

A History of Christian Worship:

Ancient Ways, Future Paths

Part 5: The Expression

A History of Christian Worship: Part 5 The Expression

Fade from black. Introduction.

Narrator:

Christians are drawn to actively participate in worship in a variety of ways. The design of the worship space engages us in the worship experience. Visual art such as paintings, mosaics, sculptures, banners, stained glass, and icons radiate beauty and provide us with a glimpse of heaven here on earth. Drama and media partner together to engage the soul and communicate God's truths in a relevant language and medium. The expression of God's story, whether seen in works of sacred art and icons, felt as part of the architecture and design of the worship space, or experienced through drama and media, is part of the ongoing story we know today as the history of Christian worship.

Fade to opening credits: Ancient Ways, Future Paths: A History of Christian Worship. The Expression: Visual Arts, Drama and Media. Fade to black.

Fade from black to middle credits: The Expression: Visual Arts. Fade to black and then to narrator.

Narrator:

One of the first ways we encounter God through worship is with our senses. As we enter a worship space, visual reminders of our faith tradition such as altars or tables and baptismal fonts and baptisteries are present. We may be surrounded by crosses, icons, statues, banners, Bibles, candles, and stained glass. These elements, and the worship space itself, create a powerful message. A cathedral brings to mind the grandeur and awe

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of God. A Quaker meeting house conveys simplicity and freedom of movement. A large gathering with projection screens and digital images speaks to the presence and movement of the Holy Spirit within the gathered community. A house church invites casual, intimate worship.

Michael Pasquarello III, Ph.D. (Asbury Theological Seminary):

An important part of the way that we worship God is with our eyes. We see. Scripture does refer in numerous places in the Old Testament and the New Testament about the face of God, and about the role of the eye, and about seeing, and about directing our vision, which orients our whole being in life to God: our heart, our minds, even our bodies are positioned in a way that they're oriented to God.

Narrator:

The arts, in a variety of forms, become a medium through which we can individually and collectively celebrate God's story in worship.

Brian McLaren (Author, *Finding Our Way Again*):

I started writing poetry and music when I was a teenager and a brand new Christian. And I don't know why, I just remember I'd experience something and I'd want to write about it. I guess it's no surprise that I ended up being a writer. But, so for me, I'd be reading something in the Bible and something would jump out and I'd want to capture it in song or I'd want to experience something in prayer or in my daily life. So for me, there's always been this sense that an experience isn't complete until it's been celebrated. You

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know, I think we do this with a good meal. It's not just enough to eat a good meal. You have to talk about it. You know, 'Boy, those potatoes are good. What's in 'em?' You know you want to celebrate how good they are in some way. And I think song is one of the ways we do that. And I think all the arts are ways we do that, which is why the arts are so much a part of worship.

Narrator:

One of the most notable visual arts in worship is the design of the worship space itself.

Denis R. McNamara, Ph.D. (The Liturgical Institute, Mundelein, IL.):

Well, traditionally, everyone has always known a church as an important building, right? Even the earliest Reformers of the Reformation would whitewash an old Catholic church, and it was a big, important building. Or the colonial churches of the 18th century, where even though they were called meeting houses, they had steeples and they looked like significant public buildings. The Catholic tradition and the Orthodox tradition and many of what they call the high liturgy traditions always have this notion that you are into a place that's different from everywhere else. Worshipping God is a higher endeavor than shopping for groceries, so the church will look different than a grocery store.

Dr. James R. Hart (President, Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies):

I actually think that the building serves as an additional voice in worship in many ways. The building acts as a participant in the worship even though it's an inanimate object. It will either enhance or detract from a congregation's worship depending on how the

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building is constructed, how the seats are arranged, what kind of acoustic the building has, what kind of acoustic it supports.

Narrator:

In the first few centuries of the church, worship took place in homes, mostly because of the threat of Roman persecution. These house churches contained decorative elements such as frescoes and murals and practical elements such as altars and baptisteries.

When Christianity became a legal, recognized religion under Constantine in 321 AD, the church first moved into buildings that were already in place in the community, notably the city hall buildings that the Romans called basilicas. The basilicas resembled courthouses, so the bishop would stand up front before the open gathering hall to celebrate the Mass, just as a judge would stand before the courtroom to preside over a trial. The basilica would contain an altar, first of wood, and later of stone, and an open space where the congregation stood, separated by sexes. Baptisteries and shrines were built as separate structures outside the basilica. In this era, the church transformed a public building to a place of worship.

