APRIL 2016

Ministry®

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR PASTORS

*A **word** to* WORSHIP LEADERS

Reflections on Revelation 14:6, 7

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Correction: On page 11 of the February 2016 issue of Ministry, the Revival and Reformation column titled "Mission vision" was incorrectly attributed to David Trim. The column was authored by Cheryl Doss, PhD, who serves as director of the Institute of World Mission, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States. We apologize for any confusion.

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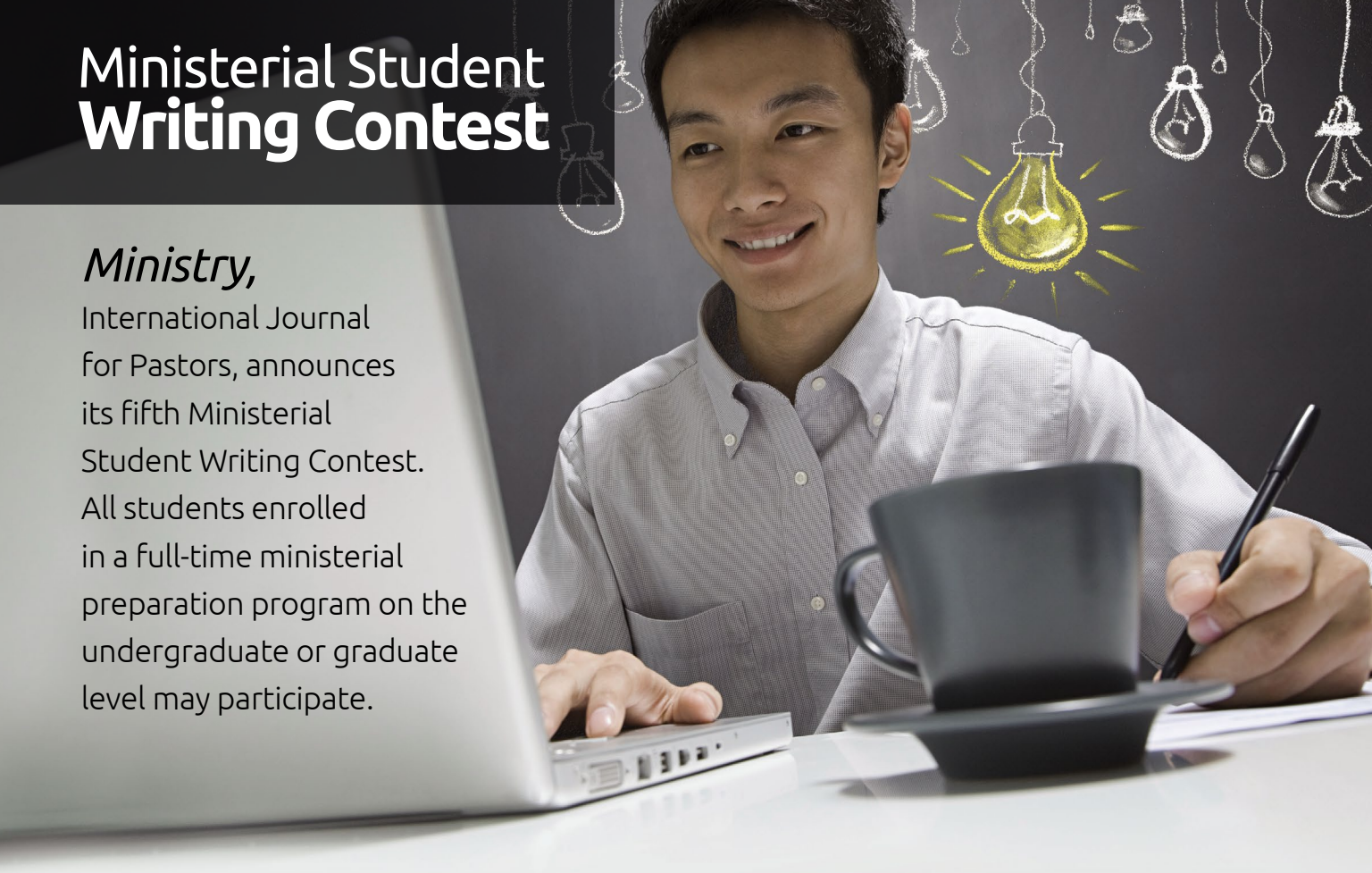

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www.MinistryMagazine.org/swc

Father Abraham: The worship leader

It was one of those worship services in which everything fell perfectly into place. The music, sermon, and other elements of the liturgy formed in beautiful symmetry, impressing those in attendance.

Then prior to the benediction, the pastor stood and made some summary comments, prefaced by the question, "Did you enjoy today's worship?" I found the query to be the equivalent of sticking a pin into a birthday balloon. Cringing, I sensed that at the foundation of my discomfort were differing definitions as to what constitutes worship.

Worship is a lifestyle

Genesis 22 has often been preached and taught from the perspective of exercising faith. Abraham, in this chapter, also teaches us what constitutes worship; and this is, in part, seen against the backdrop of his life experiences and shortcomings. He occasionally struggled in his walk with God (Gen. 16:4; 20:2), sometimes failing to recognize that God has a visionary plan and can fully implement it (Gen. 17:18, 19).

Before Abraham and Isaac journeyed to the land of Moriah, it became obvious that Abraham had grown; and his subsequent actions were more than acts of worship—his life itself served as an example of worship. Before he could *do* something, he had to *experience* something. Encountering the God of the impossible (Gen. 21:2) empowered his close connection with God—so close that hearing what would seem a strange command to most (Gen. 22:2) was an invitation to glorify God through his commitment and eventual actions.

Worship is an activity

Abraham told the two young men who accompanied Isaac and himself that he and his son were going to engage in worship (Gen. 22:5). Without question, what constitutes worship in this story includes various activities. However, the key to understanding the focus of worship lies in Abraham's response to Isaac when he inquires about the lamb (Gen. 22:7). "God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering" (Gen. 22:8, KJV). Although we collectively offer sacrifices of praise to God in His sanctuary, God Himself is the ultimate Sacrifice who also has provided the reasons throughout the week to praise Him.

Remembering that God is the Prompter of our praises should keep us mindful that when we come before His presence, the overarching aim of the worship service is not quality in praying, singing, or preaching—although we should plan and prepare to honor God through every element of the liturgy. Ultimately, we gather together because the Lamb has provided Himself as the Sacrifice that gives us salvation. Everything we do in His house is for the true Audience—God and God alone. Every sentiment in our prayers, every lyric in our songs, every idea in our sermons should be Bible based and Christ centered.

But such can occur only when we approach worship as a 24/7 lifestyle. A dichotomous life that separates holy living on the seventh day of the week from the holy standard expected of us the other six days results in vain Christianity.

Worship is an outreach

I wonder what Abraham and Isaac sounded and looked like while sharing their story when they returned from Moriah. Did they speak so quickly they stumbled over their words? Were their faces aglow? The outgrowth of the events of Genesis 22 (continuation of the bloodline) has created a narrative repeatedly alluded to—pointing not to the patriarchs themselves but rather to the God of those patriarchs and His kingdom (Acts 3:13; Luke 13:28).

When people attend Sabbath School and the divine worship hour, they are looking for more than inspiration and answers to life's questions. They even seek more than fellowship. They want to see people in whom the presence of Christ makes a difference. They don't merely want to *hear* a testimony about God's power. They want to *see* that same testimony. Children of God who display the principles of God's kingdom through their lives of daily worship provide the greatest outreach to those who wish to join God's church.

The challenge to pastors and worship leaders

Whether real or imagined, some pastors and worship leaders feel constant pressure to design and implement more creative, innovative, and engaging worship experiences. The most effective times of divine worship continue to be those that place a primacy on exalting Christ in every phase—regardless of creativity or innovation.

We must always remember that worship is not about the preacher, musicians, or children's storyteller. Neither is the principle function of the offertory to raise funds for local church operations, nor should someone render a Scripture reading just because this has become tradition. Instead, one of the greatest challenges pastors face is to encourage people to live consecrated lives throughout the week and to celebrate—when we assemble together each Sabbath—all He has done for us during the previous six days.

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A word to worship leaders:

Reflections on Revelation 14:6, 7[1]

How can pastors, elders, music leaders, and choir directors lead corporate worship more thoughtfully and proficiently? The answer lies in Revelation 14:6, 7.

From their start, Seventh-day Adventists have identified themselves with the three angels' messages of Revelation 14, particularly as they relate to mission and evangelism.[2] Yet, Revelation 14 also contains a guiding vision on how we should approach the subject of worship. Verses 6 and 7, in particular, capture a clear and compelling vision of what it means to worship God. "Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.' "[3]

Those who lead worship are called to know the gospel, be culturally sensitive, and fear God as they glorify and worship Him. This simple outline can help those who are in charge of leading out in corporate worship to better understand, plan, and carry out their liturgical duty. Let us briefly examine each point.

Worship leaders are called to know the gospel

Despite its strong symbolism, our text contains an important element that cannot be overlooked: one cannot separate the preaching of the gospel (v. 6) from the call to authentic worship (v. 7). To know the gospel is to know God and to know God is to worship Him. Considered from another angle, it can be said that the ultimate purpose for proclaiming the gospel is that nations truly worship God. Consequently, we should understand that worship leaders need to clearly grasp the fact that all true worship centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ. Although Trinitarian in nature, Christian worship remains Christ-inspired, Christ-shaped, Christ-centered, and Christ-focused.

The Cross is central to worship. True worship flows from Christ's work on the cross. No celebration exists without Calvary, no glory without Golgotha, no blessings without the blood. Through His death on the cross and resurrection from the grave, Christ has brought salvation to humanity and made true worship possible. Authentic Christian worship is hence the celebration of a redeemed people. Any worship time or church service that does not tell the gospel story through word, song, and any other expression is simply not Christian worship.

It is therefore important that worship leaders familiarize themselves with the gospel message and see how it is closely related to worship. This knowledge of the gospel cannot be purely intellectual; it also needs to be experiential. For us as worship leaders, the everlasting gospel must be the air we breathe, the heart of our piety, the nourishment of our reflection, and the fountainhead of our praise. The Cross needs to be the vantage point from which we plan and offer our worship. Our strength as worship leaders must not rest on our talents or skills but on the power of the gospel bursting in and through us. To know God through Christ by immersing ourselves in the riches of the gospel must therefore be our top priority.

Worship leaders are called to be culturally sensitive

Verse 6 describes the angel carrying the eternal gospel in the midst of heaven and proclaiming it in a loud voice to "every nation, tribe, tongue, and people." This indicates that both the proclamation of the gospel and the call to true worship cannot be done in a vacuum. Worship needs to be culturally sensitive to be an authentic response to the gospel.

Every worship service expresses a certain culture. Our worship, whether traditional or contemporary, did not come straight from heaven. Worship expressions reflect theological perspectives and cultural influences. Our background and milieu influence the way we worship. To fight over whether to sing the songs of Isaac Watts or Chris Tomlin sometimes has more

to do with style than substance. And yet a crucial and critical dimension of the gospel proclamation and worship is cultural adaptation. Thoroughly undergirded by Bible principles, our worship needs also to be contextualized. In other words, our regional and ethnic background, our cultural context and socioeconomic milieu inform the way we worship because they all encompass and influence who we are.

Hence, leading out in public worship requires both theological robustness and cultural sensitivity. In an increasingly complex and diverse world, worship leaders must hold firm to biblical principles while remaining open to diversity in practice. In so doing, they should never forget that the principle of attraction in worship must be Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:1), not ingenious ceremonies or entertaining rituals. Only through His sacrifice can we draw near to God (Heb. 10:19–22). This means that no matter our worship styles, our focus needs to remain the transforming power of the Cross. When God is magnified, the people are edified. When Jesus is lifted up, He will draw people to Himself (John 12:32).

Worship leaders are called to "fear God"

"Fear God" are the first words proclaimed by the angel. The biblical notion of "fear" (*phobeo*) should not be understood as "to be afraid" but "to respect, to revere."[4] It is essentially a matter of faithfulness and obedience as we walk in God's ways and keep His commandments.[5] Interestingly, this notion of fearing God can be very odd in an age that evokes a lack of gravitas. There can often be a shortage of a sense of weight, glory, or awe in church services. This is not a new phenomenon. Ellen White wrote more than a century ago, "It is too true that reverence for the house of God has become almost extinct. Sacred things and places are not discerned; the holy and exalted are not appreciated. . . . We have abundant reason to maintain a fervent, devoted spirit in the worship of God. . . . But an enemy has been at work to destroy our faith in the sacredness of Christian worship."[6]

Worship leaders need to remind themselves constantly of "the sacredness of Christian worship" and approach their ministry with godly fear and humility, praying that God will use them as they lead worship. They will refuse to succumb to the cultural pressure to trivialize worship. They will set an example of reverential awe and joyful wonder as they lead worship. Sermons should never degenerate into platitudes. Talks ought not fall into the trap of irrelevance, and singing must never become a show for people. True worship should always be a selfless offering to God. Conversely, good worship leaders will also refuse to be so rigid in traditions just for the sake of keeping them. Rather, their fear of God will manifest itself in dignity and a sense of wonder.

