

Worship in the Spirit through the Truth:
Remembering the Trinity in Your Worship Set

Lester Ruth

Duke Divinity School and the Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies

Lester's Basic Assumption

- Christian worship, including worship sets, ought to be robustly Trinitarian.

Million Dollar Question

Why?

What being Trinitarian is not

- Saying “Trinity” a lot
- Simply tacking on a Trinitarian formula (“...in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”) to the ends of prayers and songs

What being Trinitarian is

- Being apostolic
- Following the practices and perspectives of the New Testament:
 - Nouns
 - Verbs
 - Prepositions

Nouns

- The NT names all three Persons clearly and distinctly and repeatedly.
- The NT delights in the names of all three Persons, not just the name of Jesus.
- The NT uses names that relate the Three to each other.

Verbs

- The NT gives good, strong, vibrant actions to each one.
- The NT speaks about how they act toward each other.
- The NT speaks about how they act with each other cooperatively.

Prepositions

- The smallest words can carry the biggest weight
 - Classic perspective:
From/through/in and To/through/in
 - 2nd Classic perspective: To³

Sidebar: What is the Doctrine of the Trinity?

- 1 God, 3 Persons
- Each fully divine but the Persons are distinguishable from each other (you can't collapse them into 1 Person).
- What's called for: the ability to affirm individuality within community without undercutting unity.

Ways to Remember the Trinity

Actual suggestions

A Handy Rule of Thumb

WWPP?

Ideas: Nouns

- Read the New Testament, especially Acts and the books that follow, to see how early Christians named the three Persons in close proximity.

- Replicate those NT practices in the short spoken elements in a worship set:
 - Exhortations and calls to worship
 - Scripture readings
 - Praying
- Look for and select those songs with those NT dynamics.
- Write those songs.

Ideas: Verbs

- In speaking about salvation—past, present, and future—let God the Father and the Holy Spirit do something.
- Give them strong verbs.

Another Verb Idea:

Let Jesus Mediate Worship

- And let God the Father be the main recipient of worship

The Mediation of Jesus

- How this connects to the name dynamic:
- Don't let all general references to God, the Lord, or the Lord God collapse back automatically into references to Jesus Christ.

The Mediation of Jesus in Worship

- Select songs based on whether you could imagine Jesus singing them to the Father.
- Now.
- In us.

Ideas: Prepositions

- The Classic Mirror: Salvation from/through/in results in worship to/through/in.
- Do you see these dynamics in the content of the worship set?
 - When it talks about salvation?
 - When it talks about worship?

Ideas: Prepositions

Could the inherent flow in the to/through/in prepositions be used to shape song sets? Perhaps

Start with songs honoring God the Father (explicitly),

transitioning to

Songs that remember God's saving work through Jesus Christ,

transitioning to

Songs asking for us to be empowered and filled with the Holy Spirit

To³

- Write and use songs that uses the symmetry of the Trinity as the structure for the song
- Place Trinitarian bursts of praise at the end of generic songs

Final Thoughts

“Traditional” Worship is no Guarantee

- Note: compare Amazing Grace and O For a Thousand Tongues To Sing 📖

A Reasonable Rule of Thumb

- Not every act of worship needs to be explicitly Trinitarian
- But the cumulative effect should make it clear that this is essential

WWPP?

WDJS?

Want to read more?

- Frank D. Macchia's *The Trinity, Practically Speaking*
- Robin A Parry's *Worshipping Trinity: Coming Back to the Heart of Worship*