

# AN INCARNATIONAL ENGAGED WORSHIP AND SPIRITUALITY<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Modern culture is sick with secularism resulting in a growing recognition permeating our culture that all life is at root spiritual. Whilst not necessarily recognised in Christian terms, there is a growing awareness and craving for spirituality. People are turning to exotic cultures and esoteric practices in search of intimacy — a desire to experience human love and trust, meaning and purpose; and transcendence — recognition of the divine. Through developing a theology of spirituality and worship this article attempts to define a practical theological theory for worship and spirituality. Worship and spirituality are incarnational engaged lifestyles that give voice to the nature, character and will of God and are reflected in the Christian's human activities of adoration to God and action in the world. This incarnational engaged approach, expressed in adoration and action, provides intimacy and access to the transcendent, and replaces the religiosity and secularisation in the Church with a message of love and hope.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The hypothesis for this study can be stated as follows: The Christian's lifestyle and witness in a postmodern world will depend on the definition and practice of worship and spirituality. An incarnational engaged approach to worship and spirituality results in a praxis-orientated apologetic being presented to a postmodern world (The New Age).<sup>2</sup>

The term "apologetic" implies a defence, argument, or an explanation of the Christian faith. The Christian desires to defend the truths that Christ is the Son of God and the Bible is the Word of God. A praxis-orientated apologetic must champion, justify, and vindicate the belief system of the Church and the faith system of the

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Christian. It should reveal how Christianity is able to make sense of all human experiences. An apologetic must build a bridge that will allow individuals to move from unbelief to faith.

In a postmodern world of no absolutes and where the interest in spirituality is growing,<sup>3</sup> the Church needs to ensure it practises a relevant and contemporary spirituality to fulfil its commission as reflected in Mt 28. This study proceeds from the assumption that in worship the spirituality of a person/Church is both formed and revealed. Worship, as a way of life, is dependent on the way in which spirituality is defined and practised.

The conclusions of this study will show that ultimately, spirituality means living the Christian faith; and that worship entails adoration of God and action expressed in loving one's neighbour. Worship, spirituality, and the Christian faith become synonyms for each other.

## 2. SPIRITUALITY IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT

The foundation of any Old Testament spirituality is God (Snyman 1997:377). In Exodus 3:14-15 God reveals Himself as 'I am who I am.' This means that God is the always present God and an Old Testament spirituality is founded on the conviction that all life is lived in the 'voortdurende teenwoordigheid van God' (Snyman 1997:378) (the continuous presence of God). The Old Testament reveals a spirituality that has 'Yahweh' existing and involved in all aspects of life.

Experience of the presence of God is linked to obedience to God. Obedience is linked to gratitude for salvation and all that God has done in the past. Religiosity (legalistic conceptualisation of the Law) was the one sin that Israel often seemed to fall in. In Isaiah 58 God warns Israel that they have kept the Law legalistically but have missed the substance of the Law. God's emphasis and requirements

3 In his book on Jesus and postmodernism Breech (1989) gives new meaning to spirituality.

were focussed on the inner attitude of the heart of the people and sincere acceptance of the Law as a guide for life (Snyman 1997:379).

Psalms 119 shows how, in a sense, God became incarnate in the Law. Deuteronomy 11:18-25 speaks of a desire to see the Law filling the hearts and minds of its readers. Barton speaks of a 'Torah-mysticism' that involved keeping the Law, meditating on the Law and studying the Law (Barton 1985:57). Gratitude for salvation was to motivate obedience to God's Law in concrete practical ways in daily life as they lived in the presence of God (Snyman 1997:379).

The New Testament develops this and teaches that ultimately the test of spirituality is conformity of heart and life with the confession and character of Jesus as Lord (1 Cor 12:3). There is a development in the understanding and the practice of spirituality from the Old to the New Testament. This is seen in God moving from living in the temple to residing in the hearts of His people. The *coram Deo* (living in the presence of God) is now founded on Matthew 1:23 where Jesus is called Immanuel (God with us) and 28:20 where Jesus says to His disciples "I am with you always, to the very end of the age." The guarantee of Christian spirituality is the presence and power of God given through the presence and operation of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer (resulting in obedience and conformity with God's revealed will).