Any worship time or church service that does not tell the gospel story through word, song, and any other expression is simply not Christian worship.

Worship leaders are called to glorify God

At the core of any true worship ministry is the desire to see people glorify God. Worship leaders must themselves be passionate about God's glory. They must have no other agenda than to lift up the name of Jesus Christ. Here, in Revelation 14:7, the angel summons the nations to fear God and glorify Him at a time when "the hour of His judgment has come." Interestingly, the book of Revelation shows a close link between the manifestation of God's character in judgments and His glorification in worship. In Revelation 15:3, 4, the redeemed sing and declare:

" 'Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested.' "

Through the judgment, God reveals who He is and what He has done. This revelation of God's character leads the saints of God to worship Him. Put differently, giving glory to God means acknowledging, displaying, and magnifying the unparalleled radiance and beauty of God's character, for, in essence, God's glory is His character on display.

How are we to give glory to God as worship leaders, then? By making Him most precious to our souls. This involves contemplating His infinite nature and marvelous deeds as well as responding to His glorious name. Our reflection on who God is and what He has done inspires our response to Him in worship.

Yet, magnifying God's greatness implies putting self aside. God cannot be glorified where self reigns. This could be one of the greatest challenges that worship leaders face. Have you ever gone through your sermon notes while waiting to preach because you felt that what preceded the sermon was unimportant, that they were just preliminaries? Have you ever conducted song service while being more preoccupied with your stage presence and musical abilities than God's glory?

When self is at the center, it becomes impossible to glorify God. This is why, as worship leaders, we need to constantly remind ourselves that worship is not about us but about God. The Creator is the One who is worthy of honor and praise. We need to understand that worship is not primarily about our preaching, leading, voice, or skills. Worship is about God. Worship is not a performance; it is an act of service. Our responsibility as worship leaders is to make sure that God is glorified in our lives and among His people. This is our imperative duty.

Worship leaders are called to worship God

The angel in Revelation 14:6, 7, in an echo to the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1–11), summons people to worship God for three reasons:

a. Because He is Creator ("Worship Him who made the heavens and earth . . .")
b. Because He is Redeemer ("the everlasting gospel")
c. Because He is Judge ("the hour of His judgment has come")

The doctrines of Creation, Redemption, and eschatology are closely intertwined here. This means that God cannot be Savior and Judge unless He is Creator. We need to always keep in mind this exalted vision of God.

Is it possible for a worship leader to lead worship and yet not worship, to sing and not really sing, to pray and not really pray? What happens when leading worship becomes so mechanical and routine that we go into liturgical autopilot? Yet, we know that in order to lead others in worship, worship leaders must themselves be full-fledged worshipers.

The problem is that sometimes we fail to bring before God's people a vision of the majesty and glory of God. Imagine a worship service that is unplanned—announcements take too long, the platform party is never ready—where the congregation acts like spectators, prayers are long and dry, the singing is lethargic, and the sermon empty and boring. In short, worship services become an anesthetic valley-of-Gilboa experience. Do you think people leave such services with a sense of God's greatness? They might, in fact, leave with the impression that worship is irrelevant and that God makes no difference at all.

Worship must be led with the vision of an exalted God who is worthy of all praise and honor. As worship leaders, we need to be worshipers 24/7. Worship is about the whole life lived in adoration before God. It is as much about what we do during the week as it is about what we do on Sabbath morning. In God's economy, religious services do not take precedence over worshipful hearts, for God is more interested in our hearts than in our offerings; He takes more delight in our dedicated lives than our finely-tuned and timely, choreographed worship services. In essence, Christian worship is more relational than cultic. For that reason, unless we cultivate a deep relationship with God, true worship cannot take place.

Conclusion

Leading worship is a high calling, and only through God's grace can it be done most effectively. God, through His Word, gives us clear principles and guidelines. Reflecting upon Revelation 14:6, 7, we see what could be a guiding vision for Adventist worship leaders. As worship leaders, we have to make worship our priority. As worship leaders, we should not only cultivate the art of worship; we should also cultivate a heart for worship. Only then can we boldly venture in helping members become better worshipers. Only then can we offer to God the worship that He deserves.

May God grant us the eyes to behold His magnificence and the privilege of helping His people worship Him.

1 This article is adapted from the author's plenary session presentation at the 2015 Andrews University Music & Worship Conference.
2 See for instance, P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977).
3 All Scripture in this article is quoted from the New King James Version of the Bible.
4 David Aune, *Revelation 6–16,* Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52B (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 827.
5 See David Peterson, *Engaging With God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 72.
6 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church,* vol. 5 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948) 495, 496.

HYVETH WILLIAMS

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An appeal *for a* new era *of* preaching *and* worship

Preaching the Word of God has always been central in the life of His called-out people. This act of proclamation is distinct from giving a speech, even if that speech is eloquent, authoritative, and godly (cf. Gen. 41:25–36; 44:18–34). Proclaiming the Word actually began with God Himself when He spoke to the Israelites (Exod. 20:1–17). It was so profoundly powerful that when the people heard it, "they trembled and stood at a distance. Then they said to Moses, 'Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die' " (Exod. 20:18, 19).[1] It was indeed a sermon to remember!

The Hebrew word *qara,* "to proclaim, call or read aloud," captures the essential definition of preaching or proclamation in the Old Testament. It "denotes primarily the enunciation of a specific vocable or message . . . customarily addressed to a specific recipient and . . . intended to elicit a specific response."[2] It was used when God said to Moses: "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will *proclaim* the name of the LORD before you" (Exod. 33:19; cf. Neh. 6:7; Jon. 3:2).

To demonstrate that preaching was not a phenomenon unique to the newly-minted Christian faith, the apostle Peter noted that Noah was "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5). In *koine* Greek, the word *kerussō* "signifies (a) to be a herald, or in general, to proclaim . . . publish . . . to preach, Rev. 5:2; (b) to preach the gospel as a herald, Matt. 24:14; (c) to preach the word, 2 Tim. 4:2 (of the ministry of the Scriptures, with special reference to the Gospel)."[3] Other notable heralds included John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1); the leper whom Jesus healed who "began to proclaim" (Mark 1:45) what He had done despite the stern warning not to (vv. 43, 44). Jesus announced that the Spirit of the Lord anointed Him to preach the gospel (Luke 4:18) and, in His last command to His disciples, told them to " 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation' " (Mark 16:15). After His ascension, they did just that, "[a]nd every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:42).

It is also evident that preaching was a significant part of the life and worship of the early church. Exegetical, polemic homilies became a staple of the church during the period of A.D. 200–800[4] when Origen—recognized as father of the sermon, as a fixed ecclesiastical custom—explored theological-practical exposition of a definite text, known as the homily. Then, "at that period of the separation of the divine service into homiletical-didactic part and a mystical part, the sermon was missionary and apologetic in type and suited to instruct the catechumens."[5] Sermons also "took the form of explication and application of the text, using particularly the method of allegory, which from that time on became prevalent and controlled the homiletical use of Scripture until the Reformation."[6] John Chrysostom put preaching on the map. As archbishop of Constantinople—this Early Church Father, and perhaps the first celebrity preacher—denounced the abuse of authority by political and ecclesiastical leaders. Later on, Augustine "was distinguished for his energy and tirelessness as a preacher." His sermons were "strong in the elements of experience, witness-bearing, dialectic, and practical applications . . . and more infused with the Gospel."[7]

With the proliferation of mass media communications and a renaissance in worship, preaching reached its zenith as the main portion of worship in the mid-twentieth century. During that resurgence, more than half of the time spent in worship was devoted to preaching. However, the unhinging of the sermon from the rest of the worship service may have originated in the Middle Ages when some elements were done in Latin and "the sermon required the use of the vernacular of the region."[8] This created the sense that some parts of worship (i.e., preaching) were more important than others. Some contemporary theologians and/or homileticians, such as Michael J. Quicke, bemoan a recent paradigm

shift in worship style and content where music, drama, praise, dancing, and video presentations appear to be usurping the prominence and centrality of preaching in worship.

A few proponents of this change express that "when sermons are regarded as primary, worship is reduced to plying musical ability and arranging service elements appropriately,"[9] into "preliminaries." Opponents did not surrender or sit silently as the movement gathered strength and popularity. Some, like Albert Mohler, said: "Music fills the space of most evangelical worship, and much of this music comes in the form of contemporary choruses marked by precious little theological content . . . [as] many evangelical churches seem intensely concerned to replicate studio-quality musical presentations," adding that these stylistic changes "have sadly contributed to friction and sometimes even divided churches."[10]

T. David Gordon confidently predicted the imminent decline (not disappearance) of contemporary worship music[11] and gave eight reasons, five of which are summarized below:

"Contemporary worship music hymns not only were/are comparatively poor, they *had* to be" because "one generation cannot successfully 'compete' with 50 generations of hymn-writers."

"Early on in the contemporary worship music movement, many groups began setting traditional hymn-lyrics to contemporary melodies and/or instrumentation." The writers quickly realized "how difficult/demanding it is to write lyrics that are not only theologically sound, but [are] significant, profound, appropriate, memorable, and edifying (not to mention metrical)." Thus, "the better contemporary hymns . . . have been over-used to the point that [congregations] have become weary of them."

No longer is it "a competitive advantage to have part or all of a service in a contemporary idiom" since most churches now do so—reaching "what Malcolm Gladwell calls the 'Tipping Point' "[12]—and are no longer marked "as emerging, hip, edgy, or forward looking."

"As with all novelties, once the novelty wears off, what is left often seems somewhat empty. In a culture that celebrates what is new, . . . most people will pine for what is new."

"Contemporary worship music is . . . accompanied by 'Praise Teams' " to whom it is frequently, but not always, "difficult to provide direction . . . due to the inherent confusion between whether they are *participants in* the congregation or *performers for* the congregation." Gordon also asserts that " '[c]ontemporary worship' to me is an oxymoron. Biblically, worship is what angels and morning stars did before creation."[13]

Some of these predictions are challenging, conjuring uncomfortable feelings. Others, such as David Williams, opine that "when worship music is determined by our own preferences, we enthrone self"[14] are indeed fighting words. Comments of this ilk have been said in an assortment of ways by a diverse group of opponents of the new trend in worship. They are like a shot over the bow, throwing down the gauntlet for a duel, or enough to raise the hackles of the proponents of contemporary worship music. Truth be told, worship has already become so controversial it "should be spelled 'warship,' and tragically, the term *worship wars* describes conflict, sometimes bitterly splitting congregations over worship styles."[15] Traditional churches, where the musical style continues to be hymns and choirs, have not escaped this great controversy. The pressures to conform, plus the dwindling attendance and declining financial support, cause many to surrender, even under duress, to the new wave where music is more dominant than preaching.

Are worship wars a new phenomenon?

Even before the establishment of His church, the woman at the well wrangled with Jesus about the place of worship. She observed contentiously, " 'Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and *you people* say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship' " (John 4:20; emphasis mine). Upon reflection, this response of Jesus should cause the warriors of worship to lay down their arms: " '*You worship what you do not know, we worship what we know,* for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers" (John 4:22, 23; emphasis mine).

It is clear that "the worship of God will be emancipated from the bondage of place,"[16] but can we anticipate that it will be loosed from the wars about style and content? Since *proskuneo* (worship) means "to make obeisance, do reverence to (from *pros,* towards, and *kuneo,* to kiss)" and "is used of an act of homage or reverence,"[17] in the battle between preaching and music, both protagonists and antagonists are worshiping "what" they do or do not know. Neither group is worshiping the implied "Who" (i.e., the Father). If they did, instead of their own knowledge, they would not allow this controversy to divide, destroy, or detract His church from its mission to seek and save the lost.

