

## ACTIVE AND LOUD WORSHIP RESPONSES: IS IT A BIBLICAL PRACTICE?

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### Abstract

The central role of church worship cannot be gainsaid. The fact that worship determines the responses of church members means that to a significant extent, worship underscores significant psychological nuances among members and as such, their preferences always come into consideration. This is the reason why worship services and experiences vary from congregation to congregation. However, this variance often creates conflict between the various forms of worship responses and the biblical validity of each. On one hand are the contemporary active and loud worship responses and on the other are the traditional mute or silent worship responses. Consequently, this study sought to ask; which practice between active loud and muted worship responses is biblical? And which practice between active loud and muted worship responses leads to effective and meaningful worship experiences? The Old Testament before and during the patriarchal era is largely silent on the biblical fidelity of active and loud worship responses. However, the Davidic Era appears to endorse it as it does not necessarily denounce it. But nonetheless, also looking at the New Testament, an accumulation of the precepts of true worship shows that true worship that creates effective and meaningful worship experiences is one that is both Theocentric and Christocentric. Such a Theocentric and Christocentric is thus devoid of selfishness, personal gratification, androcentrism and negative multiculturalism and multi-generationalism. Considering however that God created man with intellect and emotions, our worship must cater to the emotions and to the intellect. Thus, there should not be tension between those who focus on emotions (active loud worship responses) and mind (traditional mute worship responses). What should be avoided is extremes from both sides and what should be sought is a hybrid of the Theocentric and Christocentric elements from each response that edifies Christ. Also, moderate active and loud worship responses can be coupled with silence and muted postures depending on the circumstances. It would be a dereliction of effective and meaningful worship experiences if the worshippers were too emotional as to deny the place of mind, order and decency but on the other hand, too cold as to deny the place of cheerfulness, contemplation, cultural inclinations and foundations and joy in their worship experiences.

**Keywords:** Active, loud worship, traditional mute worship, worship experiences

### Introduction

Worship sits at the centre of spiritual formation. To that extent, worship constitutes a key framework that determines accessions to worship services, level of participation to church activities and church attendance. These elements in turn determine the extent to which the church mission outcomes would

be achieved. Consequently, the central role of church worship cannot be gainsaid. The fact that worship determines the responses of church members means that to a significant extent, worship underscores significant psychological nuances among members and as such, their preferences always comes into consideration (Wauran, 2020). This is the reason why worship

services and experiences vary from congregation to congregation. Conversely, there are biblical precepts that underpin worship; precepts that may occasionally act in contradistinction to the preferences of church members (Masimba, 2011; Wauran, 2020). This has led to the conflict between the various forms of worship responses and the biblical validity of each. On one hand are the contemporary active and loud worship responses and on the other are the traditional mute or silent worship responses.

Active and loud worship experiences are characterized by clapping during worship services, the loud responses of “hallelujah” or “Amen” at spontaneous and occasionally scripted periods during worship and in some instances may include active physical expressions during music services that may involve dancing in varied degrees (Bucknor, 2008; Wauran, 2020). This form of worship is contrasted with the traditional often muted form of worship which is characterized by silence during worship with whatever responses of “Amen” often being solicited from a preacher or facilitator. Further, in the traditional worship style, both congregational and emotional responses are discouraged (Masimba, 2011).

An examination of literature shows that active and loud worship experiences gain their pathos from the multigenerational and multicultural characteristics of congregations which also belie the diverse preferences of church members regarding meaningful worship (Bucknor, 2008; Nixon, 2003). Yarborough (2017), exploring the prophetic stance and potential for multicultural worship promotes a worship experience and service “that

*intentionally invites a diversity of cultures into the worshiping environment. It is also one that advocates for balancing and blending as a tool to negotiate different cultures and worship styles into a shared story (pg, 33).’*’

Consequently, many SDA churches, especially the ones inundated by members from culturally diverse cultures have shifted from the traditional worship services to a more liberal and contemporary one to try and meet the unique multigenerational and multicultural characteristics of their congregations (Valmyr, 2021). Many of these churches validate their choice to change the worship services on Revelations 7:9 that say:

*After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands<sup>1</sup>*

Other proponents of a worship experiences that deviate from the traditional muted worship or liturgical practice to a more active and loud worship experience cite the need for inclusivity in church worship. Inclusivity is similar to catering to the multigenerational and multicultural characteristics of congregations. One key proponent of this is the Adventist liturgical scholar Nicholas Zork who echoes the inclusivity sentiment thus:

