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SERVING THE BODY OF CHRIST IN CORPORATE
WORSHIP: AN APOLOGETIC FOR EMBRACING
MULTIPLE STYLES OF MUSIC

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I dedicate this thesis to the three most influential women in my life:
my grandmother, Mrs. Gertrude Craig; my mother, Mrs. Helen McGee Durham;
and my wife, Mrs. Tanya L. McGee.

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PREFACE

The treatment of music in Christian worship has been the source of countless discussions over the years. Historical accounts reveal a kind of on-going tension between familiar traditions and the innovative modifications of change. The ubiquitous presence of music in modern times has somewhat elevated the preference-driven debate over the function of music in Christian worship. From the viewpoint of a musical pluralist, one who accepts a diversity of musical styles in worship, the argument for exclusivity in style is at best naïve and at worst presumptions and elitist. In thirty-five years of ministry, this author has witnessed first-hand the frustration and anger often attached to stylistic transitions in Christian worship. These transitions unnecessarily develop into disagreements that all too often result in divisions among the body deteriorating into broken relationships and weakened worship. It is hoped that this thesis can provide thoughtful insights and hopeful solutions to the challenges associated with stylistic diversity in the modern Christian church.

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Monty McGee

Sapulpa, Oklahoma

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

While [worship] draws its nourishment from the story of the Gospel that has been received from the scripture and tradition, worship has to confront the gods and facile desires of its context. But on the other hand, while it must not conform itself to the world, worship has always to situate itself within that world, finding its voice in the language of the day and in its genuine spiritual longings, even as it presents a rhetorical vision of an alternative world that God in Christ is bringing into being.¹

Biblical worship must always reflect the contour of the gospel. In other words, worshipping Christians should be able to identify and follow the gospel narrative in every corporate worship setting. For this to happen, Scripture must be the directing force in the planning and implementation of the liturgical worship practices of the church. With this theological imperative established, the form and style of the musical aspects of the liturgy should be flexible.

While biblical truth remains the sustaining substance of Christian worship, artistic style must constantly adapt to the changing needs of culture. This is seen throughout the history of the Christian Church. Modification of artistic style is not only an historical precedent of the church's worship, but it is a necessary ingredient of the church's mission if it is to speak in relevant terms to each new generation.

Musical expressions of worship that are biblically sound and culturally attuned are indispensable in communication of gratitude and adoration to God. This work argues for the application of musical pluralism; a viewpoint that assigns an amoral nature to music. This is not to say that the melodies and harmonies of music do not possess innate abilities to affect the emotions of human beings, specifically as they relate to worship

¹William A. Dyrness, *A Primer on Christian Worship: Where We've Been, Where We Are, Where We Can Go* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 16.

expressions. However, no inherent good or evil can be attached to musical sound. Only through the perception of the hearer are those traits interpreted. Therefore, the idea of musical preference is a very distinct and authentic aspect of the nature of public worship. Everyone has a preferred taste in music. The objective is to provide worshipers authentic musical vocabularies consistent with their unique cultural setting while encouraging them to embrace a willingness to set aside their own personal stylistic preferences in deference to the needs of others.

Different combinations of melody, harmony, timbre, rhythm and dynamics create a plethora of musical sounds that generate a varied array of feelings and emotional responses from listeners. Despite music's universal appeal, what some may consider a pleasant musical experience, others may deem unpleasant. It is this multiplicity of artistic creativity coupled with the great diversity of musical tastes that leads to the issue at hand. There is a division among the ecclesiastical community over musical styles, in terms of, preference and acceptability in Christian worship.

Given the cultural and societal diversity of the evangelized world, a diversity of musical styles seems preferable. However, there is much debate among musicians, theologians and church members as to the appropriateness and acceptability of certain musical expressions used in worship.

Contrary to the opinion of those who would exclude certain musical styles from Christian worship, a fully formed biblical theology of worship promotes the validity of multiple musical styles and genres in Christian worship. Furthermore, a thorough investigation of historical aspects of Christian worship reveals a continual cycle of resistance to the new music of each generation by those who would seek to preserve and employ only that music to which they consider appropriate and acceptable. This ecclesiastical propensity toward traditional and familiar forms of music is nothing new in view of the historical context.

Through an exegesis of multiple biblical passages, and an engagement with contemporary voices within the field of worship, the acceptance of multiple styles of music in worship are argued. In so doing, the claims of those who would disapprove of the use of certain music they might label “provincial,” “familiar,” or “superficial” and “amusement oriented”² are refuted. This refutation consists of careful examination and application of current scholarly research advocating for the presence of multiple musical styles in Christian worship. The acceptance of multiple styles of music in Christian worship should foster a biblical sense of unity and mutual edification within the church.

Familiarity with the Literature

Numerous books and articles dealing with the clash between the use of traditional and modern or contemporary music in Christian worship have been written since the early 1970s. Each posits a different slant for the inclusion or exclusion of these multiple styles. The so called “worship wars”³ have existed much longer than one might think. Many authors have written in favor of segregating the worshipping community of churches by giving people worship options based on musical style and taste. Still more are offering methods for the use of multiple styles used in the same service in a sort of blended method of worship. A selected few advocate for the inclusion of multiple styles synthesized together in ways that combine or mix two or more styles into one.

²T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Sing Hymns: How Pop Culture Rewrote the Hymnal* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010), 68.

³The term *worship wars* describes a late twentieth-century phenomenon in which musical style became the predominant reason Christians would choose one church over another. This phenomenon was driven by the emergence of what is called contemporary Christian music, or CCM. As CCM began to provide alternatives to the typical traditional fare of church worship music, people began to argue over the use of different styles of music in worship, hence *worship wars*.

Harold Best, in *Music through the Eyes of Faith*, makes a convincing argument for “musical pluralism.”⁴ In promoting the idea of musical pluralism, Best proposes that no musical style is superior to another. Though he contends for the importance of excellence in music, he allows for the variety of many different styles and levels of complexity in the application of musical styles to worship. Though Calvin Johansson claims that “the medium (music) is not neutral,”⁵ Best asserts that music is inherently amoral—it is unable to communicate moral values or beliefs.⁶ He maintains that music making is not a tool or an aid to worship, but simply an offering the worshiper brings to his Creator.⁷ Best insists that a missiological appropriation and use of a particular musical style is a means of achieving cultural transformation.⁸

In his speech “Authentic Worship and Faithful Music Making,”⁹ Best identifies a form of idolatry or, as he calls it, “musicolatry,” in which the music of Christian worship becomes more important than the Object of worship, God alone. He further warns of the dangers of presuming that acceptable worship somehow depends on the inclusion of certain types of music rather than solely on the work of Christ on the cross. In other words, Best denies any inherent power or worth in any specific type of music that would facilitate a divine encounter.

⁴Harold M. Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).

⁵Calvin M. Johansson, *Music and Ministry: A Biblical Counterpoint*, 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984), 57.

⁶Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith*, 42.

⁷Ibid., 152.

⁸Ibid., 213.

⁹Harold Best, “Authentic Worship and Faithful Music Making” (paper presented at ACDA National Convention, Chicago, February 27, 1999).

John Frame, in *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense*, argues for the validity and usefulness of certain kinds of contemporary music in modern worship. Frame, a Reformed theologian, sees musical and theological value in much of today's contemporary music. Though he draws a loose parallel between the current push for musical change with the historical reformers, Luther and Calvin, he connects modern day music makers primarily with the Jesus Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹⁰ Frame attributes much of the success of contemporary worship music to its avoidance of historic liturgies and old-fashioned language. Frame provides a thorough discussion of both the positive and negative effects of contemporary music used in Christian worship. He carefully examines specific complaints of detractors of this style of music and offers a balanced and thoughtful rebuttal to many of the most severe accusations brought against the inclusion of this music in worship.¹¹ His conclusive argument is to encourage all leaders in worship to appeal to the principle of *sola scriptura*: all matters of life, be they religious or secular, must adhere to the declarations and principles of God's Word.¹²

The enhancement of congregational participation and a heightened sense of intimacy with God through the use of contemporary music triggers a positive response in favor of its use for Robb Redman, author of *The Great Worship Awakening: Singing a New Song in the Postmodern Church*.¹³ Much of Redman's book consists of identifying and explaining the historical movement in the growth, expansion, and change in the music of the Christian church. He observes a repetitive resistance and tension occurring

¹⁰John M. Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1997), 5-7.

¹¹Ibid., 45.

¹²Ibid., 175.

¹³Robb Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening: Singing a New Song in the Postmodern Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002).

during the transition period between each progressive wave of church music.¹⁴ Change is almost never viewed in a positive light, as witnessed in T. David Gordon's comments regarding the alleged deficiency of modern praise songs that "would not ordinarily satisfy the criteria that previous hymns had to meet to get into the hymnals."¹⁵ Even so, as Redman observes, change does occur and certain accommodations for this change must be made for cultural relevance in the music of worship to advance. Redman concludes that although some traditional aspects of Protestant worship should remain, the preferences of one generation cannot restrict a congregation's ability to minister effectively to the next generation.¹⁶

In *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God*, Bob Kauflin recognizes the need for variety in music used in worship.¹⁷ He asserts that a multiplicity of musical styles reflects the varying aspects of God's nature. He also contends that contrasting styles of music in worship give evidence of God's love for all people. Kauflin argues, the biblical precedent for edification in public worship indicates the necessity of meeting people where they are in cultural understanding and artistic proficiency.¹⁸

Bryan Chapell, in *Christ Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice*, makes a case for Christian worship liturgy to reflect the retelling of the gospel story. His careful observations of Roman liturgy followed by comparisons to Luther, Calvin, and the Westminster liturgical formation show a distinct and consistent structure

¹⁴Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening*, 176-77.

¹⁵Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Sing Hymns*, 47.

¹⁶Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening*, 174.

¹⁷Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 104.

that is also seen in modern day worship liturgy. The procession of elements in this liturgical retelling of the gospel includes adoration, confession, assurance, thanksgiving, petition, instruction (or proclamation), and charge (or blessing). These elements of worship transcend each generation and tradition to form a gospel-centered stability in Catholic and protestant worship practices. Chapell brings perspective to the issue of the use of multiple styles of music in worship: “The Bible mercifully denies us the worship detail we may desire, by keeping our worship focused on heavenly themes rather than earthly proprieties.”¹⁹

Void in the Literature

The modern church continues to struggle over musical forms in worship. More specifically, the church grapples over the issue of acceptable musical styles used in Christian worship. Proponents who argue for multiple styles tend to frame their discussion in the areas of cultural trends and historical precedent, or the need to allow for preferences in worship music styles. Many assert their views in light of biblical precedent and principle, striving to raise the dialogue to higher levels of authoritative evidence.

John Frame concludes that biblical texts such as 1 Corinthians 14 support the “biblical and Reformational principle that worship is to be intelligible, and therefore vernacular, and in one sense ‘popular.’”²⁰ Frame clearly refutes the propositional contention of one preeminent musical style that must be adhered to in Christian worship. Harold Best observes in his treatise on “musical pluralism” in worship that “there is no single chosen language or artistic or musical style that, better than all others, can capture

¹⁹Bryan Chapell, *Christ Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 107.

²⁰John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth: A Refreshing Study of the Principles and Practice of Biblical Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1996), 117.

and repeat back the fullness of the glory of God.”²¹ Best cites the story of Pentecost from Acts 2 as the basis for his assertion.²² According to Best, the gospel is comfortable in every language, culture, and sociological setting, and by association, the proclamation of the gospel is comfortable in every artistic and musical embellishment that accompanies it.²³

Reggie Kidd refers to Psalm 22:25 as an Old Testament foreshadowing of the eschatological “gathering” of worshipers whose presence “cannot help but raise pressing questions about what—or better, whose—aesthetic governs their worship.”²⁴ Kidd identifies several problematic concerns of the church concerning the new music being written during the Reformation period. As Kidd notes, much of that music is today considered acceptable “as an aesthetic submitted to the standards of urbanity and schooled discipline.”²⁵

From an historical vantage point, Dan Wilt reminds his readers that believers hundreds of years ago repelled at the idea of “new” hymns being written with biblically-based texts, “believing that their early psalmody was both sufficient and in no need of improvement.”²⁶ Wilt comments on the significance of cultural relevance with respect to modern Christian worship, arguing against the assumption that using music derived from cultural roots is simply an accommodation to the culture and an attempt to perpetuate a given culture. Instead, he affirms the use of such music as an effort by worshipers to

²¹Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith*, 67.

²²Ibid., 66-68.

²³Ibid., 214.

²⁴Reggie M. Kidd, *With One Voice: Discovering Christ’s Song in Our Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 125.

²⁵Ibid., 130.

²⁶Dan Wilt, “Contemporary Worship,” in *Perspectives on Christian Worship: 5 Views*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 156.

“seek to express their valuing God in idioms and languages that are authentic to their experience.”²⁷ Elmer Towns agrees with Wilt’s observation and concludes that it is perfectly acceptable for a person to express worship to God “with [their] own words, thought patterns, and cultural limitations.”²⁸

While many have expressed concerns over the acceptability, even necessity, of multiple styles of music in worship, significant gaps remain in the discussion of how to identify and apply feasible solutions to the problem. Arguments from biblical, historical, and cultural viewpoints have clearly addressed the nature and scope of this situation while providing significant input that can help lead the church to an appropriate response. And yet, the struggle continues. Thus, one must conclude there is more to be done in discovery and application of basic principles related to this issue facing the Christian church of the twenty-first century.

Unity is a vital concept with regard to worship in the church. However, the real work of identifying concrete methods to resolve this problem are incomplete. The void in the literature that must be addressed is the need for believers to come together in a spirit of love, self-sacrifice, and deference toward each other, offering heart-felt vertical worship to God while maintaining a horizontal view of what is mutually edifying and encouraging to the worshiping community of believers.

Thesis

Contrary to exclusionist views on worship, the church must embrace the practice of musical pluralism by including multiple styles of music in Christian worship. Furthermore, modern day believers must welcome unfamiliar musical offerings into their worship as they adopt a biblical view of mutual edification and unselfish deference to

²⁷Wilt, “Contemporary Worship,” 168.

²⁸Elmer Towns, *Putting an End to Worship Wars* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 58.

others. This selfless attitude should help to mitigate hostilities provoked by stylistic expectations of worshipers and encourage them to lay aside personal preference and embrace new forms of artistic expression in Christian worship.

Chapter Summaries

The following chapters will explain and defend the acceptance of multiple styles of music in worship as vital to the gospel purposes of the modern Christian church. Through careful and thorough biblical exegesis combined with thoughtful engagement of literature relevant to the subject matter, the appropriateness and necessity of musical diversity in worship will be demonstrated.

Chapter 2 will include biblical exegesis of passages that provide compelling evidence of the importance of ecclesiastical unity in worship. The functionality of artistic musical expressions as tools that provide believers adequate means for the vertical articulation of their praise to God are closely examined. This chapter also looks at key passages in light of the variety of musical expressions employed in antiquity for expressing praise to God. The Pauline decree for mutual edification, which defines the true substance and purpose of the horizontal aspects of worship, fostering a kind of unity within diversity, is revealed as a core principle of Christian worship. In addition, an overview of passages dealing specifically with worship and forms of worship shows a distinct absence of any prescriptive direction for a particular musical style of artistic expression. An exegesis of these verses demonstrates a biblical and theological foundation for musical pluralism in the church.

Chapter 2 focuses on a number of key verses, including various Psalms; John 1; Romans 5,8,14,15; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 5; Philippians 2; Colossians 3; Hebrews 2, 9-10,13; 1 John 3:12; and Revelation 4-5, 19.

Contemporary issues in the area of Christian worship, specifically dealing with musical style, should be examined not only in light of the wisdom and authority of

scripture, but also from historical accounts that reveal both a stubborn tendency to maintain tradition and a tenacious determination to embrace revolutionary innovation. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the change and transformation that has occurred in Christian worship since the beginning of the New Testament church. Additionally, a look at historical accounts of transitional stages in the history of church music reveals the existence of the ebb and flow, or tension and resolution, common to the process of traditional status quo making room for innovative change in musical worship expressions of the church.

Following the establishment of biblical and theological foundations for Christian worship and a thorough analysis of the historical issues related to musical pluralism in the worship of the church, chapter 4 presents an analysis of current scholarship and debate within the field. Arguments from Christian authors with an “elitist” view of acceptable musical styles in congregational worship, such as Scott Aniol, T. David Gordon, and Calvin Johansson are contrasted with a more open, multi-cultural application of musical styles in the Christian church, by authors including Harold Best, Jeremy Begbie, John Frame, Reggie Kidd, and Barry Liesch. This chapter argues for the acceptance of multiple styles of music based on scriptural mandate calling for an ecclesiastical sensitivity to cultural setting. This openness to cultural environment is essential if the church is to reach any measure of unity within the body.

Chapter 5 presents a critical analysis of contemporary worship music providing an objective examination of potential cultural entanglements that weaken the integrity of scriptural worship. In his book, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense*, John Frame, former professor of Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary, identifies positive and negative aspects of this genre of worship music. He attempts to impartially synthesize the complaints of critics while providing justification for the historical emergence and future application of contemporary worship music. Possible

correctives for the use of not only contemporary, but traditional music expression clarifies valid concern for all styles of music in worship.

Chapter 6 attempts to summarize the overarching priorities of worship while providing pastoral solutions for enhancing mutually edifying corporate gatherings in the context of musical diversity. Although some aspects of worship, such as musical style, are methodological in nature, all artistic decisions should be rooted theologically. The vertical and horizontal priorities of worship provide a strong foundation for the promotion and implementation of musical pluralism in Christian worship. Pastoral discernment in song selection along with congregational submission to the biblical principle of mutual edification will bring the church together in ever-increasing degrees of unified worship. The objective is to understand the importance of presenting contextually-friendly worship opportunities in stylistic terms sensitive to the social, cultural, and spiritual maturity levels of the congregation.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR MUSICAL PLURALISM IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Music has been a significant component of corporate worship throughout history. Both Old and New Testament writers refer extensively to the helpful presence of music in ascribing praise to God. Although little specificity regarding musical style is presented by biblical authors, there is evidence suggesting the existence of stylistic differences in musical form used in corporate worship.

Musical pluralism, or the presence of multiple musical styles, is a concept that describes a stylistic diversity inherent in Christian worship practices all over the globe. The use and acceptance of many styles of music in worship is helpful in providing the church musical languages familiar and accessible to each congregant. Musical diversity is necessary for people of differing cultural, socio-economic, educational, generational, and ethnic backgrounds to have an adequate repertoire of familiar and recognizable idioms through which to express praise to God.

Musical pluralism is especially important in today's global cultural environment. As cultural diversity expands across the globe, the implementation of musical pluralism in the context of corporate worship needs to expand as well. Harold Best points to the necessity of musical diversity for people of differing cultural, socio-economic, educational and ethnic backgrounds to have an adequate supply of familiar and recognizable idioms through which to express praise to God.¹ Best references the Pentecost story from Acts

¹Harold Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 67.

2:2 as a biblical example of this ideal, stating, “God wants to hear the whole world in its countless tongues and amazingly diverse musics making praise after praise.”² Worldwide missions and evangelistic associations are recognizing the need for culturally appropriate worship music, representative of the people groups being converted to Christianity.

Ethnodoxology, the study of the worship of God among diverse cultures, is a relatively new theological discipline committed to the discovery and cultivation of indigenous art forms contextually consistent with the “heart languages”³ of newly Christianized people groups. Ethnodoxologist Robin Harris contends that music is not the “universal language” it has been represented to be.⁴ According to this new paradigm, musical meanings and understandings “are culture specific and must be learned to be understood.”⁵ Disagreement over the universal nature of music stems from eighteenth- and early twentieth-century missionary activities. The general consensus among missionary-sending nations at that time was that unevangelized people groups not only needed Christ, but also needed to ascend the cultural evolutionary ladder by adopting musical styles of more “advanced” cultures. This colonizing effect by well-meaning missionaries greatly impaired the development of authentic, indigenous worship expressions among the cultures being reached for Christ.⁶

²Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith*, 67.

