

Toward an Adventist Theology of Worship

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Introduction

In a manner that sets us apart from other Christians, the Seventh-day Adventist view of the cosmic struggle between good and evil focuses attention on earth's first and last events as well as the cross. At all these times in history we understand Christ to be at work, first as the Creator, then at the cross, and at last the authentic returning ruler who comes to take command of His planet.

His challenger, Satan, initiated the struggle in heaven with a demand for loyalty due legitimately to God alone (Rev 12:7-9). His demand for worship from heavenly beings precipitated war in heaven. Expelled to earth, he continued his efforts, deceiving our first parents and initiating a series of events in which most humans became diverted into false worship.

In the wilderness encounter between Satan and Christ, Satan demanded that the weakened Jesus worship him (Matt 4:9). At the crux of the cosmic conflict stands the question of worship.

In the final drama John the Revelator sees a faithful remnant of humanity under the utmost pressure to yield its allegiance to the beast power, a coalition of all the earth's apostate religious organizations who manipulate civil forces to compel conformity. The crisis culminates in enforcement of the beast's mark of allegiance, with death as the alternative (Rev 13:15-17). At the point of ultimate desperation God intervenes to rescue His faithful ones who "keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus (Rev 12:17).

It is this sweeping picture that informs our understanding and sets the issue of God's dealings with humanity in perspective. At its center is the core question of worship. To whom, when, why, how? From the gates of Eden to the assembled saints in the Holy City the Bible draws our attention to worship.

Our purpose is not to explore the ideas of the literally hundreds of scholarly writers who have addressed the theme in publications, although more than a few of them have contributed to our understanding. Our goal is an aggressive ongoing

pursuit, probing for timeless foundations on which to build both faith and practice.

To this point Adventists have not probed the subject of worship deeply, being satisfied to adapt concepts and forms received from other Christians, for we think of our primary work to lie in other areas—to sound the message of the Redeemer's soon return in glory and how to prepare for that grand event.

The first major Adventist book on worship was Norval Pease's And Worship Him (1967). Its author was a professor of Church and Ministry at the Andrews University Seminary, where his book helped guide students, along with its wider ministry to the English-speaking section of the church. More recently C Raymond Holmes, current chairman of the same department at the Andrews Seminary, produced Sing a New Song (1984), a more thorough discussion of worship and its theological foundation. Dr Holmes' work has contributed significantly to this paper. He is regarded currently as the pre-eminent Adventist authority on worship.

More recently yet, we are witnessing an increased interest among Adventists in worship. An entire issue of Ministry Magazine was dedicated to the subject (October 1991), and in 1992 and 1993 regional conferences on worship were held in the western part of North America, partly in response to new variations called Celebration worship, introduced to some churches, especially in that area, which has provoked controversy.

What remains to be done is to formulate a theological underpinning of what worship means for Adventists. This paper hopes to contribute to that task in a preliminary way.

What is Worship?

We draw definitions of worship from biblical sources and human experience as well. Although secularized anthropology offers generic descriptions, pointing up elements of similarity among all attempts of humans to reach out to the divine, there are significant differences, especially be-

tween Christian and pagan worship. Some argue that high affinity to any idea or object constitutes worship. Hence the atheist may worship. Such definition lies outside Scriptural usage, hence cannot apply to a Christian worship that follows biblical norms.

Because worship is reported in the Scriptures under a wide variety of circumstances, efforts to define it call for a series of statements.

Most Christian writers acknowledge the theocentric nature of Christian worship. In some way we as creatures come into relationship with our Creator. In its fullness we think of worship as a dramatic adoration of God because of His supreme worth. It is that worth that provides the norm and inspiration for all human life. God is at the center of all because His nature requires it. There are no other options. As Frederick Schroeder describes it, "Worship at its highest and best is the act of giving to God the honor and glory that are His due, without regard to any personal satisfaction or benefit accruing from the act of adoration (Schroeder, 1966, p 32).

In worship we acknowledge the uniqueness of God. The relationship is objective. Whether or not we worship, He exists undiminished in every way. Christian worship leads us to a review of self in light of His nature and His knowledge of us. In such worship we recognize God as the source of all, hence initiator of worship as well. We reach out in response to the divine initiative.