*“Inclusive liturgical practice has not only divine and human orientations but a future orientation as well—a commitment to sing of what will be until it is so— until the Church and our broader human*

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<sup>1</sup> All Biblical texts used in this article are drawn from the King James Version (KJV) unless otherwise indicated



*family will at last fully embody what the Good News of God's reign already proclaims: There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28 NRSV) (Zork, 2018, pg, 14)''*

Zork (2018) here suggests that inclusive liturgical practice that caters to the diver cultural inclinations of members is both a biblically endorsed practice, as he mentions the divine status of the practice, and an eschatological one, owing to his argument about the future orientation of inclusive liturgical practice. Within inclusive worship experiences are found active and loud worship experiences (Hickam, 2019; Zork, 2018). Still others see no biblical basis not to endorse the active and loud worship responses (Bacchiocchi, 2000; Holmes, 1984).

However, there are skeptical scholars of the active and loud worship responses. Bacchiocchi (2000) has called the active and loud worship responses especially as it relates to music as "theological impoverishment" and as argued that the essential condition of the worship characteristic is the choice of response only due to "*personal taste and cultural trends, rather than clear theological convictions (pg, 5).*" Some like Ng (2005) quote Ellen G. White to buttress their view on the traditional muted and conservative response to worship. The quotation used is the one found in Testimonies for the Church that says, "*...an enemy has been at work to destroy our faith in the sacredness of Christian worship*" and her subsequent urging for the church to recognize the need to restore sacred, true (biblical) and meaningful worship experiences in the SDA church (White, 1889).

As far as the need to exercise personal preferences in worship services as propounded by the proactive and loud worship responses, the antagonists question the legitimacy of structuring any form of worship based on the preferences of a group of people (Nixon, 2003). They argue that formality, emotion, charisma, dignity and tradition have been used as justification for various forms of worship but in essence, those justifications still remain personal preferences (Nixon, 2003). Others like Peterson (2014) have argued that the subjective approaches to worship that cater to member's preferences do not have any biblical backing. Dawn (1995) argued that true worship cannot be focused on the preferences of worshippers but must eternally remain in the purview of what is pleasing and acceptable to God.

*"The point of worship is to recognize that 'God alone matters.' Many battles over worship styles would be eliminated if this answer were kept in mind as the foundational criterion for planning what we do, no matter what forms we use (Dawn, 1995, pg, 12)."*

Wood (1998) on his part noted that there is actually a deep-rooted atheism hiding behind the focus for contemporary forms of worship that lean towards personal gratification. He suggests that the real need for worshippers is not to have their tastes be the subject and focus of worship but have their psyche be refined in the presence of God. Most succinctly, he said that:

*"We seek first the kingdom and righteousness of God in worship. Our own benefit is but the by-product, not the avowed intent. . . . When we have been both formed and transformed by true worship, we will seek not to 'get something out of it,' but to honor God by offering Him*



*what the Book of Common Prayer calls 'a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving (pg, 25)''.*

*forms of worship but the concepts that the forms seek to inculcate (pg, 4)''.*

Further, James E. White (2007), in his exploration of the trend towards pluralism in worship observes three clear characteristics: one, is eclectic forms of worship crafted to reflect the cultural diversity and personal preferences of the congregation; two, occasional unique and special programs in the church given to cater for the style of a specific group of congregants; and three, multiple programs at irregular times and spaces to cater for the diverse nature of congregants (White, 2007). Nixon (2003) argues that while these characteristics help to respect the diversity of cultures within the Body of Christ, they often end up fragmenting congregations into contending communities and the insistence on the particularity in worship styles becomes largely unwarranted.

There also are the moderates who believe that worship experiences can be both biblically faithful and culturally appropriate. They argue that engaging in full-blown active and loud worship responses dilutes the divine intention and respect associated with worship but totally ignoring the cultural inclinations, histories, stories and current state of worshipers for traditional forms of worship wrongly assumes that worship experiences are static and mechanical (Mumbo, 2014; Ng, 2015). In other words, the church cannot be culturally insensitive under the guise of biblical fidelity as far as worship is concerned. Of the key moderates, Nixon (2003), says:

*"A theology of worship, therefore, must first be concerned with meaning related to God; not the rituals of worship but the beliefs on which the rituals are built, not the*