Denis R. McNamara, Ph.D. (The Liturgical Institute, Mundelein, IL.):

Now there's a very long tradition of speaking of sacred space that it's not *a* sacred space. It's *a* building that encloses space that becomes sacred when the building is consecrated and the Holy Spirit is invited to dwell therein. And so the space inside that building takes on a particular character, which is sacred because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. So

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the building is a building, and the space is space, and sacred space becomes sacred when the Holy Spirit resides.

Narrator:

In the early centuries of legalized Christianity, many enduring elements of artistic expression were introduced into the church. The image of the cross first appeared in the fourth century, when it was pictured with a lamb upon it. Variations of the cross, from the crucifix in the seventh century to the empty cross, later followed.

Denis R. McNamara, Ph.D. (The Liturgical Institute, Mundelein, IL.):

In traditional Catholic thinking, the crucifix is really an object for the use of the priest. Very often now, you see people thinking a Catholic church is defined by the life size crucifix on the wall, but primarily it was sort of like a bridge between the action of the priest, who is offering to the Father, again, the sacrifice of Christ. It's not a new sacrifice, but because the sacrifice is eternal, you can offer it as many times as you can to make it present again, make it real again. And since the crucifixion of Christ is an eternal reality, then the cross with the body of Christ on it signifies that this sacrifice is not just once and over and done as a historical act, but an eternal spiritual reality and so therefore Catholics often show the corpus, the body of Christ, on the cross. But even then, it's not just a photo realistic image of a guy hanging, suffering on a cross. It's a glorified crucifixion so you'll see very often, particularly in the iconic crosses of the Byzantine and Orthodox churches, Christ will look very...almost happy on the cross. His pose will be very easy, his hands will be nailed to the cross but it will almost look like he's pleased

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to be there, pleased to offer that sacrifice...so it's the glory of the eternal crucifixion, which was the vehicle for our salvation that's represented on the crucifix, not just the horror of that earthly act that happened in Jerusalem two millennia ago.

During the Reformation, many theologians reconsidered a lot of these theological points. When you read some of their texts, they tend to see the crucifixion as an act that happened once and it was over and our salvation is done and so therefore you don't have to keep showing it because it happened and it's over, so they elect to show the empty cross as a sign of the completion of the resurrection and not so much the cross as the continuation of the eternal sacrifice. And again, where theological ideas break, you see that very directly in the architecture and the art that they choose to use.

Narrator:

This early period in church art and architecture also saw the first use of statues and figures of Mary and the saints.

Fr. Robert Reed (Network Director, Catholic TV):

God's story includes all of us, all believers who have ever lived, and so we have a tradition of holding up the lives of certain individuals within the Catholic community. We call them the saints, those who have been listed in the canon of the women and men, young and old, who we know are with God because of their exemplary and holy lives. And so, by veneration of Mary and the saints in images that we create of them to remind us that they are, in fact, a part of the story of the church, and that they are as friends to us.

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They can pray for us. We participate in that veneration in the ongoing, the unfolding history of salvation.

Narrator:

As the Middle Ages progressed, a divergence occurred in the Eastern and Western churches over church architecture and the visual arts. In the East, the church was built in a centralized style, with aisles in equal lengths in the shape of a cross, often with a large gold dome over the worship space that represented heaven. The altar was often hidden from view throughout much of the liturgy by a screen decorated with icons called an iconostasis.

Lester Ruth, Ph.D. (Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies):

In the East, the whole purpose is to get together and to see through worship in order to get a sense of the revealing of the kingdom of God here on Earth in creation. And so, the eye tends to be the thing most involved in Eastern worship, and not just the eyes of your head, but the eyes of your heart. You want to truly see and discern in the East.

Rev. Dr. John D. Witvliet (Calvin Institute of Christian Worship):

Art and icons have been significant in many Christian traditions, but in very, very different ways. In some Christian traditions, art and iconography are decorative, illustrative. They beautify the space. They remind worshippers of central Christian symbols, but they are not understood to be essential to worship.

Narrator:

For the Eastern Orthodox Church, icons, which are two-dimensional representations with specific symbolism, secured a place as an integral part of the worship by the mid ninth century.

