

Worship As Warfare  
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We speak of worship as covenant renewal, because that is what sacramental worship is. We are called in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit -- the Name in which we were originally baptized. We, the baptized, leave Egypt and enter the Kingdom anew in the Confession and Absolution. We ascend to heaven to hear the Word proclaimed, and then sit with our Lord in the heavenlies at His table. Finally, we are commissioned and sent forth, with a benediction pronounced in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

This covenant renewal structure is found everywhere in the Bible, and it has been important for us to recover it. There is more to our heaven-positioned worship, however. Worship is also holy war.

We emphasize the priesthood of all believers, and rightly so. But what is a priest? As Peter Leithart showed in *The Priesthood of the Plebs*, a priest is a royal household servant, or in shorthand, a palace servant. Now, before Jesus came only a very few men were allowed into God's palace as priests, and they were assisted by another slightly larger group of people (Levites and deaconesses) who could not enter the palace/temple, but who stood near to it.

The priests and Levites had a number of duties, but the one we want to focus on here is that they conducted holy war. The dress of the High Priest is taken up in Ephesians 6 and called the "armor of God." The daily killing of animals, which carried the liability for human sin, was an act of continual warfare. The Nazirite vow (Numbers 6) made any man or woman a temporary priest for the purpose of conducting holy war, whether physical (Samson, and Judges 5:2, "When the long-hairs lengthened their hair") or prophetic (Samuel, John the Baptist, Elijah and Elisha [2 Kings 1:8 "a lord of hair", 2:23 + Num. 6:9], Paul [Acts 18:18, 21:23-26]).

One of the primary tools of holy war, however, was and is the psalms. The Levites were stationed around the palace to sing the psalms. They were accompanied by cymbals and massed stringed instruments, which produced a huge sound. The priests participated by blowing trumpets, probably playing the melody.

Since only the priests might approach the altar and enter the temple/palace, they were representatives of the people, and not of the people of Israel only but of the whole world. The gentiles were to participate in the fast of the Day of Coverings (Lev. 16:29), and at the Feast of Booths seventy bulls were brought near for the seventy nations of the world. (Gen. 10; Num. 29; Zech. 14:16-21).

To sum up: ***Priests sing psalms in the presence of God on behalf of the world.*** If you're not doing that, you're not a priest.

The book of Hebrews makes it clear that we are all priests now, and in the highest sense, beyond merely Aaron, in union with Melchizedek. Hence, all of us are to "draw near" into the presence of God. Ephesians 5:18-20 makes it clear that one important thing we do there is "sing and play music from the heart" that consists of psalms, hymns, and Spiritual songs. There is debate about what hymns and Spiritual songs are, but for our purposes it does not matter. We can discuss that once we have begun to sing all 150 psalms.

It is our duty to sing psalms before the face of God.

It is our job.

It is part of why we were baptized and enlisted in the Holy Rainbow (Warbow) Army of the Lord of Armies.

It is not an option.

Now, when we look at the psalms, we find one after another that is about conflict, warfare, and vengeance. There are certain "imprecatory" psalms, but there are also prayers for justice and vengeance present all over the whole book of psalms.

It is important to notice that psalms are utterly different from hymns in this regard. I know of only one hymn ever written that calls on God to destroy anyone, and even that is pretty mild: "Lord keep us steadfast in Thy word, and curb the Turks' and papists' sword" (*Erhalt uns, Herr*, by Luther, 1541). I don't think that this is because the Church has been too wimpy to write imprecatory hymns. Rather, it is a reflection of the fact that vengeance belongs to God alone. We call on Him, using the words He has given us, to be the God of vengeance on behalf of His people. We do not add any of our own vengeance to it.

According to Luke 18, when Jesus taught his disciples to pray and not to lose heart, He told them a parable about an importunate widow who continually came before the judge demanding vengeance. Modern translations often try to soften up the phrase "avenge me on mine adversary," but the Greek is strong. It's the same word for vengeance as in Romans 12:19.

The saints under the altar in Revelation 6:9-10 pray to God, asking Him to avenge their blood. Jesus Himself, as the "Other Angel," in Revelation 8:3 adds His own prayers to those of these saints, and then "all hell breaks loose on earth" as we might say.

