A Proposed Model Worship Service Incorporating a Biblical View of the Holiness of God for the Urbandale, Michigan Seventh-day Adventist Church

Ivan Charles Blake

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A proposed model worship service incorporating a biblical view of the holiness of God for the Urbandale, Michigan Seventh-day Adventist Church

Blake, Ivan Charles, D.Min.
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Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

A PROPOSED MODEL WORSHIP SERVICE INCORPORATING
A BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE HOLINESS OF GOD
FOR THE URBANDALE, MICHIGAN
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST
CHURCH

A Project Report
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Ivan Charles Blake
June 1993
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A project report presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor or Ministry

by

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ABSTRACT

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Adviser: C. Raymond Holmes
ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Report

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A PROPOSED MODEL WORSHIP SERVICE INCORPORATING A BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE HOLINESS OF GOD FOR THE URBANDALE, MICHIGAN, SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

Name of researcher: Ivan Charles Blake

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Date completed: June 1993

Task

In view of significant discussions occurring in the Seventh-day Adventist Church concerning the nature and style of worship, it seems appropriate to address the place the concept of the holiness of God should have in worship. A proposed model worship service incorporating a biblical view of the holiness of God, which could be implemented by the Urbandale, Michigan, Seventh-day Adventist Church, was developed. The term "model" is used in the sense of a pattern to be tried and not a norm to be rigidly followed.
Method

Four major components of the worship service were identified and described. It was suggested that the fourth component, namely, a sense of the holiness of God, is neglected in many modern worship services. The ideas of various authors regarding the holiness-of-God concept were reviewed. A strong biblical connection between a sense of the holiness of God and worship, and the distinction between the sacred and the secular was demonstrated. The development of a proposed model worship service resulted from a questionnaire, sermons, and worship committee consultations.

Sources

There seems to be limited materials obtainable that address the holiness of God in the context of worship. Some authors give the traditional view while others present a humanistic-secular perspective. A significant source was the Bible usage of the concept of holiness as it pertains to God's nature and worship. The primary source for developing a proposed model worship service came from the Bible, literature review, and the dialogue within the congregation.

Conclusions

The apparent infrequent attention given to the centrality of the holiness of God in modern worship
services has provided an opportunity to rediscover its meaning and importance, and then to develop ways in which it can be featured more prominently in worshiping God. The congregation where this model could be gradually implemented has begun to awaken to a new understanding of biblical worship.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to examine the meaning and relationship of the holiness of God to the worship experience and develop a proposed model worship service which incorporates a biblical view of the holiness of God for the Urbandale, Michigan, Seventh-day Adventist Church. The term "model" is used in the sense of a pattern to be tried and not a norm to be rigidly followed.

Justification for the Project

There is currently significant discussion within the Seventh-day Adventist Church regarding the nature and style of worship. The Urbandale, Michigan, Seventh-day Adventist Church, which was the focus of this project, is typical of numerous congregations participating in the evaluation of traditional ways of worship and the search for more meaningful and acceptable worship practices.

The holiness of God seems to feature frequently in Bible passages that relate to worship. This concept of God, however, seems to be neglected, and even de-emphasized, by many Christians. The distinction between
the sacred and the secular seems blurred. The influence of this phenomenon of society upon the way God is worshiped could be countered by rediscovering the connection between God's holiness and how He is to be worshiped. This could provide a sound basis for choosing particular worship practices.

There appears to be confusion among worshipers regarding the theocentric and anthropocentric emphasis in worship. Coming before God to primarily have personal needs met instead of expressing His worth replaces worship with therapy. The correct relationship between people engaged in worship and God being central to the event must be established.

The apparent lack of understanding among some of the members of the Urbandale congregation of the holiness of God, and the subsequent neglect of dwelling upon his holiness during their worship experience, made it necessary to provide an opportunity to study this issue.

**Description of the Project**

Available literature was examined which dealt with the holiness of God and how it could affect worship. Several current authors seem to promote the idea that the sacred needs to be adapted to the secular frame of mind that is predominant in modern society, thereby conflicting with the positions of Scripture and authors who hold to a more traditional view.
Passages in the Bible which relate the holiness of God to worship were used to develop a biblical basis for the worship experience.

The members of the Urbandale, Michigan, Seventh-day Adventist Church were surveyed by means of a questionnaire in order to determine their views regarding the holiness of God and how these views influence the way they worship. The congregation was then exposed to a period of instruction regarding the biblical view of God's holiness and how it could affect their worship experience.

The worship committee began to evaluate the old style of worship and make suggestions to bring theory and practice together in order to prepare a model worship service. The model would be gradually and discreetly implemented over an extended period of time as negotiations with the congregation progressed.

Limitations

The literature available that deals with the holiness of God, and especially how the concept relates to the worship of God, seems to be limited. Several current authors seem to "desacralize" worship, emphasizing rather a humanistic view of God.

The nature of the questionnaire, which was filled out by the congregation, possibly did not obtain an absolutely accurate assessment of the views held by
individuals regarding the holiness of God. This is due to the limitation of time that was available to complete the questionnaire and the fact that it had to be assumed that the questions were understood by the participants as they were intended.

The process of developing a model worship service was done through the congregation's worship committee. The ideas and preferences of the pastor were shared with the committee, but not imposed. The goal was for the committee to reach consensus regarding innovations to the worship service that would be presented to the church for adoption. This meant that a final product could be reached that would not necessarily reflect all that was intended by the pastor. The approach of democratically negotiating with a group to make changes in the worship service is a slow, though most effective, process. This presented the limitation of not being able to develop a more detailed and comprehensive model to be included in this report.

**Outline of the Report**

The first chapter suggests four components of the worship service which are all necessary in order for a person to worship God. The fourth component, namely, a sense of the holiness of God, is accentuated due to its apparent neglect in modern worship services. In the second chapter the views of various authors who addressed
this subject are reviewed. Relevant Bible passages are used to develop a biblical basis for incorporating the holiness of God into the worship service. The method used to develop a proposed model worship service which incorporates a sense of the holiness of God is described in chapter 3.
CHAPTER TWO

FOUR COMPONENTS OF WORSHIP

The Missing Jewel of the Church

Many Christians gather every weekend to practice and experience what they believe to be the worship of God. Some courageous Christian thought leaders, however, have stated their studied conclusion that "worship is the missing jewel of the . . . Church."¹

It is reasonable to expect those who approach God in worship to carefully and diligently seek answers to some penetrating questions, such as: What is true worship? What elements should be present in the worship experience in order for it to be acceptable to God? What are the principles of biblical worship? How can the worshiper be sure that the practice of worship at his or her local church is based on these biblical principles, rather than on what makes people feel good, or simply going through the motions of a ritual? Finding the right answers to these questions could put the worshiper on the road to

discovering how to worship God "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

The purpose of this chapter is to suggest a definition of worship and to outline four components of the worship experience in the presence of God, namely, art, attitude, revelation and response, and a sense of the holiness of God. The fourth component is identified as the one which needs to be emphasized, since it seems to have been neglected most in the worship of God.

What Is Worship?

It is sometimes difficult to blend together an intellectual understanding of what worship is and personally experiencing the worship of God. The accumulated experiences of a lifetime of practicing worship in a particular way and the influences of culture are not easily put aside when confronted by an objective description of true worship from the Bible.

Several passages in the Bible that describe the worship of God suggest that worship consists of an activity of response to God which declares His worth. An example of this working definition of worship is,

Ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come

---

The New International Version of the Bible is used throughout this report, unless otherwise noted.

Allen and Borror, 16.
into his courts. Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth (Ps 96:7-9).

The activities of response in this passage are identified in the expression, "ascribe," which could be verbal utterances and bringing an offering. The command to "tremble" before God suggests mental and emotional involvement in dwelling on Who He is. God's worth is clearly declared in the words, "Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name." Other passages that give this basic definition of worship are: 2 Sam 22; Ps 18:3; Rev 4:9-11; 5:11-14.

The definition of worship used in this paper is that worship is the active mental, emotional and physical expression of God's worth in response to His greatness (Deut 10:12-22; 2 Sam 6:12-15; 7:18-29; 1 Kgs 8:22-53; 1 Chr 16:7-36; 2 Chr 2:3-6, 12; Neh 9:1-37; Pss 31:19; 48; 86; 92; 95; 96; 135; 145-150; Isa 12; Jer 10:6-10; 32:16-23; Matt 2:1-2, 9-11; 28:9; Luke 1:46-55).

An individual who joins a group of people who assemble in a church building at a given time for the announced purpose to worship God, but who does not actively participate in responding to God by declaring His worth, is not worshiping. An attractive program of musical performances, Scripture reading, and preaching may have taken place, but the mere occurrence of these do not constitute worship.
The typical worship service can be divided into at least four components when an attempt is made to analyze the nature of true worship. The four components are (1) art, (2) attitude, (3) revelation and response, and (4) a sense of the holiness of God. The reason these four are selected is because they represent some of the major experiences of the worshiper. As the typical worshiper enters the sanctuary, the attention is immediately drawn to the architecture, decoration of the building, as well as the music that may be playing. These art forms play an important role in aiding the worshiper to adopt a specific attitude of mind. The appropriate attitude prepares the worshiper for the revelation that comes from God through various agencies during the worship service. The worshiper's attitude is also concretely expressed in different art forms, which is his or her response to God.

The fourth component is listed last because it is the major focus of this paper, although its greatest impact on the worship experience should be made at an early stage of the service in order to be the motivation for everything else that occurs during the rest of the service. It would also feature prominently at every stage of progression throughout the service. Each component is distinct but interrelated and experienced interdependently with the others.
A brief description of the first three components, and a more detailed treatment of the fourth, could help to identify the cause of the apparent restlessness among many Christian churches in North America that are experimenting with various worship styles.

**Art**

Art, in a broad sense, is the skillful application of human activity that appeals to the senses and produces satisfaction and pleasure. Art has the capacity to raise the mind above the ordinary into the sphere of the sublime. What is seen or heard brings about a sense of pleasure and appreciation.

The art forms used in the worship service as vehicles of expression include the architecture and interior decoration of the building, a wide variety of musical performances (from the talented playing of musical instruments to congregational singing), reading of Scripture, prayers, body posture (kneeling, standing, etc.), delivery of the sermon, and spontaneous expressions of praise by the worshipers. When these art forms are skillfully presented they provide the worshiper with a sense of pleasure and satisfaction. The essential ingredient, however, is that art must be rendered exclusively to honor God. The worshiper should be aided by the art to sense the presence of God and respond to Him. The focus should not be on the performer or the
enjoyment experienced by the worshipper, though pleasure is a definite part of the experience.

Comments made after the worship service reflect the impression made by the art forms upon the audience. The enjoyment level of the audience is high if the presentations were well prepared and skillfully rendered. It is uncommon, however, to hear comments from the audience that the art forms succeeded in aiding the worshiper to declare the worth of God.

The art form is the area where the greatest attention is given when seeking to improve the worship service. If people lack responsiveness, the worship leaders change the order of service, add new features, raise the level of interest, or redecorate the building; this often temporarily puts worship back on track. The innovative changes may even bring new worshipers.

True worship is undermined when some art forms become distractions from declaring the worth of God. In order to present a successful worship service there is a tendency to direct the best efforts toward ensuring that the service runs smoothly, achieving excellence and effectiveness.¹ While all three of these qualities are necessary, they do not bring about spirituality, and they do not please God when the more essential qualities in

¹Jack Hayford, John Killinger, and Howard Stevenson, Mastering Worship (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1990), 37, 38.
worship are absent. When these efforts become undue preoccupations they distract from true worship of God. The danger, therefore, is for the art forms to replace God as the focus of worship.¹

The production of art in society has reached a high level of appeal for the population's attention. People are constantly exposed to more exciting presentations. The average person is used to being entertained, and the demand for more pleasurable stimuli does not disappear at the church door. Many expect the church to present them with a worship program that will give them a high level of pleasure. This, of course, emphasizes the spectator mode of the audience, replacing the participation required in responding to God in true worship. There is no meaning in art that is performed in a worship service unless it is dedicated exclusively to God.

It is equally faulty to view with suspicion art forms presented with skill and beauty during worship. Even art performed poorly, while it represents the very best which the worshiper can render, is an important part of the worship experience and is acceptable to God. The true worshiper will want to declare the worth of God by using the very best rendering of the art form.

¹Allen and Borror, 21.
It is difficult to avoid the danger of giving most attention to external improvements to the worship service, while the inner qualities of the heart are neglected. As important as tasteful and well-prepared art forms are, they are secondary to the preparation of the heart when it comes to approaching God in worship. The art form must be dedicated to the glory of God if it is to be an acceptable expression of worship. The next component addresses the issue of preparing the heart for worship.

Attitude

The second component of worship is the attitude of the worshiper, which encompasses the state of the heart and mind. This element is often given minimal attention in worship.

Because of the irreverence in attitude, dress, and deportment, and lack of a worshipful frame of mind, God has often turned His face away from those assembled for His worship. . . . God is to be the subject of thought, the object of worship; and anything that attracts the mind from the solemn, sacred service is an offense to Him. . . . Unless correct ideas of true worship and true reverence are impressed upon the people, there will be a growing tendency to place the sacred and eternal on a level with common things.¹

Three examples from the Bible will illustrate the importance of worshiping God with the right attitude.

¹Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 5:499-500 (hereafter referred to as 5T499-500 etc.)
Two Biblical Examples

Israel

Israel was given many art forms to aid them in their worship of God, but they reached a point in the days of Isaiah when the art forms were carried out without the appropriate accompanying attitude (Isa 1:1-20). The people came before God with rebellion, estrangement from God, and apostasy, while continuing to participate in the worship activities God had commanded through Moses (Isa 1:4-5, 12-17). God consequently told them that He could not bear their assemblies, their sacrifices were unacceptable, and their prayers were not heard any longer (Isa 1:13-15). God offered a solution to their unworshipful attitude by inviting them to reason with Him (Isa 1:18-20). A change of heart had to occur so that they would be willing and obedient. This would give credence to their worship once again.

The Book of Hebrews

The author of Hebrews delivers the good news that God's people can enter the Most Holy Place in heaven with confidence, but with this admonition: "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" (Heb 10:22). When the worshiper seeks a proper attitude before God there will be no need to depend on art forms to
worship God in a meaningful way. The attempt of this paper is to show that when the attitude is one of coming humbly before God, being conscious of His presence, seeking His working in the life, longing to give Him praise and adoration, the worshiper will not leave the sanctuary disappointed. This state of the heart, nurtured by the Bible, serves as a motivating force in the life of the believer, providing a ceaseless desire for God and to come before Him to declare His worth.

The Foundation of a Worshipful Attitude

It is essential that there be a heart desire for God as He is approached in worship (Pss 42:1-2; 51:17; 84:1-2). This demeanor can be cultivated and practiced in the ordinary affairs of daily living (Deut 5:28-33; 6:4-9; Pss 1:1-2; 63:6-8; 119:9-11; 121:7-8; 1 Cor 10:31). A neglect of communing with God during the week makes it difficult to awaken a deep sense of need for God during a worship service (Isa 29:13; Matt 15:8; Mark 7:6). The emphasis on personal pleasure and humanism in society influences even believers so that they are prone to focus on the external features of the worship service instead of on the attitude of their hearts before God.

When worship comes from a proper attitude before God, as described above and addressed in greater detail in

\[1\text{Allen and Borror, 24.}\]
chapter 3, it is because the worshiper has come to realize that worship is a lifestyle instead of a skillfully prepared and delivered program presented during the worship hour in church. The latter is vitally important, but ineffective when the former is absent. A proper attitude before God cannot be achieved in a few moments of silent prayer as soon as the worshiper is seated in the pew when the lifestyle of the week has been void of godliness. (Sadly this minimal preparation for worship hardly occurs anymore.) The worship hour in church is the culmination of walking with God all week long. When the worshiper has been practicing the presence of God incessantly during the week, then the heart will be ready to approach Him with a sense of His awesome majesty during corporate worship.

In spite of the resistance from culture, cultivating a childlike attitude toward God brings the worshiper into the right frame of mind before God (Ps 34:18; Isa 57:15; 66:2; Matt 18:1-5). Such an attitude reminds the worshiper that no matter how educated, famous, important by virtue of position in society, or how advanced in wisdom from experience, when compared to the Great I Am, the worshiper has no stature at all. The worshiper is as a little child, dependent and needy.¹

¹Hayford, Killinger, and Stevenson, 39.
If the attitude is to humbly come before God, to flood the mind with ideas and concepts that reveal His attributes and deeds, and then to respond with full thought and heart involvement to declare His worth, there will be no need for theatrics, noise, entertaining performances, emotionalism, and guest speakers to awaken the worship from drab, dull, and dead rituals.

Heart worship does not do away with art forms. Focusing on the right attitude before God will give rise to new forms of art by which expressions to God will be made.

Art forms are the vehicles through which God communicates with the worshiper and through which the worshiper responds to God. The third component of worship deals with this process.

Revelation and Response

The component of worship that frequently receives formal and perfunctory attention involves revelation\(^1\) and response. This is the element in worship where the Word of God is presented through Scripture reading and preaching, and where the congregation responds in song and commitment. Worship occurs as a human response to a

\(^{1}\text{For purposes of this project report revelation is used in the sense of inner illumination, and not in a strict theological sense.}\)

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Divine revelation. When this sacred interchange falls prey to formalism, worship is marred.

Formalism

Formalism is the mindless repetition of an activity that is void of meaning and personal application. It is when the words of a hymn are sung, but not contemplated. It is when Scripture is referred to, but not expounded as the Word from God for His people meeting before him. It is when the words of a sermon are heard (tolerated), but not masticated, digested, absorbed, and applied. It is the public prayer which is intended to be genuine but is filled with mindless phrases using the language of clichés.¹ "The evil of formal worship cannot be too strongly depicted, but no words can properly set forth the deep blessedness of genuine worship."²

Because an experienced worship leader has learnt the skills involved in leading a congregation, it is easy to rely on those skills and neglect taking time to let God communicate a fresh and revitalizing approach to the worship experience that will help the people to worship meaningfully. Too often worship leaders are satisfied with the service only because every seat is filled and the program runs smoothly. This is a fertile setting for

¹Hayford, Killinger, and Stevenson, 114.
²White, 9T143.
formalism to take root. Boredom sets in and nobody is convinced that God is really present.

A significant reaction to meaningless formal worship services has occurred in many churches throughout North America since the 1970s. Traditions that served the church at worship for many years have been replaced by styles of worship that have caused turmoil in many congregations. New congregations have been established that offer a worship style that concentrates on informality. Often the new styles of worship eventually become just meaningless formalities. Changing the style of worship, adding variety, and maintaining a sense of expectancy and informality do not eliminate the danger of meaningless revelation and response. There needs to be a close relationship between revelation and response in worship.

The Relationship between Revelation and Response

Worshipers need training in giving particular attention to God's revelation and maintaining concentration when responding to Him during the worship service. This requires a reversal of the spectator attitude many have, by which they expect to be treated to a great performance which does not move them to any personal response other than complimenting those who did a good "job" on the platform. Worship does not occur if the worshiper makes no personal and appropriate response to
the revelation from God.¹ At the same time, when the worship service is dominated by human responses, and revelation from God is minimized, many aberrations of human expression may occur, and there will be a distortion of worship. Many modern worship services primarily consist of praise responses to God while no revelation of substance has been received from God. "When God's speech takes precedence over human response, balance in worship poses no problem."²

The legacy left from the Enlightenment has tended to create a culture that suppresses the expression of emotion and emphasizes the rational analysis of human experience. Healthy emotional responses to God are consequently minimized. The later development in the culture of the priority given to the pursuit of pleasure has released many to be more emotionally demonstrative. This, however, has led to the encouragement of many inappropriate forms of emotional responsiveness in worship in some places.

