

♪ Worship Notes ♪

Volume 1, Number 7 ♪ July 2006

THEME: All God's Children

Congregational Participation: Drawing God's People into Worship

In that now-famous quote by Kierkegaard, he stresses that the members of the congregation are the “performers,” with God as the “audience” (rather than seeing the congregation as the audience who watch performers on the platform). In other words, worship is something done *by* God's people, not *for* God's people. It is not a spectator sport; hence the title of Robert Webber's book *Worship Is a Verb*. As Don Hustad has aptly put it, “The relevant question is not ‘Do you have a *voice*?’ but ‘Do you have a *song*?’” And all believers in Christ have a song to sing in gratitude to their Redeemer.

Congregational participation in corporate worship is in fact a direct application of the biblical doctrine of (and the Reformation reemphasis on) the priesthood of all believers, and thus is in itself a powerful testimony to the nature of the New Covenant and the free access of every believer into the presence of God through Jesus our Great High Priest.

The Singing Congregation

Music is a gift of God ideally suited for the praise of the Creator—in heaven and in the church on earth. And *the congregation is the most important singing group in the church* (the wonderful ministry of the gifted musical leaders notwithstanding). Following are some ways the congregation can be brought into a greater participatory role in worship through song:

Give them credit. Announcing every hymn number found in the bulletin, or every song title projected on the wall, is almost an insult to the intelligence of the worshiper, and certainly can detract from a worshipful atmosphere. That is not

to say that thoughtful words of introduction can't sometimes set the tone in an effective way; but a rote lead-in that is always the same would be better left out, not to mention a mini-sermon. The bulletin or projection tells the people what to sing; the instrumental introduction tells them in what key and tempo to sing; and the worship leader shows them when to sing—so why not just let them start singing?

Coach the congregation. Use the choir or worship team to sing through a song that is unfamiliar, then let the congregation join in the second time. If the tune is not too difficult, it is surprising how quickly the average group can pick up on it.

Model for the congregation. Expressions of joy or wonder, enthusiasm in singing, and an obvious heart for worship go a long way towards motivating the congregation. In this way the musicians up front truly serve as worship leaders (and fulfill Kierkegaard's view of them as “prompters” for the audience as “performers”).

Use hymns and songs creatively. It is remarkable how taking well-known texts and singing them in unfamiliar ways can make those texts come alive to our people. If the text is worth singing, then it is worth being savored and reflected on, not just sung in a lifeless, rote manner. Try changing the tempo and/or dynamic range of hymns or songs (either slower or faster, or louder or softer). Doing a normally lively or majestic setting in a more contemplative way can bring new attention to, and appreciation for, the words being sung. And there's no law that says all verses of a hymn must be used every time; in fact, if a theme is being developed, very often only one or two verses will pertain to that theme.

There are many contemporary harmonizations of classic hymns now available; and there is as well

Biblical Principles of Worship*

#5 Worship is
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a strong movement towards setting rich old texts to new contemporary tunes (some excellent examples may be found at www.ruf.org and www.reformedpraise.org).

Don't strain their voices. It has often been pointed out that many of the settings in hymnbooks are pitched too high for comfortable singing by untrained voices. And contemporary churches need to likewise be conscious not to do songs too high: just because the original recording artists can soar in a certain key does not mean that the rank and file in our churches can do the same! In both cases, people will simply stop singing if the range of the songs makes it uncomfortable to sing for any length of time. It is worth the trouble to transpose music into lower keys (either by hand or by using a music notation computer program). We want to remove any impediments we can to full participation by God's people in musical praise.

Also, just because a song is effective on some solo artist's album does not mean that is necessarily suited to congregational singing. Rhythms and melodic lines must not be too complex.

Don't blow them away. When sound systems are in use, it is important to use them judiciously so that the congregation is not overwhelmed by the flood of sound from the speakers. It is simply not a fair fight when electronic amplification is in play. When the music from the front is too loud, people will just stop singing, and then what results is a concert rather than a worship service. If the congregation is the most important musical group, then the primary function of those up front is to support and facilitate the singing of the whole body: to help it sing better, not to drown them out.

