

*A Brave
New World*



A Brave New World

“Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.” 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

The title for this article came to me as I was thinking about the religious landscape of our day. It sounds exciting doesn't it? A Brave New World! *Brave New World*, if you remember your literature studies at all, is the title of a book written by Aldous Huxley. This novel was written in 1931 and published in 1932. It is set in the year AD 2540 (632 A. F.—“After Ford—in the book). The novel anticipates developments in reproductive technology, sleep-learning, psychological manipu-

lation, and classical conditioning that are combined to profoundly change society. Huxley answered this book with a reassessment in an essay, *Brave New World Revisited* (1958), and with *Island* (1962), his final novel.

Huxley said that *Brave New World* was inspired by the utopian novels of H. G. Wells, including *A Modern Utopia* (1905) and *Men Like Gods* (1923). Wells' hopeful vision of the future's possibilities gave Huxley the idea to begin writing a parody of the novel, which became *Brave New World*. He wrote in a letter to Mrs. Arthur Goldsmith, an American acquaintance, that he had "been having a little fun pulling the leg of H. G. Wells," but then he "got caught up in the excitement of [his] own ideas." Unlike the most popular optimistic utopian novels of the time, Huxley sought to provide a

goes into long riffs that you might intend as "offerings to God," we the congregation become utterly passive, and because we've adopted habits of relating to music from the Grammys and the concert venue, we unwittingly make you the center of attention. I wonder if there might be some intentional reflection on placement (to the side? leading from behind?) and performance that might help us counter these habits we bring with us to worship.

Please consider these points carefully and recognize what I am not saying. This isn't just some plea for "traditional" worship and a critique of "contemporary" worship. Don't mistake this as a defense of pipe organs and a critique of guitars and drums (or banjos and mandolins). My concern isn't with style, but with form: What are we trying to do when we "lead worship?" If we are intentional about worship as a communal, congregational practice that brings us into a dialogical encounter with the living God--that worship is not merely expressive but also formative--then we can do that with cellos or steel guitars, pipe organs or African drums.

Much, much more could be said. But let me stop here, and please

receive this as the encouragement it's meant to be. I would love to see you continue to offer your artistic gifts in worship to the Triune God who is teaching us a new song.

Most sincerely,

Jamie

<http://forsclavigera.blogspot.com/2012/02/open-letter-to-praise-bands.html?spref=tw>



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1. If we, the congregation, can't hear ourselves, it's not worship. Christian worship is not a concert. In a concert (a particular "form of performance"), we often expect to be overwhelmed by sound, particularly in certain styles of music. In a concert, we come to expect that weird sort of sensory deprivation that happens from sensory overload, when the pounding of the bass on our chest and the wash of music over the crowd leaves us with the rush of a certain aural vertigo. And there's nothing wrong with concerts! It's just that Christian worship is not a concert. Christian worship is a collective, communal, congregational practice--and the gathered sound and harmony of a congregation singing as one is integral to the practice of worship. It is a way of "performing" the reality that, in Christ, we are one body. But that requires that we actually be able to hear ourselves, and hear our sisters and brothers singing alongside us. When the amped sound of the praise band overwhelms congregational voices, we can't hear ourselves sing--so we lose that communal aspect of the congregation and are encouraged to effectively become "private," passive worshipers.

2. If we, the congregation, can't sing along, it's not worship. In

other forms of musical performance, musicians and bands will want to improvise and "be creative," offering new renditions and exhibiting their virtuosity with all sorts of different trills and pauses and improvisations on the received tune. Again, that can be a delightful aspect of a concert, but in Christian worship it just means that we, the congregation, can't sing along. And so your virtuosity gives rise to our passivity; your creativity simply encourages our silence. And while you may be worshipping with your creativity, the same creativity actually shuts down congregational song.

