AN INTRODUCTION TO WORSHIP FOR UBF CHAPTERS
(Draft: February 2010)

> *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.* (1 Peter 2:9)

Preface

University Bible Fellowship began in 1961 as an evangelical student movement, and after nearly five decades we are still focused on campus evangelism and discipleship. Unlike other campus ministries, however, we have assumed many of the traditional functions of a church. We hold worship services every Sunday and serve as the primary faith community for believers of all ages. We are therefore responsible for creating an environment for worship that is biblically sound, honors God, and is meaningful to our members.

The purpose of this document is to help UBF leaders and members to understand the importance and nature of Christian worship. We hope to provide a scriptural and doctrinal framework to evaluate our worship practices, to inspire and guide us to make improvements as God leads.

[Note: In the future, additional sections will be added regarding Baptism and the Lord's Supper.]

1. The UBF chapter as a place of worship

UBF identifies itself as a ministry for campus evangelism and discipleship. Our current mission statement begins:

> *"The University Bible Fellowship is a non-denominational, evangelistic campus organization focused on raising disciples of Jesus…"*

In this purpose, we are closely aligned with student-oriented parachurch organizations such as Campus Crusade for Christ and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. However, UBF differs from those ministries in many respects. One very notable difference is that we conduct Sunday worship. Dr. Jun Ki (Moses) Chung of Kwangshin University reviewed the work of UBF in a journal article published in 2003. He wrote:

> *Every UBF chapter holds a worship service on Sunday afternoon, usually at three o'clock. The time, three in the afternoon, was originally chosen so that students could attend a local church worship service in the morning with their families.*

> *This meeting has grown and now functions as a true gathering of the body, an assembly of a local congregation.*

Since then, many chapters in North America have moved their worship services to Sunday morning hours, typically 11 am. This change is significant, because it carries an implicit recognition that most committed UBF members are not worshiping in other congregations. We have become a *de facto* church, a faith community serving as the spiritual home for believers of all ages.

In most of our chapters, the Sunday worship service is a focal point of ministry activity. Chapter directors and staff devote a great deal of time to producing textual Bible messages each week, and the Sunday service is the occasion when the message is delivered to the congregation. A written transcript or summary of the message is usually made available afterward, and fellowship members will study the Bible passage and share their own written reflections on it during the week. In this way, Sunday worship establishes a rhythm and weekly cycle in members' spiritual lives. Indeed, it is usually when a fellowship begins to hold its own Sunday worship service that we consider it to be an independent UBF chapter.

Despite the key role of worship in our ministry, it is often downplayed in our own descriptions of what we do. For example, our current *Statement of Work* at www.ubf.org describes one-to-one and group Bible study, campus prayer meetings, conferences, publication, relief work, scholarships, etc.; however, "Sunday worship service" is mentioned only in passing under the heading "Fellowship and Small Group Bible Studies." And discussions about worship have been largely absent from the training provided to fellowship leaders in North America. UBF staff members are expected to be competent in Bible study and expositional preaching, but other aspects of leading worship have received little attention. We hope that this document on worship will be a positive step toward addressing this issue.

UBF worship practices and trends

The typical UBF worship service in North America follows a simple mid-20th century Presbyterian form. It includes singing of traditional hymns accompanied by piano; representative prayer by one or more members; responsive reading of a single passage of Scripture; preaching an expository message on that passage; gathering of the weekly offering; and prayer topics and announcements. The service may also have special musical performances and reflections (testimonies) by students or non-student members.

Because UBF chapters are largely autonomous, leaders of local chapters have authority to vary this pattern, and many changes have been appearing over the last decade. Traditional hymns are often supplemented by contemporary praise music accompanied by guitar, drums and other instruments. Many chapters now recite the Apostles' Creed. Some have also begun to celebrate the Lord's Supper on an annual or even monthly basis. The wearing of jackets and ties by men, and skirts, suits or dresses by women has gradually given way to looser and more

casual styles of dress. In the hope of attracting and retaining new members, leaders are seeking changes to make our worship more meaningful and relevant to a younger generation.

Although the effects of these changes are mostly positive, we have reason to be concerned about the *process* of change. We recognize that worship must be sensitive to the culture of the congregation. Without cultural sensitivity, congregants may not understand what is happening and will find it difficult to participate. But decisions about worship should not be driven by cultural fads, nor by the arbitrary preferences of whoever happens to be in charge. Worship is a God-directed activity, and worship decisions should be made carefully and intentionally, based upon sound principles. This document is a call to greater understanding of how and why we worship.

Worship drives mission

Chung (2003) observed that our Sunday worship service is an occasion for Bible teaching and discipleship:

> *The focal point of each worship service is the Bible message, which, technically speaking, is more biblical exegesis than sermon, for UBF's method is textual rather than topical Bible study. Usually the director of each chapter delivers the Sunday message, but spiritually mature lay leaders are also given opportunities to share, as part of their discipleship training.*

Prayer topics and announcements given at the end of worship service are also strongly focused on campus mission. In our zeal to preach the gospel, we have unwittingly come to regard worship as secondary to our "real job" of teaching the Bible and raising disciples.

Given our unique history, this perspective on worship is understandable. But it is correct? Is worship subservient to evangelism? It is not. Worship is the purpose for which we were created and redeemed. Volf (2004, p. 35) explains, "God did not create human beings to be merely God's servants, but above all to be God's children and friends. As much as [Christians] need to do God's will in the world, they also need to enjoy God's presence." This theme is echoed in 1 Peter 2:9:

> *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

Jesus Christ has broken the powers of sin and death and has become our spiritual king. Now that God's kingdom has been established in Jesus, our task is to live as a royal priesthood, a nation of people who worship God and declare his praises. To whom do we declare his praises? To nonbelievers? Yes, but not primarily. First and foremost, these praises are directed to God. The passage in which 1 Peter 2:9 appears is not about evangelism and disciplemaking but holiness and sanctification.