Rev. Dr. John D. Witvliet (Calvin Institute of Christian Worship):

The presence of icons tell the story of the full range of God's actions as depicted in Scripture, and those icons become opportunities for veneration and worship. Orthodox theologians tell us that that veneration is not the worship of the icon, but rather the worship of God and the activity of God as depicted or referred to in the icon. But in that case, those icons are not merely decorative, and to remove them would, in some ways, remove a key portion, almost the essence, of worship in those contexts.

Fr. Ted Bobosh (St. Paul Orthodox Church):

In the liturgy we try to experience not only the world as we normally do, the fallen world, but also the world that has been transfigured and transformed by God Himself. And there, again, we have the iconography, the very way that worship is done, it is to remind us of the kingdom of God.

Dimitri Shkolnik (Iconographer):

Iconography is the art based on theology and tradition, and the best thing, that inspiration, we really need get from the church, from the Holy Fathers, theologians, and what was developed in the church art before...I don't want to say that really it's not an art at all.

No. It is art, but it's not purely art. It's some sort of craft with art together blessed by church.

Narrator:

For Russian Orthodox iconographer Dimitri Shkolnik, icons helped lead him to faith.

Dimitri Shkolnik (Iconographer):

Even being a child, not being baptized yet, I felt some kind of presence. I start like, maybe like a very, it may sound childish, but I talk to them. I talk like saying, 'Good morning, good night,' or some very simple prayers without even understanding that, and when I get sick or lay down, I would feel some sort of like praying, asking to help me. It was some sort of, like, beginning for me even to come to the faith.

Narrator:

As a contemporary artist, Shkolnik relies on many centuries of historical art and church traditions in creating new iconography.

Dimitri Shkolnik (Iconographer):

For example, a commission to do a large feast day in a particular part of the church. So first, I'm looking for interiors of the church as was through the last fifteen centuries, painted, and choose the subject for that feast day by composition, by color, and adjusting it myself. So I'm not exactly copying the old icon, no. This is a contemporary icon I'm doing, but using the background, the traditional types that was done before.

Narrator:

For Shkolnik, creating an icon is a mystical experience.

Dimitri Shkolnik (Iconographer):

I know it is that icons change. They change after...when I am working with them, I feel you know, better or change little bit with a shade here or light here, working, you know, like normal work in process. When it's done and finished, I already feel different. It's like complete finished, I don't want to say, product, complete finished icon, kind of like stand away from me. It already, like, belongs to the church. But if I see that a few years past after that, sometimes I even not recognize my hand. And that's kind of like a mysterious thing that I experience with my previous project.

Narrator:

While the East focused on a central cross design and iconography in its architecture, the Western church continued in the pattern of the Roman basilica. Its churches were t-shaped, as a Latin cross, and featured high, vaulted roofs, long chambers, and an altar area covered by an arched semi-circle or half-dome. There were two main rooms to the Western church during this period: the nave, where the congregation stood, and the sanctuary, where the Mass was celebrated. Over time, church architecture added to these two rooms and evolved to include areas for specific liturgical functions such as choir stalls and baptisteries.

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By the twelfth century, a new style of architecture called Gothic was sweeping across Europe. This form of church design featured arches and supports and large windows, often of stained glass. The French abbot who introduced the first Gothic cathedral described the work as “a spectacle in which heaven and earth, the angelic hosts in heaven, and the human community in the sanctuary, seemed to merge.”

Denis R. McNamara, Ph.D. (The Liturgical Institute, Mundelein, IL.):

And so, when you see a church in the traditional understanding, what it shows you is how wood and glass and stone and marble can become an image that participates in the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem.

Michael Pasquarello III, Ph.D. (Asbury Theological Seminary):

Most folks know that for many centuries, on a Sunday, if we were to go into a parish church, that most of the people present did not own a Bible and probably weren't able to read all that much. And yet, in many ways, they had as much Bible and they were able to read as much as we do because they had stained glass.

Michael Pasquarello III, Ph.D. (Asbury Theological Seminary):

As they stood, often they didn't have pews in which to sit, and faced toward the altar in the sanctuary, they were surrounded by the story of God and they were surrounded by the whole communion of saints. And they realized that as they stood there in God's presence, they weren't alone, that their life had been taken up and was part of something much longer and grander and glorious that had already been at work before they came

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and would continue to be expanded into the future until, finally, to the end, when God would bring all things together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Stained glass, to this day, is very important for this reason.

Narrator:

Stained glass has remained as a central artistic element of many churches due to its universal appeal and its representation of the heavenly church.