So which way should the church go? And which way is biblical? Whichever way one looks at the worship practices employed in congregations, significant data shows that active presence and participation in church services by members is highly dependent on the type and style of worship services. Studies from the USA especially among churches that are multicultural have almost completely divested from the traditional mute worship style to active and loud worship style which is more culturally responsive (Bucknor, 2008). However, the more culturally homogenous churches, especially where Caucasian members dominate, show the use of the traditional mute worship response (Ottley, 2020). Nonetheless, in Caucasian dominated churches where the dominant generational cohort are Millennials and the Generation Z, active and loud worship responses appear to be more preferred (Ottley, 2020; Robles, 2010). The same tension between active, loud and traditional mute worship responses showcase in African and Kenyan churches. Mumbo (2014) was attracted to creating a strategy to foster meaningful worship services in Kenya as a result of massive absence of church members that led to some moving to Pentecostal churches due to SDA worship services being "boring" and "too traditional" and unable to meet the spiritual needs of members (pg, 1). He in fact proposes a balanced worship approach. Masimba (2011) noted from a Survey done at New Life SDA Church in Kenya that 64% of the members preferred the active and loud worship responses and only 34% preferred the traditional mute worship responses. This according to him was a recipe for conflicts between the espousers of the traditional silent or mute worship response and the proponents of the



active and loud worship responses. The tension has not abated to date.

This article thus offers valuable insights that portend significance for church leadership, local church members, denominational church leadership, worship leaders and denominational scholars trying to sustain and implement a biblical-based worship service in the wake of a multigenerational and multicultural church context that now highly advances the need for contextualization in worship services and experiences. Considering the ongoing debate around active and loud worship responses on one hand and the more traditional muted and conservative response on the other; and the fact that there appears to be no tangible consensus in sight, this paper offers valuable scholarly input into the debate with the view to track knowledge on the matter forward. And to better explore this, the study put forward two research questions:

- i. Which practice between active loud and muted worship responses is biblical?
- ii. Which practice between active loud and muted worship responses leads to effective and meaningful worship experiences?

### Methodology

This paper is a general literature review of biblical texts related to worship and particularly those delineating active loud and muted worship responses. The biblical text examination was done by dividing the examination within Worship in the Old Testament and worship in the New Testament. Further, other writings by denominational scholars of significant repute are examined to add support or critique to each other and further shed more

light on the biblical texts owing to the scholar's exegetical and hermeneutical prowess. Some books were also reviewed and the writings of Ellen G. White<sup>2</sup> on the issue of worship theology also reviewed. The reviewed literature are all geared towards ensuring that valid solutions are canvassed especially relating to which practice between active loud and muted worship responses is biblical? And which practice between active loud and muted worship responses leads to effective and meaningful worship experiences? But first, it is important to start with an epistemological grounding of what worship is.

### The Epistemology of Biblical Worship

The biblical view of worship presents it as exclusive and full and total allegiance to God. Fowler (2000) writing in the Handbook of Seventh - day Adventist Theology, defined worship as "*simply giving God His worth: unreserved praise, unconditional, and absolute gratitude, (pg, 236).*" The exclusive nature of worship is witnessed in Exodus 20:3 that says; "*You shall have no other gods before me.*" Another text gives the reason why God alone should be worshiped, "*Fear God and give Him glory . . . and worship him who made heaven and earth*" (Rev 14:7). Creation thus becomes a key reason why we worship God. Further, another reason for worship is the redemptive act of God. Dybdahl (2008) shows this to be the case when he interprets Exodus 20:2, "*I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage*" to mean that God starts by giving a reason why he should be worshiped through the keeping of the commandments because He first redeemed them from bondage. Further, worship in the biblical sense demands that God be put first above

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<sup>2</sup> **Ellen Gould White** (November 26, 1827 – July 16, 1915) is believed to have possessed the prophetic gift needed in the end times and thus

places centrally in the eschatological, historical (as co-founder of the SDA Church) and ecclesiological space of the SDA Church.

every other thing. This is best illustrated with the text, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment*” (Matt 22:37-38).

Writing in the *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Van Gemeren [VanGemeren] (1997) notes that worship is drawn from the Hebrew term *shachah* which may mean ‘worship,’ ‘bow down,’ ‘bend down,’ ‘kneel,’ or ‘serving.’ The term finds corroboration from *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* which also adds the Greek term *proskuneō*: ‘to prostrate oneself,’ ‘to do obeisance,’ or ‘to reverence’ and *latreou* that means simply ‘to serve.’ Horn (1979) expressed that these terms underscore adoration, honor, attitude of humility, reverence and devotion that a worshipper needs to have in recognition of the creative and redemptive power of God and the relationship that a creature and redeemed has with his creator and redeemer.