³Joan Huyser-Honig, “Ethnodoxology: Calling All Peoples to Worship in Their Heart Language,” *Calvin Institute of Christian Worship*, 2, February 10, 2009, accessed September 15, 2016, <http://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/ethnodoxology-calling-all-peoples-to-worship-in-their-heart-language/>.

⁴Robin Harris, “A Great Misconception: Music the Universal Language,” *The Lausanne Movement*, 2, July 25, 2010, accessed September 1, 2016, <http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/resources/translation/10635/>.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Glenn Stallsmith, “Worship from the Nations: A Response to Scott Aniol,” *Global Forum on Arts and Christian Faith* 3, no. 1 (2015): 22.

If Harris is correct, and there is no universal musical language, then it follows that there is no exclusive musical style or genre superior to all others. A piece of classical Western art music, though arguably more complex in harmonic structure and melodic contour, is no worthier of God's acceptance than an African plainsong accompanied only by a djembe. Though one may distinguish itself as a masterpiece in form, texture, and style, the other is equally capable of expressing glory and honor to the God of all creation. Best writes, "There is no single chosen language or artistic musical style that, better than all others, can capture and repeat back the fullness of the glory of God."⁷

This macro understanding of global missional sensitivity to cultural contexts applies equally to a more particular (or micro) understanding of diversity in musical styles in the American church. The need for musical pluralism across the globe is reflective of the need for a pluralistic view of music in the local church.

In American churches, a predominant example of multiculturalism is observed in generational differences. For centuries, but especially since the onset of Rock 'n' Roll and Pop Rock in the 1960s and 1970s, each generation has exhibited a proclivity toward diversity in tastes and preferences in musical style. Frank Burch Brown comments on the modern phenomenon of incorporating secular pop music into the church: "Never has there been more diversity in the kinds of music being offered for use in worship, or more difference as to preference."⁸ Because of the disparities in musical preferences, church leaders are looking for ways to address this issue with fairness and balance as they seek to provide meaningful worship experiences.

As previously stated, the Bible offers evidence for the acceptance and use of multiple styles of music in Christian worship. Best suggests that God not only appreciates

⁷Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith*, 67.

⁸Frank Burch Brown, *Good Taste, Bad Taste, and Christian Taste: Aesthetics in Religious Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 165.

diversity but actually demonstrates his appreciation for diversity in creation. According to Best, compelling evidence for the justification of musical pluralism in worship is found in the variety and multiplicity of design in creation. Some parts of creation are considered more beautiful and appealing to the senses of humanity than others, yet each is beautiful and acceptable because of its creative source. Every aspect of God's creation is appealing and acceptable to him by virtue of his unique creative energies.⁹

An understanding and implementation of musical pluralism is crucial in providing opportunities for mutual edification and ecclesiastical unity in the Christian church. This chapter argues for the necessity of unity in worship, achieved by a de-emphasis on personal preference and a willingness to defer to the needs of others. While demonstrating the necessity of musical diversity in worship, exegesis of key biblical passages dealing with stylistic variety in Christian worship will show divine proclivity toward embracing cultural diversity among the Christian community.

The first step in this strategic approach is to identify and explain key biblical passages that speak to the theological and philosophical magnitude of glorifying God by (1) creating environments that include an awareness of the need to provide meaningful opportunities for mutual edification for all believers and (2) laying aside personal preferences in deference to the needs of others in the worshiping community. The goal of being others-focused, diversity of musical style, and the acceptance of an expanding musical vocabulary will become more palatable to those committed to achieving mutually edifying musical expressions in their worship offerings to God. Musical pluralism will serve this commitment to mutual edification by providing a practical and functional approach to stylistic diversity in Christian worship.

Mutual edification, a term used by the apostle Paul in his writings, will be shown as a primary goal of Christian worship. Mutual edification is often interpreted in biblical

⁹Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith*, 25.

translations as the “building up” of one another in their faith (1 Cor 14:1-5). Peterson asserts the priority of mutual edification in worship demonstrated by the body of Christ as they lead each other through “real engagement with other believers in the context of mutual ministry.”¹⁰ The accomplishment of these ends requires the church to embrace the practice of musical pluralism in planning, implementation, and leadership of Christian worship.

Ecclesiastical unity, with respect to musical pluralism, is revealed by a spirit of openness and acceptance on the part of Christian congregations to many kinds of musical expression. Believers demonstrate this spirit as they lay aside personal preferences and coexist in an environment of diverse musical offerings that fairly represent the needs of every member of the body.

Mutual Edification

Peterson asserts, “The purpose of Christian gatherings is the edification or building up of the body of Christ.”¹¹ Mutual edification in worship is accomplished as believers recognize the horizontal aspect of their musical offerings to God. Though God is the subject and primary focus of Christian worship, there is a sense in which believers are addressing one another as they offer their praise to God. Speaking about directional aspects of worship, Calvin Stapert suggests, “There are two directions, two audiences” in Christian worship.¹² He concedes, “The primary direction is Godward...but equally explicit is another direction, another audience.” He believes this secondary audience is significant to Paul “because edification is an essential ingredient in Christian life and

¹⁰David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992), 214.

¹¹Ibid., 287.

¹²Calvin R. Stapert, *A New Song for an Old World: Musical Thought in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 21.

worship.”¹³ Considering this secondary audience in worship, certain musical aspects become important in terms of their stylistic diversity and cultural context.

Mutual edification is a phrase Paul used numerous times in his epistles. Edification according to McKim denotes the “building up of Christians . . . and thus the strengthening of their faith and devotion to God.”¹⁴ The adjectival connection of “mutual” simply means multiple persons committed to a common purpose; in this case, the purpose of building each other up in the faith.

In Romans 14:19, Paul speaks of mutual edification as the building up of others in their faith. In doing so, Paul admonishes believers to lay aside, or sacrifice, certain personal preferences. Implicitly, Paul is embracing the inevitability of mature believers denying themselves of personal privileges and likes that they might “pursue” the needs of others as more important than their own. At least two of Paul’s references to mutual edification occur in passages that deal with acceptable worship (Rom 15:2; 1 Cor 14:3).

In 1 Corinthians 14:1-5, Paul prioritizes prophesy over other spiritual gifts given to the church. According to Fee, the “building up of the church is developed . . . by insisting on *intelligibility* in the gathered assembly.”¹⁵ Paul emphasizes the importance of prophesy in the gathered church because of its simplicity and accessibility to all people. Fee interprets Paul’s argument to mean that “prayer and praise must be intelligible if the community is to be edified.”¹⁶ Fee concedes, “Edifying oneself is not a bad thing; it is simply not the point of gathered worship.”¹⁷

¹³Stapert, *A New Song for an Old World*, 21.

¹⁴Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 87.

¹⁵Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 652.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 653.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

Some might protest, “What does Paul’s argument for prophesy over tongues in 1 Corinthians 14 have to do with musical pluralism in worship?” Though Paul limits his discussion to prophesy and tongues in these first few verses, a greater principle is at hand. The idea of intelligibility, as Fee points out, is significant in the greater discussion of Christian worship. Paul is not specifically speaking about musical styles in worship, but he is speaking to the importance of communal worship being implemented in such a way as to be understandable to the people. Peterson stresses, “We minister to one another as we teach and exhort one another on the basis of his word, using the gifts that the Spirit has given us. . . . Edification is to be our concern even when we sing or pray to God in the congregation.”¹⁸ Mutual edification in worship is only possible to the degree that each person present can comprehend the mode and medium of the worship and express praise to God in ways that are individually (according to their “tribal language”)¹⁹ and corporately meaningful. The responsibility to provide worshipful expressions, accessible and meaningful to the congregants, lies with worship leaders and pastors. Good pastoral leadership reflects an understanding of the needs of the flock and a willingness to provide spiritual and scriptural nourishment in an appropriate worshipful context.

Later in 1 Corinthians 14, Paul includes a more extensive list of worship elements, underscoring the importance of all things in corporate worship being done for mutual edification. Paul summarily includes the elements of “hymn,” “lesson,” “revelation,” “tongue,” and “interpretation,” concluding with the directive to “let all things be done for the building up” (1 Cor 14:26). Thus, the concept of intelligibility is broadened to include musical expressions of worship, such as hymns. This concept

¹⁸Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 287.

¹⁹Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 22.

speaks to the necessity of musical aspects such as idiom, style, and cultural experience adhering to a level of commonality shared by the gathered worshipers.

It is significant, as noted by C. K. Barrett, that “Paul chooses to apply the metaphor of edification to the whole body of Christians rather than to the individual.”²⁰ The practice and purpose of corporate worship is that the whole body of Christ, together, might bring glory and honor to him. Again, Paul’s emphasis on mutual edification is reinforced by his acknowledgment of the importance of the communal aspects of worship. The body of Christ comes together in ecclesiastical unity to offer praise to God and to be encouraged and edified by one another. This objective calls for the laying aside of personal preferences in conjunction with a willingness to embrace stylistic diversity in corporate worship. The process of achieving unity in worship is of paramount importance to the goal of mutual edification. John Calvin concurs, “The church must not be taken up to no purpose with unproductive exercises, but must, in whatever is done, have an eye to edification.”²¹

In commenting on the sensitivity of the Protestant Reformers to their congregants, Bryan Chapell stresses their concern for the “capacities of God’s people . . . in apprehending and appreciating the aspects of worship.”²² Chapell continues, “These Reformers made music choices that they believed would allow people more readily to enter into the praise of God . . . listening to both the world and the Word to ensure people can know what they must know and can worship as they must worship.”²³ Arguably,

²⁰C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1968), 327.

²¹John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans, 1957), 458.

²²Bryan Chapell, *Christ Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 127.

²³*Ibid.*, 128.

Paul's polemic over prophecy and tongues in 1 Corinthians 14 suggests an openness to musical diversity in Christian worship. Additionally, Paul's directive that all things done in worship must lead to mutual edification implies the possibility of the presence and acceptability of multiple styles of music in worship.

Romans 15:2 is another example of Paul emphasizing the significance of edification both in personal relationships among Christians and with a view to its connection to the pursuit of unity in worship. The setting for Romans 15:2 is Paul's admonition for the stronger members (in matters of faith) of the church to bear with the failings of the weaker members who were believed to have been Jewish converts. These Jewish Christians were still struggling with their consciences as to the continuation of Jewish dietary restrictions, Sabbath keeping, and other requirements of the Law.²⁴ Paul places the burden for tolerance and personal sacrifice on the more mature, "stronger" believers by insisting that they "bear with the failings of the weak" (Rom 15:1) for the immediate purpose of building the weaker brother up in his faith (Rom 15:2). The insistence that the strong bear with the failings of the weak is about much more than dietary issues. Paul is speaking to more comprehensive matters dealing with the way believers approach God in worship. Thomas Schreiner clarifies this objective: "The central theme of the book, the honor and praise of God's name, reaches its fulfillment when Jews and Gentiles worship together harmoniously."²⁵

In Romans 15:5-6, Paul completes his argument in praying that this multi-cultural church in Rome might come to a point of unity in their worship. The unity Paul is praying for is not a unity that comes through the capitulation of one set of beliefs and ideas

²⁴John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 356.

²⁵Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 757.

in favor of some kind of forced unanimity between disagreeing parties. Rather, Paul is hoping and praying, according to Schreiner, “that they will be unified by learning to love and accept one another in the midst of their differences.”²⁶ Schreiner further asserts that Paul’s “ultimate purpose” in chapters 14-15 is that the Jews and Gentiles of the Roman church “will worship together in harmony.”²⁷ This passage underscores the importance of mutual edification and unity among believers in the church. By implication, the commitment to the building up of one another is most recognized in their worship. Dunn notes, “Paul expects this unity to come to expression in worship rather than in unanimity of opinion.”²⁸

Once again, some might question this reasoning in that musical style is not directly mentioned in this passage. This observation might be valid, except that the cultural and religious differences that would cause contention in one area of liturgical praxis (i.e., dietary restrictions, keeping of the Sabbath, physical circumcision, etc.) would also cause discord in other areas. Though Paul gives no specifics as to musical aspects of early Christian worship in this passage, or more specifically, music used in the Roman church, it would seem unavoidable that musical tastes would differ dramatically between two such diverse ethnic groups (i.e., Jews and Gentiles, Greeks, and Semites).

David Music and Milburn Price concede, “Hellenistic culture was the dominant influence throughout the Roman empire . . . culture, philosophy, art, and [the] language of the Greeks continued to be leading forces throughout the area under Roman rule.”²⁹ It was not uncommon for Christian teachers to attract Greek and Roman

²⁶Schreiner, *Romans*, 750.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38b (Dallas: Word, 1988), 841.

²⁹William J. Reynolds and Milburn Price, *A Survey of Christian Hymnody*, rev. and enlarged by David W. Music and Milburn Price (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing

audiences by first appealing to their cultural sensitivities, and then attempting to persuade them to the truth of the gospel. Both Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria were considered “bridge-builders” in the way they attempted to find “common ground” between Christianity and pagan philosophies.³⁰

Because of these strong cultural influences, it follows that musical diversity would become a necessary aspect of corporate worship. The musical style that accompanied ancient hymnody would almost certainly be subject to cultural interpretation and application. Converted Jews and Greeks, influenced by Paul’s admonition for mutual edification and unity in the church, would undoubtedly feel a responsibility to lay aside personal interests by placing the interests of others above their own, all for the glory of God. Schreiner observes,

Their unity is not for their own sake, nor is Paul’s highest aspiration that believers should live together peacefully. His desire is that they should ‘glorify’ God. God is not honored, however, if the believing community is fractured by divisions. He is honored when Jews and Gentiles, with all their diversity, stand shoulder to shoulder and lift their voices in praise to him.³¹

Accordingly, God is glorified when believers consider the mutual edification of brothers and sisters in Christ more important than the preservation of a certain musical style or tradition. Just as these “stronger” believers in the early church were directed to bear the burden of the “weaker” brother’s doubts and hesitations, modern day believers must endure with patience those who are hesitant to accept new forms and styles of music. Each group should maintain openness to the preferences and needs of the other in purposely seeking the building up of all in Christ. Ultimately, Christians must see “the glory of God as the controlling purpose of all our attitudes and actions.”³²

Company, 1999), 5.

³⁰Stapert, *A New Song for and Old World*, 37.

³¹Schreiner, *Romans*, 750.

³²John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans 9-16*, The New International

Musical Diversity in New Testament Worship

Scriptural evidence indicates that multiple styles of music existed in the New Testament. The most glaring examples of this stylistic diversity are found in the parallel passages of Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19. Other references to songs in the New Testament are found in the gospel canticles found in Luke 1 and 2 and the eschatological songs of Revelation 4, 5 and 14.

Paul mentions at least three genres of New Testament worship songs in the Colossians and Ephesians passages. There are differences of opinion among scholars and church musicians as to the exact nature of Paul's listing of songs in these passages. He identifies "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" as the kinds of musical idioms to be used in Christian worship. Wall contends, "Lists in Paul's writings tend to be illustrative rather than technical . . . we do not gain much by trying to differentiate among psalms, hymns and spiritual songs."³³ Lincoln concurs, "The three terms here are best seen as another example of this writer's fondness for piling up synonyms."³⁴ Vaughan asserts, "No rigid distinctions should be made between 'psalms,' 'hymns,' and 'spiritual songs.'"³⁵

However, Moo acknowledges, "It is attractive to identify 'psalms' as songs based on scripture, 'hymns' as songs about Christ, and 'songs' as spontaneous compositions 'prompted by the Spirit.'"³⁶ Martin, though conceding that "any hard and

Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1965), 201.

³³Robert W. Wall, *Colossians and Philemon*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 150.

³⁴Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 346.

³⁵Curtis Vaughan, *Colossians*, in vol. 11 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 216.

³⁶Douglass J. Moo, *The Letter to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 290.

fast distinction between these terms” is somewhat uncertain, also affirms that many scholars accept the notion “that the various terms are used loosely to cover the various forms of musical composition.”³⁷ He also promotes the following scenario:

Distinct types of liturgical praise are to be understood. “Psalms” could refer to the Hebrew psalter . . . suggested further by Jesus’ own example of appealing to the psalms in his teaching. . . . “Hymns” preserved in the Pauline churches took on a Christological turn and were exclusively devoted to a recital of the “events of salvation.” . . . “Sacred songs” or, “songs inspired by the Spirit” . . . were the result of immediate inspiration, as in the scene in I Corinthians 14:26.³⁸

Though acknowledging “the different categories of song in this verse are not easy to distinguish,” Wright confidently maintains the intention of Paul to indicate a diversity in early Christian musical expressions by describing a “variety and richness of Christian singing which should neither be stereotyped into one mold nor restricted simply to weekly public worship.”³⁹ Hustad convincingly states, “On the testimony of music scholars and the confirmation of later history, I must believe that they [psalms, hymns, spiritual songs] were different—in origin, in subject matter, and possibly even in performance practice.”⁴⁰

Liesch argues for the multiplicity of different styles based on the variety of cultures and religious practices present in Colossae during that time. He concludes Paul’s differentiation of musical genres probably “reflected their multicultural environment.”⁴¹

³⁷Ralph R. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revel, 1964), 47.

³⁸Ralph P. Martin, *The Worship of God: Some Theological, Pastoral, and Practical Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 51-53.

³⁹N. T. Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 145.

⁴⁰Donald P. Hustad, *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing, 1993), 146.

⁴¹Barry Liesch, *The New Worship: Straight Talk on Music and the Church*, expanded ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 41.

While some will, undoubtedly, argue against the presence of musical pluralism in the New Testament Christian church, it seems logical given the confluence of Jews and Gentiles worshiping in the heart of the artistically rich Greco-Roman culture, that differing musical styles would be incorporated in worship. The existence of this multicultural community combined with the necessity of producing new expressions of worship to accurately reflect a new belief system, strongly suggests the use of a multi-faceted musical repertoire. Hustad acknowledges, “Paul assumed that Christians would use a broad expression of congregational music,”⁴² again, largely due to the multicultural dimension of the early Christian church.

Scholars and Christian writers who agree that Paul’s “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” provide evidence of distinguishing characteristics of New Testament songs, tend to characterize the three types in fairly standard ways. Hoehner provides much detail in his description of the three types.⁴³ The word, “psalm” from the original language refers to “plucking the string of a bow” or simply the playing of a stringed instrument.⁴⁴ As a result, Hoehner proposes the singing of psalms was accompanied by stringed instruments, as was “the Old Testament and Judaistic practice.”⁴⁵

The term *hymn* has some uncertainty attached to its origin. Biblical references connect the playing of stringed instruments to this musical expression as well. The word *praise* is often indicated by the use of this term and connects *hymn* to the singing of the “hallal psalms” in the New Testament (cf., Acts 16:25; Paul and Silas in the Philippian

⁴²Donald P. Hustad, *True Worship: Reclaiming the Wonder and Majesty* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 1998), 223.

⁴³Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 707-9.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 708.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

jail). The Psalm 22:22 quote in Hebrews 2:12 is another example of the use of this particular term. In general, Hoehner contends for the general theme of this worship expression as a “song of praise to God.”⁴⁶

The third type of song is derived from the English word *ode*, and refers to joyful songs or simply the act of singing. Sometimes connected with dancing, this term is associated with the Old Testament processional led by King David in which the Ark of the Covenant was brought into Jerusalem with singing and dancing (2 Sam 6:5). This word occurs only seven times in the New Testament. Other than the Colossians and Ephesians passages, it occurs in Revelation 5:9, 14:3, and 15:3, where it denotes “songs of rejoicing and praise for the Lamb of God’s victory over evil.”

