2. Details of the institution of the Lord's Supper are given (Matt 26:17-30; John 13:1-30; 1 Cor 11:17-34).
3. Early (probably Jewish) Christians were admonished not to forsake assembling for worship (Heb 10:25).
4. A description of worship in the New Earth (Rev 7:9-16).
5. Worship is cited as the central feature of the message of the First Angel of Rev 14:7.

Conclusion

The biblical material on the subject of worship contains some variation. The Old Testament generally describes the worship of larger numbers of people, while the New Testament pictures the worship of small groups of Christians, often in homes. Probably the place of worship, the number of worshippers, and the format of worship are of less significance than the actual *worshipping* which takes place.

Adventist Worship in the Making

Barry D. Oliver

I don't make promises lightly. But I'm prepared to do it right here. I promise that what I am about to share with you will shock the socks off you. (Just in case you are not easily surprised, please take your socks off right now!) The first time I read what I am going to tell you I said to myself, "They have got to be kidding! No way."

Despite my initial disbelief, the evidence is irrefutable. It is true; but still incredible! You see, I had some pretty firm ideas about what traditional Adventist worship practices were like. After all, I grew up in the 1950s and I know exactly what it was like to worship in a small Adventist church in rural Australia. It seemed to me that the way worship was being conducted in my home town in the 50s was the way it must have been conducted in the Adventist Church since the year dot. But that is just not the way it was; or so it seems.

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Early Adventist Worship Practices[140]

In February 1845, just five months after the great disappointment, the young Ellen Harmon was struck down in vision as all around her people were singing and shouting and praising the Lord. In a crowded farmhouse in the northern part of Maine, she lay unconscious while an Adventist preacher by the name of James White knelt, holding her head in his hands. Occasionally she would rise from her prone position in order to give the message she was receiving to those who would pause to listen.

Apparently while all this noise and commotion was going on some of the neighbours complained to the authorities and the local sheriff came to see what was happening. Alerted to his approach, the worshippers barred the door and became all the more raucous as shouts of "hallelujah" and "glory" filled the night. Despite their best attempts, the worshippers could not keep Sheriff Moulton at bay and eventually, having broken down the door and calling for fresh

reinforcements, the sheriff was successful in arresting the leader of the group, Israel Dammon, on the charge of disturbing the peace.

Commenting on the amazing events of that winter's night, Adventist historian Ron Graybill has said: "There can be no doubt that the meeting that night in Atkinson, Maine was exciting, and that the Adventists gathered there were praising God with such energy and volume that the neighbours were offended."[141] So much so that at the ensuing trial of Israel Dammon, one of those neighbours testified: "I have been young, and now I am old, and of all the places I ever was in, I never saw such a confusion, not even in a drunken frolic."[142]

You thought early Adventist worship was pretty boring stuff, didn't you? Wrong!

We leave the punchline to Ron Graybill. He concludes: "But despite all the noise and confusion, Ellen White [nee Harmon] believed the Holy Spirit was present at that meeting."[143]

And you thought early Adventist worship was pretty boring stuff, didn't you! Wrong. There is overwhelming evidence that the Adventist Church was born amid a great wave of exuberant praise which continued to be characteristic of worship practice at least through the 1850s. That has to be enough to send shock waves through any Adventist who has been attending very conservative worship services for at least a week or two; or a year or ten!

Writing to Arabella Hastings in August 1850, the youthful Ellen White insisted:

> Singing to the glory of God often drove out the enemy, and shouting would beat him back and give us the victory. I saw there was too little glorifying God in Israel and too little childlike simplicity.[144]

Three months later she wrote of a worship service that occurred in Paris, Maine:

> Sunday the power of God came upon us like a mighty rushing wind. All arose upon their feet and praised God with a loud voice; it was something as it was when the foundation of the house of God was laid. The voice of weeping could not be told from the voice of shouting. It was a triumphant time; all were strengthened and refreshed. I have never witnessed such a powerful time before.[145]

In a later report of the same service she said:

> None of you should keep silent in your meetings. Surely everyone who has tasted of the powers of the world to come can say something in honour of the lovely Jesus.[146]

Toning Down the Early Exuberance

Predictably, a reaction set in against the early enthusiasm. Mind you, it seems that Adventists were not alone in toning down their worship styles. Methodist congregations which were very similar in worship practice to Adventists and from whom Adventists had adopted much of their early exuberance also became much more sedate in the way in which they conducted worship.