3. If you, the praise band, are the center of attention, it's not worship. I know it's generally not your fault that we've put you at the front of the church. And I know you want to model worship for us to imitate. But because we've encouraged you to basically import forms of performance from the concert venue into the sanctuary, we might not realize that we've also unwittingly encouraged a sense that you are the center of attention. And when your performance becomes a display of your virtuosity--even with the best of intentions--it's difficult to counter the temptation to make the praise band the focus of our attention. When the praise band

frightening vision of the future. Huxley referred to *Brave New World* as a "negative utopia", somewhat influenced by Wells' own *The Sleeper Awakes* (dealing with subjects like corporate tyranny and behavioural conditioning) and the works of D. H. Lawrence.

Brave New World Revisited was written by Huxley almost thirty years after *Brave New World*; it is a non-fiction work in which Huxley considered whether the world had moved toward or away from his vision of the future from the 1930s. He believed when he wrote the original novel that it was a reasonable guess as to where the world might go in the future. In *Brave New World Revisited*, he concluded that the world was becoming like *Brave New World* much faster than he originally thought.

Huxley analyzed the causes of this, such as overpopulation as well as all the means by which populations can be controlled. He was particularly interested in the effects of drugs and subliminal suggestion. *Brave New World Revisited* is different in tone because of Huxley's evolving thought, as well as his conversion to Hindu Vedanta in the interim between the two books. The last chapter of the book

aims to propose action which could be taken to prevent a democracy from turning into the totalitarian world described in *Brave New World*. In Huxley's last novel, *Island*, he again expounds similar ideas to describe a utopian nation, which is generally known as a counterpart to his most famous work. *Brave New World*'s title derives from *Miranda*'s speech in *William Shakespeare's The Tempest*, Act V, Scene I: O wonder! How many goodly creatures are there here! How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world, That has such people in't. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brave_New_World)

Brave New World was a parody of utopian novels written by such men as H. G. Wells. Utopia was not realized. In Huxley's world, the ideals of utopia have been hijacked by social engineers who shape society in a different mold. They abandon the aspirations of utopia and fashion a far different world than had been anticipated.

I have taken the time to briefly look at Huxley's work in order to draw our attention to the religious climate in which we find ourselves today. Some of those who have written histories of the

churches of Christ never envisioned some of the twists and turns that the church would take. One vital question to ask is what road map are we following? In the past thirty to forty years, many influential writers and leaders in the church have promoted the idea that there are no patterns in the New Testament that the church should follow. In response to this idea, Goebel Music wrote a book entitled Behold the Pattern (Goebel Music Publications, 1991). In the Preface to the book Music writes:

Behold the Pattern is a book that stresses the Bible pattern for the New Testament Church. There was a time in the "restoration movement" when the New Testament pattern was stressed with much more emphasis than it is being stressed, brotherhood-wide, today. There is a pressing need for brethren to review and/or reemphasize "the pattern" for New Testament Christianity. This book, Behold the Pattern, is quite replete in its emphasis on the pattern and/or doctrine of the New Testament Church. The title for this book reflects the need together with the content necessary to en-

courage and assist brethren who desire and choose to follow the pattern in a day when so many tend to drift with the tide of the ongoing religious world... The time is at hand when brethren of the churches of Christ very much need to take on a renewed and/or in-depth look at the Bible pattern for the New Testament Church. The purpose of the book is to meet and/or accommodate that pressing need.

On the dust jacket of the book Curtis A. Gates wrote on August 23, 1991:

Many influential brethren have become enamored with speculative theology, the 'new hermeneutic,' modernistic existentialism, and presumptuous tampering with the Bible's precious, settled truth. To them, the Lord is no longer able to be understood nor the truth attained... Such untenable denial of the Word is powerfully refuted through brother Music's scholarly examination and exegesis of the Holy Scriptures. Further, this volume is welcomed be-

you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God

and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" – Romans 15:5-6.

-Dan Williams
Franklin, Tennessee

An Open Letter to Praise Bands

Dear Praise Band,

I so appreciate your willingness and desire to offer up your gifts to God in worship. I appreciate your devotion and celebrate your faithfulness--schlepping to church early, Sunday after Sunday, making time for practice mid-week, learning and writing new songs, and so much more. Like those skilled artists and artisans that God used to create the tabernacle (Exodus 36), you are willing to put your artistic gifts in service to the Triune God.