The result is dialogue between unequals, reported especially in the Old Testament but in the New as well, in which God as initiator converses with human worshipers. So God speaks with Adam and Eve in Eden (Gen 3), with Noah (Gen 6:13-21), Abraham in Ur (Gen 12), with Jacob (Gen 32) and with many others. He speaks to Samuel at the tent of the sanctuary (1 Sam 3), by Gabriel to Zechariah the priest (Luke 1:11-20), to Mary, Jesus' mother (vss 26-38), and Christ Himself to Saul the persecutor and Ananias at Damascus (Acts 9).

God has established a particularly intimate relationship through His acts within history, but beyond all else, His outreach is crowned with the gift of Jesus and the sending of the Holy Spirit.

In worship we express radical loyalty that stands above all things or actions. It is the act of self-giving, of relationship and renewal. Worship is total adoration, which leads to inner renewal and recognition of the Spirit's presence. Its end is eternal life in the presence of God Himself.

God accepts a worship that exhibits radical commitment to Him above all other things. As sole Creator it is His just due. For this reason to reduce worship to simple performance of ritual is to deny the fundamental essence necessary for it to be genuine.

As with anything repeated, the human tendency is to reduce it to mechanism. Exactly this kind of worship was denounced by the prophets, especially Isaiah, Micah, Amos, and Hosea, and by Jesus (Matt 6:7).

We correctly recognize that God is different from us and infinitely superior, however by His choice He communes with us in intimate form beyond description in words. In the interplay between worship as recognition of His otherness and our sense of His closeness we enjoy a rich fullness available in neither alone. Over time, holding these elements in balance has proved a challenge. History is filled with extremes on both sides, which have generated considerable conflict among Christians.

Another theological dimension of worship unfolds most clearly in the Pauline writings where worship is identified with total dedication. What Paul calls for transcends a formal act inserted into one's daily activities, it means commitment of one's whole self to Him in the fullest kind of dedication (Rom 12:1, 1 Cor 6:20, 1 Pet 2:5). Saying this expands our definition of worship to encompass the entire relationship between us and God, but is not the story of God and man designed exactly to explain and verify that relationship? We worship not only in prayer, in song, in certain designated acts, but in the whole of life committed to God without reservation.

Under this broad umbrella of service we present certain elements of life to Him through specific acts or events, such as personal or public prayer, gifts, and by other means. But in essence it is ourselves we present to Him as the ultimate sacrifice that we can make.

Since worship can be described as adoration of God, all that we do is related to Him. This means that worship is guided by our concept of what God is like and what are His purposes. Both worship's inner meaning and the way it is expressed relate to theology. If God is thought of as a potentate, or remote and indifferent, angry, or fatherly, we approach Him from different perspectives. Therefore it is urgently important for worship that we develop a mature understanding of Him.

A series of theological presuppositions underlies the way we conceive of proper worship. It will be helpful to review briefly several of the most important.

One deals with the human concept of God's location. The Genesis account presents God as above time and space, a majestic being at whose command matter flashes into existence. The psalmist echoes this vision of God as transcendent Majesty. (Ps 33 et.al.)

With the passage of time such an exalted view became compromised in the development of paganism, in which material things present in the environment were sacralized. The great struggle in the growing Hebrew understanding of God was to overcome desacralizing material objects, transferring respect to the One who made things material. Not only did the patriarchs struggle to grasp this truth but they had to learn that He alone is God.

We have many evidences in the patriarchal narratives that early believers still related worship of God with certain locations. Memorial stones are set up to mark the places of unusual contacts with God. The portable tent of worship carried during the exodus wanderings softened the idea of place with its nature. The establishment by David and Solomon of a permanent capital with its religious center reinforced the idea of place, however it was clear to the Hebrews that worship could occur elsewhere as well, such as in their homes. A central house of God served valuable purposes and was within God's plan, but it reinforced excessive reliance on place. However, the concept of place was not allowed to obscure the majesty of God. At the dedication of the temple, Solomon notes in his dedicatory prayer, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee. . ." (1 Kings 8:27). Isaiah describes God as "the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy" (Isa 57:15).

With destruction of the temple in 586 B C and exile of the Jews to Babylonia, worship became scattered to wherever Jews were found. Apparently the synagogue developed under these conditions as vehicle of dispersed worship.

Even with restoration of the Jerusalem temple, synagogues remained as places of worship alongside the temple, the synagogue oriented to study of Torah, the temple toward sacrifice. Jesus worshiped in both places, but in conversation with the woman in Samaria, He noted, "But the hour

is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23, 24). Jesus underscored the truths that God is not to be localized, but is readily accessible to every person, wherever they may be.

