

WORSHIP MANUAL

by
David C. Stone

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This document is very much a continuing effort. It is an attempt to express a theology and philosophy of corporate worship that is becoming increasingly prevalent in churches across both denominational and international borders. This third edition contains greatly expanded content in chapter 1 (The Meaning of Worship) and some additional material in chapter 2 (Corporate Worship). This includes corrections, additional references and a short Bible survey that fills in some of the background material to the text. The first revision finally includes the material on the Tabernacle (section 2.5) and the beginnings of a study on the history of worship (chapter 3, incomplete), as well as some minor section renumbering. I still fully intend to add a chapter on leading worship, but I got a little sidetracked! If you enjoy reading this document, or have any comments or suggestions, please write to me at the address below. I look forward to hearing from you!

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About the Author

David Stone is a long-time member of The Stone Church (no connection!), Toronto, Canada, where he has been involved in many aspects of worship. Prior to that he was involved in music ministry at All Saints, Thorpe Acre, UK. Through a series of moves, his church connections have varied considerably and therefore refers to himself as an Anglipentacostamethabrethabaptist. He is proud to be a husband, father, musician and chemist. He has never had any of his songs published in a major worship collection, has not been the worship leader on an Integrity Hosanna or Vineyard worship album, and has never led a praise march. He is a semi-regular contributor to Churchbass - an email discussion group for those who play bass in a church setting.

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1 The Meaning of Worship

Open worship; free worship; traditional worship; private worship; corporate worship; worship songs; worship tapes; worship concerts; worship seminars - it seems that worship is increasingly a topic of interest and debate both within the Church as a whole and within local congregations. It would also seem that opinions on what constitutes “good” or “appropriate” worship are as varied and numerous as the individuals who make up the church itself! There is an increasing awareness of the importance of worship in the life and ministry of the church, yet there are very few subjects as potentially divisive, either. In his book, “Worship”, Graham Kendrick pointed out that a neutral observer to disputes over the “correct” way to worship might conclude that worship was conducted purely for the benefit and satisfaction of the participants. He goes on to say, “Regrettably, there is often some truth in this...” It would seem that in spite of all the interest *in* worship, the true nature *of* worship is not effectively communicated.

This document is an attempt to present a clear statement of worship in its most general sense as expressed in the Bible, providing a framework within which to consider the role of those involved in planning and leading worship services. As such I have attempted to make it as “unattached” to any particular denomination or style of worship as possible. The current form of this document is a revision and condensation of an earlier Bible survey and practical manual prepared for use by the Young Adults group of my home church. It is the result of over ten years involvement in, and study of, worship, but is neither complete nor exhaustive - I am still growing in my own understanding and experience of worship, and I expect I will be still ten years from now! I have included a bibliography that, of necessity, reflects my own tastes and biases. I have, however, read all of these and believe that there is something of value in each one regardless of denomination or style of worship. I have tried to keep the number of Scripture references down within the actual text. To compensate, I have included a selection of additional references in section 1.5. These could well be used as the basis for a bible study or two!

There is one final point I want to raise in order to avoid any potential confusion. Many contemporary writers (such as Graham Kendrick and Carl Tuttle) discuss “praise” and “worship” as two distinct things. It may appear in this respect that I am at odds with such a distinction; however the real problem is that the English language allows several usages of the word “worship”. In fact, I can think of at least four common ones. Firstly, there is the service we typically gather together on a Sunday for: I refer to this as our *corporate worship*. Secondly, there

is a style or phase of corporate worship that is quieter and more reflective than praise: I prefer to distinguish these as *contemplation* and *celebration*. Thirdly, some use the word simply to mean “singing choruses” as opposed to hymns or psalms: I will just say singing choruses! Finally, there is the use of the word in its fullest possible sense, which is how I will use it here. When I talk of worship in this document, then, mentally substitute “celebration and contemplation” wherever other authors say “praise and worship”, and consider these as simply two aspects of a much larger whole. Having hopefully averted any misunderstanding on this issue, let us look at what this larger view of worship may be.

1.1 What Is Worship?

The English word “worship” is derived from the Anglo-Saxon **weorthscipe**, meaning to ascribe worth, to pay homage, to reverence or venerate. Similarly, the Hebrew word most commonly translated “worship” in the Old Testament is **shâchâh** which literally means “to prostrate (oneself), bow down, fall down flat, do reverence”. It often appears in conjunction with different words that mean “bow down”, “fall down” and “serve”. The most commonly used Greek word is **proskuneo** which literally means “to kiss towards”, and apparently referred originally to a gesture of deference or obeisance towards a superior.¹ In fact in John’s vision of heaven as recorded in Revelation we find the same combination of falling down and worshipping (Rev. 4:10; 5:14.) Both the Old and New Testament terms convey the sense of paying homage to and honouring a ruler, since prostrating oneself before and kissing the hand of another have both been signs of submission and fealty in various cultures throughout history. This image communicates four things about worship:

- Worship has an *object*
- Worship involves an *expression*
- Worship expresses a *hierarchy or dependence*
- Worship has a *context*

The first of these is obvious from the definitions we have given above. Some one or some thing is esteemed as being of great worth, and a suitable object

¹ Many writers on worship interpret *proskuneo* in contemporary terms of approaching in intimacy, although the word origins do not seem to support such an interpretation. This is not to deny intimacy as an important part of worship, simply to point out that we must look elsewhere than the definition of this one particular Greek word.

of devotion. The action also follows from our definitions, being the physical expression of devotion to the first. The hierarchy (or dependence) is implied by the concepts of homage and reverence - that is, the object of worship is deemed to be of greater worth than the worshipper. In human terms, of course, this may have been enforced by the necessity of saving one's life! The image also implies the necessity of a context. This can be seen since bowing down to and kissing the hand of another obviously implies being in their presence. It is worth stating that *anyone or anything* can become an object of worship to us. Whatever we devote ourselves to, whatever occupies our thoughts, emotions, desires and decisions and governs the way we live our lives - whether sport, family, work, wealth, fame or pleasure - that, in the very broadest sense of the word, is what we worship.

1.2 Worshipping God

We have just looked at what worship is in a very general sense. We turn now to the subject of what the Bible teaches about worshipping God. Once again, we will tackle this subject in the broadest terms first before looking at more specific aspects of the subject. There are a large number of passages that we could consider, but for the sake of brevity we will concentrate on just one that illustrates the key points. This is the encounter of Jesus with the woman at the well of Sychar. First, though, some background.

Sychar lay in the region of Samaria, roughly 10 miles to the south-east of the city of Samaria and north of Jerusalem. The city of Samaria became the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel following Solomon's death (1 Kings 12, 16:24). The region was conquered by the Assyrians, who exiled a large portion of the population and resettled the area with other peoples. These then intermarried with the remaining Israelites, and became worshippers of God while continuing to also worship their own gods (2 Kings 17:1-41). When the exiles returned to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, the Samaritans volunteered to help but were refused because of their mixed blood and religious practices (Ezra 4:1-3). In the 4th century BC, the Samaritan ruler Sanballat married his daughter to Manasseh, brother of a Jewish high priest (Neh. 13:28). This was far from popular with the Jewish authorities, who tried to change Manasseh's mind. To convince him to stay, Sanballat built a replica of Jerusalem's second temple on Mt. Gerizim and appointed Manasseh as high priest. This strained relations even more, and the temple on Mt. Gerizim was ultimately destroyed by the Jews in 128 BC. It is against this background that the encounter recorded in John 4:1-26 takes place.

We pick up the conversation at verse 19. Having aroused the woman's curiosity with His talk of “living water” and confronted her with the facts of her lifestyle, she raises the question of where is the correct place to worship. This may have been a ploy to redirect the conversation away from her and into the old controversy, or a real desire to know the truth. In either case, Jesus’ response is revealing:

“... a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.” (v21)

In other words, the physical location is *not* important. Given the centrality of the Temple in Jerusalem to Jewish worship, this is already quite a departure. In other words, it is not “being in church” that defines what “true worship” is.

“You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews”. (v22)

The main distinction between Jews and Samaritans was not the issue of the Temple or religious practices, but of Divine revelation. In fact, the issues of *knowing* and *relationship* is central to worship. It was to the Jewish people that God chose to reveal Himself through the Exodus, the crossing of the desert and coming into the promised land; and through the giving of the law and the testimony of the prophets. And it was through the nation of Israel that a Saviour was to come who would be a light to all the nations (Isa. 51:4).

“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks.” (v23)

There are two key thoughts here. One is that the Father is actively seeking worshippers - He has taken the initiative. The second is that true worship is in “spirit and in truth”. In other words, we see the importance of worship being informed by revelation - our worship involves the known, not the unknown. If this knowing depended solely on our efforts, we would be in trouble! Fortunately for us, just as the Father has taken the initiative to seek out worshippers, He has taken the initiative to make Himself known to us (John 14:8-9, Heb. 1:1-3).

“God is spirit, and His worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.”
(v24)

The question of what it means to worship “in spirit” is doubtless open to considerable interpretation, depending on one’s theological stance. We can make some general observations, however. The first is that worship is not *primarily* about externals - it is not the outward performance of religious duties and ceremony that is most important. Rather, it is the inner attitude and devotion that is of greatest concern. The second is that, since God is spirit, we must be spiritually alive to Him. As Jesus declared to Nicodemus, “unless a man is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God” (John 3:3). In other words, a purely academic approach to knowing and understanding God is an insufficient basis for what Jesus referred to as “true worship” - it must be born out of a personal experience and encounter with God. Once again we emphasize that if this depended entirely upon our efforts we would not succeed, but “with God, nothing is impossible” (Luke 18:27; see also 1 Cor. 2:6-15.)

In terms of our four aspects of worship, we can summarize the above in the following way:

- the *object* of our worship is God Himself
- the *context* of our worship is a relationship initiated by God
- the *dependence* of our worship is that of created on Creator
- the *expression* of our worship is a response to His revealed truth

It is interesting to look at the responses of different individuals to God’s revelation of Himself throughout the Biblical record. Once again there are a large number that we could choose, however the following is a representative selection:

- Gen. 17:1-8 - God establishes covenant with Abraham
- Exod. 34:4-8 - God declares His Name to Moses
- Josh. 5:13-15 - Joshua’s encounter near Jericho
- Matt. 14:25-33 - the Disciples’ encounter with Jesus in the storm
- Luke 24:50-52 - the Ascension

What is of particular relevance to our discussion is not just what happened on these specific occasions, but how that affected each individual’s life from then on. Another dramatic example would be Saul’s conversion in Acts 9 and his subsequent life and letters. My favourite definition of what we might call “Biblical worship” is:

“Worship is our individual and corporate response to God's revelation of Himself within the context of a covenant relationship.”

Pastor Earl McNutt, from sermon at The Stone Church, Canada

If you have stuck with me so far, then I think you will agree that there is very broad scope for considering the specific what, why, where and how of worship. If worship is truly “ascribing worth”, and we take seriously what the Bible reveals to us about God's person, nature and character, then our worship must impact our whole lives. Indeed, this is in keeping with both the Old and New Testament linking of the concepts of worship and service, or lifestyle (1 Sam. 15:22ff, Isa. 58:2-7, Hos. 6:6, Matt. 4:10 quoting Deut. 6:13, Rom. 12:1, James 2:17,18). Passages such as Isa. 58:2-7 can make for uncomfortable reading, but they underline the fundamental teaching of Christ:

“...‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ The second is like it ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matt 22:37-40, quoting Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18)

The first of these is of course a summary of the first three of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:3-7):

- You shall have no other gods before Me
- You shall not make or worship idols
- You shall not misuse My Name

We are therefore *commanded* to worship God! Now, this may appear to some as arbitrary and high-handed on God's part, but I think it helps put this into perspective to compare these “spiritual laws” with what we might call the “natural laws” of science. That is, the spiritual laws simply express the reality of our universe on a spiritual level just as the natural laws express its physical reality. You can, of course, ignore or defy these laws just as you could the laws of gravity or thermodynamics, but you do so at the risk of suffering the consequences!

1.3 Worship: Our Purpose and Destiny

One of the key truths we need to grasp is that we were, in fact, *created to worship God*. This can be seen throughout the Bible. Genesis 3:8-9, for example, shows that God sought out Adam and Eve, implying that His intent in creation was to establish and maintain relationship with us. We have already mentioned

passages from the historical books and psalms that touch on this, but it is also the conclusion of the Teacher of Ecclesiastes from his investigation in to the meaning of life (Ecc. 3:11; 12:13.) The heart of God for intimate relationship with His people and **not** idle or insincere fulfillment of ceremonial obligations is also displayed over and over in the prophets (Jer. 31:30-34; Hos. 6:1-6; Joel 2:12--32; Amos 5:21-24). In the New Testament, we have both the teaching and example of Christ (Matt. 11:25-30; John 6:35-51; John 17:1-26), the exhortations found throughout the letters and, finally, the glorious destiny portrayed so vibrantly in John's vision (Rev. 5:6-14.) This teaching has also been recognized historically by the church, such as the following statement:

“Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever”

Westminster Shorter Catechism

In this context, it also becomes easier to understand how anything that detracts from giving God His worth, or that becomes more important in determining our actions and priorities, is a form of idolatry. In other words, the internal attitude is just as important - if not more so - than the external actions (Matt. 5:21-24.) Again, it is helpful to put this into perspective. We know that the Spirit of God is the Spirit of Truth, and that we must worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:23; 15:26; 1 John 5:6.) Idolatry, in essence, denies the truth of God by either denying His existence or character, or by short-changing His worth. The truth of God is thus exchanged for a lie (Rom. 1:25), and this lie prevents us from experiencing the relationship with God that He so earnestly desires. It is not, therefore, the case that God punishes idolatry out of spite or hurt feelings; rather it is the inescapable consequence of the fact that, in the absolute of heaven, the truth of God simply cannot coexist with a lie. Truly, it is “Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail” (Lam. 3:22) - which is yet another reason to worship our awesome God!

