

PRAISE
and
WORSHIPPERS

Leen La Rivière

Volume 3 in the series *Biblical Principles*

PRAISE
&
WORSHIPPERS

Biblical principles for praise and worship

® Leen La Rivière

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This book is Volume 3 in the series *Biblical Principles*.

PREFACE

Before you start reading this book, the following is worth noting. The usual approach to a book like this would be to consider what the life of a believer is like, what attitude a believer takes towards God and, on this basis, what attitude she/he takes to life. This breadth of christian life (cultural, social, economic, and political) would be the basis for describing praise, worship and creative expressions of the faith, both individually and as a group. In the past, this resulted in a number of liturgical expressions within churches and congregations, that have, in my view, been sufficiently discussed elsewhere. This book describes modern forms of praise and worship, without discussing liturgical aspects. In volume 4 of this series, *The Message*, I will discuss at length the content and effects on the christian's personal life and life as a community.

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Introduction

“The service started. The praise band and singers gave their all. The music leader brought the congregation to an ever higher level of emotion. Over an hour later the audience was almost in a state of ecstasy. The minister grabbed the microphone and said that they’d never been closer to God. What could he possibly add to this? He left the Bible unopened and concluded the service...”

Since 1969 I have actively promoted new ways of praise and worship. The Continentals put on stage new types of performance; dance and other ways of physical expression were introduced from 1974; and visual art was given a place and function as well. From as early as 1974, new forms of music were profiled, which were clearly for congregational use and communal singing. All these activities resulted in a surge of new songs that we now call ‘Praise & Worship’. For many years, we collaborated with the great ‘sources’ of this type of music, Merv & Merla Watson, Dave and Dale Garrett, Graham Kendrick, Jimmy & Carol Owens and many others. This not only resulted in the introduction of many new songs, but much time was allocated to workshops and education as well. Finally, in 1986, I felt that our work in the area of praise & worship was done. Praise & worship had become generally accepted, the songwriters were well-known, songs found their way into churches and congregations, songbooks were published (for example the *Opwekking* songbook), and thousands of people had been blessed by these new forms of music. So: ‘mission accomplished’, and in 1986 we decided to put our activities as regards praise & worship on the backburner.

But there was a hitch. Gradually, those who had taken part in our education and training programmes in the past started to retire. Many new congregations were founded and their music leaders often appeared completely ignorant. Only a handful of books on praise & worship had come out since 1986 and most of them dealt with just one aspect of this ministry, which did not help. We now begin to see the consequences: there is a lack of balance in the music ministry because the biblical foundation is missing. The example at the start of this introduction shows it plainly. This meeting was a caricature of what a service of praise & worship should be. The imbalance becomes equally clear when you compare the average collection of praise & worship songs to the body of praise & worship in the Bible, i.e. the Psalms. It soon becomes glaringly obvious that there is an incredible imbalance

between the content of the praise & worship songs and the richness in content of the Psalms.

In the years since this structural problem transpired, I have discussed it with leaders within and outside Europe, and the present study is the result of these discussions. This book sets out the principles and the basis for praise & worship. I hope that it will support praise & worship, that it will clarify our aim and purpose, which is in God rather than our own emotions... and that it will help in correcting extremes and imbalances.

Finally I would like to point out a connection that exists between worship and 'the fear of the Lord'. At present, in some circles the latter is understood to mean 'being afraid of God'. Unfortunately, there are Christians who live in anxiety because of this. But the 'fear of the Lord' actually means 'standing in awe before the Lord'. This brings us to the essence, for the 'Eternal' is not our pal. We may bow down in worship before this Eternal God, we may sing in awe of the Eternal God, or honour him in other ways. The 'fear of the Lord' also results in a strong connection, intimacy and trust, and it keeps worshippers on their way with God.

Soli Deo Gloria.

Leen La Rivière

• **This book is volume 3 of the series *Biblical Principles*. Volume 1** discusses the biblical principles of creativity and art. **Volume 2** is about the music ministry and a calling to music. It analyses the preparation, tasks, aims, methods and responsibilities of the singers/musicians (the Levites) in the Bible and their impact on us today. This solid foundation is **necessary** to understand the praise and worship of this book. This book therefore builds on volume 1 and 2.

CHAPTER 1. TERMINOLOGY

In order to understand the terminology in its context it is a good idea to have a look at the words that are used. This is necessary because, certainly in evangelical circles, these terms sometimes get mixed up. So some clarification would be helpful.

Praise means to express approval, or commendation; to express adoration of God; to glorify God, or laudation of God. The term also includes thanksgiving for blessings (anticipated or received); and related terms are for example to adore, approve, bless, celebrate, glorify, honour and magnify.

Adoration, literally 'praying to' (from latin adorare) is an expression of deep love and respect or veneration. You honour something or someone as God. Paintings of the three wise men (magi) who came to worship the child Jesus and honoured him with gold, myrrh and frankincense are often titled 'Adoration of the magi'.

Worship is the act of adoration, reverence, or intense admiration of somebody/something of great honour/worth. The word consists of two parts: *worth* and *ship*. This clarifies the true meaning: '-ship' indicates rank, status, or number. The notion of 'worth' comprises, apart from quantitative value (wealth), also mental and moral excellence and qualities that deserve esteem.

Although we have clarified some of the terms used, language remains a living organism. The various terms are therefore likely to be mixed up in practice. Hence the title of this book: *Praise & Worshippers!* Giving praise is something that worshippers simply do!

In order to make clear what praise and worship mean, this book will discuss the context of a number of well-known worshippers.

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to present yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship." Romans 12:1.

CHAPTER 2. POSITIONS FOR WORSHIPS & PRAISE

There are many hypotheses about the 'right' position to adopt for worship. If you read up on all the situations in which people worship in the Bible, you see that people worship in a number of different positions. There is no such thing as THE position that is to be adopted for prayer, worship and praise, as the examples below demonstrate:

A. KNEELING

- Moses knelt before God (e.g. Ex. 34:8).
- The people of Israel knelt (Ex. 12:27).
- The whole congregation knelt (1 Chron. 29:20).
- Solomon knelt (2 Chron. 6:13).
- The Israelites knelt in the temple (2 Chron. 7:3; Neh. 8:7).
- Ezra knelt, his clothes torn (Ezra 9:5).
- A call to all people to throw themselves down, bow down and kneel before God (Ps. 95: 5b).
- The apostle Paul once prayed kneeling with all people present (Acts 20:36).
- A day will come when everyone will kneel before God (Is. 45:23; Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10).
- Paul says that when he kneels, he fully submits to the authority and majesty of God (Eph. 3:14-19).

B. THROWING ONESELF DOWN BEFORE GOD

- Moses and Aaron prayed like this (Num. 20:6).
- At times Moses prayed like this for a very long time (Deut. 9:18, 25).
- Ezra threw himself down before the house of God, weeping (Ezra 10:1).
- Everyone is called to bow down in worship (Ps. 95:6, NBG).
- The man born blind worshipped Jesus this way (John 9:38, NBG).
- In the Book of Revelation people fall down before God (Rev. 4:10; 5:8,14).

C. STANDING UP

- Samuel's mother prayed like this (1 Sam. 1:26).
- It is mentioned in the Psalms (including in Ps. 134:1).
- People often pray standing whilst reaching out or lifting up their hands (indicating a blessing or worship); see for example Ps. 134:2; 1 Kings 8:54 and 1 Tim. 2:8.

So there are many ways to worship God and there is no such thing as the one and only position for worship. All positions are right and when used creatively they are worthy in God's eyes. What you do may depend on how you feel, but there is no right or wrong in the expression of your worship!

CHAPTER 3. CIRCUMSTANCES FOR PRAISE & WORSHIP

Some people claim that you can only worship as a group, or only in church. But in the Bible you find numerous options. If you just pick up a concordance and look up all the passages that deal with praise, sacrifice of praise, song of praise, adoration, worship and glorification, a world will open up to you. God's people were pretty good at it!

• **Volume:**

The sound could be so loud, that the ground shook under the booming noise that was heard far away. This happened when the foundation of the temple was being laid (Ezra 3:13) and at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem (Neh.12: 27-43) (rock-praise is not an invention of just a few years ago). The volume could also be very low, or worship took place in silence. The sound could be vocal, but also purely instrumental.

• **Number of people:**

According to some theories you can only worship as a congregation, or at least only this would be 'true' worship. But are they right? The Bible says that people worship

- alone: Some people go out to pray or worship on their own, as did Samuel's mother in the temple. Jesus, too, occasionally went to pray alone in silence.
- in a large group of people: The other extreme is a massive number of people, for example at the dedication of the temple; or consider the multitude of people no-one can count in the book of Revelation.
- as a congregation or community.
- as a family.

• **Location:**

One of the existing theories claims that the most beautiful praise rises from the forecourt to the inner court, to the holy place, and, by analogy, our praise services should have similar stages. Is there anything to prove this claim? The Bible just shows that **any** place can be used to worship: squares, buildings, the temple, just somewhere outside, prison, or surrounded by nature. The most remarkable song of praise came from Jonah in the belly of the fish.

• **Mood:**

This is yet another issue: do you need to be in a particular mood to be able to praise and worship? Again, looking at the Bible you will see that moods in which people worship differ: some feel alone and forsaken, others are glad, or sad, some were saved, and others saw no way out. The Bible presents us with a different view on praise from the one we sometimes see in our churches on Sunday mornings.

- **Content:**

What about the texts of songs of praise and worship? If we read all the praise songs in the Bible closely, an impressive picture emerges. There are indeed a number of easy singalong songs with simple lyrics, similar to songs we are swamped with these days. But most texts are much richer and more poetic, they show a clear theological structure, the subjects are varied and include tributes to God, thanks for being saved, profound Biblical thoughts, questions without an answer, deep misery, or the certainty of the faith.

- **Style:**

In some congregations it has gradually become common practice to bring the members of the congregation to ever higher levels of emotion. What is this like in the Bible? The variety of passages on worship shows that for instance the musical styles differ depending on the situation: at times the worship is exuberant, at other times it is solemn, or subdued. The hundreds of examples show only three instances in which ecstasy is mentioned: twice in the story of Saul, once when he is anointed king (with other prophets on a mountain, 1 Sam. 10: 5-13); and the other time when he is a king (1 Sam. 19:19-24), and Paul writes about someone who was caught up to third heaven (2 Cor. 12:1-4).

- **Who:**

But praise continues. When we follow the references in the Bible, we should also have a look at *who* actually does the worshipping. If we do this, the picture becomes even more varied: people, animals, deserts, mountains, trees, bushes, the heavens, the entire earth, whole nations, etc. There is no restriction on who worships and offers praise to God.

- **Situation:**

Worship can take place in private or as a group or congregation, and can be part of the service or liturgy, or not.

This interesting list may be an incentive to us to think about where, when and how we praise and worship in all circumstances. It will be the start of a lifestyle based on praise and worship.

CHAPTER 4. THE BASIS

“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4: 23-24 (Jesus talking to a woman from Samaria.)

This text is the key to understanding the principles of praise and worship.

* ‘in spirit’: Jesus tells us that a particular spiritual attitude is required. ‘In spirit’ says something about our pretensions, priorities, and attitudes, and about an open contact with God, about being on the same wavelength. ‘In spirit’ does NOT mean being vague, emotional or superspiritual.

* ‘in truth’: this shows that who you are and what you do should be sincere, true, real, honest and right. In the Bible, truth is always related to justice, righteousness, solidarity, care and compassion or love of others. In the following chapters these matters will come up again.

CHAPTER 5. CAIN & ABEL, ON SINCERITY AND INSINCERITY

“In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favour on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.” Genesis 4:3-5

On the face of it, these brothers seem to do more or less the same. They both have an honest profession. They both bring an offering of the yields of their work. But one was right and the other was wrong. A superficial analysis would contrast agriculture with breeding cattle, and assume that offerings of living animals are apparently better (compare this to the later animal offerings in the tabernacle and the temple). But this is a nonsensical argument! After all, offerings of agricultural produce were made in the tabernacle and temple as well (see for example. Lev. 2; Lev. 6:14-23; Lev. 6:7-16; Lev. 7:11-13; Lev. 8:26-28; Ex. 23:19a; Ex. 34:22, 26; Lev. 23:17, 20; Num. 15:20, 21; Num 28:26). We have to dig deeper to get to the truth, and the first indication can be found in the description of the offerings:

- Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering.
- Abel brought some of the firstborn.

This says something about their understanding and attitude. Abel realised at once that he had to give the firstborn of his ‘harvest’ to the Creator of the harvest. Abel realised that he was in all respects fully dependent on God. Cain did not bring his offering until he felt like it, as the passage tells us: *“In the course of time Cain brought (...) an offering.”* He did not bring the firstfruit as an offering, and his offering was not born of gratitude to God or the awareness of being totally dependent on God - after all, wasn’t it Cain’s own sweat that had brought the harvest in? In Cain’s thought God had been pushed into the background long ago. This difference in attitude comes to light particularly clearly in Hebr. 11:4: *“By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did.”* Why was Abel’s sacrifice better? Because it had been prompted by faith, faithful trust in God, dependence on God in faith, and the certainty of the faith. And Cain? Well, he clearly did not believe in the same manner!

The attitude of Abel is remarked on again later in the Bible, when Abel is said to be a righteous man (see Hebr. 11:4; Matt. 23:35). Luke places Abel in the category of prophets (Luke 11:50-51), which indicates that Abel had a very personal relationship with God.

Cain’s attitude to life was different: he was negligent, envious and prone to anger (Gen. 4:5b, 6), he had a weak character (Gen. 4:7, God calls Cain to master himself and his sins

and to act rightly) and he was a liar (Gen. 4:9). No wonder that Cain's offering could not please God. God would have preferred Cain to abandon his ways and conquer his weaknesses and sins. Now Abel is the true worshipper, who brings his firstborn cattle as a praise offering.

Does Cain learn anything from murdering his brother Abel? After the incident he leaves, but he does not trust God to give him the protection He has promised, so he founds his own city to live in and protect himself (Gen. 4:14-17). Cain disseminates his wrong attitude and priorities. His descendants forget God, relying entirely on their own ingenuity, and create a civilisation that in the end becomes so violent, sinful and unrighteous that God allows the Flood...

What do we learn from this story?

- * Look further than the end of your nose. Why are people so eager to lead the singing or join the praise band or the praise group? Is this really to serve God? It may all look great, but there is a thin line between sincerity and insincerity, so search your heart for your real motives.
- * It is not about form. Cain and Abel both brought God an offering. The difference was in their attitude. This means that not everyone who keeps saying 'Praise the Lord', 'Hallelujah' or other nice things, does so only for God. The New Testament tells the story of Ananias and Sapphira, who apparently brought a big offering for the early church (Acts 5:1-11), but it appeared that they only wanted to make an impression and lied about the proceeds. We have to look through appearances and pretensions and be honest about ourselves and our motives.
- * Abel is an interesting example of a true worshipper: such people know God personally, depend on God, give God all the honour, gratitude, honesty, and righteousness, and are just, prophetic etc.

CHAPTER 6. ENOCH, THE WORSHIPPER

“Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.” Genesis 5:24

This may well be one of the most powerful examples of what the life of a true worshipper looks like. Simply walking with God! But we have to place the story in its time, for when it comes to walking, we all too easily think of the occasional stroll in a beautiful park. Walking with someone in biblical times meant that you were really on the way with each other, on sunny days and in bad weather, over hills and through dales – you slept and ate in each other’s company as well, sharing joys and sorrows, and personal secrets. You see this in the three years that Jesus walked with his disciples, and it is beautifully described in the story about Jesus walking along with the men of Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). *“He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?””* (Luke 24:17)

Hebr. 11:5 tells something else about Enoch: *“By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.”* So Enoch believed in God; his faith in God was unconditional; he wanted to be as close to God as possible. He gradually became more and more interwoven with God. God’s way of thinking became his way of thinking. God’s acting became his acting. God’s character became his character. In the end he had become one with God entirely and this pleased God so much that Enoch crossed the threshold of time without noticing and walked into eternity without dying. What a wonderful example of a true worshipper!

The passage from Hebrews continues by saying *“...anyone who comes to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”* (Hebr. 11:6) We have to see this in its proper context as well. God does not reward people with Christmas presents! We may be quick to translate this into ecstatic experiences, personal wellbeing, or other religious phenomena, but that is not what Enoch’s life shows. He simply walked with God in a kind of permanent dialogue. It shows us something about attitude, mindset, and manner. So how do we begin? By starting to walk with God.

CHAPTER 7. NOAH

Noah was a true worshipper. How do we know? In Genesis 6:9, he is characterised in a few well-chosen words, “*Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time...*”. How could he be? He could because humanity around him was corrupt and full of unrighteousness and violence (Genesis 6:11-13)! Noah was like this, because “*Noah walked with God*”, which is what characterises the true worshipper. Noah spoke with God, as appears from Hebr. 11:7, which says that he had received a word from God. Clearly, he understood God. But that he was a true worshipper also transpires in what follows, “*By faith Noah (...) in holy fear built an ark to save his family*”. A remarkable thing to say, for building the ark was apparently a tangible act of his worship. This actual work of his hands saved his family and the animal kingdom.

Noah’s life as a worshipper is constantly placed in a context of righteousness. He is *heir of the righteousness* (Hebr. 11:7b); *a preacher of righteousness* (2 Peter 2:5); and *an example of the fact that you can save yourself by your righteousness*, (Ezekiel 14:14). Jesus goes as far as to tell us that the end of time will be like the times of Noah (Matt. 24:37-42), a time in which everything seems perfectly all right, but the moral foundation of society is rotten to the core and full of unrighteousness. Jesus calls us to be alert like Noah: “*Therefore keep watch*”. So: become like Noah, become a true worshipper, so that you will understand the words of God.

What we generally call praise and worship in our groups and churches is a far cry from Noah’s life as a worshipper. It is incredible how we have narrowed the notion of praise and worship down to something emotional, a personal pietistic experience of God that we pursue for an hour or so on a Sunday morning! No wonder that we feel empty-handed shortly afterwards. Compare this hour of emotion to the life of Noah, who built the ark in awe of God, as a form of worship. How long would it take you to build a kind of supertanker? At first people regard you as the village fool, later you become a tourist attraction, but you continue to build in reverence, you persevere: no vague emotions, but hard work. If you then also realise that the ark was built on land, in the middle of a woodland area without a sea in sight, you realise that Noah had to be really convinced of what he was doing. All through this time Noah kept walking with God, kept worshipping, kept trusting God, kept hammering and sawing: blisters, blood and sweat... Noah is a great example of how worship becomes tangible in years of hard work. Noah is an example in another sense as well: all the work we

do can be a form of worship: welding, building, management, music, art, or politics. Things that don't come about easily, just like the ark, but through our walking with God they turn into an ark of righteousness, a tangible vehicle for salvation.

CHAPTER 8: ABRAHAM

Much has been written about the life of Abraham, the father of the people of Israel, in the Old and New Testament. His position as a founding father is obviously very important, but all accounts of him are really about the deeper question of why God chose him of all people to be *the* founding father! This has everything to do with his attitude of true worshipper. His life, faith and actions therefore demonstrate much that is of value to us. This chapter highlights a few episodes in Abraham's life and worship.

"The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.""
(Genesis 12:1-3)

Abraham lived his life with God, as otherwise God would never have been so close to Abraham and would never have spoken to Abraham like this. His life with God surpassed everything, even the safety and security of family relations, tribal relations or the place where he lived. This does not mean that family, tribe or city no longer meant anything, but it does say something about his priorities. Something else we see in this passage is the profile of the 'true worshipper'. Abraham started out on his journey walking with God. Another interesting aspect of the passage is that God tells Abraham, '*you will be a blessing*'. This means that you may mean something to other people! We are often quick to think in terms of "*I want to be blessed.*" This is what it is not at all about. Abraham's calling is part of a larger perspective, it is about what comes after him. To us this means that it is about the example you are, and about the right attitude... so in fact not first and foremost about your own wellbeing.

Abraham leaves his city and becomes a nomad. He finally ends up in Canaan and puts up his tents near Shechem. "*The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land."* So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him." (Genesis 12:7). Shortly afterwards Abraham moves on past Bethel, where he builds another altar and calls to God (v 8). Abraham marked significant events in his life with God with such an altar. In our culture of today, building an altar no longer has any particular meaning or purpose, but marking significant events does! As a worshipper you can do so with photos, a work of

art, a composition, a shell or a stone you take with you from the place where it all happened. Abraham continues to build altars and call on God at other stops on his journey, among them Bethel (Gen. 13: 2-4) and Mamre (Gen. 13:18). Such markers, altars of remembrance, can be wonderful opportunities to focus on God, to keep calling on God and to worship Him.

Another interesting event in the life of the worshipper Abraham takes place when a famine breaks out in his promised land (Gen. 12:10). Imagine this: God promises you this land; you're exploring it from north to south and east to west; moreover, God has promised to take care of you, your family and your flocks... and then suddenly this drought, resulting in a famine! What about those blessings now? What about God's care? Abraham does *not* get into a crisis of faith, his trust in God remains intact. Also, he does not stick his head in the sand. There are believers who are not up to a confrontation with such a reality, who become blind to God and die of 'hunger'. Abraham was a 'realo' and not a 'fundi' in this matter. He knew that this was his promised land no matter what, and left for Egypt, where there was sufficient food. Once the famine was over, he returned to his promised land (Gen. 13:1-4). Abraham's realistic and healthy view on the matter is a great example to us.

Abraham is also an example in the sense that he was not perfect. We may at times look up to him as one of the giants of Biblical history, a superman and a hero of the faith... But is he? We know of two occasions on which he lied for fear of being murdered. When he went to Egypt (Gen.12:11-20), and when he stayed with the Philistines for a while (Gen. 20). Abraham's wife Sarah was so beautiful that Abraham was afraid he might be murdered, so that Sarah could be added to the king's harem, as was customary practice at the time. So he lied. Sarah was taken away by a small army, and God had to intervene to make sure Sarah could go back to Abraham. Abraham was no superhero: he was human, he had blind spots and forgot to trust God every now and then. Abraham could have gone to God in his anxiety, but he didn't, and God just let events take their course, with the result that Sarah was carried off.

Another striking aspect of Abraham's attitude is that he and his men rushed to help Sodom and Gomorrah when they were plundered by kings from the east (Gen.14: 1-17, 21-24). Abraham's cousin Lot, too, was dragged out of the city with all his possessions. Abraham's mini army defeated the enemy and brought back the entire loot. It was clear that Sodom and Gomorrah were very rich, but also full of injustice and violence. Yet the God-fearing worshipper Abraham helped unrighteous cities when they suffered even greater injustice

than they committed. We may see this as a clear encouragement to reconsider the stance we take as regards our society and culture, and whether we can make a contribution (rather than simply withdrawing from parts of society altogether).

Abraham shows himself to be an example in more situations. He is for instance a generous man.

- When his and his cousin Lot's flocks become too big a burden, he leaves the choice of land to his cousin. Lot chooses the best piece of land (the Jordan area, Gen. 13: 1-13) and Abraham does not dispute this, for God will bless him as much with the remainder.
- When Abraham returns the loot of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 14: 18-24) he does not want any of it. Moreover, he donates 10 % to the priest Melchizedek. How do we handle our success, triumphs and income? It would do the true worshipper honour to share them. We should keep in mind that this Melchizedek was in fact a stranger to Abraham. But Melchizedek very much recognised God's work in Abraham.

After having made many efforts on other people's behalf and after defeating the kings of the east, Abraham enjoys some well-earned rest. *"After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward""* (Genesis 15:1). God promises Abraham protection. Then Abraham and God start to talk (v 26). God promises him an heir. *"Abram believed the Lord, and God credited it to him as righteousness"* (Genesis 15:6). Then God and Abraham make a pact (v 7-21). This sequence of events leads to a covenant, i.e. an agreement. This also applies to a true worshipper: she or he enters into agreements that are long-term. You can depend on true worshippers and you can trust them, for they are reliable once committed. It is an attitude worth adopting, for it does happen that people make all sorts of promises as regards meetings, praise services or other activities, but don't play ball or don't turn up when something really needs to be done. Worshippers have to stand out for their faithfulness and their reliability (note the connection with faithfulness as fruit of the Holy Spirit).

Abraham is grateful for God's promise that he will have an heir who will also be carrier of God's promise that Abraham's family will grow into a multitude. But, unfortunately, it takes a while. Sarah's patience is at an end. She has by now become too old to have children, so at long last it is decided that Abraham has to father a child with her slave Hagar. This happens and Ishmail is born (you can find this gripping story in Gen. 16). Unsurprisingly, it only creates huge problems. Becoming impatient and "sorting out" God's promises in your own

way is really something to avoid. What happens then is quite remarkable: Abraham has to wait for another *thirteen years* before God speaks clearly about a son again (Gen. 16:16- 17 :1, 15-19). It won't be Ishmael who will carry out the promise, but Isaac who still has to be born! The end of the story is remarkable: Sarah doesn't believe one bit of it. How can she give birth at her age! God answers "*Is anything too hard for the Lord?*" (Genesis 18:14). What we can learn from this passage is surprise and astonishment: irrespective of the situation we find ourselves in, let's allow ourselves to be amazed and surprised by the unexpected and the hand of God that touches our existence.

Another remarkable story. God had chosen Abraham as he was a just person who kept the way of righteousness. "*For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him*" (Genesis 18:19). All this stood in stark contrast to the unrighteous practices of Sodom and Gomorrah. (Please note that these cities were eventually destroyed for their rampant social injustice, economic bad practice and violation of human rights. Not because of perversion, as is often thought. See too Jer. 23:14; Lament. 4:6; Ez. 16:49; 2 Pet. 2:6-8.) Abraham prays for these unrighteous, sinful cities so that they will be saved. This is a good idea and worth following. It happens all too often that we as Christians may be inclined to wash our hands of aspects of our culture, or find some things so difficult to accept or plain wrong that in our hearts we feel that the sooner God puts an end to it the better.

Eventually, God's promise is fulfilled. Abraham and Sarah have a child, who is called Isaac. By that time Abraham is 100 years old. Sarah's response to the event is interesting, she says, "*God has brought me laughter*" (Genesis 21:6). How true this is. Remarkable things happen in the life of a worshipper.

Abraham was a man of his time and took an active part in the world he lived in. He certainly did not flee the world. He made agreements, treaties and alliances with the people in power around him, as is demonstrated in Gen. 21:22-34, where Abraham made a pact of friendship with Abimelech, king of the Philistines. Abraham lived in the land of the Philistines for a long time as well. In other words: he simply lived his life, moving freely in the world of his day. He is a great example when it comes to participation in the local culture and against shunning all things 'worldly'. To mark this friendship pact, Abraham even planted a tree. And next to this tree he called on God.

A worshipper has to realise that he will find himself put to the test in life. This happened to Abraham as well. God asked whether he was prepared to sacrifice his only son. You find this story in Gen. 22:1-19. Child sacrifices are really the last God would ever want, although in Abraham's time this was quite common in the religions around him. In this story God demonstrates that He is a different God, and finishes with child sacrifices once and for all. In the culture of the time this pointed out a very important new direction.

When we apply this story to ourselves, we can ask ourselves the question 'what is our Isaac?' Is God always number one in our lives? In particular if we have many talents or are particularly talented in a specific area, we may ask ourselves whether the talent is in control of us or we in control of the talent. This is a personal question for each one of us. Another question is whether people are so involved in praise and worship that they lose sight of God. One thing is definitely NOT the purpose. Some pastor thought that on the basis of this story, everyone should literally hand over their Isaac to show that they really chose for God. So people handed in their car keys, cigars, and books, and artists had to give up their art... You can guess that this resulted in disaster in the congregation.

This story (Gen. 22:14) is about our motivation, our basic attitude. God provides and as Abraham has been so clear about his priorities and motivation, God promises not only that He will bless Abraham, but also that his blessing will be a blessing for all peoples. Does the same apply to you? Is your life a blessing to others?

Worshippers can at times get so 'lost' in their own world and activities, that they forget the world around them and neglect their family. Highly motivated evangelical people are at times (rightly) accused of this. This does not happen to Abraham. Gen. 22:20-24 shows that Abraham kept in regular contact with members of his family far away in Mesopotamia. The passage speaks about him being informed about weddings and children born to the family. Incidentally, his family had *very* different views on many things than he. In Joshua 24:2 it is said that the family served *other gods*, which just shows that their way of life was very different. This normal, healthy family relationship also transpires when Abraham seeks a wife (Rebecca) for his son Isaac from the remote family in Mesopotamia (Gen. 24).

Following the life of the worshipper Abraham, you can see how he deals with suffering and sadness in Gen. 23, when Sarah dies. Abraham does not stick his head in the sand, nor does he become 'superspiritual'. He is clearly deeply affected, but he embraces his sadness

and mourning, “...and Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her” (Genesis 23:2). After this period of mourning Abraham buries his wife Sarah with all rituals. Abraham was honest and open about his suffering and sadness as well. It is striking that the world around him perceived Abraham as “a prince of God” (Genesis 23:6). It shows that the life of a worshipper with everything you do and don’t do, can be a great witness.

Another episode that can inspire us in our own lives as worshippers is when a wife has to be found for Isaac. By that time Abraham was very old and unable to travel far. Gen. 24 tells the story. It is clear that Isaac’s future wife could not come from the surrounding Canaanite culture, for they worshipped Moloch, sacrificed children and engaged in temple prostitution and such like. A match with someone with those kinds of convictions could never be successful. Abraham entrusts his servant with the task of finding a wife. It teaches us to trust others to fulfil a task. This servant had gained much trust in his position as ‘Executive Manager of Abraham & Son Ltd.’ (v 2). He set out on his journey whilst Isaac stayed with Abraham. Isaac was not allowed to retrace Abraham’s life (v 6). This is something to consider as well: we are standing on the shoulders of those who went before us. We don’t have to reinvent the wheel, we can simply continue the process.

