

Institute for Christian Teaching  
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**AN INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR  
CONDUCTING PUBLIC WORSHIP ON AN  
ADVENTIST UNIVERSITY CAMPUS.**

by  
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## INTRODUCTION

It was with a great sense of anticipation that I entered the packed auditorium that Sabbath morning. I was eager to experience what my friends called the alternative worship service. I had not sat for long before the worship team, casually dressed, came unto the stage. Grabbing the microphone, the worship leader started to share personal details of his life, cracking a few humorous anecdotes here and there. He then asked the audience to rise to their feet and sing with gusto and feeling the contemporary songs which were being projected on a large screen. Some closed their eyes, raising their hands and lifting their palms upward as they sang. Others seemed more interested in listening to the band and the worship team than praising. This lasted for about twenty minutes, after which the 'deacons' collected the offering. Someone prayed over the money, combining it with the pastoral prayer. Then came the sermon. A young man preached, clad in a Matrix-type outfit, showing DVD snippets of "The Lord of the Rings", apparently comparing the film with Scripture. As I came out of the auditorium, I felt a bit bemused. Others seem to have enjoyed the worship experience.

Interestingly, I have witnessed the same phenomenon on four continents. There is no doubt that the trend today is towards more innovation and originality in worship. Is this a sign of healthy creativity or a symptom of plain confusion? Do such services foster a stronger sense of Adventist identity to their participants or do they end up blurring our distinctives? Are these current forms of worship predominantly determined by present-day culture or by vital theological engagement?

In this paper, I argue that these liturgical changes reflect the wider cultural changes that are occurring in society. Fundamentally, the challenge that needs to be considered is this: how to have campus worship services that are theologically sound and yet culturally relevant?

In response to this complex issue, this paper posits that *Revelation 14: 6, 7* can act as a powerful integrative factor in visioning a distinct Adventist worship ethos on our

campuses. The choice of this text is obvious: as part of the Three Angels Message (Revelation 14: 6-12), it defines us as a people who have been assigned the task of calling nations to worship the true God in Spirit and in truth.

Before coming to this theological framework, I briefly define the contemporary cultural landscape in which we live and then turn to two influential evangelical movements (Seeker Service and Praise and Worship Movement) that have impacted Adventist thought and practice in recent years. As we will discover, both have a postmodern ethos. This background analysis will give us the context in which our campus worship takes place.

### WORSHIPPING IN POSTMODERN TIMES

It is commonly argued that we live in postmodern times, an era which has created for many an identity crisis. People are confused, decentred, fragmented and have great difficulties defining themselves and perceiving the world in which they live. As Kenneth Gender explains:

*Under postmodern conditions, persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction; it is a world where anything goes that can be negotiated. Each reality of self gives way to reflexive questioning, irony and ultimately the playful probing of another reality. The centre fails to hold.<sup>1</sup>*

If there is a place where the notion of identity is being thoroughly redefined, it is in the church where it is often worship styles, not doctrines that are given priority in defining Christian identity.<sup>2</sup> The advent of 'Contemporary Worship' has levelled the doctrinal walls and, for a growing number of Christians, created a new type of worship defined more by style than content. The contemporary yearning is not so much a church with the highest doctrinal accuracy as one with the worship style that best fits its spiritual and social quest. What matters the most is the worship experience.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Middleton and B. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger than it Used to be*, Leicester: IVP, 1995, pp.52-53, quoting Kenneth Gender, *The Saturated Self*, p.7

<sup>2</sup> Cornelius Platinga Jr. and Sue Rozeboom, *Discerning the Spirits: A Guide to Thinking About Christian Worship Today*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002, pp.2-3

The Adventist Church is not immune to this influence. In fact, there are two strong movements that have radically altered the way in which Adventists view worship. The first one is the Seeker Service movement, *Willow Creek Community Church* being the prime example. The second is the Praise and Worship Movement whose main proponents have been *Integrity Music* and *Hillsong*. In what follows, I want to briefly assess both movements and draw some links with worship innovation on Adventist campuses.