Of all the qualities God has revealed of Himself, possibly the most profound is His holiness. It is true that holiness carries an element of mystery, but the idea of purity is strongly present. In the holiness code of Leviticus 19 God establishes Himself as the model for holiness. The only reason given for morality is that it reflects his character. "You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev 19:2). God's holy nature is a consideration of great importance, leading humans to adore Him. Our imperfection stands in constant violation of His nature, making necessary a reconciliation, which was achieved by Christ at the cross. The barriers of violation were broken, opening the way for repentant believers of defective character to commune with God who is absolute holiness.

In God's righteousness we meet His trait of unvarying constancy. We worship a God who is not only reliable, He is strong in judgment, vindication, and retribution. He welcomes our worship on the grounds that we can put absolute trust in Him, cementing the closeness that worship implies.

Throughout the Scriptures, God reveals Himself as God of mercy and compassion, worthy of our adoration. God is love, never understood as sentimental favoritism, but in terms of bold, aggressive effort to do good for us. In both Old and New Testaments this theme is repeated many times, in Hebrew especially in the word, chesed, usually translated loving kindness. The Lord assures His people He is "betrothed forever" to them (Hos 2:19). In both Old and New Testaments He is a merciful father. The Psalmist tells us, "As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pities them who fear him" (Ps 103:13). In revealing His compassionate nature God invites us to worship Him in assurance that He accepts us when we come in honesty to adore Him.

Many other theological principles underlie the worship of God. Not only is He the sole living God (Heb 9:14), His Lordship is personal, legitimate, and complete. He rules not as despotes, but kurios. As creator of heaven and earth He is by that fact alone worthy of our worship (Acts 4:24,

17:22). He is not only creator, but the sustainer of all things, the controller of all (pantokrator, Rev 4:9).

He is the same God in both New and Old Testaments (Acts 13:14-17), in fact the God of the Hebrews is revealed fully in the Son (Eph 1:3). Not only is He the cosmic God of creation, He is intimate, lending His presence to us at all times (1 Cor 14:25, Isa 45:14). Moreover, He is concerned with our worship, wanting us to worship Him in an acceptable manner pleasing to Him (Heb 12:28; 13:16). He is One who reads our hearts and understands our concerns (Acts 1:24, Rom 8:27). Despite vast differences between his nature and ours, He solicits our trust and promises intimacy. "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you" (James 4:8). For all the qualities God has revealed of Himself He deserves glory and praise (Rom 15:6, Acts 2:46).

The supreme revelation of God is found in His Son Christ Jesus. "The only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (John 1:18). "He is the image of the invisible God," "creator of all things" (Col 1:15, 16). As He is also the sole means of salvation (Acts 4:12), He is the object of both praise and worship because of His character and our gratitude for His redemption. Christian worship therefore is Christocentric. The Apocalypse portrays an end to sin's reign, in which every creature falls in adoration before Christ, acclaiming Him as sovereign above all things, worshipping.

Worship and the Trinity

Although the Scriptures contain few statements directly about God in three persons, biblical descriptions of relationships among Father, Son and Holy Spirit are hardly intelligible without recognizing it as fact. In John 17 we find Jesus addressing His Father in heaven, establishing clearly the distinction between them. No form of modalism is compatible with it. Then we find them speaking of the Spirit as a quite separate entity. Nor is this distinction limited to John's writings. Study of the Scriptures makes it increasingly clear that worship is appropriately addressed to all three persons.

Scholarly discussion continues about how early Christ came to be recognized as deity by early Christians. Peter's confession, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God" (Matt 16:16) came during the visit to Caesarea Philippi, well before

the close of Christ's public ministry. Stephen, at his death, prays, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59), an obvious recognition of the propriety of prayer to Jesus. The Christ hymns such as Philippians 2:6-11, 1 Timothy 3:16 clearly attribute deity to Jesus. Prayers to Christ are frequent in the New Testament, including the oldest of recorded prayers, Maranatha.