Micahel Pasquarello III, Ph.D. (Asbury Theological Seminary):

I find it interesting that even folks who are not churchgoers, don't worship, find something very compelling about a church where stained glass is prominent in the architecture. There's a sense of being directed and having your attention turned to something that transcends here and now, today, and what you can see or what you can just taste and hold in your hand, what you can count and measure by numbers and quantify. There's a mystery at work and we call that mystery God.

Narrator:

As the Western Church entered the Reformation, much of its traditional art and architecture had become more sophisticated. The congregation was now seated in the sanctuary thanks to the introduction of pews in the fourteenth century. Many of the visual art elements such as paintings, stained glass, carvings, sculpted figures, mosaics, crosses, crucifixes, candles, and altars had been in use for several centuries.

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The significance of the Reformation in church art and architecture was its efforts to evolve with the rapid change in worship practice. In churches where preaching replaced the Eucharist as the primary focus of worship, such as the Reformed church traditions, the pulpit assumed a prominent position in the architecture. For some traditions, the table replaced the altar in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Denis R. McNamara, Ph.D. (The Liturgical Institute, Mundelein, IL.):

Some people will say the altar is not really an altar because it's not a sacrifice. It's just a memory of the Last Supper, so in some traditions, you see a table instead of an altar. In other traditions, they're very clear that it's an altar and a table and a tomb, all at the same time...the traditional altars have a thick slab of stone at the top as an altar, then they have the suggestion of legs as a table, and then they're enclosed between those legs to recall the tombs where the early Christians would be buried in the catacombs and where the masses would be celebrated.

Narrator:

For some traditions, particularly among the Anabaptists, there developed what is sometimes called a Protestant plain style with a focus on simplicity within the worship space and a minimalist view of visual artistic expression.

Rev. Dr. John D. Witvliet (Calvin Institute of Christian Worship):

There are portions of Protestantism, of course, that are iconoclastic, that resist the use of images, that take the prohibitions of the Old Testament against depicting God and resist

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any use of imagery. It is significant that even in the most iconoclastic of Protestant churches, that there still is visual significance. There might not be explicit images, but people still see and make meaning out of their seeing. So even in some of the most iconoclastic Puritan meeting houses, there is a beauty in simplicity to the white washed walls that some observers have described as a kind of luminosity that communicates powerfully in a visual way.

Narrator:

From the time of the Reformation to the twenty-first century, there was, and continue to be, many new developments throughout the West in how worship unfolds through art and the use of sacred space. In the Catholic Church, after the reforms of Vatican II, the altar-table has been moved to a central position so that the priest now faces the people as he conducts the Mass. There is also a greater emphasis on the pulpit or lectern and a decreased emphasis on artwork and sculpture within many contemporary Catholic churches.

Protestant churches continue to vary widely in their art and architecture. Some congregations are seeking to rediscover and revive ancient church traditions, which has led to a greater use of art and symbolism within those groups. Other churches have embraced the trend of creating what are known as seeker-friendly churches by transforming non-traditional spaces such as gymnasiums, malls, movie theatres and coffee houses to places of casual and relational worship.

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Rev. Kim Armentrout (Sulphur Grove United Methodist Church YMCA Campus):

In a space like the YMCA where people are already pretty familiar with coming in and out and that's a normal part of their process, it enables people I think to get over one potential obstacle, which is 'I don't know how this place will look or how it will feel or where I'm supposed to be in the midst of that.' And in a place like the YMCA, you don't have to worry about that. And I think churches are seeking those non-traditional spaces. One of the goals for the United Methodist Church over the next quadrennium is to find new places for new people and I think that non-traditional settings are a great way to find new places for new people. Eugene Peterson's translation, John 1, talks about God came down and moved into our neighborhood and that's what it feels like at the YMCA, that our ministry, Sulphur Grove's ministry, gets to be in the neighborhood.

Narrator:

Globalization has also brought a rich influx of cultural and ethnic diversity to the local church and its expression of worship.

Dr. James Abbington (Candler School of Theology, Emory University):

It's a wonderful challenge to go to churches or to be a part of worship that has been well thought out, that has been carefully evaluated and that has been really measured by all the authentic rubrics, if you will, of what is good Christian worship, and how the various cultures, not only through music, but through many of their own traditions and their own creeds, can be incorporated, through art and architecture, to blend the beauty of all of God's creation and all of God throughout the world.