It is very clear: ***God promises to change the world, to turn the world upsidedown, when His people come into His presence during worship and pray for vengeance.***

It is clear in the book of Revelation that the Church has the keys of the Kingdom. The Church alone has the power to come before the Throne and cause the world to be changed. Nobody else can do this. The world is not changed by direct human action. The world is changed when God is persuaded to change it.

That's what liturgical warfare is. And, as an aside, if the Church had not completely forgotten that liturgy is warfare, she would never had entertained the horrible notion that women should be ministers. What man sends his wife, daughter, mother, or sister into the front lines of battle? No real man would ever do that. But since the Church has abandoned her calling to wrestle with God on behalf of the world, since she has abandoned liturgical warfare, she has become exclusively a nurturing institution, and hence a logical place for female leadership, whether those females are women or wimpy men.

What happens when the Church sings the psalms? Consider Psalm 94:

Mighty Avenger! Yahweh!

Mighty Avenger, shine forth!

Rise up, Judge of the earth!

Repay what they deserve to the proud!

How long will the wicked, Yahweh?

How long will the wicked rejoice?

They belch forth, they speak arrogance.

They boast of all their troublemaking.

Your people, Yahweh, they crush,

And Your inheritance they oppress.

Widow and sojourner they slay,

And the fatherless they murder....

But Yahweh became my fortress,

And my God a rock of refuge.

He will pay them back for their sin,  
And for their troublemaking He will destroy them.  
He will destroy them – Yahweh, our God!

Would Jesus change the situation around the world if His people sang this? The Bible says that He would, one way or another.

Protestants claim to believe in the priesthood of all believers, but you would never know it. Roman Catholic monks sing through all 150 psalms every week. The older vision in Protestantism was for the clergy, at least, to move through all 150 psalms in a month, in morning and evening prayers.

But do modern “Protestants” do the psalms at all? Consider: Some churches sing metrical psalms, but metrical psalms are not psalms. They are sermons based on psalms. They often change words, leave words out, and interpret the psalm for us, not infrequently changing the meaning. ***Metrical psalms are not what God wrote and they are not what He wants to hear.*** I'm all in favor of metrical psalms as sermons, but only if genuine psalms have pride of place in our worship.

Or, even worse, psalms are *read* in some kind of “responsive reading.” It is amazing how this bizarre custom has arisen. The psalms are songs. Can you imagine going to a concert and hearing a singer or choir just stand up and read the words? Well, that's what God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have to endure as the audience for our half-baked shoddy worship. David never read or spoke the psalms: They were written as songs. Nobody ever read or spoke them in the Temple.

***Responsive reading of the psalms should be abolished in worship as a perversion.*** It is very easy to chant the lines on tone. Just go all the way through the psalm on one note, to start with. But don't just read them. Chanting puts more of yourself into it than mere reading does.

God does not want to hear the psalms read.

He wants to hear them sung, chanted.

If you don't like that, take it up with Him.

Why doesn't the world change? Because the Church is too lazy to take up the arms that God has given her. Those arms are the psalms, chanted with vigor and loud instruments, before the throne of God in worship.

Serious churches need to make a decision. They must make the decision to make the learning of the psalms a top priority. They must make the decision to make chanting the psalms with strength and vigor a top priority.

This is the duty of the Church. God does not ask us to do anything heroic. It is actually an easy thing to learn to do. So why don't we do it?

One thing is for certain: Until we start doing what God wants us to do in this area, things will not change in this world that Jesus desires to own.

Clearly, more than just getting worship right is important in changing the world, but since worship is the central act of God's people, performed on the first day of the week at the center of the world before the very face of God, surely worship sets the tone of everything else.

We have seen that God calls us to holy war, first of all the “wrestling at Penial” of singing the psalms before His throne and calling on Him to act. Now let us focus on what God has done for us, and how very often we refuse to receive it, and how this ruins the power of the Church.

It's very simple: ***God has given us rest.***

That's it.

Jesus has done it all. Jesus came down from heaven and gave us the Kingdom. We did not earn it. We did not deserve it. It was given to us free of charge.

Jesus has made us enthroned kings in union with Him. Jesus has ascended to God's right hand to rule the world, replacing the angels. And we are in union with Him.

