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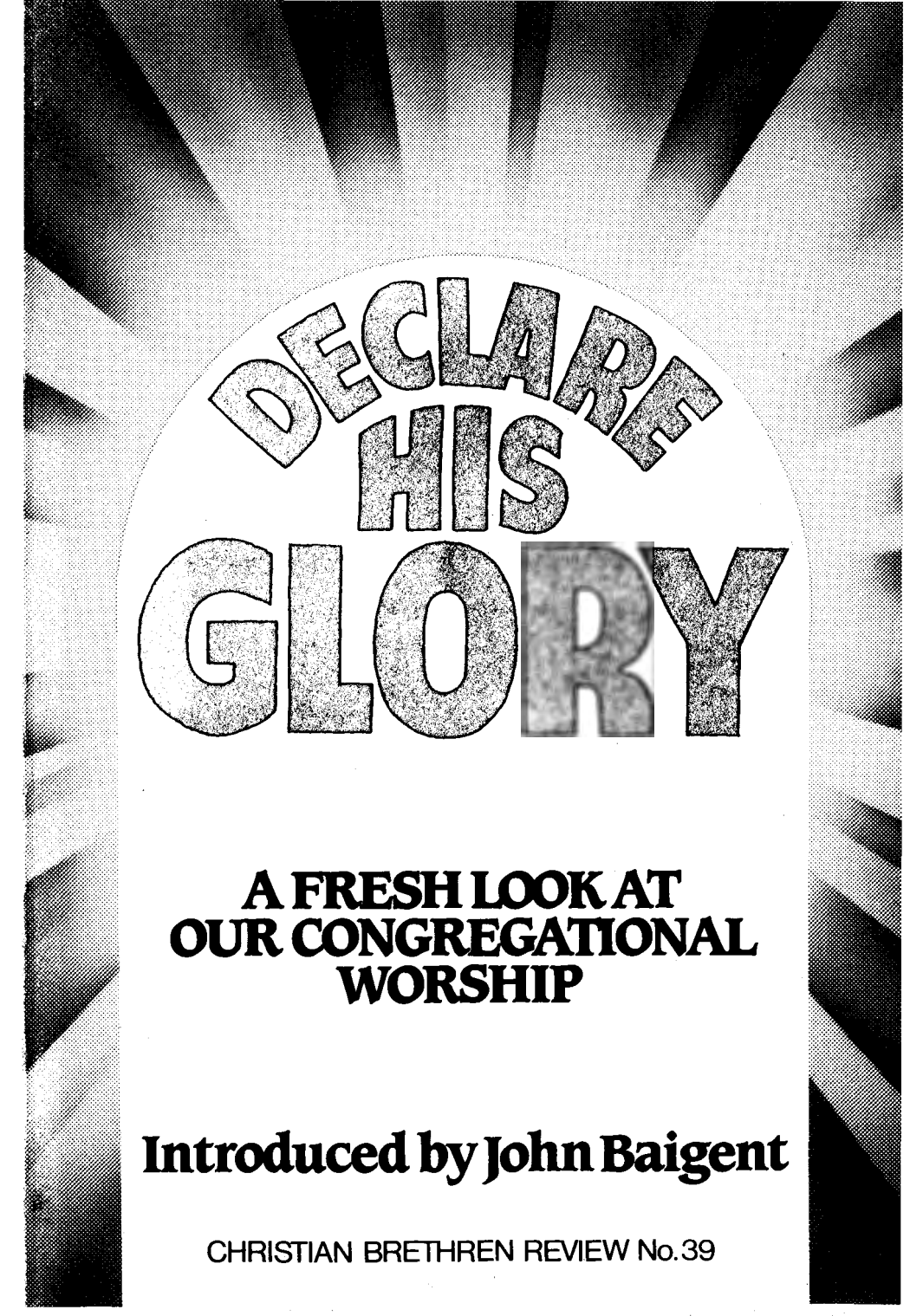
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**DECLARE  
HIS  
GLORY**

**A FRESH LOOK AT  
OUR CONGREGATIONAL  
WORSHIP**

**Introduced by John Baigent**

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN REVIEW No.39

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# DECLARE HIS GLORY

A fresh look at our  
congregational worship

Introduced by John Baigent



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CHRISTIAN BRETHREN REVIEW · No. 39

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# INTRODUCTION

**John Baigent**

*After a career in schoolteaching, teaching-training and lecturing in Religious Studies, John Baigent is now engaged full-time in Christian teaching and training in the context of a local church and in a wider ministry.*

Worship is high on the agenda of the modern church. And rightly so, because the church is called to be a worshipping people (1 Pet 2:5). In recent years, however, there has been a lot of talk and a plethora of books (see the bibliography at the back of this volume) suggesting that certain sections of the church have only just discovered what worship 'really' is. Worship has been, in the words of A W Tozer, 'the missing jewel of the evangelical church'. The implication is often that the rest of the church still does not know what worship is. We are even told (by some) that unless we adopt certain styles of worship—use modern songs, raise our hands, clap, dance, sing in tongues, etc—we are not fully and freely worshipping.

Brethren find this kind of talk especially provocative. We often pride ourselves on the depth and quality of our worship at the Lord's Table. We rediscovered 'open', Spirit-led worship long before these recent upstarts! But in point of fact, what has happened to us is that a way of worshipping which was new, fresh, liberating and exciting 150 years ago has often become a stale, predictable, rigid, joyless routine. A radical reassessment of our congregational worship is long overdue.

The essays in this volume are not simply a Brethren response to the current spate of paperbacks on worship (and certainly not an uncritical swallowing of everything in them!), nor are they a desperate, last-minute reaction to the demands of our young people for lively, contemporary-style worship. They represent the independent fruit of a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the state of worship in our churches and a careful and considered re-examination of the teaching of the scriptures.

The first essay began life as a paper given at a CBRF/Partnership seminar entitled 'Declare His Glory: a fresh look at our congregational worship', held at London Bible College on 11 May 1985. In view of the

variety of ways in which *we* use the word 'worship', it tries to discover the *essence* of the biblical concept of worship and determine whether scripture lays down any particular *forms* that our worship should take. (On that same occasion Graham Kendrick spoke on 'Worship today among evangelicals and charismatics', outlining the reasons for current changes and the dangers in contemporary styles of worship. He also led us in a time of modern, informal worship.)

The other essays were all written specially for this review. In the light of the evident flexibility that scripture allows us, Neil Summerton suggests ways in which traditional Brethren practice could be revitalized, made culturally more appropriate and (in fact) become more biblical. As the experience of Glenwood Church, Cardiff (described by Robert Parsons in *Ten Worshipping Churches*) shows, it is relatively easy for a church to adopt a more contemporary style of worship in a 'family service', but it is much harder to change the traditional Brethren-type 'breaking of bread meeting'. Neil's essay begins to point us in the way we need to go.

Gerald West starts from the centrality of the 'breaking of bread' in Brethren church life and discusses the exact relationship between worship and the Lord's Supper. Through a fresh exploration of what the New Testament says about it, he encourages us to widen our understanding of the significance of the act of remembrance.

John Allan deals with three particular methods or means of expressing worship: music, movement and silence. He is quite clear that scripture gives us freedom to use any method or means which *helps* us to achieve the purposes of worship. The implications of this balanced treatment of these topics need to be thoughtfully weighed and then carefully applied in our churches.

'Women in worship' is a *cri de coeur* from Barbara Baigent. She does not *argue* for the full participation of women in congregational worship (that was done to some extent in *Women in the Church, Christian Brethren Review Journal No 33*). Rather, on the basis of the involvement of women in worship in biblical times and since, she *pleads* for women today to be given the same freedom as the men have to take part audibly in congregational worship.

Finally Peter Cousins widens out the discussion and relates worship to the whole of life. From both the Old and New Testaments he shows that God is not satisfied unless his people 'live' their worship.

There is inevitably a certain amount of overlap in the essays in a symposium like this. That is all to the good. It demonstrates the large area of consensus that exists between the writers, particularly on the theological principles relating to worship. But it is equally clear that they would not all necessarily agree on how to put those principles into practice



in any given situation. The fact that they are not presenting a party line makes the substantial agreement all the more impressive.

Above all, this is a practical work. In the past, Brethren writing on worship has been strong on theology and weak on practice. Thus, for example, despite the fact that *The Church*, edited by J B Watson (Pickering & Inglis 1949), was labelled on the spine 'a symposium of principles and practice', it contained virtually no discussion on *how* God might appropriately be worshipped in the 20th century. Clearly the traditional Brethren ways of worship were regarded as non-negotiable.

The writers of these essays believe that each generation needs to discover for itself the best ways of putting into practice and expressing the unchanging principles that are taught in scripture. They will be happy if readers are stimulated to examine their present practice in the light of those scriptural principles and to consider (under the guidance of the Holy Spirit) what changes need to be made in their congregational practices so that God's people are better encouraged to bring him the worship which he so desires and deserves.

# WORSHIP: ESSENCE AND FORM IN SCRIPTURE AND TODAY

John Baigent

The purpose of this paper is to survey the *main lines* of biblical teaching on worship and to consider how they apply to us today. It begins with the widest possible definition of 'worship', noting the various different ways in which the word may be used, but eventually homes in on the *corporate* worship of Christians.

No attempt has been made to provide an exhaustive list of biblical references or to include more than a few quotations from modern authors. Inevitably, there are aspects of the topic that could not be covered in this relatively brief treatment.

## THE ESSENCE OF WORSHIP

### The meaning of worship

In English, the word 'worship' is both a noun and a verb. It derives from the Old English word *weorthscipe* which meant the recognition or ascription of *worth*. The two main ways in which the word is used in English are: (a) to express and/or have feelings of adoration, devotion, admiration, respect, etc, for things or people, but especially for divine beings; (b) the formal expression of religious adoration in individual and corporate acts, rites, words, services, etc.

Although the idea of 'worth' is not actually involved in any of the biblical *words* for worship, it is a thoroughly biblical *concept* to see worship as an acknowledgement of the worthiness of God (Rev 4:11; 5:12; cf Psa 29:2). Sometimes this idea is conveyed by the use of the word 'honour' (1 Sam 2:30; Isa 29:13; 43:20,23; Mark 7:6; John 5:23). It is also implied in 2 Samuel 22:4; 1 Chronicles 16:25; Psalm 18:3; 48:1; 96:4; 145:3, where the NIV translates 'worthy of praise' but the Hebrew simply reads 'to be praised'. (Similarly, in Deut 32:21; Psa 31:6; Jer 2:5 and many other

places NIV translates ‘worthless idols’ where the Hebrew reads ‘vanities [lit ‘breaths’].)

In the Bible, the verbs are basic. There are three main sets of Hebrew and Greek verbs which, in appropriate contexts, may be translated ‘worship’.

### *To bow down*

The Hebrew verb *hishtahawāh* means to bow down, prostrate oneself, do homage, normally to God (Pss 95:6; 96:9; etc) or gods (Exod 20:5), but sometimes to a human being such as the king (1 Sam 24:8). These references show that other words for ‘kneel’, ‘bow down’ or ‘prostrate oneself’ are often used along with *hishtahawāh*.

The corresponding Greek verb is *proskyneō* which also means to do obeisance to, prostrate oneself, reverence, and may (apparently) be directed to a human person (Matt 18:26; Rev 3:9)<sup>1</sup> or to idols and demonic beings (Rev 9:20; 13:4), but is normally reserved for the worship of Jesus (Matt 2:11; etc) or God (John 4:20f). Again, it is often associated with other verbs such as ‘fall down’. (Some expositors make a great deal of the fact that *proskyneō* literally means ‘kiss’ or ‘kiss towards’. It is true that its ancient pagan use would have been for stopping to kiss the earth or the image, but it is doubtful whether readers of the New Testament would have thought of ‘kissing’ when they read *proskyneō*.)

### *To serve*

The Hebrew word ‘*ābad*’ is used not only of a slave ‘working’ for his master (Deut 15:12) and an official ‘serving’ the king (2 Sam 16:19), but of a worshipper ‘serving’ his god (2 Kings 10:18). Israel is called on to ‘serve’ the Lord and not other gods (Exod 23:24–25; Psa 100:2). In particular, the priests and Levites are ‘servants’ of the Lord as they ‘stand’ in his presence and lead the worship of God’s people (Psa 134:1–2). However, the Old Testament normally uses other words, like *shārath* (‘to minister’) and *kāhan* (‘act as priest’), when it describes the work of priests and Levites as they perform a variety of cultic actions (including offering sacrifices) in the sanctuary (Exod 28:1; 30:20; 1 Chron 16:4; 2 Chron 29:11).

There are two words in the Greek New Testament which correspond to the Hebrew words for ‘serve’, ‘minister’, etc. In non-biblical Greek *latreuō* meant ‘to work for reward/wages’; in biblical Greek it normally means ‘service to God’, especially in priestly or cultic actions (Heb 8:5; 9:9,14; 10:2; 13:10), but also the worship or service of God or gods generally (Acts 24:14; 26:7; Rom 1:25; Heb 12:28; Rev 7:15; 22:3) and even worship in the heart (Rom 1:9). In classical Greek *leitourgeō* meant ‘to do public

work', but could also be used for performing priestly or cultic actions. This is its normal meaning in biblical Greek (Heb 10:11; cf 8:6; 9:21), but in the New Testament it is also used in a non-cultic way of various forms of worship or service (Acts 13:2; Rom 15:27; cf 2 Cor 9:12; Phil 2:17, 25, 30).

### *To reverence*

The Hebrew Bible contains a large number of verbs which convey the idea of 'fear' in its various forms, ranging from terror to awe and reverence which induce love or worship. The most common word is *yārē*. To 'fear' God is to reverence him in such a way that he is not only served in public and private worship (Psa 22:23, 25; Mal 3:16) but also in obedience in everyday life (Deut 5:29; 13:4).

The New Testament uses the Greek verb for 'fear', *phobeō*, in much the same way as the Old Testament words are used (Luke 1:50; 18:2; Acts 9:31; 10:35). More specifically, it uses the verbs *sebomai* (lit to fall back before, shrink from) and *sebazomai* to describe the respect and reverence that is shown to God or the gods (Mark 7:7; Acts 19:27; Rom 1:25). The participle *sebomenoi* is used for Gentiles who took part in Jewish religious ritual, especially in the synagogue (Acts 13:43, 50; 16:14,17; 18:7). The noun *sebasma* is used of objects of worship (Acts 17:23; 2 Thess 2:4). These words are not normally used of Christian worship (but cf Acts 18:13). The word *eusebeia* referred to 'piety' (respect for relatives, judges, emperors, gods) but also to cultic worship (cf Acts 17:23). In the Pastorals and 2 Peter it denotes a way of life ('godliness') that arises from reverence for God (1 Tim 4:7-8; 6:3,11; 2 Pet 1:3,6f).

Two things need to be noticed here. First, most of the words we have looked at are not intrinsically 'religious' words: they can be used of actions and attitudes directed towards human beings (and even objects) as well as towards God or gods. Nevertheless, the Bible insists that 'worship' in its highest sense should be given only to God for he is the only one who merits it (Exod 20:3ff; Deut 6:13; Matt 4:10; Acts 10:25f; Rev 19:10). (The fact that Jesus is also to be worshipped is a clear indication of his deity [John 5:23; Phil 2:9ff; Heb 1:6].)

Second, in the Bible 'worship' usually refers to *outward* acts (kneeling, bowing, speaking, singing, performing ritual actions, obeying, etc), so much so that occasionally the outward acts *without any inward intention* are still described as 'worship' (Matt 20:20; Mark 7:7; 15:19). Nevertheless, it is normally assumed that the *external* actions correspond to and express *internal* attitudes and feelings (Isa 29:13; John 4:24; Rom 1:9; Eph 5:19).

To summarise so far: worship (in the Bible) means *to bow before God* (both outwardly and inwardly), acknowledging his worthiness and

submitting to his will; *to serve God*, both in 'religious' or 'cultic' acts and in everyday obedience; and *to reverence God*, recognising his holiness and responding to it not only in special acts of 'piety' but also in a life of 'godliness'.

### The scope of worship

We may distinguish three main uses of the word 'worship' in English. These, in turn, can be paralleled in the biblical usage of one or more of the basic words mentioned above.

#### *Adoration*

In its narrowest sense, 'worship' refers specifically to the *adoration* of God, addressed directly to God, telling him how wonderful he is and how much we appreciate him. In fact, it does not necessarily involve words; it can simply be the feelings of awe, wonder, love, praise and thankfulness which arise in response to the revelation of God. So Tozer defines worship as 'to feel in the heart and to express in some appropriate manner a humbling but delightful sense of adoring awe and astonished wonder'.<sup>2</sup>

This kind of worship is well expressed in the words of a modern song:

When I look into Your holiness,  
 When I gaze into Your loveliness,  
 When all things that surround  
 Become shadows in the light of You;  
 When I've found the joy of reaching Your heart,  
 When my will becomes enthroned in Your love,  
 When all things that surround  
 Become shadows in the light of You:  
 I worship You, I worship You.  
 The reason I live is to worship You.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the basic words 'bow down' and 'kneel', this sense of worship is conveyed in the Bible by a wide range of words such as praise, bless, magnify, glorify, exalt, extol, rejoice in, thank, etc.

Obviously, distinctions can be made between some at least of these activities, but many of these words are used as synonyms in the psalms. Some commentators make a distinction between 'praise' and 'worship'. Praise is speaking well of God, recounting his attributes, telling what he has done (cf 1 Pet 2:9). It is an *outward* expression, addressed to others, whether believers or unbelievers. Worship, on the other hand, is the *inward* response of the heart, addressed directly to God (cf 1 Pet 2:5). This is a helpful distinction providing it is not pressed too far. Clearly some of our hymns and songs are *descriptive* or *ascriptive* praise (eg 'How good is

the God we adore'; 'Jesus is Lord'), whereas others are *responsive* praise (eg 'Jesus, Thou joy of loving hearts'; 'Father, we love You, we worship and adore You'). But Ephesians 5:19 actually combines both aspects when it directs Christians to 'Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord . . .'.<sup>3</sup>

A careful analysis of the Psalms suggests a distinction between *descriptive* praise (eg Psa 111), which praises God for who he is and what he has done in general, and *declarative* praise (eg Psa 34), which praises God for a specific experience of deliverance.<sup>4</sup>

### *Acts of worship*

In this sense, 'worship' can be used to denote the public activities ('services') of a religious community gathered together in the presence of God and also the private religious exercises of a family or an individual.

This wider sense of 'worship' will include not only ascriptions of adoration, praise, thanksgiving and blessing, but also supplication, intercession, confession, reading of scripture, teaching, prophecy, exhortation, words of knowledge or wisdom, testimony, speaking or singing in tongues, interpretation, healing, laying on of hands, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the collection and (even) the notices. It is *all* 'worship' because it is all done in honour of and in submission to God.

A number of recent writers<sup>5</sup> have queried whether this usage of 'worship' is entirely biblical. They would agree that the Old Testament words for 'worship', 'bow down' and 'serve', are used to describe both the work of the priests and Levites in the sanctuary and the response of the congregation (2 Chron 29:11,20-30) and that they included both the offering of sacrifices (Gen 22:3; 2 Kings 17:36; Psa 96:8-9) and ascriptions of praise (2 Chron 29:30; Psa 95:1-2). But they question whether the New Testament justifies describing a Christian meeting as a 'service' or an 'act of worship'. Banks writes, 'Of course, in the New Testament the word "worship" is never applied to what Christians do when they meet together.'<sup>6</sup> And Marshall writes, 'To speak of a Christian meeting as being "a service of worship" with the implication that everything which takes place must somehow be related directly to this primary purpose is to depart seriously from the NT pattern.'<sup>7</sup>

Both writers are making valid points. Banks wants to emphasise that 'worship' should be a description of everything Christians do, not simply something they do 'in church' (see the next section and the essay by Peter Cousins later in this review). Marshall wants to stress that a Christian meeting involves much more than 'worship' (in the sense of addressing God); in particular it includes God addressing people and people ministering to one another.

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All this is true. Nevertheless, the biblical concept of 'worship' as submission to God surely justifies our use of the word as a description of *everything* that goes on in a Christian 'service', providing it is all done for the glory of God and in submission to him, and providing it does not prevent us from using 'worship' in its narrower sense of 'adoration' and in its widest sense as the whole of a Christian's life and activity regarded as service to God. R P Martin tries to broaden the scope of congregational worship when he defines it as 'the dramatic celebration of God in his supreme worth in such a manner that his worthiness becomes the norm and inspiration of human living.'<sup>8</sup>

### *Total life-style*

Ultimately, we cannot be satisfied with any use of the word 'worship' which confines it to particular times, places or activities. In its widest sense it must denote the whole life of the community or of the individual viewed as service to God, orientated towards God, submitted in obedience to his will, with everything being done to glorify him (1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17).

In the Old Testament the verb 'serve' is used with wider reference than simply performing cultic actions. In Deuteronomy 10:12f it takes its place as one of a number of synonyms (including 'fear') which describe the total response that God demanded from Israel: 'And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his way, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees . . .?'

In the New Testament, this inclusive concept of 'worship' is very prominent. It is particularly denoted by the words *latreuō* ('serve as a priest'), *latreia* ('priestly service'), *leitourgeō* ('do priestly work'), *leitourgia* ('priestly work') and *thusia* ('sacrifice'), rather than by *proskyneō* ('bow down'). Paul saw not only his missionary work as priestly service (Rom 1:9; 15:16f), but the whole of his life (Acts 24:14). In addition to the continual 'sacrifices' of *praise* (Heb 13:15; 1 Pet 2:5), the Christian is called on to offer the 'sacrifices' of *acts of kindness and generosity* (Heb 13:16; Phil 2:17; 4:18; cf Rom 15:27; 2 Cor 9:12; Phil 2:30). This total view of worship comes to its clearest expression in Romans 12:1 where the apostle appeals to Christians to 'offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship'.

The words of Gerard Manley Hopkins may have a Victorian flavour, but they epitomise this concept of worship:

'It is not only prayer that gives God glory but work. Smiting on an anvil, sawing

a beam, whitewashing a wall, driving horses, sweeping, scouring, everything gives God some glory if being in his grace you do it as your duty. To go to communion worthily gives God great glory, but to take food in thankfulness and temperance gives God glory too. To lift up the hands in prayer gives God glory, but a man with a dung fork in his hand, a woman with a slop pail, give him glory too. He is so great that all things give him glory *if you mean they should* [my italics]. So then, my brethren, live!<sup>9</sup>

And what is true for the individual Christian should also be true for the Christian community: everything a church does should be seen as its 'worship' to God. There is ultimately no distinction between 'worship' and 'service': all true service is a form of worship. That is how it will be for the people of God both in heaven (Rev 7:15) and in the New Jerusalem (Rev 22:3).

## The purpose of worship

### *For God*

The primary purpose of worship (in all its various meanings) is to bring pleasure, satisfaction and delight to God (cf Num 28:2; Lev 1:9; Psa 149:4; Rom 12:1; Eph 5:19f; Phil 2:11; Heb 12:28; 13:16; 1 Pet 2:5). God does not *need* our worship (cf Psa 50:9ff) but he *desires* it (John 4:23).