Pliny the younger (AD 62-113) provides in a letter the earliest non-Christian report on Christian worship, in which he reports hymns sung antiphonally "to Christ as a God" (Pliny to Trajan, letter 96). Examples of prayer to the Holy Spirit are less common but not entirely absent. Recognition of the Spirit as divine appears often in the expression, Spirit of God (Rom 8:9 et.al.). The Holy Spirit has a prominent place in worship, being the one who changes us into the likeness of Christ (2 Cor 3:17-18). Through the gifts of the Spirit He motivates much of the ministry of the church (1 Cor 12 and 14). The Spirit is active in our prayers, making them acceptable to God by active intercession (Rom 8:26, 27).

Based on these and numerous other examples, we know that three persons are recognized as deity in the Scriptures, therefore worship is appropriate for all. While we cannot know the exact relationship among the divine persons, we know they function in perfect harmony and can be thought of as a unity, one God. Worship is appropriate for all, and all relate to us as worshippers.

Divine and Human in Worship

Although study of the Scriptures presents worship as theocentric, a human component is involved as well. Recognition of God's worth produces response within the worshipper, which is apparent in many Scripture passages. The adoration theme is especially prominent in the psalms, for example, however they express as well the most profound levels of personal human involvement.

The discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians stresses human activities in response to worship of God. Chapter 14, particularly, as a discussion of activities in public worship services, makes the point that whatever occurs, all must lead to spiritual growth of the worshipers themselves. If it does not edify the saints it is to be subordinated, even gifts of the Spirit.

Although order is a requirement for worship by early Christians (1 Cor 14:40), an element of

spontaneity is present. Eduard Schweizer argues it is foreign to the New Testament to divide the worshiping community into speaker and listener (Schweizer 1957, p 295). Perhaps the question turns on to what degree we express division. Elsewhere it is quite clear public worship features a specific speaker and auditors. As James Moffatt argues, worship is not to be turned into a discussion group (Moffatt 1938, p 23).

The Scriptures describe worship at personal, communal, and national levels. Each has its appropriate place. With the disappearance of the theocracy, however, the place of national worship vanishes from the Christian era, although civil authorities continue to hold a legitimate function in the economy of God (Rom 13:1-5).

On this basis worship is personal and corporate. Even in corporate worship the personal element remains. We note, for example, that although the gifts of the Spirit are personal, they are distributed through the congregation with the intent that the entire group of worshipers is edified. The priesthood of every believer is a firmly established biblical teaching (1 Pet 2:1-10), with profound implications for the way Christian worship is conducted. All but lost in medieval times, this truth was recovered by 16th century reformers. Its fuller implications were recognized by the radical reformers, who anticipated certain elements of Adventist practice.

The Enlightenment trend toward personalization is reflected today in society's tendency to over-personalize faith. Personal faith, expressed in personal worship has a long record in salvation history, but through corporate worship the individual presents himself to be merged into the body of Christ. Worship fails to reach its objective in willful, continued isolation from fellow believers. Christian worship is social as well as personal.

Although worship finds its focus in God, it brings to the worshiper many immediate benefits. Worship provides fellowship with God as well as other believers, meeting a basic human need. It sustains personal value and underscores responsibility. It widens perspective beyond narrow self interest. It reminds us of our finite nature but opens connection to the infinite God. It performs a cleansing, redemptive ministry, for when we rise from worship we go released from the guilt we brought before God. It educates us about what God is like. True worship edifies. It provides an understanding of our destiny in cosmic terms, especially as worship

incorporates the insights from the word of God. It integrates the loose elements of life in this world. Affinity with the holy God inspires integrity and obedience to God's will. It provokes us to do service to God—an outreach toward others marked by zealous activity on behalf of His cause.

Due to an inadequate grasp of what worship offers the human before God, many Christians fail to gain the benefits of genuine worship. This leads to tragic impoverishment of soul and a series of false conceptions about worship and God Himself.

What elements are needed as a person comes before God? First, he must come in faith (Heb 11:6ff). Worship brings a unity of heart and mind, hence Paul emphasizes the importance of worshiping with the understanding, both in prayer and in study of the word (1 Cor 14:15). Worship must be internalized, spiritual. We worship in spirit and in truth, which extends beyond external ritual. Our worship is "to the Lord" (Col 3:23), stretching beyond space and time.

Worship permits us to approach the God who is unapproachable except in Christ (1 Tim 6:17, Heb 4:16, James 4:8). Although based on a personal relationship, we share our praise to God (Acts 4:24, Eph 5:19). Worship is reverent, repeated, and accepting, not exclusive (James 2:1ff).