Develop a thematic approach. Long strings of contextually unrelated songs or choruses are not conducive to reflective worship, for there is no time to linger on a single aspect of God's nature or work. There is a power to focusing on and developing a single thematic focus throughout the time of corporate praise (perhaps, though not necessarily, related to the topic of the sermon), for it gives the people time to meditate on and respond to truth. (More on this subject may be found in the article "The Power of Thematic Worship" [here](#).)

Make creative use of the instruments and voices. Don't have all the instruments play full out all the

time; vary the textures by leaving out one instrument or the other on occasion. And *a cappella* singing can be used in both traditional and contemporary contexts: there is no instrument like the human voice, and no better way to foster a sense of community in our singing.

The Speaking Congregation

Remember that worship is more than music. As dealt with in last month's *Worship Notes*, the Word of God needs to have a prominent (and therefore, in most churches, a much greater) role in our worship.

Some churches with pew Bibles or with a single-translation tradition can read Scripture passages out loud together. Responsive readings should not be confined to those found in the back of most hymnals; it is well worth the effort to put together "original" responsive readings which incorporate a variety of Scripture texts (and then print or project them for the congregation). This is a wonderful way to help develop a theme in worship by pulling together many related texts to instruct and encourage God's people. Such readings are not too difficult to develop with the use of a Bible concordance (especially a computer concordance which allows for searches of pairings of specific words).

Fearing rote expressions, many non-liturgical churches have eschewed the practice of reciting the historic creeds of the church, the *Te Deum*, the Lord's Prayer, etc. But precisely because they are therefore less familiar in such churches, they may be used on occasion as effective doctrinal confessions and expressions of worship.

The Praying Congregation

All the praying in church should not be left to the pastor. Some churches have small-group prayer during a worship service, or use a greeting time for sharing prayer needs. In smaller churches it is possible to have seasons of corporate prayer where different individuals may pray aloud. In larger churches where this is not feasible, the practice of "bidded prayer" can allow for greater participation in prayer. In this practice, borrowed from the Anglican church, the pastor or other leader will successively mention specific areas for prayer, then leave about 30 seconds after each for the people to pray silently about that area; in this way the

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members of congregation are truly praying, rather than just listening to one person pray.

Conclusion

It is imperative that the members of our congregations leave, not just having attended a worship service, but *having worshipped*. It is worth all the creativity and effort we can muster in an attempt

to lovingly draw the people of God into meaningful participation in expressing praise to the God of their salvation.

**“Biblical Principles of Worship” (treating twelve principles, of which the fifth is dealt with here) may be downloaded at www.worr.org/articles.*

QUOTABLES

Participatory Worship

“A hundred years ago, G. K. Chesterton protested against the way specialists and experts were taking over common and essential human activities. He wrote that it wasn’t so long ago that men sang around a table in chorus. Now one sings alone before a microphone for the absurd reason that he can sing better. If this kind of thing goes on, Chesterton predicted, ‘Only one man will laugh, because he can laugh better than the rest’.”
(Eugene Peterson, *Living the Resurrection*, 93)

“It seems that the world is full of tenor worship leaders these days! Think about it! Name a few and see if I’m not right. Great voices, great hearts . . . but tenors! I can’t believe how high Chris Tomlin sings “Indescribable”! Great song, but not me in that key! I don’t know what your vocal range is, but the average Joe and Jane Pew-sitter have about a one octave range . . . from C to C. Though not all songs have a one octave range, many are very close or smaller. So, if the goal is to encourage congregational participation, then considerable thought should be given to that average C to C range. If you get beyond that range, be ready for people to shut down, stop trying to sing . . . and the cards and letters of complaint will follow! Adjust *your* comfort and playing ability to what is more important: congregational accessibility and involvement. Remember, the congregation is the largest group in your Worship Ministry, so their ability to focus on God and not the note they can’t reach should be of *really* high priority.”
 (“The Worship Leader and the Vocal Range of Congregational Songs”
<http://www.brehmcenter.com/Bock/bock.shtml>)