The "[h]ubris that plagues the act of preaching" has not helped to heal the wounds caused by these controversies. Unfortunately, "rightly convinced of preaching's importance, preachers can wrongly become self-important. Investing all their effort in sermon-making, and claiming its importance for proclaiming the gospel (Rom. 10:9), they can sideline worship as a secondary matter," proposes Michael Quicke. "Charles Rice," he notes, "mischievously describes such an attitude as viewing the sermon as 'a kind of homiletical ocean liner, preceded by a few liturgical tugboats.' "[18] As another example of this hubris, Quicke quotes John Killinger saying, "There is no substitute for preaching in worship. It provides the proclamatory thrust without which the church is never formed and worship is never made possible."[19]

Pastors who relegate all but preaching to the bottom drawer of "preliminaries," asserts Quicke, reflect myopic views of preaching and worship. "Myopia" he argues, "is defined as a visual defect in which distant objects appear blurred because their images are focused in front of the retina rather than on it; nearsightedness. Often unaware how limited its vision has become, myopic preaching misses out on God's long-range worship perspective, on the details of life." He also notes that "[m]yopic preaching is marked by ten characteristics":[20] (1) faulty definitions; (2) thin theology of worship; (3) nondirective use of Scripture; (4) liturgical amnesia; (5) feeble community formation; (6) naiveté about culture; (7) ambivalence about music; (8) not living in God's narrative; (9) isolated preparation; and (10) worshipless sermons.[21]

An appeal for a new era

Since preaching increasingly plays a supporting role to music and other contemporary additions to worship, how can those who are seeking and those who have never known Christ hear without the preached Word of God (Rom. 10:14, 15)? On the other hand, why should preaching have the dominance in worship when music has the power to touch the soul with such astounding emotions and accuracy? Consider the following:

1. God created the world with His word (Gen. 1; Heb. 11:3); revealed Himself to the world and humanity as the Word (John 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21); performs His works (John 9:4) of redemption, re-creation, reconciliation, and restoration by His Word (Matt. 9:22; Mark 5:8; Luke 4:39; John 11:43); and converts people (changes hearts and lives) by His Word (1 Pet. 1:23).

2. A 2002 United States-based survey by the Barna Research Group concluded that participants in the "worship wars" ignore the real issue regarding worship: " 'Most of the church people who fight about their musical preference do so because they don't understand the relationship between music, communication, God and worship. Church leaders foster the problem by focusing on how to please people with music or how to offer enough styles of music to meet everyone's tastes rather than dealing with the underlying issue of limited interest in, comprehension of, and investment in fervent worship of a holy, deserving God.' "[22]

3. There's a desperate need in preaching for "fierce conversation." This is not "menacing, cruel, barbarous or threatening," language. It does not sound "like raised voices, frowns, blood on the floor, no fun at all" discourses. "[T]he word fierce has the following synonyms: robust, intense, strong, powerful, passionate, eager, unbridled, uncurbed, untamed."[23] It is the backbone of prophetic preaching—or speaking truth to power and challenging the status quo—that nurtures, nourishes, and evokes relevance and creativity to balance the prevailing model of pastoral preaching.

4. If preaching continues to retreat or be relegated to the status of "preliminaries," a whole host of entertaining innovations will rise up to take its place. Today it is contemporary music, but who knows what tomorrow will bring? However, fighting each other for power or prominence of preferences in worship is not the Holy Spirit–anointed answer to resolve these tensions. This kind can only be resolved through prayer and fasting—the foundation, launching pad, and sustenance of preaching and worship.

5. Worship was intended to please God, not man, and contemporary worship is often anthropocentric rather than theocentric or Christocentric. There is no scriptural support that a person's traditions, instincts, favoritisms, or experiments are divine commands for the content and exercise of worship. Neither was the Geneva order of worship (developed by John Calvin and practiced by many conservative Protestant churches) written by the finger of God on tablets of stone like the Ten Commandments. Believers are called to worship God in spirit and truth, and He gave no rules or regulations regarding style or content; yet, in our obsessive, anthropocentric clime, in the words of Paul, when we "come together as a church . . . divisions exist among" us (1 Cor. 11:18).

6. We cannot and must not eliminate or undermine preaching in order to substitute entertainment for evangelism under the guise of making worship interesting and exciting to attract the unconverted. Entertainment is seductive and appealing because we all want to see many who live beyond the choir brought to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. However, in the words of Robert Godfrey, "We must remember that entertainment is not evangelism and evangelism is not worship." People are not converted by a comedian in the pulpit, a group of praise dancers on the platform, or a big band sound of music in the sanctuary. It is by the gospel of Jesus Christ. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8–10).

7. Traditional Protestant worship has always been strong on reverence and may seem mechanical, formalistic, and without emotion to some in our media-driven, action-obsessed culture. Others may view contemporary worship, with its enthusiasm and joy, as being focused on fun and excitement at the expense of reverence.

Conclusion

I recommend proponents of both approaches (a) ask and answer whether the content of their worship achieves a biblical balance where preaching is the lamp to the worshipers' feet (Ps. 119:105) and the music and songs recount and guide them to God's saving works of redemption, reconciliation, and restoration; and (b) put an end to the "warship" by beating the swords of what they know or don't know into plowshares (Isa. 2:4) to cultivate a new era of Christian preaching and worship. Then, the world will know Jesus is Lord because of our love for one another (John 13:35).

1 All Scripture in this article is quoted from the New American Standard Bible.

2 R. Laird Harris, ed., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament,* vol. 2 (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), 810.
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4 Samuel Macauley Jackson, ed., *The New Schaff-Herzog Religious Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge,* vol. 9, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1911), 159, books.google.com/books?id=pZJAAQAAMAAJ.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., 160.
8 Ibid., 161.
9 Michael J. Quicke, *Preaching as Worship: An Integrative Approach to Formation in Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 32.
10 Albert Mohler, "Expository Preaching—The Antidote to Anemic Worship," August 19, 2013, www.albertmohler.com/2013/08/19/expository-preaching-the-antidote-to-anemic-worship/.
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12 Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2000).
13 Quicke, *Preaching as Worship,* 30.
14 Professor of Worship and Music at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary.
15 Ibid.
16 Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament,* vol. 5 (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1960), 66.
17 Vine, *An Expository Dictionary,* 235.
18 Quicke, *Preaching as Worship,* 28.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 39.
21 Ibid., 40–59.
22 "Focus on 'Worship Wars' Hides the Real Issues Regarding Connection to God," Barna articles in Faith & Christianity, November 19, 2002, www.barna.org/component/content/article/5-barna-update/45-barna-update-sp-657/85-focus-on-qworship-warsq-hides-the-real-issues-regarding-connection-to-god.
23 Susan Scott, *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and in Life, One Conversation at a Time* (New York: Berkley Books, 1999), 7.

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Day of worship patterns *in the* book of Acts

Did early Christians have a set day of worship?[1] Or did they worship on any day that was convenient? If they did have a set day, was it the biblical Sabbath, the seventh day of the week? Or was it Sunday?

Even a casual reading of Acts shows that Sabbath appears prominent. There are ten occurrences of the word *sabbaton,* "Sabbath," as compared to one for the first day of the week, with multiple meetings recorded as taking place on the Sabbath. But, could it be that Paul (and other apostles) met on Sabbath *only* because this was the time when Jews and God-fearing Gentiles would be gathered and, as such, afforded an excellent opportunity for ministry? Or could it be that Sabbath meetings were just a leftover from inherited practice, soon to disappear?

Such questions might appear distant or even irrelevant but are, in fact, relevant for contemporary Christians. The vast majority of Christians worships on Sunday and has been doing so for centuries. A vocal minority has opted to have the Saturday Sabbath as their day of worship. Still others maintain that any day is fine. The practice and outlook of the first Christians could shed light on what is biblically most appropriate.

This study will explore patterns of worship in the book of Acts. These fall under three categories as far as the day of the week is concerned. First, there are daily meetings (Acts 2:44–47). Second, one meeting takes place on the "first day of the week" (Acts 20:6–12). Third, meetings are mentioned on the seventh-day Sabbath (Acts 13:14, 42, 44; 14:1; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4; cf. 1:12; 15:21). Daily meetings were probably unstructured, informal, ad hoc opportunities for instruction (Acts 2:44–47; 19:9; 20:31), as opposed to formal worship services and will not receive our attention here.

This short study will instead focus on the two other categories. We will first explore the texts that speak of Sabbath worship and endeavor to see whether they indicate habitual or opportunistic (for the purpose of missionary work) practice. Then we will review the one text that mentions a Sunday meeting.

Sabbath texts

The Sabbath is mentioned ten times in Acts, of which eight relate to worship. The noun "Sabbath" comes from the Hebrew verb *sabbat,* "to cease, rest,"[2] designating a holy day of rest and worship, a memorial of God's creative acts in the story of Creation (Exod. 20:8–11), as well as His redemptive work on behalf of His people (Deut. 5:12–15).

The first three Sabbath worship references appear in Paul's ministry in Pisidian Antioch. Luke, author of Acts, introduces the pericope as follows: "From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down" (Acts 13:14).[3] The translation "Sabbath" misses the force of the Greek original. Luke uses the phrase *tēēmēratōnSabbatōn,* which literally means, "the day which is the Sabbath."[4] He uses the same expression again in Acts 16:13.

That this phrase appears here is no coincidence. Acts 13 marks the beginning of Paul's missionary journeys. Acts 13:14 is the first mention of Paul's worship practices and, as such, sets the tone for Paul's subsequent Sabbath gatherings. Paul does not simply meet on a day when he will find people gathered so that he can minister to them. He does not meet on the day the Jews consider "Sabbath." Rather, he meets on "the day which is the Sabbath." As such, this phrase provides the reason for Paul's Sabbath worship practice—the seventh day is still the biblical Sabbath.

Having established the fact, Luke does not feel a burden to restate his case, and in the subsequent three references to the Sabbath in Acts 13,[5] as well as most other references in the book of Acts,[6] he refers to the day simply by the titular noun "Sabbath."

While in the synagogue, Paul and Barnabas are invited to speak. At the conclusion of the meeting Paul urges

the synagogue crowd, Jews and devout Gentiles, "to continue [Gr. *prosmenein*] in the grace of God" (Acts 13:43). The verb *prosmenein* has the meaning to "remain, stay with, continue in."[7] For Paul, evidently, knowledge of the saving work of Jesus did not necessitate a break from the worship practice of the synagogue.[8]

Before departing, the apostles are invited to speak again on the following Sabbath (Acts 13:42). Paul acquiesces to their request and waits a whole week. Had Sunday become the new day of worship for Christians, he could have invited them to meet him the next day. But instead he waits a whole week. "On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord" (Acts 13:44).

The next mention of the Sabbath is in Acts 16:13: "On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate [of Philippi] to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there." Apparently, there was no synagogue in Philippi because a synagogue required a quorum of ten adult males. In the absence of a synagogue, people met by the river for prayer. Paul attended the worship service and had the opportunity to speak and convert Lydia and her family.

From Philippi, Paul traveled to Thessalonica, and there he mentions Sabbath worship again: "When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As his custom was [*kata to eiōthos*], Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from the Scriptures" (Acts 17:1, 2). This text is particularly interesting because it speaks of Paul's custom, *eiōthos,* to go to the synagogue. Why did Paul customarily attend the synagogue? Was it because he kept the Sabbath? Or because it afforded him opportunity for mission work, as is sometimes assumed?

In Luke 4:16, Luke uses an identical expression in relation to Jesus: "He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom [*kata to eiōthos*]. And he stood up to read." The Sabbath in question is the first named Sabbath in Jesus' public ministry. By this early stage, "his custom" of attendance was already well established and was, as such, unrelated to his preaching and teaching ministry.

Furthermore, the statements (a) "he went into the synagogue, as was his custom," and (b) "he stood up to read" in Greek are separated by the coordinating conjunction *kai,* which functions to connect two independent statements.[9] This is well conveyed in the New International Version (NIV) by the insertion of a period between the two clauses. As such, Jesus' custom of visiting the synagogue every Sabbath was independent from any preaching or teaching he conducted there—Jesus went to the synagogue because this is what He wanted to do and was in the habit of doing.

The same conclusion is valid for Paul. Just as in Luke 4:16, the first clause of Acts 17:2, "as his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue," is separated from the following clause by the same coordinating conjunction *kai,* again indicating two independent statements.

In Acts 14:1, Luke makes the same inference but in a more subtle way. After describing Paul's successful ministry in Pisidian Antioch on the Sabbath, he introduces Paul's ministry in Iconium with the words: "At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual [*kata to auto*] into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed." *Kata to auto,* literally "in the same way," points back to Pisidian Antioch and the apostles' custom to attend the synagogue.[10] Again the synagogue attendance is separated from the synagogue ministry by the coordinating conjunction *kai* in Greek and a period in the NIV, indicating two independent statements.

We conclude, on the basis of the syntax of Luke 4:16 and Acts 14:1 and 17:2, as well as from the context of Luke 4:16; that both Jesus' and Paul's custom was to attend the synagogue regularly on the Sabbath for worship irrespective of any preaching or teaching activity they might be involved in while there. Sabbath worship was part of their upbringing and enduring spiritual experience.