Catholic and Protestant Worship

Significant differences exist between worship as practiced by Catholics, both western and Orthodox, and Protestants. Catholic practice stresses objectivity. Worship is *ad gloriam dei*. With regard to its efficacy the presence of people is incidental. Properly performed by persons properly vested, it has self-verifying merit. It may be and often is performed in a language unknown to attendees.

In contrast, Protestants recognize also a subjective quality. The major goal becomes to edify the worshiper, to establish a link between the worshiper and God. The test is intelligibility. Such worship leads to self-analysis and a search for inner peace. It also lends itself to kinds of abuse that have characterized the past 50 years.

The Reformation's efforts to alter public worship produced vigorous confrontation. Always liturgy follows theology, hence the new understanding of salvation by faith (which is personal), redefinition of the sacraments, especially the mass, from saving conveyor of grace to memorials of Christ's saving

act, the priesthood of every believer, and personal interpretation of the Scriptures, meant the public worship must change.

Populist resistance to change, a minimal grasp of the theological issues, and the fact that liturgical change was implemented by civil rulers—all conspired to create explosive conditions. In many instances the blending of church and state politicized worships, leading to conflict, and in some cases civil war. To the degree that church and state continue to be interlocked, the problem remains. Secularism in the western world has diminished conflict as the large majority of the citizens have in effect abandoned the churches.

Nowhere is the difference more clear between Catholic and Protestant worship than in the supper. Protestants return the service to worshiping community, truly participatory, not simply recipients of the bread and wine. The medieval altar is replaced with the table. No longer is the worship leader acting on behalf of the celebrants, but among them. Sacerdotalism and sacramentalism disappear.

Of all Protestants, Adventists have theological understandings that require a participative supper. Our goal of restoring early Christian practice, including the sabbath and the other elements of the apostolic faith, along with the priesthood of every believer, means participation of every believer. Our recognition that a single high priest now serves on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary—Jesus Christ—destroys earthly sacerdotalism. Every believer has direct access to Christ, and an intimacy with God that displaces any earthly mediator. Worship is direct, unmediated. Theology determines liturgy: therefore for us the supper can only be one open to all believers. The washing of feet provides the ultimate in participatory worship, to a level forfeited by those churches who have lost it.

The Corporate Worship Service

Although ultimately worship is personal, being a recognition of the infinite merits of God, it is to be expressed corporately. God has not only individual worshipers but also a worshipping people—the body of Christ, the gathered believers. This corporate service holds a high profile in both Old and New Testament times.

Therefore for Adventists corporate worship in both concept and practice accepts and pursues biblical norms. The New Testament in particular serves as guide.

But the New Testament church drew heavily upon earlier Jewish worship. Scholars such as Roland de Vaux and A S Herbert have given intensive study to Hebrew worship, helping us to see how early Christians both adopted and adapted from earlier patterns.

Remarkably, the Old Testament never describes in detail a single act of worship. Partial reports occur, particularly of special occasions such as at the dedication of the Solomonic temple (2 Chron 5-7). The regulations governing sacrifice appear in Leviticus 6 and 7.

Prior to the exile the Bible reports a struggle over who should be worshiped: which God or gods? Equally problematic was the struggle against syncretism, especially in the northern kingdom.

A century ago Hermann Gunkel destroyed the prevailing idea that the psalms are a miscellany of devotions, showing that many served specific purposes. As the most significant liturgical book of the Old Testament the psalter deserves attention. Far from imposing a rigid framework, it encompasses a wide range of experience. Its hymns about events in sacred history, calls to worship, thanksgivings, and royal psalms address many elements of life.

The place of music in worship, known from long before, is expanded in the psalms. Theologically, the psalms introduce for the first time an eschatological theme into worship. Not only is Yahweh the God of past deliverances, He controls the future as well. The psalms take on special meaning as the book most often quoted by Jesus. The same is true of the New Testament writers.

With Ezra's reorganization following the exile, the center of worship became less on sacrifice and more the study of the Scriptures, particularly Torah. In this period the synagogue appeared, providing a weekly localized worship occasion in each community, its focus on Torah. This development helped counter the excessive formality, ritualism, and syncretistic tendencies so opposed by the prophets prior to the exile.

