Reactions to worship are:

- **theological** (our “experience” of God)
  
  *This is not necessarily well-thought-out systematic theology... but can be related to things that “feel” holy to us... even down to the habits that make us feel at home*

Where we sit (Sunday after Sunday) - our “vantage-point” in the sanctuary even becomes part of the memories of our experience of God. These kinds of neural connections are deeply felt and it is difficult to articulate why we want to sit in the same spot, but we just know we do!

- **historical** (our memories of church)
  
  *Our concept of the “way we’ve ALWAYS done it” is often only a couple of generations long (if that).*

But memories (or nostalgia) are powerful factors in our opinions of what worship “ought” to be. We seek experiences that relate to our memories - either we are looking for the warm and fuzzy things we remember or we are reacting AGAINST the things we remember.
We all live with messages we’ve been taught by the influences in our lives about what is acceptable worship behavior. Our religious identity (more than whether it is “right or wrong”) is often wrapped up in various expressions of piety.

**sociological** (what it is “supposed” to be)

We resonate with different rhythms that feel “holy” to us (see Marcia’s work with the “Primal Patterns” for more on this subject). Our reactions to worship will sometimes be as simple as whether our very bodies are comfortable with certain worship expressions. And if it isn’t comfortable to us, we make value judgments about it for all others! (ah… humans)

**physiological** (what we literally “resonate” with)

Just like the “horror” flick by this name, when things “lurk” under the surface, like unresolved grief and tensions within the community, they often get played out in the “safest” place we know… conflict about worship. It is often not about worship, really, so do your homework and try to “get to the bottom of it.”

*[See also “Diagnosis Worship” in my book, The Worship Workshop”]*
and finally, our reactions to worship are often based on the “political”

Too often worship wars happen with “power plays” at the heart of it. But trying to gain or maintain control is usually about something much deeper than simply whether or not we have guitars in the sanctuary or if we are going to remove the flag from the room. Sometimes worship seems to be the “safer” way to exert power when it seems to be slipping away in other ways for folks.

So here’s my two-bit theory: I believe that the intensity of anger over worship change is:

An unarticulated fear of losing God.

What? Well…. If I have experienced God at this church where we have been doing it “this way” for quite a while… If I have felt God’s presence with me in good times and bad here and now YOU SAY YOU’RE GOING TO CHANGE IT??!! Well, if this is the case… I might be feeling like I won’t encounter God here anymore. I might lose my experience of God. But we aren’t that rational about these kinds of things or able to articulate this. We simply react. We simply call the “other” thing “not holy” or “not reverent” or “boring.”

So… we have to love each other into change/diversity. We have to keep talking about this stuff out loud and affirming our diversity as God-given. We have to teach tools for grasping why we are diverse. We have to extend the idea that part of the call to “radical hospitality” is to open ourselves to accepting that there will be times when worship isn’t embodying “our cup of tea” at the moment - and it’s OK. Like the weather in the Midwest where I grew up, just wait a minute, it will change. A community devoted to diverse expression allows the story, the message to take us on the ebbs and flows and ups and downs and highs and lows of dynamic storytelling and expressive praise and prayer. And we must keep our focus on the point of it all - the mission - which is not to make everyone happy but to facilitate the worship of God and the building up of the Body of Christ so that we might “go and do likewise” in the world.

When two or three are gathered… there WILL be diversity. Fact of life.

In fact, perhaps we can reframe the notion of diverse opinions:

If we do not witness various perspectives within a community, it is direct evidence of domination by a few.

Let’s celebrate if we are, indeed, in the midst of conversations (no matter how difficult) about worship!
So… what do we do with all this subjectivity (theology, history, experience, sociological and political sway)?

• we learn together (get tools for understanding our diversity)

• we listen together (we share our stories of worship in which our lives were transformed and the Spirit moved in powerful ways)

• we extend hospitality to the stranger (extend ourselves toward one another - especially those different from us - offer thanksgiving for the ways God works)

• we clarify our mission together (remind ourselves of the point of it all, God’s love and mission)

• we make sure that “new” experiences and worship expressions are filled with the Spirit, grounded in God’s Word and point us toward our discipleship in Jesus (not just doing something because it is the new and groovy thing to do)

• take incremental steps as well as offer alternative experiences for those who are ready for big leaps, not baby steps

• get people involved in the planning process so that the people themselves are truly doing “liturgy” - the “work of the people” - and take ownership of knowing about and crafting worship

Many blessings on your journey!

INVITE MARCIA to come and consult with your church or hold a District workshop with these and other topics presented in a fun and engaging way by e-mailing her at worshipworkshop@aol.com or visit her website at www.marciamcfee.com

For more information on workshops and consultations with Dr. Marcia McFee, visit www.marciamcfee.com or call toll free 877-387-7977.