Paul's stay in Thessalonica was not long, and he moved onwards to Berea, Athens, and then Corinth, where he stayed 18 months (Acts 18:11). While there, "[e]very Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:4), a potential 78 Sabbaths.[11] Had Paul habitually disregarded the Sabbath, he would unlikely have been able to continue synagogue attendance. When the breach did come, it was not because of Paul's Sabbath behavior, but because the Jews opposed Paul's proclamation of Jesus as the Christ (18:5, 6). David Seccombe observes that the severance of church and synagogue was "neither theologically motivated, nor final, but forced on Paul by the attitudes of that group of Jews."[12]

When Paul was forced to leave the synagogue, he established meetings in

the house of Titius Justus (Acts 18:7). Luke adds that Justus's house was *sunomorousa*, "next door" (NIV, ESV), or "joined hard" (KJV) to the synagogue. The inclusion of this detail is surprising and not a casual piece of Corinth's civic geography. Rather, Paul is establishing an alternative but parallel arrangement for worship and fellowship. H. L. Ellison insightfully observes that for believers it would be easier if they were "in or near the Jewish district of the town . . . to avoid seeing idol-figures . . . and to be able to avoid continual insult, when they observed the Sabbath."[13]

After a year and a half in Corinth, Paul went to the nearby port of Cenchrea, boarded a boat, and traveled to Ephesus (Acts 18:18, 19). Luke says little about Paul's ministry in Ephesus. The visit was brief, and when asked to stay longer, he declined, promising instead to return (Acts 18:20, 21). In Ephesus he left Aquila and Priscilla, two fellow workers,[14] and moved on to Caesarea and Antioch, concluding his second missionary journey. He returned to Ephesus during his third missionary journey but only after he had first visited the churches in Galatia and Phrygia (Acts 18:23).[15] Exactly how much time elapsed between the two visits to Ephesus is unclear, but at least a year, probably more.[16]

What is clear, however, is that Aquila, Priscilla, and the group of believers in Ephesus continued to meet on the Sabbath in the synagogue. When a Jewish believer named Apollos[17] came and preached in the synagogue, Aquila and Priscilla took him home and "explained to him the way of God more adequately" (Acts 18:26). Apollos then received letters of recommendation from the "brothers"—a term that could refer either to Jews[18] or Christians[19] in the synagogue, or both—and departed for Corinth. When Paul returned to Ephesus, he joined the other Christians in synagogue attendance for three months (Acts 19:8), until his bold preaching aroused opposition and Paul moved to a nearby lecture hall (19:9). Again, his departure was not a personal or theological choice but was forced by opposition from the Jews.

Two last texts are relevant. In Acts 15:21, James the apostle declares: ' "For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.' " The context is the Jerusalem Council, which eased the way for the acceptance of Gentiles into the church. The words quoted stand at the conclusion of the decision of the council and were intended to highlight the fact that the council decision was in harmony with "Moses" (i.e., the Pentateuch). The fact that synagogue worship services "every Sabbath" is mentioned indicates that Christians attended these services, or else the statement would have no relevance.

Finally, Luke gives the distance between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives as "a Sabbath day's walk" (i.e., about 900 meters). Both Luke, the

author of Acts, and Theophilus, the recipient of Acts, were most likely of Gentile background. The fact that they used such a Sabbatarian outlook probably means that they kept the Sabbath. Why refer to a "Sabbath day's walk" if such a concept was irrelevant?

In this brief survey of Sabbath texts in Acts, a number of points stand out. First, Luke introduces Paul's Sabbath attendance with *tēēmeratōnSabbatōn,* "the day which is the Sabbath" (13:14), a phrase that, as was noted earlier, highlights the seventh day as the biblical Sabbath. As such, it offers justification for Paul's Sabbath practices—Paul's day of worship is the biblical Sabbath. Second, Paul did not attend the synagogue for mission purposes but because, like Jesus, that was his custom. Missionary activity was an added bonus. Third, Sabbath attendance was not limited to a few initial meetings to win converts but, wherever possible, Sabbath attendance was an ongoing practice. Fourth, when Paul did depart from the synagogue, it was not because of personal choice or alternative worship practices but because of opposition from Jews who refused to accept Jesus as the Christ.[20] Fifth, Sabbath synagogue attendance (Acts 15:21) and Sabbath practice (Acts 1:12) were taken for granted.

The first day of the week in the book of Acts

In contrast to the plethora of references to Sabbath worship, there is only one reference to a first-day meeting, Acts 20:7. Not surprisingly, this text has become the focus of intense attention for advocates of a special status for Sunday.[21] Ben Witherington writes that "in v. 7 we have perhaps the first reference to the fact that it was on the first day of the week (i.e., Sunday) that Christians met to have fellowship and hear preaching."[22] Guthrie, without citing any supporting documentation, asserts that "by this time it seems to have been the usual practice for believers to assemble together in this way," on a Sunday evening to celebrate the Lord's Supper.[23]Are such assertions justified?

Acts 20:7 is set within the context of Paul's ministry at Troas (Acts 20:6–12), which lasted seven days (20:6). The text reads, "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight." Discussions hinge on two points: (a) does the phrase "to break bread" refer to the Lord's Supper or a common meal? (b) Did this evening meeting take place on Saturday night or Sunday night? To these questions we now turn.

The answer to the first question depends on the interpretation of the phrase "to break bread," *klasaiarton*. The two words appear together another 13 times in the New Testament. Eight times they refer to common meals,[24] and five to the Lord's Supper.[25] So, lexically and interbiblically, either option is possible.

To determine the nature of the "bread breaking" in Troas, we need to look at the context. Here, two things argue in favor of a common meal. First, though the believers and Paul were gathered together to "break bread," only Paul appears to have eaten: "Then he [Paul] went upstairs again and broke bread and ate" (Acts 20:11).[26]

Second, we have the following sequence: Paul speaks until midnight (Acts 20:7); Eutychus dies and is resurrected (20:9, 10); Paul breaks bread, eats, and then speaks until dawn (20:11). If this meal was the Lord's Supper it was celebrated after midnight, which is unlikely. The evidence indicates a common fellowship meal to bid Paul farewell, in which only Paul apparently ate, needing the strength to speak all night.[27]

The next issue relates to the exact time the meeting took place. This was clearly a night meeting (Acts 20:8). There are two contending theories: (1) If the biblical calendar is in view the day begins at sunset,[28] so the dark part of the "first day of the week" is Saturday night.[29] (2) If a Roman calendar is in view then the day begins at midnight,[30] in which case the evening meeting at Troas took place on Sunday night.

Which calendar did Luke use? The evidence is overwhelming in favor of the biblical calendar. Bacchiocchi, in his seminal work, *From Sabbath to Sunday,* has provided ample evidence in support of this. He lists Luke's account of the crucifixion (Luke 23:54); references to the Jewish festal year and customs (Acts 12:3–4; 16:1–3; 18:18; 20:16; 21:24, 26); and repeated mentions of the Sabbath, clearly a biblical concept (Acts 13:14, 42, 44; 15:21; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4).[31] I would add Luke 23:44 and Acts 2:15, both of which give the hours of the day according to the way Jews counted them. In light of this evidence the meeting at Troas, described in Acts 20, was a Saturday night meeting.

So what happened in Troas? Paul arrived at Troas after a five-day journey from Philippi and remained at Troas for seven days (20:6). Since he left early on Sunday morning, he must have arrived at Troas the preceding Monday.[32]

What Paul did from Monday to Sabbath we do not know, but judging from his mode of ministry he probably spent his time encouraging believers (Acts 20:31) and planning his onward travel (Acts 20:5).

On Sabbath, according to his custom (Acts 14:1; 17:2), he would have visited a synagogue or held an alternative meeting with believers. Sabbath fellowship customarily extended into the afternoon or even evening.[33] Sometime after sunset on Saturday night the believers and Paul met again to fellowship in word and meal and say farewell to each other. Paul preached until midnight (Acts 20:7). He then raised Eutychus, who had had an accident (20:8–10); partook of some food—since by that time he was probably hungry; preached until dawn; and departed for Assos (20:13).

Conclusion

We have looked at a plethora of texts. On the one hand, we have multiple references to Sabbath worship that is intentional, customary, ongoing, and independent of any missiological considerations. On the other hand, we have one reference to a meeting on the first day of the week, which takes place on Saturday night, because Paul is to depart early in the morning.

All of the above are congruent with the belief that the early Christians were seventh-day Sabbatarian and continued to see the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship. But they are incongruent with the suggestions that from the Cross and Resurrection onward Sunday replaced the Sabbath, or the Sabbath was abolished altogether.

1 By "day of worship" we mean a day set apart from the rest of the days in the week as holy to God, in which worship takes place on a regular basis, much like the seventh-day Sabbath had been a day of worship (Lev. 23:2).

2 William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), s.v. "*sabbat.*"

3 All Scripture references quoted in this article are from the New International Version of the Bible.

4 Kim Papaioannou, "Naming the Days of the Week: Overlooked Evidence Into Early Christian Sabbatarian Practice," *Ministry*, January 2015, 25–28.

5 Acts 13:27, 42, 44.

6 Acts 1:12; 15:21; 17:2; 18:4.

7 Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 1519.

8 Gerhard A. Krodel highlights such continuity and traces it in Paul's sermon beginning with Israel's election (Acts 13:17), through the fulfillment of the promise (13:29–37), to the offer of forgiveness through Christ (13:38, 39). *Acts* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1986), 245.

9 Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 293–302.

10 F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1951), 324.

11 At some point he had to leave the synagogue, but how soon this happened the text does not indicate. Clearly he stayed in the synagogue for a considerable amount of time as the Greek *kata pan Sabbaton* indicates. Cf. Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary* (Downers Grove IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 104–07.

12 David Seccombe, "The New People of God," in *Witness to the Gospel,* eds. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 364. Seccombe's statement is made in relation to the activities of the Jews in Pisidian Antioch but doubtless holds true for Corinth, too.

13 H. L. Ellison, "Paul and the Law–'All Things to All Men,'" in *Apostolic History and the Gospel,* eds. W. Ward Gasque and Ralph P. Martin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 197.

14 Acts 18:18; Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19. Aquila was a Jew from Pontus who had worked with his wife Priscilla in Italy but had been forced to leave due to an edict by Emperor Claudius expelling all Jews from Rome (Acts 18:2). Donald Guthrie notes that this expulsion may be related to disturbances among Jews and possibly Christians mentioned by the Roman historian Suetonius. This could suggest the couple were Christian prior to their arrival in Corinth. *The Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 154.

15 Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary,* 107–111.

16 Schnabel places Paul's first arrival in Ephesus in the late summer of A.D. 51 and second visit in the summer of A.D. 52. *Paul the Missionary,* 104, 107. Joseph Fitzmyer places the conclusion of the second missionary journey sometime in A.D. 52 and the beginning of the third missionary journey in the spring of A.D. 54, making the gap between Paul's two visits to Ephesus about two years long. *The Acts of the Apostles,* The Anchor Bible, vol. 31 (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 633.

17 There is some debate as to whether Apollos was a Christian during his visit to Ephesus, but the weight of the evidence suggests he was. Cf. Darrell Bock, *Acts,* Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 591–592.

18 E.g., Acts 2:29, 37; 3:17; 7:2; 13:15, 26, 38; 22:1.

19 E.g., Acts 1:16; 6:3; 9:30; 11:1, 29; 12:17; 14:2; 15:1, 3, 7, 13, 22, 23; 17:6, 10.

20 This ongoing attachment to the synagogue and the Sabbath is verified by history. The *birkathaminim* is a prayer introduced in synagogues at the end of the first century A.D. with an aim "to flush Christians out of the synagogues" as M. M. B. Turner puts it. "The Sabbath, Sunday, and the Law in Luke/Acts," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day,* ed. D. A. Carson (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 125. The prayer consisted of a curse upon Christians. When a synagogue attendee was suspected of being a Christian or even a sympathizer, he would be invited to offer the prayer. Any hesitation to recite the curse would confirm the Christian leanings. Samuele Bacchiocchi notes that several Fathers confirm the continuing use of the *birkathaminim* and cites Justin Martyr, *Dialogue* 16; Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses* 29, and Jerome, *In Isaiam*, *PL* 24, 87, and 484. *From Sabbath to Sunday* (Vatican: Pontifical Gregorial University Press, 1977), 158.

21 See Gerhard A. Krodel, *Acts* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1986), 378; Jerome Crowe, *The Acts: New Testament Message* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1979), 152; Charles John Vaughan, *Studies in the Book of Acts* (Minneapolis, MN: Klock&Klock Christian, 1890), 449–459.