There is a third dimension to worship which is related to purpose and destiny, namely *formation*. We have already discussed one aspect of the meaning of worshipping in “spirit and in truth”, being informed revelation. Another aspect is the effect that expressing spiritual truth has on our souls. One of the common dilemmas faced by those who take their worship seriously is, “How can I worship honestly when I just don't feel like it?” Life has a way of opposing devotion through a variety of means, and so there will always be times when it seems hypocritical to sing songs of praise and worship because it isn't the way we *feel*. The answer to this is something that the Puritans knew well: there is no greater antidote to such feelings than the injection of biblical truth. Recognition that God

is worthy of worship and praise simply for who He is *regardless* of our feelings or circumstances, and expressing that truth in obedience to His command, has the effect of putting life back into a proper perspective. If we put aside our feelings and base our worship on the truth about God, our feelings will follow along and we experience the formation of Christ-like character in our lives. Worship can and should be a dynamic experience in which we encounter the Living God; when this happens, life-changing spiritual formation results. Constant exposure to spiritual truth in the presence of God can renew our hearts and minds and lead us into a deeper relationship with God (John 8:32, Rom. 12:2, Titus 3:5,6.) There are clear examples of this in the Psalms (see the references in section 1.5), but perhaps a more dramatic example is found in the book of Job.

Job had a good family, incredible wealth, and the respect of his community. God's blessing was on his life, and his friends often turned to him for spiritual help. Then it all went wrong... At first, we read that Job did not sin by cursing God for taking away his family, wealth and health, but he was obviously a man desperately searching for answers. Then Job snapped, cursed the day he was born, and began *demanding* answers (Job 3:1.) In essence, Job felt that God was being unfair and punishing him for something he never did; he insisted that God should show up and justify Himself, that God *owed* him an explanation. The famous line, "even though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him" is not, as often quoted, a statement of faith under extreme duress, but the defiance of a desperate, hurt - and self-righteous - man. Job's friends were not much help. They realized that Job was raging against God because of his suffering, but assumed that God was simply punishing Job for some terrible sin he had committed (just as Job's former life had been God's blessing for Job's righteousness). Their constant urging of Job to confess and repent just made Job even more angry. Finally, God reveals Himself to Job and Job is overwhelmed by the encounter. Job experiences first-hand what I call the Scientist's Paradox: "The more I learn, the more I realize how little I truly know." The key verse is found right at the end of the book:

"My ears had heard of You but now my eyes have seen You"
(Job 42:5)

Whatever the reasons for Job's suffering (and Job never does get the answer to that question), his understanding of God has been radically and irrevocably altered. His faith has been firmly shoved from his head into the very core of his being, and he will never be the same man again. This is, in essence, what true worship does to us. While our situation may never be as extreme as Job's, encountering the Living God through worship will leave us changed in some way.

When we worship God with our whole lives and being, we experience spiritual formation within.

1.4 Expressions of Worship

The *expression* of our worship can take many different forms, both in terms of our individual response and corporate worship services. On an individual basis it can be the way we make decisions, the priorities we set for our lives and the way we deal with others as much as prayer, giving, singing, reading or any of the other ways in which we respond to God. In a corporate setting, we see many examples throughout Scripture including praise, adoration, fasting and prayer. The psalms in particular are filled with references to singing, dancing, meditating, using various instruments, raising hands and bowing down. It is also interesting to note the dramatic re-enactment of significant events in Israel's history through the Passover and the Festival of Booths - worship events that are still carried out today. We should also note the rich symbolism of the fittings and furnishings of the Tabernacle and Temple. As I hope to demonstrate in chapter 3, liturgy and ritual were also important components of this worship, while physical expressions are also important in terms of worship as formation. Clearly, then, there is a broad palette of worship expressions from which we can draw, depending on our context and cultural environment.

Finally, we should note once again that worship includes the concept of service, which implies practical action on our part both individually and corporately as an outward expression of our inward devotion (James 2:17-18.) We have already touched briefly on this issue, but it is worth revisiting here. When Satan offered Jesus rule over the earth if Jesus would worship him, Jesus responded by quoting from Deuteronomy:

“All this I will give you,” [the devil] said, “if You will bow down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'" (Matt. 4:9-10)

Interestingly, the verse in Deut. 6:13 reads “Fear (reverence) the Lord your God, serve Him only...” where the word translated as “serve” is **'âbad**, which can also be translated both as to be a bond-servant and to be a worshipper. It often appears with **schâchâh**, and is rendered as to “fall down and worship” or “worship and serve”, and includes the priestly ministering of the Levites. A similar dual meaning is found in the Greek word **latreia**, derived from the word for a hired menial:

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – which is your spiritual worship [service]” (Rom. 12:1)

The more we clearly understand that God alone is to be worshipped, that He is indeed the only One worthy of our praise, and the more we see and experience for ourselves His love, greatness, goodness and mercy, the easier it will be to fulfill this first and greatest commandment (Matt. 22:37ff.) It is also important to remember that there is a corporate dimension to this worship: a friend has pointed out to me that the Greek for “sacrifice” in the above verse is actually singular, not plural. His point is that our worship - whether at church, at home or at work - is never offered in isolation but always in the context of relationships with others, thus binding the second greatest commandment to the first. Indeed, this is exactly the example that Christ lived out for us. Interestingly, Paul seems to echo Jesus' words from John 4:24 in his letter to the Philippians:

“For it is we who are the [true] circumcision, we who worship [serve] by [in] the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus...” (Phil. 3:3)

Whilst elsewhere we read:

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
(Rom. 15:5,6)

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”
(Col. 3:15-17)

In other words, the whole realm of life's activities and relationships (and especially those within the church) are to be lived out as an act of worship. This same pattern can also be seen in John's vision of heavenly worship as recorded in Revelation 4 – God is enthroned at the centre of the assembled worshippers and is the focus of all things. How is this possible? Humanly speaking, it isn't; the

distinguishing feature between the worship we are called to and mere religious observance or societal conformity is that it is possible only through the indwelling presence of God Himself, so that **all** things might truly be by Him, for Him, through Him, and to Him.

“Now to Him Who is able to do immeasurably more than all ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work in us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!

Amen.”

(Eph. 3:20-21)

Let me close this first chapter, then, with a redefining of biblical worship in its fullest possible sense:

Worship is a life lived to the glory of God

1.5 Short Bible Survey

WORSHIP STARTS WITH GOD

Consider the following encounters of individuals with God. Who initiated the contact, what was involved, and what was the result?

- Gen. 8:19–22 (Noah)
- Gen. 35:9–15 (Jacob)
- Josh. 5:13–15 (Joshua)
- Matt. 14:25–33 (Disciples)
- Matt. 28:16,17
- Luke 24:52
- Acts 2:46,47
- Gen. 17:1–8 (Abraham)
- Exod. 34:4–8 (Moses)
- Isa. 6:1–8 (Isaiah)
- Matt. 28:1–10
- Luke 5:8 (Peter)
- John 21:24–28 (Thomas)

WORSHIP IS FOR GOD

Consider the following small selection of passages. What reasons do they give us for worshipping God?

- Exod. 20:3
- 2 Kings 17:35,36
- Psm. 66:1–4
- Psm. 99:5,9
- Rom. 12:1
- Deut. 6:4,5,13 (c.f. Matt. 4:8–10)
- 1 Chron. 16:8–36, esp. v29
(also Psm. 29:1,2)
- Psm. 95, 96
- Psm. 117
- Rev. 14:6,7

WORSHIP IS OUR DESTINY

Reflect on the following passages. What do they tell us about the importance of worship?

- Psm. 86:9
- Zeph. 2:11
- Rev. 5:13
- Isa. 66:23
- 1 Peter 2:9,10
- Rev. 15:1–4

WORSHIP IS GOOD FOR YOU!

Consider the following Psalms. How did worshipping God help the writers? Why do you think this worked?

- Psalm 42, 43
- Psalm 69
- Psalm 73

1.6 Bibliography

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- 2 “Creeds, Councils and Christ”, by Gerald Bray, Intervarsity Press, 1984. An account of the origins of the "statements of faith" such as the Nicene and Apostle's Creeds - excellent reading for those interested in church history and the use of such statements in worship.
- 3 “Ten Praying Churches”, edited by Donald English, MARC Monarch Publications, Eastbourne, UK, 1989. Illustrates the parallel growth in the prayer and worship lives of different churches during spiritual renewal.
- 4 “The Gifts of the Spirit”, by Cecil Cousen, Kingsway Publications, Eastbourne, UK, 1986. An excellent practical guide to the charismatic gifts, including much helpful instruction on tongues, interpretation and prophecy in worship. Not heavily theological, but drawn from extensive first-hand experience.
- 5 “In This Sanctuary”, by Twila Paris with Robert Webber, Star Song Publishing Group, 1993. A good introduction and “kicking-off” point for discussion and study. Includes the story behind several of Twila’s songs.
- 6 “Shine Jesus Shine”, by Graham Kendrick, Word Books, 1992.
- 7 “March For Jesus”, by Graham Kendrick, Gerald Coates, Roger Forster and Lynn Green, Kingsway Publications, 1992. Historical perspectives on praise marches. Tells how the first “March For Jesus” grew from very simple origins and came together as a “grassroots” movement.
- 8 “Public Praise”, by Graham Kendrick, Creation House, 1992. A more in-depth discussion of issues relating to taking praise onto the streets.
- 9 “Worship is a Verb”, by Robert E. Webber, Abott Martyn, 1992. Eight principles of worship. Excellent thought-provoking stuff and full of quotable quotes. May especially appeal to Anglican/Catholic/Presbyterian readers.

- 10 “A Heart Aflame”, by Don McMinn, NCM Press, Irving, Texas. A Bible study course on worship consisting of 19 individual studies for personal and group use. Some challenging thoughts and quotable quotes.
- 11 “Worship Leader”. A magazine published bimonthly by CCM Communications, Nashville, Tennessee. Devoted to articles on worship and worship leading.
- 12 “Leadership”. A magazine published quarterly by Christianity Today, Inc. Intended primarily for those in pastoral leadership, this magazine contains much of value to those involved in lay leadership. While not specifically on worship, there are frequently articles of relevance. As an added bonus, Leadership has some of the best cartoons going!
- 13 “Things They Didn't Teach Me in Worship Leading School”. Edited by Tom Kraeuter, Emerald Books/Training Resources, ISBN 1-883002-31-1. Full of good points to chew on, insights and comic relief, this is a series of short articles by a large number of well-known worship leaders.
- 14 “Worship Old and New”, revised edition. Robert E. Webber, published by Zondervan Publishing House, ISBN 0-310-47990-8. This is more of an academic theology/worship history text, but is full of excellent material and many additional references. Will especially appeal to those who want to know more about the roots and traditions of Christian worship practices from Biblical times to the present day.
15. “The Story of Christian Music”, by Andrew Wilson-Dickson, Lion Publishing plc, Oxford, UK, 1992. ISBN 0-281-04626-3. (Published by Fortress Press, MN in North America, ISBN 0-8006-2987-6). This is an excellent book for anyone interested in the history of music in the church. It also provides a much-needed global perspective on contemporary worship. Highly recommended!
16. “In Spirit and in Truth: Exploring directions in music in worship today”, Robin Sheldon (Ed.), Hodder & Staughton, London, 1989. ISBN 0-340-48715-1. A collection of essays on the state of worship across the denominations by authors who represent widely different worship traditions. There is much insight to be found here; the first article by Graham Cray on justice and worship is particularly thought-provoking. Definitely recommended.

1.7 Worship Resources

There are many excellent resources for worship available on the Internet. Here is just a selection of them; you will, however, find many more linked from within some of the web sites listed below.

Worship Discussion Groups/Lists

<http://www.praise.net/worship/list/>
<http://www.worshipleader.org/bbs/>
<http://www.gospelcom.net/worshiptogether/worshiptalk/>

Musical & Technical Groups/Lists

<http://www.churchsoundcheck.com/>
<http://home.echo-on.net/~jdbsound/>

Worship Web Sites and Links:

<http://www.cambridgemusicgroup.com/>
<http://www.ccli.com/>
<http://www.gmfj.org/>
<http://www.gospelcom.net/worshiptogether/>
<http://www.grahamkendrick.co.uk/>
<http://www.highestpraise.com/>
<http://www.hillscllc.org.au/>
<http://www.integinc.com/>
<http://www.kellycarpenter.com/>
<http://www.krabbe.com/>
<http://www.praise.net/>
<http://www.sarum.ac.uk/praxis/>
<http://www.vmg.com/>
<http://www.worshipleader.org/>
<http://www.worshipmap.com/>
<http://www.worshipmusic.com/>
<http://www.worship.hypermart.net/>

2 Corporate Worship

Some churches have choirs and/or music groups - even orchestras - while others use very little in the way of musical accompaniment. Among different denominations there are also many different traditions concerning the role of music in the church, including some in which music has been frowned upon or even forbidden. Richard Webber has commented that in many evangelical churches, worship is often treated simply as a preliminary to the sermon, which is given considerably more thought and preparation. Yet there is an increasing rediscovery of the importance of music in the worship services of the church. Along with this has come an interest in the concept of worship teams as patterned in the Old Testament and the Tabernacle as a model for corporate worship.² It might (and indeed has) been argued that Christian worship should not be based on OT practices at all, especially within denominations born out of the reformation. Certainly, no one is suggesting that churches should adopt animal sacrifice as an integral part of their Sunday services! Yet there is some biblical precedence for, at the least, giving prayerful consideration to OT worship patterns. The writer of Hebrews, for example, points out that the earthly Tabernacle constructed in the time of Moses (Exod. 25ff, 36ff) was “a copy of the heavenly” one, just as every animal sacrificed as a sin offering was a foreshadowing of Christ's ultimate sacrifice (Heb. 8:4,5). Paul reminds us that the OT record is for our benefit, that we might learn from the examples (both good and bad) of others (Rom. 15:4, 1 Cor. 10:6-11), and that “all scripture...is profitable for teaching...” (2 Tim. 3:16). These examples, informed by an understanding of the New Testament, can therefore be of great help and encouragement to us. I realize that such a short answer will not satisfy everyone; however, I trust that you will read the following at least with a mind open to any possibilities that will glorify Christ and build up His church.

