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Artists in Christian Testimony

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A Philosophy of Worship and Church Growth

Byron Spradlin

Introduction

Praise the Lord!

Praise God in His sanctuary.
Praise Him in His mighty heavens.
Praise Him for His acts of power;
Praise Him for His surpassing greatness.
Praise Him with the sounding of the trumpet,
Praise Him with the harp and lyre,
Praise Him with the tambourine and dancing,
Praise Him with the strings and flute,
Praise Him with the clash of cymbals,
Praise Him with resounding cymbals.

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord!

Psalm 150 (NIV)

Have you ever wondered why the Book of Psalms would finish with such a psalm as this? Or have you ever asked yourself why in Exodus, where the craftsmen Bezalel and Oholiab are mentioned (chapter 31:1-11 and chapter 35:30-36:7) the Lord underscores that these men were “. . . filled with the Spirit of God . . .” along with being “. . . skilled with ability and knowledge in all

kinds of crafts.”

Have you ever wondered why there’s so much space in Exodus given to instructions for the design of Tabernacle (chapter 31:1-11; and 35:4-40: 38). Or so much space in I Chronicles (chapters 23-29) given to the design of the Temple? Has Jesus’ story-telling techniques ever caused you to wonder. Or have you ever mulled over why, when Paul gets so excited he seems to break out in psalm—for example in Romans 11: 33-36; or in Philippians 2:6-11? Or the same with Moses, or Mary the mother of Jesus, or Zechariah for that matter? I could go on and on. There are seemingly scores of examples.

I certainly don’t believe it’s because God was trying to bring some special focus on music or artistic expression per se. In fact, nowhere in the entire Bible will you ever find an apologetic or defense for the use of music or artistic expression. There just isn’t one.

Rather you’ll actually find the simple, consistent assumption that God created human beings, and the human community, to express that we are multi-dimensional beings made in the image of God, and designed to worship Him. And though we are fallen from God’s perfect design—dulled in our bentness and frailty—when overwhelmed by the greatness and reality of the God-Over-All, or when overcome in our frailty by the difficulties of life and our frequent distance from God—we express out of the depths of our very being our desire for His communion; we worship ... and we do it in many and multi-faceted ways.

Far from dealing with the rather mundane topics of music and artistic expression, I believe those passages to which I’ve alluded have much more to do with an *awareness* that resides in every human being. “What awareness,” you ask? The awareness that there is a true and living creator God. That He’s the God with whom we were designed to experience intimate and vibrant communion.

I believe these passages have much more to do with our awareness that there is a King of the universe and we ought to worship Him. I’m convinced those passages are much more about the reality that this true and living God is also the rightful Ruler-Over-All. And when we have been restored to right relationship with Him—and come close to Him, and taste even for a moment the beauty of His majesty and the compassion of His grace and mercy—something springs out of the depths of our

being. Something presses us to express in every way we know how, our overwhelming awe at His glory and majesty and beauty. And in those moments ... we worship.

Worship and the field of Church Growth

We know worship is central to the heart of God and to the life of each believer, not to mention central to the heart and life of His Church worldwide. We also know—at least those of us committed in some direct way to the study and implementation of the principles of *church growth*—that many of those we influence are looking these days for more and clearer leadership concerning the relationship of worship related to the study and implementation of the principles of *church growth*.

Therefore it seems very clear—from the Scriptural record, as well as the realities each of us face in daily ministry—that there exists the need to develop a conscious philosophy of how *worship* relates to the whole arena of *church growth*.

To that end then, let me make some suggestions, not so much in offering something brand new, but by giving some broad stroke observations and principles that may add to or restate some of what you are already thinking.

The results, I hope, will be that as you develop a more intentional philosophy of worship in relation to your understanding of the field of church growth, you will more intentionally place on your plate of priorities such things as ...

- help release people to worship the living God;
- help equip the Church to bring relevant worship to the world's communities, regions, and the Nations themselves;
- help train, empower and release those believers specifically equipped by God as worship enablers;
- help impact our cultures for Christ through establishing resident communities of worshipers within their midst who are intentional about reaching out to their surrounding unsaved, while being committed to the priority of culturally relevant worship formation;

...all this working toward the end goal that people will worship and serve God, and proclaim Christ, in ways relevant to their own cultures and communities. That means we must worship, communicate, and care through the heart strings (familiar

metaphors, symbols and rituals) of the various communities of the world. And worship is central to all these agenda.

I'm convinced as we pursue these priorities we will see the Church universal grow—a growth more rapid in number and more substantial in quality of devotion, discipleship, and community impact.

My Personal Pilgrimage in Worship & Church Growth

Let me take just a moment to give a word about my own pilgrimage in the field of *worship & church growth*. I come to you as much a practitioner as anything else.