If the worshiper is caught up in an awareness of the great God that is being revealed, then it would be tragic slavery to traditional cultural reserve that inhibits the worshiper from responding to God with mind

¹Allen and Borror, 39.
and heart, intellectually and emotionally. It would be equally tragic if the response deteriorates to base expressions of emotion that are stripped from any control by the Holy Spirit. Both these extremes have often made worship devoid of adequate responsiveness to God, keeping the door open for formal meaninglessness. The balance can be found in directing all mental, emotional and physical responses to God as they are regulated by God's revelation through Scripture and worship leaders to the worshiper.

An Antidote to Formalism

An antidote to formalism, recommended by Ellen G. White, is the effort to make meetings "intensely interesting."* This will ensure that there are no long, dry speeches and formal prayers merely for the sake of occupying the time. . . . His service should be made interesting and attractive and not be allowed to degenerate into a dry form."**

To achieve a high degree of interest it is not necessary to resort to popular entertaining presentations, such as "worldly singers and theatrical display."***

The worship of God must include the declaration of His worth through adoration, confession, thanksgiving, dedication, and petition. These responses to God should culminate in giving the life to God in order to become

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*White, 5T609.
**Ibid.
***Ibid., 9T143.
like God in every aspect of living. It is necessary, however, to determine the focus of the worshiper who participates in the revelation and response component of worship. This focus is addressed in the fourth component of worship.

The Fourth Component

In addition to (1) art, (2) attitude, and (3) revelation and response, there is a fourth component to worshiping God. The thesis of this paper is that if the fourth component is introduced to the worship experience together with the three components described above, it will make worship what it ought to be. This fourth component has received the least attention by the church in the modern era, but seems to be central to worship experiences found in Scripture.

In the evangelical movement in the United States the traditional emphasis of the past was on examining Christian doctrine as taught in Scripture. More recently this emphasis has shifted to focus on the nature and manner of worship. Some in that movement have moved toward a liturgical style of worship, while others have moved toward the charismatic. "Both represent a shift in emphasis away from knowledge about God toward the
experience of God."¹ This tendency has also taken root in
the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America. If the
worship service is to be revitalized by emphasizing how
the worshiper can experience God to the neglect of knowing
Who God really is, then the most important component of
worship has been overlooked, and worship can be expected
to deteriorate into a human-centered activity.

It will not do to ignore any of the other three
components mentioned above. All four must work together
to form a completeness in the worship experience. The
primary component, however, is the one that directly
focuses on God. To neglect the primacy of God in worship
is to depart from theocentric worship and to turn worship
into an occasion for therapy, entertainment, and self-
fulfillment. Placing God in the center of worship will
require an understanding of Who He is and regular
reminding of how people worshiped Him as taught in the
Bible. Chapter 2 attempts to demonstrate that God is
revealed primarily in His holiness by Scripture. It
becomes essential, therefore, to give proper attention to
the relationship of the holiness-of-God concept to the
worship experience. The fourth component of worship is
identified as a sense of the holiness of God and is
developed in chapter 2.

¹Nathan O. Hatch and Michael S. Hamilton, "Can
Evangelicalism Survive Its Success?" Christianity Today,
October 5, 1992, 25.
CHAPTER THREE

A SENSE OF THE HOLINESS OF GOD IN WORSHIP

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the nature of the holiness of God and show its relationship to the worship service. In the first section the views of a number of authors on God's holiness and the phenomenon of the sacred are reviewed. The next section deals with the way the Bible reveals God's holiness, especially in the experience of persons who encountered God in worship. This provides a biblical basis for incorporating a sense of the holiness of God into the worship service. The third section addresses the connection between understanding God as holy and the worship service by exploring the distinction between the sacred and the secular. The importance of the holiness-of-God concept for worship is the subject of section four, and the final section mentions some of the implications of a sense of the holiness of God for the worship service.

A Review of Approaches Taken by Various Authors to the Holiness-of-God Concept

Once a basic definition for "holy" is stated the ideas of several current as well as older writers who have
addressed the concept of the holiness of God is reviewed. Their views are explored especially as they describe the experience of encountering the holy.

**Definition for "Holy"**

Defining holiness or the sacred is difficult because it is so foreign to human thinking. No language adequately describes the rich meaning of the word "holy." The common way of defining "holy" is "purity, free from every stain, wholly perfect and immaculate in every detail." The primary meaning, however, of "holy" is "separate." The word "holy" in Hebrew (qodesh) and in Greek (hagios) means "to cut, to separate." When someone or something is set apart from the ordinary and brought into relationship with God it is considered to be holy (Exod 3:5; 16:23; 19:6; Lev 19:2; 21:7-8; 27:30; Ezek

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1 The words "holy" and "sacred" are not distinguished as to their meaning for the purposes of this paper. Together with the words "sanctity, hallow and sanctify" these words all have the same basic meaning even though each has its own nuance.


The word "holy" does not convey the idea of morality in its basic form.⁴ In His holiness God is absolutely separated from all forms of defilement and impurity. As holy God He is morally pure (Job 34:10; Hab 1:13). The concept of purity, when applied to humans and objects, relates to holiness in that when someone or something is set apart for God's service it is to be used in a way that will reflect purity in a moral sense (Lev 11:44-45; Matt 5:48; 2 Cor 6:14-7:1; 1Thess 3:13; 4:7; Heb 12:14; 1 John 3:3). A changed relation to God involves a change of character.

Encountering the Holy

When humans encounter the holy there is both objective and subjective involvement. The objective aspect is described in the concepts of God that are brought to the worshipper's consciousness in an encounter with the holy. The attempt made by some authors to "desacralize" the encounter with the holy is given significant attention in the last part of this section.

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⁴Joseph A. Beet, Holiness: Symbolic and Real (London: Robert Culley, 1910), 132; Berkhof, 73.
The Objective and Subjective Aspects

In the study of God the student attempts to blend rational and emotional approaches. It is easy to give greater weight to the latter. It is even possible for the subjective experience to exclude the objective reality. Worship can, consequently, be reduced to a religious experience which is nothing more than a state of mind, a feeling, a sense of sin and an assurance of salvation. There should be a serious attempt made at understanding Divinity while avoiding a strictly emotional experience. This could yield an objective view of God and avoid a one-sided subjectivity in the worship of God.

When examining the holy the student is dealing with something beyond the scope of human reason. There must be a dependence upon Divinity revealing Himself to the human mind. This revelation leads to both an intellectual understanding and an emotional response. An early twentieth-century German scholar, Rudolf Otto, made the primary point in his book, The Idea of the Holy, that there is a combination of sensing the transcendent presence (objective) and the inward experience (subjective) of the Divine when the human mind is

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confronted by God, according to John W. Harvey, the translator.¹

Harvey advises that there should first be a focussing on the object (divine) before a response of feeling is given. First must come the awareness of the divine, then follows the feelings of awe, reverence, dependence, impotence, rapture, and exaltation.² When this occurs the emotional response is more apt to be governed by the objective, so that it prevents the subjective from running wild, even becoming sacrilegious, and making worship primarily experience-oriented.

**Concepts of God Aroused in an Encounter with the Holy**

The concepts of God that are aroused in the mind of the worshiper in an encounter with the holy are derived from the objective revelation of God found in the Bible. These concepts are a challenge to the rational capacity of the human mind because forming a concept of God is not a human skill; it is a Divine revelation which often introduces non-rational concepts of God (Exod 33:18-34:9; Job 36:26; Isa 6:1-8; 40:28; 46:9-10; Ezek 1; 2 Cor 12:1-6; Rev 1:9-16; 4; 15:1-4).

¹Ibid., xv.
²Ibid.
A correct concept of God

Rationality is unable to satisfactorily explain deity. There is, therefore, a need for non-rational concepts when trying to understand God. The rational and the non-rational are not in conflict. The former is simply exhausted when attempting to comprehend God, while the latter remains beyond human grasp. Many consider the two in conflict and discard the non-rational only to define deity according to their own narrow rational ability.2

It seems that some modern people want to analyze and explain everything before acknowledging credibility. Whatever is beyond human power to fathom is denied. If, however, one small part of God's creation can fully understand God, He would cease to be God (Rom 11:33; Col 2:2, 3). Human intellect must, therefore, try to grapple with non-rational concepts when studying God, or arrive at an erroneous concept of God.

"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."3 People do not rise above their religion, and the quality of their religion depends on their idea of God. The ideas about

1The non-rational does not refer to the unreasonable, but beyond the capacity of reason.
2Otto, 4.
God believed by a group of Christians determines what kind of congregation they will be. "Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God."\(^1\) This means that worship flows from the concept of God held by the worshiper.

It is my opinion that the Christian conception of God current in these middle years of the twentieth century is so decadent as to be utterly beneath the dignity of the Most High God and actually to constitute for professed believers something amounting to a moral calamity.\(^2\)

It is, therefore, vital that a right concept of God be held or else the nature of worship will be faulty.

Since the time when Tozer made the above statement in the early 1960s the concept of God among Christians seems to have moved further away from the revelation of the Bible. Worship has taken on a more secular and humanistic style. The result is to reduce God to manageable terms where He can be controlled.

Another god whom our fathers knew not is making himself at home among us. This god we have made and because we have made him we can understand him; because we have created him he can never surprise us, never overwhelm us, nor astonish us, nor transcend us.\(^3\)

Any thoughts and ideas held about God that misrepresent his true character and nature are basically idolatry. There is nothing that undermines the holiness of God more

\(^1\)Ibid.

\(^2\)Ibid., 10.

\(^3\)Ibid., 49.
than idolatry, because He is the only God. When the worshiper has lost a lofty concept of Who God is, as revealed in the Bible, there is serious danger of worshiping a false god. It is of greatest importance that the church rectifies and purifies its concept of God.

Contemporary worshipers must depend on previous revelation of God to form their concept of Him, since He has not revealed Himself in modern times as He did in Bible times. Nothing, however, about God's nature or character has changed. He still dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim 6:16). He is still beyond human understanding (Job 11:7). He still can only be known by revelation (John 14:6).

Divine transcendence

One of the concepts of God that is awakened in the mind of a worshiper who encounters the holy is the transcendence of God. This refers to His being exalted above all of creation and beyond all human thought or imagination (Isa 6:1-5; 55:8-9; John 8:23). It does not refer to distance from the earth, but to God's quality of being. Isaiah describes this concept: "For this is what the high and lofty One says--he who lives forever, whose name is holy" (Isa 57:15). To Paul, God is transcendent because He "alone is immortal and . . . lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see"
(1 Tim 6:16). Other Scriptures that underline the transcendence of God are: Pss 11:4; 138:6; Isa 40:28; 66:1, 2; 1 Kgs 8:27; Acts 7:48; 17:24.

When the worshiper meditates on this concept of God, God's greatness and holiness are brought into consciousness. A sense of awe, which is more than just a natural apprehension of danger, takes hold of the worshiper and a sense of personal insignificance is experienced. An awareness of the transcendence of God also makes the worshiper uncomfortable because of a sense of sinfulness (Exod 19; Isa 6:1-8; Luke 5:1-11; Acts 9:1-6; Rev 1:9-18).

The discomfort felt by the creature-sinner makes it preferable to ignore or neglect meditating on the transcendence of God. Joy instead of godly fear (awe) is then accented in worship. An absence of godly fear in worship, however, leads to an absence of godly healing as well. "There is no fear of God before his [wicked] eyes" (Ps 36:1). The modern self-assurance of Christians, the basic levity present at many religious gatherings, is a shocking disrespect shown for the person of God. It shows the deep blindness of the heart and ignorance of Who God is.¹ It is evidence of the low estimate many have of God and the failure to recognize His transcendence.

¹Ibid., 78.
Divine immanence

While the transcendence of God expresses His being beyond humanity, incomprehensible and unapproachable, He is not bound by this attribute. God is also present and active within nature, the lives of people, and world events (Jer 23:24; Acts 17:27-28). His greatness is also demonstrated by His ability to relate personally and intimately to the worshiper (Pss 32:8; 34:15, 18; Heb 4:14-16). The worshiper becomes aware of God's holiness (uniqueness) as something which enables Him to cross the chasm and reveal Himself as personal and warm toward the worshiper (1 Kgs 8:27-30). The awful presence is an intimate personality. God's immanence includes the idea of Him being within the worshiper (Isa 57:15; Col 1:27).

In the perception of God there is a tension between the sense of His transcendence and the sense of His immanence. There is a simultaneous attraction of love and an inhibition of awe. While humans may get to know God personally as He reveals Himself through the Holy Spirit, there remains the original sense of wonder and godly fear in the presence of the mysterious God. A person may experience the leap of the heart to cry out happily, "Abba Father, my Lord and my God," and also kneel

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1Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), 302.

with trembling to admire and adore the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity.¹ This tension is illustrated by the words "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit" (Isa 57:15). The worshiper is challenged to conceive of God as both wholly separate and within the heart.

Communion with God must begin with a revealed knowledge of God's nature. This revelation brings about the human response. In this way God, Who is beyond humans, is also with humans (Ps 113:4-6; Isa 6:1-6; 7:14; 57:15; Hag 2:5; Matt 1:23; John 1:14). Both these elements must be emphasized in worship. The result is a religious experience with an objective significance. This will prevent the imposition of humanistic and anthropocentric ideas upon worship. By the "undue preoccupation with the human and the personal we may blind ourselves to that transcendent and supra-personal character of the deity which cannot be surrendered without a real loss to religion."² There is no lasting soul satisfaction when God is considered a friend in terms opposed to knowing Him as the wholly other, infinite and awesome. Both the "otherness" and closeness of God must shape the human encounter with God.

¹Tozer, Knowledge of the Holy, 112.

²Otto, xviii.
Numinous

Because the encounter of the holy is beyond human rational capability, Rudolf Otto coined the word "numinous," referring to the numen, which is the Latin word for supernatural Divine power. The numinous refers to the non-rational religious apprehension of the divine.¹

Christians encounter the numinous when their rational focusing on the infinite mystery and majesty of God becomes united to a sense of awe and reverence. God's holiness makes Him awful in that He is august and awe-inspiring. The concept of the greatness of God brings about a numinous response.

The subjective response to encountering the sacred often involves feelings of fascination and fear. There is a mixture of terror, fright and awe with excitement, thrill, exuberance, love and joy (Gen 28:10-22; Exod 3:1-6; Judg 13:6-23; 1 Sam 12:18-25; Job 37:21-24; Mark 4:35-41).² This paradoxical experience, the "numinous," is the combined feeling of attraction and awe characteristic of communing with God.³ These emotions do not identify the true nature of holiness. God gave an objective revelation of His holiness, and this should form

¹Ibid., xvi, xvii.


the basis for an understanding of holiness. Though the human mind cannot fully grasp the complexity of such a Divine concept there must be a honest attempt at reflecting the full picture portrayed by Scripture.

The numinous state of mind is called "creature-consciousness" as seen in Abraham's words: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes" (Gen 18:27). Isaiah expressed the same lowliness when he saw the exalted God, by crying out "Woe to me!" (Isa 6:5). When Peter became aware of the supernatural power Jesus commanded, he sensed his unworthiness and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8). The sense of "creatureliness" comes to a person who becomes aware of God's presence.1 Thoughts of being finite, temporal, dependent, fallible, and ordinary become prominent. Encountering the holiness of God will shatter any ideas of human greatness and pride. "It is the emotion of a creature, abased and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures."2 The overwhelming sense of Divine greatness cannot be explained, but only responded to by this "creature-feeling" experience. The primary element in this experience is its reference to an object outside of the self.

1Sproul, 63.
2Otto, 10.
The subjective encounter with the sacred is not unimportant. Though this experience does not define holiness it brings about an awareness of the holy.

**Mysterium tremendum**

The numinous, which comes from perceiving God's greatness, is similar to the *mysterium tremendum* experience.

**Paradoxical feelings.** Rudolf Otto studied people of different cultures in the way they felt and behaved when they encountered something they considered as holy. He discovered that people could not adequately describe that which they considered holy. The spiritual nature of holiness defied human language.¹ He labeled the experience of encountering the holy the *mysterium tremendum*, the "awful mystery." People are attracted to the holy, and repulsed by it.

This tension is illustrated by the experience of the women who were told by the angel that Jesus had risen from the dead. As they hurried away from the tomb they were "afraid yet filled with joy" (Matt 28:8). When Jesus made Himself known to them they "clasped his feet and worshiped him" (vs. 9), while He at the same time told them not to be afraid (vs. 10). The simultaneous

¹Sproul, 59.
experience of excitement and fear is evident in this incident.

The fear of God. The mysterium tremendum is akin to the "fear of God" (Exod 23:27; Job 9:34) emotion which lifts the worshiper out of the realm of ordinary living and into a deep awareness of Who God is (Ps 89:7; Prov 9:10). The contrast between holiness and being ordinary brings about an unavoidable fear which is not due merely to an immoral condition. This dread occurs only because God's greatness is contrasted with human smallness when He is encountered in worship (Exod 3:11; Ps 8:3-4; Matt 28:8-10; Mark 4:40-41; Rev 1:17-18).

Because it is normal to avoid fear, many choose to pursue emotional experiences in worshiping God that minimize a sense of His holiness. There is a trauma involved in encountering the holiness of God. The full spectrum from wild ecstasy to horror and trembling can be experienced. The emotion of fear in this context is the natural response to encountering divinity. The worshiper is trembling in speechless humility, overwhelmed by a sense of being the creature in the presence of that which is a mystery, above all creatures and inexpressible.¹ As God reveals His mysterious self to the worshiper there is an awakening to an encounter with God and there appears

¹Otto, 13.
before the mind a sense of awe and godly fear. This godly fear brings the worshiper to fear God without being afraid of Him (Job 28:28; Pss 19:9; 36:1; Prov 8:13; 9:10; 14:27; 16:6; 23:17; Eccl 12:13; Isa 11:2-3; Acts 9:31; 2 Cor 7:1; Eph 5:21). This fear of God is a sense of awe and reverence for Him that flows from being aware of Who He is.

The contact some people made with the angel of the Lord in Bible times struck them with awe and made them afraid that they would die (Judg 13:21, 22; 6:22, 23; Josh 5:13-15). "They had so exalted views of the terrible majesty and power of God that they thought it would destroy them to be brought into close connection with one direct from His holy presence." There is a close connection between knowing God as holy and the fear of God: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov 9:10). Godly fear is appropriate when approaching the holy God.

The wrath of God. The awe of God is akin to the wrath (anger) of God which is portrayed in Scripture as going out from God when, among other things, unsanctified persons approach or offend Him (Lev 10:6; Num 1:53; 16:46; Deut 9:7, 22; 2 Chr 28:11; Ps 78:31; John 3:36; Rom 1:18; Rev 14:10). It is portrayed in Scripture as the natural

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1White, 1T410.
response of God to evil. One cannot separate the wrath of God from His holiness. His wrath is His utter intolerance of evil. Such strong words disturb those who see in God nothing but goodness, gentleness, love, and close intimacy which fit in with the world which people have created for themselves. God's wrath, however, is not the same as human wrath which reduces the concept to nothing more than vindictive retribution. Divine wrath is a supernatural quality which brings about a sense of terror that cannot be produced by human anger.¹

The quality of worship. The mysterium tremendum emphasizes the importance of introducing an awareness of Who God is into the worship experience.² To lose this element would be a fundamental loss to the quality of worship. Without this revelation of Who God is there cannot be an experience of awe amid the creature-feeling of personal nothingness before the awful object of worship.³ "Christ's followers to-day should guard against the tendency to lose the spirit of reverence and godly fear."⁴ An awareness of one's creature relation to the

¹Otto, 18, 19.