The story shows that the servant definitely took Abraham as an example, as is demonstrated by his attitude. Throughout the story he keeps calling himself ‘servant of Abraham’. He understands that it is not about him, but that he has a place in the larger plan, and he does his job and fulfils his duty with competence. He shows the perfect attitude, giving honour to whom honour was due and supporting Abraham and Isaac. This way he travelled virtually around the world to fulfil his task. It is obvious that this servant was proud to belong to the house of Abraham. He is a great person, who keeps the relationship clear, he is reliable and loyal. He could have made off with all the precious gifts, but this servant followed the example of his master and started to trust God and worship Him (v 12). We can learn a lot about teamwork from this story: maintain proper/good relationships; acknowledge the person in charge; be loyal and reliable; be proud of your group/team; trust each other’s commitment and task; persevere; bring things to a favourable conclusion; do not steal the show at the expense of someone else; follow those who supervise you with conviction, etc.

Abraham’s life continues, as is shown in Gen. 25:1 when he takes another wife after Sarah’s death. Finally, he dies at the age of 175 and his sons Ishmail and Isaac bury him in the same grave as his wife Sarah.

Let us examine how others in the Old and New Testament view the patriarch Abraham. What do they say about this model worshipper?

- Nehemiah 9:7-8:

“You are the Lord God, who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham. You found his heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites. You have kept your promise because you are righteous.” This is told to the people on a national day of penance and prayer. Faithfulness was the basis for the covenant. Faithfulness is essential to each worshipper. It means that you are faithful to God, faithful to your neighbour, faithful to your obligations, and to your promises.

- Leviticus 26:40,42:

“But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers – their treachery against me and their hostility towards me... I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.” This passage actually tells us to walk and act like Abraham, and the land will prosper as a result.

- Numbers 32:11:

“Because they have not followed me wholeheartedly, not one of the men twenty years old or more who came up out of Egypt will see the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” As the people did not follow God with all their heart, by contrast to Abraham, the people will not enter the promised land.

- When the people finally get the land, as promised to Abraham and those who will see it (see Deut. 6:10-13), they are told, *“be careful that you do not forget the Lord...”*. An interesting point! Apparently it is possible for worshippers to forget God (or their first ideal) and pursue other ideals or aims even after reaching an aim!
- Deut. 29; just before the people of Israel enter the promised land, the covenant is renewed *‘in the footsteps of Abraham’* (see verse 12).
- When Elijah on mount Carmel presents the people with a choice of whom to serve, Baal or God, Elijah starts his prayer with: *“O Lord, God of Abraham...”* (1 Kings 18:36). Here, again, Abraham is the prime example of a true worshipper.
- In 2 Chron. 20:7, King Jehoshaphat prays for help, saying:
“O our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it for ever to the descendants of Abraham your friend?” This is how Jehoshaphat, many centuries later, sees his forefather Abraham: as a friend of God. What a beautiful qualification for any worshipper, to be called friend of God!

- 2 Chron. 30:6-9; King Hezekiah brings about a moral revival. He sends letters to the entire country appealing to people to return to God, *“the God of Abraham...”* and to stop being unfaithful. Abraham, his faithfulness and God’s faithfulness to Abraham are used to strengthen his appeal..

- Psalm 47:9:

“The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham...” In this passage Abraham is linked to being a noble person, which constitutes an appeal to behave similarly.

- In Is. 51:1-3, the prophet Isaiah makes another interesting connection between behaviour and motivation, and Abraham, *“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and seek the Lord ... look to Abraham, your father”*. In other words, Abraham is set as an example for righteousness and seeking God.

- Matthew 3:9:

“And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.” Apparently, you can also hide behind great people to whose group you belong. You can act like a worshipper, join in all worship activities and yet miss the point. For if our hearts haven’t changed profoundly, we’re nothing more than monkeys doing tricks. Jesus says it very clearly in verse 8, *“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.”*

- Luke 19:1-10 tells us about the conversion of Zacheus, a kind of traitor and a thief. Jesus calls him in verse 8 ‘son of Abraham’ (Luke 19:9), meaning that Zacheus is a follower of Abraham in the sense that his conversion is real. This also happens in practice: Zachaeus starts practising righteousness and gives everything back that he had stolen from the people.

- In Acts 3:13 and 25, Peter refers to Abraham in an important speech. Through his offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed. God’s blessing works through the ages. Abraham was aware of this bigger perspective and looking at him can help us not to be too focused on being blessed ourselves and on our own wellbeing.

- Rom. 4: In this chapter, Paul gives an in-depth analysis of the background to God’s covenant with Abraham. It appears that it is not the covenant as such that has meaning. Putting things to paper, following all the rituals and carrying out everything that has been agreed has no meaning if the spiritual foundation is lacking, which is the faith (verses 3,13, and 22). This faith became Abraham’s righteousness (= salvation) by God. Paul calls everyone to follow in Abraham’s footsteps and have the same faith as him (11b, 12).

- Gal. 3:6, 7, 14 continues in this vein. Abraham's faith (and the resulting acts) became his righteousness (salvation). Everyone who believes and acts like this is a child of Abraham. *"He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit"* (Galatians 3:14).
- In Gal. 4:21-31, Paul refers to Abraham's two sons, saying that one of them was the child of a slave and one of a free woman. The children of slaves will be slaves again and have to follow orders, but, by contrast, we should be free. As a creative artist you can choose what kind of successors you want, yes-men who blindly do as you told them, or free people. You can impose your will on others, but it won't generate anything authentic. As artists you can also cooperate as free people with free will and achieve something truly creative. What kind of successors do you prefer?
- Hebr. 2:15-16 is a great promise for anyone who follows the example of Abraham *"He (Jesus) frees those who (...) were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants."* (Hebr. 2:16)
- In Hebr. 6:10-15; 11:1, 8-11,17, too, we see Abraham presented as a shining example of faith, perseverance, patience, industry and obedience to God.
- James 2:20-24; the apostle James tells us that Abraham combined faith and works. By believing *and* acting we are justified before God.

One more passage needs to be mentioned, which is the one about where Abraham lived. His family originally came from the city of Ur (capital of the Chaldees in Mesopotamia), then they settled in Haran (North Mesopotamia). The family leaves the culture of city states and adopts a nomadic lifestyle with herds and tents. *"By faith he (Abraham) made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God"* (Hebr. 11: 9,10). The passage in Hebrews explains why Abraham did not settle, although he could have built an entire city for himself. His aim was higher (see Rev. 21:1-2, 9-27 in which this city whose architect and builder is God is described). Abraham's example shows that you can lose yourself in concretising God's promises or worship. If you do, you may at some point find that little is left of your walk with God. Adventure and creativity easily disappear. Abraham chose to keep moving.

This has turned into a long chapter, but the life of Abraham, the great patriarch, has been described in such detail in the Bible that there is a lot to learn from it for each worshipper. He is the one with whom God makes His covenant. And he called upon God, praising and magnifying Him, in many places and situations.

CHAPTER 9. MELCHIZEDEK

Suddenly, in the middle of biblical history, someone by the name of Melchizedek pops up. We do not know his past history and his end (see Hebr. 7:1-3), but suddenly an enigmatic person appears who is even a priest of God Most High.

“Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram saying, ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.’ Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything” (Genesis 14:18-20).

Melchizedek was clearly a true worshipper and we still read his praise. He is referred to later, in the Psalms: *“The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘you are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek’”*, Psalm 110:4). This is repeated in Hebr. 5:6, 10 and 6:20 and Hebr. 7, where it says that Jesus is the final High Priest in the order of Melchizedek. This priest and king Melchizedek apparently had found a very sincere and proper way to worship God. He belongs to an order of priests in which Jesus is the final priest. This order was apparently important to God. Another meaning of the word order occurs in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, when he writes, *“God is not a God of disorder”* (1 Corinthians 14:33). This, too, is important. You often see praise and worship in evangelical services that is chaotic and disordered. Whether you make music, dance, paint, or make coffee, if you intend to praise God by it it has to be done orderly. Praise and worship are not a form of ‘free expression’, in which everyone just does as they please. Don’t think that will lead to something sensible!

Another point of consideration is that this Melchizedek did not belong to Abraham’s family or tribe. Melchizedek was a king of Salem, a place in the promised land, entirely surrounded by the abhorrent paganism of the Canaanites (who, among other things, sacrificed children). It is most remarkable that anyone would find and serve God in such a totally corrupt environment. For us today it means that there are people who apparently find and serve God, even in the most corrupt situations and cultures. Let us bless such people (Abraham even gave Melchizedek a tenth of everything he had recaptured when saving Lot) and let us not try to make such people leave and go with us. Melchizedeks should be left where they are. Let us just bless them as Abraham did.

CHAPTER 10. MOSES

Moses was one of the greatest leaders in world history. Not only did he achieve his goal of leading the people out of Egypt without causing civil war (in that sense he can be compared to Gandhi and Nehru in India and Mandela in South Africa); he was also the great legislator who established legislation with rights for everyone, even the poorest, that was free of corruption and personal interests. Such legislation was head and shoulders above the power of the absolute rulers with their elite by which all surrounding countries were ruled. Under Moses every 'citizen' and 'slave' had rights and obligations. Women were given rights as well, whereas they were regarded as property in the surrounding countries. Animals, possessions and nature had to be treated with care. Even foreigners had rights, and in the meetings of tribes or the people decisions were taken with a high degree of democracy. At the same time, Moses established a sound leadership structure consisting of elders of the tribes. He was a giant and a great example in his worship of God. What can we learn from him? The Bible books of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy tell the story and state all the laws and rules. Much of it is dull as dishwater. For that reason we just highlight the significant events in Moses' personal doings and dealings.

Ex. 2:11-22 tells the story of Moses' flight from Egypt. This young man appears to have an extraordinary sense of what is right. When he sees that a Hebrew (someone from his people, the people of Israel) is beaten by an Egyptian, he takes action, but he loses his head and kills the Egyptian. He makes a runner (for he will face the death penalty for this act), and ends up in the country of Midian. When he is resting from the long journey at a spring, he sees a couple of shepherd girls being treated unfairly and swings into action to help them. This yields him a home. This episode in the life of the young Moses shows that he tried to effect justice and righteousness with his own human strength. Moreover, he was not in control of his emotions, which resulted in him killing someone. So don't let your emotions get the better of you and influence your balanced judgement!

After having tended the flock of his father-in-law Jethro for many years, Moses meets God in a burning bush (Ex. 3). What is striking about it is that God speaks through something unexpected. Similarly, whatever happens, we can ask ourselves whether God may want to tell us something through this – but, to make it more complicated, this may or may not be the case. Another striking element in the story is the deference and awe with which Moses reacts to the phenomenon, *“At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at*

God.” Quite frankly, this attitude is at times missing in worshippers. If you hear how they address God in their praise service, you would think they are His childhood pals...

In Exodus 4-12 we read all the things that happened to Pharaoh in Egypt, which resulted in the people finally being allowed to leave. If you look at Moses throughout this process, you see that he grows into his part and learns to persevere and hold on to the ultimate ideal. It is not miracles and slick presentation that do the trick. If we go down that road we would get onto the slippery slope of impressing others and manipulating people. That is not what we see Moses do. He is growing – are you open to growth, in character, in your relationship with God and people? And do you stay the course, despite setbacks? Even his own people did not believe Moses at some point. Another interesting point is that Moses introduces the feast of Passover (Ex. 12). This special festival of commemoration was introduced on the evening before the exodus went ahead. People need rituals to give events a place, to remember important events and to give meaning to them. Passover is now the longest existing ritual in human history and has been celebrated every year without interruption for approximately 3500 years! What does this tell us?

- Rituals may be, and need to, be part of our praise and worship. Many of our meetings are really plain, whilst from a creative point of view it is interesting to seek forms and places for rituals, (baptism, Holy Communion, marriage, and funerals involve rituals as well);
- A ritual has to be explained, learned and kept;
- The annual return of the ritual adds its own dynamic to (re)living the event, reflection, joy, gratitude, festivity and presentation.

Moses is confronted with a number of things. The people are allowed to leave (great, now it is all about to happen, God will make His promises come true), but soon it appears that matters evolve a bit differently from what everybody expected. Moses was not supposed to lead the people to the promised land via the shortest route (Ex. 13:17-18). The short route would soon have landed them with a huge conflict with the Philistines. The people were untrained in combat and would without a doubt have fled the Philistine armies. It involved much hardship, but it was the perfect way to learn about all areas of life. The longer route went around the Philistines. Slowly the people learned to defeat ever stronger enemies and finally they reached the promised land via the back door.

The shortest route is not always the best one. Quick successes and a rapid rise to fame can spoil your entire life. Top quality art has to develop, you have to work on it. A shortcut to success often leads to laziness, zap behaviour and hedonism. Practice makes perfect. The

only way to get ahead as a worshipper, artist, dancer, visual artist, actor, author or musician is by endless practice – blood, sweat and tears. The long road eventually makes our art convincing and credible (compare Ex. 14:31).

Was Moses a worshipper? After crossing the Red Sea and the destruction of Pharaoh's armies, a mighty praise happening takes place: "Free at last, finally free", Martin Luther King would have said here. Moses composes a song and all the people sing it; you can find it in Ex. 15: 1-18. Miriam leads all the women in an explosion of dance (Ex. 15: 20,21) and sings the responses. Special events have to be celebrated, sung, danced, expressed, painted and described! Moses composed another song as well (Deut. 32), a kind of didactic poem that comprises all the experiences of forty years in the desert. He composed it at the end of his life and it is of great importance, for at the end of time, when God judges this world, all God's children will sing this song before His throne (see Rev. 15:3-4).

Another interesting aspect of Moses' life is the way in which he deals with opposition, trouble and affliction. Imagine the situation he finds himself in. God confirms Moses by signs, miracles and the extraordinary exodus – you would think that after all this the people follow Moses without whinging. But if even the slightest thing was against them, complaints poured in and at some point the people even wanted to supersede and kill Moses. This happened several times. How would you react? Moses' response was something to go by. He did not strike back or lock these people up. Moses called on God each time! (Ex. 15:25; 17:4; 32:11; Num. 11:2; 12:13; 14:5-20; 16:22; 20:6; 21:7) Even a terrible attack from the Amalekites is to be remembered (Ex. 17: 15-16) when Moses builds an altar to mark the occasion. Not only great moments, but also difficult ones may be marked, in this case with an altar (a stone or heap of stones). Other special markings we encounter further on in the text include an altar to mark the covenant of God with His people (Ex. 24); the flowering staff of Aaron (Ex. 17) and the bronze snake (Ex. 2:4-9). If you take a close look at Moses' attitudes with regard to the priestly service, everything that was done had meaning or marked some occasion or other: the lampstand, the table, the bread, the priestly garments, and the ark of the covenant. Yet the purpose was not that these objects should be venerated! When the bronze snake was later made into an object of idolatry, this memorial was destroyed (2 Kings 18:4), for everything that constituted idolatry, including this kind of symbol, had to be destroyed (Deut. 7:5-6). The matter of the bronze snake of course raises a number of questions. Things that were originally worthy and beautiful can turn into something bad. If you apply this to praise and worship, you have to say that praise and

worship can turn into idols. We can become completely hooked on the rush of adrenaline or the energy of the music. There are sweet brothers and sisters who have had experiences during praise and worship that were similar to the effects of ecstasy. Clearly, this kind of thing does not help knowing and serving God. Working yourself up to a higher emotional state will certainly not bring you closer to God. We will always have to be focused on the Giver of the gifts, not on the gifts or expressions themselves.

But there is more to Moses. You may think that he was a great leader, and he was. Yet he had a number of blind spots. One of them was that he thought (correctly) that he had been called by God, and that, consequently, he also had to be consulted in all matters and had to be the judge in every single case. Moses thought he was indispensable in all areas of government! This was a big mistake. When his father-in-law, Jethro, visits Moses (you can read the story in Ex. 18) and observes the system for a while, this outsider can only conclude that Moses' administration and legal system wear him and the people out and lead to major frustration. The whole system has to be reviewed. This story demonstrates that you should never think that you own the truth, even though you have been 'called', and never make the mistake of not seeking external advice.

The theory that everything has to be done by the members of the congregation themselves has caused much damage in many churches. In Abraham's case, there was no lack of good will, but certainly a lack of expertise. Jethro, as an external expert, advises correctly. You can read how carefully he states the criteria for establishing a structure for the administration of justice (Ex. 18:21-23). It later appears that Jethro's advice is not sufficient. Even though jurisdiction has been sorted, God intervenes (see Num. 11:16-17) and Moses has to select seventy elders who will receive God's Spirit and carry the burden of the people with Moses. In addition to the justice system, a structured system of spiritual leadership appears necessary. Clearly, there are such things as business leadership and spiritual leadership, and they do not need to be united in one person. In any event it is a good idea to obtain external advice for a while at some point. And we may be warned that if we think we are 'called' or 'anointed', we do not suddenly know everything. Even the giant worshipper Moses had to learn his limitations.

Another useful point is that if we take a hard look at the contents of many praise & worship meetings, we notice that the name of Jesus is mentioned very frequently, and that is about it. But if you honestly look at the contents, it all says very little. Yet it is often very emotional! We can learn from Moses in this respect. You won't find another worshipper in the Bible

who has thought equally deeply about the contents of the faith and who was used to convey such profound, important and concrete matters as Moses, with the ten commandments for a blessed life in Ex. 20 as the most significant.

Another lesson from Moses' life concerns other people's qualities. Moses had the vision for building a tabernacle, he had the blueprint and everything needed for the services. Did he then personally supervise the whole process? Certainly not. It was entrusted to the expert supervision of the Besalel and Oholiab (Ex. 31: 1-11). These experts supervised the entire creative process and selected yet other people who could contribute to the work (See Ex. 35:10, 25; 36:2,4). Similarly, not everybody in a congregation should do everything. Look for people with the knowledge, expertise and professional skills you need. Quite wrongly, the spiritual is sometimes set against natural gifts or studies. It appeared God's will that Moses should select people with natural skills, knowledge and expertise.

At times you wonder how it is possible that a deeply spiritual experience can turn into desires of the flesh, or how a respected spiritual or artistic leader can go terribly wrong. The spirit and the flesh appear to be right next to each other. Moses witnessed this as well, as is narrated in Ex. 32, where the dance around the golden calf ends in a mass orgy. The adrenaline generated to deliver a great spiritual or artistic performance can easily lead to a sexual release. There are innumerable examples of this in the world of the performing arts. Under Moses' leadership, a number of people behave just like that, all with terrible consequences. So be aware of this danger if you have to put up a monumental spiritual or artistic performance. You will feel 'empty' afterwards and this emptiness wants to be filled. Beware that you don't do this with the wrong things, such as excessive alcohol, food, drugs or sex. If your performance has left you under such stress that you need to wind down, do so wisely, by playing games or sports, seeking relaxation etc. Don't do things you will regret for the rest of your life.

Something Moses learned by experience was that if you let yourself go and do something wrong, you have to bear the consequences yourself. God himself had made two stone tablets and written the ten commandments on them (Ex. 31:18; 32:15-16). After receiving them from God on the mountain, Moses goes down to the valley. When he sees that in his absence the people have gone out of control, he becomes so angry that he smashes the stone tablets (Ex. 32:19, 25). Moses should never have allowed himself to be guided by his

anger, however understandable his disappointment. The consequence of his action is that he has to carve out the second set of stone tables himself (Ex. 34:1, 27).

Your first association with the word 'Moses' may be books full of ordinances, laws and rules. Yet if you look at Moses like this, you are missing out on everything he established in the area of feasts and festivals. These involved dance, music, eating and drinking, enjoying all God's gifts and thanking God for them!

At some point it seemed Moses had everything under control. All duties had been delegated to good leaders. But then a new situation arose: the promised land had to be explored. God tells Moses to send a true leader from every ancestral tribe (Num. 13:2) and Moses makes a selection. Then it all goes horribly wrong. These leaders were tribal chiefs who had risen through the ranks automatically, supported by the system. They probably functioned well within their tribe, but they were not up to the task of forming a balanced opinion in the totally new situation of exploring the promised land. God needed leaders who could take a helicopter view of a situation, assess it correctly and develop a policy to tackle this extraordinary, pioneering situation. Only two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, are up to it and argue in favour of taking possession of the promised land. The others are afraid, they only see what seems impossible, and wrongly interpret what they encounter. In the end this will set the people back forty years. Something similar applies to us in our organisations and congregations: we should not automatically appoint the obvious choice of people for tasks, but seek the right person for each situation, also for the praise and worship ministry.

Imagine you are really doing your utmost to go God's way. Then an unexpected situation presents itself and you are tempted to abuse your power. This can have serious consequences, as the story of Moses shows. At some point the people were grumbling again, despite their experience of many years during which God had always provided food and water. God then orders Moses and Aaron (Num. 20:2-13) to go to a rock and order the rock in God's name to yield water. But Moses lets his emotions get the better of him and says, "*Must we bring you water out of this rock?*" The rock yields so much water that the people and their livestock can both drink, but God tells Moses and Aaron, "*Because you did not trust in me enough to honour me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them*" (Numbers 20:12).

Instead of giving God all the honour, Moses performed a little miracle of his own, thus abusing God's providence. This is something that does not go unpunished. Moses and

Aaron will bring the people to the border of the promised land, but they themselves will not enter it. So how does this apply to us? In what ways can we abuse power these days? A few examples spring to mind: if we start to claim that we are the anointed or the one with a calling, or the chosen one and that others will therefore have to submit to our views; or that you have to do as the minister tells you under all circumstances. If you make such claims and use them to silence others you actually abuse the blessing, authority or power you received from God, just as Moses did. Just don't forget that this may have personal consequences.

A major event deserves to be marked in a special way. When the people cross the river Jordan, Moses orders them to set up large stones, coat them with plaster and write the words of the law (the ten commandments) on them (Deut. 27:1-8). This was a very special way of marking the occasion. If you as a person, or if a congregation or group comes through a watershed, it may be marked in a very special way, so that everyone concerned will speak about this blessed occasion for many years to come.

At the end of his life, Moses transfers his powers to Joshua. At times you meet people who keep saying that the Lord will provide (for example in new leadership). This sounds really pious, but it is not that simple. Moses thought ahead and made preparations. When Moses finally laid down the leadership, Joshua was appointed the new leader in the presence of all the people (Deut. 31:1-8; 34:9). Joshua wasn't just anybody: he had been trained and prepared for many years and had demonstrated good insight in every area.

We have to conclude that Moses was a great worshipper and much can be learned from his courage as well as his mistakes. So how has he gone down in history after his death?

“Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt – to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land” (Deuteronomy 34:10-11).

“Then Samuel said to the people, ‘It is the Lord who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your forefathers up out of Egypt. Now then, stand here, because I am going to confront you with evidence before the Lord as to all the righteous acts performed by the Lord for you and your fathers” (1 Sam. 12:6-7).

Samuel tells the people that Moses did not act on his own accord; and God performs righteous acts and is therefore worthy of our worship (verse 14).

*“(...) Observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go”*1 Kings 2:3).

David orders his son Solomon to “worship/serve God as Moses described”.

“May your eyes be open to your servant’s plea and to the plea of your people Israel, and may you listen to them whenever they cry out to you. For you singled them out from all the nations of the world to be your own inheritance, just as you declared through your servant Moses when you, O Sovereign Lord, brought our fathers out of Egypt”(1 Kings 8:52-53).

King Solomon worships God in this passage (see verse 54) and in his worship he acknowledges that God spoke through Moses.

“He stood and blessed the whole assembly of Israel in a loud voice, saying: ‘Praise be to the Lord, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses’” (1 Kings 8: 55-56). Then the worship turns into praise!

“Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did – with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses” (2 Kings 23:25). King Josiah is converted and this can be measured by the Law of Moses.

“But Aaron and his descendants were the ones who presented offerings on the altar of burnt offering and on the altar of incense in connection with all that was done in the Most Holy Place, making atonement for Israel, in accordance with all that Moses the servant of God had commanded” (compare 1 Chron. 6:34 with 1 1 Chron. 6:49). The duties of the priests included worship (service to God) and atonement, all this in accordance with what Moses had commanded.

“Then Jehoiada placed the oversight of the temple of the Lord in the hands of the priests, who were Levites, to whom David had made assignments in the temple, to present the burnt

offerings of the Lord as written in the Law of Moses, with rejoicing and singing, as David had ordered” (2 Chron. 23:18).

This priest organises a return-to-God movement with offerings as Moses had commanded.

Another reformation takes place under King Hezekiah (2 Chron. 30). Here, too, a number of things are arranged as commanded by *“Moses, the man of God”* (2 Chron. 30:16). The ordinances of *“Moses, the man of God”* (Ezra 3:2) are taken as a standard during the reconstruction under Ezra. Nehemiah, who was in charge of part of the reconstruction, calls Moses *“God’s servant”* (Nehemiah 1:7).

“You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron” (Psalm 77:20).

This song mentions Moses’ special leadership. It is mentioned again in Psalm 105:26.

In Psalm 106:23 the psalmist sings the praises of Moses as a leader in prayer. Moses steps in the breach for all the people! The prophet Isaiah mentions this role as well (Is. 63:10-11), and the prophet Jeremiah calls Moses a leader in prayer and a mediator (Jer. 15:1).

Micah mentions Moses’ leadership (Micah 6:4). The prophet Maleachi underlines the importance of remembering the law of Moses, and to act upon it (Mal. 4:4).

Jesus mentions the importance of living like Moses several times and often explains the true, spiritual meaning, which is: *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practised the latter, without neglecting the former”* (Matthew 23:23).

The apostle John compares the stick with a bronze snake that Moses held up and that saved the people’s lives, to the task of Jesus (John 3:14).

The significance of Moses was referred to in the speeches of the early Christians in Acts (for instance 3:22; 7:1-53; 26:22; 28:23).

The author of the letter to the Hebrews speaks highly of Moses’ faithfulness (Hebr. 3:5) and the fact that Moses did and made everything the way God ordered him (Hebr. 8:5). Paul mentions the importance of the covenant with Moses (Hebr. 9:19; 10:28) and commends

Moses' faith, his acts of faith (Hebr. 11:24-29), and the deep awe in which Moses held God (Hebr. 12:21).

At the end of time, Moses' song will be sung before the throne of God (Rev. 15:2-4). It shows Moses' special place with God. We may conclude that Moses is a tremendous role model for any true worshipper. He persevered even if everyone was against him. Imagine you can speak directly with God the way he could!

CHAPTER 11. RAHAB, A PROSTITUTE, SEES THE LIGHT

The fall of the city of Jericho as the first great act of General Joshua is a gripping story, very suitable for Sunday schools and rightly so (you can read the story in Joshua 2 and 5:13-6:27). There is an unusual passage in this episode, which is not often highlighted. Joshua starts by sending two spies to the city. The spies arrive in the house of the prostitute Rahab (an inn sometimes dubbed as a brothel in those days) and she even hides them. You then read why: *“Before the spies lay down for the night, she (Rahab) went up on the roof and said to them, “I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts sank and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death.” “Our lives for your lives!” the men assured her. “If you don’t tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the Lord gives us the land”* (Joshua 2:8-14).

This prostitute clearly was a clever woman who had drawn her conclusions and understood that the God of Israel is the true God. So she takes the step out of her pagan beliefs and culture and puts herself and all who belong to her under the protection of God. By doing so, she risked the death penalty under her ‘ancient regime’. And yet she decides to follow and believe in God. After the fall of Jericho she stays alive and continues to live as a true worshipper.

What became of her?

In Joshua 6 you read what happens at the fall of Jericho. Everyone is killed apart from Rahab and her family, who are spared. The people of Israel don’t really know what to do with Rahab and her family, so they are given a place to stay *outside* the camp (Joshua 6:23). In the New Testament Rahab the prostitute is praised for her faith and her peaceful intentions towards the spies. She is mentioned in one breath with people like Abraham and

Moses. Her actions make her righteous (Hebr.11:31 and James 2:25). As a hero of the faith she is an example of worship, despite her dubious reputation.

Why is Rahab so important? When the people moved on to conquer the promised land Rahab went with them and when they settled, Rahab ended up in the area of the tribe of Judah. She married an important person from this tribe and became the great-grandmother of David (see Mat. 1:5). Jesus is a direct descendant of her!

CHAPTER 12. FLUCTUATIONS

Many people are not consistent in their attitude of praise and worship throughout their lives. It goes up and down. But the attitude of worship should actually be a solid foundation to our lives. Unfortunately, praise and prayer at times have more to do with our mood and how we feel in particular circumstances. When our feelings start to override such a persistent attitude of worship, things start going wrong. You see it on a large scale in the lives of the people of Israel after conquering the promised land. One generation serves God and the next generation forgets Him and starts to worship gods like Baal and Astarte. Then the people get into difficulty due to external factors and they call on the true God; God sends a judge or liberator who mobilises the people in the name of the Lord and conquers the enemy. As long as the judge lives, the people serve God, but once he is dead, the people of Israel forget about God and start worshipping other gods. It's a vicious circle (see Judges 2:10-23).

If you think of God's miracles and the many times God saved the people in those forty years in the desert, and that God has acted so clearly, you might expect that people wouldn't swap the worship of the true God for idols so easily. And yet that is what happened. Apparently it is possible to let priorities gradually slip until at some point you suddenly realise that your career, income, holiday or status has become more important to you than worshipping the true God. In other words, another god has grabbed your attention. Now it would be wrong to suggest that in order to serve God truly, you have to give up your job, holiday, career and position in society. There are believers who think that that is the only way to show that you are a true believer. This is a dangerous argument. In fact it is all about your basic attitude. Jesus refers to this issue as well when he spoke about the good seed that can nevertheless be choked. You can read about this in Matt. 13:1-9 and 18-23:

“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of his life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil

is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown” (Matthew 13:18-23).

