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# Foreword

Our era is intoxicated with the desire for change and innovation. The church is also marked by interest in change, sometimes radical change. Within the church, however, concern for change is derived from at least two very different sources. On the one hand, the same impulses demanding change in the surrounding society are clearly being reflected within the church. On the other hand, developments outside the church are forcing the church to make changes in order to meet new challenges responsibly.

These two very different interests flow together to become a powerful and disturbing force in the contemporary church. At no place is this more visible than in the area of worship. This issue of *Christian Studies* is presented with a view toward aiding readers to sort through the present confusion regarding worship. Our desire is that these essays clarify, correct, and deepen our understandings of Christian worship.

Michael R. Weed, *Editor*

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# "Sing Where the Bible Sings"
## *Praising and Creating in Psalm Singing*

David Worley

In his European home a few years ago I asked my esteemed dissertation advisor what he expected in heaven. As if he had not heard my question, he began to tell me about his adult daughter who had made a commitment to daily read and chant the Psalms.

Then he said (as I remember), "What she does reminds and represents to me what shall, and even now does, fill the courts of heaven." I found his answer intriguing.

Maybe, perhaps, possibly, the innumerable angels in festal gathering are singing selected Psalms around the throne of God in the heavenly Jerusalem. If they are singing such "old" songs (as well as the new song), it is not in chorus with us; in our churches, Psalm singing has small place indeed. At best we have been deaf to such angelic refrains.

For our Scottish forefathers in the faith, this "state of the assembly" would seem strange. In Scottish churches, the Psalms in metrical paraphrase were the overwhelming majority of songs.[1] Our Puritan cousins in the Massachusetts Bay Colony praised the Father above out of the very first book printed in America, the Bay Psalm Book.[2] Such strong interest in recovering "primordial" singing can be seen in John Cotton's essay on *Singing of Psalms as Gospel Ordinance*.[3]

On the better authority of our brother Paul, our neglect of Psalm singing seems all the stranger, for Paul said to sing psalms as well as hymns and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19). Unhappily, our legitimate claim to *a cappella* singing has obscured the word "psalm" in the passage.[4]

If this plea is beginning to sound like an exhortation to recover, revisit,

*The present essay is an adaptation of material from my eight *Staley Lectures* delivered at Abilene Christian University in 1990, entitled *The Culture of Praise: Recovering the Psalms for the Ordinary Routines.*

[1] Lynn McMillon, "Discovery of the Earliest Extant Scottish Restoration Congregation," *Restoration Quarterly* 30 (1988) 49. For background, see Millar Patrick, *Four Centuries of Scottish Psalmody* (London: Oxford, 1949).

[2] A facsimile of the 1640 edition was reprinted by Chicago University in 1956 with an extended essay by Zoltan Haraszti.

[3] See the brief survey in David Music's "America's Hesitation over Hymns," *Christian History* 10 (1991) 26–29.

[4] Certainly there were other Jewish hymns called "psalms" (e.g. Psalms of Solomon) and "psalms" in other Jewish writings (e.g. 1 Mac 3:50–53; 11QPs a–e; 2 Bar 10:6–19 et al.; T Mos 10:1–10;

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restore, revitalize Psalm singing in churches of Christ, so be it. Amen.

*A sower went out to sow*

The instruction to sing the Psalms falls on different soils.

*Be Alert.* Some seed has fallen on the path. Not surprisingly, the*Evil One has come along and snatched* the Psalms from our assemblies. Taking a page from C. S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*, we can hear the senior devil's advice to his nephew, to convince the churches that there is no need to sing the Psalms because there are spiritual songs enough which inspire and hymns aplenty which pump the adrenalin.

Because Satan is fundamentally opposed to the enthroning of Yahweh on the praises of the new Israel, the Evil One has and will in the future try to keep God's people from singing the Psalms. His reason: praise spells defeat for Satan. Jesus knew this (Matt. 4:10, 11). The praise of God in the words of the Psalter filled our Lord's understanding, his heart and his expressions. The Gospels well attest Jesus' use of the Psalms. They mediated God's will and comfort to Jesus in critical junctures of his life as well as providing refuge in the midst of wickedness (cf. Mark 14:26; Psalms 113–118).[5]

Satan desired that Job curse God, not bless Him (1:11–2:5). Through the canonical ordering in our English Bibles, Psalm 1 following Job 42, we remember Job as an immediate example of one who did not "walk in the counsel of the wicked nor stand in the way of sinners nor sit in the seat of the scoffers" (Ps. 1:1). The Lord indeed watched over the way of righteous Job (Ps. 1:6). Job's praise of God, i.e., his choice of the way of righteousness, was Satan's defeat. The Psalter functions to arm us with words and instructional praise for Satan's defeat.

*Be Alert.* Occasionally, the Psalms are read or sung in church,*but because the soil is rocky*, when the newness wears off, their use is abandoned because the enduring significance of the Psalter had no real root in the congregation's heart and understanding.

Congregations do not abandon the Psalter in singing because they consider the Old Testament of lesser value. No. It is because the course of this world, the spirit of the age, is to intensify the expectation of relevance, instantaneous applicability to me, myself, right now. The singing of the Psalms, however, requires a spirit of

Ps Philo). But, we must, without a doubt, give first referent to our canonical Psalter, for its pervasive influence as "psalm" in the New Testament is clear. In any event, commentators have too quickly read the musical triad in Ephesians 5:19 as synonymous, making "psalms" indistinguishable from hymns and spiritual songs. The singing of "psalms of David" in the second-century church is probably reflected in *Acts of Paul* 10, p. 7 (Hennecke, Schneemelcher, Wilson, *NT Apocrypha*, 2.380). References in the early church fathers to the church singing the Psalms are numerous; see E. Ferguson, "Psalms," in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* (New York: Garland, 1990) 765.

[5] For Jesus' acquaintance with the Psalms, see Henry Shires, *Finding the Old Testament in the New* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) 145–159, and Thomas Hawkins, "Disclosing the Heart and Mind of Jesus," in *The Unsuspected Power of the Psalms* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1985) 22–38.

community, a willingness to linger with the words of other believers, in other times, and a willingness to share in song the exasperations and elations of fellow believers in the present—even when I myself may not feel at the moment such hurt or such joy (Rom. 12:15).

For those few Psalms which sound vengeful or vindicative, we are allowed and permitted to repeat these words to God out of our own (or others'!) hurts, disappointments and anger.[6] In the fourth century, Athanasius in his famous letter to Marcellinus observed that from the Psalter a person was able

> to have the form of words for what he experiences and for what distresses him. These words become like a mirror to the singer for him to be able to understand in them the emotions of his soul and thus perceiving them to explain them. [7]

The loss of the Psalter in Christian life has only given further license and plausibility to the various alternative ways of dealing with anger proffered by the social sciences.

Wherein the Psalms presuppose and express historical memories of Israel, the church can transfer meaning within the new life in Christ.[8] Difficulties in doing this have been exaggerated. Isaac Watts thought such deficiencies in relevance required interpretive paraphrases of the Psalms.[9] Watts, however, would surely be shocked with what has come to be in our day, our inhospitality to singing metrical psalms in church.

*Be Alert.* In some churches, the Psalms are sung, *but because the soil has thorns*, the Psalms are soon abandoned because the pleasure from singing spiritual songs chokes out Psalm singing.

It is true. Singing the Psalms may not at first be delightful. It can be work. It is work. It requires effort and concentration. At first, it is awkward and wooden. Sometimes, this is because the content can seem so removed from the trappings of our world. Sometimes our hearts do not "feel" adoration for God. We may decline the opportunity to "hallelujah" in a certain Psalm thinking that expressed praise is only

[6] C. S. Lewis' thoughts about the so-called imprecatory or cursing passages in the Psalms remain helpful, in his *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1958) 20–33.

[7] Migne, *Patrologiae Graeca*, 27.20D, 24B, trans. Everett Ferguson in *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* (1978) 388, 390.

[8] An aid in this regard is R. E. O. White's *A Christian Handbook to the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984). Also, the extended essay of Walter Brueggeman, *Abiding Astonishment: Psalms, Modernity and the Meaning of History* (Louisville: Westminster, 1991).

[9] From the preface of his *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707): "There are a thousand lines in it [Psalms] which were not made for the Church in our Day to assume as its own. There are also many deficiencies of light and glory...You will always find in this Paraphrase [Watts' hymnbook] dark expressions enlightened and the Levitical ceremonies changed into the worship of the gospel and explained in the language of our time and nation" (quoted in Robin Leaver's "The Hymn Explosion," *Christian History* 10/3 [1991] 15).

accepted praise when it is heart felt *response* to God's goodness. Such is preposterous. Praise is not always response. Often praise in the Psalms is intentional determination to see things differently (see below). Praise constitutes a world, a culture, a way of perceiving.[10] Praise can set forth and create. It is not always response!

In singing the Psalms we are training and nurturing our hearts in the pleasures of God, in what is pleasing to Him. In this respect, the praise of the Psalms is non-utilitarian.[11] Praise is obligatory by our being creatures. As creatures we in fact invite other aspects of God's creation, animate and inanimate, to praise God. Certainly in the singing of certain words in certain modes our own sensibilities are changed over time. Blessings will surely obtain. Praise in the Psalms does stretch and exercise us fully in our humanity and in our being especially loved by God, increasing our proximity to His presence and completing His reign as our only King.

### *Other seeds fell on good soil*

Satan wants us to believe the lie that the Psalms are a relic of a bygone Israelite era and that for the church they can be no more than a sedative. The truth, however, is that the Psalms are the church's primer for learning how to praise God. The climate has rarely been more favorable than now for learning how to sing[12] and to better understand[13] the Psalter.

*Chanting the Psalter.* To sing the Psalms verbatim, regardless of the translation, is of course preferable to singing the Psalms in paraphrase, metrical or otherwise. There is a profound wisdom in learning to speak in the vocabulary of scripture. To speak where the Bible speaks, or better, to speak *what* the Bible speaks, is a comfortable slogan in our tradition. It should not be despised, especially in the matter of reciting or singing the Psalms.

Recent work in cultural linguistics has drawn attention to the necessity of certain specific vocabulary and language to the formation and viability of a community and its culture.[14] When words are not fully understood by newcomers to the community, the words are not changed but the community waits for the newcomer to change as he repeats the vocabulary and learns to use the words in certain contexts, in certain life situations. Over time, the language of the community, with its own logic

[10] The insight of Walter Brueggeman in *Israel's Praise: Doxology against Idolatry and Ideology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 1–28.

[11] As Walter Brueggeman says bluntly, "Praise is a useless act. It is not a means, but an end in itself. . . In the end we are able to see that our true end is 'to glorify and enjoy God.'" In "Praise and the Psalms: A Politics of Glad Abandonment," *The Hymn* 43/3 (1992) 18.

[12] Michael Hawn, "Current Trends in Hymnody: Psalm Singing," *The Hymn* 43 (1992) 31–42. And Massey Shepherd, "Renewal of Psalmody Today," in *The Psalms in Christian Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976) 75–117.

[13] See David Howard, "Editorial Activity in the Psalter: A State of the Field Survey," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. Clinton McCann (Sheffield: Academic, 1993) 52–71.

[14] Applied to theology in George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984) 32–41.

and structure, actually shapes and changes the newcomer.

Each Psalm has its own structure and logic. It is not misbegotten. And the association of each Psalm with a neighboring Psalm (see below) builds the skeletal structure of the language of praise. And the Psalms together in a book, and then together in five books, accumulatively, form a culture with its own logic and language.

As a newcomer, I chant the Psalms, not fully understanding everything I sing nor fully appreciating the structured flow of my words. But I continue to sing because I believe that in praising God through the Psalms I am being changed and the words I repeat of the Psalmist are actually structuring my perceptions of the world and altering my sensibilities. The words of Athanasius are sobering:

> Let no one ... attempt to alter or wholly change the phrases. Let him say and sing **artlessly** the things written just as they are. . . . Their words are better and stronger than those composed by us. . . . For in these words they were pleasing to God.[15]

Chanting the Psalms verbatim (in contrast to metrical versions) is certainly foreign to our tradition. It has, of course, had greater vitality in the Anglican tradition, though some have lamented its loss even within the disciplines of Anglicanism![16] Thankfully individual Christians (more difficult for congregations) can benefit from the collection of verbatim Psalm singing in the *Anglican Chant Psalter*, ed. Alec Wyton (NY: Church Hymnal, 1987).

*Singing Metrical Psalms.* First attempts may require singing metrical paraphrases rather than chanting verbatim texts of the Psalter![17] More practically, for congregational life, we are blessed with recent hymnals (metrical and paraphrase) of the entire Psalter from various Christian traditions. Songleaders in our churches would be well advised to spend time with two such recent hymnals: *A New Metrical Psalter*, ed. by Christopher Webber (NY: Church Hymnal, 1986) and *Psalter Hymnal* (Grand Rapids: CRC, 1988). We can only commend Edward Fudge for his valiant effort in 1974 to publish a short Psalter hymnbook for churches of Christ. It did not gain wide circulation or visibility.

[15] Migne *PG* 27.41D, trans. Ferguson, "Athanasius," 400–401.

[16] The "dean" of Anglican music writers, Erik Routley, wrote in a conversation with his American friends that "a hasty liberalism, in which there is little liberality, has conspired to withdraw the psalter from the worship of ordinary Christians. What the liberalism which has no sense either of poetry or of history has not wholly achieved has been completed by modernists, anti-medievalists, and, I regret to add, the misplaced pedantries of church musicians." In *Music Leadership in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1967) 68.

[17] For a review of the most frequent 3 meters (common, short, long), see William Reynolds and Milburn Price, *A Survey of Christian Hymnody*, 3rd ed (Carol Stream, Illinois: Hope, 1987) xv–xvi.

There should be an evolving pleasure and delight in congregational Psalm singing. The praise of God has its own progression toward pleasure and delight![18]

If the prospect of "enjoying" Psalm singing seems far fetched, it may be instructive to remember the circumstances surrounding the recovery of Psalm singing in the 16th century. The influential metrical Psalm book by Sternhold and Hopkins published in 1562 had its roots in the courts of France and England where the attempt was made by two court servants, Clement Marot in France and Thomas Sternhold in England, to paraphrase the Psalms into meter so as to provide "healthier" verse and song for the **recreational** enjoyment of the court. John Calvin adapted the metrical songs of Marot and set his churches to singing the Psalms in language they could understand.

In France to chant the Psalms meant in popular parlance to turn Protestant.[19] In England the Psalter (Sternhold and Hopkins) became in the 17th century the most familiar verse known to the majority of Englishmen?[20] Though difficult to establish historically, one can imagine that the wide knowledge of the Psalms was a strong undercurrent in the tide of the Reformation. This extensive knowledge of the Psalter was surely the womb for the birth (fertility!) of spiritual hymnody of the 18th century.[21]

In the melodies and metrical paraphrases of the Psalms, there emerged for many a delight in the praise of the Psalter. For many the singing of the Psalms replaced the singing of unsuitable ballads.[22] John Chrysostom lamented in a homily many centuries earlier, "Most of you know dirty songs, but who of you is able to say even one psalm?"[23] In our day, contemporary Christians artists are slowly (too slowly) putting the Psalms to music. We need so many more to fill the airwaves. Let us pray that the record companies will allow and encourage such composing.

But truthfully and practically, before our congregations can delight in Psalm singing, servants of the Word in our churches, and their shepherds, must first develop for themselves disciplined reading (and singing) of the Psalms.