Christian worship is not driven by mission; it is the cause and purpose for mission. The reason why we preach the gospel is because God's name is not yet universally hallowed, and his kingdom rule does not yet extend to every corner of the earth and every human heart. Piper (1993, p. 11) explained:

> *Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't… When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.*

Not only is worship is the purpose of mission, it is also the spiritual force that drives mission. Jesus said to his disciples in Acts 1:8, *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."* Two details in this verse are worth noting. First, there is no command. Jesus does not say, "Go do witnessing." Rather, he states as a foregone conclusion that witnessing was going to happen. Second, the verbs appearing in this are *to receive* and *to be.* Mission is not merely something that we do, but something that we receive and become. It is God's mission, not our own. When we repent and believe and meet the risen Christ, the Holy Spirit comes upon us in power. We then become credible living witnesses of Christ's kingdom, and evangelism and mission begin to happen automatically. Lesslie Newbigin, the great missiologist of the 20th century, noted that evangelism is not primarily about obeying the world mission command of Jesus; if it were, it would be part of the Old Testament law rather than part of the gospel. Rather, he claimed that evangelism begins with the "explosion of joy" that happens when Christians realize that the resurrected Christ is in their midst (Newbigin, 1989, Chap. 10). This is a consistent pattern seen throughout the book of Acts. On the day of Pentecost, the apostles did not work to gather an audience to hear the gospel message; the crowd assembled itself in response to activity by the Holy Spirit (Ac 2:12). It is also noteworthy that the commissioning of Paul and Barnabas for their first mission journey happened in Antioch during a time of fasting and worship (Ac 13:2). Evangelism and mission are not programs engineered and implemented by human effort. They are works of the Holy Spirit that naturally spring up in the lives of those who worship the risen Christ.

Worship is vital to the spiritual health of Christian individuals and communities, and apart from it evangelism loses direction and power. We need not fear that a renewed interest in worship will detract from our missions focus. On the contrary, we believe that a better understanding and practice of worship will bear positive and lasting fruit as we preach the gospel and make disciples.

2. Problematic aspects of modern evangelical worship

Worship is a touchy subject for believers today. There is a sense in which people are hungry for worship; they are desperate to experience the presence of God as part of a community of sincere believers. But many are chronically dissatisfied by the worship taking

place in local churches. They don't like the atmosphere, the music, or the preacher. They may say that the services are too long or too short, too formal or too casual, too modern or too old-fashioned. Sunday morning in Christian America is an endless shopping mall, with more options and choices than ever, and yet wherever people go there is the nagging sense that something isn't right.

Worship as instruction

In some churches, worship is an occasion for the pastor to teach. The Sunday service is essentially a sermon surrounded by a few prayers and hymns. It has largely replaced the traditional Sunday school class which few American churchgoers now attend. A strong program of teaching is not wrong. Indeed, sound instruction in the Bible is sorely needed. But when worship is reduced to a lecture, it imparts little awareness of the divine. Eyes and ears become fixed on the messenger, and congregants are not brought into the presence of God. Instructional worship characterizes a Christianity that has been unduly influenced by modernism. To modernist Christians, faith becomes an abstract activity, an intellectual acceptance of creeds and doctrines rather than a radical transformation of one's life and self. It should come as little surprise when young people raised in a postmodern culture perceive this type of worship as dry and hollow. Instructional worship does not inspire them, nor does it fulfill the mandate of Christ to worship the Father in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:24).

Worship as entertainment

In reaction to worship that seems too heady and intellectual, some have adopted activities and styles designed to evoke an emotional response. The criterion by which this new worship is judged is whether the worshipers feel moved or inspired. This trend is epitomized by contemporary music whose lyrics continually address the worshipers in the first person ("I," "me," "we"). Attention of becomes inwardly focused on the worshipers' individual or collective experiences rather than on the Trinity and the objective reality of God's salvation work.

Back to the Bible

In every aspect of life, and especially in worship, sincere Christians want to see God honored and exalted. Given the problematic aspects of worship today, it seems desirable to step outside of modern culture to recover worship patterns described in Scripture. Getting back to the Bible sounds good in theory, but in practice it proves challenging for the following reasons. First, worship practices in biblical times were not constant but evolved over centuries in response to God's revelation and the living conditions of God's people. Old Testament worship was built on a system of temple sacrifice that Christians (and even the vast majority of Jews) agree is no longer applicable. The New Testament gives few direct teachings and commands about worship. Even if Scripture told us exactly how the apostles worshiped in the first century, we would not necessarily be compelled to return to that pattern, because the world has changed a great deal since then, and the Church was not meant to be frozen in time. Understanding of Christian worship cannot be divorced from tradition and Church history. The

earliest Christians were Jews, and their worship was strongly influenced by Jewish law and custom. After the resurrection of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles guaranteed that the apostolic faith would be contextualized in a wide variety of worship styles.

There is no single correct way for Christians to worship. Members of Christ's Body come to God in many ways, and this unity-in-diversity is biblically supported. Visions of heaven and the coming kingdom of God, as described in texts such as Revelation chapters 4, 5 and 7, depict people of every tribe and tongue and nation worshiping together at God's throne. As we endeavor to carry the gospel to the nations, we must be ready to accept and implement worship practices that are culturally sensitive, doctrinally sound and faithful to the vision of God's kingdom revealed to us in Scripture. Most of all, our worship must be truly Christian, keeping Christ at the center at all times.

3. Worship in the Bible

Old Testament principle and practice

Throughout the Bible, it is taken for granted that human beings are going to be worshiping something or someone, because worship is intrinsic to human nature. The principal duty of God's people is to put aside all idols and worship the LORD (*Yahweh*) alone. The Old Testament contains so many injunctions against idolatry that we are led to this conclusion: The idolatrous impulse is deeply embedded within our sinful nature and must continually be rooted out.

Another consistent principle of Old Testament worship is that when we approach the LORD, we do not come empty handed. Offerings and sacrifices are as old as humankind. One generation after the Fall, Cain and Abel brought offerings to the LORD (Ge 4:1-4). Immediately after the Flood, Noah built an altar and presented burnt offerings (Ge 8:20). Job offered sacrifices on behalf of his sons and daughters (Job 1:5). Most of these pre-Mosaic offerings were animal sacrifices. One notable exception appears in Genesis chapter 22, where God tested Abraham to slay his son Isaac. By halting the sacrifice at the last moment, God revealed that his intention was never to kill the boy, but to help Abraham to perform an act of supreme devotion to demonstrate that he truly feared the LORD (Ge 22:12).

In the book of Exodus, worship is frequently cited as the reason why God was going to redeem the Israelites (Dalbey, 2001). When the LORD appeared to Moses at the burning bush, we see this exchange (Exodus 3:11-12):

> *But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"*

> *And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."*

In Exodus 9:11, the LORD commanded Moses:

> *"Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: "Let my people go, so that they may worship me."'"*

Other mentions of worship as the reason for the Israelites' redemption appear in Exodus 4:23, 4:31, 7:16, 8:1, 8:20, 9:1, 9:13, 10:3 and 10:26. And God's intention for the newly freed Israelites is made explicit in Exodus 19:5-6:

> *"Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."*

The imagery of a kingdom of priests carries an unmistakable message: God intends his people to be community of those who worship him and who lead others to worship him. When God gave them the Ten Commandments, the first two directly pertained to worship (Ex 20:3-6).