The word *spiritual*, which is placed before *songs*, is considered by some scholars to be a modifying adjective of all three words. Martin, however, connects *spiritual* only to the third word, *songs*, and determines the combination of the two words as descriptive of “snatches of spontaneous praise which the inspiring Spirit places on the lips of the enraptured worshiper.”⁴⁷

After evaluating the Colossians and Ephesians passages, the presence of musical and lyrical diversity in New Testament worship is preferred. Though clear-cut distinctions between psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs cannot be definitively proven, sufficient evidence exists to accept the presumption that musical pluralism was present in the early church. Liesch contends, “Despite the impossibility of exact differentiation, commentators are convinced a diversity of materials is suggested.”⁴⁸ Perhaps Paul would not have so carefully prefaced his desire for musical diversity with an admonition for peace and unity

⁴⁶Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 709.

⁴⁷Martin, *Worship in the Early Church*, 47.

⁴⁸Liesch, *The New Worship*, 41.

among the brethren had there not already existed differences of opinion as to the musical fare of worship.

Both the church at Ephesus and at Colossae included a diverse cultural and ethnic make-up. Ephesus is believed to have been an even more “pluralistic and culturally diverse population than Colossae” consisting of Asians, Persians, Romans, Greeks and Egyptians.⁴⁹ With its cultural and ethnic diversity, Ephesus was most certainly a center of great artistic diversity. It follows that there would exist within the Christian congregation in Ephesus a multiplicity of musical preferences. For these reasons, as well as the clarity of the biblical text, Paul was aware of differences in musical form, and probably even more aware of the potential for disagreement over musical styles used in worship.

Mutual Submission: Deference over Preference

Ephesians 5:21 functions as a transitional verse between two sections of scripture in which Paul deals with the importance of being filled with the Spirit and the corresponding behaviors that are exhibited by such a filling. Verse 21 in the ESV is grammatically connected to verse 20 as a continuing condition of being filled with the Spirit in verse 18: “Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:20-21). This transitional phrase also becomes foundational to Paul’s discussion on family and other domestic relationships in Ephesians 5:22-6:9.

Ephesians 5:21 is a call to mutual submission out of respect and reverence for Christ. Bruce observes from this verse that Christians should not be “insisting on getting [their] own way . . . but should put the interest of others before their own,”⁵⁰ thus

⁴⁹Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 39.

⁵⁰F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 382.

connecting this verse to the exhortations from the Philippians 2 passage. Continuing in this vein, he sees Paul's phrase from the ESV, "out of reverence for Christ," as connected to the Philippians discourse on having the "same mind" (Phil 2:2,5) as Christ, which showed the servant-attitude of Jesus, ultimately leading him to death at Calvary.

From verse 21, O'Brien calls for "a voluntary submission or subordination, and this means to act in a loving, considerate, self-giving way towards one another."⁵¹ O'Brien also notices the connection to the Philippians 2 passage. He further notes, "If this subordination is the result of the Spirit's infilling believers, then its motivation is 'the fear of Christ.'"⁵² He qualifies the use of "fear" thusly: "It does not convey the idea of terror or intimidation for those who are in Christ, it signifies a sense of awe in the presence of the one who is Lord."⁵³

Hoehner emphatically denies the assumption that verse 21 serves as a precursor to the following verses on family relationships. He asserts, "This verse is not the beginning of a new section but a fitting conclusion to the broader context of wisdom" found in verses 18-20.⁵⁴ He agrees with O'Brien that verse 21 is the final participial clause of verses 18-21,⁵⁵ denoting its connection with "speaking to one another" (v. 19a) and "singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" (v. 19b). This interpretation is substantial in that it provides a direct contextual connection with the corporate worship event. In the planning and implementation of corporate worship, Paul is calling for a mutual submission among believers that would include sensitivity to balancing preferences in music.

⁵¹Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 400.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 401.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 404.

⁵⁴Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 716.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

Bruce and O'Brien both acknowledge a strong connection between Ephesians 5:21 and Paul's directive to the Philippian church in chapter 2:3-8, which reads,

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Philippians 2:3-4 compliment Ephesians 5:21a while Philippians 2:5-8 seem to expand upon and bring a greater depth of understanding to Ephesians 5:21b. Paul is asking the Philippians to focus on a unity of heart and mind as he brings his appeal in Philippians 2:3-4.

Silva notes that the overarching concern of this section is "sounded out by 'humility.'"⁵⁶ Humility is the key aspect of these verses. It is only by assuming an attitude of humility that one is able to consider the needs of others as more important than one's own needs. Fee comments on humility as "a uniquely Christian virtue. . . [that] stands in utter contradiction to the values of the Greco-Roman world."⁵⁷ Even today, humility is considered a weakness in many circles, often including the church. It is especially difficult to observe a spirit of humility in discussions over musical preferences. People want to hear what is familiar to them; they want to hear and participate in singing what they know and what they like. Instead of a spirit of humility in the church, so often there is a spirit of selfishness and self-centeredness.

Many churches have attempted to extinguish the flames of "worship wars"⁵⁸ by simply giving in to people's demands. Acquiescence occurs in many forms. Some of

⁵⁶Moises Silva, *Philippians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 101.

⁵⁷Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 88.

⁵⁸A phrase that describes the conflict in modern churches over musical styles

the more frequent examples include the creation of simultaneous worship services in different venues catering to the musical preferences of one demographic group. Others offer a “blended”⁵⁹ style of worship, attempting to bring together in one worship service musical styles and elements preferred by several different generational and cultural groups. Some larger churches offer several consecutive services promoting the stylistic content of each service (i.e., Traditional, Classic, Contemporary, Modern, etc.). Providing options for people is not necessarily wrong, but the consequences of these options can and do cause unintended issues for the churches. The most tragic consequence is the loss of unity. Silva contends, “The true obstacle to unity is not the presence of legitimate differences of opinion but self-centeredness.”⁶⁰

The significance of mutual submission, or deference to the needs of others, is that the concessions made in attempting to satisfy people’s preferences would not be necessary if an overarching spirit of humility existed in the congregation. Instead of dividing churches into smaller factions based upon stylistic differences in music, the church could come together as one body, glorifying God in a spirit of unity and mutual submission. Instead of staff and volunteers overextending themselves to the point of exhaustion and burnout trying to satisfy unrealistic and unscriptural expectations, submission to divine wisdom would hopefully diminish the power of generational and preferential differences, uniting the church in meaningful and fulfilling opportunities of involvement and sacrificial service. Instead of the church and the unchurched seeing their involvement in Christian worship as just another weekly choice based upon personal convenience and the assurance of self-gratification, people might rejoice in the opportunity

of worship.

⁵⁹Blended worship is an attempt to bring several different styles of music into one service in order to try and provide a pleasing experience for everyone.

⁶⁰Silva, *Philippians*, 101.

to lay aside personal preference in favor of becoming more like Christ through self-denial and love for others.

In Philippians 2, Fee astutely observes the connection between the words *each* (v. 3b) and *others* (v. 4). In the collocation of these words “one finds a kind of tension between the individual and the community . . . [where] the accent rests on the community.”⁶¹ In other words, Paul is emphasizing the health and wellbeing of the community and the responsibility of each individual believer to consider the needs of the community above their own. Adherence to this apostolic directive could end the aforementioned “worship wars.” Corporate Christian worship is not primarily an individual practice. When the body of Christ comes together to worship, it is a communal activity and an opportunity for mutual encouragement and edification. When believers operate from this selfless perspective, showing more concern for the needs of others than themselves, Best affirms, they can “enter deeply into and live within—even if for a spiritual moment—the lives of brother and sister, so as to weep, to mourn, to rejoice, to identify with, to intercede for, to uphold, to support, even to correct.”⁶²

Paul is quick to provide a good example of the humility and selflessness he is trying to communicate to the Philippians. He finds the perfect example in Christ. Philippians 2:5 becomes the transition from theoretical perspective to a living, breathing tangible testimony. Paul says, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5). The New King James interprets the second phrase as, “which was also in Christ Jesus.” The New International Version modifies “mind” to “attitude” and reads, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” In calling for a spirit of humility that admonishes believers to see others as better than themselves—to empty themselves

⁶¹Fee, *Philippians*, 89.

⁶²Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 51.

of self-interests and to look out for the needs of others—Paul finds the only satisfactory comparison in Christ. O’Brien explains, “The pattern or model is Jesus, who invited people to come to Him as the one who is ‘meek and lowly in heart’ (Mt. 11:29).”⁶³

Paul goes on in verses 6-9 to describe the humiliation of Christ in his suffering at Calvary. The example and the motivation for Christians to live a selfless, others-centered lifestyle are found in Christ. Once again, O’Brien contends, “Christ’s action in humbling himself is the pattern for believers, who in humility are to count others better than themselves.”⁶⁴

Submission to others and the subordination of oneself to the preferences of others are not, by worldly standards, an enviable position. However, according to the kingdom principles of Christ as found in the writings of the apostle Paul, the position of humility is the station to which believers are called. These attitudes and behaviors are to be employed by individual believers as they come together in corporate worship, laying aside personal preferences and deferring to the needs and desires of others in a spirit of mutual cooperation and love. Just as importantly, these expectations for Christian relationships apply to the way Christian musicians work together in planning and implementing Christian worship. These attitudes and behaviors are to be employed by individual believers as they come together in corporate worship, laying aside personal preferences and deferring to the needs and desires of others in a spirit of mutual cooperation and brotherly love.

Multicultural Aspects of Biblical Worship

One of the strongest arguments for musical pluralism in Christian worship is found in the diversity of ethnic and cultural backgrounds associated with modern

⁶³Peter T. O’Brien, *Epistle to the Philippians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 181.

⁶⁴Ibid.

Christendom. The scope of the gospel of Christ is global. Its impact is seen in the inestimable number of different cultures, ethnicities, and languages represented by belief and participation in the kingdom work of Christ. A natural by-product of a people's acceptance of the good news of Christ is the formation of indigenous liturgical expressions of praise appropriate to the cultural articulation of the new people group.

Farhadian suggests, "The mark of Christian worship is its openness."⁶⁵ The church must accept the presupposition that musical style in worship is secondary to doctrinal soundness and is functional in its service to the scriptural message. The church, with respect to its musical expressions used in worship, must be open to "innovation and transformation."⁶⁶ The music used in the church must remain relevant in an "organic, living and celebrative" explosion of new worship expressions across the globe.⁶⁷ No one culture or civilization has so excelled in its musical advancement that it becomes the standard by which all music must be judged.

The story of Pentecost in Acts 2 is a significant example of the value God places on all the peoples of the world. Best argues that churches and church musicians should live "in a spirit of Pentecost . . . among the musics of the world."⁶⁸ In describing the impact of the Pentecost event as it relates to the intersection of the gospel with the world, Best explains,

The story of Pentecost goes further than its historical reality. It is also a parable that urges us into the knowledge that the gospel is comfortable in any culture and its

⁶⁵Charles E. Farhadian, *Christian Worship Worldwide: Expanding Horizons, Deepening Practices*, ed. Charles E. Farhadian (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 3.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith*, 67.

message finds easy residence in the languages, cultural ways, and thought styles (but not thought systems) of countless societies.⁶⁹

He is declaring the depth and breadth and limitless nature of God's grasp upon mankind and his willingness to receive heartfelt, truthful worship in whatever language and musical form it is offered. God is not limited to the enjoyment of classical, western musical fare. At this point, Best's powerful statement bears repeating: "God wants to hear the whole world in its countless tongues and amazingly diverse musics making praise after praise."⁷⁰ God speaks through the psalmist: "I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" (Ps 46:10).

Acts 2 seems to be an indication that God places importance upon communicating his love to all peoples of the earth in their cultural, linguistic context. It seems reasonable that if all nations are welcomed into the kingdom, worship will be offered from the people of these nations in their native tongues and with great artistic diversity.

John speaks of a great heavenly gathering of the nations in Revelation 5:9, and then again in 7:9-10. In both instances, he includes the designations of "tribe," "language," "people," and "nation." The first passage simply refers to what Christ has done for these people; in the latter, he describes the actual vocal response of the groups. Paige Patterson observes, "John is making the point that this group is ethnically distinct from the Jews . . . tribally, and linguistically diverse from one another."⁷¹

Why would John mention the diverse language and tribal characteristics of this group? The implication is that God not only loves these people of diverse cultures and ethnicities enough to include them in the salvific work of Christ, but he receives their

⁶⁹Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith*, 66.

⁷⁰Ibid., 67.

⁷¹Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, The New American Commentary, vol. 39 (Nashville: B & H, 2012), 200.

acknowledgement of his majesty through praises expressed in their “linguistically diverse” languages. Patterson notes, “The multiethnic chorus shouts in a loud voice.”⁷²

The ethnic and linguistic diversities mentioned by Patterson point to cultural distinctions that seem to be welcomed in the eschatological worship of the nations. Glenn Stallsmith concurs with Patterson’s observations of the multi-ethnic expressions of the heavenly worshipers, stating, “Culture—as the complex interaction of nationality, ethnicity, geography, language, and, yes, behavior—has a role to play in God’s saving history.”⁷³ Stallsmith concludes that the original language does not depict language as simply a characteristic of ethnicity, but “a portrayal of cultural identity . . . related to ethnicity and behavior.”⁷⁴ This conclusion is significant in establishing the identification and acceptance of cultural particularities in the eschaton.

There is no indication that this heavenly response in Revelation 5:9 is a simultaneous offering in native tongues. However, implicit in John’s specification of the backgrounds of the worshipers is the possibility of a wonderfully harmonious union of many languages singing in a multiplicity of dialects that can only be understood by heavenly beings in the heavenlies. While this is purely conjecture, the miracle of Pentecost stands as a clear reminder that with God, nothing is impossible.

Conclusion

Through a brief exegesis of key New Testament passages, this chapter has shown that musical pluralism is necessary in Christian worship to ensure the application of mutual edification in worship. Additionally, passages have been cited to defend the position of the existence of a variety of musical genres used in the early church. Perhaps

⁷²Patterson, *Revelation*, 200.

⁷³Stallsmith, “Worship from the Nations,” 26.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 25.

the most crucial need for the assimilation of a variety of musical styles in modern Christian worship is the promotion of ecclesiastical unity in the church.

A unified acceptance of musical pluralism in Christian worship and the successful implementation of the use of a variety of musical styles will require a balance of tenacity and patience. It is an endeavor that will demand cooperation from individual church members, pastoral leadership, and academicians actively involved in preparing young worship leaders for vocational ministry.

Foundational to the success of a de-emphasis on self, and the pursuit of a unified spirit in worship, will be the presence and power of the Holy Spirit actively working to accomplish these ends despite predictable opposition from certain factions in the church. Though the application of musical pluralism advocates for a blending or mixing of many kinds of music in a worship service, some will feel marginalized by the inclusion of music that is, in their eyes, distasteful and unacceptable. Some from Christian academia will also oppose the inclusion of music that is stylistically attuned to the culture to which the church must engage and minister. Musicians who have been immersed in the academic rigors of higher education will continue to struggle to see merit in the simplicity and cultural apprehension of pop music as it relates to modern worshipers.

These and other obstacles will require the supernatural intervention of God's Spirit to accomplish the unity and mutual edification necessary for worship that is pleasing and acceptable to God. There is no formula, no step-by-step plan, that if followed will insure the inculcation and application of this concept in the hearts and minds of all Christian worshipers. However, if strategic measures are taken toward prioritizing the unity of believers and the significance of the biblical principle of mutual edification as primary aspects of worship, incremental success will more likely be accomplished. It is hoped that propositional truths presented in this research will assist those struggling with the concept of using a variety of musical styles in worship.

Those in worship leadership must acknowledge the functional aspect of musical forms used in corporate worship if progress is to be made in applying the principles of musical pluralism in modern worship. There must be openness to musical expressions from all cultural and educational backgrounds. As Best asserts,

The doctrine of common grace helps us understand why all music, flowing out of the creativities of a thousand cultures, subcultures, lifestyles, and belief systems, can be good. And from within these, all good music should be offered to a Creator for whom a thousand tongues will never suffice.⁷⁵

⁷⁵Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith*, 53.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL ISSUES OF MUSICAL PLURALISM IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Disagreements over the forms and traditions of Christian worship are not new. Author and professor of New Testament at Carson Newman College, Gerald Borchert, asserts, “Worship is an issue that touches our lives at their very core and engages our minds in intense differences of opinion.”¹ Historical accounts seem to indicate these differences have existed for centuries. Borchert agrees, “History reveals that differences of opinion about worship are not new.”² These differing opinions have often evolved into major disputes over music in the church, showing a proclivity on the part of church leaders to reject innovation in musical styles and practices.

Contemporary issues in the area of Christian worship, specifically dealing with musical style, should be examined not only from the wisdom and authority of Scripture, but also from historical accounts that reveal both a stubborn tendency to maintain tradition and a tenacious determination to embrace revolutionary innovation. This chapter provides an overview of the change and transformation that has occurred in Christian worship since the beginning of the New Testament church.

It is widely accepted that early church worship was greatly influenced by Jewish synagogue worship.³ The book of Psalms became the early church’s main worship

¹Gerald L. Borchert, *Worship in the New Testament: Divine Mystery and Human Response* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2008), 1-2.

²Ibid., 2.

³Ibid., 120.

sourcebook. The New Testament canticles found in Luke, according to Eskew and McElrath, are “much like the Psalms both in form and content”⁴ and were thought to be a part of the liturgical material of early Christian worship. Though much can be observed from textual content, it is difficult to speculate as to the musical characteristics of these early songs. Wilson-Dickson contends that early Jewish worship, distinguished by “wild, vigorous and noisy music, inseparable from physical movement,”⁵ had been tempered in the synagogue to reflect a more “contemplative . . . formal and ritualized” expression of “psalms, prayers and readings.”⁶

The transference of worship style from the synagogue to early Christian worship undoubtedly included musical similarities but, according to Hustad, was “no longer the work of ordained priests or professional cantors . . . [but] thoroughly social and congregational.”⁷ The highly ritualized worship of the synagogue became a more Spirit-led worship with the risen Christ as the focus. With more emphasis on participation among the congregants, spontaneity and freedom characterized the format of the worship. The apostle Paul gave a brief directive as to the various elements to be included in Christian worship: “What shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church” (1 Cor 14:26 NIV).

In the absence of actual musical artifacts from early church worship, it is difficult to identify stylistic features; however, from the writings of early church fathers

⁴Harry Eskew and Hugh T. McElrath, *Sing with Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Hymnody*, 2nd ed., rev. and expanded (Nashville: Church Street, 1995), 78.

⁵Andrew Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 22.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Donald P. Hustad, *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing, 1993), 145.

and ancient historians it will be shown that change was constant. The church birthed in Jerusalem soon began to spread, increasing not only in number but also in cultural diversity. Early Hebrew musical foundations were certainly influenced by the ubiquitous presence of Greek and Roman culture surrounding the spread of Christianity. Peter's interaction with Cornelius in Acts 10, resulting in the abolition of Jewish dietary restrictions for Christians, certainly suggests the possibility of other cultural changes occurring during this time. Speaking of the early church in Ephesus, author and Biola professor of music Barry Leisch observes, "The music in the house churches and synagogues probably reflected the divergent cultures represented."⁸ This cultural milieu would undoubtedly impact the praxis of artistic expressions used in the worship of this new faith. As the church continued to expand, orthodoxical challenges, cultural influence,⁹ reformational upheaval, and revivalistic eruption would trigger much innovation in the form and practice of musical styles used in Christian worship. For instance, doctrinal heresies such as Gnosticism, Donatism, and Arianism were issues that demanded strong rebuke and correction from early church fathers. These false doctrines were often espoused and integrated into the hearts and minds of converts through musical tunes. Heresies articulated through the medium of song were also combatted through musical works proclaiming biblical and orthodoxical fidelity.

As believers moved north and east toward Antioch and Ephesus, Greco-Roman influences would challenge certain religious practices and worship traditions. Peter's encounter with Cornelius (Acts 10) and the Pauline doctrine of grace¹⁰ released the Gentile

⁸Barry Liesch, *The New Worship: Straight Talk on Music and the Church*, expanded ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 36.