### **The Seeker Service Movement**

The main goal of “seeker friendly” services is to make the unchurched comfortable about being in a church and hearing the Christian message. According to its leaders, everything is designed and implemented to avoid the alienating impact of traditional architecture and practice. It is a space where seekers can feel at home. The main elements of a typical service<sup>3</sup> normally consist of contemporary ‘congregational’ singing with simple lyrics projected on large screens and talks that always try to avoid “clichés and spiritualized and archaic language.”<sup>4</sup> The pinnacle of the service is a “practical” sermon, delivered in simple language and illustrated with power point presentations or video clips. The service then ends with a prayer and a simple chorus. Everything that happens in the Seeker Service is planned with the non-believing person in mind.

The seeker service movement is not new. It has its roots in the American revivalist worship of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that found its best expressions in camp meetings. However, it was Charles G. Finney, the famous nineteenth century revivalist, who became the most influential worship reformer.

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed analysis see Pritchard Gregory A., *Willow Creek Seeker Services*, pp. 80-156

<sup>4</sup> Pritchard, p. 87

Three important aspects of Finney's worship reforms can be mentioned here.<sup>5</sup> First, he emphasised freedom and innovation over tradition, arguing that the Bible does not prescribe any particular styles. Second, he contextualised worship by adapting it to its surrounding culture, removing all 'unnecessary' barriers to the audience. Third, and perhaps most importantly, he reversed the relationship between worship and evangelism. For centuries, theologians had viewed evangelism as the by-product of worship. With Finney, evangelism took pre-eminence over worship as he turned worship services into evangelistic venues. Other revivalists and evangelists consequently adopted this strategy and its legacy can still be felt in Protestant churches, even in Adventism.

The Seeker Service mentality has been well absorbed in many Adventist circles. The existence of a multiplicity of church services on campuses along different perceived needs is a testimony to the popularity of worship *à la carte*. Hence, there is no need for the young and the old, the traditionalists and the innovators to worship together. Each can worship separately if they choose. Fundamentally, this puts into question the idea of the church as a family.

#### **Areas of Concern for Adventist Campuses**

The assumption of the Seeker Service model is that the closer it is to the immediate culture and the further away from traditional Christian cultural trappings, the better it is. But the problem is that instead of creating something unique, it may end up identifying itself completely with the ambient culture. Equally, what one finds in this postmodern context is that many seeker-oriented churches put traditions and doctrinal differences in the background because of their perceived 'authoritarian' or 'divisive' overtones. We end up with a utilitarian religion where distinctiveness is often camouflaged in an effort to appeal to people. Angles are smoothed and that which is not

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<sup>5</sup> Redman Robb, *The Great Worship Awakening: Singing the Lord's song in the Postmodern World*. San Francisco, CA : Jossey-Bass, 2002 p.5 ff.

palatable to contemporary tastes tends to be discarded. In this context, churches are defined more by pragmatism than their historical or doctrinal affinities. When pastors and chaplains end up becoming obsessed with the notion of relevance at the expense of their prophetic calling, they tend to have action-oriented ministries based on satisfying immediate needs but with little doctrinal emphasis. Or, as Marva Dawn puts it so well, they end up dumbing down as they try to reach out.<sup>6</sup>

Seeker services are often so enmeshed with contemporary culture that they have difficulties soaring above it. We become so obsessed with being culturally relevant that we tend to miss God in worship. In addition, by rejecting all tradition, many worship leaders have ended up depriving God's people of rich resources for worship. This lack of historical and theological perspective has reduced worship to the here and now. It prevents solid engagement with the God who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

One cannot deny that seeker-oriented services have most often made evangelism a top priority. However, I think that seeker services miss the essence of worship in that it is profoundly anthropocentric. Seeker services inversely downplay God's centrality in worship, as they increase focus on individual felt-needs. As churches become self-obsessed, the biblical God can easily be reduced to a heavenly therapist.

For this reason, one needs to remember that authentic worship does not start with felt-needs or human ingenuity but with the action of God in history. Worship is the believer's heart-felt response to God's mighty acts in creation and redemption. It is the creature's affirmation of God's love and faithfulness. The primary point for worship leaders to realise is not how to make worship more appealing and relevant to seekers, but how to make believers engage more fully with their Creator and Redeemer. Such worship will not only draw the believer into God's presence but will also help the seeker experience God in and through our worship (1 Cor. 14). The main task for worship

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<sup>6</sup>Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B.Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995

leaders is not simply to be relevant, but to engage the worship community in truly worshipping God.