Many of us will ask themselves who they are in this parable. A sower must be mad to waste precious seed in places where it cannot bear fruit. Yet it is possible that some seed ends up in such places, where it can be choked. So don't put your head in the sand and remain alert to changing circumstances that may choke God's seed.

It is important to understand that the fluctuations of the people of Israel exist in our own lives as well, and that the lives of the generations after us will see similar fluctuations. Even though you are a true worshipper yourself, you educate your children in 'the ways of the Lord' and give them a good example, your children may still turn out differently. Someone once told me that each generation needs its own conversion, and there is much truth in this.

Yet passing on the fire of God's Spirit of praise starts with a life based on worship and prayer. As the great worshippers from the Old Testament prayed for their children and blessed them, so we may do the same.

CHAPTER 13: JABEZ

Halfway through the historical records of various family lines in Chronicles, amidst the descendants of Judah, you suddenly stumble upon the story of Jabez:

“Jabez was more honourable than his brothers. His mother had named him Jabez, saying, “I gave birth to him in pain.” Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, “Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.” And God granted his request” (1 Chron. 4:9-10).

Jabez worshipped God, that is the bottom line. But some readers have become distracted by other aspects of the story, such as esteem. Then they want esteem like God gave to Jabez, for isn't that the 'reward' for true worshippers?

In the United States and some other countries, Jabez groups have already formed. The first books on this man and his prayer have been published. Reading them, you notice that it is all very much focused on 'enlarging territory'. People want more, more health, wealth and happiness. But is this what the story is about? There are a few aspects that should make us think. The story starts with the word honourable, so with the notion of integrity. Jabez is apparently an honourable person, full of righteousness. It is plainly stated that he had more integrity than the rest of his family. In the line of descent only his mother's name is listed. His father's name remains out of the picture. This is very un-Jewish, so there seems to be something wrong here. Also, the boy was given a very unpleasant name when he was born, 'borne in pain'. Just imagine that you're playing outside and your mother calls you in from the village green for dinner, 'Borne in pain, tea's ready!' How would you feel? When he has grown up and has come to terms with everything, he asks God to bless him abundantly. In those days this became apparent by the size of your territory. The Israelites were still winning ground from the enemies of God in those days. But then Jabez continues by asking that God's hand be with him and keep him from harm, so that he'd be free from pain. What pain was he referring to? In those days it could be childlessness, children who do not follow God, war and destruction, terrible diseases striking your family, livestock or crops. Now the picture becomes a lot clearer. Don't focus on an increase in possessions, so don't ask God for this shiny Mercedes. Ask God for a steadfast character, integrity, peace in your heart and peace in your family. Peace, but most of all His blessing. These are all things we may ask in our prayers, just like Jabez. We need Jabez' attitude today. Call on God and ask Him to be with you and keep you from harm. Pray this not only for yourself, but for everyone you know, whether they believe or not. And God will be with you.

CHAPTER 14. GOOD EXAMPLES CATCH ON

There is a gem of a story in the Old Testament, a real idyll. It is the book of Ruth. The book is about a family that goes abroad to escape a famine. The sons marry abroad. Then the father and the sons die and, finally, the mother decides to return to her own country, Israel, with her daughters-in-law. She intends to return to the city where she was born, Bethlehem. At the border the mother speaks with her two daughters-in-law. She wants to send the girls back, for what awaits them is only distress and poverty. What should they do in this alien city and this alien land? One of the daughters-in-law goes back, but the other, Ruth, doesn't. The life her parents-in-law lived had made a tremendous impression on her and in the course of time she has become a true worshipper of God. This is what Ruth answers her mother-in-law: *"But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me"* (Ruth 1:16, 17).

This may sound very melodramatic, but don't think too lightly about it. Ruth makes the leap from one culture to the other. She chooses for the true God and goes with an embittered mother-in-law (that she had become embittered is no surprise given that she had lost everything). Later everything turns out for the best. Ruth marries Boaz (a very gripping and romantic story) and thus she becomes the great-grandmother of the great King David, the forefather of Jesus! An unknown foreign girl becomes a true worshipper and is given pride of place in the line of descent of Jesus (Mat. 1:5). Ruth is a shining example of honesty, commitment, sacrifice and faith!

CHAPTER 15. SAMUEL

Samuel sounds like the Hebrew for 'heard of God'. Samuel's mother gave him this name at birth with the explanation 'because I asked the Lord for him'. She had gone through hard times (you can read the moving story in 1 Sam. 1:1-28). So the choice of the name Samuel is a direct result of an act of worship. How did this little boy fare in life?

As a child Samuel is dedicated to God, which means he was dedicated to a life of worship in the service of God. When the young Samuel was brought to the temple, his mother sang a magnificent song of praise (1 Sam. 2:1-10). He had a splendid entry into the spiritual life in the temple.

What happens next to this little boy? You would think everything turns out all right, for he lives in the temple and is brought up by the High Priest of the country (1 Sam. 2:11, 21b). But then it transpires that the sons of this priest are criminals who heap sin on sin (see 1 Sam. 2:11-25). The very people who should have been an example to the young Samuel were the worst publicity ever!*¹).

And what effect does this have on Samuel? He has a very clear notion of good and evil and focuses on true worship (1 Sam. 2:26). God sees this attitude of purity and calls Samuel (1 Sam. 3) to be a prophet. As Samuel grows up, God is with him and the entire nation of Israel acknowledges it (1 Sam. 3:19-4:1). As a result, Samuel even becomes a Judge. He is the last of the judges. After him the era of the kings starts, which include Saul, David and Solomon).

As a judge, Samuel makes an annual tour of the country to administer justice (1 Sam. 7:15).

Samuel motivates the people during a battle against the Philistines (1 Sam. 7:2-11) and Israel regains its territory. He marks the victory by setting up a stone and naming it 'Ebenezer', which means 'Thus far has the Lord helped us' (1 Sam. 7:12). It was a true monument of praise.

After many years of faithful service, Samuel is deeply offended when at the end of his life the people desire a king to succeed him (1 Sam. 8). Yet he manages to get over it. He listens to God and hands the power over to Saul (1 Sam. 12:14-24). He ends his speech at the time of transfer of power with true magnanimity: *"As for me, far be it from me that I should sin*

against the Lord by failing to pray for you” (12:23). He conquered human feelings and shows true greatness when he says “And I will teach you the way that is good and right”. In other words, ‘I will continue to show what true worship is’.

Now that the power has been handed over, you’d think that Samuel would finally start enjoying his pension, for by that time he is very old. Unfortunately, it soon appears that King Saul is making wrong choices and does not follow God the way he should (1 Sam. 15:22-23). Sadly, Samuel is given orders to anoint a new King (David). What is Samuel’s attitude now? Is he gloating, now that it is clear that he was right all along? No, he shows the right attitude for a worshipper again: *‘Samuel mourned for Saul’* (1 Sam. 15:35).

What views do others, later in the Bible, hold about Samuel?

* Peter says in a speech that Samuel was the first in a series of prophets (Acts 3:24), thus recognising the significance, greatness and example of Samuel.

* In a speech Paul mentions the prophet Samuel as last in the series of judges, thus acknowledging Samuel’s important position and role.

* The letter to the Hebrews places Samuel in the ranks of great heroes of the faith.

We can learn from Samuel how to deal with big disappointments; how to stay on the right track in a so-called ‘spiritual environment’ that is in fact corrupted; how to continue if you are deeply disappointed in your spiritual expectations. This last of the Judges became one of the greatest worshippers, for he kept walking with God.

*¹) There are parents who think that, if their child just goes to church and takes part in christian activities regularly, things will turn out all right. Nothing is further from the truth. Evil can come from within. Ministers, youth leaders, elders, everyone can be mistaken, and if you make yourself completely dependent on them by placing them on a pedestal or ‘worshipping’ them, the result can be disastrous! Yet this episode inspires confidence: God will go His way no matter what. Even in such unspiritual surroundings you can, just like Samuel, keep your footing as a true worshipper!

CHAPTER 16. DAVID AND NATHAN

So much has been written about David, films and plays have been made about him – what is there to add? But there is a key to another point of view. It is the verse: *“David (...) a man after my own heart”* (Acts 13-22, 1 Sam. 13:14). What is meant by this? It means that David demonstrated the attitude of a true worshipper. David honestly wanted to worship God and follow Him in everything.

Yet erring is human and in a moment of madness he committed murder (on Uriah) in order to get his hands on Uriah’s wife Bathsheba! This blackest page in his personal history is described in 2 Sam. 11:1-12:24. When David finally realised what a dreadful thing he had done, how deeply he had fallen and what terrible sin he had committed, he sincerely confessed guilt. This, too, demonstrates the attitude of a true worshipper: being honest, sincere and authentic. David teaches us a lesson: we all too easily find ourselves in the situation that our praise is out of this world, but at the same time we are sweeping all problems under the carpet and don’t really dare to confront them. Or, worse, we pray about the problems and say that they are now ‘under the blood of Christ’, so they are now over. Of course it later transpires that that was not the case at all, but by then it is too late. Matters come to a head and a family, a congregation, an organisation explode, with all the traumas and damage that entails.

The prophet Nathan risked his neck when he broached the subject of Bathsheba to David, who was completely intoxicated at the time. Fortunately, Nathan did so anyhow. Nathan is a great worshipper, for he dared to risk his life for the truth. True worshippers can, if necessary, be whistleblowers as well, and dare to sacrifice their own comfort if they have to say what nobody wants to hear.

The moments from David’s life in which he is presented as a model worshipper in terms of giving God the glory are well known:

- * Samuel had to anoint David rather than his stronger and more handsome brothers, even though he was the youngest (1 Sam. 16:1-13): *“Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart”* (1 Sam. 16:9).
- * The young David slays the giant Goliath, saying that God will bring salvation (1 Sam. 17).
- * David avoids Saul’s attacks, putting everything in God’s hand (1 Sam. 18-19).
- * David spares Saul’s life (1 Sam. 24-26).

- * David's principle is that all parties have to share the booty or victory, including those who do the administration at home (1 Sam. 30:24, 25).
- * David's song of mourning at the death of Saul (in fact his enemy) and Jonathan (2 Sam. 1).
- * His song of joy when Jerusalem becomes the national temple and capital (2 Sam. 6:9; 1 Chron. 15).
- * David's prayer that he may collect everything needed to have this superb work of art, the temple, built by his son Solomon (2 Sam. 7:18-29).
- * David's attitude towards the treason, the palace revolution and the plotting and scheming of his son Absalom (2 Sam. 15-19).
- * David's organisation of, among other things, singing, singers, temple choirs and instruments (1 Chron. 16, 23, 25).
- * David invented and innovated instruments.
- * The many songs and songs of praise of David among the Psalms.

Praise was more to David than a mantra (a mantra is a text, saying or stanza that is constantly repeated and thus in due course acquires a hypnotising, stirring, ecstatic or manipulating effect). Many modern songs of praise are, unfortunately, a bit like mantras. They whip people up, but only to a higher emotional level, and the songs have little or no content, or they bring a congregation into a kind of ecstasy or trance. Don't think you have met God when that happens, even though it seems a 'nice' feeling.

It is a good idea to study the contents of the Psalms and all the other kinds of songs David has written (you find them in Samuel and 1 Chron.) They can be categorised as

- songs marking special events;
- songs about sadness, loss and mourning;
- songs of thanksgiving;
- songs of mourning;
- penitential songs;
- and songs for when life has been turned upside down, when God seems nowhere to be found and the author is angry; these are called the protest songs.

If you read all these songs (it is a good advice to do this once a year), you are very much encouraged to see matters in a much broader perspective, name things differently and write or try something new. And, in particular, to move away from the suffocating expectations of the average congregation if they are that every chorus has to make frequent mention of the

word 'Jesus'. So away with the clichés and the simplicity of the average elevator music of many of the 'new' evangelical songs of praise! David's songs encourage *new* creativity.

* The precise meaning of a Levitical calling/ministry is described in Volume 2 of this series *Biblical Principles*.

* A number of situations of worship can be found in the chapters 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54 and 55 of the book *Praying: 251 prayers*, published by Continental Sound/Christian Artists.

CHAPTER 17. SOLOMON: THE WISEST MAN TURNED INTO THE MOST UNWISE: HOW THINGS CAN CHANGE

Was Solomon a worshipper or just a great king, Maecenas, promotor of the arts and architect? *“Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the statutes of his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places. The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.” Solomon answered, “You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. Now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?” The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, “Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for – both riches and honour – so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life.” Then Solomon awoke – and he realised it had been a dream. He returned to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the Lord’s covenant and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then he gave a feast for all his court”* (1 Kings 3:3-15, cf. 2 Chron. 1:1-13).

Then comes the day the temple is dedicated: God’s presence is like a cloud (1 Kings 8:10-11) and at the end Solomon says a special prayer: *“When Solomon had finished all these prayers and supplications to the Lord, he rose from before the altar of the Lord, where he had been kneeling with his hands spread out towards heaven. He stood and blessed the whole assembly of Israel in a loud voice, saying: “Praise be to the Lord, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses. May the Lord our God be with us as he was with our fathers; may he never leave us nor forsake us. May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in all*

his ways and to keep the commands, decrees and regulations he gave our fathers. And may these words of mine, which I have prayed before the Lord, be near to the Lord our God day and night, that he may uphold the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel according to each day's need, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God and that there is no other. But your hearts must be fully committed to the Lord our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time” (1 Kings 8:54-61).

Beautiful worship, great intentions... but would Solomon continue on the same path as his father David? God must have known that Solomon would take a very different course, for not much later He appears to Solomon in a dream again (1 Kings 9:1-9; 2 Chron. 7:11-22). God encourages and warns Solomon: *“As for you, if you walk before me in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne over Israel for ever, as I promised David your father when I said, ‘You shall never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel’. But if you or your sons turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. Israel will then become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples. And though this temple is now imposing, all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff and say, ‘Why has the Lord done such a thing to his land and to this temple?’ People will answer, ‘Because they have forsaken the Lord their God, who brought their fathers out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshipping and serving them – that is why the Lord brought all this disaster on them”* (1 Kings 9:4-9).

Solomon's wisdom, intelligence and richness threaten to become his downfall. Now that the temple and palace, these superb works of art, are finished and a large-scale redevelopment of Jerusalem is well under way, he continues his economic expansion, the further fortification of the country and building the army, cavalry and fleet. And then his success starts to take on megalomaniac proportions. He commissions two hundred gold shields for his personal guard and another three hundred small gold shields, as well as a magnificent throne (2 Chron. 9:13-20). All this is to impress the frequent foreign state visitors and other tourists (verse 22-24). The success of this young king, a great businessman, excessively rich and by now part of the world's upper-class (he was married to the daughter of Pharaoh, she was even given her own palace), started to show. Solomon ensured that the offerings, music and temple service were organised perfectly, and it must have been a slick show in

his days. Solomon knew many proverbs and songs, but you won't find expressions of his personal worship in the Bible. The truthfulness and authenticity of David that you see in the Psalms is lacking. This business-oriented strategist grew in splendour, but his moral reputation was becoming tarnished. He had a legion of wives. His father David had had a few wives and it is a different story how each one of them had become David's wife. But it never got beyond a few. You read that Solomon loved many women, so apparently he was a passionate man, but he does not seem to develop the kind of deep relationship that his father David had with his mother Bathsheba. Eventually this becomes his downfall. As part of his political strategies Solomon married many foreign women. They brought political stability to the state, but spiritual lability to Solomon. The man who in the end had everything, went abroad to worship other gods (1 Kings 11; note that a complete chapter is devoted to cause and effect of this). He started to worship idols, and what kind of idols! The Astarte worship was centred around sex, with orgasm as the ultimate experience of the goddess, and as part of the Moloch religion gruesome things were done to children and people were sacrificed. What was it that drove Solomon at the end of his life? Had he become so bored, had he become so numbed by ever more of the same sex with different women that he started looking for stronger stimuli? We can learn from Solomon that the spirit and the flesh are very close to each other. Great achievements, for instance in the area of preaching, praise & worship and art, leave you feeling empty and this emptiness has to be filled. This can be done by strong stimuli like drugs or sex: there are real stories of a minister who visited prostitutes to combat stress after impassioned preaching; a performer who started gambling; a worship leader who seduced another girl from the youth group each month. But you should combat stress and boredom or emptiness by seeking healthy stimuli: being with your partner, playing with your children, meditating/praying/seeking to be with God like the prophets. Success such as Solomon had it is not wrong in itself. There is nothing wrong about being rich or famous, or about great artistic achievements, but it can cloud your mind and impress, manipulate and tempt others. The greater the success, the more you should be on your guard. What use is it to fall like Solomon! The price he had to pay was immense. So don't say 'That won't happen to me'. Be always aware of your own weaknesses and the idols you are most likely to fall for.

If you look at how Solomon went down in history, you will find a handful of references in the Bible. They only mention his wisdom, the pomp and circumstance of his court, and his architecture, but you will find no reference whatsoever in which his life is held up as an

example to worshippers (cf. Matt. 6:29; 12:42; Luke 11:31; 12:27; John 10:23; Acts 3:11; 5:12; 7:47).

* How special the temple building was is explained in *Creative and Christian: Biblical Principles of Creativity and Art*, Volume 1 of the series *Biblical Principles*.

CHAPTER 18. SONG OF SONGS

In the first centuries AD, elements of 'Greek thought' crept into the faith: higher things, the intellectual side of humanity, and aesthetics were contrasted to the lower, carnal and physical side of people that includes eroticism, natural urges and sexuality. Song of Songs (a festive song) challenges this notion. Love, eroticism, sexuality and romance are gifts of God as well, and can be part of your praise to God. If in your life sexuality has always been surrounded with an air of secrecy or if you feel that it is something fierce or a dark side to yourself, it may be difficult to feel the emotion of this book when you read it, or, even better, to recite it with fervour. Song of Songs is a great ode that sings the praise of the human sides of a worshipper. There is freedom in embracing and accepting your own sexuality. The original Hebrew text was retranslated into English by Prof. Seerveld, Toronto, Canada* in 1963, and this splendid translation relegates any form of allegory to the realm of fiction (there are exegeses of this text that for instance regard it as an allegory for the relationship between God and His church). It also becomes clear that parts of the text are supposed to be danced to. It is a good idea to read this song with an open mind and distance yourself from traditional interpretations for a change.

What is actually the 'plot' of Song of Songs? A beautiful girl has fallen in love with a shepherd, but is taken away to become the umpteenth wife of Solomon. Solomon declares his affection, he makes grand promises, commends the splendour of his harem, and even tells her that she is offered the opportunity to become part of the line of descent of David. But the Shulammitte remains faithful to her beloved, who is looking for her. Finally the mighty ruler has to make his exit, rejected and disappointed. The lover and the Shulammitte can go back home where they repeat their vows.

Song of Songs shows a different side to Solomon. Too many Christians want to view Solomon only as a wise man, the builder of the temple, the person who established the temple service, dedicated the temple, was immensely rich and was even visited by the Queen of Sheba. But Solomon became blasé, a tyrant, with some very nasty sides to him (see the previous chapter).

This epitome of a song of praise makes a few contrasts that are useful for us to note:

- the impressive fidelity and true love of the Shulammitte and her workman, the shepherd.

- Solomon's decadence and abuse of power; the court versus the contentment and simplicity of simple life.
- The temptations of luxury versus real life.
- Spiritual manipulation versus resolve and truth.

So don't let yourself be manipulated, carried away, or easily impressed; don't trust everyone who promises you the moon; but remain faithful to your principles and yourself. This is vital to each worshipper.

* The Greatest Song © Calvin Seerveld 1963, 1967, 1988 ISBN 0-919071-03-1, Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

CHAPTER 19. ELIJAH'S FLIGHT

“Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel send a messenger to Elijah to say, “May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.” Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day’s journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, Lord,”he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat”” (1 Kings 19:1-5).

Elijah was a true worshipper. The way in which he dared to take a spiritual, social and political stance showed courage. From his contact with God he got the strength to say publicly what was not socially acceptable or politically correct in his days. This made him many enemies, including the mighty King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. The conflict came to a head on the topic of worshipping the true God or worshipping the terrible Baal (1 Kings 16:30-33; 1 Kings 17:1; 1 Kings 18:17,18). This powerful king and queen of the northern part of Israel had all prophets of God killed off (1 Kings 18:4).

Then the situation comes to a head during the event on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18: 17-46), with the prophet versus the royal family, the state, the Baal priests employed by the state, and with the people as silent witnesses. This fascinating episode shows decisively what real worship is, who the true God is, and who the true worshippers are. The way God answers with fire and rain is a tremendous miracle.

It is clear that this situation will have required all Elijah’s energy, faith and persistence. Elijah makes a great achievement in what must have been an extremely stressful situation. But then the story takes an unexpected turn. Queen Jezebel lets Elijah know he is a dead man. She vows that she will have him killed for destroying the state religion and killing the priests. How does Elijah respond? In view of the fact that God had performed such a miracle just a few hours before when Elijah kept trusting against the odds that a miracle would happen (otherwise he would have lost his head on Mount Carmel), surely he should know that God could save him again, this time from an assassination attempt by Queen Jezebel? The odd thing is that Elijah does not even seem to think of this and just hares off (1 Kings 19: 3-4). He flees straight through Judah to Beersheba, then another full day into the desert, and then

he hides beneath a shrub. That is how scared he is. Is this the mighty miracle worker, the strong prophet, the worshipper of God, the hero Elijah? Elijah is exhausted, depressed, afraid and even wants to die. Finally an angel saves him from this situation and strengthens Elijah with food, and God has a special meeting with him on Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:5-18).

These things still happen. Everyone who makes a great achievement and has been strong, invincible and full of God's strength, can easily fall into a sort of limbo afterwards, get into a crisis or become depressed, all from exhaustion. This is a very common phenomenon in the lives of actors, musicians and performers. After the achievement people feel empty. This emptiness wants to be filled, which you can do by relaxing, playing sports, eating and drinking, and resting. If you don't do so, you may all too easily find that the emptiness is filled with excessive alcohol, drugs, or sex. Typically, the emptiness then has to be filled by strong stimuli. Either that, or the balance tips and you find yourself in a state of even more profound emptiness: the despair of depression or anxiety, which in Elijah's case resulted in a flight. If the great worshipper and prophet Elijah fell into this emotional pitfall so easily, it can happen to all of us! People are vulnerable after each achievement, so be aware of this and learn to control your reactions after an achievement. Many speakers, christian artists, worship leaders, youth leaders and elders who were not aware of this have made mistakes after major achievements. The spirit and the flesh are very near each other. Whatever you do, never hide behind the stupid excuse "the devil made me sin!" when you were just not on your guard.

It may seem as if Elijah was a scaredy-cat, but that is not what I want to emphasise. I highlight this episode as it is important to all performers today. Elijah was a great worshipper who had done many special and dramatic things to lead the people of Israel to God and get policy-makers to repent and seek to govern with righteousness. Centuries later, the apostle James writes about Elijah: *"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops"* (James 5:16-18). It is not the miracles that are central, but the righteousness. And, finally, James says that Elijah was not superhuman, but a human being like you and me!

CHAPTER 20. GEHAZI'S DOWNFALL

Reading about the life of the great prophet and worshipper Elisha, I came across the name of his helper Gehazi a few times. As Elisha had been the helper of Elijah, Gehazi was the helper of Elisha. Why had Elisha become a prophet, succeeding Elijah in his calling and ministry, but Gehazi did not become a prophet? We will have a closer look at three telling examples from Gehazi's life.

Thanks to the word of Elisha, a woman from Shunem had had a son. At some point the boy died. The woman travelled to Elisha and when she found him, she took hold of the feet of the prophet. Gehazi wanted to chase the woman away (2 Kings 4:27). He did not notice that this woman was deeply distressed. Gehazi sees to lack the ability to empathise with others and did not show an attitude of mercy, love and care. Subsequently, Gehazi is given the order to lay Elisha's staff on the face of the dead boy. He returns and reports that the boy did not wake up (2 Kings 4:31). The way in which this is described shows that he does not have faith. On another occasion Naaman is healed and Elisha does not want to accept gifts for his advice. But Gehazi runs after Naaman and under false pretences he wangles valuable gifts out of Naaman (2 Kings 5:20-23). It clearly shows his greed and envy. They have become more important to him than serving God.

Artists, worshippers, but also up and coming leaders should never be like Gehazi. On the face of it Gehazi had the wind behind him: he had the right position as a disciple and potential successor of Elisha in the service of God. But in his heart things were wrong. He did not have real life, patience, real strength, or mercy. Gehazi was only after the *status* of prophet, not after *being* a prophet. This will always be the big problem of frontrunners and followers. And yet the follower can become greater than the forerunner. If we look back to previous episodes from the Old Testament, Elisha appears to have done greater things than Elijah. But such things depend on someone's attitude and what goes on in his heart of hearts. With Gehazi this was not right, but with Elisha it was. Elisha proceeded in the same strength as Elijah (2 Kings 2:9-14), he even prayed for a double portion of Elijah's spirit and was given this. Elisha went for the essence. As a symbol, Elisha was given the cloak of Elijah. By contrast, Gehazi meets an inglorious end, disappearing from the stage with leprosy. Where are the worshippers who will pick up the cloak of the prophet and worship in true spirit and truth?

The problem of status is a problem with which every artist, speaker, leader of the music ministry, and worshipper struggles or will be faced with. There are two aspects to status: *A. Inner status.* This is the most hidden and the most difficult to be honest about. Perhaps you recognise the following examples:

- the member of the praise team, who closes his eyes during the singing, no longer interactively responding to the conductor and the congregation; who gets wrapped up in his own reality and emotions, completely losing sight of his function as part of the whole (member of the praise team, which means accompanying the congregational singing); and who explains this with the argument 'look how close I want to be/am to God!'
- the member of the congregation who is so engrossed in the worship that he/she loses all sense of reality, and then desires to experience the same or something even more intense in every service. Such people are hovering on the verge of emotional addiction. What they say is 'I was so close to God this morning' or something along these lines. This frame of mind reaches rock bottom if people start bidding against others about who had the most 'anointment' or who has been 'closest to the throne of God', or whatever pious talk they may use. Don't say that such things don't happen in your church or group. Be alert. True anointment and real contact with God bring about sincere humility.

B. Outward status. Take another close look at Gehazi: he put himself under the protection of the prophet Elisha, so he was at a top private school of prophets and a personal servant of the great Elisha. Gehazi will have attracted attention for his hard work, persistence, commitment and external signs of faith. At first sight he must have been a very nice man, otherwise his boss would have soon thrown him out. It is likely that Gehazi was prepared to make sacrifices, for prophets definitely did not belong to the financially well-off middle class. So at face value he would be the perfect successor of Elisha. Wrong! Not so! All these great character traits were not rooted in a sincere contact with God or in true servitude, but in a desire for status. All the attention from the people, he thrived on it. But when push came to shove and he had to do something right (the episode with the Shunammite woman), he demonstrated a chilling lack of insight and reacted without mercy. He made a poor show. Similarly, in the episode with Naaman (2 Kings 5) he demonstrated a complete lack of spiritual insight. He fell for the opportunity to make a quick buck; he was corrupt!

It is time to take a long, hard look at your own motives and come clean about them. Why are you active in the praise & worship ministry? Is it because it puts you in the picture? Or because you can make your personal mark? Or because you think you then won't have to do anything else for your church or congregation? Or because you think you will be closer to

God? Or because you experience stronger emotions if you are involved in this ministry? Are you addicted to the rush of adrenaline? Is it because you think it makes you more humble? Or do you think you are better at singing and playing than ‘the others’? Or are you in a kind of competition with the speaker about who is better at gripping people? Is it because it gives you a sense of ‘power’ about the meeting? I agree, this is a nasty list of considerations. In my time as a leader of artists I have encountered all of the above situations. It is very sad. It is even sadder that these kinds of thoughts start at all. You often don’t notice at first, but after a while you may become aware of such wrong motives. That is the time to take action! Sanctify and purify yourself and fight such wrong motives with a conscious act of will. This struggle will always be with you. Paul is very honest about this when he says, “*When I want to do good, evil is right there with me*” (Romans 7: 21b).

So don’t say ‘That’s not me, I’m not that way’; just be on your guard. Looking back on myself and many artistic achievements and projects that I have been involved in, I have to confess that other motives at times played a part. I am grateful for all the moments of honesty during which I discovered my more sinister motives and could turn back to God. Apparently, true worship starts by true honesty about yourself.

This passage on honest motives is not meant for investigating each other! And no worship leader or minister may ever use this chapter for a heavy personal one-to-one talking to or a manipulating group session during or after which each participant is expected to confess his or her sinful motives. The purpose is that you think it over on your own or read it with your praise group, after which everyone should draw his or her own conclusions in silence.

Finally, to be fair I have to say that motives like the ones described above can be found in everybody who gets onto a stage: dancers, actors, professional musicians, speakers and ministers. The call to honesty applies to them as well. In my early days I was a part-time co-minister for seven years; since then I have been in the pulpit and on stage many times and visited many kinds of churches, church services and conferences and heard many speakers. I can only conclude that this chapter very much applies to preachers and speakers as well.

CHAPTER 21. NEW TIMES, NEW WORSHIP

As long as the priest Jehoiada lived, the arrangements regarding burnt offerings and sacrifices of praise were all perfectly in order and the King (Joash) as well as the people served God (2 Chron. 24:14).

“After the death of Jehoiada, the officials of Judah came and paid homage to the king, and he listened to them. They abandoned the temple of the Lord, the God of their fathers, and worshipped Asherah poles and idols. Because of their guilt, God’s anger came upon Judah and Jerusalem. Although the Lord sent prophets to the people to bring them back to him, and though they testified against them, they would not listen. Then the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest. He stood before the people and said, “This is what God says: ‘Why do you disobey the Lord’s commands? You will not prosper. Because you have forsaken the Lord, he has forsaken you.’” But they plotted against him, and by order of the king they stoned him to death in the courtyard of the Lord’s temple” (2 Chron. 24:17-21).