Vanttoozer (2005) adds a practical dimension to worship when he defines it as a public gathering of congregants who seek to engage in religious activities. Thus, it denotes the regular and periodic assembly of church going people and members in a bid to engage in acts that are religious performed in the name of God. Thus, Van Gemeren (1997, p. 857) defined worship as “*both an attitude and an act.*” Consequently, there are internal and external elements of worship, each carrying with it diverse nuances and practices.

### **Worship: The Old Testament Account**

The biblical account records that worship was key at the very beginning of time “*...whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; when the morning stars sang*

*together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?* (Job 38:6-7). God’s conversation with Job also reveals that worship connotes the language of glory and honor expressed by God’s people (Masimba, 2011). On this Henry (2005) asserted that:

*They were the sons of God who shouted for joy when they saw the foundations of the world laid because though it was not made for them, but for the children of men, and though it would increase their work and service, yet they knew that the eternal wisdom and word, whom they were to worship (Heb. 1:6) would rejoice in the habitable parts of the world and that much of his delight would be in the sons of men (Prov. 8:31). (p. 732)*

Masimba (2011) thus asserts that authentic worship is borne out of an initial almost *a priori* (intuitive) knowledge of who God is and what he has done. This is the central force of worship in the Old Testament (Masimba, 2011; ).

Sacrifice then became the key element in understanding worship in the pre-patriarchal period. This is because the pre-patriarchal period is mainly emblematic of the fall but also characteristic of the redemptive actions that God took to help Adam and Eve to get back to the fold. To better propound this, Nichol (1978) argues that:

*Also the skins were a constant reminder of their lost innocence, of death as the wages of sin, and of the promised Lamb of God, who would by His own vicarious death take away the sins of the world. . . . The sacrificial service, though not specifically mentioned here, was instituted at this time. (p. 235).*

The sacrificial aspects of worship are seen in the way Cain and Abel brought sacrifices to God (Gen 4:4). Argument has been made that part of the reason Abel's sacrifice was accepted was because of the faithfulness, orderliness and decency of the sacrificial worship exercise (Wauran, 2020; Osei-Bonsu, 2013). And many have suggested that in keeping to this biblical principle, present worship services should be orderly, decent and faithful and thus traditional, conservative, silent but not active and loud with their clapping and shouting character (Bacchiocchi, 2000; Wauran, 2020).

The tradition seen in the pre-patriarchal period continues and Gen 4: 26 illustrates this: *“and to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then begun men to call upon the name of the Lord.”* This has been interpreted to mean that there was a remnant of faithful worshippers who kept to the biblical precepts. Nichol (1978) on his part notes that on the principle in this verse:

*“In this time a more formal worship was begun. Man had of course called upon the Lord before Enos' birth, but as time went on a more pronounced distinction arose between those who worshipped the Lord and those who defied Him. The expression “to call upon the name of the Lord” is used frequently in the Old Testament to indicate, as it does here, public worship” (Ps. 79:6; 116:17; Jer. 10:25; Zeph. 3:9). (p. 244)”*

To Nichols, true worship was one that was more formal and orderly. Also, true worship meant calling upon the Lord through public worship.

In the patriarchal time, Gen 12:1-2, 4 shows that Abraham related with God through an act of worship that was exemplified by

taking God at his word and accepting by faith to go to a foreign land. Thus, taking God at his word is an act of worship that reorients or transforms a worshiper's life from one of idolatry (can be read 'sin') to one of righteousness. Due (2005) had this to say on the issue aforementioned:

*“In particular for our purposes, we note how God's dealings with Abraham have the universal restoration of true worship in view. We see this first in the case of Abraham himself, whose worship is reoriented away from idolatry towards the living God. Then through his seed, we see it in the restoration of true worship to the nations to the place of their own defiant idolatry. . . . Abraham, however, did not remain as such, for his life was transformed by God's choice of him as the one through whom his purpose would be fulfilled. (p. 62)”*

Abraham later engaged in acceptable worship by building God an altar and Masimba (2011) notes that this exemplifies that true worship involves the engagement in a religious activity. Whaley (2001, p. 54) also corroborates this when he asserts that *“Abraham accepts a blessing from Melchizedek and worships by the giving of tithes (Gen 14:18-24).* The same sacrificial form of worship, taking God at His word and engaging in religious activities permeated the lives of Isaac, Jacob (Gen 28: 1617) up to Moses (Exod 3: 12).

