


Dancing in praise of God: Reinterpretation of theology in worship

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In many religions, worshipping God whilst moving the body is part of worship. This article aims to explain and defend the position that worshipping God by moving the body in liturgy is biblical and has a theological foundation. The discussion is divided into three. Firstly, the writer traces the origins of objections to bodily movements in liturgy and analyses them. Secondly, it is explained that body movement is a language to God. A biblical argument about body movements, which should not be trapped in appearance and drama, is the third part. The article concludes that worship by gestures is biblically substantiated. The research contribution suggests that the church should be accommodating in its orthodoxy to accept this as truth. The church should deem it important to teach the congregation the concept of true worship and not worship that is trapped in appearances. The key finding is that the meaning of worship lies not in the direction but in the worshippers' hearts. Each church should have a unique way in their respective cultures. This article performs a theological reconstruction of worship theology and analyses it briefly through a literature review of several literature works such as books, articles and research findings.

Keywords: The theology of worship; gesture; body movement; the true worshipper; charismatic; pentecostal; practica.

Introduction

Worship has a significant role in religious practice (Bayne & Nagasawa 2006). Adherents of religion find it a way to connect with God. Not only seen in contemporary religious worship, Durkheim (2011) states that worship is characteristic of human religious power, which can be traced to primitive worshipping rituals that feature specific body movements (Mustaffa, Awang & Basir 2017). It can be inferred that worship, like the Dhavamony theory that directs its followers to join the sanctuary, is an articulated rite of worship (Dhavamony 2016:183).

Christianity is a religion that introduces the concept of expression in worship as part of worship to God (Merrill 2000). As an expression of worship, Nelson (2007) initially analysed that it was born from an emotional attitude, as revealed by his research in Christian worship amongst African Americans. However, this attitude is constructive in building religious identities that lead to an experience with God. Geraghty's (2007) explanation, which says that expression should occur in every Christian's worship because this action is part of the implementation of Jesus' command to worship him in spirit and truth, as revealed in the Gospel of John 4:23 (Wijaya 2017). In other words, worship and expression are inseparable parts of a Christian rite.

One of the expressive forms of worship in Christian worship is the practice of body movement. According to Setiawan (2012), complete and comprehensive worship in the full theological meaning only occurs if the human conscience is fully involved, and includes the body in worship. Smith (2008) suggested that the body's participation in worship is as consequential as that of emotional and intellectual involvement. Therefore, only when there is a connection between body, mind and spirit in God's worship is the real spiritual experience created.

The problem is that not all churches have the same understanding of body movement in worship. Theological reflection on body movement in worship is still strongly influenced by doctrinal views; whilst some agree, others disagree with this concept. Although body movement has been a part of the trend in Charismatic-Pentecostal adoration, a psychological fear of being branded and rejected by the mainstream Protestant churches could be at the source of abstaining. This is also inspired by thoughts that suggest that it is not necessary for body movement in worship; the emphasis being more on the role of worship in communion with God. Thus, the church pays more attention to discuss the meaning of worship and its elements rather than discussing the attitudes and movements of the congregation's body in worship, which at times actually focuses more on

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performance than essence. Only when the congregation has true ecclesiology is the practice of worship more authentic (Pruitt 2007).

These differences of opinion divide the church's attitude such that the veracity of the biblical interpretation becomes blurred. This situation poses one fundamental question that is based on this fact: Does it uplift the body and the biblical truth, whilst praising God or praying? This can be justified by David dancing before God. We are asked, with all our might, to love him. One way is mentioned in Romans 12:1, which states that offering the body as a living sacrifice strains the metaphor in order to present the sacrificial lifestyle in every Christian worship (Keener 2014:448).

For this reason, I first explored the ideas of rejection. It then provides an analysis to defend the idea that moving the limbs during worship is a biblical language that emphasises hysteria and expression. God understands body language as an integral part of the liturgy of worship that communicates to him. The concluding section warns that it is far more essential to take heart and be motivated in worshipping God, than to indulge in drama for public appearances. The aim of the study is how to describe gestures in worship from a theological and biblical viewpoint.

Reasons for rejection

The following are several reasons and arguments underlying the rejection of body movements in worship.

The first reason can be traced to Tertullian's teachings: an influential Latin Church priest, regarding the human body. Tertullian teaches that the body is the centre of lust and flesh causing man to fall into sin (Uzukwu 1997). This view forms the basis for the Church's assumption that the portals to sinfulness will be left wide open when the body is involved in the worship of God's holiness. The nature of the body, considered unclean and dirty, must be suppressed in such a way. This is a contradictory view of Tertullian's teachings regarding the theology of Christ, wherein the 'flesh' or humanity of Christ is a worthy instrument of God's presence (Fergusson, Wright & Packer 1988:676). In other words, the church's doctrinal interpretation of the body as the centre of lust in worship needs to be reviewed.