22 Ben Witherington III, *The Act of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 606. See also Paul K. Jewett, *The Lord's Day* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 61.

23 Guthrie, *The Apostles,* 259, 260.

24 Matthew 14:19; 15:36; Mark 8:6; 8:19; Luke 24:30; Acts 2:46; 20:11; 27:35.

25 Of the five times, four refer to the institution of the Lord's Supper in the upper room (Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24). There the act of breaking bread was not on its own of cultic significance but rather a normal part of the Passover meal. As such, there is only one reference, 1 Corinthians 10:16, where the phrase "to break bread" clearly refers to the Lord's Supper as a distinct Christian celebration.

26 Thomas Walker's assertion that the phrase "broke bread and ate" (Acts 20:11) entails a Lord's Supper ("broke bread") and not a common meal ("and ate") stretches credulity unnecessarily. Both verbs are in the third singular without any hint that Paul (a) shared the bread, or (b) others partook of food. *Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids MI: Kregel, 1984), 469.

27 Witherington admits that it is unclear whether there was any Lord's Supper involved in the meal but alludes to 1 Corinthians 11 where the Lord's Supper appears to have been celebrated in the context of a meal, in the hope that the meal at Troas also included the Lord's Supper. His approach is speculative. The fact that the Lord's Supper could be part of a meal in no way implies that every mentioned meal included the Lord's Supper. *The Acts of the Apostles,* 606. Cf. Bock, *Acts,* 619.

28 See Robert Leo Odom, *The Lord's Day on a Round World* (Nashville, TN: Southern Pub. Assn., 1970), 20–26.

29 R. C. H. Lenski admits a biblical calendar, but argues that this was a Sunday evening meeting on the basis that the meeting would have started before sunset and as such was a "first day" meeting by Jewish reckoning. *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1934), 824, 825. However, the text mentions no pre-sunset gathering, and we must take the "first day" reference as referring to the night meeting. He admits that "little can be proved" from Acts 20:7 in favor of Sunday.

30 See Robert L. Odom, *Sabbath and Sunday in Early Christianity* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1977), 28–33

31 Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday,* 105–106.

32 If we use the biblical inclusive reckoning of days where every part of a day is counted as one day.

33 Matthew 12:1–8; Mark 1:29–32; 2:23–28; Luke 4:38–40; 14:1; Acts 13:43; 16:14, 15.

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Worshiping . . . with children?

Jesus made it clear that children were very special to Him. He remembered what it felt like to be a child, be vulnerable, be filled with wonder, run freely, and live a simple and uncomplicated life. So He welcomed them, healed them, raised them from the dead, blessed them, involved them in His miracles, and told them stories they could understand. Several times He challenged His followers to become more like little children.

How does Jesus' teaching about children inform our understanding of the role of children in our churches today? How can we place the same importance on children as He did? And how can we involve children in our worship experiences so that we can be inspired by each other, and help each other grow closer to God's kingdom?

In children's shoes

Pause for a moment. Take a pen and a piece of paper and draw a "stick person" picture of a child in your church. You know the one. The child who struggles to sit still. The one who is most likely to end up being taken outside during the sermon. The one who runs around and makes a lot of noise. The one who dreads coming to church because he or she always seems to get into trouble, no matter how hard he or she tries. The one whose parents are wondering whether they can face the struggle of coming to church week after week.

Now put yourself in this child's shoes. What did they experience when they came to church last week? What did they enjoy most? What did they dislike? What made them feel happy, sad, afraid? What was it like sitting in their seat in church? What could they see, hear, and understand?

Whenever I teach a seminar on worshiping with children, I ask a couple of adults to sit on a table facing a blank wall. Then they listen to a sermon—in a language they do not understand. Imagine you have a friend from another country and they invite you to their church. Most of the service is completely incomprehensible to you, except for one of the hymns. Would you choose to return? Probably not. So what would you think and feel if someone made you attend that church for the next ten years? Many of the children in our churches experience our weekly worship services in this way.

Each time a child has a negative experience of worship, they are more likely to reject the church when they are older. But each time they have a positive experience of worship, they are more likely to make a positive choice for God.

Centuries of worship

The traditional style of worship that many churches follow today is very different from the patterns of worship we see in the Bible. Adam and Eve walked and talked with God in a garden, surrounded by the sights, sounds, and smells of nature. Abraham worshiped outside; he built altars and on them offered sacrifices. The children of Israel worshiped in a woven and embroidered tabernacle with sights, sounds, smells, feasts, and various activities that involved the children. Jesus sat outside and stood in boats as he told the people short stories about everyday life that children understood, too, such as lost sheep, wedding feasts, and planting seeds. While the children listened to him, they probably picked wildflowers, counted sheep, and chased butterflies. They never sat still for an hour or so on an adult-sized seat that made their legs ache.

Shouting in the temple

Jesus' heart sank when He walked into the temple. He remembered being in the same place a few years earlier. The merchants and traders were still manipulating the people, still encouraging them to buy their way into His kingdom. For three years he had loved and taught these people. For three years he had tried to show them a better way to live, tried to show them God's love, and tried to help them focus on the most important things in life and not on the trivial and everyday details that made them look at the dust around their feet rather than the face of God. And they were still focused on the temporal rather than the eternal.

So He cleared the noisy traders out of the temple. Then He sat down, and the people came who needed Him the most. He healed them, forgave them, and set them free, and their hearts filled with happiness.

But the children really noticed what was happening. They were the ones who overflowed with such wonder and praise that they could not contain themselves. They ran, shouted, sang praises, and laughed.

And if the child in your sketch had been born two thousand years ago, he or she would have been the fastest runner and the loudest singer. But Jesus did not catch him or her in His arms and give him or her a good telling off. He did not grumble about the parents behind their backs. Jesus was totally delighted by these exuberant children because, in their innocence and wonder, they understood what was most important, believed in Him, and responded to His ministry with joy and praise.

The adults—including the priests—failed to understand. They grumbled and complained about the children's "lack of reverence," unaware that the children were full of wonder and worship, while the adults had lost sight of God's kingdom.

Once we start to think outside the box of our traditional worship services, we can find simple and creative ways to involve children in our worship services.

Jesus' theology of childhood

It is important to explore Jesus' theology of childhood, because He has some profound teachings about the role of children in His kingdom. Through Matthew's narrative, we read some of His most powerful statements about the position of the children in His kingdom:

"At about the same time, the disciples came to Jesus asking, 'Who gets the highest rank in God's kingdom?'

"For an answer, Jesus called over a child, whom he stood in the middle of the room, and said, 'I'm telling you, once and for all, that unless you return to square one and start over like children, you're not even going to get a look at the kingdom, let alone get in. Whoever becomes simple and elemental again, like this child, will rank high in God's kingdom. What's more, when you receive the childlike on my account, it's the same as receiving me.

" 'But if you give them a hard time, bullying or taking advantage of their simple trust, you'll soon wish you hadn't. You'd be better off dropped in the middle of the lake with a millstone around your neck. Doom to the world for giving these God-believing children a hard time! Hard times are inevitable, but you don't have to make it worse—and it's doomsday to you if you do' " (Matthew 18:1–7, *The Message*).

These verses help us understand the importance of children in God's kingdom:

- Children are vitally important in the Christian community. They are central to the life of God's kingdom, not peripheral to it.
- Jesus does not tell children to be more like adults. He tells adults to be more like children—in their simplicity of faith, wonder, and love.
- Jesus found that children felt totally welcome in His presence. When we welcome children into worship and help them feel special and at ease, we are also welcoming God into our presence.
- Adults need the humility to learn about God's kingdom from the children in their congregation. They need to think more simply about God and trust Him completely and uncomplicatedly.
- Jesus feels angry when children have experiences that push them away from God's presence. So, we need to ensure that nothing in our worship experience comes between the children and their relationship with Jesus.

The child's reality

Look at the picture you drew of a child in your church. Is he or she central to your church or on the periphery? How welcome does he or she feel? What is he or she learning about Jesus by the way the adults in your church interact with him or her? What would he or she tell you about his or her experience of church last week? What would your church have to do differently to put the children in the center? What difference might it make to this child's relationship with God, and his or her salvation, if you did?

A captive audience?

Every church service should be an amazing evangelistic opportunity. Every week our worship can help children grow their relationship with God, or it can make them feel that God does not care about children, that He is too complex for them to understand, or that He is too perfect and organized for their spontaneity, energy, and unpredictability. How does it change the way we worship as a community when we see every church service as an evangelistic event for our own children?

Keep the sketch you drew of the child in your church. Put the sketch on your desk. Whenever you are planning a service, or organizing any activity in your church, think about this child. Try placing him or her in the middle of your plans and look at what you do through his or her eyes. Will he or she feel comfortable, happy, and accepted? What will the children learn about God's love for them? Will he or she learn that children are the most important people in your church? Will this worship service or church activity bring him or her one step closer to accepting Jesus, or one step further away?

Involving children in worship

Once we start to think outside the box of our traditional worship services, we can find simple and creative ways to involve children in our worship services. The kind of involvement we need to encourage is not simply listening to a children's story or helping collect the offering. These are helpful, but not as useful for nurturing their spiritual development as active involvement that invites them to be reflective, pray, be filled with wonder and gratitude, listen to the Holy Spirit, and use their creative gifts.

How do you start worshiping with children?

- Pray—God wants to help you create the kind of worship experiences that will win children's hearts. Ask Him to inspire you with the best ways to reach the children in your church through your worship.
- Reflect—Think about your topic from the perspective of a child in your congregation. Which aspects of your topic are relevant to children? What difference will this worship service make to their relationship with God?
- Wonder—How can you adapt your message, or at least one aspect of the worship, so that children will find the service memorable and enjoyable?
- Plan ahead—Involving children takes extra time and thought. Planning ahead makes this easier to find the resources you need, and it can give you time to prepare children to participate in a way that nurtures their spiritual development.
- Be flexible—Involving children in worship is not always neat and tidy! Be prepared for the unexpected and know how to respond. The most important thing is to keep the child safe—physically, spiritually, and emotionally. So do not blame or shame a child who does not get it quite right.
- Invite feedback—Ask the children what they liked best about the worship service so you can do more of the things they enjoy.
- Celebrate their gifts and strengths and use them in your worship.
- Help the children to share God's love by serving others.
- Keep going—Gather a supportive team to help you, read books about all-age worship, search the Internet, and do not give up. You are planting seeds that may take time to grow.

Practical ideas

Churches that involve children often choose to sing one child-friendly song each week. Provide a selection of good-quality percussion instruments so the children can enjoy praising God.

Plan your scriptures several weeks ahead so that a small group of children can practice and read the Bible verses as a voice choir or narrative. Or invite one child to work with an adult mentor. They can study the scripture together to help the child understand what they are reading. Maybe they can find objects to illustrate the Bible passage, design a creative PowerPoint presentation, or dress as a Bible character to present the scripture.

Make space for children to bring their thanks, praises, prayer requests, and answers to prayer. Let them see that their prayer concerns are important to you. Pair them with a trusted adult so they can share a prayer request with each other every week. Ask a family to offer the main prayer and involve each of their children in performing different aspects of the prayer. Invite children to bring something to church that represents what they want to thank God for and to place it on a special display table at the side of the platform.

Children can decorate special envelopes to collect the offering. Or someone can hand children "thank You!" slips and ask them to write a thank-You note to God for something special that has happened during the week. These can be collected with the offering and several can be chosen to read during the offering prayer. The thank-You slips can be arranged on a bulletin board for people to read after the service.

Try telling the children's story as part of the sermon, to keep their attention. Show appropriate video clips that help children understand the message of the sermon.[1] Involve them in physical illustrations and mini experiments. Or give them something quiet and meaningful to do during the sermon, such as inviting them to make posters that tell the world about God's love. Display the posters immediately after the service.

After a sermon on the theme of the lost sheep, one congregation made a circle around the children. They blessed them and promised to look after them, like good shepherds. Children could also hand out blessing cards that they have decorated. The greeters at the door can place their hands on each child as they leave, and say a short blessing or prayer over them.

Try organizing a creative, spiritual activity for families to enjoy after church. After a service about heaven, we drew a road map of the heavenly city—basically three gold streets running north and south and three running east and west to give us 12 gates. Then we provided the families with folded cardstock houses and plenty of glue and sparkly craft materials. They worked together to create heavenly mansions and placed them on the shiny streets.

Create opportunities for children to work alongside experienced adults to make banners, posters, props, displays, decorated offering envelopes, program cover designs, etc. Remember that the process of wondering, thinking, and creating is much more important to the child's spiritual development than the quality of the end product.[2]

Yes, Jesus showed us how special children were to Him. Should we not do the same?