This is recognized in modern songs like the following:

I love You, Lord, and I lift my voice  
To worship You, O my soul rejoice.  
Tak joy, my King, in what You hear.  
May it be a sweet, sweet sound in Your ear.<sup>10</sup>

Help us now to give You  
Pleasure and delight  
Heart and mind and will that say:  
'I love You Lord'.<sup>11</sup>

The Bible does not *explicitly* answer the question, Why did God decide to create human beings? or even, Why did God create anything at all? What it does tell us is that everything God created derives from his will and exists to bring him pleasure and to serve his purposes (cf Rev 4:11). Thus the universe worships God by reflecting his glory (Psa 19:1; Isa 6:3; Rev 5:13). The angelic beings worship God by declaring his holiness (Isa 6:2-3; Rev 4:8) and carrying out his orders (1 Kings 22:19ff; Psa 103:20; Matt 26:53; Heb 1:14). But the Bible *implies* that God was not satisfied just with the worship of the universe and the angels, he created human beings to stand in a unique relationship with him as his image (Gen 1:26f; Psa 8:5), to represent him and to serve his purposes on this

earth (Gen 1:26, 28; Pss 8:6ff; 115:16). For the first human beings, this involved not only practical activities—tending the garden for God (Gen 2:15)—but also times of intimate, personal communion with God (cf Gen 3:8f). Thus (as we saw earlier) everything a person does, can and should be an act of worship, in so far as it is done in obedience to God, out of love for him, to bring him glory and give him pleasure (cf 1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17). Nevertheless, God desires not simply our ‘service-worship’ but also a more deliberate and intimate form of fellowship in which we respond to him in words and actions which express our adoration of, devotion to, and dependence upon him (cf Gen 4:2ff).

God seeks not only the response of individuals but also the *united* worship of his people—all hearts beating as one in his presence (cf Rom 15:5f). He chose Israel to be a special people who would bring him particular pleasure and satisfaction (Exod 19:5–6; Deut 7:6; Jer 13:11) as they worshipped him in the way that he directed (cf Exod 25:8f), served him in an obedient life-style (cf Deut 6:1–5) and spread the knowledge of him throughout the world (cf Isa 42:1–7; 43:10, 21).

God has brought the church into being (in both its total and local forms) in order to achieve the purpose that mankind as a whole and Israel as a nation have failed to fulfil (cf 1 Pet 2:9f). The church is now intended to be the sphere in which God receives the worship which his creatures owe him (cf Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 4:15; Eph 2:12f; Jas 1:18) and the instrument through which he fulfils his purposes of grace and salvation for a fallen world (cf Matt 5:13–16; Acts 1:8; Eph 1:10ff; 2:10; 3:10). Thus the church has both a priestly (1 Pet 2:5) and a prophetic (1 Pet 2:9) function. Everything it does should be done for God and for his glory (Eph 1:12), and this constitutes ‘worship’ (cf Rom 12:1; 15:16; Heb 13:16). But it must also deliberately give time to occasions of corporate worship (Eph 5:19f; Heb 10:22; 12:28; 13:15) in which the overall orientation of the life and work of the church is focused and expressed. Corporate worship must, therefore, be given priority on the church’s agenda because it answers to the desire of God’s heart to receive his people’s adoration and submission; not simply in isolated acts of individualized worship, but in a united response to him, like a polyphonic anthem from a vast choir, or a symphony from a large orchestra, with each member contributing a different but synchronized and harmonious part.

### *For human beings*

When people worship they fulfil the purpose for which they were created. As we have seen already, God has made us for worship; and if we do not worship God, we end up worshipping someone or something else (cf Rom 1:23,25). Worship is not only the *highest* occupation of human beings, in its widest sense it is the *only* occupation in which they should be engaged.

It is not surprising, then, that when we worship God we find it both a beneficial and an enjoyable experience. As we direct our attention to God and concentrate on him (rather than on ourselves and our own desires), our faith is strengthened, our motives are purified, our aspirations are lifted, our joy is increased; above all, the process of spiritual transformation is facilitated (2 Cor 3:18; cf Psalms 135:18).

This is where William Temple's justly famous quotation fits:

Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by his holiness; the nourishment of mind with his truth; the purifying of imagination by his beauty; the opening of the heart to his love; the surrender of will to his purpose—and all this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy for that self-centredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin.<sup>12</sup>

And there is no need to restrict the beneficial effects of worship to the *spiritual* sphere. Consciously to put God at the centre of everything we do, say or think will bring not only spiritual benefits but *mental* and (even) *physical* well-being (cf Phil 4:6–7; 1 Thess 5:23). Worship has healing properties. Praise is positive: it lifts us above the difficulties and problems of life and banishes the negativism of discouragement, depression and despair.

So when God asks us to worship him, he is not being selfish: he knows that worship is also for our good. As C S Lewis put it, 'In commanding us to worship him, God is inviting us to enjoy him.'<sup>13</sup> There is no need for us to be frightened of the word 'enjoyment' in connection with worship (cf Psalm 147:1). Enjoyment can be 'spiritual' as well as 'carnal'. The famous words of the answer to the first question in *The Shorter Catechism*, 'Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever', apply not only to life in heaven in the future, but to life on earth now. There is something wrong when we do not enjoy worshipping God, when it is seen simply as a necessity or duty. On the other hand, there are dangers in *aiming* at enjoyment or 'thrills' in worship. Joy, like happiness, is a by-product which comes when we forget about ourselves and are absorbed in adoring and serving God.

### *For the church*

Obviously, a church consists of individuals, and what has been said about the beneficial effects of worship on the individual applies to the members of a church when they meet together for worship. But there is also a corporate dimension to their worship. Worship builds up the church.

When the Body of Christ meets consciously in the presence of God, all its activities constitute acts of worship because they are intended to glorify

God. Thus worship includes not only the words and actions (and the thoughts and feelings) addressed directly to God, but also the words and actions communicated by God through the members of the body: in reading scripture, teaching, exhorting, prophesying, giving 'words of knowledge' and 'words of wisdom', speaking in tongues (interpreted), singing, laying on of hands, healing, etc (cf 1 Cor 12:7; 14:26; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). In these ways the time of worship not only brings pleasure to God but also strengthens the congregation (cf 1 Cor 14:3,12,26; 1 Pet 4:10f). In particular, the celebration of the Lord's Supper constitutes not only an act of worship but also a means of grace (cf 1 Cor 10:16; 11:24–29).

The worship of the church constitutes a witness both to angelic beings (cf 1 Cor 11:10; Eph 3:10) and to unbelievers (cf 1 Cor 14:24f). In addition, praise and worship should play an important part in the spiritual warfare of the church. It is true that we have to go to the Old Testament for the clearest expressions of this function of praise (Psa 149:6–9; 2 Chron 20:21f). The classic treatment of spiritual warfare in the New Testament (Eph 6:10–18) speaks of 'prayer' rather than 'worship', but 'all kinds of prayer' (v 18) must include ascriptions of praise and worship. If Satan 'trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees', surely the confident praises of a group of Christians setting out to attack the strongholds of the evil one in evangelistic outreach are going to strike fear into the enemy! Such praise is not a psychological technique (people 'psyching themselves up' or 'singing to keep up their spirits'), but an expression of faith in a God who has already won the decisive battle and will give his people victory in each subsequent skirmish. The church needs to worship if it is to take the initiative in pushing back the frontiers of the kingdom of darkness. Praise is an essential weapon in the armoury of the Christian. This was well understood by the author of 'Onward, Christian Soldiers' (Sabine Baring-Gould) when he wrote:

At the name of Jesus,  
Satan's host doth flee;  
On then, Christian soldiers,  
On to victory!  
Hell's foundations quiver  
At the shout of praise:  
Brothers, lift your voices:  
Loud your anthems raise.

Through worship the church is reminded that it exists solely for God's glory (Eph 1:12) and that it owes everything it is and has to the grace of God and the cross of Christ (Eph 1:3–8). Through worship the church allows God to speak: to instruct, challenge, encourage, direct, rebuke, etc (cf Acts 13:1ff; Rom 15:4f; 1 Cor 14:26; 2 Tim 3:16). Through worship

the church remembers that it is the Body of Christ (1 Cor 10:17; cf 11:29) and that each member needs the contributions of the others (Rom 12:4-8; 1 Cor 12:7-11; Eph 4:7,11-16). Through worship the church is strengthened and equipped to go out into the world to serve the Lord in the power of the Spirit and to defeat the opposition (Acts 4:23-31; Rom 15:30, 16:20).

### **The bases of worship**

The possibility of worship rests not with us but with God. If God seeks worshippers, he must take the initiative and make worship possible. Three things are necessary.

#### *The self-revelation of God*

We could not worship God acceptably and appropriately unless he revealed his nature and his ways to us. You cannot really worship an 'unknown god' (cf Acts 17:23; John 4:22).

God graciously revealed his name (Exod. 3:15) and the character that that name signified (Exod. 34:6-7) to Israel through Moses, both in words and actions (Psa 103:7). Worship is, therefore, a response to the self-revelation of God: not simply to 'information' about God but to the self-disclosure of God encountered in the experience of his presence (cf Gen 28:16-17; 1 Kings 8:10-13; Pss 26:8; 27:4). As Donald Bloesch puts it: 'Worship is not a social get-together but a state of being grasped by the holy God.'<sup>14</sup>

The full and final revelation of God came in human form in the person of Jesus (John 1:18; 14:9; 17:6; Heb 1:1-3). He revealed the 'Father' not only by words but also by actions and character. Christians now worship 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Eph 1:3; cf Luke 11:2; 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 3:14). But because Jesus is the divine Son of God, present in a special way when they meet together (Matt 18:20), Christians also worship him (John 5:23; 20:28; Phil 2:9-11; Rev 5:8-14).

#### *The work of Christ*

As sinful people we could not worship a holy God acceptably unless the barrier of our sins were removed. Only God could do that. So God gave his people Israel a sanctuary where they could approach him without infringing on his holiness and being consumed (Exod 25:8; Deut 4:24) and a system of sacrifices which 'atoned for' their sins and fitted them to live in covenant relationship with himself (Exod 24:5-8; Lev 17:11; Isa 6:5-7).

The once for all sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was both the counterpart

and the basis of those Old Testament offerings (Rom 3:25; Heb 9:11–14; 10:5–14). The finished work of Christ is the basis of our acceptance before God (Rom 5:1–2; Eph 1:7; Heb 10:19ff) and his continuing high priestly intercession is the basis of our assurance that we will never be refused entry into the presence of God (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25; 9:24; 10:21), even though it is still true that ‘our God is a consuming fire’ (Heb 12:29). Jesus, then, is the mediator of a new covenant which enables Christians to join in with the incessant worship of the heavenly hosts (Heb 12:22–24).

### *The activity of the Holy Spirit*

We could not worship God while we were spiritually ‘dead’ (Eph 2:1ff). It is through the work of the Holy Spirit that we have been made ‘alive’ to God (John 3:5–8; Tit 3:5f) and made members of God’s family, with the right to call God ‘Abba’ (Rom 8:14–16; Gal 4:6). Moreover, communication with God can take place only through the mediation of the Spirit (cf Rom 8:26; 1 Cor 2:10ff; Phil 3:3) and that is why it is essential that all worship is inspired and prompted by him (cf John 4:24; 1 Cor 12:7; 14:26; Eph 5:18f; 6:18). It is the Spirit who takes the things of God and makes them real to us (cf John 16:13–15) so that we are impelled to respond in worship.

## THE FORM OF WORSHIP

In this second part we narrow down our consideration of ‘worship’ to the *corporate* aspect of the worship of the people of God, to the things they do when they consciously meet together in the presence of God.

### **Biblical practice**

The following brief summary makes no attempt to be comprehensive. As far as Jewish practices are concerned, it deals largely with worship in the sanctuary (taking together the whole period from Moses to 70 AD) and the synagogue. It hardly notices the aspects of individual worship at other times and places, nor does it deal with practices in the time of the Judges (eg Judg 17:5) and the place of worship on the battle field (cf Exod 15; 1 Sam 7:5ff; 13:8ff; 2 Chron 20; Pss 20;44;74).

### *Patriarchal worship*

Pre-Mosaic worship is depicted as largely individual (cf Gen 4:3ff; 8:20) or representative, with the clan father offering sacrifices and prayers on

behalf of his family (cf Job 1:5; Gen 22:5; 35:2–7). Altars, trees and pillars figure in this early worship (cf Gen 12:8; 21:33; 28:18): it seems that some use was made of contemporary modes of worship.

### *Tabernacle and temple worship*

#### Design and details

The tabernacle was divinely prescribed (Exod. 25:8f); its structure and furniture, its personnel and their garments, the cultic actions they were to perform and the festivals to be celebrated, were all laid down by God (cf Exod 25–30; Lev 1–7; 16; 23; Num 8;9;28;29; etc). There were no regulations, however, regarding words and music to be used (but cf Deut 26).

By contrast, Solomon's temple was a divine concession (cf 2 Sam 7:5ff; 1 Kings 5:3–5; 6:11; 8:15–21). He was allowed to follow David's plans, basing the overall design on that of the tabernacle but incorporating considerable Canaanite and Phoenician influences. Nevertheless, God was prepared to accept it as his house (1 Kings 8:10f; 9:3). The organisation of singers, players and music seems to have been the result of human rather than divine direction (cf 1 Chron 15:16–24; 16:4–6; 23; 24:1–9).

#### Characteristics

Tabernacle and temple worship was a mixture of individual, family, corporate and representative actions, with the cultic personnel assisting and leading. It centred around the bringing of animal sacrifices and other offerings, with the priests being responsible for making 'atonement' with the blood (Lev 4:30f; 17:11) and disposing of the bodies (cf Lev 1–7). The offerings expressed penitence, adoration, thanksgiving, vows, reparation, etc.

There are relatively few descriptions of a temple 'service' (cf 1 Kings 8; 2 Chron 29:20–36; Ezra 3:10f). There is also an interesting example in the Apocrypha in Ecclesiasticus 50. None gives all the details we would like to know. The Psalms, however, provide a source from which we may infer further information. What is clear is that temple worship was varied, colourful, lively, exuberant, exhilarating and noisy.<sup>15</sup> (What with the stench of burning bodies and the cacophony of sounds, it is unlikely that *we* would have found it conducive to worship!)

#### Other constituents

In addition to the bringing of offerings, temple worship seems to have included: prayers—individual, corporate and representative, liturgical and spontaneous—(cf Deut 26:5ff; 1 Sam 1:10f; 1 Kings 8:23ff); singing (choir only?) with instrumental accompaniment and 'breaks' (cf Ezra



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3:10f; Psa 150 etc and 'selahs'); shouting (Ezra 3:11); clapping (? cf Psa 47:1); dancing (cf Exod 15:29; 2 Sam 6:14; 1 Chron 15:29; Pss 149:3; 150:4; Jer 31:13); drama (cf Ps 48:9); processions (cf Neh 12:31ff; Pss 48:12f; 55:14; 118:27); historical and credal recitations (cf Deut 6:4ff; 26:5ff; Pss 105; 106); priestly instruction and prophetic exhortation (cf Psa 78; Jer 7); covenant renewal (cf Josh 24; Neh 10; Psa 50); fasts (cf Joel 1:14); vigils (cf Psa 134:1; Joel 1:13); silence (Pss 4:4; 46:10; 76:8); and priestly blessing (cf Num 6:22ff; 1 Kings 8:55).

### Postures

Presumably the full range of possible postures and gestures were used in public as well as private worship: standing (2 Chron 20:9); sitting (2 Sam 7:18); kneeling (Psa 95:6); prostrating (Job 1:20); raising hands (Psa 134:2); and spreading out the hands (Ezra 9:5).

### *Synagogue worship*

Whatever the origins of the synagogue, it became an alternative to the temple for those unable to travel to Jerusalem. It could never replace the temple (because only there could animal sacrifices be offered), but it developed into a centre for the reading and study of the Torah (Law) in a setting of praise and prayer (which was regarded as the equivalent of the temple sacrifices), and thus became the normal place of worship for the majority of Jews (even before the destruction of the second temple).

Its services were led by various lay officials with opportunity for any male to take part (although it appears that gradually prayers became less spontaneous and more liturgical). A typical service would include prayers; The *Shema* (Deut 6:4ff); a reading from the Torah (Pentateuch); a reading from the Prophets; translations and a sermon; singing of psalms; benedictions and a blessing.

### *Early church worship*

The closest we get in the New Testament to a description of a Christian 'service' (or rather 'meeting', cf 1 Cor 11:17ff) is Acts 20:7–11. This and other passing references (such as in 1 Cor 11–16) are hardly sufficient to enable us properly to reconstruct or visualise early Christian worship. Outside the New Testament we have valuable evidence in the *Didache* (chs 6–16, probably late first century or early second), the *Apology* of Justin (I.65–67, c 150 AD) and Pliny's *Letter* to Trajan (X.96, c 112 AD).

It would seem that early Christian worship was largely influenced by the synagogue, with only marginal Gentile influence. It is also very likely that the example of Jesus and especially the form and content of the Last

Supper and the upper room ministry (Luke 22:7–38; John 13:2–18:1) exerted a considerable influence. In addition, we cannot assume uniformity and thus we must make allowance for the possibility of a variety of forms and practices in the early church.

### The Jerusalem church

It would seem that the early Christians continued to attend the temple and the synagogue not simply as convenient meeting-places but in order to join in Jewish worship (cf Luke 24:53; Acts 1:15; 2:46; 3:1; 6:1; 21:24ff). Specifically Christian worship took place in homes (Acts 1:13; 2:46; 4:23–31; 12:12). Acts 2:42 may well describe the usual constituents of such worship: teaching; ‘fellowship’ (lit ‘sharing’—probably either a collection for the poor or—more likely—a common meal in which the better off shared with the less well off); ‘breaking of bread’ (probably the remembrance of the Lord at the beginning and ending of the meal); prayer (lit ‘the prayers’, probably both spontaneous and fixed and including the singing of psalms; cf Acts 4:24–30).

Baptisms presumably took place in public (cf Acts 2:41), but we have no detailed description of a ‘baptismal service’ (cf Acts 8:36ff). Of the conduct of marriages and funerals (they must have had them!) we have no evidence whatsoever: we assume that current Jewish practices were simply taken over and ‘Christianized’. Similarly there is little solid evidence as to whether the early Christians continued to keep the sabbath and the Jewish festivals or whether they began to develop a Christian calendar, with emphasis on the first day of the week.

### The Pauline churches

The core of Paul’s converts were Jews and proselytes. It is unlikely that they were often able to continue attending the synagogue, but it is quite likely that their meetings for worship in each other’s homes (cf 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15) were modelled to a large extent on synagogue practice.

The Sunday (Saturday?) evening meeting in Troas described in Acts 20:7–12 included teaching (extensive!) and the Lord’s Supper (probably as part of a communal meal). 1 Corinthians gives further insight into Christian meetings for worship in which the Lord’s Supper formed part of a communal meal (cf 1 Cor 11:17–22) and in which scope was given for the exercise of various spiritual gifts (1 Cor 14:26), the use of which, however, could easily lead to chaotic conditions that called for some degree of control (by the leaders? cf 1 Cor 14:26–29). The extent of women’s participation is still debated (cf 1 Cor 11:5ff; 14:34ff; 1 Tim 2:9ff). Meetings apparently took place on Sunday (as well as at other times?) and included (if appropriate) a collection (1 Cor 16:1ff).

References in the Pauline letters point to the use of a variety of songs,

some traditional, some newly composed and some spontaneous (cf Eph 5:19; Col 3:16); and at times Paul may actually be quoting from early Christian hymns (eg Phil 2:5ff; Col 1:15ff; 1 Tim 3:16). We can be quite confident also that prayers were similarly both fixed and extempore (cf Eph 6:18f; Col 4:22ff; 1 Tim 2:1ff,8), and that we catch a glimpse of early Christian praying in the recorded prayers of Paul (eg Eph 3:14ff). Paul's use of the Aramaic 'Abba' and 'Marana tha' (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6; 1 Cor 16:22) may well echo ejaculatory words and phrases (including also 'Amen' and 'Hallelujah'?) used in worship.

The Johannine churches:

The heavenly songs in the book of Revelation may reflect the worship of the churches in Asia. It is also possible that John's Gospel throws light on the content and emphases of the worship in the circles from which it emanated.

### **Biblical principles**

Having looked at some of the ways in which God's people have worshipped him in the past, we come now to consider how *we* should worship him. How can we be sure that our worship pleases God? Has he told us how he likes to be worshipped? Can we discover in the Bible a pattern for our worship?

#### *Pattern or principles?*

##### **Old Testament**

It is generally agreed that the pattern of worship ordained for or adopted by Israel is not binding on Christians. It is not simply that Jesus has fulfilled or superseded the ceremonial laws and especially the institution of animal sacrifice (cf Matt 5:17; Mark 7:18–19; Heb 7:18–19; 10:1–10), but that the church is not Israel. What was written in the Old Testament scriptures was written for our *learning* (Rom 15:4; 2 Tim 3:16), not necessarily for our *imitation*. What we learn from the Old Testament descriptions of worship, as well as from the exhortations to and expressions of worship (eg in the Psalms), are the basic spiritual principles that should govern our practice of worship.

##### **New Testament:**

In what way is the New Testament different from the Old? Is it written for our imitation as well as for our learning? If we could discover exactly how the early church worshipped, would that constitute a blueprint that we would be obliged to follow? Or should we distinguish between what is

*described* in the New Testament (eg in Acts) and what is *commanded* (eg in the epistles)? For example, fasting is described in Acts (13:3) but not actually commanded in the epistles; whereas singing is commanded (Eph 5:19) but nothing is said about musical accompaniment.

The main forms or expressions of worship which are actually commanded (as opposed to being described), either by Jesus himself or by the apostles, are: baptism (Matt 28:19); the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:19f; 1 Cor 11:23–26); singing (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16); praying (1 Thess 5:17); giving thanks (Col 3:17); using spiritual gifts (1 Cor 14:26); teaching (1 Tim 4:13); reading the scriptures (1 Tim 4:13); taking a collection (1 Cor 16:2); giving a holy kiss (1 Thess 5:26); and washing each other's feet (John 13:14).

In no case are there detailed instructions on how these actions or activities are to be performed, except that some guidance is given on the exercise of certain spiritual gifts (1 Cor 14) and on what is unacceptable practice in relation to the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 10;11). The main directions regarding the conduct of worship relate almost exclusively to the participation and clothing of women (1 Cor 11:5ff; 14:34f; 1 Tim 2:9ff). James 2, however, does deal with where people should sit in a church service!

The consequence is that if we look for a detailed pattern for Christian worship in the New Testament, we shall be disappointed. There is just not sufficient detail. If we adopt the approach that 'nothing is permitted unless it is commanded', we shall deprive ourselves of much that is helpful and conducive to real worship. If we try to copy all the procedures of the early church, we shall find that some of them do not fit our culture or circumstances. (It is ironic that some who have claimed to be basing their worship on the New Testament pattern have spiritualized 'feet-washing', reinterpreted the 'holy kiss' as a handshake and refused to acknowledge the validity of some of the gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14:26, while using the verse as the justification for 'open' worship!) Worst of all, this approach leads to Pharisaism, an emphasis on externals, pride in being 'correct' and judgement of others who differ.

Although there are clearly a number of constituents which are essential to Christian worship (or at least, highly desirable), it would seem more realistic and appropriate to regard both the detailed instructions about and the more general descriptions of worship contained in the New Testament as contemporary applications of spiritual principles rather than as rules binding on the church for all time.

### *Acceptable forms of worship*

Are we, therefore, free to express our worship in any form we choose or

that appeals to us? Are there any limits or is anything potentially permissible? There are three principles that seem to be fundamental.