Nonetheless, the key form of worship that lends itself to the style of worship as presented in the OT is the worship experienced in the sanctuary. One, the sanctuary offers the Israelites an avenue to revel in God's presence amongst them (Exod 25:8) because God knew that if He



did not set His presence among them, they would undoubtedly go back to their polytheistic worship experiences and practices (Masimba, 2011; Hickam, 2019). In other words, He alone wanted to be the centre of worship. Two, the worship experience as exemplified by the sanctuary was to have the giving of a free will offering as a key part (Exod 25:2-3). Three, the priests were to be consecrated as holy vessels for holy use and this is more illustrated by how the animals were offered for the cleansing of the priests (Exod 29:1; Lev 16:6). Four, the worship at the sanctuary was within a specified schedule (morning and evening) (Exod 29:38-41). There is no evidence within the sanctuary worship that there were any charismatic, emotional or active and loud forms of worship responses.

However, the argument has been made that in the worship service in the sanctuary as presented in the Old Testament, the fact that the Israelites were asked to bring offerings depending on their financial endowment was itself endorsement for inclusivity in worship (Hickam, 2019). Of course this has been denounced as stretching the principle of financial inclusivity to reflect cultural inclusivity which is not proper (Ng, 2015). The Davidic worship era presents the most problematic era of worship in the Old Testament. Within that era of OT, there is evidence of shouting, instrumental singing, clapping and dancing especially as it relates to music (2 Sam 6:5-6, 14-16). The Seventh-day Adventist commentary attests to dancing and leaping within the worship experience as practiced in the Davidic worship. Nichol (1976) noted that

*“To an Oriental of that day such an activity [David’s dancing] was a natural mode of expression, however strange it may appear today. By this means David expressed his grateful praise and thus gave*

*honor and glory to God’s holy name” (pg, 627).*

On her part, Ellen G. White observes that David’s dancing and shouting in worship to the Lord was essentially an act of “*reverent joy before the Lord*” (1958, p. 707). Miriam danced before the Lord (Exod 15:20) and the book of Psalms is inundated with texts that show approvingly the acts of dancing and shouting (Ps 149:3; Ps 150:4). Dancing and praise also appear to have been practiced even in the temple services. Ellen G. White notes in the book *Desire of Ages* that:

*“...at evening when the lamps were lighted, the court was a scene of great rejoicing. Gray-haired men, the priests of the temple and the rulers of the people, united in the festive dances to the sound of instrumental music and the chants of the Levites” (1940, p. 463).*

There thus appears no biblical text that prohibited dancing in the temple and the active and loud worship responses during the Old Testament times. Should the lack of prohibition also transcend to modern times? Should we agree with Newman (1990) who said:

*“I find it fascinating to observe that we condemn what the Bible expressly commands as part of worship. We associate dancing with immorality and worldliness, forgetting that it has had good and even spiritual connotations. While there are evil types of dancing, there are also types that express the emotions and creativity of the mind and body. (p. 26)”*

On clapping, only one verse shows it as a means of worship in the bible. Ps 47:1 says, “*Clap your hands, all you nations; Shout to*





*God with cries of joy.*” Inasmuch as it is unwise to base a theology on one verse, the bible in this case and in other cases does not appear to proscribe it.

Conversely, scholars who are antagonistic to dancing, clapping and loud singing and shouting argue on eschatological and ecclesiological and in some cases theological standpoints. Bacchiocchi (2000) who has done extensive study specifically on church music places his central thesis on the need to have church worship keep to the tenets of holiness that is best illustrated by the Sabbath and consequently the denouncing of mixing worship with acts that do not make it possible to delineate what is sacred and what is secular. The holiness of the Sabbath affirmed in scripture (Gen 2:3; Ex 20:11; Ex 16:22; 31:14; Is 58:13) according to Bacchiocchi (2000) should be inundated with solemnity, silence and sacredness that is characterized by hymnology in music and general silence or ‘spontaneous but gauged’ responses in worship. The kowtowing to cultural preferences according to Bacchiocchi (2000) is cultural relativism which acts contrary to the absolutist character of God’s instructions regarding worship. Of particular note is Bacchiocchi’s lack of examination of the OT verses that show clapping and shouting as ingredients of temple worship and a lack of biblical prohibition thereof.

