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CL 8530: Gospel and Cultures
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Report on additional text: Scharen, Christian Batalden. *Public Worship and Public Work: Character and Commitment in Local Congregational Life*, Virgil Michel Series. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004.

Public Worship and Public Work is a publication of Chris Scharen's dissertation for his Doctor of Philosophy in Religion from Emory University (Atlanta, Georgia) awarded in May, 2001. Chris is currently the associate director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture, Yale Divinity School, New Haven, Connecticut. He is the author of *Married in the Sight of God* (University Press of America, 2000) and *One Step Closer: Why U2 Matters to Those Seeking God* (Brazos Press, 2006).

Scharen addresses the question "does Christian worship form and sustain a people committed to a greater public good?"¹ Scharen cites the work of Robert Putnam (*Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*) who argues that "regular worship is one of the strongest predictors of general social connectedness and concern."² Scharen argues that there is a growing consensus of liturgists and ethicists that "Christian worship shapes people and communities committed to the broader public good, to acts of justice and peace in the world."³ He cites Hauerwas who argues that worship of God forms people for Christian living in the world.

Having presented an argument that worship or liturgy defines or shapes the church, Scharen presents a counter argument that "It's the community that makes the church."⁴ He presents the argument that the heart of the church is its communal identity which is shaped by contextual and cultural influences and that it is those influences that structure the range of possible styles of worship and social ethical witness of a congregation. Scharen proposes that a "linear model" of relating worship and ethics has emerged over the last decade: "participation in public worship forms one as a Christian, who then lives this out in public works of justice and mercy."⁵ Scharen presents his thesis that "*such a linear model has neglected the profound structuring effect of a congregation's communal identity in relationship to the church's public worship and work*"⁶ (emphasis Scharen's).

As background for his study Scharen explores the relationships between liturgy and social ethics. He identifies four models of congregations:⁷

¹ Christian Batalden Scharen, *Public Worship and Public Work: Character and Commitment in Local Congregational Life*, Virgil Michel Series (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004), 203.

² Ibid., 9.

³ Ibid., 10.

⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 48.

1.) a *house of worship* which focuses on worship and religious education, tends to not make significant demands on members loyalty or time, and views their physical presence in the community as a witness to others.

2.) *family congregations* which value worship, religious education, and social activities that provide close-knit and supportive relationships. Caring for individuals constitutes their social witness.

3.) *community congregations* which embody the close-knit focus of the family congregation but also place high value on expressing feeling and values through democratic processes, policies, and programs that bear witness to member's social commitments.

4.) *leader congregations* which, while upholding an attention to worship and religious education, focus on connecting religious values to actions that serve an activist mission to engage and change the world around them.

As further background for his study Scharen explores ritual and its effectiveness in shaping collective identity and moral community. He draws particularly upon the theory of ritual practice of Pierre Bourdieu. Scharen draws out three main components of Bourdieu's work:⁸

- 1.) the relation of ritual and the acquisition of *habitus*;
- 2.) the apprenticeship within a community of practice required for its acquisition;
- 3.) the socially informed body as the nexus of intersecting practices.

Scharen explores the Eucharist as an example of ritual that shapes identity and community.

Scharen then presents his research. He presents three case studies of congregations in Atlanta, GA: The Shrine of the Immaculate Conception (Catholic), Central Presbyterian, and Big Bethel African Methodist Episcopal. They were chosen because each is a vibrant, urban ministry with a "historic authority not unlike a cathedral, because it is the 'mother church' for its denomination in the city." They are all also "exemplary" in that they have "strong" ritual enactments tied to "strong" ethical engagements.⁹ In each case study Scharen addresses the history, communal identity, public worship, and public work of the congregation.

Scharen identifies five sources of communal identity: social context, member's social worlds, denomination and polity, local culture and history (including worship), and dominant ecclesiology ("leader congregations" in these cases). In place of the linear model identified earlier, Scharen proposes an interactive model of communal identity, worship, and ethics.

⁸ Ibid., 59.

⁹ Ibid., 74.

Scharen's model¹⁰ begins with "what's there" – the current, dominant, communal identity which "draws members into its life, worship, and work. In turn, its life, worship, and work impact its socio-cultural context." The next stage is worship participation that invites deeper commitment and connection. The third stage is a communal identity that structures a local 'sense of public' that calls upon members' commitment of gifts and abilities. In the fourth stage the congregation's 'sense of public' guides its public work. These four stages form a circular model that moves continuously through the four stages.

In Scharen's model the communal identity, public worship, and public work of a congregation are seen as interactive. As they come full circle in his model they come back to the stage one identity that impacts the socio-cultural context. Scharen focuses upon the impact of identity, worship, and work of a congregation upon its context.

As I reflect on Scharen's proposal I am convinced, as he suggests that the linear model of public worship and work is inadequate. Scharen's work is convincing that an interactive model of public worship, public work, and communal identity is necessary.

There are a couple of areas in which I would challenge Scharen to give further consideration. I would ask whether a circular model is adequately interactive and chaotic enough to reflect the possible interactions amongst the variables defined. A circular process seems to be only an expansion of a linear process. Also, I would suggest that the role of the *context* of these three congregations is another significant variable that shaped all three in significant ways but was not the focus of this study and therefore did not receive what I would consider to be adequate attention.

¹⁰ Ibid., 223.