Worship should be 'in spirit and in truth' (John 4:24)

Since worship is primarily for God, it should please him and bring him glory. The problem is: how do we know what pleases God? The scriptural answer is that God is interested primarily in *heart* worship, in the *inward* thoughts and feelings of a person, and is concerned about the outward forms only in so far as they express or enable true inward worship (cf Psa 51:17; Isa 29:13; John 4:23f; Eph 5:19). Thus, for example, God enjoys our singing only if it really expresses the feelings of our hearts towards him.

Worship should be 'in truth' not only in the sense that it is 'sincere' but also that it is in accordance with the truth about God, as revealed in the Bible. Acceptable worship is a response to and a mirroring of the nature and character of God (cf Heb 12:18f).

Above all, God has made it clear that no worship (however deeply felt) is acceptable unless it is the expression of a life lived in 'truth', that is, in obedience to him (cf Pss 15; 24; 50; Isa 1:10-17; Jer 7:22f; Hos 6:6; Amos 5:21ff; Mic 6:6ff; Matt 5:23f; 1 John 1:6; 2:4; 4:20; 5:3). As Augustine is supposed to have said, 'make sure your life sings the same tune as your mouth'.

Worship (normally) involves some physical expression

Since we are physical beings and normally express our thoughts and feelings by means of our bodies, worship (particularly corporate worship) will usually involve some physical activities. (That does not mean that someone who is totally paralysed cannot worship God!) In addition, it should be recognised that physical gestures may not only *express* feelings but also *generate* them (cf a kiss; 'making love').

How much or what kind of physical expression is felt necessary and appropriate will no doubt depend partly on personality, temperament, age, experience, cultural background, education and so on. (It cannot be accidental that the forms of worship that God imposed on Israel were so similar in many respects to those of its neighbours, though there were also significant differences.)

Because we find it hard to concentrate on one thing for long, and because we soon get into a routine, and worship can so easily become a mere formality, we need variety in the content and forms of our worship (cf OT worship in the temple).

Corporate worship should be an expression of unity (Rom 15:6;  
1 Cor 10:17)

If God is looking for the *united* worship of his people, anything that

disrupts or destroys that unit renders the worship unacceptable (cf 1 Cor 11:17–22). It is, therefore, essential not only that there should be right relationships between Christians (cf Psa 133; Matt 5:23–25; Eph 4:2–6; Phil 2:1–4) but also that each person should be able to participate as fully as possible in the worship and use his/her gifts for the benefit of the others (Rom 12:3–8; 1 Cor 12:7–11).

### *Testing our worship*

We close with a check-list of the kind of questions that we should ask about any proposed form of worship. The questions are based on the principles which scripture provides for testing the acceptability of our worship.

- Is it compatible with the revealed nature and will of God? (Cf Deut 4:15ff; 18:9ff; 1 Kings 12:26–33)
- Does it express and encourage a reverential attitude to God? (Cf Psa 22:23; Heb 12:28)
- Does it direct attention to God rather than to others or oneself? (Cf Matt 6:1–6; Col 2:18f)
- Does it foster an awareness of God's presence? (Cf 1 Cor 14:24f)
- Does it centre on the person and work of Christ? (Cf John 5:23; Phil 2:10f; Col 1:15ff)
- Does it increase people's appreciation of God-Father, Son and Holy Spirit? (Cf Eph 1:17ff; 3:14ff)
- Is it inspired and prompted by the Holy Spirit? (Cf John 4:23f; Eph 5:18ff)
- Does it allow freedom for the Holy Spirit to direct, modify or inhibit? (Cf John 16:13f; Gal 5:16,25)
- Does it enable God to communicate with his people? (Cf 1 Cor 14:19; Col 3:16; 1 Thess 5:19)
- Does it express what people actually think and feel about God? (Cf Isa 29:13)
- Does it facilitate united, corporate worship? (Cf Rom 15:5f)
- Does it leave room for individual response and decision? (Cf Rom 14:5,23; 1 Cor 14:29; Col 2:16; 1 Thess 5:21)
- Does it lead to intelligent (as well as felt) worship? (Cf John 4:24; 1 Cor 14:6–19)
- Does it strengthen people for service? (Cf 1 Cor 4:12; Eph 4:12)
- Does it involve cost or sacrifice? (Cf 1 Sam 24:24; Mark 14:3ff)
- Does it make use of *all* the gifts that God has given to this particular congregation? (Cf 1 Cor 14:26)
- Can it be done in a decent and orderly way, in submission to one another and to the leaders? (Cf 1 Cor 14:33,40; Eph 5:21; Heb 13:17)



- Is it morally acceptable? (Cf Deut 23:17f; 1 Cor 11:21ff)
- Does it lead to a life of obedience? (Cf Col 2:23; Jas 1:26f)
- Does it glorify God in the eyes of unbelievers? (Cf Matt 5:16; 1 Cor 14:24f; 1 Pet 2:9)

Worship is the greatest privilege that is granted to the people of God. We must do our utmost to ensure that it is as pleasing to God as we can make it.

We are here to praise You,  
Lift our hearts and sing.  
We are here to give You  
The best that we can bring.  
And it is our love  
Rising from our hearts,  
Everything within us cries:  
'Abba Father.'  
Help us now to give You  
Pleasure and delight.  
Heart and mind and will that say:  
'I love You Lord.'<sup>16</sup>

#### Footnotes

- 1 Some would say that the NT uses *proskyneō* only in relation to a divine object, that the king in Matt 18:26 stands for God and Rev 3:9 refers to 'the angel' of the church.
- 2 A W Tozer, *Worship: The Missing Jewel in the Evangelical Church* (Christian Publications, Camp Hill, Penn).
- 3 Author unknown.
- 4 See C Westermann, *The Praise of God in the Psalms* (Epworth, London 1966).
- 5 Eg R Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: the Early House Churches in the Historical Setting* (Paternoster, Exeter 1980); R & J Banks, *The Home Church* (Lion, Tring 1986); I H Marshall, 'How far did the early Christians worship God?' *Churchman*, 99.3 (1985) 216–229.
- 6 Banks, *Home Church*, 255.
- 7 Marshall, op cit, 226f.
- 8 R P Martin, *The Worship of God* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1982) 4.
- 9 Source not known.
- 10 Laurie Klein (Word Music [UK] 1978, 1980).
- 11 Graham Kendrick (Thank You Music 1985).
- 12 W Temple, *Readings in St John's Gospel* (Macmillan, London 1939) 68.
- 13 C S Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (Bles, London 1958) ch IX.
- 14 D G Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (Harper & Row, New York 1982) 92.
- 15 H H Rowley describes it as 'organized noise making' in *Worship in Ancient Israel* (SPCK, London 1967) 206.
- 16 Graham Kendrick (Thank You Music 1985).

# THE PRACTICE OF WORSHIP

**Neil Summerton**

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## INTRODUCTION

Not the least of the distinctive features of the New Testament church was the character of its worship. What little we are told about it shows that the worship of the early church was decisively different from both that of Judaism and the various cults to be found in the Gentile culture of the day. Of course this distinctiveness took a little time to establish itself. The Christians in Jerusalem continued for some time in temple worship as well as worship among themselves as Christians (Acts 2:46; 3:1; 21:26). And the synagogue can be seen to have had its influence upon the worship of the early church just as it did upon its organization.

But the worship of both the Hebrew temple and the pagan temple was characterized by prescribed forms and activities and by pre-determined content, performed by specially selected individuals. Furthermore, it took place in a special building or place set aside (consecrated) for the particular purpose. By contrast, the early church did without special places for worship; permitted or encouraged participation in worship by members; and clearly left much latitude to participants to decide the form and content of the worship event. We should not, however, assume that all worship was spontaneous in the early church—evidence of preformulated worship material can be discerned in the pages of the New Testament.<sup>1</sup>

New Testament worship was consistent with the radical dissolution of the distinction between the sacred and the secular which was characteristic of the pentecostal age. The normal place of worship was not special but in people's houses (Acts 3:23–31; 12:12–17; 18:7; 20:7; Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 11:17–32). There was great freedom of form and content as can be seen

particularly from the account of the worship at Troas (Acts 20:7–12) and at Corinth where clearly Paul is describing the normal worship of the Corinthian church (1 Cor 14). Prophetic utterance was also a regular, not to say normal, occurrence in the gatherings of the New Testament church.

If all the references are taken together we can see that in the New Testament there is no sharp distinction between meetings of the local church (congregation) as such, meetings of part of it, and meetings which, in Brethren parlance today, might be described as 'private' or unofficial. Rather, there is a flexible continuum from small and no doubt impromptu gatherings in the homes of individuals to larger gatherings, possibly in the commodious home of a well-to-do member of the congregation, possibly in a particular part of the temple precinct in Jerusalem, possibly in the fields. All were meetings of 'the church', the form and character of events to some extent depending no doubt on the circumstances and scale of the particular gathering. All, it might be added, must in principle have been equally subject to the leadership and authority of the church, in particular as to doctrine and the Pauline injunction, for example, that 'all things should be done decently and in order' (1 Cor 14:40).<sup>2</sup>

This flexible pattern of worship did not last long in the church. Just as sacerdotalism began to be discernible in certain parts of the church before the end of the first century, so formal liturgies also began to emerge quickly. These were possibly parallel and self-reinforcing phenomena since a distinct clergy is helped in establishing its special position by having a formal liturgy which only it is qualified to perform.

This formalization can be seen in other aspects of church life, such as the discontinuance of immediate baptism in favour of the rigorous preparation of candidates for baptism annually on Easter Sunday. There were good practical reasons for some of this, just as the phenomenal growth of the early church in some places made it sensible to meet not in homes but in specially reserved and, soon, specially designed buildings. Frequently, those special buildings were modelled on the lay-out of the synagogue and in time, it has to be said, they were influenced, too, by the lay-out of the pagan temples with which so many converts were familiar. This trend was reinforced, it may be surmised, by the theological move towards sacerdotalism.

The influence of familiar structures and practices on any group of Christians is inevitable. We ourselves will be affected by it. The Brethren oversight of the nineteenth century can be seen from one point of view, not so much as an effort to return to the principles of the New Testament as an application of one of the characteristic institutions of Victorian England—the committee. (So was the Parochial Church Council invented for the Anglicans by William Temple and others in 1921!) In our own day, I am struck by the similarities between the physical and phonetic

manifestations to be seen and heard on the video tapes of rock concerts which my children play, and those to be found at Christian celebrations such as those at the annual Spring Harvest event. In itself this is no bad thing. If worship is to be meaningful to the individual and the group, it must be expressed in an intellectual and emotional idiom with which they can identify. But on the question of worship, as on other matters, the church and its leadership had better be on its guard. The genius of the New Testament is that it does not seek to legitimize and sacralize any particular form or way of doing things in worship. Rather, in decisive counterpoint to both Hebrew and Gentile worship, it presents the radically new goal of a worship which, in the Holy Spirit, is vibrant, dynamic, alive and unrestricted by form, place and person.

The history of the church suggests that in periods of revival and restoration efforts are usually made to recover the New Testament character of worship. As the fires of spiritual intensity burn down, however, formalization of worship re-establishes itself. The church tends to revert to the forms of religious institutionalization which are common to fallen man. So it re-establishes a caste of 'holy' men to lead or perform worship, 'sacred' places for worship, 'sacred' formularies for worship. In short, it tends to re-establish the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular which the Christian spirit and mind of the New Testament simply refused to recognize.<sup>3</sup>

## BRETHREN WORSHIP

### Roots

The experience of the Brethren movement has been no exception, despite its conscientious efforts to evade this experience. Two different traditions of worship can, in my judgement, be discerned in Brethren congregations in Britain at least. Each owes its origin to different spiritual roots.

First, there is a tradition of spontaneous or 'open' worship which Brethren adherents would regard as both the characteristic form of Brethren worship and the normative form of Christian worship. Traditionally, it has been practised at the meeting known as the Lord's Supper or the Breaking of Bread, and in the weekly prayer meeting. This method derives from the efforts of the founders of the movement in the 1830s and 1840s to return to what they regarded as the authentic character of worship as depicted in the pages of the New Testament.

For particular reasons relating to the specific origins of the movement, manifestations such as prophecy and tongues-speaking were rejected as appropriate practice in this worship. But its character was essentially charismatic in that it looked directly to the Holy Spirit to lead audible

participation in worship and accordingly allowed for a wide measure of contribution from the congregation. (Though in the early days a presidency with, in essence, a police power to control unhelpful contribution was practised in some places.<sup>4</sup>)

A similar openness was also practised with respect to the ministry of the Word, in the midweek ministry meeting, the conversational Bible study, and the Saturday inter-congregational conferences which were regularly held and which were one of the principal mechanisms by which the movement acquired coherence as a denomination.

The second mode of worship derived from the alternative and quantitatively far more important source of the Brethren movement—the revivals of the latter part of the nineteenth century associated in particular with the names of Moody and Sankey, and perhaps later with Torrey and Alexander. Subsequently, these influences were reinforced by the Keswick experience and by participation in ventures such as the CSSM. These associations were as important as Brethren theology in determining the characteristic spirituality of the movement, and they provided both the hymnology of the movement (at events other than the Breaking of Bread meeting) and a highly structured form of worship with strong leadership from the platform. This structure with, for example, the singing of choruses ‘while people are coming in’ was, I suspect, very much modelled on the pattern of the revivalist meeting to which Moody and Sankey were heirs.

Undoubtedly, the pattern of ‘open’ worship would have been considered the superior form and it is doubtful whether many would have thought of what went on at the gospel meeting as being worship—though it clearly was and it can be argued that the undoubted success in its day of that meeting as a vehicle of evangelism owed much to the reality of worship expressed by the Christians present.

### **Contemporary expression**

Among the Protestant sects, the Open Brethren have been remarkably successful in maintaining their vigour and spiritual vitality over a period of some five or six generations: in other groups, the rate of spiritual decline and departure from evangelical truth has often tended to be more rapid. Nevertheless, it is scarcely surprising that over such a long period many features of its denominational life should have ossified into debilitating traditions. In no aspect has this been more true than in its worship. Despite the rejection of written formularies, of special sacred buildings, and of a special sacred caste, the tendency has been to institutionalize to such a degree that sacred and secular compartments in the lives of the worshippers have been re-established.

Nowhere has this rigidity been seen more clearly than in the Breaking of Bread service. That event is widely regarded (with some biblical justification of course) as being central in the life of the congregation. In consequence, nothing should, it is often argued, dethrone it from its place in the weekly calendar—certainly not the task of evangelism, for example. It becomes the central cultic act. Attendance at it becomes as mandatory as that of the Catholic at weekly Mass. It may even be regarded as virtually the exclusive measure of an individual's spiritual state (some take this view to the point that while they have no effective fellowship with the congregation concerned and indeed may be at loggerheads with it doctrinally and personally, they would never dream of missing the Breaking of Bread meeting).

In form, the meeting (and indeed the prayer meeting) has generally come to be dominated by a rigid though unwritten liturgy. Though there are variations between congregations, in any one of them the order of the event is utterly predictable. It will almost certainly begin with a hymn. That hymn will determine the theme and content of the remaining period of worship. There will be a prayer of institution before the bread is taken, and a similar prayer before the wine is taken. The offering will be taken up immediately following; and if there is arranged or 'spontaneous' ministry it will then follow. The prayer of institution for the bread will begin at an accustomed time, give or take a minute or two. The whole event will conclude at a particular time (justified of course on the grounds of convenience and practicality). If anyone moves outside this timetable the body language of emotional and intellectual discomfort will be all too obvious in the congregation—for example, if a hymn or song is proposed after the elements have been passed round, or possibly while they are being passed round!

The form and content of worship is also restricted. The limitation on content can be traced to the view that the meeting is in *memory* of the Lord's *death* so that any worship material which does not meet this single criterion is considered to be inappropriate. In consequence, a homiletic contribution on an individual's spiritual experience of the Lord is ruled out. So is a word of personal testimony from a young person as to what the Lord has done for them recently. So, too, is thanksgiving for any matter which is not directly related to the work of Christ on the cross. The same principle can be seen at work in relation to the use of scripture and song in open worship at the Lord's Table. The material *must* focus narrowly on the Lord's death. Readings, hymns, ministry which turn the congregation's mind towards the Father, or towards the glory of God, or towards his kingdom which is at once now and not yet, is unacceptable. If anyone dares to introduce this type of material, others will quickly bring the meeting back to content which is considered appropriate to the occasion.

If acceptable content is narrow, so is form. Expository preaching of the Word in the course of worship is often considered unsuitable, and one suspects that in some places homiletic preaching or indeed any human enlargement upon the meaning of scripture is frowned upon. In many places, the form has settled down into a sandwich of hymn, prayer and scripture reading, punctuated by long (often empty) silences, and it would be thought odd even to propose that one hymn should be followed immediately by another. Often oral participation is limited for want of (male) numbers to a handful of individuals who are themselves only too conscious that there are limitations on the spiritual variety which they are capable of bringing to the worship event.

The problems of limitation of form are not in my view limited to highly traditional approaches to worship. Efforts 25 and 30 years ago to modernize worship have brought their own problems. Though highly necessary at the time, the instruments then introduced to accompany worship at the Lord's table (the piano and the organ)—in most places they had of course been used at evangelistic meetings since the last century—have proved to be highly inflexible. So have the collections of hymns then favoured, largely on grounds of their theological and intellectual depth. Valuable though these developments were in their time, they have resulted in an inflexibility in worship and severe interruptions often in the spiritual 'flow' of worship. Congregations are tied intellectually, manually and visually to their hymnbooks and can apparently do nothing in worship without waiting for the accompanist to find the tune and strike it up on the instrument.

The same kind of problems can afflict meetings for prayer. Here, too, the range of content is narrow. The event is often seen as being narrowly intended for *intercessory* prayer, and material which concentrates on worship is considered misplaced from the worship services of the congregation. Where this is combined with an unwillingness to engage in deep supplication for the specific needs of individual members of the fellowship and for the fellowship as a whole, the result is arid meetings in which a dull and unspecific shopping list of requirements is presented to the Lord. Again there are extensive empty silences punctuated by a few lengthy contributions by the 'professional' pray-ers of the congregation. There is little worship and thanksgiving, and little sense of the corporate nature of prayer in which the baton of prayer is eagerly and urgently taken up from one to another.

Things are frequently little or no better at gospel or teaching meetings which are prepared and led, usually by the person appointed to preach at the occasion. Preparatory hymn and song singing has rightly been abandoned as no longer serving a useful purpose. This is usually because it no longer catches the idiom in which people wish to worship. It is

interesting that in some circles where there is manifestly a spirit of worship preparatory singing of spiritual songs is widely to be found. Once the 'service proper' has begun (significant terminology in itself), an unwritten nonconformist liturgy is generally followed. It comprises hymns interspersed with prayers and Bible readings, leading in due course to the preaching of the Word—the familiar 'hymn-prayer sandwich'. Apart from the notices, individual contribution in prayer and reading is confined to the speaker, and congregational expression is confined to collective hymn singing. Frequently it is all too obvious that what precedes the address is viewed as no more than preparatory to it. These preliminaries are not thought of as capable of standing on their own as a sufficient end in themselves—if they were the only purpose of coming together, we would not bother.

Finally, singing is confined to collections of *hymns* such as *Hymns of Faith, Christian Worship, Christian Praise*, or even, still, *The Golden Hymnal, Sacred Songs and Solos, or Redemption Hymns*. Accompaniment is by means of a single 'heavy' instrument. All these were of course dynamic innovations in their day and there is no doubt that the church can make much good use of the forms of expression in which earlier generations of Christians chose to cast their spiritual experience. But if this material becomes the sole means of *our* spiritual expression, then we shall be being truly liturgical, ie, casting our worship in traditional formularies, albeit in the undoubtedly worthy ones of the first to fourth evangelical revivals. I would assert that there is something seriously wrong if a group of Christians do not cast at least some of their corporate expressions of fellowship in forms which are original to themselves. Otherwise, they are likely to be living on past spiritual capital.

### Summary

In summarizing the character of the corporate spiritual exercises commonly found in Brethren congregations in Britain, I would point to three key features. First, they have an essentially cerebral nature. It is as though we have taken too seriously to heart John Henry Newman's criticism of the Evangelicalism in which both Brethrenism and Tractarianism were rooted, viz that it was guilty of shallow emotionalism.<sup>5</sup> It is doubtful, in fact, if the Brethren of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century could have been charged with being over cerebral, but by way of reaction in the last two generations there seems to have been a fear of engaging the emotions in worship, and certainly of permitting any significant *physical* expression of worship. These would be rejected as associated with the (unbiblical) over exuberance of ethnic and Pentecostal groups.



Second, even when spiritual exercises are cast in a form in which worship is intended to be spontaneous under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, there is often—even normally—a fundamental lack of spontaneity. Rather, there is a predictability about the event which is discouraging. It will be known who will take part, roughly when, and the content will be all too familiar. There is a reluctance to break out of the accustomed form. Worship has in fact become fundamentally liturgical in character.

Third, worship in many Brethren churches has a distinctive mood which is partly attributable to the content which is thought to be appropriate in worship. There is a lack of joy and vibrancy. Frequently, the dominant sentiment is of melancholia which, in my judgement, the tradition imbibed from one strand of Victorian romanticism rather than from scripture. This melancholia encourages and feeds on a sense of spiritual depression and hopelessness which are symptomatic of the parlous state into which the movement has fallen in the last two generations. This is well illustrated by the comment of a visitor from another spiritual tradition who arrived in good time for a Breaking of Bread service. After a few moments, he jokingly remarked to his hostess, 'It feels as though we are waiting for a funeral'. After 10 minutes of worship, he was compelled to comment, now with deadly earnestness, 'We *are* at a funeral!'. Even if the story is apocryphal, it catches well the tenor of worship in many assemblies.

#### REFORMS

If this is an accurate analysis of the condition into which corporate worship has widely fallen, what is to be done to remedy the situation and to encourage a revival of deep spiritual experience when the church meets together?

#### **Traditional solution**

This is no new question of course. Many who are deeply committed to current traditions in Brethren worship are conscious that things are not quite as they ought to be. Others have been positively discontented with them for years. Wherever the barrenness of the worship service is mentioned, the answer which tends immediately to be given in the tradition is that all could be restored if only people, especially younger people (for they are often vociferous critics of the current state of affairs), would deepen their personal knowledge of scripture and of the Lord in their own devotional lives, and in particular if they would prepare

carefully beforehand rather than spending their Saturday evenings in socializing.

There is a degree of truth in this solution. If there is a wide gap between what is professed in corporate worship and the poverty of spiritual experience and practice in the lives of the worshippers, it is only to be expected that corporate worship will be hollow and unrewarding. One thing of which we can be certain from the gospels is that the Lord abominates spiritual and moral hypocrisy. From one point of view, corporate worship is no more than the expression of the reality of the day to day life of God's people in fellowship together. The essential identity of worship and service in the new Testament, as already noted, should never be forgotten.

