen.26:2-6, and his appearance to Jacob Gen. 35:9-15 were all clear acts of divine self-revelation which lead to worship and pivotal actions in the history of Israel. This lead to worship by prostration, circumcision, obedience and in the building of alters.

Probably one of the most well known theophanies in Scripture is also the source of one of the best examples of revelation and response in worship. In Ex. 3:1-4:17, God appeared to Moses in the form of a burning bush that was not consumed as he spoke to him. In response to this

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<sup>20</sup>David Peterson, *Engaging With God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 36.

<sup>21</sup>*ibid.*, 48.

<sup>22</sup>Andrew E Hill, *Enter His Courts With Praise* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993), 33.

revelation of God, Moses “said, ‘Here I am.’ Then [God] said, ‘Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’ He said further, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.”<sup>23</sup> Moses responded in fearful worship of God as he revealed himself to Moses.<sup>24</sup> The worship of God naturally follows the pattern of revelation and response, thus presentation and participation are both essential to Christian worship.

It is apparent from Old Testament examples that the revelation of God is the first essential step in worship, but this must be followed by response on the part of the people of God. “[T]he worship of God is a response to this divine self disclosure.”<sup>25</sup> God’s people need to participate in corporate worship services in order for them to be complete. “The ancient Hebrews understood a human being as an indivisible totality. Thus, almost by definition, Hebrew worship in the Old Testament was participatory.”<sup>26</sup>

One of the major ways in which the Israelites responded to God in worship was in prayer. Prayer by nature is to be conversational and the Israelites prayer was rooted in their knowledge of God, “prayer is rooted in the knowledge of God as mighty Creator and merciful Redeemer (Neh. 1:4-11).”<sup>27</sup> Prayer followed the process of listening to God and responding in prayer to his revelation; God works and and his people respond in prayer.

Confession of sins and of God’s holiness was also an essential part of Israel’s worship. “Confession acknowledges sin while praising the awesome character of God.”<sup>28</sup> When Isaiah encountered God he responded in confession of his sinfulness and unworthiness, and after he was purified, in obedience. This account shows the importance of confession in response to

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<sup>23</sup>*The New Revised Standard Version*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1989.

<sup>24</sup>Andrew E Hill, *Enter His Courts With Praise* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993), 35.

<sup>25</sup>*ibid.*, 32.

<sup>26</sup>*ibid.*, 110.

<sup>27</sup>Andrew E Hill, *Enter His Courts With Praise* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993), 21.

<sup>28</sup>Randy T. Hodges, *A Call to Worship* (Kansas City, Misso.: Beacon Hill Press, 1996), 40.

God's revelation as a necessary part and precursor to worship.

Another way in which the Israelites responded to God in worship was through taking corporate vows. The book of psalms which was recited in corporate worship settings in the Old Testament mentions the importance of keeping vows to the Lord.<sup>29</sup> "Vows were an act of faith for the righteous, a testimony or witness of fidelity to the congregation, and a tribute to the God who answers prayer."<sup>30</sup> Response to God's revelation in corporate worship through taking vows showed the commitment of the people their God.

Israel also responded the revelation of God through worship in the ritual of the passover feast as recorded in Ex. 12. God revealed to the people how he was going to set them free from the oppression of the Egyptians and he revealed how they were to prepare for it and participate in it. "The redemption and the exodus became and remained the focal point of Israel's joy in God's saving grace and power, and at every Passover in Scripture and in the liturgy of the seder the story was retold and divine deliverance rehearsed."<sup>31</sup> God revealed himself and a plan of deliverance to his people and it was extremely important in their corporate worship that they remember God's faithfulness in ritual.

Another form of response which the Israelites practiced was song. After they had been delivered from the Egyptians and had crossed through the Red Sea, Moses sang a song of praise to God, as did Miriam.<sup>32</sup> It is also evident that David established music guilds for worship in the temple.<sup>33</sup> Responding in musical worship to the revelation of God was an essential part of Old Testament corporate worship.

It is clear from even a cursory study of Old Testament worship that presentation and participation were both key part of worship. The New Testament also gives numerous examples of God's divine self-revelation and his peoples response in worship.

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<sup>29</sup> Psalms 50:14; 56:12; 61:5, 8.

<sup>30</sup> Andrew E Hill, *Enter His Courts With Praise* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993), 117.

<sup>31</sup> Ralph P. Martin, *The Worship of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982), 21.

<sup>32</sup> Exodus 15:1-19; 20-21.