It’s a surprising story. How is this possible? The good high priest dies. Evil leaders make use of the vacuum in spiritual leadership by suggesting another type of worship. This worship was definitely very modern and in keeping with the latest trends that the peoples around Israel had been following for a while. In addition, these worship rituals were much more interesting and exciting (sexuality played part in them) than the solemn services and sacrifices of praise in the temple of Solomon. So this was an opportunity to jump on that bandwagon. It is striking that the leaders asked the King to steer this new course. God responds by sending prophets, but nobody listens to them. Finally, the son of the late high priest Jehoiada puts the matter on edge. It turns into a big political conflict and this whistleblower is killed.

What does this story show? It shows that not all innovations are good. These new rituals were of a horrific nature. So when innovations present themselves you are obliged to ask the question: who or what is worshipped; who is actually addressed; and whose praises are sung. We have to stay critical. I once met a mighty worshipper who in fact worshipped his own ego, and I’ve seen rituals (always a means to an end) turning into a purpose in themselves. This also happened a long time ago with the bronze snake that Moses held up as a symbol and that saved the people of a plague of snakes (see Num. 21:9). Centuries later, this bronze snake had become an object of worship and it had to be destroyed (see 2 Kings 18:4).

What else does this story show? In times when there is a change of management, unwise decisions can be taken. So we should be aware of this possibility and speak up if need be. We can't expect that everyone will listen (perhaps I should say 'we can't expect anyone to listen'). Whistleblowers often end up in the pillory. But nevertheless we should not keep quiet.

Of course there are better ways to solve issues regarding leadership, the direction to take, content, and criticism. They are explained in Volume 6 in this series of *Biblical Principles*, entitled *The Church and the Public Space*.

Someone who made herself heard very cleverly and at the right time was Esther (see the Bible book Esther). By doing so, she managed to save her people!

CHAPTER 22. JOB

Job has a lot to say to worshippers. To understand this chapter as best as possible, you should read the book of Job as a whole first. Read it in the most recent translation, otherwise you might stumble over all kinds of old-fashioned words that make it more difficult to get a good insight into the book's meaning.

- The first striking observation is that the book forms a triptych. It looks like a medieval painting: the left volet (chapter 1 and 2) is short, written in prose, and it constitutes the prelude to the main body of the story. The middle panel is large, written in poetry, and describes the big conflict. It consists of chapters 3 to 42:6. The right volet (chapter 42:7-17) is short and written in prose again; it is the epilogue to the story, the blessed end. It shows that the form we give to the content of our ministry, our liturgy, meeting and presentation is important. The structure of the book of Job is no coincidence, but well-considered.

- The introduction (chapter 1 and 2) tells us that prosperity is not automatically the effect of following God's way. The reasons for adversity can be many:

- Some things happen just because they do – it's blind coincidence, being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In the middle panel Job discusses this: does God's guidance look like arbitrariness? Jesus says about this: *"Of those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish"* (Luke 13:4-5).

In other words: trouble and affliction belong to life. It doesn't mean that God has left us. Paul says so too, *"For I am convinced that (...) neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation [persecution, oppression], will be able to separate us from the love of God..."* (Romans 8:38).

- There are situations that God apparently allows to exist. The book as a whole shows that this only concerns *one* situation in someone's entire life. That also solves the difficult question that everybody asks: "Why me?"

- The devil appears to have a hand in this *one* situation. That solves the question whether all adversity is caused by the devil.

- Job remained righteous no matter what and did not use adversity as an excuse to slip up. Unfortunately it happens that believers start sinning consciously and justify themselves by saying "The devil made me do it." That is an easy way out of your own responsibility.

- In the large middle panel these fundamental questions of life are extensively dealt with. Job's best friends are really tough on him, but only after they have sat with him speechlessly and in deep mourning for a period of time. Then Job is presented with all the well-known human empty answers:
 - Eliphaz: nobody suffers innocently: it is your own fault, but discipline is followed by blessing (Job answers that he is disappointed about this answer);
 - Bildad: God punishes according to His law, so you get what you deserve (Job answers that he does not understand what has happened to him);
 - Zophar: stop the claptrap, for you say you're right, but you are completely wrong (Job answers that he does not understand how the ungodly can prosper, and wants to put it to God);
 - Eliphaz continues: Job must have turned against God in his heart, which is the reason for all the disasters that have befallen him (Job answers that this is cold comfort, and that such words don't help him; the friends only make it all worse; Job doesn't expect anything from life any more, yet he calls on God);
 - Bildad continues: Job is just playing on words to hide the truth: he does not really want to recognise God (Job answers that this hurts him very much; he insists that great injustice has been done to him and he keeps hoping on God);
 - Zophar continues: even though Job used to prosper, he is now perishing like the wicked. Zophar sees proof of Job's wickedness in his misery (Job answers that in fact the wicked often prosper, which is something he doesn't understand, so Zophar's argument does not make sense).
 - Eliphaz, for the third time: Job really has to repent of his terrible sinfulness (Job answers that he seeks God to put his situation to Him, as well as the godless behaviour of the rich).
 - Bildad, for the third time: how can anyone be right with God? Job's argument is nonsensical (Job answers: Is this supposed to be advice? It is just meaningless talk; even though Job does not understand it all, he won't be tempted to say nonsense, he'd rather speak about God's power and wisdom, which is to stay away from evil. Job has done so, so why all this misery? He is innocent).
- * This exchange of views is followed by a short fragment of prose to introduce a young man, Elihu, who has neatly waited for his turn until the old men had nothing more to say. Elihu becomes very angry with Job and the three friends (Job 32:1-6).

- Eliphaz then goes ahead and does it all over again, accusing Job that he is a blasphemer and talking through his hat, for where does he stand compared to God's greatness as demonstrated in nature?
 - * Then God puts an end to Eliphaz' arguments and shows Job His omnipotence in creation.
 - Job humbles himself before God.
 - * God continues to tell Job about His greatness as expressed in creation.
 - Job retracts his words again and does penance. He has had a real meeting with the eternal God and this has clarified everything. Note that it is the personal meeting with God that changes his life and understanding, rather than the speeches of his friends.
- In the final part of the triptych God rebukes the friends, for they were wrong and Job was right. Their arguments cut no ice and, in addition, they had not said the right things about God. To us, this is a call to prick through such pious arguments, for they wrong God. It means that if things you hoped for and expected do not materialise, if things don't go your way, if you are faced with serious adversity and disappointment, you should not spiritualise the situation, but seek to meet God and things will become clear. Finding God starts with worship, which includes humbling yourself like Job (even though you are convinced you did everything right and did not sin in any respect).
- Despite the fact that Job was right, he is not allowed to pride himself on it or seek revenge, and Job should pray for his friends; then a change will be brought about in the adversity. This is a commendable attitude. Job has found the answer to the question of what God's answer to suffering is: it was given to him in his personal meeting with God. We are not told what the answer is, it is apparently none of our business. Like Job, anyone who has been confronted with terrible suffering or great misfortune will have to work their way through well-meant but ineffective advice and arguments. We have to overcome our feeling of being right and our doubt in order to meet God anew. Job met God with a humble attitude (i.e. without imposing conditions beforehand). And God lets himself be found. For Job it results in a different kind of worship. Each person will find their own, personal answer in their meeting with God (and this answer will also be none of anyone else's business). Suffering can embitter and poison people. Meeting God in suffering changes the perspective, even if you don't get an explanation for everything. Meeting God made Job a different person, even to the extent that he could pray for his well-meaning (but totally misguided) friends. What a worshipper Job is, and what an example!

The whole story is also a lesson in how not to encourage. Beware of using the same well-meant arguments. The only thing we can do is find comfort in God by seeking and meeting Him. Leaders in the music ministry should not come out with some empty slogans in front of their group or congregation, as these may just add to people's trauma.

- Centuries later, Ezekiel is told in a prophesy that if a country has sinned and terrible disasters happen, and if Noah, Daniel and Job lived there, they would be able to save only themselves by their personal righteousness (Ezekiel 14:14, 20). It confirms that Job was right about what he said to his 'friends'.
- In James' letter in the New Testament, Job's perseverance in the face of all the adversity is mentioned again. We, as worshippers, can take this as an example. *"As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy"* (James 5:11).

CHAPTER 23. DANIEL

The lives of the prophets from the Old Testament are all interesting examples for worshippers, but Daniel's life is extra challenging, as he made an extraordinary political career. The enemy, Nebuchadnezzar, steamrolled the country and besieged the capital Jerusalem. The conquerors took the cleverest children from the royal family and the nobility to serve the victor (and to ensure that the defeated noblemen would not organise a revolt, as their children would pay for this with their lives). At the new court, in a totally different culture, these young people made long hours of study in order to assimilate and integrate into the new country, in terms of food, customs, literature, science, religion, politics, the social and cultural system etc. There was no chance to form their own little group as foreigners. These four young people, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were even given different names (Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego). Yet they managed to maintain their identity. They cleverly managed to keep their own food laws. God gave them a bright mind, they passed their exams with flying colours and entered the service of the king. This meant that they embarked on a political career in a hostile culture that also did not share the Jewish religious values. Daniel would remain in politics all his life.

Then a conflict about freedom of faith and conscience arises. A divine miracle prevents Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from burning to cinders in an enormous oven. The boys stand by their conviction. Daniel is made governor of Babylon. Once the power falls into the hands of the Persians (King Darius), Daniel even becomes the Finance Minister, for he is incorruptable. Corrupt administrators try to tackle him, but Daniel sticks to his faith. On procedural grounds they manage to sentence Daniel to the lions' den, but he comes out of it miraculously. Would you keep up your principles under such pressure? Think of the attempts at corrupting you ("Come on, just do it for once..."), and people condemning you for your principles... But Daniel keeps worshipping God and as a worshipper he remains unshaken.

So what does Daniel's attitude tell us?

- As a result of the deportation of Israel and Judah, Jewish communities, often with a kind of synagogue, shot up throughout Mesopotamia. Life was reasonably comfortable and most people did not return to Israel after the Exile to rebuild the country. Daniel does not make an attempt to seek the relative safety and security of such a community. He climbs the ladder in the society in which he lives and stands out as a good administrator. His attitude challenges

us as worshippers to take positions of responsibility in society, the economy, or the public or cultural sphere and to excel in them.

- So Daniel fully participates in the real world, even in the highest echelons. But there is another aspect to Daniel's participation, which is the quality of his work. Daniel did not deliver a second-class performance: he was top-class in every area. Eventually this yielded him the respect of everyone around him. Even after a change of power he just stayed in his post and continued to deliver quality.
- Daniel kept worshipping God every day and did so at fixed times. Such a personal system appears to work to keep you on your feet spiritually in a (different) culture.
- Daniel did not live for kicks, he did not seek new 'experiences' all the time. The miracle of the lion's den happened once and no other 'divine experiences' took place. And Daniel did not try to have more.

CHAPTER 24. EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

After the exile, the remainder of the people of Israel are allowed to return to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple and reinstate the service of God. This period of restoration is led by the priest-scribe Ezra (Ezra 7:1, 6) and the governor-administrator Nehemiah, and described in the Bible books Ezra and Nehemiah. Righteous administration and spiritual restoration go hand in hand with these two. After the exile, part of the people indeed return and rebuild the temple as the spiritual focal point of the people. When the foundations are laid, the priests, the Levites and the people gather and sing God's praise, "*He is good; his love to Israel endures for ever*" (Ezra 3:11).

The Bible says that "*Many (...) shouted for joy*" (Ezra 3:12b), but there are also people who weep loudly. Shouting for joy and weeping were heard at the same time: sadness and gladness are mixed. And raising your voice can also be part of worship!

After a while the work grinds to a halt, until King Darius orders Ezra to go with more of the people and rebuild the temple. Before the people set out, Ezra prepares for the journey: "*There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, "The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him." So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer*" (Ezra 8:21-23).

What Ezra is doing here is an interesting way of preparing for an important journey. Before embarking on a big project, it is a good idea to humble yourself before God, to fast and petition God about the things you need. Prayer helps us to focus.

Upon his arrival in Jerusalem, Ezra sees that the first group of exiles who returned some time before has intermarried with the local people and adopted all sorts of detestable practices and idolatry from the neighbouring peoples. Ezra is completely cut up about it. "*When I heard this, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled. Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel gathered round me because of this unfaithfulness of the exiles. And I sat there appalled until the evening sacrifice. Then, at the evening sacrifice, I rose from my self-abasement, with my tunic and cloak torn, and fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the Lord my God*

and prayed: "O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens" (Ezra 9:3-6).

Ezra's prayer lasts until chapter 10 and is a beautiful example of how you can ask forgiveness for other people's guilt. This attitude still is very important for every worshipper today. Ezra's humility and faithfulness have effect, for the people join him (Ezra 10:1-6).*

What follows is a large meeting of the people, in which Ezra explains the law (Neh. 8:6 and following). It starts with a special prayer of praise and is followed by a day of penance and prayer (Neh.9). The Levites say a prayer of penance (Neh. 9:6-37), which is concluded with a covenant (Neh. 9:38). It is remarkable to see how an attitude of prayer brings about a reformation of the public life and an administrative reform.

Nehemiah is a high official. He is very much affected by the report on the state of disrepair of Jerusalem, the destruction and the miserable circumstances in which the remaining Jews in Israel live. Nehemiah responds by doing penance, mourning and praying for the temple, Jerusalem and the people. This honest and sincere prayer can be found in Nehemiah 1. After this prayer he summons up the courage to discuss his concerns with the king. When the king asks him why he looks so sad, Nehemiah offers up a quick prayer (Neh. 2:4) and tells the king about Jerusalem. He is granted leave to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the city. Nehemiah knows how to motivate the people, but he also immediately meets much opposition. Nehemiah brings that to God as well: *"Hear us, O our God, for we are despised"* (Neh. 4:4). Then Nehemiah and his people are threatened. Nehemiah solves the situation and prays *"Remember me with favour, O my God, for all I have done for these people"* (Neh. 5:19). He brings to God all the lies, slander and intimidation of his opponents: *"Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who have been trying to intimidate me"* (Neh. 6:14). Nehemiah continues to restore proper administration to the country and the temple, praying *"Remember me for this, O my God, and do not blot out what I have so faithfully done for the house of my God and its services"* (Neh. 13:14). Then it appears that there are traitors among the returned priests and Levites and Nehemiah has to make a clean sweep. He prays, *"Remember them, O my God, because they defiled the priestly office and the covenant of the priesthood and of the Levites"* (Neh. 13:29). The book of Nehemiah concludes with *"Remember me with favour, O my God."*

As a governor, Nehemiah oversaw the new start of the people after the exile. He did so by the grace of God and without seeking gain for himself. This turns him into an example for everyone who is in charge of something in society. It is to be hoped that, when looking back, they will be able to pray “Remember me, O my God, for I did this like Nehemiah, without seeking gain for myself.” Do you want spiritual restoration (in your group, church, community)? Then this spiritual restoration will have a social element to it as well; good leadership and administration are a necessity, for good leadership and administration prevent us from being tossed back and forth on the waves of emotion and short-term solutions. Develop a long-term vision as a worshipper, make an effort to organise good leadership and proper administration and it will greatly support a spiritual revival!

*) It is important to note that after prayers of confession, action was taken. In the Bible, times of penance are always concluded with practical action in accordance with the will of God as it has been revealed (cf. Joshua 7:6-15, where God tells Joshua when he has made a prayer of confession, “Stand up and take action”!). For some years now, there has been a growing trend in some evangelical churches whereby the members of the congregation fall face down on the floor to humble themselves and ask for forgiveness for everything and everyone. This happens service after service. This ‘pious’ form of imposed humility paralyses all activities. Ezra concludes his period of penance and mortification at some point and starts explaining the law in practice. The danger of overly spiritual behaviour just to impress each other can easily be averted by keeping a level head, in order to know where confession ends and action should begin.

CHAPTER 25. PAUL, THE WORSHIPPER

When reading this title, some people might think, “That’s odd; when I think of Paul I mainly think of a theologian who is at times pretty difficult to comprehend.” This thought is understandable, yet Paul was a true worshipper. The central argument of this book is that praise and worship are a lifestyle, so if you take that as a starting point and you look at Paul, you can only conclude that Paul’s entire life was aimed at serving God. He devoted his life to God’s service, and tradition has it that he was killed for it as well. So Paul was a worshipper, but not of the happy-clappy kind, sitting around and singing simple mantras all day. We know that Paul took things seriously. Every single letter he writes starts and ends with a brief word of praise for God or a blessing. As a true worshipper he wishes everyone the shalom of God.

But this attitude can also work in the wrong direction, as is shown in the first part of Paul’s life. It is described in Acts 7:54-8 and 9:1-19. At that time Paul is still called Saul, but he has the same attitude of really wanting to serve God. Hence he has to find and kill false worshippers, for their lies bring confusion and will be everybody’s downfall. So he persecutes the followers of Christ.

This is one of the biggest pitfalls for any worshipper: fanaticism! Before Saul realised it, he had turned into an extremist (sounds familiar, doesn’t it?). Don’t think that Saul was an uneducated moron. On the contrary: Saul had studied for many years and knew the Jewish as well as the hellenistic culture he lived in very well (as is demonstrated by his speech in Athens later). His family was part of normal, civil society (Paul obtained Roman citizenship by birth, which meant that his parents had been ‘real’ Romans already). So Paul was not a ‘cultural dumbo’. Yet despite all his studies, knowledge, and cultural background he turned into a religious extremist, killing people who worshipped the same God in a slightly different way. If God had not grabbed him by the collar, Paul would have ended as a great-inquisitor.

Paul’s conversion is described in Acts 9:1-21. It is worth noting that his basic attitude of true commitment to and worship of God remained, but it was channelled in a completely different direction.

The rest of Acts and the letters after Acts describe the life of Saul, who is now called Paul and distances himself entirely from fanaticism and extremism. When you read Paul’s letters there is not a single verse that incites hatred or promotes violence. He has met Jesus, the man of peace and non-violence, and this is the way he now goes. Where necessary he

makes use of his rights as a Roman citizen, but he never takes the law in his own hands. He shows respect for all kinds of customs and people who think differently (you can see this for instance in his speech in Athens).

In the first part of his life his basic attitude and desire were right, but in practice they worked out as religious extremism and Paul went about terrorising the followers of Christ.

In the second part of his life, Paul knew the meaning of true worship. He could bring his attitude of worship into practice because he had met Jesus and through Him learned to understand God's intentions. As a result, it was him who was at times persecuted, thrown into prison and almost killed. But in everything he followed the essence of praise and worship, Jesus Christ, who gave himself as a ransom for others.

We can learn much from Paul and the story of his life, and can hope to adopt the same attitude. Paul is a great example of real worship, someone who shows us the way from intolerance to peace, nonviolence and respect, whilst always being clear about his faith and identity. This way he has become an inspiration for millions of people, and not only because of his theological views.

We are living in a time when religious fanaticism is growing and therefore these considerations are of great importance, also politically. Do we go about our faith like Saul or like Paul? Before we realise it, we may turn into fanatics or extremists and have blood on our hands. Nonsense? The man who threw a bomb into an abortion clinic in the US called himself an 'evangelical christian'... There are christian leaders who try to justify discrimination; some christian leaders propagate violence; and manipulation of believers is also a form of violence.

Paul shows us where true worship can bring us. He understood the depth and the richness of knowing God like no other. He followed Jesus Christ like no other. He was not stupid, but used his brains, showed cultural understanding and respect for other convictions, be it religious, political or cultural. On the other hand, he succeeded in putting forth the reality of God convincingly and powerfully in debates and in his writings.

CHAPTER 26. WORSHIP BY THE WISE AND UNWISE

The Christmas story can be found in Matthew 1:18, 2:18 and Luke 2:1-21. When Jesus was born, a variety of people came to worship him. There were wise men, astrologers from the east, who had seen the star of the child, the King of the Jews, and came to give honour to this child. These wise men were overjoyed and brought treasures consisting of gold, incense and myrrh. They knelt before this new King, who was lying in a trough. To be able to know constellations of stars or signs in the stars, you had to be well-educated and the wise men (also called magi) combined a thorough knowledge of astronomy and astrology. But from whichever point of view you look at it, their philosophy of life was entirely different from that of a believing Jew! Yet their worship is valuable in God's eyes. God even speaks to them in a dream.

On the other side of the social spectrum are the shepherds. When Jesus was born, the times when shepherds were the noble warriors of the great King David (who had been a shepherd himself) were a distant memory. In Jesus' days, shepherds were normally cheap labour, hired for the day and the first to leg it when danger threatened. There was also little difference between shepherds and highwaymen. Some shepherds saw the occasional hold-up as a nice little earner on the side... There was good reason for them to be scared out of their wits when the angels appeared! Shepherds were at the bottom of the social scale; they were even prepared to look after pigs, which was the most unclean profession from a Jewish point of view. So who cared about shepherds? Nobody!

And for this scum, these marginalised, often foreign people the angels performed their fantastic lightshow. These outcasts are the first to hear the message of God's Kingdom: "Honour to God on high, and peace to all people of good will". They then summon up the courage to go to the place where it all happened, and their meeting with Jesus changes them: when they return they praise God.

What does this tell us? It is clear that people from the entire social spectrum may go to Jesus and worship him. Dissidents, thieves, there is room for everyone at that trough in which Jesus lay. Whether you are educated or uneducated, have amassed wealth or not, it is all of no particular importance. Just think of what you can offer to Jesus. What is your myrrh, frankincense or gold? What are your treasures? They too may be a sacrifice of praise!

CHAPTER 27. WHO DO YOU WORSHIP?

After his experience at the river Jordan, Jesus is full of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1), but then, immediately afterwards, he goes into the desert where he is tempted for forty days. Will Jesus be able to see through the smart tricks and manipulation of the devil? The story can be found in Matt. 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13.

There are a few striking aspects to the story:

- The temptation follows a period of meditation, prayer and fasting. Similarly, we may expect temptation after a great spiritual achievement.
- Twice over the temptation is introduced with the words, "*If you are the Son of God...*" This is also typical of the way we are tempted today. It often starts along the lines of, "If you really are such a blessed/anointed musician, leader, choir master, artist...". This may be sufficient to warn you that some kind of manipulation is going to follow.
- After the tempting introduction, Jesus is challenged to perform a miracle (i.e. turn stones into bread). Today a typical remark would be, "If you don't do so and so, you aren't God's anointed or such a special artist or..." The point is that you never have to prove yourself this way. If you give in to such challenges and do your 'trick', you would in fact worship your gift rather than the Giver of your talents.
- At the second temptation (in the order in which Matthew notes the events), something truly impressive is asked of Jesus, followed by the remark: "If God is with you, as you claim, it will certainly happen." This second question also includes the temptation to prove God's presence, but the point is that God and His majesty or effectiveness never have to be proven. God works in His own way.
- At the third temptation, the devil drops his mask completely. In fact, he seems to speak the truth: the entire world and the power is his; it has come into his possession as a logical result of the fall of man. But this is only seemingly the truth. The dominion of the fallen world is still in God's hands. There is a greater truth behind the first, superficial truth. The question to us is: are we aware of this? What do we tell people who come to us saying, "I have the power to..." or "I can make sure that..." in situations in which we need such influence. Will we go for integrity, authenticity and real creativity, or do we fall for the power? This last temptation appeals to our deepest desires: doesn't everybody want to be recognised, understood and valued, be at the centre of attention and have influence? But that is not what it should be about: we should keep focusing on the real aim! We don't worship our position or status, but God.

The order of the temptations in Matthew shows something else that is highly relevant to us today. It has to do with your personal development in the course of the years. What are you faced with during your career?

* First of all there is the matter of providing the daily bread. Will we sell our souls to earn a living (for instance by doing a few paltry tricks; by going commercial; or by sacrificing authenticity for cheap effect)? Or do we go for deeper, more authentic artistic aims?

* Then there is the matter of your artistic and religious calling, your anointment. Will you prove it by taking risks in the name of God?

* And finally there is the question of success, influence and recognition. You can achieve those by agreeing with everybody, sacrificing authenticity, compromising yourself and going for the easy successes, but it shows more character, commitment and authenticity if you stick to your first calling. However, not everyone will be too pleased with you if you do that. Every creative person who opts for a creative career has to contemplate these matters, for there will be a day when you will be faced with these questions.

Other believers and worshippers will also encounter these temptations in some form or another, be it at work or in the church.

CHAPTER 28. WOMEN

I come from a background where men were perceived as the 'anointed of the Lord'. Not that women were second-rate beings, but there was a clear difference. At the start of my marriage I hit upon this issue and after intensive Bible research I have had to completely revise my ideas. Women are called to worship and praise God with their talents and their lives just like men. Also the question whether women can have ministries can only be answered in the affirmative. There have been female political leaders in the Bible, women were prophets, ministers, etc. (Volume 4 of this series, *The Message*, contains a complete overview). The final conclusion can only be that God created man and woman, equal in abilities and value, but different in gender.

In the context of this study of praise and worship it is interesting to shed light on the role of women in the Old and New Testament.

- We know what happened when the people of Israel passed through the Red Sea under Moses' leadership. After crossing the sea, there is a tremendous feast of praise and thanksgiving, during which Miriam leads in singing and dance (Ex. 15).
- One of the Judges was the prophetess Deborah. She heads the resistance against a hostile king and when the victory is won, she sings a very expressive song of praise (Judges 4).
- The book of Esther tells how this beautiful Jewish girl becomes one of the wives in the harem of the king. Thanks to her clever tactics she manages to prevent the destruction of her entire people. Such is the importance of these events that a feast of praise and gratitude, the Purim feast, was established to celebrate it.
- Song of Songs sings the praise of the resolve of a young woman and the purity of her love for the man she resolutely chooses even over a king.
- In the gospel of Luke you read that before Mary gave birth to the Son of God, Jesus, she glorified and worshipped God with a beautiful song (Luke 1:46-54);
- The followers of Jesus did not just consist of the twelve disciples. There was a whole crowd of women who travelled with Jesus and served him too (see for instance Mark 15:41; Luke 8:1-3);
- At the crucifixion, the disciples leg it for fear, but the women stay (see for instance Mat. 27:55; Mark 15:40; Luke 23:27, 49, 55; Acts 1:14). They discover the empty grave (Luke 24:1-12, John 20:1-10) and it is a woman, Mary, who is the first to meet Jesus after his resurrection (John 20:10-18);

• During Jesus' three-year ministry, all kinds of remarkable things take place that turn the public opinion, morality, ethics and cultural ideas of his time upside down. Jesus restores women's dignity and opposes the lower position and abuse of women. He also exposes the double standards and hypocritical morals of men. If you just place the events that have been passed on to us in the religious, cultural, social and political context of two thousand years ago, it is clear that Jesus was a loving revolutionary who sought God's change in male-female relationships as well:

- * Jesus immediately sets out to heal Jairus' dying daughter (Matt. 9:18-26, Mark 5:21-43), although girls were not considered particularly valuable.
- * Jesus helps the Canaanite woman (helping a woman, and even a foreigner, would normally be out of the question) (Mat. 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30).
- * Jesus tackles men's attitudes to marriage (Mat. 19:1-8; Mat. 5:28).
- * Jesus allows himself to be anointed by a woman (Matt. 26:6-16).
- * Jesus values the widow's mite (Mark 12:41-44)
- * Jesus treats a Samaritan woman with great respect (John 4:1-42). A Samaritan, and a woman at that, morally dodgy to make it worse, of the wrong faith, and worshipping in the wrong location: she would really be the last person you would wish to be associated with.
- * Jesus does not condemn a woman who has committed adultery, but he restores her and protects her against the double standards and falsehood of 'upstanding' men (John 8:1-11).

Every now and then you hear that Christians oppress women or don't treat them equally to men. If so (unfortunately), this is done on the basis of private conviction or by abusing Bible passages. If you follow Jesus, your life will be a praise offering whether you are a woman or a man. Women and men are equal in the eyes of God, both are gifted with talents that may be developed. The last thing that should happen is for naive believers to abuse the faith and prevent a fellow human being from living out a calling or gift.

CHAPTER 29. THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

“And God spoke all these words: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God”” (Exodus 20:1-5a).

This commandment has at times been used to demonstrate that plastic arts are wrong (whereas it is clear that God likes the arts). But this commandment is not about art, but about objects of worship. It implicitly raises the pertinent question: What do you worship? What are your gods? What are you focused on? What is actually number one in your life?

- Is it possessions?
- Is it luxury?
- Is it your desires for which you sacrifice everything?
- Is it your pleasure?
- Is it greed?
- Is it money?
- Is it power?

Who or what is your God? Who do you worship?

- Are you your own god?
- Is your talent, knowledge, or gift your god?
- Is your arrogance or self-interest your god?

What is your god? What do you worship?

These questions can be confronting and embarrassing, for they are linked to your personal identity, the reason for your existence, the meaning of life, the meaning of your own life, or your relationship to others.

Who is your God and why do you worship?

- There are people who are just very afraid of God and therefore stay on the straight and narrow.
- There are people who believe in God in order to be saved, and then spend the rest of their lives comfortably sitting in a pew, doing nothing.
- There are people who worship God because they want more blessings, either more health, wealth or possessions, or more spiritual experiences.

Who is your God? Who do you worship? Why do you worship?

CHAPTER 30. FINAL ACT

John, the last living apostle, is in a prisoners' camp on the island of Patmos. There he sees a vision, a revelation about the end of time. What will it look like? Will it be like popular belief has it, that we will drift around on clouds for all eternity, clutching little harps and singing spiritual songs? This image couldn't be further from the truth.