2.1 Singers and Musicians in Church Worship

The biblical use of singers and musicians in worship was probably most developed during the time of David, who assigned different Levite clans to specific responsibilities within the Tabernacle in Jerusalem (1 Chron. 6:31-47). Later, it was these same groups that formed the orchestra and choir that accompanied the Ark of the Covenant on its journey back to Jerusalem (1 Chron. 15,16). We read

² I don't agree completely with all the teaching that has been presented on this subject, which in some cases seems to owe more to creative interpretation than rigorous biblical scholarship; however, that is no reason to dismiss the subject completely out of hand, either.

of singers and the use of harps, lyres, cymbals, trumpets, shouts, rams horns and dancing in this one section alone! When David delivered the kingship to Solomon, these same people and duties were reaffirmed for the coming Temple that Solomon was to build (1 Chron. 23:5, 25:1-26:19). There are many singers and musicians mentioned by name, but the three principal leaders were Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun, who were the heads of the families assigned to ministry through music. Another is Kenaniah, who was appointed to be a song leader because “he was skillful at it” (1 Chron. 15:22). Heman is described as “the musician” in 1 Chron. 6:33 and was the King's seer (1 Chron. 25:5). Asaph, his associate (1 Chron. 6:39) also prophesied under the King's supervision (1 Chron. 25:2), as did Jeduthun who “prophesied, using the harp in thanking and praising the Lord” (1 Chron. 25:3).

Clearly, music was an important and integral part of the Temple worship, to the point that skilled and trained musicians were set aside under the leadership of specific individuals to fulfill this role. Another important emphasis found in these references is the emphasis on the prophetic role played by the worship leaders. The Hebrew word used is **nâbâ**, which meant, “to speak (or sing) by inspiration in prediction or simple discourse”. The Psalms are rich in examples of just such worship inspired by God and setting forth the truth about Him. Similar echoes are to be found in the many “classic” hymns and choruses of the church throughout history; music and words that seem to capture the heart and imagination, and to speak to individuals and churches about the specific times and situations in which they find themselves.

What we see in these passages, then, is a pattern for leading the corporate worship involving teams of singers and musicians, and a specific leader who is responsible for both the worship and those under his or her direction. It is also interesting to note that these people are distinct from those responsible for other aspects of the worship, a situation that is quite foreign to many churches where the ordained clergy are responsible for everything. This is not to say that the priest or pastor should be completely uninvolved in the preparation and leading of worship services, but to recognize that all members of a church should be freed to focus on using their gifts in ministry (service) where they fit best. Thus if a pastor is a gifted worship leader, he or she should be freed from other responsibilities that do not fit as well and allowed to lead; similarly, if a pastors’ primary gifting is preaching, he or she should not be obliged to also lead in worship when other members of the congregation are gifted and equipped to assume this role. The underlying principle here is that of Rom. 12:1-8 and Eph. 4:7-13 - let each employ the gift given them by God for His glory.

One very important point of clarification is required here, and has to do with the nature of the ‘priesthood’. The individuals and families set apart under King David as singers and musicians were a particular clan of Levites, the tribe of Israel set apart by God for priestly duties (c.f. Num. 1:47ff, 3:1ff). This might create the impression that I am advocating some special status for worship leaders, but nothing could be further from the truth – especially in the light of New Testament teaching. In fact, if we accept the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5, Isa. 61:6) then the analogy to the Levites is that, although all were set apart for the priesthood, different Levite clans fulfilled different specific and specialized functions. In applying this Old Testament model to our contemporary worship experience, I do not believe that we should go any further than saying that there are many different roles to be filled within the church, and that each one is gifted and called differently to fill those roles for the benefit of all. I mention this because, in making use of Davidic (Tabernacle) or Temple worship as a model for contemporary worship practices, it is all too easy to take the terminology a little too far. Thus while I believe I understand what some writers mean in referring to the ‘priestly function’ of worship leading, this terminology easily creates the false impression alluded to earlier.

On a related theme, it is sometimes objected that in Ephesians 4 where Paul describes various gifts to the church (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) he does not mention worship leaders and therefore we should not treat this designation as a gift or ‘position’ within the church. Rather than get into contentious arguments over the completeness (or otherwise) of various ‘gift’ listings, I would like to respond with two simple comments. Firstly, I tend to use the designation ‘worship leader’ pragmatically (someone has to take responsibility for what happens, even if it is only to say “let’s start now” or “Amen!”) and personally do not attach any greater or lesser significance to this than, say, being an usher, intercessor, reader or custodian; and secondly, I would point out that those who lead worship well tend to operate in one or more of the areas listed by Paul *whether or not* this has been formally recognized.

One consequence of the approach I have outlined (if adopted) is that a distinction is made between a musical ability and the “call” to worship ministry. This will seem hard-hearted to some (and plainly ridiculous to others), but if it is accepted that some are specifically called and gifted to lead worship it also has to be accepted that not everyone who can play and/or sing automatically qualifies. In other words, pure talent is not the primary criterion for selection. In the same way, pure enthusiasm or simple willingness to fulfill a need are not good criteria either. The best way to illustrate this is the following quotation from David Watson:

“Our first seven years in York were limited by an organist who was totally reliable and faithful, but did not really comprehend [our] spiritual aims...
"He was replaced for a short time by a brilliant organist who was absolutely committed to Christ, but was musically too sophisticated for our congregation. He produced amazing harmonies ... but I could see some puzzled expressions...

“I discovered then that a natural talent becomes a spiritual gift only when it both glorifies Christ and edifies the body of Christ...

“Unless our contribution is helping and encouraging others, it will never be a spiritual gift, however brilliant it may be. The style of worship that is especially needed today (and all too rare) is one marked by gentleness and simplicity.”

David Watson "You Are My God" Hodder & Staughton, 1983, pp127-8

There is probably no choir director, music minister or worship leader who has not, at some time, had to grapple with the issue of “the professional musician.” It is probably equally true to say that many amateur musicians have felt inadequate and struggled with taking part in worship services because of an awareness of their talent compared to professional musicians. The truth is that there is a place for both side-by-side *if* the heart is right - and under such circumstances I have personally never found it to be anything but beneficial to both. The key is to ask the simple question, “what are we doing, and who are we doing it for?” If the primary goal of the church, the worship leader and the worship team (be it choir, orchestra or music group) is to celebrate Christ together in a manner pleasing to God and glorifying Him, then it really isn't so important who is doing the playing and singing!

Before leaving this section, we should probably point out that we have concentrated almost entirely on the musical aspects of worship. There is a lot that could (and probably should) be said about the other arts in worship - decoration, drama, readings, movement, dance and art. Again, the Bible (and church history) illustrates a richness that has been lost by many churches and which is slowly being rediscovered along with the renewed interest in worship. All this is beyond the scope of this document, however, and even more prone to personal and cultural biases than the question of musical style! I therefore happily leave it up to someone else to sort out that particular mess.

2.2 Worship Teams and Leaders

We have looked at a model for worship, and tried to address the issue of what makes worship different from a concert or other forms of entertainment. In this section we look more specifically at the role of worship teams and worship leaders. In many ways, the comments made are equally applicable to most forms of worship, since there is usually one person responsible for planning and leading the service and those who assist them. The worship leader may therefore be a Pastor, Priest, music director or choir director while the worship team may be anything from a pianist up to a full choir and orchestra! Clearly there will be some exceptions based on particular traditions - the Brethren church comes immediately to mind - but I'm assuming that if you are reading this then either your situation fits the team/leader model or you are interested in moving in that direction. One other important assumption implicit throughout this chapter is that leadership is necessarily based on servanthood, just as Jesus taught and demonstrated.³

(i) The Team Leader

We have already seen that the worship leaders identified in David's time had a dual responsibility. This involved actually leading worship and being responsible for those under them. We also saw that these leaders functioned in a prophetic manner. Before anyone gets too scared off, I should perhaps reiterate that prophecy in the Bible has two elements: predicting the future ("foretelling") and proclaiming the truth about God ("forth-telling"). We usually tend to think of the former rather than the latter, but both are exercised under God's inspiration for the benefit of His people. The role of the worship leader, then, is to be sensitive to God's prompting as he or she prepares a worship service in terms of the selection and ordering of those elements that make up the whole. Clearly there will be constraints imposed by the particular style of worship - we will consider this more fully later - but there needs to be a real sense of proclaiming a specific truth about God through the worship service. It has been my experience that worship which really engages and involves people is prophetic in the sense of forth-telling, and that there is a timeliness to the proclamation for the time and place in which it is made.

The other aspect is of responsibility to those assisting the worship leader throughout the service. Doubtless there are many interpretations that can be put on this, however some of the key elements will be communication, organization and

³ If this seems unnecessarily obvious to you, good! I have been asked about this, however, so I put it in.

rehearsal. I would add to that training and care. Any choir, team or music group that meets together on a regular basis to rehearse and lead worship is, in effect, a small group or cell that has a particular affinity or common cause. In many ways, it is natural that the members of such a group become close to one another over a period of time (human idiosyncrasies notwithstanding). To some extent the worship leader therefore plays a pastoral role within the context of the team. Training is important too, whether this be teaching rudiments of music or sight reading to choir members, or instruction in worship and musical technique. If a church is serious about lay ministry and allowing members to discover and exercise their gifts, this also must include the training of future worship leaders. I know that I personally owe a considerable debt to those who took the time to encourage and teach me in writing and arranging music for use by both choir and congregation. This is not to say that every worship leader should come complete with degrees in music, education and theology! It is important, however, that each leader should be willing to learn - and to pass on - the skills needed to effectively lead worship.

So who makes a good worship leader? To some extent this will depend on the specific church context, but here are some general (and personal) observations, in no specific order:

- musical talent/abilities (level and extent depends on context)
- desire to serve God and the church (a servant heart)
- known and respected within the congregation
- has strong desire and vision for worship
- humble, teachable attitude - always looking to learn more
- commitment to excellence and personal devotion to Christ

Individual churches may well have their own additional, specific requirements for those in leadership positions, but these represent a good basis from which to work. The importance of a servant heart, a worshipping heart and personal integrity cannot be overstated. You cannot lead people somewhere you are not prepared to go yourself, and people will not follow someone they either do not know or do not trust. Finally, a worship leader needs to be accountable. I realize that accountability is not a comfortable topic - indeed, it took me a while to come to terms with it - but I believe it is vitally important both for the church *and* the worship leader to address this issue. I also believe that it is fully supported by scripture. Probably the best way to explain what I mean by accountability is to describe how it works in my own situation.

Firstly, I am a full member of my church, which means that I have voluntarily agreed to be accountable to the church as a whole for my personal conduct and discipleship. It is very important to me that people know that I hold myself accountable in this way, especially as someone in a highly visible position of leadership within the church. There have been too many “loose cannons” who have caused considerable damage by holding themselves accountable to no-one for their actions and behaviour. On a more pragmatic level, it is also important that a worship leader not pursue their own agenda, or act independently of the appointed leadership of the church. It is natural as a worship leader to want to introduce changes and developments to the structure and style of a local congregation. While this is not unreasonable, there may be issues, concerns or situations that the worship leader is simply not aware of, while the final decision on such matters must still rest with the senior clergy responsible for setting the vision and direction of the church.

Secondly, I hold myself personally accountable through individual relationships. I make it a point to establish and maintain personal contact with both the senior pastor and music director of my church: they need to know what kind of person I am and know that they can count on me just as much as I need to know the same of them. They also provide support, encouragement and training to me, and so need to know what is going on both in my own life and in my ministry. I also hold myself accountable to my wife and a circle of close friends both within and outside of my church. All together, these are the people who know me best, can ask the right questions, keep me honest, and help me through difficult times. In fact, this very document would not exist without their support, encouragement and input - and blessing! I know that I do not always get everything right, and I need people around me who can provide checks and balances for everything I do. I have yet to meet anyone in a position of public ministry leadership who did not have the same need.

(ii) The Team Member

The team member must also be, at heart, a worshipper with an attitude of serving through the exercise of musical gifts. In fact I would suggest that these qualifications are more important than the musical gifts themselves. It is also a good idea not to invite people on to a team until they have had a chance to get to know (and be known by) others within the church. It is often tempting to “pounce” on a new arrival with a reputation for musical talent simply because there is a perceived need, but this is fair neither to the individual concerned nor to the church as a whole. Worship team members need above all else to be genuine team players. Temperament and personality is also a factor for small groups that have to

work closely together but will not be so critical for larger choirs or orchestras. Team members do not have to be potential worship leaders - although it is always nice to identify such individuals where possible! Team members must also show a flexible attitude towards what they do and a willingness to participate even if the music may not be to their own personal tastes and preferences. The primary responsibilities of the team member are to be consistent in attendance at practices and services, to learn as much of their music as possible, and to actively support the team leader in the worship service. Ideally, a singer or musician should be practicing on their own as well as with the team. Team members should also be encouraged to participate in worship conferences, seminars and technical training in order to develop their own understanding and abilities.

(iii) The Team Coordinator

When more than one worship team exists (or the “team” consists of different “units” that may not meet simultaneously, such as choir, orchestra, drama group, etc.) then it is important to have an overall coordinator. This person will be responsible for organizing schedules, forming the teams, planning events and the pastoral care of the individual team leaders. This person can be one of the lay worship leaders, a part- or full-time musical director or one of the pastoral staff of the church. It is also important that this person should act as the “channel” for all new music that might be introduced by the teams. This may seem a rather trivial (or dictatorial) point, but it has several very practical purposes. Firstly, it ensures that the congregation isn't overwhelmed by new material from every direction at once, which can be highly counterproductive. Secondly, it allows the practicalities of copying, copyright and distribution to be taken care of so that all the teams have access to new material. Finally, it provides a check so that new material is (i) singable by the congregation, (ii) in a suitable key, and (iii) in keeping with the direction and needs of the church as a whole.

