

Author: Paul F. Bosch [paulbosch31@gmail.com]

Series: Worship Workbench

Issue: Essay 193 + June, 2016

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FOUR REASONS why High Technology is out of place in Christian Worship

1 A ceiling-mounted screen and projector have suddenly appeared in the church where I attend. How did they get there? No matter. In any case, here they are. And I suppose I must learn to live with them.

2 I myself argued for the appropriateness of electronic projection possibilities in worship when I was younger.

3 But I have come to believe that High Technology has no place in Christian worship. Instead, Christian worship should take us back to *Primary Experience*.

4 Yes, of course: Even a candle, even a book, is a technology. But these are low tech: technologies of Primary Experience. Generations have lived without screens and projectors. No generation – including our own and including generations still to come – can live without candles or books.

5 First reason: Projectors and screens, and even PA systems, re-enforce the perception that worship is entertainment – the perception that coming to worship is like going to the multiplex. The audience is down here in the nave. Entertainment – or instruction or even inspiration! – is up there ahead of us and above us in the chancel.

6 But that perception is the death of Christian worship, as Danish Lutheran theologian Soren Kierkegaard warned us long ago. Christian worship is corporate. In Christian worship, every worshiper is “on stage”. Everyone is invited to play a part. You may not want to engage, but you

should feel invited “on stage”. Most of our church architecture betrays us in this respect: two-room spaces – nave and chancel – rather than a one-room space.

7 Second reason: Screens and projectors, and even PA systems, present you with the virtual, not with the real. What you see on the screen – what you hear through a PA system – is an electronic version of reality. It’s phony, a fake. I want the Real in worship, not the Virtual.

8 Here’s a parable: An old lady in a nursing home wants to see the Pope in person on his visit to Toronto. Her family and loved ones understandably try to talk her out of it. “If you try to go to downtown Toronto, there will be enormous crowds. You’ll have to stand all day. Why not stay at home and watch the whole thing on TV? You can see the Pope much better on TV, even close up...”

9 “Yes”, says the old lady. “But he can’t see me...”

10 Indeed.

11 Third reason: High Technology carries with it three basic problems, which can never – repeat, never – be resolved:

12 An undependable power source: What happens with your screen and projector – with your PA system – in a city-wide power failure? In a local power failure? When someone simply neglects to connect it correctly? A mentor of mine says: “Never trust anything you have to plug in...”

13 Undependable equipment: What happens when the equipment fails? When the plugs or bulbs or switches or wire connections fail?

15 Undependable human operators: What happens when the operator of the equipment fails? Falls asleep? Has a heart attack? Is simply poorly trained? Or just does not pay attention?

16 Fourth reason: The chief focus of a Christian worship space should be the four Holy and Irreplaceable Architectural Signs: Table (Altar), Ambo (Pulpit or Lectern), Font, and Sedilia (Seats of worship leaders). In Christian worship, nothing should distract an assembly’s attention from these four important Signs.

17 But moving images on a screen are incredibly seductive. We live in the Age of TV. Humans have trained themselves over the last several generations to watch any screen, even a tiny screen on a cell phone. If I put a screen in front of you, you cannot *not* look at it. It is almost an addiction.

18 All of the above is pretty much a minority opinion among Christians today. Many Christian churches are installing high tech PA systems and screens; “Your church is not modern without them!” Certainly many lovely, thoughtful, intelligent, well-intentioned Christian people will dispute much of what I say here.

19 But here’s a prophecy: One day soon I will not be the only voice critical of High Technology in worship.

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