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Mike Slaughter (Pastor, Ginghamburg Church):

God incarnates Himself into each dimension of culture, so it's going to look different in different places, and I think that's the beauty about God. God comes to us where we are. In some places of the world, worship is not as centered on a building. You know, you can experience worship in fields, in Africa, in the open in many places. On Christmas in Darfur, the refugee camps in Darfur, the Dinka Christians they dance in the celebration of the newborn Christ.

Narrator:

Regardless of denomination or church tradition, human expression through the arts is a fundamental part of worship.

Dr. David W. Fagerberg (University of Notre Dame):

Our praise, our thanksgiving, our petition, our gratefulness, our begging for forgiveness: these things need expression. They need external expression...This is where liturgical symbolism comes from. It's not just being fancy for the sake of being kind of snooty. This is picked up expression as it has moved through Christian tradition from sixth century Byzantine to twelfth century European to twentieth century Hispanic, it's picked up these forms. The forms of religion, of Christian liturgy, put us in touch with past generations and with fellow members of the body of Christ alive now.

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Narrator:

The visual arts connect us across time, peoples, and cultures to weave our human experiences into the ongoing tapestry of God's eternal story.

The Expression: Drama and Media.

Narrator:

An important element of human communication is the ability to convey the right message at the right time in the right medium. For the church, this happens mainly through the use of drama and media.

Kim Miller (Creative Director, Ginghamburg Church):

Media has become who we are and how we learn and it's been our modern stained glass window. It's been the vehicle for telling our stories over and over again.

Fr. Robert Reed (Network Director, Catholic TV):

If you think of it, down through the ages, for the last 2,000 years, the church has been one of the most effective communicators. The transmission of the Gospel message as it has come down to us from the apostles has only occurred because of the effective use of the media of the day, whatever it might have been.

Narrator:

Although we tend to associate media with technology, it actually refers to any method of communication that transmits information. In the early church, drama was one of the most common communication mediums of the day. The word “drama” is an ancient Greek word that means “action” and is the public performance of an important message in a way that can be understood by its intended audience.

Dr. Tom Boomershine (Founder, Network of Biblical Storytellers):

Well, the major performance tradition of early Christianity, and of the tradition of Israel throughout its history, was storytelling. And there are dramatic dimensions to storytelling, as we now think of it and experience it in the ancient world. It was highly dramatic. It was very expressive.

Narrator:

No one had mastered the art of drama through storytelling better than Jesus. He attracted large crowds and captivated them with short, simple stories called parables.

Dr. Tom Boomershine (Founder, Network of Biblical Storytellers):

Jesus told a lot of short stories, so his parables are often very short, fifteen, twenty seconds, a minute, two minutes, which clearly he strung together. That is, that he would tell a series of parables as a way of talking about the kingdom of God.

Narrator:

His parables may have been short, but their messages were powerful and thought provoking.

Dr. Tom Boomershine (Founder, Network of Biblical Storytellers):

Jesus was a storyteller whose preaching was apparently wildly popular, and it was because he was a great storyteller. And so people were engaged with what he was doing, and his stories are very sophisticated and are also always surprising, so there are reversals of expectations in virtually all of Jesus' parables that, in turn, require listeners to think.

Narrator:

As the New Testament church was born, the apostles continued to spread the message of Christianity through preaching and storytelling.

Dr. Tom Boomershine (Founder, Network of Biblical Storytellers):

There's a direct correlation between the history of Biblical interpretation, the history of worship, and the development of the major systems of communication technology, which we call media. So the original medium was oral communication.

Narrator:

The Apostles intended for their sermons, stories, letters, and admonitions to various churches to not be read silently, but to be shared and heard aloud as part of worship.

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Dr. Tom Boomershine (Founder, Network of Biblical Storytellers):

The Bible, as we think of it, is not a book. So I frequently will hold up a Bible and say, ‘This isn’t the Bible. You can’t hear anything.’ Those who composed the Bible assumed that what they were doing was that they were recording the sounds of the Bible in the only medium that was available to them for recording sound so that others, then, could reproduce the sounds.

Narrator:

The storytelling and preaching media ministry of the apostles was in competition with the theatrical dramas of the day, whose themes were closely associated with paganism and epic tales of mythological gods. This changed with the rise of Christianity as a sanctioned by the Emperor Constantine in 321 AD.

Dr. Tom Boomershine (Founder, Network of Biblical Storytellers):

When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, all the theatres were closed and drama basically ceased.

Narrator:

Theatrical drama did not return to widespread practice in the English-speaking world until later in the Middle Ages, when the Church developed what were called mystery and miracle plays in the 10th century to act out Biblical stories as part of the liturgy.

