

## **Sessions 1 and 2—“The Verbal and Non-Verbal Languages of Worship”**

**Don Saliers, IWS Worship Seminar, June 2008**

There are many important complimentary definitions of Christian worship:

1. The glorification of God and the sanctification of all that is human (creaturely).
2. Gathering about the book, the font and the table to receive the grace of God—to speak and to touch in God’s name.
3. The on-going prayer, word and acts of Jesus Christ in and through his Body in the world.

The third definition leads us to see that worship is also a pattern of life; this teaching, preaching, healing, feeding, reconciling, suffering, dying, rising and Spirit-giving gives shape to how we are to live for others.

We will explore how Christian public worship (the “liturgy) is a receiving of the grace of God found in creation, in covenant, in time and history, and supremely as encountered in the life, teaching, passion, death and resurrection of Christ. Our life as a Christian community is thus a continuing dialogue, a continuing “remembering” of the whole mystery of God-with-us. Worship is more than a “cultic” action, it is a community living out baptismal grace and covenant.

One approach to worship begins with the various “languages” or dimensions of the gathered community. It involves time, space (place), sight, sound, tradition, Scriptures, ritual signs, gestures, movement, and human experience of life.

**Time:** cycles of weeks, years, days, seasons—and human temporality

**Space:** specific places that provide “visual theology” and accumulate experience

**Sight:** the visible and the invisible, the seen and the unseen

**Sound:** silence, speaking, singing, hearing beyond the “literal”

**Tradition:** a history of forms, language, ways of doing things, memory

**Scriptures:** a book of memory and hope—a complex history of witness

**Ritual signs (symbolic actions):** meals, bath, anointing, light, movement

**Human experience:** bringing life, passages, sickness, health, death, birth . . .

Christian worship both forms and expresses us in the Gospel message and the mystery of God’s self-revealing. Sometimes we focus on the formation in practices of faith and the means of grace: to pray, to praise, to confess, to share. . . . At other times we focus on the “expression” of our lives before God and witness to our hopes/fears, gratitudes, compassions, sorrows, and the whole of life.

Christian worship has from the beginning been culturally embodied and embedded. But it has also stood “over against” the culture. Above all Christian worship is “eschatological”—that is, it is a “foretaste of glory divine,” a yearning for the fullness of God’s rule and reign. Thus it is founded on the promises of God and upon the incarnation of God in Christ, animated by the Holy Spirit.