

4 Ways to Kill Church Worship Fast

Looking around the church last Sunday I noticed that the majority weren't singing. And most of those who were singing barely moved their lips. The only voices I actually heard were those on stage with microphones.

That's been the case for years now—in churches large and small. What used to be congregational singing has become congregational staring.

Even when the chipper “worship leader” in contemporary churches bounds on stage and predictably beckons everyone to “stand and worship,” the people compliantly obey the stand command, but then they turn into mute mannequins.

What's behind this phenomenon? What happened to the bygone sounds of sanctuaries overflowing with fervent, harmonizing voices from the pews, singing out with a passion that could be heard down the street? I suspect it's a number of unfortunate factors.

Spectator set-up. Increasingly, the church has constructed the worship service as a spectator event. Everyone expects the people on stage to perform while the pew-sitters fulfill the expectation of any good audience—file in, be still, be quiet, don't question, don't contribute (except to the offering plate) and watch the spotlighted musicians deliver their well-rehearsed concerts.

Professionalism. It seems it's paramount for church music to be more professional than participatory. The people in the pews know they pale in comparison to the loud voices at the microphones. Quality is worshipped. So the worshipers balk at defiling the quality with their crude crooning. It's better to just fake it with a little lip syncing.

Blare. The musicians' volume is cranked up so high that congregants can't hear their own voices, or the voices of those around them, even if they would sing. So they don't sing. What would it add? The overwhelming, amplified sound blares from big speakers, obliterating any chance for the sound of robust congregational singing.

Music choice. Sometimes people refrain from singing because the songs are unfamiliar, hard to sing or just cheesy. Sometimes worship leaders choose a song that may thematically tie into the day's sermon topic, but it's unsingable. Sometimes worship leaders choose lame songs written by their favorite songwriters—themselves.

I admit. I've joined the majority. I've stopped singing. I'm not happy about it. I know I should overcome these barriers and just praise the Lord with my very unprofessional vocalizations. But I long for an environment that evokes my real heartfelt vocal participation.

Thom Schultz *is an eclectic author and the founder of Group Publishing and Lifetree Café. Holy Soup offers innovative approaches to ministry, and challenges the status quo of today's church.*

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