Holmes (1984) on his part also looks at worship from an eschatological point of view when he notes that:

*“In our [Adventist] worship we enter the heavenly sanctuary by faith and are able to see the world, the purpose of the church, the ministry of our Lord, and our own lives from God’s all-encompassing perspective and not just from our own limited, self-centered,*

*and narrow point of view.” (pg. 34).*

Both Holmes and Bacchiocchi argue that true worship must reflect the worship in the heavenly sanctuary that the book of Revelation speaks to. Some of the texts in Revelation that speak to heavenly worship (Rev 5:9; 5:12; 5:13; 12:10-12; 19:1-2; and 19:6) and according to these scholars, none of them exemplify any active or loud or culturally appropriate worship response. Thus Bacchiocchi (2000) notes that:

*“The triumphant music of Revelation is inspired, not by the hypnotic beat of percussion instruments, but by the marvelous revelation of God’s redemptive accomplishments for his people. As the worshippers of the heavenly sanctuary are privileged to review the providential way in which Christ, the Lamb that was slain, has ransomed people of every nation, they sing with dramatic excitement in their doxological praise of the Godhead (pg. 14).”*

#### **Worship: The New Testament Account**

After the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in AD 70, the Jewish worship experiences shifted to the synagogue. The synagogue worship experience was fueled by order. Bruce (2010) mentioned that

*“The typical synagogue order of worship begun with the reciting of the Shema, (“The Lord your God is one Lord, and you shall love the Lord your God. . .”); followed by prayers, two Scriptural lessons, one from the Torah, the other from the prophets; then an exposition of one of this passages, which might on occasion be a message of encouragement from any*

*appropriate visitor present; and then a concluding blessing. (p. 289).”*

The abovementioned order has biblical texts to corroborate (Matt 6:24; Luke 16:13). Bookman and Kahn have observed that the liturgical order in the synagogue save for the holy days and the Shabbat, included morning/*shachart*, then midday/*mincha*, and finally, evening/*ma'ariv*. The scriptures show that Jesus preached in the synagogue (Luke 18:19; John 3:2; Mark 1:21-22; Matt: 4:23; 9:35; 13; Luke 6:6, 13:10) and he even led the worship services (Luke 4:15-16). Paul as a representative of the apostles also worshipped and reasoned with Jews in the synagogue (Acts 17:1-2, 3:1 8:4, 9:20, 13:15), ‘reasoned’ here according to Barrett (2002) means submitting, expounding and/or affirming.

In the early church, there is no evidence of public worship largely because at the time the apostles and disciples were not keen on public evangelization (Horn, 1979). There is also no evidence in the bible regarding the order of worship. Nonetheless, the book of Acts gives a better picture of their worship:

*And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, had all things in common; sold their possession and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continued daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness with singleness in heart.*

*Praising God, and having favour with all people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. (Acts 2:42-46);*

From this text, it is clear that in fellowship (*koinonia*) they shared common goals, spirit and goods, in breaking of bread, they ate together, shared communion to remind them of the body of Christ (Valmyr, 2021), and devoted their time to prayer in a world that was antagonistic to them (Ottley, 2020). They also sang hymns and praises as also exemplified in other texts in the NT (Matt 26:30; Mark 14:26).

The songs here were done for the purposes that in the same way Paul in Col 3:16 says, “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*”

Within the space of the NT, music was part of worship. Paul writing to the Ephesians wrote on singing thus:

*“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 5:19-20).*

Scholars have interpreted “*singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,*” to mean not merely singing with feelings and emotionally, but recognizing and acknowledging what God has done in your life (Masimba, 2011), singing drawn from the depths of one’s being, in actual sense where Christ has already taken His residence (Neufeld, 2002). Snodgrass (1996) said that ‘heart’ does not mean singing with emotions inasmuch as it involves emotions but singing with one’s



whole being in a way that the song expresses the reality and integrity of a lived life. On emotions he said, “...surely no one should expect that emotions are always on the same level. While emotions are always involved in spirituality, being spiritual does not depend on a level of emotional feeling” (p. 310).

