DYNAMICS OF WORSHIP

BY PASTOR OWEN E. JACK

MINISTERIAL SECRETARY, SOUTH CARIBBEAN CONFERENCE OF SDA

Reverence for God, the House of God, and the things of God are almost extinct. Sacred and eternal things are placed on the level with the common and profane. There is a blending of the sacred with the secular. The attitude of many leaders and members is “what I think, what I feel and what I want”. It’s no more what God says or what God wants.

Let us look at the dynamics of worship:

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Announcements are items of business and should be done before the midday worship service begins, and before the participants enter for the midday service. Announcements should not be more than five minutes and should not be items that will take people’s thoughts off of God and worship to focus on secular things. At no time should anyone be announcing socials, job vacancies, sales and the price for things since they will only take people’s thoughts away from God and holy things. Such items should be placed on the notice board or announced at the end of the Sabbath. Some letters should not be read entirely, only the information that is necessary should be shared.

Letters for the board or department leaders should not be read to the entire church. The Pastor, First Elder or Communication Secretary should inform the relevant individuals about the workshop or programme. There should be no announcements after the sermon.

The last thing people should go home with is the message they just heard.

The church Manual says on page 121 that “if the announcements deal with matters not specifically related to Sabbath worship or the work of the church, pastors and officers should exclude them, maintaining even in this respect a proper spirit of worship and Sabbath observance.”

**PRAYER MINISTRIES**

 The prayer ministries should be praying before the platform participants go up to minister, for the presence and power of God to be experienced during the service so that every worshipper will be transformed, encouraged, edified, spiritually fed and blessed.

 They should also pray that God will bring to our churches non SDA Guests and use those who are officiating to minister to the worshippers. If the Holy Spirit is absent no heart will be touched, no life will be changed. Worship will just be an empty ritual.

 The Elders and Pastor should spend time interceding with God before leaving the vestry.

**THE PA SYSTEM**

The PA system should be set in such a way that if allows for effective preaching. A good sermon could be ineffectively delivered if the PA system is not properly adjusted.

**TIME MANAGEMENT**

The persons officiating should be notified well in advance so that they can be prepared. The worship book should be made up long before the midday hour so that time is not wasted in the vestry.

The platform participants should go up at 11:00 a.m. and you should aim to finish the service by 12:00 to 12:30 p.m. for the latest. The most important thing in the service is the preaching of the Word. Therefore, the persons doing the other items should be short and to the point. Quite often by the time you get to the sermon the worshippers and even the preacher are tired because of the much talking of those who spoke before. Singers should give their music to the Technical personnel long before they are ready to sing so that time is not wasted in an effort to sort things out. We need to take into consideration the members with health challenges and peoples’ attention span. The service should start on time and end on time.

**SONG SERVICE**

The midday service should begin with songs of praise followed by songs in keeping with the sermon for the day, to put the worshippers in the frame of mind for worship. Songs sung for the midday service should be relevant to the sermon for the day.

Secular songs should **not** be sung at weddings, funerals or any of our worship services.

**INTROIT**

The introit signals to the congregation the beginning of the midday worship service as the platform participants enter the rostrum.

**DEPORTMENT AND POSTURE OF PLATFORM PARTICIPANTS**

As the platform participants enter they should kneel, and by this action they are saying that we dare not speak to you before we speak to God. While they are kneeling and praying for God to use them to be a blessing to the waiting congregation, the congregation should be praying that God will use His servants to be a blessing to them.

“He should bow down in silent prayer as soon as he enters into the pulpit, and earnestly ask help of God. There will be a solemnity and awe upon the people. The minister is communing with God; he is committing himself to God before he dares to stand before the people. Solemnity rests upon all, and angels of God are brought very near. Everyone in the congregation, also, who fears God, should with bowed heads unite in silent prayer with him that God may grace the meeting with His presence and give power to his truth proclaimed from human lips." Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, pp. 492, 493.

Platform posture should be sitting upright and not with legs crossed. Walking on and off the platform is distracting and should be avoided. Sleeping, talking and inattention by persons sitting on the platform during the service are totally unacceptable and dishonours God. It might be better if everyone else leaves the platform before the delivery of the message.

“One minister conversing with another on the platform before the congregation, laughing and appearing to have no sense of their sacred calling, dishonours the truth, and brings the sacred down upon a low level of the common things. Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2, pp. 612, 613.