John describes the great throne of God (Rev. 4); twenty-four elders and four animals worship God and give glory, honour and thanks to Him (Rev. 4, Rev. 5). There is also a crowd of angels praising God, and a vast number of people who worship God (Rev. 7:9-17). A sequence of events takes place, alternated with songs of praise (e.g. Rev. 11:15-19; Rev. 15:1-4; Rev. 19:1-9). And the animals, crowds of angels, the twenty-four elders and the crowds of people take part in the praise.

John's final vision is that of a new heaven and a new earth, with a new Jerusalem. This city is a gigantic work of art, but it is empty. Then the rulers, leaders and nations (Rev. 21:24, 26) will bring all their glory and honour into this city, filling it with the praise offering of all people. This praise offering may consist of art, music, stories, everything creative, poetry, folk art, mainstream art, children's drawings, inventions, song, dance, books and collections, i.e. everything that deserves praise and is valuable. And we may enjoy it for ever.

What a great prospect! There will be a new world, which will be a sacrifice of praise. There will be a new heaven that is one great song of praise. There will be a sparkling world capital, the new Jerusalem, a breathtakingly beautiful work of art, which will be one big sacrifice of praise. And this city will be filled with everything from the history of humanity, all for the glory of the eternal God. Everything has its place in eternity, and so do we, as a living praise offering. What a marvellous prospect!

CHAPTER 31. FOLLOW IN HIS FOOTSTEPS, BUT DON'T BE A YES-MAN

In the early 15th century, Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471), a Dutchman and member of a fraternity, wrote the book *The Imitation of Christ (De Imitatione Christi)*. It became an absolute bestseller. After the Bible this book has been translated into most languages and sold most copies in the world.¹⁾

The book is part of a tradition of imitations. In the Middle Ages, people were called to imitate remarkable, mostly deceased, committed Christians and at some point the stories about such people's lives became a literary genre (hagiography).

Today, the call to imitation can be heard again in some evangelical circles. The disciples followed Jesus, and Paul had fellow travellers (although that was not always a success, see Acts 15:35-41). For the rest, there are texts here and there in the Bible in which good leadership is praised. Some leaders today wrench all these from their context, and then tell people to obey their leaders, which in practice means that they have to keep their mouth shut. Other leaders puff themselves up even more and demand virtually absolute obedience, saying, "Don't touch the Lord's anointed". This can seriously affect many of their 'followers'. Is that the kind of imitation the Bible refers to?

Fortunately, there is a chapter in the Bible that clarifies the principles. Hebr. 11 lists a number of worshippers who are set as an example to us. If you read what is said about them, it soon transpires that the concept of imitation works rather differently from what is described above. These people are mentioned because they proved themselves an example of faith on the basis of their deeds, not by being the most vocal ones or by their intellectual tours de force. Their faith shone through in their acts and that commands respect. Only this kind of people should be taken as an example! Such people win authority by their commitment and the quality of what they do. This is food for thought for each leader today.

Just read the whole chapter of Hebr. 11. It is quite a list, and each item starts with, "By faith so and so did...". Their faith gave these people the strength and confidence to bring their challenge to a good end. It was definitely not easy! Those who tell others to listen to them or who want to command docility should just think over **why** these 'heroes of the faith' are worth being imitated.

“And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawn in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and ill-treated – the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground” (Hebr. 11:32-38).

This passage shows at once how we should deal with the issue of imitation. Each one of us has to run their own course, meet their own challenge (which lies ahead) and remain focused on Jesus.

To conclude, each person should answer the following questions to him/herself:

- **Who** do **you** follow, and why? Does this person’s profile meet that of people in Hebr. 11? If not, why would you follow this person?
- **Who** follows **you**? Why? Do you demand obedience or does your life reflect the principles of Hebr. 11? If that is the case, you don’t need to demand anything – you will have earned respect.

The list of worshippers from Hebr. 11 is not finished yet. We may add among others the disciples, Paul, the church fathers, missionaries like Willibrord, Boniface, Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila, Bernard of Clairvaux, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and Peter Valdes. Could you be on that list? Everyone who does what Jesus says, *“Love God above everything and love your neighbour as yourself”*, may be added to this list. James calls it, *“Show me your faith by your works”*. So demonstrate your faith in what you do! And be honest to yourself; you may feel that you should take a radical stance for Jesus, but that does not mean that you can make blunt remarks to people, wrenching Bible texts out of their context (“If you don’t believe in Jesus, you will go to hell.”). If you do that, you actually commit a sin of the tongue and you’d better show some acts of mercy, love of your neighbour, and solidarity first!

^{1*}) Other titles from the top ten of books that have sold most copies of all time include *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx (but this is going down on the list) and the Koran.

CHAPTER 32. XTREME

In the last few years there is a growing trend in our meetings and youth meetings to call people up to be 'radical for Jesus'. Praise services are at times riddled with such slogans. If you probe a bit deeper, it soon transpires that the apparent purpose is to bombard colleagues, visitors, fellow train passengers and friends with Bible verses, whether appropriate or not. But is that right? Is this the thing to do to be a true worshipper?

The person who has thought most about everything, the wisest in the Bible, the one who had been given wisdom and knowledge by God, can be found in the Old Testament: it is Ecclesiast (Solomon). When you read this book for the first time, you may think 'This is neither here nor there. How did that ever make it into the Bible'. Yet the more you read Ecclesiastes, the more radical it becomes in advocating a fine balance in everything, work and relaxation, effort and enjoyment, possession and poverty, and wisdom and foolishness. The deep wisdom of Ecclesiastes teaches that there is a time for everything:

"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace" (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8).

This is perhaps one of the biggest voyages of discovery in the entire life of worshippers, that the ways in which they praise God apparently change along with changing situations or the phase in life in which each individual is. Ecclesiast tells us in many places throughout the book that it is a gift and a blessing from God to be able to enjoy what you have and that you should not be envious. This book also appears to take a very radical stance against extremist and fundamentalist behaviour: *"Do not be over-righteous, neither be overwise – why destroy yourself? Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool – why die before your time?"* (Ecclesiastes 7:16-17, 20).

This is a very wise advice to quibblers and the ultra-orthodox, and it helps us to put what we do in our praise in the right perspective. It also calls us not to give room to fanaticism, fundamentalism and a legalistic attitude in our lives as worshippers.

CHAPTER 33. AN ATTITUDE OF BLESSING

It is a striking fact that many worshippers tend to beseech heaven with their personal requests. Of course, 1 Tim. 2:1 tells us to bring to God *“requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving”*. But much of what we call worship is only too often directed at our own wellbeing only. We glorify God in our praise offering, but just think how often we do so in relation to what He did *for me!*

Yet God is so great and wonderful! And this does not depend on us: His greatness is of all times and is therefore not proven by what He does or does not do for *me*.

It is therefore wise and sensible to think about your position in this matter. Do you praise God because He is God? Or do you praise him because you expect Christmas presents? Do you worship God out of self-interest (e.g. to get salvation) or do you worship Him because He is the Eternal, the Creator and an awesome and great God?

If you display the right attitude, you will find that this has a great impact on others! For instead of being focused on being blessed yourself, you will go for the blessing of others. Aaron and his sons were called to be priests. It was not their task to ask for blessings for themselves, but to be a blessing to others and that way literally to bless the people: *“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: ‘The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.’” So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them’”* (Numbers 6:22-27). If you do that, others will be truly blessed and you will be blessed with them (cf. Gen.12:2-3; Luke 6:28; Rom.12:4; 1 Cor. 4:12; 1 Petr. 3:9).

Part of our praise has to be spent on blessing others. The right attitude for a worshipper is therefore to be focused on God and the other, so in fact NOT on his or her own wellbeing.

CHAPTER 34. PRAISE ONLY WORKS BY JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

“You turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground” (Amos 5:7).

“You hate the one who reproves in court and despise him who tells the truth. You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. For I know how many are your offences and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts” (Amos 5:10-12).

“Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph” (Amos 5:14-15).

“Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light” (Amos 5:18).

“I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a neverfailing stream!” (Amos 5:21-24).

That is quite something! And it was such a great spectacle! A temple full of commitment, songs of praise to honour God, and all kinds of offerings – it looked fantastic! But God does not want anything of it. He despises it, for the people who bring these sacrifices of praise are guilty of glaring injustice. The key to God’s heart is in *doing* justice and righteousness. If that is your attitude, then you may praise and worship God.

“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

“This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other’” (Zechariah 7:9-10).

“These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgement in your courts; do not plot evil against your neighbour, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this – declares the Lord” (Zechariah 8:16-17).

“He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and

the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years” (Malachi 3:3-4).

These are all very serious admonitions, aimed at exhorting us to pursue a life of justice and righteousness. It is unfortunate that such social action is at times forgotten.*)

Righeousness has everything to do with truth:

“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24).

This worshipping in the spirit is something that most are quite familiar with. The friction starts with the truth! Pilate had asked Jesus, “What is truth?” But Jesus answered, “This is why I came into this world...” He came to show the truth and act upon the truth. This is quite something else than taking Bible texts out of their context and hurling them into the praise service, even if that is done with the best of intentions. True worship leads our life onto the path of acting upon the truth. And this action consists of acts of social justice.

Amos said, *“Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord!”* Why? Well, Jesus tells us precisely what will happen on that day:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’ Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you give me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ They also will answer,

‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life” (Matthew 25:31-46).

This is not one of the most popular subjects for sermons. After all, we prefer to be pampered in the Sunday service. We like to leave feeling good. It is interesting to see what Jesus tells us in this firm passage. Our nice feelings are of no use to him. He just looks at our deeds! *“Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).* It’s not a matter of saying or singing something, but of acting upon it! Note that in verse 22 spiritual phenomena are mentioned that we find really important: prophesy, driving out demons and doing miracles. Yet that is clearly not what matters most, for in verse 23 Jesus says, *“I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”* Apparently, these highly spiritual people did not pursue justice and righteousness in the lives. True worshippers worship in spirit *and* in truth, and this becomes visible in our deeds. If we do everything that is said in Matthew 25, we live out the right, practical christianity. Then we may also worship and praise God and God will hear us. He will be glad with this kind of worship. Why not suit the action to the word now?

A real revival is based on practical christianity, humility and prayer. This is the basic structure on which the building of praise and worship springs up!

This way praise will turn into a lifestyle of worship, a lifestyle marked by **doing** justice, **doing** righteousness, **doing** truth, **doing** mercy, **doing** the love of your neighbour and **doing** the fruit of the Spirit!

That’s a radical life. The very thought of this kind of radicalism can give many people a fright. But that is not necessary. Just think of what is said in the Bible on occasions when a human being meets God or someone sent by God, “Do not be afraid!” Nothing should keep you from going this way of true discipleship! Jesus will go with you and will be pleased with your new life of praise.

*) The theme of Biblical righteousness and what it means is discussed in Volume 4 of this series, *The Message*.

CHAPTER 35. ART FIRST

It is sad that over the centuries ‘the word’ has become overvalued in the Calvinist tradition. Calvin himself thought rather differently about it: he believed in the great value of music, communal singing, modern compositions and even dance (albeit in private only). This conviction did not just appear out of the blue. He knew a number of examples from Scripture in which God had worked in a special way via the arts.

The best known example is the famous battle under King Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 20:1-26), where the singers went ahead of the army, singing God’s praise. The enemy tribes then engaged in battle *with each other*, and God’s people won the victory without a fight.

But there are more examples. In 2 Chron. 13:10-14, you read about the threat of war between King Abijah of Judah and Jeroboam, a son of an official of Solomon. Abijah says that fighting is of no use to the enemy, for, *“God is with us; he is our leader. His priests with their trumpets will sound the battle cry against you... do not fight against the Lord, the God of your fathers, for you will not succeed.”* Here, too, there is a clear connection between music and the presence of God at the front. Another occasion is when the people return to God during the rule of King Asa. They do so in the temple, *“They took an oath to the Lord with loud acclamation, with shouting and with trumpets and horns”* (2 Chron. 15:14). God goes ahead of the people, in combination with music.

The importance of art in the Bible is also demonstrated in the accounts about King Saul. He suffered from bouts of rage and when David played the harp for him he would find rest (1 Sam. 16:23). It shows how art can have a positive effect on someone’s mental state. These days there are various therapies that make use of art forms. How much better can art work when it is put in God’s service and His Spirit uses that particular form of art! The story of the prophet Elisha demonstrates this. At some point he is spiritually ‘dry’ when the King needs a word of the Lord. Elisha then sends for a musician. The music puts the prophet in the right frame of mind to receive the word of God (2 Kings 3:15). This aspect is also strongly present when David sets apart some people for the ministry of prophesying accompanied by harps, lyres and cymbals (singers and musicians, see 1 Chron. 25:1-3). You read that they prophesied by means of songs of praise and thanksgiving (accompanied by instruments).

And think about the effect of the temple: architecture, visual arts, tapestries and garments, fragrances and music, all had the same purpose of bringing people into contact with God and helping them to lead a life of worship and praise.

God speaks and works through every form of art, and art brings us into contact with Him, so that our lives can be one big ode to God!

CHAPTER 36. PROPHECY

Recently a new buzzword has popped up in a number of places: praise has to be 'prophetic'. And so the worship services get even wilder and more emotional in those places, with people throwing in slogans and claims that start with: "Thus speaks the Lord". I would be the last to deny that God still speaks through people or situations, but the way I view it, this phenomenon is beginning to look like the spectacle put on by the Baal priests on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:20-46) – just contrast that with the calm of the prophet Elijah.

If we are really seeking prophetic praise, we should first look at the lives of the prophets of the Old Testament and read Isaiah to Malachi! Just try to read these books one after another in quick succession for a change and complete the list below with examples:

FORM:

- there are prophesies in the form of poetry or songs;
- there are prophesies in the form of acts, street theatre, happenings;
- there are speeches and sermons;
- there are written statements;
- etcetera.

CONTENT:

- there are encouragements;
- there are serious warnings;
- there are judgements;
- there are laments;
- there are charges;
- there are words about the past, present and future;
- etcetera.

The above presents quite a different picture from spontaneous, emotion-driven outbursts preceded by the invocation "Thus speaks the Lord...". When you study the prophets in the Bible in more depth, the very last thing you would say about the content of their prophesies is that these prophets were just shouting a few slogans at a gathering. What we see in print now was noted a long time ago with great care and consideration. And rightly so, for if the prophesy did not prove correct, the prophet could be killed (Deut 18:20, compare Deut. 13).

Nobody may or can speak in God's name lightly. Trying to do so amounts to downright manipulation of people, as Satan did in paradise: "Didn't God say that...". So would you dare to set your life on your prophesy? That is how serious we should take it.

In the New Testament this problem of manipulation is fully recognised. Paul comes to the conclusion, "*So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind*" (1 Corinthians 14:15).

This means that

- there is singing in or with the spirit;
- there is singing with your mind;
- there is praying in the spirit;
- there is praying with the mind.

These matters must have got out of hand in Paul's days. Paul puts an end to the resulting chaos by bringing order in the congregation (1 Cor. 14:26-40). He tells the Corinthians that there should be two or three prophecies at the most and that the others should weigh carefully what is said. This weighing afterwards is necessary to maintain clarity and steer clear of all kinds of personal emotions, convictions or high horses.

Acceptance:

You can't say that many prophecies were received with thanks. The problem was that most prophets acted as whistleblowers, and whistleblowers often come to a sticky end. You see this happening to the twelve apostles of Jesus. According to tradition and the church fathers, they all died an unnatural death, apart from John, but he was exiled and died in a penal colony on the island of Patmos.

- Isaiah was executed (according to tradition);
- Jeremiah almost died in prison (even locked up in a pit) and was abducted to Egypt against his will;
- Ezekiel was abducted to Babylon and lived in exile;
- Daniel was carried off as a teenager and lived in exile; when God revealed the future to him and he told the King, his honesty almost cost him his life.
- Hosea was the object of ridicule and contempt, for he trusted a wife whose children did not all appear to be Hosea's;
- Amos was thrown out of the country by the 'spiritual' leaders;
- Jonah almost lost his life, for he did not feel like following God's calling;
- Nehemiah lived under permanent threat from various sides.

What does this chapter say about the present practice of praise and worship? There are examples we can learn from. If prophetic elements appear in our praise and worship, they can never be simple, superficial commonplaces that make us feel good. Apart from encouraging us, these prophecies will teach or exhort us. It is good to beware of one-sidedness or the feel-good factor.

In fact, prophecies in the Bible virtually always come with conditions that you have to meet in order for the good to take place. These days you sometimes hear the most beautiful prophecies that don't mention conditions at all. Perseverance, testing, commitment and conversion are elements that are inextricably bound up with fulfilling the prophecies. If people are simply promised the moon, it is time to be alert.

The New Testament clearly states that prophecies have to be weighed to see whether they come from God. These days, many prophecies are spoken in backrooms and during conferences where no objective weighing takes place. For this reason prophecies should be made first of all within the congregation, where they are weighed openly, in line with the instructions given to the first congregations (see for instance 1 Cor. 14:29).

CHAPTER 37. CREATIVE DIVERSITY

In the previous chapters we have had ample opportunity to see the influence of the lives of the worshippers on their praise. As many people immediately think of one particular type of music when we talk about praise & worship, it is a good idea to look at other types of art in this chapter as well.

According to 1 Pet. 2:9 we have been called to declare the praises of God, or, in another translation, proclaim the mighty acts of God... How do you do that?

Obviously, you can do this with **music**. Great examples are the Psalms and the marvellous songs of praise with choirs, cantors and orchestras as these were organised by David and Solomon. A full description of this Levitical music ministry and what we are called to do today can be found in the book: *A Music Ministry*¹).

You can glorify God and proclaim His mighty acts, i.e. declare his praises, by means of **speech (preaching)**. Peter and Paul are the main examples of this method. Their preaching got people going ! But there are more great speakers from the pulpit, including the Dutch Friar Minor Father Brugman (who was such a gifted speaker that he is the man behind the Dutch expression 'talking like Brugman'); Luther; St. Francis of Assisi; or from modern times Martin Luther King and Billy Graham.

You can capture God's greatness in **poetry**. Just think about the great poems of Solomon (Song of Songs, Proverbs), or think about 1 Cor. 13.

You can glorify God by **'storytelling'**. This art form encompasses a bit more than just telling some stories. Storytelling was and is the greatest form of art in the Middle East. In Jesus' time such stories were called 'parables'. Jesus used this art form more or less always to communicate with people (cf. Mark 4:33-34). In fact Jesus rarely preached to the people. He used to explain the parables in greater detail to his disciples. Such a story has a hidden meaning. The villain suddenly appears the hero. Sometimes the story forces the audience to revise their ideas. The aim of many of these stories is to bring about a catharsis or purification, inner cleansing, and insight in a higher plan, i.e. that of God. We will discuss this in more detail in chapter 40.

You can glorify God by your **leadership**, which includes the laws and regulations you impose, and in good administration. This has been demonstrated by people like Moses and Daniel. You can read more on good leadership in the book *Leadership*²).

You can glorify God in **dance**. A number of aspects of dance are discussed in Chapter 38 and 39 of this book; also see the booklet *Pas-de-Deux*³).

You can glorify God through **drama**, see Chapter 40, and by **visual art, architecture** and such like. Great examples include the tabernacle (made under the rule of Moses) and the temple (built under the rule of King Solomon). How all this was done is described in the book *Creative and Christian: Biblical Principles of Creativity and Art*⁴). This book also lays the foundation for all forms of creativity and expression.

You can glorify God in **clothing**. Just think about the robes of the priests and Levites, and the decor of the tabernacle and the temple. So fashion, too, has a splendid task.

You can glorify God by being active in **society**. James rightly says, “*Show me your faith by your works.*” (James 1:27; 2:14-26; 3:13). How you can do this for people in society is extensively discussed in the book *The Congregation and the Public Space*⁵).

Obviously, you can glorify God in every situation and with every gift you have. These include natural and spiritual gifts. **Natural gifts** are for example parenting, artistic skills, honesty in business, skilful craftsmanship/technology, honesty in jurisdiction, corruption-free politics, making coffee, creating a real home for your children, love and commitment to your partner.

Spiritual gifts (see for instance Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12) are partly for your personal growth in the faith, but mainly serve the development and encouragement of the community, the congregation. “*Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing*”. (1 Thes. 5:11, cf. 1 Cor. 14:12; Rom. 14:19).

Yet all these creative forms of expression only work if we think deeply about the **content** of what we communicate or express. The issue of content is extensively discussed in the book *The Message*⁶).

All these creative expressions, forms and methods make it possible to proclaim the “*multicoloured wisdom of God*”. There is not just one colour or form, but God works through all colours, methods and forms of expression. God works differently through every individual. What richness and variety are offered to us as worshippers!

- 1) *Music & Ministry*, Volume 2 of the series *Biblical Principles*.
- 2) *Leadership*, Volume 5 of the series *Biblical Principles*.
- 3) *Pas-de-Deux*, publication of Continental Sound/Christian Artists
- 4) *Creative and Christian: Biblical Principles of Creativity and Art*, Volume 1 of the series *Biblical Principles*.
- 5) *The Church and the Public Space*, Volume 6 of the series *Biblical Principles*.
- 6) *The Message*, Volume 4 of the series *Biblical Principles*.

CHAPTER 38. DANCE & PRAISE

In this chapter we will discuss notions of movement and moving in the Bible, to strengthen the understanding of the biblical foundation of the performing arts.

- Have you ever thought about the term 'ruach'? This word is often translated as the wind or breath of God's Spirit. It is a dynamic term, full of movement and at the same time giving life.
- There are texts that link worship to movement (and movement is the basis for dance), including bowing down (Ps. 95:63; Ps. 96:9), lifting hands as a sign of worship (Ps. 141:2; Ps. 143:6), clapping hands (Ps. 47:1), or a procession (Ps. 68:24; Ps 118:27). Throughout the Bible you can find examples of individual words and passages that indicate all kinds of 'movement' and link them to worship.

Old Testament

The Hebrew word *hyl/chul/gul/gil*, which is mostly translated as 'rejoicing', also means 'turning around' or 'turning in joy'. The Hebrew word *rekad/raqad* is translated as 'jumping for joy'. The word *chagag* refers to praise as a celebration or procession and movement in or as a circle. The word *yadah*, which is translated as 'praise', also means 'with clear hand movements'. The word *mahol* means 'joy' as well as 'dance', and there are other similar examples.

New Testament

The word *agalliao*, usually translated with '(great) joy' or 'gladness', also means 'jumping for joy'. It occurs sixteen times in the New Testament! The word '*proskyneo*' ('worship' or 'bow down in worship') occurs as well; a striking name is that of Prochorus, one of the first deacons (Acts 6:5). *Pros* means 'in front' and *choros* 'dance' or 'movement', so the name refers to 'dancing before in a chorus'.

There are people with only superficial knowledge of the Bible who therefore cannot find the Biblical references to dance. Either that or they know the story of the daughter of Herodias, who danced so seductively (Mat. 16:6; Mark 6:22), that John the Baptist lost his head as a result. The easy conclusion is then, "You see? Dance is wrong!" Or they know of the embarrassing incident that took place when Moses had gone up on the mountain to meet God. It took forty days for him to return with the Ten Commandments, and in the meantime the people had gone from bad to worse. When Moses still had not returned after a while, the

religious vacuum was (understandably) filled with an effigy the people could understand (from the abstract Eternal God to the concrete fertility symbol of the golden calf). This asked for a feast and the feast, that included dance, eventually got out of hand and ended in a massive orgy. This story is told in Exodus 32 and 1 Cor. 10:7-8, which make it crystal clear how that feast got out of hand. The step from the spirit to the flesh is easily taken. Hence the wrong conclusion is easily drawn: "You see? Dance is wrong." Obviously, the only right conclusion is that the people did this very consciously and that it had nothing to do with music, dance or art. After all, there are lots of examples in the Bible where singing, music, dance and art are used to the honour of God.

Whenever you read in the Old Testament (including the Psalms) about praise, praise offerings, songs of praise, festivities and feasts, you may include dance. At times the context makes explicit mention of dance!

Examples to read:

- Choral dance and dance to honour God, which means that dance has a place in explicit worship: Ex. 15:20; 2 Sam. 6:5, 14-16; 1 Chron. 13:8; Ps. 30:12; Ps. 87:7; Ps. 149:3; Ps. 150:4; Jer. 31:4, 13.
- Choral dance and dance simply to express pleasure or gladness: Judges 11:34; Judges 21:21; 1 Sam. 18:6-7; 1 Sam. 21:11; Eccl. 3:4; Song of Songs 6:13; Jer. 31:4,13; Lament. 5:15; Luke 15:25; Mat.11:17.

Simply expressing joy is also a praise offering to God. Nowhere in the Bible will you find support for a division between the profane and the sacred! The division between higher things/the sublime and lower/earthly things is a concept from later Greek thought. The message of God's kingdom is something else entirely: your mind, soul and body are sacred. Your emotions, from trauma to exultation, are part of His kingdom; from aesthetics to abhorrence, from gratitude to orgasm, it is all part of His redemption.

Dance is therefore a normal expression of joy. You dance as a child, in the family (family party); dance can have a social or cultural function; or it can be done by a community (think of folk dance or the numerous forms of tribal cultural dances); but dance can also be used to glorify and thank God in religious services. Orthodox Jews celebrate the joy of the law by dancing with the scroll up to the present day!

CHAPTER 39. HISTORY OF DANCE

Dance and music are very normal in Jesus' eyes, as you can read in Luke 7:31-32:

"To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the market-place and calling out to each other: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry'". (Luke 7:31-32)

The story of the prodigal son shows it as well: *"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing"* (Luke 15:25).

Dance was used in the early church as well. This has been attested by:

- Clement of Alexandria (± 215 AD), who mentions it in his *Miscellania*;
- Chrysostom (± 386 AD);
- Ambrose (± 387/390 AD);
- Theodoret, bishop of Kyrros (± 400 AD), who says that the christians in Antioch celebrated the victory of the cross by dancing in a circle;
- St. Augustine (ca. 390 AD), who says that he hopes that musicians, singers and dancers will cooperate in unity;
- St. Basil (4th century AD), who is against excesses of dance, but in favour of the simple application of dance.

Then, with the fall of the western Roman Empire, in the 'christian' eastern Roman Empire the need is felt to regulate matters, and a number of musical elements are curbed. Jerome (340-420 AD) wants to put a stop to the church being a kind of 'theatre' with its music and dance. Augustine of Hippo (± 400 AD) is also strongly opposed to dance. The Laodicean Council (± 350 AD) decides to put an end to all this free creativity. Stringent rules are imposed on the singing, and dance more or less disappears. Nevertheless, around 400 AD the services in Jerusalem still start with a kind of procession, and at times banners and flags were used. Theodorus (± 430 AD) still views dance as a gift from God. The bishop of Milan (± 600 AD) mentions dance and around the same time St. Gregory of Nazianzus says that David's dance is a blessing. Abbot Meletius (± 700 AD) speaks about the importance of eight hundred processions. There is some mention of dance in the orthodox rite of the early Greek Orthodox church in Romania, among other places. In the dark ages after the fall of Rome, there were at times local festivals to bring some light into people's life, and, to the displeasure of the church, these had a tendency to get out of hand. This contributed to free expression being gradually removed from church services and order being brought in (by e.g. Gregorian chant). Around the 11th century AD, miracle plays became popular. These

turned into complete theatre plays, which became so big that the church authorities decided to move them from the church to the market place. This period marked the start of processions everywhere in Europe (the procession in Echternach, Luxemburg, is a remainder of this age-old tradition). In the 14th century, dancing takes place in the church in England, and the Spanish kings allowed it for a while as well. From the 11th to the 13th century AD dance was also practised in French churches, although Odon of Paris (12th century AD) prohibited dance again. The painting of Fra Angelico's (1387-1455) '*last judgement*' shows a splendid line of dancing angels! On the other hand, dance was at times also viewed as a symptom of disease: there were epidemics of dance that struck groups and towns, whereby people were caught in an outburst of dance and could not stop. There are reports about such incidents from the 7th and 8th century AD, from Kölbigr (Saxony) in 1021, from Thüringen in 1237 and from Maastricht in 1278. Was it related to the pest epidemics of those days? Nobody knows!

Dance as a popular expression or as social interaction is timeless. It was common both at courts and among the general population. From the 17th century, ballrooms were built throughout Europe and in the 16th and 17th century books were published that detailed the etiquette of ballet and dance. In 1661, King Louis XIV founded the first dance academy. In the 18th and 19th century, opera and dance (sometimes with masks) are combined, and in the 20th century the big dance schools and ballets are founded. Especially in the 20th century, hand in hand with the gradual increase of wealth, many forms of dance were developed and practised at all levels of society, including the working classes.

From the Reformation to the present

It is a shame that the Calvinists became more puritan than their founding father. Calvin actually mentions the importance of dance! Luther, too, refers to dance. Even the great Bible translator William Tyndale mentions dance. In the Roman Catholic church, dance has always remained part of the liturgy: there were processions and basic forms of dance (coordinated steps) around the altar for worship purposes. In the year 1462, the Corpus Christi Festival took place under King René in the Provence; in 1501, a passion play was performed in Mons; Jesuit schools had forms of drama/ballet (16th/17th century). In 1682, Menestrier (a Jesuit) described the ritual movements of the clergy around the altar as dance. In some monasteries and convents dance was practised. In the 16th century *Canon de Langres*, mention is made of dance. In the cathedral of Seville (ca. 1800), there was religious dance around the altar. This also took place in the cathedral of Toledo in the 18th

century. The Shakers (USA) viewed dance as an essential part of their services (1825). The Methodists used dance (around 1900). The Pentecostal Revival of 1906 used dance as an expression of joy, particularly in its first years. 'Dancing in the Spirit' existed at the time. But the 'conservatives' quickly curbed this with the argument that it was too 'worldly'. Up to 1970 you find modest use of dance in Protestant services all over the western world, but the great breakthrough took place in the early seventies, thanks to the efforts of Merv & Merla Watson, who travelled through Canada and Western Europe with their dance company Shekinah. This kicked up quite some dust in evangelical circles and traditional churches. The churches slowly became more open to liturgical dance again. From 1983, the annual international Christian Artists Seminar (the Netherlands) included dance, theatre and the performing arts in its programmes and workshops, thus contributing to the worldwide acceptance of the performing arts in churches. Many well-known dancers, mime artists, actors and dance companies showed their art there and inspired many.

