

♪ Worship Notes ♪

Volume 2, Number 2 ♪ February 2007

THEME: Unity in Diversity

Corporate Worship in a Compartmentalized World

One Perspective on Worship Styles

The Discman Syndrome

A few years ago I drove five Christian teenagers to a ski camp. For the first hour or so, they visited and talked excitedly among themselves, and genuinely seemed to enjoy one another's fellowship. Then suddenly all the headphones went on, the Discmans started up, and five teenagers each retired to his or her world and music of preference. You see, one liked country, one liked rock, and I have no idea what the others were into. I must admit to I was thankful to be spared having to listen to some of their preferred styles on the car stereo! But I couldn't help but notice how abruptly the fellowship stopped as each young person pursued his or her own musical taste.

It also occurred to me that this is what happens in many churches today. God has called us in Christ into one body (Ephes 4:4), and the Spirit is the one who must make us one in all our diversity. The fellowship of the church is intended to be a laboratory where, guided by divine love, we learn to break down barriers (Ephes 2:14) and recognize and enjoy the fact that in Christ what bonds us is far deeper and more significant than the trappings of generation, background, culture and personal preference.

Yet in many churches, when it comes to corporate worship, we find a similar phenomenon to what I experienced in the car that day. Different segments of the body gather at different times, and

perhaps even in different places, to pursue musical worship according to their own preferred style. The congregation is divided into musical affinity groups with the admitted purpose of giving people what they want, what they are comfortable with, and what is most meaningful to them. The melting pot nature of the church gives way to homogeneous groupings which value choice over unity.

Biblical Principles of Worship*

**#11 Young
and old need
each other in
the Body of
Christ.**

Unity in Diversity

Can you imagine the early church structuring itself in that way? Surely there wouldn't have been separate services for Jews and for Greeks, for slaves and for free, though their backgrounds and hence their tastes would have undoubtedly shown much variety! In Corinth Paul taught against the institutional recognition of factions within the church; far from having separate services for those "of Paul," "of Apollos," "of Cephas," "of Christ" (1 Cor 1:12-13), he decried gathering under any banner but that of Christ alone.

It should also be pointed out that in areas of the world today where the Church is persecuted, there are rarely any debates about worship styles; rather God's people are deeply grateful simply for the opportunity to worship with other believers. May we learn from them! Our worship wars grow out of a complacency and arrogance to which we are susceptible because of our spiritual affluence.

Surely the unity of the body should be demonstrated and lived out in a congregation's corporate worship life. Surely the people of God should be challenged to join together as one body and to work towards a unified, corporate expression of praise to the Lord who wants them to be one (John 17: 23). Surely the leadership of the church should wrestle with ways to bring the peo-

ple together, not send them into separate enclaves with “separate but equal” worship forms and styles.

We should be under no illusion that such a pursuit will be easy. It will take much work and prayer on the part of the church leaders and those responsible for worship; most importantly, it will demand a mature response on the part of the people. Rather than vying for what they like or want, their goal must be the good of the whole body. But isn't that what being the body of Christ is all about? Isn't that how all men will recognize that we are Christ's disciples, from the love and deference we show for one another (John 13:35)? If the body is to “build itself up in love” (Ephes 4:12), the area of worship will definitely test the progress of the church towards that goal!

And don't leaders have the right and indeed the responsibility to exhort the congregation to respond in a Christ-like, body-edifying way? Sometimes pastors and other church leaders are afraid that if they ask too much of their people—even Christian maturity!—some will become disillusioned and offended and leave for another, less demanding church home. Perhaps we should welcome such departures!

Blended Worship for a Blended Body

The fact that the body of Christ is by definition *blended*, not homogeneous (Gal 3:28), might perhaps suggest a direction for our worship. A blended style of worship, which pulls songs and other materials from a wide variety of styles and sources (and historical periods), and which artfully synthesizes them into a tasteful whole, would seem to be one way forward. That will look different from congregation to congregation, and will require a lot of work by gifted and biblically informed musicians, guided by an understanding leader who is firmly committed to the spiritual goal of unified congregational worship. The result will probably need to be a good deal more integrated and complex than simply having different styles of worship represented at different parts of the service; that simply invites people to “check out” during that portion of the service which is not to their liking.

The diversity should ideally extend beyond merely generational preferences (Western traditional and contemporary idioms), and also include expressions of the faith from other lands and cultures (even languages). The availability of these

materials in our day is one effect of globalization for which we can truly be thankful.