Hence, we also are seated in the heavenlies.

But you would seldom know it.

In *Rite Reasons* 89 I showed how over and over the New Testament tells us to sit for our meal with God. Six times we are weirdly told that Jesus *commanded* people to sit when He fed the 5000 and the 4000. The text does not say "the people sat down" or even "Jesus gave the people permission to sit" (which would be strange enough), but that He commanded them to sit! We also looked at numerous other passages that show that the picture of the Kingdom is always of people seated with God. Matthew 14:17-19; 15:34-36; Mark 6:39-40; 8:6; Luke 9:14-15; John 6:10; Matthew 8:11; Luke 12:37; 13:29; 14:10; Ephesians 2:6; Matthew 26:20; Mark 14:18; Luke 22:14.

I received several responses. One young man who has decided to abandon Biblical Christianity wrote that, well, this was all very interesting, but that Church tradition was otherwise (meaning his own church tradition). Another wrote that in his church, people had sat for 45 minutes for a sermon and really needed to get up, so he had them come forward. Another told me that his people wanted to *do* something and so he had them come forward.

I can reply that if the people are tired of sitting, have them stand for the Prayer of the Church (which should come after the sermon as part of the Offertory) and also stand for a communion hymn or chant or psalm or two or three. Then sit for communion.

I can reply, more ferociously, that the desire of people to get up and *do* something is precisely what needs to be fought. ***We don't come up to get the meal; Jesus' representatives bring it down to us.*** The meal is part of incarnation. It is gift. Yes, perhaps we get up and go forward to leave our tithes and canned goods and other gifts at the Table during the Offertory, but when it comes to receiving the Kingdom, we do nothing but eat.

Jesus brings it down to us.

Jesus washes our feet, even though we'd rather He didn't.

Now, this refusal to sit for communion is a ***Judaizing evil***. Of course, I'm *not* saying that people who come forward and stand around, or march by the pastor, or kneel at a rail intend to forsake the Gospel. But their ritual does, in fact, betray a Judaizing facet.

You don't believe me? You're scandalized that I dare to say this? Well, it's not I who say it. It's Paul (or "Anybodybutpaul"), the author of Hebrews, who says that under the Law "every priest ***stands*** daily ministering, and repeatedly bringing near the same offerings, which can never remove sins; but He, having brought near one offering for sins for all time, ***sat down*** at the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:11-12; 1:3).

There you have it. Standing in the holy place for the sacrificial meal is a characteristic of the Old Covenant. The priests never sat in the Tabernacle and Temple. We, however, are in union with Jesus, joined to Him, and seated with Him. ***To fail to sit for communion is DE FACTO to refuse the New Covenant.***

A friend of mine once said in a lecture on prayer that there are no seated prayers in the Bible. Well, not quite. Jesus was seated when He gave thanks at the Last Supper. I draw from this that the officiant in the liturgy, as Jesus' enthroned representative, should also conduct the Supper from a seated position.

Now, all of this material is kind of clear, but there is something more to be said. After all, it is possible to come back and say, "Well, that's fine, Jim, but there's no actual command to be seated for the Supper." And yes, certainly there are times in the church when sitting is not possible, when the supper must be eaten hurriedly in the forests before the enemy army arrives.

But.

What kind of obedience do we want to have? The olde Puritans used to be called Precisionists sometimes. The story is told of a Cavalier who asked a Puritan, “Why are you men so precise about everything?” The reply was, “Because we serve a precise God.”

That’s a good answer. And before moving on, notice how the word ‘Cavalier,’ which used to mean horseman and designed the State-Church party in England, has come to mean “sloppy and high-handed.” This is no accident.

At the same time, I’d like to propose a better answer for the Puritan.

Unto You I lift up my eyes,  
Who dwell in the heavens.  
Behold, as the eyes of servants to the hand of their masters,  
As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress,  
So our eyes are to Yahweh our God,  
Until He shows mercy to us. (Psalm 123:1-3)

What does this mean? It means that a faithful and loyal servant is so attentive to his or her master’s or mistress’s wishes that he pays attention to his or her slightest gesture. Good servants are not looking for loopholes. Good servants delight to pay close attention to the slightest indication of what their lord wants, because they *love* their lord.