The phones of persons officiating should be switched off or be put on mute. To have your phone ring, and answer it while officiating is disrespectful to God and it sets a bad example for other worshippers.

The platform participants should reflect the different ages, gender and ethnicity in the church. You should have a child, a youth, males and females and people of different ethnicity.

Avoid saying the church is now called to worship. Worship begins from Sabbath school. You don’t want to give the impression that worship begins only at midday. Just read a passage dealing with thanksgiving.

**DRESS**

Leaders should be clothed in a manner befitting the dignity of their office. Women's clothing should never be tight, short or revealing. Men clothing should not be tight either. Men’s hair should be well groomed. Men and women’s clothing and hairstyles should be of such that it does not call attention to themselves or take the worshippers’ minds off of God.

Worshippers can be so offended by a person’s dress that they cannot hear anything that the person is saying. Pastors and Elders and leaders of departments should not allow anyone to officiate if they are not modestly and appropriately dressed. Improper dress brings our services into disrepute and dishonours God. Our deportment and dress on the platform should reflect reverence for God, the place of worship and be an example to the brethren.

“The God of heaven is honoured or dishonoured by the apparel of those who officiate in His honour. “Ellen G. White, Gospel Workers, p. 173.

“A minister who is negligent in his apparel often wounds those of good taste and refined sensibilities.” Ellen G. White Testimonies, vol. 2, p. 613.

“Let none dishonour God’s sanctuary by their showy apparel”. Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church vol. 6, p. 170.

“All should be taught to be neat, clean, and orderly in their dress, but not to indulge in external adorning which is wholly inappropriate for the sanctuary. There should be no display of apparel, for this encourages irreverence. The attention of the people is often called to this or that fine article of dress, and thus thoughts are intruded that should have no place in the hearts of the worshippers. God is to be the subject of thought, the object of worship; and anything that attracts the mind from the solemn, sacred service is an offence to Him. The parading of bows and ribbons, ruffles and feathers, and gold and silver ornaments is a species of idolatry and is wholly inappropriate for the sacred service of God.” Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 353.

“Many need instruction as to how they should appear in the assembly for worship on the Sabbath. They are not to enter the presence of God in the common clothing worn during the week. All should have special Sabbath suit, to be worn when attending worship in God’s house. While we should not conform to worldly fashion, we are not to be indifferent in regard to our outward appearance. We are to be neat and trim, though without adornment. The children of God should be pure within and without.” Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, p. 355.

“Some who minister in sacred things so arrange their dress upon their person, that, to some extent at least, it destroys the influence of their labour? There is an apparent lack of taste in colour, and neatness of fit. What is the impression given by such a manner of dress? It is, that the work in which they are engaged is considered no more sacred or elevated than common labour, as ploughing in the field. The minister by his example brings down sacred things upon a level with the common things”. Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2, p. 614.

“Black or dark material is more becoming to a minister in the desk, and will make a better impression upon the people, than would be made by a combination of two or three different colours on his apparel.” Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2, p. 610.

When we attend church we are going before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Especially should leaders be clothed in a manner befitting the dignity of their position and be an example. A shirt and tie or a suit will be appropriate for worship and to officiate. It is becoming popular for Elders, Deacons, male song leaders and other male church leaders to officiate without a tie. The way we dress for an occasion reveals the importance we lend to the occasion.

“A person’s character is judged by his style of dress. A refined taste, a cultivated mind, will be revealed in the choice of simple appropriate attire.” Ellen G. White, Education, p. 248.

**WELCOME**

We should welcome all our guests by name and then ask the members to stand to greet all our guests. Then you let our ushers give them a bookmark with a promise at the front and the channels for our internet, TV and radio programmes. You may want to add a book like *Steps to Christ* or *The Desire of Ages*.

**OFFERING**

Enough people should be assigned to take up the offering so that the offering can be done in two to three minutes. Prayer for the offering should be done before the offering is collected.

**THE INTERCESSORY PRAYER**

The intercessory prayer should not be more than two minutes and should include praise, thanksgiving, confession and intercession for the needs of the worshippers.

“Christ impressed upon His disciples the idea that their prayers should be short, expressing just what they wanted and no more ... one or two minutes is long enough for any ordinary prayer.” – Ellen G. White, Testimony vol. 2, p. 581.