(iv) Setting Up A Team

In terms of starting a team, it is important that the individual church should establish its goals, objectives and ground rules. These might, for example, include a requirement that all those involved in worship ministries should be full members of the congregation. Such issues are up to the leadership of the church to decide and will clearly vary from one congregation to another. It should also be decided at the outset what the role of the team will be, how often it will function and what length of commitment members should be asked to make. Another issue that needs to be decided is how the team will function with any existing teams, choirs and/or orchestras. One question that occasionally arises is the issue of payment for

the services of musicians and singers. There is no one right answer to this question, but some points to consider are:

- How much time and effort is involved for a particular position?
- Is there an expectation of professional standards of performance?
- Will the individual incur unusual travel and/or other expenses?

It is traditional in many churches that the organist/choir director should at least be paid an honorarium in recognition of the time, effort and personal expense involved in fulfilling their duties. If the required duties would limit the ability of the individual involved to engage in full-time employment elsewhere, either at least a part-time staff position should be created or the duties reconsidered. Finally, it should be clearly decided who has overall responsibility for the team(s) and for approaching potential members (the Worship Coordinator). This should ideally be the same individual in order to ensure that the various teams function together and not in competition with one another. In many churches this would be a member of the clergy or pastoral staff.

2.3 Making It Work - Some Examples

You may well be wondering how all this works in practice - and whether or not you can get there from where you are now! The following examples are taken from different churches that I have been involved - or have some personal connection - with. They are not meant to be perfect examples, nor am I saying that this is how your church should approach conducting its worship. They are simply provided to illustrate ways in which the principles we have looked at can be worked out in different settings. In looking at these examples, please remember that different churches (and denominations) will have different constraints imposed on them in terms of the nature and extent of any independent changes that can be made to the structure or style of their worship services. It may very well not be possible (or desirable) to simply transfer one of these examples to your own situation (I will have more to say on this in the following section). The underlying *principles* however I believe to be fully transferable.

(i) Small to Mid-Size Anglican Church

Starting from a very traditional style of service with a choir and organist/choir master, a small music group was added for once-a-month family services. This was subsequently merged with the choir. Services were usually planned around the sermon theme, the music being chosen by the music director/organist who functioned as the Worship Coordinator in consultation with the clergy. The actual services were then led by one of the clergy, deacons, lay

readers or clergy-in-training. Musical resources included anthems, hymns, psalms and choruses to reflect the diversity of tastes within the congregation as a whole with participation by all the singers and musicians. An important aspect of this was the use of 3- and 4-part (SATB) arrangements of many of the favourite choruses, as well as original compositions of both hymns, anthems, service settings and choruses by individuals within the choir/music group.

(ii) Mid-Size Pentecostal (Evangelical) Church

Starting from a fairly traditional style service led by one of the pastoral staff with a choir in the morning service with pianist, organist and soloist. A part-time music director had responsibility for the choir, arranging soloists and pianists, and director special music festivals and cantatas. Additional involvement by specific individuals (both singers and musicians) in support of the worship leader was developed into the first worship team in which the same group met regularly and led morning worship with one of the pastoral staff as the team leader. This developed further with expansion to three teams leading both morning and evening services on a rotating schedule. Subsequently, this evolved in to four teams consisting of one or two worship leaders, pianist, singers and other musicians under the overall leadership of the music director (the worship coordinator). Teams meet regularly for rehearsal, prayer and study. The ultimate aim is to fill out the teams and have them meet all together on a semi-regular basis, as well as hold regular meetings between the senior pastor, worship coordinator and team leaders. Note that it is crucial with this format that the worship coordinator and team leaders meet regularly to ensure a unity of direction and purpose, and to jointly make decisions on the introduction of new material.

(iii) Small Evangelical Church

In this church, there were sufficient musicians to form two teams which alternate every week (doing both morning and evening services on their “on” week). There were not, however, the available leaders to have one permanent worship leader for each team. In this case, the Music Director does the bulk of the worship leading, while three others lead about four services a month between them. One advantage of this situation is the continuity of direction provided by consistent leadership by one individual, which is a potential disadvantage of having three or more leaders on a rotation (this can be offset by the leaders meeting together regularly to discuss direction and jointly make decisions on new material).

(iv) Small Ministry Group

In this situation, there were never enough musicians to form more than one team. Within the worship team, however, there were usually two or three individuals capable of leading worship. These leaders rotated responsibility for planning and leading worship for the ministry (young adults) whilst always being present on the team as singers/musicians. This was also effective in maintaining a sense of unity and direction between the worship leaders, and meant that all leaders learnt new material simultaneously at one of the mid-week rehearsals.

2.4 Making The Change - Some Suggestions

I hope that the preceding section was of some help in filling out the ideas presented so far. As I said, these are not meant to be statements of “how it should be done”, just illustrations of ways in which different churches have worked out (and are continuing to work out) the way they “do worship”. Obviously, there are many things - both good and bad - that can happen when a church tries to change the way it handles its corporate worship services. While I can hardly claim to have seen and done it all, I hope the following suggestions will help those who are wondering where to start in their own church.

(i) Get The Vision

The initiative needs to come “from the top.” If the senior leadership does not support the effort, then it will either die or result in great contention and dispute. There must be a desire to see worship developed beyond simply the sermon preliminaries, a commitment to lay involvement, and a willingness to both learn and teach. The senior clergy with ultimate responsibility for decision making must honestly evaluate whether they are gifted and equipped for the task, or whether it should be delegated to a suitably gifted individual within the congregation under their oversight. Note that the latter can be highly freeing, not threatening! It is vital first to evaluate: (a) who the church is in terms of its membership; (b) what is the church's history and traditions in worship; (c) how much autonomy does the local congregation have in making changes; and (d) what is the vision or direction for the church's future. You have to know both where you are coming from and where you are going! Of course, this is relatively easier if the ones desiring the change include the church leadership. In the situation where this is not the case, it is important to be patient, prayerful and humble. By all means discuss, suggest, and question - there could very well be issues that you are not aware of, or have not thought through. And it may well be that the leadership is aware of the need, but doesn't have the musical skills to do something about it. God has His appointed leadership, His plans and His time, and it is vital to act accordingly and not on our own agenda.

(ii) Set Right Priorities

It is often tempting to either scrap everything and completely start from scratch or simply institute a second, “modern” service for those who prefer it. While there may well be those who will disagree with me, I strongly believe that both approaches should be avoided. My reason for this stems from the belief that if our corporate worship is to be biblical, it must have as its focus celebrating Christ as a local representation of the Body of Christ. This of necessity requires that we be united in worship, and that our priority is to please God, not ourselves. The sad testimony of many churches is that dramatic and sweeping changes in worship style, or the institution of different worship services to cater to different tastes within the congregation, all too often result in division, acrimony and alienation. If we want to get our priorities in worship (and changing worship!) right, I believe we have to take seriously the words of Philippians 2:1ff:

“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

When, following a move, I first started attending an Anglican church from a Brethren/Baptist background, there were two things that I found incredibly hard to cope with. One was the whole idea of reading chunks of liturgy that were the same every week. The other was singing pointed Psalms and liturgy. I just didn't get the point, couldn't figure out how the system was supposed to work, and never did understand singing “And make your chosen people joyful” in a minor key... and I know I'm not the only one! The turning point for me came in two ways. First was the realization of how much Scripture was packed into the liturgy - something my Brethren/Baptist background could readily appreciate. The second came while rehearsing for a special Women's Ministries service. This included much highly traditional music including The Magnificat. There were a number of murmurs and complaints, and the question was finally asked “Why do we have to sing this?” The answer came back, “Because it will minister to those coming to the service from a more traditional background, and we are here to glorify God - not please ourselves.” There was an appropriate silence, and then rehearsal resumed. For myself, the switch that occurred must have unblocked something, because all of a sudden it made sense. It helped that the music fitted the meaning

of the words well, but putting aside my own attitude helped even more. What had been a burden undertaken somewhat grudgingly became a powerful worship experience. The postscript to the story is that, not only was the Magnificat greatly appreciated, but the modern African songs went down very well, too, and no-one raised an eyebrow over the electric guitar and bass!

(iii) One Small Step...

If you are still with me, I hope that the preceding story made my point. Our priority in changing worship needs to be on glorifying God and serving one another, not following our own agenda or indulging our personal tastes. That still begs the question, how do we institute change without losing people or causing division? I believe the keys are sound teaching and taking small steps. It is also important to start teaching before an attempt at changing! Furthermore, this should be done in the situation that will reach the largest segment of the congregation - and if that means the sermon on Sunday morning, so be it. What should be taught? I believe that this should include not just what Scripture has to say about worship as a whole, but also how different traditions of corporate worship have arisen throughout church history. If your church is one that uses a formal written liturgy, go through it explaining where it all comes from in Scripture and what it means. Talk about psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Examine the role of prayer in corporate worship in the Bible and church history. Understanding the “why” of the things we do in our worship services can of itself bring a renewal in both personal and corporate worship. The same applies to making changes - take one aspect of the service at a time, take time to explain the change and the reasons for it, and give people time to get used to the idea before trying to change something else. And if you find that a certain change was a mistake, have the courage to admit and reverse it.

(iv) Innovate, Not Imitate

If you are like me, you have been both inspired and irritated by the explosion of worship recordings and song books in the last ten to fifteen years. Inspired, because they expose you to powerful expressions of praise and worship. Irritated, because the incredible orchestrations and arrangements sound great on tape, but fall flat with a lone guitarist and out-of-tune piano! Or maybe you have seen the response to a particular style of worship at another church, and are longing to “make it happen” at your home church. Whatever the situation, it can sometimes be a little intimidating - especially in smaller churches - when the comparisons start flying; even more so when these examples are variously held up as the “right” or “wrong” way to worship. There is only one “right” way for your particular church to worship, and that is the way that most honestly reflects who you are,

what God has done for you in the past, what He is doing now, and where He is leading you in the future. So resist the urge to implement a particular style of service, or use only a particular type of music, because “it works for them, so it will work for us.” True, it might work, but it might also succeed in alienating a large number of the people you are trying to take with you. If you have been inspired by a particular style of worship service or music, first ask the question, “Why does it work here?” and then ask “How much of this is relevant to my church?” before you ask “Why aren't we doing that?” This will help you adapt ideas so that your own services can evolve, not explode!

(v) Keep the Baby, Lose the Bath Water

I have already stated that I do not believe we should completely jettison our existing worship services or arbitrarily offer alternatives since this tends to disunity and not a building up of the local body of Christ. There are other reasons, too, however. To explain this, I would like to make a clear distinction between “tradition” and “traditionalism”. By “traditionalism” I mean a blind adhering and defense of “the way it's always been done”. Such an attitude fails to recognize that today's traditions are yesterday's innovations! It also completely ignores the question of whether there is any value in the traditions being upheld, and whether or not they continue to be relevant. Traditionalism can be associated with fear, insecurity, or a desire for recognition and power. The opposite attitude can be just as destructive, however, and just as convinced that it is right. Tradition, on the other hand, can be a powerful unifying force that provides a strong sense of continuity and community. By “tradition” I mean something that is passed on complete with its context and meaning. In the context of a corporate worship service this could be the tradition of strong teaching, or the use of a written liturgy rich in scripture and theology, or of hymns and songs that engage both heart and mind.

Some traditions arose in response to a highly specific congregational or societal need, and should quite rightly change with time and circumstance. Others have grown out of the experience of the Church in its worship throughout history, and should not be readily abandoned. In this respect I find myself in agreement with Stephen Dean, who writes from a Roman Catholic perspective. He expresses the opinion that “a healthy liturgy will include both the new and the old.” He goes on to say:

“The musical and cultural world that we live in is fragmented, and unfortunately the liturgical sphere cannot escape this influence. But this must be counteracted if liturgy is to be a sign of unity, and tradition, which is

the lifeblood of the Church, must be seen as an ally rather than a dead weight.”

Stephen Dean, in "In Spirit and in Truth", Hodder & Staughton, p.43

A good example of what I am referring to is the use of creeds. These grew from baptismal formulas used to teach the essence of the faith and evolved with time in response to different challenges to what we might call “orthodox” Christianity. Today, many churches which do not use a written liturgy have at least one of the Apostles’, Nicene or Athanasian creeds in their hymn book. There can be great power in reciting together a statement of belief - or singing it! Modern examples that come to mind are Graham Kendrick’s “We Believe” and Marc Nelson’s “I Believe In Jesus”, not to mention the many different settings and arrangements of the creeds used in Anglican and Catholic churches. Thus it is possible to retain the *tradition* of reciting a credal formula together without necessarily adopting a *style* out of keeping with the current realities of a particular congregation. Yet when we sing “We believe in God the Father, Maker of the universe” we are upholding the same tradition affirmed by generations of Christians throughout the world for over a thousand years! If I could make a personal plea on this issue, it would be that the real problem with the use of a written liturgy is a lack of understanding and ownership. The solution is education and explanation, not wholesale rejection. On a similar theme, it is also interesting (and highly revealing) that many of the more “charismatic” churches are rediscovering the hymns of Wesley, Watts and company while more “traditional” churches are incorporating the new worship choruses. Many needless arguments could be avoided if those who oppose choruses as being shallow, emotional and unscriptural took a careful and critical look through their hymn books, while those who oppose hymns as stifling, dusty and anachronistic took the same time to hold up both these hymns and their own choruses to the light of Scripture! I can think of no good reason to refrain from embracing the best of both, and plenty of reasons for avoiding the worst of either. And the best of both can make for rich worship traditions and experiences that bring us all into the very presence of God Himself.