I came to a committed faith in Christ in the late 1960's during my early University days. My desire for the Lord led me into the "discipleship" ministries of Campus Crusade for Christ and the Navigators at the University of California at Davis. My music background and abilities moved me into experimentation with what we now call "contemporary worship;" except to me and the campus ministries I was involved in, it was simply communicating and worshiping in ways that were meaningful and effective. The campus movement I helped lead grew from 30 to almost 400, with 50-60 weekly Bible Studies in three years. The student worship service I helped designed and develop moved from a small group to over 150 during that same period.

During and after University, not only did I lead semi-professional Christian music teams throughout some 20 nations and record on one of the early Christian record labels; I also served to introduce—with positive results—youth and more contemporary music and worship in a medium sized San Francisco Bay Area American Baptist Church.

During Seminary days, 1973-1980, not only did I have opportunity to minister in some 300-400 conservative Churches across America, I also had opportunity to sit under some of the earlier church growth leaders including Virgil Gerber, Ray Buker, and Ralph Winter. In 1977 I did my first decadal Church Growth evaluation, analyzing the growth of Village Baptist Church of Beaverton, OR, where I also had the privilege of gently introducing contemporary worship into the worship service. In that congregation now, two of its three worship services are contemporary, they have both traditional choirs as well as worship bands, and they employ both contemporary and traditional worship leadership.

In the '80's I had opportunity to study under C. Peter Wagner and Charles Kraft, become aquatinted with Carl George, Dan Reeves, Charles Arn, Gary McIntosh, Glen Martin; and the wonderful opportunity to serve as worship pastor with Bob Logan in the Southern California congregation Bob had earlier launched, as that church grew from 200 to over 1400 in five years. During those years, I also had the opportunity to participate in the church planting think tank Bob launched, and then later plant a daughter congregation and pastor that church for 8 years.

All that to say I've been fiddling with and stumbling around in this area for some time, with some good opportunities to make a lot of mistakes along the way, both theologically as well as pragmatically.

So with that, let's move on to the heart of my assignment: Worship related to Church Growth. First let me say a few things about worship. Then relate worship to some broad stroke comments about its integration with and importance to *church growth*.

Worship: What is it?

If God is truly Creator and King, then central in the lives of His subjects must be their involvement in His worship. Given the reality God *is* King it follows that His supernatural realm is real; and that His supernatural realm is in fact the real worship center into which we were intended to enter for our worship.

Three Oughts Related To True Kingdom Worship

I'm convinced there stand three *oughts* related to true Kingdom worship. I'm convinced of these *oughts* by virtue of the Bible's presumptions about worship, about life before the Fall, about the LORD's redemptive (reclamation) program, and about our ultimate state-of-relating-with-God in eternity. Though I'm not going to attempt anything close to being exhaustive, the body of Biblical material seems clearly to bear out the following:

1. Worship is the *environment* in which we were created to live, and therefore, the *realm* which we ought strive to *live in* each moment of the day; e.g. Hebrews 9: 14.
2. Worship is the *core focus* we were created to hold, and therefore the *center* we ought strive to *maintain* from each moment to the next; e.g. John 6:38-40.
3. Worship is the *lifestyle* we were created to manifest, and

therefore its from our *reservoir of moment-to-moment worshiping communion with the LORD* we ought strive to draw for every endeavor of life; e.g. Romans12:1.

(One like a son of man) approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence, He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; *all* peoples, nations and men of every language *worshipped Him*. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His Kingdom is one that will never be destroyed (Daniel 7:13b,14 (NIV)).

Worshiping God—in broad stroke then—is much more than just a feeling or a song or a worship service. At the end of this section I will give nine concise working definitions of worship. (If you'd like the Biblical foundations of each of those definitions I can send them out to you. But I felt this discussion is already long enough). But let me get to those definitions through the following thoughts.

Worship Is A Combination-Quest

Worship, *from the human vantage point, is a combination-quest*. A combination of the worshiper expending faith-based energy toward God, and in response to God, His person and His work. Worship is energy expended simultaneously in spirit, mind, and body. In effect, a combination of the truths of Scriptures like: John 4:24, "... God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." (NIV); Romans 12:1, "... to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to Go, which is your spiritual service of worship ..." (NASB); Philippians 2: 12 b, 13, "... work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at works in you to will and to work for His good pleasure." (NASB).

In other words, the *combination-quest* of worship is your pursuit to approach God, so that He might engage you in all areas of your being—all at the same time.

Worship Defined

So, we know worshiping God is far more than simply going to church. Worship is vastly more encompassing than simply involvement in some religious act. And certainly, worship is more than experience feelings somehow related to a spiritual experience.

In fact, worship *is* greater than the sum of all its various aspects. For at least . . .