The centrality of worship in the lives of God's people is also the theme of the book Leviticus. When God was molding the Israelites into a new nation, he did not mandate an elaborate system of civil government. Rather, he established a priesthood and commanded the Israelites to erect a tabernacle in the middle of the camp where he would meet with them and make his presence known. The tabernacle was a simple tent that housed the Ark of the Covenant. Leviticus describes a community whose activities and identity were centered on worship. When an Israelite sinned, he would not be arrested by the authorities. Rather, he would turn himself in and offer a sacrifice for his redemption. His relationship to God and to his neighbors was mediated by sacrifices of animals which, from the New Testament point of view, are unmistakable pictures of Christ. The first seven chapters of Leviticus describe offerings for different purposes. The burnt offering represented complete dedication to God (Lev 1:1-17). The grain offering represented thanks to God for his provision of food, and it became the basic food source for the priests and their families (2:1-16). The fellowship offering was a joyful family or community meal to be eaten in the presence of God (3:1-17). Sin and guilt offerings were for reconciling one to God and making restitution (4:1-5:19). Levitical worship was not an occasional public event. It was a continuous service which spilled over into the daily life of each person through a system of dietary laws, rules for ceremonial cleanness, and an annual cycle of religious holidays.

The Israelites' worship was not a human invention; it was commanded by God through his revelation to Moses. The Israelites were to worship precisely as God commanded. Violations were serious offenses and sometimes merited the penalty of death (Lev 10:1-2). But it was not God's intention to suppress human creativity, and Israelite worship gradually evolved

to include a wide range of artistic expression. When the Ark of the Covenant was brought up to Jerusalem, King David danced before the LORD (2Sa 6:16). David introduced musical instruments played by professional musicians (1Ch 9:33, 26:5). The entire book of Psalms attests to the fact that Solomon's temple was not a somber house of blood but a joyful place of praise and song. After the destruction of Solomon's temple, the Jewish captives in Babylon renewed the non-sacrificial aspects of their worship. By the time of Jesus, they were gathering in synagogues for communal prayer, singing and expository preaching.

Worship in the New Testament

The first mention of worship in the New Testament occurs in Matthew 2:1-12: the Magi arrive at the house of the baby Jesus, bow down to him and present gifts. To Jewish readers, worship of a human being would have been seen as an act of unspeakable blasphemy. This passage is a thinly veiled declaration of the divinity of Jesus; it heralds the beginning of a new period of worship centered on Christ.

When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the desert, he was urged to gain riches and power by bowing down and worshiping the devil. Jesus' resolution to worship God alone appears to be a decisive moment in his victory over the forces of evil (Mt 4:8-10; Lk 4:5-8).

The most significant teaching of Jesus on worship appears in his conversation with the Samaritan woman. He announced that God's worshipers would not be coming to the temple in Jerusalem any longer, but would soon be worshiping the Father in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:21-24). This radical change in the nature of worship was effected through the crucifixion and resurrection. At the moment of Jesus' death, the curtain in Herod's temple was miraculously torn in two (Mt 27:51, Mk 15:38, Lk 23:45), signaling that the sacrificial system of the Old Testament had been fulfilled (1Co 5:7). Jesus became the mediator of a new covenant, a covenant sealed in his own blood, which cleansed his people of their sins and brought them into his eternal kingdom (Lk 22:20; He 9:14-15). Worship is conspicuous in the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus; disciples are repeatedly found worshiping the risen Christ (Mt 28:9,17; Lk 24:52).

The New Testament offers some brief glimpses into the worship practices of first-century Christians. Immediately after the day of Pentecost, they worshiped in temple courts and broke bread together in their homes (Ac 2:42-47). During the ministry of Paul, they gathered on first day of the week (Sunday) with breaking of bread (Ac 20:7). The Lord's Supper is again described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, where he warns believers to celebrate this meal in a worthy manner as a proclamation of Christ and the sacrifice of his body and blood. The practice of bringing offerings of money to Sunday worship is also mentioned by Paul (1Co 16:2).

4. Christian history, traditions and trends

Over two millennia, Christian worship has evolved in response to historical conditions, changing relationships between Christians and the rest of society, and doctrinal developments within the Church. In the first century after Christ, people throughout the Roman Empire worshiped many gods. These gods were not exclusive, and people could ascribe to as many religions as they wished. If the apostles had presented Jesus as just another god, Christianity would have been non-controversial. But because they preached Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords, this new religion was regarded as subversive, and Christians were often persecuted for their faith. For three centuries, believers met in secret, and the Church grew into a broad network of local house churches with no central governance.

The official recognition of this religion by Emperor Constantine in 313 A.D. ushered in a new period of institutionalized Christianity and worship by congregations in large buildings. Citizens of Rome were fond of ceremony, and the celebration of the Eucharist in the Roman Catholic Church evolved into dramatic and highly elaborate forms culminating in the Tridentine Mass of the late 16th century. In medieval times, worshipers played little role in the Catholic Mass; for the most part, they were passive observers. This passivity of Roman Catholic worship was addressed by Rome in the 1960's when the Second Vatican Council approved changes, including the use of vernacular (languages of common people), to foster greater participation.

Leaders of the Protestant Reformation reshaped the worship practices of their day. Martin Luther was a strong proponent of congregational participation which he fostered by creating a German Mass and a German Bible. He was also an accomplished musician and wrote dozens of hymns that were used in worship. In regard to the Lord's Supper, Luther disagreed with the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, but he did believe in the real presence of Jesus Christ conveyed through the bread and wine. Zwingli and Calvin disagreed with Luther; they argued that the bread and wine were signs of grace and that the Lord's Supper was a profession of the believers' faith. Zwingli developed a simple communion service that was a radical departure from the Roman Mass, stripping it of all its ceremonial trappings. Under the leadership of Zwingli and Calvin, Protestants in Geneva banned the use of musical instruments; the only music approved for worship was *a capella* metrical singing of Psalms and other passages of Scripture. Subsequent generations of Protestants relaxed this rule. In particular, the Methodist movement known as the Great Awakening produced thousands of great English hymns by the likes of Charles Wesley, John Newton and Isaac Watts.