²This awareness of God is not limited to the weekend worship experience, as noted on p. 15-16.

³Otto, 18.

Creator brings about fear which includes, but is more than, reverence for God.

As Otto says, the *tremendum* refers to the feeling of awe and dread while the *mysterium* refers to the feeling of "dust and ashes" that results from becoming aware of Who God is.\(^1\) When this occurs there is need for an understanding of God's grace.

Atonement for sin

The concept of God's grace addresses the need created by the numinous experience of the worshiper. The sense of sinful "creatureliness" which is unable to approach the holy is in need of a covering, an atonement, a shield against the wrath of the *numen*. This is what Isaiah experienced when he cried out, "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa 6:5). Peter similarly fell at the feet of Jesus and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8). God provides this covering and brings the worshiper into consecration before him, enabling the creature to converse and commune with the holy one.

A sense of moral transgression increases the sense of unworthiness and need for atonement. It is only as God provides expiation that the closeness with deity can be experienced. The divinely appointed means of atonement is

\(^1\)Otto, 17, 26.
the self-revelation of God, the Word, the Person of Christ, to Whom the sinner flees and finds refuge in order to be consecrated and cleansed of profaneness and have access to the presence of holiness.¹

The encounter between sinful people and the holy God results in a struggle for them. Unholy people are uncomfortable in God's holy presence and they prefer to flee from One whose holiness naturally condemns the evil in them. There is at once resistance and a desire to flee from God because of their rebellion against God. The only way the enmity can be overcome is by the sinner accepting God's free gift of justification. This reconciles the sinner to God (2 Cor 5:18-21). Since Jesus died in the place of humanity the saved sinner can boldly approach God and be comfortable in the presence of God. The worshiper still comes in awe before God. The fear has changed from being afraid, due to guilt, to fear that is a reverence and adoration of God (Heb 4:14-16).² God is still holy. The worshiper still trembles before Him out of awe and veneration for His greatness.

Summary

The concepts of God that include His separateness and His closeness, His wrath and His grace, bring about

¹Ibid., 59.
²Sproul, 196.
paradoxical subjective responses from the worshiper who meditates on the revelation of God coming from the Bible. The awareness of Who God is coming from this revelation impacts on how worship will take place. Any attempt to alter or eliminate the biblical revelation of the holiness of God will make the consequent worship experience unacceptable to God. Various authors seem to have "desacralized" the way God is revealed in Scripture and the worship experience.

"Desacralization" of the Encounter with the Holy

The holy as a product of society

The way people encounter the sacred has changed since the period of Enlightenment\(^1\) began, according to J. G. Davies, who departs from the traditional view of the sacred. This change, he says, demands a revised definition for "holy."\(^2\) Davies notes that many decry the demise of experiencing the holy as the numinous, which is the paradoxical feeling of attraction and awe when the worshiper senses the majesty of God. For him this

\(^1\)Prior to the beginning of the Enlightenment views about God usually went unchallenged, even though some philosophers and theologians gave rational understanding to their ideas. The Enlightenment gave supremacy to the rational (reason) over faith and Divine revelation. This radically changed the way people began to view God and the Bible. Truth, consequently, had to have rational and analytic support to the exclusion of religious influence.

\(^2\)Davies, vii.
departure from the numinous it is not a sign of sacrilege characteristic of a secular age, but rather the result of liberation brought about by technology and urbanization. Since theologians teach concepts that reflect their surrounding circumstances, their understanding of the holy is shaped by the worldview of their time. Theologians belonging to the era of the sacral universe would have a different view of the holy from those belonging to the secular universe. To be relevant and effective in society it is necessary to follow the view of the holy that belongs to the present era.¹

Davies' view presumes that theologians of the past came to conclusions about the holy on the basis of their understanding of Scripture shaped by their worldview. This would subject truth to the dominance of circumstances and people's worldview; the Bible would not be normative. Instead it would be adaptable and subject to human ideas. The basic question to settle is: Does the philosophy and culture of the age determine truth, or does the Bible have final authority? Just because the human race may have exited the so-called sacral universe and come to live in a secular universe does not require that the teachings of the Bible should change. The principles of the Bible, including that of the holy, are relevant to every age (Ps 12:6-7; Isa 8:20; 40:8; Mark 7:13; John 17:17; 1 Thess ⁴Ibid., 3, 4.
Those who belong to a particular age and who choose to exclude teachings from the revealed Word of God from their worldview are creating a void in their lives.

The notion that the concept of holiness was adopted by the Israelites in a syncretistic way from the surrounding religions that impacted on them is a denial of the role of Divine revelation. The prior existence of the idea of holiness to Israel's use of the idea is not proof that Israel adopted it from other religions. Natural influences were overruled by revelation, as David Clark underlines in his dissertation.1 God used revelation to make His holiness known and to be distinctive from that of views held by surrounding nations (Exod 23:31-33; Lev 19:1-4; Deut 29:1-6, 16-18; 1 Chr 16:23-29; Ps 96; Isa 45:22-25; 46:9-10; 2 Cor 6:14-18). The way Isaiah looked upon God was unequaled among pagan views of their gods. Deity and holiness took on a unique form for Israel.2 This view conflicts with many modern scholars3 who hold to the idea that Israel held to a primitive view of God as something fearful and unapproachable while people in the


2Ibid., 28.

3Scholars listed in the bibliography of this report who strikes me as holding a non-traditional view concerning the holiness of God include: E. H. Askwith, Joseph A. Beet, J. Stanley Chesnut, J. G. Davies, John G Gammie, Jean-Pierre Sironneau, and Robert Wuthnow.
"prophetic period," as they refer to it, progressed to understand holiness to be an ethical and moral quality.

The sacral versus the secular universe

According to Davies the sacral universe adopted by people makes them see nature as mysterious and without explanation. Natural events are controlled by transcendental forces. It is irreligious to attempt any disclosure of the hidden secrets of nature. God is seen to be involved in all the details of daily life. It is this approach to life, claims Davies, that gives a sacred character to people, objects, and events. All this falls away in the secular world where there is no distinction between the sacred and the secular.¹ Davies describes the secular world as one in which technology has put man in control of nature, doing away with God's involvement in nature. Science explains everything and religion is irrelevant. The sacral God to the secular mind is distant and vague; He has become absent.²

Could it be that Davies has overlooked that it is possible to maintain belief in the transcendence of God, His involvement in nature and history without denying the reality of secular aspects to life? It is not necessary

¹Davies, 4-12.
²Ibid., 20-26.
to discard the sacral world view in order to live in a secular era. It is also not necessary to deny the secular in order to believe in God's holiness. The sacred and secular have always existed together; they only need to be distinguished from each other. A totally sacral world could lead to pantheism.

Davies' view implies that the human encounter with the holy as the numinous is obsolete. To see the holy as the *mysterium tremendum* in the secular "mindset" makes it unrelated to daily experience. Feelings of awe and fear belong to the world of ghosts and to natural phenomena which can be created by humans. Human development has eliminated a sense of the sacred. Life is to be enjoyed without the antiquated influence of a remote God. Holiness in the secular world is total involvement in the world. The "wholly other" has become the "here and now."

Davies seems to discard the transcendence of God in favor of His immanence, thereby adopting an either-or position. These two qualities, however, are not contradictory, but complementary. God, the holy, can be encountered as the wholly other and also involved in ordinary everyday human situations (Exod 25:8; 33:14-20; Isa 66:1-2; Phil 2:6-13; 1 Tim 6:13-17). It was God's desire that while His people continuously revered Him as the wholly other (transcendence) they would at the same

1Ibid., 27-29.
time be involved (immanence) with those other than of
their own race (Exod 12:38, 48, 49; 22:21; 23:9, 12; Lev
19:10, 33, 34; 25:35; 35:15; Deut 1:16; 10:18, 19; 23:7;
26:11; Josh 8:33; Ezek 22:7, 29; Mal 3:5). Israel's
recognition of God's uniqueness (transcendence) was shown
by their keeping themselves (separateness) from adopting
the views and practices of those ungodly nations they were
involved with in service. In this way God showed that His
separateness does not exclude Him from being involved with
the affairs of people. In the New Testament, likewise,
God discouraged certain kinds of involvement on the basis
of keeping pure (Matt 18:17; John 17:15, 16; 1 Cor 5:9-13;
2 Cor 6:17; 2 Thess 3:14), but He at the same time wanted
His people to be involved in the sinful world (Matt 5:13-
16; 28:19-20; John 17:13-19). Both Israel and Christians
were instructed to maintain a distinction between the
sacred and common, thereby preserving their view of God's
transcendence, but at the same time to be part of the
daily affairs of the world, thereby demonstrating their
belief in God's immanence.

The holy as a human invention

William Kraft addresses the modern trend to
analyze God as a projection of humans. According to him
this idea teaches that humans create their own super-
natural being in order to find protection and security for
themselves amid their ignorance, limitations, and
helplessness. People of ancient times, supposedly, needed the holy to help them understand their ignorance and to control their helplessness, and, therefore, went about creating the holy to fill this need. The modern approach is that this function of the holy is now replaced by the advent of science and evolution which has provided meaningful explanations for the cosmos. The tremendum does not need mythological gods but scientific testing of hypotheses about the unknown.

Kraft says that this view accounts for some unauthentic religious notions, but not all religion is the product of human projection. Such proponents believe that religious experience excludes a sacred reality outside of the person, making the holy a mere function of society. The basic error of such reasoning, according to Kraft, is that it does not account for the real personal experiences people undergo regardless of their scientific orientation, nor does it account for the impact of the sacred transcendence and love which bring about positive changes.¹

It is possible that people who meet to worship God have been influenced by the idea that the concept of God being holy belongs to a time of ignorance and false religious notions. The more such persons have become

educated in the sciences and seen how that the mysteries of nature and world events (associated with the idea of a mysterious and holy God) have been unlocked, the more they could become estranged from any idea that suggests that God is beyond humanity, separated and transcendent. For such persons the worship experience could only be meaningful if it avoids reference to the wholly other, and emphasizes what they can personally gain from worship. It is important, therefore, to counter this pitfall by presenting God's holiness as both fully compatible with, and essential to, meeting human needs.¹

Cultural impact on the sacred

Societal influence on the perception of the holy changes when culture changes. The modern technological influences have done away with much of the traditional cultural experiences that interpret the holy. The issue is whether the way the sacred is experienced must be continually redefined by cultural changes. While forms and perceptions may change, it is essential to identify the principles that characterize the holy and apply these to whatever direction the culture takes. Culture must be subjected to principle even though the latter is not universally accepted. The revelations of the holy in

¹See pp. 83-85, "The Focus of Worship," where this issue is addressed.
Scripture are, therefore, not simply cultural experiences, but a principle which applies to all people of all ages.

Before people's perception of the holy changed their relationship to the Bible as authority changed. Many have placed culture and intellect above the Bible in shaping their perceptions and conclusions. To perceive God differently does not make God different.

When secularism influences perception to the point where reality is only that which fits in with the characteristics of secularism, then reality will not be correctly perceived. Reality must be determined by revelation for the Christian. The challenge faced by leaders of worship today is to communicate the reality of the holiness of God to people whose concepts have been changed by the secular framework of viewing the universe which dismisses the holy.

Davies promotes the need for a "proto-understanding of the holy" that will fit into the conceptual framework of those who hold to the secular view of the universe. If the secular perception of the holy revises the revealed nature of the holy, however, it cannot be accepted by the Christian.

The move away from concentrating on the sacred in worship is done in the interests of being relevant to the modern secular culture. Anglican dean Ralph Inge said,

\[1\text{Davies, 37.}\]
"He who marries the spirit of the age is soon left a widower."¹ When relevance becomes the object, it soon becomes evident and ironical how what was considered relevant just a little while prior soon becomes irrelevant. Worship forms must also change constantly if relevance is the sole norm for worship value. Relevance can become an idol. Perhaps the rudimentary elements of true worship, when practiced, will see to maintaining proper relevance also. Cultivating a sense of the holiness of God will not neglect relevant forms of communication, but will prevent forms that introduce common and contradictory elements from desecrating the worship of God. Any attempt to minimize the sacred in order to make worship relevant and save it from obsolescence will inevitably humanize worship to the point where it is not substantially different from any number of human actions.²

When the church tries to find meaning on the terms of secularism for its worship practice it soon finds out that it is in crisis. Questions about the church's identity are then never answered fully. Social issues becomes the preoccupation of the church. The empty souls of people, finally, chase them back to the spiritual, the

¹Hitchcock, 29.
²Ibid., 32.
metaphysics, and the ritual. The "desacralization" and demythologization endeavors lead many to eventually consider God a creation of humans, and they leave Christianity altogether. Those who try to construct a modern secular worship style end up with a product that is devoid of the sacred and absorbed rather in dealing with human problems.

While culture will unavoidably impact the way God is worshiped the principles of the Bible must have precedence over culture. When it becomes culturally unacceptable for the worship experience to be directed by a biblically cultivated sense of the holiness of God, due to the predominance of secularization, then it is fitting for the church to take a stand against culture.

The holy revised by Jesus

According to Davies, the Old Testament concept of the holy as separate and distinct from the common is replaced in the New Testament by Jesus Christ Who knows nothing of a gulf between the Divine and the human. The awesome mystery of God is done away with by the coming of Jesus Who brings about communion between God and humans. The "wholly other" is replaced by the presence of Jesus.

1Ibid., 17.
2Davies, 52, 53.
Holiness has become the same as Christlikeness.\textsuperscript{1} The holy is expressed in service to others. There is no need for places of worship where people come apart to seclude themselves from the secular in order to encounter the sacred. The secular person cannot relate to this because service to the world and the holy are identical; nothing is set apart as sacred.\textsuperscript{2} For Davies, worship is community oriented, not God-directed. People come together to focus on interpersonal relations. The fellowship between people is how God is encountered.\textsuperscript{3} 

Davies' reasoning seems to ignore the fact that Jesus came in human form that veiled His Divinity and which sheltered humans from the terror of encountering the holy. When at times Christ's Divinity flashed through His humanity the reaction of those around Him was characteristic of the numinous (fear and attraction).\textsuperscript{4} Peter's falling before Jesus at the transfiguration scene is one example (Luke 5:8). The Old Testament encounters with the holy are similar to those described in the New Testament (Matt 28:1-11; Heb 12; Rev 4). Davies fails to prove that these encounters reflect a different kind of 

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1}Ibid., 64.
\item \textsuperscript{2}Ibid., 252.
\item \textsuperscript{3}Ibid., 304, 305.
\item \textsuperscript{4}E. G. White, The Desire of Ages (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1940), 158, 162, 421, 459, 591, 707, 731.
\end{itemize}
holiness from that of the Old Testament. The coming of Jesus did not change the nature of holiness nor the perception of holiness. Even though Jesus atoned for the sins of humanity and reconciled humanity to God, the human relation to the holy is still one of awe, and God is still the "wholly other." Davies portrays Jesus in conflict with the Old Testament model of the holy. He eliminates all distinction between the sacred and the common, and confines the expression of holiness to doing good.

One can only regret that Davies subjects the nature of the holy as revealed in Scripture to the modern worldview of the universe, thereby putting human culture and ideas above the revealed Word of God. This eliminates the need for humans to encounter God personally as He is portrayed in the Old and New Testaments. Biblical worship becomes irrelevant to the modern concept of the holy. The God of the Old Testament no longer exists for the Christian.

Those, however, who choose to accept the authority of the Bible will also seek to encounter God as He is revealed in Scripture. The essential choice faced by worshipers today is not between various forms of worship, but between the neglect and recognition of the authority of Scripture. To remain true to the Divine origin of the Bible will mean a deliberate decision to return to forms of worship that will incorporate the Bible's view of the
holiness of God so that He may be appropriately approached.

**Biblical Usage of the Holiness-of-God Concept**

The Bible reveals God as holy in His nature, associates God's holiness with worship, and provides examples of persons who encountered God in a worship setting. This section develops these three assertions.

**God's Nature As Holy**

The issue of how God should be worshiped should be preceded by considering Who He is. The understanding of Who God is determines how He will be approached in worship. The priests of Baal on Carmel worshiped their god in a way that reflected what they believed he was like (1 Kgs 18:26-29). Elijah, in contrast, demonstrated a totally different worship experience because the God he worshiped was fundamentally different from Baal (1 Kgs 18:36-38).

There is a danger that people will decide for themselves what God is like, thereby creating their own god and being guilty of idolatry. The Bible should be the source of knowledge about God's nature.

The most basic description about God's nature in the Bible is that He is holy.¹ Holiness is synonymous with His deity. His attributes express His holiness.

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¹Clark, 2.
"The crowning glory of Christ's attributes is His holiness."  

Everything about God is holy: His justice is holy justice, His love is holy love, etc.  

"Of all the qualities attributed to the divine nature there is one which, in virtue and frequency and the emphasis with which it is used, occupies a position of unique importance—namely, that of holiness."

When God identified Himself to His people He declared, "I am holy" (Lev 11:44, 45; 19:2). Joshua described God to the people by saying, "He is a holy God" (Josh 24:19). Isaiah, more than any Bible writer, referred to God as "the Holy One" ( Isa 40:25; 43:3, 14; 49:17; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9). John used the same term to identify God (1 John 2:20; Rev 16:5). Jesus is frequently referred to as "the Holy One" (Mark 1:24; Luke 1:35; 4:34; John 6:69; Acts 2:27; Acts 3:14). "Holy" is used as a prefix to God's name more than any attribute. It is His holiness more than anything else that makes Him worthy of praise.  

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2Sproul, 57.  


God is designated as holy because He is distinct, separate and altogether different from all other gods.

This is illustrated in statements as:

Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? (Exod 15:11).
There is no one holy like the LORD; there is not one besides you; there is no Rock like our God (1 Sam 2:2).
Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy (Rev 15:4).

God's distinctiveness (holiness) is declared by Paul who writes God "alone is immortal and lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see" (1 Tim 6:16).

The separateness and distinctiveness of God is described as His being exalted or being great in a superlative sense. He is not greater than anyone or anything; He is unrivaled. His greatness is qualified by Him being the "God of gods and Lord of lords" (Deut 10:17; Rev 17:14; 19:16). His greatness is synonymous with His holiness, as illustrated in statement as:

For the LORD God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome (Deut 10:17). Your ways, O God, are holy. What God is so great as our God? (Ps 77:13). And so I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD (Ezek 38:23).

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1See also, Deut 3:24; 4:35, 39; 33:26; 2 Sam 7:22; 1 Kgs 8:59-60; Job 25:2; Pss 86:8-10; 136:4; Isa 45:5, 6, 14, 18, 22; 46:9-10; Ezek 36:23; Hos 11:9; Mark 12:32.

2See also, Pss 47:2; 95:3; Isa 5:16; Mal 1:14; 1 Tim 6:15.
God regards the recognition of His holiness as important and is offended when His holiness is slighted (Deut 32:51; Isa 29:23; Jer 2:19).

God's holiness is the only Divine attribute repeated three times in succession (Isa 6:3; Rev 4:8).

**God's Holiness as Awesome**

God's greatness and holiness is often associated with Him being awesome. This is illustrated by statements as:

O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands (Neh 1:5).

How awesome is the LORD Most High, the great King over all the earth! (Ps 47:2).

In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him (Ps 89:7).

