



Helping Seventh-day Adventists Worship

Issue 4 September 2002

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By Nigel Bruce

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We are interested to find out what you think about some of these issues, and your thoughts on them. We would also like to know what some of the pressing issues are for you as a worship leader. Don't forget we are always interested in reading your ideas and practical suggestions for all aspects of worship. Send them to Gods_TimeMag@hotmail.com.

Editorial

Where Were You?

September 11. A date that is etched very clearly in our minds. Everybody remembers exactly where they were at that moment.

Because of the time difference, it was about 11pm EST. I was having difficulty sleeping, having come down with the flu, and got up to gargle some salty water. I was living in Watson Hall, Avondale College, at the time and my room was not far from the TV room. While returning to my room, a fellow student rushed out, telling me that something unbelievable was happening. America was being attacked!

Whether it was because I was sick, or drowsy, I didn't register any surprise. In fact, I didn't even go and watch it. I happily returned to my bed, and slept comfortably. Even when I woke up, I wasn't surprised at the events. For some time I had understood that America had many enemies, some of whom would be likely to resort to violence. Even Australia had some serious grievances at the time, and still has, over American farm subsidies and the American notion of "free trade".

I think the other reason I wasn't so surprised is that we've been desensitised to violence by entertainment. Many movies were postponed at the time, because they either depicted attacks on the World Trade Centre, or the movie was about 'terrorist' activity. In fact, it is ironic that Americans weren't as prepared as they should have been seeing they are the largest producers of this 'entertainment'. I can't say that I watch a lot of movies or television, but the amount I've seen has desensitised me to a lot of this 'violence'. In fact, one just has to watch the news to be desensitised.

In the days and weeks after the attacks we were all behind America and the people who suffered. But I didn't hear that kind of support for those in Afghanistan who suffered in the brief war. And we're already immune to the conflict in the Middle East, the dispute over Kashmir, and many other battles that rage throughout the world.

In fact, we've seen the pictures of children starving for decades. We know about the people who suffer from natural disasters. We see the anguish of a nation over the disappearance and suspected murder of two young girls. But we go to our entertainment, which often ends up glorifying tragedy, showing the villains as heroes. Who are the freedom fighters and who are the terrorists?

What is the point of our worship if we don't see the needs of the people around us? I've used examples from overseas, but do we even see the pain in the people around us?

Where are you?
Nigel

Devotional

A Week is a long time. . .

Of all the time periods in the world, one of the most common is the week. We define our lives by our weekly schedules, usually working 5 days of the week, and enjoying the weekend for other activities. In fact, a cartoon describes it well. It has some cows on it, showing what they're like on different weekdays. The upshot is that adults start Monday at their peak, and lose it as the week goes on, while young people begin the working week at a low but are at their peak for the weekend. The comment is then made that everyone is about the same on Wednesdays.

But did you know that there is no obvious scientific event that defines the week! A day is defined by one rotation of the earth, and a year by a full journey of the earth around the sun. Still, humanity is bound by it, as attempts to have 10-day weeks have ended in failure.

Because of this, we could talk about any week in history, but I want to look at the one week that changed the course of humanity. It is a week that occurred about 2000 years ago. It started out so wonderfully, as Jesus, after 3 and a half years of ministry, finally demonstrated that He was the king, the Messiah, whom the Jews had been longing for. For the disciples it seemed that their plans were falling into place.

But by the end of the week, Jesus was dead. The disciples had been scattered. Their dreams were totally shattered. It seemed that life had dealt such a bad blow. There were many questions in their minds. Jesus could have easily overpowered any individual or group during His arrest, trial and death – why didn't He? Wasn't He supposed to be the One to get rid of those wretched Romans? A kingdom doesn't start with the death of the individual – what was going on? What were they to do now? Their reputation had now sunk so low that they wondered if people would accept them again.

That Sabbath must have been the longest one they ever had. There was no hope in the future, and now their past might condemn them to a life of misery, isolated from former friends. And as Sunday came, they suddenly were confronted with a new problem. Jesus was not in the tomb – had His body been stolen? What was going on? Agatha Christie couldn't have thought up a greater mystery with which to baffle even the best detective.

What they learned was that another week had begun, but this time, it was the first week of Jesus' new life. Instead of weeks ending in tragedy, they begin anew with life. Instead of just going from week to week, one needed to find value in the week of the present. They could accept the bad weeks with the good ones, and that with Christ, every week can be used for the good.

