

The Praise and Worship Movement and its relation to culture – an exploration of new fields of research in Liturgical Studies

Marcel Barnard

1. Introduction: late modern liturgical renewal in Europe

The Praise and Worship Movement appears to be the most important liturgical renewal in European Protestantism.¹ Evangelical, Pentecostal and charismatic worship in independent, smaller or larger communities as well as within the established churches seems to be attractive to many Protestants. Within the limits of this article we use the container concept of ‘Praise and Worship’ to summarize the different ways of worship of evangelical, Pentecostal and charismatic churches and groups, – thus emphasizing their common characteristics and disregarding their differences. We borrow the use of this broad concept from the Northern-American liturgist Robb Redman.²

The history of the Praise and Worship Movement in the United States goes back to the eighteenth century, whereas in the Netherlands it only started at the beginning of the twentieth century. In America it has spread rapidly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; in the Netherlands the movement – originally for the greater part consisting of the Salvation Army, Baptists and ‘Free Evangelicals’ (*Vrij Evangelischen*) – remained comparatively small for a long time. The movement began to grow and became visible through the *Evangelische Omroep* (the Evangelical Broadcasting Company) from the 1960s.³ At the turn of the millennium it had developed into a movement that could no longer be denied. From the perspective of liturgical studies the movement was little or not reflected on in the Netherlands; the discipline focuses on the conventional churches and their liturgies, or on the dynamics of liturgy and rituality, but not on the ‘counter-movements’.⁴ Mainstream liturgical studies in the United States similarly concentrate on worship in the established churches, although some

¹ Cf. M. BARNARD: *Liturgie voorbij de Liturgische Beweging. Over ‘Praise and Worship’, Thomasvieringen, kerkdiensten in migrantenkerken en ritualiteit op het internet* (Zoetermeer 2006, forthcoming).

² R. REDMAN: *The Great Worship Awakening. Singing a New Song in the Postmodern Church* (San Francisco 2002) 22-46.

³ J. EIJNATTEN & F. VAN LIEBURG: *Nederlandse religiegeschiedenis* (Hilversum 2005) 358.

⁴ As an example we name P. OSKAMP & N. SCHUMAN (eds.): *De weg van de liturgie. Tradities, achtergronden, praktijk* (Zoetermeer 1998). It describes a so-called ‘free church’ – in fact a congregation within the established church using the methods of Willow Creek Community Church – in the beginning of the book, but further completely neglects it.

studies on liturgy have been written from an evangelical, sometimes critical, inner point of view.⁵ The notion of ‘newness’ is not absolute, due to the historical origins, developments and breakthroughs of the movement on both sides of the Atlantic. In the Netherlands it is to a certain degree a new movement, in the United States it is more deeply rooted in history and consequently in society. In Europe the importance of the movement is fairly new, both in numbers and in influence.

After formulating the research question of the article in the next section (2), we will describe the Praise and Worship Movement (3) and its liturgical characteristics (4). In the last section we will discuss its paradoxical relation to culture (5).

2. Research question and method

The Praise and Worship Movement can no longer be disregarded. This appeared to be very true at least in my professional life. For a long time I worked on liturgical renewal in the track of the Liturgical Movement, mainly as a professor in Liturgical Studies at Utrecht University and as chair of the Service Book Committee of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. In addition to my chair in Utrecht, I have held an honorary chair at the *Vrije Universiteit* Amsterdam since 2004. The theological faculty of that university houses various protestant denominations. Many students see themselves as ‘evangelical’, ‘Pentecostal’ or ‘charismatic’, in, or, more often, outside the established churches. I had to introduce them to Liturgical Studies, which compelled me to study evangelical and charismatic worship in greater detail and to formulate a position in the field of this liturgy. I supposed that liturgical renewal unto a high degree developed in the periphery of, or, more often, outside the established churches. During my research, it appeared that context was a key concept: whereas the Liturgical Movement has to be understood in its dialectical relation to modernity and the artistic movement of Modernism,⁶ current liturgical renewal is closely related to late modernity and has to be investigated in that context.