⁹Clint Arnold, quoted in Liesch, *The New Worship*, 42.

¹⁰Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 714.

believer from adherence to Jewish laws such as circumcision, dietary restrictions, and the observance of the Sabbath. Possibly, the relaxing of these ritualistic restraints of the Old Testament Law brought about an openness for more culturally familiar musical idioms.¹¹

In time, the church experienced the theological upheaval of the Reformation bringing significant doxological change to worship practices for the common man, such as songs in the vernacular and the borrowing of popular musical idioms of the day. Then, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the revivalistic movements of Edwards and Whitefield inspired an all-new type of hymnology featuring familiar, easy to sing tunes.¹²

These stylistic changes in worship accompanying the worldwide expansion of Christianity provide clear justification for the presence of multiple styles of music in contemporary Christianity. This research intends to provide convincing historical evidence of diversity in form and methodology of artistic expression in Christian worship that, at the very least, calls for a retrospective consideration that a range of musical styles has proven useful in the past. At best, according to Webber, this evidence might suggest that the continuation of contemporary musical offerings “should not be excluded from worship but incorporated at the appropriate places in worship and added to the uses of hymns, psalms, and other musical forms.”¹³

Christian Worship in the Early Church

It is understandably difficult to seek a clear perspective of musical style from an epoch of time in which no extant musical evidence remains. McGowan writes, “Not a great deal is known of ancient Greco-Roman music generally, nor of ancient Jewish or

¹¹Borchert, *Worship in the New Testament*, 72.

¹²Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 223-228.

¹³Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old and New*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 203.

early Christian music in particular.”¹⁴ Most of what is thought to be the accepted practice of early liturgical expression is interpreted solely from the writings of early church fathers. McKinnon notes that “great difficulty is involved” in definitively identifying the stylistic nature of early church worship because historical evidence is “generally fragmentary in character and widely scattered in sources.”¹⁵ One might presume, however, given the cultural amalgamation of the day, that at least some mixture of stylistic intermingling is probable in the spread of Christian worship. Writings and quotes from early church fathers provide much of the evidence historians use to try and piece together some semblance of an understanding for the musical traditions of the early church.

Alluding to the apostle Paul’s exhortation from Romans 15:5-6, author and Calvin College professor of music Calvin Stapert concludes that unity was of prime importance in the early church: “No one can doubt that [‘with one voice’] articulates a principle that the church took very seriously for her singing.”¹⁶ Indeed, Clement of Rome (ca. 96) declared, “In the same way . . . gathered together in a conscious unity, [we ought] to cry to Him as it were with a single voice.”¹⁷ Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-ca. 215) echoed, “The union of many in one . . . becomes one symphony following one choir-leader and teacher, the Word.”¹⁸ Ignatius of Antioch invited early Christian believers to “join in this choir . . . taking up God’s melody in unity, [singing] in one voice through

¹⁴Andrew B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 111.

¹⁵James McKinnon, ed., *Music in Early Christian Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 8.

¹⁶Calvin R. Stapert, *A New Song for an Old World: Musical Thought in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 25.

¹⁷Clement of Rome, quoted in Stapert, *A New Song for an Old World*, 25.

¹⁸Clement of Alexandria, quoted in Stapert, *A New Song for an Old World*, 25.

Jesus Christ to the Father.”¹⁹

The emphasis on unity in worship seemed to contribute to a general exclusion of the use of musical instruments in the church. Historians tend to support the idea of an ecclesiastical prohibition against instrumental accompaniment because of secular and pagan-ritual connections present in society. McKinnon identifies the “close association of much pagan musical practice” as a factor in the “incipient *a cappella* doctrine.”²⁰ McGowan assumes a similar position but also acknowledges the impression “that the idioms of the Christians were overwhelmingly vocal in nature from the outset.”²¹ Additionally, he sees the exclusivity of vocal expression in worship reflecting “the implications of desire for communal singing or participation, over against specialized performance.”²² This idea of favoring unison, *a cappella* singing over the use of performance-enhancing accompaniment may point to an early ecclesiastical emphasis on the importance of the communal aspect of worship, reflecting the biblical mandate of the apostle Paul to prioritize mutual edification in worship.²³

Though early church leaders spoke against the use of musical instruments in the church, positive references to specific Old Testament instruments were made by some of these same church fathers. Literary evidence of musical imagery used by Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Ignatius of Antioch suggests the possibility of a general

¹⁹Ignatius, quoted in Reggie M. Kidd, *With One Voice: Discovering Christ's Song in Our Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 177.

²⁰McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 3, 4. McKinnon's phrase, “incipient *a cappella* doctrine,” refers to the condemnation of the use of any instrumental music in Christian worship due to its association with theatrical and cultic pagan activities. Thus, insisting on the exclusivity of human voices in the church liturgy.

²¹McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, 123.

²²*Ibid.*, 123-124.

²³David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992), 287.

acceptance of musical instruments, at least in metaphorical depictions of spiritual realities. Ignatius makes a comparison between ecclesiastical harmony and the finely tuned strings of a harp.²⁴ McKinnon notes that the “instrumental metaphors . . . repeated again and again in the psalm commentaries of various authors” from the patristic period²⁵ point to a recognition by the early church fathers of the fundamental value of instrumental music.

Considering these conflicting ideas toward the acceptance of certain musical idioms, and more specifically musical instruments used in the worship of the church, one might assume the problem was not so much with the style or instrument per se, but with the offensive and vile social and pagan practice in which the instrument was used. Wilson-Dickson agrees: “Dancing and instrumental music were almost universally shunned, because of their powerful associations with debauchery and immorality.”²⁶ The music became ugly and unusable by its association, not necessarily because of an inherent depravity. Harold Best concludes, “So with music . . . the intrinsic worth of every type, along with its contextual ability to be useful, is common to all musics as it is to all trees.”²⁷ Best compares the value of each kind of music with the inherent created worth of every kind of tree. This concept speaks to the intrinsic value of all musical expression apart from its contextual connections. Therefore, certain instruments or instrumental music used to accompany a morally reprehensible act is not, in and of itself, morally reprehensible due to its connection to that particular event.

²⁴Stapert, *A New Song for an Old World*, 40.

²⁵McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 7.

²⁶Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music*, 28.

²⁷Harold M. Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 66.

Augustine to the Reformation

Beginning in the fourth century, between AD 311-313, Westermeyer notes, “Edicts of toleration made Christianity legal and safe from persecution.”²⁸ Though free of external, governmental interference, the church still struggled against internal heretical disputes and a basic unease over liturgical musical practice. Hesitancy over the use of instruments and musical styles that could be associated in any way with surrounding pagan practices persisted.

Stapert explains that the so-called “Golden Age of early Christianity,” which included “saints Basil, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine”²⁹ saw not only the greatest period of church expansion, but also a continued orthodoxical controversy. While these church fathers provided much oversight in refuting certain heretical teachings, they also continued to display a general sense of anxiety over the “passions”³⁰ of music in worship.

Basil revealed his concern for the presence of instruments in worship attributing their innate connection to “the plectrum from below,” while extolling the virtue of singing psalmody as the pursuit of “higher things” so not to be “brought down to the passions of the flesh by the pleasure of song.”³¹ Chrysostom, culturally surrounded by the pagan entertainment venues of Antioch and Constantinople, decried any musical association with these activities and those who participated in them calling them “devilish choirs and harlot’s songs” preferring “instead of flute, lyre or pipes, the lips of saints.”³² Westermeyer

²⁸Paul Westermeyer, *Te Deum: The Church and Music* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 67.

²⁹Stapert, *A New Song for an Old World*, 82.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 86.

³¹Basil the Great, quoted in McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 66.

³²John Chrysostom, quoted in Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 72.

encourages modern Christian worshipers to “grant the cultural associations of musical instruments with immorality and idolatry in pagan antiquity” as good reason for the “church’s sense that it had to oppose them.”³³

Ambrose, often ascribed as the “father of church song,” provided a measure of innovation in his development of antiphonal chant as well as his contribution to early Christian hymnody.³⁴ Ambrosian hymns were composed in four-line stanzas using iambic tetrameter or “long meter” as it is now called. Ambrose pioneered the simple strophic style that, according to Eskew and McElrath, “set the standard for a great body of systematic hymnody that was to develop throughout the Middle Ages.”³⁵ Though in agreement with the exclusionary mentality of his contemporaries toward the use of cultural musical idioms in the church, Ambrose displayed a true delight and enjoyment for music. Hustad commends Ambrosian style as having a “strong appeal to the masses of unsophisticated worshipers” and as being influenced by a “secular antecedent.”³⁶

Ambrose’s protégé, Augustine, also exhibited a strong emotional connection to music. However, for Augustine this attachment to music became a snare. Stapert explains the paradoxical prolegemma Augustine endured: “As his enthusiasm for the moving power of music soars above that of [Basil, Chrysostom, Jerome, Ambrose et al.], so does his sensitivity to the dangers of its charms run deeper.”³⁷ Augustine’s struggle with the “passions” roused in him in response to sensory stimulation brought him to a sense of repentance: “When it happens to me that the song moves me more than the thing which is

³³Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 73.

³⁴Ibid., 82.

³⁵Eskew and McElrath, *Sing with Understanding*, 86.

³⁶Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 164.

³⁷Stapert, *A New Song for an Old World*, 181.

sung, I confess that I have sinned blamefully and then prefer not to hear the singer.”³⁸

Other times, however, Augustine speaks favorably toward the usefulness of music in the liturgy. For example, in the same passage from *Confessions X* he affirms,

When I recall the tears which I shed at the song of the Church in the first days of my recovered faith, and even now as I am moved not by the song but the things which are sung, when sung with fluent voice and music that is appropriate, I acknowledge again the great benefit of this practice.³⁹

And in another passage, recounting the positive effects of hearing the music, he explains,

How much I wept at your hymns and canticles, deeply moved by the voices of your sweetly singing church. Those voices flowed into my ears, and the truth was poured out into my heart, whence a feeling of piety surged up and my tears ran down. And these things were good for me.⁴⁰

The church’s strict adherence to the exclusion of all pagan musical influences continued with some slight, but not insignificant, modifications. It seems that the fourth century East Syrian church allowed women to lead in singing during liturgical worship and vespers. McGowen notes that going against the Greek and Latin West rejection of women singing in the church, “the Syrian church tended to stipulate the use of women’s choir.”⁴¹ Even Augustine is noted as “commending adoption of customs of other churches”:

For the singing of hymns and psalms . . . which is so useful in stirring the pious soul and inflaming the strength of divine love, there are different customs, and in Africa many members of the church are rather sluggish about it . . . we sing solemnly . . . while they inflame their passions into revelry by singing psalms of human composition, which rouse them like the stirring notes of herald trumpets. When brothers are assembled in the church, when is it not time for sacred singing?⁴²

³⁸Augustine, quoted in McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 155.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., 154.

⁴¹McGowen, *Ancient Christian Worship*, 128.

⁴²Augustine, quoted in McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, 126.

McGowan indicates a strong possibility that liturgical dance was accepted in certain regions, once more against the admonition of the more conservative bishops of the West who continued to fear any association with pagan ritual. McGowan proposes, “The connection noted between dancing and singing means that organized choirs may have danced in church at times . . . [and] the devotion expressed in these acts was . . . more closely related to faith than accounts of liturgical history have usually allowed.”⁴³

McGowan concludes,

While writers such as Athanasius or Clement evince distrust of any ecstatic or hedonistic engagement with music, and see song or dance as acceptable only for the body as disciplined by the soul rather than dominating it, they and those they scolded shared at least a basic understanding of these forms of worship; in these performances of faith by believers, the body itself is placed not merely at the disposal of the soul but in the service of God.⁴⁴

As the church moved into a period known as the Dark Ages (c. 500-1,000 A.D.),⁴⁵ Western liturgy became more systematized. Under the leadership of Pope Gregory I (the Great),⁴⁶ the *Schola Cantorum* was established to “standardize and teach the official chant of the church.”⁴⁷ With the standardization of chant, a system of modes was developed nudging the church toward a musical theoretical structure with rather strict codification of melodic and harmonic rules. Modes, a pre-tonal system of melodic movement, as Wilson-Dickson observes, were “identified not by the names of notes, but by their unique sequences of intervals.”⁴⁸ The eight modes, called the *oktoechos* in the

⁴³McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, 133.

⁴⁴Ibid., 134.

⁴⁵Eskew and McElrath, *Sing with Understanding*, 89.

⁴⁶While there is no evidence to suggest Pope Gregory actually composed any of the chant, it is believed he was very instrumental in promoting and overseeing its origination and integration into ecclesiastical use.

⁴⁷Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 176.

⁴⁸Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music*, 34.

Byzantine church, were the melodic formulas monks used to compose monophonic, unison liturgical chants.⁴⁹

Musical sophistication seemed to diminish the accessibility of church repertoire to the common man in that, as musical understanding became more complex, liturgical involvement was relegated to the priestly class and the congregation was largely excluded from participation in worship. Hustad explains that the exclusive use of chant in the Latin Church precipitated a paradigmatic shift in which “the congregation’s voice was silent for 1,000 years of official liturgical worship!”⁵⁰

As polyphonic music began to develop in the form of *organum*, singing in parallel fifth’s and fourth’s, the increasing musical demands of liturgical repertoire promoted a sort of elitist atmosphere in which only trained professional clergy were believed to have the qualifications to sing in church. The ensuing choral polyphony advanced to the point that musical expression in the church was often no longer an offering of praise, but as Westermeyer notes, a kind of intellectual pursuit “plunging one into a world of mystery [contemplating] the laws of harmony, primary proportions, and eternal numbers.”⁵¹ Westermeyer concludes that, left unchecked, this “spiritual discipline—a very priestly one—indicates [an] inherent elitist danger: peasants—musical or otherwise—were not able to participate.”⁵²

It was during these years the people began to develop their song outside the church walls. Hustad observes, “It is a mistake to believe that congregational singing

⁴⁹Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 95.

⁵⁰Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 176.

⁵¹Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 118.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 119.

disappeared from all religious life.”⁵³ Early in the thirteenth century, St. Francis of Assisi led a reform movement in Italy preaching a “simple gospel” and using songs derived from French popular folk music.⁵⁴ These *laudi*, as they were called, were vernacular hymns of praise composed in a simple monophonic style, “suitable for performance by persons without musical training.”⁵⁵ Other popular religious songs which flourished outside the church and without ecclesiastical approval included “macaroni hymns” and “contrafacted hymns”—dance-like tunes composed in the vernacular and derived from “secular antecedents.”⁵⁶

Inevitably, even in the church, innovation took place but not without a certain amount of turmoil. As chant graduated from *organum* to full blown Renaissance polyphony, there were complaints. Speaking of the new music of the *Ars Antiqua*, John of Salisbury states,

Bad taste has, however, degraded even religious worship, bringing into the presence of God, into the recesses of the sanctuary a kind of luxurious and lascivious singing . . . you would think yourself listening to a concert of sirens rather than men . . . the treble and shrill notes are so mingled with the tenor and bass, that the ears lost their power of judging.⁵⁷

Later, according to Hayburn, Pope John XXII in the twelfth century, comparing the newer music of the *Ars Nova* to that of the *Ars Antiqua*, “expressed concerns about . . . violence done to the words; new musical techniques like hockets (or hiccups); great numbers of notes; intoxication of the ear without satisfying it; [and] lack of what he

⁵³Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 180.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 181.

⁵⁷John of Salisbury, quoted in Robert F. Hayburn, *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music, 95 A.D. to 1977 A.D.* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1979), 18.

regarded as appropriate to worship.”⁵⁸ It is clear that musical and ecclesiastical innovation encountered resistance whenever and wherever it occurred. The assumption that worship practice in all medieval monastic communities was essentially homogenous is false. The “lavish and lengthy liturgical celebrations” of the Benedictine monastery at Cluny (c. 942) were upended by Bernard of Clairvaux (c. 1125) in his desire to “suppress the visual for the acoustic . . . valuing sound over sight and the word over ceremonial” extravagance.⁵⁹

The church also experienced the gradual use of instruments during these transitional times. It is believed that rudimentary organs came onto the scene sometime in the eighth century and “were widespread by the twelfth century.”⁶⁰ Even the use of the organ, considered today a distinguishing trait of traditionalism in worship, was initially viewed as an unwanted innovation. Aelred of Rievaulx questioned, “Whence hath the church so many organs and musical instruments? To what purpose, I pray you, is that terrible blowing of bellows, expressing rather the cracks of thunder, than the sweetness of a voice?”⁶¹

Carols, strophic songs with familiar refrains derived from popular song, increasingly became the primary songs associated with non-liturgical religious activity. Westermeyer notes the derivation of carols from “less than sanctified bawdy and even pagan origins” as becoming more associated with Christianity than their secular roots.⁶² Carols and *lauda spirituali* were songs used most probably as “processional hymns” and

⁵⁸Hayburn, *Papal Legislation*, 20-22.

⁵⁹Wetermeyer, *Te Deum*, 31.

⁶⁰Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 177.

⁶¹Aelred of Rievaulx, quoted in Hayburn, *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music*, 19.

⁶²Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 136.

as “vernacular substitutes for parts of the liturgy itself.”⁶³ These simple, singable hymns would become the prototype for the congregational music of the Reformation. According to Eskew and McElrath, these were songs of the “common folk . . . giving vent to simple religious joys . . . [and] the result of an irrepressible universal urge to glorify God.”⁶⁴

The puritanical constraints of Medieval Christendom, which denied the congregation its voice in worship and paralyzed potential for significant musical innovation, would soon be challenged by theological upheaval. This theological transformation not only impacted ecclesiastical practices, but also redefined the place of music and art in Christian worship.

The Reformation and Beyond

The Protestant Reformation occurred against the backdrop of a new birth in art, music, and philosophy, known as the Renaissance Period. Wilson-Dickson explains, the Renaissance, “a rebirth of the ideals, the philosophy and cultural riches of the Greek and Roman empires”⁶⁵ stirred the beginnings of a man-centered morality soon to be known as humanism. This shift toward the centrality of humanistic thought and rationalism impacted not only the cultural standards of science, philosophy, and art, but also the ecclesiastical viewpoints of the Catholic Church. Hustad observes, “It is significant that the Reformation occurred as the Renaissance was coming to full flower and Christian humanist thought was emerging.”⁶⁶ The humanist ideals of personal freedom, rational inquiry, and individual conscience and the Christian convictions of grace over law and

⁶³Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 137.

⁶⁴Eskew and McElrath, *Sing with Understanding*, 97.

⁶⁵Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music*, 58.

⁶⁶Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 184.

freedom from the tyranny of established religion combined to form this idea of Christian humanism.

Martin Luther was a product of “Christian humanism.”⁶⁷ Ultimately, his Pauline belief that salvation is by faith alone (*sola fides*) led him to post his 95 theses on the church at Wittenburg in 1517, thus officially beginning the Protestant movement that ultimately led to a break with Catholicism. Though his primary objections centered on the sacerdotal interpretation of the mass by the Catholic Church, his desire to return the Word of God to the people through vernacular renderings of Scripture and song in liturgical gatherings led to the vast restructuring of Christian worship.

Musical innovation in liturgical settings was already underway in much of the church during the Renaissance period, but the influences of Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli transformed the musical environment of Christian worship. Each of the primary reformers held specific and distinguishable views on theological and liturgical changes that were necessary in belief and practice. Luther was considered the most conservative of the three in that his desire was not so much to create a new faith, but simply to overhaul the abuses of the existing Catholic Church.

Part of Luther’s transformation of Christian worship included returning the singing to the congregation. Hustad comments that in order to accomplish this, Luther essentially replaced the traditional Latin Mass with an “all-vernacular form,” replacing the Latin chant and polyphony with “German metric [hymns] set to melodies in the secular Meistersinger and Minnesinger traditions.”⁶⁸ Eskew and McElrath note that Luther was careful to retain some of the familiar sounds of the Latin mass, using “music which was already familiar to the majority of the people of Germany,” perhaps in some

⁶⁷Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 185.