[18] Daniel Hardy and David Ford suggest "recognition" (attention) and "respect" (affirmation) as preludes to delight in praise in their thoughtful exploration of the phenomenon of praise, *Praising and Knowing God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985).

[19] Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England* (Princeton: University, 1970) 1.385–91.

[20] Rivkah Zim, *English Metrical Psalms: Poetry as Praise and Prayer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 143.

[21] See Madeleine Marshall, "A New Species of Christian Song: Where did the English Hymn come from?" *Christian History* 10 (1991) 32–34.

[22] From the opening page of Sternhold and Hopkins' metrical Psalms: "Set forth and allowed to be sung in all churches, of all people together, and after morning and evening prayer as also before and after sermons and moreover in private homes for their godly solace and comfort laying apart all ungodly songs and ballads which tend only to the nourishing of vice and corrupting of youth." The recent popular interest in the "sound" of the Chant (sung by Benedictine monks from Spain) may signal a "cultural" openness to the musical style of chanting.

[23] Quoted (without reference) in Josef Jungman, *The Early Liturgy*, trans. Francis Brunner (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959) 168.

*Inter-Psalm Interpretation.* It is an encouragement to see the distance between Psalm and reader now being narrowed by recent illuminating observations about connections between consecutive Psalms, i.e. by recent "inter-psalm" interpretations. The laborers have been few so far but the field is white unto harvest.[24]

Stimulated by the theory of Brevard Childs and its implementation by his student Gerald Wilson, interpretations of the Psalms now discern a flow from Psalm to Psalm and book to book.[25] Indeed a rule of thumb in personal Psalter reading is to read the Psalms three at a time, e.g. Day 1: Psalms 3, 4, 5; Day 2: Psalms 4, 5, 6; Day 3: Psalms 5, 6, 7 and so on.

Such care in reading provides an immediate surrounding context for each individual Psalm. For example, interpreting Psalm 22 in light of Psalm 23 reinforces what is clear even within Psalm 22: Jesus' cry "My God, My God" was not the declaration of some objective divine abandonment but rather the appropriate expression of the suffering son of man.

A further advantage of inter-psalm interpretation is that it provides an alternative to this century's rearrangement of the Psalms into categories according to their form and genre (e.g. royal, torah, thanksgiving, lament, et al.).[26] The inter-psalm interpretation allows the believer to read and sing the Psalms in the order we have them in the canon.

*Psalm 1 and 2 as Overture.* This context of surrounding Psalms must be used, however, in conjunction with the hermeneutic provided by Psalm 1 and 2. The fundamental character of praise is sounded in the overture to the Psalter, Psalm 1 and 2. The beginning and ending with "blessing" (1:1; 2:11) surely identify the first two Psalms as a unit which introduces the Psalter and offers us interpretive guidance.[27]

Jesus' words to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness (Matt 6:33) encapsulate the heartbeat of the one who praises in Psalm 2 and Psalm 1. The blessing upon the one who speaks and lives the praise of Psalm 1 and 2 (1:1; 2:11) is expanded in blessings elsewhere in the Psalter and given memorable expression in the blessings of Jesus on the mountain.

From singing Psalm 1 to each other we learn that the praise first acceptable

[24] Franz Delitzsch's commentaries on the Psalms (1881) are some of the very few modern works concerned with inter-psalm connections. See also David Howard, "A Contextual Reading of Psalm 90–94," in McCann, *Shape*, 108–123.

[25] Brevard Childs, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 503–25; Gerald Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1985). The most up-to-date assessment of this approach can be found in the collection of essays edited by McCann, *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*.

[26] For a more appreciative appraisal, see Roland Murphy, "The Psalms and Worship," *Ex Auditu* 8 (1992) 23–31.

[27] Recognized by Patrick Miller, "The Beginning of the Psalter," in McCann, *Shape*, 83–92 ; and Clinton McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993) chaps. 1, 2.

to God is a life disciplined to avoid the company and conversation of the wicked. The prominence of warning as the beginning of praise at first seems strange. We would have expected the Hallelujah chorus to begin the Psalter. It does not.

It is those seemingly "insignificant" daily, hourly spontaneous decisions we make in our walking, standing and sitting which are, or turn out not to be, praise to God. The effort necessary to praise God by deliberately choosing righteousness is not of course some devious scheme of the Father to make our way tedious and filled with drudgery.

If the choice of associates and the way of righteousness constitute an elemental expression of praise through the Psalms (so Psalm 1) , the second fundamental aspect of praise is the concern for the collective, i.e. society and nation (so Psalm 2). Just as our lives ebb and flow between life as an individual and life in society so Psalm 1 and 2 present what is praise to God individually and collectively.

Specifically, Psalm 2 confesses that God is sovereign. Just as final recompense of the wicked is hidden (Psalm 1) so God's reign can be unnoticed (Psalm 2). In singing Psalm 2, we hear prominently not our own voices but the sound of laughter, the laughter of God in the heavens. The laughter is occasioned by the pretension and arrogance of wayward nations and leaders who refuse to acknowledge, even rebelling against God's Kingdom. In Christ, we sing Psalm 2 with special reference to the anointed Jesus, regal son of God. We also remember his words that the Kingdom comes with power but evolves in often surprising, even hidden ways.

When we remember Psalm 2 as we sing through the Psalter, our hearts are indeed drawn to the inextricable connection of praise with honoring God as King. In singing the Psalms of David, especially in Book I, we express praise through one individual's struggle with the way of righteousness in the midst of attacks from the wicked (Psalm 1). But we also remember David as King and we sing, especially in Book III, of the hopes and dreams attached to David and Zion?[28]

In the opening of Book IV, in the midst of disorientation, we sing a prayer of Moses (Psalm 90), seeking guidance from Israel's great leader. Progressing through Book IV we come to sing of the Lord as King (95–100), no longer relying on nations or powerful leaders for security or deliverance or direction.

The Psalms drill us in the expression of praise. We do need help. While we had been created to live to the praise of God's glory (Ephesians 1) we nevertheless became children of disobedience. The Psalms help us recover our purpose for living, indeed our reason for having been created, through the repetition of the Psalter's words of praise.

[28] Gerald Wilson has noted the metamorphosis, from the first three books of the Psalter to the last two books, of the hope of David's kingship shifting from earthly realization to the trust in God being the only real king ("Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalm," in McCann, *Shape*, 72–82).

If our church hymnals lack the Psalms, the twin elements of praise in Psalms 1 and 2 may be sadly receiving inadequate attentive expression. On the one hand, if the Psalms whose themes are previewed in Psalm 1 are **not** sung in church, *the hostility in the world and Christian's dismay in response to such evil may have poor expression in a church's canon of hymns.* A certain comfortableness may deny endemic wickedness. Consistent singing of the Psalter will disabuse the singer of such sanguine understanding of the world. For others the onslaught of evil is overwhelming. Singing the Psalms airs the frustrations and anxieties of believers who may see little near term relief.

On the other hand, failure to sing the praise of God's Kingdom in the Psalms as anticipated in Psalm 2 *may elevate the seeming importance of political forces in the world or, worse, blind us to God's true oversight and lordship over every nation of the world* Without realizing it, our education in American citizenship, with its strong separation of church and state, may have made it even more difficult for us truthfully to confess that God is king over all the nations of the earth. Singing the Psalms teaches us to consider and believe the reign of God over every nation, no matter its momentary rebellion. We must at least balance the interpretations of cause and effect in our daily newspapers and media broadcasts, with the presentation of the Kingdom of God in the Psalter.

Paul said that we understand the will of God not in intoxication but by singing in the Spirit, Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph 5:17–19). May we as teachers be willing to go back to singing school, singing from our first and primary hymnal, the Psalter. Only then, can we encourage others in the elemental exercise of praise. Only then can we truly understand Jesus' words to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness.

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# Trivializing the Holy
## *Current Trends in Worship and Isaiah 1:10–17*

R. Mark Shipp

> Worship is holy meeting. In worship, man enters into the sphere of holiness, into the presence of the Holy One.... In her worship she remembers God's self-witness, "I, the Lord, am holy," and to it she responds ..., "The Lord our God is holy" ... In the cult, Israel remembers the holy past, and in the spoken recital it becomes present ....
>
> James Muilenburg

In the contemporary movement to revitalize worship, two general trends are discernible: first, there is a trend to recover traditional worship styles and second, a trend to deny the relevance and vitality of traditional modes of worship in favor of those which are more immediately appealing to the outsider. Curiously, there has been little concomitant interest in recovering a biblical understanding of worship!

These comments focus on the theology of worship in the Old Testament, with particular reference to Isaiah chapter one. If the church is to recover a biblical theology of worship, it must reflect Old Testament concepts of God's presence and holiness and Israel's response to that holiness. The God of Sinai and Zion is also the God of Golgotha and has always required his people to worship him in spirit and in truth. I will, therefore, seek to explore the theology of worship from the perspective of Isaiah 1. It is my hope that this approach will shed light on what we do in church today and the attitudes we bring to worship in a time of changing styles and preferences. Those worship practices and attitudes should be fundamentally informed by scripture, not merely taste or tradition.

[1] On the theology of worship in the Old Testament, see A. S. Herbert, *Worship in Ancient Israel* (Richmond: John Knox, 1959); H. H. Rowley, *Worship in Ancient Israel: its Forms and Meaning* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967); and James Muilenberg, *The Way of Israel: Biblical Faith and Ethics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961) 107–127 are among the few monographs or sections of monographs dedicated to this subject. Most recently, *Ex Auditu* journal vol. 8 (1992) has dedicated the entire issue to a theological understanding of worship in the Bible.

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## The Vocabulary of Worship in Isaiah 1:10–17

Isaiah mentions all five kinds of offering practiced at the temple in Jerusalem. The "sacrifices" (v. 11) may refer to animal sacrifices in general; more often the word is used of the sacrifices that an individual would present (fellowship, sin, and guilt), which were intended to *bring about the restoration of broken fellowship* between individuals, and between individuals and God, or to celebrate such a restoration.[2] The purpose of the "burnt offering" (v. 11) was to *make atonement for the sins* of all Israel so that the "Holy One of Israel" might continue to dwell in the midst of his people.[3] The "offerings" (v. 13; better translated, "grain offerings") were an *expression of thanksgiving* for the lord's blessing of agricultural bounty.[4] One of the major functions of the "incense" (v. 13) was to cover the ark of the covenant with smoke during the priest's entry into the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16); in two biblical texts, it *represents the prayers of the people of God* (Psalm 141:2; Rev. 8:1–4), which Isaiah mentions specifically in v. 15.

Other words in this passage also refer to worship. The first of these we encounter in v. 11: "When you come to appear before me . . . ." The words "to appear before me" in Hebrew literally mean "to be seen by my face."[5] "To see the face of God" is typical terminology in the Old Testament for coming to the temple in Jerusalem to worship (see, for example, Ps. 42:2). Another term which also has worship connotations is the term "abomination." This word almost invariably refers to idol worship in Old Testament narrative literature, but has a wider range of meaning in the prophetic literature. Here, especially in Ezekiel, it refers to abominable practices involving transgression of covenant law involving more than idolatry. It is difficult to determine whether Isaiah is referring strictly to idol worship (and therefore the "incense is an abomination" would refer to incense offered to foreign

[2] The sacrifice mentioned here is probably to be equated with the "well-being" (also translated "peace") or "fellowship offering," although it is also the generic word for sacrifice or slaughter. Out of 33 occurrences of the term in the book of Leviticus, 30 are related to the fellowship offering and only three are clearly the generic "animal sacrifice" (Lev. 17:8, 17:9, and 23:37). These generic occurrences are telling: in both contexts they refer to animal sacrifice *in distinction to the whole burnt offering* and grain offering. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that all individual sacrifices of animals, including fellowship offerings and the two kinds of sacrifice not mentioned in Isaiah one are subsumed in Isaiah under the category of "animal sacrifice, not totally consumed on the altar." These latter two, the sin offering (for those guilty of inadvertent transgression), and the guilt offering (for those guilty of intentional transgression), along with the fellowship offering, were instigated primarily by individual Israelites on a voluntary basis.

[3] In the whole burnt offering, performed twice daily on behalf of the entire people of Israel by the priests, but particularly on the annual Day of Atonement (Lev. 16), the entire animal was consumed, leaving nothing for the sustenance of the priests or the people, as a complete gift offered up to God.

[4] There are other occurrences of this word which have a more general meaning: "gifts," or offerings, of either the field or the flock (note Gen. 4:3). It was not only a specific category of sacrifice as presented in Leviticus 2, which could be offered on its own, but could also be given along with the fellowship offering (Lev. 7:12–15) as an expression of thankfulness, or as a substitute for the sin offering (Lev. 5:11). Its primary sense, however, is that of *thankful return to the Lord for his bounty*.

[5] Many scholars have suggested that "to appear" instead of "to see the face of God" is a scribal alteration of the phrase "to see my face" so as not to leave the impression that one may literally see the face of God and live.

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gods as in Ezekiel 8: 11), or to the broader meaning of "abominable behavior." In other words, Isaiah is either saying, "Your worship is tantamount to idol worship," or "Your worship is tantamount to immorality."[6]

One final phrase, "wash yourselves, make yourselves clean," also has worship connotations.[7] To Isaiah, the entire people of Israel require cleansing, leaders and commoners alike (vv. 10, 15–16). This is because their "hands are full of blood." Somehow, the oppression of the widow and the orphan, the disregard for the neighbor, and the despising of the Holy One invalidate the worship being rendered to God in Isaiah chapter one. Their attitude towards God and neighbor make them as surely unclean (or, unsuitable to participate in worship) as if they had contact with blood or with a dead body.[8] Water was also used for the ritual cleansing of those who had contact with blood (Lev. 15:25–30) or bodily discharges (Lev. 15). Those in Isaiah's day who trampled the courts of the Lord with their multitudes of sacrifices yet disregarded their neighbor and the holy nature of God were like those who had defiled themselves with contact with blood or dead bodies: they were equally unclean and unsuitable to come before the Lord with their offerings. Isaiah 4:3–4 describe the plan of God regarding the unholy inhabitants of Jerusalem: their filth will be washed and their blood will be cleansed, and "he who is left in Zion will be called holy."

Isaiah is condemning Judah's expression of worship across the boards: the voluntary sacrifices for intentional and unintentional sin, the sacrifice and the eating of a fellowship meal, the offering of the whole burnt offering on behalf of the entire nation, contributions in the form of thanksgiving offerings, cultic prayer, and the various festivals and holy days on which "all Israel" recited the great deeds of God in their past, offered songs[9] and prayers, and recommitted themselves to the covenant.

It is not difficult to see in the various forms of worship practiced at the temple in Isaiah's day analogies with worship in the church today. We meet for worship at prescribed times and places as they did and rehearse God's deeds on our behalf, which constitute us as a people no less than it did the ancient Israelites. We offer corporate prayer as they did. We meet for fellowship meals and celebrate an atoning sacrifice as they did. We give freewill offerings of thanksgiving for God's bountiful gifts as they did.

[6] In the first case, Isaiah would be comparing the "pious" offering of incense to idol worship. In the second, the comparison would be between incense offering and immoral behavior.

[7] Out of 33 occurrences of the word "wash" in the Old Testament, the vast majority deal with ritual cleansing (20 in Leviticus alone).

[8] See particularly in this regard ritual cleansing required in the Pentateuch. "The water for impurity, for the removal of sin" (Num. 19:9) was to be used for washing when someone had contact with a dead body (Num. 19:11–22).