Torah-mysticism involved ensuring the presence of God by the keeping of the Law. By the time of Jesus' ministry, the Jews had accumulated hundreds of laws. The question posed to Jesus in Mark 12:28 as to which commandment was the most important might have provoked controversy among these groups, but Jesus' answer summarised all of God's laws. Jesus reduced God's law to two simple principles: love God and love others (Mk 12:30-31). If one loves God completely and cares for others as one cares for oneself, one has fulfilled the intent of the Ten Commandments and the other laws of the Old Testament. These two commandments summarise all God's laws. They are the substance and foundation of the Christian's life. They should rule his/her thoughts, discussions, and actions. These two laws are linked in a subtle manner, as if the first can only be fulfilled by fulfilling the second.

These commandments impose infinite and undefinable obligations (Jones 1985:66). They cannot be fulfilled completely and represent aspirations as well as commandments aimed at perfection in love and mercy comparable only to that of God Himself (Mt 5:48; Lk 6:36).

In the autobiographical passage of Philippians 3:3ff., Paul contrasts his former Jewish life of legal correctitude with his new life in Christ. Previously his emphasis was on 'confidence in the flesh', i.e. religious effort. Paul probably defined spirituality in terms of his fulfilment of duties and the level of his human activities. He could boast of impressive credentials, upbringing, family background, activity and morality, but his conversion was based not on what he had done, but on God's grace.

To know Jesus Christ as Lord should be the Christian's ultimate goal and priority. Paul gave up everything in order to know Christ and his resurrection power. This implies that in order to experience the power and presence of Jesus fully, Christians have to make sacrifices. The power that raised Christ from the dead will help them live morally renewed and regenerated lives. In order to walk in newness of life, they must also die to themselves, their achievements, and sin. Their objective is to become all that Christ has in mind for them.

### 3. A THEOLOGY OF SPIRITUALITY AND WORSHIP (ROMANS 12:1-2 AND HEBREWS 13:15-16)

#### 3.1 Defining spirituality

Jesus Christ had to conform to the pattern of all human nature, which must achieve fulfilment through self-emptying, as the grain of wheat must die if it is to be fruitful (Jn 12:24). If Christians regard the life of Christ as the ideal they should strive for, and believe that they share in that life, then it is not difficult to argue that Jesus' life reflects a life of self-giving and that therefore so should the Christian's. The incarnation of Jesus is the most spectacular instance of cultural identification in the history of mankind. Jesus, the Son of

God, entered humanity's world, emptied Himself of His glory, took on human nature, lived human life, endured human temptations, experienced human sorrows, bore humanity's sins and died their death. He made friends with social outcasts and penetrated humankind's humanness. He humbled himself to serve. Jesus' worship and spirituality reflects an incarnational, engaged approach.

The essential theme of the Bible is God's purpose to call out a people for Himself, set apart from the world to obey Him. Nygren (1982:734) writes:

The Christian is set between God and his neighbour. In faith he receives God's love, in love he passes it on to his neighbour. Christian love is, so to speak, the extension of God's love.

To live a life that is pleasing to God, that fulfils God's purpose, requires deep experience of God's presence within Christians.

For many people spirituality means some mysterious and self-contained activity, a secret that can be broken into by the study and practice of some spiritual techniques. Christian spirituality concerns and embraces the whole life. Spirituality is the Christian life. How you define Christian life is how you define spirituality. How spiritual a person is, is determined by the extent to which he/she lives his/her life according to God's will and purpose. There is new birth (justification) and then there is the Christian life to be lived. This is the area of sanctification (from new birth until we die or Jesus comes).

To live a spiritual life does not comprise a list of external things one must do or refrain from. We do not come to true spirituality or the true Christian life by keeping a list. True spirituality is a lived, moment by moment, practice of the Christian life. Life is lived only one moment at a time and we cannot live the Christian life in our own strength at this moment in time (Schaeffer 1972:104-105). In believing God's promises, we apply them — the present meaning of the work of Christ for the Christian — for and at this moment. The Holy Spirit brings forth His fruit through us, at this moment.

Justification deals with the Christian's guilt, and with one's sin once and for all. Sanctification deals with the problem of the power and continuation of sin in one's life as one lives moment by moment.

