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## Principles of Worship and Liturgy

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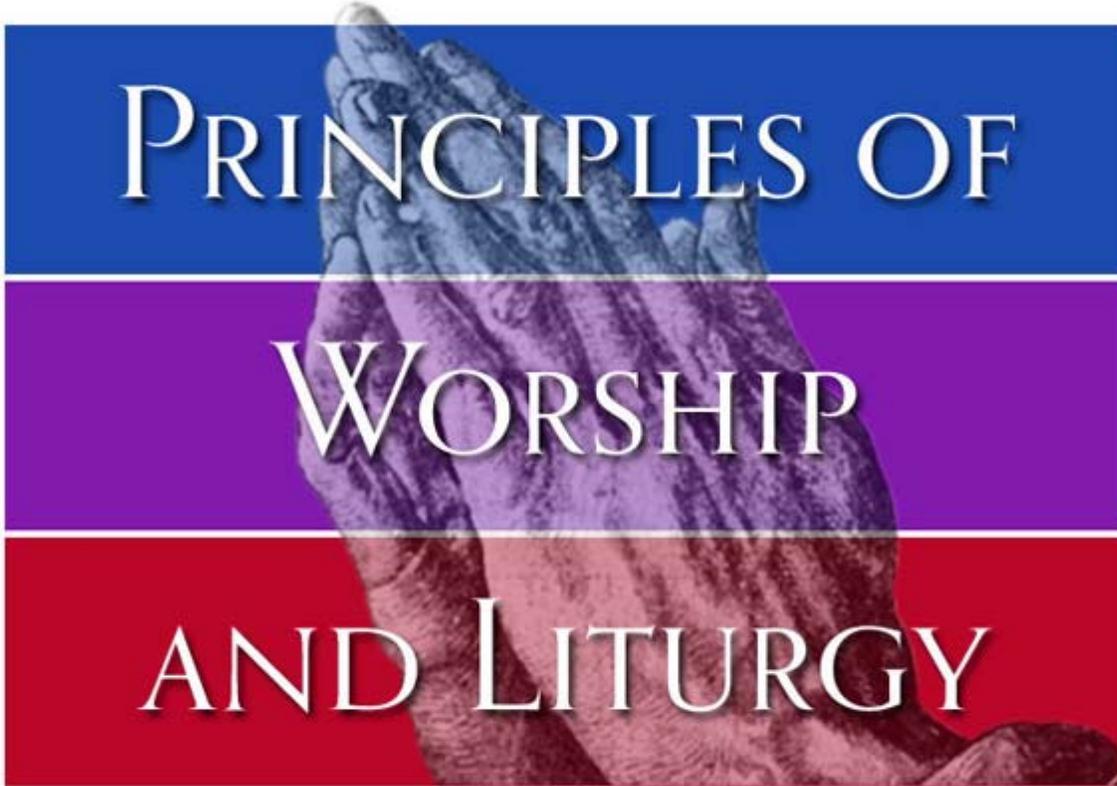
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***Worship and liturgy should reflect something far more than culture or personal preference.***

**By Fernando Canale**

Many church members are bewildered by the multiplicity of Christian styles of worship. Usually, when believers are talking about these feelings, the conversation ends when someone asserts that the reasons for disliking a form of worship are cultural. Culture shapes taste.

Thus, the reasoning follows, if the new style is accepted, with time it will become liked. Are worship styles<sup>1</sup> a matter of taste or a matter of principle? Is corporate taste a reliable principle to shape our corporate worship style? Are there principles that can be used to help shape worship and to choose what to include in it?

Many believers have worshiped God since their early youth. When they worship, experience precedes thinking. They relate to the Sabbath in the same way. They experience it without giving it much thought. They just do it.

Why should worshipers reflect on what they experience? Because Jesus personally prayed to the Father that they “may be made perfect in one” (John 17:23, KJV), as He and the Father are one (vs. 22). Thus, when the worship style becomes divisive, there is need for some reflection on some of the explicit and implicit reasons for what is done. All need to think and pray about this situation, which dishonors God.

Many Adventists understand worship as what they do on Sabbath during the sermon hour. The conviction is spreading, however, that modes of worship are cultural. To say that worship styles are cultural implies that any cultural form may be used that is accepted by contemporary society. Worship, some think, is about self-expression. Therefore, anything one chooses to do to express oneself in worship is acceptable before the Lord.

When divine worship is addressed in this context, it is bound to generate animated disagreement and very little real communication. Worship is understood on a cultural/individualistic basis. Yet, at least in theory, everyone will deny that *everything* is acceptable before the Lord. When no clear parameters are used to evaluate cultural forms, it is impossible to avoid this conclusion in practical life. Obviously, human culture provides no permanent parameters to evaluate cultural forms.