[9] Worship in song, a large part of cultic worship in Israel throughout the pre- and post-exilic periods, is not specifically mentioned in Isaiah 1. The gatherings of Israelites at the temple on Sabbaths and festivals would, however, have certainly included such singing, as the large number of liturgical notations in the Psalter attest.

This is not to diminish the differences which exist between their worship and ours. It is to make the claim that the church's worship has its roots in the ancient Israelite acts of praise, contrition, confession, thanksgiving, and, above all, the recognition that the Holy One of Israel is present in our midst as He was in Israel's. This aspect of worship is today no different than it was for Israel. Worship has always been both the celebration of God's salvation and our recognition of unholiness in the face of the consuming fire of his holiness (Hebrews 12). The motivations for worship remain the recognition of sin, praise for who God is and what He has done, and incorporation into the fellowship of his people.

### The Kind of Worship Isaiah Condemns

It must first be said that Isaiah does not condemn formal worship *per se*, as some older commentators have suggested. He is condemning a specific *manner* of worship: worship which is combined with oppression, iniquity with solemn assembly. Individual worship acts are not condemned, nor is the method of performing these acts either too innovative or not innovative enough. As we have seen, Isaiah mentions most Israelite worship practices, at least insofar as these are revealed to us in the Old Testament. The people were going about their business worshipping in the temple via the traditional modes. Indeed, the people of Judah are worshipping frequently and *en masse*: they are offering multitudes of sacrifices (v. 11) and their church attendance is characterized as "trampling the courts" of the Lord (v. 12). To an outward observer these are a very religious people who are well-versed in religious pageantry.

Nor should we suppose that Isaiah is condemning the Israelites because their worship had become "stuck in a rut." Isaiah does not suggest that the old forms of worship have become petrified with time and what they really need is to change the way worship is conducted to make it somehow more meaningful and relevant. The superficial worship Isaiah describes is not superficial because the people are going through meaningless ritual. Because Isaiah mentions most forms of worship practiced throughout Israelite history (sacrifice, prayer, festivals, convocations), which are never condemned as such, one can only assume that temple worship is being carried out in a careful and salutary manner and in the traditional modes. Isaiah says "wash yourselves," not "wash yourselves from ritual."

What is it about their worship which evokes such a vitriolic response from Isaiah? Why the comparison of such religious people with the "rulers of Sodom" and the "people of Gomorrah"? In the context of this passage I would like to suggest that it is for two reasons: first, they have "despised the Holy One of Israel" (v. 4) by not acknowledging his presence in their midst, and second, they have oppressed or ignored their fellows who were least capable of response and most in need. Sodom and Gomorrah were not known for either their holy lifestyle or their brotherly concern.

Here, it appears that the comparison with Sodom and Gomorrah has not so much to do with idolatry or flagrantly immoral lifestyles on the part of Judah as much as with the people's trivializing the presence of the Holy God and disregarding their covenant obligation to their brother.

### Trivializing the Holy

The purpose of worship in Israel was to praise God for His acts in creation and redemption, mostly celebrated and rehearsed at the annual festivals, and to offer the various sacrifices which allowed Israel to live in the presence of a holy God. An interesting passage in Ezekiel 45: 15–17 says that *all* the sacrifices conducted in Israel were to "make atonement for the house of Israel." All contributed to the "disposal of impurity" and made it possible for Israelites to live with God and each other in holiness.[10] The primary pre-condition for worship in ancient Israel was the recognition of the presence of impurity and unholiness, requiring atoning sacrifices in order to restore a holy relationship with both God and one's fellow. But impurity is only recognized where there is an absolute standard of purity beside which it is compared. God's holy presence in the midst of the camp of Israel in the wilderness and his "dwelling" in the midst of Israel in the temple should have brought about a response of awe and the recognition of sin. Israel was unsuited for worship and unprepared to be in fellowship with the Holy without first recognizing the reality of sin and the incongruity of "iniquity with solemn assembly."

The people of Isaiah's day had forgotten the reality of the divine presence in the midst of Israel. The offering of the entire catalog of sacrifices, the giving of prayers, and the rehearsal of Israel's past in the celebration of God's deliverance from Egypt, sustenance in the wilderness, and continued prosperity in the land continued unabated. But they seem to have missed the whole point of their sacrifices and celebrations. By failing to understand that the "Holy One of Israel" was present in their worship and daily lives they trivialized the holy. Their worship was tantamount to those who came before the Lord in their impurity, without recognition of their sin and need for cleansing.

Just as Israel over-emphasized worship rituals, so we may be equally guilty of trivializing the holy by de-emphasizing the role of tradition. This has to do with the peculiarly American assumption that change is good, while what is old or traditional is almost by definition obsolete or bad.

"Novelty," on the other hand, was never a virtue in Israel or anywhere in the ancient Near East. Worship practices and political and social institutions were

[10] David Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity* (SBL Dissertation Series 101; Atlanta: Scholars, 1987).

especially related to the actions of God in the beginning![11] The worship practices described in Isaiah derive their authority from Moses himself. There are two implications here: first, that worship practices are part and parcel of the very inception of a tradition, and second, that it is possible to be faithful to the traditional practice while being unfaithful to its underlying motivation.

It is not only the motivations for worship, but also the forms that worship takes, which must be in continuity with the original tradition. All worship practices, including all "innovations," ought to be evaluated in terms of their coherence with biblical teaching and apostolic faith. In our modern American fascination with change for change's sake, we may at times be guilty of the opposite problem which Isaiah decries: we at times have tried to dispense with the traditional forms of worship, something which would not have occurred to Isaiah or his audience.

### Lack of Concern for the Neighbor

Where there is no sense of God's holy presence and recognition of impurity and need for cleansing, there is also the disregard for the needs of the brother or sister. The Judeans had missed the whole point of worship: the giving of thanksgiving and praise to God for who He is and what He has done and the realization of the reality and need of their neighbors. Worship tendered to God must include the elements of atonement for sin and praise for God's redemption and presence on the one hand and the renewal of fellowship with our brothers and sisters on the other. There was no redemption of solitary Israelites from Egypt. All the Israelites were redeemed so that they might *worship God* and that He might *constitute them a people for His own possession.* For Judah to trivialize God's holy presence and ignore the needs of their fellow Israelites was to miss the entire point of worship.

[11] The giving of the rite of circumcision to Abraham (Gen. 17), the Torah, or law, given on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19–24), and the establishment of priestly and Levitical procedures (Leviticus, I Chr. 23–29) are all presented as having their inception with major figures in Israel's past. Cultic practices and laws—which could be amended and updated through the course of time, as the differences between Exodus 20–24 and Deuteronomy 5–6, 12–26 attest—always derived their continuing authority and relevance from the original tradition. Practices which were not so grounded in the ethos, confession, and cultic procedures of the original traditions were not tolerated (cf. Lev. 10:1–3, Num. 16, etc.). Note especially the passion with which the books of Chronicles ground the worship of the post-exilic period (post 539 BC) in David, the first king reigning in Jerusalem—the city of the temple—and not just in the pre-exilic period or even Solomon. Outside of Israel the requirement that the cult be based in creation or a significant intrusion of the gods into human affairs is virtually self-evident and too well-represented to document. It is sufficient to give a single example. In the *Enuma Elish*, the sacred creation story of the Babylonians, the temple in Babylon and its worship are established at the creation of the world and enjoy all the authority and prestige of antiquity and divine election.

## Conclusion

Like Israel, we may trivialize the holy by failing to recognize that the Holy One is present in our worship; a particular temptation today is to introduce novelties in worship that have no basis in the Christian tradition. We may also trivialize the holy by failing to perceive the ethical implications of our worship.

Worship in Israel was not primarily intended to attract the outsider, but Israelite worship offered to God was often attractive to outsiders.[12] There is no concern in the Old Testament for either "making worship relevant," so that individual tastes and preferences might be satisfied, or for merely maintaining familiar rituals without alteration. The tradition of Israel was a *living* tradition, but nonetheless it was an *authoritative* tradition; there was no place for innovation or novelty *per se* which was not in fundamental continuity with the past. Changes in Israelite worship were made in continuity with the tradition of the past in order to be faithful to that tradition.[13]

What, then, is the point of it all? Isaiah's concern is that in her corporate worship Israel might recognize the presence of the Holy One and her neighbor's need. No act of sacrifice or festival gathering in the Old Testament was an end in itself. All were intended to bring to Israel the awareness of God's demands for holiness and his holy nature, as well as the need for concrete acts of kindness and covenant faithfulness to fellow Israelites. But they often became ends in themselves, whether in Israel's attempts to "be like the nations" or in the repetition of comfortable traditions. True worship, whether in Israel or the church, has always been "an offering greater than all sacrifices that is pleasing to God, the spontaneous outburst of the heart in gratitude and adoration and praise."[14] Likewise, true worship must possess the moral dimension of concern for the neighbor in need.

Neither in Israel nor in the church is "iniquity with solemn assembly" condoned.

> What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)
>
> Religion that is pure and undefiled is this: to care for the orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world (James 1:27).

[12] See Isaiah 2:2–3, 56:6–8. "God-fearers," those Gentiles in the New Testament who were attracted to Judaism but were not proselytes, also come to mind (see Luke 7:1–5).

[13] Examples of the "updating" of Israelite worship practices are numerous. The three annual festivals, as I mentioned above, were originally agricultural festivals but became associated with the exodus, Passover, and wilderness wanderings.

[14] Muilenberg, *Way*, 116.

The worship God wants has always been the sacrifice of ourselves in willing obedience to Him. This, the only true offering in worship, involves the recognition of God's holy presence, our own need for cleansing, and concrete acts of compassion:

> Is this not the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?...Then you shall call and the Lord will answer, you shall cry for help, and He will say, "Here I am" (Is. 58:6, 9).

# "How Shall the Seeker Say Amen?" *The "Seeker" and the Service in First Corinthians*

Jeffrey Peterson

Change is inevitable, as the Greek philosopher Heraclitus observed some 500 years BC. This venerable insight has recently been rediscovered and urged as the key to guiding Churches of Christ into the next century. Among other needed changes, it is argued, worship must be refashioned so as to "connect" with a new generation and serve more effectively as a means of evangelism. To attract the masses of the unchurched adrift in urban and suburban America, the public services of the church must be rethought with the tastes of these "seekers" in mind.[1]

The general fact of change is inevitable, but the direction in which particular changes tend is not, especially when change results from deliberation and choice. Churches will implement radical changes in worship only if their leaders become convinced that this is the best course for the church to follow into the next century—or the only way for the church to survive. A theological examination of proposals to

*A first draft of this essay was presented to the ICS Administrative and Development Board at its Fall Retreat, September 18, 1993, in Salado, Texas. I am grateful to those attending for a stimulating discussion. My thanks also to my colleagues on the Institute faculty and to Lanny Henninger, pulpit minister of the University Avenue Church of Christ in Austin, for helpful criticism of the penultimate draft.

[1] A noted evangelical advocate of this approach to worship is Bill Hybels, pastor of the Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois, author of several books, and frequent contributor to *Leadership* magazine. George Barna has collected much of the data that inform the approach. For a brief introduction to the approach, see Ed Dobson, *Starting a Seeker Sensitive Service: How Traditional Churches Can Reach the Unchurched* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993). Both Hybels's and Dobson's churches hold separate services for seekers and for believers, as is currently done in some Churches of Christ. This essay argues only against the refashioning of *believers'* worship services along the lines of the seeker service in the interests of evangelistic outreach, as has been advocated in a number of essays appearing in the journal *Wineskins*; Dobson also advises against such a blurring of the lines between seeker and believers' services (*Seeker Sensitive Service*, 95–96). The alternative service itself raises a different set of questions, not dealt with here—such as how to distinguish regular attendance at a seeker service from full membership in the church, a problem which Dobson's church has encountered but which does not seem to concern him especially (*Seeker Sensitive Service*, 96–97). For the sake of brevity, this essay refers to the attempt to target unbelievers in worship as "the seeker service approach," including in this description both the rationale for the appeal to non-Christian perceptions through worship and the suggestion that the main worship assembly of the church should serve this function.

reorder worship so as to attract the unchurched is therefore in order, and the present essay is intended as a contribution to that effort.[2]

## A Service for "Seekers"

"Seekers" may seem familiar, for they are identical with the baby boomers whose exploits are chronicled in *Time* and *Newsweek*: a generation reared on television and rock, impatient of authority, dismissive of tradition, and willing to commit themselves to people or organizations only for a clear and immediate personal payoff. The following testimony is typical of the religious attitudes of this group:

> I think it's difficult for me to grow spiritually in an organized church. I have a hard time with a lot of dogmas. They don't match what I feel on a spiritual level, so I keep looking and looking. The thing about the Serendipity Class [at church] is we are exploring lots of different things. We've been talking about the concept of evil and Satan and all that, but any view is accepted. We will talk about it. People will argue with you, but you are perfectly free to express what you think and how you feel about things. In the course of talking back and forth, it helps us all to clarify it for ourselves. And we still may walk out not really agreeing on it, but we may have come a little bit farther in our own spiritual journey. That's what for me is so appealing about this class.[3]

The minister who makes it a first priority to attract and retain people with such sensibilities may succeed in presiding over a weekly convention of religious dilettantes; unless this attitude toward the Christian faith is challenged, the proceedings can scarcely be called a church.[4] Nonetheless, we are assured, the church for today is "seeker-targeted," and the worship service of the future is a "seeker service."

Seekers feel left out when words and actions that are strange to them predominate in a service. Worship targeting seekers will therefore soft-pedal those things that distinguish Christians from non-Christians—including the language in which the church has confessed the work of God in creation and redemption throughout its history, the symbolic actions by which Christians renew their incor-

[2] The essay is thus limited to examining whether worship in the seeker service mode is the most appropriate course to follow. To determine whether it is the only way to survive, one would need to know among other things whether modified services in fact attract the unchurched or merely redistribute members among the existing congregations of a locality. It would seem to many that what is needed to insure the survival of Churches of Christ in the next century is not the wholesale recruitment of non-members but the retention of the church's children, and it is at least debatable whether public worship will better facilitate this by attempting to compete head-to-head with the other diversions available to youth or by articulating a view of life not available in secular culture.

[3] Cited by Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993) 253.

[4] For a discussion of the kind of ministry needed to transform such attitudes, see William Willimon, "Turning an Audience into the Church," *Leadership* 15 (1994) 28–35.

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poration in Christ, and the traditional hymnody of the church.

Seekers have short attention spans; most are not given to sustained reflection on anything, much less the mysteries of existence and creation and redemption—traditionally, the stuff of the Christian sermon. One "connects" with them not through the mind but through the emotions. To lure seekers, it seems, the church must devise a worship service as stimulating as MTV, as vogue as *People*, as intellectually challenging as "Entertainment Tonight," and as personally demanding as membership in a video club.

The most troubling aspect of the seeker service approach is not any particular change in traditional worship that has been advocated[5] It is rather the pervasive assumption in the seeker service approach that the crucial perspective from which to assess worship lies not within the Christian tradition but outside it; the services of the church are evaluated from the standpoint of an outsider looking in on the church from a position somewhere in modern American culture. Any element of worship which might not appeal to contemporary pagans or to disaffected members of traditional churches should be suppressed.

