

The Need for Christian Imagination in Worship and Discipleship

Christian worship finds broad expression across the globe. Many would consider extreme ends of this spectrum to be occupied by certain forms of Evangelicalism and Orthodoxy. In some cases, Evangelical worship can be excessively focused on the individual's experience while, conversely, some instances of Orthodox worship can be excessively focused on the community's experience. Both of these tendencies mirror important tendencies within Christian discipleship, resulting in caricatures of Evangelicals watching church on TV from their sofa and caricatures of Orthodox Christians never reading the Scriptures on their own.

We propose that robust Christian Imagination is vital for healthy discipleship and worship, and that it can bridge gaps between different Christian traditions by focusing attention on timeless facets of the Divine Economy. The Wəddase 'Amlak (ወዳሴ አምላክ; WA), an Ethiopic prayer text of uncertain provenance, accomplishes just this in profound ways. By situating the supplicant within biblical stories and prophetic visions, the WA creatively guides individuals to imagine themselves in circumstances that inspire deep personal and corporate reflection.

Ultimately, any type of true Christian growth, formation, or theosis must be directed towards a future reality. Such eschatological vision inevitably requires Christians to draw upon their God-given capacities of imagination. Christians are given powerful glimpses of future glory throughout the biblical texts, but it remains incumbent upon all Christians to envisage precisely how the individual and community are to be integrated at various stages within God's Divine Plan.

Thus, we come full circle to Christian worship, during which human beings commune with God and one another in ways that defy full description. This is one reason why Christians have made such extensive use of art (linguistic, visual, musical, architectural, and others) to express what occurs during worship and how the journey of Christian discipleship increasingly deepens that experience.

There are few better examples of Christian Imagination in action than Ephrem the Syrian. Although no direct link exists between his writings and that of the Ethiopian tradition, this paper draws upon material written in a 'Syriac style' contained within the WA to explore how a Christian Imagination can function to produce beautiful, imaginative prayers that simultaneously deepen the faith of individual Christians while also uniting church communities in common scriptural visions of God and the life of Faith.