

♪ Worship Notes ♪

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THEME: The Tyranny of Taste

My dear Woodworm,

When human creatures first come into the world, they are notorious for their singleminded focus on their basic needs, and their effectiveness in making those needs known. They make it *very* clear to everyone around them that they want what they want, and they want it NOW, and they won't rest until they get it. Delightfully, many of them never seem to advance beyond this stage!

I tell you, we have certainly put that tendency to good use when it comes to their worship services. The "tyranny of *taste*", I like to call it, or the "power of *preference*." You see, when they first show up for worship, they may enjoy well enough mingling with others, usually chatting idly and mindlessly about things like the weather or last night's sports scores. But the moment the service starts, "it's every man for himself," as they say. Any thought of community is quickly extinguished as each one prefers instead to see it as an opportunity for some "one-on-one" time with the Enemy.

This perspective causes them to evaluate everything that goes on in the service through their own individual grid. Each one comes with a whole set of personal standards, expectations, hopes, needs and desires—and they each see worship as a failure if their own agenda is not accomplished. And so we get a delightful cycle of frustration and disappointment and disillusionment that only serves to turn them even more in on themselves.

And of course, when everyone comes to the service with his or her own agenda, they are on a collision course with each other. What one likes, the other despises, and vice versa. It's just marvelous to see that kind of dynamic! Rarely is

any pleasure is taken in one another's spiritual journey—and we're often able to encourage rather a sort of competitive spirit which guarantees a total lack of community.

This whole area of worship has certainly been worth all of the attention and effort we have given it over the past several years. How like our father in hell to so skillfully corrupt something so central as worship in the hearts and minds of the Enemy's people! Would you believe it, we can so fill their minds with disapproving thoughts about the songs or the musicians or the decorations or the lighting, that sometimes they can go through an entire service with hardly a thought about the Enemy himself! And even if they leave with a positive feeling, it's often because of a satisfying personal experience which has stroked their ego but still largely left God out of the picture. How delicious it is that in all our work of seeking to distract them from a heavenly focus, one of our most effective tools should be the worship service itself!!

And so, my dear Woodworm, don't fret yourself about all this attention being given to worship these days: the programs in their churches, the books, the seminars and conferences, the recordings and concerts, the sermon series—this new fad just adds to their busy striving, and leaves them wonderfully ignorant that the worship they're working so hard at, is to be found simply through a restful preoccupation with the Enemy himself. As long as we keep them from learning that, we'll be OK.

Stay the course, my dear nephew.

Affectionately yours,
Your uncle Tapescrew

(with apologies to C.S. Lewis)

A Parable

And He also told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that their worship style was the only acceptable form:

“Four men went up in to the temple to pray, two traditional music directors and two contemporary worship leaders. One of the music directors stood and was praying thus to himself, ‘God, I thank Thee that I am not like many other church musicians: untrained, unrefined, undignified, or even like these contemporary worship leaders. I program only the finest art music; I present only those works truly worthy of Thee.’

“One of the contemporary worship leaders was standing off to the other side, praying like this: ‘O Lord, I thank You that I am not like many other church musicians: stuffy, inhibited, stuck in a rut of boring and irrelevant music of the past. I present only the very latest songs and reach people where they’re at.’

“In another corner the other music director and the other contemporary worship leader were kneeling and praying together. The music director prayed: ‘Lord God, You know how easily the striving for artistic excellence can become idolatrous. When I use my gifts, may I always remember that they come from Your hand, and that You delight in all of the genuine gifts of worship which Your children bring, in all of their variety.’ The worship leader prayed: ‘God, I only know four chords on the guitar, and I am not a polished performer; but I thank You for Your grace in allowing me to come near in worship, and for the privilege in leading others to Your throne. Thank You for all the different ways that Your people can praise You.’

“I tell you, these last two went away with their offerings of worship received by the Lord, rather than the others; for God is not so much concerned with the style of the musical gifts you bring, as He is with the humility of heart and genuineness of love with which you bring them.”

“The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.”

(Romans 14:3)

by Ron Man. From *Church Musician Today*, May 1999.
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QUOTABLES

Worship and Taste

“God has no favorite songs.”

“Cruising the Caribbean, a ship’s captain spied smoke coming from one of three huts on an uncharted island. When the crew went ashore to investigate, they were met by a shipwreck survivor.

“I’m so glad you’re here!” he yelled. “I’ve been alone on this island for five years.”