Focusing on the dynamic relation of liturgy and culture, I propose the following research question: How does the Praise and Worship Movement address culture? I expect to find that liturgy of the Praise and Worship Movement in our late modern days is to a high degree determined by the language of late modernity and its electronic communication infrastructure.

The research will be exploratory and tentative in nature. It signals tendencies and is an attempt at defining the outlines of a new field of research in liturgical studies.

⁵ REDMAN: *The great Worship Awakening*; S. MORGENTHALER: *Worship Evangelism. Inviting unbelievers into the Presence of God* (Michigan 1995).

⁶ BARNARD: *Liturgie voorbij de Liturgische Beweging* Part I, Ch. 2A.

The exploration of the fields of the Praise and Worship Movement requires a creative use of methods. We cannot rely any longer on official books, documents nor brochures, neither can we rely on the observations and descriptions of services performed in established churches only; we also have to investigate websites on the Internet, and at the same time have to observe worship meetings in more or less informal groups as well. The complex field also causes conceptual complexity. A ‘community’ of visitors of a specific website, chatting in the chat room from their own individual screen and keyboard, is completely different from a more or less incidental congregation coming together for a service in church or the public attendance of a reli-pop festival. Classical concepts like participation and communion are no longer adequate or need to be brought into a completely new semantic field. The fact that also established churches are influenced by the Praise and Worship Movement complicates the research object even further. In short, the field appears to be complex, diffuse and not unequivocal, and asks for new concepts and methods of scholarly research.

3. The Praise and Worship Movement – a short description

I will not broadly discuss definitions of ‘evangelical’, ‘Pentecostal’ and ‘charismatic’ worship in this article. I largely rely on Robb Redman’s descriptions in his book *The Great Worship Awakening. Singing a New Song in the Postmodern Church*. The book refers to the Northern-American circumstances and developments, but was nevertheless very helpful in my understanding of new late modern liturgical developments. It made clear what the Praise and Worship Movement in Europe refers to and where it obtained its methods. An advantage of the book is its focus on liturgy; within the context of this article we do not need a more or less complete history of the movement. First, we will summarize Redman’s sketch of the movement, after which we will add some remarks on Europe, focusing on the Netherlands.

Redman’s topic is the Praise and Worship Movement including evangelicals, Pentecostals and charismatics. In a sense, it is a container concept that intends to include various movements and ways of worship. As a heuristic concept it is nevertheless very useful, because the notion provides a perspective that characterizes certain forms of liturgy that are not so common to current scholars in liturgical studies. Rather than by eucharistic-sacramental or verbal-listening attitude, it is distinguished by a constant ‘flow’ of praise and worship (we will discuss the notion later). Praise and Worship liturgy has common qualities, which will serve us sufficiently in this article. It is even better, at least in relation to the European ecclesial practice, not to define evangelicalism, Pentecostalism and charismatics, because they often exist in merged shapes.

Evangelical worship is characterized by its being ‘a means to evangelistic ends’,⁷ and has to be seen in the tradition of the 18th- and 19th-century North-ern-American ‘camp meetings’ and ‘worship festivals’ as expressions of Methodist evangelism and revivalism (brothers Wesley and George Whitefield) that were brought to the east coast by Charles Finney in the middle of the nineteenth century, and that developed until now (father and son Schuller and their Crystal Cathedral, and Willow Creek Community Church).⁸ For a description of this kind of worship I point to Sally Morgenthaler’s *Worship Evangelism. Inviting unbelievers into the Presence of God*.⁹ The subtitle of her passionate book confirms that liturgy is a means to evangelism, but also implies a warning against it as being a collection of tools to attract people, while forgetting that the only aim and convincing aspect of liturgy is its being itself: worship to God.

The Pentecostal Movement started in 1906 in Los Angeles (Azusa Street Revival) and spread quickly all over the world. Its worship is

exuberant and expressive. Services are full of upbeat, hand-clapping songs, as well as slow, mournful songs of lament and longing. Pastors and song leaders encourage the congregation to dance and move to the music, and shouts of ‘Amen’ and ‘Hallelujah’ punctuate the service. The congregation kneels and weeps as well.¹⁰

In short, the emotional aspect is more important than the rational one. From the mid-twentieth century radio and television began to play an important part as means to mass evangelism.