<sup>33</sup> Ps. 68:25.

Christ's life and ministry quite often took on aspects of both presentation and participation. When Jesus revealed something of his divine nature when he walked on the water out to the disciple's boat, they responded in fearful worship.<sup>34</sup> Then after his resurrection when he appeared to the women in the garden they responded in worship, as did the disciples when he appeared in their midst.<sup>35</sup> Finally, in Jesus ascension his divinity was revealed, he blessed the disciples, and they responded in joyful worship.<sup>36</sup> In all of these occasions Jesus' divine self-revelation resulted in worship, involving aspects of presentation and participation.<sup>37</sup>

It is important to understand how the New Testament believers viewed the process of revelation and response in worship through presentation and participation in order to develop a thorough understanding of biblical worship. Much of early church worship was based on preaching, teaching, prayer and communion.<sup>38</sup> These practices along with singing, giving, and mutual ministry made up most of the early churches' worship services.

Scripture reading and the study or exposition of Scripture were some of the main means of the revelation of God in the New Testament. There are clear examples of Christ reading Scripture at the temple in Lk. 4:16-17, and later of Paul's letters being circulated and read in Christian gatherings in Col.4:16, showing the importance of biblical teaching in congregational worship.<sup>39</sup> "[R]ight worship is predicated upon sound doctrine", as shown in John 4:24, therefore there is an essential need for the revelation of God through the reading of Scripture and preaching.<sup>40</sup> This shows that there is definitely a place for a presentation aspect within Christian worship services. Further, Paul, in his letter to Timothy he exhorts him as a leader of the church to "... give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, [and] to teaching . . ."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Mt. 14:22-33.

<sup>35</sup>Mt. 28:9; Mt. 28:17.

<sup>36</sup>Lk. 24:52-53.

<sup>37</sup>David Peteson, *Engaging With God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 87.

<sup>38</sup>Acts 2:44-47; 1 Cor. 11:20-22, 33-34.

<sup>39</sup>Robert E. Webber, *Worship is a Verb* (Nashville, TN: Star Song Publishing, 1992), 72.

<sup>40</sup>Andrew E Hill, *Enter His Courts With Praise* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993), 158.

<sup>41</sup>1 Tim. 4:11-16. (RSV)

Quite often modern thinking designates Scripture reading as an action of pure revelation, however in the New Testament Scripture was an opportunity for both revelation and response, as the word was presented to the people but the people also responded in it. In the New Testament church, “[t]he open discussion of Scripture readings was interactive; while it had its own ritual, such instruction also allowed for a lively interchange of opinion and interpretation.”<sup>42</sup> Scripture reading was a time for both presentation and participation.

One of the most vital aspects of worship among the believers in the new testament was prayer. In Acts 1:12-14 the disciples are portrayed as “constantly devoting themselves to prayer.” Prayer was the means by which the early church conversed with God; receiving his revelation and responding to him in kind.

Singing was also an important part of New Testament worship. Songs, hymns, and spiritual songs were all a part of worship in the early church and were an important part of both revelation and response as truth was revealed through the songs as they sang them unto the Lord.<sup>43</sup> This allowed for both presentation and participation aspects. “. . . [B]oth synagogue and church had cantors sing the psalms . . . [and] both used the psalms as congregational responses . . .”<sup>44</sup> Singing was an important part of worship in both presentation and participation.

Another important aspect of early church worship gatherings was the opportunity for mutual ministry between believers. One way in which this occurred was through the passing of the peace. Christ’s ministry on earth was one of reconciliation, between people and God, and between people themselves, and passing the peace through handshake, hug, or holy kiss, encouraged believers with the love of God and assurance of reconciliation.<sup>45</sup> Believers also ministered to each other through the use of spiritual gifts such as prophecy, tongues, healing, and

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<sup>42</sup>Patrick R. Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1992), 70.

<sup>43</sup>1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:18-20.

<sup>44</sup>Andrew E Hill, *Enter His Courts With Praise* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993), 206.

<sup>45</sup>Robert E. Webber, *Worship is a Verb* (Nashville, TN: Star Song Publishing, 1992), 147.

others.<sup>46</sup> “If the balance of New Testament teaching is to be preserved . . . there should be some space for the informal contributions of members.”<sup>47</sup> Through mutual ministry amongst believers both aspects of revelation and response in presentation and participation are present for worship.