1. *Worship, at its core*—theologically *and* experientially—*is encountering God*. Worship is encountering the real, live, personal Creator God; the One revealed in the classic orthodox Christian Scriptures, the Bible. Worship is encountering the Provider God, the One Who became flesh in the Person of the historical Jesus of Nazareth and Who died to endure God's wrath intended for all who so viciously insisted on self rule. Worship is encountering the One Who's Spirit takes up residence in any who confess their sin of self-rule and receive forgiveness and life in Him.
2. Worship is the *environment* in which we were created to live . . . and therefore, the *realm* which we ought strive to *live in* each moment of the day.
3. Worship is the *core focus* we were created to hold . . . and therefore, the *center* we ought strive to *maintain* from each moment to the next.
4. Worship is the *lifestyle* we were created to manifest . . . and therefore, the *reservoir* we ought to strive to *draw from* for every endeavor of life.
5. Worship is the intentional attitudes and actions of *focus* on God—both religious and general—in which we ought repeatedly engage . . . and therefore, the *life-discipline* we ought repeatedly *exercise and develop*.
6. Worship is the *conscious and repeated positioning* of ourselves before God—whether in spirit, soul or body— . . . and therefore, the reaction we ought strive to train ourselves in, in order to face every life situation.
7. Worship is our *responses* to God, out of real meetings with Him—whether out of a deeply emotional 'ah ha' moment of meeting, or a very objective, premeditated and intentional commitment of conscious obedience. Therefore, worship is the *sacrificial 'service-ing' of others* based on the foundational motive of deep and wonder-based gratitude to God for His salvaging and sustaining us.
8. Worship is *righteous, biblical obedience out of hearing God's voice* . . . and therefore, the *listening posture* we ought strive to assume more consistently; or better, more con-

stantly every moment of every day.

9. Scripture, in broad stroke summary seems to clearly indicate that ...

Worship is... the process of developing a lifestyle of intentional focus on & response to the true and living God out of regular and repeated meeting with Him.

Limiting worship to something less than 1) the *environment* in which God created us to exist (and into which believers in Jesus will ultimately and completely exist); 2) the *core focus* we were created to hold; and 3) the *lifestyle* we were created to manifest . . . misses completely the heart of God in Scripture: for example, "For me to live is Christ; and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

A more consistent daily walk will ultimately be the sum total of your responding to God through a growing lifestyle of personal worship. That is the sum total of all your attitudes, thoughts, and actions (i.e. your sacrificial actions towards others). In other words, you will witness in yourself (or others will witness it in you) growing change, from the inside out, as you "...prove what the will of God is, that which is good and perfect and acceptable" (Romans 12:2).

Now let's turn to *Church Growth* for a moment. Thom Rainer in his 1993 book, *The Book of Church Growth*, gives a good basic definition of Church Growth as "... (the Movement that) includes all the resources of people, institutions, and publications dedicated to expounding the concepts and practicing the principles of church growth, beginning with the foundational work of Donald McGavran in 1955."¹

Rainer, at the end of his book, comments that "... the Church Growth Movement began with one man (simply) asking the question: 'Why do some churches grow and some churches don't?' "²

Suffice it to say: *Church Growth is all about why and how churches grow; and especially asking these questions with a view to Christians getting obediently on with the Biblical mandates to proclaim the gospel in the whole world to all nations.*

It stands to reason then, 1) if we really do believe *worship* is central to the life of the believer and the Church, both now *and* on into eternity, and 2) if we really are serious about getting obediently on with the Biblical mandates to proclaim the gospel in the whole world to all nations; then 3) we must sooner or later

as the question, "What is the role of *worship* in relation to the implementation of *church growth*?"

A Philosophy of Worship and Church Growth

Let me answer that question in four ways: first with some simple statements, second through some practical observations, third by suggesting that worship is central to seven practical *church growth assumptions*, and fourth by suggesting that worship is central among ten *church growth tactical elements*.

First, some simple statements concerning the role of *worship* in relation to the implementation of *church growth*?"

1. Worship is central to church growth because God created human kind to worship Him.
2. Worship is central to church growth because worship is a God-ordained priority in the life of the believer.
3. Worship is central to church growth because worship is a God-ordained priority in the life of the believers gathered – the local congregation
4. Worship is central to church growth because winning worshipers for the Lord God Almighty is the ultimate end of evangelism.
5. Worship is central to church growth because worship is one of the major priorities – if not the major priority – of believers now, and on into and through out eternity.

Second, let me mention some practical observations concerning the role of *worship* in relation to the implementation of *church growth*?"