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Dr. Tom Boomershine (Founder, Network of Biblical Storytellers):

The first development of what became the miracle and mystery plays was a chancel drama that happened in one of the medieval churches where two women came out and were met by angels, who then announced the resurrection. So it was a little play about the resurrection... And then, other plays were added to that, and that became over the course of a couple centuries, the miracle and mystery play traditions of the middle ages that were, in turn, the source of the Elizabethan drama and Shakespeare and the development of modern drama, all of which developed out of those miracle and mystery plays of that period.

Narrator:

As mystery and miracle plays reached the height of their popularity in the fifteenth century, passion plays depicting the life of Jesus were becoming more common. The first passion play from the thirteenth century contained Latin texts and was sung, while the oldest passion play still performed today, the Oberammergau Passion Play which dates back to 1634, combines spoken text and music.

When popular playwrights such as Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare emerged in the mid sixteenth century, the popularity of drama as a religious medium again faded, though it still endures in the skits, illustrative stories, and seasonal dramatic plays performed in many churches today.

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Dr. James Abbington (Candler School of Theology, Emory University):

Recently I experienced probably one of the most exciting dramatic skits in a worship experience at Calvin College, where these young people depicted the whole life of Christ and Satan coming into the world bringing sin and Christ coming into the world and dying and coming back and redeeming them, and watching these young people act out this life of Christ. Yeah, we could have heard it in a sermon, we could have heard it in a song, but to see this dramatic rendition by these students, these young people who are differently abled, was just absolutely awesome. I mean, I think all of us struggled to keep the tears back, but it spoke to us in a way that as we sang about the life, the birth of Christ, the life of Christ and the death of Christ, it really made sense when we saw these children and the innocence of them really just act out this.

Mike Slaughter (Pastor, Ginghamburg Church):

It was a beautiful experience over in our youth center several years ago. We did it for, like, two straight years where on Holy Thursday, we built living stations of the cross. It was amazing to go through where you literally went into the Garden of Gethsemane. I remember we used clips at one point from Mel Gibson's film 'The Passion of the Christ.' We had built a village with donkeys and goats, of going through and picking out at the different marketing stalls what we would have for the Seder meal. So the children got to literally go through that kind of experience.

Narrator:

One of the most significant advances in the historical use of media in Christian worship was the invention of the printing press and the shift in significance from oral to written communication.

Dr. Tom Boomershine (Founder, Network of Biblical Storytellers):

The development of the printing press some 1,500 years later was the next major media transformation that happened in the history of Western civilization, and it was in that context that Protestantism developed. It was focused on the study and interpretation of the Bible in the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts and their interpretation, then, in sermons that became much more elaborate and much longer and much more grounded than in the original character of the Scriptures and of their meaning and their original context.

Narrator:

The widespread availability of Scripture led to a cultural shift among Christians of silent Bible reading. When the Scriptures were recited, the readings of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries were not performed as stories as in earlier centuries, but instead were often recited without emotion and expression to fit Enlightenment thinking.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, there has been another shift in communication known as the electronic media age, which is a hybrid blend of the oral and written communication styles of centuries past merged with modern technology.

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Dr. Tom Boomershine (Founder, Network of Biblical Storytellers):

We now live in the beginning of the most significant transformation in communication technology since the development of writing in the ancient world. The development of digital communication has now transformed the world of economics, business, education, and all of the basic systems of communication. In that context, now, a new paradigm of Biblical interpretation is forming that is organized around the performance of the scriptures and their being experienced both orally and in digital media as a re-presentation of the original character of the Scriptures and stories that were told. And so, what we have now in worship and in biblical interpretation, is in various contexts, we have all of those previous forms of, and ways of, interpreting the scriptures that were developed for earlier cultures in the Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant traditions, all of those are present in various ways.

Dr. James Abbington (Candler School of Theology, Emory University):

There will always be a Christian church because Christ is eternal. I just worry about those of us who lead worship, those of us who teach worship, and those of us who participate in worship, how we will either seize the great opportunity or how we will neglect and abandon the opportunities that God has given us. I am impressed, overwhelmed, and intimidated by technology, but it is certainly a tremendous tool and resource for the Christian church, and certainly the future of the church as it is now has really benefited by technological and media advancements.

Narrator:

The electronic media has revived storytelling in digital media as a predominant art form in Christian worship.

