

RUNNING HEAD: Styles of Worship

**The Psychological and Emotional Effects of Different Styles of  
Worship: Traditional, Contemporary, or Some of Each**

**Brian Berry**

**RS3863**

**Psychology of Religion**

**Dr. Neil A. Soggie**

**December 1, 2009**

## **Abstract**

Should we go with a traditional or contemporary style of worship? Must we limit ourselves to an organ, or go all out with a worship band? Should we change the order of service every once in a while or keep it static? Is there some sort of happy medium that can be found in a worship service where the entire congregation is fully engaged and connecting with God? These are questions that every worship leader is faced with when trying to find the style of worship that best suits their entire congregation. In the end it rests on the individual to decide what attributes of a worship service are necessary for him and what he is comfortable with before finding his place on the continuum of worship styles.

**The Psychological and Emotional Effects of Different Styles of  
Worship: Traditional, Contemporary, or Some of Each**

Larry is a regular church attendee. Every Sunday morning he goes into the same church building. Larry will tend to sit next to the same people he always sits next to in the same church pew. Larry begins to notice that week in and week out somehow without fail his church will more than likely stick to a similar worship format week in and week out. He knows what to expect, and does not say anything that might possibly hint at shaking things up as far as the worship service is concerned. Larry is not interested in causing a fight with any of his fellow worshippers; after all he is there to worship God just like the rest of the church congregation. However, from time to time Larry wonders if he is getting all that he is looking for emotionally and psychologically as he worships God in his current church.

After analysing the situation, most anyone might assume that Larry is resigned to be comfortable in his current Church setting, or is he? Just what is it that makes a traditional service "better" than a contemporary service? What is it that makes a contemporary service better than a traditional church service? Can the two ever mix harmoniously? Does the order of service have to be written in stone and followed exactly? As one continues to read, he will be exposed to the views of the author on some of the different styles of worship since the author has had a fair amount of

experience in the area, why they are important, and how they affect people psychologically.

Being the son of a Baptist pastor the author's family has moved around between a few different churches during my lifetime. The author of this paper has had experiences on both sides of the worship spectrum. The first church the author can remember being a part of was Middleton Baptist Church. When the author was there, Middleton was, and still is, made up of primarily older church members in that congregation. When the author's family was serving there between the years of 1989 and 1998 the experience was on the traditional end of the worship spectrum. The majority of the worship service consisted of classic hymns of the faith and some great new music from the 1970s and 1980s. This could have something to do with the fact that Middleton is located in the Annapolis Valley in a rural area of Nova Scotia and in the 1990s Christian book stores and music stores were not as easily found then as they are today. The order of service was quite static. One would arrive around mid morning (9:00 or so) for what was called open session where "newer" songs of the faith were sung, then if one had children, he could send them off for Sunday school, the author was one of these children at the time, while he attended Adult Sunday school until it was time for the actual Church service which began around 10:30. Traditional hymns would be sung, followed by the offering and the "Children's Story." After that the children would be rushed

out to “Junior Church” while the adults would possibly sing another hymn or sit down for a special presentation by the Middleton Baptist Church Choir. After this would be the sermon which would be delivered either by the Senior Pastor, or the author’s father, who was the Associate Pastor of Middleton Baptist Church at the time. After this there would be a closing hymn and the benediction would be delivered. After this the adults would be free to socialize, or pick up their kids from “Junior Church” and head home where the business of their individual lives would overtake them until the next week where they would then faithfully congregate for another round of fellowship and praising God. As more young people began to join the congregation, Middleton Baptist Church would begin to contemporize, though the congregation would still lean on their traditional Church background while embracing the new as it came along.

Middleton Baptist Church did indeed follow the mould of the traditional Church service. (Robert A. Webber III, **Traditional vs. Contemporary and the Myth of Blended Worship**) There can be many benefits to the traditional version of worship, especially for the older person. If one has lived their entire life doing the same style of worship week in and week out, one can get comfortable in that style and feel that they will not be intimidated to do anything outside of their comfort zone, unless God tells them to of course. (Kim Linton, **Worship Style Guide**, September 4, 2009) Typically, in a traditional church setting, the routine provides that comfort

and security for its congregation. Depending on the demographic of the church, and the style of music the congregation likes, the musical section of the service could contain a variety of instruments and song styles. If the congregation of a particular church is older, the music section might mostly be driven by a classic pipe organ, and maybe some piano thrown in for good measure. The aim of limited instruments is to simplify the worship experience and limit distractions that might occur with added instruments. As a person gets older, the structure and composition of his brain will change. The ventricles of the brain that is the spaces in the brain where nothing occurs, get larger and the physical area of the brain that is reserved for thought process gets smaller. In most people it is a slow unnoticeable change, but it can cause distraction to happen more frequently. (Allen Baddley, Michael W. Eysenck, Michael C. Anderson, **Memory**, (2009), Psychology Press, East Sussex, Madison N.Y., p 305) When the music is simple it is easier for the older generation to concentrate on the central focal point, which would be worshipping God, this way those who are more affected by this natural shrinking of the brain will not get distracted by other instruments they might classify as "noise". It is good for worship leaders to play songs their congregation enjoys. However, playing the same overused songs that one's church has relied on for the last fifty years can cause boredom and death in the worship life of one's church. Worship leaders have a huge responsibility in traditional churches to ensure that everyone in

their congregation is getting something out of the worship service. This includes the possibility of stretching the congregation by encouraging them to learn new songs gradually. (Linton, 2009) This can be an easier task to perform in some traditional churches as opposed to others. It all depends on one's church demographic and how open the population is to change in routine. Learning new worship songs can revive the church body and bring excitement back to traditional church. To quote a well fitting cliché "variety is the spice of life. It gives it all its flavour." (William Cowper)