## THE PRAISE AND WORSHIP MOVEMENT

The Praise and Worship movement also is strongly influencing worship on our campuses. Distinct and yet not unconnected to the Seeker Service movement, it is the most influential Protestant worship renewal in recent years. Trans-denominational and global in scope, it has impacted denominations across the world. Hailed by some as a new touch of Pentecost, it is accused by others as representing 'the blowing not of the Spirit of God but of the spirit of the age.'<sup>7</sup>

'Once loosely and pejoratively identified as Pentecostal worship,'<sup>8</sup> contemporary or P&W often describes lively, expressive and participative services in which congregations actively seek the presence of God through the sacramental use of contemporary worship songs.<sup>9</sup> From fast-paced praise songs that extol God's greatness and power to mellow worship music that emphasises the believer's personal relationship with God (hence the terminology P&W), the worshippers are led in a series of affective states which, according to its proponents, allow them to experience an ever-increasing sense of God's presence in their midst.

Although the roots of this form of worship can be traced back to such diverse sources as Methodist Revivalism, the Holiness Movement, African American churches and the Jesus Movement of the 1960s<sup>10</sup>, it is most closely linked to what Peter Wagner calls the

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<sup>7</sup> Cornelius Platinga Jr. & Sue Rozeboom, *Discerning the Spirits: A Guide to Thinking About Christian Worship Today*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003, p.3

<sup>8</sup> Paul Basden, *The Worship Maze: Finding a Style to Fit Your Church*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999, p.77

<sup>9</sup> Lester Ruth, "Praise & Worship Movement" in Paul F. Bradshaw (ed), *The New SCM Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*. London: SCM Press, 2002, p.378

<sup>10</sup> James F. White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989, p.192-216; Don Williams, *Charismatic Worship* in Paul A. Basden (ed) *Exploring the Worship Spectrum: Six Views*. Grand Rapids, MI, 2004, pp. 139-144; Robb Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening*, pp.22-27; see also Platinga and Rozeboom, pp.27-38; Basden, pp.75-83.

“Third Wave of Charismatic movements”<sup>11</sup> that swept across the Christian landscape in recent years. The phenomenal growth of the Charismatic movement and its subsequent influence over churches has made it so that ‘charismatic styles of worship have been diffused throughout congregations and denominations of varied theological persuasions.’<sup>12</sup>

This type of worship emphasises a relational encounter with God rather than the more passive or cerebral expression of worship prevalent in other forms of Christianity. In this ‘face-to-face’ worship experience, being “in the Spirit” becomes the *sine qua non* condition for real encounter with God. This often manifests itself through uninhibited singing, dancing and *glossolalia*. Worship is lived as an experience of total engagement and abandonment to God.

It is unquestionable that the growth of the P&W movement parallels that of economic and cultural globalisation. What happens in influential evangelical churches is quickly exported to the most remote areas of the world through modern means of communication. This expresses itself more in terms of the rapid exchange of culturally tailored products along with the mentoring by international leaders who travel across the globe to train a new generation of worshippers. *Integrity’s* products include authentic international recordings in Spanish, Hindi, Russian, and Mandarin Chinese, along with albums recorded live in Singapore, South Africa, Israel, Brazil and Ireland. In addition, through their worship seminars all over the world, influential Charismatic worship leaders like Don Moen, Ron Kenoly or Darlene Zschech (all had gold certified recordings) shape contemporary worship through their songs and their teachings.

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<sup>11</sup> Wagner suggests that the first wave was the Pentecostal movement of the 1900s, followed by the charismatic movement of the 1960s. According to him, the third wave which started in the 1970s and 80s is still unfurling. See Peter Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit: Encountering Power of Signs and Wonders Today*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1988

<sup>12</sup> Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.22

Whereas traditionally worship rapprochement was fostered through talks and texts by ecclesiastical elites, today the most influential catalysts are CDs and musical artists.

This new situation is definitely favouring a global reshaping of worship. Harvey Cox even contends that our age parallels that of the first century Roman Empire. He writes:

*Christians use the hardware and the software of the global culture to make the gospel known. Just as Paul made use of ships, the Greek language, references to classical poetry, letters and his Roman citizenship to travel with the good news, so Christians benefit from the worldwide travel and communication technologies of today.*<sup>13</sup>

However, on a cautious note he adds:

*...but while the first century Christians said both 'yes' and 'no' to the global culture of their time, today's Christians mainly just say 'yes'... At worst certain Christian movements actually promote and even sacralize the false values of the market.*<sup>14</sup>

In a market-driven world, there is a tendency to make Christianity as attractive as possible. This leaves us with some questions: do we run the risk of denaturing the Gospel by mass-marketing it? By making it as palatable as possible, do we end up robbing it of its power to challenge the world with the values of the Kingdom?

