

Mind and Spirit in Worship – It's A Tricky Balance

I remember stories my mother told from her childhood in north central Alberta, about one of the church groups in her community that she (and others apparently) derided as *holy rollers*. I have hardly heard that phrase used by anyone else since then. I suspect it has not commonly been used past her generation. As a child, I didn't really know what she meant with that term, but it was clear that it was not a positive or supportive description.

I've learned since, that this has been a term mostly applied to Pentecostal church members by folks from other denominations or no denomination at all. And no, it has generally not been used in a friendly way. From our United Church perspective, it's worth noting that the same term was sometimes used against some Methodist groups as well, along with Quakers and Shakers.

Whatever the history of the phrase, it's been pointed toward those who worship in "ecstatic" ways, sometimes called "charismatic" worship. That kind of worship particularly recognizes, celebrates, and embodies the presence of the Holy Spirit. It comes out in movement, dance, loud responses, speaking in tongues, and other enthusiastic expressions. It's the "Hallalujah, sister!" kind of worship. That's a simplistic description, to be sure, but I think you can get the point.

While we may not hear the phrase *holy rollers* all that much anymore, I still hear the same disparaging notes in comments about those evangelicals, those Catholics, those Anglicans, or those anything else.

In its positive sense, worship like that sees a community of people caught up in a shared experience of joy, letting go of self-conscious inhibitions to simply express their love for God. Really, who can argue with that?

Yet we of the Reformed churches, or other folks much like us, do argue with that, don't we, from what we see as our more solid, grounded, mindful and sensible understanding of what's OK and not OK in worship. We think it's important to be *correct*, carefully crafting our worship, our expectations and our behaviours to match our understandings and our theology. Ours is often a cerebral worship, rooted primarily in our heads, focusing mostly on *what* one believes.

Ecstatic or charismatic worship is often rooted in experience, in the heart or spirit. If our style of worship is described as mindful, then charismatic worship is certainly more soulful. In large part it's focused on *how* one believes.

We need both. It's a matter of balance, and that balance can be hard to find, hard to create, hard to keep up. The balance, or lack of balance, is fed by words and music and the visual surroundings for worship. It's fed by relationships, sense of community, passion, and thoughtful attention to the all the senses we each bring to worship. In fact, *everything* about the worship experience affects that balance. When a church's worship consistently leans too heavily in one direction of the other – toward either mind or spirit, either head or heart – then balance gets lost.

Could it be that sometimes *our* balance is missing? Might *our* worship be more uplifting, feed our spirits more deeply, express our faith more fully, if we chose to intentionally address that balance? In the words of one blog I often read, we may want to ask ourselves if "Sunday worship leaves frost on the stained glass and icicles on the altar. Cool, cerebral services are held for increasingly empty pews." (*Liberating Word*, March 26, 2014)

Mindful deliberation, or spiritual abandon? We need them both.