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Reformation
& Revival



A Quarterly Journal for Church Leadership

Volume 3, Number 4 • Fall 1994

The first way in which it (the church) always shows itself is this: (there is) a love of the same doctrine always.... Doctrine before fellowship, doctrine before breaking of bread, doctrine before prayer. It is the reverse today, is it not? Fellowship is the great thing. "Let us all get together, let us all pray together." No, No! Doctrine first. Why? Well, this is inevitable. A man who has got something of the life of God in his soul is always a man who desires to know the teaching and the doctrine.... I want to ask you some plain questions—I am addressing evangelical people. Do you enjoy doctrine? Do you enjoy sermons on doctrine? Are you interested in teaching? I sometimes hear from my brethren that they visit churches where a limit is put on the length of their sermon, and indeed on the content of their sermon. The people say they cannot follow doctrine; they are bored by doctrine. They want entertainment; they want more singing; they want more "happiness," they say, and they do not want doctrine.... Unless you have got a desire within you to know more of this precious truth, you cannot be a child of God. It is impossible.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

The New Testament church was a pneumatic church. She was a church vibrating with life and with power. They all took part. It was not a case of one man doing all the talking, and all the praying, and all of everything else, and the others just sitting and listening.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

What About Applause in Public Worship?

Norman P. Anderson

"Applause in Worship: Are There Better Options?" That was the title of an article in the recent *Worship* magazine which captured my attention.

A few weeks ago, I began to think again about the inappropriateness of applause following a Call to Worship, titled "Standing on Holy Ground," led by the choir in my own church. I wondered, as I spoke to the church of my concern, "Is it right for us to applaud as we do in a public worship service?"

Such applause is becoming an accepted practice in many churches these days. Could it be because we have lost our idea of what worship is? Or is this a good trend that accentuates worship, as some would say?

First of all, we need to understand that worship is the action of God's people in giving glory to God, Who alone is worthy of praise. God is the audience and the congregation is the performing cast. Those up front are merely the prompters who should lead the congregation in glorifying God. The question thus becomes, "Why, really, do we applaud?" Most often, we respond that we applaud in order to let the person, or musical group, know that we appreciate their part in the worship service! Or we applaud because a person does a particularly good job in singing, or in playing an instrument, etc. Certainly, there are times when it is appropriate to express this kind of appreciation. For example, when a musician has given a concert, or the choir has sung a cantata, it is appropriate to express appreciation for the worship experience they have provided.

In my opinion, however, applause can easily become distracting to worship. When you applaud the soloist, or the group, or the choir in the middle of the worship service, here are some of the questions that are raised in my mind:

1. Do we then always applaud everyone, for fear that we will offend someone? They will think that they didn't do as well, or they are not appreciated, if we do not applaud.

2. How does the musician respond to applause? After all,

they were singing or playing for the glory of God, not for the praise of human beings. (If they were not, then they should not be up there as a worship leader!)

3. Do we applaud for up-beat, stirring numbers that generate our excitement and not for the more meditative, solemn numbers? There are many times when silence before God is the only appropriate response.

Randall Bradley, in the *Worship* article to which I referred above, says some very interesting things. Let me simply quote a few lines from his "Viewpoint" article: "Applause tends to bring attention to the messenger instead of the message.... Occasionally, congregations, like theater-goers, feel a distinct need to express themselves after they have heard musical presentations (especially ones that have loud and high theatrical endings)."

"Applause can create a competitiveness among various musicians in a congregation so that soloists question their own effectiveness if their applause level is less than that of another soloist."

"Is applause always a poor response in worship? The Bible has numerous references to 'clapping.' However, there seems to be a difference between clapping for an act of worship and clapping as an act of worship, i.e., clapping during music as a physical act of worship. I am much more comfortable with the latter expression."

Psalm 46:10 says, "Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." Psalm 47:1 says, "O clap your hands, all peoples; shout to God with the voice of joy."

Author

Norman P. Anderson is senior pastor of Elk Grove Baptist Church, Elk Grove, Illinois, and contributed an article to the *Reformation & Revival Journal* in 1993.