The role of culture in ritual formation should not be addressed without a clear idea about the permanent principles that should guide the rituals in corporate worship. There are some permanent guiding principles of biblical worship that should unite Adventist worship around the world and help to evaluate the cultural process of ritual formation and worshiping practice:

## **Scripture, Culture, Worship, and Liturgy**

Believers arrive at their conceptions of worship in different ways. And Adventists frequently copy their worship styles from other Protestant denominations as if they could do no harm. The various worship styles currently available should be analyzed to decide whether each new style of liturgy is grounded on scriptural thinking. Adventists need to understand the role that culture plays in the liturgical styles that are being copied from other Christian denominations.

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines worship as “the feeling or expression of reverence and adoration for a deity,”<sup>2</sup> and *liturgy* as “a form or formulary according to which public religious worship, especially Christian worship, is conducted.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, while *worship* refers to an internal state of human consciousness, *liturgy* designates objective forms and rituals, external to human consciousness. In short, worship is an internal experience that takes place in human beings. Liturgy consists of the external forms and rituals believers use in their worship ceremonies.

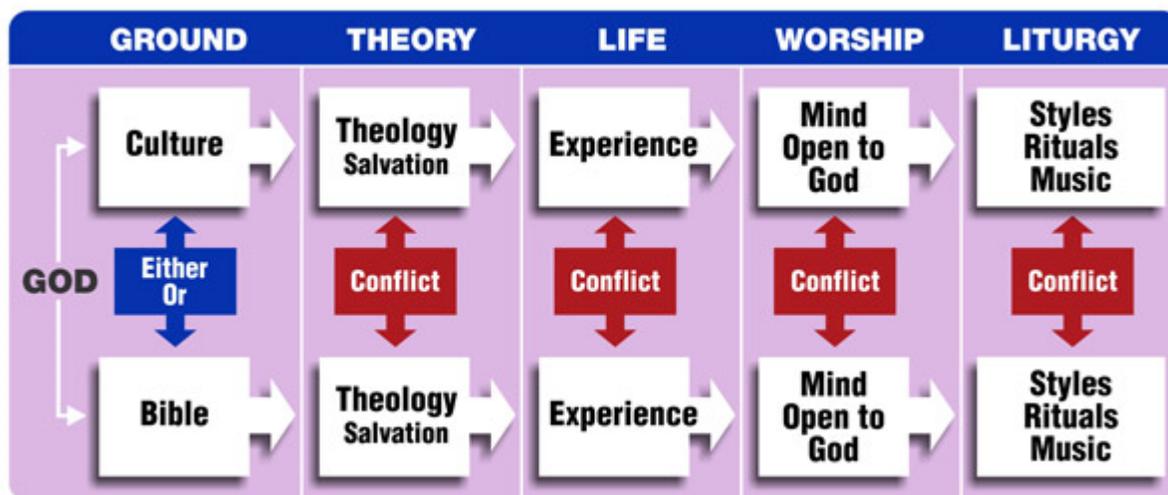
From this distinction, it follows that much of the discussion about worship in Adventism is a quarrel over liturgy and rituals. Confusing worship with liturgy obscures the deep spiritual issue of worshipping God. Worship should not be equated with liturgy and rituals. Instead, worship should be understood for what it is and how it connects to the formalities of liturgy.

Participants in church rituals usually think more about how the rituals make them feel than about how they originated. Subjective personal enjoyment and pastoral success in attracting believers to worship services, however, are not reliable criteria to judge the appropriateness of rituals in public worship. Adventists may be inclined to assume they draw their rituals from Scripture. Clearly, baptism and Holy Communion originate in Scripture. Yet, other things Adventists do in public worship, such as the hymns they sing, cannot be traced to a biblical text. Thus, culture plays

a role in liturgical formation. How can worshipers know, then, if the liturgical forms copied from evangelical denominations are compatible with biblical worship? An answer to this question necessitates a consideration of what any liturgical style assumes.

To simplify the explanation of a complex matter, see Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Conditions of Worship and Liturgy**



To describe this diagram from the viewpoint of life experience (historical order) is to begin from the right and move to the left. The diagram's headers present interlinked levels of reality. They are: (5) liturgy, (4) worship, (3) life, (2) theory, and (1) the foundation. The liturgical level (5) includes, for instance, styles, rituals, and music. The worship level (4) refers to the inner attitude of the mind and its openness to God. The life level (3) antecedes the worship level in the sense that experiences of the Christian life are conditions to the worship experience and help to shape liturgical forms. Yet, the theory level (2), where the understanding of theology and salvation takes place, logically precedes and helps to shape the levels of life, worship, and liturgy. Finally, the foundation level (1) is the base on which the other four levels stand. If we consider the same components in their logical order (causal order) we have to begin from the left

and move to the right. Thus, the foundation (1) causes theological understanding (2), that in turn, influences life experience (3), which goes on to elicit worship (4), and shape liturgical styles (5).