The use of Scripture in Christian worship has also evolved. In medieval times, most worshipers were illiterate, and copies of the Bible were rare. Scripture was delivered through ceremonial public reading, often in languages that people did not understand. Knowledge of Bible history was conveyed through mosaic, painting, sculpture and stained glass. But Gutenberg's creation of movable type and the printing press – arguably the most important inventions of the second millennium – changed everything. Bibles became affordable and commonplace, and Protestant congregations became biblically knowledgeable. By the 16th century, the importance of visual arts started to fade, and churches began to resemble

auditoriums for preaching and exposition. The Enlightenment period of the late 18th century and the spread of modernism – a system of Western thought that emphasizes rationalistic knowledge and propositional truth – diminished the importance of mystery and sacrament in western Protestant worship traditions. As a reaction against Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodox worship, which were often criticized as "empty ritual," many evangelical Protestant churches became non-liturgical. In a non-liturgical church, worship is not codified in a missal, and prayers are usually extemporaneous. The term *non-liturgical* can be misleading, however, because every congregation's worship inevitably follows a pattern. All communities create ritual. What Christians need to avoid is *ritualism*, which involves habitual action devoid of substance. Ritualism can be a problem for any church, including non-liturgical ones.

Recent trends in evangelical worship

As Western youth culture advanced during the last half-century, church leaders sought to engage young people with contemporary worship styles. The first youth-oriented Christian music appearing in the 1960's did not evolve from rock and roll, because rock music – although wildly popular – was seen by many adults as rebellious and carnal. Instead, contemporary Christian artists and publishers first sought inspiration from folk music, which was softer and gentler in tone. The organ was replaced by the guitar, and praise and worship music gradually became more amplified and more percussive.

Transitions to these newer musical forms were often controversial, accompanied by heated exchanges between advocates of "contemporary" versus "traditional" worship. As noted by Crouch (2004), contemporary and traditional are not mutually exclusive, and effective worship ought to be both. Worship should always contemporary in that it should engage a particular community at a particular moment in time. And it is inevitably traditional, because the meaning of words, expressions and symbols are always rooted in the history and traditions of some community. Many disagreements over worship style are proxy wars between factions seeking to influence the overall character, direction and culture of a church. But these disagreements should not be trivialized, because the theological concerns behind them are valid. In our consumer-driven culture, Americans are prone to see worship as a commodity, and catering to worshipers' tastes may inadvertently encourage them to remain focused on themselves rather than God. But stubbornly clinging to outmoded cultural forms is also a stumbling block, a needless distraction and hindrance to outreach. If a newcomer attends a church service filled with language, symbols and expressions from a culture very different from his own, the message conveyed to him may be, "You are welcome to stay, but if you do, you must change and become like us." That message is antithetical to the gospel of Jesus, who incarnated himself and became one of us so that we could meet God.

To accommodate different musical tastes, some North American congregations now hold separate services with distinctive worship styles. For example, Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California currently features nine different venues designed for different demographic segments. Segmentation has obvious short-term benefits; it attracts new congregants and allows people to worship comfortably within their own cultural boundaries. Over time,

however, it may deepen divisions within a church, especially if worshipers who attend different services rarely see or interact with one another. In the past, Christians tended to divide themselves over doctrine; today they seem to be dividing themselves by their preferred styles of music. To keep members of a congregation together, some churches now engage in *blended worship,* which combines different styles of artistic expression within a single service to reflect generational and cultural diversity. Blended worship may incorporate ethnic elements from other nations as a prayer for Christ to reign over all the earth. It may also include expressions from other periods in history, allowing worshipers to join their voices with those of faithful people of God who have gone before us and are now in the presence of Christ.

To foster evangelism and serve newcomers, some have adopted worship styles that are *seeker-sensitive* or *seeker-friendly*. That is, they create an atmosphere that is comfortable and accommodating for those who do not yet believe. Seeker-sensitive worship tends to be informal. Worship leaders and pastors may deliberately dress in casual clothes. The centerpiece of the service is a message containing evangelistic teaching at a basic level, or scriptural principles to address felt needs and to solve practical problems. Seeker-sensitive worship is usually implemented as part of a deliberate strategy to foster church growth. Without a doubt, spreading the gospel and welcoming newcomers must be a high priority. But evangelism and worship are not the same thing. Those who attend seeker-sensitive services may never encounter Christians who are actually worshiping God; a steady diet of this style may, over time, inadvertently encourage churchgoers to remain immature and uncommitted.

Resurgence of tradition: the ancient-future paradigm

Much has been written about the effects of postmodernism on the church. Robert E. Webber (1933-2007), one of the foremost evangelical scholars of worship in recent times, believed that the postmodern revolution has profound implications for how churches should conduct their services. Contrary to what some have thought, evidence shows that the new generation does not regard worship as a form of entertainment. The overwhelming concern and desire of young people is to have an authentic encounter with God (Webber, 2004). They have a profound distaste for rationalistic Christianity that reduces faith to acceptance of doctrines and propositional truths. Instead of merely hearing about God, they long to experience him and come into his presence. Although members of the new generation tend to be skeptical of organized religion and religious authority, they are showing a renewed interest in ancient tradition, mystery and sacrament. An older generation of church leaders may want to dismiss these tendencies as an unhealthy seeking of miraculous signs. But that position is indefensible biblically and historically. The sacramental and mystical qualities of worship were well accepted for the first eighteen centuries of Christianity and are still a vital part of worship in Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and many Protestant traditions.

In a series of books published between 1999 and 2008, Webber promoted an ancient-future paradigm based on a renewed understanding of early Christian tradition handed down by the apostles and practiced during the first six centuries AD. In many respects, today's postmodern and post-Christian culture mirrors the social and religious conditions found in the

Roman empire. The writings and practices of the early Church fathers, which have been largely forgotten by evangelicals today, provide insights into how we may experience a transformative Christian faith in the 21st century. In Webber's final book, *Ancient-Future Worship*, he argues that the antidote to worship-as-instruction and worship-as-entertainment is to recover the purpose of worship in the early Church. That purpose was to focus worshipers' attention on God and his mighty redemptive acts through history. Ancient-future worship is a remembrance of God's salvation work over thousands of years, culminating in the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. This worship is also an anticipation of the Second Coming when Christ will return to recreate and reunite heaven and earth. A community of believers who immerse themselves in this redemptive history will come to understand that the Bible is the Great Story that gives meaning to their lives; they will see that they are living part of this story together with all believers from every nation and generation. This type of worship encourages us to look beyond our present experiences, the immediate issues in our own ministry and pressing concerns of modern life, to focus attention on God and his eternal kingdom.