Fr. Robert Reed (Network Director, Catholic TV):

But it seems to me, and I speak only for the Catholic community, it seems to me that in the present age of electronic media that at least we as Catholic have somewhat dropped the ball, that there is no concerted effort to use electronic media most effectively is problematic. And so in our work at Catholic TV, that is for us the supreme goal. And this is not to say that there are not wonderful examples of the use of media within the church. But to use the tools that we have at our fingertips, in television and the internet, and to put those tools at the service of the church, that needs to be the goal. For us today, and for the future, the electronic media are like the papyrus and the paper upon which God's Word was recorded. The electronic media are like the canvas artists have used for painting, the stone that sculptors have carved, like the glass in the mosaic, the printing press. The electronic media are the means for us today to continue to transmit the Gospel message to every creature on Earth, and that is the mandate that Jesus gave to us.

Narrator:

The Jesus Film Project is just one example of how digital media, in this case, film, is revolutionizing how the story of Jesus is told to believers around the world.

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Jim Green (Executive Director, *The Jesus Film Project*):

The founding director of The Jesus Film, Paul Eshleman, put it very well. He said, ‘We’ve moved from preaching to printing to portraying.’ This is the portraying generation. You know, Jesus used stories. He called them parables and film lends itself to story. In fact, as you know, if you deal with real estate, they say ‘location, location, location.’ When you deal with film, it’s ‘story, story, story.’ It’s all about the story and so film is visual story because visual story is the medium that, really, people of the world today are totally engaged in. In fact, if you look at the figures, certainly in our country, over 120 films a year are being viewed by young people today. They’re making their moral choices, they’re making their life decisions based on what they see on film. The visuals draw people in to see the Word of God lived out in a real situation, and then as they hear the Word of God, God and the Holy Spirit takes it and uses it in their lives.

Narrator:

Technological advances have made it possible for people around the globe to view the film and hear the story of Jesus and His life, death, and resurrection.

Jim Green (Executive Director, *The Jesus Film Project*):

The Jesus Film has been used around the world in about 1,027 languages to date as really a tool for the whole body of Christ. Over 1,500 mission agencies and denominations are using the film primarily to reach out to people all around the world. All kinds of different methodologies have been used, from 16mm film showings out in jungles and the desert to theatre showings to Internet to iPods to DVDs, all kinds of things like this.

Narrator:

Equally impressive to its wide reach is the great impact the Jesus Film has had on its viewers.

Jim Green (Executive Director, *The Jesus Film Project*):

Certainly the film has become a tool, I would say, that many people in the body of Christ are using. Today we know of over 220 million people who have indicated a decision to follow Christ as a result of the film, and probably about six billion viewings of the film...probably on average a million people a day are watching the film and it's said that historically, about every four seconds someone decides to follow Jesus as a result of the film.

Narrator:

Television, radio, and the Internet have been other great influences on Christian worship in the digital media age.

Fr. Robert Reed (Network Director, Catholic TV):

Well, I direct a Catholic television network, so I certainly know how tremendous the impact of the media can have upon worship, upon our lives in an increasingly disconnected, yet actually, very connected world. The use of electronic media, be it television, radio, the Internet, and everything in between, should serve to connect people with Christ and with the church community, and that really needs to be the goal.

Narrator:

At first, electronic media was used on a large scale to facilitate a more meaningful worship experience.

Fr. Robert Reed (Network Director, Catholic TV):

Well, you know, at enormous gatherings of people, obviously the use of electronic media serves to connect people and to help them to be more a part of the worship experience. I think of large gatherings, large liturgies where Jumbotrons allow people who are far out from the action to be connected with what's happening and to feel much more a part of the experience. Certainly, for many years, public address systems have been used, and even for those who are hearing impaired, the use of electronic devices that transmit the spoken and sung word are very effective means to help people to worship better.

Narrator:

Now, as technology has become more available and affordable, digital elements are woven into the fabric of worship in many churches, even smaller congregations or parishes with limited resources.

Such was the case for three men who were leading worship at a men's retreat in 2005.

Gary Molander, Dave Wilkins and Jason Rowe began discussing the idea of partnering together to create resources for churches.

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Floodgate Productions:

We're in love with God and we want to communicate to other people what we've experienced in our life, and just really communicate that no one's ever too far gone, and that a relationship with Christ is just a wonderful, beautiful thing that will just change the core of who you are.