Ellen White makes the connections drawn in this diagram when explaining Satan's ways of deception: "Satan is constantly seeking to divert the attention of the people from the Bible" [foundation level].<sup>4</sup> "It is Satan's constant effort to misrepresent the character of God, the nature of sin, and the real issues at stake in the great controversy. His sophistry lessens the obligation of the divine law and gives men license to sin. At the same time he causes them to cherish false conceptions of God [theory level] so that they regard Him with fear and hate rather than with love [life level]. The cruelty inherent in his own character is attributed to the Creator; it is embodied in systems of religion and expressed in modes of worship [worship level]. Thus the minds of men are blinded, and Satan secures them as his agents to war against God. By perverted conceptions of the divine attributes, heathen nations were led to believe human sacrifices necessary to secure the favor of Deity; and horrible cruelties have been perpetrated under the various forms of idolatry [liturgy level]."<sup>5</sup>

Historically, liturgy is known by its activity. As we experience rituals, they become part of who we are. We belong to the liturgy, and the liturgy belongs to us. With repetition, liturgy becomes second nature. This explains why many find it difficult to analyze rationally or explain with words their views about liturgy. Matters of liturgy can become very emotional and sensitive. The historical level in which liturgy is experienced cannot be ignored. Because external forms of liturgy appeal to sensory perception, there is always the risk of confusing them with worship.

When disagreement about liturgical styles arises in the church, its emotional nature should not be overlooked, and an

effort must be made to reflect on its causes. Worshipers should distance themselves from their emotional experience and attempt the difficult task of understanding the causes of liturgical styles.

This should begin with the consideration of the foundation of theological beliefs and religious experiences. As we see in Figure 1, God's revelation is the foundation. Revelation, however, requires human appropriation. Christians have appropriated divine revelation in two main ways. Classical and modern Christianity believe that, primarily, human culture reveals or points to God. Seventh-day Adventism believes that God reveals Himself in Scripture as He personally interacts historically within human culture.

These disparate convictions become the foundation from which theological understanding, life experiences, worship, and liturgical styles flow. They create two different and conflicting views of theology, salvation, Christian experience, worship, and liturgical styles. In other words, liturgical styles in Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations are closely dependent on the way they understand the revelation-inspiration of Scripture, theology, salvation, the Christian life, and worship. For this reason, it is not safe to uncritically borrow liturgical styles from evangelical denominations. To do so would be to risk acceptance of culturally based rituals and make the church vulnerable to the theological system to which they belong.

When believers assume changing culture as the foundation of divine revelation—philosophy, science, and tradition—they place salvation outside human history. This theological assumption disconnects God and salvation from history and culture.

God effects salvation on the timeless non-historical level of the human soul. God does not save on the historical/cultural level but on the higher level of non-historical spirituality. Protestants call it justification by faith or "the gospel"; Roman Catholics call it

sacraments.

Liturgy, then, can be seen as belonging to the realm of history and culture where God does not intervene. This being the case, believers feel free to use cultural forms to worship their conceptions of God. This uncritical use of culture fits well with the use of culture as the foundation of theology and life experiences. Yet, as culture changes, Catholic and Protestant denominations are compelled to adapt their theologies and liturgical styles to changing social conventions. Thus, cultural-originated rituals and pluralism in liturgical styles are believed to fit with the timeless/spiritual nature of divine activity and the gospel experience of salvation.

Seventh-day Adventist believers, however, should not adopt liturgical forms based on culture as Roman Catholic and Protestants do because Adventists found their theology and life on Scripture, not on culture. When believers assume Scripture as foundational to God's revelation of Himself—the *sola, tota, prima scriptura* principle—they find the transcendent and immutable God personally providing salvation within the historical flow of human history.

Since the fall of Adam and Eve, the same God continues to be the center of all histories. As Adventist theology originates directly from His revelation through the prophets, cultural changes do not require changes in theology, life experiences, worship, or liturgical styles. Only new revelation from God could bring changes in the Christian life, worship, and liturgical styles.

Believers committed to biblical teachings, then, should make cultural or artistic forms of Christian liturgy fit the overall teachings of the Bible, especially its teachings about salvation and the new life in Christ. Specific principles about liturgy should also fit the overall theological and experiential contexts based on the *sola scriptura* principle.

There are, then, conflicting ways to incorporate cultural

elements in Christian liturgies and rituals. One way, grounded in culture, adopted mainly by Catholic and mainline Protestant denominations, uses only non-permanent cultural guidelines—philosophy and science—to determine the inclusion of current cultural customs in their liturgies. Another way, grounded on biblical revelation, adopted by Seventh-day Adventism and some biblically based evangelical congregations, use only permanent biblical guidelines to determine the inclusion of current cultural customs in church liturgies.

### **Scriptural Principles of Worship**

According to the Oxford Dictionary, a principle is “a fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behaviour or for a chain of reasoning.”<sup>6</sup> Simply put, a principle is a guide that helps us understand life. There are biblical principles that may help us personally and as a community to experience true Christian worship and to express it using compatible cultural forms in our liturgy.

**Principles of Personal Worship.** Some general principles can help to understand the nature of personal worship. There are also principles of congregational worship. Both are reliable criteria that Adventists may use to identify, evaluate, and modify cultural forms to make them compatible with Scripture and acceptable to God.