Repeatedly, as we have seen, the Bible tells us that God wants us to sit at His meal. Anyone who has the attitude of Psalm 123 will not require some explicit command, but will readily see the hand gesture. Nobody who has the attitude of Psalm 123 will go about dreaming up cool new liturgies, like wandering by coffee tables and dipping wafers in wine, and other like rubbish.

Now, what has all this to do with changing the world? Very simply this:

***We rule.***

We are enthroned with Jesus Christ in the heavenlies, replacing the angels (Revelation 4:4; 15:8; 20:4). We need to move through this life as kings and queens, viceroys of King Jesus and His ambassadors on earth. We apologize to no one. It’s His Kingdom and as His baptized ambassadors, rainbowed into His warbow by the prisms of sprinkled water, we’re in charge.

The Supper is the celebration of our rule in union with His, and it ***must*** be taken enthroned. If not, it’s not the Festive Marriage Supper of the King and Queen, but some odd rite that we’ve made up. Sure, God is gracious and makes up the difference in our failures, but there’s no power in standing or kneeling communion. We aren’t participating in the kingdom. And when we bring our petitions, we aren’t going to be heard as well as if we are seated, like Esther, at table with the Great King (Esther 5:5-8; 7:1-10).

You want Jesus to hear your petitions to stop the horrors going on everywhere in this world? Then sit, like Esther, at His table when you talk to Him.

## Weapons of War

Worship takes place in an arena before God. It is a place of wrestling (as Jacob found out), a place of holy war (as the book of Revelation shows very clearly). We have mentioned that musical instruments are weapons in the hands of God’s holy warriors. These weapons are to be used first of all in the arena, the time and place of special worship, because it is during this time that we are in closest encounter with the principalities and powers that can be defeated only by liturgical warfare.

These same weapons can be taken out from the arena, from the Garden sanctuary, into the land. When David exorcised Saul he was in the palace. When the French state outlawed the singing of Genevan Psalm 68, it was because that powerful Protestant war-psalm was frightening the

Catholics as the Protestants sang it all week long. And then the French had to outlaw whistling the tune.

The film *The Mission* shows how music had a way of charming the savage natives of South America and opening them up to the gospel. There is no doubt in my mind that Christians marching through the streets of any Islamic country singing vigorous psalm chants and metrical psalms would utterly destroy Islam. The Church, however, has almost never used this weapon, as we shall see.

A great many of the psalms are reactions on actual war and social conflict caused by “troublemakers,” liars, schemers, and the like. But at the same time, all of these poems are *psalms*, to be sung in the near-presence of Yahweh at His Temple during His worship. The overlap of holy war and liturgy is so complete that when David begins Psalm 144, “Blessed be Yahweh, my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle . . .” we are not sure if the hands and fingers manipulate weapons or musical instruments, for the only activity that David himself engages in with his hands is to play the ten-stringed harp (v. 9).

In a similar vein, Psalm 149 begins with a call for Israel to praise with dancing and sing with timbrel and lyre (v. 3), but then moves to “let the high praises of God be in their throat and a two-edged sword in their hand to execute vengeance on the nations . . .”

Vigorous dancelike worship that might include “shouts” and loud calls to God and was accompanied by a panoply of weapon-instruments was originally characteristic of the Church. It is clear from Acts and from the kinds of conflicts mentioned in the Epistles that the Church insisted that she was the new Temple. In this new Temple she offered memorial bread, and, more scandalously, memorial wine. King Josiah had done away with those who broke such memorial bread at places other than the Temple, and certainly Saul of Tarsus was imitating him in seeking to wipe out the blasphemies of the Christians. Similarly, as we can see from Ephesians 5 and Revelation 4-5, the early Christians worshiped with musical instruments, which were used only at the Temple and never at the synagogues.

The sound of this worship went out into the street. When Paul writes, “If I speak with the tongues of men [gentile languages?] and of messengers [Hebrew?], but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal,” he is most certainly *not* arguing against these instruments. His statement, in fact, seems to imply that these instruments were being used in Christian worship, along with “speaking in tongues” and other sonorous activity. Paul only says that without love, singing with such loud instruments is empty.

