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MISSION AND WORSHIP IN THE AGE OF THE SPIRIT

Missão e adoração na era do Espírito

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Abstract:

Using Paul Tillich's method of the correlation, this article relates the relations between the inside and the outside of the worship space, relating worship and mission. At the end, the fourfold of the worship is re-interpreted.

Keywords:

Worship. Mission. Holy Spirit. Method of correlation. Gathering. Word. Meal and Sending.

Resumo:

Usando o método da correlação de Paul Tillich, este artigo diz respeito às relações entre o interior e o exterior do espaço de culto, relacionando adoração e missão. No final, as quatro partes fundamentais do culto é re-interpretada.

Palavras-chave:

Missão. Culto. Espírito Santo. Método da Correlação. Chamada a Adoração, Pregação, Eucaristia. Envio.

Introduction

The theme of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America in its New England Synod meeting in 2014 called forth the church to live "Mission and Worship in the Age of the Spirit." The way the theme was described in the brochure of the event mentioned Harvey Cox's words: "people's quest for meaning and authentic encounter with God." I grew up reading Harvey Cox and had the privilege to have him as a guest speaker in my class when I was in Louisville. However, I believe that to live in the age of the Spirit nowadays have to do less with a quest for meaning and more with a quest for connection, with authentic, reliable, sustainable connections, both with God and one another.

Nathan Mitchel, a fantastic Roman Catholic liturgical scholar, says that in our time we strive more for *meeting* rather than meaning. What matters for our times now are the ways in

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which we live together rather than proper meanings. Mitchel says that our liturgies “beckon us to *meet* God in Jesus Christ and the Spirit, not to produce meaning or meaningfulness.

Such meetings with the living God are bound to be harrowing. We should probably leave our churches limping, rather than congratulating ourselves on a ‘job well done’.²

It used to be that a proper *sense* of the faith, a reasonable meaning of belief was what kept us in church. While this is not out of the horizon, out of the question, what matters when somebody thinks about joining any social group today has to do more with what things they do, how this community lives practically, and how they put blood and bones to their beliefs.

I believe young people are looking to belong to a movement rather than participate in a set of proper religious and theological beliefs. The churches that are responding to our society nowadays are not proposing a list of things people should believe, but rather, they are getting into movements of change, of transformation, proposing forms of living that matters to the daily life of people and communities. Again practices do not preclude beliefs but we arrive in God’s arms by actually meeting God in Jesus Christ and not by getting a proper sense of what or who this God might be. From the early church, we learn that the *lex orandi*, the law of prayer is what forms the *lex credendi*, the law of belief, and gives us a *lex agendi*, the law of ethics.

Paul Tillich wisely said that religion is the response to the philosophical and existential quests of the world. And the world, made of peoples and societies, are asking for connections, for ways of relating. The more we grow into our individualism the more we crave to be connected. Recently a father discovered that his 12 year old son sent 10.000 txt messages during a month, that means that he sent 1 txt message every 10 minutes. These connections however, seem to be made more of anxiety rather than sustained relations. Anxiety of the father about the text messages and the son about not feeling connected. More than anything, people today fear losing their phones than losing their wallet. OR perhaps their spouses! We live alone eager for connections.

That means that our Christian notions and understandings and hermeneutical axis have now shifted. To live in the age of the Spirit today is not to provide cognitive meaning but to provide meetings. For God is to be met in Jesus Christ. When we meet Christ, our spirituality moves from the head to the heart and shape our deepest feelings. Our bodies become the locus of God’s revelation.

That means that we need to actualize our theological tool kit and our sense of faith in Jesus Christ for this time. Let us imagine the theological notion of sin for instance, which is so important for Lutheran and reformed theologies. If we think of sin as related to law in terms of wrong doings only, we are missing the point in communicating the gospel.

Well, sin is not even on the radar of many people anymore. Fewer people are going to church to ask God’s forgiveness for something they did wrong. There is an absence of a language of sin even in Protestant churches that has made many of us very uneasy. Recently a liturgist complained that we don’t talk about forgiveness anymore, because sin is not in our current use of language.

However, I do believe that the language of sin is still important for us. What is at stake here is the ways in which we *understand*, experience, participate in sin and organize our lives around it.