The Pentecostal Movement penetrated the established churches as Charismatic Movement, which also formed independent churches. Redman names the personal experience of God through worship and prayer, and emphasis on miracle and healing as characteristics of Charismatic worship. A difference with Pentecostals is, that these consider speaking in tongues as necessary confirmation of the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Charismatics consider baptism with the Spirit as ‘the full gospel’, but do not believe that speaking in tongues is necessary.¹¹

Redman regards the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement as part of a larger Praise and Worship Movement, which also includes the Holiness Movement, the African-American Churches and the Methodist Revivalism discussed earlier. In the Holiness Movement worship is dependent on the actual advent of the Spirit and is being answered by weeping, laughing, shaking, fainting and speaking in tongues. In the African-American Churches, which go back to the time of slavery, worship is characterized by emotion and abundance, commu-

⁷ REDMAN: *The Great Worship Awakening* 7.

⁸ REDMAN: *The Great Worship Awakening* 5-9.

⁹ MORGENTHALER: *Worship Evangelism*.

¹⁰ REDMAN: *The Great Worship Awakening* 29.

¹¹ REDMAN: *The Great Worship Awakening* 29-34.

nity and participation. Belief is intuitive by nature and there is no distinction between the sacred and the secular domains.

Evangelicals and Charismatic Christians are the fastest growing group of Christians in the world, and they contribute strongly to the renewal of spiritual life, often outside the established churches, sometimes within. There are as many as 400 million evangelical Christians in the world at the moment; compared to the more than one billion Roman Catholics and about 350 million Protestants, they are the second largest group of Christian believers.

According to Robb Redman, the main difference between classical protestant worship and charismatic and Pentecostal worship is the way God is encountered: in classical protestant worship liturgy is mainly an *answer to* God, in the Praise and Worship Movement worship is mainly *meeting with* God, to be brought into the presence of God.

I will suggest, that Dutch Calvinism is open to evangelically oriented liturgy because of its strong emphasis on experience. Reformed worship in the Netherlands was strongly influenced by what is called the *Nadere Reformatie* ('Further Reformation'). The 'Further Reformation' is characterized by *Bevinding* ('Experience', viz. of God's grace in personal life). The *Bevinding* is evoked and expressed by means of ritual, for example, the non-rhythmic singing of the metrical Psalms on tunes of the Genevan Psalm-book. Within conservative reformed – and evangelical – circles the current project *Psalmen voor nu* (*Psalms for now*) is very popular, in which the psalms have been rewritten in a direct and simple language and set to music in a pop-style.¹² Van Eijnatten and Lieberg confirm in their description and analyses of the Dutch history of religion that the dogmatic differences between 'ecclesial right' and evangelical are small.¹³

4. Liturgical characteristics of the Praise and Worship Movement

In this section of our article we will characterize the Praise and Worship Movement from a practical perspective, as well as from the syntactic and semantic codes it uses.¹⁴

From a *practical* perspective, the present liturgical field is complex, multi-layered, differentiated and unequivocal. This also holds for the liturgy of the Praise

¹² R. VAN DEN BERG (ed.): *Psalmen voor nu. Totdat het veilig is. 16 psalmen* (Zoetermeer 2005³); IDEM: *Psalmen voor nu. Voor niemand bang* (Zoetermeer 2006). The project consists of books, cd-recordings and live concerts.

¹³ VAN EIJNATTEN & VAN LIEBURG: *Nederlandse religiegeschiedenis* 358.