⁶⁸Ibid., 187.

way anticipating the modern-day practice of “blending” the new styles of music with the old.⁶⁹ Dowley observes, Luther replaced “chant melodies, which often used many notes for a single syllable of text . . . with just one note to each syllable, making them simple to learn, sing, and remember.”⁷⁰

Luther’s desire for liturgical participation by the people led him to incorporate many types of song in worship. He was especially concerned that young believers have a basic understanding of music and that the musical offerings of the church provide adequate and engaging artistic expressions for all. There is evidence, says Wilson-Dickson, Luther believed “the profane could be made sacred by encouraging new and wholesome associations.”⁷¹ Blume quotes Luther:

Street songs, knightly and miners’ songs, changed in a Christian, moral and ethical manner, in order that the evil, vexatious melodies, the useless and shameful songs to be sung in the streets, fields, houses, and elsewhere, may lose their bad effects if they can have good, useful Christian texts and words.⁷²

Like Luther, Calvin opted for a much simpler approach to congregational worship. Unlike Luther, Calvin systematically removed any semblance of Catholic tradition from the people’s song. Calvin’s strictures, according to Westermeyer, included the singing of “metrical psalms” using “a single monophonic line [with] one note for each syllable of text [and] without melismas, without polyphony, without instruments, and without choirs.”⁷³ Zwingli was the most aggressive and severe of the reformers in his iconoclastic removal of all signs and symbols of the Catholic Church. Thiessen notes, in

⁶⁹Eskew and McElrath, *Sing with Understanding*, 99.

⁷⁰Dowley, *Christian Music*, 88.

⁷¹Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music*, 63.

⁷²Martin Luther, quoted in Freidrich Blume, *Protestant Church Music: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), 33.

⁷³Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 157.

his attempt to rid the church of any semblance of idolatry, “he ordered the systematic destruction of images and statues” in every church in Zurich.⁷⁴ An accomplished musician himself, Zwingli feared the power of music would lead the church into fleshly entanglement. Westermeyer concludes, “Zwingli’s solution to the dilemma was silence, silence for hearing the word and for contemplation.”⁷⁵

Calvin eventually enlisted the help of French poets Marot and Beze in versifying the psalms and procured the musical talents of Louis Bourgeois to compose simple tunes to accompany the psalms. Bourgeois’ tunes often made use of popular French chansons, or dance songs⁷⁶ borrowing extensively from the secular. In its final 1562 edition, Calvin’s Genevan Psalter included “all 150 psalms . . . with 125 tunes and 110 different meters.”⁷⁷

In England, the Anglicans and Puritans also sang metrical psalms in the style of Calvin. Westermeyer reports that in the same year as Calvin’s Genevan Psalter, the “famous Sternhold and Hopkins ‘Old Version’ of psalms” was completed in England.⁷⁸ Along with Cranmer’s *Book of Common Prayer*, the “Old Version” of Sternhold and Hopkins provided the worship materials for the British church for three hundred years.⁷⁹

While Zwinglian and Calvinist influences minimized the use of music in much of the early Protestant reformation, Lutheran enthusiasm for musical expression in worship flourished. The second generation of Lutheran hymn writers built upon the practice of

⁷⁴Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen, ed., *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 127.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 152.

⁷⁶Eskew and McElrath, *Sing with Understanding*, 116.

⁷⁷Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 154.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 170.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 170-71.

freely borrowing tunes from the secular culture to enhance the musical offerings in the church. Dowley posits that Johann Walther, and later Michael Praetorius, were pivotal figures in Lutheran church music “respecting the old tradition of music performed by trained choirs, but also creating new chorales for the people to sing.”⁸⁰

Another example of the Lutheran influence of borrowing tunes from secular sources is found in Johann Franck’s hymn *Jesu, meine Freude*. It is believed, Hustad says, Franck “modeled his hymn on the love song of H. Alberti, ‘*Flora, my joy*’ considered an antecedent of Charles Wesley’s, ‘*Jesus, Lover of My Soul*.’”⁸¹ Eskew and McElrath observe that Franck, a Pietist and follower of Philipp Jakob Spener, embodied in this very personal hymn of devotional love, the essence of Pietism in worship: “To give new life to the church and to underline the importance of a personal Christian experience.”⁸²

Paul Gerhardt, considered next to Luther “the greatest German hymnist,”⁸³ composed subjective, intimate lyrics using many personal pronouns such as I, me, and my, indicating a first-person, vertical dimension in his worshipful communication to God. Is it possible to compare the nature of this seventeenth century hymn to some of the contemporary musical offerings of today which emphasize an intimate, first-person connection with God? Many are quick to criticize the intimate, first person character of some contemporary songs, insinuating an overly strong connection to the subjective, feelingful aspect of worship. While disparagement of certain contemporary Christian

⁸⁰Dowley, *Christian Music*, 90.

⁸¹Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 204.

⁸²Eskew and McElrath, *Sing with Understanding*, 105.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 103.

songs is sometimes warranted, the legacy of respected Lutheran hymnists demonstrates openness to the personal, vertical dimension of approaching God in worship.

The heart of the musical transformation, which occurred during the Reformation, is epitomized in Luther's love and respect for music believing "next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise."⁸⁴ Westermeyer further interprets Luther: "Luther was not just fond of music. Luther thought music has a theological reason for being . . . just like the word of God. Music is unique in that it can carry words. Since words carry the word of God, music and the word of God are closely related."⁸⁵

For Luther, the iconoclastic removal of all aspects of Catholicism was extreme and unnecessary. Though many of the reformers believed the music of the Catholic church was something to be discarded, Luther adopted a more reconciliatory attitude. In his refutation of Karlstadt's iconoclasm, Luther speaks of "inner idols we create and desire for ourselves" as more dangerous than "the outward material images"⁸⁶ of crucifixes and other icons. Could one conceivably interpret Luther's defense of certain visible images in the church as consistent with his desire to reclaim the unique potential of music to enhance worship? Is it possible Luther was pointing to the inability of the removal of outward manifestations of idolatry, alone, to accomplish the absolute purging of the inward realities of the human heart? Luther's willingness to retain certain conventional practices reveals his determination to forge contemporary musical meaning and significance from the traditions of the past.

⁸⁴Martin Luther, quoted in Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 144.

⁸⁵Ibid., 145.

⁸⁶Thiessen, *Theological Aesthetics*, 126.

Watts, Bach, and Wesley

The age of Enlightenment, “i.e. the turn to the human subject from a formerly theocentric world-view,”⁸⁷ with a focus on rationalist thought, contrasted with the puritanical priority of a subjective, personal experience with the Divine set the stage, as it were, for the emergence of, arguably, the “father of English hymnody.”⁸⁸ Eskew and McElrath assert that Isaac Watts (1674-1748) brought together the “two merging streams of church song stemming from the reformation.”⁸⁹ In Watts, Lutheran hymnody and Calvinist psalmody “converged and blended” in one man.⁹⁰ Hustad attributes Watts’ ability to “combine most successfully the expression of objective worship with that of subjective devotional experience,”⁹¹ thus connecting the rationalist thinking of the Enlightenment within the experiential context of Puritanism. Speaking of the inestimable contribution of Watts, Westermeyer contends, “He did for the English-speaking world what Luther had done for the German-speaking world two centuries earlier and what Ambrose had done for the Latin world twelve centuries before that.”⁹²

Watts’ immediate predecessor, Benjamin Keech, opened the way for Watts as one of the first Puritan ministers to provide hymns for his church to sing. Westermeyer notes that Keech broke with the established church tradition of strict psalmody (in some cases, no singing at all!) believing that “singing needed to be restored . . . no matter how hard the restoration may be.”⁹³ Keech, remembered not for the exceptional quality of his

⁸⁷Thiessen, *Theological Aesthetics*, 155.

⁸⁸Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 206.

⁸⁹Eskew and McElrath, *Sing with Understanding*, 131.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 206.

⁹²Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 201.

⁹³Ibid., 190.

hymnody, is historically important for his pioneering spirit in tenaciously standing against opposition to a singing church.

Westermeyer and Dowley explain that believing “translations for singing the psalms should . . . speak in contemporary ways,”⁹⁴ Watts, in his Christ-centered texts, “attempted to interpret Old Testament Psalms with New Testament theology in contemporary language and with poetic fluency.”⁹⁵ Horton Davies identifies Watts’s concern over the “unsuitability of David’s expressions to meet our experience” as his prime motive to “accommodate the book of Psalms to Christian worship.”⁹⁶ Watts’ hymns were all written in the usual psalmodic meters of the day so that familiar tunes could be applied to the texts and offered as singable expressions of worship for the people. Wilson Dickson notes that to maintain this singability, Watts carefully guarded the literary scope of the text “to avoid the expression of sentiments more involved than a singing congregation could grasp.”⁹⁷

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) is such an important composer and musician that his death signals the end of the Baroque Era in Western music.⁹⁸ Though considered “the pinnacle of composers of all time,”⁹⁹ Stapert concludes that Bach believed his purpose in life was “writing music to the glory of God and the edification of

⁹⁴Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 203.

⁹⁵Dowley, *Christian Music*, 115-16.

⁹⁶Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997), 177. Original publication by Dacre Press in 1948.

⁹⁷Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music*, 111.

⁹⁸Hugh M. Miller and Dale Cockrell, *History of Western Music*, 5th ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1972), 85, 88.

⁹⁹J. Peter Burkholder, Donald J. Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, eds., *A History of Western Music*, 8th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 439.

his neighbor.”¹⁰⁰ Historians Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca consider him to have been a devout Christian whose goal in serving the Lord and his church was simply to be “a conscientious craftsman doing his job to the best of his ability.”¹⁰¹

Identified by many as the “fifth evangelist,” suggesting his liturgical output could comprise a fifth gospel, Bach’s cantatas boldly proclaim the Word of God in musical form. Westermeyer observes, “Proclaiming the gospel and liberating music to be its most intrinsic essence as music were not contradictory for Bach.”¹⁰² His music embodied a sense of order and freedom all at once. He was uniquely able to write music “with form for the pious heart and with heart for the orthodox form.”¹⁰³ The essence of Bach’s mastery in the creation of a timeless repertoire of church music is found in his ability to internalize the Word of God and then interpret that Word musically, exegeting passages of Scripture through exquisite musical symbolism. Kidd recognizes Bach’s work as a “rich testament to the power of Christ to wed head and heart.”¹⁰⁴ Bach’s contribution to the history of western music and to the body of church liturgy is arguably unparalleled, as Kidd concludes: “His music incarnates impeccable orthodoxy and indescribable passion.”¹⁰⁵

John Wesley (1703-1791) and Charles Wesley (1707-1788), strongly influenced by their experience with the Moravian brethren, produced a strain of hymnody, described

¹⁰⁰Calvin R. Stapert, “To the Glory of God Alone,” *Christianity Today*, accessed September 1, 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-95/to-glory-of-god-alone.html>.

¹⁰¹Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 440.

¹⁰²Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 241.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴Kidd, *With One Voice*, 140.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*

by Dowley, “with appeal to both heart and mind . . . [providing] an ideal popular vehicle for Christian devotion, renewal, evangelism, and theological teaching.”¹⁰⁶ Emerging theologically from the Lutheran Pietism of Zinzendorf and Spener, and doxologically from the pragmatic congregational sensibilities of Watts, the Wesleys merged English hymnody and revivalism into a new genre of “songs of individual experience, marking the successive stages of penitence, conversion, justification, pardon and sanctification in the life of the Christian pilgrim.”¹⁰⁷

Along with preachers like George Whitefield, the Wesleys were instrumental in the origin and expansion of the great “Wesleyan Revival of the eighteenth century, commonly called the Great Awakening.”¹⁰⁸ The songs of this evangelical movement utilized tunes from the popular music of the day, often coming “directly out of the theater.”¹⁰⁹ Hustad observes that it is through the work of the Wesleys that congregational song became instrumental in the work of evangelism in “calling individuals to repentance and faith.”¹¹⁰

Hustad acknowledges,

In any period of spiritual renewal, old symbols frequently lose their meaning and new ones must be sought. Obviously, they must be found outside the church, and, because they must be common or popular, they will come from secular folk song, and even from commercial entertainment music. In the evangelistic thrust of renewal, the fresh “secular becoming sacred” song is an effective vehicle for witness to the uncommitted, who do not know the older ‘sacred’ styles. . . . In theological terms, one might say that this process demonstrates the church’s willingness to be forever incarnational, to identify with ‘the world’ and to transform it for Christ.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶Dowley, *Christian Music*, 117.

¹⁰⁷Charles Wesley, quoted in Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music*, 116.

¹⁰⁸Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 207.

¹⁰⁹Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 233.

¹¹⁰Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 209.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 210.

Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

A spirit of secularization propelled music, art, and philosophy into an era of free expression in the nineteenth century. Art was produced for art's sake and was no longer expected to serve the needs of societal convention or religious function. Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca note the beginning of the century became a transitional phase between the classic model of “elegant, natural . . . formally closed and universally appealing” art, to the more romantic ideal of “original, evocative, individual . . . and extreme” expressions of artistic statement.¹¹² In the midst of a vast industrial revolution and the politics of nation building, romantic artists saw the “common folk” as the “true embodiment of the nation,”¹¹³ and sought to depict the struggles of real life emotions in artistic expressions that eclipsed the parameters of conventional rubrics.

During this time of international revolution, a new revivalism began to characterize American Protestantism. In 1800, an evangelistic phenomenon known as “camp meetings” began to move across the Alleghenies in Kentucky.¹¹⁴ The spontaneous enthusiasm that characterized these interdenominational meetings, according to Reynolds and Price “called for a new type of song . . . [that] by necessity had to be largely improvisational in nature.”¹¹⁵ These songs dealt with the themes of sin, impending death, and the need for salvation, and were distinguished by short, repetitive choruses that could be easily remembered and sung by these “backwoods” folk.¹¹⁶

¹¹²Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 602.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 603.

¹¹⁴William J. Reynolds and Milburn Price, *A Survey of Christian Hymnody*, rev. and enlarged by David W. Music and Milburn Price (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing, 1999), 103.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, 104.

¹¹⁶Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 225.

Revivalist Charles G. Finney is generally considered the most influential preacher of “The Second Awakening.”¹¹⁷ Redman quotes James White in calling Finney “the most influential liturgical reformer in American history.”¹¹⁸ Redman outlines the particular influence Finney had on musical style in worship. First, his “pragmatic approach emphasized freedom and innovation over tradition.”¹¹⁹ Redman attributes Finney as one who was able to enculturate musical styles “indigenous” to the emerging American culture of the times.¹²⁰

One of Finney’s musical associates, Thomas Hastings, compiled a songbook to accompany the revival meetings. The songs and hymns in Hastings’ collection are of a higher musical quality than the typical camp meeting songs of the day. Hastings argued, “Music is a language of sentimental feeling, and the excellence of any music is directly proportional to the effect it produces in the listener.”¹²¹ Along with Lowell Mason and William Bradbury, Hastings re-energized the notion of “singing schools” and was instrumental in the establishment of music education in the schools,¹²² primarily instituted for providing musical instruction that would ultimately improve the quality of singing of the church.

¹¹⁷Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 228.

¹¹⁸James F. White, quoted in Robb Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening: Singing a New Song in the Post Modern Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 7.

¹¹⁹Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening*, 8.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*

¹²¹Thomas Hastings, quoted in Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 266.

¹²²Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 231-32.

The evangelical atmosphere of the nineteenth century produced not only notable preachers like Finney, Moody¹²³ and Booth,¹²⁴ but also witnessed the emergence of what Hustad calls, “gospel song.”¹²⁵ Gospel song is not only characterized by the thematic material of personal experience, the sinful nature of man, and the redemption of God through Christ, but more specifically identified by its “simple lyric melody, inconsequential harmony, and usually sprightly rhythm, in the style of . . . popular music.”¹²⁶

Booth and his Salvation Army benefitted greatly by the popularization of religious song by substituting sacred words in place of the original secular texts. Wilson-Dickson concedes, “This is no more nor less than the principle of *contrafacta*, or text substitutions, common at many points in Christian history.”¹²⁷ *Contrafacta* was the practice of using secular tunes with newly written Christian words. Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca note, this practice was common in the early Reformation, especially used by Luther to “recast the melody in an appealing, up-to-date style that was easier for lay worshipers to sing.”¹²⁸

Ira Sankey, Moody’s renowned music leader, modernized solo-singing by his interpretation and style of singing the new gospel songs. Although not strictly *contrafacta*, Sankey’s songs were written in a style similar to the musical vocabulary used in popular songs of the day. Tapping into the phenomenon of gospel singing, Sankey popularized

¹²³Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899) was a late nineteenth-century evangelist who developed a more organized approach to the planning and execution of revival meetings.

¹²⁴General William Booth (1829-1912) founded The Salvation Army and used popular, upbeat tunes in his evangelistic outreach. He is credited with the famous saying, “Why should the devil have all the best tunes?”

¹²⁵Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 221-34.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, 234.

¹²⁷Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music*, 140.

¹²⁸Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 216.

the songs of esteemed nineteenth century hymnists such as Fanny Crosby, Philip Bliss, D. W. Whittle, Robert Lowry, James McGranahan, and George Stebbins.¹²⁹

The technological innovations of the twentieth century forever transformed the manner and process of communication. The emergence of radio during the First World War and television following the Second World War brought a new kind of closeness and connection to the people of the world. The rise of the space age and development of the World Wide Web further established expectancy among modern generations for immediate access to information. Computer and cellular phone technology continues to enhance capabilities for instantaneous global connection.

Amid the development of and ubiquitous access to high-tech innovations, the challenge of negotiating physical distance has virtually disappeared and the expectation for immediate access and instant gratification has soared. These advances, though positive in many respects, have posed challenges to the modern Christian church. The church of the twentieth century has reacted to these changes in a variety of ways. Some in ecclesiastical leadership have opted for a sort of status quo mentality, while others have sought to meet cultural change with flexibility in methodology. Whatever the church's response, the inexorable reality of change in culture demands certain modifications and alterations in approach to ministry and worship.

Protestant Worship in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

For the purposes of this discussion, a summary of the liturgical transformation in the twentieth century will deal exclusively with the variations in worship praxis among Protestant American churches. Primarily, this discussion centers on the emergence of the Pentecostal movement at the turn of the century, the derivative development of Charismatic

¹²⁹Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 236.

renewal worship, and its subsequent effects upon traditional, mainline denominational churches.

According to Redman, the roots of American Pentecostalism are found in the eighteenth and nineteenth century Methodist and Holiness movements. Musically speaking, “Charles Wesley’s hymns matched plain words with winsome melodies, encouraging congregational participation in worship.”¹³⁰ The Holiness movement of the next century was characterized by the singing of gospel songs with an emphasis on personal experience “with the Holy Spirit” leading to the “threshold of Pentecostalism . . . in the twentieth century.”¹³¹

The Azusa Street Revival,¹³² considered by many the beginning point of modern Pentecostalism, “was a singing revival, adapting familiar worship music and creating new songs.”¹³³ Webber observes that worship among Pentecostals “was characterized by freedom, spontaneity, individual expression, and joy” using “musical idiom of popular culture to present the gospel.”¹³⁴ Toward the middle part of the century, Pentecostals pioneered the use of radio and television to broadcast their evangelistic meetings. Through a series of events including the Jesus movement in the 1960s¹³⁵ and the Charismatic renewal movement in the 1970s and 1980s,¹³⁶ mainline Protestant

¹³⁰Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening*, 23.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, 25.

¹³²J. Roswell Flower, “The Genesis of the Pentecostal Movement,” *Enrichment Journal* (Fall 1999), accessed December 6, 2016, http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/199904/016_genesis.cfm.

¹³³Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening*, 28.

¹³⁴Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 123.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, 129.