Apparently, there were some good reasons why the church lost its early enthusiastic approach to worship. First, the processes of growth and institutionalisation, inevitable in any expanding organisation, explain some of the loss of initial spontaneity and enthusiasm. Second, increasing sophistication and education of the membership of the church mitigated against the likelihood of the kind of gatherings that occurred in Atkinson, Maine, in 1845. Third, was the massive cultural transformation that occurred in the United States as a result of the Civil War. If there was a buoyant enthusiasm in the towns and cities of North America

before the war broke out, it was thoroughly dashed by the war. Its aftermath was a broken, sombre land which found it very difficult to maintain the same naive enthusiasm that had tended to characterise society and the frontier churches before the war.

A fourth reason why a spirit of caution developed during the 1860s-1890s was the outrageous abuses of worship by some who maintained an "anything goes" attitude. For example, in the early 1860s there was a group of people in Wisconsin who practiced extreme forms of ecstatic utterance in worship and tied them to their views on sanctification. It is reported that one of their number, claiming to be receiving visions from the Lord, lost her mind and had to be committed to an institution.[147] Then, particularly during the 1890s, there developed in Indiana a "holy flesh" fanaticism which claimed that it was possible to obtain complete perfection on this earth.[148] Again the church was called upon to condemn religious enthusiasm in the context of the excesses which accompanied it.

Adventist Worship in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

The coming of the twentieth century saw important organisational reforms in the church. As the church was maturing it was taking on the appearance and habit of a larger denomination. In order to give itself a sense of identity and in an effort to promote unity it was necessary to regularise many of the functions of the church so that it could maintain its global mission and structure with a degree of efficiency and effectiveness. Thus, in the early years of this century, and on into the twenties and thirties there was considerable effort to produce policy manuals which defined proper procedures and practices for the church. This included financial policies; voting and election practices; the delineation of church officers and their duties; and the purpose, order, and form of worship.

With the printing of the *Church Manual* and its inclusion of a "suggested" order of worship, Adventist worship style and practice became almost universally static. This occurred despite the fact that Adventists made it clear that they believed in a free style of worship in distinction from many other religious organisations which insisted on closed worship or highly liturgical worship forms which held little room for spontaneity or variation.[149] Adventists tended to look with distaste at those worship forms. Unfortunately, we are now aware that Adventist worship itself was falling into the same hole that many of those who had gone before were in. Worship lost its flexibility, its spontaneity and for some, its meaning.

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But we should not be too critical. What needs to be remembered is that many people find a great deal of security in the knowledge that the forms and structures of their lives are relatively stable. The people who lived in the early years of the twentieth century lived at a time when change was occurring at a slower rate than today. Questions of meaning and truth were much more a function of the structures of life and society than is now the case. Indeed it was structure that gave a sense of security, meaning, and truth. That need for structure had, in many cases, been somewhat satisfied in the worship practices of the churches that they left to join Adventism. Adventist evangelism in the early years of this century brought into the church many people who thought of worship in

Worship has become a hot topic in many Seventh-day Adventist Churches

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a preconceived framework. Even if methods have now changed and the emphasis on structuralism in society has somewhat diminished, we still need to recognise that it explains why the Adventists of an earlier time were relatively comfortable with fixed worship forms, and that there are still a large number of loyal Adventists who continue to need to worship in that way.

In addition, it should be kept in mind that most Adventists were primarily cognitive in their orientation to learning and life. The Adventist message as presented in evangelistic events during the first half of this century was perceived as a list of doctrines to be accepted and believed. Belief was primarily a cognitive process. It stood to reason, therefore, that those who were so inclined were more likely to become Adventists than those who were not. The point is that cognitive people are normally also highly structured people who gain a sense of security from the regularity in their lives. They are more likely to wish to perpetuate existing worship styles. As I think back on my childhood and youth, I can remember no variation, no innovation, no change in the order of the 11.00 a.m. worship service.

