

1-1-2004

"You (All) Are the Temple of God": Spirituality and Worship

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Recommended Citation

Magness, Lee (2004) "'You (All) Are the Temple of God": Spirituality and Worship," *Leaven*: Vol. 12: Iss. 4, Article 11.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol12/iss4/11>

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"You (all) Are the Temple of God": Spirituality and Worship

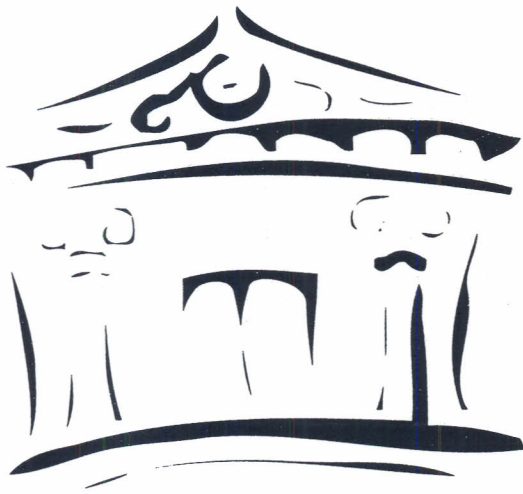
LEE MAGNESS

Essays are supposed to have one thesis statement. This article has two. They cannot be separated, either literarily or liturgically. *Thesis statement 1*: The corporate worship of a Christian is the public, communal expression of that consistent undercurrent of Christian experience we call personal spirituality. *Thesis statement 2*: The personal spirituality of a Christian is the daily, individual expression of that great ground of Christian experience we call corporate worship. If you think I'm trying to have it both ways—have my cake and eat it too—you're right.

Corporate worship is the part of personal spirituality that shows most readily and most regularly. It is the massive mountain of ice, the part of the iceberg that rises and rides above the water. It is the foamy crest of the mighty wave that surges toward the shore. It is the spectacular eruption, bright and booming, of the volcano above the seemingly impenetrable mantle of the earth. It is the tree that springs to life in leaf and bloom. It is the exuberance that spouts forth in uncontainable laughter.

Personal spirituality is what underlies meaningful corporate worship. It is the yet more massive ballast of the iceberg that anchors the icy extrusion in the swirling sea. It is the dark deep from which that curling, crashing wave emerges. It is the vast chamber of molten magma that explodes through the mountain. It is the root system, as vast as the branches, that supports and sustains the tree. It is the well-spring of joy, the aquifer of hope, that gurgles and giggles to the surface.

Early Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to community, to the breaking of the bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42). When they gathered, they gathered to learn about Jesus, his life, his death, his resurrection, and the implications of his life for theirs. When they gathered, they gathered as an expression of *koinonia*, radically shared life in the body of Christ. When they gathered, they gathered to remember and celebrate and reenact and give thanks for the saving death of Jesus. And when they gathered, they gathered to offer prayers and intercessions and entreaties to God through Christ. These activities are what we would have seen if we had "gone to church" with the saints in Jerusalem in A.D. 30.



But read the rest of the second chapter of Acts. Undergirding the teaching of the apostles was a daily ministry to the people of Jerusalem, an awe-inspiring demonstration of God's power and love acted out in their every encounter with human need (2:43). Undergirding the gathering of the community on the first day of the week was

a daily common life of shared property and shared possessions based on a radical reassessment of resources in the light of the provision of God, the body life of the church, and the realities of human need (2:44-45). Undergirding *the* breaking of *the* bread was a daily breaking of bread from house to house, the sharing of meals that signaled mutual acceptance, mutual recognition, and mutual joy (2:46). And undergirding the prayers of the church to God were lives of daily praise to God, often in the temple where they had been taught to seek a sense of God's presence (2:46-47).

This interrelationship between weekly worship and daily life, the interpenetration of liturgy and spirituality, is the rhythm of the Christian life. In Eph 5:15-21, "how we live" is connected to the presence of God's Spirit. Life in the Spirit is connected to worship in the Spirit. Worship in the Spirit is manifested in the sincere singing of the worshiping community. And communal singing of praise to God is connected to a daily expression of thanksgiving to God—"always giving thanks."

Our inner life cannot be separated from our outer life. Our personal devotion cannot be separated from our life in the community. Sanctity cannot be separated from service, piety from praise. Christian worship and Christian spirituality are the ebb and flow of the lives we live before God, through Christ, and in the Spirit. According to Paul, our bodies are the temple of God, the setting for the work of God in the daily disciplines of our lives (1 Cor 6:19). And that same Paul, in that same letter, says that the church is the temple of God, the setting for the work of God in the communal expressions of our lives (1 Cor 3:16-17). In other words, our corporate worship is the public, communal expression of that consistent undercurrent of Christian experience we call personal spirituality. And our personal spirituality is the daily, individual expression of that great ground of Christian experience we call corporate worship.

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