

# **Only God is worthy of worship; all else is idolatry, music professor maintains\_110104**

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## **Only God is worthy of worship; all else is idolatry, music professor maintains**

**By Craig Bird**

*Baylor University*

WACO—Agendas, even holy agendas, are not worthy of worship, Terry York is convinced. And when something else—anything else—takes God's place as the focus of the church's worship, it violates God's commandment against idolatry.

A secondary, but still tremendously hurtful, result of even well-intentioned idolatry is that believers can be split into warring camps in what should be a joining of hearts and minds to praise God—thus violating Jesus' prayer and commandment that Christians “be one.”

In the recent past, and still continuing today, Christians attacked each other “in a shark-feeding frenzy in the name of worship, relevance and evangelism” as they fought about the right style and emphasis and aim of the worship hour, he said.

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Christian  
musician John  
Michael  
Talbot  
gestures for  
emphasis as  
he leads a  
workshop  
about  
Christian  
contemplation  
during the  
Hearn  
Symposium at  
Baylor  
University.

Now, as he looks at an increasingly bitter and divided political America, he fears the day is rapidly approaching when voter preferences will divide not only congregation from congregation but generate splits within churches-when the wrong bumper sticker on your car will shut you out from fellowship with other Christians with opposing bumper stickers.

York, a professor of Christian ministry and church music at both Baylor University and Truett Seminary, challenged worship leaders to focus their church's services in accordance to the clear teaching of Scripture, both to honor God and to protect his bride, the church, as part of Baylor's "Music and Worship in an Emerging Culture" symposium.

"I want to make the parameters very clear," he noted before leading a breakout session entitled "America's Worship Wars: The Road Behind, the Road Ahead."

“I am a U.S. Marine who took an oath to defend my country in 1967 that has not been revoked. The names of two close friends are on the wall of the Vietnam Memorial. We were recruited by my dad the same day. We went through boot camp together, and I carry their memory with me everywhere. My family reunions look like Marine Corps rallies there are so many of us.

“That being said, we still need to admit that God meant what he said about not putting anything above him in worship. We need to speak the prophetic word to our congregations before we cease being what we were called to be—a place that contrasts the politics of heaven with the politics of the world—and becomes just another arena where the politics of the Democrats and the politics of the Republicans do battle.”

He drove his point home by holding up two items. The first was a stained-glass cross, clearly imprinted with the stars and stripes of the United States flag. The second was a paperback Bible—with an American flag cover.

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“Our job is to love people who react to these things in totally different ways,” he explained. “Both those who look at them and say 'amen' and those who see them and say 'God help us' need to feel freedom to come into the house of God, stand beside each other as loving brothers and sisters and worship their Creator and Savior.”

To show that he practices what he preaches, he told of an e-mail he received asking if he could provide the words to a song titled, “God is on Our Side.” He replied, “Is that a Christian song or a Muslim song?”

Admittedly, “That was not the most polite response, but it allowed us to begin a helpful discussion.”

He repeatedly admitted he was presenting a difficult challenge, especially in the aftermath of Sept. 11 and the on-going wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. But as worship leaders, “You have been called to a task you can't do in your own strength,” he stressed.

The Sunday after the terrorist attacks on the United States, York's pastor called on him to lead one of the prayers during a special service.

“I said something like this,” he remembered, “‘God, it is impossible for us to love the people who did this—please remind us that you do love them.’ Afterward, one of our members, a survivor of Pearl Harbor, would have beaten me with his cane if he could have gotten up fast enough—and out of my respect for him, I would have let him. I understand the emotion and the pain. I share the emotion and the pain. But if we let the focus get off God and his love, we commit idolatry.”

One suggestion York made was to separate the issues by time.

“This year, July 4 fell on a Sunday in the middle of war time,” he said.

“You obviously need to reference that but not focus on it. Far better would

be to have a separate gathering to express patriotism on the Saturday before or the Monday evening after July 4. That allows us to honor our country in a proper and respectful way while still giving God the honor due him, and only him, when we gather as his church on Sunday morning.”

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