But it is precisely because of this fact that the traditional solution is at best inadequate. We are not at liberty simply to throw up our hands and say that there is nothing to be done until individual Christians come to a deeper and more committed spiritual life. To do so is to propose an individualism which is common in Christianity in the West following the Enlightenment but which is questionable in biblical terms. Throughout, scripture places great emphasis on the corporate identity of the people of God and their corporate experience of him. The metaphors are collective—people, nation, body, temple, assembly—and the New Testament lays great stress on fellowship and the common life of the people together. Apart from baptism, the only rite enjoined upon the church was a fellowship meal which emphasized their union *together* with the Lord (1 Cor 10:16–17). Worship was not to be a private matter when they came together. They were to address *one another* in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Eph 5:19). And one of the purposes of worship was mutual encouragement (Heb 10:25; see also 1 Cor 14:3, which is referring to one of the characteristic activities of the Corinthians' worship event). It is impossible to escape the conclusion that, typically, what the people of God experience when they come together for worship is something greater than they could experience privately. In fellowship, the whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts. It is arguable that, far from worship being no stronger than the individual experiences of God represented at the gathering, the Lord reveals himself in a special way when his people meet together. Thus it is private worship which is as likely, perhaps more likely, to be enriched by the corporate worship experience than the other way round.

Second, however, the traditional solution too conveniently shifts the responsibility away from the congregational leaders and other spiritually mature members towards the young and immature. This is curious because scripture clearly places responsibility for the maturity of the church, which ought presumably to be reflected above all in its worship

experience, with those who have been specifically gifted for that purpose, viz apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Eph 4:11–16). Ultimately, responsibility for worship, as for every aspect of the life of a local congregation, lies with its leaders. It is they who should be seeking the Lord's guidance about the most profitable arrangements for worship. They should be teaching and encouraging others; identifying and encouraging the exercise of gift which will enrich the corporate worship of the congregation; giving a lead and modelling for all to see the kind of worship which is mutually helpful; shepherding compassionately those who find changes in the character of worship hardest to bear.

The remainder of this essay concentrates, therefore, on the practical steps which leaders ought to take to encourage a renewal of congregational worship.

### **The context of worship**

Despite the fact, just noted, that the worship experience of a congregation will inevitably inform and set the tone of much else in the common life of a fellowship and its individual members, it is important to remember, too, the reciprocal relationship between the various components of congregational life. Worship can at once be the leading edge and the summation of collective experience. Thus in seeking a more rewarding experience, congregational leaders may have to focus on more aspects of church life than the arrangements for worship itself. The problem may be a lack of shared congregational life, so that the members simply come together as a collection of individuals with little knowledge of and sympathy for each other and their concerns; there may even be a fundamental lack of love for each other. In that case, the priority may not be the worship meeting itself, but measures to deepen the common life of the congregation, such as meetings in informal groups for fellowship and prayer. Or the fundamental problem may be theological. The congregation simply may not understand the true nature of Christian worship, or may misunderstand the relationship between worship and the other aspects of congregational life. In that case, the priority may be teaching to rectify these misunderstandings. Or there may be deep problems in the personal lives of many members which stand in the way of deeper experience of the Lord. In that case, the priority may be pastoral care. Achievements in evangelism may result automatically in praise: if the angels worship over sinners who repent, what of the church? Ideally, then, action by leaders to encourage more inspired worship in a congregation should form part of the leaders' general strategy for the strengthening of their congregations.

## Praying and modelling

If there is truth in the traditional route to deeper worship, it is as it is applied to leaders and the mature Christians in a fellowship. It is they who need to ensure that they are personally prepared for worship week by week. This is not simply a question of confession and personal experience of forgiveness, though it should certainly include that. It should include, too, the often neglected ministry of strong prayer that the Lord will reveal himself to the congregation as they worship together. Leaders need to strive in prayer for the protection and blessing of the congregations for which they are responsible. It should include, as well, waiting upon the Lord for the material, from scripture and in other ways, which can give the necessary lead to the congregation in worship. It is an aspect of the false dichotomy which is often drawn between worship and the rest of life to hold that worship is only truly Spirit-led if the words come spontaneously within the particular worship event itself. Frequently, of course, the Holy Spirit does greatly enrich worship by this means—it will be argued later that the Spirit should never be prevented from doing this. But, equally, to suggest that the Spirit cannot or does not lead in prior preparation is to place limitations on the Spirit which scripture implies he would decisively reject.

Not only should leaders themselves prepare, but they should teach and instruct all who have a part in leadership to prepare thoroughly themselves. This extends to worship leaders. It includes musicians who have the dual task of technical and spiritual preparation. The latter should not be neglected for the benefit of the former. In worship, it is at least as important that the participants' spiritual credentials should be seen as their intellectual and technical ones. For the same reason, the corporate preparation of those who lead in worship is important. Their spiritual unity and teamwork needs to be evident as well as their technical teamwork.

Encouragement in worship should include the setting of good examples. If people are not to learn by painful experience, they must learn by observing others, and that is especially true in worship. Many people will never transcend the good or bad habits which they learn from their spiritual mentors. It is important, therefore, that those in leadership should seek to model the developments in worship which they believe the Lord wishes to see. If we exhibit narrow content, long empty silences, and a heavy religiosity which is not consistent with our manner in ordinary congregational life, it will not be surprising if those whom we disciple come to think that that is what worship ought to be like.

They will do so, of course, only so long as they remain largely within our orbit. Increasingly, however, there is a mobility between areas and

congregations. People see other, more vibrant, dynamic and evidently spiritual modes of worship and, not surprisingly, they register their discontent with what they experience at home. That points to the importance of leaders' being willing to learn from others. As opportunity arises in the course of travel, they should observe what is done in other congregations in order to plunder shamelessly practices and approaches which might be profitable at home. They might even go as far as deliberately to seek out places where it is known that there is truly spiritual and spontaneous worship in order to take advantage of those models.

### Structuring worship

Paradoxical as it may seem, the quickest route to the restoration of spontaneity in worship may be to introduce some degree of structure with the aim of helping people towards a deeper worship experience. In principle, the traditional Brethren approach of 'open' worship confers the widest possible measure of freedom for participation, subject only to the possibility of intervention by the elders if contributions of a certain type or a particular individual are persistently unacceptable because of their character or theology or the known unholy life of the participant.

This can present two problems. First, where worship has degenerated into a narrow and unacknowledged liturgy which is severely at odds with the principle, many present may simply feel that there is no point in trying to participate since their contribution would either be falsely constrained or unacceptable. Second, the very freedom inherent in the principle may be intimidating. For there are at least two ways of teaching people to swim. They may be invited simply to plunge in at the deep end and get on with it; or they may begin at the shallow end, with support from the teacher and other aids, and with *terra firma* close at hand. The first method is the more difficult! Yet in worship we often persist in asking people to launch out, with the thought in the back of their minds that the teacher will *not* plunge in and help if they get into difficulties, but criticize them from the side for their poor technique or simple incompetence.

It may be, therefore, that where open worship has become arid, an essential stepping stone for renewal may be for the leaders to introduce some degree of structure. For example, a specific president might be appointed whose task is to ensure that the period of worship is launched in a particular and helpful direction and who, prominently or discreetly, will seek under the leading of the Holy Spirit to steer the course of the whole event in a way which is spiritually rewarding. Such an individual might be an elder, or a teacher, or might be an instrumentalist or singer who has the necessary spiritual sensitivity and gifts.

Such leadership and structure can vary widely in character and degree.

One of the chief functions of the leader will be to expand the horizons of the congregation in worship, in effect both to model and teach worship. The aim should normally be to encourage the congregation's worship to the point at which individuals can be invited to take part spontaneously in a helpful way. But, in the final analysis, the only criterion is whether the Lord is truly worshipped corporately. A completely unstructured event is of no value if the product is not true and spiritual worship, while a fully structured event will be biblical if the result is such worship (John 4:23–24).

### **Breaking moulds**

In seeking renewal in worship, leaders may need considerable courage in addressing the existing structures of worship. The traditional way of doing things at the Lord's Table, as described earlier, may exercise a particularly powerful influence on the character of worship, both in style and content. Experience suggests that it can be very difficult to change the character of this event by a process of gradualism. It may be necessary in effect to bypass that meeting altogether, by creating a quite separate event in a congregation's programme which the leadership uses to encourage a quite different sort of worship. Alternatively, the mould may be broken by introducing a decisively different structure to the communion service. Either approach will require due Christian concern for those who are deeply attached out of principle or habit to the customary way of doing things. And, as with all changes which affect a voluntary group, much effort needs to be invested in preparing the group for the change and in gaining their assent.

Another tradition which leaders may need to seek to change is the endemic individualism of much that passes for Christian worship. Many come to worship with the notion that, since rightly the purpose is the worship of God alone, the only thing that matters is what passes between themselves and God. This breeds a habit of mind in which the other people who have come together for the same purpose are mutually ignored. This attitude ignores the Lord's injunction that the true worshipper must first be reconciled with his brother and sister (Matt 5:23–24). It ignores the New Testament emphasis on partnership in every aspect of the corporate life of the congregation and the fact that communion is intended to be not only with the Lord but with the other members of the Christian body (1 Cor 10:14–22). Many coming to Christian worship, however, turn their backs mentally and emotionally on their fellow-worshippers to such an extent that they might as well be worshipping alone.

Where this is so, if a truly corporate worship is to be revived, leaders

may need to seek to change attitudes by teaching, by example, by structures, and by sensitive leading of worship, with the aim of obliging the congregation to recognize one another's presence. Appropriate ways include greeting one another, addressing one another at suitable moments, and acknowledging one another in passing the elements in communion. Such are the emotional hang-ups about intimacy, especially among the (?southern) English, that these steps may need to be taken with as great a sensitivity to the feelings of the group as those which affect the form and structure of the Breaking of Bread service.

### **Finding the right idiom**

More widely, congregational leaders should seek an idiom of worship (music, poetry, words, style, etc) with which the particular congregation can identify and make a satisfactory vehicle for their own worship of the Lord. Down the years, this has been both the source of hope and the cause of much frustration in Christian worship. One of the aspects of spiritual revival has always been that it tends to express itself in the musical and poetic idiom of the time. Luther purloined the popular tunes of his day. So did General William Booth, along with the uniform and military style of the jingoism of late Victorian England. Sankey adopted the popular musical expression of the 1860s, as can be seen by comparing his sacred songs with some of the marching tunes of the American Civil War. Now that those particular idioms have had their day, there is every reason for seeking to repeat the process in our times, provided that we are satisfied that there is no reason for rejecting a particular musical or poetic form as being unsuitable *in its very nature*.

This is to propose, however, a further assault upon tradition, in one of the most sacred areas of all. For among the matters most likely to excite any traditionalist group of Christians are two things: the hymnal from which they sing; and the time of the services!

### **Deepening content**

Much of what passes for Christian worship is unsatisfactory because it is spiritually superficial or focuses other than upon the God who is to be worshipped. One remedy is to broaden and deepen the congregation's understanding of the material which is appropriate in worship. It is at this point that the traditional link between worship and the Lord's Supper as practised in Brethren assemblies can be least helpful. A key feature of worship is an appreciation of who God is in all his limitless facets (see Rom 11:33-36). Worship is in essence a *response* to God himself. It is often poverty stricken because of a lack of appreciation and experience of God

on the part of the congregation. In this respect, the narrowness already noted in the content is no help at all. If people are to worship corporately, it is essential that they should focus their mind from the beginning on the person of God and the magnitude of his works—of creation and of redemption.

It should not be assumed that the worshippers will necessarily arrive with appropriate material in their minds for this purpose. If they do not, then it is essential that the congregational leadership should ensure that the gap is repaired, by directing minds towards the Lord. This implies focusing upon the divine revelation of himself. The most obvious way to do this is through the reading and exposition of the Word. That is why it has been so unfortunate that Brethren tradition has tended to limit severely the forms of biblical contribution which have been considered appropriate in worship.

This biblical input can be provided in a variety of ways, of course. It may be that, contrary to the traditional form, worship should begin with pre-arranged expositional or devotional ministry rooted in scripture. So far as I am aware, there is no particular biblical warrant for the widespread practice of reserving the sermon to the end of any meeting. Indeed, some of the historic Christian liturgies place the Word early rather than later in the order of service. Or it may be that the leaders should simply adopt a policy of seeing that they themselves participate early in the worship period by reading and commenting on scripture so as to inject material with which the congregation can begin to work and use as a launching pad for its worship. This will frequently be preferable to the time-honoured practice of taking up some phrase in the first hymn as the theme of worship.

### **Freeing for worship**

But better leadership, more and better structures, and deeper theology will not, in my judgement, in themselves automatically produce a living congregational worship. If the spiritual input is confined to that of the worship leader, the congregation's experience of the Lord will get no further than his. It will be at the mercy of his state of mind, emotion and spirit at the particular time. Nor does it lie simply in better structures or in a formal liturgy which is of its very nature constricting (which is not to say that God cannot and does not use liturgical forms to great spiritual blessing sometimes). Nor does it lie in aesthetics, whether of language or music; nor in quality of performance in the worship service whether by the worship leader or the preacher or musicians. Quality in these areas can be secured by human effort unaided by the Spirit. Nor even does it lie simply in deeper preaching of the Word, though insofar as the Lord is revealed in



his written Word there should certainly be that response in the heart and life of the believer which constitutes worship.

Just as the whole purpose of teaching someone to swim or to ride a bicycle is to be able to stand back and watch them doing it for themselves, so the congregational leader's object must be to set the whole body free to worship as the Spirit leads them. One of the glories of the New Testament is that it reveals a priesthood for all believers, and the great object is that everyone at corporate worship should experience freedom to worship, audibly and inaudibly, the living God.

There are a number of areas in which freedom of form needs to be encouraged positively. Idiom has already been mentioned. Subject only to basic doctrinal checks, worshippers should be free to worship in the intellectual and emotional idiom in which they can best give expression to their thoughts and sentiments about the Lord. There should be a wide freedom as to content. Many subjects can be wholly conducive to worship, particularly where the focus is on the person, character and work of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit—not just of Jesus as saviour).

In this context, it should be noted that too severe a requirement that the theme of a particular worship period should be respected can be very restrictive for many in a congregation. Such an approach can in effect limit audible contribution to those with the intellectual ability and knowledge, not to say ingenuity, to develop the particular theme. Others who might contribute very effectively to public worship may be intimidated into silence because they feel that they cannot develop the particular theme in an acceptable manner.

A wide variety of types of contribution should be perfectly acceptable. There is no reason, for example, why personal testimony of some recent experience of the Lord, or of what he has done for the individual concerned, should be regarded inappropriate or embarrassing in worship. It should be made abundantly clear that short interventions are perfectly acceptable. Indeed, brief participation by a wide variety of people is perhaps the measure most likely to bring about more vibrant worship.

Freedom from unnecessary constraints of time may also be an important factor. It is interesting how bound congregations can become by the accustomed limits of their meetings. When the usual hour to finish has been reached, impatience to be away promptly begins to manifest itself. There may, on occasion, be legitimate practical reasons, of course. But often, when worship is burdensome, it is a symptom either of spiritual sluggishness or perhaps of the failure of the leadership to make arrangements which set the congregation free to worship. By contrast, where there is spiritual revival, people show themselves to be quite unconcerned by the passage of time and are prepared to spend literally

hours in prayer and praise—the events at Troas as recorded in Acts 20 were just the first recorded example of this phenomenon.

Sometimes a sufficient space of time is needed for a congregation to give proper expression to its corporate thoughts about the Lord, and the customary hour, up to half of which is taken up with preaching of some kind, is often simply not long enough. Some care and sensitivity to the feelings of the majority of the congregation are needed in making changes in this respect. The best course may be a gradual lengthening of the time allotted to worship, coupled with a policy of making it clear that at a certain point people are free to leave, but others may wish to continue in worship.

### **The structural integrity of spontaneous worship**

Where worship is led by an individual or a group, and has been carefully prepared in advance, it is possible, whether by carnal or spiritual means, to achieve a satisfying coherence, balance and flow to different contributions. Once, however, the leader releases a meeting into free or spontaneous worship, these features may easily be lost. Worshippers need to be educated to the fact that they are not worshipping as individuals who are free to contribute just as they like. They need to be very conscious of one another and responsive to what the Holy Spirit is saying and doing through others who are contributing. Congregational leaders, whether or not they are in the presidential position for the particular occasion, need to be alert to this process and ready to contribute constructively themselves where it threatens to break down. They also need to stand ready to stimulate further thought or to move the event on to a further stage in the cycle of worship, when that seems to be spiritually appropriate. If effective spontaneity is to be encouraged, the requirement is for worship leaders who are sympathetic to the leading of the Spirit in the gathering and who can help the gathering to respond.

On the more practical side, congregations need to be educated in practices which are helpful to the flow of worship and those that are not. One feature which seems to me most unhelpful is unnecessary dependence upon the hymn or songbook—a consequence, perhaps, of widespread literacy. It seems that congregations often cannot contemplate singing except from them. They bury their heads in them, even for pieces with which they have been totally familiar for at least 40 years, and the habit has developed of always waiting for the tune to be announced at length on the accompanying instrument. This can introduce quite unnecessary hiatus into worship and reinforces the sense of individual isolation rather than the corporate nature of worship. There are, of course, practical

difficulties where numbers are small and musical expertise limited. But it would often be preferable for the coherence of worship if, under the leadership of the Spirit, an individual could take up a well-known song or hymn unannounced and the congregation could join in, if necessary unaccompanied. Then either the accompanist could transpose into the appropriate key, or at a suitable opportunity, shift the key appropriately. Even where songbooks are available, it often helps to display the pieces on an overhead projector in order to lift the heads of the congregation and to enable them to be more conscious of the corporate nature of worship. (This implies, of course, that questions of copyright must be properly attended to, and that arrangements be made for operating the projector and looking after the slides.)

Those presiding at worship should not neglect silence in worship, either. It is not the case that all silences are empty. It may be very helpful from time to time positively to encourage everyone present to worship the Lord silently for a period—though it is wise to make sure that they have the material ready to mind with which to do this.

### **Identifying and encouraging spiritual gifts**

The whole point of open or spontaneous worship is to give opportunity for the exercise of the diverse spiritual gifts which are available in the particular gathering. It follows, therefore, that leaders should be seeking to identify those who have such gifts and encouraging them to develop and exercise them for the benefit of the body as a whole. By contrast, it will not help much if participation is dominated by those who are not suitably gifted.

There are some spiritual gifts which are obviously of particular relevance to worship. If it is held that the full range of spiritual gifts are still available to the church and there is no restriction on their use, then Paul refers in 1 Corinthians 14 to six which are clearly relevant: prophecy; knowledge; revelation; teaching; tongues (ecstatic utterance); and interpretation of tongues. He also refers to contributing a hymn, possibly spontaneously composed under spiritual inspiration (v 26). The reference to knowledge suggests that utterance of wisdom and utterance of knowledge, mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:8, are also relevant.

Prophecy and revelation are clearly of especial importance, if only because Paul says so explicitly, 'If all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all . . . the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you' (1 Cor 15:24–25). What is true for the unbeliever seems to be likely to be even more true for the believer. For the English, the almost automatic principal connotation of prophecy is with foretelling

future events. Some prophecy in the New Testament undoubtedly had that character, as when Agabus foretold extensive famine (Acts 11:27–28) and the imprisonment of Paul (Acts 21:10–11), the latter apparently in confirmation of numerous such prophecies elsewhere ('the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me'—Acts 20:23; see also Rev 22:6). But in the New Testament, the main burden of the concept of prophecy lies elsewhere: in giving direct instructions to a congregation (Acts 13:1–2), in exhorting and strengthening it (Acts 15:32), and in building it up and consoling it (1 Cor 14:3). In referring to 'some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching' (1 Cor 14:6), Paul may have in mind a spectrum stretching from a reminder of established and general Christian truth on the one hand to a more directly intended word from God to the particular congregation on the other.

Many, of course, balk at the idea that God still speaks directly today in congregational worship, but it is not clear why the idea should present such difficulty. It may be argued that the whole point of worship is to enter the presence of God and to experience him. If pre-Christian people heard him, *a fortiori* why should not those who live in the Christian era (see, for example, Isa 6 where God speaks directly; Luke 1:8–20 where he speaks through the angel; and 2 Chron 5–7 where he speaks both directly and through Solomon and the people in prophetic mode)? Evangelical Christians have long held that God speaks directly to individual Christians, in conversion and subsequently in order to guide them. It is not clear why he should be prohibited from doing this to the congregation as a whole as it meets together. They have long held, too, that he speaks directly through the exposition of scripture and the preaching of the gospel. But it is not obvious why he should now have confined himself to those methods of communication to a congregation. Such communication should, of course, be consistent with God's authoritative revelation of himself in the scriptures—which is presumably the main reason why the prophets were required to test the utterances of their brethren (1 Cor 14:29, 32; 1 Thess 5:20–21; and 1 John 4:1). But there is an obvious distinction to be drawn between revelation which purports to add to God's general enduring revelation of himself to the church as encapsulated in the scriptures, and revelation which deals with the specifics of the life and ministry of an individual or of a congregation, and which for that reason is limited in time and place.

The conclusion is that, without exercise of the intelligible gifts which Paul enumerates in 1 Corinthians 14, worship is likely to be comparatively impoverished. Their exercise is clearly related to the importance of deepening the spiritual content of worship from the Word, as already mentioned. This is a vital area in which congregational leaders need to encourage the exercise of gift if worship is to be enriched and freed into

effective spontaneity. Regrettably, it is an area in which the elders of Brethren assemblies are, by virtue of inexperience, often poorly equipped to give a positive lead.

### **Identifying and encouraging natural gifts**

It is not disembodied spirits who come to worship God, but whole human beings. The dominical injunction is, 'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength' (Mark 12:30—the last term generally refers to physical strength). In the Judaeo-Christian understanding it is difficult to draw meaningful distinctions between body, mind and spirit. Where there is true worship, therefore, it is only to be expected that it will find legitimate expression in the mind, the emotions and even physically. So there is much that can be done to enrich worship by encouraging the use of the natural gifts with which the group is endowed—instrumental, vocal, poetic.

It can be done in a way which also encourages freedom and spontaneity in worship. There is no law, for example, which says that the instrumental accompaniment of Christian worship should be limited to one instrument, any more than there was once a law in Brethren assemblies which limited it to none. There are many congregations elsewhere in the world where all instrumentalists are encouraged to bring their instrumental gift to worship as naturally as traditionally the gift of teaching has been brought to worship in Brethren churches. Provided that the overall result is orderly and edifying there is no need to be too concerned about musical balance. Congregational singing will in any case to a large extent mask that and many churches are discovering that accompaniment by a small musical group is more helpful in worship than that of a single rather inflexible instrument. Some instruments do seem more flexible than others in accompaniment of spontaneous worship. And instrumentalists who can accurately recall and pitch tunes by ear are particularly valuable in assisting congregations to worship without unnecessary interruption. They should be strongly encouraged to help in freeing worship.

Vocalists also need to be encouraged to use their skills both collectively in giving a strong lead to congregational singing and in making spontaneous individual contributions in song. Here, congregations and especially worship leaders need to be alert to whether or not the vocalist should be left to contribute individually, and to when the congregation should be encouraged to join in. The possibility of instrumental solos should not be neglected either, for example, during periods of silent worship or when the elements are passing from one to another.

