

Married to the Divine

What mystery, marriage and materialism have to do with our response to God's divine nature

Though **Paul Baloche** may not be a household name in Christian circles, his songs have been sung in churches around the world for more than 20 years. The worship pastor at Community Christian Fellowship in Lindale, Texas, has written such modern-day worship classics as "Above All," "Open the Eyes of My Heart" and "Your Name," and he continues to mentor countless worship leaders around the world through his travels and popular website, . Despite Baloche being on tour in Canada, *Charisma* recently caught up with him to ask about a few fundamental truths of worship.

CHARISMA: How would you define worship?

Paul Baloche: Worship is defined in Romans 12:1-2, where we present our bodies as a living sacrifice each day to the Lord in the context of relationship with Him. God is ultimately after our heart.

CHARISMA: How is God's divine nature a part of that definition?

Baloche: God is a divine being, of course, and we're made in His image. If we're born again, we have His Spirit, so part of our walk of faith—and our worship—is learning to walk with the divine encounter, with the divine perspective, instead of getting up and living in a three-dimensional reality of what we see, hear, taste, touch and smell. We respond with worship because when we're born again, our spirit is awakened and becomes alive to the divine aspect of who we are in Him.

When we combine this worship with music, it primarily becomes a matter of us singing a prayer to God. Music is an expression of an outgrowth of our prayers to God. We're essentially

married to God. We wake up every morning, and we present our bodies as a living sacrifice, as you would in a marriage relationship. Regardless of our feelings, regardless of what's going on, we present ourselves with commitment. At times we experience His presence, and at times it's a matter of doing this out of obedience.

CHARISMA: Many of today's worship songs center on the worshipper's experience—"I feel this," "I love it when You do this"—yet your songs stand out because most are exclusively about God's divine nature. Is this an intentional response on your part to the trend?

Baloche: As a worship pastor, I'm cognizant of the fact that our theology and our image of who God is, is very much shaped by the songs we sing. And as a songwriter, I've been aware of that through the years and tried to keep the worship Scripture-based so we're at least singing words about the Lord that are accurate. It's important that we sing biblical truth.

Yet I also realize there's a poetic, creative aspect that makes music interesting and inspiring. It's challenging: How do you combine what can be "cold doctrine," if you will, in an inspirational, pop-song format so that when people finish singing a 3 ½-minute song, they have another perspective on, for example, God's infinite nature or His mercy or the lordship of Christ? As a worship pastor, I just try to write or choose songs that will inform our congregation of biblical doctrine without it feeling like, "Oh, we're singing doctrine—how boring."

CHARISMA: You mention the infinite aspects of God's nature that we'll be worshipping for eternity. What aspects of that divine nature have personally captivated you the most throughout your life?

Baloche: I grew up Catholic. I was an altar boy. It was understood that the mystery of God can't be completely defined

or neatly packaged into a little box. When I was born again at 18 or 19, I developed a heart relationship with God and it became a little different, but I honestly don't think that aspect of being fascinated by His mystery ever changed for me. The longer I've been a Christian, the more comfortable I've become with not knowing certain things, with not being completely certain. I don't have to have an absolutely didactic answer for every question there is in the Bible.

So often in the church we find people digging in their heels and creating division over scriptural interpretations, but I think there are many parts of the Bible and God that we can at least acknowledge that we don't completely understand, yet we can continue to embrace the God of mystery, the God of creation, the God who Jesus spoke of when He came to earth and said, "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father." Those are the aspects that a worship leader or someone who's often in ecumenical or multidenominational settings can center on and say, "Hey, for tonight, let's lay aside our doctrinal differences and focus on what we truly know about God, about Jesus and about the Holy Spirit."

CHARISMA: Today the emphasis on the church's call to social justice is challenging the notion that worship is about more than just "me and Jesus" within the church walls. How do we balance this intimacy in a corporate context while also understanding what it means to worship God in spirit and truth?

Baloche: You can do all kinds of good works apart from the spirit of Christ and apart from His initiation. But it's like being in a marriage—it's possible to approach it purely from a contractual perspective. It becomes all about works, and you never actually spend intimate time as a couple.

The social justice thing can get clouded by politics and, frankly speaking, can almost become a false religion. It becomes a way to avoid intimacy, like in a bad marriage. You

can stay in a bad marriage because of the kids and because it would be financially impossible if you split up—so you end up staying together and going through the motions, but you don't do it for relationship, to try to build a healthy, godly marriage.

I see extremes of that in the social justice movement, where it's become the trendy thing. I'm on tour right now and have been standing up every night representing Compassion International and talking about child sponsorship, and last month I actually got to meet one of the children that we've sponsored in India. It was profound. These days you hear a lot of talk about social justice and social change. You can't change the whole world, but you can change the world for one child.

But the difference between just mailing a check to some big corporate charity in the sky and supporting an individual child who writes to you and you write to them—the difference is you're building a relationship. What you do is based out of relationship. A lot of people are doing social justice, but they're angry and think worship is a waste of time.

We're wired for intimacy—and it has to be there for true relationship.

CHARISMA: What lessons do you think the church in America still needs to learn when it comes to worshipping God's divine nature?

Baloche: I want people to realize that most of us just live in the dimension we can experience around us with our five senses. But there's a whole other realm, another dimension, and it goes beyond what scientists are aware of. Yes, there's a microscopic realm. There are layers of things that we can't see that exist—molecules and atoms and everything else. But there's also a spiritual realm Jesus talked about when He said we could be born again in the spirit. That part of you that

was dead becomes alive, and it causes us to see all these things we never saw before.

So the question becomes: How do we inspire people to yearn for this mystery, to be curious and pursue the divine that Jesus spoke about? And how do those of us who already believe embrace this journey of looking for the divine potential in each day, through the people we run into, the situations that come our way and how we respond to them? Because we're not just responding out of a Buddhist or Muslim perspective; we're responding out of an ever-progressing relationship with the living Holy Spirit. And in the process, as our relationship gets closer to God, we acquire the ability to discern His voice. As we spend more time with Him, as we read His Word, as we spend time in quietness and as we spend time fellowshiping with other healthy believers who are trying to pursue a relationship with God, we get better.

It's refined obedience, if you will. It's not just "Thou shalt not," but it's more like in our heart of hearts, we begin to pick up on spiritual hunches. We pay more attention to those spiritual hunches when we feel like, for example, we need to go over and ask that person if she's OK—despite it seeming crazy at the time. Developing that relationship with the Spirit involves that kind of spiritual sensitivity, where you discern what's going on around you and respond like Jesus would respond.

Paul Baloché explains the difference between performance and worship—and why performing isn't always bad. Visit [this link](#).