¹⁴ We borrow this method from D. FOKKEMA & E. IBSCHE: *Modernist Conjectures. A Mainstream in European Literature 1910-1940* (Londen 1987) 30-47. See BARNARD: *Liturgie voorbij de Liturgische Beweging* for an explanation of the application of the method in Liturgical Studies.

and Worship Movement. Liturgical renewal in the track of the Praise and Worship Movement in our days, at least in Europe, does not generally use the established ecclesial infrastructure, but creates new independent churches and makes use of the worldwide late modern communication network. It has been suggested, that this requires a redefinition of church as ‘liquid church’ (which is in a sense a pendant of the church as body).¹⁵ Borderlines between ecclesial liturgy (for example in a congregation allied to the *Evangelisch Werkverband* – the Evangelical Working Alliance within the Protestant Church in the Netherlands),¹⁶ concert liturgy (praise concerts), Internet liturgy (praying by way of *flash*, see below) and telecommunication liturgy (sms-services – see below) are fluid. This also goes for the communities participating in these forms of Christian rituals. Individuality – of the participant behind his or her screen and keyboard – and mass – the public and worldwide nature of the Internet and the mass meetings with praise bands and popular worship leaders, like, in the Netherlands, the Youth Days of the Evangelical Broadcasting Company – are dualistic concepts in which the notion of ‘community’ has to be understood.

There are no longer clearly defined liturgical spaces and times, or well-known leaders of the movement, but we have to deal with a Christian ritual that is performed in worldwide networks and in independent groups and churches by whomever. There is no liturgical elite in the Praise and Worship Movement, but it is principally a popular movement (although it may be admitted that there is a new elite in the sense of the popular worship leader and of the company that produces worship music as well as the corporation that owns the digital networks). Influences from evangelicalism and charismatic spirituality blend with late modern emerging ritual, especially as it takes shape on the Internet, and on the other hand with established liturgy – in the Netherlands primarily with a re-invention of classical, 16th-century reformed liturgy, due to the conformity of reformed and evangelical spirituality that we explained before.

The semantic and syntactic codes of the Praise and Worship Movement are realized under complex conditions. There is an Evangelical Working Alliance within the Protestant Church in the Netherlands that has to be understood as part of a worldwide network of evangelical organisations. This network is shaped by and uses late modern communication media, like television and Internet, projector and cell-phone. It also uses modern artistic means like the pop band. The use of these means goes hand in hand with a non-traditional late modern terminology, like beam team, floor manager, video team, light team, praise concerts, ‘modern rock worship band’ and worship leaders. There are no service books, but compact discs – or ‘downloads’ – with titles like ‘Rock ‘n Roll Worship Circus’ and ‘Kisses from Heaven. Streams of Worship’.

¹⁵ P. WARD: *Liquid Church* (Peabody / Carlisle 2004).

¹⁶ www.evv.nl → welkom → introduction in English.

In Germany the sms service was invented.¹⁷ On the Internet the visitors can furnish their own chapel and paint it in the colours they like best, they can burn candles in their own chapel, on other websites they can attend short services and afterwards discuss these in the chat room.¹⁸ They can confess their sins on the Internet, create a memorial for a beloved deceased one on a digital cemetery,¹⁹ and pray by way of a 'flash'.²⁰

The following example of Internet liturgy will make clear that popular cyberspace worship asks for a redefinition of concepts, in this case of the concept of 'altar'. On the website of the *KRO*, a well-respected Roman Catholic Dutch broadcasting company, there is a page where one can build a personal digital altar, 'your sacred place on the internet'.²¹ The website shows that also the definition of 'altar' is dynamic. Before quoting the website, I will cite a description of 'altar' in Davies' *Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*. It says:

(...) the word means a place or structure where sacrifice is offered. In Christian worship it is associated with the chief act of Christian worship, the Lord's Supper, the eucharist, the holy communion or the mass.²²

The description of 'altar' on the website of the Roman Catholic broadcasting company in the Netherlands says:

An altar old fashioned? Not really! Look around and you see them everywhere. Places you create to feel good, with things and photographs you like to have with you. In your home, the garden, at your work, in the car. A place for remembering. A place to dwell upon, to fall silent. It is your own domain. Make your altar now!

The definition of altar is no longer that of the ecclesial elite. Instead the description is popular and secular. From this screen you are guided to the instruction page to build your own altar and to save it to the Internet. You can also share 'your sacred place' with a friend via an e-card.

Which *semantic* possibilities does the Praise and Worship Movement select from the wide range of possibilities and how does it extend, limit and redistribute the potential of meanings?²³ What hierarchy does it construct in meanings?

From a semantic perspective 'to be devoted disciples of Jesus Christ' ranks highly in the semantic possibilities that theology and language of faith offer.