One aspect of gift which generally tends to be neglected is that of the lyric writer and poet. Where the Holy Spirit is really at work in a

congregation, it is to be expected that people will not confine themselves exclusively to the vehicles of worship which have been provided by former generations or from people outside the congregation. Where there is genuine spiritual experience combined with lyrical gift, it should be natural for the individuals concerned to give expression to their praises in original work. The rest of the congregation should in turn be pleased to take up such work themselves as expressions which stem from their common experience. That it seems so rare may be because of want of deep contemporary spiritual experience. But it may also be because the individuals concerned have not been trained to see it as a possible way of expressing their praises and rendering useful service to the Body of Christ. Congregational leaders may also have failed themselves to see the possibilities in this area and to encourage the exercise of the relevant gifts. In either case, it would follow that the congregation is the poorer because gift is not being exercised 'for the common good' (1 Cor 12:7). For myself, I do not see why in addition to instrumental, vocal and lyrical gifts, the rhythmic gifts of dance should also not be deployed in congregational worship from time to time, though I grant that care should be taken, out of concern for the conscience of the weaker brother and sister.

In the use of this type of gift, I believe, too, that there should be room for the air or lyric which is spontaneously composed at the time of worship under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If any of this should seem strange or shocking, I would say only that they seem to me to be possibilities which are implicit in the principles of spontaneous worship as pioneered by the early Brethren (among other groups). It is surely not to be supposed that the *full* possibilities were revealed to them. They were children of their times, and past and familiar practice was bound to limit their understanding, as it will ours. Often in spiritual practice, it will be for us, under the guidance of the Spirit, to take up the trail from the point reached by others.

In encouraging the exercise of these gifts, congregational leaders should be careful to enjoin on the people concerned a number of important principles. First, they need to understand the need to refine and develop their particular gifts for the benefit of the congregation, just as the teacher needs to prepare himself spiritually and technically (1 Tim 4:14-15); in the case of a musical ensemble this implies collective preparation as well as individual preparation. Second, as already noted, it is not simply a matter of technical proficiency. Spiritual preparation is important, and adequate time needs to be given to worship as well as practice. Third, and most important, instrumentalists, vocalists and lyricists *must* understand clearly that their task in worship is *not* to *perform* to the congregation. It is, rather, both to lead and help the assembled company as a whole to worship before the throne of God. It follows, therefore, that the hearts and minds of musicians and singers should be directed towards the Lord, rather than

towards the congregation ('it was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the LORD'—2 Chron 5:13). This is often a hard lesson for musicians to learn who have been brought up in the post-Enlightenment tradition of musical performance. Fourth, there is the point of the subtle relation between musicians and the rest of the congregation. The task is not to accompany or to follow; it is to lead and help. There are many congregations whose worship is impaired, either because musicians will not shoulder properly the responsibility of leading song, or because they dominate the proceedings to such an extent that it becomes a struggle between them and the rest of the congregation. Where, however, the ministry is properly exercised there are great benefits in prospect: in Solomon's temple, it was the presence of the glory of God (2 Chron 5:13–14).

### **Blending spiritual gifts in leading worship**

'When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.' The purpose of the exercise of spiritual gifts is to build up (1 Cor 14:3, 26), for the common good as just noted, and finally to express unity (1 Cor 12:12; see also Eph 4:3–6, 16). It follows therefore that, the multiple exercise of gift notwithstanding, worship should amount to a satisfying unity, expressing the unity of the Spirit with the Father and the Son (John 17:20–26). Free or spontaneous worship should not be a series of disparate contributions; if it is, it calls into question the reality of what is claimed to be taking place. A special burden rests with those who lead worship, with those who lead singing, with musicians and singers, and everyone else who takes part prominently, to give expression to that unity. To achieve that, they need to be especially conscious of the leading of the Holy Spirit not only within themselves, but in each other and in the gathering as a whole. It calls for teamwork in which under God they seek to blend their various gifts for the benefit of the whole. They must be prepared to respond to each other's leadership. The president or the principal leader must be ready to give place to another who believes that he or she has from the Lord something which is critically necessary to the gathering at that particular point. Especially, worship leaders and musicians need to seek to blend their contributions to give a clear and flowing lead to the gathering as a whole.

### **CONCLUSION**

'O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How

unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways. "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen.' (Rom 11:33-36). If the object of worship is to experience the presence of this God, we cannot expect that it will be possible to tie him down with formularies on the one hand, or with particular methods, techniques and practices on the other. He will reveal himself as he chooses. Fearfully, it is always possible to manufacture in the energy of the flesh something that will pass, even among Christians, for true Christian worship. Moreover, it may not be wise simply to try to copy what other Christians do. For them, they may be worshipping in spirit and in truth. For us the same arrangements and practices may simply be a counterfeit. Quite apart from principle, this may simply be a matter of practicality. For example, what is appropriate in a gathering of 200 or 1,000 worshipping Christians may not be at all relevant or practicable in a gathering of 20. Within the general framework of scriptural teaching on worship it is for the individual gathering to seek to use the gifts among it so as to give authentic expression to the worship of God.

If scripture is viewed as a whole, it becomes clear that corporate worship and individual prayer can take many different outward forms, varying with place, time and culture. It is the object of worship which is of abiding importance: to experience the Lord in reality and to respond to him in adoration and commitment with all that that implies. Happily, we have numerous models in scripture which indicate for us something of the character of true worship, for example, in the Psalms, in passages in the prophets like Isaiah 12 and Ezekiel 1, and in the book of Revelation. The task of the congregation is to seek that authentic experience of the Lord. We must wait upon the Lord for this experience of himself. But it is my conviction that we do not need to lie idly on the hillside like the poet waiting for the muse. In Christian thinking, seeking is a more active mode than that. As I have suggested, there is much that congregational leaders can and should do to help the Christian community in the quest.

#### Footnotes

- 1 See Ralph Martin, *Worship in the Early Church*, (Marshall, Morgan & Scott 1974) 28-65.
- 2 Incidentally, it might be pointed out that there is no reason in our day why mid-week house groups for worship, prayer, Bible study and fellowship should be construed as inevitably divisive or outside the authority of the congregation. That anxiety derives, I suspect, from a distinction between corporate and private activity which has more to do with Victorian notions of the Englishman's



home as his castle than it does with the New Testament—though of course where such notions are strongly held there might be good reason for caution about the development of groups which might be outside effective regulation by the congregation.

- 3 On this process, see John Tiller with Mark Birchall, *The Gospel Community and its Leadership*, (Marshall Pickering 1987) 1–51.
- 4 F Roy Coad, *A History of the Brethren Movement*, (Paternoster Press, second edition, 1976) 125–126, 128, 139–140; H H Rowdon, *The Origins of the Brethren, 1825–1850*, (Pickering & Inglis 1967) 227–228.
- 5 See C S Dessain, *John Henry Newman*, (Thomas Nelson 1966), in particular the material cited from *Parochial and Plain Sermons* on pp 17–21.
- 6 So C K Barrett: ‘a fresh, perhaps spontaneous, composition, not an Old Testament psalm, is intended’ *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, second edition, (A & C Black 1971) 327.

# WORSHIP AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

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In Brethren churches there has always been a close connection between worship and the celebration of the Lord's Supper. This connection is so close that, for many Brethren, worship is virtually synonymous with the Breaking of Bread. A description of Brethren practices and some consideration of the historical circumstances that surrounded their origin in the last century will help to explain the way their tradition was shaped and formed.

## BRETHREN AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

Many of the founders of the Brethren movement were ordained or preparing for ordination.<sup>1</sup> They found themselves prevented by ecclesiastical tradition and denominational rigidities from sharing fellowship with other believers and expressing this fellowship by breaking bread together. Those contemplating missionary work found that, if not ordained, they could even be prevented from breaking bread with the fruit of their own evangelism. The Lord's Supper which should have been the focus of Christian unity had become the occasion of division.

They wrestled with this problem, as many others have. As a result of deep heart searching and a re-evaluation of the scriptures, they broke out of their spiritual straightjacket on discovering that the New Testament did not make the ordinance dependent on the presence of a validly ordained individual. They could express Christian fellowship and be united around the Lord's Table without waiting on any man for authority or recognition. The necessary authority stemmed directly from the Lord's command and recognition depended only on him.

The effect of this discovery was electrifying. They were able to meet together from different denominational backgrounds without inhibition.

The sense of freedom and the release of spiritual power that flowed from this discovery drew many to their gatherings. Having thrown aside the restrictions of clerical ordination they acknowledged as far as their own ministry was concerned that they exercised it 'on the nomination of my Lord by his Spirit'.

It was a small step from this position to the rediscovery of the role of spiritual gifts within the assembly. (They rejected, however, the use of the ecstatic gifts which they came to regard as no longer available to the church.) These spiritual gifts needed opportunity for their free exercise in ministry and worship. Where more natural to exercise them but at the Lord's Table?

The hallmarks of the early gatherings of Brethren were:

- 1 An open table—at which all believers in good standing were received.
- 2 The dismantling of clerical differentiations and freedom to break bread together without requiring authority or authorised administration.
- 3 The abandoning of a liturgical approach to worship and the practice of open worship associated with the Breaking of Bread.

The result was to establish a new pattern for gatherings of believers. It has been the general practice of Brethren to meet each Sunday morning for worship and the Breaking of Bread. The 'morning meeting' as it became known, was and still remains, unique to assemblies of Brethren.<sup>2</sup> In the morning meeting there was firmly established a close link between worship and the Breaking of Bread. Although it would not be suggested that corporate worship could not take place without breaking bread, this ordinance is undoubtedly seen as the normal, natural and primary context for the worship of the assembled church.

#### NEW TESTAMENT PRACTICE

Brethren would undoubtedly contend that their practice reflects the emphasis of the New Testament church. One must ask, however, to what extent this connection between worship and the Lord's Supper is supported by New Testament practice. A study of this question throws light on the ordinance itself and suggests appropriate contexts for its celebration.

In four verses in 1 Corinthians, Paul describes a simple series of actions and words of the Lord Jesus at the Last Supper (11:23–26). The ordinance which these verses describe has been given a number of names including Holy Communion, The Eucharist, the Lord's Supper and the Breaking of Bread. Brethren have typically referred to it by the last two of these, the Lord's Supper and the Breaking of Bread. All of these names have a basis

in the New Testament or in the ordinance itself. (See Acts 2:42; 1 Cor 10:16, 21; 11:20, 24.)

'The Breaking of Bread' and its equivalent 'to break bread' are interesting terms. It is not always clear that they refer necessarily or only to the ordinance itself. They occur a number of times in the New Testament, and are the most frequent designation for the ordinance. The slight uncertainty of reference is a reminder that the early church seems frequently and perhaps typically to have 'broken bread' in the context of a communal meal (see Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor 11:20-34). There is a similar breadth of reference in the single New Testament usage of the term 'The Lord's Supper' which encompasses the common meal within which the Corinthians celebrated the ordinance (1 Cor 11:20).

This conjunction of the ordinance with a meal is a reflection of the original circumstances in which the ordinance was instituted. The Last Supper was the final occasion before his death on which the Lord Jesus spent an evening with the disciples and shared a meal with them.

The Last Supper was not simply an opportunity for fellowship with close associates. It was also a Passover meal. It combined a formal meal with a structured religious liturgy including elements of worship. The courses of the meal were interspersed with prayers, thanksgiving and praise, singing and the recitation and exposition of scripture.

This ordered sequence had a number of purposes. The whole meal was in part a re-enactment of the original circumstances of the Passover. It was designed to remind the participants of God's saving acts when he brought their forefathers out of Egypt and as a result of which they became his people. The specifically religious elements provided an opportunity for a response of praise and worship to the remembrance of what God had done in the past. The ceremony was designed to educate all those present, and especially children, in the significance of the meal.

The Passover was celebrated nationally in Jerusalem. The lamb was ritually slaughtered in the temple, but the meal and its associated ceremonies were not part of the temple worship. These were celebrated in small groups usually within the extended family. In this intimate circle the formality of the occasion was considerably softened. Even a cursory reading of the gospel accounts show that the Last Supper shared this informal character. Little of the Passover ritual remains in the record but the intimate atmosphere is made abundantly clear especially in John's Gospel. The circumstances of the foot washing; the questioning and conversations; the Lord's extended but intensely personal instruction of his disciples: all graphically depict an intimate occasion. Twice during the evening, first towards the beginning of the meal, and then at the end, our Lord departed from the normal course of events and in so doing instituted what we now recognise as a single ordinance.

The apostles continued, after the ascension, the table fellowship they had experienced with the Lord both before his crucifixion and after his resurrection. The special importance of what he had done at the Last Supper was quickly recognised. His command to repeat it was obeyed and observed, probably daily (Acts 2:42, 46). There could be nothing more natural than to remember him by breaking bread as they enjoyed table fellowship together. This was made especially easy as they were continuing the communal life they had enjoyed together for the past few years. Under these circumstances it was also natural that, under the guidance of the apostles, the table fellowship of the early Jerusalem church should follow the pattern of the Last Supper and be accompanied by prayer, praise, teaching from Scripture and holy conversation (Acts 2:42).

This immediate practice seems to have been modified later by the circumstances of time and place. With the recognition of the first day of the week as the regular occasion for Christian gatherings, the celebration of the ordinance probably became a weekly occurrence, but the character of the gatherings continued, combining a fellowship meal, the Breaking of Bread, worship and Christian instruction (Acts 20:7–12). Such gatherings provided the opportunity for many of the New Testament letters to be first read to the assembled believers to whom they were addressed.

Although one cannot be certain how the gathering described in 1 Corinthians 14 was related to the supper described in 1 Corinthians 11, there is every reason to suppose that it formed part of the same gathering. It is perhaps relevant that the gifts of prayer and prophecy which are discussed in the verses in chapter 11 immediately prior to the discussion of the supper are also the principal gifts discussed in chapter 14. The exercise of spiritual gifts would be both natural and appropriate at such a gathering and some of the comments in chapter 14 are particularly relevant to the Breaking of Bread (nb vv 16–17). In view of the general practice it seems probable that they were part of the gathering referred to generally by the apostle by the repeated phrase ‘when you come together’. (1 Cor 11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34; 14:19, 23, 26).

Within the period covered by the New Testament, one can see some signs of modifications in this practice. Reference has already been made to a change from daily to weekly observance. An important development was the bringing together of the two parts of the ordinance—the bread and the cup. At the Last Supper these had been separated by most of the Passover meal. Having been brought together, the ordinance became a distinct part of the fellowship meal. From Paul’s description of the ordinance it would seem that this had already happened by the time of Paul’s conversion and certainly by the time of his arrival in Corinth and the beginning of his mission there (1 Cor 11:23). Later, in sub-apostolic times, the fellowship meal became separated from the ordinance altogether. This was perhaps

due in part to the type of abuse which Paul seeks to correct in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 11:20, 22, 34).

There were some occasions when believers came together for a particular purpose as, for example, when they met to pray regarding the crisis arising from the imprisonment of Peter and John (Acts 12:5,12). But the general impression is that, in New Testament times, there was no clear distinction by time or place between fellowship at a common meal, breaking bread, praise and worship and teaching. The emphasis is upon a synthesis of spiritual exercise at a single gathering rather than the segregation which subsequently became typical.

#### THE SUPPER AND WORSHIP

New Testament practice shows a close association between the Lord's Supper and the various other expressions of the corporate life of the church, including worship. Brethren practice was formed and moulded by historical circumstances seen in the light of New Testament practice. If the ordinance is considered in this light, one can establish whether the conjunction of worship and the Lord's Supper is a casual connection or whether it derives from the character of the ordinance itself. If the latter is true, the ordinance will influence the character of the worship with which it is associated. One can also consider whether there are features of the Lord's Supper which make it particularly appropriate as a context for corporate worship.

There are undoubtedly a number of aspects of the Lord's Supper which make it a powerful stimulus to the corporate worship of the church. Paul's account in 1 Corinthians 11 records that, on two occasions, before the bread was broken and before the cup was drunk, our Lord gave thanks. Embedded within the ordinance, therefore, is a twice repeated expression of thanksgiving to God (Mark 14:22-23). This may have been understood initially by the disciples in part as thanks for the provision in God's providence of the bread and wine. But in retrospect it was quickly perceived to have a deeper significance. The meaning of the loaf and cup are clearly expressed in the words of institution. It is the understanding of this meaning by believers which results in thanksgiving.

Such thanksgiving follows the examples of the Lord himself. It is made mandatory by his injunction 'do this' and it is found at the very centre of the ordinance. The broken bread and poured out cup, which speak so eloquently of the sacrificial death of the Lord for his people, are placed firmly in a setting of praise and thanksgiving. So important was this seen to be that in the early centuries of the church the ordinance was called 'The Thanksgiving' ('The Eucharist'). Any setting of the Lord's Supper

which ignores this truth seriously distorts the ordinance. Following our Lord's example, we bring our thanksgiving to the Father for the person and work of the Son. This is only possible as we come in the fullness of the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:18–20).

The ordinance is not simply a stimulus to private thanksgiving. It is essentially a communal act which cannot be celebrated by an individual believer. It brings believers together. The loaf must be broken, the cup poured out, and both shared among the assembled company. To take is to share with and to identify oneself with both the Lord and the other believers present. To break bread is a symbol of fellowship and is an act expressing the presence and reality of the local church.

The ordinance is not only a corporate act. It is also intended to be a public act. Paul says that it is a declaration and proclamation of the essential Christian gospel. He writes, 'as often as you eat the bread and drink the cup you proclaim the Lord's death' (1 Cor 11:26). We proclaim his death not simply as a fact of history. The ordinance makes clear its vicarious nature, its saving power, and that we are the grateful recipients in Christ of his salvation. Peter asserts that the role of the Lord's people is to be a worshipping people and that they fulfil that function by declaring his wonderful deeds (1 Pet 2:29). The proclamation of God's saving acts is an essential element of worship. If to break bread together is to make such a declaration, then it is also to engage in an act of worship. Furthermore, in this action the church expresses its purpose and fulfills its highest calling.

The proclamation is not confined to a statement regarding the Lord's death. Paul writes, 'you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes'. The clear implication is that an essential part of the proclamation is the assertion of his resurrection, present exaltation and future return. The bread and wine remind the believer of a living Lord Jesus. The bread which we break is a communion with a living and life-giving Lord (1 Cor 10:16). The Lord who is proclaimed is the one who declares of himself, 'I am the Living One: I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!' (Rev 1:18).

There are a number of New Testament indications that point to the Lord's Supper as providing in some way a revelation of Christ to the believer. The Lord himself promised that when two or three are gathered together in his name he would be present with them (Mark 18:20). No one can doubt that this promise applies to a gathering of the Lord's people around his table. He commanded us to do this 'in remembrance of me'. (1 Cor 11:24–25). Faithful obedience to that command in the company of the Lord's people brings him powerfully before the mind's eye.

The Pauline comment 'until he comes' is a reminder of a joyful and blessed expectation. The atmosphere of thanksgiving and joy to which

reference has already been made is consistent with the fact that this is 'The Lord's Supper'—a feast. It sprang from a feast and it points forward to a feast. Indeed the supper is, in a measure, an anticipation of that longed for occasion.

As we look forward to his coming again and anticipate the joy of the heavenly supper, we also remember that he is present at the feast as the host.

What food luxurious loads the board  
 When at his table sits the Lord.  
 The wine how rich, the bread how sweet  
 When Jesus deigns the guests to meet.<sup>3</sup>

When believers come together as the body of Christ around his table and fulfil their divinely appointed role in the power of the Holy Spirit, it is not surprising that he becomes manifest. If the presence of God is manifest to an unbeliever when believers assemble, it is to be expected that believers themselves will be powerfully aware of the presence of their Lord (1 Cor 14:25). Worship is the natural response of the redeemed soul to the presence of the redeemer. Surely those who break bread in accordance with the Lord's command and who find him present with them will fall down in worship and adoration.

In all these ways breaking bread is a powerful stimulus to worship. At its centre is thanksgiving and joy. The bread and cup testify to the saving acts from which we personally benefit and for which we give thanks. The act itself is an act of worship which fulfills the divinely ordained role for the church. In fulfilling this role the assembly becomes the vehicle for a revelation of the Lord to itself and to the world.

In view of the powerful theological character of the Lord's Supper one would expect any activity of the church which is brought into close relationship with it to be strongly influenced both as to content and conduct. That this is indeed so can be seen from the apostle's discussion of the way in which the Corinthian assembly conducted the fellowship meal which they associated with the Breaking of Bread (1 Cor 11:20-34). So inappropriate was their behaviour that the apostle could comment, 'it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat' (v 20). A number of general lessons can be drawn from this passage and applied to worship in the context of the Lord's Supper.

There is a distinction between corporate and personal worship which needs to be clearly understood. Corporate worship is not simply simultaneous personal worship where each individual worships without intelligent interaction with the others present. Corporate worship is the worship of the body *as a body*. Unity of thought and expression in worship is achieved, not by an imposed liturgy but by the intelligent and free



expression of the individual members of the body exercising their gifts in the fullness of the Spirit and interacting with one another and with the whole church.

Worship so generated expresses the corporate nature of the church as a free association of individual members bound together by a common bond with their head and upbuilding themselves in a common life. Such worship will have a greater scope and depth than the personal worship of a single individual. The breath of understanding and experience of the Lord possessed by the whole church is available to inform and enrich the worship. This can be brought to bear by the Spirit using all the gifts available. This is of course only possible where there is freedom for the exercise of these gifts. It is this added scope and depth to worship which makes 'the morning meeting', at its best, a treasured experience for those who worship in Brethren churches.

The character of the ordinance set limits for the Corinthian church to the character of the meal with which it was associated. The ordinance performed a controlling function (vv 21, 22, 33). If this was ignored, there was a serious danger of destroying the ordinance (v 20). It ceased to be a meaningful celebration. Similarly, breaking bread performs an important controlling function on any associated worship. It does this by focusing the worship and by providing limiting boundaries for it. This is particularly important where the worship is open and liberty can easily be abused. It focuses the worship by bringing the attention of the assembled church to the meaning of the ordinance itself and by the necessity to perform the acts which constitute the ordinance. It sets a boundary to the worship by excluding anything which cannot be encompassed within the meaning and purpose of the ordinance.

However, it is essential to identify carefully the focal point and where the boundary lies. The Lord Jesus made his intention quite clear when he said, 'Do this in remembrance of me.' The ordinance is to be celebrated in remembrance of him; the bread is to be broken and eaten in remembrance of him. The cup is to be drunk in remembrance of him. There is no qualification or restriction in these words. It is the fullness of the person and work of Christ that is the object of remembrance and it is the fullness of the person and work of Christ that is the subject of Christian worship.

There is no restriction of topic or time—so long as it is related to Christ—who is the eternal word, the alpha and omega; in whom, through whom and for whom all things were created; and who is the beginning, the first born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. (John 1:1-3; Rev 1:17; Col 1:16-18). The person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ provide the whole subject matter of Christian worship and it is this upon which the attention of worshipping believers is concentrated. With such a restriction there is an endless source of inspiration for true

worship and there is a constantly renewed source of freshness. His riches are unsearchable and his praise eternal.

Amongst some Brethren there is a feeling that the worship associated with the Lord's Supper should be more restricted than this and should concentrate on the death of our Lord. They feel that other aspects of truth should be excluded from worship on such an occasion. This attitude, which can express itself in positively disruptive ways, involves a misunderstanding of the ordinance itself and a serious diminishing of the person of our Lord. We come to remember him. And as we remember him it is the living Christ who is present. We cannot deny the cross but we must not restrict our remembrance of him to such a narrow compass. Those who fear that without this restriction the worship of the church will lack focus do not take proper account of the influence of the ordinance itself. There is no doubt that worship, when associated with breaking bread, is inevitably focused on the person and work of the Lord Jesus. This is all the restriction that is necessary.