Fairly early, however, the enemy of humanity persuaded the Christian churches that singing without weapon-instruments was superior and a more “spiritual” way. (Which “spirit?” we may ask.) This notion came entirely from pagan philosophical ideas of spirituality. These notions prized contemplation, psychological withdrawal, quietness, “moderation,” and removal from the physical world – all of which are the exact opposite from Biblical Spirituality. The psalms are certainly not emotionally “moderate,” and it was necessary for the “Church Fathers (Babies)” to reinterpret and effectively castrate them.

Not only were instruments abolished, but also singing in harmony. The churches were to sing “with one voice,” singing only melody and not harmonizing. The idea, of course, was unity before God, but this notion of unity can find no purchase in the Bible, or in a trinitarian (three-voiced, at least) understanding of reality, or in a music authored by the seven-fold Spirit of God.

At the same time (and this is important), the churches did maintain that all of worship should be sung. Scriptures should be “chanted,” not merely read. Prayers had to be intoned. Merely saying the words of the Bible and of prayer was borderline blasphemy. Such words were too important merely to be spoken like ordinary colloquy or dramatized as if on stage. If the pastor did not have a good singing voice, a cantor was enlisted to intone prayers and Scripture. The sermon was the time for more informal communication from the (seated) pastor to his flock.

In time, however, the idea of sung worship was compromised, during the so-called Middle Ages, with the development of the “low” or spoken mass. This was the origin of “merely talked worship,” which has degenerated today into “chatty worship.” We have fallen very, very far.

Nevertheless, when the Reformation restored congregational participation in the worship, it was “high language” that was used. Much of the service was sung, though not all of it. The language that was used for the spoken parts, however, was semi-poetic and strong – language that called out to be intoned.

Nowadays we can attend weddings that are conducted entirely in modern “bluejeans language” – by which I mean the kind of language you hear in any “post-'60s” church. “Lord, we're just so happy to be here, and we just want to pray, Lord, that you'd just really bless this couple . . .” and so forth. The strong intoneable language of the historic Church makes more of an impression concerning the importance of the event: “Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the sight of God and of man . . .” etc. The traditional language almost sings itself, because it is “high speech,” not “cheap speech.” (Of course, a true marriage takes place when a man and a woman wed one another, whether in a church or not, and whether the language is high or not.)

The “'60s” was the end of whatever remained of Biblical worship as intoned or semi-sung worship. The idea was to be as close to other kinds of language and events as possible. What this meant was that there was to be as little difference as possible between the ambience of the world and that of worship performed in the heavenlies before God. The notion of worship as an arena, as holy war, had finally disappeared completely. The language, dress, attitudes, and music of worship became indistinguishable from that of general culture, with all its neo-pagan and humanistic admixtures.

We must look a bit more at the notion of arena and boundary; so to close off this essay, consider that the Tabernacle and the Temple were bounded by screens and walls from the rest of the geography of the land. Within that boundary the Levites sang the holy war music of God near to Him. The layman entered that boundary to bring his offerings, and exited it again afterwards. Within that boundary was a bit of “wilderness” space with the altar “holy mountain” in it, functioning as a doorway to the “ladder to heaven” of the Tabernacle/Temple itself. One left general culture behind and moved into the “simplified” space of the wilderness for worship, and then returned.

Consider: In the wilderness we ate manna and drank water from the rock. That was the wilderness meal. Very simple. Jesus has turned water to wine, but with that difference, we still have the same simplified meal in worship. Similarly, covenant renewal worship is not the place for concerts of great music, but is the place where all Levites (now all of us) participate in the holy war. Sacred concerts are for other occasions.

By the same token, however, the time and space of worship must not be the same in style as other events. We are to go to a *different* place, a *holy* (set apart) place, where we use high language, speech lifted up into intonation, chant, and song. We are to dress at least a bit differently. The building must look different. By the use of incense (possibly), it should smell different.

Pastorally speaking, this different world is what people need. They do not need more of the same. They do not need bluejeans language Bibles, bluejeans language worship, bluejeans style dress, bluejeans music. They have that all week. For nearly 2000 years the Christian Church knew this, even though how she expressed it varied with time and place. The eruption of the demonic that we call the “'60s” destroyed this, and hell is to pay. The Church now is almost completely unable to change or disciple people.

Therefore, at present the Church is losing the holy war.