Bible Study

1 Corinthians 13

One of the most beloved passages of Scripture is this famous love chapter. We tend to read it on its own, but if one reads the surrounding chapters, he or she will realise that it comes in the middle of a discourse on worship. And the Corinthian church is a great church to look at in this year of unity in worship, because it had many divisions within it.

Paul begins this letter by examining the divisions within the church, and pointedly telling them that they are babies in Christ (3:1). They followed different church leaders, to the point of forgetting Christ. They were also filing lawsuits against each others, and allowing most practices to continue, sometimes with good reason (the food to idols) and some not so good (sexual immorality). At the heart of their problem was knowledge. It seemed that the more they thought they knew the better they thought they were. Paul tells them plainly “knowledge puffs up but love builds up.” (8:1)

It is from here that he leads into his discourse on worship. He clearly remonstrates them for having these divisions, while partaking of the Lord’s Supper. He then shows that we are not the same. We have a variety of spiritual gifts, but without putting them to a unity, they are of no value. It is here that he shows us a “most excellent way”, (12:31) before concluding his thoughts on the topic.

Christianity, worship, and spiritual gifts of no use if there isn’t love. We can be the greatest saint, but without love, it doesn’t get us anywhere. The word love is used a lot in the contemporary world. For many it describes that emotion of love. Others equate it with sex. Others see it as an ideal, while others search for it in all sorts of places. Paul’s list gives us a comprehensive definition that most of us struggle with.

Love is patient, kind, not envious or boastful, not proud (arrogant) or rude. It doesn’t self-seek or get angered easily. And it keeps no record of rights or wrongs. It desires truth, and always protects, trusts, hopes and perseveres. In fact, love never fails. This list is so comprehensive that all of us find we might be good at a number of these things, but we struggle with a number of others.

The secret is not to achieve this list in our own strength, but to recognise that this is what God is like with us. How long did He wait for you? Look at how kind He is. He really doesn’t have anything to be envious of, but He could be boastful, proud and even rude if He wanted to be. He seeks out our best interest (to the point of dying for us), and doesn’t very quickly get angry at us. He isn’t sitting up there with a book listing all our rights and wrongs, trying to catch us out. In fact, though He desires truth, He longs to protect us and to trust us, persevering to the end. His love never fails to affect us. Let us then show it to our fellow human beings.

Theological Eyes

Unity

In this quinquennium unity is the central theme of the Adventist church. Last year we looked at it in relation to God's Word, and in coming years, we will be looking at the wonder of His grace, the warmth of fellowship, and the witness of truth.¹ Out of all of these, this year's theme of unity in worship is the more challenging. Worship is not only a very diverse topic, but has been the cause of numerous wars within churches. This article is going to look at some of the major challenges for unity.

Age

If there is one major problem it is that of age differences. Those who grew up during the Great Depression view, act out their views differently from Baby Boomers. And with each generation there is a gap dividing the two groups. They are inter-dependent on each other, but also pull in different directions.

But in recent years there has not only been the usual generation gap, but the current generation has a totally different mindset. Whereas previous generations held to modernity, where one can conquer all with intellectual thought, the current generation holds to the belief that the individual determines what is right. The poor Baby Boomers are caught somewhere in between, having both grown up as modernists, also as initiators of post-modernism, which their children are naturally adopting.

This has led to many churches offering multiple services to cater for the needs of all individuals. It is difficult to claim this as unity (though one could say that people live harmoniously rather than in a state of constant battle). Are we simply dividing to hold unity?

Gender

As a male, I can't claim to understand everything about females, and I would suggest that vice versa is true. We have differences – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Equality was something desired by women, and they have been fighting for it for the last century. Equality, like unity, is a somewhat subjective term. When does one achieve it? We can certainly see the extremes of sexism, but closer to the mark, it becomes very messy indeed. Even within Christianity equality is a major debate, centred on whether women can be clergy. Do we lose equality and unity, if we don't accept them in that role?

Theology

Even within Adventism we don't all think alike. One only needs to look at the 1888 Minneapolis conference to recognise that we can even disagree on something as foundational as grace and works.

¹ South Pacific Record January 27 2001

Add to that, the variety within Christianity. For many non-Christians it is confusing, because they think that one Christian should be the same as the other. Because of this many Christian groups have attempted to join together. There have always been major difficulties, but there have been some very useful dialogue between denominations.

Added to that we all see these things differently because of the glasses we wear. Not only do the above things form these glasses, but our background, our family, our friends, our location, our education, our workplace etc also help develop our worldview. In fact, one would have to ask how we could ever have unity with such divergence between people.

