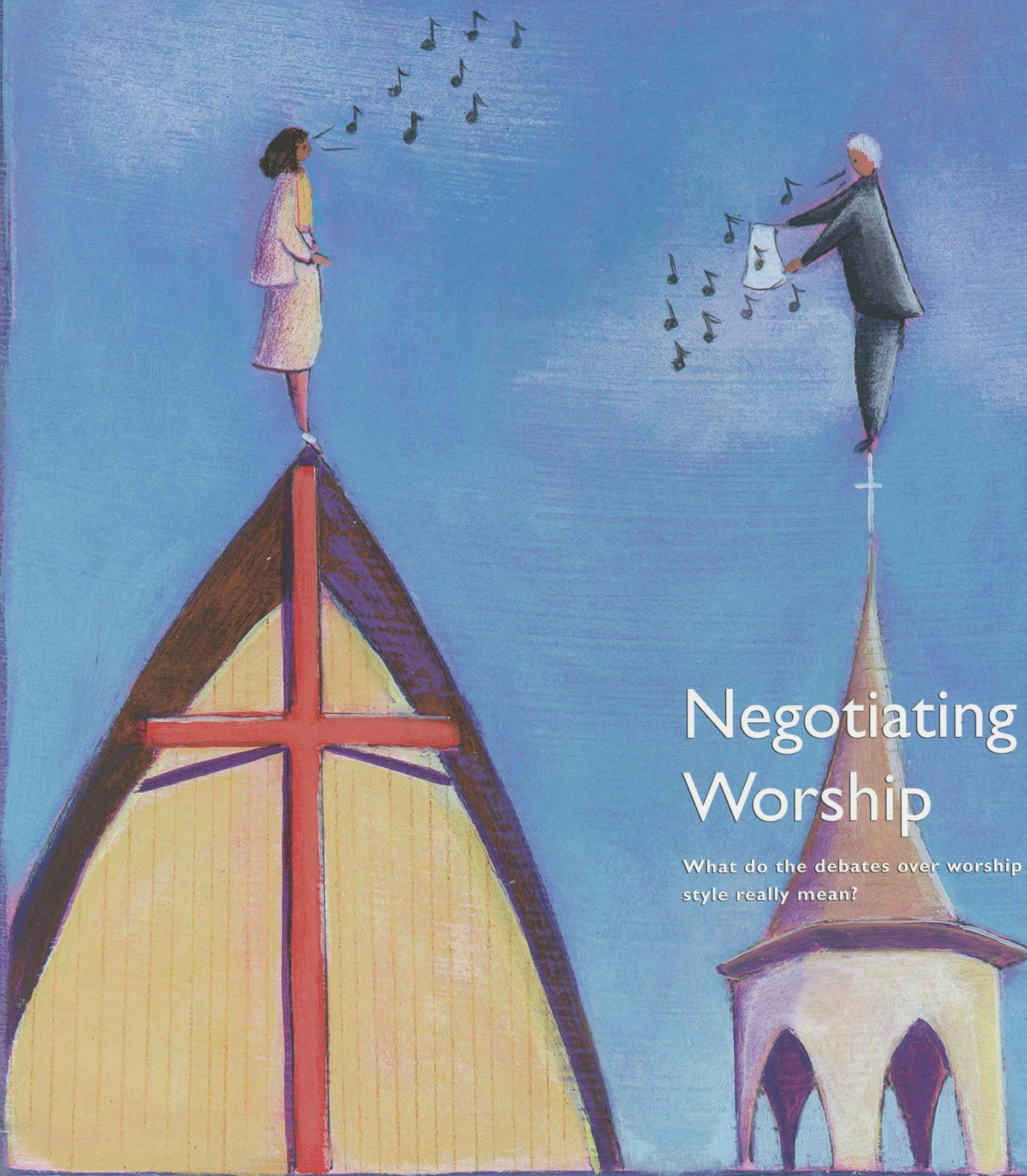


CONGREGATIONS

LEARNING LEADING CHANGING

JUL/AUG 2001



Negotiating Worship

What do the debates over worship
style really mean?

Finding a Common Voice



The framework for this issue of CONGREGATIONS emerged from a conference held in January 2001 called “Meaningful Worship in a Changing Culture.” This conference was sponsored by the Alban Institute’s Indianapolis Center for Congregations in cooperation with the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. The conference featured some of the leading voices on worship today, including John Witvliet, Richard Mouw, Tom Long, Sally Morgenthaler, and Horace Clarence Boyer. The conference, drawing from congregations in the greater Indianapolis area, attracted more participants than any other event the Indianapolis Center has sponsored: approximately 350 people (222 laity) representing 107 different congregations. As Alban Institute president James Wind notes in his article “The Main Thing” on page 16, no matter what other issues congregations face, worship is the most important thing we do. The turnout at this event supported that belief.

In this issue we feature John Witvliet, director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, who begins to unpack the deeper issues that lie behind congregations’ questions about worship style in “Beyond Style” on page 19. Specifically, he leads us through eight trends that affect the way worship is perceived and conducted in today’s congregations. In “Between Opposing Forces” on page 8, Candler School of Theology professor Tom Long describes traditional and contemporary forces at work in worship today, and how some vital congregations are finding a “third way.” And there’s more—including Holly Miller’s report on a worship conference leader roundtable discussion (page 5), an interview with Rabbi Jeffrey Summit (page 22), and thoughts about postmodern worship from Terry York, Sally Morgenthaler, and Chris Seay (page 28).

Above all, what emerges from these and the other articles in this issue is a strong sense that some of today’s congregations are, in fact, moving “beyond the worship wars” (the title of Tom Long’s new Alban Institute book). There is a hint of something new stirring. There is a sense of hope and renewed cooperation concerning what often has been a painful and divisive issue. There is also a greater ability to live creatively and faithfully with the tension of divergent views. We offer this issue of CONGREGATIONS with the prayer that our readers will find within it the seeds of new dialogue, new hope, and a common voice.

Blessings in your work,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lisa".

Lisa Kinney

lkinney@alban.org

CONGREGATIONS

LEARNING LEADING CHANGING

JUL/AUG 2001

Negotiating Worship

19 IN FOCUS Beyond Style

Calvin Institute of Christian Worship director *John D. Witvliet* explores the complex dynamics and motivations that lie behind debates over worship style

5 Collision Course?
When the Alban Institute invited worship experts from around the country to participate in a roundtable discussion, writer *Holly G. Miller* was there to report on what they said

8 Between Opposing Forces
Thomas G. Long, Bandy Professor of Preaching at Candler School of Theology, says that between the Hippolytus and Willow Creek forces, there is a "third way" in worship

12 The Spirit Is A-Movin'
Alban Institute field consultant *Sam Leonard* showcases congregations that are helping worshipers find their voice

22 Singing the "Right" Tune
Writer *Micah Marty* interviews Rabbi Jeffrey Summit of Tufts University about the role music plays in vital Jewish worship

28 Postmodern Worship: Three Views
Writer *Hillary Wicai* interviews Terry York, Sally Morgenthaler, and Chris Seay about how churches can minister to postmodern generations

FEATURES

26 Finding a Niche and Filling It
Visions-Decisions president *Anthony E. Healy* describes where congregations fit in a postindustrial economy

DEPARTMENTS

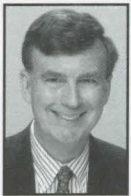
3 FIRST CLASS MAIL

16 PERSPECTIVES
The Main Thing
Alban Institute president *James P. Wind* reminds us that worship is the most important thing we do

31 REVIEWS

36 ASK ALBAN
Alban Institute field consultant *Dan Hotchkiss* describes how to set up an endowment fund

CONTRIBUTORS



Dr. Anthony E. Healy is president of Visions-Decisions, Inc., a 10-year-old Atlanta-based consulting firm that provides demographic and congregational studies for individual churches, regional judicatories, and denominational bodies. Visions-Decisions also publishes a newsletter for religious leaders covering developments in the sociology of religion, demography, and the general social sciences that pertain to religious organizations. Dr. Healy has recently received a major general grant from the Louisville Institute for a manuscript project entitled "The Church in Post-Industrial America."

Rev. Sam Leonard has been a minister for more than 25 years and has been an Alban Institute field consultant for 12 years. In addition to his pastoral work, he has served as a denominational executive covering three states; he now lives out John Wesley's philosophy of "the world is my parish." Rev. Leonard also consults with private corporations, teaches in law schools, and works with government and nonprofit agencies to help them function in healthier ways.



Rev. Dr. Thomas G. Long, Bandy Professor of Preaching at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, has been an ordained Presbyterian pastor since 1971. In addition to his previous teaching positions at Princeton Theological Seminary, Columbia Theological Seminary, and Erskine Theological Seminary, he also served as director of Geneva Press, a division of the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. He is the author or editor of more than a dozen books.

Micah Marty is director of FaithArchive, a photographic project documenting life in Christian faith communities and congregations of all sizes in the twenty-first century (faitharchive@aol.com). His books of photographs include *Our Hope for Years to Come* (Augsburg) and *When True Simplicity Is Gained* (Eerdmans).



Holly G. Miller is an Indianapolis-based writer and editor with *The Saturday Evening Post*. She teaches advanced writing classes at Anderson University and is a frequent guest lecturer at writers' conferences across the country. She is the author of 13 books.

Hillary Wicai is a freelance writer and television reporter in St. Louis, Missouri. She has been reporting and writing about religion since 1994, when she became one of the few religion reporters in the country to work in local television news. She currently works for KMOV-TV in St. Louis.



Rev. Dr. James P. Wind is the president of the Alban Institute. Before coming to the Institute in 1995, Dr. Wind's previous positions included program director at the Lilly Endowment's religion division, director of research and publications at the Park Ridge Center for the Study of Health, Faith, and Ethics, and pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in River Forest, Illinois. Dr. Wind is the author of three books and numerous articles.

Rev. Dr. John D. Witvliet is director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. He also is assistant professor of worship and church music and adjunct professor of theology at Calvin College, as well as adjunct professor of worship at Calvin Theological Seminary. His writings have appeared in numerous academic and religious publications. He is a past member of the National Board of Directors of the Choristers Guild and is currently on the Denominational Worship Committee of the Christian Reformed Church.



CONGREGATIONS

LEARNING LEADING CHANGING

President & Publisher

James P. Wind

Editor

Lisa Kinney

Contributing Editors

Richard Bass

Ian Evison

David Lott

Alice Mann

Art Director

Phoenix Graphics, Inc.

Marketing Director

Holly Hemphill

Publishing Assistant

Barry Forrest

THE ALBAN INSTITUTE

7315 Wisconsin Avenue

Suite 1250W

Bethesda, MD 20814-3211

Telephone: 301-718-4407

Fax: 301-718-1958

Editorial Inquiries

To submit articles or letters to the editor, send an e-mail to lkinney@alban.org or send a letter to Lisa Kinney at the address above. Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for writers' guidelines or visit our Web site at www.alban.org.

Advertising Inquiries

To advertise in CONGREGATIONS, call 301-718-4407, ext. 238, or send an e-mail to hhemphill@alban.org.

Reprint Permissions

If you would like to copy material in CONGREGATIONS for use in your congregation or other settings, please send an e-mail to bforrest@alban.org or a written request to "Reprint Permissions."

Other Inquiries

For information concerning Alban Institute membership, publications, education events, or consulting, send an e-mail to tpwalker@alban.org.

Moving?

If you are about to move or have moved recently, please send your address label, along with your new address, to "Membership" or send an e-mail to tpwalker@alban.org.

www.alban.org

Young Clergy: Some Responses

I WOULD LIKE TO ARGUE A BIT with James Wind's article ("Wanted: Young Ministers," page 4) in your March/April 2001 issue. Although I truly enjoyed the historical perspective on young, daring ministers (Bonhoeffer being one of my most admired theologians), I realized at the end of the article that I vehemently disagreed with his case. Having young ministers is not always the best choice. The age in which ministry is occurring determines more the type of minister needed. Bonhoeffer's historical time needed the immortality complex of youth so that he would dare to try the deed to which he was committed.

But this is not the day and age in which we live. In fact, our culture is far too youth-oriented. We have elevated children and youth, and now young pastors, to such a position of prominence in our society that we have lost the recognition that wisdom, maturity, thoughtfulness, patience, and compassion are the needs for our day and time.

I entered seminary at age 42. I have been in the pastorate for a decade now. Given what we deal with in ministry these days, I cannot even imagine trying to guide a parish at the age of 25 or even 35: bombings in our cities (I was in Oklahoma City at the time of the bombing), shootings in our local schools, violence in the home, teen suicide attempts, loss of employment, cancer and more cancer, the church in crisis over sexuality, doctrine and theology in complete disarray. I cannot even imagine that I could have responded to these events with a halfway compassionate and intelligent response at a young age in ministry.

Parish is no longer about theology. Parish is no longer about doctrine. Parish is no longer about denomination. These days, parish is about the survival of family and their faith in a culture that—despite all lip service—couldn't care less. It takes every ounce of training, understanding, experience, prayer, faith, compassion, and strength that I have to help my parishioners find their way through the chaos of American life.

I simply do not agree that young ministers have the life skills to handle what is occurring in parish today. They may have the brashness of good theological debate in hand, but this is not what people need or want in parish these days. In fact, I will go so far as to say that as I see younger ministers come into our churches, it makes me fear for their parishioners as I watch them "grow up" while trying to face all the critical dilemmas of parish life in this cultural milieu. Frankly, I celebrate that the new breed of ministers is older, more mature, more skilled in life. These are the ministers needed for this day and time.

Rev. Dr. Barbara S. Boyd

St. Paul Presbyterian Church (USA)

Aurora, Colorado

AS A SECOND CAREER Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod pastor (age 38), I read with interest your recent issue of CONGREGATIONS. I must admit that it was a bit disheartening to know that I am no longer considered a "young" pastor because I'm over the age of 35!

Thank you for the magazine and for your study on the clergy shortage (young or old). I don't know, however, if the articles really touched on the real issue of "young" or "old" clergy. As one who went at this later in life I can tell you that the reason was nothing more than I felt completely unprepared to do ministry at the young age of 25. Personally, I'm glad I waited. I wasn't mature enough to do this job then. (Of course I'm not sure I'm mature enough to do it now, but since I am the senior pastor of a congregation of 1,100, I guess I'd better be ready.)

To me a greater issue is whether or not a pastor (of any age) is willing to try new ideas and test his own assumptions. I've gotten to know some very "young"-thinking pastors who are in their 60s, while encountering plenty of stick-in-the-mud young pastors in their 30s. The issue isn't age so much as it is the ability and willingness to think in new and innovative ways to pave the way for the gospel. Quite honestly, that can be done at any age.

The only concern about fewer young pastors is that we'll need more of them because we don't serve as long. I'll serve 10 years' less time than if I had gone through the system and graduated at age 25—a concern in today's era of clergy shortage.

Despite being considered an "old" pastor by the survey's data ("Clergy by the Numbers," page 9), I hope my congregation will still consider me youthful in my thinking until I retire!

Rev. Steven Siegel

Trinity Lutheran Church
Reese, Michigan

WOW. AS I SIT HERE on Monday, April 2, deep in Lent, way behind, I really resonate with some of the statements in David Wood's article ("The Conditions of Call," page 17). As one of the "207" clergy in the UCC under age 35, his article really stands out. There is a real lack of mentoring. As far as denominational support, it seems that as our conference and many other conferences struggle with issues of finance and dying churches and clergy burnout across the board, a focus on the needs of young clergy just isn't going to happen anytime soon. "Is it a meaningful struggle?" At 32 years old, with 6 years in the ordained ministry, I have yet to answer the question. In the words of that wonderful stuffed donkey, Eyore, "Thanks for noticing . . ."

