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Worship in Church Growth Introduction

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Worship and Church Growth

Introduction

Gary L. McIntosh, Editor

Few issues have aroused the interest of church leaders and lay persons in the latter half of the Twentieth Century as the recent debate over church music and worship styles. Some church leaders report rapid church growth following the introduction of new forms of music into their worship services. Others decry the resulting conflict produced when they attempt new forms of music.

Of course, discussion over the appropriate types of church music is nothing new. For example, a while back a prominent American clergyman suggested several reasons for opposing the newer trends in church music. He is quoted as saying,

There are several reasons for opposing it. One, it's too new. Two, it's often worldly, even blasphemous. The new Christian music is not as pleasant as the more established style. Because there are so many new songs, you can't learn them all. It puts too much emphasis on instrumental music rather than Godly lyrics. This new music creates disturbances making people act indecently and disorderly. The preceding generation got along without it. It's a money making scene and some of these new music upstarts are lewd and lose.

While you may be thinking this quote comes from the pen of some recent critic, the date was 1723. It was an attack on Isaac Watts, the father of English hymnody, who produced the first

hymn book in the English language.

Contention over worship music continued into the first half of this century. Many pastors felt a need to protect the Methodist Episcopal Church worship service from what they perceived as an inferior form of popular music used during times of revival. Pastor James Elvin Wagner, a Methodist evangelist, wrote in *Rural Evangelism* (1920) that

One privilege of every pastor is to know and appreciate the church hymnal. Any pastor who possesses a voice, whose ear is not too dull to harmonies, ought to sing, and see to it that the hymnal is used correctly. The little red-backed book, the compilation of some ambitious leader of revival meeting hymnology, may have a mission, but it has no place or right in the worship of a Methodist Episcopal church.

Similar concerns are being expressed by church leaders writing about music and worship today. As leaders who are trying to navigate through the waves of change in our society, we all find ourselves pulled in different directions by undercurrents created from the debate over worship styles. Hymns or praise songs? Organs or bands? Praise teams or choirs? One thing for sure, the style of worship is changing.

That's why the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the American Society for Church Growth focused on Worship and Church Growth. Meeting at the Hilton Hotel in Kansas City from November 21-23, 1996, six church growth leaders addressed over 100 members of our society on this crucial topic. Theologians, practitioners, professors, and pastors spoke on the topics of *A Theology of Worship*, *Trends in Worship*, *Philosophy of Worship*, *Multiple Worship Services*, *A Pastor's Perspective*, *Contemporary Models*, and *The Culturally Relevant Congregation*.

All lectures are published in this issue of the Journal of the American Society for Church Growth in the order in which they were presented at the meeting. In addition, the Presidential Address of Dr. R. Daniel Reeves, *Back To The Future*, begins the volume.

Where is worship heading in the next millennium? How does worship affect a church's growth or decline? What are the effective models of worship? When is it time to add a new worship service? How can worship speak to our secular world? Dis-

cover some of the answers in this issue of the Journal of the American Society for Church Growth.

Writer

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