Apart from these differences there are many similarities that draw us together. We may not be exactly alike, or even a tiny semblance, but we chose to agree on certain fundamental things that hold us together. We are all Australian because we are born in this country, or we choose to move here ourselves. We are all Christians because we believe Jesus, and some other basic ideas about God's love. We are Seventh-day Adventists because we believe in the Sabbath and baptism by immersion, amongst other things. We might still have differences, but we've chosen to agree on some things, and so we dialogue from there.

Just recently I've read a biography of a Mormon turned Christian.² It was interesting to see his view of unity. As he described it, unity in Mormonism was agreeing with whatever the church leaders said. One wasn't supposed to ask questions or have doubts. Unity, like love, is not something that can be forced. One just has to look at our political parties to recognise that there are often major disagreements within parties (perhaps even more so than between parties). Unity comes from people having the freedom to ask questions, receive answers, have doubts and even disagree. Forced unity tends to make individuals into robots, just following the standard line.

Unity is something that is often achieved through pain, sorrow, and hard work. For it to occur we have to want it (and it is more than people just agreeing with another's viewpoint, as unity doesn't usually occur by just following one person's ideas). Sometimes compromise is necessary to retain unity. Are you willing to work for unity, or do you wish to follow your own plans (however good they may be)? Are you willing to sacrifice your own desires for unity?

² J.A.C. Redford. *Welcome All Wonders A Composer's Journey*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: BakerBooks, 1997

Prayer Cares

GOD'S PERFECTION

Brooklyn, New York: Chush is a school that caters for learning-disabled children. Some children remain in Chush for their entire school career, while others can be mainstreamed into conventional schools.

At a Chush fund-raising dinner, the father of a Chush child delivered a speech that would never be forgotten by all who attended. After extolling the school and its dedicated staff, he cried out, "Where is the perfection in my son Shaya? Everything God does is done with perfection.

But my child cannot understand things as other children do. My child cannot remember facts and figures as other children do. Where is God's perfection?"

The audience was shocked by the question, pained by the father's anguish and stilled by the piercing query. "I believe," the father answered, "that when God brings a child like this into the world, the perfection that He seeks is in the way people react to this child."

He then told the following story about his son Shaya:

One afternoon Shaya and his father walked past a park where some boys Shaya knew were playing baseball. Shaya asked, "Do you think they will let me play?" Shaya's father knew that his son was not at all athletic and that most boys would not want him on their team. But Shaya's father understood that if his son was chosen to play it would give him a comfortable sense of belonging.

Shaya's father approached one of the boys in the field and asked if Shaya could play. The boy looked around for guidance from his teammates. Getting none, he took matters into his own hands and said, "We are losing by six runs and the game is in the eighth inning. I guess he can be on our team and we'll try to put him up to bat in the ninth inning."

Shaya's father was ecstatic as Shaya smiled broadly. Shaya was told to put on a glove and go out to play short centre field.

In the bottom of the eighth inning, Shaya's team scored a few runs but was still behind by three. In the bottom of the ninth inning, Shaya's team scored again and now with two outs and the bases loaded with the potential winning run on base, Shaya was scheduled to be up. Would the team actually let Shaya bat at this juncture and give away their chance to win the game?

Surprisingly, Shaya was given the bat. Everyone knew that it was all but impossible because Shaya didn't even know how to hold the bat properly, let alone hit with it. However, as Shaya stepped up to the plate, the pitcher

moved a few steps to lob the ball in softly so Shaya should at least be able to make contact. The first pitch came in and Shaya swung clumsily and missed. One of Shaya's team mates came up to Shaya and together they held the bat and faced the pitcher waiting for the next pitch. The pitcher again took a few steps forward to toss the ball softly toward Shaya.

As the pitch came in, Shaya and his team-mate swung the bat and together they hit a slow ground ball to the pitcher. The pitcher picked up the soft grounder and could easily have thrown the ball to the first baseman. Shaya would have been out and that would have ended the game. Instead, the pitcher took the ball and threw it on a high arc to right field, far beyond reach of the first baseman.

Everyone started yelling, "Shaya, run to first. Run to first!" Never in his life had Shaya run to first. He scampered down the baseline wide eyed and startled. By the time he reached first base, the right fielder had the ball. He could have thrown the ball to the second baseman who would tag out Shaya, who was still running. But the right fielder understood what the pitcher's intentions were, so he threw the ball high and far over the third baseman's head.

