

Author: Paul F. Bosch [ [paulbosch31@gmail.com](mailto:paulbosch31@gmail.com) ]  
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## A THEMATIC INDEX An Inventory of my Passions and Prejudices Over 25 YEARS

- 1 Faithful reader: Within a matter of months I will be celebrating a significant personal anniversary: Twenty-five years – a quarter of a century! – of these postings at <worship.ca>.
- 2 So I have lately been reminiscing, looking back over my own work. Reviewing my legacy, so to speak. Over the years, I've printed out every Essay, both sides of the paper, and had them coil-bound; I now have five volumes, each a half-inch thick! I'd love to see some of them published in a proper book, some day!
- 3 And I have asked myself: What passions (and, yes, prejudices!) keep re-appearing in these paragraphs? Are there particular themes and issues and topics that I can't let pass, in these postings? Are there specific songs that I keep singing?
- 4 Yes, there are. I suppose it's to be expected. Nobody can write 228 Essays over a quarter century without harping, again and again, on some specific strings, to change the figure.
- 5 So here they are. A catalog, an inventory of themes and passions that I have felt strongly about over the course of these years. You will probably recognize them all.
- 6 FIRST, I have been obsessed, over these years, with the conviction that there are no atheists. I've quoted John Calvin several times: "The human mind is an idol factory." Our human idols are many: Sports, sex, science, celebrity, patriotism, money. Despite all protestations to the contrary, I have come to believe that we're all religious, in the broadest sense of that term.

7 To defend this conviction, and to describe this universal religious impulse among homo sapiens, I've used my personal shorthand, and conjured up what I call The Four Cs of Religion: Creed, that is, your beliefs and values. Code, that is, your ethics and moral systems, how you live out your values. Cult, that is, how you ritualize the above. And even Constitution, the political shape, the institutional forms, you give to your allegiances.

8 And everybody's got 'em, those Four Cs! I take Martin Luther's definition of God from his *Small Catechism*: Whatever it is "you fear, love, and trust in" above all else: That's your God.

9 So that's a foundational, bed-rock conviction that has shaped and motivated these Essays through the years. Sample recent Essays, among others, that dwell on this topic: Essays 178, 195, 227 above.

10 Here's a SECOND persistent theme: A devotion to our magnificent catholic tradition in worship: See Essays 195, 197, 203 above.

11 That catholic – small c – tradition is devoted to what I have called the grand Ecumenical Consensus of the 'Sixties. You can find it in the documents of the Second Vatican Council (1963) of the Roman Catholic Church, and in the World Council of Churches' document *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (1982).

12 That Consensus proposes a four-fold shape or ordo for Christian worship: Gathering, Word, Meal, and Sending. Intercessions – prayers for the world and for our community – could be inserted after Word and before Meal to make it a five-fold ordo.

13 Weekly Sunday worship with this ordo is Standard Operating Procedure according to this Consensus. The worship space features four grand, irreplaceable, unambiguous architectural signs: Font, Ambo, Table / Altar, and Sedilia (seats of worship leaders).

14 This great, unprecedented Ecumenical Consensus prefers a one-room worship space to a two-room space (with nave and chancel, that is). The Table / Altar is free-standing. The Presiding Minister faces the people across it at the Meal.

15 Two-room churches – nave and chancel – send three unfortunate signals: They are A) Hierarchical (from the Greek: "Priests first"): All the holy stuff and holy people are way up there in the chancel with God. They are B) Presentational, like a theatre: We're an audience here in the nave being entertained by those folks up there in the chancel with the funny costumes. And they are C) conducive to Private, not corporate, worship: All you see are the backs of people's heads.

16 The Ecumenical Consensus I've harped about for 25 years maintains that Christian worship is post-literate. Worshippers should not have to read. We pay – and educate! – our worship leaders to be the literate ones.

17 There are many other aspects of our splendid catholic Tradition in worship. I list above, 11 to 16, only the most important.

18 Hence, here's a THIRD theme or passion or prejudice of mine over 25 years: A plea for comprehensive worship education in every parish. Mystagogy is the fancy English word from the Greek that describes it: "Initiating into the mysteries" of Christian worship. See Essays 184, 185, 186, 188, 212, 225 above.

19 Most Christian worshippers are woefully unaware of what they are doing in worship. Not to mention kids, youth, and the so-called seekers. Every parish should understand that reality and deal with it. A deliberate, constant, comprehensive program of worship education – liturgical literacy! – is a must in every parish.

20 In parish study groups, in parish newsletters, in print announcements in the guide-to-worship, in verbal announcements every Sunday: Parishioners will welcome knowing what they're doing. And the leaders' enthusiasm for their subject – for their vocation! – should shine through at every moment.

21 Most Christians today are ritually illiterate. They're Biblically illiterate and theologically illiterate as well. Educating the laity in these subjects is an on-going, unending, sacred responsibility in every parish!

22 Here's a FOURTH personal passion. For 25 years I've reminded readers that the arts speak: They are Media of Meaning. You cannot NOT utilize the arts in worship. You fail at your peril to take the arts into account in designing and leading Christian worship. If you don't use these prayers, these hymns, these vestments, this architectural arrangement, then you are surely simply using others.

23 Everything people do or make or wear or handle, every posture or position or gesture sends a signal about who you are and how you perceive what's happening at a given moment – in worship as in life! My plea through all these years has been: Be conscious of what signals you are sending, in this or that choice of options.

24 Architectural arrangement is a case in point. See paragraph 15 above. Your position as worship leader, relative to other worshippers. Your posture. Your gestures. Even your facial expression. All of these "speak". They are Media of Meaning. Essays 192, 226, 188 above.

25 A FIFTH favourite focus: I've probably belaboured among you my plea for a return to Primary Experience in worship. Essays 180, 185, 188, 198, 221 above.

26 Primary Experience suggests real bread, rather than individual wafers, and real alcoholic wine, rather than grape juice in individual communion glasses at the Holy Communion. It suggests copious amounts of water at a Baptism, rather than three dabs of moisture on a baby's brow. The ideal at Baptism: naked, and by immersion.

27 SIXTH and finally: A repeated warning against a dependence on High Technology in worship has been my constant prejudice, I'll admit it. And it's probably a Lost Cause as well. See Essays 193, 198, 205 above.

28 High Tech in worship subverts my fifth passion, Primary Experience, paragraphs 25-26 above. High Tech presents us with the Virtual, not the Real. I want my worship to be Real, a refuge from the Virtual. Even a Public Address system presents, to me, an intolerable assault on my sensibilities. If a worship space needs a PA system, the worship space is too big. Cathedrals excepted. But of course no parish church should be as big as a cathedral.

29 And of course, doing away with a PA system means worship leaders must be taught how to speak in public, how to project their voices, how to enunciate clearly. I admit, my absorbing passion – prejudice? – here is probably a Lost Cause.

30 Ceiling-mounted projectors and wall-mounted screens? Moving images on a screen are incredibly seductive. You cannot NOT watch them. And that looming screen directs worshippers' attention away from the Four Grand Architectural Signs essential to worship: See 13 above. And away from the faces of fellow worshippers, in whom Christ dwells.

31 Last but decidedly not least, I have argued ad nauseum that the expenses of High Tech could offend the poor.

32 There you have them. Six of my favourite harp-strings. You knew them all, right?

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