Rev. Kevin Fruchtl

First United Church of Christ
Hellertown, Pennsylvania

I ATTEND PHILLIPS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY (Christian Church, Disciples of Christ) in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Approximately half of our students are female and a great majority are second career. I am not what your articles define as young—under 35—but at age 45 I bring life experience and a call to the ministry. As a lay leader with 20+ years experience, as a wife (21 years) and mother of two teenage sons, and as a visual artist and former art

teacher, I feel I am uniquely qualified to bring creativity and transformative leadership to a church.

Several of your articles in this issue highlighted the need for innovative thinking, idealism, imagination, and creativity to tackle the challenges facing the church. The implication is that these much-needed qualities are primarily found in the "young." I would disagree. I bring all of these most desired qualities of leadership to the ministry and, as a second career minister, I bring the enthusiasm of a young/new minister because the ministry is a new career choice for me. I also bring a passion to follow God's call in my life (see "Different Ages, Different Everything" on page 22).

In the last two years I have changed denominations, left my career as a teacher, and turned my family's life upside down in order to follow God's call in my life. Yes, I hope to pastor a church and yes, I know what I am up against—commonly held views of men in the pulpit. I pray for more churches with pulpit search teams with the vision and willingness to take a chance and call a woman to be their minister. A visual image of a woman in the role of senior pastor in an Alban Institute publication would have been very helpful to churches looking for a minister and would have personally affirmed my spiritual vocation. I trust that gender-sensitive illustrations will be a part of upcoming issues.

Romney Nesbitt

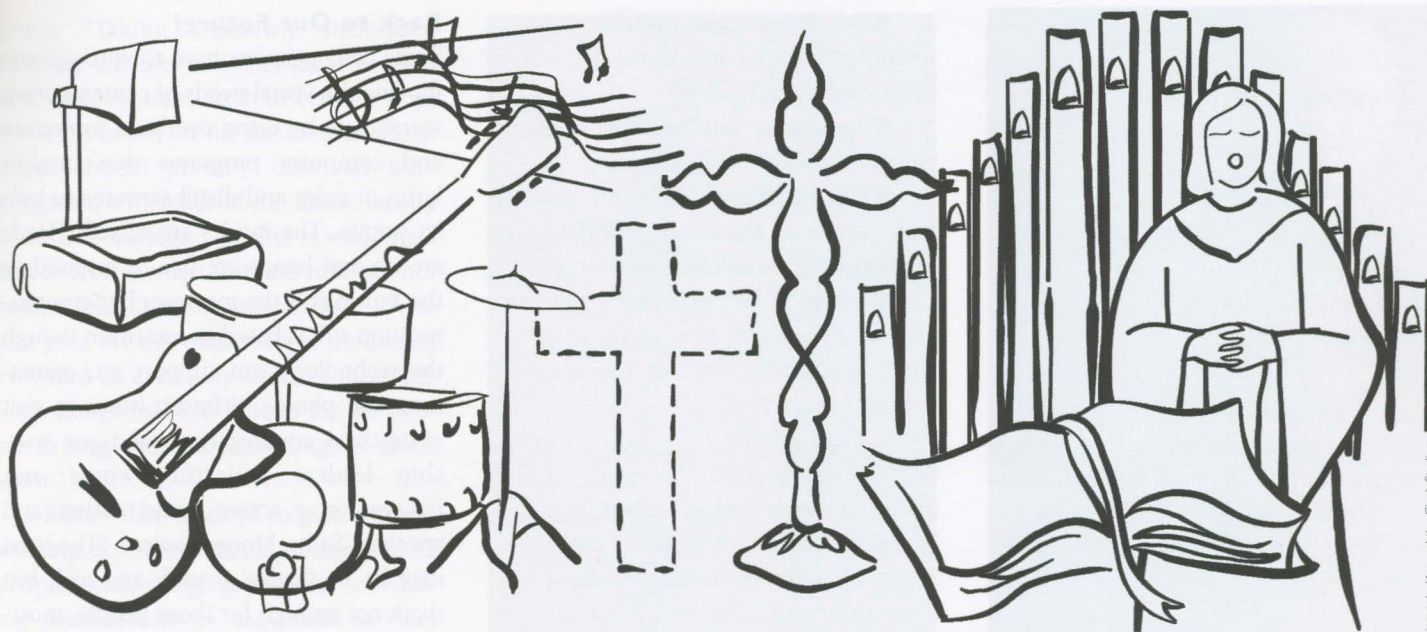
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Tulsa, Oklahoma

WHEN I READ THE QUESTION ON THE COVER of your March/April issue ("Young Clergy: Where Are They?"), I was rather amazed. In the ELCA, after eight or more years of post-high school education it takes a clergyperson another nine years to get to \$30,000 as a base salary according to the official compensation guidelines. After graduating from seminary with \$50,000 in tuition debt, the young clergyperson discovers that he or she has become an indentured servant. The reality is that the majority of available churches are in rural settings with even lower levels of income and opportunity. The Church has muzzled the oxen, and they are quickly dying off.

Rev. Kert Reedstrom

First Lutheran Church
Worthington, Minnesota

Editor's Note: The March/April 2001 issue on young clergy generated more mail than we could print. Please visit our Web site at www.alban.org/periodicals to read more—and keep the letters coming!



Collision Course?

TRADITIONAL WORSHIP MEETS "THE THEOLOGY OF THE OVERHEAD"

Holly G. Miller

Clapping during services, offering special prayers for healing, sharing personal testimony, and embracing fellow worshipers aren't practices usually ascribed to Reform Judaism, but these activities are gaining favor at some liberal synagogues, according to Peter Knobel, chairman of the liturgy committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. And that's just the beginning. "Men and women are rediscovering traditional worship dress, and persons wearing prayer shawls are wrapping them around the people next to them during the priestly blessing," says Knobel. "In some ways this is creating tension within the cool,

rational, intellectual religion of classical Reform Judaism."

Christian congregations report similar tension—even turmoil—as their leaders tinker with tradition and initiate changes in long-standing worship practices. Some groups are swapping hymnals for overhead projectors in an effort to free hands for a high-touch kind of worship. Others are returning to their roots, eschewing the stripped-down "warehouse approach" to church, and reintroducing banished icons and symbols from the past. Pianos, once the instrument of choice for "low" church services, now are supplementing mighty pipe organs in

arrangements of music that vary from sacred masterworks to foot-stomping choruses.

"Never before have congregations been reforming worship in so many directions at the same time," notes John Witvliet of Calvin Institute of Worship. As diverse as the experiments and the settings are, they often evoke a common response. "People feel an uneasy pressure," says Witvliet. "They know change is happening and they're confused by it."

Eavesdropping on Trends

To solicit guidance on the kinds of resources that will ease pressure and



*What we're
discovering now
is that the
unchurched are*

walking into worship

services and saying,

"Something is wrong here;

this doesn't look like a

church."

Richard Mouw, President
Fuller Theological Seminary
Pasadena, California

reduce confusion within congregations, the Alban Institute invited 13 experts—Knobel and Witvliet among them—to join in a private “conversation” about changing worship styles. “We want to eavesdrop on your reflections,” explained James P. Wind, president of the Institute and host of the informal gathering. Because participants in the discussion represented a range of faiths, geographic locations, and professional experiences, Wind asked them first to identify the trends in American religion that they are encountering in their various ministries. Among the observations they shared were:

- Lay people are gaining acceptance as primary worship leaders.

- Some clergy feel threatened by the expanding role of lay leaders.

- Congregations are moving toward an ecstatic, joyful form of worship that invites involvement and provides catharsis.

- People are seeking authentic community in a fragmented world that seems consumed by technology.

- Tampering with tradition is simultaneously unsettling and exciting.

- Congregational leadership needs a high degree of tolerance to survive the “messiness” of worship experimentation.

- A new “visual” generation is emerging that likes color, movement, and religious symbols as part of the worship experience.

“Congregations have been restructuring worship with the needs of the unchurched in mind,” said Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary. As an example, he cited research conducted several years ago by a church in the Midwest to determine how best to reach persons who did not attend religious services. The study indicated that unchurched persons wanted three things in a worship setting: anonymity, passivity, and the absence of religious symbols. With those findings in mind, many churches created neutral worship spaces devoid of stained-glass art and multiple crosses, and designed services that attracted newcomers by entertaining them, singing to them, speaking at them, and expecting nothing from them. This approach worked well until the next round of change occurred. First, society evolved into a more visual culture that reacted positively to icons and symbols; and second, worship spectators made the transition to worship participants.

“What we’re discovering now is that the unchurched are walking into worship services and saying, ‘Something is wrong here; this doesn’t look like a church,’” said Mouw. No longer passive, “many of these people want to get involved in the community even before they become believers. They want to participate; they want to sing; they want to be part of the group.”

Back to Our Future?

Some congregations have tried to accommodate the visual needs of contemporary worshipers by using overhead projectors and computer programs that present lyrics in color and distill sermons to bullet points. The results are mixed. Heads are up and hands are free to respond to the music and the message, but communication still is based in text, even though the technology can support art, animation, and photos. “I find it ironic to visit evangelical congregations and see worship leaders projecting words, not images, on a screen,” said author and speaker Sally Morgenthaler. “The text may be in shades of pink and teal, but that’s not enough for those people, mostly under age 35, who want icons and symbols.”

Equally unsettling are some efforts to blend the old with the new—in an attempt to please both camps—by updating classical church music with modern



*Some older people
aren't comfortable
with the idea of
worship becoming*

*independent of clergy. Their
thinking is, you can't have a
worship service if you don't
have a rabbi.*

Peter Knobel, Liturgy Committee
Chairman
Central Conference of American
Rabbis
New York, New York

lyrics. "Taking unknown, little-used German chorale melodies off the shelf and wedding them to 20th century texts is not a solution for the dilemma of which music should prevail," observed John Ferguson, a member of the music faculty at St. Olaf College. "Neither is wedding a text to a tune when text and tune are not compatible. One encounters cases where text goes on but music stops, producing awkward or even silly shifts of meaning. Such things make it difficult for the people to sing with understanding, let alone spirit."

Rather than attempt to plan a single worship experience that is all things to all people, some congregations are scheduling simultaneous or sequential services tailored to the preferences of the participants. This practice solves some problems and creates others. "Does this make for community or does it break up community?" asked Knobel. "Who gets to use what resources? For example, our synagogue has three Saturday morning services, each of a different character. Which service should the clergy attend?" In practice, some of the services take place totally under the direction of lay leaders. "This can be freeing because it means that worship becomes independent of clergy," noted Knobel. "On the other hand, some older people aren't comfortable with that idea. Their thinking is, you can't have a worship service if you don't have a rabbi."

Needed: Tolerance, Flexibility

Multiple services are common in the Roman Catholic Church, where worship disputes don't center on who leads the services—priests conduct all masses—but on how well those leaders meet the worship needs of culturally diverse congregations. In a large city, "we could have six services going on at the same time in six languages, and none might be in English," said Janet Walton, professor of



*When we talk
about tradition,
we're talking
about what's*

*been missing in the tradition,
what is past and what is
present. There are very few
models for integrated
churches.*

Janet Walton, Professor of Worship
Union Theological Seminary
New York, New York

worship at Union Theological Seminary. Dealing with this kind of diversity requires special pastoral skills, a challenge for seminary faculty members who prepare students for ministry. Trying to honor the worship traditions of several cultures often involves making decisions on issues as controversial as what role women should fill, and as nitty-gritty as what kind of organ is appropriate—a Hammond or a pipe organ? "We deal with these issues every single day in every single class," said Walton. "When we talk about tradition, we're talking about what's been missing in the tradition, what is past and what is present. There are very few models of integrated churches."

The likely fallout of most worship experimentation is an exhilarating "messiness," observed Tom Long, faculty member at the Candler School of Theology. Describing the experiment as "formative and exciting," he predicted that church leaders will need to develop tolerance as their congregations accept

some changes and reject others in their worship laboratories. The congregations, too, need tolerance as their worship leaders take risks, divert from their familiar practices and, on occasion, make mistakes. For example, not all musicians, trained in European classical music, are going to succeed in their early attempts to lead programs that vary from African American spirituals to contemporary choruses.

"It's a little like learning another language," said Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., of Calvin College. "A whole lot depends on your willingness not only to be wrong but to look a little foolish. It also depends on the ability of the people whose language you are speaking to find your mistakes endearing. If they are people of good will, they will be charmed by your mistakes."

Faith of our Fathers

When will it end—all this meddling with worship practices? Experts agree that the short answer is: It won't. Ongoing changes in worship styles not only seem likely, but may be cyclical as well.

"I fall somewhere in the middle of the boomer generation," said Anton Armstrong, faculty member at St. Olaf College. "Our generation didn't want to do what our parents did; we wanted to be different. Then we got to a point where we asked, 'But what do we pass on to our children? What is our legacy? What symbols are left? What do we have to legitimize who we are and how we worship? How do we find a common voice? How do we regain those things that make us a community and bind us together?' We've gotten rid of so much stuff, and now we're trying to regain it. We've learned that tradition can stifle, but it also can stabilize. How often, by the time we reach our 40s and 50s, do we start sounding like our parents? We may scare ourselves, but we find wisdom in it." ❁

Between Opposing Forces

FINDING A "THIRD WAY" IN WORSHIP

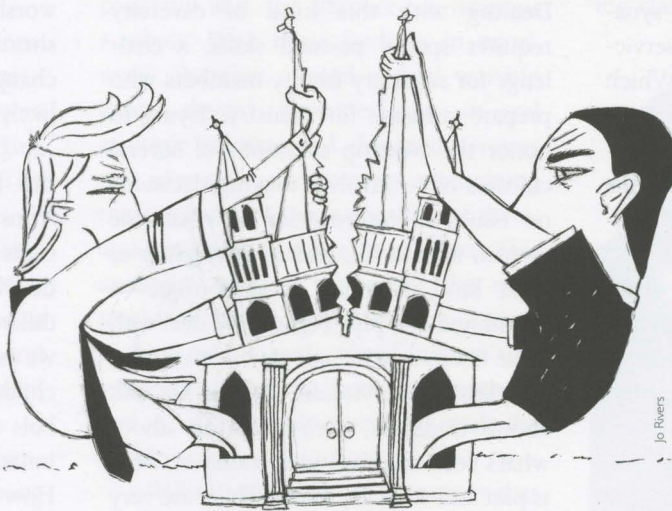
Thomas G. Long

Much of the confusion, uncertainty, and conflict over worship today is generated by the collision of two powerful forces—forces that have developed gradually in the American church over the past 50 years and that are now engaged in a struggle over the soul of the church's worship. I call these forces the "Hippolytus force" and the "Willow Creek force."

The Hippolytus Force

The worship earthquake that occurred in the Roman Catholic world following Vatican II set off massive aftershocks among Protestants, challenging them to a fundamental rethinking of their own worship as well. This rediscovery of the common Christian heritage in worship was accomplished in part through a recovery of the prayers and rites of the ancient church, such as eucharistic prayers modeled after a prayer found in the writings of Bishop Hippolytus, a third-century theologian and church leader in Rome. Perhaps the earliest complete eucharistic prayer we possess, Hippolytus' prayer symbolizes Christian worship when the church was still one, the pattern of prayer all Christians hold in common, prayer from a time before the schisms and bitter fights that were to follow.