Others have used to quotation of Ellen G. White in Counsels to the Church to argue for denouncing active and loud worship responses for traditional mute responses. The quotation reads:

*“When the worshiper enters into the place of meeting, they should do so with decorum, passing quietly to their seats. . . . Common talking, whispering, and laughing should not be permitted in the house of worship either before or after service. Ardent, active piety should, characterize the worshippers. (p. 492).*

A close and contextual reading of this quotation however shows that in the immediate context she was speaking about the attitude to prayer. Nonetheless, the quote seems to suggest the avoidance of shouting “hallelujah” or “Amen” during the prayer itself as is common in some churches. Her other quotations like, “Because of the irreverence in attitude, dress and deportment, and lack worshipful frame of mind, God has often turned his face away from those assembled for his worship” (White, n.d p. 499), also appear to suggest promotion of a more calm, mute and somewhat traditional worship response over the active and loud responses.

On music, White (1945) notes that “Those who make singing a part of divine worship should select hymns with music appropriate to the occasion, not funeral notes, but cheerful, yet solemn melodies. The voices

*can and should be modulated, softened, and subdued” (p. 178).*

Wauran (2020) in examining the biblical foundations of clapping as one of the active and loud worship responses noted that “there is no Bible text and theological evidence which support the practice of clapping in the place of worship, in other words clapping in the church services is unbiblical, and for this reason clapping in Seventh-day Adventists worship services is not necessary.” He however proposed the need for saying amen.

Ng (2015) observes that there is need to contextual to diverse cultures in order to get the peoples in these cultures to effectively understand the gospel and biblical precepts. According to him, there is no better contextualization avenue as in worship in moderate forms to cater for cultural thirst and help deal with biblical understanding of what Christ has done. Culturally appropriate music and worship responses that do not go to the extreme of emotionalism but also do not get boring as to lose the people is proposed.

### **The Worship Response that Creates Meaningful and effective Worship Experiences**

From a review of the biblical principles and the scholarly inputs that underlie the worship formats (active, loud and traditional mute worship responses), this study identifies the following implications and makes subsequent recommendations.

First, the review of worship in the Old and the New Testament and from writing from E.G. White and other scholarly inputs, shows that, true worship engages the emotions as well as the intellect. Further that, God is the object of true worship and true worship originates from God. Also, true worship is freely expressed devoid of coercion but emblematic of spontaneity.



The actions of David in the book of Psalms attest to this. Moreover, true worship include spiritual sacrifice in terms of giving one's body and the external elements that characterize it including tithes, offerings, time and talents. True worship also helps to transform lives from one of sin to one of righteousness and thus emanates truly from an obedient heart. Further, true worship honors decency and order.

Thus, secondly, it appears that in situations where the active and loud worship responses are used, the worshippers are largely tapping into their emotional parts. Conversely, in situations where the worshippers are attracted to the traditional silent worship responses, the worshippers are holding on to their mind dynamics.

Consequently, an accumulation of the precepts of true worship listed above shows that true worship that creates effective and meaningful worship experiences is one that is both Theocentric and Christocentric. Basically, it is one which centers on God as the originator of worship and the only one who qualifies for worship and a worship that exemplifies, honors, praises and glorifies Christ and what He has in his redemptive power done for mankind. Such a Theocentric and Christocentric is thus devoid of selfishness, androcentrism and negative multiculturalism and multigenerationalism. Considering however that God created man with intellect and emotions, our worship must cater to the emotions and to the intellect.

In John 4.23-24, the bible records that: *"Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and truth"*

Here, it seems Jesus is seeking a balanced approach to worship. In fact, the he

Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary on this text says that, *"in all sincerity, with the highest faculties of the mind and emotions, applying the principles of the truth to the heart. . . ."* (pg. 232). To the extent, there should not be tension between those who put the focus on worship on emotions (active loud worship responses) and mind (traditional mute worship responses). What should be avoided is extremes from both sides and what should be sought is a hybrid of the Theocentric and Christocentric elements from each response that edifies Christ. And not that there is divergence between emotions and mind as that would be to fall into the Greek philosophical quagmire. What it means is that moderate active and loud worship responses can be coupled with silence and muted postures depending on the circumstances. For example, it would be helpful to be solemn during prayer time, but the church should not disallow responses of *"Amen"* or *"Halleluyah"* from congregants as they spontaneously respond to the marvelous claims presented by the person praying. This applies also to preaching. It would be a dereliction of effective and meaningful worship experiences if the worshippers were too emotional as to deny the place of mind, order and decency but on the other hand, too cold as to deny the place of cheerfulness, contemplation, cultural inclinations and foundations and joy in their worship experiences.

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