1 One can find examples of these video clips at www.ignitermedia.com.

2 These are just a handful of suggestions. Find more ideas, resources, and Web sites for involving children in your worship services at www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2009/05/simply-creative.

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The wonder *of* worship[1]

At last, I made it home. I changed into my comfortable clothes and finally had a moment to sit down and rest from a long, busy, Sabbath day. Once Sabbath ended, I plopped down on my family room couch and began flipping aimlessly through the television channels. But before too long, and to my dismay, I received a text message from one of my former students that began like this, "Pastor Bridges, I have a question regarding church music. I have been having a discussion with my roommate and his stance on drums is . . . " All I could do was turn off the TV and sigh. I knew this was going to be a long conversation. While I began to text my response, I could not help but wonder to myself, *will these heated debates on worship and music ever end?*

Over the years, I have been frequently asked to referee debates on worship. I imagine you have heard of similar debates in your own circles, too. I receive numerous texts, phone calls, emails, and Skype calls and engage in frequent hallway conversations with people who regularly bicker about the virtues or vices of praise music. I am often asked questions along the line of, "How do you think we will resolve this raging debate on music and worship?" Today, it seems like all around us worship wars are rampant.

Often, we leave these discussions with more questions than answers. Instead of prayerfully looking to Jesus Christ for a solution we choose sides. We separate in our sanctuaries and refuse to compromise our positions. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a worldwide denomination. Therefore we surmise that our praise music *must* reflect our cultural diversity. Because of our global reach, we may even believe no clear, singular solution to our church music mayhem exists. So we stay on separate sides of the praise music aisle (for example, classical versus gospel; hymns versus contemporary) and sadly blame each other for the deepening problems in our pews.

But what is the struggle really about? What is praise and worship? The Bible clearly says that the words *praise* and *worship* are not synonymous. The most frequently used Hebrew word for *worship,* Šhāhāh, implies bowing down in service before a superior. This word means "to come before God and enter into His presence" (Exod. 34:8; 1 Sam. 15:25; Jer. 7:2). According to the *Holman Bible Dictionary,* "Biblical praise has a specific approach. Praise is one of our many responses to God's revelation of Himself. To give praise to God is to proclaim his merit or worth."[2] Our heartfelt praise is offered in complete devotion to Jesus Christ (Luke 19:38–40).

Therefore the burning question we should ask ourselves is not "Should our praise music reflect our culture?" It should, instead, be, "Should our praise music culture reflect Christ?" Our music needs pastoral power. Our music must be able to focus on the gospel of Jesus Christ in order to convict and convert souls. As Christians, our dominant culture must be the culture of the Cross. We do not need more discussions on musicology; instead, we need a Christ-centered theology of worship. In his book *Music and Ministry: A Biblical Counterpoint,* Calvin M. Johansson writes, "The church needs musicians who know what church music should express and who also understand the musical methodology for expressing it."[3]

This means that for us to use music with pastoral power, the theology (words) and the melody (music) must be Christ-centered to enable the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, praise is a unique art form that requires spiritual knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. In today's music culture, most of us wonder how to maintain variety in our worship services. In our search for answers, we tend to ask for each other's personal opinions and freely share our preferences on the topic. The time has come for us as pastors to resist creating praise standards based on personal preference. We must let God's presence, found in the pages of His Holy Word, guide our music models.

Our God is an awesome Wonder. We can only marvel at the works of His hands. One of His greatest wonders is the gospel of Jesus Christ. God rescued His people—the Israelites—from the bonds of slavery and made them priests and kings. Through the line of King David, Jesus Christ was born of a virgin. Jesus came to die in order to free us from sin. Christ died on the cross like a criminal; yet from His humiliation came our liberation. He resurrected from the tomb so that we could live eternally. What a wonder! All we can do is praise Him! Praise is beautiful, and God our divine Creator loves variety. God's love

for variety can be seen throughout the beauty of nature in all of creation. God's passion for variety extends to praise as well. God infuses His sovereign character and affection for variety into the way He desires us to praise Him. How can we reflect Jesus Christ in our praise?

The *Holman Bible Dictionary* states that the modes of praise are many. However, it includes seven modes of praise to God.[4]

Seven modes of praise

1. *Offering a sacrifice.* In ancient worship, the priests would sacrifice a lamb as the daily offering. Today, we no longer need a lamb to slaughter for our sins since Jesus Christ became the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). So in our deepest praise we offer ourselves, our lives to God. David understood this principle and noted in Psalm 40:6, 8, 9 that his sacrifice of praise was not burnt or sin offerings but the law within his heart that he expressed with his lips. Everyday we must live a surrendered life. Before we can offer praise, we must repent of our sins and give our hearts in service to Jesus Christ. This is how we become a living sacrifice.

2. *Physical movement.* Bible history confirms that the Israelites were expressive in their praise to God. In Israelite worship the Israelites would engage in various movements. They would stand, bow, prostrate themselves, dance, clap, kneel, and lift their hands. In Nehemiah 8:5, 6, we see some examples of these praise movements (standing, bowing, prostration, lifting hands). David instructs us to lift our hands in the sanctuary and bless the Lord as the evening sacrifice (Pss. 134:2; 141:2). David danced before the Lord (2 Sam. 6:14) as an offering of praise. The psalm writer instructs us to clap our hands in praise (Ps. 47:1). Even though this praise act is mentioned in the Bible, some theologians view clapping as eschatological—acceptable only for King Jesus' second coming—and not church worship. I assert there is a present-day praise application because in each praise and worship experience we make Jesus King over our lives and ask Him to come into our hearts.

Nevertheless, the application of these praise movements depends on the congregation that you serve. Whether you use one or all of these movements in worship, your act of praise pleases God. Not everyone has to respond in the same exact way for our praise movements to be acceptable. Some congregations may just stand, kneel, and bow their heads; others may clap, dance, and lift their hands. We must be wise and understanding with our praise. God loves variety. Therefore the movements that elicit praise for your congregation may differ from movements that elicit praise for mine. That does not make my praise movements wrong and yours right or vice versa. This just underscores the variety ingrained in God's kingdom. Any physical movement within these prescribed parameters is all God requires from us for proper praise.

3. *Silence and meditation.* We live in a world filled with the hustle and bustle of activity. As Christians we should learn to cherish and create meditative moments of silence. We must build times of silence into our lives and worship services. The word *Selah* is most frequently used in the book of Psalms and three times in the book of Habakkuk. *Selah* is a musical notation that means "to pause and think calmly on what has just been expressed."[5] Silence and meditation are an essential part of praise (Ps. 77:12). It is in the quiet times that we can hear the still, small voice of God (1 Kings 19:11, 12). We can create silent times of meditation during service transitions, within praise and worship, or as part of a prayer. This silence allows us to reflect on God's goodness.

4. *Testimony.* How can others know how wondrous God has been in our lives if we neglect to share our life experiences through stories? Testimonies about God's goodness are tools we can use to strengthen our faith and encourage others to trust and praise God no matter how difficult the situation (Ps. 105:1, 2). Brief stories about our triumphs or trials can be used in our services or small group ministries to encourage, express our faith, build community, and promote compassion for others.

5. *Prayer.* Prayer provides us with constant communication with God. Prayer is a conduit to the halls of heaven and a pathway into God's presence. David knew that in God's presence there is life, pleasure, and fullness of joy (Ps. 16:11). Isaiah 56:7 reads, "For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (NKJV). Prayer ministries, not just prayer meeting, should be established at every church. Our members need to view prayer as an integral part of our church life. Purposeful, persistent prayers exhibit our faith in Jesus Christ and His power to transform.

6. *A holy life.* God continues to admonish us to be holy. Why? Because He is holy (Lev. 19:2). Praise allows us to reflect the character of our Creator. Through constant praise, we become changed, for we cannot encounter God and remain the same. As we worship and praise God in private, the result is that we will have the mind of Christ so that Jesus will be seen in our daily lives.

7. *Music.* Music, both vocal and instrumental, pleases God. Music is audible, melodious adoration that God created for His perpetual praise (Rev. 5:8, 9). God instructs His people to sing and rejoice around Him (Zech. 2:10). It is widely recognized that most praise words can be linked with vocal and/or instrumental music. Music has God-ordained, prophetic power. David made instruments for giving praise (1 Chron. 23:5). "David . . . separated for the service some of the sons of Asaph, of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, stringed instruments, and cymbals" (1 Chron. 25:1, NKJV). The Lord Himself chooses to show His delight in us through music and will rejoice over us with singing (Zeph. 3:17). In heaven, the redeemed will sing with the harps of God (Rev. 15:2, 3). Praise music transforms behavior. Ronald Allen and Gordon Borror, authors of *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel,* say, "An idea (either good or bad) set to a good melody, given rhythmic intensity and harmonic consistency, can really work its way into our minds. . . . [M]usic is a powerful way to get . . . ideas implanted and affect the behavior of mankind. . . .

"What we sing we remember, because we have combined the power of intellect with emotion."[6]

It does not matter how beautiful your melodies or wonderful your music. It makes no difference how talented you are or how much popularity you or your church may have. It does not matter whether *you* think your praise is genuine. Your music and worship could be of the highest and holiest genre. But if it is focused on personal preference and personal satisfaction, it is worthless. Your praise is pure mayhem. Instead of the tender touch of a love relationship with God, your praise becomes harsh and hollow like sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. Your praise is just chaos and displeasing noise to God if the blood of Jesus Christ does not cover it.

Conclusion

When we fight and complain about the music our offerings of praise are not covered by the blood of Jesus Christ; instead, they may be soiled by the sin of our self-serving pride. There is a way to give God glorious praise. No matter what we offer God it is sinful, because we are all sinners. But if we give Jesus Christ our hearts, He will cover our praise with His righteousness. Our praise will be a sweet melody to God. We must shift our praise paradigm, return to God's Holy Word, and be revived by the revelation of His truth. Johansson agrees when he writes, "If theology is to be the foundation of our value system, then clearly the musician's regard for musical art cannot be allowed to become idolatrous. By the same token, methods will not be worshiped; rather, they will be determined by theological presuppositions. Music directors will not bow at the shrine of success. There will be no conflict between artistry, spirituality and methodology."[7]

We no longer have to wonder about worship. The wonder of worship is found in our knowledge of Jesus Christ. Everything we need to know about praise and worship is outlined in the pages of God's Holy Word. We just need to delve deeper. We must move beyond the comfort of our traditions, culture, and rituals to find God's righteous pathway to true praise. If we follow God's Word, our praise practices will be filled with doctrine and diversity that can stand the tests of time.

1 This article is an adaptation of an excerpt from Cheryl Wilson-Bridges, *Deeper Praise: Music, Majesty, or Mayhem* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2016). Used by permission.
2 Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England, eds., *The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1998), 1319, 1320.
3 Calvin M. Johansson, *Music and Ministry: A Biblical Counterpoint,* 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA; Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1998), 56.
4 Brand, Draper, and England, *Bible Dictionary,* 1319, 1320.
5 "Lexicon: Strong's 5542 - celah," Blue Letter Bible, www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H5542&t=KJV.
6 Ronald B. Allen and Gordon Borror, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1982), 148.
7 Johansson, *Music and Ministry,* 7.

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Sabbath: *A school for worship*

Worship is recognizing who we are in response to who God is; it is giving God His due. However, it is not sustainable unless we continually keep God before us. Thus, for the children of Israel to learn how to worship, Yahweh gifted them with the weekly practice of Sabbath rest. The words of Mark Buchanan capture these truths well: "At the heart of liberty—of being let go—is worship. But at the heart of worship is rest—a stopping from all work, all worry, all scheming, all fleeing—to stand amazed and thankful before God and *his* work."[1]

A true understanding of worship makes the practice of Sabbath a foregone conclusion, an inescapable necessity, even if it is not necessarily always easy to do. What, then, are principles we can follow to help us have a deeper experience of Sabbath and what Sabbath was intended to be? This article will look at two crucial points as we explore the question of Sabbath worship: differentiation and preparation.

Challenges to Sabbath worship

The great challenge ancient Israel faced in embodying Sabbath worship was undoubtedly the Egyptian culture in which they had been immersed for generations. As slaves in Egypt, the Israelites had to work when, where, and how Pharaoh and his taskmasters dictated. There was no option to rest, because the gods of Egypt never rested. These were "confiscatory gods" who demanded endless production and authorized "endless systems of production that were insatiable."[2] By seeking to free Israel, Yahweh not only publicly engaged in a battle of the gods but also collided with an oppressive socioeconomic system. A byproduct of this system left God's people in conflict with their own desires, questioning their identity, and prone to idolatry.