Mutual ministry along with Scripture reading, preaching, and singing are all primarily word based activities, but there were symbolic aspects to New Testament worship as well. Giving to God in the ministry of the church was also a part of New Testament worship practice. “Sacrificial giving for gospel ministry is thus shown to be an expression of the worship pleasing to God under the new covenant.”<sup>48</sup> Giving of physical goods to the work of God showed true thankfulness in response to God’s blessing and saving work.

Possibly the most important symbolic act of worship in the new testament though was the eucharist. In Matthew 26:26-29, Jesus established the new covenant in his blood through drinking of wine and eating of bread which symbolized his blood and body. “The command to ‘do this in remembrance of me’ is found . . . in Luke 22:19 . . . and in 1 Corinthians 11:24-25 . . . The present tense of the Greek imperative (poieite) implies the need to repeat Jesus’ actions together with his words of interpretation, to eat and drink in remembrance of him.”<sup>49</sup> It is clear from the accounts of early church worship in the book of acts that believers would both eat and drink to celebrate the revelation of God and salvation in Christ.<sup>50</sup>

It is apparent from both old and new testament examples that worship needs to include aspects of both revelation and active response. Often revelation and response in worship can be accomplished through both presentation or participation. It is important that all of these aspects be apparent in Christian worship in order for it to be truly biblical. Learning from these biblical examples should have affect a number of changes within the way the modern church practices worship in a corporate setting. It is quite obvious from a study of the biblical words for worship

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<sup>46</sup>David Peteson, *Engaging With God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 178.

<sup>47</sup>ibid., 197.

<sup>48</sup>ibid., 184.

<sup>49</sup>David Peteson, *Engaging With God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 124.

<sup>50</sup>Acts 2:44-47.

and the practices within old and new testament worship that both revelation and response are necessary aspects of worship. Both of these aspects of worship can be expressed in presentation and participation in worship so it is essential that careful thought and planning is put into including both aspects of revelation and response in corporate worship practices whether presentational or participatory in nature.

One of the most effective ways of including both aspects of revelation and response in corporate worship is the four fold model of worship as espoused by Robert Webber in Worship is a Verb, Andrew Hill in Enter His Courts With Praise, and Jane Rogers Vann in Gathered Before God<sup>51</sup> This is a model of worship which is essentially rooted in the New Testament practices of worship which include the four steps of preparation to worship, presentation of the Word of God, response in the eucharist, and sending into the world in service.<sup>52</sup> All four of these steps can include elements of presentation and participation but show a definite movement from revelation to response as set out in the biblical model.

The first step of this model is preparation to worship. There is a clear necessity for preparation to meet God in worship as evidenced in Moses removal of his sandals at the burning bush and God's command for his people to consecrate themselves in preparation to meet God.<sup>53</sup> Unfortunately in many modern worship services there is very little attention paid to the need to prepare for worship. In many services people just file in straight from their cars into the sanctuary and start into singing "worship songs" with "top forty" music still playing in their heads. Preparation is necessary to center ourselves on what we are doing and symbolize a coming before God in worship. "Centering is a term that refers to the intentional focus of our inner person. In worship our focus is not on self . . . but on God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But too often we drag into worship all those everyday life issues that have

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<sup>51</sup>Robert E. Webber, *Worship is a Verb* (Nashville, TN: Star Song Publishing, 1992), 13.  
Andrew E Hill, *Enter His Courts With Praise* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993), 157.  
Jane Rogers Vann, *Gathered Before God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know Press, 2004), 25.

<sup>52</sup>Robert E. Webber, *Worship is a Verb* (Nashville, TN: Star Song Publishing, 1992), 13.

Jane Rogers Vann, *Gathered Before God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know Press, 2004), 25.

<sup>53</sup>Exodus 3:6; 19:10-15.

concerned us over the past week or more.”<sup>54</sup> “By beginning the service of worship by focusing on God, we lay a solid foundation for great things to follow.”<sup>55</sup> Having our persons centred on God we allow him to be the center of worship and not ourselves. One of the most important ways to do this which is often neglected in the gathering of people to worship is silence. “In the bible, silence most often provides the context for God’s self revelation.”<sup>56</sup> Most often in non-liturgical services especially there is very little room given for silence although it is essential in preparation for worship. Preparation for worship may include elements of symbolic entrance into the sanctuary, prayer, singing, and silence.<sup>57</sup> Some of these things may be presentational, but this part of worship is primarily participatory as the people of God prepare themselves to hear his word.