“A passive audience must become the Body of Christ. It is completely foreign to the New Testament to split the Christian community into one speaker and a silent body of listeners.”
(Eduard Schweizer, “Worship in the New Testament,” *Reformed and Presbyterian World* 24:2050)

“One of the great, and often ignored, contributions of the Reformation was to return worship to the people. Somehow, many Protestants have got the idea that prayer books, with written prayers, responsive readings, creeds and the like are Roman Catholic and medieval. Nothing could be further from the truth. Prayer books were a product of the Reformation and they were written so that the congregation could participate fully in the act of worship.”
(Peter Leithart, “Transforming Worship,” *Foundations* 38:30)

“The liberating effect of the Reformation on worship music was accomplished through the vision, insight and bravery of many who spoke on the subject of music with an intellectual depth and clarity never heard before or, it could be argued, since. They dealt with this topic as they did all other vital issues of the day—seeking biblical underpinnings and practical applications. In the process, they accomplished the formidable task of wrenching worship from the hands of the priests and returning it to the people. This, undoubtedly, was one of the crowning achievements of the Reformation.”
(Chuck Fromm, “New Song: The Sound of Spiritual Awakening”)

“The service is a dialogue (liturgy means ‘the work of the people’) in which God speaks to us and we respond. This is why it is so important that our special worship be seen as more than just an opportunity to hear the minister teach. In biblical worship, there will be congregational participation.”

(Monte E. Wilson, “Church-O-Rama or Corporate Worship” in *The Compromised Church*, 80)

“I challenge our worship leaders to consider themselves worship facilitators, not worship performers. The very measure of an effective worship time is not whether we performed well. It is whether or not people engaged well. . . . Contemporary worship without participation is nothing more than a concert with spiritual words.”

(Joe Horness, “A Contemporary Worship Response,” *Exploring the Worship Spectrum*, 202)

“Nearly every non-Anglican evangelical church I have worshipped in uses a form more akin to medieval Catholic worship than to Reformation worship. True, worship is conducted in the vernacular and when the Supper is served it is served to every communing member. In other ways, however, much of evangelical worship is pure medievalism, with active clergy and passive congregation. The congregation does not bow or raise its hands; the people never pray audibly, rarely if ever saying the Lord’s Prayer; the congregation frequently does not say a creed; there are no responsive readings of the Psalms or corporate readings of other portions of Scripture. On most Sundays, the congregation watches, listens, and the only active participation is singing a few hymns. Apart from singing, the only voice that is heard is the minister’s. . . . The typical evangelical service is *not* Reformation worship; it is in important respects closer to the medieval abuses that the Reformers spent themselves to change. Reforming worship demands an end to the clericalisation of evangelical worship and a new emphasis on congregational participation.”

(Peter Leithart, “Transforming Worship,” *Foundations* 38:31)

“God is God. God will be God regardless of the nature of human responses. Neither is the nature of God adversely affected nor the power of God diminished by a lack of worship from people. But a similar comment cannot be made about people. Human fulfillment and wholeness require participation in the worship of God by every individual.”

(C. Welton Gaddy, *The Gift of Worship*, 40)

“It is evident from the manner in which . . . Paul continually addresses himself to the church, and not to a few who occupy positions of leadership or to office-bearers, how much the gatherings of the church are not a hierarchical affair or one to be discharged by a few ‘holy’ persons, but bear a fully congregational character.”

(Paul Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, 482)

“If we remember that public worship presents the opportunity to unite with others in gratitude to the King of the cosmos, we will each want to do our best and offer our most excellent singing—our finest performance—and join with all the other saints in thorough participation in the act of worship.”

(Marva J. Dawn, *How Shall We Worship? Biblical Guidelines for the Worship Wars*, 78)

“One of Luther’s stated goals was the restoration of true worship. He understood the tremendous benefit resulting from hearing the word of God and then uniting as a congregation to offer thanksgiving in song. This stress on congregational participation in worship became a lynchpin of the Reformation.”