5. Introduction to the theology of worship

Some conservative churches claim to follow the *regulative principle* of worship. The regulative principle maintains that unless a specific act of worship has been commanded in the Bible, we should not do it. Other churches adopt a *normative principle*, which maintains that unless something is prohibited in the Bible, it ought to be allowed. Even if we adopt one principle or the other, questions about what is permissible are far from settled, because the Bible is not a manual of instructions or commands. The Bible is a narrative, a book of stories, describing how God worked among people in various times and places. The words of Scripture and the work of the Holy Spirit have inspired Christians to worship God in different ways. Thus we should approach this subject cautiously, seeking to maintain open minds and generous hearts toward believers who may think differently from us. We need a degree of understanding, a biblical theology of worship, to guide our process of decisionmaking. And members of our congregations should also understand what we are doing when we gather to worship, because understanding will foster deeper levels of participation and devotion.

Foundational questions

Although worship is vital to the Christian experience, the term is notoriously difficult to define (White, 2004). The original meaning of the English word *worship* is to ascribe worth to something or someone. This is consistent with the heavenly vision of the Apostle John in which elders fall down before God's throne and say (Rev 4:11):

"You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created
and have their being."

Worship usually involves words, physical postures and offerings, but none of these have intrinsic value to God; what he wants is contrition and wholehearted obedience (1Sa 15:22; Ps 51:16-17). Opinions about the purpose and character of worship are varied. Martin Luther defined worship as when people "assemble to hear and discuss God's Word and then praise God with song and prayer." John Calvin promoted simple worship practices for the purpose of achieving union with God. In the Roman Catholic tradition, worship is "for the glorification of God and the sanctification of humanity" (Pope Pius X, 1903). Eastern Orthodox theologians tend to view worship as our human response to God's saving works in history.

What makes worship distinctively Christian? How is the worship of a follower of Christ different from, say, the prayers and chants of a believer in Islam? Muslims address prayers to *Allah*, which is simply the Arabic word for God. When we gather to worship God in our own language and tradition, is our worship really any different from theirs? Unfortunately, we must admit that often it is not. Professed Christians who address the Creator as "God" or "Lord" and maintain a generic mental picture of a Creator may not, in fact, be engaged in Christian worship at all. If we approach God in our own way and on our own terms, there is no guarantee that our worship is acceptable or valid in his sight. If we come to him with our own agenda in search of particular favors or blessings, our worship may resemble that of ancient pagans who bowed before idolatrous images.

A related question is: How does our worship differ from that of present-day Jews or believers from the Old Testament? We hold the Old Testament Scriptures as authoritative, and we claim to worship the God of Israel. Yet within a few years of Jesus' death and resurrection, his followers departed from Jewish tradition and developed their own distinctive worship patterns.

Understanding from Hebrews

A rich understanding of Christian worship is presented in the epistle to the Hebrews. Old Testament worship was established in Leviticus; Hebrews revisits this pattern and shows how it has been fulfilled in Christ.

The author of Hebrews begins by addressing the identity of Jesus. The opening verses describe his relationship to the Father (Heb 1:1-3):

> *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.*

The first chapter emphasizes his divinity, and the second chapter describes his humanity (Heb 2:17):

> *For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*

Now that this Jesus, who is fully God and fully man, has been revealed to the world, he has become the focus of our faith and the center of our spirituality. When Christians come into the presence of God, we do so by Jesus and through Jesus.

Jesus as mediator and sacrifice

Jesus is the high priest, the mediator between God and man, who approaches the throne of God to make atonement for our sins. But this high priest is also the sacrifice (Heb 9:11-12):

> *When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.*

The author speaks of a sanctuary – the house of true worship – located in heaven, of which the earthly tabernacle or temple is merely a copy (Heb 9:24). Jesus entered this heavenly sanctuary by the sacrifice of himself. His offering was also accepted by God as a representative sacrifice for all believers. By his work and his merit, Christians are now commanded to come into the presence of God (Heb 10:19-22):

> *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.*

To worship as a Christian is to approach the throne of God in the name of Jesus and through the blood of Jesus. All worship that is truly Christian must recognize, either explicitly or implicitly, this central role of Christ as our mediator and sacrifice.

Jesus as the true worshiper of God

The New Testament also speaks of our spiritual union with Jesus. The Apostle Paul frequently refers to Christians as those who are "in Christ." This is not a nominal affiliation, but a conjugal bonding at a very deep level in which Jesus lives in us and through us and his spiritual life actually becomes ours. Christians are united with Christ, both in an individual and corporate sense. The agent of this union is the Holy Spirit, who was sent by Christ after his

ascension. When Christians are worshiping God, it is actually Jesus who is worshiping his Father through us. The bond between Christians and Christ as they worship is described in Hebrews 2:11-12:

> *Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says,*
> *"I will declare your name to my brothers;*
> *in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises."*

When we pray in the name of Jesus, it is Jesus praying to the Father through us. The Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 4:6:

> *Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."*

Thus a biblical theology of Christian worship is closely related to the doctrine of the Trinity: three pre-existent persons, each one fully God, distinct yet united in perfect love. In Old Testament times, God revealed himself to his people by the sacred name *Yahweh*. But the advent of Christ brought a new revelation of God's Triune nature, and believers throughout history have understood the Trinity as key to Christian prayer and worship. This understanding comes from Jesus who directed his apostles to make disciples and baptize them "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19).

Worship in spirit and in truth

Another key to our understanding of worship comes from the teaching of Jesus in John 4:21-24:

> *Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."*

Jesus initiated a new period of history in which the physical location of worship was not relevant. Jesus did not nullify the use of ritual in worship – which, as we have noted, is not really possible – but he did indicate that the animal sacrifices being offered in Jerusalem would be rendered obsolete. The coming of Christ brought a new covenant, a new relationship between God and his people, rooted in an inner transformation in which the Spirit of God writes the requirements of the law on their hearts (Heb 8:7-13). Under this new covenant, God's people become temples of the Lord (1Co 6:19; Eph 2:21), and all aspects of their lives may become acts of holy worship. Christians are exhorted to continually offer ourselves as

living sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ (Ro 12:1; 1Pe 2:5) and to always sing and make music in their hearts to the Lord (Eph 5:18-20; Col 3:16).