Let them praise your great and awesome name—he is holy (Ps 99:3).

Holy and awesome is his name (Ps 111:9).¹

Frequently the Bible records a sense of awe coming upon people who were made aware of God's greatness and holiness. This is illustrated by statement as:

When they see among them their children, the work of my hands, they will keep my name holy; they will acknowledge the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel (Isa 29:23). Then this city will bring me renown, joy, praise and honor before all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it; and they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it (Jer 33:9).

My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for

reverence and he revered me and stood in awe of my name (Mal 2:5). ¹

On several occasions people in the New Testament record became awed as they sensed the presence or works of God (Matt 9:8; Luke 1:65; 5:26; 7:16; Acts 2:43).

It is evident that God's holiness is closely associated with His greatness, and that an awareness of this brings a sense of awe to people. What the Bible reveals as the greatness of God, as seen in the works He performs, sets Him apart from all else (Isa 45:22-25; 46:9-10). It is an awareness of this greatness of God, his holiness, that motivates worship. "The Christian's instincts of trust and worship are stimulated very powerfully by knowledge of the greatness of God." ²

God's Holiness and Worship

God's holiness is often associated with worship in the Bible. This association is so strong that it seems worship cannot occur unless the worshiper is aware of God's greatness, or His holiness. This seems evident from the following texts:

The Lord reigns, let the nations tremble. . . . Great is the LORD in Zion; he is exalted over all the nations. Let them praise your great and awesome name--he is holy. . . . Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy (Ps 99:1-5).

¹See also, Judg 13:6; 1 Sam 12:18; Ps 89:7; Eccl 5:7; Mark 2:12; Luke 4:36; 9:43.

Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth (Ps 96:9). Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his holy mountain, for the LORD our God is holy (Ps 99:9). When they see among them their children, the work of my hands, they will keep my name holy; they will acknowledge the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel (Isa 29:23). Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe (Heb 12:28).  

The victorious saints finally worship God in heaven, saying "Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you for your righteous acts have been revealed" (Rev 15:4).

Prayer

Examples of prayers offered to God contain expressions of His greatness and awe. "O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands" (Neh 1:5; also Neh 9:32; 1 Kgs 8:23; Dan 9:4; Matt 6:9). 

Jesus gave priority to God's holiness in the prayer He taught His disciples. The words, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (Matt 6:9), are not an expression of praise to God, or it would read, "Hallowed is your name." This is a petition to God that He should be recognized as holy. Jesus gave primary place to this petition to indicate the high regard He held for the

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1See also, 1 Chr 16:29; 2 Chr 20:21; Neh 8:6; Pss 29:2; 71:22; 89:7; 93:5.
holiness of God and that its prominence takes precedence even before the coming of His kingdom and the doing of His will on earth as it is done in heaven. While His holy name is desecrated, or given virtually no recognition by virtue of it being neglected, His will cannot be done on earth. God's kingdom exists only where He is revered and honored as holy.¹

God's Transcendence and Immanence in Worship

The transcendence and immanence of God is experienced by the worshiper.

For this is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite" (Isa 57:15).

God repeats this concept through Isaiah when He states that

"Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declared the LORD. "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word" (Isa 66:1-2).

God's holiness as seen in His separateness is not a deterrent for Him to also come close to the one who approaches Him appropriately. The harmony between the transcendence and immanence of God is illustrated by Jacob's dream at Bethel (Gen 28). The ladder symbolized

¹Sproul, 25.
the bridge between heaven and earth, God and man. God is not so utterly transcendent that He cannot be close to people. Jesus referred to the ladder as a symbol of himself (John 1:45-51). Jesus is the bridge between God and humanity. When Jacob heard God's voice it spoke of a personal interest in His life. Jacob experienced both fear and assurance at Bethel, and it set the tone for the rest of his life.

If Christians deprive themselves of an awareness of God's transcendence and only seek to sense His closeness they will have a distorted understanding of God, and it would be impossible to relate to God appropriately. The absence of a sense of awe, of being in the presence of the Holy One, leaves people bored and they tend to be casual in their approach to God. Every person who early in the worship experience seeks to focus the mind on the holiness of God will be motivated to make meaningful responses to God.

Worshiping God begins with a revelation of God's holiness (greatness). "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov 9:10). An awareness of the greatness of God brings about a sense of awe (numinous) in the worshiper. This experience and appropriate responses to God by the worshiper are clearly seen in specific examples of encounters with God revealed in the Bible.
Worship Experiences in the Bible

Heaven is the place where worship in its purest and truest form occurs, and it is the place to which worship is directed. It is, therefore, important for worshipers to ensure that their activities of worship coincide with what happens in heaven. Serious attention should be given to Bible passages that describe heavenly worship.

Usually when humans encounter God, as recorded in the Bible, there is evidence of at least four elements: (1) a revelation of the holiness of God, (2) a sense of fear, (3) an intervention of compassion by God to restore, and (4) a response of praise and obedient service by the worshiper. These four elements are illustrated in various Bible passages.

Jacob At Bethel

Jacob, in his dream at Bethel, saw God standing above the stairway linking heaven to earth and heard God speak to him in a way that made him aware of the greatness of God (Gen 28:10-15). When he awoke he was filled with fear and a sense of God's awe (vss. 16, 17). God's assurance of care and support for Jacob is clear in the words he heard in his dream, "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to

this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised" (vs. 15). Jacob's was moved to respond by erecting a marker to set aside that place as the house of God, and to make a vow to serve God (vss. 18-22).

The outstanding element in Jacob's experience was the revelation of God which showed Him as being both transcendent and immanent; He stood above the stairway, removed from Jacob, but at the same time He came close to Jacob by means of the ladder and by His words of promise and direction. This illustrates that the worshiper does not need to choose between the transcendence and immanence of God when focussing the mind on him. Both attributes are necessary in order to give balance to the worshiper's view of God.

Moses at the Burning Bush and at Sinai

The burning bush experience (Exod 3) teaches that when Moses came into contact with the sacred he had to try to conceptualize something that was beyond his natural mind, even something confusing, unexplainable, and contradictory to human thinking. The bush was not consumed as it burned. Moses was told he was on sacred ground; sacred because of the presence of God. The presence of God required that Moses behave differently from ordinary behavior; hence the removal of his shoes.
Moses learnt that he had to approach God reverently, after careful preparation.

The revelation of the holy, which made Moses fear (vs. 6), stands out in this experience. God used a familiar object (bush) to reveal and illustrate His greatness, and to impress Moses with the importance of recognizing the holiness of God by the symbolic act of removing his shoes. God mercifully sustained Moses by His assurance (vs. 12), and he left that place to carry out God's command.

At Sinai Moses requested to see God's glory, and was shown only the back of God because God would not permit His face to be seen. He remained separate. Moses fell to the ground and worshiped as a result of the revelation he received. He finally returned to the camp of Israel carrying the tables of the law in his hands (Exod 33:7-34:29). This experience emphasizes the effect the limited view of God's back had on Moses' boldness in wanting to see God's glory. His boldness soon turned into prostration before God.

**Isaiah in Vision**

Isaiah began his vision (Isa 6:1-8) by stating "I saw the Lord" (vs. 1), and expressed his astonishment that "my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty" (vs. 5). These designations for God refer to Him as "the Sovereign One" and is the holy, unutterable name of God. Isaiah saw
God "seated on a throne, high and exalted" (vs. 1), which refers to His being separate (holy). Even the angels were enthralled with Who God is, and they sang about His nature by repeatedly mentioning His holiness (vs. 3).

Isaiah's immediate response to this awesome revelation of God was to cry out in fear. A sense of nothingness and sinfulness came upon him as he became aware of God's holiness. Only God's gracious intervention through sending the angel to purge Isaiah's sinfulness with a coal from the altar of burnt offering (symbolizing the cross of Christ) rescued him and restored him. Isaiah's joy is implied by his willing consent to become a spokesman for God (vs. 8).

The element that makes the strongest impression is the remarkable change from total debasement to the restoration that came through the cleansing act of atonement. It appears that the prominent awareness of the holiness of God in worship can lead to both deep remorse for sin and complete reconciliation with God.

**Similar Examples**

Bible statements about the experiences of other persons who sensed the holiness of God provide evidence that an encounter with God involves the four elements outlined above.

When the ark of the covenant was returned to Israel from Philistine territory and audacious men looked
into the sacred ark they were struck down by God (1 Sam 6:19). Those who witnessed the scene asked, "Who can stand in the presence of the LORD, this holy God?" (vs. 20). The revelation of God in the context of distinguishing between the sacred and the common made them aware of the holiness of God, and brought fear upon them. In this instance the worship of God was enhanced by the accentuated element of fear.

The Psalmist's awareness of Who God is made him cry out, "My flesh trembles in fear of you; I stand in awe of your laws" (Ps 119:120). He later expressed his joy with two things: (1) God's promise, while his heart trembled at God's word (vss. 161-162), and (2) the peace that comes to those who obey God's law (vs. 165). This illustrates the numinous experience of fearing God in the sense of revering Him and also rejoicing in Him during the same encounter. It is clear that worshiping God can include both fear and joy.

Ezekiel's vision (Ezek 1) of "the glory of the LORD" (vs. 28) exposed him to scenes of God so out of the ordinary that he responded by falling facedown. Only as God's Spirit entered him was he able to stand up again (Ezek 2:1-2). God's call to him to speak to Israel was obeyed. It is possible for the worshiper, according to this incident, to be totally overwhelmed by a revelation of Who God is and what He is like.
A sense of the holiness of God brought Job to confess his foolishness in questioning God's providence (Job 40:4; 42:1-6). A sense of God's holiness brought Habakkuk to accept the discrepancy of injustices that came over God's people (Hab 3). A sense of God's presence brought Saul to conversion and to a decision to become a Christian (Acts 26:13-19). An awareness of the holiness of God is indispensable to relating appropriately to God.

When the disciples battled the storm on the Sea of Galilee with Jesus asleep on board they were afraid of losing their lives (Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25). The extraordinary ability demonstrated by Jesus in calming the storm exposed the disciples to the holiness of God. Nature obeyed its Creator. God is holy in that He is not subject to nature. This awareness made the disciples respond in terror, "They were terrified and asked each other, 'Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!'" (vs. 41). Even though the wind was calm and the storm was over the disciples experienced fear; they were awed by the holiness of God. In a similar way the worshiper can be awed by the events in life that reveal God's greatness and that lead to an accentuated sense of wonder at God's ability.

Peter sensed the holiness of Jesus when He filled the nets miraculously with fish and he fell at Jesus' feet saying, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" (Luke...
A sense of the holiness of Jesus made Peter uncomfortable and he took on a posture of worship. He sensed the clear distinction between Jesus and himself. His sinfulness came strongly upon his consciousness, and he wanted to flee. "The transcendent standard of all righteousness and all purity blazed before his eyes."^1

This brief description of several biblical examples of persons who encountered the holiness of God shows that each incident emphasized one or more of the four elements outlined above. No two worship experiences is exactly the same. It is not possible to stereotype worship when biblical examples are examined. Each person's experience adds nuances to the diversity that characterizes worship. This illustrates the dynamic impact a sense of the holiness of God has on the worship experience.

**Recognizing the Four Components**

In several of the above examples it is possible to identify the four main components outlined in chapter 2: (1) art, (2) attitude, (3) revelation and response, and (4) a sense of the holiness of God. The presence of the art form was evident in what Jacob saw and heard in his dream, the burning bush and voice of God which Moses encountered, and the vision Isaiah saw. The attitude

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^1 Sproul, 79.
component was shown by the humbling response of each individual to sensing the presence of God. In each instance God revealed himself. Jacob responded by building a marker and making a vow; Moses responded by carrying out God's command; Isaiah responded by crying out woefully and consenting to becoming a spokesman for God.

Central to each experience and essential to each of the first three components were the worshiper's sensing the holiness of God. For Jacob God was high above the earth (separate) and in full control of the events of his life (greatness). Moses was made aware of God's holiness by the supernatural burning of the bush and God's announcement that the ground was holy. Isaiah was overwhelmed by the expressions of the angels concerning God's holiness and His being exalted.

Without the vital component of sensing the holiness of God, these encounters with God would have been nothing out of the ordinary; they would not have been worship. Because worship is responding to the "worthship" of God, His worthiness is central to worship, and His worthiness is found in Who He is, which sets Him apart from all else.

A Comparison with Modern Worship

Feelings of terror accompanying revelation of the sacred is seemingly appropriate during Divine and human
contact. These feelings are not pleasant and, therefore, avoided by many people when they approach God to worship him. Neglecting to seek God's revelation of Himself leads to substituting a picture of God that eliminates a sense of awe and godly fear. The comfortable worship experience is, therefore, out of harmony with worship as portrayed in the Bible, God is lowered to the level of the ordinary, and worship becomes a human-centered experience.

Many worshipers today seem to avoid being confronted by the contrast between themselves and Bible truth (Heb 4:12-13). A comfort zone has been installed by the ability of worshipers to manipulate the atmosphere in order to choose what they will allow to affect them. The closer people get to Jesus the more uncomfortable they would be (John 6:60-66). It is only when He delivers them from their sins and sustains them that they will be able to survive His presence and enjoy His closeness. It is possible that the feelings of closeness many worshipers testify to today are nothing more than an emotional charge derived from the sensory stimulation offered by the art forms that take center stage in many houses of worship.

The contrast between the Bible descriptions of encountering God in worship and what often happens in modern houses of worship is remarkable. Some people today claim they are bored and unmoved during worship. Even the inanimate objects in Isaiah's vision of heaven's temple,
in contrast, shook and moved.' Isaiah came under the ultimate measurement of God's holiness and became devastatingly aware of his uncleanness. This was a prerequisite to his being healed and restored. Modern worshipers seem to avoid self-debasing consciousness which would expel casualness, boredom, and display before God.

The concepts of worship and the holy are integrally linked with an encounter with God. To worship God appropriately requires that the holiness of God be central to the worship experience. The worshiper must become aware of the holiness of God through revelation, sense the awe of God's presence, be graciously rescued by God's intervention, and respond by acts of praise and obedient service. If the centrality of God's holiness is not present in the worship experience, then worship loses its sacredness and the event is purely secular.

**Distinguishing between the Sacred and the Secular**

Biblical evidence for God's requirement that a distinction must be made between the sacred and the secular in worship gives weight to the importance and centrality of cultivating a sense of the holiness of God in the worship experience. This section presents such biblical evidence and reviews the ideas of various authors on the distinction between the sacred and the secular.

'Ibid., 40.
Nadab and Abihu

Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron the high priest, were exposed to God's revelation of Himself on Mount Sinai when Moses and the seventy elders saw God (Exod 24:9-11). They were also part of the elaborate and explicit instructions concerning their ordination ceremonies setting them apart as priests (Lev 8-9). When they began to serve as priests they filled their censers with fire from the common hearths instead of the altar of sacrifice which was ignited by God (Lev 9:24-10:1). They were consumed by fire sent by God because they "offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, contrary to his command" (Lev 10:1). God was offended by their mixing the common with the secular.

Moses explained God's strict action toward Aaron by saying, "This is what the LORD spoke of when He said: 'Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored'" (Lev 10:3). These words make it evident that God has laid down strict rules and set clear boundaries concerning how people should relate to that which is sacred. The reason for these rules and boundaries is that God is holy and He can only be honored as holy if worshipers respect His holiness by not associating anything common with Him. This is explicitly stated by God to Aaron: "You must distinguish between the holy and the profane, between the
unclean and the clean" (Lev 10:10). This statement was made in the context of the temple, its services, and those who served the people at the temple.

God's holiness and judgment are closely related as demonstrated in the action He took against Nadab and Abihu. His judgment affirms His holiness. God cannot compromise His holiness in order to accommodate sacrilege and carelessness regarding the sacred. God is merciful and gracious, but never at the expense of holiness.¹

Ananias and Sapphira

When God brought Israel out of Egypt and instructed His people in the setting up of the temple and its services, He made a fresh start in building a people that would represent Him. He similarly established the Christian community as a fresh start from the distorted religion of the apostate Jewish nation. Early in the experience of the Christian Church God again confronted the issue of distinguishing between the sacred and the common.

Ananias and Sapphira committed themselves to selling a piece of property and giving the money to God. In doing this they were setting aside the money for God's purpose, thereby sanctifying, making holy, the offering. When they decided to retain a portion of the money for

¹Clark, 87.
themselves, they desecrated the holy, treating it as though it were common. God's response to this practice was to take their lives instantly (Acts 5:1-11).

It is evident that God wanted His people to have a true concept of His holiness and of the offensiveness of mixing the sacred with the common. To disregard this distinction would destroy a sense of the holy and lower God to the level of the ordinary and common. His justice seems cruel and overdone only because humans have an imperfect concept of His holiness and the offensiveness of sin.

Various Old Testament Examples

Throughout the Bible God has made a distinction between the sacred and the ordinary. In the garden of Eden He set aside the seventh day as holy time. He required that one tenth of all possessions be set aside for His use in the temple as "holy to the Lord" (Lev 27:30). God called Israel a holy nation because He chose them from among all the nations to belong to Him and to carry out His purposes (Exod 19:6). The same is said of the Christian community (1 Pet 2:9). God required that the priests should instruct the people in the distinction between the sacred and common (Ezek 22:26; 44:23).

Frequently the objects used in connection with the temple and its services were designated as holy because they were set aside for God's use (Exod 28:38; 29:6,
These objects were not given a moral quality by being considered holy. They were simply set apart from all ordinary things. They were consecrated to God's service. To use these objects for any common purpose would be a violation against God. Idolatry occurs when people take what is common and treat it as holy. Only what God designates as holy must be considered as such. Created objects are not holy in themselves because they do not go beyond the creature; they are not transcendent. If there were no deity there would be nothing holy. It is deity that makes things holy, and only in relation to deity are they holy.

The ark of the covenant was sacred, not because of any inherent quality, but because it represented the throne of God. When Uzzah tried to stop it from falling, his good intentions were met with sudden reprisal (1 Chr 13). What seemed like a heroic act to some was offensive to God. God gave explicit instructions about how the ark was to be treated (Num 4:15-20). His particularity underscored the importance of distinguishing between the sacred and common. God did not allow for emergencies to desecrate what was holy. Uzzah's sin was one of arrogance.

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1 Sproul, 56.

and presumption.\textsuperscript{1} To permit unholy hands to touch His holy throne would mean He was not especially perturbed about evil invading righteousness. To preserve His sanctity and help His people bear in mind the stark contrast between holiness and evil, God inflicted the severe punishment. It was not a capricious or arbitrary act of Divine justice. Only an understanding of God's holiness, justice, grace, and love in the face of sin can come to terms with God's strong insistence that the sacred be kept separate from the common.

The Jewish Leaders

The Jewish leaders in Jesus' time on earth worshiped God in a way they believed was acceptable to God, but they did not demonstrate the same attitude toward the sacred as Moses taught. Their regard for the sacred was characterized by putting on moral and physical appearances,\textsuperscript{2} which lead to their encounter with the sacred becoming a formality. Performing rituals, harboring self-righteousness, and displaying hypocrisy gave the semblance of a religious regard for sanctity while they in fact desecrated God's holy name (Matt 23). They observed the boundaries set up by God forbidding unauthorized entrance into His presence, but they

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\textsuperscript{1}Sproul, 141.
\textsuperscript{2}Huxley, 14.
apparently lost a deep sense of the awesomeness of God's holiness.