The second argument can be seen in the concept of dualism in Christian theology, which is heavily influenced by Greek philosophy (Korak 2012). Human beings are believed to consist of a spiritual aspect (soul or spirit) and a physical aspect (body) in the dualism perspective. The soul or spirit is associated with positive things like purity and goodness, whilst the body is associated with negative things such as impurity and defilement (Jacobson, Hall & Anderson 2013; Vidal 2016). This view firmly draws a line between body and spirit; the two being unrelated (Fergusson et al. 1988:211). In this view, body movement does not directly influence the act of worship initiated by the spiritual aspects (soul and spirit). In view of the dichotomy, body movement becomes insignificant.

This view is contrary to the psychological approach that regards human beings as the united entity of spirit and body (Walach 2007). For example, Paul's emphasis in his letter to Rome's worshippers (Rm 8) is not a dualism between flesh and spirit. However, it concerns priorities and emphasis that the Christian life is no longer led by the flesh but by the spirit. The flesh remains, but the power of the spirit has control over the body as a whole (Wasserman 2008). The implication is that when the body moves in spirit-led worship, the body is being led into the spiritual dimension.

The argument of rationalism developed in the 15th century helped shape the theological rejection of body movement. Rationalism emphasises humans as 'thinking being', thus the cognitive aspect is of prime importance. With rationalism, unrestrained expression of human faith through body movement in worship is considered unnecessary. Zwingli supports the idea of rationalism in the extreme in his church. Various spiritual symbols and icons are revealed so that the church space becomes empty. The use of musical instruments is prohibited during worship, including body movement. For Zwingli, all expressions of faith in material form (art, symbols and unwarranted movements) do not show faith; rather, it can be a barrier to faith, and therefore does not need to be practised (Browne 2005). It is enough to have faith in Jesus Christ, the King, and Saviour, so all will go well.

Body movement as a language

The body is a medium in the sociology of religious view. From primitive times to right up to its contemporary form, religions have ritualised worship in three aspects: continuous worship, sacraments and ceremonies (Whaling 2002:325). All aspects involve physical activity. Primitive religious rites show dance movements, both regular and irregular, in the way they worship.

Some stories in the Old Testament (OT) can be used as a reference. During the race 'fire from heaven' between the Prophet Elijah and Baal's priests, a performance of body movements was shown. The author of the book of Kings describes the following:

They take the bull given to them, process it and call the name of Baal from morning till noon, they said: 'O Baal, answer us!' But there was no voice, no one answered. Meanwhile, they tiptoed around the altar they had made. (2 Ki 18:26)

One purpose of using the Hebrew word 'pasach' there is to describe a dance involving irregular movements by jumping around (ed. Renn 2010:584).

Turner (2012:441) states that religious behaviour (one of which can be observed through body movements in rituals) is intended as an answer to a human existential problem. In comparison, religious belief attempts to understand the world by referring to sacred reality. Turner's thought provides a sociological foundation for the emergence of religious behaviour amongst religious communities. Praying, singing, dancing, clapping and fasting, are a part of worship.

Furthermore, in religious life, Turner (2012:363–366) said there is a transcendent reality, an awareness that can only be humanly owned. This view explains that through the expression of body movement human consciousness seeks to reach and enter a transcendent reality. Manifestations such as dancing, raising hands, clapping, crying, or trance in worship, become an immanent personal experience of a transcendent God. In addition to immanent expressions, it can be concluded that gestures can guide human efforts to develop supernatural communication to a transcendent God (Russell 2001). Facial expressions and body movements represent the condition of the human heart to God in a non-verbal way (Chomaria 2018:110).

In his book on *Body Sociology*, Raditya sees the body as part of social conventions. The body can 'talk' unfettered by its physical limitations, expressing itself in social relations through signs, meanings, symbols, or semiotics (Raditya 2014:xvi). Therefore it can be concluded that bodily activities in worship are not merely movements without meaning but are expressions of the human desire to build supernatural (non-verbal) communication with God.

Biblical view of the body movement in worship

The Declaration of Faith addressed to Israel in Deuteronomy 6:5 states the law of love towards God (Pawson 2015:188). 'Love the Lord God, with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength'. The manuscripts in Mark 12:30 and Luke 10:27 add the phrase 'mind'. The text shows the absolute unity between body, soul, spirit and mind to the love of God. The word 'strength' in that sentence comes from the Greek word *ισχύς* which refers to physical strength or power (Strong 1986:49). Worship as a way of loving God provides space not only as an expression of spirit, soul and mind, but encompasses the involvement of the body as a language.