Such lack of concern for continuity with the historic Christian tradition, and such readiness to impoverish the worship of the faithful in order to attract persons with no more than a casual interest in the faith, is staggering. It is one thing to propose reforms in worship to better express the historic faith of Christians[6] It is something else entirely to propose that churches abandon the Christian tradition as the principal resource for worship and replace it with the latest fads in entertainment and informational media and public relations. The basis of change in the seeker service approach is not the faith of the church but the predilections of potential religious

[5]Among the many departures from traditional worship suggested in this connection are the following: the removal of communion to another meeting for believers only, often in private homes; choral music or featured performers as a supplement to congregational singing, or in place of it, with contemporary Christian music replacing traditional hymns and the projection of lyrics on a screen displacing hymnals; the use of skits in addition to preaching to present the Christian message; and a limitation of the amount of traditional doctrine conveyed in the sermon, with preaching focused on contemporary problems faced by the churched and the unchurched alike.

[6] Two reforms arising from recent study of the history of Christian worship deserve special consideration. First is the adoption of a scriptural lectionary, which would address the unhappy circumstance that since the Second Vatican Council, the worship of most denominations involves more public reading of Scripture than is usual in a tradition based on respect for the Bible; see *Common Lectionary: The Lectionary Proposed by the Consultation on Common Texts* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1983). Second is the recovery of the Pauline understanding of the Lord's Supper as a communion in the risen Lord and the focal point of the service, which ancient liturgies preserved in part by the observance of the supper after the sermon; see Wendell Willis, *Worship* (Living Word; Austin, Texas: Sweet, 1973) 37–45; Keith Watkins, *The Breaking of the Bread: An Approach to Worship for the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ)* (St. Louis: Bethany, 1966); and Robert E. Webber, *Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 77–114. Allan McNicol has proposed an order of service that includes both of these reforms ("Contemporary Developments in the Church of Christ: Reflections on Worship," *Leaven* 1/1 [1990] 30–35).

consumers.[7] For guidance in the conduct of worship, the church is advised to consult not the Christian tradition but reigning fashions in marketing.

## Paul and the "Seeker Service"

Advocates of this approach to worship have claimed the support of Paul: the apostle to the Gentiles became "all things to all men" in his preaching of the Gospel, and so should the church today, so that we might by all means save some (1 Cor. 9:19–22).[8] The apostle was prepared to regard much in his religious background as dispensable, and Christians who follow his example today will so regard their accustomed style of worship.

The appeal to 1 Corinthians in this matter is appropriate, for here we find the most extensive discussion of the church's worship in the New Testament (chapters 11–14). Also, throughout this letter Paul keeps one eye on relations between Christians and non-Christians, both inside and outside the setting of worship.[9]

But Paul's description of his missionary strategy in 1 Corinthians 9 is not the only passage relevant to the question, nor even the most pertinent; his description of the response of a "seeker" to Christian worship in 1 Corinthians 14 clearly shows the limits that the apostle set on the accommodation of the service to a pagan audience.

Seen in the context of the whole discussion of worship in 1 Corinthians 11–14, Paul's remarks suggest that, far from pioneering the seeker service, he would frown on the attempt to tailor the church's worship to the preferences of those unacquainted with the faith. In Paul's view, the church's worship should rather exhibit the heart of the Gospel, so that believers might be fortified in their adherence to it and outsiders might be inescapably confronted by its claims.

[7] The attempt to disguise this aspect of the seeker service approach by citing its theological grounding in an attachment to Jesus rather than the first-century church is not convincing. To drive such an absolute wedge between Lord and church represents a serious misunderstanding of the incarnation; in 1 Cor. 12:12–13, Paul applies the description "Christ" to both the Lord Jesus and Christians incorporated in him through baptism, taken together (cf. Eph. 1:10; Gal. 3:28 [literally translated, "you are all *one man* [*heis*] in Christ Jesus"]). As Austin Farrer has remarked, "There is no ... partaking in the Head which is not communion with the members: the separation of the two aspects is unthinkable" ("Eucharist and Church in the New Testament," *The Parish Communion: A Book of Essays* [ed. A. G. Hebert; London: SPCK, 1954] 83). Rubel Shelly and Randall Harris thus quite properly focus on the image of the church as Christ's body, although the title of their ecclesiology (Monroe, La.: Howard, 1992) does not quite capture the Pauline doctrine: the church is, not *The Second Incarnation*, but the one incarnation extended, the diffusion of the life of the Son of God through those who have become his members. One need not regard the New Testament's description of the churches which the apostles established as an exhaustive blueprint to see in it a definitive embodiment of the Gospel and an indispensable guide for the common life of all Christians who follow after.

[8] Dobson, *Seeker Sensitive Service*, 53–64.

[9] Paul contrasts the church with those outside its fellowship in 1:18, 23; 6:1–2, 6, 9–10; 7:32–40; 8:5–6; 11:32; and 12:2. He describes conversion to the Gospel as a crossing from the world into the church in 1:9, 13, 15, 21, 26–30; 3:1, 10; 4:15; 6:11, 20; 7:15, 17–24; 9:11, 19–23, 27; 12:13; and 15:1. He considers relations between Christians and non-Christians outside the context of worship in 5:9–10; 6:1–6; 7:12–16; and chaps. 8–10 before considering the presence of non-members in worship in chap. 14.

### The Apostle's Example and the Worship of the Church

The use of 1 Corinthians 9:19–22 as a Pauline warrant for the seeker service is not supported by a consideration of the passage in its context in the letter. The text is one of several in 1 Corinthians in which Paul presents his way of life as a model for his converts at Corinth.[10] Paul applies his example to different problems in the Corinthian church, and he commends different aspects of his life for imitation.

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul develops the particular use of his example that he introduces briefly in 6:12; his refusal to insist on his rights as an apostle shows the Corinthians how to behave in the matter of food sacrificed to pagan gods![11] The chapter leads up to the statement of Paul's general missionary policy in vv. 19–22, which involved giving up the Jewish way of life to which he was accustomed for the sake of making converts among both Jews and Gentiles.

The lesson for the Corinthians is that in their difficult social situation, caught between sociable pagan neighbors on the one hand and fellow Christians chary of sacrificial meat on the other, they must be ready to forsake their accustomed dining practices to avoid leading other Christians into sin![12] The text says nothing about what Christians should do when they meet to share their regular banquet in memory of Jesus and rehearse the deliverance that God wrought through him.

Paul's example is mentioned in connection with the church's *worship* not in 1 Corinthians 9:19–22 but in 10:32–11:2. The passage forms a transition between two main sections of the letter: chaps. 5–10, which treat various issues concerning the relations between Christians and non-Christians in Corinthian society, and chaps. 11–14, which deal with problems in the Corinthians' worship assemblies![13] Paul's admonition in 1 Corinthians 10:32 to "give no offense to Jews or Greeks or to the church of God" summarizes his resolution of the dispute over food sacrificed to pagan gods in chaps. 8–10. "Giving no offense to the church of God" means in the first

[10] Abraham J. Malherbe discusses this characteristic feature of Paul's exhortation of his converts in its ancient setting in *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophic Tradition of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 52–60.

[11] Paul begins the appeal to his example at 8:13, with the use of the pronoun "I," and this verse specifies the respect in which he commends his life as worthy of imitation in the chapter that follows. He devotes 9:1–14 to establishing his right as an apostle to receive financial support from his converts; he then turns around in 9:15–18 to present his refusal of support from his churches (mentioned in passing already in 9:12b) as the model to be followed.

[12] In 1 Cor. 8:10–13 and 10:27–28, Paul concretely describes the behavior to which he is exhorting the Corinthians throughout chaps. 8–10.

[13] For this division of the letter into sections, see Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 277–289. Transitional passages between sections are a feature of 1 Corinthians and of Paul's letters in general. See also 1 Cor. 4:17–21, which connects 1:10–4:16 with chap. 5; and 5:12–13, connecting chap. 5 with chap. 6. Nils A. Dahl discusses such transitional passages in Romans and points out the inadequacy of a traditional outline to represent their function in Paul's epistolary rhetoric ("The Missionary Theology in the Epistle to the Romans," *Studies in Paul: Theology for the Early Christian Mission* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977] 78–88).

instance refraining from actions that will lead a fellow member of the church to violate a moral scruple.

But the admonition to "give no offense to the church of God" also points forward, preparing the reader for what follows in chap. 11; as he introduces the topic of adornment in worship, Paul commends the Corinthians for their fidelity to the traditions that he had passed on to them (11:2), which accord with the practices of churches everywhere (11:16; cf. 4:17).[14] One way for the Corinthians to avoid offending against the church of God is to conserve the apostolic traditions, both in worship (11:23–25) and in doctrine (15:1–11).

Throughout1 Corinthians Paul stresses the obligations of the local church to the church universal (cf. 1:2; 4:17; 7:17; 14:33, 36; 16:1–4). It is striking that when he turns to the service of worship he insists that his converts respect the twenty years of Christian tradition that preceded the foundation of the church at Corinth![15] The attitude of the apostle to the Gentiles toward liturgical tradition contrasts markedly to that of contemporary advocates of the seeker service.

## The "Seeker" and the Service in 1 Corinthians 14

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul argues that prophecy is superior to speaking in tongues as a public medium for the praise of God and the proclamation of his saving deeds.[16] By the phrase "speaking in tongues" Paul refers to the praise of God in utterances that other worshippers cannot understand (vv. 2, 4a, 9, 14), while by "prophecy" he means praise and exhortation in language intelligible to all present (vv. 3, 4b, 19). Since a principal aim of worship is to "build up" the church in the understanding of the faith (vv. 3, 6, 12, 19), prophecy is a better gift than speaking in tongues; for "the one who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but the one who prophesies edifies the church" (v. 4).

In vv. 13–17, Paul insists that the "edification" or "building up" of the church takes place only if the understanding is engaged; prophecy rather than tongues-speaking edifies the church because it can be understood. Paul once again appeals to his example in vv. 14–15 with his statement, "I will pray with my spirit, but I will also

[14] Besides the reference to the churches of God in 11:16, another indication that 1 Cor. 10:32 should be read with both what precedes it and what follows is the appearance of the motif of imitation in both 11:1 ("practice the imitation of my example") and 11:2 ("you remember every aspect of me [as a model for yourselves]"). The major break inserted between 11:1 and 11:2 in most versions obscures this element of continuity.

[15] Paul had once staked his ministry on the essential congruence of his message with the Gospel of those who preceded him in the faith and in the apostolate, and so he went to Jerusalem to determine that he "was not running, or had not run, in vain" (Gal. 2:2). Paul is constrained to mention this possible negative outcome even though he recounts this episode in Galatians to stress his relative independence from the pillar-apostles at Jerusalem.

[16] For full discussion of the chapter, see Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 652–713.

pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind" (NIV). This statement pre-empts outright the proposal that personality types should determine the character of worship, with rational, "left-brain" worshipers requiring cognitive services and "right-brain" personalities who sooner feel than think—most seekers among them—in need of emotive worship activities.[17]

In response to the enthusiasm of some Corinthians for unbridled ecstasy in worship, Paul insists that the understanding ("mind") and the emotions ("spirit") properly move together in the corporate celebration of God's gift in Christ.[18] The emotions appropriate to Christian worship arise from the understanding of God's actions in Christ. Emotional uplift generated apart from the preaching and re-enactment of God's redemption of us through his Son has no legitimate place in the worship of the church.

While the edification of the church is the major consideration that Paul uses to commend prophecy, in vv. 16–25 he introduces an additional consideration: the reaction of non-Christians to the worship service. Paul mentions two categories of non-members who may be guests in the assembly. One of the words that Paul uses to describe non-Christians means "unbeliever" unambiguously (*apistos*, vv. 22–24, as in 1 Cor. 6:6; 7:15; 10:27); the other word (*idiotes*, vv. 16, 23–24) is translated by the standard Greek lexicon of the New Testament as "inquirer"—a person interested in the faith who attends the service in order to learn more about Christianity.[19]

In 1 Corinthians 14:16–25, then, we have Paul's counsel precisely as to how the church should accommodate "seekers." Paul's major concern is for *clarity* when the Christian confession is proclaimed in worship; when Christians gather for

[17] The proposal that worship oscillate between intellectualism and emotionalism to satisfy both these personality types grossly oversimplifies current neuropsychological theory. Stephen G. Meyer has suggested more responsibly that worship should engage *each* worshiper on *both* rational and symbolic—not simply emotive—levels ("Neuropsychology and Worship," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 3 [1975] 281–289). Webber argues (*Common Roots*, 93–96, 104–108) that the celebration of the Supper is the key element in the service for alleviating the rationalistic tendency inherited from Zwingli, which Richard T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen have argued to be characteristic of the restoration tradition ( *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America 1630–1875* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988] 156–160). Modeling the service of the spoken word on a television variety hour, as currently some appear to be suggesting, hardly represents a lasting contribution to the restoration tradition.

[18] Diogenes Allen suggests a helpful illustration to show how the understanding may be indispensable to an emotional experience: at a crucial point in a football game, a pass dropped in the end zone will elicit a groan of anguish, and a caught one whoops of delight, only from a person who understands the rules of the game well enough to recognize a touchdown ( *The Traces of God in a Frequently Hostile World* [Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley, 1981] 3). As the rules of the Christian "game" are infinitely more difficult to master than those of football, involving such difficult "plays" as repentance and reformation of life, the church had better spend its communal time clarifying the rules and discussing the plays rather than staging pep rallies.

[19] *Idiotes* denotes a "layman" in secular Greek and is used in a religious context of a non-member permitted to offer sacrifices in the meetings of a private religious cult (Walter Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [translated and adapted by W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979] 370b, s.v. " *idiotes*"). The title for this essay is adapted from the translation "inquirer" in 1 Cor. 14:16.

worship, the faith is to be exhibited with sufficient clarity that the interested non-member can respond to the living God who has brought salvation through his Son.[20]

The affirmation of Christian faith takes different forms in the service. Paul has earlier mentioned the Lord's Supper, in receiving which Christians "proclaim the death of the Lord until he come," in a way comparable to Paul's own missionary proclamation of the cross (1 Cor. 11:26).[21] Christians made several different kinds of verbal proclamation in worship (14:6, 26); the particular one that he mentions in connection with the seeker is a "blessing" or "thanksgiving" (14:16).

The blessing is a form of prayer traditional in Jewish worship; for example, "Blessed art thou, O Lord, who quickenest the dead!"[22] This form of prayer focuses attention on God and his action, relating the benefits of the Gospel to the God who has given them, as in Paul's blessing in 2 Corinthians 1:3–4. Typical of early Christian worship are two extended blessings which fully recite God's saving deeds in his Son (Eph. 1:3–14 and 1 Pet. 1:3–12). Paul expects the service of the spoken word to acquaint visitors with the story of Christ.[23]

Paul assumes that non-members will be present in worship, brought there by friends or relatives, but he offers not the slightest suggestion that Christians should arrange their common worship with an eye towards *enticing* non-members; indeed, the restrictions on ecstatic prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14:27–28 may have made the Corinthian assembly *less* attractive to pagan devotees of oracles like the one at Delphi. Paul insists that worship be *intelligible* to pagans, not that it be *attractive*. He knows that the Gospel, clearly stated, scandalizes non-Christians (1 Cor. 1:18–25). Indeed, Paul's reason for avoiding *unnecessary* offense to non-Christians and counseling his converts to do the same was to lead unbelievers to an understanding of the *necessary* scandal, the word of the cross at the heart of Christian faith.

[20] The recent study of Frank C. Senn (*The Witness of the Worshiping Community: Liturgy and the Practice of Evangelism* [New York: Paulist, 1993]) suggests how this understanding of the function of the service in evangelism, characteristic of the ancient church but markedly different from the seeker service approach, may be appropriated today.