The Significance

It is a basic characteristic of all religion that everything is divided between two distinct and opposing categories, either profane or sacred.¹ This separation is so strong that the sacred will consume the profane, or the profane will contaminate the sacred when they come into contact with each other.²

The worship of God is validated by the distinction made between the sacred and the common. Because worshiping God involves the use of time, space, people, and art forms in association with God Who is holy, it is reasonable that these elements should be set aside from the ordinary in order that they might properly represent and honor Him. To introduce the common into the worship of the holy God would put Him on the level of the ordinary. There would then be no reason to worship God. The holiness of God requires an approach to Him that is distinct, separate, and different from the ordinary. The honor and glory due to His holy name demands a worship that does justice to His holiness (Ps 29:2).

¹Clark, 1.
²Davies, 17.
When people come into contact with the sacred there should be a distinct change in their practice and thoughts in order to put aside the common and ordinary. Failing to do this eclipses and blurs the awareness of the sacred and offends the nature of Divinity Who has revealed Himself as totally distinct from the common and ordinary. God is one or the other.

If the thoughts, conduct, speech, attitudes, and performances of worshipers are not distinct from when they are not worshiping God, though these be quite proper for Christians under ordinary circumstances, they would be cheapening worship and shutting God out of their worship experience. When the sacred is not distinguished from the common during worship it then becomes necessary to concentrate instead on putting on a high-quality performance that will give emotional satisfaction and lift the spirits of the congregation for the next week. Instead of worshiping God the people are entertained. The focus is not on Who God is, but rather on how good the congregation can be made to feel by what the people can get out of the service. If the performance is mediocre they leave the building feeling they received no benefit from being there. The church service has to compete with media productions in order to keep the congregation
satisfied. "There is an enemy at work trying to destroy our faith in the sacredness of Christian worship."

It seems that in many modern worship services the sacred has been replaced by spontaneity, as if the sacred is associated with formalism. Spontaneity in the modern culture of American society too often means that shallow, insincere, effervescent emotions can be summoned up on short notice and at little personal cost, calling into serious question their genuineness and compatibility with God's requirement that worship be a matter of the heart. Modern innovations are often the work of a few who want to get the many to "lighten up" and make "celebration happen." Such manipulation can only have dire consequences on the Christian church because the sacred has been replaced by the common.

People of Bible times and the medieval period seem to have had a far greater consciousness of the sacred as distinguished from the common than people in modern times. The thought categories of modern people have undergone radical transformations as to how they perceive the sacred and the common. Religion no longer plays the important role it did in times past. This is partly due to the fact that people have stripped away much of the erroneous

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1White, 5T496.
2Hitchcock, 49.
3Davies, 19.
thinking of heathenism that dominated popular culture in the medieval period. People, in addition, have discarded the sacred in favor of independent thought and scientific achievement. This tendency has influenced people's approach as to how they choose to perceive and worship God. This is reflected in Davies' belief that worship takes the right form when the church takes its agenda from the contemporary world.¹

When the distinction between the sacred and the secular is clear during the worship service it becomes possible for the worshiper to give maximum attention to cultivating a sense of the sacred and consciously preparing the heart to approach God. An inward sense of the sacred would compel the worshiper to maintain the distinction between the sacred and the common.

The Importance of the Holiness-of-God Concept for Worship

An understanding of Who God is and that His holiness is prominently revealed in the Bible in connection with worship has significant implications for how He is to be worshiped. It leads to ensuring that the focus of worship is God and that His holiness is central to the worship experience. The focus of worship and the centrality of the holiness of God to the worship experience are addressed in this section.

¹Ibid., 342.
The Focus of Worship

Worship is about God. He is the object and focus of true worship. The overwhelming influence of humanism in the modern world has put the human being at the center. People's wishes and needs have taken first place in the institutions and programs of society. This mind-set has been brought into the church. People choose to attend a church that will best meet their perceived desires and needs. They come to worship in order to "get something out of the service," to receive fulfillment so that they can be "charged" for another week. This puts the focus on the person, who becomes the object of worship. Those planning the worship service, consequently, have to constantly bear in mind that the program must cater to the demands of the target group they want to reach and retain.

To say that the worship service must focus on God does not mean that people do not matter, and that no attention should be given to the needs of people. The danger the church is facing is the tendency to primarily orientate all activities to please people. The personal enjoyment level must be subject to the discipline of training the mind to focus on Who God is and how He relates to people. This will provide all the satisfaction the human heart can possibly receive. This fulfillment, though, will be a product of defining worship in terms of God.
Tozer is concerned about "the loss of the concept of majesty from the popular religious mind" and its effect on the church. Because the church has surrendered its once lofty concept of God and adopted a view of God that is so low that it is unworthy of thinking worshipers, it is inevitable that humans would become the focus of worship. This has not happened deliberately, consciously, or suddenly. The results have been the emergence of a new philosophy of the Christian life, the loss of sensing awe in the presence of God, and the absence of a true spirit of worship which inwardly communes with God in adoring silence. There is a significant connection between the decline of spiritual power within the church, its ineffectiveness in the world, and the decline in the knowledge of the holiness of God. "The more our hearts are awed by His ineffable holiness, the more acceptable will be our approaches unto Him." Once the revealed God of the Bible is restored to His elevated position of prominence within the church at worship, there will be a return of power to the church.

In order for the worship service to be focussed on God, the worshiper will need to be educated and trained to

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1Tozer, Knowledge of the Holy, 6.

2Ibid.

consciously discipline the mind to be directed toward God. A greatly improved experience of worship will result from a renewed emphasis on reverence for God and practicing His presence.¹ This will give precedence to seeking internal change before making external changes to the forms of worship. The attitude of the heart will then give greater priority to God than to the external forms of worship.

When God is rightly worshiped the worshiper will be personally and deeply affected. This impact on the worshiper is, however, not the goal or purpose of worship. The primary focus of worship must be on God rather than on the human individual.

The Centrality of the Holiness of God

To make God the focus in worship will require an understanding of Who He is. Because the holiness of God is the all-encompassing attribute of God and the way He is most prominently revealed in Scripture, the worshiper will need to give God's holiness primary attention when making God the center of worship. William Temple gives the focus of worship by saying,

To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.²

¹Allen and Borror, 37.

Robert W. Bailey strongly states that "we cannot worship rightly until we recapture, as the principal element in worship, the overwhelming sense of awe and reverence in the presence of God."¹

Improved congregational worship is not so much dependent on introducing more innovative styles of worship, but a clearer understanding and proclamation of Who God is. Liturgical changes made superficially "would be ineffective without a profound reawakening within the church of a sense of divine mystery."² If a sense of the sacred is a precondition to good worship, then the question naturally arises whether or not any new innovative forms of liturgy have enhanced a sense of the sacred, or if they have arisen because a sense of the sacred was considered an obstacle to what is considered good worship. There seems to be less of a sense of the sacred in modern worship styles and more of a sense of warmth, comfort, and pleasure. These components, however, can be injected into a social gathering, but should never become a priority over a sense of the sacred. When a sense of the sacred is lost there is too often an emphasis on entertainment. Entertainment pleases the audience, but worship should please God. Losing a sense of the holy in worship opens the way for radical individualism and

¹Allen and Borror, 42.
²Hitchcock, 4.
selfish personal piety which turns God into a servant that is expected to supply all the felt needs of those who want to feel good about themselves and life more than anything else.

Encouraging the supernatural mystery of Divinity in worship can never be meaningfully expressed by human feelings and perceptions. Human intellect cannot penetrate Divine mystery, nor can emotional response adequately express its impact. Human perception and experience, therefore, cannot be central to worship. The human comprehension and response must be centered on God's holiness. The human perceptions, experience, and response have only a subordinate place in worship, or else they will be devoid of any Divine character or quality.¹

It has often been said that the liturgy must be altered in order to attract the young. This strategy sometimes brings short-term benefits. In the long run, however, it worsens the situation because it leaves the impression with the young that Christian certainties (1) are flexible and easily altered to suit the desires of people and (2) are placing first the subjective state of the worship participant.² A deliberate casualness in worship signals the death of the sacred, because a sense

¹Ibid., 50.
²Ibid., 85.
of the sacred depends in part on a sense of awe or reverence.

**Implications for Worship**

The presence of God cannot be invoked even by the most eloquent clergy reciting a carefully constructed liturgy and praying a spirited prayer. Just as the prophets of Baal were unable to bring down fire from heaven (1 Kgs 18:26), so modern worship leaders are unable to manipulate the presence of God in a worship service. "No one can master worship, for worship is a process whereby we become mastered by Another."¹

**The Worship Leaders**

The worship leaders must first ensure that their consciences and commitment are right with God. When their hearts are united to the heart of God, and they have made humble and thorough preparation to lead the flock of God in worship, they can depend on God to make His presence felt among the people. The goal goes beyond trying to ensure a smooth-flowing worship service. There must be intentional pleading with God to meet with His people. A serious and conscientious effort must be made to focus the minds of the worshipers on themes that reveal the holiness of God. It must not be left to chance for worshipers to develop thoughts that will give them a sense of the

¹Hayford, Killinger, and Stevenson, 8.
holiness of God. They need concerted, explicit, and frequent instruction from Scripture to help them shape their focus during worship.

Worship leaders have a distinct role in encouraging a sense of the holiness of God among the congregation during worship. Awed by the task of directing minds to the sanctum of heaven so that a fire will be kindled in every heart as the simultaneous terror of the majesty of God and the peaceful intimacy of His mercy are sensed, worship leaders will dwell on the words of Scripture and kneel before God pleading for an unction of God's power in their lives. There is a need for worship leaders to remain in God's presence until their hearts and minds have been transformed. This is personal preparation. It is essential to enabling the congregation to sense the holiness of God.

The Holy Spirit

Otto points out that the numinous can be obtained by internal rather than external means. "More of the experience lives in reverent attitude ... and in the solemn devotional assembly of a congregation at prayer"¹ than by mere verbal phrases or external symbols. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the worshiper is the most essential element in experiencing the

¹Otto, 62.
numinous, which is the combined feelings of attraction and awe when sensing the holy presence of God. Once this has occurred it takes only a very small incitement or stimulus to arouse the numinous consciousness. "He who 'in the Spirit' reads the written word lives in the numinous."¹ The worshiper needs to accept the Holy Spirit as an effective aide in awakening a sense of the holiness of God during worship.

Meditation upon the Bible

The numinous was conveyed in ages past through mysterious and incomprehensible liturgies, lofty architecture, dark cathedral interiors, and rituals. Though these are more or less absent in technological societies it is still possible for modern people to encounter the holy because they too have the capacity to invite the Holy Spirit to guide their minds into a predisposition to recognize the holy and to respond to it.² At the presentation of the Word, even in fragmentary bits, the Spirit appeals to the conscience and awakens a responsiveness which the person willingly yields to.³ There is no formula that can be prescribed that will bring a revelation of the holy. Through contemplation the mind

¹Ibid., 63.
²Ibid., 166.
³Ibid., 167.
is submitted to what the Spirit may reveal through the Bible. The power of the revelation stirs the heart bringing about an irresistible impression and apprehension of encountering the holy.

It is especially in the cross that a religious intuition can be found, where the eternal Father is mirrored, and holiness is affirmed. The most classic revelation of the transcendent mysteriousness and "beyoneness" of God is seen in the cross of Christ. Here the most exalted love and awe-inspiring wrath of the numen is revealed as the holy.¹

True worship calls upon the individual to commune with God by prayer, study, patience, and humility. These require hard work and self-abasement which are unpopular and too demanding in a society that has become accustomed to being entertained and stimulated. The modern society is described as the generation that worships its work, works at its play, and plays at its worship. It is more convenient to seek that which satisfies the superficial emotional desires for pleasure and excitement. The demanding rigor required to learn how to appropriately approach God through the Bible and prayer is eluded. This essential element in encountering the holy cannot be replaced with an adequate substitute.

¹Ibid., 176, 177.
Silence

A period of silence, appropriately placed in the worship experience, and intentionally guided, can do much to provide an opportunity to the worshiper to sense the presence of holy God. This element of encountering the holy is based upon the prophetic words of Habakkuk, "But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him" (Hab 2:20). Moments of silence were a familiar feature in Hebrew worship.

The Quaker community since the time of George Fox practiced the worship of silent waiting upon God. "It is the most spiritual form of divine service which has ever been practiced, and contains an element which no form of worship ought to be without, but which . . . is unduly neglected in our Protestant devotional life." The silence was intended as a time of waiting, when inward concentration and detachment from the many outward distractions would occur. It was also a time to prepare the heart to become attuned with God. The time was not necessarily spent in literal silence, but it was in preparation and expectation of the Spirit and His message. This silence of waiting leads into a deep inner knowledge of the holy. It is similar to the experiences portrayed

\[1\text{Ibid., 216.}\]
in the Bible where the inward eye is opened to see God in His holiness (Isa 6; Jer 1; Ezek 1, 2).¹

The Worship Program

The features of the worship service surrounding the sermon must not be presented so as to give the impression that they are to serve as a warm-up for the main event, namely, the sermon. The impact of the sermon will be greatly increased if the people have truly worshiped as they anticipate hearing a word from the Lord. "Great preaching emerges out of great worship."² Every worshiper should first experience the reality of God's presence in order to be attuned to hear Him speak through His Word. Every feature of worship must contribute to this experience.

Because there has been a general neglect of focusing on the holiness of God during worship, people will not develop a new sense of God's awe and majesty by giving the theme minor attention. By cautious, balanced, and tasteful insertions virtually every feature of the worship service could include some instruction and powerful reference to the dynamic concept of God's holiness. Examples of how this can be done are reflected in the proposed model worship service found in chapter 3.

¹Ibid., 228, 229.
²Hayford, Killinger, and Stevenson, 11.
CHAPTER FOUR

A PROPOSED MODEL WORSHIP SERVICE

The first section of this chapter describes the process that was undertaken to develop a worship service model which incorporates the concept of the holiness of God for possible implementation in the Urbandale, Michigan Seventh-day Adventist Church. The proposed model is presented in section two.

The Process of Developing a Proposed Model

The pastor presented the concept of the holiness of God developed in this project report to the Urbandale, Michigan Seventh-day Adventist Church worship committee and church board to determine whether it would be advisable to lead the whole congregation into an experience of renewal in worship. Unanimous and enthusiastic support for the project was given. The steps in the process were approved by the church board.

The concept of the holiness of God and how it relates to the worship of God was presented to the congregation on four consecutive Sabbaths by means of sermons during the worship service. The first presentation, which took place on January 9, 1993, was
preceded by giving a nine-question questionnaire to those in attendance above the age of sixteen years to fill out.

The four sermons drew positive responses from a significant number of persons who indicated that they had received a fresh understanding of God and how He ought to be worshiped. This produced a climate within the congregation where worshipers could be invited to change some of their worship patterns of the past and develop new ways of approaching God in worship.

The worship committee began the process of creating ways in which the holiness of God can become the focus of the worship service. Each art form was to receive careful attention to become a means of reinforcing an awareness of God in the mind of the worshiper. The committee began to seek methods that would help the worshiper to privately nurture the numinous experience.\(^1\)

This is a slow and on-going developing process, and will take more than a year to mature. At the time of writing this report the worship committee was only beginning this process.

As significant changes are proposed there will be wide-spread consultation with the congregation before implementation. Smaller changes will gradually be

\(^1\)For various methods of nurturing an awareness of God's presence during the worship service, see "The Worship Bulletin," and "Symbols," on pp. 105-106.
introduced to the worship service in order to maintain a sense of movement and progress toward an ideal.¹

Questionnaire

Purpose of the Questionnaire

The purpose of having the congregation fill out the questionnaire was to give them an opportunity to test their understanding of the holiness-of-God concept before receiving instruction on the topic. The questions were phrased to stimulate thought and awaken interest in the subject.

Administration

Even though about 190 persons attended the worship service on the day the questionnaire was handed out, only ninety-nine questionnaires were returned with an additional six that were spoiled. Of those in attendance about fifty were below sixteen years of age. About thirty-five persons chose not to participate.

Participants were assured of anonymity and the voluntary nature of the questionnaire. They were asked to

¹Examples of some of the smaller changes are, (1) introducing songs with words that directly address the holiness of God, which are to be sung during the period preceding the call to worship, (2) using a variety of musical instruments to accompany the congregational singing in order to enhance the meaningfulness of the singing, and (3) precede the singing of hymns, prayers, call for the offering, and Scripture reading with brief statements that underline the concept of the holiness of God which will feature in those renderings.
give their immediate response to each question without taking much time to evaluate their answers. The deacons received the questionnaires back after participants spent about ten minutes giving their responses.

The worship committee worked together to collate the information on all ninety-nine questionnaires and evaluated the results.

Conclusions

Question 1 determined how frequently the worshipers consciously thought about God as holy during the worship service. Of the ninety-nine respondents, fifty indicated they always think about God as holy when they worship, thirty-two said they usually do, sixteen said they sometimes do. None said they never do. Question 7 inquired about their definition of God's holiness. Seventy-eight persons said it referred to His purity, twenty-five said it was His separateness, forty-nine believed it was His power, sixty-six chose His forgiveness, and forty-one checked His closeness. Respondents were asked to check each option they believed described God's holiness. The most accurate description of God's holiness is His separateness, and yet it received the weakest support by far. The implication is that while eighty-two persons said they at least usually think about God's holiness when they worship him, they misunderstand what His holiness means. Because so many dwell on His
purity when they think about His holiness one wonders if
the intention of worship for such is considered to be an
occasion primarily for cleansing from sin, instead of
focussing on the worth of God.

The primary reason for attending worship services
revealed that sixty-two came to commune with God, twelve
for fellowship, eight to hear the sermon, seven to
continue a good habit, and three to participate. This
response corresponded with the opinion given that true
worship is a conscious interaction between God and the
worshiper, since seventy-two gave this response. Twenty-
two said it was to praise God, while twelve said it was to
hear a moving sermon. This indicates a high level of
understanding that worship should be focussed on God with
a corresponding personal communication with God.

Acceptable worship requires that there be a high
degree of a sense of the holiness of God to eighty-three
persons, a sense of sinfulness before God to sixty-nine
persons, an awareness of God's love and saving grace to
eighty-two persons, feeling good after worshiping to
fifty-eight persons, and a warm atmosphere in the
congregation to sixty-one persons. As to whether the
respondents actually experienced a high degree of these
aspects, it was indicated that seventy-five said they
often or very often experienced a sense of God's holiness,
sixty-seven sensed their sinfulness, eighty-five were
aware of God's love and saving grace, sixty-four felt good after worshiping, and fifty-six felt a warm atmosphere in the congregation. An implication from this summary is that eighty-two persons said they thought about God as holy during worship, while seventy-five said they sensed His holiness to a high degree. The difference is not significant and can be accounted for by confusion of the real meaning of holiness. If eighty-two persons, however, think about God's holiness during worship, and most of them believe it refers to His purity, one wonders what it is that they experience when they say they sense His holiness to a high degree. Are they aware of His purity? It is evident that not too many sense His greatness and separateness. A significant component in the worship experience of most in the congregation is absent, namely, focussing on Who God is so that they will come to sense His holiness (sacredness) as the lofty, majestic, superior One, Who nonetheless draws near to those who are of contrite heart because of their awareness of Who He is. Experiencing a sense of sinfulness and healing from the gospel may not be as life-changing as when it is derived from the numinous experience.