The official worship books of many denominations are shaped by this movement (hence my name, the "Hippolytus force"), and a good number of clergy today have been trained in this form of worship and have come to love and respect it. In the Book of Revelation, there is a picture of the heavenly hosts at worship, singing in one voice, "Holy, holy, holy." The Hippolytus force represents the hope that all Christians everywhere may be joined in that song.



The Willow Creek Force

Ironically, just as the flood tides from Vatican II were rising and the ecumenical movement was reaching a high-water mark, another cultural tidal surge was passing over the American churches. Even as the Hippolytus force was reinvigorating the worship in many old, estab-

lished churches, the culture seemed to be busily, vigorously, and thoroughly rejecting both them and their worship. Many once-flourishing congregations grew smaller, older, and discouraged about the future.

As a response to this crisis, a few visionary church leaders began to theorize that people were leaving these churches not because they were tired of spirituality but because they were tired of the typical churchy kind of spirituality, tired of the boring, remote, and highly institutionalized forms in which the established churches always seemed to package the search for God. These people are termed "seekers": religious free agents, people untethered from conventional church loyalties, human beings hungrily searching in their own ways for spiritual experiences in very personal, immediate, often unconventional, and practical ways.

What was needed, these visionaries maintained, was not a Band-Aid placed over the wound of rejection but major surgery on the life of the church—an entirely new kind of church with an entirely new way of connecting with people and a thoroughly refashioned way of worshiping. If the church is to survive and to be faithful to its evangelistic mission, then worship will have to be designed with these seek-

ers in view. A handful of churches led the way toward developing "seeker-oriented" worship, none more publicly, famously, or symbolically than the Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, a northwest suburb of Chicago. Willow Creek is the flagship/mentor church of the seeker worship phenomenon (thus our designation of "the Willow Creek force"). Willow Creek's seeker-oriented style of worship turned out to have great appeal to people inside the church as well as outside, particularly young people, who responded favorably to the exciting visuals, swift pacing, and upbeat music.

The Forces Cross Swords

So the Hippolytus and the Willow Creek force were both at work in the life of the church, both with noble and well-grounded intentions, and they were bound to cross swords. And they have. Indeed, shock troops for the two sides have begun to hurl some nasty insults across the trenches. Some of the Hippolytus advocates tend to see the Willow Creek folk as having sold their birthright for a mess of porridge. The grenade-throwers on the other side charge the Hippolytus folk with antiquarianism, boring punch-the-time-clock pacing in worship, and a stubborn and selfish insistence on bells, smells, and chancel-prancing while a spiritually hungry world quietly starves to death. Actually, most congregations today do not find themselves firmly in either camp. Most churches are somewhere in the mixed and muddled middle, trying to sort out what their conflicts over worship mean. In other words, both Hippolytus and Willow Creek forces are at work simultaneously in most congregations, and the permutations that result are seemingly infinite.

I am convinced that both the Hippolytus and Willow Creek forces, for

I am convinced that both the Hippolytus and Willow Creek forces, for all they have to teach us, are finally not up to the challenge of the day.

all they have to teach us, are finally not up to the challenge of the day. In their pure forms, they both miss the mark. The Willow Creek approach (meaning the whole movement toward seeker-friendly, contemporary worship) puts too much distance between itself and the Christ-centered, historically informed, theologically shaped worship that constitutes the great tradition of Christian prayer and praise that is obedient to the gospel. It turns out in the end to be a pretty shallow pool in which to learn how to swim with maturity as a Christian.

For all the protestations that seeker-friendly worship is simply an evangelistic prelude to "real" worship, its participants do not often view it this way. Seeker-friendly services happen on Sunday and they feature religious songs and a preacher doing something like preaching: It walks like a duck and it talks like a duck, so it must be church. Indeed, the seeker-type churches have lately faced up to the fact that getting people to make the transfer from seeker worship to "believer worship" has been more difficult than originally thought.¹

More telling, however, is the fact that much seeker-style worship constantly betrays its roots not in the gospel story but in the television-shaped consciousness of our time. A service of worship is a ritual, and all significant rituals spring from powerful life-changing origins. Indeed, part of the function of rituals is to allow the participants to experience vicar-

iously that original force and to tap some of its energy anew.

A classically shaped Christian worship service is formed by the biblical story; it is in essence a recapitulation of the sacred narrative of God's interactions with human beings. To go through the order of worship is symbolically to walk through the whole narrative of faith. The service is a metaphor constantly pointing to its referent.

When the chancel is a stage, however, and the music is performed by musicians gripping hand-held mikes, and the interspersing of talk and music and skit moves with the rapid and seamless pacing of "Saturday Night Live," then the referent here is unmistakable, too. This is not a retelling of the biblical narrative; it's the recapitulation of prime time. Even if the music is stimulating, the prayers uplifting, the messages inspiring, and the experience heartwarming, the underlying structure of the service is still basically telling the wrong story, the story that will not finally take one to Christian depth but only to "see you next week, same time, same station."

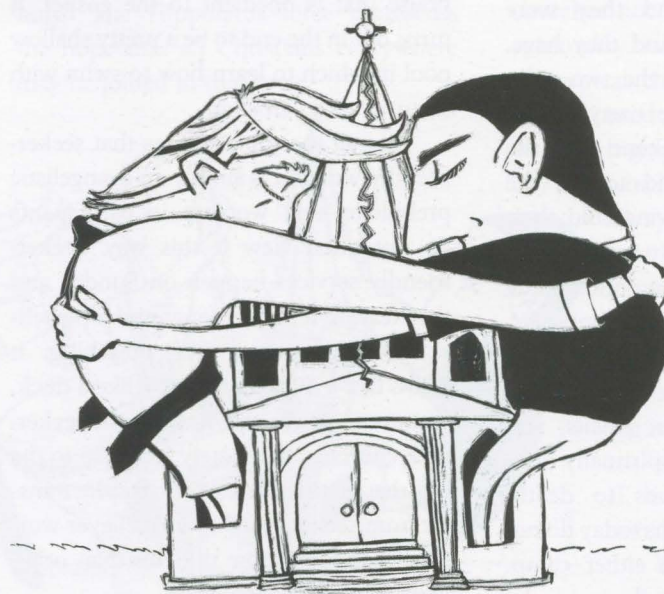
On the other hand, the Hippolytus approach, unlike the Willow Creek approach, has often not taken sufficient account of the fact that we are in a new and challenging cultural environment and that worship must always be ready to adapt. The advocates of the Hippolytus force are fully aware that Christian worship is a private event. It is not a picnic

Vital and Faithful Congregations...

- ❖ make room, somewhere in worship, for the experience of **mystery**.
- ❖ make planned and concerted efforts to show **hospitality** to the stranger.
- ❖ have recovered and made visible the sense of **drama** inherent in Christian worship.
- ❖ emphasize congregational **music** that is both excellent and eclectic in style and genre.
- ❖ creatively adapt the space and **environment** of worship.
- ❖ forge a strong connection between worship and local **mission**—a connection expressed in every aspect of the worship service.
- ❖ maintain a relatively stable **order of service** and a significant repertoire of worship elements and responses that the congregation knows by heart.
- ❖ move to a joyous **festival** experience toward the end of the worship service.
- ❖ have strong, **charismatic** pastors as worship leaders.

softball game or a holiday parade performed for and by all comers; it is the ritual of the community of faith, of those who belong to Christ. As such, it demands a special vocabulary, a practiced set of skills, and growing knowledge of the biblical story and the meaning of worship itself.

What the Hippolytus people sometimes fail to recognize fully, however, is that although Christian worship is a private event, it is done in a public place. The doors and windows of the church are figuratively always open, and there is no authentic Christian worship without a genuine welcome and hospitality to the stranger. Out there in American society are millions of people who are spiritually hungry, people who have either never looked to the church as a resource or who have tried it and found it wanting. Some people have never heard what the church has to say. Others have heard it, but their memories have grown dim. If the “stranger” in our day includes the hungry spiritual seekers out there in the world who cannot find their way into our worship because the doors are locked or the



language is too cryptic or the hospitality too stingy or the family rituals impossible to learn, then Christ, too, will have a difficult time getting in.

Moreover, the Hippolytus style of worship, as actually practiced in local churches, is, frankly, often quite boring. It can plod along its once majestic path

from gathering to blessing without much spirit, verve, or life. Sadly, the Sunday worship of many a traditional church has become something of a Chevy Bel Air: it starts every time and gets you safely from here to there, but the heart never races and the spine rarely tingles. “Wasn’t church a lot easier when God didn’t show up?” asks one of the new seeker church ministers, throwing an elbow at the traditional churches. “Then you knew what time you’d get home for Sunday dinner.”²²

A “Third Way” in Worship

My intuition is that some congregations have managed to avoid the hardened battle lines and have, by plan or providence or both, discovered a “third way” in worship between Hippolytus and Willow Creek. Many congregations have managed to remain firmly within the trajectory of historic Christian worship (the main contribution of the Hippolytus force) and yet have fashioned worship that is genuinely responsive to the present cultural environment and is accessible, attractive, and hospitable to religious seekers outside the church (the main goal of the Willow Creek force).

I am not talking about what is often called “blended” worship, however, which tends to convey the idea of a mix-and-match approach—a dash of contemporary thrown in with a measure of traditional. Too many congregations, in my view, have adopted this compromise—we’ll do a traditional hymn, then we’ll do a praise song. We’ll have the classic struc-

ture, but we'll spice it up with skits. A little of this and a little of that, and everyone will be happy.

What I am referring to, rather, are congregations that have created a new thing in the earth—a service of worship completely attuned to the American cultural moment but also fully congruent with the great worship tradition of the Christian church; a service that attracts young people and seekers and the curious and those who are hungry for a spiritual encounter, but that does so by beckoning people to the deep and refreshing pool of the gospel of Jesus Christ as it has been understood historically in the church.

Slowly but surely, I have located congregations that are managing to carve out this other path. In visiting these remarkable congregations, worshipping with

them, and speaking to their leadership, a coherent picture has emerged. Although these churches are large and small, urban and suburban, Protestant and Catholic, white and ethnic minority, they share certain characteristics and virtues [see sidebar]. Varied as they are, they hold some features in common, which seemingly are transportable to other congregations seeking to renew their worship. To be sure, not every congregation possesses every single virtue, but each congregation embodies most of them. I call these congregations “vital and faithful churches”—“vital” because they are active and growing and drawing crowds of people to their worship, “faithful” because they manage to remain true to the great worship heritage of the church as they do so.

These churches are not perfect. They

have the same petty quarrels, the same staff problems, the same low Sundays that every church has. But they have found themselves in a good place in regard to worship, a place that can serve as a beacon to the rest of us, guiding us toward worship that attracts people in our society to an encounter with God in Christ. ☛

Notes

1. Sally Morgenthau, *Worship Evangelism: Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), pp. 44-45.
2. A preacher at the Vineyard Church “Catch the Fire Service,” as quoted in Jackson W. Carroll, *Mainline to the Future: Congregations for the 21st Century* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), p. 54.

This article was adapted from *Beyond the Worship Wars: Building Vital and Faithful Worship*. Copyright © 2001 by The Alban Institute, Inc. To order, call 1-800-486-1318, ext. 244.

Congregational Resource Guide

Online Resources at a click:

www.congregationalresources.org

A new Web site for all who work in and care about congregations

A selective, annotated guide to the best resources to help congregations thrive—over 500 items arranged in 10 categories.

Dynamic, evolving, always new

- Books, articles, periodicals, and other print materials
- Web sites and links
- Audio and video resources
- Organizations and professional associations
- Resources prepared exclusively for the guide

Participate in the growth of this invaluable Guide. Connect with other users by posting your comments about the resources we list or tell us about others you have found helpful. With every resource listing, you can share your own experiences.



The Congregational Resource Guide is a joint effort of the Alban Institute and its Indianapolis Center for Congregations. Funded by Lilly Endowment Inc.

The Spirit Is A-Movin'

HELPING WORSHIPERS FIND THEIR VOICE

Sam Leonard

The year is 1931. Visualize St. James Episcopal Church on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles: huge Gothic arches, awe-inspiring stained glass windows, massive chandeliers imported from Europe, an organ bellowing music to the heavens, pews filled with Anglo-Saxons dressed in formal attire, the ritual straight from the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*—comforting, familiar, formal.

Now visualize the same place 70 years later: the same architectural grandeur, great organ, and worshipers gathering to praise and celebrate the presence of the Holy. Only now the pews seat people from places such as Nigeria, Ghana, the People's Republic of China, Taiwan, Sierra Leone, Japan, India, and Belize. Nearly 50 different ethnic and cultural groups are represented, making St. James one of the most diverse congregations in the United States. The church no longer uses the 1928 liturgy but incorporates into its worship life the richness that all these cultures have brought.

Worship Is Changing

In the words of the old spiritual, the spirit is a-movin' throughout congregations from coast to coast. We are changing the way we worship; discerning how today's worshipers can "find their voice" in praising God; struggling to create celebrations that give new expression to ancient truths; and separating traditional cultural conceptualizations of worship from its

essence, without confusing the trappings with the core.

We all have heard the horror stories of what can happen when a local congregation's worship service is tampered with. For example, several years ago, I was working with a conflicted congregation. One of the flash points flared up around

the pastor's attempt to move the primary Sunday service from the traditional 11:00 hour to an earlier starting time of 10:30. I will never forget the words of one member as her eyes bored a hole in the minister: "Sir! I have worshiped God at 11:00 for 62 years. It is God's hour. And it is the ONLY time I plan to ever worship him!"



Eric Dever

This article will take a look at several very different congregations. A single thread connects all of them: each was successful in expanding the worship life of the congregation.

Missouri: A Path to Renewal

Webster Grove Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is located in a lovely, affluent, mature suburb of St. Louis, Missouri. Historically, this congregation has prided itself on what it refers to as "high culture worship," close relationships with one another, and a stellar music program. The centerpiece of church life had always been the 11:00 Sunday service. Attendance at this service reached its peak in the late 1950s and early 1960s, then began a slow decline in 1968. Over the next 22 years, average attendance dipped to 200.

About 10 years ago, three elements converged to put this congregation on a path of renewal:

- Anxiety over declining numbers was experienced throughout the system. As aging worshipers died, no one was taking their places.

- A new minister, Rev. Tim Carson, was selected as senior pastor. He brought an appreciation for the strengths of the congregation and a vision for building upon those strengths.

- A core group of key laypersons, under the leadership of the pastor, began exploring new possibilities, researching contemporary worship, and taking field trips to see different models of worship.

