Whom Is Christian Worship For?

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righteous indignation that ensued, a Google search for Victoria Osteen. But my concern is less with what she said and more with most of the responses to it. The whole controversy surrounding her comments reveals less about "health and wealth" theology than it does about the rest of us who do not explicitly subscribe to that fallacy.

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JOIN THE DISCUSSION ON FACEBOOK

Resource Preview
by Cheryl Wilson-Bridges

Faith of Our Fathers (chapter excerpt)

Today, the noise of war and divisiveness is being waged in our church pews. Maybe you have experienced this divisive phenomenon in your own church. As I travel the globe, I see church members bicker, fight, and ultimately choose sides to promote their rigid, personal opinions on praise and worship with little to no comprehensive Biblical foundation. Without Scripture to guide and formulate our opinions, we worship in vain. Unknowingly we choose the wrong side as we sing our songs in the camp of preference and self-centeredness. Then with all our might we play and offer our worship to an idol -- praise music -- that has slowly and secretly become our golden calf.

Without Biblical direction, we select the winners and losers based on the most acceptable praise genre of the masses. In our efforts to win the
worship wars, some of us choose the side of classical music, the hymns or anthems of the church. Others choose the side of gospel, spirituals or Contemporary Christian Music (CCM). We exile those who choose genres like jazz, rap, Christian rock or pop music based solely on personal preference, historical research or the rapidly changing waves of musical fads. In this unstable state, the winning and losing sides alternate erratically. In this volatile environment, the winning and losing camps tend to easily reach their boiling points. People's opinions on the appropriateness of the worship music continue to ebb and flow. Yet in this mayhem, the undercurrents of frustration and contention continue to flood our pews.

While we may have noble intentions, we fiercely fight the worship wars and base our view of victory on personal preference. Still we never stop to notice that Jesus Christ is not fighting our battle nor is God pleased with our praise. In true praise there are no two sides and no competition. In true praise there are no winners and no losers. In true praise, there is only one side united by one body with only holy one purpose. In true praise, we unite our sacred songs of praise to worship the One True God our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Editor's note: The above paragraphs are part of a chapter in a forthcoming book resource that will be available in October, 2014. If you would like to be notified when the book is available, let us know via email.

Worship Music
by Richard Hickham
Florida Hospital Church Hymn Project: Classic, Revised, and New

Richard Hickham

There is the old story of Isaac Watts complaining to his father about the quality of songs and singing in the church of his day. Watts' father, growing tired of listening to his son's whining challenged him to do something about it.

We have the blessing today of celebrating with the scores of generations before us great songs of faith that have inspired through the centuries, but what about today's struggles and victories? Who is writing those songs? Who is writing those songs in the vernacular of the church of our Lord in 2014?

We have a number of talented musicians in our church with varying degrees of musicality. As a music educator, I thought if I can get them all in the same room together, cast a vision with a timeline and a destination, we could do some great things together. I could help with some music fundamentals and pairing the lyricists with the tune writers. We have a few experienced songwriters, and we have several working on their first songs. We are a little ways into our journey, and it's been fascinating. Here are a few comments from some of our musicians regarding this process:

"It's good for a church to sing songs that are being written within the church, while having a universal application it has a certain resonance in the local congregation"

"We are the new generation; we are adding to the collective history of the saints"

"I have learned organizational skills, how my thoughts work and about the process to create something new"
"After I pray, I feel like God is speaking back to me, I write the words down and then comes the difficult part of finding the right music"

"It is a process, a long process with many layers, the words, the music, the arrangement, the instruments, the recording"

"I felt like a had a gift and now I have a purpose to use it for God's glory"

We'll keep you posted about our continuing journey, and eventually some new songs!

Editors note: Expect a follow up article on this hymn project in the next edition of Best Practices for Adventist Worship.

Worship Leading
by Elia King

Leading Beyond the Style Wars

My family and I worship with a beautifully diverse group of people. Our church has two main services, each with their own flavor: one is more traditional and the other more contemporary. In both services, we use social media to communicate about what we're doing throughout the week and during our weekend services.

We recently posted a photo of the worship band with a caption based on the lyrics of the song we were singing: "Worthy is your name."

We got a response that surprised me a bit. Although the comment has since been removed, it was something along the lines of:
"Worthy of more honor than rock music can provide."

I'll admit that I struggled not to take that comment personally. It felt not only like an attack on the validity of my personal style preference, but also on the sincerity of my worship.

But the more I thought about that statement, the more I agreed with my critic. Sort of. Read More

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Worship Technology
by Eddie Cornejo

Enhancement Tracks, Yes or No?

Editor's note: We asked worship leader Eddie Cornejo to film his first attempt at using enhancement tracks in a worship service. He documents his experience and some of the lessons learned in this video. Share your thoughts in our Facebook dialogue.

Click here to watch the video.

Featured Media
by Rick Anderson

Anthem Rising (Ep. 4) - Excellence in Worship

Rick Anderson discusses the value of excellence in Christian worship.
Anthem Rising (Ep. 4) - Excellence in Worship
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I have a couple suspicions regarding our inadequate responses to statements like the one above. And I hope you will believe that when I write “we,” I really do mean you and me (and especially me).