A lack of understanding that a sense of the holiness of God produces godly fear is evident because thirty-four persons said the concept of fear as it relates to God's holiness is an Old Testament concept and is
inappropriate for Christians, while fifty-three indicated it was appropriate for Christians. Twelve persons failed to give a response to this question. The reaction expected when exposed to God's holiness was fear for thirty-one persons, joy for forty-three persons, and excitement for sixteen persons. While fifty-three believed it is appropriate for Christians to consider God's holiness as fearsome, only thirty-one said they expected to experience fear when encountering God's holiness. This indicates a confusion as to the connection between fear and God's holiness as well as discomfort with experiencing fear. This is understandable when it is considered that so many believe that God's holiness is His purity. Only an awareness of His separateness and awe can introduce the element of fear.

It is evident that the congregation did not disregard God's holiness in worship, but that they were uninformed as to what it means and how it could have an impact on their worship experience. The need for instruction on this subject would be rewarded by a growth in understanding and an enrichment in the worship experience of the congregation.

Sermons

The series of four sermons, preached consecutively, was intended to provide the congregation
with a progressive understanding of the holiness of God and its relationship to worship.

The basic meaning of holiness as it relates to God was the subject of the first sermon. The congregation was made aware of the importance of focussing the attention on the greatness of God, what makes Him different from all else, and then to respond to that awareness by coming before Him in awe and a sense of unworthiness.

Through the experience Isaiah had of seeing God in vision the second sermon attempted to show the congregation that worshiping God according to the biblical model could bring about elements of fear (woe), joy (wonder), and obedience (work). This presentation exposed the people to the dual response that a sense of God's holiness brings to the worshiper, the necessary awareness of sinfulness, the deliverance, and life-changing power.

The third sermon explained the importance of distinguishing between the sacred and secular when approaching God. The example of Nadab and Abihu in Lev 10 was used.

Because some people may misunderstand the meaning of "the fear of God" the fourth sermon attempted to show the difference between being afraid of God due to conscious sin in the life, and revering Him as a result of knowing Him as the Holy One.
The congregation's informal response to the sermons indicated that they wanted to incorporate into their worship experience the concepts and principles they had been taught. Training in these biblical principles will need to continue over an extended period of time in order to bring the congregation to greater familiarity with the subject and prepare them to make changes in their worship involvement in the future.

Worship Committee

The worship committee's function will be to give intense attention to creating acceptable ways to introduce and maintain an awareness of God's holiness in the worship service. Every aspect of the order of service will be carefully examined and used as an opportunity to focus the attention of God's greatness. The committee is unable to bring about a sense of the holiness of God, but can provide an opportunity for the worshiper to invite God's revelation of Himself and to be open to receiving His presence. In time the committee will introduce possible changes that will build the worship service toward meeting the goal of providing a service where God can make Himself known in His holiness, and the congregation will respond appropriately.

The cornerstone of a model worship service that incorporates a sense of the holiness of God is the opportunities created for the worshiper to become aware of
the holiness of God. The features of the worship service cannot present the holiness of God to the congregation to receive and respond to. The worshiper can only use the opportunities provided to voluntarily focus on God and utilize the aids that can encourage a participation in worship.

**Preparation Preceding the Worship Service**

The effectiveness of providing adequate opportunities for worshipers to focus on the holiness of God during the worship experience depends largely on the preparations done before the worship service begins. This can ensure that worshipers will be presented with fresh opportunities to direct their thoughts on the holiness-of-God theme.

**Program Preparation**

Even the majestic theme of the holiness of God can become stale if there is just one way in which the congregation participates in practicing an awareness of God. There are so many dimensions to this theme that it will take a long time to present most of its facets. Concerted effort will have to be made to combat the human tendency toward routine and dullness. The challenge facing worship leaders is to invest the effort to discover new and fresh ways of keeping the congregation interested in dwelling on the theme of the holiness of God. An
important principle to achieve this is to maintain a high level of unpredictability among the worshipers. People should not be allowed to get used to the way the holiness of God is focused on. Variety must be introduced constantly. Creative thinking and origination must occur as each feature of the worship service is looked at from several angles. This should never be done for entertainment purposes. The dignity and sacredness of the worship event must guide the choices made as to how a worship feature is prepared and presented.

The worship committee should plan the theme and basic program for a worship service at least three months in advance. Each aspect of the program is assigned to a specific person to develop and find suitable presenters. During the week prior to a worship service every person involved in presenting an art form during the upcoming worship service meets with the worship committee for a rehearsal. This is the time to coordinate and blend together all the aspects of the service to ensure a smooth flow from one item to another, that the theme logically and clearly moves from one item to the next, and especially that deliberate emphasis is given to the holiness of God in its various dimensions throughout the program.
The Worship Leaders

Adequate time should be taken by those who will lead out in worship to prepare themselves personally before they come to the sanctuary for worship. Each individual should take time in prayer and study to reflect on the awesome responsibility that is ahead. As they approach the sanctuary they must be keenly aware of the fact that they are coming into the presence of the holy God.

The worship leaders should gather in a room before the worship service begins in order to collectively prepare for the service that is about to begin. Once technical matters have been dealt with, sufficient time should be taken to pray together. The theme to be concentrated on should be the wonder of coming into God's presence. All conversation must be channeled in that direction.

The Worship Bulletin

Words printed in the worship bulletin should direct the minds of the congregation toward a worshipful spirit. A fitting poem or an extract from a book could stimulate the reader's thoughts on the theme of worshiping God. Such words can remind the congregation what they are doing when they come to worship. The theme should often focus on thoughts about the holiness of God.
Once people become used to seeing the words in the bulletin they may tend to take it for granted and neglect to read it. As a variation the words may be projected on a screen or wall if such facilities are appropriately in place in the sanctuary.

Some talented persons in the congregation can write their own poetic expressions about worshiping the holy God, and these can be printed from time to time. Any devotional aids created by gifted members of the congregation can be incorporated into the worship service. Such creations will increase and encourage participation and involvement.

Symbols

Each culture can develop symbolic activities that help people to realize the importance of coming respectfully and expectantly before their holy God. A simple ritual, modeled by the worship leaders, and voluntarily adopted by the congregation, can serve to remind them of the sanctity of the worship service. The ritual may be the taking off of shoes temporarily, or spending a few moments kneeling at the pew before being seated.

An attractively designed and carefully worded sign can be brought into the sanctuary as people begin to enter, to convey the thought that God is present and our thoughts and words should reflect that fact. Different
persons can take turns holding this sign up from the front from week to week. Artists can vary the appearance of the sign. Children can have a part in holding it up until a leader calls the attention of the worshipers to an activity. This will encourage people to silently be seated and center their minds on appropriate subjects.

The Worship Service

This model worship service is not unique in its format or art forms, but it stands out in that the congregation has undergone and continues to undergo instruction concerning the holiness of God which has shaped their attitude toward coming before God and the purpose of worship. The service is also different in that the holiness of God is featured often in that which is presented to the worshipers.

The following outline is more descriptive of what takes place than the way it will be worded in the worship bulletin.

1. Musical instruments play quiet meditative music while the ushers help people find their seats. An attractive, large sign on the screen displays the words: "The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him" (Hab 2:20). A notice in the bulletin invites people who have been seated to read the words of Ps 99 and then to privately open their minds to the revelation of God.
2. At ten minutes before eleven the platform is filled with those who will lead the congregation in worship. An enthusiastic welcome is given. The congregation is led in singing songs that speak of preparing for worship and the holy attributes of God. The song leader regularly points out the purpose of the songs with the reminder that God has come to meet with His people. The songs can be projected on the screen that hangs from the roof in front of the sanctuary. The final song focuses especially on the holiness of God, such as,

Holy, holy, holy, Holy is the Lord!
Holy, holy, holy, Holy is our God!
He who always liveth,
Evermore the same Heav'n and earth He ruleth,
Come and praise His name!¹

3. The Scriptural call to worship is taken from a passage that reveals the holiness of God, such as Ps 29:1, 2. A few sentences are spoken to remind the congregation of the meaning of the holiness of God and to invite everyone to apply the words personally to themselves.

4. The hymn of praise uplifts God and addresses His attributes. It must be a hymn of praise to God and not a subjective expression of human experience. The importance and meaning of the words are emphasized in an attention-arresting manner in order to avoid formal repetition of a familiar tune with no attention given to

the meaning of the words. The congregation is told why
the song was chosen, how it contributes to the theme of
the worship service, and how it contributes to an
understanding of the holiness of God.

5. The invocation is aimed at lifting the
thoughts of the worshipers to a keen awareness of God Who
has come to be with His people. The fact that although
God is holy (separate) He has come to be close to His
people is emphasized.

6. In order to develop the practice of especially
being aware of the holiness of God during worship, about
five minutes is taken to explain the importance of keeping
the mind focused on the holiness of God, using a passage
of Scripture to illustrate the prominence of the
revelation of God's holiness in connection with worship.
This is done skillfully in order to avoid predictability
as to what the people can expect to hear, and to stimulate
thought.

7. Special music is presented to continue the
purpose of keeping the minds of worshipers centered on
God. The music is performed in such a way as to help the
congregation think more about God's nature, His character,
and His saving grace. The worshipers are taught to
respond to the music expressing an enthusiastic "Amen."
8. The congregation is invited to recognize the greatness of God by responding through bringing Him a tithe of their possessions and an offering of gratitude.

9. While several features are done from the platform and the distance from the congregation suggests the separateness of God, it will be meaningful for the one leading the prayer to meet the people on the floor of the sanctuary. The message received is that God has come to His people to hear their prayer. The tension between the transcendence and immanence is maintained and illustrated. Special needs expressed by the congregation are mentioned. The congregation is reminded that the reason for kneeling before God is to recognize His holiness and the worshiper's humility before him. A suitable song is quietly sung by the kneeling congregation. The prayer includes adoration, confession, intercession, and thanksgiving.

10. When the Scripture reading is presented it is obvious to the congregation that significant preparation has been made to bring God's Word in an attractive and lively manner. The congregation is reminded of the importance of listening for God's voice coming through His Word. The people can be reminded of what happened when God spoke His Word to His people at various times in the past. Once again a closing remark is made about the wonder of being able to hear the holy God's voice through

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His Word and an invitation is made to internalize those words.

11. The sermon leads the worshiper through an experience of hearing and understanding God's Word, relating the focal message to everyday living, and making a response of commitment to God.

12. A song is sung by the congregation to express their heart response to God. They are aware that God has accepted them by grace through Jesus Christ, and they show their gratitude by committing themselves to Him to do whatever He desires of them. This thought is spoken in a variety of ways before the song is sung.

13. The benediction seeks the blessing of God on His people as they go to be a separate people for Him as they mingle with the members of their community.

14. As the people leave the sanctuary it is with the sounds of triumph and joy coming from instruments.

15. The congregation have opportunity to eat and fellowship together in the social hall.

This model will serve as a basis for developing a variety of ways to maintain a fresh and continuous sense of importance in focussing the attention on the holiness of God during worship.

Conclusion

The frequency in which the Bible gives emphasis to the revelation of God's holiness during worship is an
invitation for Christian worshipers to rediscover an awareness of the sacred, concentrate on the holiness of God, and respond appropriately to His awesome majesty. It is an experience only God can give to those who are willing to make earnest preparation for it by practicing His holy presence all week long. The whole Christian life is to be one of separateness so that the time of corporate worship will be God's opportunity to reveal Himself as He is, and worshipers to respond to Him for Who He is: the Most Holy One.

This project has brought me to the conclusion that a sense of the holiness of God during worship

1. Makes the worshiper aware of Who God is and focuses the attention on God so that the worship experience is theocentric

2. Puts the worshiper in an appropriate stance before God, having a proper sense of unworthiness, sinfulness, "creatureliness," and need for God

3. Enables the worshiper to honor God by keeping the common separate from the sacred

4. Gives occasion for the worshiper to praise and adore God with much enthusiasm as His greatness is emphasized

5. Provides the worshiper with the fulfillment of felt needs as Divine healing results from looking away from self with dependence on God.
This project has brought about a clearer and deeper understanding of the nature of God's holiness to my mind and to the minds of the Urbandale congregation. The project has stimulated continuing discussion. A spirit of exploring new forms of God-directed worship has been awakened. When new and more meaningful practices of worship are developed in the future it will more likely arise from general consensus based upon scriptural principles of worship.

As a worship leader I have been sensitized through this project to the intricacies of leading a congregation through of the process of evaluating and exploring implications for worship that arise from a biblical understanding of the holiness of God. It has established my resolve to always work from a biblical basis for developing and achieving dynamic (growing) ways of worshiping God. The importance of giving adequate emphasis to an awareness of the holiness of God during worship has been impressed upon my mind.
APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE AND COVER LETTER

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please read the attached letter before giving your responses.

1. When you worship, do you consciously think about God as holy? (circle one) never sometimes usually always

2. What is the primary reason you attend the worship service on Sabbath? (circle a, b, c, d, or e--choose only one reason)
   a) for fellowship
   b) to hear the sermon
   c) to participate
   d) to continue a good habit
   e) to commune with God
   f) other__________________

3. In your opinion, what is true worship? (circle the letter closest to your opinion)
   a) a well prepared and skillfully presented program,
   b) a moving sermon,
   c) opportunity to participate in most of the service,
   d) a conscious interaction between God and you,
   e) singing and speaking praise to God

4. Indicate the degree of importance the following have in making worship acceptable to God? (1=little, 2=somewhat, 3=much, 4=very much--write the appropriate number beside each option)
   a) your sense of God's holiness
   b) a sense of your sinfulness before God
   c) an awareness of God's love and saving grace
   d) your feeling good after worshiping
   e) a warm atmosphere in the congregation

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5. Which of the following do you experience in worship? (1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=very often—write the appropriate number beside each option)
   a) a sense of God's holiness
   b) a sense of your sinfulness before God
   c) an awareness of God's love and saving grace
   d) feeling good after worshiping
   e) a warm atmosphere in the congregation

6. To consider God's holiness as fearsome is an Old Testament concept, inappropriate for modern Christians. If you agree, circle "yes". If you disagree, circle "no".

7. In your opinion, is God's holiness His (check each answer you agree with) purity ___, separateness ___, power ___, forgiveness ___, closeness ___.

8. If you should encounter God's holiness, what reaction would you expect to have? (circle only one letter)
   a) fear  b) joy  c) excitement  d) nothing out of the ordinary.

9. Is a sense of fear before God appropriate when you worship?  Yes ___  No ___
Dear Friend,

This questionnaire is part of a project requirement for a degree I am working on at Andrews University. Your responses to the questions will be most helpful.

Your participation is voluntary. Please do not write your name on the sheet, since I would like your responses to be anonymous. The data from the questionnaire will be used only for the project report to be submitted to Andrews University.

Please give your responses as quickly as you can. Fold your completed sheet in half and return it to the deacon right away.

Any information about the results of the survey, or the purpose of the project, may be directed to Pastor Ivan Blake at (616) 968-9442.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Ivan C Blake
Pastor
APPENDIX B

SERMONS

WHO IS GOD?

Scripture: Hebrews 12:25-29

Hymns: 109, 71

I. Where Worship Begins

A. What is worship?

1. What is worship? When we make a response to God, we worship.

2. That can happen here in the sanctuary: We hear God saying to us through the Bible that He accepts us as His children through Jesus Christ; we then respond to that by singing praises to Him. That is worship.

3. Worship can also occur outside the sanctuary: On Monday morning, during our private devotions, we read in the Bible that God assures us that He will be with us always; we respond to that throughout the day by following His directions and doing His will. That is worship.

When we respond to God from our hearts, we worship.

B. Who Do We Worship?

1. Before we give much attention to HOW we respond to God (how we worship), we need to give special attention to WHO we worship.

2. Who is God? What is He like? When we have that clear, we will be motivated by our understanding of Him as HOW we ought to worship Him.

3. The Israelites on Mount Carmel worshiped their god Baal in a way that reflected what they knew him to be. 1 Kgs 18:26-29. Here is an all-day worship service of shouting, dancing, cutting the flesh until blood flowed
freely, and frantic prophesying—what picture of a god will you have in your mind when you have to do such things to get his attention? In contrast, Elijah had the people prepare the altar of the Lord. At the appointed time, Elijah simply prayed. 1 Kgs 18:36-38. Elijah's picture of God led him to approach God in the way he did.

4. WE NEED TO BEGIN OUR WORSHIP OF GOD AT OUR UNDERSTANDING OF WHO GOD IS, WHAT HE IS LIKE; THEN WE CAN THINK BEST ABOUT HOW WE OUGHT TO RESPOND TO HIM IN WORSHIP.

II. God's Greatness/Holiness

A. Idolatry

Think for a moment: What is God like to You? Would we be safest if we let the Bible tell us what He is like? God's attributes, what He is like, are beyond our opinions of what He is like. If God is the way we decide He should be, or the way we desire Him to be, then we have created our own god. That is idolatry. We need to listen to what He says about Himself.

B. Greatness

When we read everything the Bible says about God, we discover that God's attributes can be divided into two categories: His attributes of GREATNESS, and His attributes of GOODNESS. That helps us to simplify our understanding of God. We will focus on His Greatness.

The GREATNESS of God refers to all His attributes that make Him different from us.

1. "God is a Spirit" (John 4:24). This means God is not subject to the limitations of a physical body. He can be anywhere, everywhere, at anytime. Just like the air around us is invisible, but everywhere at the same time, the same can be said of God. That sure makes Him different from us. That is why He is great.

2. God is also personal. Just because He is a spirit, so very different from us, doesn't mean that He is some force we cannot relate to. God's greatness is also seen in the fact that while He is so different from us, He is intimately involved with us.

The Bible pictures Him as having personality. He is an individual being, capable of feeling and choosing and loving. He can have a reciprocal/shared relationship with us. He is not some abstract, unknowable being, or
nameless force. He is actively engaged with people, sharing warmth, understanding and care. God is personal.

SUMMARY: So, God is invisibly present everywhere (God is spirit), but also personal. His greatness does not preclude His nearness. His greatness is made even more amazing in that while He is so different from us, He still comes close to us in a personal relationship.

APPLICATION: As you ponder this truth about God, what does it do to you? What feelings come to you? Does God's greatness—His differentness by being invisibly present everywhere—make you feel small? Knowing who God is makes us sense His greatness and our smallness. Then as we consider His ability at the same time to come near to us, we feel humble. He is worthy and we are unworthy—not worthless, or God would not have anything to do with us. We cannot help but to fall at His feet and say, "You are worthy of our adoration, praise and loyalty, O Lord God."

This is worship: sensing the greatness of God and sensing our littleness, we respond by expressing His worth.

If we skip the process whereby we become aware of His greatness, we probably would not have the sense of who God is, nor will we have a sense of our smallness and unworthiness. Praising Him will have little meaning. Worship, then, will not be a response to God's worth. The center of worship then shifts from God to human beings. Worship then can easily degenerate into an exciting experience of entertainment or therapy. But starting worship with concerted and conscious attempts to focus on the greatness of God, puts us in the right frame of mind to participate in worship that pleases God. His coming near to us will mean so much more when we first sense how far we are from Him.

3. God's greatness is also seen in the LIFE that is in Him. God is alive. "I AM." is what He calls Himself to Moses (Exod 3:14). "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself." (John 5:26). "In him was life, and that life was the light of men." (John 1:4). These statements indicate that God has a kind of life that is different from that of every other living being. We derive our life from Him, but God does not derive His life from any external source. He never received life. He is life. That is also what makes Him great and different to us. He is infinite, without limitation. Does that make you feel small?
4. God's greatness is also seen in His power. We call it the omnipotence of God. That means He can do all things. He controls the course of history. He can perform miracles which go beyond the limits of nature. Best of all, He has power to change human personalities when He is permitted. Nothing frustrates God. He is always in control. What He wills always come about in the end. To Abraham He said, "I am God Almighty," (Gen 17:1). Jesus said, "With God all things are possible," (Mat 19:26).