In simple language, this means that positionally one is saved but experientially one is being saved. This is the practical effect of the true Christian life or true spirituality.

As Schaeffer (1972:107) writes, the solution for true spirituality is

being cast up into the moment by moment communion, personal communion, with God Himself; and letting Christ's truth flow through me through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

He continues:

To believe Him, not just when I accept Christ as Savior, but every moment, one moment at a time, this is the Christian life, and this is true spirituality.

True spirituality is discovering and understanding the meaning of the work of Christ, the meaning of the blood of Christ, moment by moment in one's life after becoming a Christian. It is the lived experience of Christian belief and faith in both general and specialised forms. Spirituality is the reaction that the Christian's belief system arouses in religious consciousness and practice. By virtue of the reality that the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian, the Triune God is at work in the Christian's life moment by moment. Positionally one is saved but experientially one is being saved.

Humans are either growing spiritually (in relationship and fellowship with God) or becoming spiritually more dead. One can describe and define a person's spirituality by their awareness and response to God (relationship and fellowship). Spirituality is the human response to God's call to a relationship with Him. It can be believed that all human beings have a deep yearning and longing for spirituality, for finding meaning and purpose, for discovering one's roots as humans. Jung was correct in speaking about a 'collective consciousness' or 'archetypal memory' in all humanity. This archetypal memory can be understood as the image of God that resides in all human beings and longs for relationship, self-transcendence, and meaning. If all persons are created spiritual beings then the spiritual quest is a quest for self-discovery. One must warn against prescribed spirituality. The spiritual pilgrimage of each

person must be a personal response to the deep inner call for self-transcendent surrender and service.

Miroslav Volf (1993:203-211) describes the role played by Martin Luther in overcoming the medieval bias in favour of the contemplative life. The monastic understanding of the relation between the life of contemplation (*vita contemplativa*) and the life of action (*vita activa*) involved a false dichotomy. The monastic understanding is rooted in the Greek philosophical tradition. Contemplation of the order of things and its divine origin was considered the activity of the divine in human beings, and the highest possible human activity. Practical involvement in the world was important, but inferior to contemplation. The value of secular work lay in its making the contemplation of God possible. Luther overcame this medieval bias. He believed that all Christians have a twofold vocation. One of these he described as spiritual. It consists of reaction to the call of God coming to us through the proclamation of the Gospel to enter the Kingdom of God. The other vocation he called external. This is the reaction to the call of God to serve God and one's fellow human beings in this world.

### 3.2 Romans 12:1-2 — the basis of worship

There is a link between Paul's dogmatic and ethical teaching (Barrett 1987:230). The first eleven chapters of Romans make it very clear that the life that is promised for the man who is righteous by faith must be a life of obedience to God. There is an obedience of thought and attitude, of word and deed that has to be lived out in the 'concrete situation of human existence' (Cranfield 1985:292).

Paul never taught doctrine simply in order that people might acquire knowledge of it (Stott 1994:317). Theology was taught so that it might be translated into practice. This can be called the ethical admonition of Paul (Barth 1968:424 and Achtemeier 1985:194).

Verses 1-2 reflect a call to radical commitment. Christians may engage in a great deal of doctrinal study and have a developed doxology, but what are the implications thereof for their lifestyle?

The grace of God demands that all Christians present the totality of who they are 'unto obedience', and yield themselves as servants.

Worship and theology are a composite that must never be separated. Worship without theology is sentimental and weak. Theology without worship is cold and dead. Worship must be grounded in the knowledge and love of God or it is not true worship. Theology must lead to the worship of God in Christ or it is both false and harmful (Segler 1967:57). Stauffer (1955:88) declares:

Theology is doxology or it is nothing at all.

### 3.3 The character of worship

In Romans 12:1-2 the thought of sacrifice has been transported across a double line — from cultic ritual to everyday life, from an epoch characterised by daily offering of animals to one characterised by a whole-person commitment lived out in daily existence (Dunn 1988:710). Volf (1993:204) explains this as Paul transporting the notion of worship from cultic ritual to everyday life so that

there is no space in which worship should not take place, no time when it should not occur and no activity through which it should not happen.