“If you’re alone,” the captain said, “then why are there three huts?”

“Well, I live in one and go to church in another.”

“What about the third hut?”

“Oh,” the man said. “That’s where I used to go to church.”

(Reader’s Digest July 2005, 151)

“[There is a danger of] making our favorite human culture into an idol, equal to the Scripture in normativity (Mark 7:8-9).”

(Timothy J. Keller, “Reformed Worship in the Global City,” in *Worship by the Book*, 196)

“We can’t canonize our scruples.”

(Cole Huffmann)

“Being fallen creatures we tend to resent offenses against our taste, at least as much as, or even more than, offences against our conscience or reason.”

(C.S. Lewis, “Christianity and Culture,” in *Christian Reflections*, 31-32)

“Complaints have been made to the Consistorium that you now accompany the hymns with surprising variations and irrelevant ornaments which obliterate the melody and confuse the congregation. If you desire to introduce a theme against the melody, you must go on with it and not immediately fly off to another.”

(reprimand of J. S. Bach by Johann Christoph Olearius, Superintendent of the Neukirche in Arnstadt, 1707; cited by Charles Sanford Terry, *Bach: a Biography*, 70)

“Both musical parties, the Highbrows and the Low, assume far too easily the spiritual value of the music they want.”

(C. S. Lewis, “On Church Music,” in *Christian Reflections*)

“Unless it can be shown to be inappropriate for worship, everyone’s music should be heard: old people’s and young people’s music; European, African American, and other ethnic music; complex music and simple music. This is how we defer to one another—serve one another—in the body of Jesus Christ.”

(John Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense*, 25)

“Too often we don’t construct worship ‘for God’ but for individuated consumers who come for an experience of God. This is how we manage to endlessly fight over worship.

For those coming to be fed, taste is a neverending battle.” [emphasis mine]

(J. D. Walt, “It’s All About Who? Part Two” <http://www.christianitytoday.com/leaders/newsletter/2004/cln40913.html>)

“John Newton refused to have Handel’s Messiah performed in his church because he thought the music too worldly.”

(Kevin Twit)

“Mindless words, bad theology, emotional tunes.”

(written in 18th century about Isaac Watts’ “O God, Our Help in Ages Past”)

“For most people, Christian music is what they like; un-Christian music is what they don’t like.”

(Oleg Turlac)

“SINFUL ATTITUDES AND THEIR ANTIDOTES:

1. THE AESTHETE: art for the greater glory of art
--> THE AESTHETIC: art for the greater glory of God
2. THE PHILISTINE: denying and disdainng art for the sake of worship
-->THE AESTHETICALLY ATTENTIVE: discovering and creating beauty
3. THE INTOLERANT: uncaring in criticism and arrogant in judgment
-->AESTHETICALLY HOSPITABLE
4. THE INDISCRIMINATE: not knowing when to say no
--> DISCERNING: seeing what artistry is appropriate and good”

(Frank Burch Brown, “Sinful Taste in the Art of Worship,” “Calvin Symposium on Worship, 2007)

“We do in fact say things like, ‘Oh, that kind of music, that kind of preaching, that kind of ceremony, isn’t pleasing to God.’ Now, I don’t want to sound disrespectful, but I’m not yet convinced that those of our number who argue this way have really heard a word from God about divine likes and dislikes. I’m more easily convinced that such a view amounts to a subtle and unintentional form of psychological projection: I rather suspect that what they really mean is, ‘that kind of music, that kind of preaching, that kind of ceremony, isn’t pleasing to ME; it prevents me from worshipping, so surely it can’t be pleasing to God either. Our arguments may claim to be about God, but they are more often about ourselves.”

(Michael Knowles, “The Worth of Worship” <http://mcmaster.ca/mjtm/2-5b.htm>)

“Every complaint about worship music, no matter which style, claims to be rooted in theological principles. Yet in every critique, the theology aligns perfectly with the critic’s own musical taste. What may be more helpful instead is a pragmatic test based on a bit of wisdom from the Gospels: ‘The tree is known by its fruit.’ If this is so, then worship music ought to be judged not by the songs themselves but by the people who sing them. Looking at the songs themselves is rather like looking at the bark of a tree and then pronouncing the tree good or bad. Better to look at the fruit itself—the lives of the people who are singing the songs. The job of the local church is to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ, to draw people into a living relationship with God, and to remold disciples of Jesus into a Sermon-on-the-Mount shape. Any worship music that aids a church in these tasks is almost certainly a conduit of the Holy Spirit. In light of this, maybe it is time to substitute charity for condescension.”