Another aspect worth noting is that from the 19th century many biblical stories have been turned into theatre productions, film or dance in Hollywood or the West End. However, these productions did not lead to the application of these art forms in churches. They were usually viewed as secular applications (or distortions) of biblical history, which many Christians preferred not to see. Yet productions like Jesus Christ Superstar and Godspell definitely have stimulated creative minds among Christians (Roman Catholic and Protestant) to come up with their own answers.

Sources

It was not easy to gather all the above information. The following books have been used for this chapter:

- *Rejoice* (1984) - Debbie Roberts
- *God's People on the Move* (1988) - Mary Jones
- *In Him we Move* (1998) - Janet Randell
- *Dans en Religie* (1962) - Prof. Th. P. van Baaren
- *Healing in the Dance* (1988) - Martin Blogg
- *The Silent Prophet* (1989) - Todd Farley
- *Fool of the Kingdom* (1996) - Philip D. Noble
- *The Gospel according to Dance* (1980) - Giora Mamor
- Archives of the Continental Art Centre (1969-2004)

CHAPTER 40. DRAMA

Some people will say now, “Right, up to here we’ve been with you, but drama really isn’t mentioned anywhere in the Bible, so let’s keep that door well shut.” In the 17th century, the clergy of Amsterdam took this approach to the plays of the greatest Dutch dramatist of all times: Vondel. These clergymen fulminated against Vondel’s drama and more or less demanded a ban, thus nipping a promising development in the bud. A terrible shame. Around the same time Shakespeare was one of the leading authors of drama in England. He managed to keep his theatre company afloat with the support of the court, thus laying the foundations for a tremendous theatrical development that has flourished in England to the present day.

Do we find drama in the Bible? You easily overlook references to drama in the Bible, so to make it easier to find you first have to define drama. In this chapter the following definition of drama is applied: drama is something with a plot (perhaps dramatic), which is performed.

- The first thing to notice is the liturgy and general worship in the temple (under the rule of David and Solomon). Choirs, orchestras, songs, chanting and ritual garments, it must have been a spectacle every day. It even attracted tourists, most notably the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10; 2 Chron. 9). You may call it a liturgical drama, or dramatic liturgy.
- A number of prophets performed dramatic acts with a specific, elevating purpose, for example:
 - The drama of Elijah on Carmel (1 Kings 18, from verse 20).
 - Elisha takes the king of Aram and his armies prisoner (2 Kings 6:8-33).
 - Elisha’s death bed was dramatic (2 Kings 13:14-21).
 - The dedication of Jerusalem’s wall (part of the process of rebuilding the temple after the exile) under governor Nehemiah was a large, well-directed musical theatre production that included choirs that moved towards each other and musicians. It must have been a big spectacle, for it could be heard from far away (Neh. 12:27-43).
 - The whole book of Esther is a drama.
 - The prophet Isaiah performed dramatic acts, for instance with a large scroll (Is. 8:1-4); another dramatic act involved walking around in his underwear for three (!) years to make a statement about Israel (Is. 20:2-3); and he had to write a text on a tablet or scroll with a similar purpose (Is. 30:8).
 - The prophet Jeremiah carried out forms of street theatre, among other things with a linen belt (Jer. 13:1-11), and he performed an act with a clay jar from a potter (Jer. 19:1,2,10).

The latter act was not looked upon favourably by the political leaders and landed Jeremiah with a beating, after which he was thrown into prison (Jer. 20:1-3). Jeremiah also had to walk around with a yoke made of straps and crossbars on his neck to act out Judah's downfall (Jer. 27, from verse 2), which also rubbed people up the wrong way (Jer. 28:10-13). Jeremiah buys a field after the entire country has been captured and destroyed (Jer. 32) as a dramatic act to make God's promise visible. At some point Jeremiah writes all God's words regarding Israel on a scroll; a powerful act, for the scroll gets into the hands of the king, who has it read out to him and burns it dramatically, piece by piece. Jeremiah then writes all God's words again (and adds some more, Jer. 36).

- The prophet Ezekiel built, at God's orders, a miniature city under siege and lay down next to it, 'besieging' it, for 390 days (Ez. 4:1-17). This must have been quite an attraction. Then he had to shave his head and burn his hair in public (Ez. 5:1-17). Another time he was told to dress and pack like a refugee, make a hole in the wall of his house and leave 'in exile' under the eyes of the people (Ez. 12:3-7). This theatrical performance drew a large audience, as did another act with pieces of wood (Jer. 37:15-21).
- Another dramatic life was that of Daniel. Just think about the episode with the fiery furnace (Dan. 3), God's hand that writes on the wall of the palace (Dan. 1:6), and the lions' den (Dan. 6).
- The life of the priest-prophet Hosea was one big soap. He had to marry an adulterous woman to signify Israel's adulterous actions towards God. This 'performance' will have been the talk of the town.

Is there drama in the New Testament as well?

- The appearance of John the Baptist looking like a 'hippie' in his camel-hair clothes, eating grasshoppers and wild honey and organising happenings at the river Jordan. That must have been a dramatic scene, for the house was 'sold out' each and every time.
- The performances of Jesus with his 'troupe', including 'groupies', were a phenomenal attraction (apologies for viewing it from the point of view of an outsider for a moment). These were dramatic performances all round, involving miracles and storytelling that even the illusionist David Copperfield could never match.

In short, it is clear that God has used drama for centuries in order to convey His message. But was it drama for the sake of drama? God's drama aimed exactly at what was later, in the famous Greek drama, called 'catharsis', the moment of purification and relief. The resulting fresh insight and understanding allowed spiritual renewal and therefore new

worship, commitment and praise.

CHAPTER 41. STORYTELLING

In the previous chapter we concluded that drama has its place in praise and worship as one of the performing arts. But what about one of the greatest performing arts from the east: storytelling? First of all, it should be clear what 'storytelling' is. This art form is not the same as telling some silly story. It is something quite different. In this art form you are taken on a voyage of discovery. Each story grips you, you choose sides, view matters from the point of view of one of the players in the story. But the story has several levels. Villains or outcasts appear to be the heroes and the obvious good guys appear to be the villains. The purpose of the story is to create a deeper level of understanding of something, effect some sort of catharsis or spur action.

A very well-known example of such a story is that of the good Samaritan, in which the unclean, unholy, false worshipper appears to be the right and true hero/believer and the correct priest and Levite (responsible for the music ministry!) appear the villains. These priest and Levite keep to the letter of the law, following all the correct procedures in their worship duties, but missing the point completely when it comes to understanding and internalising their worship. And the message is: beware not to become like that!

The Old Testament is full of this type of story. The prophets used storytelling to clarify matters. The most famous example is perhaps Nathan, who tells a story to bring home the truth to King David when he is completely intoxicated by his love for Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12). God himself also uses stories to clarify things. A number of them can be found with the prophets of the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, Jesus is the great example. Almost everyone sees Jesus as our Messiah and Saviour, and He is. Yet all too easily we tend to lose sight of the fact that He used the most important art form of the region, storytelling, to communicate. As we are still gripped by his stories after two thousand years, He must have been a top artist. Mark notes (4:33-34) that Jesus only spoke to the people in parables. Matthew confirms this (Mat. 13:34,35). It means that Jesus did not actually 'preach'! An interesting fact.

You can read about the meanings of these parables in *The Message*, Volume 4 of this series *Biblical Principles*.

To conclude: God uses storytelling to encourage people to praise and worship!

CHAPTER 42. SPECIALISATION

“Those who were musicians, head of Levite families, stayed in the rooms of the temple and were exempt from other duties because they were responsible for the work day and night” (1 Chron. 9:33, compare 2 Chron. 31:4). In business and industry it is common practice for employees to specialise (by being given time for study, courses and opportunities). This practice increases productivity and improves morale. Research into human resources management has established that if the right person is in the right place and working conditions enable optimal output, the results can be staggering... gifts and talents are put to maximum use.

What is this like in churches? There are obviously many churches and congregations where everything is well organised and the same principles are adhered to: when God gives people gifts, room should be created to deploy and develop these gifts. A list of these gifts can be found in 1 Cor. 12:28-30, 1 Cor. 12:4-11, Rom. 12:6-8 and Eph. 4:11-12. In addition to the gifts and specialisations mentioned there, there are of course specialisations that are mentioned earlier, in the Old Testament: gifts of music (see the beginning of this chapter) and other creative gifts (see the building of the tabernacle and temple, which can be found in Volume 1 of the series *Biblical Principles*).

Yet in practice there appears to be some friction here and there.

- Some people are of the opinion that the gift of spiritual leadership (in particular preaching) is more important than that of management (whereas management is viewed in the Bible as an important gift, see 1 Cor. 12). Some people even dismiss management as work of the flesh, They consider management ‘unspiritual’ and an impediment to the work of the Holy Spirit. If you study the history of congregations in which this kind of nonsense is believed, you find, unsurprisingly, that members often walk out deeply frustrated and that there are regular schisms in the congregation. Good management is a gift and a specialisation. It ensures a good infrastructure that in turn enables the congregation to keep existing and to grow. The first apostles discovered this very soon as well (see Acts 6:1-7). Paul even says that elders who provide good leadership are ‘worthy of double honour’ (1 Tim. 5:17).

Specialisation is clearly important.

- Some people feel that ‘the Holy Spirit should lead everything’. This may sound very pious, but the feelings behind such a view may be quite different, for example:

- people do not dare to cut a Gordian knot and keep putting decisions off, hoping that everything will sort itself (thus greatly increasing chaos and frustration);
- people evade their responsibility;
- people are afraid to lose power if others bring in a relevant specialisation (knowledge, experience, or a particular skill).

Specialisation is of great importance for the proper running of congregations (not to mention the fact that personal development is a big blessing). Its effect is that specialists can fully concentrate on their task (see the Bible passage at the beginning of this chapter). For people involved in the music ministry this means that:

- they do not have to be present at all kinds of congregational activities like Bible study groups and mission activities. Just let them use their precious time to do an excellent job at the praise services! (But this does not mean they don't need to do Bible study and pray.)
- they practise together thoroughly once a week for some considerable time;
- on the remaining days they devote time to their skills: the singers to their singing technique, the instrumentalists to the mastery of their instrument;
- do not forget that when David re-established the music ministry, he only selected those who were fully trained (*'trained and skilled in music for the Lord'*, see 1 Chron. 25:6,7); they had had teaching! In other words, they had graduated successfully from the music academy (also see Volume 2 of this series *Biblical Principles*). This is a great challenge to everyone who selects a specific art form to give content and form to their praise rather than do a few easy tricks. Being in the creative ministry means training, training and again, training. It will be blood, sweat and tears. When it comes to serving God we should definitely go for the best! There is no shortcut to quality. Quality requires you to be alert and self-critical, and to practise.

This also means that a congregation has to invest in training, music lessons, education, instruments, and infrastructure. If a congregation starts operating like this, it will in due course become a shining beacon of preservation and innovation of culture, which is increasingly important in a changing society. There is a great opportunity for showing a christian profile and manifesting yourselves as believers.

Finally, we can learn from Nehemiah's complaint about the rebuilding of the temple and the need for praise:

"I also learned that the portions assigned to the Levites had not been given to them, and that all the Levites and singers responsible for the service had gone back to their own fields.

So I rebuked the officials and asked them, “Why is the house of God neglected?” Then I called them together and stationed them at their posts” (Neh. 13:10-11).

These Levites cannot be blamed for eventually going out to grow their own food. If all parties had done what they were supposed to do, God’s house would not have been neglected! So invest (also financially) in the creative talents of members of the congregation. Then God’s house (i.e. the people) will be a marvellous, multi-faceted praise offering!

CHAPTER 43. NOT ALWAYS HAPPY-CLAPPY

In evangelical circles in particular it sometimes seems that you have to be permanently happy and cheerful, for *“the cheerful heart has a continual feast”* (Proverbs 15:15b). Your redemption, your eternal salvation, the expectation of Christ’s return, the gifts of the Spirit – it’s all reason for major happiness and joy. The choice of subject matter for songs in evangelical churches goes hand in hand with this idea: from joy to even more joy, “joy, joy, my heart is full of joy”, as the well-known children’s song has it. When you enter such a church, you are joyfully welcomed and people ask how you are. If you then give an honest answer for a change and say “terrible”, people almost get into a panic (this once happened to my honest wife Ria).

It is time to ask ourselves whether the ever-happy attitude of worshippers is actually that important and whether we, as part of the music ministry, should always sing happy-clappy songs.

If you read the collection of songs of praise and worship in the Old Testament, the Psalms, closely, you notice at once the wide range of feelings and emotions that are expressed. They include even outbursts of anger. It soon transpires that there is music for every occasion. For special occasions special music would be composed, e.g.

“Jeremiah composed laments for Josiah, and to this day all the men and women singers commemorate Josiah in the laments. These became a tradition in Israel and are written in the Laments” (2 Chron. 35:25).

These laments are special songs about the death of the good King Josiah, but there is also a lament on the destruction of the city of Tyre, which can be found in Ezekiel 27:23. David composed a lament after the death of Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam. 1:17-27), followed later by another lament, Psalm 7. The prophet Jeremiah wrote laments: Jer. 7:29; 9:10, 20, and the prophet Ezekiel frequently calls on the people to lament (2:10; 19:1; 26:17; 27:2, 32; 28:12; 32:2, 16. The Old Testament even has a whole book of Lamentations!

In other words, mourning is as important as celebration. Penitential songs are as important as songs of forgiveness. Songs about the future are as important as remembering the great things God has done in the past. Depending on the situation, praise in church services can cover various subjects and represent various styles. Sadness, too, belongs to this range.

I hope that these considerations may help to make praise and worship in our churches more varied. *“A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver”* (Proverbs 25:11). What counts for speaking equally applies to the right song at the right moment.

CHAPTER 44. THE FEAR OF THE LORD

I don't know whether you have noticed, but when you listen to some speakers and leaders of the music ministry, it seems as if they have known Jesus since he was in short pants and have been at school with God. This is a perilous starting point. Is this way of talking about Jesus actually appropriate or OK? If you read Hebr. 12:18-28, the impression given is quite different. God is awe-inspiring, great, powerful, eternal and the creator and judge. The last sentence rightly says "*let us worship God with reverence and awe*". This says something about our attitude towards God, how we should approach Him and name Him in our praise and worship. Looking further, you find a number of instances in which the 'fear of the Lord' is mentioned (for example Ps. 2:11, Proverbs 15:33 and 2 Cor. 7:1). Does that mean that you should be afraid of God? The answer is no. In many places in the Bible we are assured we do not need to be afraid of God, "*do not be afraid*" (see chapter 29 of Volume 1 of this series)!

The fear of the Lord clearly refers to awe and reverence in our attitude of praise and worship. The 'fear of the Lord' can also be translated as taking God into account in everything you do, including how you live your life according to His guidelines. This attitude in fact makes you feel secure (Proverbs 14:26) as you will avoid evil (Proverbs 16:6). In other words, the fear of the Lord does not distance you from God, but quite the opposite: it makes you stay well clear of evil:

"To fear the Lord is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behaviour and perverse speech" (Proverbs 8:13).

This proverb gives a good idea of what the attitude of a worshipper entails: doing what is right and shunning evil. It states the do's and don'ts of a worshipper, all based on an attitude of awe and reverence.

CHAPTER 45. EMOTION OR MEASURABLE REALITY

How do you worship God? And what do you expect to happen as a result? These days there seems to be a tendency to believe that the more emotional a service is, the closer we are to God.

First of all, there is nothing wrong with emotions. The Old Testament reports occasions where music and singing go hand in hand with emotions (for example the dedication of the temple), where visual arts are combined with emotion (ark of the covenant; the temple), drama with emotion (think of what some prophets had to act out), dance with emotion (Miriam and the women after crossing the Red Sea) and storytelling with emotion (e.g. the parables of Jesus, see Chapter 41). However, emotion was *not* the ultimate aim, emotions are just an aspect of the whole story or event!

God's presence is entirely separate from our emotions. Whether we feel him to be near or not is immaterial (compare Chapter 30 of the book *Praying* ¹):

“Observe the decrees and laws of God carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?” (Deuteronomy 4:6-8)

God is near. He is near to us in His rules. The laws mentioned in the passage above are the ten Commandments, which constitute the core of the law. And God is near us when we call out to Him.

You may not always be aware of God's presence, in fact this may happen very rarely. Yet it is definitely so that if you follow His rules (and that means listening to Him) He is near you. He is always with us, around us, within us, even though you may not notice. But His love is sure. God loves us if we do His will. Not the listeners of God's word, but those who act upon His word are pleasing to God (compare Matt. 7:21). He is near them.

A few more conclusions:

- If we call on God and worship Him, He is near! For He is always near.
- This means that His nearness is *not* a result of the height, depth, or intensity of our emotions.
- God is measurable for everyone (also for non-believers) if you just look at His decrees. The Ten Commandments are just, eternal, and always true, and acting upon them in our daily lives (which is also the part that is visible and measurable to people around you) will add depth to our praise and worship. That is when God is near.
- On Mount Carmel, the pagan priests called on their god Baal with a profusion of emotions, theatre, show and drama (see 1 Kings 18:16-45). Nothing happens. Then Elijah (God's prophet) prays in quiet and God answers with fire.
- Paul clearly states that the worshipper, the believer, has to live in/through faith and not in/by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). The Greek word that is translated 'sight' refers to all forms of perception, senses and related emotions. So we should not believe and worship because we feel 'something' or would like to 'feel' or 'experience' something! ²⁾

The innumerable examples in which God consoles people (with the Holy Spirit as comforter) and gives them rest, peace, or joy, are proof that God can touch us in our emotions and wants to be involved in our *entire* being (body, mind and soul). The key question is: is it about us, whether it makes us feel good if we worship, whether it makes us happy, or is it about God? If you worship God with the aim of feeling better yourself, you may ask yourself what or who is the actual object of your worship. Even though God's presence can at times be felt, as David describes in the Psalms, your feelings can never be the measure of the presence of God. In John 20:29 Jesus says, "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*" Let us therefore aim at believing His Word and His presence rather than seeking to see, feel, or experience God.

¹⁾ *Praying: 251 Prayers*. This book aims at practical prayer. Written by Leen La Rivière © 2003 © Continental Sound/Christian Artists, P.O. Box 81065, 3009 GB Rotterdam, the Netherlands; ISBN-90-76959-12-9.

²⁾ Note that believing is not a purely intellectual act, involving automatic salvation as long as you keep the rules or agree to the creed, like the Pharisees and Sadducees did in the days of Jesus. Contact with God goes deeper than simply obeying and doing your work. He did not make us in order for us to serve Him like robots.

CHAPTER 46. A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

In all previous chapters we looked at individuals and the situations they found themselves in. In the next chapters (47 to 49) we will have a look at the bigger picture and present some historical outlines. The previous chapters in combination with the next three chapters will give rise to a number of practical recommendations (chapters 50 and 51).

There will no doubt be devout brothers and sisters who wonder what the point of all this is; shouldn't we be forward-looking, led by the Spirit? Why all this seeking, research and analysis? What a waste of time!

But there is more to say about this. God's Word is a light for our path (Ps. 119:105; John 8:12). We are called to **keep** to the Word and **act** upon it (1 John 2:3-6). Jesus emphasises this as well, in Mat. 5:17-19: *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practises and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."* All words God has spoken in the past and what has been learned from them are of great importance. We have to act upon them and learn (that includes teach) them. Jesus refers to history and the law regularly, for example by saying *"The law and the prophets say..."* This occurs very often. It means that history, analysis, study, context, and application are all very useful.

CHAPTER 47. THE OLD TESTAMENT

The very first 'revival' song can be found in Exodus 15 (verse 1-18). It is the song of Moses. After the hard times in Egypt and the miracle of crossing the Red Sea, the largest 'choir' of the Old Testament sings a song with a powerful message. It is a song about the strength of God and His liberation, righteousness and care, a song of fear, praise and joy, representing the rebirth of God's people. With her tambourine, Miriam spontaneously leads the women in dance and worship, repeating the first lines of the song of Moses (Ex. 15:20-21). By underlining God's goodness, this cheerful song becomes a song of revival.

There is a clear correlation between this song and the song of Moses in Revelation (15:2-4). In this passage, one of the biggest crowds mentioned in the New Testament sings the song of Moses (with instrumental accompaniment), with different words, but with the same subject as in Exodus 15: the power of God, fear, joy and righteousness. This song is the musical overture for the last judgements of God (the plagues that come upon the ungodly as their judgement, and the destruction of Babylon – no music will be heard there any more, Rev. 18:21-22). Once the last judgement has taken place, music will only be used for its ultimate purpose, the worship of God, its creator and inspirator. Then songs will be sung by the largest choir of all times, the multitude of people before God's throne during the wedding of the Lamb (Rev. 19:6-8). This group of redeemed people has a true revival rally there, singing a song of praise to their Redeemer.

If we return to the events in the Old Testament, we see in the book Judges that Israel tends to gradually drift away from God. Each time when they are attacked by their enemies, God sets them free by means of a judge. During the lifetime of such a judge there is a spiritual revival. One of the most remarkable stories is that of the female judge Deborah. After having defeated the enemy, she sings a very impressive song of praise together with Barak, the son of Abinoam (Judges 5) on victory, grace and righteousness. This is the first example of a song about sin, repentance, deliverance and a spiritual revival, crystallised out in worship and praise.

After the great judge and prophet Samuel, the age of the kings arrives. The return of the ark of God to Jerusalem, under the rule of David (1 Chron. 13:1-8) is accompanied by song and dance and ends with a special revival meeting. These were the days of repentance, sanctification and conversion to God (1 Chron. 15:12-14). There was a spontaneous, but at

the same time well-organised revival meeting with David as its conductor and dancer (1 Chron. 15:29) and the Levites leading the music and singing. This musical event was very joyful.

In 1 Chron. 15:16-28 we read how David led this large praise service. It should be noted that there were people specifically appointed to serve God with music on that occasion (1 Chron. 16:4-6). David wrote a splendid song to mark the occasion (1 Chron. 16:8-36) and it was performed on that day. If you contemplate the words you will see that it is a song that originates in a renewed and born-again heart. David lived very close to God, he was God's friend and, in biblical terminology (Hebr. 13:15), there was a sacrifice of praise for the Lord on his lips all the time. This musician is a lasting example to all believers, including christians. David and Solomon, his successor, organised gatherings in Jerusalem. Not only animals were offered; people offered God a sacrifice of praise from their lips.

The following passages tell how this was organised: 1 Chron. 6:31-33, 39, 44; 9:33; 16:37-43; 23:1-5, 30-31; 25:1-3, 5-7; 2 Chron. 7:16; 8:14. Note that the music was of high quality.*

Jesus' coming into the world meant that all offerings were fulfilled, apart from one: the offering of our lips (Hebr. 13:15). This means that it is a challenge to christians to act upon the musical ordinances of David.

The dedication of the temple (2 Chron. 5:12-14) involved a praise service of gigantic proportions. There were seven days of revival meetings (2 Chron. 7:6-8), and praise to thank God for His goodness. Just read Solomon's prayer in 2 Chron. 6: it is the prayer of a broken heart because of God's judgement. The audience and the professional musicians lifted their voices unanimously to God to glorify Him (2 Chron. 7:2-3).

However, the people of Israel strayed soon afterwards and turned their backs on the Lord. The stories in 1 and 2 Kings show one thing very clearly: each time an ungodly king gets on the throne, the temple service virtually stops playing a part in the life of Israel. And each time a king who serves God comes into power, a revival takes place and music, praise and the arts are given a prominent place in the public life of Israel again. The following examples demonstrate this.

In 2 Chron. 15:14, King Asa has turned to God and brings the people together; they renew their relationship with God with music and loud cheering.

Jehoshaphat was a king who followed the Lord as well. When at some point an enemy attack was imminent, he organised a group of singers who went at the front of his army to praise God for the splendour of his holiness. The music was deafening (read 2 Chron. 20:14-22) and had tremendous strength. God delivered his people as he had promised. In a valley the Israelites held a meeting of praise (2 Chron. 20:26). Upon their return to Jerusalem this victory was celebrated again with abundant music (2 Chron. 20:28).

After a few ungodly kings, King Joash comes to power and a feast of spiritual renewal takes place. This revival also involved music and clapping of hands (2 Kings 11:12-14) and we see again that praise and music return to the temple (2 Chron. 23:13, 18).

Joash' reign was followed by that of other kings who abandoned God and dragged the people down with them, but then Hezekiah became king. He restored the temple and another revival took place. Music and praise were also immediately restored to the temple service and to the people's everyday lives (2 Chron. 29:25-30). As a sign of this renewal, the Passover was celebrated in a very special way (2 Chron. 30:1), with seven days of music and praise (2 Chron. 30:21-22).

After a few other ungodly kings, Josiah came to power (2 Chron. 34) and '*did what was right in the eyes of the Lord*'. The temple was restored again and a revival with singing, music and praise followed (2 Chron. 35:15).

This pattern is typical for the time of the kings: a revival, music and praise always take place during the reign of kings who follow the Lord!

Below are some remarkable passages in the Old Testament that speak about the correlation between revivals and music.

The smallest revival took place in a strange place: in the stomach of a fish (Jonah 2:1-9). When Jonah had renewed his commitment to God, he sang a song of repentance and praise for salvation.

In Joel 1:8 and 12 the prophet wails because joy has fled humanity. Without God there is no point to music and praise. Yet when the people turn to God (Hos. 2:14) they sing again as they did on the day on which they left Egypt behind.

The prophet Isaiah predicted the return of the people of God. Chapter 12 has the famous hymn of those who have been saved, exalting the Saviour. Isaiah 26:19 has a strong message: the dead will rise, awake and sing. This will take place at the end of time. Jeremiah 6:17 says that God had put watchmen over the people: *“Listen to the sound of the trumpet! But you said, ‘We will not listen.’”* The music called the people to repent, but the people did not and, eventually, the exile inevitably took place. Seventy years later the people were allowed to return. It was a return to their country, but also to their God.

The ensuing rebuilding of the temple was also proof of a spiritual renewal. The Levites, music, worship and singing were re-introduced in the lives of the Israelites (Neh. 7:1; 3:10-13). It was the fulfilment of Jeremiah’s prophecies (Jer. 30:18-19; 31:4-13; 33:11) and gave rise to songs of worship and praise, pouring from a born-again heart after a time of exile, repentance and a long ordeal. A very well-known song was written by Nehemiah (8:10b: *“...the joy of the Lord is your strength”*). The dedication of the wall of Jerusalem was a special event: two choirs that sang in turn (Neh. 12:27-43) and orchestras, all to praise God for His grace.

The temple service remains intact, with varying success, until the destruction of Jerusalem by, among others, General Titus and the Roman army in 70 AD.

* The quality of the music, as well as the duties of the singers and musicians are explained in detail in Volume 2 of the *Biblical Principles* series.

CHAPTER 48. THE NEW TESTAMENT

Jesus' coming meant that all sacrifices and laws of the Old Testament were fulfilled. There is just one exception: the verbal offering that was instituted by David. The letter to the Hebrews (13:15) states it unambiguously: the Lord desires a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Psalm 50:23 explains why: sacrifices of praise are particularly powerful. Sacrifices of praise prepare the way, they make way for God's grace to flow to us from his throne and let us see his salvation. Praise is the basis for a spiritual revival. The early Christians knew this.

When Jesus performed a miracle, the bystanders often praised God for His goodness. An interesting fact is that approximately half of all the passages from the Old Testament that Jesus quotes come from the Psalms! Psalms were texts that had to be sung. This is quite telling: apparently the Psalms were significant in Jesus' life and in the lives of his audience.

There was much singing in the early church, which at that time consisted of groups that met in people's homes. A typical observation in the New Testament is "they glorified God." Traditionally, there was music involved in glorification or praise. This becomes clear when we look at how praise is described in the Old Testament. The early church inherited these methods of praise, these tunes, these forms of expression, and over the years many new tunes have been composed: old gemstones in a new setting.

There is a profusion of examples from the New Testament that show how the early Christians put Hebr. 13:15 about the fruit of our lips, a sacrifice of praise, into practice. Below we will discuss a number of them.

The first congregation of believers came into being after Peter's speech at Pentecost. It is emphasised that these early Christians were in the temple to praise God every day (Acts 2:47).

Peter and John performed a miracle on a crippled man at the temple gate called Beautiful. The man could walk for the first time in his life and he praised God, as did the bystanders (Acts 3:2-10).

The apostles were flogged because they spoke in the name of Jesus. When they left the Council building (Sanhedrin) they rejoiced (this means that they praised God), because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for their Lord (Acts 5:41).

After the first wave of persecution in Jerusalem, Philip went to Samaria and preached there. The people accepted his message, and as a result there was great joy (and therefore praise) in that city (Acts 8:8).

Philip baptised a eunuch from Ethiopia. After the baptism the eunuch went on his way again with joy (Acts 8:39), i.e. praising God.

Peter proclaimed God's Word in the house of the centurion Cornelius. When the Holy Spirit filled the pagan believers, the Jewish followers of Christ were surprised because they heard them speak in tongues, glorifying (i.e. praising) God (Acts 10:46).

When the Christians in Jerusalem heard Peter's report, they glorified (so again praised) God (Acts 11:18).