1. Many, if not most who are seeking God either understand or sense that one must sooner or later gather together for worship with other seekers and believers.
2. Sooner or later when one thinks about God or faith, one thinks something to the effect, "I need to participate in some sort of ritual, ceremony or activity of devotion, and some of the time that needs to be with others of like quest."
3. Therefore, and certainly in the Western world (but as well in many non-western, non-industrialized settings), the 'corporate worship context' – what ever it might look like –

- is the place where your church is most regularly visible to the community;
- is the place where most people shape many of their values and attitudes about God, worshiping Him and living for Him daily;
- is the place wherein most people make major evaluations and decisions about whether your church is for them—and whether your God is for them.

There are many more observations we could make here. But let these simple observations help make a point we can see each week in most ministry contexts: that is, whatever goes on in the *worship gatherings* deeply impacts the believer, the seeker, and even those in the community who are resistant to the things of God.

Third, let me suggest seven practical *church growth assumptions*, the hub assumption being the strategic importance of the relevant, meaningful worship.

From my experiences and observations in ministry, Churches that grow assume the importance of the following seven ministry areas:

1. Worship—Bible-based, celebrative, inspirational, genuine, familiar (i.e. in the sorts of metaphors, symbols, rituals, jargon, environment, etc.)
2. Cell (small) groups
3. Gift-oriented service opportunities
4. Outreach focused
5. Women released to initiate ministry
6. Intentional administrative systems in place for care and assimilation into service opportunities and cell groups
7. Volunteers considered as 'staff'

Most all of us here, I'm certain, know these things. My point though is to highlight how, in most cases, worship holds a *first among equals* priority within the inter-working dynamics of all seven of these key assumptions.

Fourth, let me suggest that worship is central among ten *church growth tactical elements*:

For *Profile* of your congregation in the community, we know it's essential to provide

1. Worship—that's celebrative, Bible-based, etc.

2. Children's Program – Bible learning activities, clean, etc.
3. Gift-oriented service opportunities, even for seekers and non-members
4. Care – a sense by the newcomer that someone cares for them

For *Organization* of your congregation, you need ...

5. Organization systems
6. Administration systems
7. Finances and Fund raising systems

For *Depth* within your congregation, you need ...

8. Cell groups of one sort or another
9. Youth ministries
10. Mission, in at least three options:
 - a) community (social) concern ministries
 - b) cross-cultural and world mission concern
 - c) church planting concerns –
 - (1) same culture church planting, &
 - (2) cross-culture or cross sub-culture church planting

Again, most of us know these issue well. But take special note of the tactical priority the worship context plays. Many call it the “front door” of your church family.

If our churches are to grow, it is no secret: you must give high priority, much time, special personnel and good budget to see worship for you rather than against you.

On Contemporary Worship: Some Principles

Let me, at this juncture, quickly make just a few comments about *contemporary worship*, especially since it's a topic none of us can avoid, and a topic and issue that creates so much tension.

To some, just mentioning “contemporary worship” brings shutters, along with an almost knee jerk suspicion of weak theology, trivial emotionalism, and even worldliness and syncretism. So let me quickly remind us that it's only when we arrive in heaven that we will be in the truest state of utterly released, theologically accurate, completely appropriate worship ... as we dwell in the beauty of our Lord; as we see Him face to face as He is in all His glory.

Therefore, every time we come together in worship, I'm con-

vinced we must work to give all people—believers and our unbelieving friends and family—a preview, a foretaste of the joy of dwelling in the presence of the loving, merciful, holy and living God.

Therefore, corporate worship—to reach its desired objective: ushering people into God’s presence—must be founded on God’s Scripture and designed to position people before God in *ways and manners that have meaning to them*.

Then and only then—when a person’s worship experience makes sense in relation to their every day life and community—will they have some reasonable expectation of experiencing the awe, conviction, repentance, confession, relief, joy, adoration, celebration, and life change worship (of the Living God) is intended to produce. Only when worship *makes sense* will it become a response to the forgiveness, love, and life extended by God to all who repent of their sinful self-rule, and rightly turn to the One and only rightful Ruler of all—the Lord God Almighty!!!

“Contemporary Worship” Defined

Having those thoughts as a context then, *“Contemporary Worship”* to me means *worship contexts, rituals, metaphors and symbols³ fitted to the times, the community, the culture or sub-culture; and worship elements fitted to a specific target audience*.

Why? Because there exist so many different *values-and-attitude packages*, so many different sub-groups in our communities today, that the *one-size-fits-all* idea is simply NOT in touch with reality.

The *one-style-fits-all* idea makes for very bad missions methodology, doesn’t it. Well, though in many alleged ‘one-culture’ communities (if any of those really exist these days in any of our metro areas) we’re not jumping language and ethnic barriers per se. But in most settings—just like the more classical idea of missions—we face real and drastically divergent sociological and value-attitude differences that are functionally the same as cross-cultural missionaries face.