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, 127.

churches began to feel the effects of Pentecostal influence. According to Redman, “Thousands of Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, and Methodist congregations found themselves in the midst of serious internal conflict over charismatic activity.”¹³⁷

A distinct musical style known as praise and worship, characterized the liturgical activity of the charismatic renewal movement. Liesch describes this new kind of musical expression as “free-flowing praise,” consisting of “twenty to forty-five minutes of congregational singing . . . [in which] songs are stitched together into a medley by improvisational playing and modulation to create a sense of seamlessness, of one song flowing into the next.”¹³⁸ Some worship leaders and charismatic theologians actually distinguish between the terms *praise* and *worship*, as separate and distinct “phases” in the musical portion of the worship service.¹³⁹

The ultimate goal of charismatic worship is to “experience” God in personal engagement with a sense of emotional connection to the Divine. This experiential objective calls for a highly participatory musical event in which the people are led to respond to God in physically demonstrative ways such as clapping, raising of hands, and even dancing.¹⁴⁰ Some scholars and clergy from a more conservative theological context question the priority charismatics place upon personal experience in worship. They contend encountering a holy, transcendent God calls for a more reverent approach without expectation of subjective feelings accompanying the worship action.

¹³⁷Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening*, 32.

¹³⁸Liesch, *The New Worship*, 53.

¹³⁹Pastors John Wimber and Bob Sorge, and teacher/scholar Judson Cornwall adhere to this theological distinction between the two terms, distinguishing the “praise” time as an opportunity to enthusiastically exalt the person of Christ, while the “worship” portion characterizes a more solemn and musically subdued time of adoration and intimacy. Today, many churchgoers in non-denominational and mainline protestant churches routinely refer to the musical portion of the worship event as “praise and worship” or simply “the worship time.”

¹⁴⁰Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening*, 41.

Doxological tension between the subjective, individual experience of God's immanence and the objective, corporate response to the revelation of God's holy transcendence has led to a more balanced approach, combining the reverent acknowledgment of who God is—his attributes—and what he has done—his gracious redemptive acts on man's behalf.

The latter part of the twentieth century and the beginnings of the twenty-first century have witnessed what Webber has called “convergence worship,” where “the liturgical and the contemporary forms and experiences of worship”¹⁴¹ merged together. Cherry defends the concept of convergence worship: “Convergence worship is bigger than style; it is more fundamental than style. It is a model for worship that can be expressed in any number of styles . . . in that it does not arise out of a specific context and is not identifiably influenced by any particular culture.”¹⁴²

Though stark differences continue to linger between traditional and modern worship expressions, there is a growing trend toward a fusion of style and genre which conjoins the best of both worlds. This convergence involves a sort of juxtaposition of the historical and the contemporary forming a new model of stylistic tones and textures, creating “maximum opportunities for engaging worshipers with the presence of God.”¹⁴³

Conclusion

History demonstrates a human propensity toward growth and change. One generations' convention and ritual becomes the next generations' tradition to accept or reject. Usually this cycle occurs over several generations where traditions gradually lose their appeal in favor of more innovative ideas. To be clear, tradition in and of itself is not

¹⁴¹Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 132.

¹⁴²Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 244-45.

¹⁴³*Ibid.*, 248.

to be viewed as bad. The observance of time-honored customs provides a sense of comfort and an opportunity to rehearse pleasurable memories of the past. More importantly, certain theological and doxological traditions retain their ability to convey eternal truths over long periods of time. On the other hand, mindless repetition of disconnected formalities that no longer effectively communicate relevant ideas in current cultural contexts should be subject to scrutiny.

In terms of musical styles used over the centuries in the Christian church, the practice of what is new replacing what is old is common. For instance, in the sixteenth century, the “Sternhold and Hopkins” (1562)¹⁴⁴ song collection of psalmody eventually became the “old” Sternhold and Hopkins and was replaced by the “new” “Tate and Brady” (1696) collection.¹⁴⁵ Of course, this process of innovation did not happen without its detractors. Those traditionalists who had grown fond of what was comfortable with the old book, complained about the new book and often refused to use it in worship. Another example would be the unison psalmody of Calvin supplanted by the “human composed” hymns of Watts.¹⁴⁶

This progression of the traditional being eventually phased out by the contemporary is an inevitable cultural reality. Even in the preservation of timeless hymns, certain original words may be altered to bring modern clarity to the author’s fundamental intention. Wren defends this practice:

However much we value our past, our present interest in congregational song is not antiquarian, but immediate. We sing to God from today, in lyrics which—whether ancient or recent—express today’s faith. When a lyric from the past gets too archaic

¹⁴⁴Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 170.

¹⁴⁵Eskew and McElrath, *Sing with Understanding*, 121-22.

¹⁴⁶Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 206.

to be understood, or too out of sync with today's hope, faith, and issues to speak for us, it will eventually cease to be sung, or amended to keep it singable.¹⁴⁷

Historical cycles of change are evident. Future successions of declining tradition amid unyielding innovation are inevitable. For the church, and more specifically for church music, it is important that pastors provide godly oversight in the transitional phases of change. Wisdom and discernment are the indispensable tools of ecclesiastical leaders in identifying traditions that must be sustained, and advances that must be allowed and encouraged. Perhaps a commitment to balance is the reasonable approach. Witvliet states,

At its best, pluralism teaches us to marvel at the stunning diversity in the created order, and in the church, helping us better sense what it is to be a member of the body of Christ . . . what seems like a wholesale capitulation to market forces may be for many a breath of spiritual fresh air after years of stagnant routinized Christianity. Conversely, what seems like an antiquarian interest in liturgical history and academic theology may be an avenue for promoting spiritual depth and vitality.¹⁴⁸

If anything can be learned from history, it is that the relational aspects of Christianity—the interpersonal qualities of brotherly love and self-sacrifice in deference to others—are of much more importance than the mere superficial trappings of preferred methodology. In other words, history demonstrates that when Christians can lay aside personal preferences and self-seeking agendas, focusing instead on outward flowing ministry to each other and the world, God is glorified and his kingdom is advanced. If there is to be any learning from past mistakes, it will be demonstrated by the church placing primary importance on loving God and loving people as the objective of future ministry endeavors.

¹⁴⁷Brian Wren, *Praying Twice: The Music and Words of Congregational Song* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 298.

¹⁴⁸John D. Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding: Windows into Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 178.

CHAPTER 4

ARGUING FOR MUSICAL PLURALISM IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Introduction

Evidence from key biblical passages mentioned in chapter 2 substantiates the presence of musical diversity in the early church. Substantiation from early church examples of a heterogenic mixture of cultural styles presupposing the presence of diverse musical idioms justifies the application of musical pluralism in the modern church. Despite this, strong opposition toward stylistic diversity, specifically the use of contemporary styles, still exists in some Christian circles.

This chapter presents the arguments of notable scholars and church musicians in Christian academia who have published books and articles openly calling for the exclusion of popular musical styles from worship. An attempt will be made in this chapter to analyze the theological and philosophical positions of the authors and to offer alternative conclusions to each of their arguments.

Though many authors are referenced in this chapter, three main authors' writings are analyzed: Scott Aniol, Assistant Professor of Church Music at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; T. David Gordon, professor of religion at Grove City College; and Calvin M. Johansson, former professor of music at Evangel University. Each author enjoys honorable reputations as scholars, teachers, and ministers in Christian worship.

Scott Aniol

In *Worship in Song: A Biblical Approach to Music and Worship*, Aniol indicates his desire to be “another voice” in the “arguments for a conservative music

philosophy.”¹ Aniol points to historical shifts in the cultural perception of free will and human independence as factors leading to “man-centered, evangelistic-focused” church music. The rise of American democracy is one example of an historical occurrence promoting and securing individual rights among citizens. He considers the expectation of people to possess and defend certain rights and preferences as one of the reasons leading to “an anthropocentric Christianity that emphasized free choice and human autonomy.”² Aniol sees this cultural shift in societal values as the antecedent of a populist, commercialized worldview. He identifies these changing values as the trigger that displaces the exclusive use of art and folk music in Christian worship for a more open acceptance of popular musical idioms. The result, according to Aniol, is a dismal decline into “substandard church music.”³

Aniol, to his credit, approaches the subject of music in worship from a biblical foundation. He contends, “Any definition [of worship] we contrive is insufficient unless it finds its basis in the Word of God.”⁴ Aniol provides his reader a clear overview of biblical worship with compelling rationale for today’s Christian leaders to prepare and present worship in light of scriptural mandate. Aniol cites numerous Old Testament and New Testament passages dealing with worship, providing detailed word studies on specific worship terms used in Scripture. He actually defines worship as “a spiritual response to God as a result of understanding biblical truth about God.”⁵

¹Scott Aniol, *Worship in Song: A Biblical Approach to Music and Worship* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 2009), viii.

²Ibid., 73.

³Ibid., 76.

⁴Ibid., 24.

⁵Ibid., 30.

He couples the need for biblical understanding about God with the importance of responsive actions toward God describing two types of response. Aniol says, “We respond . . . with our affections and with our actions.”⁶ Affections play an integral role in Aniol’s philosophical conception of worship. To Aniol, affections differ from actions in that they are “internal response[s] of our spirit to what we know.”⁷ The difference for Aniol is the intellectual connection with affections as opposed to what he would call a “physical tingle” associated more with feelings and emotion.⁸

Aniol devotes several chapters challenging readers to examine their lives with respect to personal holiness and the need for sanctifying experiences, especially related to the kind of music that is enjoyed. He is to be commended for asking hard questions about lifestyle choices and how those choices impact the Christian walk. His commitment to making godly choices in all areas of life extends to his concern for how personal choices can affect other people. He challenges, “We should be willing to give up questionable music if it could cause someone else to sin.”⁹

Aniol provides an enlightening discussion as to the differences in ephemeral feelings of human passion and true heartfelt affections that lead people to take appropriate godly action. He adjures readers to seek affections, resulting from a “sort of cognitive understanding of truth” rather than settling for passions “associated with the body.”¹⁰ An appeal is made to “guard those things that shape our affections,” not allowing certain kinds of cultural entanglements to create unhealthy emotional connections leading God’s

⁶Aniol, *Worship in Song*, 33.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., 34, 35.

⁹Ibid., 41.

¹⁰Ibid., 53.

people away from truthful expressions of worship.¹¹ Aniol does not condemn emotions in worship. On the contrary, he applauds emotional involvement: “Contemporary churches have it right when they insist that expression of emotion is a critical part of the church’s work.”¹² Though Aniol concedes the necessity of emotion in worship, he cautions that churches “often misunderstand emotion and, in the end, focus on emotion for its own sake” rather than seeking “affections,” which are more influenced by intellectual realities.¹³

Aniol defends the importance of good lyrical content in hymns and songs used to proclaim the gospel message. He urges modern worship leaders to scrutinize the words of the songs used to internalize the spiritual truths of God’s Word into the hearts and minds of impressionable congregants. Emphasis is placed on correct theological grounding of the text that, if missing, leads to a “failure to worship him [God] acceptably.”¹⁴

Signaling the priority of faith over feelings, Aniol defends the key biblical principle of approaching God through the blood of Christ alone, independent of any other mediating factor. Success in worship has little to do with the style of the music or the charisma of the leader. Instead, “the theology of Christian worship . . . is drawing near to God through Jesus Christ by faith.”¹⁵ Aniol is correct in affirming this vital distinction of which many contemporary worship leaders are seemingly unaware.

In his second book, *By the Rivers of Babylon*, Aniol warns missionally-minded evangelicals to prioritize the worship of almighty God. According to Aniol, modern

¹¹Aniol, *Worship in Song*, 56.

¹²*Ibid.*, 166.

¹³*Ibid.*, 166-67.

¹⁴Scott Aniol, *By the Rivers of Babylon: Worship in a Post-Christian Culture* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2015), 119.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 133.

evangelicals, specifically those allied with the “church growth movement,”¹⁶ have subverted the order of worship and mission, suggesting that evangelism should drive the style and content of worship music. Aniol reminds evangelicals that “though the church’s mission is to make disciples through the proclamation of the gospel, this end is subordinate to worship.”¹⁷ He further clarifies, “Although redemption is an important purpose for God’s mission, it is nevertheless subordinate to the ultimate end of creating worshipers.”¹⁸ It is heartening to know that competent biblically-based scholars like Scott Aniol are involved in the training of future Christian worship leaders. Respectfully, however, several points in Aniol’s writings regarding the use of multiple styles of music in Christian worship must be addressed.

Aniol is convincing in his argument that Christians should be controlled by the “affections” of the heart rather than the “passions” of the flesh. Likewise, he is absolutely correct to admonish believers to guard the things that “shape” the affections of their

¹⁶Considered the father of the Church Growth Movement, D. A. McGavran’s, *The Bridges of God* (London: World Dominion Press, 1954), became the “summons for missionaries to utilize the ‘bridges’ of family and kinship ties” to reach people groups worldwide. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds., *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 323. C. Peter Wagner, former professor of Church Growth at Fuller Theological Seminary (1971-2001), along with Win Arn, pastor and author of *The Master Plan for Making Disciples* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), assumed the mantle of leadership in the Church Growth Movement after McGavran’s death. Ed Stetzer, “What’s the Deal with the Church Growth Movement?” *Christianity Today*, October 1, 2012, accessed January 6, 2018, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2012/october/whats-deal-with-church-growth-movement-part-one.html>. This movement continues to impact the church in terms of its emphasis on evangelism and growing the church numerically. Aniol is concerned about the process of growing churches by utilization of the Sunday worship service as an “entry point” for unbelievers. The tendency for Church Growth advocates to “use” worship music as a “draw” for the unchurched, rather than for offering worship to God, is especially troubling to Aniol in *By the Rivers*.

¹⁷Aniol, *By the Rivers*, 140.

¹⁸Ibid., 141.

hearts.¹⁹ However, since affections and passions are both intrinsic aspects of human nature, why not portray passions as a normal and natural part of life? Why not allow feelings to be experienced and enjoyed, and then emphasize the need to move past the mere enjoyment of the passion, seeking to transform the emotional feelings (passion) into affections that lead believers to willfully choose to honor God with their mind and emotion. Aniol concedes that passions are not wrong, but “they are not the measure of true spiritual response to truth and should never be allowed to control us.”²⁰ Very true! However, what if the initial response of a worshiper to a remembrance of God’s love and faithfulness manifests itself as a passionate feeling of awe and gratitude that is soon transformed into a greater desire to respond to God’s faithful love with intellectual affections of devotion and obedience? Is this not the natural process of a loving relationship with the Heavenly Father. Best offers the following insight:

Aesthetic excitement, at whatever level and from whatever source, is as much a part of being human as loving is. Ecstasy is, in itself, an offerable art. So instead of assuming that worship is the same as ecstasy, we must assume that if we do become ecstatic, this emotion itself is to be offered up as an act of worship.²¹

Instead of striving for “noble affections to keep our passions in check,”²² why not allow for a kind of holistic response of worship that involves mind, will, and emotions. Jesus said the most important commandment was “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). The actual Greek words for *heart* and *soul* in this passage include a sense

¹⁹Aniol, *Worship in Song*, 56.

²⁰Ibid., 53.

²¹Harold Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 152.

²²Aniol, *Worship in Song*, 53.

of “feeling” and “impulse.”²³ To love the Lord rightly and biblically is certainly to offer one’s fully devoted affections to him. But it is also to offer him the extreme, even extravagant fullness, of one’s emotional (passionate) being.

In considering this idea of extreme emotion, one might remember the story of the woman who anointed the Lord’s feet in Luke 7. The woman, “a sinner,” came into the room and, “weeping, began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment” (v. 38). These extreme measures emerge from a heart full of an extreme sense of love. Darrell Bock, theologian and author, concurs, “The woman’s actions reflect great cost, care and emotion.” He interprets her weeping as “tears of joy and appreciation” expressing deep emotional feelings of gratitude for Jesus’s forgiveness.²⁴

The importance of this discussion goes beyond the question of whether affections are better than passions. Certainly it is agreed that affections are a higher expression of devoted love than the more instinctive temporal manifestations of passion. It has been previously noted that passion is only a beginning point in worship that must graduate to the level of affection. However, to suggest that musical style alone can negatively shape affections is a bit naïve. Aniol questions, “How can we expect to have religious affections for God when our affections are being shaped by the sensual, chaotic, immoral sounds of rock music?”²⁵

Does Aniol utterly reject the power of the Holy Spirit to produce affections in the believers’ heart and mind that inspire devoted, authentic worship? Musical style alone

²³William B. Mounce and Robert H. Mounce, eds., *The Zondervan Greek and English Interlinear New Testament (NASB/NIV)* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 184, 1089, 1197.

²⁴Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 141.

²⁵Aniol, *Worship in Song*, 58.

simply does not have the capacity to effect behavioral action. Best asserts, “Incipient idolatry comes from the idea that art and music possess the capability, by their presence and use, to shape behavior.”²⁶ Best is explaining the inability of a created thing, such as musical style, to influence significant action on the part of the listener or creator. He continues, “There is really no difference between someone carving a god out of what otherwise is a piece of firewood and someone else who happens upon or makes a certain piece of music, expecting it to govern the actions of those hearing and using it.”²⁷

In effect, Aniol fails to acknowledge the basic intelligence and spiritual discernment of the worshiper to recognize the difference between the praise being offered and the expression being used to offer the praise. The power to effect spiritual growth and behavior is not in the music, but rather, in the indwelling Holy Spirit who mediates truthful revelation from God and worshipful response from believers regardless of musical style. Aniol’s solution to music that allegedly draws the “listener into a sensuous experience of physical pleasure . . . without deflecting its finite representation of beauty to the divine,” is to count that music “not worthy of Christian use.”²⁸ Aniol places unfounded blame on music as the culprit for unsanctified, unbiblical worship. Kauflin asserts, “Biblical realities are more significant than the melodies we use to sing them . . . truth transcends tunes.”²⁹

Aniol’s assumption that all things “popular” are inherently evil and destructive to a healthy Christian lifestyle is overstated. His rebuke is to “forsake those things . . . that are warping your idea of what true affection is.”³⁰ Those “things” Aniol refers to are

²⁶Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith*, 48.

²⁷Ibid., 49.

²⁸Aniol, *Worship in Song*, 116.

²⁹Bob Kauflin, *True Worshipers: Seeking What Matters to God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 106.

³⁰Aniol, *Worship in Song*, 58.

“movies, music and pop culture.”³¹ Certainly, some aspects of all civilized and uncivilized cultures are unsavory and even evil, but to indiscriminately insist that anything considered popular is evil and should be forsaken is careless, if not destructive.

Aniol and others who share his opinion of pop music identify modern “pop culture” as something altogether new to the modern world.³² While certain artistic endeavors in modern culture do make use of technological advances and a proclivity toward commercialism unique to this moment in history, the concept of human preference determining certain things to be “popular” is nothing new. Opponents of musical diversity in Christian worship would have one believe that Martin Luther’s adoption of popular tunes in the sixteenth century was completely different from contemporary musicians writing tunes with modern musical idioms (i.e., popular idioms). According to Aniol, “Luther’s genius was combining the best sophisticated art music with accessible folk music forms” creating a new genre of Christian music especially suited “for average worshipers in a congregation . . . thus embracing what was excellent as it was popular.”³³

Folk music was the popular music of Luther’s time, just as modern popular idioms are the preferred music of today. The difference for Aniol is a subjective view that the “more debased forms of folk art” from the sixteenth century were tolerable, but twenty-first century popular music is fundamentally flawed due to its association with what is “commercial and secular. . . . Folk music is popular, but it is not the same as pop music in the way the term [popular] is used today to describe the commercial music of radio,

³¹Aniol, *Worship in Song*, 58.

³²Ibid., 69, 74. Aniol defines pop culture as “whatever appeals to the masses . . . intrinsically commercial and secular . . . controlled by mass media and commercialism.” Ibid., 69.

