

The Worship Wars Continue

Don Chapman

The worship wars continue:

Trapped in the past...

Have you ever Googled old classmates? I did the other day - I was thinking of a guy I knew in college. I went to an ultra conservative Christian school and he was a ministerial student.

His church popped up on Google - come to find out he's now a pastor. And, towing the old party line, the church is ultra conservative (i.e. hates contemporary music!)

His church website has a music page that states "Worship is a byproduct of godly music and should not be manufactured by superficial emotionalism or spontaneous excitement. For this reason, we have purposefully distanced ourselves from the "Praise & Worship" motif with the accompanying CCM, Southern Gospel, or Rock & Roll music styles." Yes, there are still churches that preach against praise and worship!

Some grouchy old men hate praise music...

I'm always searching the net for religious stories for the news section of WorshipMax.com. Last week I found an editorial from "The American Spectator"

http://www.spectator.org/dsp_article.asp?art_id=11658

...where the author trashes praise and worship music.

I seem to be finding more and more articles like this. Chuck Colson wrote an article about his distaste for praise and worship last year which heated up the blogosphere:

<http://www.breakpoint.org/listingarticle.asp?ID=713>

Coming to blows...

I taught at a worship conference a few years ago in nearby Anderson, SC. Someone in the class brought up Newspring Church, the local mega church that has crazy growth (8,000 each week in ...Anderson SC??) because of relevant preaching and great music. In my opinion they have the best music balance of any church I've visited... pop, rock, hymns, praise, you name it - all done exceptionally well and worshipful on top of it.

The thing is, people are leaving the dead traditional churches in Anderson for new life at Newspring. More power to them - but people in my class nearly erupted into a fistfight over it. I seriously got nervous for a few minutes. I hear that Newspring regularly receives hateful, viscous email, even people screaming at staff members over the phone, over the style of the church.

Conclusion:

I find it sad that some Christians are still so fixated on and trapped in the past. If a church chooses NOT to do praise and worship, that's their right. Heck, maybe it's even a market niche! But I find all the nastiness and snobbery suspicious.

Take Chuck's gripe about the lack of theological content in one of my favorite praise songs "Draw Me Close You." It's not a hymn and it's not supposed to be. It's intended to help people connect with God on a personal level. For all the ranting and raving by traditionalists over contemporary music in church you rarely hear what I believe is the heart of the matter: a personal relationship with Jesus.

I suspect the traditionalists are afraid of a touchy-feely one-on-one with God. As a stuffy Presbyterian visitor said about the music of my previous PCA church, "Horizon is evidently more interested in God's immanence than His transcendence." (Translation for normal people: we sing to God more than we sing about God.) He was absolutely right - I selected the music exactly for that purpose - to help bring a distant, "transcendent" God into our "immanent" personal lives.

It's much easier to sing ABOUT a relationship with God, as the vast majority of hymns and Gospel songs do, than to HAVE a relationship with God...

"Oh, how I love Jesus..."

"Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine..."

Even the most popular hymn ever, "Amazing Grace," talks ABOUT my salvation experience.

Praise and worship is distinctly different. The songs are NOT doctrinal statements. They're prayers, not Shakespeare. Notice the "direction" (upwards) of the lyrics. They help us talk TO God:

"Blessed be Your name..."

"You are my all in all..."

"Open the eyes of my heart, Lord..."

I also suspect the traditionalists are panicking. Their churches are dwindling. I'll never forget the pastor at the worship conference I mentioned earlier who was just considering using praise and worship music in his service, bewildered by the droves flocking to Newspring. Better late than never I suppose.

I think we're finally over the hump in the worship wars. As I wrote a few weeks ago, the majority of evangelical churches seem to have gone pop. *It's more than music - it's a whole new way of doing church - less seminary class and more how to be a follower of Jesus.*

Worship leaders, keep in mind WHY you're doing contemporary worship. Is it merely to be "hip" or to help bring people into a personal relationship with Jesus? Be ready: as traditionalists realize they're fighting a losing war, a last gasp worship battle just might erupt in your church.