And then, many of us still face congregational leaders completely out of touch with ... or worse yet, simply in denial of ... those many sub-groups around us. It’s no wonder we often experience knee jerking at the slightest mention of *contemporary worship*. Often, as most well know, our congregation and the many reachable nearby ‘target audiences’ are far from being ‘the

same.'

So with those things in mind, let me give you some principles that will help those of you seeing the need to diversify the worship contexts your Church offers your community.

[Also let me mention that as an appendix to this paper, I'm attaching "Worship Problems in Your Church ? Eight Things You Can Do to Help." See Appendix III.]

Six Principles

Six principles will help guide you in developing your contemporary worship.

1. *DEVELOPING A 'WORKING' DEFINITION OF WORSHIP.* Develop a 'working' definition of worship. Then, measure every part, prayer, and participant against this definition.

The Bible describes worship much. But it gives little in the way of a 'packaged' definition (I'm so thankful! If otherwise, John Wesley would have had difficulty getting his tunes on the chart!). Never-the-less, you need a working definition that really works. It needs to be *Biblical* and *measurable*.

For example, here are some of mine: *WORSHIP is . . .*

- Activities of intentional focus on the Person and work of God;
- Positioning yourself before God ... regularly enough, and over a long enough period of time, whereby He will draw you into His presence;
- Developing a lifestyle of active response to the Person and work of God;

2. *DEVELOPING A 'WORKING' VIEW OF CREATIVITY* Without an understanding of 'creativity' that's *practical* you'll either—

- Create for the sake of creativity (that's art for art's sake alone, and exalts the creative process rather than the Creator)
- Change for the sake of "change" (that could be meaningless at best, certainly hurtful to some, and bring critical damage to ministry), or
- Never change for the sake of tradition (and that could be Biblically disobedient and disastrous to your ministry).

The Bible's clear: The Gospel never changes, but culture does (... these days some say almost every three-to-five years). So must our worship forms and styles ... if we desire to stay effective must change.

Here are two working "view points" on "creativity" I've used over the last ten years (thanks to Howie Stevenson formerly of Westmont College and E. V. Free Church, Fullerton, CA):

- "Creativity is taking a fresh look at the familiar," and
- "The higher the predictability the lower the impact."

3. *DEVELOP A "REAL" VIEW OF OUR WORLD.* You are responsible to initiate worship in a real world. And your world, yes, even our neighborhood, even your congregation, is diverse!

Therefore diversify (give options) for the various worship styles, times and flavors—to meet needs ... keeping these three (3) groups in mind:

- The *majority ethnic group* of the congregation and *minority ethnic groups* represented in the congregation;
- 'Churched' in background and "unchurched" in background;
- *Pre-WW II-born* believers and *Post-WW II born* believers.

4. *DISCIPLE A "CONTEMPORARY" WORSHIP LEADER.* You've got to be a "contemporary" worshiper to lead "contemporary" worship. There's just no other way. Therefore, churches that want to include or develop contemporary worship need to embrace, disciple, and develop (or hire, if there is no skilled volunteer within the congregation) someone who can lead out of their natural orientations.

5. *DEVELOP A COMMITMENT TO "PLANNING."* If you fail to plan, you automatically plan to fail. The key to your planning is to focus on *transitions between songs* and *flow between major sections of the service*. In the 'age of TV' dead time will kill your service!

6. *DETERMINE THE "OUTCOME" YOU WANT.* Out of our worship services *I want people to feel like they've met with God*. You may express your desired 'outcome' differently, but you must point towards 'something' to expect success. If your people are feeding back that your 'outcome' is being achieved keep doing what it is you're doing. If not, then keep experimenting with leaders, components, and planning. "*The laity perennially need a*

*'living tradition' of ... worship ... that is being renewed by reappropriated worship in the present ... so that tradition and renewal become mutually corrective."*⁴

The above mentioned principles will help you work towards more meaningful contemporary worship !

Conclusion

To conclude, for a moment recall Matthew 24:14 ... *"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come"* (NIV).

As I see things in broad terms, the entire field of Church Growth points toward this end: that we would 1) *analyze* the various groups and sub-groups of people yet to be reached, so that we can 2) *appropriately announce* to them the good news that God's Kingdom and salvation into it are available, so that we can 3) *win worshipers* to the Lord; and in the process 4) plant growing and reproducing churches of those worshipers ... for the purpose of repeating that process over and over until the Lord Jesus comes.

Worship is central to Church Growth because it's central to the will of God for His elect; it's central to the reason for the existence of human kind now and on into eternity; it's central to the life of the local congregation; it's the ultimate objective of all our evangelism and discipleship; and, it will be one of our primary activities in the Age to come for eternity.