How different God is to us! How little we are! Yet He is intimately close to us. The paradox is clear: God is so far from us in His being different from us, while He is at the same time very close to us by being a personal God. It is an error to view God as either far or near. Our view of God must have Him both separate and close to us. This is illustrated in these words: "This is what the Lord says: Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being? declares the Lord. Do you notice these expressions of God's greatness? Now notice how He comes close to us in spite of His greatness. This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word" (Isa 66:1, 2).

APPLICATION: God is great, but at the same time closely involved with us. This greatness of God makes us humble because we sense our smallness before His greatness, and it makes us contrite/repentant because of our sinfulness. This sense of smallness and sinfulness brings about a trembling, godly fear as we approach God. We are compelled to ask, "Who am I before this Great God?" But it also brings us warm assurance and confidence. It sounds like a contradiction.

Here we have our second paradox. The first is that God is both separate and close to us. The second is the tension of our reaction to God: sensing our smallness (godly fear) and sinfulness, while at the same time sensing the warm assurance and confidence He brings.

C. The Holiness of God

1. God's Greatness = His Holiness

We have looked at some of God's attributes of greatness; qualities that make Him different from us. He is separate from us because of His greatness. He is unique. THIS DIFFERENTNESS OF GOD THE BIBLE CALLS GOD'S HOLINESS. "Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you—Majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders
(terrible in glorious deeds)" (Exod 15:11). Please notice how God's greatness, differentness and holiness as closely associated together.

The Bible is full of expressions of the loftiness, the exaltedness, and the splendor of God. This is His Holiness. "There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no rock like our God" (1 Sam 2:2). Please notice that God's holiness is seen in His being different, separate from all else. His greatness is His holiness.

SUMMARY: God is holy in that He is above, separate and different from us. Our awareness of how great, lofty and majestic He is brings us a sense of our unworthiness and sinfulness. In this attitude we can rightfully approach Him in worship. Even though He is so great, He at the same time loves to come near to His people when they are in the right attitude of unworthiness before Him.

2. It is striking to see how often in the Bible people come before God in worship when they sense His holiness (greatness, majesty, uniqueness). When that is true, it is amazing to see how terrifying and also how comforting and reassuring their worship experience is. Then we also see what their worship leads them to do. (Next week we are going to look at one such example. Read Isaiah 6 in preparation.)

3. God is Unapproachable

The word "holy" in Hebrew means "marked off" or "withdrawn from common, ordinary use." That which is holy is separate. Because God is so great (as creator, infinite, all-powerful, the essence of life), He is therefore holy. He is separate from us. He is above anything we can imagine. Paul says He "alone is immortal and lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see" (1 Tim 6:16). We cannot see or approach God. We cannot understand Him. He is beyond finding out (Isa 40:28). He is holy.

APPLICATION: What does it do to you when you think of God this way? Before you consider that Jesus made it possible for us to come close to God—before that occupies your mind—think of what God is like. To focus on who God is could do something to our attitude as we come before Him. That is what it did to people in Bible times.

Could it be that we have lost the meaning of worship, that we have failed to learn how we ought to worship God, because we have neglected to give serious consideration
first to WHO HE IS? Is it appropriate to come before God in worship, praising Him in words of song, before we have considered WHO He is? Doesn't it make our praising a little hollow? or even meaningless? We can sing the most sublime words of praise to God without giving much thought to what we are singing, because our minds are not filled with an awareness of who we are praising. The words of praise will then be meaningless. Why? Because we haven't become crucially aware of Who it is we are approaching. BUT ONCE WE HAVE TAKEN TIME TO THINK ABOUT AND PONDER GOD'S GREATNESS, HIS HOLINESS, WHO HE REALLY IS, we will come to sense our smallness, our unworthiness, and our sinfulness. We will come sensing our need of God's grace and mercy. And we will also be led to see His compassion, acceptance and forgiveness. We will become so overjoyed by what He has done. It will then be a natural response to express His worth, to praise Him and adore Him in ways we have never yet dreamed of. And we will be empowered to go from His presence, taking Him with us, rendering Him lives of service, loyalty and honor. That is what a sense of the holiness of God can do for us. It begins with thinking about WHO GOD REALLY IS!

4. Purity

God's holiness is His greatness in that He is creator, the giver of life, He is all powerful, He is infinite. But He is also holy in that He is pure, sinless.

God's holiness is also His absolute purity or goodness. He is untouched and unstained by the evil in the world. He will have nothing to do with evil. "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong" (Hab 1:13). In this respect God is again different from us, separate, unique.

The amazing thing is that while God is so pure that He cannot have anything to do with sin, He is still able to have everything to do with sinners. This paradox is hard for us to deal with.

Because God is holy in that He is absolutely pure, He must react to sin. Because it is repulsive to Him God's justice must eliminate sin. Sin arouses God's holy anger, His wrath. This is His natural response to sin. That sounds like He must consume us who are sinful. And that is why the Bible says, "the wages of sin is death"--a death that is eternal separation from God. We were objects of God's wrath (Eph 2:3). What hope do we then have?
God made a way to keep us safe while His holy wrath consumes sin. Jesus is that way. Jesus became the victim of divine justice in our place. When we accept that fact, God sets us free. And He comes ever so close to commune with us. Our sins separate us from God but He has closed the gap and now draws us near to Him. "We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb 10:10). "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb 4:16). The far-away God is also the close-up God. Too many have turned from the first, and want only the second.

A real sense of awe and godly fear is appropriate in our relationship with God. Sometimes worship which stresses only "the joy and confidence that the believer has in relationship with a loving heavenly Father, goes beyond that point to an excessive familiarity treating him as an equal, or worse yet, as a servant" (Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology, 318). But if we have grasped the truth of God's greatness, His holiness, His differentness, His awesome majesty, this will not happen. We do need enthusiasm of expression in worship, and it will take its rightful place when our focus is right, but it must never lead to a loss of respect and casual irreverence before God. There must always be a sense of awe and wonder in the worship of God. Yes, there is love and trust and openness between us and God, but we are not equals. He is almighty, sovereign; we are His creatures. The way we know God, must be reflected in the way we worship Him.

Challenge

May I challenge you, invite you, to take time to develop in your mind the Bible's concept of WHO GOD IS. Dwell on the attributes of God until there comes to you a sense of His holiness—His uniqueness, His greatness, His majesty. Let this sense of Who He is lead you to come before God in awe and reverence, even godly terror, sensing your unworthiness and sinfulness. Then listen as He speaks to you words of love, grace and compassion. And see what that will do to your worshiping experience before God.

Like Thomas, who after three years of walking with Jesus in a more or less casual manner, but then came to sense who Jesus really is, we too will fall at His feet and say with all the emotion and depth we can muster: "My Lord, and MY God." That is true worship!
THE EXPERIENCE OF WORSHIP:
WOE - WONDER - WORK

Scripture: Isaiah 6:1-8

Hymns: 30, 295

INTRODUCTION

The prophet Isaiah said, "I saw the Lord" (Isa 6:1). This is the only vision Isaiah had that is recorded. Through this vision Isaiah is transported into the temple of God, before the throne of God, and Isaiah experiences what happens in heaven when God is worshiped.

At the very beginning of the worship experience Isaiah "saw the Lord." In coming before God to worship God, Isaiah's attention was on God. Is God-centered worship automatic, or do we need to purposely seek after it?

Coming before God to worship Him should also mean for us that we look away from all else: look away from human beings around us who could be a distraction, who could be leading out in some part of the program, who could be doing such a good job that we are inclined to admire the creature instead of the Creator. Fellowship is not worship, though it is a product of worship.

Looking only to the Lord God when we come to worship Him takes concentration and effort. It means we focus our attention and thoughts on WHO GOD IS; Who it is that we are approaching. It means consciously saying to ourselves: "I am coming into the presence of the great God of the universe: the Creator, the all mighty, all powerful, infinite and majestic God."

As you have come into God's house today have you taken time to contemplate Who He is; can you say, "I have seen the Lord." This is where we ought to begin. This is the starting point of worship. Isaiah saw the Lord. What did he see?
I. Revelation of God's Holiness (1-4)

A. What Isaiah saw

1. The LORD

Isaiah is standing near the altar of sacrifice, looking into the heavenly temple. The door is open. The veil hiding the holy of holies is drawn aside. God is seen as a ruler (Lord), like an Eastern Monarch, attended by angels, who are His ministers of state. God is wearing a robe and flowing train, which in the East stood for dignity. This train fills the whole temple.

In verse 5 Isaiah says he saw the "King, the LORD Almighty." This is absolutely amazing. The name, "LORD," is so special that many Jews will not say the name. It refers to God as Yahweh. It is the holy, unutterable, unspeakable name of God. His name is too great for words. Isaiah says he saw none other than Yahweh the Sovereign One.

Exo 33:20 says no man can see God and live. John 1:18 says no man has seen God at any time. 1 Tim 6:16 says God lives in unapproachable light, and no one has seen or can see Him. And yet Abraham, Joshua, Moses and John all claim they saw God. Isaiah joins them, but does not say anything about God's form, only what He wore. What he saw of God, and what all others in Scripture saw of God, was enough to bring terror upon them, even though they only saw the symbol of His presence (A. R. Fausset).

2. God Exalted

As Isaiah looks upon God he becomes aware that God is lifted high above all else. As the exalted Lord, He is on a different level to all else. Here is the first indication of God's holiness. His holiness means He is exalted, different, above and distinct from everything else. Isaiah, therefore, saw the holiness of God.

3. The Angels

The angels, who are sinless, and who minister for God, are so impressed with His presence that they use two of their wings to cover their faces--they do not look upon Him constantly, because they are unworthy. They also cover their feet. Someone said our feet connect us with the earth, from where we come; and to cover our feet is to recognize our creatureliness before our Creator. Moses removed his shoes as a symbol of the distinction between him the creature, and God the Creator. These angels were
hovering on expanded wings around the throne of God. These are all symbolic acts of reverence as they recognize Who it is they are worshiping. It is awesome to be in God's presence.

They are called seraphim. The word means "to burn." These angels gleam in dazzling brightness as they attend the Majesty of heaven.

Are you beginning to see what Isaiah saw? Are you beginning to sense what Isaiah experienced?

4. Music

The worship scene in heaven is not silent. The angels sing about the God they adore. Their song says nothing of themselves. It describes the greatness of God. Their song says God is holy. They tell one another that God is holy. Here is true fellowship. The worshipers are speaking to one another in God's presence, but what they speak about is the greatness, the holiness of God. No other attribute of God is repeated three times in succession in the Bible.

Can we come to the place, where our focusing on God is so central to our worship, that when we speak to one another it will be about the greatness of God? It seems to me that this is a real part of worship (Mal 3:16).

5. Heaven Shakes

To speak and sing and be absorbed with the holiness of God: His greatness, His lofty majesty is so profound that the doorposts and thresholds of heaven shake. The temple becomes filled with smoke. Instead of doorposts, it means foundations. The foundations shake. The smoke refers to the shekinah cloud, which is symbolic of God's presence. In other words, Isaiah became aware of God's presence so strongly that it engulfed him like a cloud of smoke.

God's presence is most real to the worshiper who focusses on His holiness. When God's holiness is revealed we are in the atmosphere of worship. Amazing things begin to happen; things we know little of yet.

B. Contrast With Earthly Houses of Worship

Isaiah's experience of worship is starkly contrasted by what often happens in our earthly houses of worship. Many people claim to be bored. The experience of worship does not move them or revitalize them. But even the inanimate objects in heaven, the door posts and the foundations, are
moved and shaken. Others claim they have all the excitement and thrill they can handle in their worship experiences. They literally shake and quake. But very often it is simply display and performance that causes their excitement rather than a sense of the holiness or greatness of God.

TRUE WORSHIP OF GOD MUST BEGIN WITH A REVELATION OF GOD'S HOLINESS (GREATNESS). THIS WILL LEAD TO THREE RESPONSES.

II. The Threefold Affect On Isaiah (5-8)
A. Fear/Woe (5)
1. Sense of Sinfulness

When Isaiah received the revelation of God's holiness, his first response was FEAR. Now, we are not comfortable with having fear for God. Many say that is an Old Testament concept we are liberated from since Jesus came. (We will address what it means to fear God at another time.)

Notice the affect the revelation of God's holiness had on Isaiah: "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." Isaiah tells us why he fears. Seeing God as the Holy One, made him sense his sinfulness, and the natural affect on him was fear. Isaiah was an upright man, yet sinful. A low view of sin comes from a low view of God. Isaiah's view of God made him sense his guilt.

Others who came to sense the holiness of God also responded in fear. (Jud 6:22-23, 13:22; Job 42:5,6; Luk 5:8; Rev 1:17.)

Isaiah, an upright and righteous man, considers himself "ruined, undone," doomed, judged, when he sees God in His holiness. Fully exposed and naked before the gaze of God's absolute holiness he couldn't find a single reason to be confident about himself in God's presence. The ultimate standard of measurement was God's holiness, and that made him feel like destruction was imminent.

2. APPLICATION: You and I do not visibly encounter God the way Isaiah did in his vision. It is nonetheless necessary for us to become aware of the same reality: God's supreme holiness versus our utter uncleanness. This attitude created in our minds as we come to worship will certainly expel all casualness, boredom and desire for display of self.

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What can we do individually and as a group that will keep the holiness of God fresh in our minds early in the worship experience, so that a sense of our sinfulness and need is evident? It will take a conscious determination on each individual's part to concentrate on the words spoken during the call to worship and the silent meditation of the heart. Worship leaders on the platform can only create a climate in which we can be encouraged to focus our thoughts on God's greatness.

SUMMARY: So, the first affect a sense of the holiness of God had on Isaiah was Fear, or WOE. Notice the second affect.

B. Assurance/Wonder (6,7)

1. Atonement

Isaiah would not have survived were it not for the gracious act of God of removing his guilt. God sent one of the angels to pick up a red hot coal from the altar, and he touched Isaiah's mouth with the coal, saying, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

Jesus Christ is the altar where atonement for our sins was made. God's Word here says that it is only by sacrifice that sin can be pardoned.

2. The Pain of Cleansing

The coal represents the painful experience of confession, repentance and restoration that takes place in our hearts when we fall before God, sensing our sinfulness, our deserved condemnation, and our need for His grace.

It's painful, because self is dethroned, shamed and put into the dust. Cleansing from sin is painful because it requires repentance and remorse. That's not easy for anyone. To dethrone self, and humble ourselves and admit our guilt--that's painful stuff. We do it seldom because we seldom sense the holiness of God. We prefer to skip this part of worship. It is no wonder, therefore, that it is mostly missing from worship today.

3. Superficial Worship

Would we not experience pain as we come before God, conscious of His holiness and our sin? We prefer coming to worship God as an exercise in being made to feel good about ourselves, to receive therapy and a boost of our spirits. That means the focus in worship is on us and
those who do a good job in making us feel better for the next week.

Please don't misunderstand me. Our personal needs ought to be met in worship. Worship ought to be a happy, rejoicing experience. But such personal satisfaction is superficial and not life-changing if it doesn't flow from a God-focused worship: beginning with a revelation of Who God is, sensing His holiness, sensing our sinfulness and unworthiness, and sensing our need of His grace; then, having Him come to us with the live coal of repentance and atonement, giving us forgiveness, healing and restoration. From this springs a joy, excitement, and happiness that cannot be matched by any of the superficial, man-centered emotional hype served up often as worship where God is only mentioned, but not experienced.

A specific act was undertaken to make Isaiah aware of God's forgiving grace. Only this could get Isaiah up from the floor where he was groveling in shame and wishing to hide from God. Could today's worshipers not even so much as shed a tear of regret for sin as they enter God's presence to worship?

Isaiah first felt pain and anguish before he felt good. There was no easy, "I'm sorry," utterance. The experience of mourning before God for sin, being overcome by moral guilt precedes God's healing touch. Anything less is a superficial experience devoid of the impact of the holiness of God upon the mind.

What Isaiah went through would today be considered by many as an affront to human dignity, an insult that no human should be expected to go through. But this is exactly why there is such a dearth of true healing among Christian today. Healing comes through the pain of admitting guilt, repentance, remorse and restoration.

4. Wonder

The consequences and fruit of encountering the holiness of God is being healed, restored, deeply happy and joyful. THIS IS THE EFFECT OF WONDER UPON THE WORSHIPER. A new sense of wonderment at God's love and gracious goodness floods the heart. And now Isaiah is ready for the final affect of sensing God's holiness.

C. Service/Work (8)

Uncleanness is replaced by a commission. Isaiah is ready to be an agent for God to influence other people to also come to know God. Isaiah hears a voice, the voice of
God, saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"
And Isaiah responds, "Here am I, send me."

Worship that is deprived of encountering God as the holy
God ends in nothing. But when worship begins with sensing
God's holiness, which leads to sensing sinfulness and
guilt before God, and then leads to receiving God's saving
grace, such worship never ends in nothing. It end in
Service, or WORK—the third affect of sensing the holiness
of God.

A worship experience focused on receiving a good feeling
lasts temporarily. It seldom drives the worshiper to
actively work for God. But worship that is focused on the
holiness of God takes the worshiper into the world to
continue worshiping God by living and working for God as a
continual response to God.

SUMMARY

The Bible pattern for worship is clear. God reveals
Himself in His holiness, we fall before God in fear and
guilt, God forgives, heals and restores, then, finally God
sends us, and rejoicing we go into the world to work for
God. FROM BROKENNESS TO HEALING TO SERVICE: That is the
pattern for worship. It only comes when we sense the
holiness of God. WOE—WONDER—WORK: This is our response
to seeing the holiness of God. This is worship.

"Exalt the Lord our God and worship at his footstool; he
is holy" (Psa 99:5).
TWO FIRES THAT DON'T MIX

Scripture: Leviticus 10:1-11

Hymns: 11, 308

PRAYER OF FOCUS
Speak, Lord, while our minds dwell on You Who are holy,
Hush our hearts to listen in expectancy,
Speak, O blessed Master, in this awesome hour,
And let us see Your face, Lord, and feel Your touch of power.

INTRODUCTION

Football and Tennis

Well, Football fans! It's the Cowboys and the Bills, huh?
What would you think of JIM KELLY, the Bills quarterback,
arraiving at the Superbowl, dressed like ANDRE AGISSY,
tennis racket in hand and a couple of tennis balls in his pocket? No Way! You know why! Tennis and Football don't mix. You don't play tennis on a football field. A football field is distinct, different from a tennis court.

It is just as ridiculous and unacceptable to come into God's house to worship Him and continue doing the ordinary things of life: thinking, speaking and acting the same way we do all week long.

The things we think, speak and do during the week may not be wrong (hopefully), but they just don't mix with the things God wants us to think, speak and do when we worship Him. The one is secular, the other is sacred. The one is ordinary, the other is holy.

I. Examples

A. Nadab and Abihu

Nadab and Abihu decided there was no difference between what happens when they worship God and the rest of their lives. They discovered (and so did everyone else) that life outside the temple and life inside the temple don't mix; what you do in worship before God doesn't mix with what you do when you're not worshiping. Here's their story.
Elisheba and Aaron named two of their sons Nadab and Abihu (Exod 6:23). Parents don't give their babies those names anymore.

Nadab and Abihu saw God (Exod 24:9-11). They were on Mount Sinai with Moses, Aaron and seventy elders. What did they see? "Under God's feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire (a transparent bright blue precious stone), clear as the sky itself. But God did not raise his hand against (them); they saw God, and survived.