Since then, Webster Grove has experimented with worship styles and settings and, in spite of some setbacks, has managed to continually expand its worship services. Today, gatherings include

- An informal chapel service at 8:30 A.M. each Sunday, in which the congregation selects the hymns to be sung (both

In each case, the process of change involved listening to people, addressing concerns, and practicing discernment prior to making significant changes. This process was as important as the desired product.

old familiars such as "Amazing Grace" and cutting-edge new ones introduced by younger members), followed by a scaled-down version of the former 11:00 service

- Two worship choices running simultaneously at 10:45 A.M. on Sunday:

- ◆ A contemporary service, described by the pastor as "participatory, sensory, communal, and spontaneous," that fills the 100-capacity chapel

- ◆ A traditional service, whose rubric is "Reverently Centered on the Presence of God," offering worshipers a full choir, a powerful organ and a traditional liturgy, all done within a beautiful worship space

- The Webster Café, Sundays at 9:30 A.M., which serves refreshments and allows people attending any of the three services to connect with one another

- A small, 30-minute contemplative service each Wednesday at 5:30 P.M. in the chapel, allowing for chanting, silent time, and a place of peace in the midst of a harried world

One concern of the congregation has been that holding several worship services might fragment the community. Webster Grove Church has done an excellent job of addressing this issue. On several Sundays each year, the entire congregation gathers at 10:30 A.M. for a "come home" service. Each one of these

services has a different theme (for example, "Come Home for Thanksgiving") and its own flavor, thus exposing everyone to different styles of worship. In the course of a year, a worshiper who attends all of these services will have experienced the church's full spectrum of worship.

Had this congregation continued to hold only its traditional Sunday service, it appears that fewer than 100 people would be participating. Now a solid 300 gather weekly to celebrate and honor God in a variety of meaningful ways.

New Jersey: Meeting New Needs

Westminster Presbyterian Church in Trenton, New Jersey, illustrates the life cycle of many urban congregations. An old, established church, it fit the pattern of a Euro-American monocultural congregation. Then Trenton experienced white flight, shifting demographics, and the abandonment of the city for the suburbs. The church became a shadow of its former self.

Rather than close its doors, members of the presbytery, the loyal remnant of the congregation, and neighborhood people adopted a vision: they would create an urban church to meet the needs of people in the parish now, not simply whine about the good old days.

Westminster's current pastor is Rev. Karen Hernandez-Granzen—a dynamic, tradition-grounded, creative, and caring leader. She is quick to give credit to the presbytery, which designated the church

a redevelopment project, and to the previous pastors, who prepared the congregation for change.

Six years ago, the Sunday service was still in a traditional Presbyterian format. Rev. Hernandez-Granzen, appreciative of reformed worship and wanting to retain its elements, first added a time for people to share their "joys and concerns." Next she introduced a segment called "Worship and the Arts for the Child within Us," intended for that part of each human being that wants to be creative and open to new ways of experiencing God.

Clowning, reader's theater, liturgical dance, a reenactment of the Lord's

Supper, miming—any of these may be experienced in the new Sunday morning worship. The organist, a longtime member who early on questioned many of the changes, recently wrote the congregation's very own doxology, entitled "*Canto De Esperanza*" ("Song of Hope"), a musical testimonial for the people of God in this place at this time.

Westminster has grown from a handful of loyal worshipers who refused to abandon the urban church to a worshipping community of 60, which includes not only folks with European roots but also people of Puerto Rican, Guatemalan, and Dominican origins and a contingent of African Americans. Plans for a multilin-

gual contemporary worship service are in the works. The Westminster Church of today is best characterized as multicultural, multiracial, and multigenerational. No longer just surviving, its worship life is thriving.

North Carolina: Dynamic Change

Now let's go south to Westminster Presbyterian Church of Greensboro, North Carolina. When I was growing up in Greensboro, my family passed this church often on the way to my great-uncle's house. I did not find Westminster very interesting then, mostly because it was virtually invisible, set as it was below the level of the busy boulevard in a gully. Now, however, I have a different impression.

With the leadership of Rev. Bob Henderson and some visionary lay leaders, this congregation has set out to be a multistyle worship church affirming the value of both traditional and contemporary expressions of faith. For this congregation, high priority is placed on fidelity to tradition and "being authentic in doing what God is calling us to do" in a modern, changing, diverse culture.

Ten years ago, the only service was at 11:00 and was characterized by excellent music, sound reformed liturgy, and preaching. The average worship attendance was approximately 200. In a spirit of trial and error, and accepting that some start-up worship settings would fail, the congregation has tried many configurations to get to its current schedule:

■ On Saturdays at 6:00 P.M., an informal contemporary service using acoustic instruments is held. The constituency is a mixed group: some previously unchurched, many from recovery communities, many under age 40, empty nesters, and people who are simply attracted to the Saturday evening time slot. Incidentally, my mother's senior women's



Eric Dever

Sunday school class from First Baptist Church went on a field trip to this service several months ago. These women found it warm, meaningful, and wonderful.

■ A second contemporary service is offered at 9:30 A.M. each Sunday. The congregation now faces a serious problem: There is standing room only, and people are literally being turned away from this service! A third contemporary service that would run simultaneously with the 11:00 service is being considered.

■ The traditional, more formal service is held at 11:00. It has a loyal constituency of about 200.

Ten years ago, 200 folks worshiped each weekend. Now that number has increased five times over, and provisions are being made to make room for even more.

Common Denominators

These are diverse congregations—ethnically, geographically, culturally, and theologically. What learnings can be gleaned from their stories?

■ Each congregation had a minister who appreciated tradition, partnered with the congregation, built relationships, articulated a vision for change, was able to pace that change, added rather than subtracted, and manifested more patience than Job.

■ From each of these stories emerge laypeople who can see that there are many ways to worship God. Through embracing this diversity, a rich tapestry is formed.

■ In each case, the process of change involved listening to people, addressing concerns, and practicing discernment prior to making significant changes. This process was as important as the desired product. One longtime member of the Trenton church said, "We are always able to talk with the pastor. We may not

always get what we want, but we always know we have been heard by her."

■ Permission was given to try different things. Obstacles were seen as opportunities, not barriers. Failure was to be learned from, not punished.

■ Both traditional and contemporary styles were encouraged in the same place, and often at the same time. The absurdity of worship wars was avoided.

■ A passion for worship existed in each setting. Indeed, these clergy and congregations understood that worship is the very heart of Christian community.

These three congregations are not anomalies. I think of Congregation Sh'ar Za'hav, a primarily gay and lesbian synagogue in San Francisco whose dynamic lay-developed liturgy is forged from the real-life pain, struggles, and celebrations of its members. Rabbi Camille Angel is walking beside these people of faith as more worship settings are in the process of being created.

And there is Northwoods Presbyterian Church of Houston, a congrega-

tion established 30 years ago as an alternative to the fundamentalist worship prevalent in the area. It is under the leadership of Rev. Brent Eelman, who envisioned an intimate chapel for alternative services such as Taizé, weekly communion, small weddings, and contemporary worship. The church is architecturally magnificent and has become the most used worship space on the property in the two years since it was completed.

And there is Myers Park United Methodist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina—a huge congregation and a denominational flagship. Myers Park created a new setting recently, called "worship in the round," and it is offered at the same time as a traditional early service. Already it is booming, with 250 attendees and no loss of attendance in the other services.

So many wonderful things happening, so little space to share their stories. Just remember: the spirit is indeed a-movin', and so are hundreds of congregations. ☛



Eric Dever

The Main Thing

FINDING DIVERSITY AND JOY IN "THE WORK OF THE PEOPLE"

James P. Wind

These days people want congregations to do many things. Walk into a megachurch like Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois, and you will find large service counters to help visitors and members find the particular connection they are looking for. The range of options is astonishing—from a support group for the recently divorced to a ministry that fixes up old cars and gives them to those who cannot afford to set foot on a showroom floor. Or listen to President Bush and other political leaders talk about moving more responsibility for meeting social needs onto congregations and other faith-based organizations. Expectations mount. We live in a time when more and more people (including members themselves) want congregations to step up.

This is not necessarily bad news. Part of what is going on is a growing recognition that congregations are pivotal institutions for our flourishing as a nation. Great! After decades during which congregations were ignored or dismissed as hopelessly obsolete, it is encouraging to see their importance being rediscovered. But let's not underestimate the impact of these growing expectations. Most of our congregations are small. Often they are overwhelmed by all that people want from them. They can suffer mission creep and loss of direction. They can be involved in so many projects that they are unable to distinguish between good ideas (the world is overflowing with these) and the essential ones that are their reason for being.

The Most Important Thing We Do

So what is the main thing—the most important thing that congregations do? The answer is so self-evident that we may be embarrassed to say it. The most important thing congregations do is worship God. Worship, that mysterious human activity in which people gather, sing, dance (at least some do), tell stories, pray, share meals, and celebrate birth, death, and all the life passages that come in between. Worship, that sacred space where people get caught up in a reality much larger than themselves, where they see themselves differently than in the other spaces of

daily life. Worship, that powerful condensation of human practices that reshapes all the fragments of our little lives into a magnificent new creation called the people of God.

The stunning truth—given all the knowledge we have accumulated, all the violence we have experienced, all the trivia that crowds every corner of our consciousness, and all the pressures we feel toward individualism and self-realization—is that we still do this thing. Week after week, millions of people stop whatever else they are doing and gather to participate in this most ancient, traditional, even countercultural of activities. Why, given all the choices that compete for Sunday morning or Sabbath evening, do so many of us keep on doing this? That's the visible edge of the mystery. For some unfathomable reason, humans keep seeking this experience of grace and transcendence. Deep within us is a yearning, or as St. Augustine called it, a restlessness, "that cannot be quieted till [our hearts] may find repose in thee."¹

A Rich Diversity

Worship is difficult to talk about in the abstract; indeed, it is dangerous to do so for too long. So let me speak out of my own experience as a Lutheran Christian. Recently our family, like millions of others, participated in the great liturgies of Holy Week. To be sure, we are (post?)modern, so we did not do so in one place or even in one tradition.

On Palm Sunday, we worshiped at St. Peter's Lutheran Church, a historic congregation that now lives in the basement of Manhattan's sky-scraping Citicorp Building. This congregation is about as "high church" as Lutherans can get, with incense, elaborate vestments, and lots of traditional liturgical gestures. There we were, processing around the lobby of this most modern of office towers, raising palms and singing "All Glory Laud and Honor." On Maundy Thursday, back home in Virginia, we were at Community Lutheran Church, a suburban congregation that now finds itself in the middle of a shopping center and that teems with young families. In a much more informal style, the congregation reenacted Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet. One by one,

young children and still-young parents made their way forward to have their feet washed.

The next day, Good Friday, we worshiped at historic Bruton Parish, an Episcopal Church in Williamsburg, Virginia. There, in the quiet, candlelit darkness of early evening, sitting in pews that even the stalwarts of colonial days must have found uncomfortable, we sang Lenten hymns and reflected on the central mystery of the Christian faith, the death of the son of God. As we sang and prayed, I felt the presence of centuries of predecessors, starting with those who performed the rituals of the earliest Christian communities, then picking up echoes from Reformation England and later from the patriots who met in Williamsburg to chart a new destiny for America.

We celebrated Easter at St. Stephen's Lutheran Church, a much younger Williamsburg congregation. The worshipers included representatives of both town and gown, the latter including our son, who studies at the College of William and Mary.

How different each of these worshipping communities is from the others! And how much richer the diversity when we think of all the congregations of this land and beyond, representing all the traditions of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and the other great religions, and all the world's races and cultures. All of them—each, to be sure, in its own way—keep on doing this most important thing, worship.

A Common Hunger

Those of us who work closely with congregations know that it keeps getting harder to do this most important thing. In addition to the pressure from a culture's great, conflicting and diffuse expectations, we now are experiencing an immense mixing of religions and traditions that often results in what some call "worship wars." There is a joke making the rounds these days that asks what the difference is between a liturgist and a terrorist. Answer: you can negotiate with a terrorist. The joke reminds us that many who want to do the most important thing find it difficult to deal with others who want to do that same thing, but in a different way. In many churches and synagogues, lines are being drawn between groups colliding over differing worship traditions, styles, and preferences. Musicians line up against clergy, newcomers against old-timers, reformers against traditionalists, formalists against informalists, one ethnic group against another.



Chris Mirmir/Indianapolis

Many find these worship wars frightening and want to end them at any cost. But others find in these deep disagreements a common hunger and a possibility for something new to come to life. Not too long ago, I visited St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco. Founded in 1980, St. Gregory's has embraced the challenge of worshiping in an age of cultural mixing. In particular, it seeks to incorporate elements of traditional Christian and Jewish worship into something new. This is, obviously, risky business.

Not everyone will be comfortable with the menorah and the Coptic crosses sitting in close proximity. Others will be puzzled, and maybe intrigued, by the Shinto shape of the shrine that houses the Scriptures and the Buddhist bells that are rung at key moments in worship.

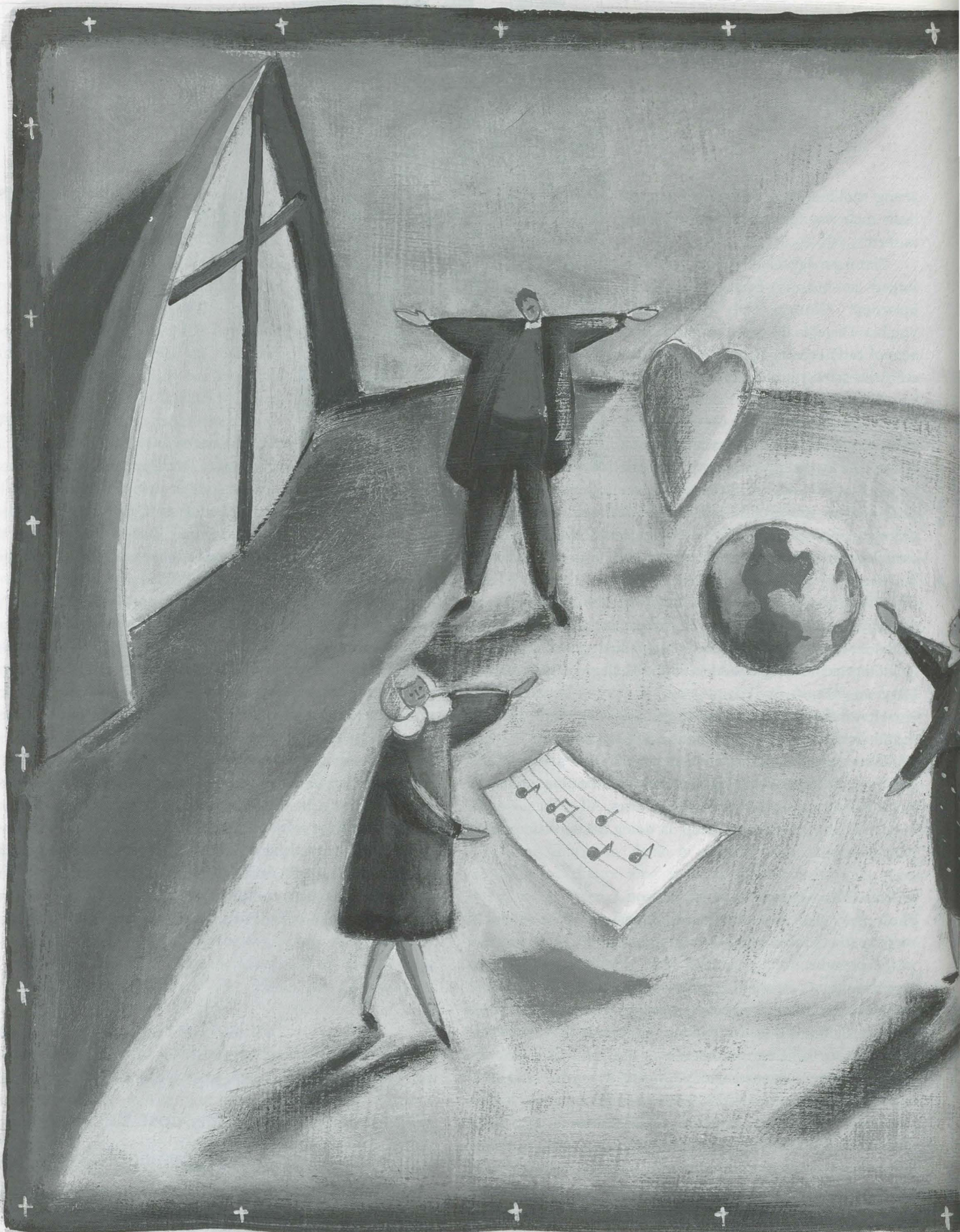
But few will be unmoved by the life and spirit stirring in this congregation. On my visit I encountered robust and full-harmonied chanting; a great, dancing procession of the whole congregation to the communion table; animated and very personal responses to the sermon, so natural that people competed for a time to talk about their lives in light of the preacher's message; and some of the most beautiful and spontaneous offerings of corporate prayer I have ever heard.

