

## Summary: Worship Wars -- Traditional vs. Contemporary Worship

While we hear a great deal of scuttlebutt about the conflicts of styles of worship in the 21st Century, our LUMC group concludes, through extensive study and research, that there is no right or wrong style of worship as long as the One being worshipped is the One True God. We found that consensus not only a reflection the attitude of our group members, but one confirmed by interviews and surveys. A survey (provided with analysis in an addendum to this report) contained assorted statements pro and con toward both styles of worship. And yet, the greatest agreement of response came to the statement, **"If your heart is in the right place, it doesn't really matter how you worship, only THAT you worship."**

Hoping to identify the traits that draw and repel Christians to the various styles of worship, we assigned group members to "pick apart" the upsides and downsides to both traditional and contemporary services. Not surprisingly, a divisiveness of pros and cons emerged from both sides.

\*\* Traditionalists embraced longstanding rituals and hymns, the underlying universal element to traditionalists being comfort . . . both in the sense of comfort of the familiarity of the style of services and in the sense of following the paths of our forefathers. Having been raised with the traditional church, significant deviation seems like sacrilege. On the flip side, non-traditionalists may find traditional services uninviting and confining in the sense that ritualistic worship may dampen the effect God by placing tradition above worship, and even The Bible has passages which can be interpreted as a caveat that fervent allegiance to tradition can become obsessive to the point that the Spirit of God becomes secondary to tradition.

\*\* Contemporary advocates point to a large segment of today's population as being resistant to embrace tradition, and, therefore, being left out of the church experience. Enthusiasm seems to be the common thread of non-traditionalists in expressing their preference for contemporary worship. Contemporary services also embrace modern technology and offer musical choices that may speak to a younger generation in ways that traditional hymns do not. In one research study, the statement emerged that while traditionalists may view contemporary services as too edgy, "the edge is a tenuous and unforgiving place, but it seems to be . . . where Jesus and His disciples lived." Opponents of contemporary worship point to "new ways" being disrespectful to the ways that have been handed down through generations, pointing to modern Christian music -- the cornerstone in the break with tradition -- as banal or lacking in depth. Critics of contemporary worship styles argue that such services are designed to be more entertaining than worshipful.

We also explored the positives and negatives of blended worship services, those that take elements from both the contemporary and the traditional. It should also be pointed out that today's traditional services have evolved to the point that they have little resemblance to traditional services of centuries past, a "blend" of contemporary ideas adopted into the traditional structures leading to what we today all "traditional worship" but would more appropriately be called "contemporary traditional worship."

Our group was fortunate to have a member whose church had been through troubling times in an attempt to add contemporary services to reach "the un-churched" who did not respond positively

to attending traditional services. While this segment of the report was not consistent with our final conclusions, it offers a valuable insight to churches considering the expansion of their present services.

Our conclusion was that even though there is a phenomenon dubbed "worship wars," the combatants in the wars are on the same side. The wars are not about our philosophical differences. We agree wholeheartedly that our services are for the purpose of worshiping the One True God. And if we need to offer multiple avenues to reach this end, let God's Word prevail, regardless of the vehicle we choose to become entrenched in His Word.