It's something like being the only person invited to enter the gold chambers of Fort Knox and to handle real gold. You expect to be handcuffed any moment, because you feel guilty about what you're doing. Nadab and Abihu actually saw the glory of God.

Next, God gave very explicit instructions on how Nadab, Abihu and the other priests were to be ordained. These men were to represent Jesus Christ, our priest, who provides us with salvation. Imagine being chosen to be a symbol of Christ! All the people of Israel gathered at the entrance to the temple to see the ordination service. And God said, "You must stay at the entrance to the Tent of meeting day and night for seven days and do what the Lord requires, so you will not die" (Lev 8:35). They were into serious stuff!

In Leviticus 9 Aaron and his sons went through an intense preparation for the glorious moment when God would appear to them. Three times the sons carried blood to Aaron, who made sure they were cleansed from sin. When Moses and Aaron came out of the temple and blessed the people, "The glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offering . . . . And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell face down" (Lev 9:23, 24).

With all this grandeur and splendor; with all the privilege and honor given Nadab and Abihu; with all the clear instructions from God on how to behave during worship; with an awareness of how exalted and lofty and special it is to come into the presence of God, how amazing then that Nadab and Abihu would consciously disregard all rules of maintaining a sense of the sacred.

They drank intoxicating wine, assumed the office which belonged only to Moses during the time of dedicating the altar, encroached on the duties belonging exclusively to Aaron, which was to perform the incense service—the highest and most solemn of the priestly office, took the audacious liberty to intrude near the Most Holy Place,
which only the high priest could enter. Instead of taking fire from the altar of burnt offering, which God Himself had kindled, and which was therefore sacred, they took fire from the ordinary, common hearths where the priests prepared their food.

Considering the miraculous down pouring of fire from heaven just shortly before, and the solemn obligations they were set apart for, they displayed a carelessness, an irreverence, a want of respect for Who God is. Though they were consecrated to the priesthood it had not changed their hearts; they themselves were still common, not set aside totally for God's glory alone.

If God let their reckless irreverence go by unchallenged, a precedent would have been made for the disregard and casual treatment of sacred things in the worship of God.

A blazing fire coming from the Most Holy Place, the presence of God, struck the two men and killed them. This was God's awful judgment on the mixing of the common with the sacred. In wisdom He addressed the first instance of contempt for sacred things. Ordinary fire and sacred fire are not the same, and don't mix.

Moses realized what God was doing. He reminded Aaron that God had said, "Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored" (Lev 10:3). The way this is to be done is to distinguish between the sacred and the ordinary.

APPLICATION: Many today would brush this incident aside as typical of the Old Testament. "People back then had this strange mystical idea about some things being sacred. In our modern world God is more easy going," they say. Don't fall into that trap!

When we approach God in worship He still requires from us a cautious and reverent attitude and manner. Coming into his Divine presence demands a different approach than coming into the presence of a human.

Those who came into the newly inaugurated President Clinton's presence this past week made elaborate preparations and spent vast sums of money in order to be sure that their coming before the president was proper and acceptable. Some paid $1500 just to eat where he was present. One lady told the whole country over radio that she finally found a suitable dress costing some $2000 that would be appropriate for the special occasion of coming into the presence of her president. When you attend the inauguration of the president of the United States of
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America you treat that privilege differently to any other occasion. His office, his position requires that.

Considering who God is, shouldn't we come into His presence with the utmost preparation and caution. God's personal closeness to us is no reason for our being casual toward Him. He is still the infinite God, the most holy. His greatness demands an approach that sets Him apart from all else. God makes that very clear through Moses who said "You must distinguish between the holy and the profane (secular, common, ordinary)" (Lev 10:10).

B. Ananias and Sapphira

At this time in Israel's history, God was making a fresh start. They had just come out of pagan Egypt. Moses and Aaron were the leaders through whom God wanted to train the people in the importance of knowing God, worshiping Him and serving Him the right way. At this crucial beginning God made it very clear how important it is to distinguish between the sacred and the ordinary.

God made the same point once again in the New Testament, when the young Christian community was God's fresh start to once again train His people in knowing Who He is, how to worship and serve Him acceptably. The 12 apostles were His instructors. And once again the big issue was making a clear difference between the sacred and the ordinary.

Ananias and Sapphira committed themselves to selling a piece of property and giving it all to the Lord. That money was set aside for God. That made it holy. It no longer belonged to them. But they treated what was sacred as though it was common. They handed over only a portion, keeping some of the holy gift for themselves. For this they in turn dropped down dead. "And great fear seized all who heard what had happened" (Acts 5:5, 11).

God's justice seems cruel and overdone to us only because we have an imperfect concept of God's holiness and the offensiveness of sin.

Today our society and culture disregards a sense of the sacred, the holy and exalted. Everything, including God is placed on an ordinary, common level. But God has not changed. He is still the great and mighty God who rules the universe.

"Time" magazine reported a truck driver who was arrested for drunken driving and disorderly conduct in the State of Maryland. The driver used God's name in abusive language to the officer and magistrate. The maximum penalty that
could be imposed for drunk and disorderly conduct was $100 and 30 days in jail. The magistrate found an antiquated law still on the books in Maryland, but in disuse. It prohibited public blasphemy. Since the man publicly blasphemed the name of God, the magistrate tacked on another $100 fine and an additional 30 days in jail. The "Time" news editor was outraged. To put a man in jail for 60 days and fine him $200 was a gross miscarriage of justice, so he claimed. Such a penalty was too severe. It was cruel and unusual. The news editor was not upset about the penalty imposed for drunk and disorderly conduct. He couldn't accept the punishment for blasphemy. The sacred was unimportant.

Now, if the truck driver was arrested by Aaron the best lawyer in Israel would not get just a $100 fine and 30 days in jail for his client. He would have gotten life imprisonment or even death. (R. C. Sproul, in The Holiness of God.)

What is worse to our modern minds—conditioned by secular values—creating a public disturbance by getting drunk, or publicly insulting the dignity of holy God? If the OT laws were in effect today, why every television network would have long ago been silenced and every producer hanged. But today the holy is not given high regard. We have lost the ability to distinguish between the sacred and the common.

Nadab and Abihu reasoned: fire is fire; what difference does it make which fire we take. But there is a difference. It is the command of God that makes the difference. And to ignore God's command is rebellion against His authority and turning worship into a secular and ordinary event.

II. God's Pattern

A. God has always made a distinction between the sacred and the ordinary.

1. In the garden of Eden God set aside time, one seventh of all time, the seventh day, as holy.

2. Space has been set aside by God to be holy. Places of worship are holy places, not to be used in an ordinary way. God told the prophet that the temple was measured off "to separate the holy from the common" (Ezek 42:20). Jesus drove the merchants out of the temple because they were using God's holy space, the temple, for ordinary, common use.
3. The Bible is set aside from all other books, and because it is God's Word, it is holy. God says those who take away from His book or add to it will be punished.

4. One tenth of our possessions are holy because God says it belongs to Him. "A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord" (Lev 27:30).

5. Marriage is holy. Of all the human relationships we enjoy, only marriage is set aside by God as a permanent relationship. "What God has joined together let no man separate" (Mat 19:6).

6. God regards our bodies as holy. "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple" (1 Cor 3:16, 17). To mistreat my body means I am not distinguishing between the sacred and the ordinary.

7. When we belong to Christ and become Christians, we become set apart from the rest of humanity, and God considers us holy in that we are to be distinct. "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 .... I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires .... Live such good lives among the pagans that .... they may see your good deeds and glorify God." (1 Pet 2:9-12). God cannot tolerate His people being just the same in lifestyle as everyone else. "Make every effort to .... be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). The Christian does not have part of his/her life holy and another secular. All of the Christian is set apart for God's honor and praise.

It's amazing how Satan has persuaded our society to desecrate everything God has made sacred. But God wants us to preserve that line between the sacred—that which belongs to Him—and the ordinary. But why? Why is it so vital for us to distinguish between the holy and the common?

III. The Reason for the Distinction

A. God is holy. If God was on our level, the level of the ordinary, we would have no reason to worship Him. The holiness of God requires an approach to Him that is distinct, separate from the ordinary. "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us
be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for (because) our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:28, 29).

Even the pagans treat their idols with awe and reverence. Only godless people fail to draw a line between what is sacred and what is ordinary. The one thing that makes religion valid, that gives meaning to religion, is that there is a decisive and clear line of distinction between the sacred and the ordinary. And when we consciously make that distinction, we are allowing our worship of God to be valid and meaningful.

B. We cannot commune with God when we come to Him with common, ordinary and secular approaches. "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name; worship the Lord in the beauty/spendor of His holiness" (Psa 29:2). If our thoughts, conduct, speech and attitude during worship is not distinct from that of the rest of the week--though they may be quite pure and proper for Christians--we cheapen worship and God is shut out. We then instead concentrate on putting on a high-quality performance that will give us emotional satisfaction, to lift us up for the new week. And we think we have worshiped God, when in fact we have been entertained. Our focus is not on Who God is, but on how good we can be made to feel by what we get out of the service. And if the performance was mediocre we leave saying we got nothing out of church that day. We expect the church to compete with the Media, which has a sensual grip on us.

How important, then, that we cultivate a sense of the sacred, the holy, and consciously prepare our hearts when we come before God, and be sure we keep all secular and common elements out of the place where our God is worshiped. The cleaner the distinction between the sacred and the secular during worship, the more we will benefit from the worship experience.

CHALLENGE

We are faithful when we teach our children to make that distinction, so that they will learn to behave differently in God's house than anywhere else. Aaron failed to train Nadab and Abihu, and he lost them.

"There is an enemy at work trying to destroy our faith in the sacredness of Christian worship" (5T496).

"Nothing that is sacred, nothing that pertains to the worship of God, should be treated with carelessness or indifference" (CC249). "Common talking, whispering, and
laughing should not be permitted in the house of worship" (CC249). That makes some think we are advocating a long-faced, dreary and formal service that puts some to sleep and puts others into a bad mood. Nothing can be further from the truth. When my heart and mind has been actively prepared as I enter God's house for worship, dwelling on Bible passages that speak of His loftiness and greatness, and my heart is open to God's Spirit to lead me into worship, I will leave this place with more joy and happiness than I have room to contain, and it will overflow.

To sense with awe the divine presence of God will make me break into praise and adoration, and like Israel, I will fall before God because I know I am in His presence.

What is God calling us to do today? Let's discover again the beauty of holiness. The sacred (the things of God) and the common things of life just don't mix.
FEARING GOD JOYFULLY

Scripture: Matthew 28:1-10

Hymns: 82, 229

A. Fearful and Joyful

Have you ever experienced both fear and joy all at the same time?

1. Mountain Climbing

In the days when risk was more important than safety to me, I did some rock-face mountain climbing with three other dare devils.

It takes several hours of careful, patient and determined effort to reach the most sensational part. The nylon rope has been anchored securely way up above by the lead climber, and also down below by the climbers waiting for me to reach the next level.

My fingers search for little crevices in the rock face to grip while I find new footholds for my climbing boots. At all times I cling to something, somewhere, somehow, at three points, while just one hand or just one foot searches for a new life-saving grip.

The rock face is vertical. There is an endless mountain up ahead, and a quarter mile drop to the bottom. Then comes the ultimate challenge. I have to get my body up and around an overhanging rock ledge, which means that I have to climb in a horizontal position, against gravity. I have to hang from underneath the rock ledge.

That is the moment when fear and excitement exist together. "What am I doing this for?" is mixed with "I've never had so much fun!" Terror and wonderment, I hate it and I love it, all at once.

I feared that mountain. No, I wasn't afraid of it, or I would have stayed away from it. I feared it in that I respected it. That's why I made sure I had the right safety equipment and followed the exact rules of rock-face mountain climbing.

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2. The Two Marys

Since those days I have discovered that knowing God is a similar experience.

The more I study the Bible to get to know God personally, the more I discover that I both fear Him and enjoy Him, all at the same time. And I'm not alone in this.

Look again at Matthew 28. Early Sunday morning the two Marys go to the tomb where they believe Jesus lay dead. The earth shakes, an angel rolls away the stone, Jesus walks out, and the guards are terrified.

The angel says to the women, (verse 5) "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he is risen, just as he said .... Go quickly and tell his disciples." Now verse 8, "So the women hurried away from the tomb, AFRAID YET FILLED WITH JOY."

Their fear did not make them want to escape. In fact the next incident is that they see Jesus and hug His feet and worship Him while afraid. With fear and joy they are attracted to Him. And He says to them, "Do not be afraid." If they had the fear of the Roman guards, they would not have hugged Jesus' feet; they would have left a cloud of dust between themselves and Jesus. In their fear they were attracted to Jesus. They had both fear and joy while they worshiped Him.

3. The Psalmist

This is not an isolated experience. In Psalm 2 the Psalmist addresses the wicked rulers of the earth. He counsels them to be wise and change their attitude. He invites them in verse 11 to "serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling." It is God's desire for those who serve Him and worship Him to do it with fear and joy.

B. Godless and Godly Fear of God

We can understand this better if we look at the Bible use of the idea: to fear God. There are many Christians who are so uncomfortable with the idea of "fearing God" that they avoid using those terms altogether. They have never learnt the Bible distinction between "godless fear of God" and "godly fear of God."
1. Godless Fear

There is a fear of God that only the godless have; those who don't know God.

Exod 23:27 "I will send my terror (fear) ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run." This fear of God makes the people run from Him because God is a stranger to them.

2 Chron 20:29 "The fear of God came upon all the kingdoms of the countries when they heard how the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel." The context of this passage tells us these were pagan nations, estranged from God.

Psalm 36:1 "An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes." (Rom 3:18). The wicked are defined as those who have no fear of God. So, in order to be righteous we ought to have fear of God.

So far we have read verses that say the wicked have a fear of God that reflects their distance from Him, that makes them flee from Him, and they also lack a fear of God which they ought to have in order to be righteous.

There is a fear which God wants to deliver us from, and there is a fear He wants us to have.

1 John 4:18 "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The man who fears is not made perfect in love." When we fear punishment, it is because we are guilty. But when we believe Jesus took our guilt upon Himself and set us free from the punishment of sin, we then have love instead of fear. We then have a new relationship with God. No longer do we fear Him because we deserve His punishment; we now have the fear of God that Psalm 36 says we should have. What kind of fear is this?

2. Godly Fear

The kind of Fear of God we ought to have is described in Isaiah 8:12, 13: "Do not call conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread." When Israel was backslidden from God, worshiping false gods, they had no defense against their enemies; so they feared them. Isaiah told
them to switch/trade their needless fear of their enemies for a different kind of fear; a fear of God. Isaiah told Israel that they should turn their attention to the Lord Almighty—the One altogether different and separate from all other gods—the One who is Holy. When they get to know Him as holy, they will have a fear for Him that will be their strength.

The grandeur and majesty of the mountain moved me to fear it; not to avoid it, but to explore it with caution and reverence. God wants us to know Him as the holy God who is set apart because of His greatness and majesty. This will make us fear Him in that we will hold Him in high regard. We fear Him without being afraid of Him.

C. Definition: "Fear of God"

What then is this good kind of fear of God?

The fear of God is that reverence for God which leads to obedience because we know Him as holy.

1. Reverence for God

Instead of being afraid of God, the fear of God is a deep reverence for God, full of joy.

Psalm 5:7 "But I, by your great mercy, will come into your house; in reverence (fear-KJV) will I bow down toward your holy temple." Worship and reverence/fear is closely linked in Scripture. Here the worshiper is attracted to God's house of worship, but not without a sense of reverence and godly fear for God.

Psalm 119:38 "Fulfill your promise to your servant, so that you may be feared." This is like saying, "God, give me joy so that I may stand in reverent awe before You."

In fact, God says we are very unhappy when we do not fear Him. Jer 2:19 ""Your wickedness will punish you; your backsliding will rebuke you. Consider then and realize how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the Lord your God and have no awe (fear-KJV) for me", declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty." Those who walk closest to God are not only happy, they at the same time fear God; they revere Him, they stand in awe before Him. (Also Jer 32:40; Mal 1:6.) This is the only time fear and joy are compatible and fused together. It is godly fear.
2. Leads to Obedience

To have this godly fear for God, a reverence, respect and high regard for Him, leads to a lifestyle of obedience.

Phil 2:12 "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed . . . continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling." When Jesus becomes our personal Savior, we are awed, moved to deep reverence, and we want to obey and serve Him.

2 Cor 7:1 "Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence (fear-KJV) for God." Obedience is absent when godly fear is absent.

Sir Leonard Wood once visited the King of France. The King was so pleased with him, he was invited for dinner the next day. Sir Leonard went to the palace and the King met him in one of the halls, and said, "Why, Sir Leonard. I did not expect to see you. How is it that you are here?"

"Did your majesty not invite me to dine with you?" said the astonished guest.

"Yes," replied the King, "but you did not answer my invitation."

Then Sir Leonard Wood made one of the most powerful statements ever spoken. He replied, "A king's invitation is never to be answered, but to be obeyed."

Jesus says to us, "If you regard Me as your King, if you know Me the way I am, you will honor Me by obeying me.

That's the way it was with the early church. Acts 9:31 "Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord."

The Christian lifestyle God is looking for in His people is a direct product of our fearing Him, our respecting, revering and loving Him. The fear of God is a guiding principle for every aspect of life.

3. Where Fear of God Comes From

How do we come to fear God in this way?

Job 25:2 "Dominion and awe (fear-KJV) belong to God; he establishes order in the heights of heaven. The fact that God is in control of the universe puts Him apart from all
else, it makes Him holy, and this leads to a sense of awe, a reverence, a fear of God that is appropriate.

The fear of God is an attitude of reverence and awe which I adopt when I come to know God as the holy God, the great God.

The Final Issue

During the final days of evil and conflict on this earth God sends out messengers to warn the world of the coming judgment. To prepare to meet God in peace, God's message is that all should "Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come. Worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water" (Rev 14:7).

Worshiping God is to serve Him and loyally do His will every day, all the time. And to do that we need to have godly fear: a regard for God that comes from knowing that He is great, that He is holy. This is the final issue this world is facing. Have we personally come to terms with it already? Do we fear God with a holy fear? There is no greater joy.

Jenny Lind is known as the Swedish Nightingale. She won great success as an operatic singer. Money poured into her purse. But then she left the stage--just as she reached the height of fame. She left the money, fame and applause of thousands. She began a life of contentment in privacy.

One day an English friend found her on the ocean shore, with a Bible on her knee, looking out into the glory of a sunset. They talked, and then came the big question, "Jenny, how is it that you abandoned your success on the stage?"

This is her quiet reply, "When every day made me think less of this (laying a finger on the Bible) and nothing at all of that (pointing to the sunset), what else could I do?" (5624)

Perhaps, what your life is into is making you think less of God, and nothing of His holiness. You can change that.

To know God as the great God, the only God, holy--brings a fear and a joy that cannot be compared to the dung of the world, and it spurs you to love and serve God all of your life.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


A strong interest in "worship" developed early in my pastoral ministry as I became involved in leading congregations in practicing worship. I began serving as a pastor in 1972 and led two different conferences as president for six years.

As I observed the quality of worship that occurred in various congregations it seemed that too often the worship activity was not focused on God. The tension that emerged between formal traditional worship and more informal "up-beat" worship in Christian churches made me realize that this issue needed to be addressed.

As I began formal post-graduate studies through Andrews University I keenly looked for opportunities to study the subject of worship. After receiving an M.A. in religion in 1984, I resolved to pursue the subject of worship while earning credit toward the D.Min. degree.