³³Ibid., 66-67.

film, and television.”³⁴ It is true, modern popular music is developed and disseminated quite differently than it was in Luther’s time. Likewise, modern pop culture is distinctively dissimilar to the culture of sixteenth-century Germany, but what is meant by the term “popular” is essentially the same. Luther’s use of popular musical idioms to remake “secular songs into religious ones,” thus “appealing to the broadest popular tastes” is effectively what modern Christian writers and worship leaders are doing today.³⁵

Hustad draws a parallel between the popularity of historic folk music and modern day contemporary Christian music:

Throughout Christian history, the need for common religious expressions for the masses has encouraged the development of folk music forms, especially in times of spiritual renewal. In modern Western culture, popular musics are the only widely accepted “common expressions,” and it is apparent that they figure largely in today’s “communication renewal” movement.³⁶

In addition to his views regarding the unsuitability of modern pop music in Christian worship, Aniol believes music carries meaning.³⁷ This belief demands an acquiescence to the notion that music carries associative meanings that can actually influence behavior. Aniol claims that music has the ability to “reproduce natural human emotional responses,” thus attributing to music the ability to carry “intrinsic meaning.”³⁸ Once again, Aniol is accrediting capabilities to music it simply does not possess. He is attempting to connect emotional response to some sort of communicative meaning that initiates behavioral action in the listener. Aniol ascribes to music the ability to “express”

³⁴Aniol, *Worship in Song*, 69.

³⁵J. Peter Burkholder, Donald J. Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, eds., *A History of Western Music*, 8th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 215.

³⁶Donald Hustad, *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing, 1993), 61.

³⁷Aniol, *Worship in Song*, 81.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 89.

human emotions through the reproduction of “universal outward manifestations” of musical sound that “universally communicate the primary emotions”³⁹ in question. In other words, according to Aniol, the internal properties of musical sound in their various combinations can communicate distinctive human feelings affecting not only mood and emotion, but initiating behavioral tendencies leading to action. It seems that Aniol is confusing emotional reflection with moral influence. Certainly music can “trigger associations” and even conjure up emotional feelings, but can it really influence behavior and somehow carry cognitive meaning apart from its lyrical connection?⁴⁰

David Pass, teacher and pastor, argues against the notion of music possessing inherent meaning. Pass agrees with musicologist Jean-Jaques Nattiez in the “functional tripartition of music” as it occurs in the “musical event” of producing and interpreting musical sounds.⁴¹ During the musical event, a “producer” initiates sounds known as the “artifact” that are received by the “interpreter,” or listener. Pass concludes from Nattiez’s observations, “The artifact, the music, doesn’t intend anything or mean anything by itself. The people who produce the music and the people who interpret the music intend and find meanings in it.”⁴²

For Aniol and others to suggest that certain styles of music inherently possess negative meanings that can somehow influence negative behavior is, in essence, to assign more power to music than is logically attributable. While listening to certain kinds of music can certainly stimulate a vast array of emotional feelings and cognitive thoughts, these feelings and thoughts are not derived from the intrinsic aural combinations of tone,

³⁹Aniol, *Worship in Song*, 89.

⁴⁰Barry Liesch, *The New Worship: Straight Talk on Music and the Church*, expanded ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 178.

⁴¹David B. Pass, *Music and the Church* (Nashville: Broadman, 1989), 41.

⁴²Pass, *Music and the Church*, 42.

timbre, pitch, and rhythm found in the music, but rather are understood and deciphered through pre-existing filters of meaning in the mind of the listener. Pass contends, “It is the intentions of the producer and the interpreter that determine the meaning of the music, not the music.”⁴³

Jeremy Begbie, director of Theology through the Arts at the University of Cambridge, describes music as “fundamentally the actions of music making and music hearing . . . engaging with the integrities of the sonic order.”⁴⁴ Though Begbie concedes to a measure of meaning in music, he clarifies this meaning as “metaphorical, generating a surplus of meaning.”⁴⁵ By categorizing the meaning of music as metaphorical, he is clarifying the inability of mere language to bring adequate interpretation to the music. In other words, a metaphorical interpretation must be assigned since the meaning of the music cannot be fully expressed verbally. Begbie assigns meaning to music in relation to the context of its hearing. Since “musical sounds do not intrinsically point or refer with any precision and consistency to things beyond themselves,” listeners of the sounds of the music interpret meaning based upon other contextual information.⁴⁶ Harold Best says, “The more a piece of music is repeated in the same context, the more it will begin to ‘mean’ that context.”⁴⁷ Begbie concludes, “Musical notes come to have meaning first and foremost not because of anything they might direct our attention to but because of their relation to one another.”⁴⁸

⁴³Pass, *Music and the Church*, 43.

⁴⁴Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 49.

⁴⁵Ibid., 50.

⁴⁶Ibid., 53.

⁴⁷Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith*, 54.

⁴⁸Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 57.

In his agreement that music “does not carry meaning in terms of propositions,” Aniol concedes, “Any time we try to summarize the abstract in terms of propositions, we are bound to overstate.”⁴⁹ However, he continues to assign some sort of moral connection to music by insisting that Christians “must be willing to evaluate meaning in music to determine whether that meaning fits with God’s desire.”⁵⁰ It seems Aniol is implying that God is partial to certain kinds of music, while opposed to other kinds. In fact, upon further reading, Aniol affirms and clarifies this assertion:

It would be nice if music were a black and white issue with a clear line distinguishing bad music from good music. Unfortunately, it is not that easy. We must affirm, however, that this is the case in the mind of God. In his mind there is a line. In other words, there is no such thing as neutral music. Any given song is either good or evil. To deny such a truth would be to deny absolutes. Absolute truth in this area does exist; the problem arises from man’s finiteness . . . we must affirm that God has a definite line in his mind separating good music from evil music. It is because of our creatureliness and sinfulness that we cannot see the line that God has set regarding music.⁵¹

If as Aniol believes, there is “good” music and “evil” music, how then does he distinguish between the two? It seems Aniol favors prior association as his method for culling out evil music. He suggests categorizing music according to its “associations” with “ungodly movements or causes,” presuming “that the music communicates messages that are compatible with their (i.e., Rock ‘n’ Roll) sinful message.”⁵² In so doing, Aniol is adhering to historical precedent set by the early church fathers who rejected all instrumental music because of its association with pagan ritual.⁵³

⁴⁹Aniol, *Worship in Song*, 91.

⁵⁰Ibid., 96.

⁵¹Ibid., 139.

⁵²Ibid., 140.

⁵³See chap. 3.

Is the total exclusion of music with prior associations (especially to secular pop and rock music) really necessary to provide suitable musical accompaniment for Christian worship? Can some of this culturally relevant music, with changed lyrics, not be redeemed for use in the church? Reggie Kidd maintains, “Jesus purges the idolatrous aspects of a culture’s music and focuses the yearning for redemption that shows up whenever the imago Dei bears the kiss of common grace . . . and he cleanses songs one would have thought foul beyond redemption.”⁵⁴

In defending the uses of all kinds of music in modern worship, Liesch cautions, “Beware of elevating any one style as intrinsically sacred,” further clarifying, “Any given style . . . may be a happy fit as determined by the particular subgroup at a particular place and at a particular time.”⁵⁵

In distinguishing between God’s “truth” and God’s “handiwork,” Best asserts, “Art and especially music are morally relative and inherently incapable of articulating . . . truth.” According to Best, as much as the artist would like to think he or she is communicating personal “belief” through the art, “their art remains purposefully ‘dumb,’” and ultimately “their works must be understood simply as handiwork.”⁵⁶ Best is articulating the difference between truth and beauty (art), recognizing the abstractness of artistic expression in contrast to the objective meaning of propositional truth. If music, by itself, is incapable of communicating objective truth, hence meaning, how can one attribute an innate goodness or evil to its expression? Certainly personal preference dictates the level of quality and enjoyment of one musical style over another, but by its very subjective

⁵⁴Reggie Kidd, *With One Voice: Discovering Christ’s Song in Our Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 127.

⁵⁵Liesch, *The New Worship*, 199.

⁵⁶Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith*, 42.

nature, musical style should not be scrutinized for some speculative degree of inherent morality.

Perhaps most alarming are the implications Aniol's argument has for the missional views of inculturation and contextualization of the gospel in cultural settings both at home and abroad.⁵⁷ In *By the Rivers of Babylon*, Aniol's purpose seems positive enough in his hope to "convince . . . that biblically regulated, gospel-shaped corporate worship that communicates God's truth through appropriate cultural forms will actually have the most missional impact in a post-Christian context."⁵⁸

The key word in Aniol's statement is "appropriate." He is not wrong to maintain the expectation that worship offered to God is not only expressed appropriately, but wholeheartedly. His concern is that missionally-minded pastors and worship leaders have a "fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of culture."⁵⁹ He is concerned that missional authors have "failed to engage serious thinking on the matter of culture" and "devote much too little space to consideration of how the modern idea of culture relates to the biblical realities of 'the world.'"⁶⁰

Aniol is correct in cautioning those entering unevangelized communities to carefully examine cultural practices and customs. He rightly instructs missionaries to

⁵⁷Perhaps helpful at this point would be some basic definitions of terms. *Missional* is a relatively new term in evangelical Christianity. This term essentially describes a twenty-first century movement that identifies the mission of the church as evangelizing the world through the process of enculturation. *Enculturation* is defined by Brian Wren as "a two-way process by which Christians reach out to a culture different from their own, respect it, enter it, and interact with it, neither losing their identity nor remaining unchanged." Brian Wren, *Praying Twice: The Music and Words of Congregational Song* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 153. *Contextualization* is basically an attempt to present the gospel in culturally relevant ways.

⁵⁸Aniol, *By the Rivers of Babylon*, 16.

⁵⁹Ibid., 45.

⁶⁰Ibid., 46.

identify practices that are unacceptable to a biblically Christian lifestyle, and lead people to repent of and change beliefs and values which are inconsistent with Scripture. However, his implication that cultural “forms” are essentially evil and unworthy to be used in Christian worship is troubling.⁶¹ Aniol equates form to substance or behavior: “Just like a liquid takes the shape of a container, doctrinal facts take the shape of the aesthetic form in which they are carried.”⁶² This is a non-sequitur in that Aniol sees the style of the container (aesthetic form) somehow significant to the thirst-quenching properties of the liquid (doctrinal facts). Form is not the same as content, nor does it achieve the same result as the content. Constance Cherry, professor of worship at Indiana Wesleyan University, clarifies the difference between form and content: “Style and content must not be confused . . . style is not what we do; rather it is the manner in which we express what we do. Style is the way we deliver the content, not the content itself.”⁶³ The form, or style per Cherry, simply carries the message, hopefully in such a way as to provide contextual familiarity in the delivery of the message.

Music is an example of an aesthetic cultural form possessing unique idioms that carry lyrical messages, helping the people of a culture communicate, celebrate, and exist in community. Andy Crouch, former editor of *Christianity Today*, concludes, “Many features of culture . . . prove to be completely capable of being put to use in faithfulness and dependence on God.” John Stott, pastor and author, agrees: “True conversion involves repentance, and repentance is renunciation. Yet this does not require the convert to step right out of his former culture into a Christian subculture which is totally distinctive.”⁶⁴

⁶¹Aniol, *By the Rivers of Babylon*, 79.

⁶²Ibid., 158.

⁶³Constance Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 223.

⁶⁴John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1975), 181.

Aniol's concerns deserve thoughtful and prayerful evaluation from the missional community. Evil exists in all human cultures. It is expedient for those who teach, preach, and sing the gospel to effectively enculturate the message in contextually relevant forms. Likewise, pastors and missionaries must be vigilant to stay alert, discerning the presence of worldly elements within the culture that would seek to destroy the work of God.

T. David Gordon

In *Why Johnny Can't Sing Hymns*, T. David Gordon posits the theory, "We make song, and song makes us."⁶⁵ Gordon's thesis revolves around the question, "Why is it that so many people effectively cannot sing traditional hymns?"⁶⁶ He suggests the ubiquitous presence of "pop music" coupled with a lack of "balance" in the musical diet of most Americans as the cause of what he considers "impoverished congregational praise" in today's Christian worship.⁶⁷

A secondary theme of his book is "contemporaneity," which he describes as a "value, or value system, that prefers what is new to what is old."⁶⁸ Gordon attributes this system of valuing what is new to the precipitous technological advances of recent years. The presence of an increasing state of technological innovation has driven consumers to stay current in their craving for the latest and greatest gadgets and tools. Commercialization, along with savvy marketing techniques, has increased a societal desire for the most advanced gadgetry on the market, while feeding the notion that last year's

⁶⁵T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Sing Hymns: How Pop Culture Rewrote the Hymnal* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010), 10.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 11.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 15-17.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 103.

devises are passé. Regarding musical styles in worship, Gordon is correct in assuming “rapid change without significant theological defense is a cause for significant concern.”⁶⁹

Many of Gordon’s thoughts on corporate worship are admirable. He sees the selection of hymns for corporate worship as weighty and consequential to the spiritual formation of his congregants. In his words, “Hymns that accompany one’s life are one of life’s richest treasures” and a “significant component of . . . religious experience,” “equipping them to live well or not so well.”⁷⁰ Commendable is the import and urgency he brings to the discussion of music in worship, specifically his insistence that “music is not insignificant”⁷¹ in the discussion of acceptable corporate worship.

However, his claim that those sympathetic to contemporary worship music view “worship song [as] merely a matter of amusement or entertainment, and therefore merely a matter of personal preference or taste” is prejudicial.⁷² Like Aniol, he brings a distinction to musical style that treats certain genres of music as inherently suited for Christian worship, and others as fundamentally secular and wholly unsuited for use in the church. He argues against the historical evidence of reformers such as Martin Luther assimilating popular musical idioms of the day into the worship repertoire of the church. Gordon insists Luther “believed in what we now call *sacred music*—music that is deliberately and self-consciously different from other forms of music.”⁷³ As previously mentioned in chapter 3 of this work, Luther speaks of the potential of “useless and shameful songs . . . of the streets . . . [losing] their bad effects if they can have good,

⁶⁹Gordon, *Why Johnny Can’t Sing Hymns*, 105.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 24.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 27.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 35.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 46.

useful Christian texts and words.”⁷⁴ Hustad maintains, “Luther was the most inclusive and consistent of the reformed leaders in his espousal of all sorts of music for worship,” even advocating for “tunes that had long been associated with secular texts.”⁷⁵ Noting historical “precedent” for “worthy lyrics . . . sanctifying a secular melody,” Wren observes, “Wishing to be topical and timely, writers and composers have often imported ‘secular’ musical idioms, and whole melodies, into congregational song.”⁷⁶

Gordon agrees with Aniol: “The form of contemporary pop music shapes the content of what is placed in it.”⁷⁷ Gordon reasons, “Since contemporary pop music has been developed for commercial reasons, and is almost exclusively associated with fairly superficial amusement,” can it be used “for a religion that requires repentance, sacrifice, obedience, and selflessness [?]”⁷⁸ He further suggests that “guitar-playing just doesn’t sound serious.”⁷⁹ So much of Gordon’s complaint seems perilously close to a distinction of taste rather than actual substantive reasoning worthy of serious contemplation. Brian Wren, professor of worship at Columbia Theological Seminary, notes, “Theologically, we preach acceptance and inclusiveness. Musically, we proclaim rejection and exclusion, on the culturally conditioned belief that ‘good taste is more pleasing to God than bad taste.’”⁸⁰ Much of Gordon’s protestation seems to stem from his own particular tastes. He

⁷⁴Martin Luther, quoted in Freidrich Blume, *Protestant Church Music: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), 33.

⁷⁵Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 186.

⁷⁶Wren, *Praying Twice*, 155.

⁷⁷Gordon, *Why Johnny Can’t Sing Hymns*, 60.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 60.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 60, 61.

⁸⁰Wren, *Praying Twice*, 140.

provides no significant theological or biblical basis for his complaint, only a very personal bias against the use of pop music in worship.

In terms of missional responsibility, Christians are called to proclaim the gospel in culturally acceptable and understandable ways. Likewise, they are obligated to provide meaningful opportunities for culturally accessible worship. Cornelius Platinga, president of Calvin Theological Seminary, stresses, “Just as people ought to hear the gospel in a culturally perceptible form, that is, in their native language, so also they ought to worship in one.”⁸¹ Platinga further exhorts the “church to be culturally astute and then to practice its worship accordingly” in order to avoid supercilious issues that might cause worshipers to “[stumble] over unnecessary obstacles.”⁸² Liesch concurs: “If we accept that the gospel can be preached in any spoken language, then we must also accept that it will eventually be preached through any music. Another implication follows: local musical dialects should not be despised.”⁸³

This cultural and musical sensitivity not only applies internationally, but locally. Musically, the songs used in corporate worship should in some way connect with the cultural surroundings of the worshipers. If the musical language is to be accessible to the congregant, it must reflect something of the surrounding cultural idioms familiar to them. Scott Connell, professor of music at Boyce College, speaks of an authenticity that accompanies this kind of worship: “Something very authentic happens when they [Connell’s students] can use a musical style they identify most closely with in worship—a musical heart language is employed for their theological heart language.”⁸⁴ For worship

⁸¹Cornelius Platinga and Sue A. Rozeboom, *Discerning the Spirits: A Guide to Thinking about Christian Worship Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 64-65.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 65.

⁸³Liesch, *The New Worship*, 180.

⁸⁴Scott Connell, “Defending (and [Re-] Defining) Contemporary Worship Music,” The Institute for Biblical Worship, Blog, March 7, 2016, accessed November,

to be genuine, it must be offered with heart-felt expressions in idioms familiar to the worshiper. What could be more awkward than trying to communicate the intimacies of love in an unfamiliar tongue? Cherry explains,

Style is the way a certain faith community expresses the content of its worship. . . . Every group has a way of communicating that is native to who they are. The style in which they worship God in Christ will be indigenous - a natural, intuitive expression; it must be so in order to be authentic to who they are.

Despite Gordon's claims that the message "contemporary music sends is: nothing is important; everything is just amusing and entertaining,"⁸⁵ it is imperative to remember that a significant portion of the population finds much more than mere amusement and entertainment in the regular expressions of worship offered up in the language of contemporary music. Wren observes,

Perhaps contemporary worship is like a foreign language, which we, as liturgical missionaries, need to learn. When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, people heard the good news of Jesus Christ, not in what was for them a foreign language, Judean Aramaic, nor in what was for many of them a fluent second language, common Greek, but directly, in their native tongue (Acts 2:11). Their response suggests both surprise and delight. They were "amazed" and "astonished" because "in our own languages" they heard the news of Jesus Christ. That is why the message touched them to the heart. If contemporary worship music is, for many, their "native" musical idiom, it is bound to touch them more directly than "foreign" music can do.⁸⁶

Gordon believes a definitive kind of music is uniquely sacred. He asks, "If worship is a sacred task, what is wrong with the musical aspects of worship sounding sacred?"⁸⁷ He identifies "traditional worship forms" as those forms "suitable to that remarkable occasion in life when the creature meets the Creator" when only "the church's music" is "appropriate for an immortal God."⁸⁸ He arbitrarily contrasts the

15, 2017, <http://biblicalworship.com/blog/2016/2/18/defending-and-re-defining-contemporary-worship-music-part-iv>.

⁸⁵Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Sing Hymns*, 72.

⁸⁶Wren, *Praying Twice*, 152.

⁸⁷Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Sing Hymns*, 75.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 76-77.

reckoned superiority of sacred-sounding music with the inappropriateness of contemporary worship music in approaching “our Maker and Redeemer.” Several rhetorical questions come to mind: (1) What does sacred music sound like? (2) Who decides what it sounds like? and (3) Does this so-called, sacred-sounding music provide some sort of pseudo-mediatory role in authenticating worship that contemporary music cannot?