St. Gregory's is a congregation for whom worship is the most important thing. In seminary, long ago, I learned that the word liturgy means the work of the people. This congregation, like so many others around the world, does this strenuous work with joy and excellence. In so doing, these congregations call all of us to a fresh commitment to worship that heals the world and gives us the freedom to be more than we think we are. ☛

Notes

1. *The Confessions*, book 1, chapter 1.

Many find these worship wars frightening and want to end them at any cost. But others find in these deep disagreements a common hunger and a possibility for something new to come to life.



Barbara Quinn



Beyond Style

ASKING DEEPER QUESTIONS ABOUT WORSHIP

John D. Witvliet

One of the most illuminating parts of my job as director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship involves reading worship conference evaluation forms. The most instructive comments explain what questions congregational leaders want addressed at future conferences. Significantly, most of them concern the mechanics, strategy, or style of worship:

- Should we add a service in a new style?
- What do we do if we don't have a priest or pastor available?
- What is the value of the lectionary?
- How do we do cross-cultural music?
- What different models are there for "blended worship"?
- How should we structure our worship planning team?

■ What are the best Internet resources for worship?

■ What can we do to make worship less boring?

Eight Trends

These questions arise out of the sometimes bewildering world of liturgical change in which we live. Recent changes in worship practices are so complex that it takes several categories simply to cover the most pervasive of them. The most significant movements include these eight:

1. The Liturgical Movement. This ecumenical resurgence of early church practices has resulted in new denominational worship books (the Presbyterian *Book of Common Worship*, the Methodist *Book of Worship*); a revitalization of lectionary preaching; more frequent celebrations of the Lord's Supper/Eucharist/Mass, with greater participation; a resur-

gence in celebrating the Christian year; the use of eucharistic prayers based on historic models; a desire for full, conscious, and active participation of all the faithful; and a revised catechumenate for welcoming new members into congregational life.

2. The Church Growth Movement.

Public worship is seen as a primary means of evangelism. This movement has brought about practices intended to make worship more accessible to seekers, such as musical forms adapted from popular culture, informal sermons, drama presentations based on scenes from daily life, and services targeted to a particular market niche.

3. The Hymn Renaissance. An ecumenical revival of hymn-writing has resulted in a bevy of new hymnals, hymnal supplements, single-author hymn collections, and hymn-writing workshops. To the surprise of many, thousands of new texts and hymns (in more or less traditional forms) have been produced in the last generation. Many of these new texts reflect deep concern about inclusivity in the church.

4. Cross-cultural Sharing of Resources. This ecumenical concern manifests itself on two levels. At the denominational level, it is reflected in denominational hymnals featuring music in several languages and from several cultural and ethnic backgrounds. At the congregational level, even ethnically homogenous congregations have attempted to become liturgically and musically multilingual, convinced that this will enhance their sense of worshiping as part of the universal body of Christ.

5. The Charismatic Movement. The influence of this late-60s movement continues through the publishing companies it has spawned. Congregations in many Christian traditions have derived from it a whole new paradigm for wor-

ship—one that features a praise team modeled after a soft-rock band, praise and worship choruses, and a temple worship paradigm that structures worship around a movement from the “outer courts” of exuberant praise to the “holy of holies” of songs of “intimacy with God.”

6. Children in Worship. In some congregations a generation or two ago, children were to be “seen and not heard.” Today, some congregations are pursuing intergenerational worship models, with children functioning as ushers and Scripture readers and the children’s choir taking a significant role in liturgical leadership. Others are pursuing a more segregated model, with services targeted to generationally defined groups. In such churches, children, youth, and parents might all go to different locations in the church building when they arrive for worship.

7. Technology. The influence of technology on worship is not new; inventions such as the pipe organ and incandescent lighting resulted in significant liturgical change. Today, the most noteworthy innovations involve presentation technology. Liturgical PowerPoint presentations might include visual imagery, song texts, and movie clips.

8. Liturgical Eclecticism. In some circles a generation ago, “eclectic” was a bad word, as worship leaders strove for services that were stylistically unified. Now many congregations strive for a mix of musical and rhetorical styles. Terms like “blended worship,” “fusion worship,” and “liturgical menus” suggest attempts to reflect diversity within congregations.

Each of these trends, and many others, are mediated through economic structures that have changed a great deal in the past generation. Congregations no longer limit their search for worship resources to denominational catalogues, looking instead to sophisticated market-

driven publishing companies, Internet chat rooms, and nondenominational megachurches. Or they may simply produce their own resources, perhaps through intensive planning sessions by a group of laypeople.

These changing patterns often lead to vexing disputes. While worship preference is now a central topic in interviews for pastors, it has at the same time been declared off-limits for discussion at many family reunions. Nationwide, there is an almost complete division between leaders of “traditional” and “contemporary” worship; they read different magazines, attend different conferences, listen to different recordings, and buy resources from different distributors. I am both grateful and dismayed to hear comments about conferences such as, “this is the only place I know where both our contemporary and traditional service leaders can come together.” The long-term implications of this split will trouble the church for some time.

Congregational Uniqueness

Most congregations are influenced by several, though probably not all, of the current liturgical movements. As denominational identity has weakened for most congregations, each congregation has assimilated these broad patterns of change in unique ways. One congregation might introduce lectionary preaching, a GenX service, and songs by Ruth Duck and Brian Wren while another incorporates the catechumenate, a children’s worship program, and songs accompanied by African conga drums. As much as ever, each congregation maintains a unique identity around its practice of worship.

Changes in worship signify different things in different settings. In one congregation, a new GenX service might arise out of genuine spiritual renewal and a

desire for deeper worship. In another, it might signal a desire for a less demanding form of worship. In one congregation, the use of a South African freedom song might be motivated by a sense of solidarity with the marginalized. In another, the same song might be chosen simply because it is exotic.

Results can vary as well. One congregation's addition of a praise team and PowerPoint presentational software might lead to greater lay participation in worship and services that are pastorally, theologically, and spiritually richer. Another's identical innovation might lead to less engagement, less congregational participation, and reduced theological and spiritual content.

Worship's Meaning and Purpose

These observations suggest that there is much more to talk about than the style of worship. Behind the strategies and practices of a given congregation lie a complex web of motivations and goals. Fortunately, several of the conference evaluation forms I review raise questions that probe this important topic:

- What can we do to provide better hospitality in our congregation?
- What can we do in our worship to communicate our love and concern for the world?
- What practices will form our congregation more richly in the contours of the Christian faith?
- What can we do to help worshipers attend to God, not just to the style of music or the rhetoric of the sermon?
- What in worship will most effectively communicate the joy and hope of the gospel message?

These questions drive beyond mechanics to probe the meaning and purpose of worship. They highlight the virtues that should mark all worship, regardless of its style. True, these ques-

Many congregations are discovering that while they have obsessed about stylistic identity in worship, they have failed to cultivate conversations about its deeper meaning. Style has taken precedence over content.

tions inevitably lead to questions of strategy. But these are the primary questions.

Many congregations are discovering that while they have obsessed about stylistic identity in worship, they have failed to cultivate conversations about its deeper meaning. Style has taken precedence over content. These congregations are discovering the need for a winsome, well-grounded, and well-articulated vision for the purpose of worship.

To be effective, this vision must be owned and expressed by several groups within the congregation. First, genuinely pastoral conversations about worship should occur among preachers, musicians, artists, liturgists, and all who lead in worship. In the world of worship conferences, by far the most urgent and passionate comments come from musicians who feel disenfranchised from the process of worship planning and who long for meaningful conversations with pastors. Comments by pastors frustrated by the attitude or specific practices of musicians number a close second. This lack of communication must be replaced by collaboration—and about deeper issues than simply what song to sing after the sermon next week.

Second, these conversations need to extend into the heart of the congregation. One congregation recently made the mistake of asking, in a survey, what kind of music its members preferred for worship. The results revealed a congregation deeply divided, as worshipers expressed

preferences for hymns, praise choruses, Christian contemporary music by a band, classical anthems sung by a choir, folk music, and even no music at all. The survey hardened the divisions within the congregation and stymied worship leaders. The climate improved only after an adult education session contested the taste-oriented language of the survey itself. The presenter challenged the congregation to ask not “what music do you like,” but rather “what music helps you pray most honestly and deeply in worship.” As one member later testified, “Part of our problem was that we had been dealing with worship so superficially. We needed to learn how to talk about worship in deeper pastoral, spiritual, and theological ways.”

The Pastoral Leader

All of these conflicts can make life difficult for the pastoral leaders who are responsible for planning and leading worship. Congregations seeking new leaders may apply an implicit litmus test for stylistic preferences. And the questions, “Why is our pastor or musician (or other leader) so reluctant to change?” and “Why does our pastor or musician change so much, so quickly?” might be asked by disgruntled members of the same congregation at the same time.

Negotiating the mines on the worship war battlefields is no easy task. But part of the strategy must include moving

continued on page 35

Singing the “Right” Tune

HOW MUSIC SHAPES COMMUNAL EXPERIENCE

Micah Marty

Consider these worshipers in modern urban America: rather than having performers act out skits or play instruments on a stage, they want “participatory” worship in which all attendees play a part. Instead of grand auditoriums where the audience gapes at huge Jumbotron screens, they congregate in intimate, even makeshift, spaces where worshipers face only each other. In lieu of constantly rewriting (or discarding completely) the liturgy in favor of newer songs, they stubbornly adhere to the traditional “old songs”—albeit with ever-new interpretations. Rather than play down the text in fear of alienating new or “seeking” members, they increasingly focus on it through word and song. Most amazing of all, they even insist on worshipping in the same tongue their great-great-grandparents did, rather than in English!

Are these members of some austere and bizarre sect, living in the past and slavishly following a rigid set of dead traditions? On the contrary, says Rabbi Jeffrey Summit of Tufts University in Boston: they are members of vibrant Jewish worship communities, and their choices strongly reflect their own tastes. In other words, they are worshipping the way they believe is most faithful, even as it flies in the face of other American worship trends and may even be at odds with what the older generation in their communities wants.

A Stylistic Spectrum

Summit, a lifelong musician with a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology, deftly toes the line between participant and observer in his fascinating book *The Lord's Song in a Strange Land: Music and Identity in Contemporary Jewish Worship* (Oxford, 2000). Bringing the reader inside five Jewish worship communities in the Boston area, he explores the range of contemporary Jewish prayer, chant, and song through descriptions, interviews, and recorded music (the book includes a 39-track CD). The examples cover the spectrum from the religious left (a group that meets for festive, informal worship in a Masonic Hall) to the religious right (a largely Hasidic community, in which women and men are separated for prayer, dancing, and eating).

The cultural and stylistic differences across this spectrum are evident in everything from the role of women in worship to the participants' fluency in Hebrew to community members' willingness to integrate with American secular culture. But the common thread, Summit says, is music.

“When I spoke to people about worship and music,” says Summit of the research for his book, “within minutes we were talking about core issues in people's lives: the aspects of community that they deeply valued, their connection to history, the ways that they could most effectively feel joined with other men and

women to create a community of transcendent meaning and harmony.

“So while the book is obviously about how music is strategically used in worship, I also came to view this work much more as an exploration of religious values and their relationship to meaningful spiritual expression in twenty-first-century America.”

Words or Melody?

Just as important as the *nature* of contemporary worship, Summit says, is its evolution and development. “While we often think of worship as a form handed down from generation to generation, bounded by tradition, the reality is that at the same time there's another very active dynamic as people plan and structure worship. I wanted to explore the strategic choice and use of music to convey certain values and shape a communal experience. That process of strategic choice is sometimes very conscious and sometimes emerges more subconsciously.”

Summit says that in talking with Protestant and Catholic colleagues in Boston he was “struck by how much we seemed to be standing on common ground.” They too struggled with the search for music that is historically authentic but speaks to the contemporary soul; they too were acutely familiar with battles between those who want more participation in services and those who want more performance. These colleagues had

also mediated between those who want high-quality performance and those who argue for participation from the congregation, regardless of skill level, and they also sometimes wanted to focus on the words of hymns ("let's sing all of the verses") even as they knew many worshipers notice primarily the melody. And they had repeatedly dealt with the perennial question of whether to use the organ, or a piano, or an electric piano with a guitar, bass, and drums—or even just a guitar.

"After I spoke with these Christians," Summit recalls, "it struck me that the Jews in the worship communities I studied were describing larger issues than music; they were discussing concerns common to middle-class religion in America. The expectation that worshipers can find or create the kind of service they need, the role of the empowered individual in creating new structures and institutions, and the ready tendency to form communal associations—these are all themes common to American religious life."

Meaningful Experience

The hidden meanings of worship style in various faith communities is a subject of great fascination for Summit. "People sometimes think style is superficial," he explains. "But it's not. Style is the way we really understand meaning in culture, because it often symbolizes or represents highly important but less visible issues. Because of this significance, in the realm of worship there's a tremendous proclivity in the Jewish community for people to find a style that reflects who they are. People vote with their feet and their pocketbooks by shopping for a synagogue where the style feels true to their desired religious/spiritual direction but also meshes with their own cultural style. People for whom it's important to have fun in community are not going to gravi-

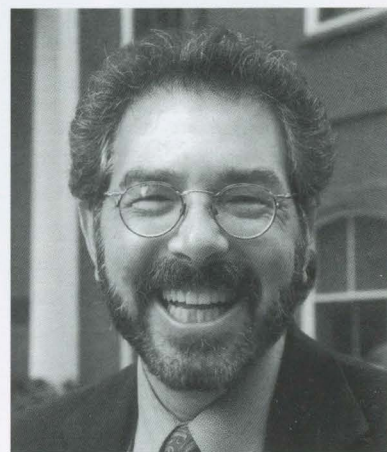
tate toward a worship experience that is tedious and heavy."

Not that contemporary Jewish worship is about fun and games or repackaging worship to become mere entertainment in order to fill seats. Indeed, readers fatigued with endless talk of contemporary church growth will find refreshing Summit's minimal discussion of numbers, at least with regard to judging the health or success of the Jewish worship communities he studies. The emphasis is much more on each worship community's well-being. Summit measures success in terms of how meaningful the worship experience is in the lives of participants rather than how many people can be coaxed through the door.