- *Principle of Origin: God the Creator.* The cause of worship is God—His nature, actions, and initiatives. That worship is about God. It is not about us or our cultural preferences. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, biblical authors clearly teach this principle. Twenty-five centuries ago, God told Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt to worship Him (Ex. 3:12). At the end of Scripture, an angel of God tells John to worship only God (Rev. 22:8, 9).

According to Jesus, this principle is universal; all the angels (Heb. 1:6) and even Satan (Matt. 4:16) must worship God.

"The true ground of divine worship, not of that on the seventh day merely, but of all worship, is found in the *distinction between the Creator and his creatures*. This great fact can never become obsolete, and must never be forgotten."<sup>7</sup>

This distinction is huge. It declares that God's reality goes beyond the greatness of His exalted throne in heaven. Theologians call it "divine transcendence." This means that God is great, beyond our understanding (Job 36:26). Not even the highest heaven can contain Him (2 Chron. 6:18).

This can help to explain why the second commandment says not to make any image of God (Ex. 20:4). God the Creator is beyond images. To make an image of God is to limit Him in form to that of one of His creatures. The greatness and transcendence of God the Creator elicits worship and requires befitting liturgical forms.

From Moses' and John's statements above, it can be seen that worship is a human action directed to God. Interestingly, neither the Hebrew nor the Greek languages have a specific word for worship as we do in English. Addressing Moses, God used the Hebrew word *'abad*, which means "to serve," "to work," "to be a slave," or "to worship." Addressing John, the angel used the Greek word *proskunéō*, which means, "to bow down." According to these words, worship includes human submission and service to God. Submission points to the inner spiritual nature of worship. Service describes its external expression as lifestyle.

If worship is a relation of submission and service to God, the way God is understood (theology) determines worship and liturgy. This link between theology and worship fits the presuppositions of worship described in Figure 1 above. The less that is known of the God of Scripture, the more likely culture will shape worship and liturgy. The statement quoted above

masterfully underlines God the Creator as the biblical origin and referent of worship and liturgy.

Seventh-day Adventists worship the Creator. In doing so, their worship departs from most organized religions that accept deep-time evolutionary ideas. According to the message of the first angel in Revelation 14, God's visible end-time church will worship the Creator and proclaim this message to the world (Rev. 14:7). As Adventist understanding of God differs, so does our Christian life, worship, and choice of liturgical forms.

Christian believers worship God in Christ. Christ is the Creator (John 1:1-3) incarnated in human nature (vs. 14). Yet, many believers forget the otherness and greatness of Christ as Creator and assume that in worship they relate to a human friend. This view promotes a wrong sense of familiarity that leads to informality, casualness, and worship as entertainment.

We need to broaden and deepen our idea about who God is beyond His incarnation in Jesus Christ. The Bible will help to do that. As ideas of God expand through Bible study and the work of the Holy Spirit, worship experience and liturgical forms will conform to the transcendence and otherness of God. In approaching the presence of the infinite and mysterious Creator, a sense of awe and reverence will fill our hearts and houses of worship.

● *Principle of Existence: Discipleship as Necessary Condition.* Though God is the cause of worship, human response is the necessary condition of its existence. Without human response, there is no worship. Human response, then, belongs to the relational essence of worship. The nature of human response in worship is implicit in the words submission and service. Thus, only true disciples worship God. Thousands of professed Christians can participate in religious ceremonies, but only Christ's disciples can offer Him truly acceptable worship.

How do sinners become disciples? Baptism (a worship ritual)

does not change sinners into disciples. "The condition and evidence of our discipleship is self-denial and the cross. Unless these are brought into our experience, we cannot know God; we cannot worship him in spirit and in truth and in the beauty of holiness."<sup>8</sup>

Jesus taught that if we continue in His way, we are truly His disciples (John 8:31). We become disciples, then, when by studying Scripture we understand Jesus' lifestyle and freely follow Him, leaving behind the lifestyle of the old self (Eph. 4:22) and of the world (Gal. 6:14). Self-denial that is central to Christ's incarnation and life makes possible discipleship (service to Christ). According to Paul, this is the only rational (coherent) way to worship God (Rom. 12:1). Without discipleship, private and corporate worship rituals are external forms voided of power, meaning, and coherence.

- *Principle of Nature: Spirit and Truth.* When Jesus told a Samaritan woman that "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24, NRSV), He defined the nature of worship. Commenting on this passage, Ellen White pointed out that Christ was "showing that the ritual service was passing away, and possessed no virtue. . . . True circumcision is the worship of Christ in spirit and truth, not in forms and ceremonies, with hypocritical pretense."<sup>9</sup> Consequently, believers need to realize that worship does not consist of performing external rituals (liturgy), but in experiencing inner spiritual surrender to God's truth.

If worship is a matter of the heart (mind, will, and emotions), sinful human beings need a constant renewal of the content and pattern of their thoughts. Knowing that inner thoughts corrupt humanity (Gen. 6:5; Matt. 15:18), Paul realized that worshipers must not only avoid adopting the thinking of the world, but they must also seek to adopt Christ's thought patterns (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 10:5). As Christ transforms the thoughts of

men and women into His likeness, they become ready to worship Him in spirit and truth.