No exact Hebrew word is equivalent to our term, worship, but the concept is carried by descriptions of activities. The Hebrew noun, ʿabad, to serve, carries connotations of "to adore" as well. Hence in the second commandment we are told not to reproduce the likeness of anything in our environment. To what purpose? For worship. God forbids us to bow down to them or to serve

them, an obvious reference to worship. The other expression, to bow down, is based on the Hebrew shacah, to bow, which with its derivative histah^awa, to prostrate oneself, bow, or bend low, appears more than 170 times in the Old Testament. The parallel Aramaic sgd appears 12 times in Daniel. The Hebrews are expressly warned against showing such reverence to other gods (Deut 5:9, 20:5, Ex 23:24, et.al.). The fundamental concept is humility before one's superior.

Jesus was a participant in both the temple and synagogue format of worship. He was dedicated at the temple, inducted there at 12 years of age, and in His ministries in Judaea often taught in the temple precincts. Generally He attended the festivals of the Jews. However we find Him going on Sabbaths to worship in the synagogues, "as his custom was" (Lu 4:16).

Early Christians continued to worship in the Jewish environment and were regarded as a sect of Judaism, the Nazarene sect (Acts 24:5). After Christ's ascension they continued at the temple (Acts 2:46, compare Lu 24:52, 53, Acts 3:1), however with addition of a Christian distinctive, breaking bread (Acts 2:42, 46). They continued their work as well among convert Gentiles and God-fearers (Acts 10:22, 13:16).

With roots in Hebrew worship, Christians followed its basic pattern with Jesus being, however, the fulfillment of the sacrificial temple system. Quite clearly the synagogue provided the model which was merged with the Upper Room experience. The synagogue service was held weekly, on the sabbath, consisting of Scripture reading, preaching, prayer, and singing. To this was added specifically the supper, a special memorial communion with the Messiah.

As with Hebrew, the Greek used by early Christians lacked an exact equivalent to our term, worship. Several words contribute, one being latreia and its derivatives, all associated with the idea of service. Its form latreuo means to serve voluntarily with no thought of reward (Phil 3:3). Under influence of these words we speak today of worship "services."

Leitourgia, a source of our word "liturgy," meant in Athens a public service or program staged by a private citizen at his own expense. We are told Christ serves as "a minister (leitourgia) in the sanctuary" on our behalf (Heb 8:2). Here its sacrificial connotations are clear, something rare in the New Testament.

A different Greek word, proskuneo, comes nearer to the meaning of our modern word, worship. Literally meaning "to kiss the hand" [of a superior to one's self], it conveys the idea of prostration or homage, bending the knee. Rare except in the gospels and Revelation, it is the nearest parallel to the Hebrew shacah. Its use in the New Testament represents a public act in response to an inward motive.

As noted earlier, in the New Testament the concept of worship as service is expanded to include the whole of life. Paul urges the Romans to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom 12:1). Worship becomes more than a public formal matter, but an integral element of every act and thought. The Christian presents his entire self, physical body included, as adoration. Here we find one of the major theological foundations of healthful living, which is an important part of Seventh-day Adventist message.

If worship is service voluntarily presented to God in gratitude, it is service that marks a disciple. He or she then serves God, a frequent biblical theme. Jesus' response to Satan's temptation came in the form of a quotation from Deuteronomy 6:13, "worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve" (Lu 4:8). Serving God becomes worshiping Him.

The Worship Service in the New Testament

Early Christian worship consisted of six elements: Scripture, preaching, prayer, singing, the supper, and the bringing of gifts (Acts 2:42, 46, 20:7, 1 Cor 16:1-3). Whether we have sufficient information to reconstruct an exact order of service seems doubtful, although considerable data exists. It is unlikely a fixed cycle of Scripture readings was followed everywhere, although synagogue patterns provided one if desired. We know the writings of the apostles were read as well as the Hebrew Scriptures.

Preaching themes were focused on salvation, especially based on passages drawn from Old Testament prophecies, coupled with extensive testimonies about Christ. Prayers appear to be free rather than formalized, although the early post-apostolic Didache reports formal repetition of the Lord's prayer and doxology. (Didache 10.6, 8).

The Aramaic expression abba, father, seems to have had a liturgical use (Gal 4:6, Rom 8:15).

As noted earlier, Maranatha, come Lord Jesus, closes the first Corinthian letter (1 Cor 16:22) and appears in the Greek as an imperative to close the Apocalypse (Rev 22:20). The Aramaic form appears at the close of the meal in the Didache (Didache 10.6).