[21] Paul uses the verb *kataggellein* ("to proclaim") also in 1 Corinthians 2:1 and 9:14, both in reference to the missionary preaching of the cross. The verb is cognate with *euaggelion*, Paul's characteristic word for the Gospel.

[22] From the second of the Eighteen Benedictions of the Jewish synagogue service, some of which were likely prayed in the first century AD. For a convenient listing of all eighteen, see Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 543–544.

[23] That the content of the various forms of verbal utterance in early Christian worship (cf. 14:6, 26) concerned the Gospel of the crucified and risen Messiah is suggested not only by the response of the outsider in 14:24–25, but also by the transition that Paul makes from the description of the service to the summary of his Gospel that opens chap. 15. Paul must argue for the general resurrection in chap. 15 because "some . . . *are saying* that there is no resurrection of the dead" (v. 12); presumably this denial has taken place at the service, where the foundational beliefs of the community are rehearsed and developed.

When worship is appropriately conducted, "everyone is *instructed* and *summoned to right conduct*" (1 Cor. 14:31).[24] In such a service, the bearing of the Gospel on the life of the hearers will be inescapable. The unbeliever will be led to a critical evaluation of life apart from the living God (vv. 24–25a), a submission to him (v. 25b), and a recognition of his presence in the church (v. 25c).[25]

It is questionable whether a service calculated to appeal to persons with the attitude to religion characteristic of many baby boomers is capable of evoking such a response. Such worship will certainly do nothing to strengthen the faithful in their adherence to the historic, biblical faith.

## Common Worship and Christian Identity

In 1 Corinthians 14:16, Paul asks rhetorically how the non-member can assent to unintelligible prayer. The phrase that Paul uses for the inquirer's assent is "to say the amen"—a Hebrew word which Greek converts had to be taught to say. In fact, worship in Greek-speaking churches included a number of traditional words and phrases taken over from the Christian Jews of Judea.[26] Far from being an expression of their "heart-language," these were terms that the Corinthians had to learn from Paul; "seekers" learned them, too, when they observed the church at worship.

The Corinthians' new vocabulary reflects the new identity that worship conferred on all Gentile converts to Christianity. Perhaps the most striking indication of this new identity is the description of their life before conversion as the time "when you were Gentiles" (1 Cor. 12:2). By learning the traditions of the church, these Greeks have become subjects of Jesus the Messiah and gained a share in the inheritance of Israel, the people of God. The church of both Jews and Gentiles now makes up "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16).

Paul's converts have undergone a transformation in their understanding of themselves, their place before God, and their destiny.[27] Even the language in which they now praise God is language that they have learned to speak. This transformation, which began with baptism, was confirmed and deepened week to week in worship, as they confessed the name of the one who found them "aliens to the commonwealth of

[24] The versions translate "instructed and encouraged." The latter word is used to mean not "cheered up" but "urged to live rightly." It is Paul's characteristic term for the "appeal" to live in conformity with the Gospel (Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 1:10; 4:16; 16:15; 1 Thess. 4:1; 5:14).

[25] For conversion as a turning from idols to the living God and his Son, see 1 Thess. 1:9–10; 1 Cor. 12:1–3. For some of the Corinthians, this also involved forsaking certain vices (1 Cor. 6:9–11).

[26] Paul assumes also that Gentile Christians know the Aramaic expressions *marana tha* ("Our Lord, come!" 1 Cor. 16:22) and *abba* ("Father!" Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15).

[27] Thus, Paul can speak to his Gentile converts about "our fathers" who crossed the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1). Paul once refers to ethnic Jews as "Israelites" (Rom. 9:4) and to the nation as a whole as "Israel" (Rom. 9–11 passim), but he more fully describes them as "Israel according to the flesh" (1 Cor. 10:18). For the Christology correlative to this ecclesiology, see N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 18–40.

Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise" and drew them near to himself through the cross of Christ (Eph. 2:12–13).

If the church today forsakes traditions of worship *only* because modern pagans find them foreign or offensive, it is unclear how Christians in our generation are to be established as the Israel of God.

## Conclusion

Since the beginning of this century, conservatives have criticized mainline Protestantism for its accommodation of the church's faith to the assumptions of modern secular culture. Now, as the century draws to a close and liberal Protestants in increasing numbers call for an end to accommodation, it is the evangelicals who are taking the lead in fitting preaching and worship to the mold of popular culture. Paul's treatment of common worship suggests that the seeker service approach advocated by influential evangelical preachers lacks the biblical and theological support that its advocates have claimed for it. Indeed, it reflects a basic misunderstanding of the relationship between Christian worship and the Gospel.

The unbeliever can say "Amen," expressing assent to the Christian vision of God and his saving work, only when our worship clearly articulates and embodies the Gospel. The critical need in worship today is not for current tunes, celebrity testimonials, or increased outlets for self-expression and enjoyment; it is for clear affirmation of the fundamental convictions which unite the church. Worship which abandons or disguises such affirmation may succeed in attracting an audience, but it must fail to include worshipers in the adoration which the Son offers to his God and Father from eternity, the everlasting worship which he will complete when he returns to make all creatures subject to the Father (1 Cor. 15:23–28). Failing thus to associate worshipers with the incarnate life of the Son of God, the church fails in its reason for existence, the goal of both its mission and its worship.

# "The Pleasures of Worship"
## *Heartfelt Devotion in Stone and Campbell*

Gary Holloway

> Next to the beatific vision of God in his own glorious heaven, there is nothing on earth to compare with the pleasures of a soul-absorbing protracted interview in prayer with God; or in the celebration of the Lord's supper in the solemn silence of a sincerely pious and well informed Christian community . . . .
>
> Alexander Campbell[1]

Much of the current agitation for change in the worship of Churches of Christ is based on a critique of our current and past worship practices. All we really cared about was getting our ticket punched each Sunday by completing the five acts of worship (prayer, singing, Lord's Supper, contribution, and sermon). Because of the rationalism of the early leaders in the movement (particularly Alexander Campbell), we had little place for emotion in our assemblies, and became concerned solely with fulfilling the requirements of the acts of worship in an orderly manner.

This description of unemotional worship, although overstated, may ring true for some of us who grew up in the church between the 1940s and 1970s, but it certainly is an unfair characterization of the thought of Alexander Campbell and other early leaders of the Restoration Movement. In fact, as we shall see, they were concerned with the same issues that face us in worship today: How can we insure our worship is heart-felt? What forms of worship are most appropriate? How can God remain the focus of our worship? How can our worship draw the outsider?

### Worship from the Heart

The quote that begins this article makes it clear that Campbell believed worship should be heart-felt. We would do well to recover his language of the "pleasures of worship." When was the last time you heard someone describe worship as a pleasure? However, it is true that in his day Campbell had to fight extremes of

[1] *Millennial Harbinger* (1849) 9.

emotionalism in worship. Frontier revivals were notoriously emotional and many confused "spirited" worship with spiritual worship. Campbell fought these excesses with an appeal to reason and order. However it is grossly unfair to characterize him as an unfeeling rationalist who cared only for restoring the external forms of worship.

Indeed, Campbell realized the danger of overreacting to the extremes of emotional worship. He prints with approval the following letter from James Henshal:

> They who come over from a noisy, irregular, and external form of worship, are too apt to place reform in being singularly quiet and contemplative; and where animal excitement has been mistaken for true devotion, reform is likely to consist in eradicating the feelings altogether. Ah me! We are so prone to extremes. Lord have mercy upon us![2]

Although these are Henshal's words, Campbell often published letters in his periodicals that expressed his own views (when he disagreed with a writer, he made a clear rebuttal). I believe that Campbell wholeheartedly agreed with Henshal's further statement that what he feared most was a "dry, informal, intellectual worship, performed in an insipid and indifferent manner."[3]

Campbell was not alone in calling for worship to be from the heart. His contemporaries Walter Scott, Robert Richardson, Robert Milligan, and others made the same plea.[4] Some may claim that more recent worship in Churches of Christ emphasized the correctness of the acts and ignored the heart, but in fact David Lipscomb and E. G. Sewell at the turn of the century, G. C. Brewer at mid-century, and our more recent leaders have all been remarkably consistent in condemning empty ritual and calling for the true worship that springs from the heart.[5]

But how is one to promote heart-felt worship? Should we change what is done in worship to make it more exciting? Must worship be in tune with our "heart-language?" Does "noisy and irregular" worship produce more true devotion?

To Campbell and other leaders, these questions place the cart before the horse. Worship must not be changed to appeal to our hearts, rather our hearts must be prepared for worship. Worship did not come naturally to his age any more than it comes to ours:

[2] *Millennial Harbinger* (1834) 34.

[3] *Millennial Harbinger* (1834) 34.

[4] Walter Scott, *The Evangelist* (1842) 80; Robert Richardson, *Millennial Harbinger* (1847) 340–41 (later reprinted as the first chapter in his book, *Communings in the Sanctuary*); Robert Milligan, *The Scheme of Redemption* (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1868) 432.

[5] *Questions Answered by Lipscomb and Sewell* (Nashville: McQuiddy, 1957) 294; G.C. Brewer, *The Model Church* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1957) 142. For more recent views on heart-felt worship, see the quotations from the Abilene Christian lectures in William S. Banowsky, *Mirror of a Movement* (Dallas: Christian Publishing, 1965) 243–244.

> The present age is not an age given to devotion. Men have not time to meditate, to pray, to examine themselves. They have too many newspapers to read, too many political questions to discuss, too much business to transact, too many doctrines to debate, too many faults and errors to censure—and too little taste for communion with God.[6]

How does one promote heart worship in a busy, secular, entertainment-oriented age? Not by changing what is done in worship, but by changing the attitudes of the worshiper. True worship does not come easily or naturally; it requires effort and preparation:

> No religious offerings, services, or worship can be acceptable to the Lord without the proper preparation of the heart; and it is out of the question for any person to rush from the midst of worldly thoughts, words, and actions, into the presence of the Lord, either acceptably or profitably. This is to offer the sacrifice of fools...[7]

Campbell would remind those who do not find worship exciting, uplifting, or relevant that the problem is most likely in their hearts, not in outmoded forms of worship.

## Orderly Worship

Any discussion of order in worship conjures up pictures of dry, dull, and rote services where we do the same thing each Sunday and no honest emotion is ever seen. In this view, order implies lack of sincerity, while disorder and spontaneity are exciting and spiritual. However, this contrast between order and heart-felt worship cannot be found in Scripture. Indeed, order is given as a hallmark of true worship. This does not keep some from preferring disorder in our day as well as in Campbell's:

> The worship of false gods is a scene of superlative tumult, confusion and disorder. So is the corrupt worship of some who acknowledge the one only living and true God.[8]

Orderly worship can certainly become empty ritual, but it may also be sincere and heart-felt. Campbell says, "Every one that speaks or acts must feel himself specially in the presence of the Lord. . . ."[9] Having spoken of the feeling of worship, he launches immediately into a discussion of the ordinances or acts of worship.

[6] *Millennial Harbinger* (1838) 392.
[7] *Millennial Harbinger* (1838) 392. Robert Milligan, *The Scheme of Redemption*, 36, also sees the need for "preparation and discipline of both head and heart" for worship.
[8] *Millennial Harbinger* (1835) 507.
[9] *Millennial Harbinger* (1835) 508.

The five acts of worship have been discussed at length recently in Churches of Christ. No doubt some are correct in their criticism that we have at times in our past treated these acts as legal requirements that must be performed each Sunday in order to fulfill God's command to worship. This was not the understanding or practice of the early leaders of our movement. Although Campbell is maligned as a mere rationalist who had no place for emotion in worship, we have seen his clear call for deep feeling in worship. However this feeling is not to be expressed in whatever way we see fit, but in the ordinances God has established. Indeed, it is by these acts that the early church expressed its faith, and it is by these acts our feelings can best be expressed.

Some are critical of the five acts because they believe other actions—drama, dialogue, dance, or musical performances—can better express the devotion of contemporary worshipers. In reply Campbell would argue that we are bound by the ordinances delivered to the early church by her Redeemer. By arguing that the early church practiced these five ordinances—singing, prayer, preaching, the Lord's Supper, and the contribution for the poor—Campbell anticipated the conclusions of modern scholars on New Testament worship.[10]

Some also are critical of the five acts because they claim they lead to a stifling uniformity in the sequence of worship ("two songs and a prayer," etc.). By order Campbell does not mean each church must have the same sequence of worship; those questions are up to each local church. This is part of the genius of Christian worship: it is "designed for all nations, and is adapted to all the varieties of human circumstances, from east to west, and from pole to pole."[11] The insistence on order and ordinances then is not a disguised plea for a Western, American form of worship, but rather a call to return to the New Testament practice of worship that is applicable to all cultures.

## Serious Worship

Campbell's talk of the pleasures of worship and of worship from the heart does not mean he measured the quality of worship by the quantity of emotion that was outwardly expressed. Worship is no good without sincere feeling, but this feeling is directed to the One who is a consuming fire. Reverence is a component of all true worship, and reverence is shown by worshiping in a serious manner. Worship should be from the heart but also from the mind; one should not take precedence over the

[10] For example, see Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953); Gerhard Delling, *Worship in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962); Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (New York: Revell, 1964); and C.F.D. Moule, *Worship in the New Testament* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1961). Of course, Campbell was not the first to speak of these ordinances; he here shows his debt to Calvin and the Reformed Church.

[11] *Millennial Harbinger* (1835) 509.

other. In speaking of the excesses of emotion in the worship of his day, Campbell says, "Then it is, that heart-religion usurps the throne of reason, proscribes common sense and propriety, and rends the welkin [tears the sky] with its hideous shouts."[12]

Some criticize current worship in Churches of Christ as lacking in visible emotion. However their solution is to go to the other extreme and campaign for clapping, swaying, and shouting. Again, our age is no more naturally given to common sense and decorum than was Campbell's. Worship must be serious, planned, and sincere. We should strive for a middle path between the extremes of uncontrolled display of emotion and empty unfeeling ritual:

> In the solemn assembly simplicity of dress and manners—gravity, sobriety, and serious cheerfulness, equi-distant from the morose austerity of Pharisaic sanctity and the thoughtless gaiety of Sadducean levity, are essential elements of christian decency and order.[13]

This rage for order, decency, and seriousness in worship cannot be simply dismissed as springing from Campbell's rationalism. Barton W. Stone, whom some call a pietist,[14] uses even stronger language concerning seriousness in worship. In commenting on "a want of solemnity in the Lord's supper," he says, "such irreverent conduct ... has no good effect on by-standers."[15] Stone was not a believer in unruly, spontaneous, worship but rather felt such worship actually drives away the outsider.

But what does a solemn assembly look like? When people arrive they spend a few minutes in private prayer. Members sit near to each other in order to make the serving of the Lord's Supper more convenient and less distracting. Songs of praise are sung, preferably standing. Scripture is read accurately, distinctively, and solemnly. Members leave the assembly respectfully, but greet one another affectionately. In all these actions is a spirit of joy and celebration, but it is a serious cheerfulness, appropriate to the worship of the Living God.

Campbell's and Stone's picture of a solemn assembly should serve as a model for our time. Too many of us approach worship flippantly or at least with no thought of preparation. Some confuse informality with sincerity, assuming God wants us to be spontaneous. Lack of planning is considered a virtue. We need to be reminded that God desires our best in worship: heart, soul, and mind. Since worship is an encounter

[12] *Millennial Harbinger* (1842) 86.

[13] *Millennial Harbinger* (1835) 508.