#### **(i) A New Way of Singing the Lord's Song**

In a postmodern world, where people are more eager to embrace mystery and give more space to their intuition, personal involvement is the key word. Reflecting on today's worshippers, Kenda Creasy Dean writes, "to them worship is a verb. 'To worship' is to invoke God's immediacy-God's awesome 'nowness' in which the divine presence is

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<sup>13</sup> Harvey Cox, Pentecostalism and Global Market Culture: A Response to Issues Facing Pentecostalism in a Postmodern World in Murray W. Dempster et al.(eds), *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*, Oxford :Regnum, 1999, p. 391

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p.391-2

subjectively apprehended.”<sup>15</sup> This experiencing of God is a fully active and dynamic engagement.

The Praise and Worship Movement and its newest cousin, the Emergent Church, can be seen as a response to a postmodern thirst for more intimate religious experiences. The type of music (most often soft popular or light rock) plays an important part in the ability of P&W to resonate with the current generation. Through this medium, people can sing contemporary hymns to today’s tunes and beats. To put it differently, there is no need to revisit the past and sing unfamiliar words and unusual tunes to meet the God of the ages.

This vernacular approach also manifests itself in the texts that are used. Most of them are kept simple, current and short. Although many of the songs are based on passages of scripture, they are generally devoid of deep theological complexities. Rather, they stress heartfelt thanks and praise for God’s greatness and goodness. The common use of PowerPoint technology in worship services also favours greater bodily freedom than hymnals would allow. Hence, contemporaneity and accessibility are paramount to P&W.

Another element of this experiential nature of P&W music is the emphasis on songs to God rather than songs about God. British theologian, Pete Ward argues that this shift denotes a move from objective to reflexive worship.<sup>16</sup> Whereas traditional hymns tend to be more centred on the ‘objective’ rehearsal of salvation history, contemporary songs tend to stress more our feelings and emotions toward God. This shift tends to be accompanied by a greater sense of proximity and expectation because it emphasises God’s present involvement in the midst of his chosen people. God is seen as being actively involved, still eager to touch and transform lives.

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<sup>15</sup> Kendra Creasy Dean, *Moshing for Jesus: Adolescence as a Cultural Context for Worship* in Tim Dearborn and Scott Coil (eds), *Worship at the Next Level: Insight from Contemporary Voices*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004.

<sup>16</sup> Pete Ward, *Selling Worship: How What We Sing Has Changed the Church*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005, p.207

This emphasis on God's immanence is a welcome change, for in worship we do not exalt a God who is locked in time or who is impervious to our praise and adoration. Yet, worship also needs to take into account the transcendence of God. He is 'the God who is at hand...and the God who is afar off' (Jer.23:23). Hence, limiting the worship of God to a present experience is quite restrictive. It does not keep in balance the biblical tension that should inform contemporary worship. This leads me to raise two important issues regarding worship.

### **Areas of concern for Adventist Campuses**

The first area of concern is emotionalism which is never far away when 'belief is demoted, (and) experience promoted.'<sup>17</sup> Too often, the value of the worship experience runs the risk of being measured almost exclusively by the feelings it generates, thus divorcing intellect from Christian experience.

In a postmodern milieu where experience and emotions are taken very seriously and propositional truth considered as a social construct, fine points of doctrines tend to become simply irrelevant. However, detaching worship from theological reflection on God and his mighty works cannot be helpful to a university community. Students need not only be encouraged to express their feelings to God. They also need to be challenged to think. The notion that 'we need to just relax to come into the presence of God' is a fallacy according to biblical standards. It simply stunts spiritual growth and hampers theological thinking. At the most radical and foundational level, such types of fideism and pure sentimentalism are antithetic to a true engagement with God. They constitute a hindrance in forming people for the kingdom. Theologically, worship is holistic in nature and should involve all our faculties.