Nevertheless, when we come together, the Spirit often does direct the thoughts of the church to some particular aspect of his person and work. Such a theme is to be treated with respect, but it is important not to become bound by the idea that there *must* be a theme. If there is a theme it should develop as the occasion proceeds and should result in the expression of thanksgiving and praise. This in itself is a liberating ministry.

Both New Testament practice and the theological meaning of the Lord's Supper confirm that worship is necessarily associated with the Breaking of Bread. Such worship must reflect the corporate nature of the church as the body of Christ. To this extent scripture supports the Brethren tradition. But, as other essays in this review show, this is not to say that worship is to be confined to what takes place around the Lord's Table.

#### Footnotes

- 1 See F Roy Coad, *A History of the Brethren Movement* (Paternoster Press 1968) 15-35,
- 2 For a description of a morning meeting see: Peter Cousins, *The Brethren*. Christian Denominations Series. (The Religious Education Press 1982).
- 3 From the hymn 'Amidst us our Beloved stands' by C H Spurgeon.

# MUSIC, MOVEMENT AND SILENCE IN WORSHIP

John Allan

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## THE SILENCE OF THE BIBLE

One of the annoying things about the scriptures is that often they don't tell us all we would like to know. On some subjects there is tantalisingly little written for our instruction, and we might wonder why God has allowed this to happen; you or I would not have managed things thus. We would have inserted a couple of verses unambiguously clarifying the doctrine of the Trinity, and so have undermined a whole century of Jehovah's Witness confusion. We would have written long, detailed directions for the participation of women in church services and the precise mode of baptism to be used, and so have avoided thousands of hours of theological controversy and bitterness. And—I suspect—we would have said a little more about worship.

Worship is never defined or described in detail in either the New Testament or the Old. Hence Christians have problems in deciding what we are actually commanded to *do*. What are the limits of our freedom? Are some activities acceptable, and others not? Are we to follow slavishly an approved liturgy composed by other men? Or are we to make a determined drive for simplicity, spontaneity and originality—at the possible cost of depth, beauty and theological richness? And what physical or mental activities are involved anyway? Must we restrict ourselves to the style of the early church—in which case, out goes the organ—or are we free to open ourselves up to a bewildering range of innovative techniques of which the apostles never dreamed?

How different it all is from those religions which place tremendous stress upon their ceremonies. In some sacred books there are detailed,

pedantic instructions for every stage of a ritual or sacrifice or sacrament. Roman augurs followed a strict code of rules in trying to read the omens; and if one minor detail went wrong, even at an advanced stage of the proceedings, the whole procedure had to be scrapped and started again. This is the way that magic works, and still does in our own day (as the books of people like Dion Fortune and Gareth Knight demonstrate). Divine power depends on getting the ceremony right. Otherwise, it doesn't work.

But the Bible's reticence about worship methods is precisely what we might expect from the Bible's view of God. For he is a personal, sovereign being, not an impersonal natural force which can be manipulated by initiates. Peter Berger has written a suggestive essay in which he contrasts the pagan nature religions of the Canaanites with the true worship of God for which the prophets contended. He points out that the seductive appeal of Canaanite religion was that it did not involve any personal dealings, any 'I-Thou' encounter, with a God who was loving, jealous and demanding:

The human being's fundamental religious quest is to establish contact with divine forces and beings that transcend him. The cult of sacred sexuality provided this contact in a way that was both easy and pleasurable. The gods were as close as one's own genitalia; to establish contact with them, when all was said mythologically and all was done ritually, one only had to do what, after all, one wanted to do anyway . . .

The sacred sexuality complex was repudiated by those who spoke for Yahweh because it violated their central understanding of both God and humanity . . . Israel encountered its God as a God of history, through the mighty acts that were the foundation of the covenant . . .

Unlike the cult of sacred sexuality, the cult of Yahweh did not lead to otherworldly ecstasy; rather, it directed people back into the world, where their task was to do God's will in human affairs. Worship here was inevitably linked with the whole gamut of moral concerns in society—with social justice, with the right relations between nations and classes, with the protection of the weak.<sup>1</sup>

Biblical worship is a two-way process: *God gives to us* and *we give to God*. Two independent personalities encounter one another. Paul insists in Acts 17:25 that our God 'is not served with human hands, as if he needed anything', and the word used here for 'serve' is *therapeuō*, a word never used of Christian worship. Yet it describes some forms of non-Christian worship perfectly. The basic meaning of the word is 'to take care of' (it is the word from which we derive such words as 'therapy' and 'therapeutic'). This is precisely what the Hare Krishna follower does in his life in the temple. Every morning the temple gods have to be taken reverently out of their 'beds' and put on their shelf in the temple. Food has to be offered to

them. They have to be washed. At night, they are put back in bed again. And throughout the day, the devotee spends a large part of this time quite literally *taking care of the gods*. This is one form of worship.

But such one-way worship is profoundly non-Christian. The worship of the God of Israel involves an interplay of *what God supplies* and *what we contribute*. God does not want the mechanical obedience of robots, following a prescribed pattern of unvarying service in an unthinking way. He wants to draw out of us something which is individual, creative, our own.

This is why the psalms speak so often of 'a new song'. The creative edge in worship, not just the tired reciting of acceptable forms, is vitally important. And it is why Revelation tells us that 'the glory and honour of the nations' will be brought into the heavenly city (Rev 21:26). Even in the direct presence of God, when worship reaches its eternal climax, human creative achievement can and must be blended into the great paean of praise.

#### HUMAN FREEDOM IN WORSHIPPING METHODS

So much has been taught down through the years, in Brethren circles, about the divine pattern for the construction of the tabernacle and the feasts of Jehovah, that we sometimes fail to notice the element of human freedom which God built in, right from the start, to the worship he had commanded. We must not focus so exclusively upon God's part in designing Old Testament worship that we ignore Israel's contribution. For one thing, although the materials used in the construction of the tabernacle are listed in detail, Exodus 25 makes it clear that these materials came together in an offering 'from each man whose heart prompts him to give'. In other words, God organized the materials once they were provided, but each of the human beings involved had the freedom to decide upon the part that he personally wanted to play. There is more freedom when men of skill are appointed (Ex 31) 'to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship': they have to produce the sacred objects exactly as God has directed, but room is left for their personal creativity, 'to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze'.

Most notably, although the furnishings of the tabernacle and the sacrifices to be offered are closely prescribed, the same is *not true* of the manner of worship. Did they sing? Did they dance? We know little of the style of those days, and the scriptures are no help to us. God left room for *methods* of worship to develop as culturally and historically appropriate.

When later in history the temple worship was established, we gain no sense from the scriptures that this was a bad thing—even though it

involved changes in the strict pentateuchal pattern of worship; even though it was David's personal idea, rather than a sudden command from God. And centuries later, the synagogue emerged spontaneously, changing the style of worship yet again, although God had given no new direction that this was to happen. Jesus used the synagogues as places of worship (and, for that matter, Herod's temple); and early Christian congregations patterned their worship and government on synagogue practices. There was obviously nothing wrong with the synagogue just because it was a human invention.

Perhaps, sometimes, we Brethren have been overly concerned with strict purity of practice. 'See that thou do all things according to the pattern shown thee in the mount' is a text which has often haunted our worship style. In the Darby-inspired quest for a totally, biblically pure fellowship, we have tried to find rules and patterns where the scripture actually leaves us free. (I grew up in an assembly, for instance, where the 'by-laws' included the idea that brethren and sisters should sit at opposite sides of the hall; that the bread should be passed literally from hand to hand, since putting it on a plate would be 'a symbol of Egypt'; and so on. Other assemblies have had laws about not permitting 'ministry' before the bread was broken, not permitting different brethren to give thanks individually for loaf and cup, never breaking the bread before a certain amount of time had elapsed in the service.)

#### MUSIC, MOVEMENT, SILENCE, AND WORSHIP

What has all this to do with the professed subject of this essay? Simply this: that music, movement and silence are all possible *methods* of worship, and if we want to determine their usefulness to us in worshipping God, scripture will not help us much directly. Scripture does not legislate about our methods; space is left for human freedom; the way to assess our methods is not to ask, 'But did they really do this in biblical times?'—but instead, 'Do these methods really help us achieve the purposes of worship?'

It is important to stress this point, since so many of the current crop of evangelical paperbacks arguing for or against the use of dance, drama, rock music and the arts in worship try to prove their case by listing all the places in the Bible where such activities are mentioned. The result is stalemate, because advocates of dance can point to a few verses that mention their speciality, and their opponents can point to thousands that don't; supporters of rock music can quote texts which refer to loud and rhythmical noises, and their opponents can point out that this is all Old Testament, and a ram's horn trumpet can't be compared to a Vox AC 30

anyway. The only clear conclusion from the biblical evidence—although it is a conclusion both sides seem to resist—is that the scriptures are supremely uninterested in the pros and cons of specific methods. The real question is what they achieve.

What *are* the purposes of worship? That is dealt with elsewhere in this volume. Here it will be enough to note that the key New Testament words for worship (*proskyneō*, *leitourgeō*, *latreuō*) combine three basic ideas: *affection*, *intelligent recognition of the authority* of the person worshipped, and *submission to serve*. In other words, the total response of the human personality to God: emotions, mind and will. Worship thus has three purposes: *release* of the emotions; *recognition* with the mind; and *resolve* of the will in gearing itself for fresh acts of service.

It is not difficult to think of historical cases of the distinguished use of music, movement and silence in worship. Music has been with the Christian church from the start, going right back to the early days when a perplexed Roman governor wrote to his emperor, 'They sing a hymn to Christ as a god.' Different kinds of movement have been important in worship in various cultures—from the ritual movements and symbolic actions of Catholic and Orthodox traditions, to the uninhibited self-expression through dance of some black denominations and Latin American Pentecostals. Silence was an important tool in the mystical tradition—Thomas A Kempis, for one, says a lot about it—as well as among Quakers and Quietists.

But do these methods—music, movement and silence—genuinely achieve the purposes of worship? And if so, in what forms? For there are serious questions which need to be asked. Isn't it possible that a wrong application of methods can introduce us to experiences which we fondly imagine to be worship—but are actually something quite different?

Music today raises the problem of contemporary rock. Is it a fitting style for the worship of God, or is it 'devil music', full of dangerous jungle rhythms? Aren't all these new choruses lamentably superficial, repulsively sickly, and sometimes downright misleading? While some are finding new avenues of worship through movement, and writing books with titles like *Praise Him in the Dance* and *Moving Prayer*, others are writing equally trenchantly that 'the dance has more potential for evil than anything else we do in Christian circles today'.<sup>2</sup>

But surely no one could object to *silence*? Well, perhaps. Ralph Martin points out that in the Old Testament 'praise involves the use of words audibly expressed. Silent prayer is not a Hebrew practice',<sup>3</sup> and he cites Eli, who thought Hannah was drunk because her lips were moving but she was making no sound. 'I do not believe it is necessarily true that we are worshipping God when we make a lot of racket', wrote A W Tozer. 'But not infrequently worship is audible.'<sup>4</sup>

The few verses in the Bible which seem to speak about silence in worship (such as Hab 2:20) are actually not about worship at all, but set against the background of a law court—in which the guilty party remains silent because he has no defence to offer. (The same is true of that curious half hour of silence in Rev 8:1—silence speaks of judgement, not worship.) In the New Testament epistles, silence is mentioned only as a *restriction* upon participation in worship, not a means of worship in itself.

Taking all of this together, it would be possible to argue that the normative biblical picture of worship is of *people being compelled to speak*—of impulses of devotion that demand verbal expression, otherwise ‘the stones would immediately cry out’—and that an unscriptural emphasis upon silence will lead into an introverted, idiosyncratic mysticism which separates worshipper from worshipper and ends in the fanciful pursuit of an ‘inner light’ which is no more than a subjective fantasy.

And so the questions mount up. How do we tackle them? Here I want to do it by asking two questions. First: do these three possible worship methods actually achieve each of the purposes of worship—release, recognition and resolve? And, second: if they *do*, how should they be employed for maximum benefit? What is the distinctive contribution that each of the three can make?

#### RECOGNITION, RELEASE, RESOLVE

First, then, let us ask some questions about the purposes of worship. Do these three methods help us to achieve a *recognition* of God’s greatness? Do they affect our mental appreciation in worship?

Music obviously does. Teaching can often be much more effective when set to an insistent rhythm (‘Thirty days hath September’, ‘i before e except after c’). Jesus knew this secret, and scholars such as Joachim Jeremias have shown that distinct Aramaic rhythms lay behind the teaching Jesus passed on to his disciples. In the Old Testament, several of the psalms clearly served an educational function: recitations of the history of God’s mighty acts, such as Psalm 136, taught the young and reminded the old, all in the context of worship.

In the New Testament text there are several embedded passages (Eph 5:14, 1 Tim 3:16, Phil 2:6–11, 2 Tim 2:11–14, Jas 1:17) where it seems the writer has quoted a section from a current Christian hymn. Obviously, hymns were useful in helping people remember the key facts of the faith—and could sum them up better than the writer felt he could himself.

How does *movement* affect our recognition? First, participation in symbolic actions can make theoretical ideas more concrete, provoke moments of awareness and insight; this is the result of the symbolic act at the very heart of our worship:



Here, O my Lord, I see thee face to face;  
 Here faith can touch and handle things unseen . . .

'No Gospel like this feast', we sing. For the physical action of taking bread and wine and passing it from hand to hand *makes actual* what would otherwise be merely an academic concept. Other kinds of movement and action might then have a similar, if less central, effect, in bringing home to our recognition some of the central truths of our relationship to God and one another.

But, second, movement in which we may not be involved personally, but merely watch as spectators (a performance of dance, for example), can also provoke recognition in a unique way. I have seen Springs Dance Company evoke the wonder of the resurrection unforgettably in a worship service, in a way that could not have been equalled verbally. Brian Edwards' critical book *Shall We Dance?* complains that dance and drama are inferior to the spoken word because they 'have generally to be interpreted'.<sup>5</sup> This, it seems to me, is exactly wrong. Dance and drama can speak more immediately and powerfully, can provoke a more direct crisis of recognition, than words can manage.

What of silence? It has been a remarkable feature of history that churches with a worship style involving plenty of reflective silence (such as the Brethren and the Society of Friends) have typically produced thoughtful, careful people with a more stringent intellectual approach to faith than those reared in churches whose worship majors on noise and excitement, or predictable liturgy. Silence allows time for a whirlwind sequence of conflicting impressions to be analysed into its elements and sifted thoroughly.

So much for *recognition*. But there is also *release*. Here, again, all three methods have a contribution to make. Music, obviously—the emotional release of belting out 'Bold I approach the eternal throne . . .' is something we have all experienced. And movement—for watching a well-executed piece of dance, drama or mime can stir the emotions unforgettably. I can still remember examples I witnessed ten or fifteen years ago, although all other details of the service in which they featured have faded completely from my mind.

It is not natural for us to sit still at times of deep emotional experience. 'Let Israel rejoice in their Maker', urges Psalm 149, ' . . . let them praise his name with dancing'. Rosemary Budd argues, 'Our physical energies are a major element in our lives whether we recognize them or not . . . If we recognize our energies, we can harness them for great good.'<sup>6</sup> Movement in worship can release emotions powerfully and effectively, because 'body language' affects our state of mind. It is no coincidence that emotion is often hard to detect in meetings where the ground rules dictate

two permissible positions—standing to sing and sitting for all else—with no variation contemplated.

And silence? Everyone who has ever been in love has known moments when words are inadequate and unnecessary: the wondering silence of two young lovers staring into one another's eyes, the companionable, trusting silence of a long-married couple who can almost communicate telepathically. Sometimes worship will touch these emotional heights. And a period of silence can deepen what would otherwise be a passing moment's impulse.

It has been suggested that speaking in tongues is really a regression to the pre-speech phase of infancy—when we make sounds, but they have no logical referent; we express ourselves with total freedom, unconstrained by the demands of grammar and vocabulary. To speak in tongues releases us to express what we could not otherwise; some emotions in worship defy confinement to normal vocabulary. Perhaps (especially for non-tongues speakers) silence can serve the same function.

Do music, movement and silence also help us with the *resolve* aim of worship? Music, it is easy to see, can be powerful in reinforcing decisions we need to make—as anyone can tell you who has been brought into the Kingdom during the singing of 'Just as I am'. Recently after I had spoken to a group of young people on a houseparty, a young musician present quietly played a song he had written himself, 'To be more like Jesus'. The atmosphere of worship as he finished was almost overpowering.

Music has often been useful in strengthening resolve in moments of crisis. Just before he and a group of his colleagues went out into a dangerous, costly mission, Geoffrey Bull records, one of them suddenly began to sing, 'King of my life I crown Thee now'. It was an unforgettable moment, and just what the group needed. Was there even an element of the same thing on the evening on which, Matthew tells us, 'when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives'?

Drama or dance can have the same impact in focusing decision. For our first evangelistic presentation at the Greenbelt Festival two years ago, the committee decided that after the preacher had finished, no music or spoken words would follow. Instead Geoffrey Stevenson would end with a silent mime challenging non-Christians to commitment—and the audience would leave with that unspoken appeal as their final memory. Over thirty people accepted Christ that evening.

Other kinds of symbolic movement—standing up, walking to the front, raising a hand—are often used in evangelism to signal commitment and offer a concrete chance to make up one's mind. Creatively used, movement can serve that kind of function in worship too.

After years of 'Just as I am', Billy Graham began to find that silence could be just as effective as music in bringing people to personal crises of

decision. Sometimes the breathless hush as people from all over the auditorium left their seats and filtered to the front could be even more compelling than a hymn. As in evangelism, so in worship. Leaving a space for people to make their own promises to God can be an effective thing to do. Often the stillness for several minutes at the end of an affecting worship service is an indication that people are having private dealings with God, all over the room. The worst thing to do at such a point would be to give out another chorus.

Used in the right way, then, music, movement and silence can all fulfil the three basic purposes of worship. Which leads to our second question. What is the right way? What limits do we set to the use of music, movement and silence in worship?

#### THE ROLE OF MUSIC

Music crops up often in scripture. The Old Testament mentions all sorts of instruments, both loud and soft, both percussive and otherwise. 'It can be assumed', historians tell us, 'that . . . the singing of the Psalms was always accompanied by musical instruments.'<sup>7</sup>

There were probably no musical instruments in use in the early church, but experimentation and creativity were encouraged. Tertullian tells us that all members were free to participate by words of scripture or 'songs of their own invention'. Ralph Martin believes that the 'spiritual songs' of Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19 were 'the result of immediate inspiration, as in the scene in 1 Corinthians 14:26 where improvised compositions . . . are brought to the assembly and used in worship. They may well have been no more than single-line statements . . .'<sup>8</sup>

Scholars have often debated the difference between 'psalms', 'hymns' and 'spiritual songs'. Most would agree that it is impossible to define these terms clearly. But it is certain that Paul uses them to indicate an enormously wide range of musical activity: employing the text of scripture, individual compositions, spur-of-the-moment improvisations, credal statements in musical form, personal songs of devotion.

Not all Christians have agreed that such an abundance of musical variation should be possible in the church. (Zwingli, for instance, wanted to abolish all congregational singing; Calvin was ill at ease with anything more than metrical psalms.) And in our own day we have witnessed the rise of a new, ersatz pop art form: rock music. Increasingly now the rhythms of rock are invading worship music, and the instruments associated with it—drums, bass guitars, synthesisers—are appearing in church services. Is this a phenomenon which should worry us?

John Blanchard's book *Pop Goes the Gospel* has no doubts. 'When the

beat overrides the other elements in a song the communication level is significantly changed to one which is primarily physical and often specifically sexual . . . the element of relentless beat in rock music increases the danger of a shallow, emotional, unthinking response . . . ' He quotes approvingly David Wilkerson's comment that 'I also have a sense, an inner knowledge, that the gentle Holy Spirit is not comfortable in the atmosphere this music creates.'<sup>9</sup>

It is hard to argue with comments like this. Blanchard is appealing to a psychological analysis of rock's effect which few psychologists would subscribe to, and at best is unproven; Wilkerson is arguing from inner intuition—and that is inaccessible to reasoned argument. There are really no musical, moral or psychological grounds for damning any particular musical form as 'inappropriate for Christians'. As Larry Norman pointed out, 'The sonic structure of music is basically neutral'.<sup>10</sup> In the Middle Ages the interval of the augmented fourth was banned from church music, because it belonged to the Devil. But no-one bothers about using it today.

Arguments from the dissolute lifestyle, or occult interests, of certain rock stars are beside the point. The medium has been misused, but it has become the major form of cultural expression in music for the greater part of the British population this century; and its misuse by some people should not prevent us from employing it to create an authentically modern, genuine response in worship to God. Says Andrew Maries, musical director of St Michael le Belfry,

To begin to make moral judgements as to the worth of different styles of music and the moral calibre of composers and performers really does become a nonsense. So many of the great classical composers could hardly be considered committed Christians, and yet they produced masterpieces which reveal something of the meaning and glory of life. Their works are windows on eternity through which we may well witness God.<sup>11</sup>

And yet—however much scripture encourages the *new song*—lively appreciation of *past tradition* always marks biblical worship too. The psalms were not abandoned in the early church. The antiphonal choir complexities of post-exilic worship were a new thing in Israel, but the music reflected the old songs of past centuries. There are dangers in a headlong rush into modernity; throwing out *Hymns of Faith* when we acquire *Songs of Fellowship* may turn out to be a premature move.

For one thing, the modern style of music encourages emotional expression and depth; that is its strength. It does *not* encourage intricate expression of truth, and it is vulnerable to mawkish sentimentality; that is its weakness. We need the strong hymns of previous ages too.

Also, rock music in society is often associated with showmanship, shallow excitement, and self-promotion. If it is to be recovered for use in

worship, it needs to be divorced from these tendencies. We have learned a great deal about how to do that in the last ten years. And blending the new with the old is the most effective way of reaping the benefits of the contemporary style, without losing the perspective of all we have learned about worshipping God from the past.

What can music do that other worship media can't? Music is a tremendously *communal* activity; it brings the church together as little else can. 'The first Christians thought of "hymns" as a means of mutual encouragement and challenge aimed horizontally at a group of fellow believers.'<sup>12</sup> And music provides a means of expression for the less articulate. It is no coincidence that most movements of the Holy Spirit among the oppressed and downtrodden have produced great music—from Negro spirituals to nineteenth century Salvation Army creativity to the harmonies of unschooled Welsh miners. No method is *essential* to worship. But music would be very difficult to do without.

#### MOVEMENT: THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF THE BODY

Early in its history, the Christian church was strongly influenced by Greek philosophy. And in some respects the malign influences of Platonic thought have tended to cling around Christianity ever since. This is especially true of the attitude Christians have often adopted to the human body.

For Plato and his popularisers, the body was basically evil, the loathsome prison of the pure and valuable spirit. Growth in spirituality comes as we de-emphasize the material realm and concentrate on the life of the spirit instead.

The Hebrew view of the body never made this sharp distinction of the 'spiritual bit' and 'physical bit' in man. 'Don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit . . .?' inquires Paul. 'So use your bodies for God's glory' (1 Cor 6:19–20 GNB). At creation 'man *became* a living soul' (Gen 2:7 AV)—the soul is not a detachable possession which man was given along with a body, but inextricably involved with the body as part of the complex reality of being human.