The next stage of the service is the revelation of God to his people which should be characterized by reading or preaching Scripture, but may also include other creative elements such as drama, art, mutual ministry and choral or congregational singing. This will most often take place within the context of presentation but elements of participation may also be creatively involved. Preaching is one of the most traditional means of God’s revelation to his people and should be included in services. “. . . God speaks to us through the reading of his word.”<sup>58</sup> Scripture is the primary means of self revelation God has given to his people and is essential in worship because, “. . . it enables people to present themselves as a ‘living sacrifice’ to God through Jesus Christ.”<sup>59</sup> Revelation through Scripture essentially enables people to respond in worship. Preaching is definitely an important means of God’s revelation, although it is by no means the only means of God’s revelation.

A tradition which has become less common in many evangelical churches needs to be

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<sup>54</sup>Robert E. Webber, *Worship is a Verb* (Nashville, TN: Star Song Publishing, 1992), 99.

<sup>55</sup>Randy T. Hodges, *A Call to Worship* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 1996.), 34.

<sup>56</sup>A. Daniel Frankforter, *Stones for Bread* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 171.

<sup>57</sup>Robert E. Webber, *Worship is a Verb* (Nashville, TN: Star Song Publishing, 1992), 101.

<sup>58</sup>*ibid.*, 48.

<sup>59</sup>David Peteson, *Engaging With God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 182.

revived, the public reading of Scripture. Scripture needs to be read for the sake of hearing God's word and not just small passages in preparation for the sermon. In his work, Evangelical is Not Enough, Thomas Howard asserts the value of directing people to God and his revelation through the reading of Scripture.<sup>60</sup> This is primarily a presentation based act, but Robert Webber suggests some ways or making Scripture reading more participatory through the institution of lay reader's groups, having the Scripture read from within the congregation rather than from a stage, or dramatizing Scripture.<sup>61</sup> These ideas would allow for presentation and participation both within revelation.

Music and mutual ministry within the congregation are also important means of God's revelation to his people although both of these activities may be means of response as well. They can be both presentational or participatory in nature. Songs can be very powerful ways of congregational participatory revelation of God's truth, while choral ministry can be an important means of presenting God's truth to the congregation.<sup>62</sup> Interpersonal ministry within the congregation allows its members to minister to others through the spiritual gifts God has given them for his service including tongues, prophecy, healing, and others.<sup>63</sup> We must, "view mutual ministry as the context in which which to engage with God. Edification and worship are different sides of the same coin."<sup>64</sup> Congregational ministry is both is primarily participatory, but involves aspects of both revelation and response as members minister to each other through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Other means of God's revelation which are sometimes minimalized within evangelical circles are the use of symbol through art, liturgical acts, and communion. All of these elements can be very helpful in revelation for those who are more visual learners as opposed to auditory

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<sup>60</sup>Thomas Howard, *Evangelical is Not Enough* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1984), 46.

<sup>61</sup>Robert E. Webber, *Worship is a Verb* (Nashville, TN: Star Song Publishing, 1992), 75, 93, 191.

<sup>62</sup>Andrew E Hill, *Enter His Courts With Praise* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993), 114.

<sup>63</sup>David Peteson, *Engaging With God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 206-215.

<sup>64</sup>*ibid.*, 215.

learners.<sup>65</sup>

God's divine self revelation always demands a response from his people, and this is next stage in the worship service. Webber stated, "I respond in worship to God, whose person and work of redemption is represented to me through what is being done."<sup>66</sup> As can be clearly seen in the biblical words for worship and examples of worship in Scripture, worship is the process of active response to God's divine self revelation. "Corporate worship is characterized by deliberate response."<sup>67</sup> One of the most important ways the way can deliberately respond in worship is in communion. In communion we respond to God's revelation by proclaiming our union with him and with the body of Christ. "The Lord's Supper, which has . . . been understood as a means of deepening the personal communion of believers with their Lord, is clearly meant to focus . . . the participants on one another as well as one God. We do not simply meet to have fellowship with God but . . . we express our common participation in Christ . . ."<sup>68</sup> Thus communion is a response to God's revelation personally and corporately. Both of these aspects need to be understood within the context of response. Obviously communion is participatory in nature as believers eat and drink, however Webber suggests ways such as having the members of the congregation come forward to receive the elements in order to make it more of a "decisional choice" to participate.<sup>69</sup> Communion is an important part of response to God's revelation and should likely be a part of every worship service, although this is quite different from many evangelical traditions.

Singing is also a great means of response to God's revelation which actively involves the congregation in participatory acts of worship. Congregational singing has been a part of worship right from ancient Hebrew worship and is an effective way to involve the congregation in

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<sup>65</sup>Robert E. Webber, *Worship is a Verb* (Nashville, TN: Star Song Publishing, 1992), 87-88.