These challenges to Sabbath worship are not illusions from antiquity, for the "gods of Egypt" persist and manifest themselves today as well. In a fascinating book called *Sabbath in the City,* Bryan Stone and Claire Wolfteich report their findings of a study conducted with 96 urban pastors from 24 partnerships across the United States. Although the aim of their study was to discover what constitutes and sustains pastoral excellence, they also learned of some serious impediments along the way. "Urban pastors," they write, "encounter particularly stressful demands and carry a sense of Christian vocation that elevates self-sacrifice and makes boundary setting problematic."[3] Consequently, like the Israelites of old, these pastors experience the pressures of their work toward productivity and activity. The authors conclude how this proves "particularly problematic when it conflicts with their actual vocation—when they find themselves too busy to pray, inattentive to important relationships, exhausted and neglectful of their own health, inauthentic and frazzled."[4]

It is not difficult to discern how even God's work performed on the Sabbath can be idolatrous, that is, if it depends solely on the pastor and leaves little space for God or the people of God. As Abraham Heschel advises, "One must abstain from toil and strain on the seventh day, even from strain in the service of God."[5]

A reluctance to rest

Based on this context, the countercultural logic of Sabbath worship embedded in the Exodus account becomes clear. Our imitation of God's rest on the seventh day is not for recovering from a long work week. Rather, this is part of what it means to be and to do as beings made in the image of God—an image that does not replace God but that is finite and prone to folly.[6] As any sabbatarian pastor knows, the Sabbath is not a holiday, vacation, or reward for a job well done, but a gift that can be received only by relinquishing our control of the created world and remembering that we are but dust.

While there are certainly psychological and physical benefits for resting one day of seven, we must resist utilitarian notions of the Sabbath as the *primary* motivator for this practice.[7] Clergy, whose Sabbaths are freighted with pastoral obligations, know too well that conventional notions of Sabbath as physical rest are illusory at best. Thus, the idea that one keeps the Sabbath to increase effectiveness and efficiency for the other six days of the week is complementary to Israel's desire to

return to Egypt. This is nonsensical when considering the bondage that such a life entailed. In other words, "Don't revive what God has removed. Don't gather and piece back together what God smashed and scattered. Don't place yourself in a yoke that God broke and tossed off with His own hands."[8]

If by keeping the Sabbath we, like ancient Israel, matriculate into a school for worship, then what lessons can be learned from those who have come before? What can we glean from those whose contemporary experiences of the Sabbath have a story to tell?[9]

Sabbath as differentiation

In the Exodus, the Sabbath is portrayed as different and distinct from the rest of the week. Although the children of Israel no longer had to fear the crack of a whip, they still had to work to survive their wilderness wanderings. However, when the Sabbath arrived, everything and everyone was supposed to stop. There were limitations placed on their sphere of control. " 'Six days you shall labor and do all your work,' " declared God, " 'but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you' " (Exod. 20:9, 10, NASB). The fourth commandment also reminded them that God blessed this special day and made it holy.

Thus, one of the worship principles we can derive from this story is differentiation: whatever happens on the Sabbath ought to be qualitatively and quantitatively different from what transpires on the other six days of the week.

Differentiation was a major theme in my research with rabbis, including how they practiced Shabbat. As a part of their training for the rabbinate, all but one was required to spend a year in Israel. While there, they had the opportunity to experience how Israeli society structures its public sphere around the Sabbath. In the words of one Reform rabbi I interviewed: "Buses stop, things close, and work gets out in time for you to prepare for the Sabbath in a way that does not happen in this country [i.e., the United States]." This transition from a weekday way of life to a Sabbath way of life is not simply an ideological shift; it is an embodied transformation as one turns toward the creator God.

Most of us do not live in a society oriented toward the seventh day, where there exists a clear distinction between the workweek and the Sabbath. Indeed, we must choose to swim against the current of contemporary culture. The Sabbath is thus the call to resist the taskmasters of our society; and, for pastors, those taskmasters are of a specific ilk. Not only Pharaoh's demand for insatiable productivity and efficiency haunts us as an "angel of light," tempting us to do more good or to serve in such a way as to be noticed, but we need to find other ways of adopting the differentiation principle of Sabbath worship wherever we may find ourselves.

One way is to intentionally treat the boundaries of Sabbath with care. Friday and Saturday nights—the beginning and the end of the Sabbath—are important thresholds that are laden with meaning, for they usher in and dismiss a different way of life. Interestingly, both rabbis and ministers related a marked difference in their experience of the Sabbath at these times as opposed to Saturday morning and afternoon, which were replete with numerous responsibilities. For the pastors, Friday night, in particular, was a time for the

family to be together in the home, enjoy a wholesome meal, engage in stimulating conversation, and listen to sacred music. All of these imbibed an atmosphere of peace, which then set the tone for the remaining hours of the Sabbath.

After "running hard" all week, one pastor related, "On Friday night, we stop. We'd be with the kids, the family, and we'd be reading stories to them. We would have all the electronic stuff off. Friday night just had a different feel. We were coming into the presence of the Lord, [and] all that stress of the world just seems to melt away."

Another tangible way to implement Sabbath differentiation is to be mindful of our food, possessions, wealth, conversations, thoughts, use of and relationship with technology, and the places we inhabit as areas in need of the transformative touch of the Sabbath. With respect to technology, a creative project known as the Sabbath Manifesto is raising awareness among young Jews and people of all faiths regarding the differentiation principle contained within the ancient practice of Sabbath. If you are a person who has multiple cell phones, takes an iPad on vacation, and finds it difficult to get through a conversation without posting an update to Facebook or Twitter, then they invite you to take the "unplug challenge." In a hyper-connected world, they say unplug your devices and "start living a different life: connect with people in your street, neighborhood, and city, have an uninterrupted meal, or read a book to your child."[10]

The necessity of preparation

Preparation is another key component to foster meaningful Sabbath worship. The classic text in the Exodus narrative regarding Sabbath preparation is taken from God's provision of the manna (Exod. 16). The Israelites were to gather what they needed for each day in the morning, no more and no less. On the sixth day, however, they were to gather twice as much. Why? The reason is that God wanted them to rest on the Sabbath as an act of trust in God's provision, to recognize that human beings do not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord (Deut. 8:3). An ancillary passage regarding Sabbath preparation occurs later in the book of Exodus. Here, we find God instructing Moses to tell the children of Israel to *make the Sabbath* throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant (Exod. 31:16).

Both of these passages call for forethought, planning, preparation, and discipline. They combine to illustrate how our Sabbath experience in many ways is a do-it-yourself project.

Total commitment to your marriage

Revival and REFORMATION
YOU, YOUR FAMILY, YOUR CHURCH, YOUR COMMUNITY

We have always understood, and rightly applied, Ellen White's words to the church: "A revival and a reformation must take place, under the ministration of the Holy Spirit."[1] Some time ago, however, we saw a secondary application to this description of the reformation that must take place. She wrote, "Reformation signifies a reorganization, a change in ideas and theories, habits and practices."[2] While this applies to the church, and to church members individually, we also see a specific application to marriages, particularly in marriages that are going through some challenges, maybe even on the brink of a breakup.

In their book *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially,* psychologists Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher note that 86 percent of the married people who rated their marriages as unhappy, but who chose to stay together, rated the marriage as having improved within five years.[3] However, it is not enough to simply stay in a marriage relationship, especially if it is not satisfying or even healthy. These couples were intentional about making positive changes in their relationship. We could say that they experienced a *reformation* in their relationship; that is, they went through a "reorganization, a change in ideas and theories, habits and practices."

One of the most wonderful blessings of a lifetime marital relationship is that we never stop growing. Ellen White referred to that when she wrote, "To gain a proper understanding of the marriage relation is the work of a lifetime. Those who marry enter a school from which they are never in this life to be graduated."[4] Total commitment to your marriage means a lifetime of growing in love, experience, and closeness.

1 Ellen G. White, "The Need of a Revival and Reformation," *Review and Herald,* February 25, 1902.
2 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages,* bk. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 128.
3 L. J. Waite and M. Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially* (New York: Broadway Books, 2000), 148.
4 Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1980), 105.

—Claudio, DMin, and Pamela, PhD, Consuegra serve as director and associate director, respectively, for Family Ministries, North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

Meaningful Sabbath worship does not simply happen. The Sabbath is not only a revolutionary idea; it is a transformative theological experience. Thus, to make the Sabbath, Aryeh Kaplan writes, "You must prepare yourself and get into the mood . . . [for] true understanding only comes from doing and feeling."[11]

Suggestions for how we can prepare for the Sabbath fall within two categories: outer and inner preparation. Outer preparation often gets the most attention and involves such things as buying food, cooking a meal, cleaning the house, bathing the children, and turning off electronic devices. Inner preparation, on the other hand, is often overlooked. Here spiritual practices can be especially helpful to become more attuned and sensitive to each moment of the coming Sabbath. The goal is to bring the inner into the orbit of the outer, so our preparatory actions are then infused with heartfelt and faith-filled intention. Moreover, it is entirely possible to cease working on the Sabbath externally while still occupying one's thoughts with work-related matters. For the pastor, the converse becomes especially important—"working" externally but maintaining an inner sense of Sabbath *shalom,* or peace.

Friday has the potential to be a truly unique day of inner and outer preparation for Seventh-day Adventist pastors. Contemporary Judaism offers keen insight into how this can be so. For example, Joseph Soloveitchik once quipped that in America, there are many *shomer Shabbat* Jews (Sabbath observant), but not very many *shomer Erev Shabbat* Jews (ones who properly prepare on the eve of Shabbat).[12] What he meant by this was that in places like Israel, observant Jews feel a greater intensity of the Sabbath because Friday equates essentially as a day off. As one Orthodox rabbi stated, "Kids don't go to school on Friday or [at the most] they have half a day. Many businesses are kind of in 'Sunday mode' on Friday. Israel has a very different experience of the workweek, certainly in religious centers like Jerusalem." Soloveitchik's point: if you want to take your Sabbath experience to another level, slow down and begin your Sabbath rhythm on Friday. While this goes beyond the realm of possibility for most church members, by carefully managing one's time throughout the week, Friday can become a type of proto-Sabbath for Adventist pastors.

Beyond Friday as the primary day of preparation, perhaps one of the best ways to learn how to fully rest for 24 hours is to experience such rest for shorter periods throughout the week. After all, how can we expect to fully inhabit Sabbath and focus on God if we have not done so throughout the week? We could do this by stopping more frequently at fixed times, dropping whatever we are doing to acknowledge God, pray, ruminate upon a passage of Scripture, go for a walk, or reflect on our day. One Hasidic rabbi noted that resting on the seventh day of the week and working the other six shares a symbiotic relationship—they are partners in practicing Sabbath and they inform each other. "Six days of the week if you think about Shabbos, you will do Shabbos; then if you do Shabbos, during the six days of the week you'll think about being godly."

Conclusion

"Tell me what your Sabbath is like," writes Pinchas Peli, "and I will tell you who you are and what kind of person you are."[13] As pastors, what does our Sabbath practice say about us? Is it truly a revolt against the "gods of Egypt," or are we still beholden to the taskmasters of our time?

In this article, we have seen how differentiation and preparation constitute indispensable biblical principles for making Sabbath worship meaningful. Of course, others could be mentioned, such as the role of ritual and the centrality of community. There are also numerous variables to consider as the Sabbath envelops not only time but also person and place. In the end, the important thing is to act, do, and make Sabbath in such a way that transformation can occur. My hope is that by continuing to renew our Sabbath experience we may ultimately graduate from this school of worship and be eternally united with our Sabbath-keeping God.

1 Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 94; emphasis his.

2 Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2014), 2. The rhetoric of Pharaoh is relentless and serves as a prime example of what the Israelites were up against. See Exodus 5.

3 Bryan P. Stone and Claire E. Wolfteich, *Sabbath in the City: Sustaining Pastoral Excellence* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2008), 44.

4 Ibid., 44, 45.

5 Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005), 30.

6 If human beings are ontologically unique, as indicated by the statement "God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27, NET), then according to Wilma Ann Bailey, "humans image God when they do the work of God in the world." That is, "image and likeness reside not in our being . . . but in our responding to relationship that we have with God." Thus, being created in God's image is a call to action; it is commensurate with worship language. Wilma Ann Bailey, "The Way the World Is Meant to Be: An Interpretation of Genesis 1.26–29," *Vision* 9 (2008), 47. I would like to thank Sigve K. Tonstad for bringing this insight to my attention.

7 See, for example, Simon Dein and Kate Loewenthal, "The Mental Health Benefits and Costs of Sabbath Observance Among Orthodox Jews," *Journal of Religion and Health* 52, no. 4 (December 2013), 1382–1390; Margaret Diddams, Lisa Klein Surdyk, and Denise Daniels, "Rediscovering Models of Sabbath Keeping: Implications for Psychological Well-Being," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32, no. 1 (2004), 3–11.