But the Greek distaste for the body eventually started to influence Christian thinkers, and anchorites, flagellants, hermits began to pride themselves on their mistreatment of their bodies. Origen as a young man tried to prove his zeal by castrating himself (a deed he later regretted). And the Platonic attitude in less extreme forms has never quite left Christianity alone since, as Macaulay and Barrs<sup>13</sup> have demonstrated.

The Platonic attitude to the body can produce two very different approaches to worship: first, a horror of anything fleshly, and thus a fear

of undue movement, physical expressions, dance and drama; second, a struggle to release the spirit from the body. Plato said that this could happen through 'divine madness', and in Christian circles this has often led to the attempt to develop 'the things of the Spirit' by abandoning the body to ecstasy. Neither of these responses are Christian.

The Hebrew attitude to the body, however, leads to a recognition of three facts. First, that a body has a place in worship, as a valuable part of creation. Elisabeth Elliot claims,

More spiritual failure is due, I believe, to this cause than to any other: the failure to recognize this living body as having anything to do with worship or holy sacrifice.<sup>14</sup>

'For far too long', complains Rosemary Budd, 'many of us as Christians . . . have found it terrible difficult to understand ourselves as bodies, a physical expression of personality in a physical universe. We've tried to pray without bodies.'<sup>15</sup>

Second, the Hebrew attitude recognises that the body is not a channel of sacredness—the mistake made by the Canaanite 'sacred sexuality' religions we examined earlier. God communicates primarily through rationality, through propositional statements, and while sensitive use of the body's movements in worship can assist our understanding, it cannot become a substitute for rational appreciation of God.

Third, the Hebrew picture demands that we also recognize the fallenness of the body. 'I see another law at work in the members of my body', writes Paul, 'waging war against the law of my mind' (Rom 7:23). The possibility of evil is always there. Which is not a reason for shunning the body's potential in worship—but simply being careful to exploit it watchfully and honestly.

It is true that New Testament worship did not include dancing, as Herbert Carson points out in his book *Hallelujah!* Carson asks why the church eschewed such a powerful means of communication, since it was known and practised in the Roman world. But earlier in his discussion he has supplied his own answer: dance was a practice exclusively related to pagan ecstatic religion; there was not much use of it for other purposes. For the Christians to have incorporated it, at that stage, would have been unthinkable.

But dance and movement played an important part in Old Testament worship. Or did they? In his book *Shall We Dance?*, Brian Edwards has bravely—if perversely—tried to prove that they did not. He claims that most of the words commonly translated 'dance' can mean something else, that when dancing is mentioned it is not as a part of worship (or, as in Jud 21:21, it reflects a decadent form of worship), and that David's famous dancing before the ark in 2 Samuel 6:14 was 'exceptional', 'the spontaneous overflow of an excited worshipper'.<sup>16</sup>

This argument will not do. Dance was a common feature of Oriental festivals, and it would have been strange—strange enough to require comment somewhere—if the nation of Israel had been markedly different from all their neighbours. The Hebrew word for ‘festival’ comes from the verb *hagag*, to dance. Edwards suggests that David did not exactly *dance*—“Skip for joy” would be more accurate—but 2 Samuel 6:13–14 is clearly describing a set of deliberate ceremonial procedures, not a momentary burst of unscheduled enthusiasm.

Psalms 149:3 and 150:4 both exhort worshippers to ‘praise his name with dancing’. Edwards counters that the verses ‘do not set out to discuss the content of Jewish worship in the temple; they simply claim that everything in the life of God’s people, from dancing to war, should be to the honour of God’.<sup>17</sup> If so, one would expect both psalms to mention a wide range of human social activities which could be unexpected avenues for the praise of God. But they do not. They simply elaborate a list of ceremonial implements of praise—the trumpet, the tambourine, the harp . . . The obvious conclusion, for an unprejudiced reader, is that dancing is just one item in a list of recognised worshipping methods.

The use of physical movement opens up many possibilities for worship: artistic presentations to add a dimension to a service; free participatory spontaneous movement; physical positioning and symbolic gesture. We must guard against mentally reducing the list to a few obvious, well-worn routines. For instance, many house church people who take pride in having rediscovered dance in worship have really gone no further than the curious, stylized, self-conscious little dance step cruelly christened by onlookers ‘the charismatic hop’. Freedom has frozen into liturgy. We Brethren know all about that.

Again, we must guard against becoming too pompous about it all. Surely I’m not the only one who finds Rosemary Budd unduly fanciful when she writes that hands held under a Bible ‘are a symbol of receptivity to its contents’, or unduly programmatic when she advises us practically: ‘Your pelvis is very important. Tuck your tail in and check that the lumbar vertebrae are bent neither forwards nor backwards.’<sup>18</sup> It sounds faintly ludicrous. But there again, if the lumbar vertebrae are part of a good God’s creation, perhaps they have their own humble part to play in praising him.

#### SILENCE AND ITS USES

Another result of Platonism, through the ideas of Dionysius the Areopagite, has been the *via negativa*, the ‘negative way’ of acquiring spiritual knowledge which has characterized Christian mysticism for many centuries.

Spiritual growth, according to Dionysius, does not come through understanding who God is and what his blessings are. Rather, we must remove all positive

statements about God until we are left with silence—the bare communion of the soul with God.<sup>19</sup>

St John of the Cross wrote about the experience in these words:

The man who truly there has come  
Of his own self must shed the guise;  
Of all he knew before the sum  
Seems far beneath that wondrous prize:  
And in this lore he grows so wise  
That he remains, though knowing naught,  
Transcending knowledge with his thought.<sup>20</sup>

Evangelicals disagree about how to assess this kind of spirituality. But all agree that, first, it is the province of a few rare people, rather than a practical possibility for every Christian; second, even if genuine, it comes so close to the experience of mystics in other religions (Sufis, for instance, or the writers of the Upanishads) that it can lead to religious relativism and heresy.

Perhaps the reason that the scriptures pay so little attention to *silence* is that the silence of mysticism can be a dangerous route to travel. Speech is more characteristic of a religion in which 'it is in the nature of God to speak. The second Person of the Holy Trinity is called the *Word*.<sup>21</sup> Edmund Clowney insists, 'Christian meditation, therefore, looks to Jesus. It treasures his words and remembers his deeds. The vision of God is not a mystical achievement requiring prodigious feats of trance-like concentration.<sup>22</sup>

And so the scriptures have little time for the kind of silence which blanks out normal thought processes. This does not mean, however, that *all* silence is necessarily a bad thing. Periods of silence can heighten thought, as well as depressing it; can reinforce ideas, as well as obliterating them. Silence in worship can legitimately achieve three useful objectives at least.

First, it prevents worship becoming a 'spectator sport'. It suddenly removes from the worshipper all outside stimulus, and throws him in upon his own resources; for a short while now he will be unable to coast along as a passive observer of prayers, hymns and readings offered for his benefit by other people. Silence *personalizes* worship.

Second, paradoxically enough, silence draws worshippers closer together. We are never so aware of one another as when a group of people sit together without talking. (For example, watch a carriage full of Underground passengers when the train stops between stations!) A shared, almost palpable silence expresses deep communion more eloquently than the singing of a dozen hymns.

Third, silence can change the direction of worship. In the stillness it is



possible for worshippers to listen more closely to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, to hear him saying something unexpected which would otherwise be missed in the noisy forward thrust of an all-action period of worship. As a result, the worship time can have quite a different outcome to what anyone present might initially have expected.

Of course, silence can be misused. There is a fine line between the reverential silence of worshippers awed at the presence of God's holiness, and the bored silence of a bunch of Brethren in one more standard 'morning meeting' with nothing new to say. Silence, like any other method, can be overused and cheapened.

But it is good that it should be so! God has not given us strict and specific instructions about how much of which elements to incorporate at which moments in order to produce an approved worship service. Instead, he has left it up to us. The methods we use are at our discretion. And that is the awful joy, the responsibility, the delight and freedom of worshipping in Spirit and in truth.

Sometimes the silences of scripture are a thoroughly good thing.

#### Footnotes

- 1 Peter Berger, 'Cakes for the Queen of Heaven', in *Facing Up to Modernity* (Penguin 1977) 243, 245–246.
- 2 Brian Edwards, *Shall We Dance?* (Evangelical Press 1984) 98.
- 3 Ralph Martin, *The Worship of God* (Eerdmans 1982) 20.
- 4 A W Tozer, *Whatever Happened to Worship?* (STL/Kingsway 1986) 16.
- 5 Edwards, *op cit*, 88–89.
- 6 Rosemary Budd, *Moving Prayer: An Introduction to a Deeper Devotional Life* (MARC 1987) 42.
- 7 K H Bartels in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol 3 (Paternoster 1978) article 'Song'.
- 8 Martin, *op cit*, 53.
- 9 John Blanchard, *Pop Goes the Gospel* (Evangelical Press 1983) 17 and 133. Odd to find a non-charismatic Calvinist like Blanchard—who criticizes advocates of rock music for their woolly subjectivism—using evidence of this kind.
- 10 From the sleeve notes of his *Solid Rock* albums.
- 11 Andrew Maries, *One Heart, One Voice: the rich and varied resource of music in worship* (Hodder 1986) 98.
- 12 Martin, *op cit*, 53.
- 13 Ranald Macaulay and Jerram Barrs, *Christianity with a Human Face* (IVP 1979).
- 14 Elisabeth Elliot, *Discipline—the Glad Surrender* (Pickering 1983) 45.
- 15 Budd, *op cit*, 42.
- 16 Edwards, *op cit*, 57.
- 17 *Ibid*, 61.
- 18 Budd, *op cit* 79 and 46.

- 19 Macaulay and Barrs, *op cit*, 42.
- 20 'Verses written after an ecstasy of high exaltation', in *St John of the Cross: Poems* tr Roy Campbell (Penguin Classics 1968), 47–48.
- 21 A W Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Aslan Paperbacks 1968) 75.
- 22 Edmund Clowney, *Christian Meditation* (IVP 1980) 23.

# WOMEN IN WORSHIP: A PERSONAL VIEW

**Barbara Baigent**

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The place of women in public worship has been fully discussed elsewhere and I see no need to go over this ground again (see bibliography at end). The following is merely a personal view and, I trust, a stimulus to thinking further.

## IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Jewish women often played a leading role in many areas of life. *Miriam* the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand and all the women followed here with tambourines and dancing. She sang to them:

Sing to the LORD  
for he is highly exalted.  
The horse and its rider  
he has hurled into the sea. (Exod 15:21)

I guess the men were all watching! And what dare we say about the tambourines and dancing?

*Deborah* was also a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, who was leading Israel at that time. She held court under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel where the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided. She and Barak, the son of Abinoam, sang this song:

When the princes in Israel take the lead,  
when the people willingly offer themselves—  
praise the LORD! (Judg 5:2)

They sang together, man and woman, leading the worship; and the land had peace for forty years.

*Hannah* may not have had a large congregation but at least Eli and

Elkanah were with her and her child Samuel when she gave thanks to the Lord. Three men lived to record a woman's magnificent worship prayer!

My heart rejoices in the LORD;  
 in the LORD my horn is lifted high.  
 My mouth boasts over my enemies,  
 for I delight in your deliverance.  
 There is no-one holy like the LORD;  
 there is no-one besides you;  
 there is no Rock like our God. (1 Sam 2:1-2)

#### GREEK AND ROMAN INFLUENCE

It was the influence of the Greek and Roman world that was to colour the thinking in the New Testament era. Josephus, a Jewish historian who was a contemporary of Paul, wrote that 'the woman is inferior to the man in every way'. Women were seen as less intelligent than men, as playthings and incapable of learning. They could attend worship at the synagogue, but it was not required of them.

It is against this background that we consider the ministry of Jesus in Luke's Gospel.

#### IN LUKE'S GOSPEL

Luke seems to have had a special place for women, perhaps because he was a doctor. His gospel stresses the importance that Jesus gave to women. He lifted them up and gave them a place in life, restoring the traditional Jewish view that women should be respected. To Jesus they were not empty-handed sex symbols, merely created to bear children and reward male desire. Jesus allowed women to minister to him, listen to him, discuss theology with him, be last at the cross and first at the tomb, and he entrusted a woman to evangelize her village (John 4).

Luke gives us three examples of women in worship. *Mary*, the mother of Jesus, composing that wonderful 'Magnificat' which both men and women down the centuries have used in their own worship.

My soul praises the Lord  
 and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
 for he has been mindful  
 of the humble state of his servant.  
 From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—  
 holy in his name. (Luke 1:46-49)

*Anna*, also a prophetess, 'never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying'. She 'gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem'. (Luke 2:37-38.) A woman, openly and publicly speaking in the temple of God!

The third example from Luke is the woman in one of the synagogues who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her he called her forward, saying, 'Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.' Then he put his hands on her and immediately she straightened up and praised God. In front of everyone, in the synagogue! I wonder if this was also a symbolic healing and that Jesus says to all women, 'You are set free . . . to praise'? *Worship must sometimes be the spontaneous outburst of a person set free.* It cannot be bottled up but must be expressed. I have called this 'worship and response'. Worship can also be linked with creativity and with service.

#### WORSHIP AND RESPONSE

Mary worshipped God when she said to the angel Gabriel, 'I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said.' The ultimate in submission and an act of adoration.

Luke tells also of a woman who had led a sinful life who brought an alabaster jar of perfume to the Lord. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. Jesus said of her, 'her many sins have been forgiven for she loved much'. *Worship must sometimes be allowed to be the outward public expression of a sinner's love for Christ.*

Mary of Magdala had only to say one word in her private worship in the Lord's real presence, 'Rabboni'. Through her tears she saw the Lord. *There must be room for response, often emotional, in worship.*

#### WORSHIP AND CREATIVITY

Creativity in worship can include a wide variety of subjects especially dear to women (though not exclusively so!).

#### Artistic work

We can't all paint a ceiling in the Sistine Chapel but in some cathedrals

each kneeler is worked in tapestry by women. Other churches have begun making banners which are then hung to the glory of God and used to draw worship from praising hearts.

### Flowers

By using her gift in artistic floral arrangements, a woman can present her worship to the Lord. (I don't mean to be sexist—we have a man who sometimes arranges flowers in our church—but I mean to demonstrate that women can also do this!)

### Dance

This frightens some people because they imagine the foxtrot or a disco! The dance in worship which has come to be most acceptable and helpful is that of the small group which moves in celebratory patterns before the Lord and before the people, just as a quartet may sing or a music group may play.

### Music

This is of great importance in worship, whether it be a single harmonium or a group of musicians with guitars, drums, flute, synthesizer and violin. How many churches realise that the pace of the organ leads the worship? The organist, who is often a woman, is actually responsible for the leading and the quality of the worship. Solo singing is another area where, if used sensitively and prayerfully, a woman (or man) may offer praise and worship.

### Hymn writing

Over the years when women were not allowed to be heard in church, congregations were lustily singing words of praise and worship written by women. Very often those women never dreamed that their words would become great hymns. Out of interest, I list 25 such hymns, to indicate something of our heritage.

*Father of mercies, in Thy word*

*Lord of all hopefulness*

*Come Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire*

*Our blest Redeemer, ere he breathed*

*Just as I am*

*Thou didst leave Thy throne*

*Nearer my God to Thee*

Anna Steele

Jan Struther

Harriet Auber

Harriet Auber

Charlotte Elliott

Emily Elliott

Sarah Adams

<i>O Saviour, I have naught to plead</i>	Jane Crewdson
<i>At the name of Jesus</i>	Caroline Noel
<i>In heavenly love abiding</i>	Anna L Waring
<i>I am not skilled to understand</i>	Dora Greenwell
<i>Once in royal David's city</i>	Mrs Alexander
<i>There is a green hill</i>	Mrs Alexander
<i>All things bright and beautiful</i>	Mrs Alexander
<i>Jesus calls us o'er the tumult</i>	Mrs Alexander
<i>Never further than Thy cross</i>	Elisabeth R Charles
<i>My God I thank Thee who has made</i>	Madelaine Proctor
<i>None other Lamb, None other Name</i>	Christina Rossetti
<i>Take my life and let it be</i>	Frances R Havergal
<i>Lord, speak to me</i>	Frances R Havergal
<i>Thy life was given for me</i>	Frances R Havergal
<i>Thine for ever, God of love</i>	Mary F Maud
<i>Still, still with Thee</i>	Harriet B Stowe
<i>Father, hear the prayer we offer</i>	Lotte M Willis
<i>O perfect love</i>	Miss Blomfield
	(Mrs Gurney)

It is also extremely interesting to note that in *The Believer's Hymn Book* 76 hymns are written by women, and in *Hymns of Light and Love* 127 are by women. In each case, about 15% of the total.

We should add to this list Joyce Stunt, who wrote the following beautiful hymn:

What shall I render unto Him,  
 Who died for me yet lives again,  
 Who came to earth and suffered here,  
 Such weariness and woe and pain?

What shall I render unto Him,  
 Whose love was strong enough to bear  
 My griefs and sorrows and my sin,  
 My punishment and load of care?

What shall I render unto Him,  
 Who fills my heart with happiness,  
 Who gives me joy and hope and peace,  
 And clothes me with His righteousness?

All things are His; I have no wealth;  
 I am not strong; I have no fame;  
 But He is great, and all on earth  
 Shall one day bow to His great Name.

What would'st Thou have of me, O Lord?  
 There is naught else that I can bring,  
 Save my own self and all I have;  
 Accept, I pray, my offering.

#### WORSHIP AND SERVICE

The following is not an exhaustive list of women who worshipped God by serving him, for, of course, that would include all committed Christian women. But I seek to show that a number of women have by their service and/or their writings come into the public eye and have thereby prompted others, many of them men, to worship and serve God.

Such a list includes the mystics like Teresa of Avila and Julian of Norwich; but more recently Amy Carmichael, Gladys Aylward, Evelyn Underwood, Catherine Booth, Dorothy Sayers, Rita Snowden, Corri Ten Boom, Mother Teresa, Elisabeth Elliott, Joni Eareckson, Edith Schaeffer, Helen Roseveare, and Catherine Marshall.

A reflection on their life and work will show that women are capable of deep worship and of its expression; that women have much to give both to God and to the church; and with our missionary force of women today we recognize that women too can 'declare his glory among the nations'.

#### WORSHIP TODAY

I would venture to suggest that in the past in Britain, in churches of all denominations, women have been allowed to worship *privately* in any way they wished but that *publicly* they have been restricted to *led* worship rather than *open* worship where they could take part audibly; to *liturgical* worship in the sense that they could only join in the singing of hymns rather than *spontaneously* ask for a song; and to *silent* worship during the prayers, rather than *vocal*.

The exception was, of course, the women's meeting, at which a woman could lead the public worship spontaneously and vocally since there were no men present.

In recent years, it has been accepted almost totally by the Christian world that whenever there is a period of open worship, open discussion or open prayer, a woman has as much right to pray, read a scripture or choose a hymn as has a man. This is backed up by such verses as 'There is neither . . . male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:28) and 'Your sons and your daughters will prophesy . . . Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit . . .' (Acts 2:17f).



This has caused little problem in a church where most of the worship is led from the front by a priest, vicar, or minister. In that setting, everyone (both men and women) has to keep silent during the moments when worship is being led.

The problem arises in the Christian Brethren setting where after many years of agonising over it, it is decided that women can take part in discussional Bible study or housegroups and that they can pray in the prayer meeting. What happens about the 'morning meeting', the 'breaking of bread', the 'worship meeting'? The one basis of Brethrenism was always the priesthood of all believers, but in practice, of course, it meant all *male* believers.

If worship is not led by one man and is non-liturgical, it must be open to both men and women to participate, otherwise the women feel like second class citizens in the kingdom of heaven. If the elders decide that a woman should not teach or lead the worship, surely they will not deprive the church of 60% of its gift in worship. A woman's share in the vocal public worship enriches the Body of Christ and complements the man's contribution.

Surely worship is a child saying '*Father, I love you*'; or a loved one telling her Lord that '*He is everything*' to her; or a grateful heart saying, '*Thank you, Jesus*'. If the church feels that a woman should not actually give thanks for the bread and wine, this part of the service could be led by an elder.

Many women are still suffering from feelings of rejection and unworthiness because in the past so many joys in worship were forbidden to them.

In the days of the early church, Lydia and Nympha hosted churches in their homes; Euodia and Syntyche worked side by side with Paul; Priscilla was a fellow worker and Philip had four daughters who prophesied. We can only speculate how they worshipped. But the Holy Spirit at work in a church brings it to life. He brings a freshness into every new age of church life. As musical forms and people's cultures change, we must be ready to move with him or we will stagnate.

In totality of worship surely there will be beautiful flowers offered to the Lord; bodies offered in dance movement; banners and music; instruments and voices; composition; and sacrificial service, blending with audible public praises from overflowing hearts.

The psalmist encourages us:

'Let everything that has breath, Praise the Lord!'

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# WORSHIP AND LIFE

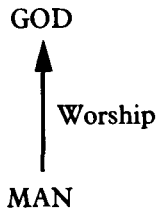
## Peter Cousins

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In worship, extremes meet. For an example, consider this expression of Anglo-Catholic spirituality:

Wherefore, O Father, we thy humble servants  
Here bring before thee, Christ, thy well beloved,  
All-perfect offering, sacrifice immortal,  
Spotless oblation.

A twenty-year-old, brought up among the Brethren, found it easy to identify with these sentiments. Again and again he had heard the purpose of worship summed up in the formula, 'We are here to give, not to receive.' This view could be expressed in a simple diagram, showing worship moving along a vertical axis, from below to above.



The same view of worship finds expression within the charismatic movement. Here worship is often seen as a weapon in spiritual warfare. As God is exalted by his people and given his rightful place, battle is joined with the forces of evil, whose chief preoccupation is to deny God the high place which is due to him.

Such a view gives little attention to the concept of worship as involving a vertical movement from God to man. For example, where a service begins

with the offertory, the placing of the bread and the wine upon the altar, the clear implication is that worship is something given by man to God. Even where there is no ritual expressing this thought, a formula such as: 'We are here to give, not to receive' expresses a similar attitude.

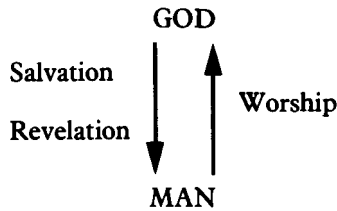
In his discussion of 'Mission and Worship' in the *Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*,<sup>1</sup> J G Davies makes a similar point in a rather different way. He refers to the Old Testament understanding of Israel's vocation to be a holy people, and to express this holiness within their worship. Only thus can Israel become a 'light to the Gentiles'. In this connection,

The function of worship . . . is to enable Israel to be holy; it is a means of sanctification for the Chosen People, who are set apart for the worship of Yahweh (Ex 19:6). The temple cultus is both the guarantee of the purity of Yahwism and the centre to which the nations are to come (Isa 2:2f). It will be noticed that Israel's vocation is interpreted centripetally; Israel is not sent to the nations; instead they are to come to it, attracted by its life and worship. In exact conformity with this, Israelite worship is similarly understood centripetally; it has its true centre in a single place, namely the Jerusalem temple, and it is to this that all the nations are to come.

A similar view is still influential today. Certainly it is true that in circles where a heavy emphasis is placed upon the concept of giving rather than receiving in worship, there has been considerable interest in Old Testament parallels. Once more we may quote an Anglo-Catholic example.

And now O Father, mindful of the love  
 That bought us, once for all, on Calvary's tree,  
 And having with us him that pleads above,  
 We here present, we here spread forth to Thee,  
 That only offering perfect in Thy eyes,  
 The one true, pure, immortal sacrifice.