¹⁷ www.sms.jesus.ch en www.heise.de/newsticker/meldung/16608.

¹⁸ www.shipoffools.com of www.cvj-m-bayern.de/jesusonline.

¹⁹ www.memorialplace.nl.

²⁰ www.mehr-als-du-glaubst.de → downloads → flash Liebesbrief.

²¹ <http://altaar.kro.nl>.

²² C.E. POCKNEE: 'Altar', in J.G. DAVIES (ed.): *A New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* 5s.

²³ FOKKEMA & IBSCH: *Modernist Conjectures* 32–34.

The expression is closely related to much used phrases like ‘the holy Spirit’, ‘authenticity of faith’ and ‘experience’. In short, the Praise and Worship Movement selects a subjective pneumatocentred gamma of meanings. In practice, it is difficult to discern this gamma of meanings from a gamma of psychological experiences. Pneumatocentrism and anthropocentrism are very closely related and often confused. The minister or worship leader is a more or less charismatic leader and does not hide himself or herself behind a fixed liturgical form. Worship leaders sometimes attain the status of a pop star – including a performance in a stadium. When Jesus is mentioned, he is referred to as Jesus, and less often as Christ. The movement is Jesus-centred, more than Christ-centred. Jesus is openly witnessed by the Praise and Worship Movement. In that sense, the movement fits in closely with the late modern notion of particularity that does not subsume the particular under the general, but starts from the particular.

Community is another important notion in the semantic field, but has to be understood in the duality of individual and mass. Reflections on Praise and Worship refer to ‘all in their own tongues’, but also of mass influencing by singing. Individual faith and personal dedication may be important, but mass meetings in stadiums and pop concert halls are the means the movement prefers. The duality of individual and mass is prominent on the Internet. Personal possibilities in cyberspace are immediately linked to central control and publicity.²⁴

The same holds for the notion of participation, which equally moves between the poles of individual and group participation. In incidental meetings in stadiums there is no community except momentarily. Tex Sample speaks of ‘spectacle worship’: ‘a total experience (that) takes place in the response of an audience to the multidimensional character of these electronic events’.²⁵ Spectacles and events are suitable ritual (or liturgical) forms for people who are shaped by and live in an electronic world, in which images, visual effects (e.g. light effects) and beat rhythm are essentials:

That is, when people are socially constructed, encoded, “wired”, formed by these practices, and when they then come to a spectacle, they participate in the enactment of an event that brings together not only the performance but the satisfaction of a range of yearnings that constitute who they basically are.²⁶

Pointing at *Live Aid* (1985) and *Live 8* (2005) – spectacles with the aim to reduce poverty and famine in Africa – he makes clear that the integrated experience of a spectacle unites people all over the world on the basis of a common

²⁴ J. VAN DIJK: *The Network Society. Social Aspects of New Media* (London / Thousand Oaks / New Delhi 2001² = De netwerkmaatschappij, Houten 1991) 221-223.

²⁵ T. SAMPLE: *The spectacle of worship in a wired world. Electronic culture and the gathered people of God* (Nashville 1998) 77.

²⁶ SAMPLE: *The spectacle of worship in a wired world* 78.

ethical aim, and, as a consequence, engages them in socio-political objectives.²⁷ Praise and Worship Services at the Youth Days of the Evangelical Broadcasting Company in the Netherlands are examples of spectacle worship, and consequently of the transmission of a cultural phenomenon to a Christian ritual shape.

From a *syntactic* perspective the liturgical language and acts of Praise and Worship are – not surprisingly – characterized by the dominance of ‘praise and worship’. Liturgy is primarily performed in a ‘praise modus’. It is not a coincidence that the liturgy itself is called Praise and Worship; there is a ‘worship leader’ and the music is performed by a ‘praise band’ and a ‘worship choir’.