2.5 The Tabernacle as a Metaphor for Worship

I would be very curious to know how much thought those who plan and lead our corporate worship give to the actual structure of the services they prepare. In many churches, this structure is fixed either by the written liturgy and church law or by the equally powerful force of tradition. These forms and structures generally did not evolve by pure chance, yet I suspect that it is a long time since anyone stopped to wonder how and why this happened in the vast majority of churches. Having said that, there is considerable interest in trying to determine what “true,

New Testament” worship should actually look like. More importantly, we should be asking ourselves the question, “what does God actually want us to do?” I hope the following chapter answers many of the hows and whys of the evolution of our worship forms. What I would like to do here is explore the Old Testament Tabernacle as a metaphor for worship. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the writer of Hebrews describes the earthly Tabernacle built under Moses and established in Jerusalem by the time of David as a copy of the heavenly one (Heb. ch. 5-10). This suggests that it would be beneficial to us to reflect on the Tabernacle carefully to see what sort of a pattern might emerge that we can apply to our corporate worship. I don’t think I would be giving too much away by saying that, as it turns out, this yields a pattern highly familiar to anyone who has analysed the structure of the Anglican and Catholic liturgy for the Eucharist or Holy Communion, and is essentially identical to the four-fold pattern that Robert Webber has traced back through church history to the New Testament era. In fact, the structure or outline we will derive is just as applicable to private devotion as to corporate worship. Finally, I should offer something of a disclaimer here: these ideas are largely derived from those presented by Pastor Daniel McNaughton, a former associate pastor at the Stone Church, Toronto, and Jim Downing in his book “Meditation” (Navpress).

The Tabernacle was a tent within a courtyard constructed as the place of meeting for the Israelites with God during the exodus. Its design and construction was specified in great detail by God through Moses and those chosen to actually perform the work (Exod. 25ff, 36ff). It was the place where the people went to offer up their sacrifices, where Moses met with God and, most significantly, where the yearly sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the nation was made. It was also the pattern for the Temple subsequently built (and rebuilt) in Jerusalem. On special feasts, the people would be summoned to assemble by the call of the **shofar**, or ram’s horn. (The shofar is still used to summon God’s people to worship in many places.) As the people went to the Tabernacle (or up to the Temple in Jerusalem), they would sing songs and psalms of praise, thanksgiving and rejoicing (see for example the Songs of Ascent, Psalms 120-134). Corporate worship thus starts with a *call to worship* and *celebration*. As the people entered into the outer courtyard, they would come face-to-face with the altar for the burnt offering. Each worshipper would bring a young, defect-free animal as prescribed by the law. They would lay their hands on the head of the animal, identifying with the animal in its death for their sin, and then sacrifice it. The priest would gather the blood, putting some of it on the alter, and completely burn the assigned portion of the sacrifice on the altar. The rest would become a meal shared by Priest and worshipper, eaten together in the Lord's presence. The third aspect of corporate

worship is therefore *confession* and a recognition that Christ's sacrifice secures our forgiveness (Heb. 9:11-14, 1 John 1:9).

Next to the altar was a large bronze laver - a wash basin. The Priest would wash himself before entering into the front portion of the Tent of Meeting, the Holy Place. At this point we should note that, under the New Testament, the priesthood is allotted to all believers (1 Peter 2:9). Unlike the Israelites, therefore, we too can enter into the Holy Place with confidence (Heb. 4:14-16). Within the Holy Place was the lamp stand, the altar of incense, and the table of Shewbread. The Priest would offer up prayers with the incense, and so following confession we enter into *communication* with God. The lamps were kept burning continuously day and night, and can be symbolic both of our continual need for the illumination of the Holy Spirit and of our commission to be the light to the world (which was also supposed to be Israel's role). The Shewbread consisted of twelve loaves that were placed fresh on the table every day, and could be eaten by the priests. It could symbolize the corporate unity of Israel's worship, corresponding to the twelve tribes gathered together, but also serves as a reminder of God's daily provision.

The rear of the Tabernacle was separated from the Holy Place by a heavy veil, or curtain, and was the Most Holy Place or Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies contained the Ark of the Covenant (containing the stone tablets inscribed with the Law, Aaron's rod, and a container of manna from the time in the wilderness). On top was the Mercy Seat, situated between two golden seraphim. The only light in the Holy of Holies was the **shekinah**, the manifestation of the presence and glory of the Lord God Almighty. Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and only once a year, to offer the sacrifice of atonement (Heb. 9:6,7). The writer of Hebrews tells us that, unlike the earthly High Priest, Jesus became our Heavenly High Priest and entered into the heavenly Holy of Holies to offer His own blood as a sacrifice for all sins, once for all. Matthew also records that, when Jesus died on the cross, the veil in the Temple at the entrance to the Holy of Holies was torn in two from top to bottom, symbolizing that God has permanently opened a way into His presence for all believers (Matt. 27:51). The fifth aspect of corporate worship is therefore intimate *communion* in the very presence of God Himself. When the High Priest had made the sacrifice of atonement, it was vitally important that he returned to the people outside the Tent: if he did not, it would have signified that the offering had not been acceptable and the nation was still in its sin. For us, we need to remember that our worship is not simply our corporate worship, no matter how important that is, but our whole lives

lived as an act of worship through the coming week. This leads to the final component, that of *commission*. To summarize, we have the following pattern:

- Call to worship – assembling together; the invocation
- Celebration – praise, rejoicing; affirmation of faith
- Confession – personal and corporate reflection
- Communication – prayer for ourselves, the church, the world;
– listening to God through quiet, readings, sermon
- Communion – intimacy with God; breaking of bread/Eucharist
- Commission – the dismissal/benediction

As I said earlier, this structure should not greatly surprise us: it underlies all worship that seems to “work”, regardless of the denomination, liturgy (written or otherwise), occasion, setting or musical style. In fact, it does not matter whether we are considering a Sunday service, a home fellowship, a youth retreat or personal devotions: there is a certain spiritual “logic” to this sequence which seems to be fundamental to the experience of worship. The way in which we address each component (and its relative emphasis) will vary with each situation, and need not be the same on every occasion, yet when we follow this pattern it imparts a certain dynamic to worship which takes us on a spiritual journey. In this regard, it is interesting that we often characterize services exhibiting this dynamic by saying that the worship seems to “flow” naturally, whereas when this pattern is broken or ignored the worship experience can be unsettling and unsatisfying - there is no sense of having encountered the tangible presence of God. To see why this is, we will take a closer look at this structure (or pattern) and the way in which the different components fit together.

There seems to be a psychological need for a concrete starting point to our worship, whether it be the processional in an Anglican or Catholic church, or the opening prayer or psalm in many non-liturgical churches. I think this reflects a need to firmly establish that whatever has been preoccupying our hearts and minds is now put aside so that we can concentrate our attention on God. In other words, we need a clear call to worship. We also need the encouragement of celebration, where we reaffirm our faith, rejoice in Christ’s victory, and remind ourselves that there is a lot more to life than our earthly preoccupations! (This is the component that some writers refer to as the “praise” part of corporate worship.) When we direct our attention to God, however, our own failures and shortcomings start to become apparent, leading naturally into the need for confession. It seems to me that this is one aspect of corporate worship which is either forgotten or deliberately downplayed in many non-liturgical churches (presumably from a fear of falling

into excess behaviour or “Catholic error”). Yet to do so short-changes our worship experience, since there is a very real need for both corporate and individual confession, regardless of how that is actually done. Sometimes we come to worship with the Holy Spirit nudging us concerning an aspect of our lives that needs putting right before God. David shows us this in Psalm 51, written after he had been confronted concerning his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband. Yet David also recognized that he was not always fully aware of his own thoughts and intentions, and that he could also be ignorant of error:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psm. 139:23,24)

It is therefore entirely appropriate (and, I believe, healthy) to include a time for reflection and repentance *provided* we also recognize that Christ’s sacrifice has secured our forgiveness.

Now is an especially appropriate time for prayer, since we are told that unconfessed sin and wrong attitudes will hinder our prayers (Psm. 66:18,19; James 4:3). In general, I would say that corporate prayer needs to focus on the needs of others - both within and outside the church - although time can be allowed for personal prayer in whatever manner is appropriate for a particular church. Having put aside anything which might come between us and God, we are now also ready to move into a time of greater intimacy of God where we hear and respond to Him. In other words, confession is a necessary prelude to communication and communion. Note that I am not restricting this to the reading of scripture, the sermon, and the actual Communion or Eucharist: there is a phase of worship which is more contemplative and intimate that we can enter into as well, and which helps prepare our hearts for both the sermon and partaking in Communion. This is the part of a service which is sometimes referred to as the “worship” half of “praise and worship”. (Note that I have no criticism of the use of this phrase but, as explained in the introduction to chapter 1, have avoided it in order to clearly distinguish between the totality of worship and a particular phase of service or type of chorus.) Finally, there needs to be a sense of closure to the service, a focusing of the relevance of what we have just experienced to our everyday existence in the week ahead: we need to be commissioned to share what we have received with others. The benediction and dismissal is, like general confession, an aspect of worship often forgotten in non-liturgical churches. Yet it seems common for a service that simply drifts to an end to be psychologically – and even spiritually – unsettling. While there is a time and place for “loitering” in the presence of God,

or for an extended time of one-on-one prayer and ministry, there is also a time to return to the world taking a sense of God's presence with us. This is, after all, what the totality of worship that I have been arguing for is all about: God in us; God with us; God through us.

3 A History of Christian Worship: Part 1

I had been going to call this chapter “A Brief History...” until I discovered that, not only had this already been used, but term “brief” was not really appropriate! Indeed whole books and even encyclopedias have been produced on the subject. It is well-worth studying the subject, however, since this greatly aids understanding the influences (and reasons) behind the musical traditions underlying each church's worship. To keep things manageable, I will tend to concentrate for the most part on Western music. This may not be altogether fair, especially since, historically, other forms of music have been looked down upon by Europeans; however, the majority of our church music still relies heavily on the Western (European) musical tradition. The reader interested in other cultures and traditions will find useful material and references in the book by Andrew Wilson-Dickson. We start with a survey of the worship practices found in the Bible before considering historical developments.

3.1 Music and Worship in the Bible

(i) Worship in the Old Testament

Considering the wealth of material contained in it, it is actually quite surprising how *little* the Old Testament tells us about Jewish musical practices, even in the context of worship! This reflects the fact that the OT is not primarily a historical account of Jewish life and society, although it does contain considerable information and tantalizing glimpses of the development of the people of God, the nation of Israel. The first musical reference is to Jubal, the “father of all who play the harp [**kinnôwr**] and flute [**‘ûwgâb**, reed pipe]” (Gen. 4:21). Laban makes reference to a musical send-off with singing, tambourines [**tôph**] and harps (Gen. 31:27) so music was obviously an important part of life, at least on special occasions. The first mention of music in worship is found in Exod. 15, where Moses and Miriam celebrated God's deliverance of Israel from the Egyptian army in song. This seems to have been quite spontaneous, and we read that Miriam (“the prophetess”) led all the women in singing and dancing. It was probably quite a party, and would no doubt have offended many evangelical Christians!

The connection between music and prophet is seen in several passages, including the song of Deborah (Judges 5), the sign of Saul's anointing (1 Sam. 10:1-12), the Levites set apart by David to lead Temple worship (1 Chron. 25:1-7), and Elisha (2 Kings 3:9-20). In his book *Wiser Than Despair*, Quentin Faulkner also notes the poetic nature of many of the prophetic writings, suggesting a link to

the use of music. The exact nature of this link is open to interpretation. Certainly, in the case of Saul the description is similar to the ecstatic experience or trance-like state induced by rhythm and dance in some primitive religions as noted by Wilson-Dickson (this also appears to be Faulkner's interpretation). In the example of Elisha, it may simply have been necessary to calm his spirit so that he was able to hear effectively from God. The powerful effect of music on our mental and emotional state is well-known, and is also attested to in the life of Saul (1 Sam. 16:14-23). The second theme - of music and celebration - is found in the bringing of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, when David "danced before the Lord with all his might" (2 Sam. 6:1-6,12-15). The use of music in general celebration is also seen in the greeting David received when returning from battle (1 Sam. 18:6-7). To what extent such spontaneous singing and dancing was a part of regular Jewish worship is unknown. It is clear, however, that music, dance and emotional expressiveness was a distinct mark of this society, in marked contrast to a good deal of Western experience. Perhaps, if anything, this should cause us (especially in more conservative churches) to seriously and honestly evaluate to what extent our beliefs and practices with regard to expression in worship are cultural, rather than theological. Music (including praise) also features several battles: Jericho (Joshua 6); Gideon and the Midianites (Judges 7:16-22); Abijah and Jeroboam (2 Chron. 13:14,15) and, finally, Jehoshaphat fighting a large combined army (2 Chron. 20:18-21).

One final theme to address is that of Temple worship as established by David, dedicated by Solomon (2 Chron. 5:2 to 7:6), restored under Kings Asa, Hezekiah and Josiah and, after the exile, Ezra (Ezra 3:10-11). Temple worship appears to have been highly organized and ceremonial, and rich in the use of instruments and singing (see also chapter 2.) Other than the passages already cited, most of what we know about Temple worship comes from the Psalms (especially the titles and musical instructions) and writings such as the *Talmud* (a collection of Rabbinical writings and commentaries) and *Ecclesiasticus* (one of the books of the Apocrypha). The Psalms were sung with musical accompaniment in a variety of manners involving soloists, singers and choir. The psalms were also divided into sections with musical "breaks" between them, as marked by the word **selah** (e.g. Psalms 3, 4 and 9). Others, referred to as **hallel** psalms (e.g. Psalms 111-113), are punctuated with the exclamation "Hallelujah" ("Praise the Lord!"). The glimpses of worship given us by writings such as the *Talmud* also show a great deal of ceremony and symbolism in both the daily sacrificial services and those for the great festivals such as the Feast of Tabernacles.

(ii) Worship in the Time of Christ

We know from the Gospel accounts that Jesus attended both local Synagogues and the Temple, and participated in the Jewish feasts that had been celebrated since the time of the exodus from Egypt. The synagogue appears to have been instituted during the time of the exile (between about 700 and 500 BC), and to have continued on the return to Israel (550 to 450 BC). Unlike the Temple worship conducted by the Levitical hereditary priesthood and involving animal sacrifices, synagogue worship was lay-lead and primarily concerned with the teaching of the Law. This was the religious, moral and social code defining the Jewish people. Indeed, as Paul reminds us in Rom. 3:1,2, it was to them that God entrusted His word: they were truly “people of the book”.