Therefore, as you develop your philosophy of worship in relation to your understanding of the field of Church Growth, please keep in mind the reality that worship is central. Worship's centrality to Church Growth also then presses us to put on our plate of priorities such things as ...

- helping release people to worship the living God;
- helping equip the Church to bring relevant worship to the world's communities, regions, and the Nations themselves;
- helping train, empower and release those specifically equipped by God as worship enablers;
- helping impact our cultures for Christ through establishing resident communities of worshipers within their midst who are intentional about reaching out to their surrounding unsaved, while being committed to the pri-

ority of culturally relevant worship formation;

...all working toward the end goal that people worship and serve God, and proclaim Christ, in ways relevant to their own cultures and communities. That means we must worship, communicate, and care through the heart strings (familiar metaphors, symbols and rituals) of the various communities of the world. Worship is central to all these agendas.

I'm convinced as we pursue these priorities we will see the Church universal grow more rapidly in number and more substantially in quality of devotion and discipleship. May the Lord Himself bear us along toward these goals.

A Closing Prayer:

Oh Lord, You who are compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintain-
ing love to thousands,
and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin;⁵
if we have found favor in your eyes⁶—and Your Scripture
says we have in Jesus⁷—
... be increasingly merciful to give us grace in these last days
to become worshipers of You ... more and more.
And through our own personal pursuits to become more in-
timate worshipers ourselves,
give us grace to be ministers to the nations
with the priestly duty of proclaiming Your gospel as our life
style of worship,
so that people and nations might be won as offerings of wor-
ship,
so that Your living sanctuary, the Church, might grow in
numbers of worshipers
and in quality of worship,
acceptable to You, sanctified by the Holy Spirit;⁸
unto Your glory, honor and praise ... now and on into eterni-
ty.
Energize us. Oh Lord, to this end,
we pray in Jesus' great Name.
Amen.

Writer

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Box 395, Franklin, TN 37065-0395. Title: Founder and Director. Byron holds a B.A. degree in International Relations from the University of California at Davis, a M.A. in Church Music and a M.Div. in Missions from Western Conservative Baptist Seminary. Rev. Spradlin is a gifted Bible teacher, communicator, musician, worship leader, church planter, and pastor. He has an extensive background in music ministry and has lectured on "The Role of Worship and Church Growth" at eight colleges, universities, and seminaries, as well as numerous mission agencies and churches. He was a featured speaker on "Music and the Arts in Missions" at Urbana in '81, '84, '87, and '90.

1. Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology & Principles*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1993), 20-21.
2. *Ibid.*, 317.
3. metaphors and symbols
4. Dr. Thomas Oden, *Christianity Today*, Sept. 24, 1990
5. Exodus 34: 6
6. Exodus 34: 9
7. e.g. 2 Corinthians 5: 17-20
8. Romans 15: 15-16

Appendix III

Worship Problems in Your Church ? Eight Things You Can Do to Help.¹

Rev. Byron Spradlin

Given the reality that popular culture (pop culture—market place values) seems to change a good deal every five years or so. Your church and mine must stand ready for controversy related to corporate worship styles for years and years to come.

I anticipate the reality of ongoing controversy, because I know “worship expression” or “worship style” deals directly with our intimate “heart strings.” Add to that the general reality that when God moves in each of our lives, there are attending circumstances and experiences, many of which are related to very meaningful styles of worship and music and such, that we immediately attach to those significant times of growth and development in our personal faith and our encounter with God.

Couple those realities with the fact that oftentimes these things happen at a less than conscious level; during which time we almost automatically presume that those contexts which were present in our own significant experience are the kinds of contexts which, we presume, are the contexts which are “appropriate.” Though this reality is rarely true, we often think that what was appropriate or meaningful for us—much of which has to do with worship style, religious music and meaningful contexts of celebration and thanksgiving—what was appropriate for us at a certain time, may not be appropriate for all for all time.

These notions are, in fact, not at all in line with reality. But we often think that’s the way reality ought be.

The complication comes when what we “think ought be normative and appropriate” needs to change every four or five years, by the time three or four of those five-year segments go by, what the market place seems to respond to is far different than what we is often appropriate.

With these thoughts in mind, know that . . .

1. *Change in worship styles is inevitable*, because if nothing else, our children change; and in reality all of society continues to change. Add to that fact, change happens rather quickly these days, in a situation that is really becoming much more cosmopolitan and much more homogenous—particularly in the metropolitan areas.

2. Given the fact change is inevitable, *controversy will remain*—especially when dealing with the very personal issues related to religious experience and a corporate worship setting.

So as a Christian music or worship leader, how do I help local church leadership?

As a Christian music or worship leader, how do I help local church leadership with whom I come in contact?

