



FROM THE EDITOR



By Mark A. Taylor

Asking the Right Questions About Worship

On a Sunday morning this February, the minister's message examined Bible passages about war. After he spoke he invited half of the congregation to sing a hymn, as the other half formed groups of about 10 to quietly pray: for themselves, for troops, for the Iraqi people, for George Bush and Tony Blair and Saddam Hussein. After a few minutes, those who had been singing formed prayer groups; those who had been praying sang the hymn.

On a Sunday in March another minister preached about Bartimaeus and his encounter with Jesus. He challenged his listeners to think about the question Jesus asked the blind man (Mark 10:46-52). A paraphrase of that question, "What Do You Want Jesus to Do for You?" was the heading of a blank paper each worshiper had received. The minister asked his listeners to write personal answers and to bring their completed sheets to the platform while the piano played softly. Hundreds of worshipers brought their requests, with the promise that the minister and the church's elders would pray about each one.

I thought about each of these worship times (one I experienced; one I heard about) as we were assembling this week's issue. Much discussion about

contemporary worship, it seems to me, misses the point. Music is only one element affecting the impact of a worship experience.

Perhaps the first question shouldn't be, "What songs will we sing?" or "What instruments will we use?" but, instead, "How will we engage the worshiper?"

Does your worship service offer variety and an occasional surprise? ("Contemporary" worship in some places follows a format as rigid as any "traditional" service.)

Does your worship service involve worshipers; do they participate or only watch? (Does the congregation sing or just sit, as if they were at a concert? And notice the nonmusical methods of involvement in each of the above examples.)

Which is the biggest influence on your worship service—concerns about style, or concerns about substance? The simple innovations in each of these examples sprang from the message of the morning, not a desire to adopt a particular style.

It is one thing to change the music we use in worship. It is quite another to connect worshipers with their Creator. Which issue are leaders at your church talking about most?

Perhaps instead of asking, "What songs will we sing?" we should be asking, "How will we engage the worshiper?"

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Cover photo ©Chuck Perry

CHRISTIAN STANDARD logo, cover and interior design by Andrew Quach

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Volume CXXXVIII, Number 18. CHRISTIAN STANDARD (ISSN 0009-5656), published weekly at 8121 Hamilton Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45231. Periodicals postage paid at Cincinnati, Ohio.

Printed in USA. **Postmaster:** Send address changes to Standard Publishing, 8121 Hamilton Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45231. Phone: 1-800-543-1301 or 1-513-931-4050.

Subscription rates: \$24.99 per year plus \$5.00 postage/handling (plus sales tax in FL and WA; \$10.00 postage/handling per year for Canadian subscriptions; \$12.50 for Mexico and all other foreign subscriptions). Two to fourteen copies to one address, \$5.00 each per quarter. Fifteen to thirty-four copies to one address, \$4.75 each per quarter. Thirty-five or more copies to one address, \$4.50 each per quarter. Send address changes to CHRISTIAN STANDARD, 8121 Hamilton Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45231. Send old and new addresses, complete with zip numbers, at least six weeks before delivery date. Unsolicited manuscripts that are not accompanied by return postage will not be returned. This publication is available in microform from UMI. Phone: 800-521-0600 toll-free; 313-761-4700 collect from Alaska and Michigan; 800-343-5299 toll-free from Canada.

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