The importance of scripture to the Jewish people is underlined both in the command God gave them to make it an integral part of their life (Deut. 6:1-9), and in the attention paid to it by the exiles when they returned to Jerusalem (Neh. 8:1-18). It is interesting to note that a platform had been built for Ezra to read from: the raised platform (**bema**) has long been an integral part of synagogue architecture, as is the reverence attached to the scroll of the **Torah**, the Old Testament scriptures. In contrast to Temple worship, that of the synagogue was more reflective and sober, while there was a certain amount of rivalry between the two. Indeed, students of church history might notice some interesting parallels here! Finally, synagogue worship was led by a **cantor**, who used a form of chant known as “cantillation” (although it would appear that this was without musical accompaniment).

By the time of Christ, the pattern of synagogue worship was well-established, and remained unchanged for centuries.⁴ It consisted of an affirmation of faith (the **shema**, Deut. 6:4-9), the recitation of prayers (the **tefillah**), and the sermon (the **derashah**). Thus it was perfectly natural for Jesus, as a visiting Rabbi, to be handed the scroll for reading and interpretation (Luke 4:16-21). Jesus also went regularly to Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish Feasts, especially that of Passover (John 2:13; 5:1; 10:22,23; 12:12). Finally, He put a new interpretation on the traditional Passover meal at what we call the Last Supper. The significance of this is mostly lost on us, but the Passover **seder** (service) - which had been established centuries before Christ and remains largely unchanged today - is strongly Messianic in its symbolism and liturgy.⁵ This included the sharing of

⁴ Webber, *Worship Old and New*, pp. 36-38, 56-68.

⁵ Webber, *Worship Old and New*, pp. 78-80; Eric-Peter Lipson, *Passover Haggadah*.

food, the reading of scripture, the singing of Psalms, the recitation of the exodus from Egypt, a looking-forward to the coming of the promised Messiah and the return of Elijah (Mal. 4:5, Mark 9:12,13), and partaking of both the Paschal lamb and a special Passover peace offering (the **pesach**).

Two very important parts of the Passover seder are the four cups of wine and the unleavened Passover bread (**matzah** (sing.) or **matzoth** (pl.)). The four cups are, in order, the cups of sanctification, deliverance, redemption and completion, and are in remembrance of God's four promises (Exod. 6:6-8). The first cup is taken at the start of the seder with the following blessing:

“Barukh atah adonai eloheynu melekh ha'olam borey pri hagafen.”
(Blessed are You, O Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, Who creates the
fruit of the vine.)
“The Messianic Passover Haggadah”

It was possibly at this time that Jesus referred to His imminent separation from the disciples (Luke 22:14-18). After this, the **haggadah** (order) of the seder involves the remembrance of the suffering of the Jews in captivity and the sharing of the matzah. Matzah was (and still is) a large, flat square which is baked so that it appears striped and is pierced with small holes (Isa. 53:5, Zech. 12:10). Three matzah are placed in individual compartments within a special bag. On one level, the outermost matzah are taken as representing the double portion of manna collected on the sixth day in the wilderness (Exod. 16:4,5) while the middle matzah is Poor Bread, or the bread of affliction eaten by the Jews in Egypt. There is a deeper meaning, however, which becomes apparent in the ceremony attached to the matzah that follows. In particular, the Rabbis refer to the three matzah as a “unity”, which has been explained as representing the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) or worship (priests, Levites and people). Remembering that this ceremony was firmly established *before* the time of Christ, it is quite remarkable. The *middle* (second) matzoh is removed from the bag and *broken* in half. One half (the **afikomen**) is *wrapped* and *hidden* until later; the other half is broken and shared. After the supper has been eaten, the afikomen is found, broken and eaten. This is likely the bread of which Jesus said, “This is My body given for you; do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). Similarly, the third cup (the cup of redemption) is now taken. This is probably the “cup after supper”; and it symbolized the blood of the Passover lamb smeared on the door posts and lintel of the Israelite houses so that the death of the firstborn might not touch them and they would be redeemed from slavery in Egypt (Exod. 11):

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”
(Luke 22:20)

Jesus is quite deliberate in His reinterpretation of this symbolic re-enactment of God’s deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt and His identification with the Passover Lamb. This is even more apparent when considering the ‘I am’ statements of Jesus, specifically John 6:35 and 53-57. Finally, the peace offering would have been shared together, and once again there is an element of identification as Jesus tells the disciples:

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.” (John 14:27.)

The celebration of Passover was an act of remembrance vitally important to the identity of the Jewish people, and Jesus explicitly appropriated this act of remembrance to His own sacrifice on the cross. It is therefore hardly surprising that, following the resurrection, the act of breaking bread and drinking wine became an essential part of the church’s identity and worship practices.

(iii) Worship in the New Testament

If the Old Testament contains little information about worship practices, this is even truer of the New. This has led to considerable debate as to the structure, functioning and worship appropriate to what might be considered a “New Testament church” today. We will therefore try and avoid too much speculation, and stick to what can be found in the scriptures. Since the first Christians were predominately Jewish, their worship was strongly influenced by Jewish practices (eventually causing the circumcision argument recorded in Acts and the Epistles). The first Christians met in both the Temple (although presumably not participating in Levitical sacrifices) and in one another’s homes (Acts 2). Yet they were also influenced by Christ’s identification with and reinterpretation of Jewish rites, most noticeably through the Last Supper as described above. It is therefore reasonable to assume that their worship was similar to synagogue practices, combined with the Lord’s Supper (the Eucharist or Communion).⁶ Acts 2:42-47 is certainly in keeping with this and so we would expect prayer, psalms, hymns, and the reading and exposition of scriptures (although with a Messianic perspective) to be a part of their worship. In fact, some scholars argue that the scriptures known as the Magnificat, Benedictus, Gloria in Excelsis Deo and Nunc Dimittis were all used as

⁶ Indeed, Wilson-Dickson suggests that this is precisely the reason why there is so little mention of it!

hymns within the church prior to the writing of the gospels.⁷ Other passages regarded as early hymns and psalms include John 1:1-18; Eph. 5:14; Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 1:15-20; 1 Tim. 3:16; Rev. 4:8 and Rev. 15:3-4. Some of these passages are also believed to be early baptismal formulas or catechisms (forerunners of the later creeds), baptism itself being familiar from synagogue practices.

Perhaps the most we see of worship practices in the New Testament (although admittedly in a church with numerous problems) is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, in the section from 1 Cor. 10:14 through to 14:40. To fully understand this section, we need to establish the social and historical context that the Corinthian church found itself in. Corinth was a melting pot of cultures, religions and beliefs, and was a byword in its day for sexual permissiveness and widespread prostitution, often in the context of religious cultic practices. Idolatry was rampant, as were common banquets involving food, drink, discussion and music.⁸ It was against this background that Paul had strong words to say about their conduct, especially in regard to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It should also be remembered that communal meals were an established part of Jewish life (the Passover and Sabbath meals), at which the scriptures, prayers, discussion and reflection played an important role.

It seems that the "breaking of bread" within the context of a common meal was practiced by the first Christians (Luke 24:30,31; Acts 2:42).⁹ In Corinth, this had become a full-blown banquet which only served to emphasize the divisions within the church, and the celebration of the Lord's Supper appears to have been relegated to a minor role within this. In fact, conduct of the meal was so out of hand as to be increasingly like the pagan temple orgies held elsewhere in the city! Paul is obliged to rebuke them for this behaviour and, indeed, by the time of Pliny (ca. 100 AD) the Lord's Supper remained part of the worship service while the common (or **agape**) meal was celebrated after the service. Paul's comments on propriety in worship in 1 Cor. 11:3-16 also need to be taken firmly in the context of the cultic practice of Temple Prostitution that would have been well-known to the Corinthians (indeed, many would have formerly engaged in such practices, requiring considerable sensitivity within the young church.)

⁷ Luke 1:46-55; 1:68-79; 2:14 and 2:29-32, respectively

⁸ Indeed, we get our word "symposium" (literally, "drinking together") from these gatherings (Fassler & Jeffrey, 1992).

⁹ The sharing of bread, salt and wine at the commencement of the Sabbath was also a Jewish custom, still practiced today.

The need for the Corinthian church's worship to be distinct from that of their surrounding society (and former life) is also seen in Paul's concern for order, “spiritual matters” (**pneumatikos**) and the proper use of “gifts” (**charismata**) and “ministries” (**diakonia**) (1 Cor. 12-14). Again, we need to read this section against the cultic practices of pagan religion which were so prevalent in Corinth. These would have included the use of music- or dance-induced trance states to produce *ecstatic utterances*,¹⁰ which could be prophetic in nature. In fact, it is probably this background which led one translation of the Bible to render “tongues” (**glossa**, or glossalalia) as exactly that - ecstatic utterances. I would like to address the sensitive subject of spiritual gifts in the *contemporary* church as a separate topic elsewhere; what I would like to state here is my strong personal belief that the Spirit-given gifts described by Paul in this passage (also in Acts 2:4; 10:44-46) are *not* to be mistaken as being trance-induced or even as “ecstatic” in the sense of involuntary and uncontrollable. Firstly, Paul says that the gifts are given for the common good (1 Cor. 12:7); secondly, they are to stem from love and not pride or conceit (1 Cor. 13:1-3); thirdly, they are to be exercised to build one another up (1 Cor. 14:3,4,13). Finally, Paul clearly indicates that tongues and prophecy are *controllable* by those who exercise such gifts, since they are to wait for one another to finish and “the spirits of the prophets are subject to the control of prophets” (1 Cor. 14:27-33). This would clearly be impossible to achieve if delivered in a trance-like state.

In completing this section, we should note two other points: that the church's worship involved contributions from all members; and that it clearly involved singing, scripture, teaching, encouragement and sharing (Col. 3:16). For example, Paul mentions in 1 Cor. 14:26 that each one has “a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation”, while elsewhere he encourages the church to:

“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19, c.f. Col. 3:16)

Although some have questioned whether these are meant to be interpreted as specific types of music, most seem to identify psalms (**psalmos**) with the Old Testament Psalms (since both the Greek and Hebrew words contain the idea of music accompanied by a stringed instrument), while we have already identified several passages generally regarded as hymns (**humnos**); that leaves the “spiritual

¹⁰ Faulkner, p.24; Wilson-Dickson, p.11

songs” (**ode**). Interpretations of this term also vary, since the word for song is general and has no particular religious or ceremonial significance: the adjective “spiritual” is therefore required to make such a distinction. Charismatic churches, for obvious reasons, equate this with Paul’s singing in the Spirit (1 Cor. 14:15), or singing in tongues. Don Hustad makes an interesting observation on this:

“Spiritual songs were spontaneous outbursts of song. There's even a Trinitarian outline here: psalms were prayers to YHWH [Yahweh or Jehovah]; hymns expressed the truth that Jesus was God's Son, our redeemer; and spiritual songs were a gift of the Creator Spirit.”

Don Hustad, Ministry, Sept. 1995, p.14

Otherwise, the only specific references to music (other than OT quotations) are: Paul and Silas singing hymns in jail (Acts 16:25); James’ charge to the happy to sing “songs of praise” (James 5:13); and the accounts of heavenly worship in John’s vision in Revelation. You may have noticed that, although singing is mentioned and encouraged several times, there has been no mention of the actual playing of musical instruments. Indeed, other than by way of allegory or in John’s vision, there is no reference to the use of instruments in the New Testament. I mention this because, as we shall see later, it became an important issue of the Reformation which - in some denominations - persists to this day.

3.2 Early and Medieval Worship

(i) Worship in the Early Church

Very little information exists about worship practices during the second century. During this period the Church was treated with suspicion and hostility by the Roman authorities, so it is not surprising that few written records were left behind. There are in fact three documents commonly cited: the report of Pliny the Younger to the Roman emperor, Trajan; the *Didache*; and the *First Apology* of Justin Martyr. Pliny was governor of Bithynia and Pontus (modern Turkey), and investigated the practices of the Christians under his jurisdiction. Writing around 111 AD, he records that Christians met together on a certain day before daylight and recited “a hymn to the Christ, as to a god.” Pliny also confirms that the Christians met after worship for a common meal, but that they had given this up in response to an edict prohibiting clubs. The second document, the *Didache*, dates from about the same time. It is described by Webber as being essentially a “church manual” and contains an early eucharistic prayer. The third document was written somewhat later and contains much important information including a description of a Sunday worship service. This includes the reading of Scripture (effectively

the Gospels and Epistles), a sermon, prayer, and communion, a pattern that will be instantly recognizable to many today. Interestingly, it seems to indicate that both liturgical (written) and spontaneous prayers were included. Baptism was also an integral part of Christian life and worship, and is discussed in both the *Didache* and the *First Apology*.

The 2nd-4th centuries saw challenges to what might be defined as orthodox Christian belief as well as political instability and external persecution. This led to both the canonization of the New Testament scriptures (deciding which writings were to be included) and the development of the first creeds, as evidenced by the writings of Irenaeus, Tertullian (ca. 200 AD) and Origen. This also seems to have inspired some of the earliest hymn writers such as Ephrem the Syrian (ca. 306-373 AD) and Ambrose of Milan (ca. 339-397 AD). Third century documents providing insight on worship practices include Hippolytus' *The Apostolic Traditions* (ca. 220), the *Didascalia*, and the writings of Clement of Alexandria and Origen. Webber characterizes the liturgy indicated by these sources as being essentially the same as described by Justin Martyr with the addition of several ceremonial items, including the Salutation, Sursum Corda, Sanctus and Kyrie Eleison that are still used in liturgical worship today. A more fundamental and consequential change was the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine (ca. 274-337 AD) to Christianity. His Edict of Milan (313 AD) gave Christians freedom of religion and allowed the church to own property: Christianity was now not only "respectable", it was the state religion and many within the church rose to high public office.