I’ve found the following eight issues that provide some help to what, in most settings, are very difficult situations:

1. *Affirm personal preference as valid*. Affirm a persons personal preferences: Worship styles, music styles, liturgy styles as valid. They are valid for that person, and make sure that you encourage the person to know that God has spoken to him or her through those styles and that is wonderful. As a matter of fact, He will always continue to speak to that person through those styles; for those styles and preferences make up the core of what is most meaningful to that particular person.

2. *Encourage (come along side the hurting person)* No matter what your preferences are; whether they are similar or far apart from the hurting person, just encourage them. Listen to them, draw out their complaint. Provide a Christian heart who can listen to them and hear their pain.

Affirm that their pain is significant. A good friend and mentor of mine, Dr. Ron Allen, Hebrew scholar, seminary professor, author and Christian good guy, said to me once, “pain is pain.” That was more helpful than I ever thought it could be; just hearing him affirm the fact that I was hurting. It even helped me to realize that God was hearing the fact that I was hurting, fearful, frustrated and worried.

3. *Help determine the present "power broker preferences."* In every congregation there is a dominant group of leaders. These leaders are power brokers. That is, they are the ones who give permission or withhold permission on any number of issues. They are the people who nod their head 'yes' or nod their head 'no.'

Many of these people have grown up together in a church and therefore share many common preferences related to worship. And many of these people perhaps have either resisted change or been in denial about the changes that are taking place in the community, not to mention that the changes that are gradually being asked for in their church community.

This group of power brokers often has either been unaware of the emergence of new sub-groups who have their own set of opinion leaders and power brokers. Often times the initial power broker group is not readily willing to admit that these people's values are different—particularly with regard to worship styles and preferences; not to mention oftentimes they are not ready to acknowledge that though their preferences are different they have validity. Therefore, it is important that you, the outsider, help the *present power broker group* to clearly identify their preferences, their tastes and their desires.

One of the reasons there's controversy is those preferences and tastes have not been clearly identified and been stated. As a result, oftentimes, one is arguing about the differences that exist assuming that none should—when they should be looking to pinpoint what the differences are and which ones can be tolerated and which ones can't be.

4. *Work with the pastor.* Work with the pastor; or encourage that the pastor be worked with.

Generally it's that the pastor and upper leadership group where the hope of finding some resolution rests.

That is, if the pastor and the key leadership group is not willing to acknowledge that—by virtue of the changes in the community—there are changes inevitably developing changes of preference and inevitably developing in the congregation, there is no hope that resolution will come at all.

If the pastor and key leadership group is willing to . . .

- A. Admit that major sub-groups in the congregation hold different preferences;
- B. Take time to identify the preferences of each sub-group,

- C. Take time to determine which preferences and desires of the not-in-power sub-groups will be tolerated and which will not be tolerated . . .

There is little hope of resolution. Therefore, you must work with the pastor and the key leadership team.

5. *Recommend appropriate helps.* Generally speaking, you cannot solve all of the problems in a one evening program. Therefore, you will need to recommend to them some directions they can take on their own.

Some suggested directions:

- A. First of all, explain some of the things we have talked about in steps one through 4.
- B. Recommend them to pinpoint some agencies specializing in church analysis, church growth analysis (for example, the Fuller Institute of Church Growth, Pasadena, CA; Dr. Gary McIntosh, Church Growth Specialist, Talbot Theological Seminary, La Mirada, CA; Dr. John Vaughn, Southern Baptists). Most denominations at this point and time have specialists that can help their church constituencies.
- C. Point these church leaders towards those who can help them both in contemporary worship as well as in traditional worship.

Keep in mind though, this: This is not so much a music and worship and arts issue as it really is an issue of recognizing that there are different desires and needs for the different sub-groups within the congregation. These kinds of differences are most readily acknowledged between adult needs and youth ministry needs. The problem these days is that with pre-World War II value-based people and post World War II value-based people and the 20's crowd, the teen age crowd – with all of these groups having significantly different preferences with regard to values and desires with regard to the whole process of celebration, music, jargon, worship, etc., – one would do better to have evaluation in the area of almost one with a cross-cultural and missions background than those who are dealing directly with music and worship issues. The reason for this is the dynamics of controversy have much more to do with values (which happen to be manifested in what we often call worship and the arts) than they really are styles of music or liturgy per se.

You must help them see the need to get outside help—because generally speaking, one of the reasons they're in such difficulty is that they're willing to look beyond their own context. (?) and win looking down one's own context is the key of the issue.

Somehow, remind them that though things are different, those differences don't necessarily make them bad or good. They are just "different."

6. *Promote the Change Process over time.* The controversies that we often stumble into related to worship and musical preferences and such, are not going to be solved by adding some contemporary choruses or doing all hymns.

The processes laid out in Numbers 1 through 4 are going to take some time bathed in prayer and invested with energy in order to see things happen.