8 Buchanan, *The Rest of God,* 89.

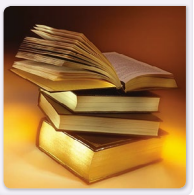
9 Erik C. Carter, "The Practice and Experience of the Sabbath Among Seventh-day Adventist Pastors," *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 1 (February 2013), 13–26; "The Shabbat Practices of American Pulpit Rabbis in Practical Theological Perspective" (PhD diss., Claremont School of Theology, 2015).

10 "Join Our Unplugging Movement," Sabbath Manifesto, accessed November 14, 2015, http://www.sabbathmanifesto.org/unplug_challenge.

11 Aryeh Kaplan, *Sabbath: Day of Eternity* (New York: National Conference of Synagogue Youth, 2002), 47.

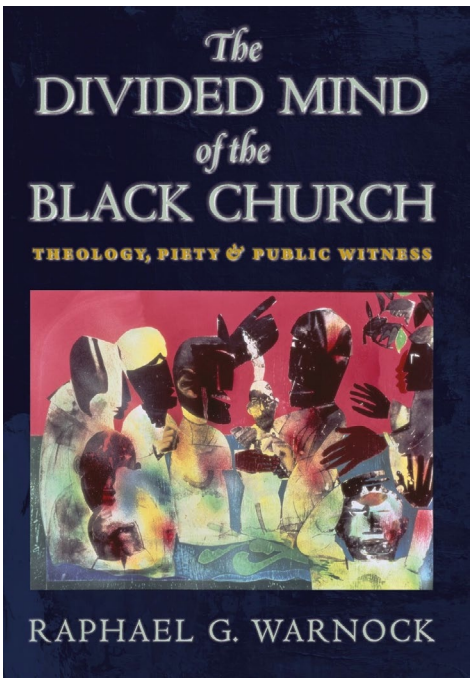
12 Yehoshua Looks, "Turning Friday Into Erev Shabbat," *Haaretz,* March 28, 2012, http://www.haaretz.com/jewish/rabbis-round-table/turning-friday-into-erev-shabbat-1.421089.

13 Pinchas H. Peli, *The Jewish Sabbath: A Renewed Encounter* (New York: Schocken, 1988), ix.



The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness

by Raphael G. Warnock, New York: New York University Press, 2014.



Raphael G. Warnock, senior pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, United States of America, describes a division in the Black church in the United States that centers on its true mission and purpose. On one side are Black pastors, and on the other are Black theologians. Pastors in the Black church tend to focus on piety and personal salvation (much like evangelicals), whereas Black theologians see the focal point of mission as a liberationist movement to save the culture from racism. Warnock argues for a coming together of the two sides, in order to "more fully integrate [the Black church's] pietistic and protest dimensions into a more holistic understanding of what it means to truly be a prophetic church and a liberationist community" (188, 189).

Warnock outlines four moments in the history of the struggle of African Americans against bondage and racism in the United States. He also sees a fifth moment that should bring together Black pastors and Black theologians in a united mission and purpose for the Black church. The four moments are (1) the formation of a liberationist faith (the invisible church that developed under slavery), (2) the founding of a liberationist church (the Black church that developed after emancipation, independent of the White church), (3) the fomenting of a church-led liberationist movement (the civil rights movement), and (4) the forging of a self-conscious liberationist theology (Black theology) (20).

The fifth moment, "*the flowering of a self-critical liberationist community*" (20), is needed to bring Black pastors and Black theologians together to create a community that can truly bring people to personal salvation and move society to be truly egalitarian for all races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations.

In chapter 5, Warnock describes the need for womanist theologians (who focus on the experiences of Black women) to interact with Black theologians to address the patriarchal nature of the Black church. He states that the Black church has allowed a subservient role for women even as it has fought for racial equality.

I recommend this book, but there are a few things that are unclear to me. The author could be interpreted as stereotyping most White theologians as missing the mark in their understanding of the church's mission. He could also be seen as advocating a permanent separation between the Black and White churches, although I am not sure that is true.

As a person who is not Black, reading this book provided a learning experience for me. It has helped me to better understand the dynamics of the Black church. I could also see this book serving as a way to spark discussion involving all ethnic groups as to how we can all, as fellow Christians, blend the goals of saving lost people and moving the culture toward equality for everyone.

Although Warnock speaks primarily to Blacks in the United States, he has a powerful lesson for all of us. Theology does not happen in a vacuum. History, social movements and realities, and cultural dynamics all influence the way we do theology and the conclusions that we draw from it. Colonialism and liberation movements in Africa and Latin America spawned liberation theology. The oppression of women led to feminist and womanist theologies.

For the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church, and for the global Christian community, it is vital to understand that our own theology and that of others are not the product solely of thinking and study in the ivory tower; all theologies are, in a sense, a response to our experiences. We want to know the will of God as it relates to our lives. This remains vital for understanding ourselves and each other in a global community.

—Reviewed by David Penno, PhD, an associate professor of Christian ministry at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.

Mexican state governor pledges support for Adventist efforts in religious liberty and social programs

Photo courtesy of Libertad de Creencias, Asociación Azteca

Toluca de Lerdo, Mexico—Human rights and religious freedom were the focus of a meeting between **Ganoune Diop**, the Seventh-day Adventist world church's religious liberty leader, and **Eruviel Ávila Villegas**, governor of Mexico's most populous state. The two, along with representatives of the Adventist Church in central Mexico, discussed ways in which Adventists work to improve the quality of life within communities.

"I want you to know that you have an ally in the government of Mexico," said Governor Eruviel Ávila Villegas. He pledged continued support for the church's work not only in promoting human rights but also efforts in health care, education, and other social welfare programs. The governor thanked Diop for his worldwide work in safeguarding religious freedom. In turn, Diop expressed gratitude to the governor for his continuing support for religious freedom as a fundamental and universal human right.

For Adventist Church members in many parts of Mexico, religious liberty is more than just a theoretical concern. **Ruben Ponce**, former religious liberty director for the Adventist Church's Azteca Mexican Conference and current religious liberty director for the Mayan Conference, cites a long list of challenges that Sabbath keepers regularly encounter, including Saturday public university admission tests; employment discrimination; and, in the State of Mexico, a mandatory statewide Saturday evaluation for teachers. Diop says that the constitution of Mexico establishes the right to religious liberty and conscience for all Mexican citizens and confirms the equality of every person. He encouraged Adventists to continue to express their gratitude for these liberties, while working to make these freedoms even more clearly reflected within Mexican society. *[adapted from Bettina Krause]*

Syrian refugees receive Bibles at Adventist church in Norway

Vadsø, Norway—A group of Syrian refugees beamed as they received copies of the Bible in Arabic during morning worship at the Seventh-day Adventist church in Vadsø, Norway, on Saturday, December 19, 2015. For them it was Christmas a few days early.

They were among a large number of refugees who had arrived via a Norwegian-Russian border crossing located in northern Norway. One of those refugees, **Elias Samer Nema**, arrived at a refugee center in Vadsø. There he asked a woman whether she knew of a nearby church. "I sure do," replied the woman.

Photo: Hilde Huru/ADAMS

The next Sabbath, Nema showed up at the local Adventist church in Vadsø, a remote town of about 5,000 people. He has attended regularly ever since. He expressed joy at the fellowship he found in the Adventist church.

One of the few items that he was able to bring from Syria was his Bible. He wanted to tell other refugees about Jesus and help them to get Bibles. **Hilde Huru**, a local leader in the Vadsø church, made contact with the Norwegian Bible Society. The society donated a number of Bibles in Arabic and Farsi for distribution. "We see a deep gratitude in the eyes of those who received Bibles," Huru said. "This is really important to them."

She said the refugees have a very limited knowledge of English, and only one of the Vadsø members speaks Arabic, so they find it difficult to communicate. But by utilizing Google Translate on their smart phones they are able to understand each other to some degree. "One of the refugees who began attending the church recently, a man from Iran, had never owned a Bible out of fear that his Christian beliefs would be revealed and put his life in jeopardy. He was so touched when he finally received a Bible he could call his own," Huru said.

Sabbath School has been transformed into a multilingual class at the Vadsø church. Huru makes copies of the Sabbath School lesson in Arabic and Farsi for the refugees. "Even if locals and refugees have a hard time understanding one another, they understand the Word of God as they read it in Arabic, Farsi, and Norwegian," she said.

"I have never met anyone in the Middle East with such a love for God as you have," one of the refugees told the Vadsø congregation. [*ted*NEWS]

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Choosing music *for* worship

I remember, in college, my first day of training at a classical radio station. I had just met the person who was to train me, and she showed me the index of music, which was sorted by time. She eyed the countdown clock on the CD player and told me to pick a song near the time of 3:02 that would bring the music to the top of the hour. As I scrolled through the songs that fit that length, my mind was flashing. What should I pick to follow up this orchestral work by Ravel? Should I contrast this with a solo piano piece by Beethoven? Maybe a more sophisticated choice by early female composer Hildegard von Bingen would make me seem inclusive to my broadcast journalism trainer.

My new colleague asked me hurriedly what was taking so long, and I responded that there were so many choices with all of these great songs. She looked at me thoughtfully and said, "Wow! You *know* some of those? I just grab one that fits the time I need."

Hopefully, when people are choosing music for worship, they are not that dismissive. However, it seems that a comprehensive process for choosing music is often missing. Besides looking in the back of a hymnal, there are songs being written daily by both hymnists and contemporary Christian music composers that can be found on the Internet. How do you decide where to start?

Recently, I found a great little book called *Selecting Worship Songs: A Guide for Leaders* by worship professors Constance Cherry, Mary Brown, and Christopher Bounds. They use an evaluative instrument, a rubric, to help worship leaders choose songs. They lay them out in three categories: theology, language, and music. Most sacred music functions in the following ways: proclamation, petition, praise, exhortation, or call to action.

The authors further assign a point system, giving the most points if the song holds to these descriptors of a given category:

Proclamation:

- is faithful to Christian teachings that are central, nonnegotiable to Christianity or to a doctrinal distinctive of a given tradition
- clearly and completely states the teaching
- elaborates upon the teaching
- expects the worshiper to respond in specific ways (to praise, change, serve)

Petition:

- includes sound theological instruction concerning prayer
- is consistent with biblical patterns of prayer

Praise:

- clearly states true aspects of God's nature and character
- develops a deep understanding of God's nature and character
- connects praise to the creative and saving actions of God
- relates praise to the appropriate economies of the persons of the Godhead

Exhortation:

- focuses clearly and consistently upon encouragement of edification for the purposes of godliness and successful Christian living
- clearly reflects the larger purposes of the kingdom rather than personal piety alone

Call to action:

- declares explicitly what the singer will do
- clearly associates this intention with the need for divine grace or assistance
- clearly associates the intention with the larger purposes of the kingdom

Further considerations are given to the lyrics: How clear is the sentence structure, grammar, and usage? What about the choice of tone? Is the writing coherent? Do the lyrics use interesting rhyme? Do they show artful use of figurative language, imagery, and specificity?

Finally, there is the category of music. This evaluation is not for *type,* but for *quality*:

- Does the music have a strong melody that uses leaps and steps judiciously? Does it have a balanced vocal range? Can it stand on its own, and is it memorable?
- Does the rhythm have direction? Is it interesting? Does it portray the action of the text and assist in good declamation, and is it reasonable for the singers to master?
- Is harmony allowed to support the progression of the melody without covering it? Does it use helpful amounts of consonance and dissonance and lend itself to singing in parts?
- Do the musical components contribute significantly in supporting, highlighting, and interpreting the text?
- Is the music accessible for corporate singing in relation to vocal range, structural repetition, and ease of unison and/or singing in parts?[1]

These ideas are not meant to be definitive for or against any particular song, but they provide a starting place to consider the wide variety of songs now available online. We should use a breadth of different types of songs in our congregational singing. Harold M. Best summed it up well when he said, "When all Scripture references to music making are combined, we learn that we are to make music in every conceivable condition: joy, triumph, imprisonment, solitude, grief, peace, war, sickness, merriment, abundance, and deprivation. This principle implies that the music of the church should be a complete music, not one-sided or single faceted. And in the spirit of Paul's instructions about praying (Phil. 4:6), we should make music in the same way, with thanksgiving and excellence, whatever our condition."[2]

1 Constance Cherry, Mary Brown, and Christopher Bounds, *Selecting Worship Songs: A Guide for Leaders* (Marion: Triangle Publishing, 2011).

2 Harold M. Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).

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