Pushing and Pulling

Perhaps because of the historical necessity of banding together to survive repeated persecution, or perhaps simply as a reflection of what a healthy community is like, there seems to be a common sense that differences within each faith community can and will eventually be worked out. The nature of worship—particularly in the most liberal communities Summit studied—is constantly evolving through a complex and often very subtle process of pushing and pulling. It's a process that's "organic," and yet always operating with an eye toward keeping in the spirit—and frequently also the letter—of the tradition.

Compromise and resolution within a community may usually be possible, but when two separate communities try to agree with each other, matters get stickier. Speaking from his university office, Summit related the efforts of various Jewish students at Tufts—who studied and socialized together but worshiped in separate Reform and Conservative communities—to negotiate the components of a joint "teaching service." Representatives of both communities met to find



After I spoke with these Christians, it struck me that the Jews in the worship communities I studied were describing larger issues than music; they were discussing concerns common to middle-class religion in America.

Jeffrey Summit, Jewish Associate Chaplain
Tufts University
Boston, Massachusetts

The striking thing about the Jewish faith communities in Summit's research is that they appeal to worshipers by going deeper into the tradition rather than sugarcoating or watering down worship.

common musical ground, he said, trying to agree on "melodies that would create, even briefly, a shared community in which all the members could belong and participate." After compromising on matters such as instrumentation (Conservative students said "no guitar" and had their way) and the use of English (Reform students got their wish to sing a prayer in English after it had been chanted in Hebrew) the service finally took place.

The experience, Summit says, "was more successful as an educational exercise than as worship. Members of both communities subsequently related their sense that they had compromised too much to feel comfortable in the joint worship setting." Both the Reform and Conservative students, Summit observes, "were unable to foresee that music from the 'other' service had such strong coded significance that its very inclusion excluded the other group."

The Right Tunes

"Strong coded significance" is another way of describing the power of music. Through both prominent and subtle choices of text, rhythm, melody, and instrumentation, Summit says, congregations express and define who they are. Much of his book (and the accompanying CD) explores the development of these relationships and choices. In Summit's experience, when the music was unfamiliar to newcomers at worship, they felt they did not belong. On the other hand, even when surrounded by strangers and in an unfamiliar worship setting, music that was familiar provided instant reassurance.

"The 'right' tune grounds one in history," Summit observes, "[serving] as a

portal to the past, a connection with ancestors, real and imagined." In a phrase that rings true with listeners who treasure Bach cantatas despite ignorance of the German language, Rabbi Summit says, "The tune is a vehicle for transcendence. For many Jews who do not understand much Hebrew, the tune is the prayer." And every church or synagogue musician can surely relate to Summit's experience with incoming freshmen at Tufts who tell him "Rabbi, I enjoyed services here but you know, you sing all the wrong tunes." "What are the right tunes?" Summit recalls responding. Students: "The ones we sing at home!"

Two Audiences

Jeffrey Summit's research and interpretation is important to at least two significant audiences. The first constitutes those wanting an inside look at Jewish worship music as it is being practiced today. Most studies of Jewish liturgical music are written from the perspective of composers, cantors, and rabbis—worship professionals—who have strong feelings about what worshipers should and shouldn't do. Rabbi Summit says, however, "I was less interested in what leaders think people 'should' do than I was in what people actually do and how worshipers perceive what is happening in worship. In other words, I wanted to understand *through worshipers* how they understood the symbolic meaning of music and prayer in worship . . . There's not just 'one musical spiritual event' happening at any one time; there are as many events as there are participants in the service." (Incidentally, the melodies on the CD accompanying Summit's book are sung by an actual congregation and were recorded in the same

physical spaces where they are shared every Friday evening in *Shabbat* services. They taped, however, on other nights of the week, as the author deemed taping of actual worship both needlessly intrusive and in violation of the proscription against the use of electricity on the Sabbath. "It was instructive," Summit reflects, "to work within the constraints of Jewish law that underscored the sanctity and singularity of specific ritual performances.")

The second and perhaps larger audience for Summit's insights include all those trying to follow trends in contemporary American worship. "What I've been excited about is that my research isn't just about Jewish worship; it's where we are in our spiritual life in America," Summit says. Through his research, Summit became familiar with active believers in the college-student through Baby-Boomer age range—worshipers who are no strangers to personally tailored media such as television and computers. How do these people channel their individual tastes into common group worship? (Or, it might be phrased, how do they suppress their individual tastes to accept the choices of the group?) One answer in the most democratic Jewish worship communities is that consensus is found through give and take between worshipers: when the group finds something that works it is incorporated into worship, while variations that are unpopular are quickly discarded. But even in the most liberal context that Summit studied there remains a commitment to the tradition—to history—that wouldn't be likely to result from focus groups or market surveys trying to lure hesitant suburban seekers to evangelical megachurches. In other words, the striking thing about the Jewish faith communities in Summit's research is that they appeal to worshipers by going deeper into

the tradition rather than sugarcoating or watering down worship and asking as little as possible of worshipers. This is in stark contrast to much of the Christian church growth movement in the country today, in which leaders are encouraged to make the worship environment as entertaining and undemanding as possible "so that no one gets scared away" by threatening rituals like collecting the offering.

Give Me Community

A natural question is whether the approach Summit describes can only work in a Jewish context, where the tradition occupies a minority role and thus adherents are forced to build on what they have in common. Although he doesn't explicitly discuss the consequences of his research for Christian faith communities, Summit's findings on what makes these Jewish congregations work suggests some components that would enhance any fledgling faith community's chances of success: healthy, accommodating leadership; a flexible, active membership; a willingness to look for new expressions of some very solid traditions (including the ability to move on if things don't work); and perhaps most important, a common commitment and devotion to each other.

"Jews assume community," Summit explains. Paraphrasing Patrick Henry and citing the Talmudic story of Honi Hameagal, "a Jewish Rip van Winkle" who sleeps for 70 years and is distraught to wake and find he has no friends left alive, Summit says the universal feeling among Jews is, "Give me community or give me death!" While non-Jewish faith communities may not be able to summon that kind of passion, Summit's experience with believers who accept the need for community as a given provides important lessons for anyone wishing to cultivate healthy worship experiences in twenty-first-century America. ❁



Chris Minick/Indianapolis

Finding a Niche and Filling It

CONGREGATIONS IN A POSTINDUSTRIAL ECONOMY

Anthony E. Healy

Blocked by a towering mega-outlet on one side and encroached on by a big suburban mall on the others, the small church is overwhelmed by retail giants. Its founding pastor was forced to quit. Members left and morale slipped.

As described by Paul D. Numrich in a chapter of the newly published *Public Religion and Urban Transformation*,¹ this church is not the large, enthusiastic body most denominations would expect in fast-growing locations. It is not seeker-friendly. It has no contemporary service.

But it is not a flop. Instead, this Naperville, Illinois, church is among many vital and often overlooked threads in the intricate, rich tapestry into which American congregational life has been rewoven in recent times.

Knowledge and Services

In developed nations, the way people work, live, and form values has been profoundly altered in recent years by the evolution of a new economy. This postindustrial economy emphasizes knowledge and services, not the authority and structure of our late industrial economy.

Too often, we hear that what church leaders should do in response to this changed world is to steer their congregations in nearly the same direction that a few well-publicized churches have taken. An example is the pressure on many mainline Protestant churches to adopt contemporary forms of worship.

What has happened at the Naperville church is an example of the varied courses open to churches today. As Numrich describes it, this church of middle-class professionals—stressed out, overextended and fretful—is evolving into a comfortable, face-to-face community “where harried, unappreciated, and anxious people can take heart that God loves them and calls them to a life of love in an often unloving society.”²

The long-struggling congregation has stumbled upon a vital niche in the community. It now provides an intimate, therapeutic place within a traditional religious context and is doing vital work in its community.

Religion Is Not in Decline

The arguments over worship that have arisen in recent decades are due partly to a failure to understand congregations as they actually are. The concepts many still hold about congregations are shaped by an outdated view that, in its extreme form, sees congregations as hopelessly out-of-it bulwarks of privatized religion in need of radical change.

The sociology of religion once held that its subject was of diminishing importance in modern society and had little to say about congregations. In recent decades, however, it has become apparent that religion is not in decline in the United States. So sociologists of religion have over the past decade descended en masse upon congregations. Starting with R. Stephen Warner's *New Wine in Old Wineskins* (University of California, 1987), their studies have delivered insights that are sometimes in stark contrast to older notions.

Moreover, these studies sometimes differ markedly with ideas being offered by a growing body of church consultants. More than a few of these consultants appear to lack any substantial evidence for their assertions. A few mainline religious leaders, however, have leapt uncritically at solutions that promised growth.

A Society of Subcultures

The picture of congregations that is emerging from ongoing studies is one of amazing complexity, variety, and vitality. In our highly mobile society, religious bodies appear to play a central role by reconnecting people socially and religiously. We appear to have become a society of religious subcultures, rather than one consolidated around an overarching religious sensibility.

Faced with change, local religious bodies have evolved on their own, developing particular niches within their localities. In fact, congregations today are distinguished more by religious subculture, form, and style than by denomination or location.

Here are some examples from recently published studies:

■ In Nancy Eiesland's *A Particular Place* (Rutgers, 2000), a

once-prominent small church struggles to find its place against an emerging megachurch in a rapidly growing Southern town. Instead of seeking growth, as its regional body urges, the church instead offers its sense of place and history to the young families in search of community who are populating nearby tract homes.

■ In *Congregations in Conflict* (Cambridge, 1999) by Penny Edgell Becker of Yale University, we find an old Chicago suburb, largely occupied by married baby-boomer professionals. The author's four models of congregations in this community—Houses of Worship, Family, Community, and Leader—provide powerful evidence that churches' ways of doing things are the result of people's needs for different kinds of religious centers.

■ Outside Indianapolis, a large, growing evangelical church with a far-flung membership merges its charismatic choruses and straight Bible talk with historic elements. As described in *Congregations and Community* (Rutgers, 1997) by Nancy T. Ammerman of Hartford Seminary, congregants file forward in the pewless modern auditorium toward a prominent cross, where they take bread and juice from the plate and the cup by intinction. Nearby, in a growing, tall-steepled mainline church, congregants find quiet and are able to put perspective in their lives amid traditional choral performances in a traditionally constructed sanctuary. Not only are these congregations different in religious subculture, but they also are different in their congregational style.

These examples do not mirror the popular emphasis on megachurches and seeker services, which, though they are an important and growing part of our present religious scene, are apparently not representative of American religious life today. Even somewhat appreciative studies on megachurches and seeker churches—*Reinventing American Protestantism* (University of California, 1999) by Donald Miller and *Seeker Churches* (Rutgers, 2000) by Kimon Howland Sargeant—show that many types of “new” church that have been held out as exemplary are often more rare than ordinary within their own movements.

A Rich Variety

These studies should also sound a note of caution to religious leaders. In attempts to revitalize existing congregations and start new ones as part of denominational goals to restore membership growth, mainline Protestant leaders in particular should not be focusing on singular solutions, such as style of worship. These solutions could damage congregations that actually are serving people well.

The reality that is emerging is that most churches are viable bodies providing vital community service. Moreover, in a society that has been radically reformed by the emergence of a postin-

dustrial economy, we are finding that the congregation remains the main place where people, in the presence of the transcendent, are putting it all back together again.

Thus, the astute religious leader today is one who attempts to enhance viable, meaningful, and effective ministry in congregations and not radically alter it based on outmoded ideas about the state of congregations. This leader does not push singular courses of action, including particular styles of worship, whether contemporary or traditional.

When we peek behind the obstructions that have marred our view of the real life of congregations, we find that religion in America is flowing in a rich variety of directions, drawn by a variety of religious needs. Instead of a single theme, or variations on a single theme, the score from which present-day congregations play is a rich, multitudinous cacophony, beating many rhythms and striking inconsonant tones.

Before us now lies a marvelous religious vista in which people are reattaching themselves to the transcendent through congregations in distinct, creative, and startling ways. ❁

Notes

1. Lowell W. Livezey, ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2000).
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 200–201.

NOW


Buy Alban books...

Register for Alban seminars...

Become an Alban member...

Online at:

www.alban.org




- BOOKS
- PERIODICALS
- EDUCATION
- CONSULTING
- MEMBERSHIP
- RESEARCH
- FUNDING
- WHAT'S NEW?

The Alban Institute

Welcome

The mission of the Alban Institute is to gather, generate, and provide practical knowledge across denominational lines through action research, books and periodicals, consulting and training services, and education seminars for those involved with congregations.

The premier source of learning for congregations and their leaders



ABOUT US

CONTACT US

CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCE GUIDE

RECONVINCED CENTER FOR CONGREGATIONAL ACTION

7315 Wisconsin Ave.
Suite 1250 West
Bethesda, MD 20814
(301) 718-4407
(800) 486-1318

Postmodern Worship: Three Views

THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN "IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME"

Hillary Wicai

Balancing the old with the new is a great challenge for congregations. As church leaders struggle with how to reach the postmodern generation, new and traditional ideas often clash. The tensions are most acutely evident in matters of worship.

"It's in worship that we most boldly declare that we have a set of values that are not of this world," says Dr. Terry York, associate professor of Christian ministry and church music at George W. Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. "It is in worship," he

adds, "that we declare the submission of our wills and purpose in life to one sovereign. It is in worship that we find ourselves most obviously subversive to the culture around us. Also, worship has a strong music component, and if people don't have an opinion on anything else they have an opinion on music, in part because music is so accessible and so much a part of the human emotion and spirit."

Something New Is Happening

How does a church move forward in a meaningful way so as to maintain rele-


vance while not alienating its long-term members? Is it the church's job to keep up with culture? Do congregations risk being left behind? In trying to cater to different tastes and styles, does the church risk segregating generations that should be learning from one another? These are just a few of the issues with which many churches are currently struggling as they attempt to reach a generation that is largely unchurched and not particularly committed to Christianity.

York, who is in his 50s, explains that he is an observer of those who wish to minister to postmoderns, the mostly younger generation who by and large reject modernity's worldview that has "elevated the scientific method to 'our sacral mode of knowing.'"¹

"I'm studying postmodernism because it walks into my classroom every day," he says. "There are those who refuse to acknowledge that postmodernism is actually happening. Obviously, something new is happening; whether it's an extension of modernism, I just don't know."

Postmodern Worldview

Sally Morgenthaler also observes and writes about culture and worship issues. Author of *Worship Evangelism* (Zonder-



We really want people to engage in the person of Jesus Christ rather than rules, regulations, concepts, and interpretations. We're tired of easy-answer Christianity.

Sally Morgenthaler, Author and Consultant
Littleton, Colorado

van, 1995), she is a consultant who tries to help churches bridge the gap between traditional church practice and ministry to postmoderns.

"In the postmodern worldview there is no one story. The world is a totally subjective place, and how you view the world is dependent on your place in the world," Morgenthaler explains. "Humans are no longer the center, the apex, the measure of all things." The modern view, by contrast, upholds humans and their ability to reason, study science, explore, and discover logical answers.

"Postmoderns," Morgenthaler points out, "are very cynical about human beings and the institutions we've created. Irony is a major tool in our communication because we don't have any faith in ourselves."

Morgenthaler says that those who hold the postmodern view tend to be under 35, but some are older. She believes it's obvious that ministering to this vastly different group of people requires new tools and approaches. "One of the things many of these young pastors would like to do is to give up the attachment to modernity; give up the way the Bible is dissected and reconfigured into a how-to formula for a 'successful' life," she says. "These young pastors and leaders would like to put the mystery back into God, keep the art in Scriptures, keep the narrative, and help people respond not just with their left brains."