After His resurrection most of Christ's appearances occurred at meals. These were occasions of intimacy and pleasure, not sacrifice (Acts 10:40). Jesus ate with His disciples, literally "took salt with them" (Acts 10:4). In joining their meals Jesus celebrated the resurrection and their future that anticipates eating together in the kingdom. Paul ties it to the Last Supper (1 Cor 11:26). The synoptic gospels echo, "till he comes," always noting the eschatological element. To the repentant Laodicean Jesus promises, "I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev 3:20).

New Testament records speak of music in worship: psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (1 Cor 14:26, Col 3:16, Eph 5:19). Especially in Revelation, music figures strongly in the heavenly courts (Rev 5:9, 5:12, 12:10-12, 19:1-2, 19:6). The report of Christians at worship in the letter of Pliny the younger (AD 62-114), tells us of antiphonal singing "to Christ as to a god," accompanied by other innocent practice such as pledges to live good law-abiding lives. (Pliny to Trajan, Letter 96)

Early Christian worship included benedictions and doxologies that appear to be stereotyped (Gal 6:18, Phil 4:23, 2 Cor 13:13), and use of the amen (1 Cor 14:16).

The fullest early post-apostolic description of a Christian worship service comes from the Christian apologist, Justin, who evidently reports worship as practiced in Rome (c. A.D. 150).

'On the day called after the sun a meeting of all who live in cities or in the country takes place at a common spot and the Memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the Prophets are read as long as time allows. When the reader is finished the leader delivers an address through which he exhorts and requires them to follow noble teachings and examples. Then we all rise and send heavenwards prayers. And, as said before, as soon as we are finished praying, bread and wine mixed with water are laid down and the leader too prays and gives thanks, as powerfully as he can, and the people join in, in saying the "Amen"; and now comes the distribution to each and the common meal on the gifts that have been brought and to those who are not present it is sent by the hands of the deacons. . . .' (Justin, 1 Apology, chap 67).

All New Testament reports as well as those of Pliny and Justin indicate a free form service, although with no reticence about including certain stereotyped components. This is significant today because of our commitment to follow New Testament norms is basic to the Adventist worship service. Throughout the world, across hundreds of culture groups, Adventist worship relates faithfully to the biblical example, recognizing that the early church reports impose no fixed order of service.

The story of how the simplicity of early Christianity was lost, tied to theological developments that ended in monarchical episcopacy and sacramentalism, is familiar. Its end product was the medieval form of Christianity, both East and West, which in doctrine and practice departed widely from original faith and practice.

The supper remains important today, but does not overshadow the other legitimate components. Its name, eucharist (Gr. eucharisteo) bears the meaning of thanks or praise. Rather than serving as a melancholy remembrance of Christ's death, it incorporates as well the joy of resurrection and His coming kingdom. Therefore the idea of thanks or praise is entirely appropriate. Worship inspired by the Spirit leads to Christ's glorification and praise (Eph 5:19, 20, Col 3:16).

Above all other New Testament books worship assumes special importance in the Apocalypse. Scenes of the heavenly throne appear especially in chapters 4 and 5. Repeatedly the narration describes choruses of praise as God intervenes to deliver His people from great peril.

A crisis over worship will precipitate the final conflict of the ages, recorded in chapters 12 and 13, where God's remnant people confront a choice of whom they will worship, seen in the sense of final loyalty and obedience. The worship at stake is commitment of the whole life, now brought to crisis and faced with the beast's mark. Those loyal to Christ are miraculously delivered by Christ's intervention.

Adventists find in the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12 our special assignment. All the world is to hear the messages, which begin with a call to worship God as Creator in the light of the arrival of His judgment. The appeal is for the original reason: He is creator. The second warns against compromise with apostate religion, the third a solemn warning that the forces of evil are now to be destroyed. In the midst of the tumult, John sees God's faithful people who, against all

pressures remain steadfast to God, having the “commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev 14:12).

Revelation closes the story of sin and redemption with a mighty shout of praise to the triumphant Jesus coming in glory (Rev 19). In the end it is the conquering Christ who receives all worship and praise.

Worship Today

Many of the forces that transformed early Christian worship into its medieval expression continue to influence us today. If we are committed to 3 basic principles: (1) Worship is theocentric, the adoration of God, (2) Worship must concur with sound theology, and (3) Worship must be patterned on biblical norms, we have reliable guidelines. Equivocation on any of these foundation principles introduces serious problems.