² MITCHELL D., Nathan. *Meeting Mystery: Liturgy, Worship, Sacraments*. New York: Orbis Books, 2006, xvi.

Let me give you an example. St Lydia's church in Brooklyn New York, led by Rev. Emily Scott, can help us reframe the way we live/understand sin. For those who don't know St Lydia, it is a very young church in Brooklyn, New York, that organizes the whole worship life around a meal. The preparing/cooking and eating together is at the heart of this congregation's worship and life. They actually worship while eating. The sin that St. Lydia is addressing is the sin of disconnection, of separation, of boundlessness, detachment from life and people, of loneliness. What St. Lydia is doing is to organize the religious practices around something that is fundamental to our lives and cultures: a meal.

By setting a table and preparing a meal, a Eucharistic meal, the very worship life of St Lydia prepares a space for people to meet God and each other on a more relational way and demonstrates its beliefs by their liturgical actions rather than recitations, even though they do recite the prayers of the church.

Well, one could say most of our churches are also organized around a meal, the Eucharistic meal. However, the way we prepare this meal is very different from the ways St Lydia prepares it.

At St. Lydia, the Eucharistic meal is at the heart of the service and everything else is organized around it. The Eucharistic meal is at the heart of people's meeting with God. The whole meal is integrated with people's daily lives and the whole eating event is a sacrament. The bread, once only in the hands of the pastor, is now broken and passed by the people who are present. The Eucharistic prayer, once prayed only by the pastor, now is shared by the people. And as people eat and drink and sing and read the Bible, people's stories are shared. The story of Jesus Christ is deeply woven into the fabric of the lives of the people.

The grace of God dispels the sin of disconnectedness by ways of having people talking, sharing, speaking, moving, eating, singing, laughing, and doing things together around the meal proposed by Jesus.

Meaning is not necessarily already there as we think that if we follow the proper liturgical steps, the meaning of the liturgy, Jesus Christ, will be there. Meaning instead is to be created by the community, by ways of meeting each other and God. Meaning will come after, by the grace of God, as a result of the wrestling/doing/showing/sharing together of this practice.

I know this way of doing church is very challenging because it challenges our ecclesial structures and for some, it puts at risk the very theological beliefs contained in the ways we believe the Eucharistic rite should be enacted/ritualized. But what I am trying to say is that St. Lydia is fundamentally dealing with the sins of our society, not by ways of announcing proper beliefs but by ways of shared actions. People come not to watch a liturgy done on their behalf, but they actually create the liturgy together. For liturgy is about connections and the grace of God is what binds us back to God and one another. As Nathan Mitchel says:

"Liturgies are, finally, about connection; about being connected and making connections – To God, people, and planet; to space, time, culture and history; to difference and otherness, to memory and expectation".³

Let me give two examples of things inside of our churches that continue to disconnect us from one another:

³ Ibid., xv.

- **Time.** When we worship we must keep the holy one hour that Martin Luther King Jr. called the most segregated hour of US. We are bound to time and not even God can go beyond this time frame. Time defines the limits of our prayers and singing and preaching and interactions and not the other way around. In this framework, one cannot afford going 5 minutes over the limit of the worship; otherwise we will hear interminable complaints of the lack of respect or lack of proper preparation. But here is the paradox: when people go to a restaurant right after the church service, the waiter will say: "I am sorry you will have to wait 30 minutes to have a table" and we say without thinking: that is just fine. What kind of assembly are we when we can't deal with each other, and even God, for more than one hour? When we are with friends, when we are with God, time is not of essence.

- **Second example: Money.** The call to liturgy and mission in the age of the Spirit must also echo within the chambers of our own structures. Most of the protestant churches in US have what for me is a very unfair structure of distribution of wealth. We have passively accepted a very uneven structure of salaries. Some pastors, and leaders of our churches get way more money than others pastors and leaders. Why do we accept this structure? Some of my students don't even know if they will get a job or if they do, they will receive 15-20 thousand dollars while other pastors are getting 100, 200, 300 thousand dollars. As Christians, we measure our call by God's promise and God's **imago Dei**, the image of God we all carry in us. And if that is so, then everybody who participates has the same Imago Dei! What does not match in this theological statement is that we all have spiritually the same Imago Dei but socially and financially, we don't share the same needs! That is the sin and the tragedy of our theologies. We are all the Imago Dei, so no one should receive more or less. If we are all the same we should have the same salaries. What I don't get is that this structure is actually killing our churches. Big churches get full time pastors because of their salary package.