Adventist Worship Today

But something has happened in the last decade or so. Worship has become a hot topic in many Seventh-day Adventist Churches. Tragically it has too often become a battlefield. The casualties of the conflict are littered all over the Adventist world; some still inside the church and to our horror, many now outside the church and Christianity altogether. It is not the intention of this chapter to become prescriptive and to apply "band-aid" solutions to what is a very great dilemma for the church. Suffice to say that it is obvious that a great deal of tolerance of the needs of others should be displayed by all. That tolerance needs to be informed by careful investigation and assimilation of the issues that are at stake here as they are understood by the various generations and cultures that comprise this church.[150]

Our intention here is to describe some of the recent movements in Adventist worship and to invite the reader to be intentional about the manner in which God is worshipped.

Our intention here is to describe some of the recent movements in Adventist worship and to invite the reader to be intentional about the manner in which God is worshipped. The list below is not intended to be exhaustive. It is given to illustrate some trends.

Of recent times Adventists have become **increasingly aware of the wider issues that affect our worship**. Worship practice is somewhat impacted by ethnic or cultural influences, generational influences, community influences, gender influences, institutional influences, geographical influences, and experiential influences.[151]

In the early years of this century, the Adventist worshipper generally came to church on Sabbath morning in order to "learn" something more about God and his will. This was a very cognitive reason for worship. While it would be foolish to contend that there is no cognitive function in worship and that worship has no educative value, recent trends in Adventist worship indicate that worshippers are **becoming more aware that God is present in worship as the one to be worshiped, more than just the one that worship is about**.

This realisation that worship is to be directed towards God has created new initiatives in worship. Adventists are being much **more creative in their approaches to worship**, and are beginning to reach even secular people who previously seemed

unreachable. Variation in orders of service, music, drama, poetry, use of multi-media, and preaching which involves the congregation are being used.

This creativity itself demanded **a greater tolerance of variety in Adventist worship**. Not all worshippers have the same needs. While all should work within appropriate boundaries, there needs to be opportunity for people to worship in a way that gives them the greatest sense of adoration and praise to God. This has been happening in Adventist churches in North America for many years. The Afro-American (black) congregations are worshipping according to their own culture and needs. The white churches worship in their own way. There has been tolerance. In this respect the North American model is one that we can all benefit from.

Discussion questions
1. Why did Adventist public worship become more conservative after beginning in an "enthusiastic" fashion? Has the change been positive or negative?
2. Why is worship such a contentious issue for Adventist Christians?

A pleasing development has been **the realisation that worship is for everyone**. What's more, the church family can be an extension of the nuclear family and provide the same sense of security and love that exists at home. More importantly, the church can provide a sense of family for those who do not have a family, or who come from broken and dysfunctional families. Worship is the gathering of the family of God. All the members of the family can participate. This is a good innovation in Adventist worship.

A vital part of Adventist worship is the sermon. It can be the vibrant heart of worship or the chilling death of it. Many pastors and elders are not resting content with presenting the "same old stuff" week after week. The use of dialogical, narrative, dramatic and inductive techniques are giving **greater opportunity for the congregation to become involved in the sermon**. The sermon should uplift the worshipper to God; not club him/her into submission or induce a sleepy stupor.

The Future?

The future holds exciting possibilities for Adventist worship. It does not have to repeat the excesses of the past, the sort of excesses in that farmhouse in Atkinson, Maine in 1845. Nor does it have to perpetuate a liturgical drone. The appeal is for each Adventist congregation to be intentional about its worship. Each local church needs a committed leadership team which is prepared to bring to the congregation each Sabbath a well-planned, participative worship service; the kind of worship which brings the worshipper into the presence of God and sends us out into the world to be the kind of Christians that we all want to be.

Principles of Worship

Barry D. Oliver

Because the last fifteen years have seen a revolution in the way Christians worship, it is important that we have good reasons for worshipping the way we do. This section will list some of the principles which should be taken into consideration when Christians think about worship. These principles supplement those which were discussed in the