It cannot be overemphasized that the ultimate goal is not to keep everyone happy. Of course, the goal is not to make them unhappy either! One key is that the people must *continually* be taught about the gravity and importance of what they're doing when they gather for worship, and the significance of moving forward in unity of heart and expression. The importance of this teaching cannot be overemphasized. We are redeemed, but not yet glorified, and we will always tend to seek out spiritual shortcuts which demand less effort and self-sacrifice on our part.

Scaling the Discman Barrier

An encouraging development during our trip to ski camp came when one of the girls in the car plugged some portable speakers into her Discman in order to expose her friends to some of her favorite songs; others then took the opportunity to share some songs they particularly liked too. All of them seemed to be willing to extend themselves just a little over their accustomed boundaries of personal preference, in order to meet one another on some common ground. *Shouldn't church be like this?*

Of course, at this point I became an involuntary participant also, for up until this point I had retreated as well into my own world (in my case, a world of silence); so it was good for me to enter into this stretching experience too. But the main thing is that *fellowship* was restored, we came back together out of our separate worlds, and we were challenged to meet each other halfway as we learned from one another. *Isn't this what the Lord desires from His church?*

It has been maintained that diverse worship services are needed in a single church in order to serve as “entry points” into the church for different types of unbelievers. Certainly God can, and apparently has, blessed churches which have moved in that direction, and I would not presume to know what God may or may not choose to use or bless. But have we considered the impact on outsiders of a church which is striving, out of love for the Lord and for one another, to sacrificially grow together in unified worship for the good of the whole?

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

TEXTS

The Biblical Case for Blended Worship

Convergent, or blended, worship refers to the mixing and blending of both historic and contemporary expressions of worship into a diverse mosaic of praise which enfranchises and encourages the participation of all of God's people. Some congregations have taken this approach, while many others have gone the route of providing multiple services with differing stylistic characters.

Arguments may of course be made for both approaches (multiple service styles vs. a single blended format). Below are biblical principles which may support a blended worship approach:

1. **The Nature of God: *God Himself exists in community, the ultimate expression of unity in diversity.*** Father, Son and Holy Spirit enjoy an eternal bond of love and fellowship; they are one in essence, glory and purpose, yet with distinct roles.

"In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.""
(Mark 1:9-11)

2. **The Nature of the Church: *The Body of Christ is itself blended.*** There is room in the church for people of all races, nationalities, ages, backgrounds and temperaments. The connecting thread is the redemptive work of Christ in all of our lives.

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."
(Galatians 3:28)

3. **The Goal of the Church: *Unity in Christ.*** The goal of the church is a unity which only the Holy Spirit can engender, molding a disparate people into one in purpose and love for the Lord.

"Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."
(Ephesians 4:1-3)

4. **The Goal of Worship: *Worship is for God.*** The issue in worship is not our pleasure, or our preferences, or our comfort, but rather the honor and praise of God. We should never presume to know conclusively what God does and not does find acceptable in the worship of Him.

"Praise Him with trumpet sound . . . with lute and harp . . . with tambourine and dance . . . with strings and pipe . . . with sounding cymbals . . . with loud clashing cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!"
(Psalm 150:3-6)

5. **God's Perspective: *He loves diversity.*** This is seen in His works of creation, and in the world of people He has made. Down through the centuries, and all around the world today, we find incredible variety in worship—in its forms, styles, music, dress, architecture, etc. We can see what a wide variety of expressions He has accepted when they are offered to His glory.

*“Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart.”
(Ephesians 5:18-19)*

6. **God's Priority: *The heart of the worshiper.*** He is much, much more concerned about the heart attitude of the worshiper than He is about the outward expression, form or style.

*“To love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”
(Mark 12:33)*

7. **The New Testament Warrant: *No one right way.*** The New Testament does not prescribe one form or style of worship for all churches. The absence of detailed guidelines suggests that God allows for considerable freedom in shaping worship to fit a particular local congregation. There are definitely consistent biblical principles which must shape and guide our worship, yet there is latitude as well.