Worship and the Church

The meaning of Christian worship is also related to *ecclesiology*, our understanding of the purpose and nature of the Church. Modern western culture tends toward individualism, centering the spiritual life of each person on his or her own experiences, convictions, decisions and actions. Some who were raised in an individualistic society see little value in joining a community worship event and prefer to approach God in their own homes, dormitories, or wherever they happen to be. Some will even claim that by doing so, they are fulfilling the Christian mandate to worship God "in spirit and in truth." Such claims display confusion over the complementary nature of corporate worship and personal devotions. One cannot replace the other; both are necessary for a healthy Christian life. The New Testament term for church, the Greek word *ekklesia*, literally means "called out." It refers to those whom God calls out of the world to assemble in one place. The epistles attest to the importance of gathering, as in Hebrews 10:25:

> *Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

The apostle Peter spoke of individual Christians as stones being built into a spiritual house of worship (1 Peter 2:5):

> *…you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

And Paul repeatedly described the Church as the Body of Christ, emphasizing how strongly individual parts need one another (Ro 12:5, 1Co 12:27, Eph 4:12). After Jesus' ascension into heaven and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on his Church, Jesus has remained on earth through this Body. When Christians interact with the Church, they are experiencing the real presence of Christ and the actual work of the Holy Spirit. It is noteworthy that the one specific command that Jesus gave to his disciples about worship was to celebrate the Lord's Supper, a communal fellowship meal that required them to gather in one place (Lk 22:19; 1Co 11:24-25).

6. Basic elements of worship

Old Testament tabernacle worship

The most complete description of a corporate worship service from biblical times appears in Leviticus chapter 9. Aaron and his sons, the newly consecrated priests, gathered the Israelite nation and offered sacrifices before the Tabernacle on the newly built altar. Spiritual truths were not presented to the people in the form of a lecture but were acted out before their eyes with real blood and real fire. The service consisted of sin offerings, burnt offerings,

and fellowship offerings. Each of the offerings held special meaning for the Israelites. From a New Testament perspective, we can say that each of these offering has been fulfilled in Jesus and represents a different aspect of Christ-centered worship. The sin offering represents the shedding of Jesus' blood for the forgiveness of our sins, which is the necessary precondition that allows us to come into God's presence. The burnt offering represents the complete dedication to God of one's life and self. Jesus offered himself to his Father wholly and without reservation, and through his merit we can approach God and do the same. In the fellowship offering, a portion of the animal was burned on the altar. The remainder was cooked and eaten by worshipers in the presence of the LORD as a celebration of joyful spiritual fellowship. Many scholars see close connections between the fellowship offering of the Old Testament and the celebration of the Lord's Supper in New Testament times.

Viewing each of these sacrifices through the lens of the gospel, we gain useful perspectives on how Christians may approach God and worship him together. At the beginning of worship, we recognize and address our individual and corporate sin, applying the blood of Christ to ourselves through prayers of confession and absolution. Once forgiveness has been received, we offer ourselves to God as living sacrifices through praise and other spiritual acts of worship (Ro 12:1). When we have wholeheartedly dedicated ourselves to God, we can experience the peace and bonding of spiritual community by enjoying fellowship with one another in the presence of Jesus.

Webber's fourfold pattern of Christian worship

Although Christian worship has seen countless variations, Webber (1994) identified four common elements that have persisted through the ages. These elements, which he called the *fourfold pattern*, are *Gathering*, *Word*, *Table*, and *Sending*. This pattern is easily remembered by a simple analogy. Suppose that you invite guests to your home for dinner. When your guests arrive, you are likely to follow this basic ritual. First, you say hello and exchange pleasantries to make them feel welcome. Next, you escort them into a suitable place (e.g., your living room) and engage them in deeper conversation. Next, you bring them into the dining room. The sharing of food is universally recognized as an act of joyful fellowship. When the meal is over, you escort your guests to the door and bid them farewell. This fourfold pattern translates to worship in the following way. When Christians gather, they are first welcomed and called to worship through opening prayer and song. These opening acts are also an invitation to God to come and join the worship through his Holy Spirit. In the second phase, worshipers engage in spiritual conversation with God by reading Scripture and listening to a sermon. The third phase may involve the sharing of the Lord's Supper, a celebration of joyful fellowship with one another in the presence of Jesus. The service concludes with a closing prayer or benediction, which blesses the congregants and sends them out to live in the world as servants of Christ Jesus.

This simple worship pattern consistently appears in the writings of the Church fathers. Apart from the New Testament, the oldest known description of Christian worship was written

by Justin Martyr in the second century (approximately 150 AD). This passage, as reported by Webber (2008), also mentions the collection of offerings and their distribution to those in need:

> *And on the day called Sunday, all who live in the cities or the country gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows, and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all those who are in need.*

7. Suggestions for improving worship

In considering how to conduct worship, leaders of independent churches are in an awkward position. If we are not careful, we may find ourselves reacting to pressure by individuals or factions with self-centered agendas. We may be blown about by winds of popular culture. Or we may entrench ourselves in our own comfortable styles and oppose reforms that are truly necessary to accommodate the needs of a congregation that has grown and changed. There is no single correct way for Christians to worship, and the New Testament grants us freedom in these matters. But worship decisions should not be made lightly, because not all worship is equally pleasing to God. To provide a framework for UBF leaders as we make decisions regarding worship, we suggest the following general principles.

Remain focused on God and his kingdom. The idea that worship should be God-centered seems so obvious that it hardly deserves to be mentioned. Yet it is surprising how easily this focus can be lost. For example, consider the style of representative prayer commonly found in UBF. Most of these prayers are very specific to our ministry. We pray for God to increase our numbers. We pray for specific individuals in our ministry and upcoming events throughout the world. Praying for these is important, but to newcomers and Christians from other churches, this heavy emphasis on UBF in the context of worship may seem peculiar and self-serving. Jesus instructed his disciples to pray in a God-centered manner: “Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” We would do well to include more prayers for God’s kingdom and to show a healthy concern for issues beyond our ministry. As worshipers are directed to see less of us and more of Christ, the spiritual environment will be improved.

Address God frequently. Liturgical worship in Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox traditions often resembles a three-way dialogue among the presider, the congregation and God. The presider and congregation often address God directly in the second person ("you"). By contrast, worship in modern non-liturgical settings often resembles a one-way flow of information in which a leader exhorts the congregation and speaks about God using third-person pronouns ("he," "him"). It is difficult to bring worshipers into God's presence if we talk about him but rarely speak to him. To foster interaction with God, try to select more hymns and songs that speak to God in the second person. Look for creative ways to address God directly. For example, when preparing for a recent regional Bible conference, we noticed that UBF chapter directors tend to share chapter news and prayer topics by delivering a report to the audience, and these reports can seem dry and businesslike. As an alternative, we asked each chapter to create a "prayer video" in which news and prayer topics were presented as an actual prayer addressed to God, accompanied by background music and visual images. These videos transformed a time of informational report sharing into a period of praise, worship and prayer.