(Chuck Fromm, “New Song: The Sound of Spiritual Awakening”)

“Throughout the history of the Church, both before and after the Reformation, there has been a recurring propensity on the part of the clergy to arrogate to themselves the whole action of worship and on the part of the laity to shift the burden of active participation in worship on to the clergy. This should be resolutely discouraged wherever encountered as contrary to the spirit of Christianity.”

(William D. Maxwell, *Concerning Worship*, 43)

“We must make worship more work by more people. This doesn’t mean that it must be complex or difficult, but engaging and rewarding. This will be impossible unless we educate, equip, encourage, and enable. We must prepare not only a service but worshipers. . . . We may have more superficial success if we acquiesce to a culture of spectatorism, but we will not form Christians or community—much less Christian community, if we do not engage and enable. . . . Long-term, intentional education about worship is essential. We do this in every other facet of the Church’s life and should make worship education part of the equipping of the saints.”

(Paul A Richardson, “Spiritual Formation in Corporate Worship,” *Review and Expositor* 96:532)

“The liturgy of the people is essential to worship, and must not be entrusted vicariously to others, for example, to the pastor or the choir. If liturgical tradition has generally respected the role of the pastor, it has much less respected that of the people, whence the deplorable clericalization of the cult. We must realize,

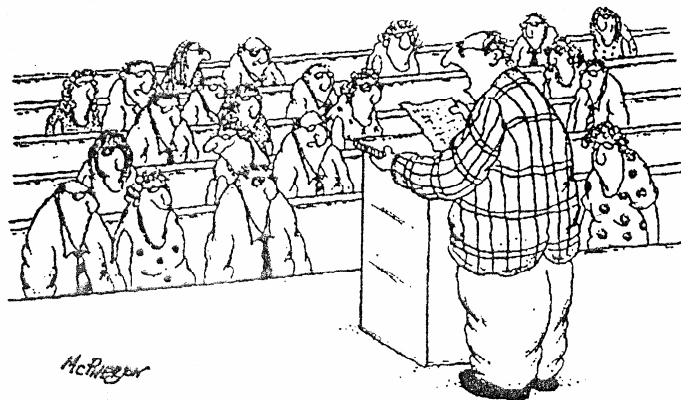
however, that this is due in the first place not to a kind of liturgical voracity on the part of the pastors, but rather to a weakening of the liturgical conscience and self-dedication of the laity. Realizing in fact that the celebration of the cult involves a total engagement, they have often withdrawn and resigned their part. This resignation impairs the whole character of worship: it turns it into a spectacle or a lecture, whereas in fact it is an action, or a game in which all those who are present are called upon to play as a team.”

(Jean-Jacques von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, 193)

“Oftentimes Free Church Protestants, who speak the most about the priesthood of all believers, are the most guilty of promoting clergy-dominated worship in which the minister does all the preaching, praying, speaking, acting, and leading, and the people do all the passive sitting and listening.”

(William H. Willimon, *Word, Water, Wine and Bread: How Worship Has Changed over the Years*, 123-4)

THE LIGHTER SIDE



“SINCE TODAY’S SERVICE IS BEING TAPED FOR COMMEMORATIVE PURPOSES, WE ASK THAT THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS PLEASE REFRAIN FROM SINGING DURING THE HYMNS: ALICE ZUTMAN, ED FROMP, CAROL VIDMAR, ...”

GUEST ARTICLE

Worship has been defined as being preoccupied with God.

We humans are preoccupied with many things: successes and failures, the gaining or losing of possessions, the hurts and joys of living; but we are rarely preoccupied with God. And yet, in a secularized age, which seems to be racing dangerously along in a rapid moral decline, we need to worship more than ever. As the late William Temple said:

The world can be saved by one thing and that is worship. For to worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.

This exaltation, this adoration does not often happen spontaneously. It takes work on the part of humans, bogged about by the demands of materiality: by the urgent, by the necessary, but not by the spiritual. We must learn to work at our worship so that preoccupation with God becomes delightfully habitual.

Worship is a sacred work in which a people corporately, determined to be enamored with God, find meaningful ways to tell Him of this and to remind themselves as well.