(Michael S. Hamilton, “The Triumph of the Praise Songs: How guitars beat out the organ

in the worship wars,” *Christianity Today* 43.8 [12 July 1999])

“What is ironic and especially pertinent is that many debates about worship are just indirect ways of talking about ourselves, not God. Our debates devolve into how we like our worship served up each week. It’s worship as consumption rather than offering. It’s an expression of human taste, not a longing to reflect God’s glory.”

(Mark Labberton, “The Real Worship War: Forget about choruses vs. hymns—what about justice?” *Leadership Journal* <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2007/03/7.81.html>)

“Therefore, if we are to pursue the biblical goal of intelligible worship (1 Cor 14), we should seek musical settings that speak the musical languages of our congregation and community. To do this is not to cater to human taste, but to honor God in his desire to edify people in his worship. We should not selfishly insist on using music only from our own favorite tradition. Rather, in the spirit of Christ the servant, we must be willing to sacrifice our own preferences in order to reach others with the truth.”

(John Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, 140)

“Our identity in Christ, not our common tastes, unites us. The New Testament churches were made up of people of different ages, genders, races, and socio-economic levels, who came together because of their common belief in Jesus. Christ gave them their identity and, consequently, their unity. . . . What would happen if people with different musical tastes got along because of their common commitment to Christ? What a testimony to the outside world!”

(Steve Bierly, “Sparring Over Worship: 5 points to make when your congregation dukes it out over musical styles,” *Leadership Journal* Winter 1997, Vol. XVIII, No. 1, 37)

“There are two musical situations on which I think we can be confident that a blessing rests. One is where a priest or an organist, himself a man of trained and delicate taste, humbly and charitably sacrifices his own (aesthetically right) desires and gives the people humbler and coarser fare than he would wish, in a belief (even, as it may be, the erroneous belief) that he can thus bring them to God. The other is where the stupid and unmusical layman humbly and patiently, and above all silently, listens to music which he cannot, or cannot fully, appreciate, in the belief that it somehow glorifies God, and that if it does not edify him this must be his own defect. Neither such a High Brow nor such a Low Brow can be far out of the way. To both, Church Music will have been a means of grace; not the music they have liked, but the music they have disliked. They have both offered, sacrificed, their taste in the fullest sense. But where the pride of skill or the virus of emulation and looks with contempt on the unappreciative congregation, or where the unmusical, complacently entrenched in their own ignorance and conservatism, look with the restless and resentful hostility of an inferiority complex on all who would try to improve their taste—there, we may be sure, all that both offer is unblessed and the spirit that moves them is not the Holy Ghost. . . . Discrepancies of taste and capacity will, indeed, provide matter for mutual charity and humility.”

(C.S. Lewis, “On Church Music,” in *Christian Reflections*, 96-97)

“Of course, the broad rules governing worship are divine commands, not people’s tastes, as we have seen. But one of those divine commands is to worship in ways that are intelligible to church members and visitors. Determining the most intelligible form of worship requires us to ask what people in a particular culture most easily listen to and understand, and that question certainly overlaps the issue of taste. But we are not asking that

question to satisfy anybody’s taste; we are asking it so that we may be more faithful in communicating God’s word clearly.

Indeed, asking such questions may force us to go against the tastes of many, notably our own! We may well have to set aside our prejudices and tastes as we plan our worship. . . . Worship is not merely for ourselves as individuals, but for God, for our fellow Christians, and for the unbelieving visitors (1 Cor 14:22-25). We must distinguish between what God requires and what we are comfortable with, between scriptural standards and mere individual preferences. And in matters of individual preferences, we must be willing to consider others ahead of ourselves.”

(John Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense*, 84)

“Years ago, I was in England at a large Christian conference. During one seminar, we were led in corporate worship by a guitarist whom I thought was average in every respect. As he finished what I would describe as a sorry time of worship in song, the elderly gentleman to my side turned my way. With a glowing smile, he asked, “That was simply lovely, wasn’t it?” I wanted to say no, but the Holy Spirit caught my tongue before the answer slipped out.

What I realized was that only one of us had been worshipping God during that time. And it wasn’t me. I was busy worshipping myself, exulting in my knowledge of worship, my experiences, my training, my background. Needless to say, God wasn’t impressed.

‘But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word’ (Isa 66:2b ESV).