Worship the Trinity. When addressing God, it is common for us to refer to him generically as "God" and "Lord," and we often speak to him as "Father." Speaking directly to Jesus is much less frequent, and addressing the Holy Spirit is quite rare. In some evangelical circles, the Trinity, although never denied, has been deemphasized to a point where believers no longer envision God in these terms. Indeed, some appear to think that the Trinity is an abstract concept that is irrelevant to present life. However, any fair reading of Church history will show that the Trinity is a defining feature of Christian orthodoxy and crucial to our understanding of God. The Trinity is not a doctrine; it is who God really is and how God revealed himself to humankind through the events recorded in the New Testament. To become a Christian is to be baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). Trinitarian language is conspicuous in historic Christian worship and prayer, and especially so in the ancient Church. For example, consider the *Gloria Patri* doxology which originated in the fourth century:

> *Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.*

Worship that speaks to Father, Son and Holy Spirit depicts authentic spiritual reality; it helps us to put aside fuzzy and generic pictures of God and engage him as he really is.

Choose a mature presider. In UBF we have often chosen young disciples as presiders in order to train them. That strategy may be unwise. The presider is not an emcee who announces to the audience what is going to happen next. He or she must act as a true worship leader, someone who can stand before the congregation and represent them to God. If possible, the presider should be a spiritually mature person who approaches the task with thoughtfulness and sobriety. The presider's demeanor will help or hinder the worship, and the tone is often set within the first few moments. If the worship service begins with a presider's prayer, the prayer should be well constructed – not a meandering list of requests, but a simple and genuine call to worship. Christians approach God in Jesus' name, by his merit and through his blood.

Recognizing this, many Christian worship services begin with a short prayer of confession and forgiveness in the name of Christ.

Strive for holiness. The Apostle John described a vision of heaven in Revelation 5:13:

> *Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"*

While this present world appears dark and dreary, the heavens are in a state of continual worship. The angels and saints join together singing praises to God. Christians have long believed that when they entered a church sanctuary, they were coming into a sacred space, into heaven itself, to join their voices with the heavenly host. Indeed, when we come to God in the name of Jesus, we approach and enter the Most Holy Place (Heb 10:19). Yet in many places worship is becoming increasingly casual, reflecting a desire to accommodate those who do not yet believe. Welcoming newcomers is vital, but it need not happen at the expense of holiness. Seekers are not well served by a mundane environment in which little worship actually occurs. An attitude of holiness is reflected partly by styles of dress, but the meaning ascribed to articles of clothing is culturally influenced and will vary from one person to the next. To some, a suit and tie appears holy; to others, it evokes images of corporate boardrooms and Wall Street investment bankers. Holiness is not the same as formality. Young people are very image-conscious. Women are especially sensitive to subtle messages conveyed by clothing, use or non-use of makeup and hairstyle, and these messages vary from one culture to another. If we do not understand these messages and appear non-generous and judgmental in these matters, we may offend people unnecessarily and drive them away. Holiness is conveyed by mannerisms and expressions, by how we address God and one another. Once again, however, the connotations of particular words are largely determined by culture. Some ascribe an aura of piety to King James-style English (*thee* and *thou*) whereas to others those words sound artificial and strange. Holiness cannot be reduced to a formula, nor can it be faked. Holiness is like its polar opposite (obscenity), of which one Supreme Court justice famously remarked, "I can't tell you what it is, but I know it when I see it."

Strive for joy. Worship is a serious business, but solemnity must not be allowed to turn dour. The main characteristic of God's kingdom is joy. In some churches, the atmosphere is downright depressing: homilies delivered by a pastor who never smiles, hymns sung so slowly that they sound like dirges. Disciples of John the Baptist were accused of being too glum, and disciples of Jesus were said to be too happy. If we are going to make one mistake or the other, it is better to err on the side of Christ. Christian worship celebrates God's mighty works of salvation, and it anticipates the glorious return of Jesus. In some settings (e.g., a movie theatre), feelings of joy are evoked by a continuous flow of entertainment and humor. Those elements may be present in worship, but if so they should used sparingly. Worship that imparts real joy is that which draws people nearer to God until the gospel of grace, love, and hope comes alive, until we exclaim along with Paul (Ro 11:32):

> *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!*
> *How unsearchable his judgments,*
> *and his paths beyond tracing out!*

Recite the Apostles' Creed. The Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed and other ancient statements of unite us with believers throughout the world and down through the ages who acknowledge the risen Christ as Lord. It affirms our identity as Christians within the apostolic tradition, connects us with other parts of the Body, and emphasizes the historical realities of our faith. An excellent resource for learning about the Apostles' Creed is the series of two lectures given by John Armstrong at Chicago UBF in 2009. If your chapter does not currently recite a creed, please consider doing so. Before making this change, however, we recommend that you watch the Armstrong lectures with your chapter's leaders and members so that everyone will understand what the Creed means, where it came from and why it is important.

Deliver the message as an act of worship. The centerpiece of a UBF worship service is the message. The type of message that we have upheld as our ideal is an *e*xpository lecture that thoroughly covers the passage, explaining its meaning to the audience and suggesting personal applications to our lives today. When the message is creatively written and biblically accurate, when it is delivered prayerfully and passionately with reliance upon the Holy Spirit, it honors God and has a powerful effect on the congregation. But if the messenger loses sight of God and merely follows a formula, it sounds stale, dispassionate, and moralistic; it does not draw the listeners into God's presence, nor does it faithfully represent the gospel. The effect of this kind of preaching on worshipers was described by Burge (2004, p. 150):

> *…we have been taught that the sermon must exposit the biblical texts, and that immediate and timely application should follow every message. While all of this is true, nothing has been left to our imaginations. Little has been left to our hearts except post-sermon feelings of conviction and exhortation. We leave the hour heavy, thinking more about what we must do than wondering about the mystery of God and his doings on our behalf. Therefore we have evolved an experience that is at best intellectual, a worship that studies the Bible. Homilies evolve into thirty-minute teaching sessions. And when it touches our emotions, it weighs us down, convicting us of wrongdoing and inadequacy.*

An expository message needs accurate informational content. Its ultimate purpose, however, is not to teach people right lessons but to open their eyes and help them to see God in all his goodness, holiness and majesty. Truly gospel-centered preaching, the kind that will move hearts and transform lives, does not focus on what we are supposed to do for Christ but on what Christ has done, is doing and will do among us. The most effective way for a messenger to draw people to God is not to exhort people to go him, but for the messenger to go to him and bring the people along.