Everyone yelled, "Run to second, run to second." Shaya ran towards second base as the runners ahead of him deliriously circled the bases towards home. As Shaya reached second base, the opposing short stop ran to him, turned him in the direction of third base and shouted, "Run to third." As Shaya rounded third, the boys from both teams ran behind him screaming, "Shaya run home!" Shaya ran home, stepped on home plate and all 18 boys lifted him on their shoulders and made him the hero, as he had just hit a "grand slam" and won the game for his team.

That day, said the father softly with tears now rolling down his face, "those 18 boys reached their level of God's perfection."

A man whispered, "God, speak to me"
 And a meadowlark sang.
 The man did not hear.....
 So the man yelled, "God, speak to me !!!"
 And the thunder rolled across the sky
 But the man did not listen.

The man looked around and said,
 "God let me see you" and a star shone brightly,
 But the man did not notice.....
 And the man shouted,
 "God show me a miracle!!!"
 And a child was born.....
 But, the man did not see.....

The man cried out in despair,
 "Touch me God, and let me know you are here !!!"
 Whereupon God reached down
 And touched the man.

But the man brushed the butterfly away
 And walked away unknowingly.....

Nuts and Bolts

The Week After. . . ³

Every night I'd gone to the meetings. I found my spiritual life reaching new levels. God and I were very close. The next week, I found myself back in reality. Is that your experience? Riding a high after a spiritual week, only to find yourself back in the mundane situation you started in? Here are some useful ideas to help you through the 'hangover'.

The first thing to remember is that a journey never remains at one level. It goes up and down like those ECG machines. It is natural to not be at that same level all the time. Even the presenters will be feeling some kind of 'down' in this week. It is a natural reaction in our bodies. We need to recognise it, but not be overly concerned about it.

Secondly, emotions aren't everything. If we based our lives on our emotions, we would be on a roller coaster for the rest of our lives. Emotions are not what should determine our relationship, but should enrich our relationship with God. Added to that, our spirituality is not defined by how much we say something, sing the songs or believe in the truth. It is how we show God's love to the people around us in practical ways. Do we assist our next-door neighbour? Do we listen to the friend or enemy that needs to talk?

And finally, the essential ingredient to a healthy spiritual life is regular use of spiritual tools. Just like one eats regularly, exercises frequently, and continually monitors what is happening with our physical bodies, so we need to with our spiritual lives. So often we expect a once a week (or even more irregular) dose of spiritual food to last us that long. Physically we would be dead from that sort of eating pattern. We need regular time reading the Scripture, and other useful devotional material. We also need to spend time in meaningful communication with God in prayer.

Here, I need to define meaningful. After such a spiritual week, where we learnt a lot about God, and what He is offering each of us, we tend to think that we can then spend the next week in long hours of doing things for God. I'm not against such an idea, but the fact is that one also needs to take it one step at a time. I've seen people do it (and even tried it myself), setting aside an hour for devotions, after doing negligible amounts before the Week of Prayer. An hour would be wonderful, but for it to last more permanently one needs to take it small steps at a time. Just with eating, one doesn't suddenly eat a lot more, but gradually increases the amount according to the changing conditions. Start with only 5 minutes if you have to, but it will be worth it.

³ Based on Malcolm D Maxwell, "How to Handle the Week After the Week of Prayer" in Michael Jones (compiler) *Help For Young Christians*. Washington DC, Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1977

Sabbath School

To follow the pamphlet or not?

One of the issues a Sabbath School class can face is whether or not to follow the lesson pamphlet. This is not the issue raised earlier about leading it, but about whether the group uses the pamphlet as the basis for discussion. I needn't talk much about the benefits of the pamphlet, as it is the standard produced by the General Conference. However, there are some other options that have been used by different churches to great effect.

One is a Bible study. Here, instead of reading the notes in the pamphlet, individuals read a passage, and discuss the implications. The group members have greater choice over the chapters or books that they wish to study. Other variations include specific focus classes – evangelistic, or prophecy studies. Another variation on this is the choice of reading material. One can choose from a large range of Christian books, many of which come with study guides.

Another option is a discussion on contemporary issues, looking at Christian responses. Issues might include paedophilia in churches, stem-cell research, environmental concerns, and the war on terror. This certainly keeps Christianity relevant, but one needs to be aware that there can be more than one Biblical view within that issue, sometimes contradicting each other.

One option that can be adapted to any of the other options is specific needs focus. Groups can be divided according to age, gender, marital status, or any particular need that one has within a church. So young married couples might have a group that deals with relational issues. A women's group might deal with what it means to be a Christian female in the twenty-first century. The list of groups is endless, so choose ones that are relevant and useful to your particular congregation.