Credal development also continued throughout the 4th century in response to continuing challenges within the different branches of the church (the major centres being Antioch in Syria, Jerusalem, Alexandria in Egypt, Rome and, from 328 AD, Constantinople - modern Istanbul). Several variants of what we now know as the Apostle's Creed were in circulation, for example, while a series of councils (Jan. 325, June 325, and 381 AD) held in response to the heresy of Arius (318 AD) ultimately produced what today we know as the Nicene Creed. One particular champion of orthodoxy was Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria, whose name became attributed to an anonymous creed that appeared in France around 500 AD. These credal formulas also began to be put to music and expressed as hymns, one of the earliest being written by Aurelius Prudentius (348-405 AD) and may still be found in hymnbooks today (Corde Natus ex Parentis, "Of The Father's Love Begotten", The Hymnal, Word Music, 1986.) Whilst on the subject of hymns, it is worth commenting on what these are understood to be. Augustine (354-430 AD) defined a hymn as "a song containing praise of God", and certainly the NT passages identified as fragments of early hymns fit this description.

Wilson-Dickson notes that if the passages from Luke's gospel are translated from the Greek back into Aramaic, they show the same poetic structure as the Psalms (Hebrew poetry did not involve rhymes, and was non-metrical). Hymns gradually grew in popularity, particularly (in the Western church) under the influence of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (374 AD). Unlike the Psalms, these were metrical (that is, they had repeating rhythmic patterns), but were again non-rhyming.

Finally, we should note again the lack of instruments in worship. In fact, there was a strong antagonism towards the use of musical instruments throughout the early church period. There were, perhaps, two factors shaping this attitude. Firstly, for Jewish Christians the use of musical instruments was strongly associated with the highly ceremonial Temple worship and its animal sacrifices (although these ceased with the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 AD). Since Christ died to abolish the need for animal sacrifices - and since both Christ and the church had been rejected and persecuted by the Temple authorities - it is hardly surprising that Temple practices were shunned. It should also be remembered that the Temple musicians were drawn exclusively from a particular clan of Levites - effectively a "closed shop". Secondly, the non-Jewish Christians associated musical instruments with the excesses of pagan worship and the music used in secular theatre. This also needs to be seen in light of the teaching of Greek philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle. Music was considered an essential part of education for its value in developing character and calming the spirit; by the same token, certain forms of music and instruments were looked on as being detrimental to these aims (anticipating the great debate on the morality of rock and roll by several centuries!) John Chrysostom (344-407 AD) was one of the church fathers in particular who spoke out strongly against the theatre and its music.¹¹ Neither Jew nor Greek would therefore have been comfortable with the use of instruments in Christian worship. This left the early church fathers with something of a dilemma: how to deal with the musical references in the OT scriptures. Their answer (inspired by Plato and others) was to assume that a deeper, spiritual significance must be found in all the literal references. Thus Cassiodorus comments on the "decachord" of the Ten Commandments.¹² Similarly, Eusebius (ca. 265-340 AD), commenting on Psalm 92:3, interprets the ten-stringed lyre as representing worship expressed through the five senses and five virtues. In fact,

¹¹ John Chrysostom, commenting on contemporary theatre called it "the habitation of pestilence, the gymnasium of licence, the school of profligacy" (De Poenitentia VI, from Routley, *The Church and Music*). One wonders what he would say about some 20th century theatre and film...

¹² Cassiodorus, *Institutiones*, 5.3, cited in O. Strunk, *Source Readings In Music History*, pp.87-92

the search for “deeper meaning” in both the scriptures and the natural world occupied theologians and philosophers throughout the Middle Ages.

(ii) Cathedral and Monastic; Eastern and Western

By the end of the 4th century, the church had come to the position of enjoying both religious and imperial (secular) authority, and had established centres of teaching and worship throughout much of the Roman empire. It became common on feast days for all the Christians in a city to gather together and process to one of the new church buildings (**basilicas**) to celebrate worship service under the leadership of the local bishop. Fassler and Jeffrey comment that this Cathedral worship became increasingly elaborate and formal, involving both cantors, choirs and congregation in the singing of psalms and hymns. This included both responsorial and antiphonal singing. Such a service was described by Egeria, a Spanish nun who visited Jerusalem sometime between the fourth and fifth centuries. Her account of Sunday worship starts with Matins, continuing throughout the day, and includes mention of the recitation of psalms, responses, hymns, other musical forms, and the reading of scripture. Credal development also continued in the face of several challenges, particularly at the 1st Council of Constantinople (381 AD), which reaffirmed the Creed of Nicaea as the standard of orthodox faith, and the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD), which gave us what is now known as the Nicene Creed. The collapse of the Roman empire also left the church in a political power vacuum, so it was Pope Leo the Great (440-461 AD) who negotiated the retreat of Attila the Hun and pacified the Ostrogoths - no small feat! Gregory the Great (589-604 AD) did even more to re-establish both secular and religious authority, changing the relationship between church and state for the rest of the Medieval period.

Other tensions resulted in quite different developments within the church, which all had an influence on worship. Although the councils convened to define orthodox christian belief ultimately achieved their aims, there was considerable misunderstanding between the Eastern (Alexandrian) and Western (Roman) branches of the church, due in part to difficulties in translating between Latin and Greek. But a more fundamental, cultural difference was also at work. In the Eastern church, the influence of Hellenistic culture was evidenced in an emphasis on the experiential, using the arts, imagery, ceremony to invoke the awe and mystery of God. In complete contrast, the influence of the more sober, intellectual and pragmatic Roman culture in the Western church resulted in a much simpler, less ceremonial (but, by the ninth century, fixed) rite. To quote Robert Webber:

“The concern of Eastern worship is to bring heaven down to earth and transport earth to heaven. It is born of the conviction that we earthlings join in that heavenly assembly... [yet] ...There was a great beauty, a sense of God’s presence, and a feeling of awe and reverence provoked by the simple majesty of the Roman rite.”

Robert Webber, Worship Old and New, revised ed., p.99-101

Another influence was the rise of monasticism, which grew out of a reaction to the increasing power, status and wealth of the state church. The founder of Eastern monasticism was Anthony the Great (251-356), an Egyptian ascetic who sought the solitude of the desert and attracted a small community of followers. Other communities developed, their life revolving around contemplative prayer, fasting, celibacy and voluntary poverty.¹³ The Western church also had its monastics, starting with Benedict of Nursia (ca. 480-530 AD.) The Benedictine Rule – still in use today – established eight services throughout the day with a strong emphasis is placed on prayer. It would seem that, at first, there was a considerable difference of style between the ornate ceremony of the Cathedral and the simplicity of monastic worship. With time, however, the clergy became more monastic in nature and monasteries were increasingly associated with cathedrals, especially in Western Europe. The result was a blending of two styles, one with an emphasis on the mystery of worship and the other with an emphasis on devotion, which is evident in the earliest surviving medieval liturgies (8th-10th centuries.)

Related to both monasticism and the nature of society at the time was the increasing shift in worship from lay involvement to the celebration of the “mystery” by the clergy on behalf of the laity - indeed, it was believed that participation in the mass was in itself a means to sanctification. Lay involvement was certainly not helped by the rise of the Latin Mass, since this was the language of learning while the majority of the population in Medieval Europe were uneducated and illiterate - and deliberately kept that way within the feudalistic society of the time. Indeed, much of medieval scholarship was found in the monastic and cathedral schools. Early Church Fathers who were also considerable scholars (and wrote extensively on music) include Augustine, Boethius (ca. 480-524), Isidore of Seville (ca. 560-636) and Cassiodorus. It was Cassiodorus who founded a monastic school in Italy around 554 AD at a time when secular scholarship was not widely encouraged. The real impetus in education and musical development was provided by Irish and Scottish monks in the 7th and 8th

¹³ For a flavour of Eastern monasticism see *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, transl. Benedicta Ward, Mowbray, 1975.

centuries, under whom the monastic schools amassed important libraries. This was no doubt in part because all books had to be copied by hand on to parchment or vellum and were therefore highly time-consuming and costly to produce - only the church really had the resources and scholars to produce them. Of particular importance was the work of Eriugena (Johannes Scotus Eigena, 810-886 AD). All these writers share a common influence in the Ancient Greek scholars such as Pythagorus, Plato, Aristotle and Dionysius (later writers gaining access to them through the earlier works of Augustine, Boethius and others). The Mediaeval world view was therefore heavily influenced by Platonism. Faulkner points out that Eriugena, in particular, adopted the Platonic view that the philosopher/theologian was the best authority and guide to practicing musicians, rather than the other way round!

(iii) The Influence of Greek Thought

I have already alluded to the influence of the Ancient Greek views of music on the Early Church's use of instruments and interpretation of certain scriptures (section 3.2(i)). The influence of Greek philosophy on Western civilization went far beyond this, however, touching on education, medicine, science, and the fundamental worldview of the Medieval period. In fact, the Greek philosophers influenced Western civilization in such a profound way that we continue to be touched by their teachings even today. At the root of this "tree of knowledge" lies the semi-mythical sixth-century figure of Pythagorus of Samos, who dubbed himself a **philosophos** [lover of wisdom], originating the English word, "philosophy". Very little is known about the man himself, although his early biographers agree that he studied Egyptian religion, Phoenician mathematics and Chaldean astronomy.¹⁴ It is also possible that he was a disciple of Zoroaster. Pythagorus moved to southern Italy, eventually settling at Croton where he founded the Pythagorean Brotherhood (ca. 530 BC) through which he spread his thought and teaching. Unfortunately for history, those initiated into the Brotherhood were sworn to secrecy, and it was only following Pythagorus' death and the scattering of the Brotherhood that his ideas began to be passed on to those who would develop and write them down, including Plato, Ptolemy and Archimedes. In essence, Pythagorean philosophy is a form of dualism heavily influenced by numerology, in which number has mystical as well as practical meaning.¹⁵

¹⁴ The "wise men from the East" at Jesus' birth were likely descendents of the same Chaldeans.

¹⁵ For a readable account of Pythagorean teaching, see Jamie James, *The Music of the Spheres*, ch. 2.

Plato (427-347 BC) studied at various times under Socrates, Euclid, and the Pythagoreans. He went on to found his Academy in Athens to promote his ideas and wrote extensively, including the *Timaeus* and the *Republic*, the key theme of the latter being Plato's conception of an "ideal state" within which spiritual and moral values are firmly enshrined through proper education. Within this scheme, the arts are seen not as a means of entertainment (which Plato and others considered a base use) but as a means of enriching the soul and building up "noble" character. Platonism itself can be described as the view that "mathematical concepts [can] exist in ... a timeless, ethereal sense".¹⁶ In other words, mathematics expresses a deeper, *spiritual* and eternal reality which is independent of the mathematician: genuine mathematical "truth" would exist independently of the discovery of that truth. This is also found in Euclidean geometry, which treats physical objects as approximate realizations of the circles, squares and lines of the ideal shapes of pure geometry. Thus the reason that a perfect integer ratio relating the circumference of a circle to its diameter could not be found was that physical constructions of circles were imperfect: Plato would insist that *real* circles *would* have such an integer relationship.¹⁷ Plato taught that this ideal world could only be accessed through the intellect; that this ideal world was distinct and more perfect than the material world; that the material world was illusory; but that the material world could be understood in terms of the ideal. The natural world was therefore studied in order to discover the deeper arithmetical relationships (the spiritual world) behind it. This fascination with numbers and relationships heavily influenced Greek thought, art and architecture.

These ideas had obvious appeal to the Early Church Fathers and Medieval scholars: the concern with noble character, moral values, peaceful existence, and the view of the physical world as a mere shadow of the real, pure, eternal spiritual world were all readily reconcilable with New Testament teaching (1 Cor. 13:10-12; Heb. 8:1-6, 9:23-28). Thus, although Greek theology was considered misguided at best, Greek thought on many areas including education, natural science and the arts, was accepted without question. One consequence of this has been the pervasive view within Western Christianity that there is a clear separation between

¹⁶ Penrose, *The Emperor's New Mind*, p.97.

¹⁷ It is possible to approximate this relationship using integer ratios such as 10/3 or 22/7, instead of the irrational number $\pi = 3.141592654\dots$ Ironically, it turns out that Euclidean geometry is actually at fault! The curvature of space-time predicted by Einstein's theory of general relativity means that, for example, the three angles of a triangle *don't* add up to 180°. Such discrepancies are, however, too small to be discernable in everyday observation (Penrose, p.156ff).

body and spirit, and that the body is inferior to the spirit. In fact this, combined with Paul's exhortations to "mortify the flesh", led to the extreme practices of the Ascetics which included self-inflicted bodily pain and suffering in a misguided attempt to attain spiritual purity. Another unfortunate consequence of this acceptance of Greek thought – and especially the teachings of Aristotle (384-322 BC) – was that, for all their brilliance, in many areas they were just plain wrong. This is particularly evident in considering the "music of the spheres" (to which we will turn shortly).

For now we simply note that, despite various refutations of "Aristotlean error" from the 7th century onwards, Kepler (1571–1630) wasted years trying to fit the motion of the planets to the Greek circular orbits before he realized they were elliptical!¹⁸ Galileo Galilei also might have fared very differently if the views of Pythagorus, Plato and Aristotle on the nature of the universe had not been so uncritically accepted. The Greek educational curriculum also had great appeal, especially to the Mediaeval monastic and cathedral schools. It consisted of the fundamental *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, dialectic), the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music) and, at the highest level, philosophy and theology.¹⁹ The idea that education had the ability to improve moral character and was a fitting occupation for the spiritual "nobility" eventually became translated into the modern view (increasingly under attack) that the primary aim of a University education was to form character, develop intellectual ability, and broaden the recipient's outlook on life and the world. It is also interesting to note that music was considered as a branch of mathematics, whereas today it is "relegated" to the arts. In fact, music *is* highly mathematical, and the act of listening to music involves a great deal of brain activity in areas which are also used in mathematical reasoning.²⁰ The Greeks had noted that the pleasing (*consonant*) intervals between different notes, as measured by the length of a vibrating string or spacing between finger holes on a flute needed to produce them, could be related to one another by simple integer ratios. Music was therefore spiritual in that it was an expression of timeless and independent mathematical truth. The other important aspect for the Greeks was the affect that music had on the emotions, especially the different *modes*.²¹ As such, music used for purposes of

¹⁸ Graves, *Scientists of Faith*, pp.46-49.