Multisensory Worship

One of these young pastors is 29-year-old Chris Seay. Educated at a Baptist college where he studied philosophy and theology, Seay spent a year taking seminary courses but has no plans to return. In 1995, at age 23, he started University Baptist Church with a small group of artists and musicians in Waco. Within weeks, 600 to 700 young people were



Age-segregated congregations are paying a higher price than they know. They're losing community and a sense of family.

Terry York, Associate Professor of Christian Ministry and Church Music
George W. Truett Theological Seminary
Waco, Texas

regularly attending the Sunday service.

A year and a half ago, Seay moved to Houston to begin another church. Ecclesia Church, in downtown Houston, is in an area that Seay estimates is less than 1 percent churched. Seay's first staff hire was a photographer—a pastor of the visual arts.

Ecclesia's services are multisensory and take place on Sunday evening. Seay recognizes that Sunday mornings are not the best time for young people. Sunday mornings are for recovering from Saturday nights, running errands, and preparing for a busy week. Also, buying a building in a city is expensive; by holding services later in the day, he can rent from an existing church.

During worship, as Seay teaches and aromatic candles burn, artists may be painting or sculpting while images are projected onto large screens and contemporary music—largely composed by church members—is played. "Visuals and images are worth more than a thousand words," says Seay. "There are things we learn more with our eyes than through other ways."

"As pastors," he explains, "we're supposed to create a gospel experience. The

gospel is something we participate in, not receive."

According to Seay, the two churches he has founded are differentiated by the culture in each town—an important characteristic of a church that is trying to reach postmoderns. "We do what we do because we're in an urban setting and in an arts district," he says. "We don't want to say that the forms we take are the prescription. We believe people should engage their own local culture."

Engaging with Jesus Christ

Postmoderns, says Morgenthaler, need more than a dusty Bible. "Those who want to minister to postmoderns don't want to pound them on the head with the Bible. They want them to hear and participate in the beauty of story and help them engage in something beyond themselves that they might not be able to explain," she says. "We're not willing to give up truth, but we really want people to engage in the person of Jesus Christ rather than rules, regulations, concepts, and interpretations. We're tired of easy-answer Christianity."

Morgenthaler understands what Seay is trying to accomplish with services that



To be a missionary you engage your local culture and you transform. The days of a franchise model of church are gone.

Chris Seay, Pastor
Ecclesia Church
Houston, Texas

some would say are appealing and others would complain are simply too busy. She believes that postmoderns are primarily visual learners. "It's not enough for them to get printed information about God. It's a movement from printed information to experiencing God. You experience God through art and music," she says.

Technology Debate

York suggests caution when it comes to using technology in church. "I'm concerned about technology becoming master rather than servant," he explains. "For instance, I am all for having sound amplification if indeed it makes the message clearer without distorting it. But I'm not for having indoor fireworks just because it's technically possible. You should be in charge of technology—it shouldn't be in charge of you."

York illustrates his point with a modern medical predicament: "If [the] technology exists to keep someone alive, we now face the ethical dilemma of whether or not we must keep him or her alive."

York does believe technology can be a helpful tool as long as it doesn't control worship. For example, he likes the use of

film clips during worship. "I think there's legitimacy to that," he says. "I see it as a story within a sermon used to illustrate the point of the sermon. It's a tool."

Segregation by Generation

York worries, however, about congregations of young people participating in multisensory worship while down the street their grandparents sing hymns from hymnals. He is concerned about generational segregation in worship, a topic he is beginning to research for a book.

"[Age-segregated congregations are] paying a higher price than they know," he says. "They're losing community and a sense of family. We're constantly increasing the menu of choices, and I think community and family suffer at that point. Generations can learn from each other. I think we need the wisdom of generations that are older and we need the sparkly-eyed hope of those younger than us mixed in the same worship event." Without the mix, York believes isolation results.

Seay would argue that the generations are already isolated when it comes

to belief in God. He refers to postmoderns as postChristians. He tells the story, however, of an Ecclesia member who graduated from art school and then traveled Europe. Although predisposed to Buddhism, she took the time to tour the great European cathedrals. "Through the art she came to Christianity," Seay says. "This is now a person who has come to a very real faith in Christ."

Engaging, Not Following, Culture

"We're not trying to follow culture," Seay says. He believes the biblical story of Daniel is an excellent example of using one's local culture as an opportunity to tell the story of God but not adopting it as one's own belief. Daniel was thrown into Babylon and taught by sorcerers and pagan priests. "He becomes ten times wiser in those things than the pagans," Seay says, "but Daniel does not cave in to that. To be a missionary you engage your local culture and you transform. The days of a franchise model of church are gone."

Morgenthaler has seen the conflict in churches she advises. Of those who complain, in effect, "I can access God from hymns and lectures—why can't you?" she says, "They want to hang onto the old ways. But if their grandkids don't, we've got a problem."

She agrees there is no one set of answers for churches faced with this conflict. She encourages congregations to add new elements to their services slowly but adds, "If a church can't morph, [it] should make an alternative possible, help fund a Saturday night service for young people. The dig-in-your-heels, 'my way or the highway' approach isn't going to work. Not if you want people to come to church." ❁

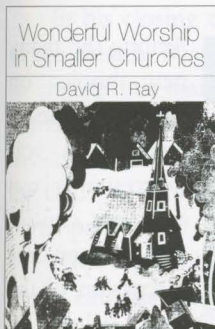
Notes

1. Huston Smith, *Why Religion Matters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), p. 19.

BOOK REVIEW

Wonderful Worship in Smaller Churches

David R. Ray
Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000



David Ray has a passion for small congregations, the locus of his own ministry for over 30 years. He believes not only that small churches are essentially different from other congregations but also that they are exactly the right size for vital congregational life. He notes that small churches have a higher percentage of regular attendance at worship and that denominations should thus focus more on their needs. He argues that God has a bias toward smallness and remnants. As a small church pastor myself, I found this refreshing news in a culture that all too often assumes bigger is better.

Ray believes that worship is the church's central and primary activity. He is therefore concerned that the style of small church worship has more to do with smallness than with theology, culture, ethnicity, or location. While we might debate that, there is no doubt that worship in small churches is unique. One of Ray's main points—confirmed by my own experience—is that small churches offer a greater possibility for the active participation in worship of all the congregation. Intimacy, immediacy, involvement, and community are readily available in small church worship. Thus, while smallness makes for challenges, it also means creative opportunities.

Ray talks about making worship authentic and appropriate to its context. He understands that worship done right informs and forms not only the congregation's life but the daily life of its members as well.

Wonderful Worship in Smaller Churches is almost a summation of Ray's own ministry. There are pros and cons to that. True, he has been successful—his parishes all experienced a dramatic reversal from decline to renewal—and his reminiscences are often charming and helpful. But sometimes the author tells too many of his own stories and it seems he is tooting his own horn. For my own theological tastes, he makes too much of experiencing God's immanence in small church worship (important as that is) and does not sufficiently appreciate the need, advisability, or even possibility of addressing God's transcendence in all worship.

Nevertheless, there is much to affirm about Ray's approach. I like his emphasis on preparing well for worship but also on being spontaneous and responsive. I enjoyed his admitting his own introversion, which led him to frame worship that is as comfortable for introverts as for extroverts. He also has many creative ideas about involving children in worship, and he makes good points about being open to reasonable change. I also appreciated his concrete advice for greeters, ushers, musicians, and children's storytellers.

There are relatively few resources on small church worship; in my extensive collection of books on worship, I have only one other on the subject. In this context, *Wonderful Worship* is a good basic book.

Rev. Dr. Arthur Paul Boers

Bloomington Mennonite Church
Bloomington, Ontario

BOOK REVIEW

Making Room at the Table

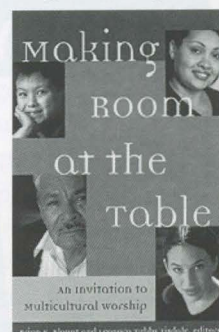
AN INVITATION TO
MULTICULTURAL WORSHIP

Brian K. Blount and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, eds.
Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000

Making Room at the Table is a collection of essays confronting issues of culture and worship in the context of Christian theological and biblical thought. Members of the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary author the twelve essays, which are divided among three sections: Biblical Foundations for Multicultural Worship, Theological Foundations for Multicultural Worship, and Toward Multicultural Worship Today.

The first essay demonstrates how imperceptible cultural categories shape our understanding of what is appropriate worship. The next, using stories from the Book of Acts, suggests that different conditions and locations require different strategies in worship. The third argues that multicultural worship, without a new imaginative framework, will unquestioningly adopt the assumptions of contemporary culture.

The most interesting essay in this first section is by Brian K. Blount. His exegesis of Jesus' condemnation of the temple in the Book of Mark leads to the conclusion that, "Since the temple has become an institutional symbol of nationalistic exclusivism, it must be destroyed before the inclusive kingdom vision that Jesus preaches in Mark can take root and



bear fruit" (p. 25). Therefore, since kingdom worship must be multicultural worship, we see our busy, prosperous, and homogeneous institutions as leafy, fruitless fig trees.

The essay in the second section that most engaged my thought processes is "Worship on the Edge" by Sang Hyun Lee. The author draws on Victor Turner's theory that worship is an experience of being freed from social structures and placed in an in-between state. This state of liminality or ambiguity can evoke a communion of equal individuals. Therefore,

Our conception of worship as liminality would imply that if truly cross- or multicultural worship is to occur, the people

of both cultural backgrounds should be led by their joint worship to an experience of being freed up from their own cultural structures as well as from their status in the society as a whole (p. 104).

In the third section, Geddes W. Hanson argues convincingly that if multicultural worship is to have any validity, "the cultures must merge to the extent that each recognizes itself—history, witness, and mission—in the other and is able to express that recognition in cultural terms to which both are committed" (p. 159).

The final essay, by Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, addresses the concern that theological depth is often sacrificed in contemporary worship. She describes deep worship as

worship that is concerned both with the glory of God and the edification of the worshipper, worship that is genuinely Trinitarian in nature, worship that is eschatological in the fullest sense of that term, and worship that addresses the whole person (heart, soul, mind, and strength) (p. 187).

This is no easy how-to-do-multicultural-worship cookbook, but a collection of serious, often contradictory essays about a complex and vital concern for today's congregations. If I were a pastor or lay leader in a multicultural community, this book would be the basis of a long-term study or, at the very least, a two-day retreat with my key leadership. I highly recommend it.

Rev. Roy W. Pneuman
Senior Consultant, Emeritus
The Alban Institute

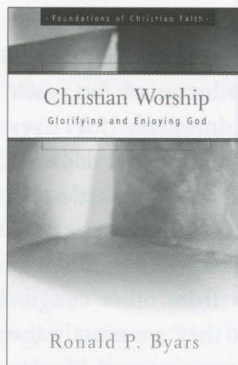
BOOK REVIEW

Christian Worship

GLORIFYING AND ENJOYING GOD

Ronald P. Byars

Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000



Among the many new books on worship, Ronald Byars' slim volume stands out as a clear, concise and jargon-free discussion of the core values of Christian worship. Byars says

the "purpose of worship is to participate in God's own life" (p. 27), and he stresses the need to involve heart, soul, and mind. Because Word (Scripture and sermon) and Sacraments (baptism and communion) are the central elements of worship, he describes their meaning, content, and history; he also emphasizes the importance of allowing for mystery. Byars calls Baptism the "drowning of the . . . self-absorbed self" (pp. 62–63), and in speaking of communion goes beyond the historically somber Last Supper to include many "pleasant meals" Jesus shared with others.

The author notes that the Protestants' rejection of idolatry led to an overcorrection that downplayed the frequency of communion, while Roman Catholics tended to minimize the role of the Word. Today, both traditions are revisiting the Bible and Christian history to recapture the "best worship [that] engages the whole self" (p. 100).

Byars addresses common questions and complaints about the church, such as

From War to Worship Harmony...

NOW . . . at last, help in finding a new way beyond the collision of partisan forces in the wars between contemporary worship and liturgical tradition.

In *Beyond the Worship Wars*,

Thomas G. Long looks at characteristics of vital and faithful worship.

"His words are wise, pastoral, and theologically astute."

William H. Willimon, Professor of Christian Ministry, Duke University

ISBN 1-56699-240-0, paperback, \$16.00

To order this and other Alban books:

1-800-486-1318, ext. 244
or online at
www.alban.org



"Why worship?", "Are people inside churches better or worse than those outside?", "Doesn't belief in the Trinity mean belief in three gods?", and "What does it mean that Jesus is host at communion, and why does a minister preside?" Each answer is highly civil and persuasive, inviting thoughtful consideration by readers.

In his closing chapter on the future of the church, Byars suggests being open to change but maintaining the basics of Christian worship, which are (1) rooted in Scripture, (2) sacramental (i.e., looking for God), (3) community-based, and (4) participative.

This book is part of the Foundations of the Christian Faith series, a follow-up to the classic Layman's Theological Library. It is appropriate for individual reading or group study.

Betsy Humphreys

Waldensian Presbyterian Church
Granite Falls, North Carolina

BOOK REVIEW

Why Religion Matters

THE FATE OF THE HUMAN
SPIRIT IN AN AGE OF
DISBELIEF

Huston Smith

New York: HarperCollins, 2001

"Imagine yourself in a bungalow in North India," writes Huston Smith, the greatest living authority on world religions. "You are standing before a picture window that commands a breathtaking view of the Himalayan Mountains. What modernity has done, in effect, is to lower the shade of that window to within two inches of its sill. With our eyes angled downward, all that we can see now of the outdoors is the ground on which the bungalow stands. In this analogy, the ground represents the material world—and to give credit where credit is richly due, science has shown that world to be awesome beyond belief. Still, it is not Mount Everest" (p. 193).

In this image-filled, mind-stretching, crisply presented and lucidly argued book, Smith brings a lifetime of experience and reflection to bear on an assessment of religion's recent history, current state, and prospects for the future. "Two worldviews, the traditional and the scientific, compete for the mind of the third millennium" (p. 193), he says. "We have dropped transcendence, not because we have discovered something better that proves it nonexistent. We have merely lowered our gaze" (p. 217).

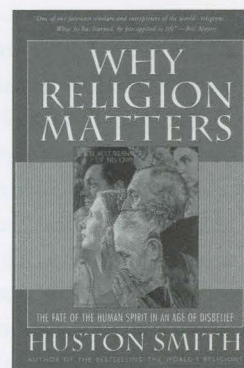
Scientism, the belief in science as an all-encompassing worldview, claims to be the most reliable method to get at fundamental reality. But science provides only the perspective of the lowest two inches of the picture window. Only a traditional religious worldview can give us the full view.

Science and religion are separate but interrelated domains. Both parties must respect the other's sphere of competence. Science is based ultimately on reason, and religion on faith. Both are important. The problem is, science has erased the traditional transcendental perspective from our reality map and claims exclusive rights. Science must not assume the role of religion, nor should religion attempt to establish and validate itself on a scientific base.

Modernity precipitated the loss of religious certainties. Now, meanings inherent to a strictly science-focused, progress-oriented worldview are ebbing in the era of postmodernism. We are globally enveloped in a spiritual crisis not unlike the political crisis that occurred with the fall of Soviet communism a decade ago.