If our thoughts must not conform to the world, how can we pretend that God will accept liturgical forms that conform to the world's way of thinking and acting? Adventist liturgical forms must be compatible with the spiritual nature of worship and fit Christ's thoughts and truth. Yet, believers must not forget that liturgy is only the external vehicle of worship. Even if they dare to enact rituals ordained by God in Scripture formally, without spirit and truth, they are not worshiping but offending God (Isa. 1:11-14).

- *Principle of Enjoyment: Meeting a Friend.* Worship must be a pleasant occasion—not because the liturgical style is attractive to personal taste, but because Christ is encountered. Christ is met in His Word. If worship is pleasant only when music, drama, decorations, and ceremonies appeal to personal or cultural taste, it may not truly be worship, but a seeking for entertainment or for the performance of an external work. One must become a disciple of Christ to fulfill the necessary condition of worship.

“When they worship Him, He expects to be with them, to bless and comfort them, filling their hearts with joy and love. The Lord desires His children to take comfort in His service and to find more pleasure than hardship in His work. He desires that those who come to worship Him shall carry away with them precious thoughts of His care and love, that they may be cheered in all the employments of daily life, that they may have grace to deal honestly and faithfully in all things.”<sup>10</sup> Doubtless, then, the enjoyment of worship embraces much more than rituals and ceremonies.

Although music, ceremonies, rituals, and social interaction have a rightful place in church services, they are not inherent to the nature of Christian worship. Many people have difficulty

understanding that the joy of worship generates from following Christ daily, not from the liturgy. Worship takes place as a life experience of discipleship. In congregational worship, believers express the joy that daily communion with God and service to Him generates in their lives. The disciple brings joy to the worship service to share with God and fellow believers. Joy of worship is not generated by the mere attractiveness of liturgy.

The notion that joy originates in liturgy corrupts the worship experience. Liturgy operates on the senses, not on the spirit where worship takes place. In the 21st century, liturgy appeals to the senses by accommodating characteristics of the entertainment industry. By adapting liturgical forms of the world, Christians disregard the Bible as the foundation of worship (see Figure 1), its principles of worship, and the essence of Christianity.

This procedure is not new. Ellen White vividly describes the results of this approach to liturgy in Ahab's time: "Captivated by the gorgeous display and the fascinating rites of idol worship, the people followed the example of the king and his court, and gave themselves up to the intoxicating, degrading pleasures of a sensual worship. In their blind folly they chose to reject God and His worship. The light so graciously given them had become darkness. The fine gold had become dim."<sup>11</sup>

### **Principles of Congregational Worship.**

For many Adventists, worship boils down to the Saturday morning sermon. What should they do when they meet together to worship God? Answers to this question require some principles of congregational worship. Congregational principles assume, expand, and affirm the general principles discussed above.

- *Principle of Existence: Divine Presence.* Is it possible to go to church without worshiping God? Can church attendance be equated with worship? What does it take for a congregation to

worship God? According to the general principles of origin and existence, worship originates in God's creation and exists in human discipleship. Thus, acknowledging God as Creator and embracing the concept of discipleship are preconditions of congregational worship. Disciples come to worship the Creator. Yet, what should take place for congregational worship to exist?

Congregational worship responds to God's presence. Without divine presence, worship does not exist. It is only meeting, singing, and relating to one another. How do believers experience the presence of God in congregational worship?

"Although God dwells not in temples made with hands, yet He honors with His presence the assemblies of His people. He has promised that when they come together to seek Him, to acknowledge their sins, and to pray for one another, He will meet with them by His Spirit." However, according to Christ, we do not see or feel the Holy Spirit (John 3:7, 8). How, then, can we experience the presence of Christ?<sup>12</sup>

The way in which Christians understand God's presence through the Holy Spirit varies widely. Roman Catholics and mainline Protestants believe that Christ is present in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Charismatic Christians think they experience the presence of Christ in the baptism of the Holy Spirit—generally manifested in connection with loud music, the gift of tongues, and preaching. Biblical Christians believe Christ becomes present when His Word is proclaimed. "God's Spirit is in his word, and a special blessing will be received by those who accept the words of God when illuminated to their mind by the Holy Spirit. It is thus that the believer eats of Christ, the Bread of Life. Truth is seen in a new light, and the soul *rejoices as in the visible presence of Christ.*"<sup>13</sup>

"When we bow in prayer, let us remember that Jesus is with us. When we go into the house of God, let us remember that we are not going into the place of worship alone. We bring Jesus with

us. If the people of God could have a realizing sense of this fact, they would not be inattentive hearers of the word. There would not be a cold lethargy upon hearts, so that those who profess his name cannot speak of his love."<sup>14</sup>

Congregational worship exists because of the proclamation, explanation, and application of God's words to the concrete life of believers. For this reason, the sermon, personal testimonies, and biblical lyrics (spiritual songs?) become the essential sensory/spiritual component of worship. Yet proclamation of the Word in itself is not worship. Worship is the invisible and free movement of the mind/life of individual believers who respond to God's Word in deep and complete commitment to Him.