Another option is having something different every week. The idea is that you have a roster of people to lead out, and they can then choose to lead the lesson on any topic that is important to them and/or the group. The week before they need to inform the class of any preparation that might be needed for next week. This is not essential, often providing healthy discussion from individual's own thoughts and ideas.

As you can see there are a wide variety of options available for making the Sabbath School discussion relevant and interesting for your class. Let us know what happens at your class, and what you find to be most useful for your spiritual life.

Lesson

This month we conclude our look at the turbulent years of the monarchs of Israel and Judah. After years of problems, the curtain finally comes down on these nations. Questions that arise include the following: What do you do when God seems to desert you? Where does one go when God's promises seem to go wrong? Can we always assume it is because of our sins that they fail? What particular reason did God give for the demise of the kingdoms at this time rather than previously?

What does it mean to be a people of God? How are we to interact with other nations?

What does it take for people to repent of their sins? How does one confront a person's sins? Can one present grace at the same time?

A contemporary issue is whether we are accountable for the sins of past generations. Discuss the implications for ancient Israel and Judah, as well as contemporary society. What do we need to do to atone for the sins of the past? How can rectify the situation for those whom we have wronged?

With Father's day occurring this month, define what it means to be a father and a child in the twenty-first century. What, and how, should a father teach his children? What can he do if the child rebels against him? How can sons come out from the shadows of their father? Now ask these questions again, except this time ask how God as Father does it.

Noticeboard

Calender

Aug 31 – Week of Prayer begins

September

1 – beginning of spring; Father's Day

7 – Week of Prayer concludes; Jewish New Year begins

11 – 1st anniversary of World Trade Centre attacks

14

21

28

Products

To the Glory of God

Contemporary Seventh-day Adventist Praise & Worship songs including Breathe on Me, In the House of the Lord and Jesus my Hope

CD \$A22.00 Music Book \$A24.95

Contact

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Ph. (02) 4977 1398

Fax (02) 4977 3309

Email pddixon@ozemail.com.au

Requests

Any old copies of Norval Pease's book *And Worship Him* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1967) that you would like to sell. Contact Nigel Bruce at nigelbruce@hotmail.com or Gods_TimeMag@hotmail.com

God's Time is looking for regular contributors for 2003. As a regular contributor you would be expected to write, or find someone to write, between 6-12 articles in the year. The areas we are looking to fill are: Theological Eyes, Nuts and Bolts, Kidz Worship, Music Spot (including Top Ten), Sabbath School (including Lesson) and a reviewer. We are also interested in beginning some other sections, including history. Send us a brief profile of your background, and a paragraph on why you want to be a regular contributor. Applications close Monday 18 November. We are still interested in reading your devotional thoughts, and Biblical insights, as well as to interesting stories, poems, and other creative material.

Reactions

Firstly, another thank you to all of you for responding to the e-mail hoax, which I sent out earlier this month. It's good to know that most of you keep up with this technology, aware of the pitfalls.

A mixed reaction to the article Sabbath School Blues (iss 2). Many of you agreed that it was a reality some of the time, while others noted that it isn't Sabbath worship that is the issue, but rather our use of time. We need to rest adequately during the week so that we are prepared for the Sabbath rather than making the Sabbath our catch up on rest. Does anyone have any practical ways we can do this?

Last month's editorial Who Can Worship? caused a stir. Some felt that it didn't address the issue that the title suggests, perhaps causing confusion where there is not. Women's ordination is considered a separate issue to whether women can lead worship, even the Lord's Supper or baptising, as lady elders presently can do the latter when they arise. On the other issue of homosexuality many felt that they should not be leading worship, as there are known sins that haven't been repented of. Any leaders need to meet the standards that have been stated by God. On participating, "the Seventh-day Adventist church forbids no one to worship, even if a person has been disfellowshipped they are still welcome to worship if they so choose", was a point most raised.

Reviews

David Petersen. *Engaging With God A Biblical Theology of Worship*.
Leicester, England: Apollo8, 1992

This book is a must for those interested in understanding the Biblical perspective of worship. David Petersen looks at the Old Testament, but focuses most of his attention on the New Testament, looking at Jesus, Paul, and the books of Hebrews and Revelation. Don't be fooled by this apparent discrepancy – throughout he refers to the Old Testament, as the NT relies on this previous understanding. He doesn't take it verse by verse, but looks at the big picture presented by sections and ideas. To get it Petersen has relied on careful exegesis, and a wide range of sources. If you're looking for just a particular text, he has included a comprehensive 15-page index of texts. You'll find this most useful in helping you understand some Biblical perspectives, giving you the big picture, while you'll still developing your own understanding.

4/5