<sup>66</sup>Robert E. Webber, *Worship is a Verb* (Nashville, TN: Star Song Publishing, 1992), 118.

<sup>67</sup>Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1999), 49.

<sup>68</sup>David Peteson, *Engaging With God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 218.

<sup>69</sup>Robert E. Webber, *Worship is a Verb* (Nashville, TN: Star Song Publishing, 1992), 53.

response.<sup>70</sup> “Familiar hymns are preferred . . . for how easily individuals can join in the rhythm.”<sup>71</sup> Although not all singing need be in the form of traditional hymns, there is something to be said for songs that are easy to sing to encourage full participation.

Prayer is another important way in which people should respond to God. “The third gospel . . . emphasizes that the temple was ‘*a house of prayer*’ for Israel . . .”, and it appears that prayer was central to the meetings of the early church.<sup>72</sup> If the early church saw this as central for congregational worship, it is unfortunate that prayer in many churches is reduced to the pastor alone praying through a massive list while much of the congregation remains uninvolved. “In the ancient church pastoral prayer was nonexistent. Prayer belonged to the people and arose out of the congregation.”<sup>73</sup> This is not to say that pastoral prayer should be eliminated, but should definitely imply that the congregation should be actively involved in prayer in response to God’s revelation. This may be accomplished in creating time for silent prayer, or even prayer groups within the service. Written prayers which may be recited by the whole congregation also are helpful in allowing people to participate in active response to God in worship.<sup>74</sup> Different postures for prayer such as kneeling, or having hands raised can also increase participation as God’s people respond to him in prayer.<sup>75</sup> Prayer unlocks the power of God in our lives and thus, prayer needs to be an important part of congregational worship.

Tithing or giving an offering to God in congregational worship settings are also important ways of responding to God in worship. It is a somewhat uncomfortable situation to ask people for money within Western culture because we see so many abuses of public funds, but there needs to be opportunity given for people to respond to worship in giving to the work of the gospel financially. “Sacrificial giving for gospel ministry is

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<sup>70</sup> Andrew E Hill, *Enter His Courts With Praise* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993), 114.

<sup>71</sup> Patrick R. Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1992), 112.

<sup>72</sup> David Peteson, *Engaging With God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 138, 158.

<sup>73</sup> Robert E. Webber, *Worship is a Verb* (Nashville, TN: Star Song Publishing, 1992), 144.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Howard, *Evangelical is Not Enough* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1984), 49.

<sup>75</sup> Andrew E Hill, *Enter His Courts With Praise* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993), 116.

... an expression of the worship pleasing to God under the new covenant.”<sup>76</sup> The traditional means for collecting an offering is generally passing around baskets through the pews. However if members of the congregation are encouraged to come forward and lay their offering up front they are thus more actively engaged in responding to God in worship through giving.

Other creative ways of responding to God in worship may include dance, visual art, responding in biblical words such as “amen”.<sup>77</sup> Creating space within church architecture where people can be active may also be helpful in encouraging active response to God, although this is a change which is far more difficult and costly than changes in the liturgy of a given congregation.<sup>78</sup>

Finally, the fourth part of the service, dismissal or sending, is important to remind the congregation that their Christian duty does not begin or end with the congregational worship service. “. . . [T]he dismissal tells a story. It is more than a signal that the time of worship is over. It is the beginning of service in the world.”<sup>79</sup> Far too often services end with the end of the sermon and a quiet instrumental. There should be a well thought out way of sending the congregation into God’s service in the world, whether it is in the form of a blessing, exhortation, or simple recessional. No matter what it is important to remind the congregation that their act of response to God’s revelation need not end with the end of the worship service, but rather should carry on into their daily lives.

Christian worship within a congregational setting should be a place for people to meet God and actively respond to him in worship. Whether it is in communion, prayer, song, vows, creeds, offerings, or arts, elements of presentation and participation are essential to Christian worship through the process of revelation and response. Corporate Christian worship must be characterized by sacrificial, active, worship in response to God’s divine self revelation in order to be biblical.

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<sup>76</sup>David Peteson, *Engaging With God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 184.

<sup>77</sup>Robert E. Webber, *Worship is a Verb* (Nashville, TN: Star Song Publishing, 1992), 194, 137.

<sup>78</sup>*ibid.*, 197.

<sup>79</sup>*ibid.*, 102.

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