Praise is expressed with the help of the arts, principally music. The Praise and Worship Movement did not ‘invent’ a musical style of its own; there is no difference between *musica sacra* and *musica profana*, between popular music and church music. All instruments are used, but preferably contemporary instruments like the electric guitar, percussion and keyboard. The popular beat rhythm is important and songs are composed in the musical idiom of pop music. In short, the popular is preferred to the aesthetics of ‘high culture’, and musicians and worship leaders are sometimes critical of the *musica sacra* that the Liturgical Movement (re)invented.²⁸

Except during preaching the music never stops: there is a constant ‘flow’ of music and prayers are said in a ‘voice-over’. Silence is no highly esteemed principle in Praise and Worship services:

Stop and start moments need to be eliminated. The service will be designed to flow from one point to the next (...) Moreover, music will be virtually continuous throughout the service, though silence can be very important. Prayers, litanies, and responses can be done as voice-overs and they can be sung. The flow of the mood of the service can be suggested by the movement of the music, especially in transitions.²⁹

The syntax of the Praise and Worship Movement is not only organised verbally. The visual and iconic, or, as Tex Sample says, the convergence of image, sound as beat, and visualisation are important.³⁰ Projector and screen, and sometimes even the display of the cell phone, have a central function in the meeting hall,

²⁷ SAMPLE: *The spectacle of worship in a wired world* 74.

²⁸ I think most of all of the Gregorian chant that was reinvented from the middle of the 19th century (Solesmes), but also – in the Netherlands – of the *Liedboek voor de Kerken* (The Hague 1973), and its musical idiom. For a critical reaction: C. VAN SETTEN: ‘Op hoge toon. De liederencultuur van de evangelische beweging’, in H. ESBACH (ed.): *Vurig verlangen. Evangelische vernieuwing in de traditionele kerken* (Zoetermeer 1996) 114-133, 121s.

²⁹ SAMPLE: *The spectacle of worship in a wired world* 112.

³⁰ SAMPLE: *The spectacle of worship in a wired world* 78.

stadium or church. The multi-layered, open, multi-interpretable symbolic and sacramental language of the Liturgical Movement is replaced by a simple and direct language that is communicated in popular songs and often in 'one-liners' via the projector on the screen. The altar is replaced by the projector. On the Internet a service via sms was announced as follows: 'God and the world in 160 tokens' (which is the maximum number of tokens an sms-message can contain). Of course with sms and by chatting on the Internet people can add their own contributions to the communication networks. Nevertheless, the possibilities of a medium-influenced language (the medium is the message!, as Marshall McLuhan said): a 'one-liner' necessarily is a reduction of a complicated truth – 'Jesus saves!' – which may or may not be consumed, whereas a multi-layered and multi-interpretable symbolic language asks for a reaction of contemplation and interpretation (individually or in groups).

Finally, the syntax of the Praise and Worship Movement is characterised by an informal, improvised and extemporized language, opposed to the formal and well-considered language of the liturgy of the established churches and their service books. The close textual organisation and fixed liturgical forms of the established churches and of the Liturgical Movement reflect the unity of the church as the earthly body of Christ. The free textual organisation of new liturgical forms reflects a 'liquid church', a 'network church' or a broad religiosity that is developing separately from the church.

5. The Praise and Worship Movement and its relation to culture

Overlooking the field that we have sketched, I will draw some provisional conclusions. The code of the liturgical renewal as it gets shape in the Evangelical and Charismatic circles in Europe fits in closely with contemporary culture. Liturgy according to the Praise and Worship Movement is highly contextualised. It takes up contemporary communication modes and contemporary art forms. It does not purposely organize these modes and forms in its own way. This holds for the music and language that is being used. Evangelical Christians take up modern music like rock and pop; language that is being used is not principally sacred. The Praise and Worship Movement engages itself in dominant values of our late modern times such as particularity, consumer behaviour, individualism, mass behaviour, image, visualisation, the iconic and beat rhythm. In that sense, the liturgy of the Praise and Worship Movement represents a 'culture Christendom' or even a late modern *Kulturprotestantismus*.

Marcel Barnard (1957) is kerkelijk hoogleraar liturgiek bij de Universiteit Utrecht vanwege de Protestantse Kerk in Nederland en bijzonder hoogleraar liturgiewetenschap aan de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

Adres: Lokhorststraat 29, 2311 TA Leiden. <mbarnard@theo.uu.nl>