When public worship takes place, God the Creator makes Himself present in Christ through the Word and the Holy Spirit, and in response, disciples offer a renewed commitment of faith, spiritual songs, praise, thanksgiving, and devotion. "When our hearts are tuned to praise our Maker, not only in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, but also in our lives, we shall live in communion with Heaven. Our offering of grateful thanks will not be spasmodic, or reserved for special occasions; there will be gratitude in the heart and in the home, in private as well as in public devotion. This constitutes the true worship of God."<sup>15</sup>

- *Principle of Attraction: The Resurrected Christ.* Why go to church on Saturdays? Is it the music? To meet friends? Good preaching? The air-conditioning and architectural style of the building? Its convenient location or time? Attending church for these or similar reasons may not be worshipping God.

God designed that in worship, Christ should be the real, living, active center of attraction. Christ promised that "When I am lifted up from the earth, [I] will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32, NIV). "Christ purposed that his cross should become the center of attraction, whereby he should draw the hearts of men to himself."<sup>16</sup> "The Father came in vital connection with the

world through his well-beloved Son, and the revelation of divine truth through the Son was designed to draw men to the Father."<sup>17</sup>

The resurrected Christ through the Holy Spirit draws all men to Himself. Not all will worship Him, not all will be saved, but all will be attracted by Christ to Himself. When men and women respond to Christ's attraction, they worship Him in Spirit and Truth.

### **Principles of Liturgy**

- *Principle of Creativity: Obedience to Christ.* The principle of attraction leads to the principle of creativity and liveliness. Worship liturgy must be attractive and testify to the worshiper's personal commitment to Christ. This requires obedient creativity in shaping attractive liturgical forms that exhort worshipers to surrender their lives to Christ and serve Him in their daily lives.

Christ is the principle of attraction and the principle of obedient creativity and liveliness of liturgical forms. "The highest commendation we can receive as Christian workers is to say that we present Christ lifted up on the cross as the object of supreme desire; and how can we do this better than by making religion attractive? Let us show that to us the worship of God is not drudgery and dry form, but spirit and life."<sup>18</sup>

Obedient creativity seeks to express the worshipers' transformation into the likeness of Christ; not their cultural differences, preferences, and habits. Therefore, the forms of worship they create should be trans-cultural rather than culturally conditioned. They should carefully avoid using forms springing from or associated with sinful practices and habits. At the same time, their liturgy should be attractive and an expression of the spiritual joy that springs from worshiping Christ.

- *Principle of Content: Distinguishing Between the Holy and*

*Common.* Through the complex liturgical system of the Old Testament, God intended to show His holiness. Thus, people, actions, and things God chose to use in the ritual became holy, that is, consecrated for holy use.

Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, presented “strange fire” before God (Lev. 10:1, KJV). What they probably did was to ignite their censer not with the prescribed fire of the altar but used a common—not the consecrated—source of fire. The consequences were horrific and probably unexpected. “Fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord” (vs. 2, NKJV). Moses explained God’s action to his brother Aaron: ““This is what the Lord meant when he said, “Through those who are near me I will show myself holy, and before all the people I will be glorified””” (vs. 3, NRSV). In this context, God expressed an important general principle of liturgy: “[You must] distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean”” (vs. 10, NIV). God not only formulated this principle theoretically, but He also explained its importance and non-negotiability in real life by punishing Nadab and Abihu with death by fire.

This principle specifically relates to congregational worship, but should it apply to Christian liturgy? Although God devised the Old Testament liturgical system to be used until Christ’s death (Mark 15:38; Matt. 27:51; 2 Cor. 3:11), He continues to be holy and desires to show Himself holy to those who approach Him. Moreover, because God’s nature and His plan of salvation are immutable (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17; Heb. 6:13-18; 13:8), this principle applies to Christian worship. Consequently, what is common and ordinary should not be used before Him. Christian worship should not employ anything clearly associated with the world or our past sinful life (c.f., Deut. 12:1-6).

“No one should bring into service the power of imagination to worship that which belittles God in the mind and associates

Him with common things. Those who worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth. They must exercise living faith. Their worship will then be controlled not by the imagination, but by genuine faith."<sup>19</sup> In liturgical matters, the criterion to include cultural contents in liturgical forms should be pleasing to Him, not what appeals to the personal or cultural preferences of worshipers. Worship is about God, not about the worshiper. How can we distinguish between the holy and the common?

