

Week 2: Reflection Paper One.
A Brief History of Christian Worship, James F. White
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What Significant Insight Does History Teach About Worship and/or Discipleship? How Might this Insight Help Us?

Significant insight stems from the worship experiences manifested by some prominent biblical scholars. Paul, Onesimus, Lydia, Crispus, and Dionysius were among the band of Christian followers. Although, these were a part of the mystery religions that involved cults. They are the ones who connected themselves to Greek and Roman deities in comparison to other religions. Additionally, the Jewish community resided in urban areas. The New Testament books bears the foundation of Christian worship that evolved during a hundred-year period. Since that time the body of community worshippers had a strong desire to follow the same path. During this time frame, their social life involved mirroring different social and educational levels.

Moreover, part of the worship experience involved “The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles.” Another term for these teachings is referred to as the Didache. It was inspired by the way some Christians thought of it, but rejected by others in the body of Christ. The results of this is the Didache was eliminated from the New Testament books. Although the Didache “is the short name of a Christian manual” it “contained instructions for Christians groups and its statement of belief may be the first written catechism.”¹

In addition, liturgical gives reference to church services in the form of public worship. Services includes but not limited to Holy Communion and baptism. One practices of the early church were to initiate baptism as a means of identifying new Christians into the body of community worshippers. “Baptism had high authority that the Lord Himself had submitted to it at the beginning of His public ministry.”² The work of missionary was a practice of the early church therefore baptism was a big part of public worship. Also, “baptism brings union to Christ” during baptism a person identifies with Jesus death and resurrection. “For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with Him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God who raised Christ from the dead.” Col. 2, NLT

Nevertheless, “baptism may be the most eschatological of it all; it introduces one into a new community where the first fruits of the kingdom are found.”³ White refers to baptism as individuals going down and coming out of a watery grave giving references to baptism. Although believers go down in the water they come up out of the water with a “new body.” After baptism, the body of Christ experiences a new birth and are cleansed from sins. Some ceremonies include

1 White, James F. *A Brief History of Christian Worship*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.

2 Ibid, 16.

3 Ibid, 17.

initiating “the laying on of hands, which signified and effected the transmission of the holy Spirit.” One must realize that humans have no power over the Holy Spirit, He manifests His presence in His timing.

Further significant history involving worship includes the Eucharist (sacrament of Holy Communion) or the Lord’s Supper. According to White, “liturgical usage has influenced the formulation of the accounts of the Lord’s Supper in many ways.”⁴ During the eucharist service the body of Christ partake of the Lord’s Supper in Christian bonds of unity with focus on Jesus and His perfect sacrifice. Believers as a caution must always partake of the Lord’s Supper in a manner that is not taken unworthy.

Likewise, persistent daily prayer is an important significant part of worship whether public or privately. Christian worship involves one of the key powerful tools of prayer. When the body of Christ assembled in daily prayer, impossible situations bowed to the name of Jesus. Captives were set free from bondages of sickness, disease, addictions and other strong holds. The light of Jesus penetrated spiritual darkness that held people captive. Prayer indeed changes things and destroys every yoke of bondages.

According to White, “the Didache instructs Christians to pray the Lord’s Prayer three times a day.”⁵ This was an indication of people praying morning, noon, evening, and night. The people persevered regardless of obstacles and setbacks; prayer warriors pressed on to reach the mark of the higher calling in Christ Jesus. First and foremost, maintaining focus, acknowledging, and giving thanks to Jesus is at the beginning of prayer. Often, believers begin petitions to God with personal requests instead of thanking Him for what He has already done.

Next significant form of worship involves “daily public prayer.” Prayer involves steadfast commitment to persevere during intercession for others and self. Yet some disagree proclaiming “true Christian’s pray throughout his whole life.” Not only that, but specific positions were described for the body during prayer. “Raising the head and lifting the hands to heaven” was a practice based on the apostles persisting in prayer three times a day. Tertullian followed these standards regularly as a discipline. Also, seven days of private prayer was another recommendation. This time of prayer gave reference to the daytime hours of the crucifixion. During this time of prayer, the community came together for public worship to receive further instructions and prevail in more prayer.

However, those attending public worship via prayer and instructions were not steadfast in their attendance three times daily. But, a positive change was made under the leadership of Constantine resulting more frequency of worship. Soon after the community of worship began praising God morning, noon, and night consistently. They rendered service by praising God through songs and prayers, and other psalms. This form of worship grew among other churches through high repetitions of its practices. But after a period, morning, noon, and evening worship began to cease “in most parts of the world in later centuries.”

⁴ Ibid, 23.

⁵ Ibid, 24.

Regarding the church and their format of worship in the middle ages, believers sought and participated in various devotions. This was one form of worship used to occupy themselves during church services. First, worshippers had the choice to participate in the whole service, but some chose to listen, but to keep quiet. Another area of participation was preaching, teaching, and more prayers. On the other hand, most repented of their sins, afterwards they asked for forgiveness, the rosary, grace, and mercy. White points to this (1993), the most characteristic medieval eucharist piety was reflected in these devotions, a penitential piety.”⁶

At the same time, the worshippers encountered a heartfelt repentance that caused a feeling of remorse for their actions. Their reply was, “we have offended a righteous God and must beg for mercy for we are not worthy.” It was highly important for all worshippers to repent of all sins prior to partaking of the Lords Supper. This action prevented them from receiving the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner. Repenting was necessary prior to receiving communion, to escape the “fear of death and its horrors for the ungodly.”

Similarly, White provides more insight through this, “a great deal of moralistic preaching contributed to the cultivation of a very penitential eucharistic piety.”⁷ This form of “the Protestant Reformation is still alive and well today.” Yet, the views of the ninth century worshippers had the wrong thoughts of their experiences during mass. Because of their ungodly beliefs, taking communion was misinterpreted. Some worshippers believed Christians “ate the very flesh of Christ and drank His blood.” Not only this, but the worshippers in the eleventh century were led to believe the believers teeth “crushed the body of Christ.” Their character revealed stubborn people being persistent in taking the sacred communion out of biblical context.

Besides, Pastoral Rites are greatly observed in various ways but some remain the same. Also, “the natural rites of passage, marriage, and burial” is considered secular in some cases. Christian marriage was socially necessary but associated with various practices. Among practices arising from the council of celibates, their belief says it is better and more blessed to remain a virgin. Thus, Martin Luther voiced his opinion stating, “marriage should be accounted a hundred times more spiritual than the monastic estate. His marriage rite of 1529 follows local customs in a simple exchange of vows and rings.”⁸

During modern times, profound changes have occurred in pastoral rites. With regards to reconciliation, penance is no longer part of the reformed churches. An exception is noticed in the Anabaptist Tradition with regards to practice of the ban. Meanwhile, leadership has been an issue confronted with questions in the new movement of Christianity. Disagreements has risen among some churches concerning the rites of ordination. Finally, “history of Christian worship is an

6 Ibid, 90.

7 Ibid

8 Ibid, 130.

amazing combination”⁹ whereas some practices and concepts have remained the same. But, others have experienced change.

⁹ Ibid, 178