[14] In the video *Like Fire in Dry Stubble* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1992) Richard Hughes says, "Campbell was a rationalist and Stone was a pietist." Since he does not clearly define these terms, it is difficult to accept this distinction. When it comes to their writings on worship, however, it is clear that one cannot make this distinction. Stone's comments on worship generally sound more rationalistic and less pietistic than do Campbell's.

[15] *Christian Messenger* (1843) 168; see also *Christian Messenger* (1822) 280.

with the transcendent Father who loves us, we must approach it with a serious cheerfulness.

### Worship that Draws the Outsider

A concern of many in Churches of Christ today is to provide worship opportunities that will draw the outsider. To draw the unchurched, some propose a separate "seeker service" where worship is quite different from what has been our practice in the past. Others would change the Sunday morning service to fit the outsider.

This concern for outsiders (those we used to call "the lost") is certainly biblical and is to be commended. However it raises two important questions. The first is, "How far can we go in changing worship to make non-Christians comfortable without making it something other than truly Christian worship?" Drama, dialogue, musical performances, and dance may draw the outsider, but are they pleasing to God? Has God not chosen certain actions (the ordinances mentioned above) as the appropriate ways of corporately expressing devotion to him? Our practice of worship for over 150 years has been to praise God by these ordinances alone. If a church may acceptably worship God in any manner it finds comfortable or that it thinks will draw the outsider, then we, not God, have become the final arbiters of worship, and any form of worship, no matter how bizarre, is allowed.

Does this mean we should have no concern for the outsider at our assemblies? Of course, we should. The second question raised by this concern is: "Can our current practice of worshiping God according to his ordinances (the five acts) draw the outsider?" The answer is a resounding "Yes," provided our worship is clearly sincere and from the heart. In his discussion of heart-felt worship and the ordinances, Campbell urged that the outsider be a prime consideration. Visitors will be "favorably or unfavorably disposed towards the assembly" depending on whether they perceive both our sincerity and our order:

> When we survey the countenance of a religious assembly on the Lord's day, if we discover an evident vacuity of devotional thought, of sentiment, of feeling (to say nothing of the positive appearance of levity, of vanity, of pride, of carnality), the forms of worship, were they as pure and uncorrupt as those of the virgin church of Jerusalem, would neither illuminate the understanding nor propitiate the heart of the intelligent and reflecting spectators.[16]

It is a gross distortion of Campbell and our heritage to picture him and our other spiritual ancestors as being solely or even primarily concerned with restoring the forms of worship at the expense of feeling. The outsider will not be drawn, even

[16] *Millennial Harbinger* (1836) 179. As we saw above, Stone had a similar fear that lack of seriousness in worship would repulse the outsider.

if our forms of worship are perfectly correct, by a lukewarm, emotionless worship. However, to draw outsiders, we must not appeal to their natural wants, desires, or needs (what Campbell calls "carnality") but to their desire to truly worship the Lord God. Campbell was convinced that right forms, when performed thoughtfully and with feeling, will draw the outsider:

> [T]he open, but unostentatious display, of all the christian affections, feelings, sympathies, joys, and delights, in our meetings—in our songs, prayers, and christian feasts, are part's of God's appointed means of quickening and exalting our piety, and of producing it in others. . . .[17]

## A Model for Today

If Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone, and other leaders were around today and visited many of our assemblies, no doubt they would join with those who are calling for change in our worship. Their call however would not be to change our forms of worship to make them more meaningful to us or to outsiders. These forms are biblical and should not be changed. What should be changed is our hearts. We should take worship seriously. We should prepare our hearts and minds for worship instead of rushing in at the last minute (or twenty minutes late). Those that plan worship should work to insure that our songs and prayers focus on the Almighty God. We should in a dignified and orderly way show our heart-felt, sincere devotion to God. Such display of genuine devotion will appeal to the outsider.

Campbell and Stone were right about worship, not just for their time, but for ours. To improve worship in Churches of Christ, we do not need to jump on the bandwagon of each new form of worship that comes down the pike. What we do (and have done for years) in worship is what the early Christians did and what God desires: we pray, sing, learn, give, and eat the Lord's Supper. What we need to do is to approach these acts with more planning, thought, and feeling. Outsiders who see such worship will be drawn to the One to whom all worship belongs.

[17] *Millennial Harbinger* (1836) 181.

# Contemporary Trends in Hymnody
## *Bane or Blessing to the Church?*

Allan J. McNicol

We are troubled over the steadily increasing cacophony of the debate concerning the role of music in the assembly. Some see this as a sign of vitality; they are no longer prepared to accept uncritically the venerable legacy of the hymnody of the church over the centuries. It is asserted that this hymnody is out of touch with the concerns of the modern person. Moderns, we are told, are tone deaf to such music. We need music that is upbeat; music that leads us to shout praises and clap. Bluntly, it is claimed that traditional hymns hinder rather than help worship and evangelism. With the increasing balkanization within congregations over music and hymns, several disquieting new directions have begun to emerge. The issue needs to be raised whether these directions are simply harmless departures from the present norm or whether they reflect, however unintendedly, an ominous theological agenda.

### Two Troubling Developments in Recent Hymnody

It would be easy to be critical of the selection and function of hymns in the average church during the past generation. Many are sentimental, moralistic, and banal. And we have too often tended to use hymns as mood setters or "fillers" before or after the events that are deemed to be of "real" significance.

Still, one must confess dis-ease with respect to several undercurrents that are now at work with respect to the use of hymns in Churches of Christ. First, we note the appearance of what some have called "performance music."[1]

Performance music has been a characteristic feature of Southern Baptists. Indeed, Baptists with their use of choirs, orchestras, soloists, and energetic precentors (song-leaders) have consciously structured the music of their assemblies to culminate in the sermon with its evangelistic plea to accept Christ. Performance music is part of the evangelistic thrust of the service; it prepares those in the assembly for a call to decision.

[1]The term is that of the prominent Baptist professor of church music Don Hustad, "Christian Worship: Is this One of God's Terrible Springtimes?" *Crux* 28/4 (December 1992) 31. In this context, performance music involves centering the music program of the church in choirs, soloists, and other trained musicians who "perform" music before the congregation as a central feature of the liturgy.

This model has developed another wrinkle with the emergence of the large urban "mega-church" and the impact of television. Congregational singing is not very telegenic. For television purposes, it is more effective to focus on an orchestra, choir, and soloists. These can be scripted and managed, allowing visually and aurally appealing performances. Thus the performance of most of the music by a select group—apart from the congregation—is even more solidified.

Echoes of this model are appearing in Churches of Christ. Simple and unadorned a cappella congregational singing hardly lends itself to dramatic images for either the television viewer or the actual participant. Hence, we are seeing choral groups, soloists, and similar use of performance music in Churches of Christ as among the Baptists. If the worship assembly is primarily a vehicle for setting up stirring evangelistic messages, it is hard to see why such methods should not be implemented; for they have been shown to increase attendance.

Of course, there are many who have a different vision of the role of music in worship. They are not enamoured by this trend. Stout resistance to these innovations insures that there will be difficult cross-currents that can easily submerge even the most well-intentioned changes in the utilization of songs and hymns in a local church.

If this development were not enough to cause headaches on the part of worship leaders, the development of "praise songs" or choruses is also having an effect on what takes place in the assembly. This development has a potential for additional volatility because it has the possibility to create inter-generational conflict in the church. It would be fair to say that the praise song has become the preferred option of music among youth ministers throughout the church. In some places it has become so dominant hat the youth refuse to sing traditional hymns because they are not "their music."

The praise song originated in the charismatic movement. Unlike the performance music that involves a small number in worship leadership, the praise song involves the entire congregation. The congregation is not only called upon to sing but, at the same time, each worshiper is urged to carry out various bodily actions such as raising of the hands, clapping, and embracing[2] The idea is that the whole person is intensely engaged in praise to God. Among the charismatics the use of guitars, drums, and trumpets, and a selective use of banners, enhance the impression that a celebration of praise is taking place. In our view the theology that informs the praise song movement represents a strong and direct challenge to the theology of music in Churches of Christ.

Before leaders embrace the praise song movement, they ought to be aware of the origin, focus, and understanding of worship that undergirds this trend. While it may be worthwhile to use select praise songs in the assembly, the theology that

[2] Hustad, 31.

nurtures these songs is incompatible with the heritage of the common faith of the church. A more defensible basis for the selection of songs for use in the assembly will be set forth in the following pages. To give substance to this argument, we will analyze the praise song movement. Then, after reflecting on the hymnology of the early church, we will suggest criteria to guide worship leaders in selecting hymns in the assembly.

## The Origin and a Critique of the Praise Song Movement

Those who embrace the use of praise songs in worship may be surprised to know that contemporary praise worship has its origin in a definite theological agenda.

In the charismatic churches a widespread model for worship is based on an analogy with Old Testament temple worship; especially a certain understanding of Psalm 100:4.[3] A typical charismatic service starts out with a series of choruses and songs that praise and adore God and Jesus for their acts in creation and in history. The analogy is made with entering the holy place, or "the gates of thanksgiving" (Ps. 100:4). The song leader will move the worshipers in contrived spontaneity through a rapid series of songs.[4] It is this aspect of charismatic worship that has been most admired and copied among evangelicals, including some Churches of Christ.

But this is only a preliminary step to the main event of charismatic worship. The analogy is the transition into the holy of holies or, in the words of Psalm 100:4, "entering his courts with praise." To facilitate this event the charismatic service takes on a very different orientation. It becomes much more subdued and calm. Each worshiper quietly, but often very repetitively, utters brief phrases of adoration for the attributes of God. This is the place where the worshiper seeks to encounter the divine perhaps in revelation or in the speaking in a tongue. This two-fold procedure of a long almost kinetic service of song followed by a quiet interlude constitutes the basic structure of much of twentieth-century charismatic worship.

*Critique*

While the influence of the praise song movement has revitalized interest in singing in the wider ecumenical community, some questions need to be asked.

First, there is the very practical issue of the time factor involved. In order for all the dynamics of "praise worship" to operate fully, one needs a considerable period of time. It is not unusual for assemblies to last for two or three hours. Praise worship

[3] Paul Wohlgemuth, "Praise Singing," *The Hymn* 38/1 (1987) 20.

[4] Hustad, 31–33. Hustad notes that in order to facilitate a form of contrived spontaneity the device of placing songs on an overhead projector beamed on a screen has been used widely. But the replacement of the hymnbook is not just a utilitarian action. Charismatics understand that these are the last days of Joel 2:28. These are the days when the Lord will do "a new thing among his people" (Isaiah 43:19). This new thing must not be compromised by the stale legacies of the past. Thus, new songs inspired in the new age of the Spirit should be used; and the hymnody that contributed to the fall of the church in the past should be discarded.

cannot easily be accommodated under the mantle of two or three songs and a prayer. Unless one is in a special setting (e.g., a retreat or youth rally), it is difficult to envision a modern urban church where people would be prepared to spend such time in one assembly. Would this mean we would give even less time to the sermon and the Lord's Supper? The minister of the large urban church knows that *the* unforgivable sin is to allow the assembly to go ten or fifteen minutes overtime.

Second, although the verbalizing of praise to God and his Son is a central feature of worship, it is not the exclusive form of our lyrical response to God. Christians are called into fellowship on the basis of a rich and nuanced recital of the history of salvation. In Christian worship the major features of this story are repeated and rehearsed. The poetry in the traditional hymnal has been a significant enabling factor in maintaining a legacy of the most evocative ways Christians have reflected on all aspects of the story. Next to the Bible, the hymnal has served as the fount of Christian piety. By providing songs of consecration, penitence, invitation, and praise, traditional hymnody affords many musical forms in which we respond to the story. Will we discard all of these responses to the Holy One and raise a generation who associate worship only with expressions of adoration?

Third, a fundamental theological question needs to be raised regarding the basic presuppositions behind many praise songs. Hustad notes that a preoccupation with the awesome attributes of God has produced a whole series of songs with such refrains as

> Lord, I praise You because of who You are,
> not just for all the mighty deeds that You have done.[5]

Inherent in such a claim is the notion that we have decided that God is worthy of *our* praise. But, it is not because of intimations of majesty that *we deign* to ascribe worth to God, implying that the initiative for worship rests with humans. Rather, worship emerges out of *response* to what the Holy One has *done* for us.

Although many in the praise song movement would acknowledge this point, the language of much praise song music caters to a segment of our culture seeking self-actualization not as a result of a story of certain actions that took place in a historical past, but on the basis of a feeling response approach to reality. Given its appeal among youth, this movement is particularly susceptible to promoting the idea that praise of the triune God is solely rooted in human feelings.

Wholesale implementation of the praise song model of worship would not be desirable for the Churches of Christ on practical, liturgical (i.e. the order and shape

[5] "Because of Who You Are," words and music by Bob Farrell and Billy Smiley. Copyright 1982 by Paragon Music Composition, as quoted in Hustad, 32, 36.

of our service), or theological grounds. However, certain individual songs produced in this movement can be used effectively in the assembly. Probably such products of the praise song movement as "Father, I Adore You," "Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God," and "Sing Hallelujah to the Lord," will stand the test of time and be sung by later generations in settings far removed from their original contexts.

## Criteria for the Choice of Hymns

### *Early Christian Music*

As a Restoration fellowship, Churches of Christ appeal to Scripture as the norm for what takes place in the assembly. The New Testament offers no specific criteria for what constitutes an appropriate hymn. However, a brief glance at what we can learn about singing in the early Church yields several principles that may serve as the basis for establishing criteria useful for worship leaders.

In the early part of the second century of our era Pliny the Younger in his letter to Trajan gives an account of an assembly of Christians who sang a hymn to Christ as God.[6] This evidence is corroborated by a good amount of internal testimony for the existence of hymns and fragments of verse within the New Testament that allows us to conclude that the singing of hymns was part and parcel of the worship of the early church.[7] Some suggest that the central setting for the early Christian hymns was the sense of eschatological joy among the early Christians who anticipated the coming of the new age.[8]

The key term that early Christians used for their songs was *psalmoi*,[9] drawn from the Greek translations of the book of Psalms (1 Cor. 14:26; Col. 3:16; 5:19). But here we need to be careful. For the Greeks *psalmoi* were songs sung to the accompaniment of an instrument of music. But in the circles of the Jewish culture of the Diaspora, formative for the expansion of the early Christian mission, *psalmoi* meant something different. As in the synagogue, Christian *psalmoi* were freely composed religious songs.[10] *Psalmoi* are notably listed first in the Pauline lists of early

[6] Pliny, *Ep.* 10. 96.

[7] Phil. 2:6–11; Col. 1:15–20; Heb. 1:1–4; 1 Tim. 3:16; (cf. Eph. 5:14; and the canticles of Lk. 1–2). Also, Ralph P. Martin, "Hymns in the New Testament: An Evolving Pattern of Worship Responses," *Ex Auditu* 8 (1992) 38–39.

[8] Martin Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Early History of Christianity* (London/Philadelphia: SCM/Fortress, 1983) 81.

[9] The term for the formal Greek hymn *paian* is not used in the New Testament. Only Eph. 5:14b (perhaps a fragment of a baptismal hymn) can be construed as having meter which approximates the hymns of the Greco-Roman world.

[10] Hengel, 80–81; the reasons why both the synagogue (until the nineteenth century) and the church of the early centuries eschewed the use of an instrument in the assembly were complex. But the bottom line was that the absence of an instrument provided a distinguishing badge that delineated what took place in the assembly from both the Jewish temple (when it was in existence) and from the pagan cults where instrumental music had very specific theological connotations. cf. J. Quasten, *Music and Worship in* [illegible] Association of Pastoral Musicians, 1983 E.T.)

