

The Pronouns of Worship

Written by Calvin Fox

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As often stated by me and many others, Worship is directed toward God. Worship involves offering to God our praise and thanksgiving. And asking Him for His forgiveness because we transgress His Law. We intercede with Him for others and petition Him for ourselves. All this is ostensibly why we assemble in church on Sunday mornings.

So what pronoun do we use? First person, Second or Third? i.e.- I, You, He? and should we use the plural, We? You? They? Well, we can eliminate the Plural. Although God is triune, i.e.- a tri-unity of 3 Persons, they co-exist as one God. So we do not address The Name in the plural (see Matthew 28:19) Of course, we always use the singular pronoun. Makes sense.

And since we are addressing God directly, it also makes sense we would use the Second Person Pronoun. Therefore, when we address God we use "You". When we talk to other people about God we use "He".

Most popular old Hymns use the 3rd Person. They often are testimonies to Salvation. They are used for evangelism and invitations to accept Jesus as Savior. (So-called Gospel Hymns) They are used to exhort or encourage Christians to live for the Lord in some way or to examples to love and serve others. They are songs to encourage and teach Believers. Many are about Heaven or the Second Coming. Some songs are used at the beginning of the Service as invitations to worship or praise the Lord. All of these use the 3rd Person Pronoun. This means none of these Hymns are really songs of worship as such, even when they are intended to be. This is glaringly obvious when Patriotic Hymns are used at the beginning of "Worship" Services (as they usually are around July 4 or Memorial Day or on other National Holidays.)

Even the Doxology used at the Offering is not a Worship Song. "Praise God from whom all blessing flow; praise Him all creatures below; ...Praise father, Son and Holy Ghost". That is actually an invitation to praise the Lord, but singing it is not the same as doing what it commands. Praising God rarely, if ever, follows the Doxology. The same thing is true with the "Gloria", often used after the Morning or Pastoral Prayer. "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning ..."

All these songs or types of songs are fine and have their place. I am not against using them. The same thing I have said about them could also be said about most of the Psalms. What I am advocating here is the adoption and use of true songs of worship or hymns that have lyrics that address God with a 2nd Person Pronoun. This would greatly elevate the "Worship" that is common in most churches to a higher level. I agree that *"Our classic hymns reveal evangelicalism at its best."* - Mark A. Noll 7/12/1999 *Christianity Today*

"Evangelicalism at its best is the religion displayed in its classic hymns. The classic evangelical hymns contain the clearest, most memorable, cohesive, and widely repeated expressions of what it has meant to be an evangelical." -

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<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1999/july12/9t8037.html>

But it is significant that Lyrics using the pronoun "You" to address God are hard to find in most evangelical Hymnals. (I just looked through the indexes of 7 Hymnals in my Library. Try looking for them yourself.) However, they can be found much more readily in Contemporary Praise Music, e.g. - the songs written by Don Moen, Chris Tomlin, Matt Redman (see

<http://www.christian-gospelmusiclyrics.com/praise-worship-lyrics.html>

What does this mean? Maybe traditional Evangelicals need to revisit what they usually do on Sunday Mornings (including but not limited to, the songs they sing) and why they do it. Is the Worship Service for Worship or not?