When Barnabas saw what God had done in Antioch, he rejoiced (Acts 11:22, 23); another praise offering.

When the Gentiles in Antioch (Pisidia) heard that the light of God had come to the Gentiles, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord (involving praise) for their salvation (Acts 13:47-48).

When Paul and Barnabas, on the way from Antioch to Jerusalem, reported to the early churches about the revival among the Gentiles, this gave rise to great joy (involving praise) with the brothers (Acts 15:3).

When Paul, Barnabas and Judas delivered the letter of the congregation in Jerusalem to the congregation of Antioch, its encouragement caused great gladness (and therefore praise, Acts 15:30-31).

When the jailer in Philippi became a Christian, he was filled with joy because he had come to faith in God (Acts 16:34).

The above examples show that praise offerings were intrinsic in christianity. Another aspect worth noting is that all these expressions, like joy, gladness, praise, glorification and worship are also signs of a revival, because the hearts of all those involved were moved or blessed with proof of new life. And they typically involved music!

One of the most significant things Paul tells the Gentiles can be found in Acts 28:28: "*God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles.*" This is a quote from Psalm 67 (verse 2) and also the fulfilment of this Psalm.

One of the smallest revivals took place in the jail of Philippi. In the middle of the night, Paul and Silas were praying and singing God's praise (Acts 16:25), loudly, for all prisoners could hear them. This 'jail house rock' came as a real bombshell, for a bit later a heavy earthquake struck and all the prison doors flew open.

The letters of the apostles show even more examples that demonstrate the correlation between music and a spiritual revival. Galatians 5:22 says that one of the fruits of the Spirit is joy (and praise without joy does not exist).

In 1 Cor. 14, Paul writes that a congregation where a revival takes place is a congregation where the Holy Spirit is working, and music is inextricably bound up with this (verse 15): "*I will sing praises with my spirit, but I will also sing praises with my mind*" (1 Cor. 14:15b).

Christians who renew their commitment to God have set their eyes on a goal. When you read Ephesians 1:5,6 and 14 you see that the aim of our salvation is for us to be 'to the praise of his glorious grace'. This means that we are to be 'living praise', and praise is bound up with music. What the redeemed sing before the throne of God can be read in Revelation.

Ephesians 5:4 says that we should avoid obscene, foolish or coarse talking, but instead we should give thanks (we should even overflow with thanksgiving, Col. 2:7), which is a form of praise. James tells us (5:13) that if we are in trouble, we should pray, and if we are glad we should sing!

Philippians 4:4: *“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”* There is a well-known chorus based on this verse from the Bible: ‘Rejoice in the Lord and sing with joy, again I say rejoice’! This is an important call to all Christians. The same call is echoed in another passage from the Bible ‘Let us keep the feast’ (1 Cor. 5:8). Christians have every reason to celebrate. ‘Be joyful always!’ (1 Thess. 5:16). We should never stop praising God, we should glorify Him at all times (read Mal. 2:1-2). God purifies and cleanses us to use us for His purpose, as He promised the Levites (the singers) in Malachi 3:1-3.

The resurrection of the dead, which will be the biggest revival and act of worship of all times, will be a musical event at which the believers will rise with the trumpet call of God (1 Thess. 4:16).

1 Cor. 14:26 says that when the living congregation meets, everyone should contribute something, for example a psalm, a word of instruction or a word in tongues, as long as everyone benefits from it. A church service is not a one man show but an exciting meeting built of components of equal value: singing, preaching, praise, arts and worship.

Ephesians 5:18-20 shows us what the life of each Christian should look like, namely that it is filled with the Holy Spirit, and how Christians should communicate with each other, namely with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, sung with heart and soul and therefore constituting true praise. The Holy Spirit is the source of each revival and of real enthusiasm, and the source of music.

Colossians 3:15-16 says, *“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God”* (Colossians 3:15-16). Here, too, there is a connection between the peace of God, a fruit of the Holy Spirit that should be visible in each committed Christian, and praise, worship and music.

In art, in creation and in music we see how creative our God is. There is not just one style, but a large variety of styles. Through the centuries Christians have made magnificent art and composed thousands of hymns and songs to express their gratitude to their Saviour. All our worship and praise will eventually result in the biggest worship service before God’s throne. In Rev. 4:2-11; 5:8-13; 7:9-12; 11:15-18; 14:2-3; 15:2-4 and 19:1-8 you read about the

songs that will be sung in heaven. Praise God for all the songs and instruments; the people of God, the church that he raised, His body, will be a singing nation. All the above Bible texts from the Old and the New Testament underline the close connection between a spiritual revival on the one hand and praise and worship, expressed in the arts, singing and music on the other. In church history you see the same phenomenon. Other religions do not have such an exuberant musical life. Musical celebrations with the involvement of the whole congregation are unique to christians through the ages.

CHAPTER 49. REVIVAL AND MUSIC UNTIL THE REFORMATION

Before reading this and the next chapter, you should know that this does not intend to be a short history of liturgical music or church music. These two chapters show where a spiritual revival (reform, renewal) caused a surge in the numbers of composers and compositions or new songs, and often also in other arts. Such a spiritual experience apparently asked to be expressed in the arts. Incidentally, we should not forget that composing, poetry, writing and painting continued in the periods between such revivals. You often see that the best of such a peak period is given a place in the liturgy during the time after the peak.

In the first three centuries, christian groups were as described in chapter 47, but gradually the fire of the revival with its direct expressions of the Holy Spirit started to die out. Sermons of the time report fewer and fewer miracles and signs of the Holy Spirit. In particular after the Decree of Milan (313 AD), that gave christians freedom of religious expression, and the decision to make christianity the official state religion (380 AD), the revivalist fervour slowly but surely got bogged down in structures. Offices and organisations were established and spontaneous initiatives gradually petered out.

The tragic decline of christian music is attested several times: at around 200 AD, Clement of Alexandria decreed that all musical instruments had to be banned from the church as well as any other christian gatherings. There was some dancing and instrumental music in the congregations, but in due course this was found to be too wordly and associated with debauchery. During the service, only the voices of the priest, the cantor and the scola (the choir) should be heard. The Council of Prelates that convened in Laodicea in 367 AD, officially confirmed Clement's decision not to allow musical instruments during services and gatherings and to perform sacred music vocally only. In 578 AD women were even forbidden to sing in the church! They had to remain silent, just like in the synagogues.

Despite the process of decline, there are also some clear signs of revival in church history. In 374 AD, the famous Ambrose was elected Bishop of Milan. He was a true shepherd of his flock, a preacher who spoke the language of the people, and an evangelist. He is the author of the Ambrosian hymns.

Ambrose has written many hymns and also collected quite a number of songs of elders, which enriched the church with a collection of new hymns. If we may believe the historians, his church was a true revivalist church. Ambrose's sincere faith and the music in his church

made a deep impression on one student in particular, Augustine (354-430 AD), who became a Christian as a result. Augustine went on to become one of the church's greatest apologists. This church father proclaimed the gospel of salvation and loved music. Some historians say that he wrote hymns himself. The ministry of Ambrose brought another important man to Christ as well. His name was Clemens Aurelius Prudentius and he became one of the most original and creative poets and songwriters of his day.

In the east of the Roman Empire a preacher called Chrisostom (ca. 400 AD) lived and worked. At some point he preached at the royal court of Byzantium where he famously said "where words fail, worship starts" and "singing is praying twice over". The gospel and music were both very important to him.

Venantius Fortunatus (ca. 550 AD) was Bishop of Poitiers. Christ was central in his sermons. He also wrote eleven books of hymns and poems, *Miscellanea*, in which the gospel and music are closely connected.

The reign of Pope Gregory (ca. 600 AD) marked the end of the free expression of revival and praise music. This pope viewed music as the sung Word of God and therefore he was convinced that he had to do his utmost to bring structure and coordination to sacred music. He collected all hymns, psalms and spiritual songs and ordered them. This marked the beginning of the old Roman Catholic choir music, Gregorian chant and Ambrosian hymns. Rome is the seat of the Scola Cantorum, and all hymns had to be sung in the same manner in which this choir sang them. Gregory's rules were so strict that only in the Hallelujah were a few embellishments allowed.

The decline of direct expressions of the Holy Spirit in the church went hand in hand with a decline in spontaneity and variety in church music. Sacred music became an institution and lost the dynamic, life-changing power of the Holy Spirit. From then on, the liturgy governed spontaneous worship and this meant the end of part of the creativity in the church. This may all look very unpleasant and it definitely was for many types of 'free' expression, but on the other hand, this was a time of mass migrations and total disruption of the public life in the whole of Western Europe, and the only unifying and civilising factor was the church. Gregory saved what could be saved by making an inventory and bringing structure and this way he preserved Jewish-Christian music. In these dark ages there was one centre of Christianity in which spirituality, mission and music remained alive: the monasteries in

Ireland. From there the gospel was brought to England, the Netherlands, Germany and later the Vikings, and the Irish mission was the basis for reform and civilisation. For centuries no sign of revival and no sign of new sacred music could be found anywhere else. The attempts to keep up the spiritual life with the aid of all kinds of rules only had the adverse effect of suffocating spirituality. International politics and ethics went through a process of general coarsening, which had a profound effect on the christian life as well. For this reason this period is called the Dark Ages. Western and Central Europe were marked by political violence, invasions, mass migration and general disintegration. In this situation the churches and monasteries were the main preserving force for civilisation and the arts. Thanks to Christianity, a degree of education and health care was provided, universities and schools were founded, the arts remained in existence and guilds were encouraged. After the year 1000 AD, Europe gradually settled and the present nation states started to form.

Then, in ± 910 AD, Odo and Odilo came to power in the monastery of Cluny in France. They were the driving force behind a reform of the monastery, a reformation in the monks' way of life, sermons in which the Bible was central again, a restoration of the liturgy, sung prayers and music. The result was a small 'back to basics' movement. Over a century later, Peter Damiani (± 1050 AD) also breathed new life into the monasteries, preached the gospel and wrote new hymns.

Another significant revival took place in the monastery of Citeaux, where the knight Bernard of Clairveaux came to faith around 1100 AD. He preached Christ with a deep, strong faith. His biography and the accounts about Citeaux show many signs of spiritual life and a revival. Bernard wrote a number of hymns. The movement of Citeaux became an inspiration for many people – many people came to faith and were inspired to write new songs of praise and worship.

A particularly special man was St. Francis of Assisi, who lived ca. 1200 AD. Once born again he resolved to spend the rest of his life in purity, humility and poverty, entirely dependent on the grace of his Saviour. He loved the Lord sincerely. He had a talent for reaching ordinary people with his sermons. His way of life inspired missionaries around the world. He was renowned for his personal approach and social involvement. The revival he brought about was, among other things, expressed in the popular spiritual words of the Lauda (hymns sung in unison and written in the language of the people). His most famous Lauda that is still widely known is his 'Hymn of the Sun'.

Revival and music typically go hand in hand and are inextricably bound up with each other. The followers of St. Francis followed his example in this respect as well. Thomas of Celano for example preached and sang the gospel; similarly, Jacopone da Todi preached and sang, and composed many hymns as well. Some time later Francis Xaverius (ca. 1500 AD), who was also inspired by St. Francis, became a passionate preacher of the gospel and a songwriter. He went to the Far East as a missionary.

From the 7th century AD, preaching the gospel became a rarity. The altar had replaced the pulpit and many priests could not even preach. The spiritual need of the church called for a reaction, which came in ± 1160, when in the South of France a big revival took place. The initiator was Peter Valdes, whose sermons brought thousands of people to Christ. They called themselves 'Waldenses', followers of this great evangelist. This revival took place outside the Roman Catholic church. The leaders of the Roman Catholic church instigated a large-scale offensive against these born-again christians, which resulted in severe persecutions. These Waldenses were later active in the Reformation. They placed great emphasis on hymns, songs of praise and songs of dedication and commitment. Again, revival and music went hand in hand.

The fossilisation of spiritual life within the church was consolidated at the 4th Lateran Council in 1215. In its defence it should be said that it is understandable that ministers had to study theology and be given Bible teaching to put an end to a proliferation of exegeses. The entire spiritual life, including music, was laid down in rules. As a consequence of all these stifling measures, people with a living and creative faith were forced to leave the church. Even the Renaissance largely took place outside the church. Spiritual life in the church was as good as dead. In 1324, Pope John XXII announced that all new forms of musical expression were forbidden from then on. New tunes, tempi or rhythms were no longer allowed. During the Middle Ages, developments in any aspect of life stagnated due to the strict rules of the guilds. Within the existing trades there was no room for innovation, creativity was strictly limited and remained within the well-defined boundaries of guilds and monasteries (think for example of miniatures, sculpture and architecture). But the Renaissance put an end to the rules that restrained art. It was time for a new art.

The leaders of the church in Rome were more involved in power politics than in spiritual leadership. Treason and intrigues were rife. In Rome everything was for sale, even the office of Cardinal. In ca. 1400 there were even three popes!

Yet here and there tiny revivals did take place within the church. Around 1320, Meister Eckhart served the church in Cologne; he wrote songs about the christian faith in German, which were called the 'Leise'. Around 1350, Jan van Ruysbroeck, who worked for the church in the area of Brussels, wrote hymns. Around 1380 we find the 'Brothers of the common life' in Deventer and Zwolle in the Netherlands; with their renewed commitment they put particular emphasis on pastoral care, teaching and preaching. They composed new songs about the love of God, dedication and worship. Two well-known examples of this movement are Geert Grote and Thomas à Kempis (the author of 'The Imitation of Christ', one of the books that has sold most copies in the world).

Around 1350 the famous reformer John Wycliffe was active in the UK. His message inspired poets and composers to write new spiritual songs in England, and also inspired the church in Prague, in particular Jan Hus (ca. 1400). Hus started a back-to-the-Bible movement. His preaching caused a national revival, involving preaching and singing in the local language for the first time ever (the Hussian hymns have become famous). It marked the beginning of the hymn in the Czech language. In 1408 the Pope interfered in this revival and in 1414 the Council of Constance condemned the movement. Jan Hus ended at the stake as a martyr for his faith, but the revival in doctrine and song could not be stopped, not even by the severe persecutions that followed on the Council of Constance. The heirs of Jan Hus' revival were called Moravian brothers.

Around 1450, the priest Jan Brugman preached all over the Netherlands, calling people to repent and convert. He became so famous for his sermons that he was immortalised in the expression 'talking like Brugman'. Apart from sermons, Brugman also wrote hymns for his Saviour.

The revival initiated by Hus caused major unrest within the church, which could not understand this revival and did not know how to respond to it. The small revivals were warnings of God to the church to follow Him in all aspects of life. But the church was not prepared to listen and the clergy disregarded the warning. This caused so much frustration among ordinary people that the time was ripe for an international revival, which came with the Reformation.

CHAPTER 50. THE REFORMATION UNTIL THE PRESENT

The Reformation was a renewal movement within the Roman Catholic church in the west. Many people received new life by the renewal of their personal faith. This resulted in new praise and worship, which in turn effected a renewal of music and art. The Reformation produced a tremendous musical revival as well: people used music to express themselves and communicate with others. The leaders of the Reformation, including Luther, made the gospel more accessible by setting essential parts to music with the purpose of reaching people's hearts. As a result of the Reformation, the church started singing again, under the motto 'a living church is a singing church'. Luther (1483-1546) challenged songwriters and composers to produce new sacred music and this proved very successful. He famously said, "Why should the devil have all the good music!" (Later William Booth and Larry Norman used these words as well). Luther wrote many hymns himself. He kept the good old hymns from the Roman Catholic church and made different arrangements for others. This was the time when the first chorales were composed. In 1524 the first evangelical song was written! However, the fire of the revival was gradually extinguished by a focus on dogmas, laws and rules. This happened when the Treaty of Münster of 1648 secured a degree of freedom of religion. This treaty granted the Reformation, which was originally a countermovement and movement of the people, official status and it became 'established'.

The right dogmas gradually became more important than the right lifestyle. Nevertheless, in the first two hundred years of the Reformation in Germany, hundreds of beautiful hymns were composed. Famous poets from the Revival include Michael Praetorius, Nicolai Philipp, Johann Crüger (he wrote hymn books), Paul Gerhardt (after Luther Germany's most important poet of hymns), Martin Rinckart, Johann Rudolf Ahle, Heinrich Cornelius Hecker, Philipp Friedrich Hiller (he preached through his hymns), Christian Furchtegott Gillert, Christian Gottlieb Göz, Carl August Döring, Gottlieb Baumann, Christian and Gottlieb Barth (the latter linked the Reformation to the Möttlinger movement, a new pietistic revival in Germany). The German Reformation has produced magnificent hymns of personal faith and commitment and impressive church music that includes compositions by Heinrich Schütz and J.S. Bach.

In Germany and later in the Netherlands, a small revival took place under the Mennonites (ca. 1600). Some of them emigrated to the United States. The Mennonites have written songs as well.

Another great revival was the reformation of Calvin. He brought the Psalms back into the church in the language of the people, which he considered very important. 'Praise God in your own words' was his device, and he felt that this should include the Word of God. On this principle he encouraged many new forms of expression and the composition of new tunes. The great names of Calvin's revival are: Louis Bourgeois, Beza, Marot and Maître Pierre. The reformation of Calvin, including the revival of 'his' music, has had most influence in Scotland (John Knox studied in Geneva), the Netherlands (Marnix of St. Aldegonde studied in Geneva too), France, Hungary and the United States (the Puritans). Calvin himself achieved a proper balance between preaching and singing and it is unfortunate that his followers in due course made the sermon much more important than the singing. Calvin was even in favour of dancing (in private)! The importance of Calvin for hymns of praise is at times underestimated.

Let us now look at the impact of the Reformation on the music in various countries.

In Switzerland, the work of the reformer Zwingli is well-known. He also encouraged the composition of new songs.

In France, a number of Waldenses remained, and as the language of the Reformation in Geneva was French the revival spread through France like wildfire. This revival was suppressed brutally in persecutions and the massacre of St. Bartholomew in 1572. Many believers fled to the Netherlands, Berlin, and England (from the 18th century many would go to the United States). Persecutions flared up again around 1680, which again resulted in groups of believers fleeing the country. A large group of French christians fled to London. One of them, August Montague Toplady (ca.1760), became a well-known poet and preacher in London. However, the revival in France ended in persecutions.

The same happened in Belgium. The Reformation in the Netherlands started in the part that is now called Belgium. Severe repression followed and many reformational christians moved to the Netherlands and England, in particular after Spanish troops seized Antwerp in 1585. Famous composers-preachers from this time include Marnix of St. Aldegonde, Peter Datheen (he translated the Psalms of Marot into Dutch), Valerius, Willem van Zuylen van Nijevelt, Jan Uitenhove and many others.

After Antwerp had been captured, the Reformation became a typically North Netherlands affair, and Holland became the first Protestant republic. However, preaching aimed at salvation was soon overshadowed by dogmatic struggles and the true spiritual life disappeared. Praise and worship threatened to be crushed by the wheels of institutions.

The preaching of John Knox in Scotland gave rise to a national reformation. Many new hymns originate from that time. A product of this reformation was Horace Bonar (1808-1889), who was called the prince among Scottish songwriters.

In England, many people were inspired by the Reformation. The work of archbishop Cranmer (around 1550), Miles Coverdale, and Nicolas Ridley is well known. At times a revival ended abruptly at the hand of a Roman Catholic government. From the time of Cromwell, the Reformation could penetrate many areas of society. As a result many people, like John Milton, were inspired to write new songs. But not everybody felt at home in Britain. To some it was all too Anglican, or they felt that life was too much pre-arranged. This resulted in the revival among the Quakers (around 1690, with names like Fox, Barclay, Penn) and a group of pilgrims left, first for the Netherlands and then to the United States. The Pilgrims spent the night before they set sail for America singing and praying in the church of Delfshaven.

Meanwhile in England, William Croft (1678-1727) gave an entirely new, different character to new church hymns. As regards music people initially depended on Geneva, but under the influence of Händel, Croft's music and songs took a new direction.

The Scandinavian government decided simply to switch to the new faith of the Reformation. Despite this decision, the fire of the Revival had by no means spread everywhere. Yet there was new faith and new music. At first the churches imported the hymns of Luther and Calvin, but later people like Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock (around 1790), a minister in Copenhagen, started writing their own hymns. Another example is Bernhard Severin, a teacher from Sorö (around 1840), who wrote many hymns, and the Lutheran bishop Johan Olof Wallin (around 1830) from Sweden, who was an acclaimed preacher and poet. As the change of faith had been imposed by the state, it took more time before real revivals took place.

The 19th century marked a time of large-scale revivals in Scandinavia. In this century many free denominations, including the baptists, came into being. At the start of the 20th century,

another revival took place and this time it resulted in large pentecostal churches. These two revivals gave rise to a vast number of new songs.

Let us go back to the days of the Reformation. As a result of the decrees of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), much changed in the Roman Catholic church (Counter Reformation), but much of this was initiated by the church hierarchy and not by the believers. As a consequence, the incentive for real spiritual renewal at times disappeared. In addition, the Reformation lost much of its renewing power due to the fact that people disagreed among themselves on dogmas and the structure of their religion. As soon as the new life disappeared, the 'waves' of songwriting stopped, as did the creative renewal which gave the impulse to praise and worship or expressions of them. Nevertheless, the process of songwriting always continued, albeit on a much more limited level. The Counter Reformation, which started with the Council of Trent, was partly a kind of revival and brought about an awakening in the Roman Catholic church. In the beginning many songs were exchanged, with people in the Roman Catholic church singing the same songs as those in Protestant churches. At times it also seemed as if there was no internal renewal at all in the Roman Catholic church. But in chapter 49 we mentioned a number of vital revivals in the church before the Reformation. These events constitute the joint history of the Roman Catholic church and the Protestant churches of today. Many Protestants do not view this as their heritage, but if you study Luther and Calvin, you begin to understand the extent to which Protestantism is rooted in the Roman Catholic spiritual revival from before the Reformation. It is tragic that so many Protestants keep up the barriers of old prejudices against Roman Catholics, which prevents them from seeing the renewing work that God has done within the Roman Catholic church over the centuries.

In the Netherlands, this renewal partly went back to the deeply spiritual and mystical movement of Hadewych and Ruysbroeck in the 11th century and formed a new movement whose most significant representative was Thomas à Kempis (author of the *De Imitatione Christi*). This made a tremendous impression on representatives from the Roman Catholic church in other countries, including Cardinal De Bérulle (France), Francis of Sales, and Port Royal (Mother Angelique).

Famous renewers of the Roman Catholic spiritual life include Francis of Assisi, Thomas Aquinas, Ignatius Loyola, and Dominic. They contributed to the sources for the Counter Reformation. There were also vital impulses from Spain (ca. 1580) by Teresa of Avila and

John of the Cross. All these Christians, who possessed great spiritual gifts, demonstrated a combination of a truly renewed life combined with and expressed in music, poetry and other art forms.

There are still spiritual renewal movements in the Roman Catholic church. A renewal movement that is currently very prominent is the charismatic movement that has been active since 1970. Again the outward signs of a renewal, an increase of new music and other art, are clearly visible. Another strong movement can be found in France and is headed by Brother André Gouzes (Camargues) of the Emmanuel community (Paris, Paray-le-Monial).

Within the charismatic renewal of our time we also see cross-overs, in the sense that the same songs are sung across the denominations. An example of this is Karen Lafferty's (a Protestant) praise song *Seek ye first the kingdom of God*. On the other hand, there are typically Roman Catholic composers, such as the Talbot Brothers, who bless millions of Protestants by their songs.

As the Reformation fizzled out in many countries, people sought a new commitment. Around 1650, the pietistic movement arose in the Netherlands and other countries, including Moravia. An exponent of Pietism is Philip Jacob Spener (ca. 1700) in Germany, who preached and challenged people to a personal faith.

Pietism immediately gave rise to a host of new songs that expressed joy and faith. The composers and poets of Pietism included Jean de Labadie, Anna Maria Schuurman, Adam Drese (who wrote the song *Seelenbräutigam*), Friedrich Adolf Lampe, and Valentin Ernst Löscher. One of Spener's spiritual followers was August Hermann Francke from Halle (ca. 1720). He sympathized with the people, preached, founded a good school and wrote hymns. Count Nicolas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760) was at this school. Zinzendorf developed a personal relationship with Christ after seeing a painting in Düsseldorf which sparked an inner revival in him. Back in Saxony, he founded a meeting of brothers, the Moravian Brothers (*Herrnhutters*). The Christians from Moravia started their movement there as well and Zinzendorf inherited their hymns, as did other born-again Christians from the Lutheran and Calvinistic denominations.

The Moravian Brothers developed into a missionary church that evangelised in Europe and on other continents. In the wake of this revival, many new hymns were written by poets and composers like Zinzendorf himself, Christian Gregor and finally John Horn (16th century).

England saw a big revival as well. The basis for this revival was laid by Isaac Watts (1674-1784), a minister of an independent church in London. He was a captivating speaker and a great poet and composer. As he believed that the gospel was there for the people, he wrote popular songs. His position within Wesley's revival was that of the avant-gardist. John Wesley started his work in Oxford ca. 1730. His vision was the same as Watts', namely to 'win souls for the Lamb'. As a result, something that resembled a national revival began. Other preachers and leaders that were central to the movement were, apart from John Wesley, Whitefield and Charles Wesley (who had come to faith in 1738 after studying Luther and Von Zinzendorf). The Wesleys soon had to leave the Anglican church. There are people who claim that this revival protected England from the terrors that the revolution in France would bring about. The fire of the revival was blazing and in its wake many new songs were written. The Wesleys wrote many of these song texts themselves: Charles Wesley alone is said to have written some 6,500 (!) songs.

This revival marked the start of the Methodist Church. One of the many people who got converted was John Newton (1725-1807). He had been a slave trader who after his conversion (1764) became a preacher. He is probably the author of the famous song *Amazing Grace*.

A typical fruit of Methodist Revival is the work of the Salvation Army (ca. 1880). Once its founder, William Booth, started his ministry, people converted to Christ and he developed a system to care for them. One of his most important tools was music. Hundreds of songs originated and are still originating from this source. The Salvation Army specialises in marching music. Booth often used worldly music, for which he wrote new, christian texts and generally challenged his Army to win the 'good music' back from the devil.

Influences from Wesley's Revival initially went as far as New England in the United States. Jonathan Edwards started a big revival in that area, but the effects of his work petered out.

Yet a revival from New England in 1795 reached large parts of the United States, thanks to the work of people like McGee, T. Dwight, McGready, Torrey, Sunday, Smith and Cambell Morgan. These two revivals inspired many composers to write music.

The development of Pietism and Methodism in Europe and the United States resulted in a strong increase in evangelism, mission, social work, care for the sick, education, bible societies and Sunday schools, and hundreds of songs and song books were produced.

The French revolution raged over Europe like a storm. Many christians were killed, in particular at the start of the French Revolution in France. One of the victims was the minister Johann Kaspar Lavater, who was killed when he wanted to help the wounded in Zürich in 1801. This preacher wrote christian songs. After the peace of 1814, many churches and lives were destroyed by liberalism. It was time for a new revival.

This became the *Reveil* (Revival) that started ca. 1830 in Geneva and Lausanne. One of the most significant features of this revival was its focus on personal salvation. The revival had an immediate effect on music, inspiring composers like César H.A. Malan (chants de Sion), Ami Isaac D. Bost, Merle d'Abigné and Alexandre Vinet. The revival reached other European countries as well. In Germany, Karl J.P. Spitta (who wrote the song book *Psalter und Harfe*), Wichern, Theodor Fzangner and Georg Müller were active, and exponents of the revival in England include Ch. Kingsley, E. Fry, John Bewley, Williams, John B. Dykes and Ellerton. In the Netherlands the revival was prepared by Bilderdijk. Apart from being a religious event, the revival in the Netherlands had an intellectual, political and social impact as well.

Exponents of the revival in the Netherlands included Groen van Prinsterer, I. da Costa, W. de Clerq, H. Pierson, J. de Liefde, A. van Scheltema, J.J. ten Cate, N. Beets and S.M. van Woensel-Kooy. All of them were inspired by a living faith and wrote new songs. The Netherlands Reformed Church introduced hymns (in addition to the traditional Psalms) under the influence of the revival. Nevertheless, because of a rigid attitude, the Reformed Church in the Netherlands seceded from the original Netherlands Reformed Church. In other countries schisms took place as well.

After some time this revival stranded in dead theology and formalism. In the United Kingdom and the United States a new revival started around 1870, which was the result of the efforts

of Moody and Sankey, with Moody being the preacher and Sankey the singer. Witness accounts say that those who were not reached by Moody's sermons were reached by Sankey's music. Preaching and music very much went hand in hand in this revival. Sankey's song book *Sacred Songs* was translated into twenty languages and sold more than eighty million copies.

Around 1880, another big revival started in England as a result of the work of Spurgeon. He became a Baptist and his revival marked the development of the Baptist movement in other European countries as well. Typical for this movement were sermons about biblical judgement and many new songs.

In Wales, the fire of revival was alighted around 1890 and peaked at the start of 1900. God used the preacher Edwards in a special way. This revival again meant that many new songs were written. It also sparked numerous small revivals in other countries, including the Maranatha movement of Johannes de Heer in the Netherlands (sermons combined with new music!). Many songbooks of today contain songs from the revival in Wales.

Around 1900, the Pentecostal movement arose in Los Angeles. Accounts of this movement mainly speak about Pentecost, but the actual basis for the movement is in fact a kind of biblical judgement preaching with an emphasis on personal salvation. An astounding number of songs originates from this revival. Within twenty years, pentecostal groups sprang up around the world. After 1930 the movement lost some of its momentum, but from 1950 a new wave of pentecostal renewal went around the world, accompanied by many new songs and artistic expressions.