Small churches cannot afford full time pastors and cannot pay them well. The social Darwinism is rampant inside of our churches. The stronger will defeat the weak. Just like our larger society. We too have our privileged 1% inside of our churches! What is going to happen is that we will end up having only big churches and small churches will disappear. Just because this is the way it is? No my brothers and sisters! **No! Nein! Não!** Let us revolutionize the world saying we believe in equality, that we all carry the same imago dei spiritually, economically and socially. If we do not address this inequality in our salaries, what is it that makes us different from Chase Bank, MetLife or Coca-Cola? Why do some poor pastors have to sing their doxologies while deeply hurting financially while other pastors are easily saying "God is good" with salaries 3, 4, 5, 10 times bigger?

Sin! The sin of disconnectedness, the sin of not perceiving, or not wanting to perceive that we share a very distinct reality, even inside of our churches.

As Nathan D. Mitchell said: "thus revelation of worship cannot be understood through reason or logic or exclaimed, but it is embodied in practices of justice and mercy in liturgy of neighbor".⁴ Using Tom Driver's words,⁵ our worship/mission are a doing of a showing, that is, a doing of our faith and then, it is a showing of a doing, that is, the ritual enactment of what we have done.

Liturgy is done for the glory of God and in the words of Saint Irenaeus: 'The glory of God is a human being fully alive,' with food, housing, medical care, and same salaries. The glory of God is

⁴ Ibid., 145

⁵ DRIVER, Tom. *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual*. Charleston: BookSurge Publishing, 2006.

the fulfillment of our humanity. Thus, mission and worship and justice in the age of the Spirit are just about one thing: connections.

Method of Correlation

To do worship and mission in the age of the Spirit we must be able to figure out what is the spirit of our age and see the movements of the Holy Spirit in relation or against it. As Abraham Heschel said.

Religion declined not because it was refuted, but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion -- its message becomes meaningless. Religion is an answer to humanity's ultimate questions. [We need] to rediscover the questions to which religion is an answer.⁶

Paul Tillich's method of correlation, read from a liberation theology perspective can help us figure out the spirit of our times. In this method, we must pay attention to the ways in which the world is organized and challenging us. And we, as the church of Jesus Christ must respond to it by changing, prophesying against it and enacting different possibilities for life. For Tillich, simply put, the world asks questions and we respond to it. Tillich's method can help us respond to the social political and existential problems of our time by using and exploring our Christian symbols. So in this first moment we will try to raise only the social-economic constituency of the US society today and then see how we can respond to it using our liturgical-missional precious symbols, namely the fourfold pattern of our worship services.

We must face the forces of the economic market, the massive movement of money to the 1% of the richest people, the scary shrinking of the middle class, the demonization of the poor, the trap of the unregulated flow of personal desires, and the narcissistic cultural framework based on accumulation as enjoyment that shapes our country and is consequently invading our churches.

1. The economic institutions are now using the First Amendment of the constitution to make economic freedom be like free speech. With this move they are saying: we are free to do whatever we want with the economics. That means: no state regulations, no corrections, no limits, no boundaries. They are free to do whatever they want. Due to that, we are developing a savage capitalism that will at the end up killing us all. This is what is happening:

* A Broken System of Compensation: The Combined Salaries of 350,000 Pre-School Teachers is Less Than That of Five Hedge Fund Managers

* Diminishing Support for Society: The 1% of our population made more from their Investments in 2013 than the entire cost of social security, Medicare, Medicaid, and the Safety Net.

* 70 million Americans are financially underserved by traditional financial services. That means that abusive companies are borrowing money to people and making them slaves of their debts.

⁶ HESCHEL, Abraham Joshua. *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; Reprint edition, 1976. p. 3.

* The amount of debts of students in the US is devastating, especially when we think that they will leave their schools and won't find jobs to pay for it. They are composing a new social class called *the precariat*. This group of people are not finding sustainable jobs and are getting by with money that are borrowed from parents, working from part time jobs, and not having enough to pay social security or live a full life.