“But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.” (John 4:23)

8. **A Higher Calling: *The common good.*** Rather than dividing the congregation along the lines of stylistic preference, there is something to be said for God's people learning to listen to one another and learn from another and tolerate one another's worship tastes in the name of Christ. This is an exercise in true spirituality and discipleship in the body of Christ, as believers purpose with God's help to fulfill Paul's mandates to “give preference to one another in honor” (Rom 12:10) and to “consider one another more important than ourselves” (Phil 2:3). God will grow us in maturity as a body as we joyfully make concessions to one another for the common good.

This is not a new idea: in fact, from the very beginning of the church, we see Jews and Gentiles (as diverse a pairing as you will find anywhere!) joined together in the church. Not that the way was easy even back then—even in churches which had Paul for a teacher! Indeed, they struggled to respect and love one another in gathered worship and in congregational life. Ultimately of course only the Spirit can produce and preserve true unity in the Church (Ephes 4:3). That unity is crucial if the church is to serve the glory of God and spread the gospel.

*“May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
(Romans 15:5-6)*

QUOTABLES

Unity in Diversity

“Some growth experts . . . have said those who pursue blended styles merely take turns ‘insulting different segments of the congregation.’

But we believe otherwise: blended styles are the result of shared sacrifice and spiritual maturity. Traditional congregations committed to outreach also must passionately communicate the concept that sacrifice always goes with spiritual maturity.”

(Michael Lewis, “Can You Teach an Old Church New Tricks?” *Leadership* 14.3 [Summer 1993], 24)

“It’s not wrong to use songs that people in our community relate to stylistically or culturally. Neither is it ‘more spiritual’ to use styles that are inaccessible or foreign to guests. The best approach is to use a diversity of styles that reflect an appreciation and knowledge of your church, your community, and those who have gone before us.”

(Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters*, February 21, 2006)

“If your church is going to really reflect the diversity of the body of Christ then everybody needs to sing songs they don’t like.”

(Marva Dawn)

“It’s a sad enough commentary on the American church that most congregations are mostly white, or mostly African-American, or mostly Hispanic, or mostly middle-class, or mostly blue-collar without willingly and knowingly creating another class of segregation by generation. The church is most able to represent God’s intention for the world when the grand diversity of the human race is at least partly exhibited in the community assembled at worship. The purest worship is that which brings together old and young, adults and children, boomers and Gen-Xers and the generations that bracket them at either end.”

(Ronald P. Byars, *Christian Worship*, 109-10)

“To make a blended approach work, the pastor must communicate the value of diversity in style.”

(Robb Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening*, 200)

“When the people of God are seen worshipping the both the Old and New Testaments, it is not by age grouping, marital status, spiritual maturity, or any other division—it is all of God’s people, regardless of differences, coming together to worship the Lord. When you read of the worship that will happen at the throne when Christ comes again, it is quite apparent there will be unified worship focused on who God is.”

(Jerry Nelson, “Unity in Diversity—Many Members Yet One Body,” sermon)

“The youth of the church will probably prefer a more contemporary style of worship than the older ones. The common solution to this cultural problem is to segregate the youth church from the adult church. The psalms-hymns-and-spiritual-songs paradigm begs for a different solution: unity within diversity. This new paradigm allows the contemporary and the historic to stand side by side and challenges our hearts to greater love. We don’t have to choose between being reverent or celebrative. Be reverent and celebrative! Be objective and subjective! Structured and spontaneous! Testimonial and theological!”

(Gerrit Gustafson “Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Song” *Worship Leader* May 1996)

“Maintaining unity among the diversity of the church’s membership requires that we defer to one another in love, being willing to sing one another’s music rather than insisting on the music we most enjoy.”

(John Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense*, 28)

“What a lot of people mean by ‘blended worship’ is not so much a blend as a lumpy stew.”

(D.A. Carson, *Worship by the Book*, 52)

“We should conclude that in music as in every other area we must seek to love one another, honoring the diversity of the body to protect its unity. As we have seen, diversity presents problems of musical communication. But we can now see that problem is at least in part a problem of love. When sophisticated members of the church insist that worship employ only the most sophisticated music of their own culture, what has happened to their love for those for those who are poorly educated or of a different cultural stream? Or, from the opposite side of our musical wars: when advocates of contemporaneity want to set the traditions of the church completely aside and replace them with something largely meaningless to the older generation, are they acting in love? Are they honoring their spiritual fathers and mothers?”