Christian "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,"[11] (1 Cor. 14:26; Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19). Their central focus was the joyous response to the reality that God had fully disclosed himself in Christ. This was *the* hymnody of the early church. Although it is possible, there is no evidence that the early Christians sang from the book of Psalms in their assemblies.[12]

If we study the content of the songs embedded in the New Testament, we discover that they are not confined to the theme of praise. As in 1 Timothy 3:16 and Philippians 2:6–11, they have a quality of narrating what God had done in Christ; and on that basis seem to function as both restating the theological truths of the story and evoking a joyous response on the part of the people. Praise is one element of this response, which also has other forms. This is particularly evident when we consider that it is difficult to differentiate between the form and function of early Christian prayers and songs. Scholars maintain that both had a certain musical quality![13]

Out of this brief summary of early Christian hymns we can identify basic principles and criteria for Christian music.

First, early Christians structured their lyrical expressions of worship in musical forms that were in keeping with their confession. They allowed their own story to set the agenda for their hymnody, i.e., it was not set by the *Zeitgeist* of the surrounding culture.

Second, early Christian hymnody emerged in a context of eschatological joy and awareness that God had broken into history in Christ. Everything in life was colored by that understanding. Contemporary claims that the legacy of great hymns of the church is boring and out of touch with the times may be more an indicator that we have lost touch with the genuine spiritual impulses of the faith rather than a negative reflection on the traditional hymns. What we need is not to replace the hymns but to recover our spiritual heritage.

Finally, the study of early Christian song shows that the didactic quality of these songs covered the basic themes of Christian theology. Such songs were used not for strictly personal inspiration but to edify and instruct the whole church. A congregation that panders to private tastes and needs will quickly become spiritually malnourished.

1–55; E. Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music: The Music of Pre-Constantinian Christianity* (Grove Liturgical Studies 22–23; Nottingham: Grove Books, 1992) 83. In our view discussions about whether there is a special kind of music, as opposed to other forms of music, that best comports with the theological claims of the faith, an issue which seemed greatly to concern the church of the early centuries, is still an important question.

[11] All three of these terms are synonyms drawn from terminology for singing in the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

[12] Nor, for that matter, do we know that the Jews sang from the Psalms in their regular Sabbath assemblies in the synagogue. See Paul Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (New York: Oxford, 1992) 23.

[13] Foley, 25.

*Practical Guidelines in the Selection of Hymns*

Those who advocate the adoption of changes in the assembly often say that, since there is no biblical injunction against such changes, opposition is based merely on biases and preferences. Clearly, there are many things that are inappropriate or wrong that are not, however, specifically condemned in the Bible. It is time that we recognized that change may be opposed or promoted for a host of reasons. It may be as neurotic to promote change as to resist it. What we need are clear criteria to allow us both to promote responsible change in our use of music and to recognize and restrain irresponsible change.

It is the rare congregation that uses more than a hundred hymns in the assembly in the course of a year. Thus each hymn should be considered a special treasure for the development of the spiritual life of the congregation.

The guidelines for the selection of hymns, based on the theological principles identified in this essay, fall into two areas: (1) Theological: Is the text of the hymn in harmony with scripture? Does it reflect the central insights of both the theology and experience of the common faith? Is it appropriate for the liturgical action taking place at a given point in the service? (There should be no hymnic "non sequiturs.") The hymn should not have excessive emphasis on the self or narcissistic concerns. (2) Literary and Aesthetic: Does the structure of the hymn clearly articulate a central theme? Are the words and phrases of the song put together without violating basic rules of grammar and syntax? Is the language of the hymn clear and are the images well chosen and appropriate? Does the musical setting, especially the rhythm, express the tones of the feelings of the text? Is the rhythm appropriate to entrance into the divine assembly?

Scripture tells us that all things should be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40). More attention given to the criteria for the selection and use of hymns does not guarantee the presence of the Holy One; but it will surely not hinder.

## Conclusion

We have discussed the emergence and impact of performance music and the praise song movement in modern Christianity and their growing impact upon Churches of Christ. We have argued that although some praise songs will stand the test of time, most are too insular and theologically misdirected to replace traditional Christian hymnody: the combined treasure of the common faith of the church. This negative critique should not be viewed as an endorsement of the status quo. It simply means that these new developments are not the appropriate means to substantive and lasting renewal in worship. Indeed, if we push very far in these new directions, serious theological questions will need to be answered about the meaning of worship.

# Worship and Ethics
## *Confession, Character, and Conduct*

Michael R. Weed

> Personality is shaped by the liturgy, by the bowed heads of family and friends acknowledging the transcendence of God, by hymns expressing the prayers of the heart, and the hearing of the Word of God.
>
> John H. Leith

At present a tremendous amount of attention is being given to worship and the need for renewal or reform of various traditions and practices regarding worship. While motivations for change vary, a common theme is that worship must be freed from strictures that render it unattractive to the modern mentality and irrelevant to modern needs. Clearly such concerns reflect underlying assumptions about the fundamental meaning of Christian worship.

The following comments call attention to the function of worship in the life of the church. More precisely, I want to address a crucial aspect of worship that appears to have gone largely unnoticed in the current discussions about "change," "relevance," and "renewal." It is my thesis that worship and ethics are integrally and inescapably related; character and conduct are correlative to confession.[1] While many recognize a connection between private devotion and ethics, the role of public worship in shaping Christian moral identity has not been sufficiently recognized.[2] The gathered church's actions in worship renew and refocus hearts and minds for faithful living; worship stands at the very center of Christian faith and life.

[1] Neglect of this area has constituted a serious and telling omission in Protestant ethics. Fortunately, the shift of attention from decision-making to character formation has produced some works in the area. One of the earliest Protestant discussions of the relation between worship and ethics is James Gustafson's "Spiritual Life and Moral Life," *Theology and Ethics* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim, 1974) 161—176. Also helpful are William H. Willimon, *The Service of God: Christian Work and Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983); Don E. Saliers, *Worship and Spirituality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984); and, more recently, Timothy F. Sedgwick, *Sacramental Ethics: Paschal Identity and the Christian Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

[2] Curiously, some who recognize the crucial importance of the disciplines of personal piety—and even of ritual and tradition in this context—do not admit a similar necessity for discipline in corporate worship or see any value in ritual and tradition.

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A second thesis follows: efforts to alter, reform, or revitalize worship must be undertaken with considerable care and deliberation. To misunderstand (and thus to distort or weaken) the role and function of worship inevitably damages—distorts and weakens—Christian identity and Christian life. While extreme distortions of worship more seriously affect the life of the believer, even the trivializing of worship critically diminishes Christian resources for faithful living.

At the outset it should be noted that the issue is not whether change is possible and perhaps occasionally necessary. Traditional forms of Christian practice, including worship, need to be reexamined from time to time. Rather, this essay is concerned with the criteria which are deployed to assess and guide proposed change or renewal. In order to avoid the temptation of simply reflecting the spirit of the age, responsible evaluation and renewal of worship practices must closely attend to the nature and purpose of biblical worship, its central importance in the life of the church, and its critical role in forming and guiding faithful lives.

## Worship

Worship stands at the very center of the church's existence. It is this fundamental characteristic which distinguishes the church from other human gatherings which "meet for pleasure, study, or to plot a course of action. The church meets to worship."[3]

In the first instance, biblical worship is defined by the nature of the God who is worshiped. The God of the Bible is the Creator and Sustainer of heaven and earth. The universe is not merely an expression of his power; even more fundamentally, it is an expression of his covenant love. Having created humans with the unique capacity to know him and to enter covenant relationship with him, God has pursued his goal of reconciliation in spite of human rebellion against him.

Biblical worship is essentially doxology; it ascribes praise and adoration to God in response to who he is and what he has done for his creation. Worship reflects the greatness of God and remembers his faithfulness to his creation in the history of Israel—faithfulness which culminates in the event of Jesus Christ.

In its rites and practices, Christian worship remembers and rehearses God's gracious acts of deliverance. At the heart of Christian worship is the Lord's Supper. Here the worshiping congregation unites in the sacrificial death of Christ, acknowledges his continuing presence in the church, and confidently awaits his return and the full reality of his reign.

In its very essence, Christian worship is necessarily and inescapably theocentric, not anthropocentric. In focusing upon God and acknowledging his

[3] Donald G. Miller, *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (Richmond: John Knox, 1957) 104.

rightful place over the universe, Christian worship subordinates all other realities to the reality of God.

Further, biblical worship brings worshipers together as the people of God. While worship should occur in the private life of individual believers, it is especially in corporate worship that we more fully and visibly signify the redemptive and reconciling work of God in creating a new community which embodies his character and purpose. It is also in our corporate worship that we recognize and signify our solidarity with the people of God, with the prophets, apostles, saints and martyrs down through the ages. Through traditions, rituals, and time-honored practices, we acknowledge our indebtedness to those who have gone before us and we recognize that we are neither the first nor the last generation of believers.

In this fashion, Christian worship occasions what has been called "the precarious vision"; it momentarily locates the worshiper within a panoramic vision or interpretation of reality. For however fleeting a moment, the worshiper is permitted to see and understand the circumstances of his or her own life within the context of the Creator's deeper intentions and purposes. The worshiper is enabled to see life in light of Eternity—or, as the ancients would say, *sub specie aeternitatis*. Worship is central to both the very nature of the church and Christian life. Clearly, the extent to which the meaning of worship is misunderstood or distorted will be directly reflected in the life of the church and in the lives of individual Christians. To distort the meaning of worship weakens the church and cripples Christian lives.

### A Fundamental Distortion: "Spiritual Epicureanism"

The most fundamental and persistent distortion of Christian worship is the loss of its primary focus on God. By the very identity of God as the Ultimate Good, worship cannot "use" God in the pursuit of some lesser good without distortion or self-contradiction.[4] To forget, neglect, or diminish the theocentric nature of worship inevitably alters its basic meaning and purpose. One of the most common ways in which this shift occurs is when worship is viewed in a utilitarian fashion and becomes a means to an end. When God is no longer worshiped because he is God but because he is somehow useful, worship is no longer theocentric. Regardless of how often or sincerely "God" is invoked, worship becomes anthropocentric when it is employed as a means for manipulating divine power to attain human goals (even if these are seemingly worthy goals).

This shift is particularly visible in attempts to use worship to pursue the self's own interests. It is perhaps most deceptive and lethal when it is masked by pious

[4] Worship is not unlike virtue in this regard. While worship may have its "rewards," it becomes something other than worship if it is pursued in order to obtain these. C. S. Lewis observes that one cannot pursue "first things" ("seek ye first") in order to obtain "second things" ("all these things will be added") (C.S. Lewis, "First and Second Things," *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) 278—281).

concerns. While there is a superficial similarity, there is a significant difference between singing, "Crown him with many crowns" and "Will there be any stars in my crown?"[5] Further, this distortion of worship's focus inevitably promotes preoccupation with the subjective or emotional experience of the worshiper. Although the distinction between seeking God and seeking the experience of God may appear subtle, it nonetheless designates two fundamentally different approaches to worship.

Countless spiritual writers have called attention to this self-preoccupation as a fundamental distortion of Christian spirituality and a major impediment to spiritual growth. Francis de Sales, writing in the sixteenth century, refers to this phenomenon as a "doubling back" or a "bending back on the self." "There is a great difference," he warns, "between being occupied with God who gives us the contentment, and being busied with the contentment which God gives."[6] Francis warns that there

> are souls who readily double and bend back on themselves, who love to feel what they are doing, who wish to see and scrutinize what passes in them, turning their view ever on themselves to discover the progress they make. And there are yet others who are not content to be content unless they feel, see, and relish their contentment . . . Now all these spirits are ordinarily subject to be troubled in prayer, for if God deign them the sacred repose of his presence, they voluntarily forsake it to note their own behavior therein, and to examine whether they are really in content, disquieting themselves to discern whether their tranquility is really tranquil, and their quietude quiet . . . .[7]

What is true of individual devotion is true also for the worship of the church.

This narcissistic shift, or "bending back on the self," radically alters the basic focus and meaning of Christian worship. Again, however much God is mentioned, worship becomes human- and self-centered, not God-centered; its focus becomes the experience of the worshiper rather than praise and adoration of the one worshiped.

Donald Miller states succinctly: "to evaluate worship by what happens in the experience of the worshiper is to make men, not God, the center of worship."[8] He astutely observes that in

> modern worship services too much attention is directed toward what happens to the worshiper. Devices of sound, lighting, symbolism, liturgy, and pageantry are frequently utilized to produce emotional feelings in the

[5] John Frederick Jansen, *Let Us Worship God* (Richmond: CLC, 1966) 49.
[6] Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God* (New York: Catholic Publication Society, 1884) 259.
[7] de Sales, *Treatise*, 259.
[8] Miller, *Nature and Mission*,107.

> worshiper. Those who participate tend to evaluate the worship service in terms of how it "lifted them up" or gave them "a good feeling" or "inspired" them. . . . Religious entertainment is often confused with religious worship.[9]

Over three decades ago T. W. Manson similarly observed that we are inclined to focus on the effects of worship on the worshiper and "are too prone these days to think of acts of worship in psychological terms."[10] He contrasts the modern mood to that of first-century Jews who were

> much more concerned with whether or not these acts of worship would be acceptable to God. The punctual performance of religious duties, with due reverence and a turning of the mind and heart towards God, was an obligation and a privilege whether the worshipper felt like it before hand or not. . . . The question whether he wanted to go to the synagogue at a set time had nothing to do with the case. His business was to be there. The question whether he felt better afterwards was also irrelevant.[11]

Manson concludes by noting that in this manner the Jew was "set free" from the modern peril of "ceasing to worship because we are never in the mood" or because our worship provides "no immediate and exciting emotional result."[12]

This observation brings us to a crucial point. Clearly, many factors contribute to defining and assessing worship which promote distortions of its true meaning. The issue is not whether worship has an effect on the worshiper or evokes a response. Rather, the issue is how worship affects the worshiper and what kind of effect it should produce in the worshiper's life. Is worship a renewal of Christian identity? Or is it more of a refreshing and perhaps entertaining interlude in life's tedium?

### The Non-utilitarian Benefits of Worship: De-centering the Self

Worshipers receive the true benefits of biblical worship only when worship is directed toward God. Paradoxically, it is in its irrelevance that worship is relevant; it is precisely in its "uselessness" that worship confers its richest benefits upon the

[9] Miller, *Nature and Mission*, 107. Regarding prayer, Miller states: "The value of prayer is not what happens to the one who prays. The value of prayer is that he has prayed. If he has prayed sincerely, he has thus acknowledged God to be God, and himself to be but a creature who belongs to God and who lives under His Lordship. If uplift comes to the one who has prayed, well and good. The end of prayer, however, is not human delight, but the glory of God. It is not God's chief end to glorify man and to make him enjoy him forever. It is rather man's chief end to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever. And this is the end of all true worship."

[10] T. W. Manson, *Ethics and the Gospel* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960) 37.

[11] Manson, *Ethics and the Gospel*, 37.

[12] Manson, *Ethics and the Gospel*, 37.

worshiper. Worship directed solely toward praise and adoration of God—without the intention of securing advantages or producing experiences—delivers the self from the tyrannies of this age.