Jewish liturgies that involve the movement of bodies are a part of worship (Idelsohn 1932; Mackie 2017; Olson & Weinfeld 2006).

A complementary view of the Bible with regard to Israeli worship rituals during OT times can be an additional reference, wherein a body dedicated to the Lord is constituent of the liturgy. For example: an act of kneeling (Is 45:23), standing (Ps 122:2; Ps 135:2), raising hands (Ps 63:4), or raising hands and making gestures with the hands (Ps 143:6). A momentous thing happened when David moved the Ark of God from Obed-Edom to Jerusalem. The Bible reports, David danced with joy (2 Sm 6:14) in the holy procession and did it with all his might. Several verses in the NT narrate how he prostrated himself in order to worship God. One of the most powerful narratives can be found in the Book of Revelations, wherein it describes the worship of God by prostrating the body (Rv 15:4). Even in his epistle to the church at Ephesus, the Apostle Paul enlivened his prostration in worship (Eph 3:14).

Mitchell supports the opinion that the synergy of body movements within the church liturgy is biblical. The manifestation of human actions to worship God can be seen through a person's liturgical movements and goes on to explain how body worship becomes more important than churches, holy places, books or other items (Mitchell 2006).

It is through worship involving the body that awareness of God is built up. Sheil said movements as simple as opening a hand and raising it can increase one's awareness of God's presence. Sheil (2006) realised that visual gestures are more important than verbal explanations.

Thus it can be concluded that body movements and the liturgy form a complementary relationship. Where there is liturgy, body movements occur, and vice versa. Mattes (2016) elaborates that it is almost impossible to imagine a liturgy without body movements because it shows the symbiotic movement between God and man. Zephaniah 3:17 states God sings to his people and alludes to movement to save sinful people, and human beings respond to God's work of salvation with rejoicing (Chrisholm 2002:450). This dialogue underlies the overall liturgical view that there is indeed a real correspondence between the body and theology (Jacobson et al. 2013; Ross 2008). Keeping this in mind, let us now analyse how drama fits in this pattern of body movements.

Beware of drama

As a movement integrated with the liturgy, there needs to be a principle of harmony that is not excessive in its expression. Horne and Davies (2006) warned that the danger of exaggerated movements in worship would have a direct impact by altering the form of worship into one of entertainment, hollow rituals, eroticism and the loss of its transcendent aspects. Vondey (2010:117), a modern Pentecostal theologian, agrees with the above statement. Although a theology of body movement can be accepted as something biblical in church liturgy, the drama trap is all too real.

Indications of worship movements that only emphasise performance has made worship in the services lose its essence.

Vondey's fears and warnings from Davies and Horne exist for good reasons. Many church liturgies are trapped in actions and attractions that only emphasise emotion and psychology. Whilst on the other hand, the actions' and attractions' main essence become vague, and even disappear. As an immanent reflection on a transcendent God, the body's movement is replaced by a strong desire to be seen spiritually in public. Perhaps, a very wide and deep gap between the two schools of theology (Protestant and Charismatic-Pentecostal) appears because of instances like this. Hence, both have opposing beliefs with regard to body movements in worship.

Conclusion

Body movements in worship are biblical and have substantial theological grounds. The problem is not only in the aspect of theological values but also with the church's decisions and attitudes: whether to accept or reject this theology as a part of the liturgy. This is not a goal, but the means to a human endeavour to express his love of God. Acknowledging that gestures are neither prohibited nor misleading should encourage the church to be more liberal than to adhere to a strictly orthodox view. It is essential to provide the congregation with education about the spiritual significance of body movements in worship. This education offers a spiritual view of the Bible so that the culture is not hindered by adding value to public appearances. Although culture and orthodoxy also influence the congregation's attitudes in worship, the worshipping style prevalent in Africa of praising God can be used as an inspiration: that such a model of practice is a reality in the contemporary church. The church is said to grow when the services held in the church inspire. Schwarz (1996:31), a church growth expert, said that inspiring worship occurs through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Its presence has a significant effect on how worship is carried out, including the entire atmosphere of worship: when people living in such an atmosphere show enthusiasm and profess that worship is fun. In other words, the involvement of all human elements, namely spirit, soul, mind and strength (body) in worshipping God in harmony is the goal of loving God and the actual practice of worship.

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