(John Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense*, 25-6)

“The Church is the place where generational differences are to be transcended, not reinforced. Where ephemeral fashions and cultural distinctions are subsumed into an eternal perspective, into a kingdom which ‘endures from generation to generation’ (Daniel 4:34). Only a church which resists being merely of one generation can be relevant to them all.”

(Veith, Gene Edward, “Through All Generations,” www.mtio.com/articles/aissar11.htm)

“Dramatic statements can be made by worship leadership in churches and beyond. First of all, worship leaders of differing approaches could, because of convergent philosophy, talk to each other and even lead worship together, making a positive statement to congregations about focusing on God rather than style. A second unifying gesture would be for younger worship leaders to seek older, experienced leaders for mentorship. What a great investment it would be for experienced worship leaders to seek out and offer to mentor younger leaders. Third, creative worship leaders of all generations could work together to develop convergent worship elements. Great relationships, enhanced resources, and inspiring worship elements would emerge from such efforts.”

(Edwin M. Willmington, “Convergence: Coming to a Worship Service Near You,” *Theology, News & Notes* [Fuller Seminary] Spring 2006, 11)

“Walt Gerber, pastor of the 5000 member Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in Menlo Park CA calls the blended concept ‘negotiated sacrifice.’ Everybody gives a little and everybody gets a lot to keep the body of Christ together.” (Ken Carter)

“Worship should be one avenue for God’s Spirit to generate a new unity and communion. Blending or weaving varied music and rites is preferred to occasional services designed for one pattern. Don’t just have spirituals on race relations Sunday or when you have an African-American preacher as a guest. Repetition and interaction are necessary for authentic reformation.” (David W. Music, “The Glorious Gospel: Our Worship Heritage,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 34.3 [Summer 1992], 528)

“In our worship it isn’t simply a matter of working out how to bring together the traditional with the contemporary. That is important, but it is equally important to ensure that the tradition is celebrated through the lens of the gospel, not uncritically, and that the contemporary is adopted by the same standards. What T. S. Eliot called the ‘easy commerce of the old and the new’ is, as the poem in question makes clear, not achieved easily or without struggle; but it is there if we will work and pray at it. It isn’t a matter of slavishly adopting a particular culture, whether that of Europe in the sixteenth or seventeenth century or of America in the twenty-first; nor is it a matter of slavishly renouncing the one or the other. It is not a matter of saying ‘this is what this congregation will be comfortable with’; who says you ought always simply to be comfortable in the presence of Almighty God? But nor is it a matter of ‘this is what this congregation need to wake them up’; who says it is your place to shock and startle the people of God? There will be shocks, yes, and there will be the deep comfort of the familiar, and good liturgy, planned carefully week by week and year by year, will bring the two together so that they complement and reinforce each other and, most importantly, build up the worshippers in the knowledge and love of God and send them out refreshed for their kingdom-tasks in the world.”

(N. T. Wright, *Freedom and Framework, Spirit and Truth: Recovering Biblical Worship*, www.calvin.edu/january/2002/wright.htm)

“Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death. Democracy tells us not to neglect a good man’s opinion, even if he is our groom; tradition asks us not to neglect a good man’s opinion, even if he is our father.”

(G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 64-5)

“It is natural for us, as for past generations, to feel that ‘we are the people and wisdom will die with us’, but nowhere is the operation of this prejudice so disastrous as in the public worship of God. An illustration of the function of tradition

as an enlarger and liberator of our worship lies to hand in our hymn-books. A hymn-book is a heritage, and within its pages we join an astonishing variety of Christian ancestry at worship.” (Rev. D. H. C. Read, “The Reformation of Worship,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 8:1 [March 1955]:70)

“There are two ways in which a tradition can be abused—either by neglect or by a slavish subservience. The Church which worships a God who was incarnate in human history cannot afford to neglect the heritage of that event; and a Church which worships the God who is a living Spirit cannot allow that heritage to become a dead letter of bondage.”

(Rev. D. H. C. Read, “The Reformation of Worship,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 8:1 [March 1955]:79)

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)

GUEST ARTICLES

Hymns: A Sentimental Journey? (Part 2)

Bob Kauflin

If church members are in conflict with one another over musical style, it's unlikely God is going to be honored in the way He desires. God uses more than musical style to draw people. He uses our lives, attitudes, and relationships, too!