In the summer of 1998 the author's family made the move from Middleton to the Halifax area so that the author's father could answer the call of God to take up a Pastoral position in a small church located on the Prospect Road just outside Halifax, Nova Scotia. The prospects were good at New Life Baptist Church. Upon entering the building for the first time the author and his family were immediately welcomed by a warm atmosphere and an upbeat congregation. Throughout the eleven years spent there this attitude would continue for the most part. The worship experience at New Life Baptist Church was contemporary in nature. The dress code was whatever people felt like wearing. There was an order of service, however on some Sundays that order would be subject to change depending on what direction God decided to move that day. The New Life Baptist Church body became good at dealing with spontaneous change. This allowed God to do many great things in the life of that church. As for the musical part of the

service, New Life Baptist Church had no organ, and not being a traditional church in nature, the congregation had “settled” for the next best thing, a worship band. This band, which the author played an active role in for a time, involved various musically talented individuals from the congregation, a great variety of instruments were used in worship at New Life Baptist over the years. New songs were introduced regularly to the congregation. Hymns would also be thrown into the mix. Freedom in worship was highly encouraged. Congregation members would express praise to God in various ways during the worship service, such as banner waving, dancing, and clapping in four / four time. These went along with the regular singing and responsive readings. One would be hard pressed to find this kind of activity in a traditional Church like Middleton Baptist Church; this is perfectly fine because both congregations are worshiping God the way they see fit.

The reason for the draw of contemporary worship services is different depending on the person. Some like it for the fact that the musical style is relevant to what one would listen to in today’s world, others for the sermons that are compatible with today’s society. Contemporary Church services are more likely to attract new and younger people towards the idea of plugging into God. This is not to say that older people would never ever attend a contemporary worship service. The church is, and should be open to anyone who walks through the door on a given Sunday. Contemporary services tend to focus on the newer music to keep the worship experience fresh and



attract a greater number of people. Keeping the worship experience fresh also allows for people to be “on their toes” in the way that they may not be able to predict which song is going to happen next or what scripture verses will be read. In this way life is brought to the worship experience and one finds himself authentically worshiping as opposed to just going through the motions. A word of caution for those who do not like drums, contemporary worship services are more likely than traditional services to heed to the words of Psalm 150 which states:

- <sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD.  
Praise God in his sanctuary;  
praise him in his mighty heavens.
- <sup>2</sup> Praise him for his acts of power;  
praise him for his surpassing greatness.
- <sup>3</sup> Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet;  
praise him with the harp and lyre,
- <sup>4</sup> praise him with tambourine and dancing;  
praise him with the strings and flute,
- <sup>5</sup> praise him with the clash of cymbals,  
praise him with resounding cymbals.
- <sup>6</sup> Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.  
Praise the LORD.” (Psalm 150, New International Version)

It is of biblical nature to include drums in a worship service if one wants to and has the talent for it. As long as the person is playing to glorify God and not himself he should be encouraged to do so. Both traditional and contemporary worship styles of services bring glory to God. (Lou Dicker,

(2000) **How to Start a Contemporary God Centred Worship Service**).

It does not matter to him whether a Church uses a full band or an organ.

The goal of worship in a contemporary service is not to glorify the talents of a particular worship band. However, if God has blessed certain individuals with musical talent they should be allowed to use it, not for performance purposes alone, rather these individuals involved in the worship band should use their respective musical talents as an outlet to set the psychological and tone of the worship service so that the congregation may be able to plug into God and wilfully praise him to the best of the ability of that particular Church. (Dicker, 2000)

Now the question arises, can traditional and contemporary aspects ever peacefully coexist in one service? It is possible, but it all depends on the demographic of the particular Church. If a Church congregation is open to the idea and can psychologically cope with the switching of styles during the service then a "Blended" worship service is possible. A good example of a church that operates under a "Blended" worship service pattern, from the author's experience, is Springhill Baptist Church, the current home Church of the author. Springhill Baptist Church sticks to a traditional Church schedule however the congregation is very open to having new things introduced to their worship experience. The church has formed a worship team in order to lead the congregation into the presence of God. Since the author's family started serving there, the church has learned several new songs although

hymns are still a staple for the worship experience at Springhill. Due to the “blended” structure of the worship service, there is the potential for a greater demographic of people can be reached for Christ and plug into him, and gain meaning from the services. Blended or Convergence worship is not the ultimate solution to get people psychologically turned on to worshipping God. In trying to compromise and make everyone in the congregation happy with the style of the music, worship authorities may be missing out on what God is really trying to instil in his people, psychologically or emotionally. It may work for many people, but convergence worship only works to a certain point before it becomes old hat so to speak. Keeping worship fresh helps to psychologically improve the congregation by exposing them to new situations whether it be through song or the message. Once again, it comes down to the choice of the individual, his likes and dislikes about certain styles of worship, what he is comfortable with, that will determine what kind of church this individual will attend. (Constance Cherry, **Blended Worship, What it Is, What it Isn't**, Perspectives, Issue #55).