The sacrificial system of the Old Testament is a system of the past. In the New Testament, the perfect, once-and-for-all sacrifice has been made. However, there is still a New Testament sacrificial system. This sacrifice consists of Christians offering themselves in the whole of their concrete lives (Cranfield 1985:294). Being a Christian implies living a life of sacrifice, a life of presentation, making a gift of your life to God. The image that Paul uses combines ethical and cultic thought in a powerful way. Christians must place their lives entirely in God's service and under His rule.

To help understand that this will never be accomplished in one's own strength one needs to hear Barth (1968:430) on this matter. He says:

In point of fact, it is grace alone that is competent to provide man with a truly ethical disturbance; and if grace is to perform this function, it must be treated as covering the whole field of human

life, and must be permitted to make that absolute assault upon men without which ethics are completely meaningless.

For Barth “sacrificing your bodies” is defined as primary ethical action, and secondary moral behaviour can be defined as living a life that is holy and acceptable to God.

Worship that is consonant with the truth of the Gospel, is indeed nothing less than the offering of one’s whole self in the course of one’s concrete living, in one’s inward thoughts, feelings and aspirations, but also in one’s words and deeds. Christians need to urgently learn that real worship is not the offering of liturgy to God. It is not something that is transacted in the Church, but something which sees the whole world as the temple of God. Ralph Martin’s definition of worship (1982:4) as “the dramatic celebration of God in His supreme worth in such a manner that His ‘worthiness’ becomes the norm and inspiration of human living” quite adequately summarises this truth.

#### 3.4 Hebrews 13:15-16: Adoration and action

Christians can offer two sacrifices to God. Firstly, they can offer a “sacrifice of praise” to God. A thanks offering was more acceptable to God than a sin-offering, for when a man offered a sin-offering, he was trying to get something for himself, while a thanks-offering was the unconditional offering of the grateful heart. The sacrifice of gratitude is one that all should bring. This is adoration.

In verse 15 the author teaches on one of the most powerful dynamics of Christian life. When discouragement, fatigue, and negative circumstances hound us moment by moment and day by day, the mature Christian discovers that praise both produces and releases energy to live victoriously despite the circumstances.

Secondly, a Christian can offer a sacrifice of “to do good and share with others” (Hebrews 13:15-16). This is action. The Old Testament is absolutely unequivocal about the response required by God. Micah 6:7 and Isaiah 58 reveal a God who requires His people to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with God. It is of no value to keep the Law legalistically but miss the substance of the Law. God’s emphasis and requirements are focussed on the inner attitude of the

heart of the people. It is from the inner attitudes that love and good works, adoration and action will flow.

The response of praise and the works of love are the only appropriate sacrifices remaining to the redeemed community. The worship God requires of those who have experienced His saving grace, is a responsive worship. Christians should respond to God's mercy and grace with sacrifices of praise and acts of goodness and generosity. Sacrifices such as these please God and in these sacrifices, His will is done. Through such sacrifice God is truly worshipped.

The commandments of God are summed up in two great commandments (Mark 12:30-31). "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." Is this not the same as Hebrews 13:15: "...continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise"? In addition, is the second great commandment "love your neighbour as yourself", not the same as Hebrews 13:16: "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased"? The two great commandments and the two requirements of worship highlighted by the author of Hebrews belong inseparably together.

Sanctimonious participation in the outward forms of worship is no substitute for a heart that is right with God and a life lived totally to His praise; it is no substitute for a compassionate concern for one's fellow men. The Christian is called to offer a sacrifice of praise to God, a sacrifice of unashamed public worship and a sacrifice of compassionate service to his/her fellow human beings (including generous giving of time, effort, and money). The good works are never the reason for our salvation, but they are the proof of it. The Christian was created for good works (Heb 9:14; Eph 2:10) and without these there is every reason to doubt the validity of his/her claim of salvation.

### 3.5 Defining worship as the purpose of life

All aspects of a life lived for God are lived in an attitude of worship. Moule (1988:77) says:

Worship is work. But, conversely, all work done and all life lived for God's sake is, in essence, worship.