How do we become intentional in worship? How do we become participants rather than spectators? A friend's mother taught her to go to church with "A full basket, not an empty one." We must begin to retrain ourselves to consider during each Saturday evening/Sunday morning: What have I to give to God and to his people? Am I ready to worship? Am I eager to be preoccupied with Him? We must learn to transform the age-old, self-centered question, What am I going to get out of the service? to, What am I going to put into the service?

We need to remind ourselves, over and over, that the focus of Sunday worship must be upon the living Christ among us. In truth, if Christ were bodily present and we could see him with more than our soul's eyes, all our worship would become intentional. If Christ stood on our

platforms, we would bend our knees without asking. If He stretched out His hands and we saw the wounds, our hearts would break; we would confess our sins and weep over our shortcomings. If we could hear His voice leading the hymns, we too would sing heartily; the words would take on meaning. The Bible reading would be lively; meaning would pierce to the marrow of our souls. If Christ walked our aisles, we would hasten to make amends with that brother or sister to whom we have not spoken. We would volunteer for service, the choir loft would be crowded. If we knew Christ would attend our church Sunday after Sunday, the front pews would fill fastest, believers would arrive early, offering plates would be laden with sacrificial but gladsome gifts, prayers would concentrate our attention.

Yet, the startling truth is that Christ is present, through His Holy Spirit, in our churches; it is we who must develop eyes to see and ears to hear Him.

One old man I know always weeps when his church sings the doxology, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty." The tears run down his wrinkled cheeks. Would that we all could experience that awe, that reality which breaches the borders of the intellect and somehow reaches the affective, the guarded emotional parts of ourselves.

For truly, one day, one eternal day, we will recognize that divine presence, we will kneel in awe, our hearts will sigh, will shout, "Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God Almighty!" We will weep for joy in the Presence of God. We will become utterly preoccupied. We will adore. We will exalt. We will worship. And this time, this one day in time, this Sunday--every Sunday, in fact Sunday after Sunday; we are preparing our souls, practicing for that Eternity when every day will be a Sabbath without end, for that day when we will know most assuredly, Christ is here!

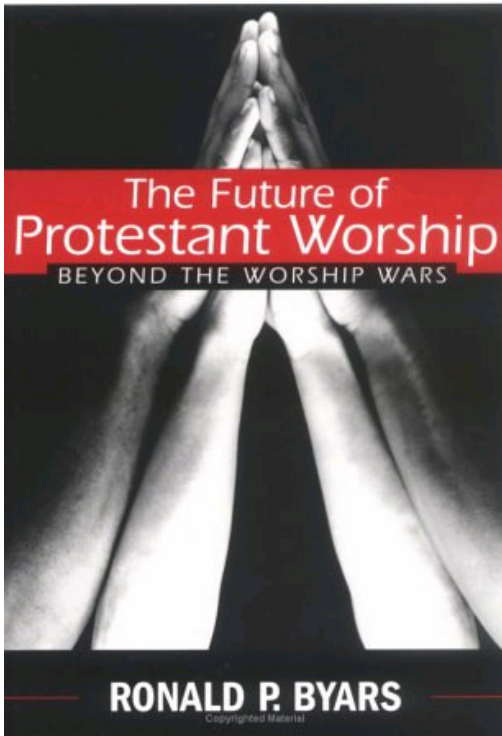
Karen Burton Mains

(excerpted from the Introduction
to the hymnal *Sing Joyfully!*)

[Carol Stream IL: Tabernacle Publishing Co., 1969], 3-6)

BOOK NOOK

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"This book is a gentle but compelling guide to genuine worship."
—MARVA J. DAWN, author of *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down*



Featured volume:
*The Future of Protestant
Worship:
Beyond the Worship Wars*
Ronald P. Byars
(Westminster John Knox Press, 2002)

Ronald Byars is professor of preaching and worship at Union Theological Seminary. He does not identify himself as an evangelical, yet seems firmly orthodox in his beliefs. He also authored *Christian Worship: Glorifying and Enjoying God* (Geneva Press, 2000).