The economics are tearing us apart.⁷ Don't forget what Martin Luther King Jr. said: "Injustice somewhere is injustice everywhere."

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The prosperity gospel churches know very well how to read our societies and our realities. They know people are sinking financially, that people are losing their economic sources and they are afraid of losing their social position. They thrive on that powerful reading of our reality and people flood these churches. However, what they propose is outrageous and wrong. They feed on human greed to promise richness and a life without problem if one only believes. The pastors are always off the hook because they can't be blamed if people don't receive the blessings. It depends on people's faith. Cheap grace! Cheap grace is what they offer, a grace transvested in prosperity, offered to all without any effort to live it. Grace and does not take other in consideration. Grace that does not care for the wellbeing of the larger society, and that blames the not well off as people who lacks faith.

If we are smart to read this reality we can offer something more sustainable in our churches, that respond to peoples needs, that transform our society and is faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So, how do we respond to that? We respond with the social capital we have which is our people, our symbols and the gospel. Aristotle used social capital to say that it is better to be active in society together than alone. Pierre Bourdieu will say that social capital is a like a social place where the agent has relations and connections that will bring sources and knowledge to oneself and his/her village.⁸

At the foundation of social capital is trust and trust is something we all work very hard at in our communities. Social capital is the ability to create interactions, connections, and establish different layers of connectivity, between neighbors, cities, states and governments and forms of decision making.

Social capital has the potential to break the boundaries of social class, the inequality of financial capital and work toward the common good by adjusting the resources of life when they become property of some and do not serve all.

Within this sense of social capital, we have our churches, our liturgies and our mission. The fourfold liturgical structures of many churches: **gathering, word, meal and sending**, can offer a response to the social disasters of our time if we juxtapose our holy things with the events of the world. The church cannot be a mirror for itself and work only inward with its own symbols and sources. We have done so for too long and we became an insulated community that does not

⁷ VIDEO - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPKKQnijnsM>

⁸ "Social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition." BOURDIEU, Pierre; WACQUANT, Loic J. D., *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. p. 119.

know how to open itself to the world. We can do well only with those of our own culture and we hope that folks will come to us and agree with everything that we say, have and do. But the Christian faith is a troubling faith that entails negotiations of beliefs, liturgical practices, social sources and capital.

Let us consider the fourfold of the liturgical order in this situation:

Gathering – worship and mission is about open doors, hospitality, welcoming, going after people and showing our care and love for them. We only gather for worship later, after we lived together for a while, after I help you clean your house and go find your son who was lost because of drugs. Liturgy is always a second act of our life together. You love me first and I will go worship God with you. It is because I love you and I care for you that you come with me to church. And then, at church, we will do whatever liturgical form we might have. Because what matters the most is not much what or how we do things but the love we have for one another. If we are grounded in God's love, I will sing your song and you will pray my prayer. I will dress up like you do, and you will not need to wear your red shoes when you are with me. When we gather, we look at each other, we confess our sins of disconnection and how the world has taken us away from each other, and by the promises of forgiveness in our baptismal waters we become again, deeply connected, treated equally as the *Imago Dei*. How does the Spirit work here?

Word – When it comes to the word of God, This very precious word is what challenges us to live together trusting God's mercy to live faithfully bounded in this sinful-diabolic-disconnected world. We read the Bible together in the midst of cultural differences, intellectual challenges, emotional gaps and linguistic accents. Because of so much difference, we must read the word of God very slowly, listening very carefully to one another. The word of God is this time when Christ is in our midst challenging us to serve each other and serving God's earth. This word has a prophesy to this word of injustice. How does the Spirit work here?

Meal – We are called to eat together and at the Eucharistic meal there are promises of God feeding us with memories of changes and transformations, promises of redemption, eternal life and a society that is equal. At the table we cry out loud: Under the name of Jesus Christ NO one goes hungry in this city! Because we do have this altar/table for all! The Eucharistic altar/table carries the kernel of this revolution that will challenge the powers that be to provide for all, especially for the poor. How does the Spirit work here?

Sending – When we are ready to go, before we go we make sure everybody has enough for the week, that everybody has money to pay the bills, every children is in school, and healthcare is available for each of God's children. Without those assurances we won't leave the sanctuary! We then bless each other with God's blessings and charge each other to remain faithful! And we go live in the world what we have just done in our worship. How does the Spirit work here?