Superficial thought about the meaning of worship leaves us vulnerable to a series of difficulties now plaguing the church in some parts of the world. Worship can receive its focus at any of three levels: theology, ethics, and aesthetics. While all have virtues, it is important that biblical theology hold primacy. All religions share common ethical and aesthetic features, but in biblical theology Christianity receives its unique quality. Excess focus on ethics leads to either a legal works-program or a philosophical orientation. Ancient Stoicism’s ethical similarities with Christian faith for a time threatened the church with a redefinition of its mission that would have destroyed it.

Much contemporary activity functioning under the name of worship has reduced the character of Christian worship to a pursuit of beauty. In the developing apostasy of the fourth and fifth centuries, at the very time when genuine worship was in decline, churches became repositories of masterly artistic works of many kinds. Blended with solemn liturgical rituals, worship lost the spontaneous character it had in apostolic times. We must take care that neither ethics nor the pursuit of beauty, legitimate as both are in their place, overwhelms the theological fact of the human in the presence of the infinite God.

Much Contemporary Christianity is now in violation of at least one of the three guidelines mentioned previously. The result is weakening of the Christian church and witness and an effort to

recapture favor by pragmatic innovations in worship and doctrine.

During the 1960s and 1970s many western churches experimented with what is called liturgical renewal. Following theories current in the social sciences, public relations, and marketing, they attempted to apply principles common in commerce to religion. The effect was important in many Protestant churches, generating new formats in worship. The charismatic movement swept through many western churches, both Protestant and Catholic. Liturgical renewal influenced Vatican Council II to introduce certain new practices into Roman Catholic churches that continue to provoke controversy.

While other churches were experiencing ferment, at the time there was minimal effect on Adventist churches. Recently, however, the new approach has influenced certain Adventist churches on several continents. What distinguishes the Adventist form of renewal is that for the first time contemporary social theory provides norms for Adventist worship. The most controversial form is a phenomenon called the “celebration” form of worship, introduced in its fullest form in a few churches only but with isolated elements used more broadly.

Although it would be inaccurate to describe celebration worship as charismatic, certain similarities exist. The format has developed in North America in certain churches designated evangelical, in a special American use of the word. Evangelicals defend elements of conservative theology but some of them cultivate an entrepreneurial spirit expressed in religious format. Principles of business management and marketing are applied to create a broad-spectrum service organization designed to appeal to many groups in society. The focus is pragmatic, applying methods advanced by psychologists, sociologists, economists, and modern organizational skill theory to produce an end result. Religion is treated as a marketed product. Celebration churches outside Adventist circles may be charismatic or non-charismatic.

The goal is to meet the needs of participants within what is termed a managed Christian environment. Its spirit is counterculture and vigorously individualistic. Certain elements resemble the spontaneous quality of early Christianity, but celebrationism follows contemporary norms. In Adventist circles its announced objective is to attract secularized persons disillusioned by dull

traditional worship, especially those from Adventist backgrounds who no longer practice the faith. The prevailing theological theme is acceptance. Critics argue that for celebrationists acceptance means an inadequate view of sin and conversion. One effect of celebration worship has been to place strain on the unity of the church.

In brief, four basic worship types appear among Christians: (1) Liturgical, focused around the sacraments, (2) Semi-Liturgical, giving increased attention to the word and music, (3) Free worship, in which preaching is central and prayers extemporaneous, and (4) Contemporary, where experimental approaches to worship seek to capture the modern mind, discarding serious efforts to reproduce early Christian practice.

What then, is unique to Adventist worship? In general, Adventists share the theological perspective of the Reformation, especially if the radical reformers are included. For us worship is

profoundly God-centered. Its corporate services are to be orderly, but no exact order of service is required. Biblical norms are accepted as guides in worship.

Because of the Christocentric quality of our faith, the gospel is inseparable from worship, for worship is spontaneous response not only to a sense of God's infinite character, but also the gravity of our lostness and what He has done to redeem us.

Adventist eschatology includes within our theology of worship a special connection to present-day events. Our recognition of the three angels' messages as our major focus and our understanding that the final crisis to over the question of worship in its sense of final loyalty, both of which combine to bring worship to the forefront. A firmly Adventist theology of worship is possible and is in development, but much remains to be done.

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