The confession "Christ is Lord" locates worshipers within an all-inclusive and over-arching vision of reality. Herein worship unmasks and "slays the gods" of every age, delivering worshipers from bondage to fragmentary and distorting visions. In a world marked by uprootedness, worship delivers the worshiper from the modern affliction of living in frantic, impulsive pursuit of confusing and contradictory goals. Worship, with its appointed times, rites, and traditions, offers meaning and stability; it offers "ground to stand on" and a depth and breadth of perspective from which one "makes sense of things."[13] Worshipers are enabled to view their lives, both collectively and individually, within the context of a transcendent reality and purpose.

Ultimately, of course, worship that is truly theocentric protects the self from being "bent back upon itself" and thus dethrones the self. For it is the expansive self—the swollen ego with its illusions and fantasies—that distorts our vision of reality—of others, of the world, and of God.[14] Nothing short of acknowledgment of the transcendent reality of God and subordination of the heart and mind to the transcendent claims of God can release the self from being blinded by its own luminescence. Only when the self finds its true center in the transcendent one—not in the self's idea of transcendence, much less the self's experience of transcendence, but in the sheer reality of God—is it released from the countless deceits of self-encapsulation. In this fashion biblical, i.e., theocentric, worship frees the worshiper to see the world, the other, and the self as they really are.

In worship the self is reconstituted; character is reshaped in direct correlation to confession. In response to the reality of God disclosed in Christ, foundational attitudes and dispositions are evoked: gratitude, humility, reverence, penitence, obligation, and hope offer a new basis for action as the self reflects God's intentions in the world.[15]

[13] Cf. Willimon: "The liturgy must be the church's supreme skeptic in face of change, that one aspect of the church's life which continually honors the past and respects the wealth of the experience, the complexity of the church's Story in the face of modern manipulators of the liturgy who claim that past was too limited. These innovators endanger the church by imposing only purely contemporary standards. . . . In affirming the wealth of the church's tradition, the liturgy is not only holding on to what is important in our past, but is also prodding us forward to ever widening realms of importance. Tradition gives the church a fresh perspective which rises above the conventional folk wisdom of present culture and frees us from the tyranny of those who know only what they have personally experienced" ( *Service of God*, 70–71).

[14] See Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Ark, 1985). Murdoch brilliantly analyzes the machinations of the ego in obscuring reality.

[15] Gustafson, "Spiritual Life," 167–168.

## Conclusion

I have argued that worship and ethics are crucially interrelated: worship is a constitutive act, forming Christian character and guiding Christian conduct. To adapt and modify worship inevitably affects its role in forming Christian identity.

We are presently living in a time when many of the pillars of our society are visibly crumbling. Ironically, it is to this confused and destructive climate that concessions and accommodations are energetically promoted in order to make Christian worship attractive to the modern mood and tempo.

To adapt or accommodate Christian faith and practices, especially worship, to the tastes and moods of a given era or culture is always dangerous. There is sober wisdom in the old adage that "he who marries the spirit of the age soon becomes a widower." Such a marriage is doubly alarming when the spirit of the age increasingly resembles the ghost of Friedrich Nietzsche.[16] With no moral framework to restrain self-indulgence and guide the expression of "individual freedoms," modern society continues to deteriorate amid the debris of its self-destructive beliefs and aspirations.

Tragically, modern worshipers too frequently receive little more than inoculations of "small doses of Christianoid concepts," immunizing them against any real encounter with biblical reality.[17] Worship, like last evening's movie or tomorrow's tennis match, becomes an amusing interlude to the spiritual Epicurean, a *divertissement*; it becomes only one more distraction from facing life's real issues.

Paradoxically, Christian worship loses its meaning in direct proportion to its success in accommodating itself to contemporary culture.[18] Worshipers, perhaps entertained and amused, are nonetheless spiritually enfeebled and left ill-equipped to venture into a confusing and hostile world. Worship that enables us to live *sub specie aeternitatis*, that forms character and guides conduct, is not found by way of accommodation, but in the attitude of the century-old hymn, "Here at Thy Table, Lord":

Calling our thoughts away
From self and sin . . .

Touch with Thy pierced hand
Each common day.

[16] Cf. Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991) 60—61.

[17] Peter Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies* (New York: Doubleday, 1961) 116.

[18] It has not been sufficiently recognized that efforts to accommodate Christian faith to a culture which is not only hostile to Christian faith but is also disintegrating into a number of very different sub-cultures can only lead to the balkanization of the church. Accommodation itself so dilutes Christian faith that the faith shared between different "sub-cultural versions" of Christianity becomes exceedingly attenuated. At best, accomodation produces "lifestyle enclaves," at worst the disintegration of the broader community of faith. Designating this process "incarnational" scarcely makes it desirable.

# Obiter Dicta

These thought-provoking "other words" have been contributed by readers of *Christian Studies* and friends of the Institute. Our thanks for their efforts in calling them to our attention.

***The Body of Christ***

The people of God who are a new creation, who share a common life together in Christ constitute His body. Christ is still present in the world, no longer physically and literally, but spiritually and mystically in His body, the church. . . .

A major problem affecting evangelicals is the failure to have an incarnational understanding of the church. This failure has caused many to view the church as a social institution, a psychiatrist's couch, an evangelistic tent, or a lecture hall. The current attempt to bring renewal by putting chairs in a circle, singing with a guitar, meeting in homes, and studying the Bible in small groups without the rediscovery of the incarnational nature of the church may be less the beginning of renewal than the last gasp before death.

Robert E. Webber, *Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity*

***Breaking Away***

Much apostasy from religion is strongly related to conflicts with one's parents. Many of those who think they are breaking away from their church in the name of enlightenment and freedom actually are at least partially working out conflicts with their mother and father.

Andrew Greeley, *Unsecular Man*

***Change Agents***

The churchman . . . who accepts the injunction that he must change to mean that he must come up with something totally new, and that he must abandon everything from the religion of the past, is likely to find that he has surrounded himself with a small coterie of secular men, men who believe as religiously as he does that they are the wave of the future and that the evolutionary process assures their triumph as the most advanced and most progressive—and, yes, let's say it—the fittest of their species.

Andrew Greeley, *Unsecular Man*

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*Church Music*

[M]usic especially belongs to the people, and theologically the burden of proof rests on those who support the case for a choir separate from the congregation. The congregation is the true choir, and all music should be conceived within this principle. . . . This rubric may well mean that anthems and solos be abolished and more hymns used instead so that the people can physically participate in the action of music; or that if an anthem is sung, it be in the spirit of a true "anthem," that is, an "antiphon" in which the people and choir join.

Paul W. Hoon, *The Integrity of Worship*

Before going to the theatre service I passed a Methodist church with a message on its bulletin board that explains many chapters in American church history. It was: "Good Friday service this afternoon. Snappy song service." So we combine the somber notes of religion with the jazz of the age.

I wonder if anyone who needs a snappy song service can really appreciate the meaning of the cross.

Reinhold Niebuhr, *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*

*Fashion and Novelty*

Substitute for the faith itself some Fashion with a Christian colouring. Work on their horror of the Same Old Thing.

C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*

The pleasure of novelty is by its very nature more subject than any other to the law of diminishing returns.

C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*

It looks as if they believed people can be lured to go to church by incessant brightenings, lightenings, lengthenings, abridgements, simplifications, and complications of the service...

Novelty, simply as such, can have only an entertainment value. And they don't go to church to be entertained... The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God...

But every novelty prevents this. It fixes our attention on the service itself; and thinking about worship is a different thing from worshipping...

There is really some excuse for the man who said, "I wish they'd remember that the charge to Peter was Feed my sheep; not Try experiments on my rats, or even, Teach my performing dogs new tricks."

C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*

Old is not better. Old can be worse. The apostolic criterion is not whether something is old or new. The criterion is whether it is truthful—truthful in the sense of true to the apostolic testimony to God's revelation, the truth personally incarnate in Jesus Christ. There was a great suspicion of novelty in the first five centuries [of the church].

Now, modernity has turned that around and said the opposite: If anything is old we reject it. Novelty has become a criterion for truth. So there is as great a phobic response to anything antiquarian in modern consciousness as there was a resistance to novelty in classical Christian consciousness.... Believers perennially need and have a right to a living tradition of preaching, worship, and discipline.

Os Guinness and John Seels, eds., *No God But God*

*Preaching*

Classically, preaching has arisen out of the substance of what is proclaimed. The Christian message determined the pattern and form of preaching. . . . Today increasingly form and style take precedence over substance. . . . There is an incongruity between the gospel and a pretty sermon.... There must be something rough-hewn about the sermon....

The development of the communications industry, as well as the entertainment industry, jeopardizes good preaching by tempting persons to subordinate content to form and to practices which may be humanly effective but which are theologically destructive.

Great preaching depends on the integrity of the human heart and mind, on the part of both the preacher and the congregation. It is not through the practice of magic or the communication arts, but through the integrity of the proclamation itself which under God creates the Christian community.

John H. Leith, *From Generation to Generation*

*Relevance*

Any institution remains "relevant" as long as it has something distinctive to offer. Religious institutions are no exceptions. The religious institution that becomes indistinguishable from other institutions . . . in very short order has great difficulties answering the question of why it should exist as a separate institution at all; at this point it has become "irrelevant" in the strictest sense of the word—the sense of redundancy and obsolescence.

Peter Berger, *Religion and Society Report*, January 1988

If one is to understand the rise of neo-orthodoxy in the 1930s in Europe, it is most important to remember that "modern" at this time meant, above all, to be in accord with Nazism—in the parlance of more recent Protestantism, it was the protagonists of Nazi ideology within the church, and not the "Confessing Church," who were "relevant" to their secular situation.

Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*

*Success*

Success is determined by the statistics regarding such things as membership, attendance, giving, budget, staff, facilities, and activities. Success equals the number of participants multiplied by the degree of their satisfaction and support. . . . "Fidelity," on the other hand, is faithfulness to the gospel, conformity to the mind of Christ, being what the biblical revelation calls the church to be. . . . The two are not so nearly alike or so intimately connected that *one* choice can include *both*. No, if the congregation chooses success *over* fidelity, then that choice is itself an infidelity, an act of unfaithfulness. If, on the other hand, the congregation chooses fidelity *over* success, success may follow *or it may not*—there is no guarantee, no promise, no assurance, and no connection. Success can and does come to churches that are completely unfaithful, and success can be created through factors that have nothing to do with fidelity.

Vernard Eller, *The Outward Bound*

Jesus commanded us not to succeed, but to obey; not to sell the gospel, but to proclaim it. Jesus was not found "acceptable"; he was nailed to a cross. And he told his disciples to expect the same kind of reaction, for human nature will not change and the proclamation of the gospel should not change. It is not our job to convert the world or to fill churches; that is God's job. Ours is to sow the seed, without sugar-coating it; God's is to make it take root and grow.

Peter Kreeft, *Back to Virtue*

*Technique*

[I]n our lust for success we overlook the fact that it takes two different conditions to make techniques right. Not only must the technique be an effective one in and of itself, it must also be appropriate to the content it is intended to promote. . . .

What so often happens in the church's experience is that a technique of worldly effectiveness looks good and is adopted. And then, because success is the only consideration (techniques have no other purpose), the gospel message is subtly pruned, shaped, and contorted until it fits the technique. "Please all men in all things," yes; but if the gospel is falsified in the process, men will not be saved. It is quite possible for Christ to be taken captive by a technique rather than the technique being taken captive for Christ.

Vernard Eller, *The Outward Bound*

*Tradition*

We not only hold on to what is important through our tradition but also through memory gain imaginative new constructions for the future. A church without memory, without some "Jerusalem" to return to for guidance and blessing, is destined to become the prisoner of the status quo, a people without vision who can see no further than merely present arrangements, slaves to the opinions of those who happen to be walking about.

William Willimon, *Acts*

In an age of "anything goes," virtue is a revolutionary thing. In an age of rebellion, authority is the radical idea. In an age of pell-mell "progress" to annihilation, tradition is the hero on the white horse.

Peter Kreeft, *Back to Virtue*

Those who are liberated from tradition generally become slaves to fashion.

Basil Mitchell, *How to Play Theological Ping-pong*

*Worship*

I wonder why it is that so many of the churches which go in for vaudeville programs and the hip-hip-hooray type of religious services should belong to the Methodist and Baptist denominations. The vulgarities of the stunt preacher are hardly compatible with either the robust spiritual vitality or the puritan traditions of the more evangelistic churches.

Reinhold Niebuhr, *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*

Boredom with our liturgical ruts has led some of us into creative and innovative experiments that too often mistake liveliness for life and "lit-orgy" for "lit-urgy." In typical American fashion, we assume that if people say that they don't get anything out of Sunday worship, that must mean that they are merely bored with the old and can be turned on with a "new and improved model" that follows the latest style. Pastors frequently long for some new thing to do in worship without questioning the source of their peoples' boredom and disengagement from worship or their own ministerial motivations for seeking the new... A well-led, skillfully interpreted, carefully structured worship service on Sunday morning in the traditional mode would be a radical innovation for too many congregations! Why do we desire newness in worship, and what form should that newness take? Are we substituting the experience of newness for the experience of worship?

William H. Willimon, *Worship as Pastoral Care*

Suppose that in your worship planning you try to keep seekers in mind, and suppose you assume that these are largely non-religious people. Suppose you further assume that if you are to appeal to these non-religious people, your contemporary services must also become increasingly non-religious, at least in any traditional way. Of course, it's hard to make a church service non-religious—it's like making a basketball game non-athletic—but for the sake of appeal to the secularists, suppose you try...

In general, you assume that the non-religious like things simple and upbeat. . . . so away with lament, away with hard questions, expressions of anguish, dark ambiguities of any kind. While you're at it, away with creeds and confessions, away with explicit references to Christian doctrine, or to the history of the Christian church.

On the other hand, seekers are interested in improving themselves, so you maximize promises of personal growth and self-realization. Secularists do like pop music, so here it comes into the sanctuary, along with semi-celebrity music performers and audience applause for their performances. . . .

Troubling questions arise: How much of this really has anything to do with the Christian faith? ... What if by offering popularized religion as an appetizer for unbelievers we should accidentally spoil their appetite for the real thing? Suppose your ten-year-old does not like your heart-healthy dinner menu, so you arrange a seeker meal for him in which you offer some non-threatening Pringles. You do this in order to set up his taste buds for baked potatoes. I wonder how often that would work.

Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Perspectives*, May 1993

What wisdom is gleaned for worship planners from these prototype churches and their surveys of unchurched America? Keep the mood and tempo of worship upbeat. Resist the minor keys, they're too somber. Discard "churchy" anthems and hymns. . . . Provide sermons with catchy "How to ..." titles. Encourage casual dress and informal ambiance. Drive the beat of worship with percussion, conclude songs with a flourish of high notes and loud dynamics (no one feels compelled to clap after slow or soft music). . . . "We don't allow any music in our church to which you couldn't rollerskate." The new model for efficiency and friendliness and enthusiasm is Walt Disney World.

Alan W. Walworth, *Journal of the American Academy of Ministry*, Fall 1992

# Contributors

All the contributors to this issue of *Christian Studies* are on the faculty of the Institute for Christian Studies, Austin, Texas.

**David Worley** is the President of the Institute for Christian Studies. He also serves as Professor of Biblical Studies.

**R. Mark Shipp** is Assistant Professor of Old Testament and Missions.

**Jeffrey Peterson** is Assistant Professor of New Testament and Homiletics.

**Gary Holloway** is Pat E. Harrell Associate Professor of Church History and Librarian.

**Allan J. McNicol** is A. B. Cox Professor of New Testament.

**Michael R. Weed** is Billie Gunn Hocott Professor of Theology and Ethics.