Around 1965, the Jesus movement, which originates in California, sprang up. The Jesus movement had most impact on youth and spread to many countries in the world. It used various forms of art, but its pivotal instrument was music, with travelling music groups spreading the message of personal faith, personal worship, praise and biblical teaching. It marked the start of a great variety of gospel music in all kinds of styles. This gospel music had tremendous influence. It is astonishing to see how God used music. Just read the accounts about Calvary Chapel and Church on the Way, and the life stories of Pat Boone, Cliff Richard, Andrae Crouch, Leon Patillo, Johnny Cash, Continental Singers, Maria Muldauer, Al Green, Donna Summer, B.J. Thomas, Noel Paul Stookey, Inge Brück, Larry

Norman (who famously quoted 'Why should the devil have all the good music'), Barry McGuire and many others.

In East European countries we hear of revivals that took place centuries ago or small-scale revivals that are taking place now. The typical features of all revivals, personal salvation, biblical teaching and music, are present there as well. Many songs have been written in their wake. It is unfortunate that most people in Western Europe know so little about East Europe, for as a result of the many political changes of the past years, the life and the music of the churches in East Europe can now become a greater source of inspiration for the west.

A significant fact is that evangelical Christians meet each other around the world and sing, praise and pray together. Many important revival songs find their way from one denomination to another, which makes us all "one in God's love".

Around 1972 another interesting revival started, which is generally called the 'Praise Revival'. Suddenly people started setting Bible texts to music. Well-known exponents of the praise revival are Dave and Dale Garratt from New Zealand, Merv and Merla Watson from Canada, the Gaithers and the Rambo's from Nashville, and Maranatha Music (California), Hosanna Music, Graham Kendrick and others from the United Kingdom.

In many countries there is a thriving charismatic movement as well. This is not a separate movement based outside the churches, but it operates within. Churches that have a charismatic movement include the Roman Catholic church, the Baptist church, the Lutheran church, and the Anglican church. This renewal movement has a musical component as well and produces many new songs.

When we read the Book of Revelation, we can see that revival, expressed in praise and worship, will continue until we stand before the throne of God. I am so glad that there will be a creative revival there. We will sing new songs as well as the song of Moses, accompanied by musical instruments. In addition, there will be the most splendid and magnificent work of art ever: the new Jerusalem, a giga-sacrifice of praise.

CHAPTER 51. SOME CONCLUSIONS

- 1) In the chapters 47-50 we briefly summarised the entire 'history of revivals' from a musical point of view and it became abundantly clear that there has not been a single revival that did not produce many new songs and other forms of art.
- 2) If you study the content of the revivals, it transpires that these are all about reconsidering the faith. The dominant aspect is a 'return to God', which comprises personal conversion as well as what is called metanoia, a turnabout in doings and dealings. This usually led to other forms of evangelisation, mission, care for the poor, care for the sick, care for widows, and schools/education. All revivals therefore had a strong social component, demonstrating literally the words of James: "*Show me your faith from your deeds*" (cf. James 1:27; 2:14-17, 24; 3:13).
- 3) The rule that revivals meant a reconsideration of the whole of life (personally and for the community) and therefore led to social reforms, also meant that revivals at times had a political impact (for example abolition of slavery). An exception to this rule is the neo-pentecostal revival that started about 1950, mixed with the Jesus revolution of the sixties, and gave rise to the wave of praise & worship that is currently going around the world. This 'revival' usually appears very one-sided, with major emphasis on personal experiences and feelings. People get together in groups that enable and reinforce such feelings, and as a result such groups threaten to slip into a form of fundamentalism with at times scarily sectarian features within a few years (compare this to the Pietism of the 17th and 18th century). In the end these groups are no longer an oasis of revival but a breeding ground of traumas. There is a long list of officially registered stories of seriously damaged people around the world.

Despite the fact that the language of this latest praise & worship movement is very beautiful and the music/dance/art is relevant (contemporary), it is generally focused on personal experience only, which makes an eventual collapse inevitable. The missing link is the relationship with the outside world, with people of other convictions, the social underclass, immigrants or refugees. Such contacts keep a church's feet firmly on the ground and balance the 'revival experience'. In the past 35 years I have traversed the whole world and personally visited innumerable groups, churches, and meetings where I have witnessed and drawn attention to this issue. Fortunately there are places where the lack of social action was recognised, and once the people and their leaders recognise this, it is still not too late to add these important social elements. A true 'revival church' therefore also has activities in areas of social action, for example care, refugees and education.

4) Research into the praise & worship texts from the Psalms up to recently written songs teaches us another interesting fact. Most of the texts of the past three thousand years have great depth: subjects include dedication to God; thankfulness for the certainty of salvation of the soul; the beauty of God's creation; injustice; a call for justice etc. This depth and breadth is lacking in the wave of praise & worship of recent years. It is a logical consequence of what was said in point 3. If you lose yourself in your own sensations, you lose sight of your neighbours and their situation. And then you get into conflict with the word of Jesus, *'love your neighbour as yourself'* (Matthew 22:39b; James 2:8b), for that means that you would do for your neighbour what you would do for yourself. In addition, as a group you run the risk of ending with the practices God curses: *"I hate, I despise your religious feast; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps! But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a neverfailing stream."*

"You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph" (Amos 5:21-23; 6:5-6). Just note how Amos clearly continues the line from praise to social and political action for those at the bottom of society. So if we develop such activities and direct part of our efforts (in various ways and very practically) towards work for less advantaged people in society, and then sing our songs of praise, we would comply with what Amos and Jesus say and may hope that God values our sacrifice of praise.

A related issue is that of the terrible one-sidedness of much contemporary praise & worship music. Some of the songs don't seem to get above the level of muzak (the wallpaper music you hear in a shopping centre), or they have the effect of a mantra rather than resembling anything like a biblical song of praise. The only correct measure of depth, breadth, richness and emotions, from closeness to God to anger and protest, can be found in the collection of songs of praise in the Old Testament: the Psalms. If you compare them to the average collection of modern songs of praise that are used in many congregations, the one-sidedness and sickly-sweet shallowness of the latter are at times nauseating.

5) Another danger that clearly leads to a deterioration in quality and content in non-English-speaking countries is the dominance of praise songs in English that are simply copied without any critical scrutiny (or even actively promoted by certain organisations/publishers). Their translation is often poor, if they are translated at all, and these poor-quality songs are introduced at the expense of gems of (new) praise songs in the country's own language. If you study songbooks over the ages, it becomes clear that valuable songs from the past

manage to keep (and deserve to keep) their place next to new songs. This has been the case from the days of the early church onwards and is mentioned as early as in Eph. 5:9 and Col. 3:16, which refer to Psalms, songs of praise and spiritual songs. Each of these three types of song had to be given its place in the life of the congregation, in meetings and services. In other words:

- Every musical style is suitable for praise and worship.
- It is to be recommended that contemporary songs and versions of songs are used in the musical part of the service, as well as treasured songs from the past (the early church, Middle Ages, Reformation, 17th century, 18th century, 19th century, 20th century) and the Psalms. This is of particular importance for groups that have so far only used contemporary, textually shallow songs.
- Another recommendation is for leaders of the music ministry to have a critical look at the content of the songs and not only to choose swinging, up-tempo songs that are easy to sing and release emotions quickly.
- It is recommended that the leader of the music ministry keeps the congregation with both feet firmly on the ground and pays attention to the reality of life outside the church, opening the door to the poor and needy in this world.
- It is recommended that the old churches that spring from the rich history of the traditional liturgy and still use it (the reformational churches, the Roman Catholic church, the Anglican church, the Lutheran church, the Orthodox churches) make sensible use of the rich variety of versions and forms of contemporary music. Personally I would choose to include one or perhaps two good contemporary songs in the Sunday morning liturgy, as appropriate. Be wise and sing them with organ or piano accompaniment. In addition, I would, in close consultation with the church council or elders, start youth services with and for young people at another time (Sunday afternoon or evening, or Saturday evening) that feature more modern versions and forms of music and include (if possible) for example a youth choir, band, liturgical dance, performing arts, poetry or a storyteller. Make it crystal clear to all that these services are meant for young people, so that you don't get unnecessary criticism from older people. Dare to experiment with the order of service, including where and for how long the Bible is opened and God's Word is told. It is also possible to integrate drama, special dress, mime, poetry, declamation or storytelling.
- All these contemporary versions have their own requirements as regards PA systems and lighting, which deserve ample attention in order to do justice to the music.

6) In the chapters 1-42 you have been taken on a journey of discovery into what praise has meant to the lives of many worshippers over the centuries. You are bound to have gained

new knowledge and insight and the logical question is now: how are you going to apply your new insights and how will you elaborate them in your personal life, in your praise & worship group, and in the life of your church or group? It is not an option to leave everything as it was.

- 7)** The 'romantic idea' that 'the Holy Spirit will guide us' or the argument 'in our group everything is as it is because the Spirit has guided us to do it this way' (implying that it is good the way it is and the rest is rubbish), are cheap and easy excuses. Three thousand years of history have demonstrated that Christians actively engaged in plans, gave commissions, took decisions and did not keep putting things off. A leader (in the Old Testament a judge or king) who had a certain insight set an example and put people to work. His deeper understanding of the faith or his conversion had an effect on him and the people followed; they put artists to work (in particular the kings commissioned large projects and financed them) and facilitated a renaissance of the arts (it required quite some expertise to restore the temple building and reawaken temple music).
- 8)** All the arts deserve a place in the praise service, not to be worshipped, but to support the worship. Needless to say, the artists themselves cannot be the object of veneration. They will also have to be and stay very aware of this themselves.
- 9)** The fact that gifts are practised at many levels, which is fine in private, does not mean that every quality is good quality. Lack of self-criticism should not be tolerated. Stimuli to study and produce good quality art are part of the life of the congregation. When the arts are transferred to the public space, quality is even more of a requirement! Striving for quality is too easily viewed as curbing enthusiasm or the work of the Holy Spirit. After many talks with members and leaders of churches I can only conclude that that argument is used to escape putting time and effort into study, practice and training. Don't forget that the worshippers (Levites) under David and Solomon were '*trained and skilled in music for the Lord*'! This is still a tremendous challenge. Our sacrifice of praise (e.g. making coffee or costumes, caring, arts, bringing up children, driving, or whatever) may show quality.
- 10)** Praise is a lifestyle. It comprises all aspects of our lives: our families, art, daily life, our handling of environmental issues, preserving creation, developing gifts, our place in the community, social activities, the way in which we work, the aims and objectives we set in our lives, the way we treat our partner, etc. "*Do everything as for the Lord.*"
- 11)** Continue here with conclusions you are resolved to put into practice:.....

CHAPTER 52. PRACTICAL

After all the analyses, historical and prophetic explorations and conclusions, it is time to put things into practice. This chapter gives some suggestions that may be of help to make progress. This practical aid has also been published in Volume 2 of this series.

1. Two-track policy and the railway sleepers

Proper rail connections depend on good rails on perfect railway sleepers that keep the rails in place. On these rails the (gospel) train is on its way to its destination.

Balance

The above metaphor shows that everything has to be in balance. Both rails have to be strong, the sleepers have to be equally strong and maintenance is required to keep it that way. This way the track remains in balance, there is no danger of derailments and the gospel train can safely reach its destination. In the following paragraphs I will elucidate all these aspects.

- * left rail: artistic quality
- * right rail: spiritual growth
- * sleepers: infrastructure

2. Artistic quality

This whole book has demonstrated that quality is particularly valued by God. Quality brings God honour, as it does full justice to the praise. You have been able to read in the book that the Levites who made sacrifices of praise by singing and making music under the reigns of David and Solomon were '*trained and skilled in music for the Lord*'. That is not something you achieve in a fortnight. It is the result of painstaking practice, teaching, tryouts and critical assessments. Does it then mean that in fact only professionals deserve a place in the choir, band or praise group? Certainly not! I only emphasise a principle, the need for the motivation to learn and to be trained, which are the things that distinguish such a group from a church that sings (out of tune).

The following requires proper agreements:

- * set weekly rehearsals or practice on a fixed evening;
- * set clear times for the start and finish of such rehearsals;

- * appoint a leader;
- * everybody knows the repertoire in time;
- * start with a welcome, open the meeting with a thought, Bible passage or chapter from this book, and prayer;
- * do singing exercises at the start;
- * do relaxation exercises;
- * if there is a band, the band must have tuned up before the start;
- * if you use equipment, it must have been set up *and* adjusted before the start;
- * appoint a music leader;
- * start with a well-known song to get into it;
- * then start on a new song;
- * have the break on time;
- * end with a final prayer;
- * keep practising during the week at home.

How to work out the above in detail to achieve good quality is described in the book *Behind the Scenes* (published by Continental Sound/Christian Artists).

Quality is the result of practice, practice and more practice, inspired by spiritual growth and motivation.

3. Spiritual growth

I hope that the contents of this book have aroused your interest and you are now determined to bring its principles into practice. In that case there are a few issues to take into consideration.

* If you are an existing choir or youth choir, gospel group or praise team and you intend to apply biblical principles, it is worth realising beforehand that changing an existing system can be an uphill struggle. You cannot simply be the bull in the china shop, leaving a trail of destruction. There is another method, that Jesus mentions in one of his parables: “plant seeds and have patience”. It may take a whole season before you see sufficient result to be able even to start applying the principles from this book. A good way to start each rehearsal is by reading a chapter together, individually or as a group. Another thing is that you should invest in relationships among group members. You can’t go faster than the slowest member of your group. This is called the shepherd principle: the slowest lamb determines the pace of the flock. But the flock does move.

Another aspect is that you should beware of the overenthusiasts. They can start nagging and before you realise it they can develop a touch of fundamentalism. This kind of people has to be tactfully but resolutely curbed. If such a person is unable to show respect for insights and feelings of others, your choir, group or band is perhaps not the right place for him/her.

* If you are about to form a choir, group, band or praise group, you have the opportunity to put down a firm foundation from the very start by making use of this book. Make it very clear to everyone who wants to be involved that you are going to take this book as a guideline.

Unfortunately, there are evangelical groups that dislocate the entire train. In the end the only thing that matters to such people is to be 'spiritual' (superspiritual), based on the thought 'If we just sing in new tongues, the Holy Spirit will do it all'. Nothing is further from the truth. The examples from this book show how the depth of the spiritual sacrifice of praise becomes apparent from the quality of our work. The next question you will get is 'But surely God works in people even if things do not go smoothly'? Of course God can work in people under any circumstances: He can even work through the braying of Balaam's ass. Only, it is not the purpose that you hide behind this argument. It has always been God's intention for you to develop each gift, talent, or personal opportunity (this is explained in Volume 1 of this series *Biblical Principles*, called *Creative and Christian: Biblical Principles of Creativity and Art*). This book on worship has to help you on the way to quality (study and practice) and spiritual growth, which can also only be effected by study and practice.

Spiritual growth does not come out of the blue! It requires looking up the Bible verses from this book and reading the Bible in general. This book also encourages further thinking, considering, weighing, internalising, making choices, motivation, meditation and prayer. That will take time as well and you'd best spend some time doing this *every day*. It will add much more depth to your life and your music, which will in turn be much more convincing and a great blessing for your audience, the congregation.

4. Railway sleepers

The *longest existing* (since 1963) and *most comprehensive* music ministry is that of the Continentals (annually ca. 70 groups on the road; more than 1500 tours; more than 15,000 participants in the tours; more than 10 million visitors; more than 100 LP/CD productions). There are Continental Kids groups (8-12 years old), Young Continentals (13-16 years old), The Continentals (16-33 years old) and Continentals Encores (25-55 years old). In addition

to many English-singing groups there are also tours in the languages Dutch, French, German, Spanish (South America), Brazilian-Portuguese, Japanese, Italian, Korean, Slovakian, Hungarian, and Romanian. Practically every country is covered. What are the reasons for this enormous success? Those who know the Continentals, know that they go for quality, an extensive repertoire, artistic renewal and spiritual depth, in combination with great motivation. But there are more groups which do this and yet disappear at some point, so there has to be another aspect to the Continentals. That's right! It is the aspect that the Continentals share with every other successful organisation, choir, dance or theatre company, and ministry: they are supported by a very clear and well-qualified **leadership and management structure** that creates and maintains the infrastructure, keeps the rails in place and ensures that the train reaches its target.

There are some (over)spiritual groups that will tell you to your face that such things are all nonsense and are only in the way of the Holy Spirit's work. Their motto is "Management is wrong." But the Continentals could never have reached so many people and been a blessing to millions of people if the organisation had not had proper administration, leadership, organisation, regulations, management and promotion. Very worldly things! They constitute the railway sleepers that are placed in the gravel, holding the rails together and at the right level to ensure that no stones get onto them that might derail the train.

There is a biblical mandate for all this organisational work:

- In the New Testament, the gift of administration is clearly mentioned among the apostolic gifts, "*And in the church God has appointed ... those able to help others, those with gifts of administration...*" (1 Corinthians 12:28).
- In the previous book you could read up on all the tasks the Levites (the singers from the Old Testament) performed as part of their calling: they were, among other things, gatekeepers and assisted with jurisdiction, transport, education and events. They were masters in organisation, management and administration! Their activities did not simply appear out of the blue. The temple organisation was huge and needed conscientious and careful planning that involved a whole machinery. The choirs and orchestras that could be heard in the temple were just the top of the iceberg. God is a God of order. Chaos, unnecessary improvisation and makeshift solutions are actually the things that impede the work of the Holy Spirit. Proper organisation takes time and energy and involves costs. What such an infrastructure looks like is described in detail in the book *Behind the Scenes*. Below you will find a summary of principles from the experience of the Continentals and other ministries, all of which can be found in the book *Behind the Scenes*.

* Motivation

There are various forms of motivation (this is explained in Volume 5 of this series *Biblical Principles* entitled *Leadership*).

- Most members of choirs and bands are motivated for one season, so don't drag people along against their will. Start each season with an interview for everyone and discuss why they should join for the new season. Don't admit unmotivated people, as they can easily demotivate others. Unmotivated people are loose canons that can cause much damage.
- If someone is motivated to perform a particular duty or fill a particular post, make sure that s/he has (or wants to acquire) the competence or skills needed, for example:
 - light and sound: don't let them sing, only do the 'technology';
 - logistics: let them arrange all the transport and only allow them on stage if they have the required talent for that ministry;
 - speaking: a good talk or presentation is worth a million, but there are many speakers who sing like crows;
 - management: management is an art and not the same as dictating to people what they should do. Management tasks cover a period of several years. An average board member is in office for four or five years, so people will need long-term motivation to do this. Management training pays rich rewards, so learn to manage.
- The motivation of groups/members of choirs can get into a dip as well. There are activities and techniques for boosting motivation and encouraging teambuilding.

* life span: our organisation of Christian Artists/CNV Kunstenbond has existed since 1969 and we have gone through many phases in our own development, as well as witnessed the same phases in member organisations. If you look closely at these phases, the following pattern appears:

- Pioneers set the organisation up. They are top-down organisers, a kind of generals whose greatest value lies in getting something off the ground. Pioneers are often (though not always) not very democratic in their decision-taking, and as a result most pioneers get stuck after a few years when the organisation is up and running. The group wants to have a say but the general wants to continue taking all the decisions, and the result is a crisis, damaged people and often the end of a great initiative. Therefore the general has to start building a leadership framework, set up a board and start delegating tasks as early as in the third year, and transfer power in the fourth year. The initiative has to continue within an association structure. If you don't do this and there is no crisis, many workers from the beginning will

stop in the 4th or 5th year. It may be necessary to have a change of conductor or artistic leader before the 5th year.

- The pioneering phase is followed by a phase of democratisation, which is also a consolidation phase. New conflicts often (but not always) break out in the 8th, 9th or 10th year. Timely changes of board members may help or it may be necessary to take on a new conductor or artistic leader.
- The next crisis is likely to present itself around the 14th or 15th year. The same action should be taken as in year 8/9/10.
- The following crisis is likely to present itself around the 19th year. The same action should be taken as in year 8/9/10.

The life span of a group can therefore be very long, but if you don't take a number of administrative precautionary measures, chances are that a great initiative stops after a few years.

Apart from this, there are of course activities with a maximum duration of one project. An example of this is the Christmas musical: three months of rehearsals followed by the performance. Yet these short-term activities also have to be well organised, directed, managed, and promoted.

* Board

A board manages the organisation. Board members have to pick up external and internal signals and react to them quickly. Aspects to manage are:

- Finances, which includes balancing the books. The members pay contributions, which, together with the revenue from performances, actions, subsidies and the sale of CDs constitute the income. All receipts of expenses have to be kept for seven years. Proper accounts must be kept. A treasurer has to be appointed. An auditing committee has to check everything for the annual report. If the organisation has a large annual budget with substantial expenditure, an accountant should do the annual accounts.
- Taking decisions *and* carrying them out. This includes monitoring afterwards, by making a report of each meeting (the minutes).
- Meeting.

What does a board do during a board meeting?

- the chairperson opens the meeting;
- the minutes of the last meeting are confirmed (is the report correct?);

- the minutes may give rise to issues that need to be discussed;
- other items on the agenda are discussed:
- incoming correspondence (for example a complaint, mail from your umbrella organisation, a letter from a church);
- policy aims;
- projects;
- rehearsals;
- general finances;
- public relations;
- recruitment of members;
- members' functioning;
- other matters:
 - set a date for the next meeting.
 - briefly summarise who will do what and when (deadlines).
 - any other matter
 - someone closes the meeting.

Remark: the chairperson leads the meeting; the secretary makes minutes and sends them to the board members later.

- Minutes have to be with the board members within three days after the meeting, so that everyone knows what actions s/he is expected to take.
- The agenda for the next meeting is drawn up by the chairperson together with the secretary. The agenda (including any relevant documents) has to be with the board members seven days before the next meeting.
- Confidentiality. Make it a rule that what is discussed at a board meeting is to be kept confidential. If you don't, inner circles develop, people hear things on the grapevine, and matters tend to be blown out of proportion. This has ruined many groups, so a serious warning is fitting.

* Members' meeting

A general meeting is typically held in spring and in August. Such a meeting has to be prepared in detail as well:

- announce the date long in advance;
- the agenda and any documents have to be with the members at least seven days before the members' meeting;
- for other actions look under the heading 'Board';

- note that during a member's meeting members have to have their say about each item on the agenda. The majority decides and this decision is binding.

* Aims

The choir, group or company will obviously have listed its aims in its statute, but such aims are often very general in nature. The following may help:

* List the long-term aims once every four or five years, for example during a weekend in the countryside, asking questions such as 'Where does the group want to be in five or ten years' time?'; 'What do we want to achieve and *why*?' Then describe in detail for the next four or five years *how* you are going to carry out a number of activities each year in order to achieve the five-year objective. Such long-term aims comprise a number of aspects, including:

- aims as regards quality;
- aims as regards contemplation/spiritual growth;
- aims as regards your church/churches;
- aims as regards the repertoire;
- aims as regards the members;
- aims as regards public relations;
- etcetera.

It is a very good idea to define a number of aims for the board and each individual at the start of the five-year term in office. Such a list offers a blueprint that you can refer to at the start and at the end of each year and ask where we are / where I am, what should be done, etc. And, if possible, it will be interesting to formulate a number of personal aims with each new group member and briefly discuss them each year.

* Promotion/PR

The best advertisement is who you are, what you do and how you do it. This applies both on stage and backstage. In addition, there are a number of activities that have to be planned and carried out strategically.

- INTERNALLY

Keep your members well informed, otherwise you are sitting on a time bomb. An announcement during a rehearsal is not enough. Everything should be confirmed in a notice sheet that also has to be sent to those who were absent as soon as possible.

- EXTERNALLY

Inform the media well in time before your performance/activity takes place and have posters, articles, photos and a website ready.

- If you are part of a larger organisation, church, institution or similar, ensure that the organisation receives regular monthly information and updates on work in progress. If monthly reports are considered too much, make sure quarterly reports are sent. Organise a meeting once a year with the council of elders and the minister at which you discuss at least the short-term and long-term aims.

Epilogue

I have received many questions on the subject of 'working in the world' and I would like to make use of this opportunity to answer them. Making music or art in 'the world' (i.e. not in the context of or for a church) is a Levitical calling as well. Doing everything 'as for the Lord' is a healthy, honest and true principle. This means it is not a problem to play hard-rock in a secular rock band or modern classics in a philharmonic orchestra. In that case your Levitical attitude will be focused on the following aspects that have been discussed in this book:

- delivering quality;
- proper motivation, including supporting your group and individual members (also personally);
- going the extra mile;
- acting ethically, which includes fair deals, keeping agreements, taking good care of materials and equipment, being honest and sincere, and speaking the truth;
- being on time, being punctual.

Your witness will be in your acts rather than in your words.

TO CONCLUDE

My aim for this book is that it will prove an impetus for:

- * originality
- * quality
- * creativity

in all forms of praise and worship.

Would you like to react to this book after reading it and acting on it? Please do! I hope this book will be a blessing to you in your daily practice.

Leen La Rivière

Personal notes

Once you have read the whole book, you are advised to start again at the beginning, read a chapter an evening and think it over.

1. Note HERE, what has challenged you from the passage.
2. Note HERE, what you are going to do about it in your own music or art.

This is Volume 3 in the series *Biblical Principles*.

Volume 1 of this series is called *Creative and Christian: Biblical Principles of Creativity and Art*.

Volume 2 of the series is called *Music & Ministry*.

Please send any reactions to these books to:

Leen La Rivière, Continental Art Centre, P.O. Box 81065,
3009 GB Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Alternatively, send an e-mail to
leen@continentalart.org

You can also order the next volume of this series from the above address
(Volume 4 of this series is called *Biblical Principles for the Message*).

The Continental Art Centre organises activities to stimulate creativity and the arts. These include one-day workshops, conferences, seminars, publications, yearbooks, exhibitions and concerts. The Continental Art Centre has several sections:

- The visual art section;
 - The music and media section;
 - The literary section;
 - The dance and other performing arts section;
 - A register of musicians (listing musicians with professional diplomas).
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- All these sections together constitute the Christian trade union for the arts, which helps, advises, supports and encourages people via a clear structure. You are invited to become a member.
 - In addition, there is the annual Christian Artists Seminar, an international study week in July/August for professional artists and artists in training. All artistic disciplines are represented during this week.
 - For post-academic education and lifelong learning there are numerous modules available at the new European Academy for Culture and the Arts.

A perfect opportunity to gain experience for those who are active in music is to take part in a project of the Continentals. These projects last two to four weeks and participants get professional training in all disciplines needed to function as a choir or as a leader, to do the

technical, musical, or instrumental work, to function as a band or a praise group. Continental groups exist for various age groups, including Continental Kids (aged 8-12), Young Continentals (aged 13-16), The Continentals (aged 16-35) and Continental Encores (aged 25-55).

Further information can be found on www.continentalministries.org . Alternatively, please write to: info@continentalministries.org
Continental Art Centre, P.O. Box 81065, 3009 GB Rotterdam, The Netherlands,

Text on the back cover of the book

Praise and worship are very special activities for every christian. Under the influence of certain trends praise and worship can be narrowed down to simple texts, blown-up emotions, or one-sided doctrines. Rather than presenting a 'dream scenario', this book is based on many years of practising praise and worship in a variety of artistic forms and in numerous different ways, in combination with years of research into the history of praise and worship.

After reading the book it is suggested to use it as a biblical diary, by reading a chapter a day and thinking it over. The book is also very suitable for group discussions of leaders in the music ministry, the praise group, leaders of the church, the choir, the dance group, the band, visual artists, theatre makers and youth leaders. We hope this book will prove to be a spur for a general review of praise and worship.

Leen La Rivière (1946) has been actively involved in the arts since 1969. He founded the work of Continental Sound. In the course of years this work expanded rapidly and La Rivière was the driving force behind the foundation of a publisher, the Magazine Music & Art, the annual Christian Artists Seminar, the European Continentals, the foundation of the CNV Kunstenbond (a union for christian artists), the Continental Art Centre, the European Academy etc. Leen La Rivière has written more than twenty books on faith, art, culture, and youth. He is the editor of a series of academic publications on culture and is frequently asked as a speaker at conferences and in churches. Each year, the activities that are organised by the Continental Art Centre attract on average 150,000 people.

"Praise and worship are eroded in our evangelical churches by lack of content. At times songs are selected just because they are easy to sing along with. We are glad about this book." Jan and Nel Kits

"I very much enjoyed this book. It has opened up some new vistas to me, although at times it took a while to take it all in. But the bitter pills had blessed effects! A must-read for any leader, artist, leader of the music ministry, and worshipper." Guido Verhoef, Manifold Clowns and Events

"My compliments for this book. I would like to see its splendid insights widely discussed in the church. It is very important to emphasise the lives of specific people and their

functioning in society, as it puts praise in a sound perspective.” Hans Savert, cabaret performer

“Leen La Rivière has again managed to write a captivating book about praise and worship. The author has studied a number of biblical personae and investigates how and in what way they were worshippers in their faith. The chapters can also be read as a biblical diary. A striking feature of the book is La Rivière’s drive to stay close to the Bible. Worshippers are not zealots or wanderers, they remain level-headed and walk with God in a very practical manner. This daily walking with God before His countenance can be characterised as worship as well. The views of Leen La Rivière show constructive criticism and a critical distance that is remarkable for a man who has invested so much in music, art and songs throughout his life. The book concludes with a brief survey of the history of song in the church and a number of conclusions, one of which is that a revival in churches or congregations without a new wave of songs and music is inconceivable. The author touches on an important point here. Apparently a revival is at first predominantly a movement that communicates strongly via emotion, followed by a phase in which people learn to secure their faith in the words of God. Perhaps this reflects the story of the author himself as well.”
Rev. Piet de Jong - Delfshaven

“This book is an excellent initiative. It is important to keep giving clear direction in this area.”
Prof. Roel Kuipers