The second area of concern is the notion of individualism. Evidently, in an age in which people are thirsty for a spiritual experience, what matters most is the human-divine

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<sup>17</sup> David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times*. Oxford. Polity, 2000, p.94

contact. Many of the contemporary songs lay considerable stress on the individual expression of faith. The overuse of the 'I and me' instead of the 'we and us' in lyrics is quite revealing of that tendency. Such songs are expressions of individual experiences, extolling God for his care and mercies towards the believer. They are expressions of deeply personal experiences of divine solicitude. Yet, a question remains: are they simply expressions of an inward-looking faith? We need to be reminded that the original meaning and nature of corporate worship, which, as the term denotes, is by nature communal, not individualistic. True worship is a dialogue and a communion along vertical and horizontal axes as it unites us both with God and with one another. The songs we sing should express more the communal nature of our faith.

#### **REVELATION 14: 6, 7 AS AN INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK**

The dual impact of the Seeker Service and the Praise and Worship movements within a postmodern cultural context has introduced new dynamics in many Adventist worship milieus. Various contemporary worship styles are emerging over our campuses. This major shift should encourage us to examine more closely the essence of Adventist worship. Unfortunately, the church has failed to articulate a clear theology of worship. As a result, debates over worship revolve around style rather than content.

If it is true that the challenge for pastors and chaplains is to be alert to the cultural conditions in which they operate, they should also aim at having solid biblical grounding. In this respect, they do not need to unreservedly repudiate contemporary culture to be faithful to God; nor do they need to conform to every aspect of that culture to be effective in reaching young people. Yet, they need to remember that Christian faithfulness manifests itself alternatively in embrace and resistance depending on diverse aspects of the ambient culture. Only solid theological engagement can provide such a stance.

This is why I believe that **Revelation 14: 6, 7** can offer an integrative framework for worship leaders to forge authentic Adventist worship services. In this text, John declares:

*Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on earth- to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said with a loud voice: "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.*

How can this text inform our thinking? First, it delineates a key aspect of worship which is Gospel-centredness. Second, it offers clear guidelines. We now turn to these two subjects.

### **Gospel-centred Worship**

Despite its strong symbolism, our text contains an important consideration- the 'eternal Gospel' (vs.6) constitutes the basis of true worship. This emphasis on the Gospel reflects the essence of the Christian kerygma. The Good News is that Christ, through his victory on the cross, has brought salvation to the human race and made true worship possible.

At the heart of the Gospel is not only a glorified cross and an empty tomb but also a living and coming Christ who is now ministering in the heavenly sanctuary. In other words, not only does Christian worship look backward to the past and look forward to the future; it also focuses on the present- Christ's continuing incarnation and his ministry in 'the presence of God on our behalf' (Heb.9: 24). The author of the letter to the Hebrews clearly points out that Christ is our *leitourgos* (Hebrews 8:2), our heavenly liturgist, who gathers in his life and person, the worship and prayer of his people. In a remarkable way, he is both the One we worship and the Worshipper. As the supreme revelation of the Father (John 1:18; Col. 1:15, 16) and unique way of salvation, Christ deserves all the praise and honour of the entire creation. As the Mediator of the New Covenant, he cleanses and purifies our tainted worship and prayers to offer them spotless to the Father. Within such a vision, the local worship leader does not act on

behalf of worshippers, but amongst them, in recognition that a single high priest now serves on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary.

Viewed this way, the Gospel can be a powerful and liberating insight for worship leaders. It puts things in perspective by reminding us that Christ, not the market or culture, is Lord. By overlooking the fact that worship is foremost man's response to God's redemptive provisions in Christ, many pastors and chaplains have often been burdened by a sense of over-anxiety concerning forms and accessories rather than focusing on content and truth. There has been an urge to design user-friendly anthropocentric worship services to attract young people rather than focussing on the transforming power of the cross. The principle of attraction in worship must be *Christ and him crucified* (1 Cor.2: 1), not our ingenious ceremonies or entertaining rituals.

This is to say, true worship on our campuses will only be possible if it is attentive to the Gospel. Its ethos and forms have to reflect the liberating message of Jesus Christ.

Worshipping the true God is not an option in light of the Gospel- it is an imperative. Verse 6 describes the eternal Gospel being carried by the angel in midair and being proclaimed in a loud voice. This message concerns the entire globe as it is addressed to 'every nation, tribe, language and people.'