In conclusion, there are several different styles of worship that affect certain people in different ways psychologically, and emotionally. Depending on what type of attitude toward worship a person grew up with, he would be more likely to favour that style of worship because it suits his psychological needs and he feels comfortable when he worships that way, whether it be

traditional, contemporary or somewhere in between on that continuum. The fact is that everyone worships and feels close to God in different ways. This presents those in charge of setting the tone of worship services with the tremendous task of striking some sort of balance so that everyone in their congregation is connecting with God during the worship service, but not to make things so repetitive that their congregation gets stagnant. Keeping worship fresh provides life to the Church. In some churches depending on the population demographic keeping worship fresh may be more difficult than in others. It all depends on the comfort level of the congregation. In the end, it does not matter to God exactly how a person worships him. All God wants is for his people to be able to connect with him psychologically and emotionally so that a relationship might be formed and maintained.

## **Bibliography**

Baddley, Allen et al, **Memory**, (2009), Psychology Press, East Sussex,  
Madison N.Y., p 305

Cherry, Constance, **Blended Worship, What it Is, What it Isn't**,  
Perspectives, Issue #55  
[http://www.reformedworship.org/magazine/article.cfm?article\\_id=849](http://www.reformedworship.org/magazine/article.cfm?article_id=849)

Dicker, Lou (2000) **How to Start a Contemporary God Centred Worship  
Service**

<http://www.fretboardfellowship.com/pages/article03.html>

Linton, Kim **Worship Style Guide**, September 4, 2009

**<http://www.ministrymaker.com/09/worship/worship-style-guide>**

Psalm 150, New International Version, Zondervan Publishing, 1997

Webber, Robert A., **Traditional vs. Contemporary and the Myth of  
Blended Worship**

[http://www.allthingsnewministries.org/trad\\_v\\_cont.pdf](http://www.allthingsnewministries.org/trad_v_cont.pdf)

Emotional and psychological trauma is the result of extraordinarily stressful events that shatter your sense of security, making you feel helpless in a dangerous world. Psychological trauma can leave you struggling with upsetting emotions, memories, and anxiety that won't go away. It can also leave you feeling numb, disconnected, and unable to trust other people. A trauma specialist may use a variety of different therapy approaches in your treatment. Somatic experiencing focuses on bodily sensations, rather than thoughts and memories about the traumatic event. By concentrating on what's happening in your body, you can release pent-up trauma-related energy through shaking, crying, and other forms of physical release. The following are some common psychological effects of colors in the Western Hemisphere. You can also review the following pages for a more comprehensive list of color meanings and symbolism, including some charts we've created that you can download or embed on your site. Keep in mind that certain shades or tones may result in very different meanings. Also, the context around the color, and even surrounding colors, can have an effect. Think of this as more of a beginning guide to color psychology.

The effects of emotional disclosure were equivalent whether participants thought they were disclosing to a chatbot or to a person. This study advances current understanding of disclosure and whether its impact is altered by technology, providing support for media equivalency as a primary mechanism for the consequences of disclosing to a chatbot. Discover the world's research. 17+ million members. Results from [18] suggest that the effects of emotional disclosure were equivalent, whether the person thought they were disclosing to a chatbot or a human. Although some chatbots have shown promising early efficacy results, there is limited information about how people utilize these chatbots. In other words, different humor styles may play constructive or destructive roles in one's mental health. Martin et al. We then conducted a full paper sift of each study using the specific criteria described below. Figure 1 displays the flow diagram for the search and inclusion criteria. FIGURE 1. We divided age into four levels to see whether the effects of humor styles on SWB are influenced by different developmental stages: childhood (6–12 years old), adolescence (12–18 years old), young adulthood (18–22 years old), and adulthood (older than 22). We observed cultures and ethnic regions including China, the United States, Canada, India, the United Kingdom, Australia, Hong Kong, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Japan, and South Africa. " Each of these channels has a limited carrying capacity " The learning process is an active process of filtering, selecting, organizing, and integrating information. (Mayer, 2001) Based on experiments, Mayer proves that humans memorize information better if it is coded not only in words but also in visual images. A recent study from Russia examined the psychological effects of multimedia on human beings. A.V. Krapivenko (2009), in his work Multimedia technologies and perception of sensations, specifically focuses on this feature of multimedia. This emotional "hook" effect is already used in some media products, such as the so called long-read materials designed by The New York Times and other prominent newspapers using multimedia.