Narrator:

Out of this collaboration, Floodgate Productions was born. The company produces short films that reinforce the messages communicated as God's story is told through worship.

Floodgate Productions:

One of the biggest ways we feel we help churches with their worship service is to create media that helps provide a distraction free environment. We try to create things that help stir thoughts and ideas, give pastors a jumping off point for their sermon. We don't try to preach sermons in what we do. We try to just stir thoughts and let the pastor speak...Nobody knows their congregation better than the pastor and where they're at and what they're going through. And then we also try to create items that a worship leader can put into the music time to call people to worship and to direct our focus on God.

Narrator:

One of Floodgate's goals in producing media resources for the local church is to match the ease and speed of using modern technology with a spark of creativity and inspiration to produce meaningful worship in a variety of settings.

Floodgate Productions:

So you can actually go online and find a video that's perfect for your worship service and download it and literally play it right away. You just need an Internet connection and the ability to download a video and just play it. It's become so accessible, and I think we're entering a time where it's going to be even more accessible, maybe to small groups, maybe to Bible studies, maybe to home churches, and that kind of thing.

Narrator:

The films combine music and visuals to tell stories that engage viewers and draw them deeper into the worship experience.

Floodgate Productions:

The music and the picture and all the images, they kind of work together to really stir hearts and not manipulate emotions, but just really give people a place to connect and, especially in our society that's so heavy on cinema and movies and watching TV, it's something that's not only relatable but can really move people as well.

Narrator:

For Floodgate Productions, the ultimate measure of success is when the films create a focus on God through worship rather than on the technology itself.

A History of Christian Worship: Part 5 The Expression

Floodgate Productions:

I think the primary challenge in having media in the church is not to put our focus in the wrong place. We've got a lot of amazing new technologies that allow us to do some great things, but if we lose sight of the story and the message that needs to be told, and water that down, or tell something that's really not very compelling at all just because it's slick and uses the latest technology, then we've lost the point.

Narrator:

In fact, the temptation to embrace the medium rather than the message is very real and relevant for churches in the digital age.

Kim Miller (Creative Director, Ginghamburg Church):

The challenges for the church with media is not to become screen focused, not to become, thinking that is who we are, and to just come and worship and leave and not have that incarnation of Jesus being with us and us being with one another there and having that human aspect, that human and divine aspect to our worship.

Fr. Robert Reed (Network Director, Catholic TV):

The challenge constantly remains to encourage people to offer to God authentic worship. In other words, really nothing can take the place of being present at your local parish church, of being part of that community and worshipping together, if that's possible.

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Yes, I do believe that the media encourages community and belonging, particularly for those who are elderly or sick and are unable to connect with the church in any other way...I hear time and time again of people who, because they have watched Catholic TV, they've heard some word that helped them, they've seen the excitement, perhaps the enthusiasm on the face of a fellow believer, so that then they've been inspired to reconnect with the church community and their lives have been changed.

Narrator:

Another challenge for the electronic age church is how to remain competitive with the engaging and entertaining media forces that permeate every day life. There must be a balance between preserving the integrity of the message while adapting the worship style to fit today's media consumption culture.

David Neff (Editor, *Christianity Today*):

A preacher still needs to realize that every five to seven minutes, your typical television drama is interrupted by an even more entertaining commercial message, and you'd better not go on in some dry form as a preacher for twenty-five or thirty minutes without providing some variety. So maybe it does mean a joke, as long as it's a pertinent joke, or a story, as long as it's a pertinent story, or doing something that changes the pace frequently enough because people's attention spans have been shortened by this passive consumption of electronic media.

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Dr. Tom Boomershine (Founder, Network of Biblical Storytellers):

We all watch television, listen to the radio, work on computers all the time. And so it's important for the technology of that age, of this age, to become part of the worship of the community in this age. So what excites me about this is that this will, over time, make worship much more credible and meaningful for the children of the digital age. But that is a very controversial area now in the life of the church, and many see it as a selling out to the culture. It's interesting that that was the same charge that happened in earlier periods, and so I'm confident that with time, that we will find ways to make that both appropriate to the tradition and integral to this new global digital culture.

Narrator:

For the past two thousand years, the ways in which God's story has been expressed are as limitless as the boundaries of human imagination. From art and architecture to drama and media, the creative arts have shaped the history of civilization and have connected worshippers to their Creator in personal and significant ways. It is a connection that has, and will, endure throughout eternity as Christians boldly express the story of God for future generations.

Roll Credits, fade to black.