Contrary to the postmodern ethos that tends to turn worship into a nicely packaged and fuzzy product, the Bible points to another way. This leads us back to verse 7 of Revelation 14 where the use of three imperatives by the angel ('Fear God', 'Give him Glory', 'Worship him') outlines crucial guidelines for our worship services. Let's explore these guidelines.

### **Guidelines for Adventist Worship on our Campuses**

#### **(i) The Fear of God**

Whereas worship can easily revolve around personal preferences or prejudices, the angel summons the nations to fear God. The biblical notion of 'fear' (*phobeo*) should be

understood as to respect, to revere in the understanding that God is God, the Wholly Other. Fear is the appropriate response to the greatness of God, especially as it relates to his mighty acts of salvation and judgment. To fear God means to take him seriously. This implies the full surrender of all aspects of our lives to him.<sup>18</sup>

The notion of fearing God can be very odd in an age where worship services can often exude an utter lack of a sense of awe. Marva Dawn refers to it as 'the postmodern lack of genuine 'fear' for God'.<sup>19</sup> She goes on to claim that the scriptural tension between fear and love has been lost in many churches because of the trend toward cheap grace and the muting of God's justice.<sup>20</sup> As a result, we often end up with services infused with tepid sentimentalism geared at making worshippers feel happy rather than confronting them in their innermost being and challenging their complacencies.

It is evident that worship that is tailored only with the spiritual-consumer in mind will be profoundly lacking in heightening a sense of God's glory and holiness. It will tend to adopt 'a cozy and sentimental Jesusolatry'<sup>21</sup> and reduce the living God to an indistinct Lord, i.e. with no explicit references to biblical history.

Consequently, we can safely assume that one of the biblical guidelines for our age is an invitation to re-sensitised to a due sense of fear in worship. This fear cannot be an initiative from below, one that is purely humanly crafted. Rather, it has to come from the worshipping community's realisation that they serve a God who is exalted above the heavens (Ps.57: 11; 108:4). Only a theology that exalts God's glory and purpose along with the eschatological presence of the Holy Spirit in worshipping communities can bring that sense of awe and reverence.

Surely, the fear of God will constitute a perfect antidote for congregations who have succumbed to a 'feel good' approach to worship. An Adventist worship ethos will be consistent with who God is and will not be subservient to what contemporary culture

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<sup>18</sup> Ranko Stephanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002, pp.441-443

<sup>19</sup> Marva Dawn, *How Shall We Worship?*, pp.49-50

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*, pp.50-52

<sup>21</sup> Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991, p.65

dictates. Rather than serving different masters, it will dethrone all competing gods and relegate them to their proper place. To this effect, the angel's summon to fear God sounds very much like a wake-up call to our worship leaders to escape bathos, and embrace the biblical paradigm of a transcendent God who is just and holy.

### (ii) The Exaltation of God

Well known is the fact that the supreme aim of man is to glorify God.<sup>22</sup> Here, nations are summoned to fear God and glorify him in a time when judgment has already arrived ('...the hour of the judgment has come' [vs.7]). Clearly, the global scope of the angel's message recaptures the OT hopes of nations being united in the worship of the true God. It is worth noting that this call to the nations to worship God is reminiscent of Psalm 96: 7, 8a-10:

*Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,  
Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.  
Give to the Lord the glory due to his name...  
Worship the Lord in holy splendour;  
Tremble before him, all the earth.  
He will judge the peoples with equity...for he is coming.*

In an age where laxity and casualness is often celebrated as a virtue, the very notion of judgment itself must be quite shocking. Yet, on a positive side, worship can be greatly improved if congregations are reminded of their accountability to God. He who inspires and enables our worship is also the one who judges it. He who empowers us also brings us into account (Rev.1: 10-3:22). This is especially important in a time when 'false worship is as much a possibility as true worship, and that the distinction between the two is not always crystal clear.'<sup>23</sup>

Interestingly, the term 'giving glory to God' contains a dialectical tension that characterises balanced worship: reverence and joyfulness. Sadly, the two extremes of the Christian spectrum have often tended to stress one at the expense of the other.

<sup>22</sup> Matthew 5:16; Romans 1:21; 1 Corinthians 6:20, 10:31; Eph.1:12; Phil.1:11

<sup>23</sup> Ian Boxall, *Revelation: Vision and Insight: an Introduction to the Apocalypse*. London: SPCK, 2002, p.155

Traditionalists have stressed reverence; Charismatics have emphasised enthusiasm and those in the middle have often fallen short of both.