So please receive this little missive in the spirit it is meant: as an encouragement to reflect on the practice of "leading worship." It seems to me that you are often simply co-opted into a practice without being encouraged to reflect on its rationale, its "reason why." In other words, it seems to me that you are often recruited to "lead worship" without much opportunity to pause and reflect on the nature of "worship" and what it would mean to "lead."

In particular, my concern is that we, the church, have unwittingly encouraged you to simply import musical practices into Christian worship that--while they might be appropriate elsewhere--are detrimental to congregational worship. More pointedly, using language I first employed in Desiring the Kingdom, I sometimes worry that we've unwittingly encouraged you to import certain forms of performance that are, in effect, "secular liturgies" and not just neutral "methods." Without us realizing it, the dominant practices of performance train us to relate to music (and musicians) in a certain way: as something for our pleasure, as entertainment, as a largely passive experience. The function and goal of music in these "secular liturgies" is quite different from the function and goal of music in Christian worship.

So let me offer just a few brief axioms with the hope of encouraging new reflection on the practice of "leading worship":

Testament psalms with gusto, but: they jettisoned the instrumental music of the Temple worship, as indeed they emphatically rejected so many of the other practices of the Old Covenant, consistently moving to more spiritual expressions of faith. I include this observation because I have talked with some of my brethren who believe they're on the cutting edge of progress by introducing instrumental music in worship, but I can't help feeling they are actually going backwards – in fact, they're going a whole covenant backwards!

I fear that many of us who grew up in the churches of Christ fail to appreciate what a marvelous legacy we have when we maintain the original practice of the church by singing a cappella. The uniqueness of congregational singing expresses that equality of fellowship of which Jesus spoke in Matthew 23:8-12. Oh, I know, I know, the current rage in entertainment is shows like “The Voice” or “American Idol”: lavish productions that prompt us to admire the talents of the musically gifted. But realistically – how many places in life do average folks regularly join with others in a community of song? That still happens in our churches.

Sometimes when friends ask me, “Why do your folks sing without an instrument?” I'm tempted to answer, “Because we still can!” I have visited in many worship services held by other religious groups, and almost without exception the level of participation in the singing is far lower than in our assemblies. The addition of musicians, with their instruments, microphones, and amplifiers, all too often seems to create an audio hierarchy, with the musicians as the new high priests. As a result, ordinary Christians are drowned out, intimidated into silence, or lulled into becoming passive spectators at a religious performance.

I am called to love my brothers and sisters, even when I disagree with them, and I am in no way suggesting that this topic constitutes “the Law and the Prophets.” I fully recognize there are weightier matters for Christians to consider. Jesus, however, indicated that as long as we keep our priorities straight, we are not being legalistic if we attempt to be scrupulous in our obedience (Matthew 23:23). As for me, I will continue to sing – joyfully, reverently, and in concert with my brothers and sisters.

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give

cause of the valid reasoning and impeccable documentation of certain heretical teachings of those who would restructure the church and thereby lead it into apostasy... everyone who intends to stand in the Old Paths and is willing to hear a ‘thus saith the Lord’ will benefit greatly by reading.

In the past twenty years or so I have been alarmed at some of the conversations I have overheard. It was becoming obvious that brethren who, in the past, had relied upon a “thus saith the Lord” were turning to church growth experts more than the Holy Scriptures. The explosion of new names for churches is a direct result of church growth experts' advice. The experts told people that they needed to distance themselves from certain names because people were wary of the traditional names. We have everything from Church on the Move to Fusion Church, and many other things in-between. While I don't believe that church of Christ is the only name for the assemblies of the Saints found in Scripture, whatever name we choose should honor Jesus Christ and God the Father. After all, it isn't our church at all. Jesus said, “... on this rock I will build my

church...” (Matt. 16:18). And the rock is the confession that Peter had just made, “... You are the Christ, the son of the living God...” (Matt. 16:16).