Worshipers need to purify their souls to avoid becoming absorbed in activities of this world. This is important because failing to differentiate between the sacred and the profane may seem of little importance to postmodern secular people, but it remains a slippery slope leading to idolatry. "Solomon changed his place of worship to Jerusalem, but his former act in sacrificing in a place not made sacred by the presence of the Lord, but dedicated to the worship of idols, removed from the minds of the people something of the repulsion with which they should have regarded the horrible performances practiced by idolaters. This mingling of the sacred and the profane was the first step in the practice of Solomon which led him to suppose that the Lord was not so particular in regard to the worship of His people. Thus he was educating himself to make still greater departures from God and His work. Little by little his heathen wives led him to make them altars on which to sacrifice to their gods."<sup>20</sup>

- *Principle of Suspicion.* Careful application of the principle of suspicion is necessary because in liturgy formation, creativity may spring at times from the sinful desires of disobedient hearts. More than two millennia ago, Gideon used his creativity to build an alternate place of worshiping Yahweh around a golden ephod he built with the booty taken from the Midianites (Judg. 8:26, 27). Gideon's creativity led Israel into licentious worship. "His sin consisted in taking over the prerogatives of the Aaronic priesthood without divine sanction. This deviation from the right

prepared the way for wider apostasy both in his immediate family and among the tribesmen."<sup>21</sup>

"The course pursued by Gideon proved a snare, not only to himself and family, but to all Israel. The irregular and unauthorized worship led the people finally to forsake the Lord altogether, to serve idols. The ephod and the breastplate were regarded with pride, because of their costly material and exquisite workmanship; and after a time were looked upon with superstitious reverence. The services at the place of worship were celebrated with feasting and merriment, and at last became a scene of dissipation and licentiousness. Thus Israel were led away from God by the very man who had once overthrown their idolatry."<sup>22</sup>

"All plans based upon human reasoning should be looked upon with a jealous eye, lest Satan insinuate himself into the position which belongs to God alone."<sup>23</sup> A "jealous eye" means a "suspicious eye," a distrustful eye.

In other words, worshipers should distrust their reasoning and imagination. They should always subject their thoughts and creations to biblical criticism. Yet, how can they criticize their own thoughts and creations? They should begin by assuming that their imaginations are sinful and their opinions tainted. Then, they should test their ideas and liturgical creations by biblical principles and doctrines, and the principles of worship as detailed earlier in this article. Finally, they should in prayer seek the advice of other Christians of proven wisdom and faithfulness to God's Word.

- *Principle of Spiritual Effect.* In creating or selecting liturgy for congregational worship, believers should keep in mind that liturgical forms influence the human spirit. Consequently, these forms should motivate, facilitate, express, and enhance the experience of individual and congregational worship. The spiritual effect of liturgy will be determined by a full understanding of the

origin, nature, and existence of worship (see above), and the presence of God. Without a biblical theological understanding of the Divine and human spirits, proper assessment of the spiritual effects of the chosen rituals will be impossible. By default, rituals may be chosen that please fallen human beings. Such liturgical forms will not motivate true Christian worship in Spirit and Truth.

As modern Christians forget that Christ is the Creator, their worship and liturgy progressively lose reverence and awe. With the explicit intention of attracting secular believers, pastors intentionally adapt their liturgical forms to contemporary cultural trends. The spiritual effect of this ecumenical liturgical approach is no longer Christian but worldly. A worldly spirit of familiarity, informality, and casualness replaces the Christian spirit of reverence and awe before the presence of God.

Christ's incarnation does not justify a change in the spiritual effect of liturgical forms. "It is dishonoring God to speak of him as though he were on a level with finite man. We should speak with reverence the sacred name of Christ, for, although he humbled himself and became obedient to the death of the cross, yet he thought it not robbery to be equal with God. Let us take this precious name upon our lips with profound reverence. Some have allowed their feelings to control their judgment, in meetings for worship, and have indulged in words and attitudes that have not been in harmony with the solemn worship of God. We have heard men shout and jump, and pound the desk, and use vain repetition, and this they thought was worship to God. But it was not according to the direction or will of God."<sup>24</sup>

Liturgy should always flow from and enhance the experience of worship existing in the heart of the believer. Consequently, congregational liturgical forms should be carefully evaluated for their effect on the spirit of the believer. This is very important because worship takes place as an inner attitude of the mind, will, and emotions. If what is done in church disturbs the spiritual

capacity for receiving the presence of God in His Word (principles of existence and nature), it should be modified or dropped, no matter how appealing to the senses the rituals may be.

Instead, liturgical forms should inspire a sense of awe, reverence, and expectation, for the presence of God is a necessary condition of worship. In the Old Testament, God commanded, “Have reverence for my sanctuary. I am the Lord” (Lev. 19:30, NIV). Following God’s command, Paul instructed New Testament believers to offer God “an acceptable worship with *reverence and awe*” (Heb. 12:28, NRSV, italics supplied). Reverence and awe are appropriate spiritual effects of liturgy because they prepare our spiritual capacities for receiving the presence of God in His Word.