If you're with someone who is already exhausted—perhaps the best thing to do is suggest that they remove themselves from the situation for the sake of their own emotional and spiritual health.

No matter what though, you must remind them that if they're willing to really take a hard look at what causes these controversies, that hard look is going to be through a process, and that process will take some time.

7. *Promote "New Innovation" in sub-group contexts – not in the main worship service.* Where there are desires for *new* kinds of *innovations* in worship and musical styles—it will be least unsettling and seemingly most productive if these innovations are *implemented outside of the worship service*. Therefore, the implementation of anything "new" should be done in sub-group meetings or new-group meetings or new ministry areas, or seasonal celebration gatherings—those places where people have a choice as to whether they're going to attend. What I mean by "places where you have a choice" is this: Yes I know people have a choice as to whether they come to worship service, but if they're coming to your church, they're going to come to your worship service. That context is the melting pot.

Therefore, for any major new changes they need to be in places where they will offend the least number of people in neutral settings. That's what I mean by people having a choice. If your church decides to have a square dance, for example, on some night where people have a choice not to come; while not

interrupting their regular worship attendance schedule.

Someone who regularly comes to a Sunday evening service, but who would not at all appreciate or be able to tolerate square dancing in the Sunday evening service, should not be confronted with that square dancing in a service where they normally have come and a service which normally things like that have not happened.

Introduce new change in new contexts or in sub-group ministries. Often these changes could be implemented in new life stage groups (e.g. singles, young adults, seniors, generation X meetings, etc., etc.).

8. Rework your definitions of worship. One of the major causes for conflict is differences in the way people define issues like “appropriate worship” or the way people have formed their “expectations” of what ought happen in those worship settings.

It’s therefore important to back up and rethink where you’ve been and how you got to where you are in relation to where others have been and how they’ve gotten where they are.

It’s kind of like realizing your car keys. You just stop, and back up, and retrace your steps. That’s especially important if you only have one set of car keys, and two of you are trying to get some place at the same time.

If the keys are lost, both of you are going to have to stop, back up, rethink where you have each come and how you got to where you are. And you’re going to have to compare that with the other. In that process there is some hope of recognizing both significant mutual goals, objectives and expectations, as well as where you have significant differences.

Following that step, you can move on to see where you can and can’t work together.

In all of this process we’re dealing with an issue we call “worship;” concerning which many hold greatly differing assumptions, presumptions and expectations. If those things are not well clarified, and then well communicated, there is really no hope for any kind of major resolution.

Some Suggestions for Resolutions

Today in churches in North America (and many other places around the world) we are seeing at least five distinct styles of worship—each of which seems to have very good results among some and very poor results among others. Those styles are 1)

Traditional 2) Liturgical 3) Charismatic 4) Blended 5) Seeker sensitive . . . worship styles. Then of course, there are many nuances of combination on all of these.

But here's the rub: The less clear you are in defining the reality of your worship situation; or the more in denial you are about the fact that there is demand in all of these areas within our congregations – the more unresolved conflict you will experience.

Some suggestions for resolution:

- A. *Begin the process, especially briefly discussed in numbers 1 through 4 and 8 above.*
- B. *Begin trying to bring vitality to your kind of worship style by giving intentional thought to these issues:*
 - a) The transitions between various elements of your worship service; make them flow, do away with dead time, know what you're doing. Pre-think those issues.
 - b) Plan small bits of variety. Remember creativity (as Dr. Howard Stevenson, formerly of Westmont College and EV Free Church of Fullerton, CA) has said is "taking a fresh look at the familiar."

Just dealing with those two issues alone can bring a new kind of vitality to your worship service, without changing one element or adding any new styles to your service.

If you could bring variety of style – to some degree that will help.

- c) A third thing you could consider is actually developing different styles of worship service within your congregation – knowing that one style will not meet all these days.
- d) Talk about these things – and then pray.

So much controversy happens because people are set on disagreeing with each other rather than coming together on the same side of the table to pray, to listen to one another and to seek God's face in knowing how you can maintain the unity of the faith, while affirming the diversity of needs that our various constituencies are needing – even within one congregation.

If you engage in the process of talking and praying together, you will be surprised how the Holy Spirit Himself will lead you away from denying the reality that variety does exist; and into new unique compromises in certain situations and new ministry

initiatives in other situations.

May we all receive Paul's admonition to Euodias and Syntyche,

"to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the Gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again; Rejoice!

(Phil. 4:2-4 NIV)

For more help, particularly related to "Worship: Resolving Conflict in the Church" or "The Role of Worship in Church Growth" contact Rev. Byron Spradlin, Director, Artists in Christian Testimony, Box 395, Franklin, TN 37065-1395. ph -615-591-2598; fx -615-591-2599, and e-mail 74152.727@compuserve.com

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