Jaci C. Maraschin, a Anglican liturgical theologian from Brazil said that "Any liturgical reform should also be related to the mission and should be based on a new theology, mission related to joy and freedom. Liturgy and mission are sisters dancing together towards the beauty of God's kingdom".⁹

Concluding

⁹ MARASCHIN, Jaci, *Da Leveza e da Beleza. Liturgia na pós-modernidade*. São Paulo: ASTE, 2011. p. 21.

Our liturgies should teach us to expand our emotional, bodily and cultural intelligences as well. Our liturgies should prepare us to share all we have. The church gathering should help us become more versatile, more experienced, more prepared to live our lives in this challenging world. Instead the church tends to keep us filled with fear, afraid of changes, scared of what God is bringing us as gifts.

We are here today to deepen connections between each other. May we learn to deepen connections between our liturgies and the world we live right there at our community.

Create! Imagine! Relate what you have received from your tradition with what people are living in their daily lives. Add soil to the table, fill the altar with fruits of creation, spend time listening to people's joys and concerns. Eat the bread and drink the wine with honey and milk, expand your table, make it a full meal! Sing songs that you are not used to, venture into praying somebody else's prayers. Remember Bonhoeffer who said in 1938.: "Only he who cries out for the Jews may sing the Gregorian chant." Move around, create rituals, make these sources relate deeply to people, make connections so people can expand their feelings, thoughts and experiences with the sources the church has given to us.

Pray new and extemporaneous prayers! Explaining the prayers of the early churches Paul Bradshaw says this:

"This would explain the existence of prayer-texts in Didache 9-10, an unusual feature in Christianity as in early Judaism, where prayers were not normally written. While prophets were to be free to use their own words (10.7), less gifted leaders might need some written help to prevent them from appearing liturgically incompetent."¹⁰ Don't be afraid of being incompetent, we all are!

And let each one of us leave church every Sunday like our brothers and sisters from the black church say: "We had church today!" Because we have seen God!

Let us finish our worship and say: "Oh my, can I really live this faith? This is too hard! Only by the grace of God we will."

Let us leave the church limping because we have wrestled with God and were touched by the angel of God.

Let us finish our worship and say: " Oh no, is it finished already? Can we sing couple more songs before we go please?"

Let us finish our worship and say: "who did we leave behind?"

Let us finish our worship and call one another back saying: "before we go, let us anoint each other with the oil of healing!"

Let us finish the church saying "The Spirit of God was here! And I can face the spirit of the world because the Spirit who lives in me now is way more powerful than the spirit of the world! Because the Spirit of God was here! The Spirit of God was here!

Let us finish the church and remind ourselves: "I am not alone! Here are my brothers and sisters! They are with me! I won't go hungry! I won't go homeless, I can face the world! Look! I can watch over my mother who is terribly ill! I can care for my daughter who is suffering from bulimia, I can go after my boy who is a victim of drugs. Because I have my back covered! I have the strength of my God and my community."

¹⁰ BRADSHAW, Paul F. *Rites of Ordination: Their History and Theology*. New York: Pueblo Books 2013. p. 27.

Let us finish our worship saying to each other: “We have God, We have Jesus Christ, we have the Holy Spirit!” Turn to your neighbor and say it: “We have God, We have Jesus Christ, we have the Holy Spirit!”

Let us finish church saying: “actually our worship will start now, in the world!”

Let us finish church asking: “who are we going to serve this week?”

Let us finish church challenged to create a new theology, filled with joy and thanksgiving!

Let us finish church connecting our mission in the world with joy and freedom.

Let us finish church asking each other “how long until we meet again?”

Let us finish church telling each other “Lutherans are very good at not doing the same old thing all the time.”

Let us finish church saying: “the world does not care for me, but my people and my God do!”

Let us finish church with the task to keep on going with our glorias and alleluias even in spite of death!

Let us finish church with this deep conviction: “We are much better now than when we arrived. I believe in my church and I believe in my people!”

And let us finish our worship services every Sunday believing, and singing, that “we shall overcome! Yes, we shall overcome someday!”

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