In the past twenty to thirty years I have read many newspaper articles regarding the deliberations at various church conventions. These conventions were held to discuss doctrines and policies of the churches and to elect officials to serve in leadership roles. Many of these bodies have split over two main issues during this time frame. There was continual pressure from movements within our society to open up pulpits to women. However, the Bible plainly taught in more than one passage that women were not to preach or teach in the assemblies of the church. Before they could deal with the issue of women preachers or pastors, they first had to overcome the Biblical doctrines. Therefore, religious bodies from Presbyterian to Anglican and even Southern Baptists began debating the inerrancy of Scripture. And on these two issues, Inerrancy of Scripture and the Use of Women in Assemblies, religious bodies began to divide. The more conservative thinkers were left behind and the more progressive thinkers formed new religious associations that would embrace their new views on

these issues. In more recent years the same thing is occurring with regard to the issue of homosexuality. People may agree or disagree with these observations and the reasons for the current practices among churches.

Another shift that I began to see some years ago regards music in the churches. We used to see a cappella music in some churches and pianos and organs in others, but something different than just a choir or congregational singing began to emerge. I was singing in a quartet that was doing some recording at Benson Sound in Oklahoma City. Gary Duggan was the sound engineer and I asked him if they were doing a lot of recording sessions for quartets and other groups. He said that really they were not doing that many recording sessions, but he told me that a lot of their work was installing lighting and sound systems in churches. I do remember one church in Oklahoma City back in the 1980's that had a revolving stage. In essence what Gary was telling me was that they were setting the stage for musical productions. And thus it has evolved into what we see today...lights, camera, action! We see huge video screens and bands rocking the stage with lots of sound and color. And like most concert settings it is hard to

hear yourself, let alone the ones around you.

As I bring this article to a close I want to briefly introduce the next two articles that will appear in this issue. The first is by Dan Williams. Dan preached for a number of years in El Dorado, Arkansas and for the past several years he has worked with Harding University. Dan has written a thoughtful and kind article on the a cappella tradition within the churches of Christ. The other article is an open letter written by James K.A. Smith, a professor at Calvin College and editor of *Comment* magazine. Professor Smith believes and practices the use of instrumental music in church assemblies. Both of these articles touch on some of the practices that are prevailing in church settings today.

I pray that you are not offended by anything that I have written, or by anything that these next two writers have to say. I do not want to provoke anyone to anger. I do pray that you will be provoked to think and to reason. I pray above all that whatever you believe regarding some of the issues raised that you will have a Godly love and a wholesome respect for those who may disagree with you.

...lsg

RE-EXAMINING "OUR TRADITION" OF A CAPPELLA WORSHIP

Some of our folks are reexamining the practice of a cappella worship. This can be a healthy process when it is based on Biblical principles – after all, every generation has the opportunity and obligation to read the scriptures for themselves and own their own faith. The freedom to question has always been an essential tenet of our Restoration Movement, and the “noble Bereans” (Acts 17:11) held up in many a sermon as worthy examples.

Rethinking a subject as essential and holy as worship can be unhealthy, however, when it is based only on personal preferences or shallow, uninformed understandings. For example, a few weeks ago I was talking with an individual whose congregation has just decided to add instrumental music to their worship. He dismissed the practice of a cappella worship as being only “our tradition.” That phrase is misleading on two counts.

First, anyone who is familiar with the whole sweep of church history will recognize that the use of a cappella singing in worship is not an idiosyncrasy of our particular fellowship, but was the exclusive practice of

Christendom for many centuries, and is still the worship experience of many millions of believers today who have never heard of the Churches of Christ. The term “our tradition” seems to portray us as being eccentric or odd, when in reality it is today’s rock and roll worship bands that are out of step with the historic mainstream of Christian theological understandings of worship.

Second, the phrase relegates our use of vocal worship to the status of an unthinking church “tradition,” when in reality there is a long history of reasoned reflection on Christian worship which supports the practice. Since those advocating instrumental music are the ones introducing a change, it seems to me that they have a responsibility to build a Biblical case for how it better reflects the nature of God and improves our worship of Him, yet when talking with them I rarely hear anything that rises above the level of “People like it.”

It might be useful to remember that this is not the first time God’s people have reevaluated worship. With the beginning of the New Covenant the followers of Jesus appropriated the Old