¹⁹ The terms trivium and quadrivium are due to Boethius.

²⁰ Especially structurally complex works such as those of Bach, Beethoven and Mozart. For a fascinating account of how we "hear" music and why certain intervals and scales are "pleasing", see Robert Jourdain, *Music, The Brain and Ecstasy*.

²¹ For now, just think of the different emotional impact of music played in the Western major and minor scales, e.g. "The Wedding March" vs. "The Funeral March".

entertainment was debased and corrupting, whilst certain types of music and instruments were considered inappropriate for use in education. The following quotes should serve to illustrate:

“And is it not for this reason ... that education in music is most sovereign, because more than anything else rhythm and harmony find their way to the inmost soul and take strongest hold upon it, bringing with them and imparting grace, if one is rightly trained, and otherwise the contrary?”

“Now when a man abandons himself to ... those sweet, soft, dirge-like harmonies ... the first result is that the principle of high spirit, if he had it, is softened like iron and is made useful instead of useless and brittle. But when he continues the practice without remission and is spellbound, the effect begins to be that he melts and liquefies till he completely dissolves away his spirit ... and makes himself a ‘feeble warrior.’”

*Plato, “Republic”, quoted from O. Strunk,
“Source Readings in Music History”, pp.8, 11-12*

“But professional musicians we speak of as vulgar people, and indeed we think it not manly to perform music, except when drunk or for fun.”

“From these considerations therefore it is plain that music has the power of producing a certain effect on the moral character of the soul, ... it is clear that the young must be directed to music and ... educated in it. ... And we seem to have a certain affinity with harmonies and rhythms; owing to which many wise men either say that the soul is a harmony or that it has harmony.”

“...for some persons are very liable to [religious excitement], and under the influence of sacred music we see these people, when they use melodies that violently arouse the soul, being thrown into a state as if they had received medicinal treatment and taken a purge.”

*Aristotle, “Politics”, quoted from O. Strunk,
“Source Readings in Music History”, pp. 17, 19, 22*

Finally, we turn to one of the central themes of the Greek philosophers’ treatment of music, the music of the spheres. This teaching can be traced from Pythagoras to Plato, Aristotle and others through Romans such as Virgil and Cicero to both Augustine and Boethius. Remember that the Greek Philosophers were convinced of the importance of number (which, for them, meant positive integers and integer ratios) as the underlying principle or harmony of the universe. That which was in accord with this harmony was moral and spiritual; that which

was not base and natural. They conceived of the universe as a series of concentric spheres which fixed the orbits of the different celestial bodies. There were seven of these in which moved the constellations, five known planets, sun and moon, plus either an outermost fixed sphere containing the fixed stars (those low on the horizon that do not appear to move) or an innermost stationary sphere (the earth), forming an **octave**: they thus had a *geocentric* view of the universe.²² In fact, Aristarchos proposed a *heliocentric* view (earth orbiting the sun) in the 3rd century BC. Aristotle's objection to such a view was that the earth would move so fast, we would fall off! It was not until Galilean relativity of motion that this was explained (Penrose, p.162–167.) The Greeks had an incredible understanding of static systems, but no understanding of *dynamics* – systems in motion – attributable to the lack of a workable clock.

A consequence of this was the belief that a moving object must be pushed continuously: thus a ball, once thrown, was kept moving by the air closing in behind it. The late-6th century Alexandrian theologian Philoponus attacked this and other errors.²³ He countered that it was *inertia* that kept objects moving at constant velocity (anticipating Newton's laws of motion). Aristotle also taught that the universe was infinite in duration, that the stars were made of special "celestial stuff", and that they were constantly propelled by divine spirits. He was also unable to conceive the possibility of a void, thus the celestial bodies must move through some medium.²⁴ It was therefore concluded that the stars and planets each make a *sound*, and that the higher and faster they orbited, the higher the pitch.²⁵ Furthermore, they compared the number of the celestial spheres with the number of notes within a scale played in any of the musical modes: there are seven plus the octave. Thus all musical harmony was contained in the continuous celestial harmony produced by all the notes sounding simultaneously, and mystical number was at the root of it all.

²² This differs a little from Pythagorus' version (as reported by Pliny the Elder), which has 8 spheres plus the earth. Other ancient writers came out with different number of spheres also. See Jamie James, *The Music of the Spheres*, pp. 37-40, 48-52.

²³ Graves, pp.14-17.

²⁴ Philoponus countered from a Biblical viewpoint that, since it was created, the universe was neither infinite not eternal. He also argued that the stars must therefore be made of the same matter as the earth, and that a void (vacuum) was necessary as otherwise the stars would experience impossible friction and cease moving. He also realised that inertial motion was effectively a state of "rest". In spite of this insight, Kepler still made fruitless attempts to determine the musical notes sounded by the planets until he gave up in disgust.

²⁵ Aristotle, *On the Heavens*

It is interesting that both Augustine and Boethius concluded that time and space were created simultaneously by God (meaning that space-time is finite and not eternal) in contradiction to Greek teaching, and yet failed to question the concept of the music of the spheres. Indeed, they maintained the geocentric view and simply interpreted the “divine spirits” of Aristotle as angels (and, since the celestial spheres existed in a hierarchy, so must the angelic beings.) Less surprising is their familiarity with these views, since both Augustine and Boethius were Romans educated in the Latin schools and, therefore, well-versed in the Roman and Greek poets and philosophers. Augustine’s definition of music as “ars bene modulandi” (literally translated as the “science of modulating well”) was widely copied even if not always understood. Thus Faulkner points out that an accurate rendition would be “the science of the well-ordered”, and that Augustine uses terms which clearly relate to the “music of the spheres”. Two terms in particular are: **numerositas**, meaning the quality of good poetry and music “by which the hearer may perceive that they are in agreement with universal truth (cosmic harmony)”; and **numeri**, the five faculties or senses by which humans are enabled to apprehend this harmony (sound itself, hearing, pronouncing, memory and intellect.)²⁶ Boethius, in his turn, formerly enumerates the three kinds of music implicit in the teaching of Pythagorus and others that Boethius had studied intently:

“Nothing is more characteristic of human nature than to be soothed by sweet modes and stirred up by their opposites. ... From this may discerned the truth of what Plato not idly said, that the soul of the universe is united by musical [harmony].”

“... There are three kinds: the first, the music of the universe [musica mundana]; the second, human music [musica humana]; the third, instrumental music [musica instrumentalis], such as that of the cithara or the tibiae or the other instruments which serve for melody.

“The first, the music of the universe, is especially to be studied in the combining of the elements²⁷ and the variety of seasons which are observed in the heavens. ... For this reason an established order of modulation cannot be lacking in this celestial revolution....”

Boethius, De Institutione Musica book 1, from Strunk, pp.79-86

²⁶ Faulkner, pp.74-75

²⁷ All matter was assumed to be made of the four elements: earth, water, air and fire

It is against this backdrop that music in the church – and music theory in general – was developed and employed for some 1500 years prior to the Renaissance and the Reformation.

3.3 Notes, Modes and Intervals: The Evolution of Chant

Having looked at the general developments in worship practices and the background to much Medieval thought, it is time to turn our attention to the development of the musical forms used in the early and medieval church. In fact, we have already alluded to some of these in the preceding discussion. One difficulty here is the question, “what did Greek, Jewish and early Church music sound like?” After all, there were no means of physically recording sound and no systematic musical notation such as we have now. To answer this, musicologists and historians study both manuscripts (containing music expressed as intervals) but also isolated cultural groups who have, presumably, retained the musical traditions of their ancestors. Before going further, however, it is necessary to introduce a small amount of music theory – a process which I will endeavour to make as painless as possible! Those familiar with music theory can skip straight to the next sub-section.

(i) Elements of Music Theory

The most obvious thing about music - especially sung music - is that it consists of a series of **notes**, which are differentiated by having different **pitches** and **durations**. Pitch can be quantified in terms of the frequency of vibration of the string, reed, vocal chord, skin, etc. by which the sound is produced; low notes (e.g. bass) correspond to low frequencies while high notes (soprano) correspond to high frequencies. The difference in pitch between two notes is called their **interval**, and a series of notes separated by specific intervals in ascending pitch order constitutes a **scale**. The first note of a scale is called the **root** note, while the specific pattern of intervals gives rise to the **mode**, which conveys a particular mood. The combination of root note and mode in turn constitute the **key** within the particular scale system. The vast majority of Western music from the classical period onwards is written using the familiar seven note (**diatonic**) scale and one of three modes giving rise to both the major and the harmonic and melodic minor keys. These scales repeat themselves, with the 8th note (the **octave**) having a pitch exactly twice the frequency of the root note. This can be demonstrated quite easily by playing only the white keys on a piano starting at middle C, which gives a scale in the key of C major. To play an E major scale on the lowest string of a guitar you would start with the open string and then finger at the 2nd, 4th, 5th, 7th, 9th, 11th and 12th frets. If you measured the distance between the nut and each of these frets, and compared this length to that between the nut and the bridge, you

would find that these can all be expressed as simple integer ratios (as can the frequency ratios of the notes in the corresponding intervals relative to the root note.) It was this type of observation that so fascinated Pythagorus, Plato and their successors, and convinced them of the importance of music within their view of the cosmos. In fact, with a little fudging, it is possible to derive the complete set of 12 notes within the Western musical system (A, A#/Bb ... G#/Ab) in terms of repeated intervals of a 5th (e.g. C to G, or a frequency ratio of $3/2$);²⁸ this gives rise to the 12 note **chromatic** scale which you get by playing every white and black note on a piano (or fingering every fret on a guitar.)

Of course, there is no rule that dictates how many notes a scale must have, just as there is no rule that dictates the intervals (frequency ratios) that can be used to determine the note relations for each scale. Within Western music, for example, there are pentatonic (5 note), whole tone (6 note) and blues (7 note) scales. Globally, there are many more varieties, especially if one includes all the modal variations for each one.²⁹ Of particular historical importance are the ecclesiastical or church modes. You can obtain these by again playing only the white keys on the piano, but starting on successive notes. Each resulting scale has a distinctive character from the resulting pattern of intervals. Early Christian writers such as Augustine were aware of the importance attached to different modes by the Greeks (as described in section 3.2(iii)), but it was Boethius who first attached the names he found in the writings of Aristotle to those used by the church in his time – without, it should be noted, a scrap of evidence that they were actually the same. This was later compounded by Pope Gregory I who set out to catalogue, classify and standardize all church music, using Boethius' naming of the different modes in the process. It is therefore extremely unlikely that the church modes of modern music theory correspond to those referred to by the Ancient Greeks and the Early Church Fathers. What we do know, based on manuscript and ethnomusicology evidence, is that the music used within the Old and New Testament periods would have sounded quite foreign compared to the vast majority of contemporary church music.³⁰ This is particularly ironic given the quite vocal

²⁸ The “cycle of fifths” inflicted upon music theory students everywhere; unfortunately for musicians - and the Ancient Greeks - it turns out that the cycle of fifths doesn't give exactly the same frequency for the 13th note (the repeated root) as we get from successive octaves. But that's another story...

²⁹ Someone once provided me with a list of over 70 different scale and modal variations!

³⁰ The issue of whether there is some intrinsic “rightness” in the classical Western major scale has been extensively debated even outside the church. It seems to be that it sounds “right” because we have become acclimatized to it through continuous exposure. See Robert Jourdain, *Music, The Brain and Ecstasy* for more detail.

insistence of some even today that only the Western major scale is approved by God, and that minor keys and intervals are not only unspiritual, but actually satanic. In the light of both the scriptural and historical evidence described so far, such a position is highly untenable.

(ii) Antiphony, Cantillation and Prosody

From the notations contained within the book of Psalms, it is clear that various musical forms were known and used by the musicians responsible for the Tabernacle (and later Temple) worship at least from the time of David onwards. Some of these notations are simply references to specific instrumentation for accompaniment, whilst others seem to refer to a specific tune or form. Examples of the latter include Psalms 6-9, 12, 16, 22, 32, and 44-45. The Hebrew word “selah” in particular - which occurs throughout the Psalms - has been construed by some as denoting musical improvisation on the part of the musicians, although the word is more frequently translated as ‘pause’ since it seems to fall at logical breaks within the text of each psalm.³¹ Although descriptions of this worship within the Old Testament itself are highly limited, considerable detail can be found in other historical sources such as the *Talmud*, the *Apocrypha* (particularly *Ecclesiasticus*), and the Dead Sea Scrolls. One musical form for which there is ample evidence (and is apparent in the structure of some of the psalms) is the practice of **antiphonal** singing (“call and response”) using either a soloist and choir, two choirs, or choir and congregation.³² This might have involved alternating lines, verses or half-verses, or a repetitive refrain such as that found in Psalm 136. Although we do not know with any certainty what the music actually sounded like it is probable, in keeping with the nature of Hebrew poetry, that the words dictated the musical rhythm and note changes.

Worship in the synagogue evolved somewhat differently as noted earlier, primarily due to the lay nature of the leadership and the omission of much ceremony and animal sacrifices. It included the recitation of readings, psalms, and prayers by a trained **cantor** rather than a choir, using a simple form of chant called **cantillation** which carried over into the Eastern and monastic branches of the church, and is still practiced today.

No, I haven't finished this section – sorry!

³¹ If true, however, it means that Jazz is far older than previously thought!

³² Although Andrew Wilson-Dickson notes that the congregational part was most likely taken by the temple choir.

3.4 Bibliography

The following bibliography is provided to identify the sources used in this chapter. While some of the references are probably of general interest (and have been included in the main bibliography in section 1.6), others are highly academic in nature: inclusion here is not necessarily a recommendation for general reading.

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