Certainly, only a God who comes to us with grace and judgment, justice and love can inspire such apparently contradictory and simultaneous responses as respect and joyfulness, reverence and jubilation. This dialectical tension needs to be kept alive for worship to remain theologically sound and experientially meaningful.

### (iii) The Worship of God

At the heart of the etymological meaning of the verb 'worship' is the idea of submission and doing homage.<sup>24</sup> It surpasses the common restrictive use of the term to congregational services to embrace the fuller range of 'Christian life and thought and experience.'<sup>25</sup>

The true ground of divine worship is found in the distinction of God as Creator 'who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water' (vs.7). It is salutary to remember that we worship God not only because he created us but also because we were created for Him (Rev.4: 11). As a matter of fact, the angel, in verses 6 and 7, summons people to worship God for three reasons:

- a. Because he is Creator. ("Worship him who made the heavens and earth...")
- b. Because he is Redeemer. ("the eternal Gospel")
- c. Because he is Judge. ("the hour of his judgment has come")

There is an interesting parallel between Revelation 14: 6, 7 and the Decalogue (Ex.20:1-11).

**God is Creator:** *For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them (vs.11).*

**He is Redeemer:** *I am the Lord, who brought you out of the Egypt, out of the land of slavery (vs.2).*

<sup>24</sup> Howard Marshall in *New Bible Dictionary* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). Leicester: IVP, 2003 edition, p.1250

<sup>25</sup> D.A Carson, *Worship: Adoration and Action*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1993, p.15

**And Judge:** *For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing...those who hate me, but showing love to those who love me and keep my commandments (vss.5, 6).*

Within this theological framework, themes such as creation, redemption, judgment, eschatology, the Sabbath need to be constantly kept in mind by worship leaders. This theocentric and eschatological emphasis on worship is much needed today. As I have argued already, one of the problems concerning contemporary worship is its anthropocentric tendencies. Many programmes, ideas, and ministries revolve around human wants and desires instead of pointing to God. This self-centred mentality has distorted the nature of true worship by displacing God from the centre. True worship is a matter of proper focus. It 'must first be God-focused and then be human sensitive.'<sup>26</sup>Consequently, our university pastors and chaplains need to put things in proper perspectives when it comes to such a sensitive issue as worship.

Following these biblical guidelines, I now proffer a brief ensemble of ideas that necessitate further consideration by campus worshipping communities. I believe that there is an urgent need for spiritual leaders on our campuses to:

1. Move from the prevalent anthropological model (in which the ambient culture predominantly defines how worship is conducted) to a more theologically robust model (in which theology courageously engages culture, alternatively accommodating or rejecting its varied aspects).
2. Craft worship services by taking into account the eschatological dimension of Adventist faith.
3. Carefully choose and train worship leaders. Some of them are good singers but not good theologians, and fine singing does not equate necessarily with sound theology.
4. Stay away from nebulous spirituality that makes Christianity simply a matter of the heart.

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<sup>26</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Free Church Worship: the Challenge of Freedom* in D.A Carson (ed), *Worship by the Book*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2002, p.151

5. Make sure that sermons explore the exceeding riches of biblical truth.
6. Connect the worship experience to real life by creating space in the worship service not only for celebration, but also for reflection, confession, repentance and mourning. There is danger in constantly requiring people to be joyful and happy within the worship context when they are struggling and hurting in life.
7. Make worship more intercultural and intergenerational rather than being narrowly selective and potentially divisive. Multi-church services for different ages, worship styles, musical tastes and ethnic categories are bound to lead in a number of unhealthy directions. A better way to go could be blended services where elements of tradition, contemporary culture and innovation cross-fertilise to enrich the worship experience.

### **Conclusion**

By being firmly placed by God in the midst of the world, the church has the difficult task of navigating the narrow channel that steers between the Scylla of marginalisation and the Charybdis of catechisation by culture. How should we worship then?

It all depends on congregations having the sense of being a peculiar people living under the principles of another Kingdom. It means being an eschatological community where God's rule, although partial and provisional, is being manifested in a distinct way. This is why pastors and chaplains on our campuses would do well to take a careful look at **Revelation 14: 6, 7** as a crucial paradigm for Adventist worship. Only then can we talk, and hope for, true worship renewal.

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