This book is full of pastoral warmth and wisdom, and very balanced and sane in its approach. Byars insightfully examines today's divergent worship trends before casting his lot with advocating a future trajectory which seeks to be convergent and truly trans-generational.

He decries a contemporary approach which is "open to everything but the past," with a self-focus which makes the entire event seem less like the body of Christ gathered than "merely a group of individuals all doing their devotions at the

same time." He describes much contemporary worship as communicating a God who is accessible and friendly but also, "like much of the service . . . easygoing, undemanding—minimal."

Traditional worship does not escape Byars' pointed assessment either. While affirming the value and importance of tradition as "the Spirit at work in history" (quoting Glenn Hinson), he claims that too often a traditional approach "means nothing much more than 'what we're used to.'" He has no patience with "complacently practicing what's been passed on without critical scrutiny." God in such settings can seem "cold, distant, almost historical."

Byars observes that too often "those designing a new service [are] guided by their gripes with the established service. The result is a service that is designed as a kind of anti-service" (p. 102). He gives an impassioned plea for instead focusing on the essentials, for majoring on the majors, for "beginning at the center rather than the edges" (p. 129). These essentials he identifies (borrowing from Gordon Lathrop) as "Book, Bath and Meal," and holds that any service can and should be evaluated by these criteria. He then adds:

Another critical criterion is whether a service, whether called "traditional" or "contemporary," gives evidence that the congregation knows itself to be in the presence of a BIG God. Not necessarily a scary God. Not a threatening God. But a God big enough to keep the promises of redemption made in Christ. A God capable of bringing out the new creation promised in the resurrection. A God who's more than a mascot, more than a cheerleader, more than a therapist, more than an educator, more than the one who comes when I whistle to help me undo my messes. (p. 63)

Byars argues for an open-minded approach to a wide variety of worship expressions; and he calls for carefully distinguishing cultural norms and habits from biblical essentials, with a willingness to adjust and vary the former while holding firmly to the latter. He forcefully contends that "there is something of vital importance about what we do in the Sunday assembly. The reason it's important is that it's in our worship where we do our primary theology. . . . The vast majority will learn their theology from their experiences in worship" (p.73).

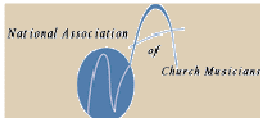
WORSHIP EVENTS



July 11-15, 2006

Bethel University, St. Paul, Minnesota

Music and the arts, missions, and indigenous worship around the world. Registrants will select from over 50 seminars, panels, plenary sessions, and media presentations. Experienced leaders from more than 20 organizations will present seminars within the following tracks: Foundations, Media and Related Arts, Contextualization and Case Studies, Methodology, and Overcoming Obstacles. Break-out sessions organized by geographical area and interest group will provide networking opportunities for participants. Check out the speaker information and seminar abstracts online at www.gcommhome.org.



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July 12-15, 2006

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The
Hymn Society
In the United States and Canada

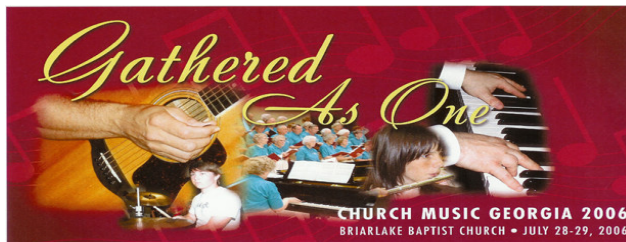
Hymns in the Heartland

DePauw University,
Greencastle, Indiana
16-20 July 2006

www.thehymnsociety.org/



http://www.baylor.edu/christian_music



[Info](#)



2006 Louisiana Baptist Church Music Conference

Calvary Baptist Church, Alexandria ♦ August 4-5

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August 9th-12th, 2006

Covenant Life Church, Gaithersburg, Maryland

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August 11-12, 2006
St. Andrews Baptist Church
Columbia, South Carolina

Purpose
To assist music leadership to
grow in their spiritual walk, to
be intentional disciple makers,
and to offer authentic worship to
God.

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