First, we are afraid that the preacher is right — at least in a descriptive sense: We do worship God for our own good. We do it all the time. Maybe our own happiness should not be our motivation, but it often is.

Second, and more significantly, the fallacious argument in question unearths — by being explicit — all the subtle ways we tacitly agree with self-centered worship in our practices. We all know that the easiest way to feel temporarily better about ourselves is to focus our attention on someone who is ostensibly “worse” than we are. The fact is, people cannot be divided into good and bad, better and worse. As Paul writes to the Romans, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Rom 3:23 NASB). At least the preacher in question is being honest about where she stands.

Let’s do the same:

First, in theory, most Christians certainly believe that Christian worship is a response to who God is and what God has done. Namely, we worship God because God alone is worthy of worship. It is difficult to read Revelation 4 and 5 (and many other passages of Scripture) and deny this theology of worship. So, unsurprisingly, few people rushed to defend the idea of worshipping God for our own good. But correct or better thinking may not be the answer to what ails our worship of God. True worship springs not only from the fount of correct theology and doctrine but from ongoing encounters with the living God. Worship as a response merely to our own ideas about God is no less idolatrous than worship as a technology of our happiness. And, if we are honest, we practice this idolatry more often than we like to admit.

Second, God may desire lives of worship to benefit us but not in an individualistic sense. In the faux and fleeting vitriol of the online worship debate this week, one important perspective was oddly lacking: the relationship between worshipping God and serving our neighbors. People denounced the idea of worshipping God for our own good, but few questioned the basic “God-and-me” binary. What about our neighbors? Without a sense of responsibility for our neighbors, the vagueness of “doing something for God” creates a lot of latitude for well-masked self service. The church and its worship can easily become — metaphorically and quite literally — a tax shelter for celebrating and uplifting self.

The Prophet Isaiah minces no words in clarifying God’s perspective on such self-centered religiosity:
The multitude of your sacrifices—
what are they to me?” says the Lord.
I have more than enough of burnt offerings,
of rams and the fat of fattened animals;
I have no pleasure
in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.

When you come to appear before me,
who has asked this of you,
this trampling of my courts?

Stop bringing meaningless offerings!
Your incense is detestable to me.
New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—
I cannot bear your worthless assemblies.

Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals
I hate with all my being.
They have become a burden to me;
I am weary of bearing them.

When you spread out your hands in prayer,
I hide my eyes from you;
even when you offer many prayers,
I am not listening.” (Isaiah 1:11-15 NASB)

The Prophet goes on to clarify the reason this worship does not please God. It is not a distaste for their choice of songs or the annoyance of a poorly played shofar. And it certainly is not that the worshipers have forgotten about seeking their own good.

Isaiah explains:

“Learn to do right; seek justice;
Defend the oppressed.
Take up the cause of the fatherless;
plead the case of the widow.” (Isaiah 1:17)

The greatest ongoing casualty of our self-serving worship practices is not God but our neighbor. If “even the Son of Man” — God incarnate — “did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45) then our worship of Him must be concerned not only with the priority of God but also God’s priorities: our neighbors in this world, people who are broken, widowed, marginalized, maligned — people whom God loves and whom it is our joy to love and serve in worshipful response to the God who has loved and served us all.
Leading Beyond the Style Wars (Part One)

By Elia King

My family and I worship with a beautifully diverse group of people. Our church has two main services, each with their own flavor: one is more traditional and the other more contemporary. In both services, we use social media to communicate about what we’re doing throughout the week and during our weekend services.

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But the more I thought about that statement, the more I agreed with my critic. Sort of.

I started to ask myself, what style of music can fully encapsulate the glory of God and the fullness of worship? Rock? Gospel? Folk? R&B? Jazz? Classical? Polka? The conclusion that I came to was that my critic was correct, because in fact no singular style of music can fully achieve the complexity that is necessary for really genuine worship.

If that were possible, then we could apply the same logic to other areas of life as well. We might suggest (however unreasonable or unhealthy) that macaroni and cheese is the most fulfilling of foods and therefore all others substitutes are invalid. But for some reason, we think it’s ok to apply such exclusive logic to our worship, something arguably of much more consequence than what’s for dinner.

One of the realities that we face as worship leaders and crafters of worship services is that the tools we employ (including musical style, key, tempo, lighting, order of service, etc.) are, in many cases, giving our congregations the vocabulary to express the innermost feelings of their hearts to God. With that in mind, it shouldn’t catch us by surprise that people feel so passionately about these things. In theory, they’re just elements of a service. But in practice, when they have such strong connections to the heart, they take on much more significance — sometimes beyond rational explanation.

Without proper perspective, our discussions about the details can take precedence over the purpose of our worship, and we can find ourselves entrenched in debates over how we worship rather than why, or more important, whom we worship. History has shown that we can become so focused on the “how” that the practice of our worship itself becomes idolatry (see Amos 5:21).

In part two of this series, we’ll explore a few practical suggestions for leading your congregation beyond the worship style wars. Stay tuned…