May God grant us grace to truly seek His reputation above our own each time we meet to worship Him.”

(Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters*, December 28, 2005)

“I naturally loathe nearly all hymns; the face and life of the charwoman in the next pew who revels in them, teach me that good taste in poetry or music are *not* necessary to salvation.”

(C. S. Lewis, “Letters of C. S. Lewis”)

“Wisdom will be needed to encourage a congregation to be united over the music it uses. One result of the power of music is that people become deeply wedded to their personal preferences and find it difficult to recognize that the style of music is almost always a matter of no intrinsic theological importance. Training the congregation to recognize the difference between what is theological and what is cultural, and between where the Bible speaks clearly and where it does not, is an important part of training the congregation to be balanced in their biblical understanding. . . . Selfishness loves to dress itself in cultural clothes. Musical taste seems a lot more godly than self-interest, but all too often that is all a preference for one style of music over another amounts to!”

(Mark Ashton, “Following in Cranmer’s Footsteps,” in *Worship by the Book*, 91)

“God sees every believer, irrespective of personal taste, exactly the same way: in Christ. It is his cleansing, rather than the quality of our art that makes us presentable.”

(John Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense*, 168)

“When I first became a Christian, about fourteen years ago, I thought that I could do it on my own, by retiring to my rooms and reading theology, and wouldn’t go to the churches and Gospel Halls; . . . I disliked very much their hymns which I considered to be fifth-rate poems set to sixth-rate music. But as I went on I saw the merit of it. I came up against different people of quite different outlooks and different education, and then gradually my con-

ceit just began peeling off. I realized that the hymns (which were just sixth-rate music) were, nevertheless, being sung with devotion and benefit by an old saint in elastic-side boots in the opposite pew, and then you realize that you aren’t fit to clean those boots. It gets you out of your solitary conceit.”

(C.S. Lewis, “Answers to Questions on Christianity” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, 61-62)

“All the above can be boiled down into a three-part artistic dilemma that has face the church for centuries. First, if art is beautiful, it has to be used whether it is effective or not. This is the idol of quality. Second, if art is effective, it must be used, irrespective of quality. This is the idol of effectiveness. Third, if art has worked well, don’t change it. This is the idol of stasis. There is no church, large or small, rich or poor, ethnically diverse or homogeneous, that will not face one, two or all three of these dilemmas. But it usually works out that the high-culture/high-taste artists face the first idol; the church-growth/seeker-sensitivity leadership, the second; and the traditionalists, the third.”

(John Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense*, 169)

“If our worship is more eschatological, then we won’t allow any distinctions between people by age or musical taste. Think about this question: “Is heavenly worship for everyone?” Won’t “boomers” and “X-ers” all be together some day? Wouldn’t it be good preparation for our future life united in glory if we could learn to sing together now across generational lines? Also, our singing together will encourage greater living together—friendships of old and young, service and outreach projects undertaken by multigenerational groups, a genuine restoration of the Christian community as a true family.”

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

“How do we love one another and defer to one another in the selection of church music? First, we must constantly search our hearts for evidence of selfishness. Are we seeking to have it our own way or to serve our brothers and sisters? Forsaking selfishness means seeking to honor the preferences of others as much as we can. Yes, we must also consider questions of quality and appropriateness, as I

plan to do later in this book. But we should be aware of our tendency to confuse those questions with questions of taste. And we should resolve that if anyone in the church is to be offended over a mere matter of taste, it should be us rather than someone else.”
(John Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense*, 25)

GLOBAL WORSHIP

PAST AND FUTURE EVENTS

An Easter concert by the Baptist Youth Choir and Orchestra of Ukraine took place on May 1, 2008 at Central Baptist Church in Kiev. Included were four excerpts from Handel’s *Messiah*.

Three clips from the concert can be found on YouTube by going to www.youtube.com and searching for “Youth Concert Kiev.”



I will be the keynote speaker at a worship and music conference in Manila, Philippines August 7-9, 2008. The conference is called MUSAIC, with the wonderful tagline “Diverse People, United Worship.” You can learn more about the conference at www.musaicphil.org.



UPCOMING WORSHIP EVENTS

Beginning Fall 2008, The Bethlehem Institute at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota will be offering a rigorous, two-year graduate apprenticeship program in worship studies.

For more information, click [HERE](#).



Thursday 11 to Saturday 13
September 2008

info [HERE](#)

COMING NEXT MONTH:

Spirit and Truth



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