We have lost our story, and modern stories have not replaced it. The traditional worldview speaks to the human heart's quest for profound meaning: a desire for oneness with creation and for happy endings. We live with the ambivalence of having abandoned traditional sources of knowledge, yet clinging to that same tradition to justify its values. We must recover a worldview that connects us to the final nature of things.

Smith refers to "flagship books" that help describe the loss, uncertainty, and efforts at rediscovery that are taking place. Readers will be led into the thought of T.S. Eliot, Bryan Appleyard, George Marsden, Edward Larson, Stephen Carter, and others. Investigations into these literary tributaries that feed the main stream of Smith's argument



become interesting excursions in themselves.

When Barbara Walters interviewed Monica Lewinsky about the scandal that almost destroyed the Clinton presidency, she asked the former intern if she had sinned. Lewinsky appeared taken aback. She hesitated and then answered, "I'm not very 'religious.' I'm more spiritual." This statement is a mantra common to our time. It is an attempt to claim concern for the larger questions without becoming committed to the religious institutions that exist to draw people into an encounter with those questions.

In the end, Smith's book is a defense of institutional expressions of faith as much as it is an affirmation of traditional religious values. Without the strong presence of institutional religion in a world of ever-expanding secular institutions, it will be difficult to envision a healthy future for the traditional meaning systems espoused and promoted here.

This book will occupy the thoughts of readers long after its contents are digested.

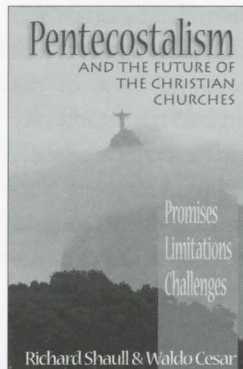
Rev. Dr. Wayne A. Holst
University of Calgary
Calgary, Alberta

BOOK REVIEW

Pentecostalism and the Future of the Christian Churches

PROMISES, LIMITATIONS, CHALLENGES

Richard Shaull and Waldo Cesar
Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000



Pentecostalism in all its varied forms has been declared a new world religion by some and the "third force in Christianity" by others. To still others, it has brought consternation due to its continued vitality and rapid growth.

Most of this explosive growth has occurred outside the United States, principally in Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America. In *Pentecostalism and the Future of the Christian Churches*, a seasoned Brazilian sociologist and a senior American theologian develop some ideas they concocted many years ago and recently had the opportunity to apply to the fastest growing sector of Christendom in Latin America. Their goal was to fuse sociological analysis with theological exegesis, the principal objective being to understand Pentecostalism as a religious reality.

One hope was that such an analysis would inform other branches of Christianity, especially in light of Pentecostalism's marked appeal to the poor and suffering of the world—a segment that more traditional forms of

Christendom have found difficult to reach or engage in large numbers. The volume serves as a resource for reflection on Christian social responsibility in today's world and may fruitfully be read alongside Ronald Sider's *Just Generosity* (Baker Books, 1999), which considers poverty in America.

In the first of two major parts, Cesar paints a portrait of the poor and disenfranchised in Latin America, showing how Pentecostalism provides a transcendence that is positively liberating in their everyday lives. Shaull, in the second half of the book, engages in a theological exegesis of how Pentecostalism transforms church beliefs and practices in the service of the poor and how the Pentecostal experience of reality lays the groundwork for social transformation.

Both authors are seasoned observers and participants in the life of the Church in Latin America, and they bring powerful perspectives to bear in this landmark study. Their discussion draws heavily upon, and at times disagrees with, significant earlier analyses of Pentecostalism by scholars such as Harvey Cox, Walter Hollenweger, David Martin, and Jean-Jacques Surmond and sociological and anthropological giants like Peter Berger, Marcea Eliade, and Max Weber. The authors find that Pentecostals "are not only making a tremendous contribution to the reorganization of the lives of individual women and men but also engaging in creating new elementary forms of community and social life" (p. 227). They also recognize the singular importance of the work of the Holy Spirit and call on Christians everywhere to realize the Spirit anew.

The empowerment that life in the Spirit brings to the individual is a driving force behind social change in Latin America. Shaull and Cesar clearly were profoundly moved by what they wit-

Learn More

RESOURCES ON WORSHIP FROM THE CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCE GUIDE



nessed, while retaining a critical perspective of what they perceive to be inherent inconsistencies in Pentecostal theology and practice. Churches in America wishing to expand their work among marginal groups in our society and mission groups seeking a better understanding of religious and social change in Latin America will benefit from this book.

Rev. Dennis W. Cheek

New Beginnings Christian Fellowship
Mansfield, Massachusetts

Witvliet

continued from page 21

the conversation beyond style. One of the worship leader's primary tasks is to link questions about style to conversations about meaning. Without this, congregations will either fall into sleepy repetition or head into deep conflict.

While the most frequent questions on those evaluation forms may be about strategy and style, the most urgent ones are about pastoral leaders:

- How do we find, keep, and train competent worship leaders?
- What kind of ongoing training is helpful?
- How can our leaders learn to identify our underlying spiritual needs?

These questions get to the heart of what is needed in congregations today—not so much another songbook, a new prayerbook, a fancier sound system, or better worship space, but discerning, nurturing leaders with the instincts to connect specific strategies and practices with a rich spiritual vision of worship and the imagination and persistence to enable congregations to practice them. ☛

- ❖ Basden, Paul. *The Worship Maze: Finding a Style to Fit Your Church* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999). This book describes and analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of five basic styles of worship—liturgical, traditional, revivalist, praise and worship, and the seeker service—and outlines a process by which a congregation can make a wise choice about which style fits it best.
- ❖ Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. The Worship Bookshelf (Web Site). The Worship Bookshelf provides a wide variety of resources for anyone involved in thinking about worship and in planning or leading worship.
- ❖ Committee to Study Worship, Christian Reformed Church. *Authentic Worship in a Changing Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: CRC Publishers, 1997). This synodical study—which includes group study questions—analyzes dominant features of contemporary culture, provides some thought-provoking theological reflection, and addresses several specific questions churches are asking about worship.
- ❖ Dawn, Marva J. *A Royal "Waste" of Time: The Splendor of Worshipping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), and *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Eerdmans, 1995). Dawn is strongly committed to liturgical worship, and shows why and how such services of worship can be inviting. She argues that worship is not "for" anything—not for gaining members, making us smarter, or entertaining us. These are good books for those who seek renewal in worship without abandoning the richness of tradition and theological integrity.
- ❖ Hustad, Donald. *True Worship: Reclaiming the Wonder and Majesty* (Colorado Springs: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1998). Church musician and seminary professor Donald Hustad examines various styles and forms of services—including traditional, charismatic, seeker, and praise—to glean the essentials of "true worship."
- ❖ Lathrop, Gordon W., ed. *Open Questions in Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books). This series explores current issues and practices in Christian worship from a variety of perspectives.
- ❖ Long, Thomas G. *Beyond the Worship Wars: Building Vital and Faithful Worship* (Bethesda, Md.: The Alban Institute, 2001). This book discusses the nine characteristics of vital and faithful worship practiced by a wide range of "third-way" congregations.
- ❖ Maynard-Reid, Pedrito U. *Diverse Worship: African-American, Caribbean, and Hispanic Perspectives* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000). This book explores the relationship between the universal elements and the cultural particularities of Christian worship and analyzes the relationship between rationality and emotion in worship practices.
- ❖ Morgenthaler, Sally. *Worship Evangelism: Inviting Unbelievers Into the Presence of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999). This book offers a paradigm in which public worship services are a primary means for accomplishing the church's evangelistic task. The book argues for a highly participatory form of contemporary worship, in contrast to more presentational seeker services.
- ❖ Wilson-Kastner, Patricia. *Sacred Drama: A Spirituality of Christian Liturgy*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1999). This book opens up the meaning of Christian worship and discusses its implications for both Christian prayer and Christian life in the world.

www.congregationalresources.org

Setting Up an Endowment Fund

Q

My congregation is expecting its first bequest. We would like to use it to establish an endowment fund. A stockbroker in the congregation offered to manage it for us, but we're wondering if this is wise. We're also worried that the endowment will have a bad effect on member giving to the church. What should we do?

A

Give thanks that you have the opportunity to structure your endowment now, before it has any money in it! It is much easier to plan when you don't have the worry of managing funds at the same time.

I would say, "Thanks, but no thanks" to the stockbroker. You want an arm's-length, businesslike relationship with your fund manager. Also, a broker's expertise can be expensive if he or she is earning commissions on investments. Many local congregations place their endowments in a joint denominational fund. Brokerage and mutual fund companies and the trust departments of banks also manage this type of fund.

It is true that sometimes, when a congregation has a large endowment, members ask, "Why should I give generously?" This kind of thinking can decrease annual giving and deprive members of their feeling of ownership and responsibility for the congregation and its mission. To avoid or correct this situation, some congregations adopt a policy limiting the amount of endowment income that can be used for internal purposes. For example, in one congregation the endowment matches giving by members, and any excess income is given to other organizations.

Properly managed, an endowment enables a congregation to endure hard times and to achieve goals beyond its current means. But when a single board is vested with the dual responsibilities of preserving the fund and using it to support the congregation's mission, the temptation to overspend by "borrowing" from the endowment is strong. Two alternate structures that can work well are (1) a separate corporation whose trustees are elected by the congregation or its governing board, and (2) an endowment committee that is part of the congregation but has some independence from the governing board.

Sound policies are necessary for any endowment to be an

effective means of fulfilling the congregation's mission. The following policies should be in place:

1. Spending. This policy governs how much of the total investment return from the endowment is available each year. The most common spending policy calculates, on the same day each year, the average market value of the fund on that date for the last three to five years. A fixed percentage, typically 4.5 to 5.5, is then applied to the average.

2. Asset allocation. Even if the fund is managed by an outside agency, trustees still must decide how to allocate the fund among broad classes of investments, such as stocks, bonds, and money market securities. A typical allocation for endowed funds would be 70% stocks and 30% bonds, with the majority of the stock invested in established domestic firms and a small portion allocated to smaller and overseas firms.

3. Socially responsible investing. One advantage of a denominational investment fund is that its policies are likely to correspond to the values of the congregation. Private investment firms also offer socially responsible funds. Some endowments invest in special projects, such as assisting new congregations, backing low-cost housing, or microlending. Obviously, money invested this way would produce little cash income in the short run and might be lost entirely. However such enterprises, if they further the institutional mission, could be part of a full financial plan.



Rev. Dan Hotchkiss is an Alban Institute field consultant and Unitarian Universalist minister based in Boston who consults widely with congregations on financial and strategic planning, conflict management, and clergy transition. He currently is writing a book for clergy on financial leadership.

New Worship Title from the Alban Institute...

How We Seek God Together

Exploring Worship Style

By Linda J. Clark, Joanne Swenson, and Mark Stamm

AL 233

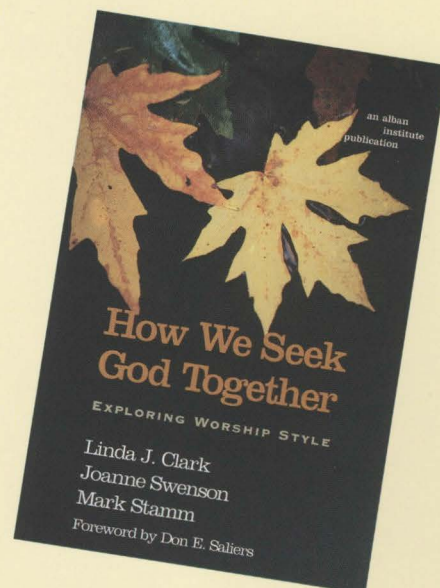
\$20.00 (video included)

In the debates about worship within congregations, the word *style* frequently crops up. What do people mean by that word? Ordinarily, when we use the term *style*, we are referring to a woman or man who is well dressed. For example, there is a "Style" section in the Sunday *New York Times*, which features pictures of people on the streets of New York wearing the latest fashions—cashmere shawls, leopard-spotted Capri pants, the new shade of lipstick.

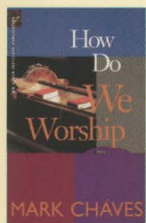
But we synagogue- and churchgoers are not arguing about New York fashion trends or the latest hair-styles. We are using the term *style* to refer to something more profound than that. Think for a moment about the hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," by Martin Luther. The versions of this hymn, as printed in most new mainline denominational hymnals, look virtually identical. However, when sung, the hymn takes on an amazing variety of sounds. It is sung in four-part harmony by Mennonites in Iowa; in an upbeat, unison style of the 16th-century "rhythmic chorale" by some Lutherans in Minneapolis; slowly and with a hint of "sway" at the AME Zion church in Boston. What differs in how the hymn is sung is style. The styles of these renditions reflect the time and place in which the people sing.

... The style of a congregation's life together is the face of its soul, a vital expression of its character. The congregational studies in *How We Seek God Together* introduce three such "faces" to you. You will learn of the way that they began, something of their present life, and an aspect of their worship life that gives you a good idea of their style and piety. These snapshots of their life are not comprehensive but suggestive. They are written with the aim to illustrate the basic concepts of the book and to help you discover and interpret your own style.

Adapted from *How We Seek God Together: Exploring Worship Style* by Linda J. Clark, Joanne Swenson, and Mark Stamm. Copyright © 2001 by the Alban Institute. All rights reserved.



Other Worship Titles from Alban...

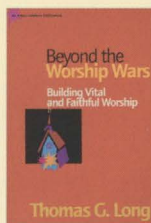


How Do We Worship?

By Mark Chaves

AL215

\$6.95



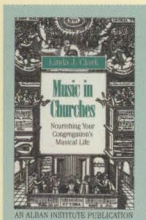
Beyond the Worship Wars

Building Vital and Faithful Worship

By Thomas G. Long

AL231

\$16.00



Music in Churches

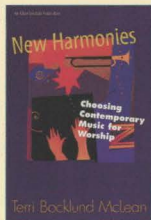
Nourishing Your

Congregation's Musical Life

By Linda J. Clark

AL155

\$14.00



New Harmonies

Choosing Contemporary Music for Worship

By Terri Bocklund McLean

AL196

\$17.95

To order Alban books: online at
www.alban.org or call 1-800-486-1318



About the Alban Institute

CONGREGATIONS is a bimonthly publication of the Alban Institute, a nonprofit, interfaith **membership organization** founded in 1974 to provide a comprehensive range of resources to Christian and Jewish congregations. **Our mission** is to provide clergy and lay leaders with practical, research-based information and ideas for effective ministry as they grapple with an ever-changing environment.

The Alban Institute serves leaders—both ordained and lay—across the denominational spectrum through **consulting services, education events, book and periodical publishing, and research**. Our work is supported by membership revenue, grant funding, and the sale of programs, services, and publications.

The Alban Institute **encourages dialogue** with many faith traditions, people of diverse ethnicity, men and women, large and small congregations, and urban and rural congregations. We invite you to join in conversation with us by becoming a member or writing an article for CONGREGATIONS—or both! Please call us at 301-718-4407 or send an e-mail to pwalker@alban.org.

www.alban.org

Coming in
September . . .

Leadership

- ❖ Alban Institute president James P. Wind's assessment of the current leadership situation in American churches
- ❖ Why clergy need to be deep generalists
- ❖ Interviews with African American church leaders about their challenges and opportunities
- ❖ An executive coach's perspective on leadership issues in churches vs. corporations

The Alban Institute

7315 Wisconsin Avenue
Suite 1250W
Bethesda, MD 20814-3211