

## CHAPTER TWO

### Christians as Changing People: Ministries within Ministry

In the previous chapter, we came to see in some detail how Christians, building on parts of their heritage while negating other dimensions of it, created worship environments which celebrated the power of community when centered around Jesus as Lord. Although they could have continued to worship in humble settings, the burgeoning needs of a growing church community called for more serviceable and attractive facilities.

As time went on, recognizing their needs and opportunities, local churches began to express a far more complete understanding not only of the power of an environment capable of supporting worship, but also of the complexities involved in providing for education, outreach, and service. Different groups within the Christian community have, in more recent times, expressed this understanding in various ways. In fact, the very essence of the worship setting encourages Christians to use all their senses to capture what it is that is being called for in that setting. In one respect, it could be said that the environment of worship provides a ministry to our five senses, which given our differences, calls for ongoing change. And different denominational emphases call for different approaches to ongoing change. All this is very personal and, in some ways, rather subjective. However, it is people who are being changed and making changes, and that calls for personal responses.

Roman Catholic worship environments, for example, despite the simplifying treatment encouraged in the post-Vatican II era, tend to provide a

multi-dimensional visual experience, replete with ornament, decorative painting, statuary and strong symbolism in furnishings. The Episcopal tradition often mirrors this strongly transcendent ambience; the Lutheran interiors largely downplay ebullient cultic appointments while still retaining the flavor of the traditional environment that has its roots in the Reformation.

Reformed interiors are more restrained, avoiding references to the cult of saints and devotion to Mary (as do the Lutherans), but pushing the simplicity of the environment even farther, even to neo-picturesque reproduction of 19<sup>th</sup> century environments.

The evangelical movement has developed a still more simplified approach. The environment is theater-- in size, shape, design, appearance and action. To celebrate is to witness, on a grand scale, all that God has wrought, by presenting razor-sharp preaching, cutting-edge choreography and celestial music, all carefully timed, and all for us.

What are the sources for such diverse collections of notions about how to worship and in particular what the worship environment should look like? Do they take us back to the first century, or have they been picked up in other places along the way? In what respect does a contemporary Roman Catholic cathedral present a sympathetic environment to its users? What does a Lutheran church built in 1915 say to a modern congregation? Could an Episcopal priest conduct services successfully in a Pentecostal arena?

Aren't all these styles and choices fascinating? Can we sample all of these and still be the church catholic? Is there a reason why we should be considering

such diversity at all? We hope to explore some of these questions in this chapter, especially noting how the totality of our personhood, in terms of our five senses, is addressed in the nuances and diversities in our worship space.

As worshipping communities, Christians, like the ancients before us, seek to engage all the senses in the practice of religious belief. Some of what we consider the accoutrements of our modern practice have a history in polytheistic and animist traditions and, therefore, probably speak to some of our very basic human needs. Percussive sounds, chanting melodies, use of color and fire, for example, are very ancient indeed.

These practices can appeal to the five senses directly, and our worship services integrate some combination of sensory qualities in a blend that attracts our attention and satisfies us. They are, in a sense, ministries within the larger ministry to all of us. If we are to discuss these elements of worship in a meaningful way, we should explore how each of them adds impact to the events taking place and how the entire experience is enriched as a result. And when we consider our personal and historical differences, we can then understand how these various ministries continue to encourage diversity and change in our churches.