Reverence means treating something or someone with great respect; in other words, to have due regard for someone’s feelings, wishes, or rights. Awe is a feeling of reverential respect mixed with fear or wonder. The principles of origin and existence presented above determine the principle of congregational mood. “Jehovah, the eternal, self-existent, uncreated One, Himself the Source and Sustainer of all, is alone entitled to supreme reverence and worship.”<sup>25</sup>

Even before the end of the 19th century, Ellen White thought Adventist worship needed to grow in reverence. Her comments apply also to Adventists at the beginning of the 21st century. “It is too true that reverence for the house of God become almost extinct. Sacred things and places are not discerned; the holy and exalted are not appreciated. Is there not a cause for the want of fervent piety in our families? Is it not because the high standard of religion is left to trail in the dust? God gave rules of order, perfect and exact, to His ancient people. Has His character changed? Is He not the great and mighty God who rules in the heaven of heavens? Would it not be well for us often to read the directions given by God Himself to the Hebrews,

that we who have the light of the glorious truth shining upon us may imitate their reverence for the house of God? We have abundant reason to maintain a fervent, devoted spirit in the worship of God. We have reason even to be more thoughtful and reverential in our worship than had the Jews. But an enemy has been at work to destroy our faith in the sacredness of Christian worship."<sup>26</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Experimentation with "worship styles" has caused confusion among Adventist believers at the beginning of the 21st century. Frequently, creativity in Adventist worship styles boils down to borrowing increasingly secularized liturgical forms from evangelical congregations. Contemporary worship styles adopt cultural forms drawn from the entertainment industry. Leaders involved in this drawn-out experimentation uncritically assume that even pop cultural forms produced to express worldly and sinful sentiments are acceptable to God.

Worship is not a matter of taste or cultural preference but a state of mind and an attitude of the heart. Pastors and believers should seek to understand the clear biblical distinction between worship and liturgical styles. As pastors lead congregational worship, they should bear in mind that in our relationship with God, worship is the essential core and liturgy an external formality. Worship may exist without liturgy, but liturgy is meaningless without worship.

Consequently, personal or cultural taste and preference are not reliable principles from which to shape liturgical forms. Instead, Scripture and the Gift of Prophecy set out clear principles regarding worship and liturgical styles that Adventists should understand and use to evaluate and modify any cultural form they may want to use in their liturgy. Literally, anything common

in congregational liturgy must be purified by the careful application of biblical principles of worship and liturgy formation.

Liturgical forms are contextualized to a series of interlinked principles. They assume principles of liturgy. Principles of liturgy assume principles of worship. Principles of worship assume a life of Christian discipleship. A life of Christian discipleship assumes a broad and deep understanding of theology. And theology assumes the foundation of biblical revelation. Liturgical forms must fit perfectly within this multi-layered contextual background. This should pre-empt any attempt to assimilate liturgical forms from evangelical churches that found their theology not only on Scripture but mainly on culture and tradition.

The transcendence of God the Creator is the basis of worship (principle of origin). Discipleship is the condition required for worship (principle of existence). Spirit and truth are the realm of reality and the general content of the worshiping act (principle of nature). Worship is furthermore a pleasant occasion because in it we meet with God our Friend (principle of enjoyment).

Congregational worship springs from the presence of God the Creator in His Word through the Holy Spirit (principle of existence). Christ and His cross bring worshipers to church (principle of attraction).

Liturgical forms should be attractive and should appeal to worshipers to surrender their lives to Christ and serve Him in their daily lives (principle of creativity). In selecting activities to include in liturgy, we should be careful to distinguish between the holy and the common (principle of content). Jesus' followers are still involved in the Great Controversy with Satan, who expresses himself through the world. We should be critical of our own judgments and choices that relate to liturgy formation (principle of suspicion). Our liturgical forms and ceremonies should help create an atmosphere of reverence and awe necessary to appreciate the presence of God in His Word, and respond to Him

in worship (surrender and service) (principle of congregational spirit). Each congregation needs to understand these principles and apply them to its concrete experience of congregational worship and liturgical formation.

Participation in liturgical forms and ceremonies is not worship. True worship can exist without congregational liturgy. Worship is necessary for salvation; liturgy is not. Those who reduce their religious experience to the external forms of worship will not be saved. For them, liturgy becomes legalism and even a form of justification by works. Churchgoers should keep in mind that God desires "steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6, NRSV).

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## **NOTES AND REFERENCES**

1. Here I use the generalized misnomer "worship styles." The correct designation for congregational activity styles is "liturgy." The distinction between worship and liturgy follows.

2. *Oxford Dictionary of English* (CD-ROM by Selectsoft Publishing), s.v., "worship."

3. *Ibid.*, s.v., "liturgy."

4. *Christian Education*, p. 39.

5. *The Great Controversy*, p. 569.

6. [Http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/principle](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/principle). Accessed March 14, 2011.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 438, italics supplied.

8. *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 51, italics supplied.
9. *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 399.
10. *Steps to Christ*, p. 103.
11. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 116.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
13. Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times* (October 10, 1895), par. 9, italics supplied.
14. *Ibid.*, April 18, 1892, par. 10.
15. \_\_\_\_\_, *The Youth's Instructor* (December, 31, 1896).
16. \_\_\_\_\_, *The Signs of the Times* (May 8, 1893).
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.* (December 4, 1884).
19. \_\_\_\_\_, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1145.
20. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 1025.
21. Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1972), vol. 2, p. 355.
22. Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times* (July 28, 1881).
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.* (February 24, 1890).

25. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 305.

26. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 495, 496.