To sing worship music from more than one generation is, in part, to communicate our larger identity as the people of God. We hail from many backgrounds, families, races, and tastes, but now we are joined together through the blood of Jesus Christ, who has reconciled us to the Father AND each other. Christian faith is not about being a certain age or liking certain music or living in a particular time and place. Christians are part of a magnificent legacy that began unfolding thousands of years ago, and will continue throughout eternity. To narrow our vision exclusively to a small, culture-bound slice of that history is to embrace a kind of spiritual poverty.

Author Marva Dawn comments, "Not only is the idea of taste as an entry point [into the church] wrong biblically, but also it is extremely destructive of genuine community, fosters an independent view of the local congregation, and reduces worship simply to a matter of preferences instead of an entering into God's presence in the company of the church throughout space and time" (Reformation and Revival, Vol. 9, No. 2, pg. 71).

Building on those thoughts, here are three reasons for using hymns in congregational worship.

1. *To serve older Christians.* Familiar hymns can enable more mature saints to worship God in spirit and truth. It gives them opportunities to worship without struggling through music and words they have difficulty understanding or relating to.
2. *To help Christians and non-Christians grow in their perspective.* All Christians, and certainly unbelievers as well, need to know that God is bigger than their current understanding of Him. Wise leaders will use words, phrases, and images from older hymns as jumping-off points for further explanation or discussion. For example, addressing God in 17th century English (Thee, Thou, etc.), while initially foreign, can also communicate God's transcendence and "otherness."
3. *To promote an attitude of honor and deference.* In a true community, everyone makes sacrifices. No one's preferences are met ALL the time. God's Word commands us to "accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Ro 15:7). Jesus taught that in laying down our lives for the gospel, we find true life. Yielding our preferences is a gateway to the joy of loving others like ourselves. So, including hymns in an otherwise "contemporary" worship service communicates the importance of honoring others, and expresses a culture of respect and appreciation that few people experience outside the church.

These issues are not always easy to work through in the context of a local church with a specific history (and perhaps some unresolved offenses). But God WILL be glorified in His Church. He is eager to produce a people "who with one heart and mouth [will] glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ro 15:6).

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He also produces a daily worship blog called Worship Matters (www.worshipmatters.com).

For other writings, and information about Sovereign Grace Ministries' extensive music and other resources, see www.sovereigngraceministries.org.

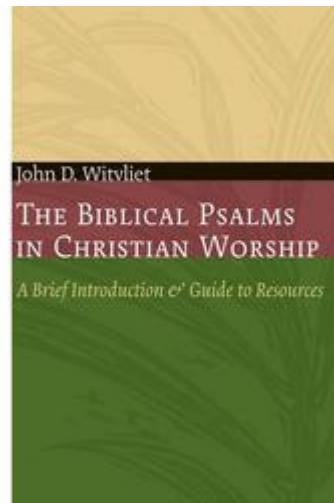
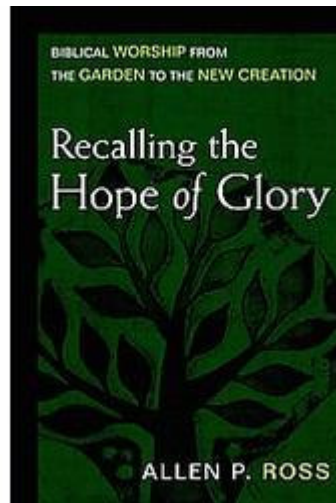
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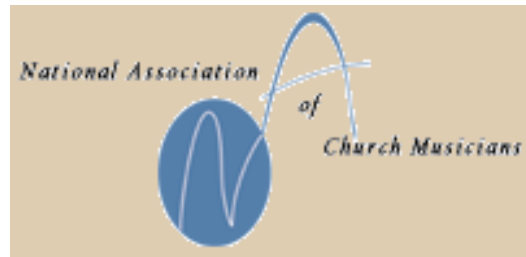
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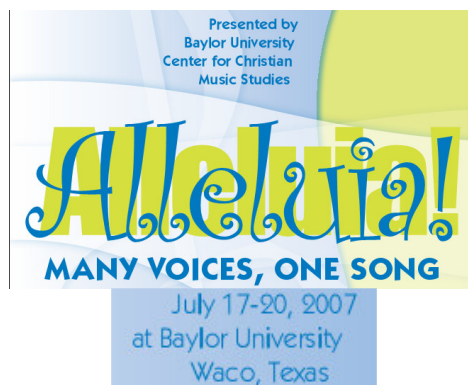
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