Elsewhere in the Christian church, not least among the Brethren, worship may be interpreted in terms of the various Levitical offerings. Such an understanding is undeniably faithful to one aspect of the Old Testament. Here we find an elaborate system of sacrifices and offerings which are unquestionably to be offered *to God by man*. But closer study shows that these offerings themselves form part of a pattern ordained by God himself. The sacrifice of Noah is offered in response to God's saving act in deliverance from the Flood. In just the same way, the construction of the tabernacle and the revelation of a divine pattern for sacrifice, occur, not only after the deliverance from Egypt, but also after Israel's disobedience at Sinai and their worship of the golden bull. Here the sacrificial system is seen as the gracious gift of God himself. The 'vertical' dimension of worship thus involves a double movement, from God to man in the first instance and from man to God in response.



But the law was not concerned with the sacrificial system only. Israel's response to the saving love of God was to affect every detail of life: food, clothing, the family, agriculture—no aspect of human existence was untouched by the laws which were given by Yahweh in love when he revealed himself as Israel's saviour. Cultic activity in the temple and righteous living under the covenant were both equally a response to the gracious saving activity initiated by God himself. In Exodus 4:29–31, where God's people first hear the divine promises and learn that God is going to deliver them, they 'bow their heads in worship'. Worship is thus not only something offered by man to God, but also a response to what God offers to man. And it is expressed in a 'horizontal' dimension also, by the relationship of God's people to the world, to other believers, and to their fellow men and women.

It is not surprising that Israel tended to focus on the external, cultic aspects of worship. These were specific, limited and easily identified, and it was always possible for an Israelite to find satisfaction in having performed them. But the prophets consistently opposed this tendency. They repeatedly emphasized the importance for God's people of keeping *all* his commandments (Deut 5:29), not only those relating to the cultus. Samuel strikes a note which resounds throughout the Old and New Testament alike, when he affirms that God wants obedience rather than sacrifice (1 Sam 15:22), an emphasis found also in Hosea (6:6) and on the lips of Jesus himself (Matt 9:13; 12:7). Such a response is unlimited. And who can claim success in loving his neighbour as himself?

Their concern for obedience within the covenant led the prophets to refer to worship divorced from obedience in terms which would be regarded as highly offensive today and certainly must have been so at the time when they spoke. Isaiah describes attending public worship as 'temple trampling' and says that God hates the cultus (Isa 1:10–17; cf Amos 5:21–24). Even more radical is Isaiah 58:1–7, where the practice of fasting is drastically reinterpreted. Here the specifically religious activity is emphatically displaced. True fasting, says the prophet, has nothing to do with religious observance. It means caring for the needy, and liberating poor people who are being oppressed. In these verses the 'religious' activity of fasting has been re-expressed in ethical terms and the vertical

Godward aspect appears to have all but vanished in a process that has been described as 'desacralization'. Similarly, Jeremiah desacralizes circumcision (Jer 9:25f). Paul makes the same point in Romans 2:29. In the same way, Jeremiah 22:16 identifies 'knowing God' with ensuring that fair treatment is given to the poor and needy.

Even sacrificial worship is subjected to this desacralizing process. In New Testament times, the writer to the Hebrews saw clearly that animal sacrifices could never atone for sin, even though they had been divinely ordained (10:4-6). The reason why the self-offering of Christ could achieve what the blood of bulls and goats was powerless to bring about was that Christ surrendered his will to the service of God (10:7-9), which they could never do. It was in this way that Christ fulfilled the inadequate cultus of the Old Testament.

But the Old Testament sacrificial system had been recognized as inadequate even by worshippers who identified with it.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
 A broken and a contrite heart,  
 O God thou wilt not despise.  
 (Psa 51:17).

Here is desacralization of an extreme kind. When a sinner stands face to face with God, there is nothing to be achieved by offering sacrifice. Indeed, God is not really interested in receiving it. The only appropriate response is a personal one, coming from deep within the worshipper himself, expressed in personal repentance and, by implication, in the obedience which flows from repentance.

But, in spite of the prophetic tradition which seems to devalue the cultus and to re-express such activities as fasting and Sabbath keeping in terms of love to the neighbour, the 'vertical' element in worship has not totally disappeared. In what Isaiah 58 says about fasting, in the reinterpretation of circumcision offered by Jeremiah and Paul, and in the moving cry of Psalm 51, we find a realization that individuals can offer God their penitence, their self-mortification, and their deeds of love—in worship.

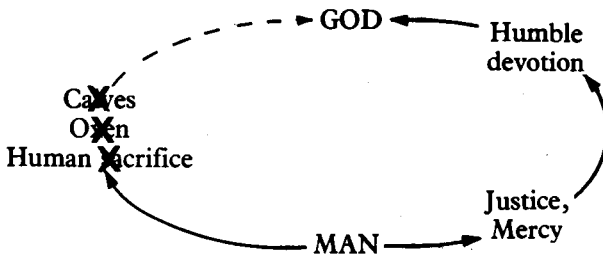
A response of this kind took on new significance after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Jews who were exiled from Jerusalem were no longer able to offer sacrifices in the place and manner that God had appointed. But the worship of individual response and obedience was still possible, and centuries later Jesus himself sanctioned it when he spoke of both prayer and almsgiving as being directed toward 'your Father in heaven' (Matt 6:4-6).

Synagogue worship was, indeed, largely desacralized. The rabbi had no cultic role. The only sacred object in the synagogue was the scroll of the

law, to obey which was to worship God. Yet even in this context, religiosity and perverted devotion intruded. Jesus found it necessary to rebuke worshippers who scrupulously gave tithes of herbs but were unjust, unloving and dishonest in daily life (Matt 23:23). He condemned some who even used their religion as a pretext for disobeying the sixth commandment (Mark 7:9–12). Clearly Jesus took his place within the Old Testament prophetic tradition. Indeed, to him, the horizontal relationship was ultimately more important than the vertical. At the most sacred moment of all, he said, when the worshipper was about to place his gift on the altar of God, he was to quit the temple, leaving his gift behind him, rather than remain unreconciled to his fellow-Israelite (Matt 5:23–24).

The implication is clear. Jesus is again reinforcing the message of Hosea. God has made the downward movement of self-revelation. The response of the worshipper is to be expressed horizontally as well as vertically upwards. And the horizontal takes precedence. 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'

Micah 6:6–8 explicitly answers the question of what God requires from the worshipper. The prophet denies that God is interested in offerings of animals—let alone of children. What he seeks from true worshippers is expressed in words which have rich Old Testament associations. They are 'justice' and 'mercy', both of which clearly relate to relationship with other men and women. To 'walk humbly with God' implies adopting a certain way of life ('walk') which is to be characterized by 'humble submission to God'.



It would be easy to write at length about the forms of worship under the old covenant. But when we turn to the New Testament, directions about worship are conspicuous by their absence. Certainly Christians are obligated to baptize and to share a symbolic meal of bread and wine. The New Testament also makes it clear that the first Christians prayed together, sang, spoke in tongues, taught and exhorted each other and prophesied. These activities are referred to in Luke's chronicle of the Acts

of the Holy Spirit. But most of what we know about Christian worship is gleaned from the correspondence of Paul, a church-planter, who wrote at length about the subject because he was concerned to correct abuses that had become widespread in one congregation, at Corinth. (Possibly two congregations, if those interpreters are correct who think that in the background to 1 Timothy we can glimpse the gnosticizing and liberated women of Ephesus.)

This is a remarkable state of affairs and for many Christians a disquieting one. Even during the decades following the completion of the New Testament, church leaders did what they could to establish rules for the conduct of Christian worship. But such attempts are foreign to the spirit of the New Testament itself. Equally alien are more recent efforts emanating from Rome, Wittenberg, Geneva, and Plymouth. An unbiased reading of the canonical documents of the Christian faith will lead us to conclude, with dismay or delight, that God is really not very interested in the externals of worship. In this connection, it is surely significant that when the Samaritan woman asked Jesus where worship should be conducted, she was told that the place was irrelevant ('neither in Jerusalem nor on Mount Gerizim') but that the one essential was that it should be 'in spirit and truth'.

All the same, there is a measure of continuity between the old covenant and the new. It is found in the typically biblical concern shown for the lifestyle of the worshippers. How is it possible, Paul asks, for someone who has been baptized and incorporated into the body of Christ, to unite the members of Christ with those of a prostitute (1 Cor 6:15)? He warns his hearers that baptism and a place at the Lord's table will not in themselves act as a safeguard against disasters such as overtook God's people of the old covenant when they disobeyed him (1 Cor 10:1-14). The Holy Spirit did not lead Paul to give any instructions about who was to preside at the Lord's Supper, or what words are to be spoken over the bread and wine. Instead, we are left with the solemn warning that we profane the ordinance if we are guilty of loveless behaviour to fellow members of Christ's body (1 Cor 11:18, 21, 29).

As for baptism, not only does the New Testament give no detailed instructions about how this is to be carried out, but Paul shows remarkably little concern about whether or not he had personally baptized anybody at all at Corinth (1 Cor 1:14-17).

In addition to this lack of detailed instruction about the ordinances of the new covenant, the New Testament shows little concern about the assortment of behaviours and emotions that we commonly refer to as worship. We can scarcely doubt that members of the early communities experienced awe, adoration, penitence, joy and other emotions associated with worship, when they met together. But as Howard Marshall has



pointed out in a challenging article,<sup>2</sup> the New Testament rarely portrays the church as engaging in what we have come to think of as typically 'worship' activity. It may be a good thing to conduct a solemn eucharist, whether this ends with the notices for the coming week or with *Ite, missa est*, or to listen to a protracted sermon or to enjoy a celebration of charismatic praise—but we shall find none of these prescribed or even described in the New Testament.

So what guidance does the New Testament give us about the motifs underlying worship? In the first instance, we shall look at the distinctively Christian observance of the Lord's Supper. Second, we shall examine the New Testament use of some words which have special significance for the activity of worship.

For many Christians, the Lord's Supper provides above all an opportunity for individual communion with the Lord.

Here, O my Lord, I see thee face to face . . .

The daily concerns of suffering and sinful humanity are to be shut out.

Here from the world we turn,  
Jesus to seek . . .

Even where there is an emphasis upon fellowship it excludes those who are not believers:

Shut in with thee, far far above  
The restless world that wars below . . .

Admittedly such an understanding may lead to the Lord's Supper being perceived as a means of gaining strength for service in the world. There is a beautiful communion hymn based on the Liturgy of Malabar which sounds this note:

Strengthen for service, Lord, the hands  
That holy things have taken . . .

But to stop at this point is to come short of acknowledging the very close link which is apparent between the ordinance of the Lord's Supper and everyday life. The bread and wine themselves, for example, speak of daily reality. More precisely, perhaps, we should say that they will have done so in their original life setting. Unfortunately, port-style wine has its own rather different connotations in Western cultures, and the use of elaborate goblets and platters further distances the event from normal experience. Even so a loaf of ordinary leavened bread is adequate to evoke that flesh which Jesus said his disciples must chew (John 6:53-56, Greek). In the Lord's Supper we celebrate a saviour who became flesh, and in biblical terms it is precisely 'flesh' which unites us all in the bundle of life. 'All

flesh', is the biblical term for humankind, even for the whole world of living beings (Gen 7:21–22). Nothing could be more 'down to earth' than the incarnation, or the sacrament that symbolizes it.

One loaf, one body—when they give each other the peace during the Eucharist, Christians affirm the basically horizontal thrust of the supper, and this, as we have seen, is prominent in Paul's teaching about the Breaking of Bread. Indeed, he repeatedly emphasizes in what he says about worship, that everything done when the community meets together must be tested by whether it builds up the body. Intense spiritual experience accompanying tongues-speaking is disvalued in this context—Christians do not meet together with a view to individual self-edification. Mutual concern one for another is to be the hallmark of Christian worship as of Christian living. (1 Cor 14:3–5, 17.)

The cup saying is explicitly linked to the forgiveness of sins. No doubt the self-offering of Jesus on the cross was an act of obedience to the father, fulfilling the burnt-offering element in the Old Testament cultus, but at the Lord's Supper we are reminded, not of this, but of the fact that his blood was shed in order to secure forgiveness for sinful men and women. In view of this, it is difficult to argue, as some have done, that 'worship is more important than evangelism'.

It is doubtful whether there should ever be a celebration of the supper without a prayer for the preaching of the gospel which it portrays so powerfully.

Not only is the Saviour's blood covenant blood, 'shed for the forgiveness of sins'. It is also offered to the worshippers with the injunction, 'Drink of it, all of you'. The most basic imperative of the gospel of forgiveness is a horizontal one. How can Christians look up to heaven and give thanks for the forgiveness of their sins while refusing to look around at the brothers and sisters (even their own husbands or wives) whom they are unwilling to forgive for the sins—real or imaginery—that they have committed against them?

'God so loved the world that he gave . . .' Some religious traditions seek to shut the world out of the upper room, but the bread and the wine will not be silenced. Christ's people, confronted by the symbols of God's love for a ruined world, must inevitably think of its anguish and desperate need. After all, to take the elements in Christ's name means that we commit ourselves to the mission that motivated the Son of God, the Divine Image, to take the form of a servant, and led him first to Bethlehem and then to Calvary. The word sacrament was used of a Roman soldier's oath of allegiance, and when we reaffirm our new covenant commitment to the Lord Jesus, we commit ourselves also to a life of service, self-giving, and sacrificial peacemaking.

This theology of the cross leads—or drives—us into the world. It is a

false theology of glory that focuses exclusively on personal communion with the ascended Christ. Ben Patterson, a Presbyterian minister in Orange County, California, comments: 'Historically the more Christians focus on *experiencing* the presence of God, the less interested they are in the poor and the hungry.' He continues, referring to the prosperity-orientated charismatic spirituality that is fashionable today: 'People in these new churches are experiencing all these wonderful things and they are into diet and health and prosperity, but there is no concern for justice'. Amos and Isaiah would have recognized the symptoms of a disease which blights the worship of Brethren, Catholic and Charismatic alike.

This reluctance to relate the experience of worship to human need is remarkable, in view of the way that the circumstances of the Saviour's death evoke human suffering. Doublecrossed by his friend, rejected by his own people, a political prisoner subjected to dubious judicial proceedings, weakened by torture, stripped naked, hungry and thirsty, dying a solitary death, the person of the crucified Christ brings before worshippers the plight of millions in the world today. But human suffering in the world today is not the whole story.

The Lord's Supper is intended to help us focus on a glorious future, when we will drink with the Lord in the kingdom (Luke 22:18). A right interpretation of the New Testament sees this kingdom as already present wherever Jesus is acknowledged as Lord, although its full manifestation is not yet. We are the children of the kingdom, pledged to the life of the new age and living out its hope, its challenge and its compassion for the poor. For some Christians, however, 'my Father's Kingdom' refers to a heavenly realm having no connection with what happens on earth.

A defective theology has too often been responsible for excluding from the Lord's Supper any thought of our suffering world. Wherever Christians believe that heaven is for the church and the earth is for Israel, they will be in danger of closing their eyes to human need and of turning away from the kingdom challenge of the Lord's Supper. As we have already noted, the New Testament contains little detailed information about Christian worship. This apparent indifference to times, places and rituals is not surprising in view of our Lord's attitude. In the words of J S McEwen:<sup>4</sup>

The principle laid down by Jesus is that of the complete relativity of the external form of worship. Any form or rule is good which is proved by experience to be an aid to that worship which is in spirit and in truth. A further consequence of Jesus' teaching is that the barrier between sacred and secular, worship and daily living, crumbles away. Since worship means the service of God, and this in turn implies loving one's neighbour, it follows that every kindly act performed in this spirit and intention is an act of worship (Matt 25:34-40; Jas 1:27).

What McEwen says about the disappearance of the barrier between sacred and secular, worship and daily living certainly corresponds to what we find in Paul. The implications of Romans 12:1, for example, are immense. At this point in the epistle, Paul has ended his account of God's saving purposes for the world and for Israel with a doxology expressing awe and worship (11:33–36). Now he demands a response from his hearers: they must surrender their lives to the God who has saved them. The word he uses, however, is not 'lives', but 'bodies' and he goes on to describe such self-surrender as a living sacrifice, their 'spiritual worship' (RSV). 'The language throughout this clause', writes C K Barrett,<sup>5</sup> 'is sacrificial; not only the word "sacrifice" itself, but also "offer", "holy", and "well-pleasing" are technical terms.' Nor is this the only occasion when the New Testament describes the actions of Christians in terms of sacrifice. The faith of the Philippians is a sacrifice (Phil 2:17); so is the gift they sent to Paul (Phil 4:18); doing good to others (Heb 13:16); praise (Heb 13:15); all may perhaps be included in the 'spiritual sacrifices' of 1 Peter 2:5.

In 1 Peter 2:5, Peter speaks of the offerings made by the church, but does not specify precisely what are the 'spiritual sacrifices' which the holy Christian priesthood should bring. In a very helpful contribution to a volume edited by D Carson, *The Church in the Bible and the World*, (Paternoster, 1987), Russell P Shedd quotes L Goppelt: 'They are not physically acts that are carried out in obedience to the letter, but Spirit-inspired surrender to all kinds of service.'

The self-offering enjoined upon Christians in Romans 12:1 is described as a *logiken latreian*. Originally used of hired service, *latreia* and the associated verb *latreuo* are used in the New Testament of worshipping God. The best interpretation of *logikos* here is probably that of Cranfield, who sees the word as implying a response based on a right understanding of the gospel and salvation.

All the same, it is apparent that Paul did not intend to reduce Christian worship to life in the Spirit, rejecting all external forms. Recognising this leaves us with the question of whether the language of Romans 12:1 may not simply be figurative. After all, even today, in a world where religious sacrifice is largely a thing of the past, we still use the term metaphorically. 'It was a real sacrifice', we say, 'when Smith gave up a summer holiday to care for a sick neighbour.' In such a context, the term has no religious significance for us. Did it have such a significance for Paul?

There are two reasons for thinking that it had. One is that Paul lived in a world where sacrifice was very much a physical and literal reality. In this setting, to say that money sent to him for Christ's sake or good deeds by Christians were sacrifices was more than metaphor. His use of cultic imagery (see the quotation from C K Barrett above) reinforces this

conclusion. So does the use of the word *latreia*, as may be seen from its occurrence in Romans 9:4; Hebrews 9:1. Paul seems to have believed that, for the Christian, worship and life are not separate entities, related to each other less or more closely. He stands in the Old Testament prophetic tradition reaffirmed by Jesus, asserting that for God's people life and worship must be coterminous. Horatius Bonar had the same vision when he sought:

Praise in the common things of life,  
 Its goings out and in;  
 Praise in each duty and each deed,  
 However small and mean . . .  
 So shall no hour of day or night  
 From sacredness be free;  
 But all my life, in every step,  
 Be fellowship with thee.

Shedd sees the traditional lists of admonitions to wives, husbands, children, parents and slaves, so often found in Paul's letters, as

a remarkable illustration . . . of what Paul meant by the sacrifice of the whole of life to God. Christians in bondage are urged not to offer "eyeservice" to please their masters. On the contrary they must consider themselves as slaves of Christ, serving him "with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord" (Col 3:22; cf Eph 6:5-7). This language borders on the cultic. All Christians are encouraged to sing in their hearts to God (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). Slaves are to work heartily, as if they were offering their service as a sacrifice to the Lord (rather than begrudging their unpaid labour). Though these sacrifices of body, praise and good deeds may seem remarkably mundane, they are well-pleasing to God. Extraordinary acts of piety, through self-affliction or ascetic abstinence, are not encouraged (Col 2:16-23). What counts is love of God and neighbours. Without such genuine love, self-immolation is quite worthless (1 Cor 13:3).

If we are justified in understanding Romans 12:1 as being more than a 'mere' metaphor, we may also cite other places where Paul seems to apply the language of worship to activities which are in no way concerned with cultic activity. In Philippians 2:17, Paul's death is regarded as a *drink-offering*, to be poured out upon the *sacrifice* of the Philippians' faith. In Philippians 2:25, Epaphras was the *minister* who by bringing their gifts to Paul, provided him with a *ministry* which they could not supply. In 2 Corinthians 9:12 gifts for the poor of Jerusalem are a *service*, and in Romans 15:16 proclaiming the good news is a *priestly duty* (NIV). In several cases the word used is one of the forms of *leitourgeo*. Although the noun can be used of secular rulers who do not act consciously as servants of God yet discharge their functions which are an ordinance of God (Rom 13:6), the word has powerful associations with worship. We may cite

Hebrews 10:11, referring to the service of priests and Levites under the law, and also Acts 13:2, where it is used of the period of prayer and worship by the church leaders at Antioch preceding the setting aside of Saul and Barnabas.

When we look at Christian sacrifice and the universal priesthood of the church from the viewpoint of the New Testament, it is clear that these have become integral aspects of any Christian definition of worship. 'Like a flowing spring', writes Shedd, 'a continuously renewed fellowship with him who sacrificed himself unreservedly for the church ought to motivate all who worship to bring God's saving solution to the world's desperate need.' He quotes H Berkhof, who speaks of worship as:

an antiphonal event in which, to the one side, God comes to us in such elements as proclamation of grace, command, Scripture reading, preaching, meal, and benediction; and in which to the other side we come before God with our confession of sin, litany of praise, profession of faith, prayers and intercessions, gifts for his work in the church and in the world, and hymns of humiliation and adoration, of praise and petition.

Shedd comments that 'such familiar exercises in worship are not worthy of him who lived his *whole* life for us, unless the members voluntarily choose to respond attitudinally in a manner that moves them joyfully to offer *all* of their actions and service on the altar of sacrifice'. The closing paragraphs of Shedd's study, which came to my attention only after I had begun work on this essay, express very clearly what the Bible has to say about the relationship between worship and life.

The average congregation, with its facile, traditional approach to worship, sees a duty to perform in the acting out of the liturgy as though that were the sum of the *leitourgia* (priestly service) the New Testament priesthood is invited to bring to God. Once the hour of service has ended the Christian feels free to sink back into the neutral ('secular') routine of daily living in the world. I have no desire to denigrate the significance of repeated worship services, but the New Testament surely challenges us all to recapture the totality of its conception of worship. All thoughts, words and deeds should be performed as worship because the Lamb is 'worthy to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing' (Rev 5:12). The sevenfold offering, which the innumerable angelic hosts proclaim the slain Lamb is worthy to receive, can be given in reality only by the redeemed on earth. For his honour, glory and blessing, we speak, write, work, play, eat and sleep, for he is worthy of all of the life power that pulsates within us.

The public gatherings of the church ought to have this objective in constant view. Her members should be stimulated, even as they participate in the liturgy, to practice actions of love and good deeds (Hebrew 10:24). Together or scattered, the church should be a glorifying community. Only such two-faceted worship is worthy of him who gave himself for the church with the intention of

securing her perfection (Eph 5:27). For we are not our own, but have been bought with a price (1 Cor 6:20), meaning that Christians have as much free time as slaves! 'Therefore whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God' (1 Cor 10:31).

#### Footnotes

1 SCM 1972

2 *Churchman* 99:3, 1985, 216–229.

3 *Wittenberg Door*, No 19, p 18.

4 *A Theological Wordbook of the Bible* (SCM, 1950) 288.

5 *The Epistle to the Romans* (A & C Black, 1957).

6 *Romans* (T & T Clark, 1980) 2.604f.

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