Make rich use of Scripture. In a typical UBF worship service, a single passage from the Bible is read responsively before the messenger begins to speak. But Scripture reading is not merely to

prepare the audience for a message; it should also be an act of worship. If the passage reading in your chapter has become tired or spiritless, consider making a change. For example, try appointing one person as a servant of the Word to read the entire passage before the congregation. This task can be shared among members on a rotating basis, and the appointee should rehearse and sincerely pray. A passage of Scripture does not necessarily need to be interpreted and explained by a messenger in order to have a powerful impact. Many hymnals contain verses, passages and responsive readings; examine these to generate ideas on how scriptural elements can be creatively incorporated into a service. Passages of Scripture, paraphrased or verbatim, form an excellent basis for God-centered prayers. In the classic book *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1954) presents the Psalms as the prayer book of Jesus and describes their foundational role in Christian fellowship and worship.

Encourage participation. Christians who gather to worship should not be passive observers. If the people at your service are not participating, it is important to find out why. Some reasons for non-participation are intensely personal. Their spirit of devotion may be quenched by unconfessed sin, inner conflict and bitterness. Or people may find the service stiflingly dull. Perhaps the cultural elements on display are so unfamiliar that they feel no connection to the worshiping community. A stiff and old-fashioned style can be very off-putting to young people, whereas a service that is entirely youth-led and youth-oriented may leave elders sitting on their hands. Music that is too loud can stun congregants into a stupor; congregational singing is pointless if the congregation cannot hear itself sing. If the group is ethnically and generationally diverse, that diversity should be reflected among the individuals selected to serve and lead. Certain roles, especially the messenger and presider, are best filled by mature persons. But people of all ages and stages of spiritual development may serve in other ways. Broad participation is spiritually vital, as it allows everyone to witness the Holy Spirit at work in every part of the Body.

Choose words and expressions carefully. People will find it difficult to participate if they do not understand what is being communicated. UBF chapters in America exhibit mannerisms and figures of speech that lie outside of the mainstream culture, and they do so to varying degrees. Members of a closely knit community who worship together for an extended period of time develop their own ways and may be unaware of how peculiar those ways appear from the outside. UBF has a unique language with terms like *fishing*, *sheep*, etc. which seem innocuous. But sometimes these terms inhibit our communication with newcomers and other parts of the Body of Christ. Sometimes these terms offend people. (Who likes to be called a sheep?) Sometimes the language that we apply is symptomatic of a careless or lazy communication style. For example, some UBF messengers talk about “marriage by faith” without defining it. This term is rarely if ever used outside of our ministry, and even within UBF it suggests different things to different people. If someone says, “I married by faith,” it could mean, “I entrusted my marriage and future to God.” But to someone else it might mean, “I didn’t meet my spouse in person until shortly before the wedding.” Terms that are potentially confusing should be clearly defined or simply dropped.

Choose music carefully. Worship music, especially congregational singing, can have amazing spiritual power. Augustine said, "To sing is to pray twice." Music is a form of art, and defining and assessing artistic merit is highly subjective. High quality religious music comes in many different styles, but not all good religious music is suitable for worship. Members of the same congregation may strongly disagree on what types of music are appropriate. In general, music should be culturally sensible for the group that is worshiping. Using a diversity of styles shows respect and love for different parts of the community and helps us to open our hearts to people from other cultures. It is unwise for one person to make unilateral decisions in these matters. Brown (2004, p. 191) writes:

> *Because every musical/aesthetic style calls for a particular kind of attunement, no one person can be equally competent to make equally discerning judgments about every kind of music. Yet almost everyone is inclined to assume or act otherwise. This impulse is related to the sin of pride.*

It is impossible to please everyone all the time. Effective musical worship requires leaders and members of a congregation to demonstrate love, tolerance and forbearance. Brown (2004, p. 191) continues:

> *It is an act of Christian love to learn to appreciate or at least respect what others value in a particular style or work that they cherish in worship or in the rest of life. That is different, however, from personally liking every form of commendable art, which is impossible and unnecessary.*

Disagreements about musical style are almost guaranteed, and these disagreements may be healthy and productive. But they often touch on sensitive issues that go beyond music. Individuals may have difficulty expressing why they feel a certain way. Learning to appreciate and value one another's opinions, even when those opinions cannot be clearly articulated, is a necessary process of spiritual growth.

Use expanded forms of prayer. A typical UBF worship service includes silent prayer, representative prayer, and prayer by the congregation two-by-two or in small groups. Many of our prayers are specific to UBF members and activities. These prayers are good, but when we examine the prayer life of Jesus and the kinds of prayer offered by the church over two millennia, we realize that we have much to learn in this regard. The emphasis of our prayers is *supplication*, asking God to grant us favor in specific areas. Supplication is essential, but it need not dominate our personal devotions and worship. Adoration, praise, thanksgiving and dedication are also necessary, and greater emphasis on those forms can revitalize a service that has become lackluster and lethargic. When multiple persons are offering representative prayers, they do not all need to pray in the same manner. Delivering the Lord's Prayer and praying the Psalms are always appropriate, as these are God's instructions to us on how to pray. McKnight (2006) describes various kinds of non-extemporaneous prayer that have been used by Christians from many traditions but not widely known by modern evangelicals. These beautiful and heart-moving prayers allow us to join with the voices of great Christians from

generations past. And the traditional role of the pastor as a worship and prayer leader should not be ignored. Every pastor should learn how to offer a *benediction*, a brief prayer of blessing that is traditionally used to close a worship service and dismiss the people. A benediction need not (and probably should not) be improvised or unrehearsed. One excellent example is the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:24-26:

> *The LORD bless you and keep you;*
> *the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;*
> *the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.*

Another common benedictory prayer is found in the closing words of Paul to the Corinthian church (2Co 13:14):

> *May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

Make changes cautiously and deliberately. We have offered many suggestions for improving a Sunday service, but we do not recommend that they be tried all at once. Gradual improvement is preferable to sudden or drastic change. Worship must be learned, and congregations need time to adjust. Changes in worship impact everyone and should not be made unilaterally. Leaders and members need to discuss these matters to achieve a common understanding and consensus. Larger chapters may consider appointing a worship committee. The committee should be diverse, including males and females of different ages and backgrounds. It should include some persons with musical expertise, but it should not be limited to musicians. To maintain a spirit of unity among us, it will be helpful to share your ideas and plans with your regional director and with other chapters in your region.

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