Ultimately, life has no other purpose than to be rendered up to God in adoration and action out of gratitude. It is obvious that worship directed towards a God in another world is problematic for people who live in the real world — one that they can see and touch. Christians need to redefine the meaning of worship in a way that reflects its essential theological dimension, yet relates its practice to the concerns and interests of people in their world of reality. It makes no sense to people to speak of God's world out there when the real world is present here on this earth.

Worship is the believer's response of all that he is — mind, emotions, will and body, — to all that God is and says and does. This response has its mystical side in subjective experience, and its practical side in objective obedience to God's revealed truth. Worship is the human response to divine revelation. The Christian ascribes praise to God and proclaims His acts of creation and salvation. Consequently, the origin of worship of God is God's acts in the world. Of all the words used in the New Testament to emphasise the Christian's response or activity in worship, the most common are *diakonia*, *leitourgia*, and *latreia*. Kittel and Friedrich (1985) describe these words as "service", "liturgy", and "worship" respectively. These are all human activities. This implies that worship involves, and is experienced through, the activity Christians perform, and it involves the whole person — mind, body, will and emotions.

The result of true worship are personal benefits that flow out of worshipping God, and everything the Christian is and does will flow out from worship. The Christian's life is either fashioned by pressure from without or transformed by power from within. The difference is — worship. Martin (1994:14) says something similar:

...while worship is directed primarily towards God, it fits and equips God's Church to be the agent by which His will is done on earth and through which the Church's prayers for the world are largely answered.

Worship does prepare Christians to be Christ's servants in this world. They discover their 'personhood' in worship and become equipped to be Christ's stewards to all of human existence.

True worship will inform Christians of their understanding of all they believe concerning God and His design and purpose for their lives. Worship is a lifestyle. It consists of both, joyful praise of God and obedient service to God. Volf (1993:207) says:

...authentic Christian worship takes place in a rhythm of adoration and action.

Worship is not only action. No one can serve like a frustrated Christian who is trying to respond to the calling of God through activity, programs, ministry or Christian service. Christians are created to be God's children, to enjoy God's presence, to have fellowship with Jesus Christ through faith. Adoration feeds and nurtures this relationship. Yet, adoration of God is not the Christian's crowning goal. The world is God's creation. It is the object of God's plan of redemption. It is not possible to worship God and trample one's neighbour at the same time. Volf (1993:208) very effectively sums up why worship can never be an event taking place simply between the naked soul and its God. He says that worship

...must include active striving to bring the eschatological new creation to bear on this world through proclamation of the good news, nurture of the community of faith and socio-economic action. Fellowship with God is not possible without cooperation with God in this world; indeed cooperation with God is a dimension of fellowship with God.

Romans 12:1 and Hebrews 13:15-16 are backed up by the teaching of both the Old and New Testaments. Adoration and action are both essential. You cannot have one without the other. The purpose of action is never relegated to being only a means to provide material support for adoration. Similarly, adoration is not only to provide strength for action.

The place and time for adoration is not seclusion as taught by some of the Church's spiritual traditions. When Scripture talks of going to a secret place (Mt 6:6), it is not a sacred place. It is what Moule (1989:78) refers to as a 'specific time and place.' It implies a momentary cessation of worldly activity. Many Church traditions regarded meditation as adoration and thus withdrew from society to concentrate on contemplation (meditation on God, His works, or

Scripture is a presupposition of adoration but can not be called worship in terms of the understanding developed in this study).

Contemplation and or adoration alone is however not suitable as the primary means of relating to God. Christian exhortation (contemplation/meditation) and adoration never take place in isolation from the world because God is active in the world. Together, they form an interdependency, a circle in a continuous flow. Adoration leads to action in the world which, in turn, leads to adoration of God. One is a sacrifice of praise and the other is a sacrifice of good works. Adoration is pure worship in the narrow sense. Jesus introduced a broader understanding of pure worship by incarnating (revealing) the Father in His own person (Harrison 1992:1192-1193). This is the incarnational engaged approach to worship and spirituality that I am arguing for.

The Church is a worshipping community called into being by God. 1 Peter 2:5 says that we are to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. Worship is a lifestyle of sacrifice — of adoration and action.

Authentic worship must both form and express the relation of human beings to God. Worship as a lifestyle is defined as a Christian life or Christian spirituality that consists of the interdependent human activities of adoration and action practised moment by moment. The distinction between adoration and action is between two forms of human activity — one directed at God, and one towards the world.