"Prayers offered in public should be short and to the point. God does not require us to make the session of worship tedious by lengthy petitions. A few minutes are long enough for any ordinary public prayer.” Ellen G. White, Gospel Workers, p. 175.

**TESTIMONY**

A pre-planned testimony should be given at every service that has to do with how the person got converted, the difference God is making in their lives, an answer to prayer or a miracle the person experienced. The testimony should be no more than five minutes.

**CHILDREN’S CORNER**

There should also be a story for the children if they are worshipping with the adults. The story should be in keeping with the sermon and no more than five minutes.

**THE SPECIAL MUSIC**

The special music should be in keeping with the message for the day and should minister to the needs of the people.

**THE INTRODUCTION OF THE SPEAKER**

The introduction of the speaker should be short and should be done before the special music, which prepares the congregation for the message. When the introduction comes in between, it disrupts the spiritual tone that was set by the item of special music.

Refrain from getting personal when introducing a speaker. Referring to the person’s size, height, clothes, voice and physical appearance is inappropriate and sometimes insulting. Whatever is said should enhance the person’s credibility and make them feel good about themselves.

**THE SERMON**

The sermon should be life-transforming, informative, encouraging, edifying, fresh and spiritually nourishing. Sometimes your sermons need to disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed. Never use sermon time to entertain people, to present your personal views or to address personal issues you have with someone, the church, the Conference or one of its institutions. Your sermons need to be simple, clear, and coherent and should be at least half an hour.

“The speech of those who represent God before the church should be solemn in every respect. (Ellen G White, Testimonies for the church, vol. 5, p. 648)

Common stories, anecdotes, jesting and joking is totally inappropriate for the worship service. “The minister of the gospel who is a labourer together with God, will learn daily in the school of Christ...No light, trifling words will fall from his lips; for is he not an ambassador for Christ, bearing a divine message to perishing souls? All jesting and joking, all lightness and trifling is painful to the cross-bearing disciple of Christ.” (Ellen G. White, Evangelism pp. 206, 207)

“Some form the habit of relating anecdotes in their discourses, which have a tendency to amuse and remove from the mind of the hearer the sacredness of the word they are handling”. (Ellen G. White, Evangelism pp. 208, 209)

“Ministers in the desk have no license to behave like theatrical performers, assuming attitudes and expressions calculated for effect. They do not occupy the desk as actors, but as teachers of solemn truths. There are also fanatical ministers, who, in attempting to preach Christ, storm, holler, jump up and down, and pound the desk before them, as if this bodily exercise profited anything. Such antics lend no force to the truths uttered, but, on the contrary, disgust men and women of calm judgement and elevated views. It is the duty of men who give themselves to the ministry to leave all coarseness and boisterous conduct outside of the desk at least.” Ellen G. White, Evangelism p. 640.

“If he is the representative of Christ, his deportment, his attitude and his gestures, should be of such a character as will not strike the beholder with disgust.” Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, pp. 648, 649.

“The flippant words that fall from his lips, the trifling anecdotes, the words spoken to create a laugh, are all condemned by the word of God and entirely out of place in the sacred desk.” Ellen G. White, Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, pp. 142, 143.

**REVERENCE FOR THE PLACE OF WORSHIP**

“When the worshippers enter the place of meeting, they should do so with decorum, passing quietly to their seats ... common talking, whispering and laughing should not be permitted in the house of worship before or after the service.”

“If some have to wait a few minutes before the meeting begins, let them maintain a spirit of devotion by silent meditation, keeping the heart uplifted to God in prayer that the service may be of special benefit to their own hearts and lead to the conviction and conversion of souls.”

“The whispering and laughing and talking that might be without sin in a common business place should find no place in the house where God is worship.” Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5 p. 492.

“When we enter the place of worship we must have “pure thoughts and holy motives. We must have no pride, envy, evil surmising, hatred, or deception in our hearts, for we are coming in the presence of a holy God.” Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 495.

**THE BENEDICTION**

Benedictions, which are a blessing of God’s own word to the congregation can be found at the back of the hymnal, and should not be turned into another prayer.

If Ministers fail to give the members and leaders guidance on the above mentioned things and fail to practice it themselves, God will hold them responsible.

Fellow leaders let us lift the bar on the way we dress, deport ourselves and conduct our worship services.