#### 4. PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL THEORY FOR SPIRITUALITY AND WORSHIP

The hypothesis of this study is that the Christian's lifestyle and witness in a postmodern world will depend on the definition and practice of worship and spirituality.

Volf (1993:211) sees worship as something human beings owe God. In worship they are the givers, and God is the receiver. Yet worship does give something concrete and tangible back to the worshipper. Christians worshipping in spirit and truth are cared for and nurtured by the very nature of worship, because it creates and

sustains a matrix within which both the Christian's individuality and sociality can grow. This matrix of individuality and sociality results from the intimacy in worship as adoration which comes from the Christian's own inner self being touched by the beauty of God. As that inner self encounters the universality of God, Christians are faced with issues of urgent and universal importance for the future of humanity (Green 1987:132-139).

Worship is adoration the Christian gives to God, and this worship gives back to the Christian meaning, a purpose, a sense of value, and a task to accomplish.

Worship must be seen and experienced as a continuation of and to the salvation event. It has the effect of changing the Christian's life, forming him/her into the new creation, of giving shape to the Christian world view and of determining Christians patterns of ethical and moral behaviour. Christian's worship and spirituality must result in actions that give voice to the nature and will of God. The understanding that worship as adoration must give rise to actions that give voice to the nature and will of God can be called an incarnational, engaged worship and spirituality.

## 5. SUMMARY

Old Testament spirituality reveals a God existing and involved in all aspects of Israel's life. Experience of the presence of God is linked to obedience to God. Obedience is linked to gratitude for salvation and all that God has done in the past.

The New Testament develops this and teaches that ultimately the test of spirituality is conformity of heart and life with the confession and character of Jesus as Lord (1 Cor 12:3). The development in the understanding and practice of spirituality from the Old to the New Testament is seen in God moving from living in the temple to residing in the hearts of His people. The *coram Deo* (living in the presence of God) is now founded on Matthew 1:23 where Jesus is called Immanuel (God with us) and 28:20 where Jesus says to His disciples "I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The guarantee of Christian spirituality is the presence and power of God given through the presence and operation of the Holy Spirit

in the life of the believer (resulting in obedience and conformity with God's revealed will). True spirituality is discovering and understanding the meaning of the work of Christ, the meaning of the blood of Christ, moment by moment in one's life after becoming a Christian. It is the lived experience of Christian belief (the lived experience is the Christian faith) in both general and specialised forms. Spirituality is the reaction that the Christian's belief system arouses in religious consciousness and practice.

The exposition of Romans 12:1 and Hebrews 13:15-16 revealed that worship is a lifestyle defined as a Christian life or Christian spirituality consisting of the interdependent human activities of adoration and action. The distinction between adoration and action is between two forms of human activity — one directed at God, and one towards the world. Conformity of heart and life with the confession and character of Jesus Christ is true spirituality and worship.

Worship must be seen and experienced as a continuation of and to the salvation event; it has the effect of changing the Christian's life, forming him/her into the new creation, of giving shape to the Christian's Biblical world view, and of determining Christians' patterns of ethical and moral behaviour.

Worship and spirituality are lifestyles. It is not possible to be prescriptive with regard to these lifestyles as I recognise the impact of culture, upbringing and Church traditions on the Christian. Yet, there is a need for the development of a holistic spirituality — a spirituality that integrates the Christian's experiences of God, in relation to themselves and the postmodern world they live in. The experience of the Divine must influence the way Christians relate to all spheres of reality.

Worship and spirituality can be broadly defined as the relationship between the whole person and a holy God. It is the lived experience of Christian belief (the Christian faith) in both general and specialised forms.

The religiosity and secularisation of the Church must be replaced with a message of love and hope ministered through the supernatural power of an incarnational and engaged worship and spirituality. This

is not an abstract, sweeping, pious, or poetical love of sentiment, utterance, or conscience. This love is an abandonment of selfishness, and the will to practice self-sacrifice; it is practical, specific, involving courageous deeds where needed in this world and at this moment.

The Christian's worship and spirituality must result in actions that give voice to the nature, character, and will of God. This can be called an incarnational, engaged worship and spirituality.

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