Most of Gordon’s arguments are, frankly, vituperative in tone. It is unfortunate that, at times, he feels it necessary to speak so condemningly to aspects of other worship traditions. For example, in clarifying his narrow characterization of what falls into the category of “traditional Christian hymnody,” he sarcastically notes that “those who know me well know I carry no brief at all for Fanny Crosby or Bill Gaither,” further clarifying, “neither Bill nor Fanny made any appearances in my bulletins.”⁸⁹ Is this information relevant or in any way helpful to the discussion? He takes a strong, albeit unnecessary stand against the free-church tradition, or as he calls it, “free-church movement” because “it is not a tradition in any ordinary sense, identifiable by some creedal or liturgical heritage . . . therefore should not be dignified by the term tradition.”⁹⁰

In disqualifying the guitar as an acceptable instrument to lead others in worship he derisively questions, “What kind of theological or religious content requires, or even survives, accompaniment by guitar,” and “maybe the guitar can handle a little truth, but it can’t handle much.”⁹¹ He greatly exaggerates in calling the guitar “the one non-negotiable of contemporary worship music,” adding, “Worship music absolutely *must* be accompanied on the guitar.”⁹²

⁸⁹Gordon, *Why Johnny Can’t Sing Hymns*, 42.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 50n8.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 98.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 98-99, emphasis original.

In spite of several significant and helpful observations on the subject of diversity in worship, the pejorative nature of Gordon's thoughts in opposing certain aspects of contemporary worship music regrettably marginalizes his influence to many. Rather than searching for collaborative solutions and common ground in his quest for "Why Johnny can't sing hymns," Gordon seems content to simply ridicule and mock those of differing "traditions."⁹³

Calvin M. Johansson

Calvin Johansson, former professor of Music at Evangel University, Springfield, Missouri, provides music ministers a timeless treasure of biblical principles foundational to music ministry in *Music and Ministry: A Biblical Counterpoint*. So much of what Johansson wrote in 1984, is still germane for today's church music and worship ministries. He was among the first to go beyond mere pragmatics and dig deeper into the philosophical and theological underpinnings of what it means to be a pastoral musician.

Johansson admonishes music pastors to "value" their "people's pilgrimage in those things most important in life . . . much more than music."⁹⁴ He pressed for a critical thinking that would help the "musician formulate a solid underlying philosophical rationale that is coherent, comprehensive, and creative."⁹⁵ He addressed the "danger of artistic veneration," where "art becomes an end in itself" and pastoral musicians "run the

⁹³It is ironic that the very title of Gordon's book goes unanswered, possibly as a result of his reactionary tone. The quotes around "traditions" are simply meant to draw attention to the diversification of thought on worship music styles and the validity of each person's worship "language."

⁹⁴Calvin Johansson, *Music and Ministry: A Biblical Counterpoint* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984), 3.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*

risk of elevating art to a place where beauty becomes God, or if not thought to be God, is at least equal to God, or thought of as essential to knowing God.”⁹⁶

Johansson identified a “biblical counterpoint,” held together by a kind of “tension of apparent opposites (i.e., aesthetical and methodological concerns)” by which biblical truth would provide the foundational principles for a ministry where “there will be no conflict between artistry, spirituality, and methodology.”⁹⁷ This scriptural integrity would become the basis for a “beautiful contrapuntal design” creating a “type of tension that is at the heart of a dynamic and creative church music.”⁹⁸

Johansson commences his biblical counterpoint at creation, recognizing man’s call to live as a creative being, thus “influencing, shaping, and directing the values and vision of culture.”⁹⁹ Unlike Aniol, Johansson suggests, “Culture is not anti-religious, nor is it neutral, nor is it the same thing as religion,”¹⁰⁰ but “religion transcends culture” potentially changing the “artistic climate of the church from an often inflexible conventionality to a flexible originality.”¹⁰¹

Is it possible Johansson’s words from 1984, prophetically announced a present-day reality seen in so many modern worship ministries? Today’s contemporary ministries are teeming with talented musicians, singers, and composers creatively thriving in a “culture” that not only allows but encourages a “flexible originality” to produce and

⁹⁶Johansson, *Music and Ministry*, 5.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 7.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 8.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 13.

promulgate the gospel through music, thus fulfilling the “creative mandate” to “live out their creaturely existence creatively and fully.”¹⁰²

In discussing the incarnation of Christ, Johansson identifies the loving humility of God’s condescension to man as the example for the church musician to “stoop in humility” as a “demonstration of his pastoral love” for the people.¹⁰³ He presses further in denouncing “an intellectualism that will alienate those whom you serve” in favor of a commitment to “lowering himself artistically” in an effort to “minister to people where they are.”¹⁰⁴ Summarily, Johansson clarifies for the pastoral musician how “the incarnation gives him a basic posture of humility, relevance, and the knowledge that church music must be an understandable ‘truth.’”¹⁰⁵

Certainly, one must commend Johansson for providing such a comprehensive overview of theological and philosophical foundations for church music ministry in this book. It would seem that his insights have been helpful to many leaders in evangelical worship ministries. Respectfully, however, significant issues in Johansson’s approach to contemporary worship music call for a response.

Johansson’s critique of “mass culture . . . the rise of mass production, mass marketing, and mass media” is based upon his belief that cultural change causes a “dehumanization” of man relegating humanity to a kind of “slavery” to the technological advances of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁶ He disdainfully reacts to the “machine orientation” of mass culture that “emphasizes speed, quantity, exact timing, technique, and

¹⁰²Johansson, *Music and Ministry*, 13.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 47.

similitude.”¹⁰⁷ Rather than focus on the positive aspects of the aforementioned innovations and the potential impact they have had and continue to make on the production and promotion of the arts, Johansson complains: “Commercialization of the arts has lowered artistic standards, encouraged musical tastelessness, and promoted artistic inertia.”¹⁰⁸

Certainly, any change in culture can have negative impact, but the overall enrichment technological progress brings to a society overshadows the significance of most adverse effects. True, the church must not be overtaken by humanistic qualities of cultural advances, but pastoral leaders must take full advantage of technological momentum by accessing the exponential potential of these developments for the expansion of the gospel. Visionary worship leaders should seize the opportunity to enhance technical aspects of multi-media communication in music ministry, as well as improve compositional capacities leading to the proliferation of new songs around the world.

In addition to his hesitancy to embrace mass culture, Johansson maintains an intense aversion to the use of pop music in the church. He contends, “Pop music . . . [is] the heart of this society (i.e., mass culture) . . . [and] the musical embodiment of *kitsch*.”¹⁰⁹ Like Aniol and Gordon, Johansson attempts to draw a distinction between historical popular music (i.e., folk music from the sixteenth century) and modern pop. According to Johansson, “popular music of the time had a folk-like character far removed from modern day pop.”¹¹⁰

At the center of his opposition to pop music is a belief that the “characteristics of pop music” are fundamentally incongruent with the “characteristics of the gospel,”

¹⁰⁷Johansson, *Music and Ministry*, 47.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 50. Kitsch is a derogatory term used to categorize art that is considered in poor taste but that provides a sort of ironic entertainment.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 51.

hence unsuitable to “carry” the message of the gospel.¹¹¹ His complaints against pop music include a “drive toward continuous novelty” and a lack of “durability and depth.”¹¹² He further assumes, “Since pop music contains nothing intrinsically new or creative, maximum musical gratification comes immediately.”¹¹³

Johansson contrasts “gospel characteristics” with twelve “characteristics of pop music”: “quantity (mass production), material profit, novelty, immediate gratification, ease of consumption, entertainment, the lowest common denominator, success first, romanticism, mediocrity, sensationalism, and transience.”¹¹⁴

Wren argues, “Johansson overlooks the fact that he, and the music which he approves, are as much a part of the market economy as the music he criticizes.”¹¹⁵ As a professor of church music, surely Johansson has provided his students with names of music publishers and other ministry related marketing outlets enabling them to purchase choral music and other ministry-related items. Is this not a form of marketing and material profit?

A quick scan of the radio dial through any local radio market would certainly reveal several channels playing hits from the 1970s, 1980s, etc., seriously bringing into question Johansson’s claims of pop music having no durability or depth. As to lowest common denominator and mediocrity, Wren writes,

The implication seems to be that the music Johansson prefers has creativity and high standards, while popular music does not. Because Johansson dislikes all “commercial” popular music, he judges it in terms of the genres he values, and finds it wanting. Such judgments are elitist and mistaken. In terms of its own genres and

¹¹¹Johansson, *Music and Ministry*, 51.

¹¹²*Ibid.*

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 52.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, 55.

¹¹⁵Wren, *Praying Twice*, 144.

possibilities, popular music allows plenty of room for creativity and for debate about aesthetic and moral standards.¹¹⁶

Wren's conclusions point to a predetermined bias in Johansson's appraisal of the appropriateness of pop music for Christian worship. Wren correctly observes Johansson's inability (or unwillingness) to recognize any inherent value in pop music due largely to Johansson's apparent preconceived distaste for popular music, at least in terms of its suitability for worship. Like Gordon's view, Johansson's estimation of the value of pop music is tainted by his own personal tastes, and therefore void of any tangible biblical or theological foundation.

In *The New Worship*, Barry Liesch argues persuasively against Johansson's claims about pop music. He begins his argument by offering several quotes from Johansson:

Pop, by whatever name, is hedonistic . . . it seems absolutely imperative to conclude that to use pop music as a medium for the gospel message is wrong . . . the music of rock supports the repudiation of biblical standards by the combination of sounds which are violent, mind-numbing, vulgar, raw, mesmerizing, rebellious, grossly repetitive, uncreative, undisciplined, and chaotic sounding. If listeners do not hear these things, it is because rock has dulled their aesthetic sensibilities.¹¹⁷

Liesch responds, "Even if a form is abused, it should not invalidate its use by others . . . when people do bad things with form or style, it shouldn't prevent Christians from doing good things with it."¹¹⁸ Pass concurs, "Whatever style of music communicates the gospel boldly and clearly according to convergences of person, group, culture, and historical moment is acceptable."¹¹⁹ Once again, Johansson is quoted by Liesch:

¹¹⁶Wren, *Praying Twice*, 145.

¹¹⁷Calvin Johansson, *Discipling Music Ministry: Twenty-First Century Directions* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 46, quoted in Liesch, *The New Worship*, 196.

¹¹⁸Liesch, *The New Worship*, 196.

¹¹⁹Pass, *Music and the Church*, 102.

Christians have been influenced . . . into believing there are no divine imperatives, no aesthetic absolutes or standards. . . . Theists must be objectivists through and through . . . all worthy art is based on God-given aesthetic principles that are laid down in creation and are cross-cultural and timeless.¹²⁰

Pass argues, “We tend to equate a certain musical style with a certain morality and then pass off our aesthetic judgments as moral judgments.”¹²¹ Ron Man from Worship Resources International reasons,

We must rigorously differentiate between biblical injunctions and cultural inflections. We must always be aware of our Pharisaic tendency towards “teaching as doctrines the precepts of men” (Matthew 15:9), which in this passage Jesus himself says leads to “vain” worship. Many (if not most) worship debates and disagreements arise from not clearly discerning the difference here. When God has not spoken unequivocally to a subject, we must be very careful about thinking we have unerringly discerned his thinking. Tradition is not our enemy, but must always be held up to scrutiny in light of God’s word, our only unchanging standard for worship and life.¹²²

Johansson subscribes to the notion that not only does music carry meaning, but music is also inherently good or bad. However, can this viewpoint actually be supported by Scripture? Though conceding that music has a kind of meaning, Begbie admits that Scripture provides no support for the opinion that music has inherent moral qualities:

Scripture provides little direct help in answering the kinds of questions that might readily be asked . . . how do we go about evaluating different pieces of music? What makes good music? It certainly does not supply anything like a “theology of music.” No verses or passages address at any great length how music is to be viewed in relation to God.¹²³

Johansson’s talk of aesthetic absolutes and standards, more specifically that “all worthy art is based on God-given aesthetic principles that are laid down in creation and are cross-cultural and timeless,” betrays an attitude of exclusivity and elitism in

¹²⁰Johansson, *Discipling Music*, 46-47, quoted in Liesch, *The New Worship*, 195.

¹²¹Pass, *Music and the Church*, 45.

¹²²Ron Man, “Ethnodoxology and Mission: Worship and Arts for the Global Church,” Worship Resources International, June 21, 2014, American Society of Missiology, 16, accessed on December 29, 2017, file://users/mmcgee/downloads/ethnodoxology%20mission.pdf.

¹²³Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 59.

attributing an inherent worthiness to artistic expressions of which he approves.¹²⁴ Music used in worship is meant to be functional and should not be discussed in terms of its worthiness. Also, to assume a “cross-cultural” usefulness in art created according to westernized musical convention reveals a certain naiveté to the unique challenges of cultural contextualization.

In an earlier quote from Johansson, the pastoral musician is cautioned about running “the risk of elevating art to a place where beauty becomes God, or if not thought to be God, is at least equal to God, or thought of as essential to knowing God.” Certainly, this admonition is wise and godly counsel coming from a sincere servant of the Lord and his church; however, Johansson’s determination to elevate and distinguish certain kinds of music (i.e., those that meet his “artistic standards”) as the only “worthy art” suitable to be used in the church moves perilously close to establishing some sort of mediatory role, “essential to knowing God,” for only the “best music.”¹²⁵

Best speaks to the dangers of elevating music of any style to this place:

Beauty and quality become idols when they become intermediaries and spiritual screening devices, things that interpose themselves in the act of worshiping God through Christ, as if God were more interested in showing himself in a performance of Bach’s B Minor Mass than in the singing of “Majesty.” For us to assume that our versions of beauty, per se, afford quicker access to God is to commit a fatal error.¹²⁶

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to identify and analyze reasons for the rejection of the use of certain musical idioms, specifically pop and contemporary, in worship by three authors and scholars in the field of Christian worship. Scott Aniol, T. David Gordon,

¹²⁴Johansson, *Discipling Music Ministry*, 47, quoted from Liesch, *The New Worship*, 195.

¹²⁵Johansson, *Discipling Music*, 109, quoted in Liesch, *The New Worship*, 195.

¹²⁶Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 167.

and Calvin Johansson have written extensively on musical diversity in the church. Each of these men oppose the use of pop and contemporary music in the framework of a larger musical pluralism.

In arguing for multiple styles of music in worship, ideas were sampled from books and articles published by the three authors. Aniol, Gordon, and Johansson have provided thoughtful arguments presenting rationale for the exclusion of some musical styles in worship. Attempting to respectfully engage with the differing viewpoints of these authors, points of agreement were revealed and acknowledgment of positive, helpful information was recognized. Points of concurrence were followed by a critical analysis of perceived weaknesses in their views toward exclusion of certain styles of music in worship.

Each of the authors points to the rise of industrialization, commercialism, and the attainment of individual rights as cultural antecedents to the rise of mass media and of a populist music. The omni-presence of popular music, which has inundated American culture, has also affected the church and the stylistic nature of Christian worship. The church is not exempt from the mass appeal of popular music. While it is important for pastors and worship leaders to judiciously incorporate popular idioms into Christian worship, many of the popular styles are well-suited to the cultural dialects of modern congregational needs.

However, for Aniol, Gordon, and Johansson, the inclusion of pop music into Christian worship is problematic. Aniol's objections arise from the belief that music carries meaning and that these inherent meanings can be good or evil, depending on the style of the music. Aniol views the musical accompaniment of a song as a significant part of the overall message of the song. In other words, the container (music) shapes the contents (words) and communicates a message in addition to the message of the text. According to Aniol, there are scriptural standards for identifying inherently good music. Though he

attempts to defend this claim for scriptural validation, the Bible simply does not provide substantive evidence for a preferred musical style.

The presumed power of pop music to adversely influence the affections of believers is Aniol's other major concern. He believes consistent exposure to popular music, especially in the context of worship, negatively impacts worshipers' spiritual formation. As previously stated, this assumption fails to consider the power of the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of believers to accomplish spiritual growth and maturity apart from any outward musical stimulus.

Though Gordon's primary issue with contemporary worship music seems to come from a general distaste for the genre itself, he argues for a tendency in modern worshipers to generally prefer pop-oriented songs to hymns. He bemoans a modern propensity toward what he considers the appeal of contemporaneity, that is, a proclivity toward innovation and culturally relevant ideas. Gordon's objective arguments against popular musical idioms in worship are, unfortunately, undermined by his seeming inability to corral his scathing criticism. His highbrow denigration of the use of guitars in worship is not only inconsiderate, but misguided. It is unfortunate that some of Gordon's more constructive observations will be disregarded as illogical tirades from an elitist, academic snob.

While providing helpful theological and philosophical wisdom for prospective worship leaders, Johansson fails to understand the usefulness of contemporary worship music to the church. Like Aniol and Gordon, Johansson assigns music more capacity than it rightly deserves to influence attitudes and behavior. He concurs with Aniol and Gordon that music has the ability to communicate, so as to either enhance or diminish the lyrical content of the song. While this supposition may sound accurate, it is highly questionable. As this thesis has shown, music does not possess inherent meaning. It is neither good nor evil. Therefore, to attach intrinsic power to the music, believing it can carry meaning and

actually compete with the text for clarity of meaning, is to assign a capability to music it simply does not possess.

Summarily, Aniol, Gordon, and Johansson hold to the assumption that musical style, alone, positively or negatively affects the message of modern worship music. Believing contemporary worship music holds an intrinsic power to adversely influence behavior, they argue for the exclusive use of traditional westernized hymnody in Christian worship.

Having provided biblical and historical evidence demonstrating an inclusive attitude toward the acceptance of musical innovation, and having argued against an unhealthy exclusivism that stifles creativity and growth in the body of Christ, this thesis will now present possible solutions to bridge the gap between intellectual idealism, cultural and contemporary expectations and preferential demands.

CHAPTER 5
CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP
MUSIC: ECHOES OF VALID CONCERNS

Introduction

Contemporary worship music (CWM) is a broad categorization intended to identify music reflective of modern popular idioms, culturally accessible to twenty-first century Christians. Brian Wren defines the stylistic nature of CWM as “music with a beat . . . lyrics or music designed for the present time, using metaphors, slogans, and allusions current at the time of writing, or melodies and musical idioms current at the time of composition.”¹ Though inclusive of a broad spectrum of popular musical styles, much of CWM falls within the pop and pop/rock idioms.

Modern worship music provides cultural relevance to the singing of the gospel. Much of recent CWM provides a depth and range of theological substance suitable not only for dynamic vertical engagement with God, but for impactful, spiritual development in believers. However, some modern worship music still lacks serious doctrinal weight and must consistently be evaluated for lyrical clarity and scriptural integrity. Clearly this call for depth and strength has nothing to do with musical style, but rather with textual matters. Liesch challenges worship leaders to focus on the richness and veracity of song texts, asking, “Are we watering down the teaching capacity of congregational song? Are we singing up to our theology?”²

¹Brian Wren, *Praying Twice: The Music and Words of Congregational Song* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 131.

²Barry Liesch, *The New Worship: Straight Talk on Music and the Church*, expanded ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 25.

In choosing repertoire, worship leaders should carefully evaluate songs not simply for anticipated musical acceptance, but for biblical accuracy and doctrinal substance. Whether traditional hymns or contemporary ballads, worshipful expressions must rise to a certain standard. Scheer asserts, “We must be open to different styles of worship music,” choosing only “the best of each genre” for corporate worship.³ How might worship leaders identify this standard of excellence for the selection of excellent worship repertoire? Choosing only the best songs from various genres is a daunting task requiring much prayer and discernment. There is no official evangelical rubric for the culling out of unacceptable worship songs, however, some authors have provided insight pertinent to this discussion.

In *Contemporary Worship Music*, John Frame, former professor of Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary, provides an objective analysis of criticisms leveled against CWM. Frame identifies positive and negative aspects of this genre of worship music. He attempts to impartially synthesize the complaints of critics while providing justification for the historical emergence and future application of CWM. Critics’ complaints include attitudes of “me-centeredness . . . anti-intellectualism . . . ignorance of biblical teachings,” and a determination to “turn worship of almighty God into secular entertainment.”⁴

While CMW is “not one of [his] personal musical passions,” Frame does see “musical, as well as theological, value in contemporary worship music.”⁵ Frame’s defense

³Greg Scheer, *The Art of Worship: A Musician’s Guide to Leading Modern Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 68.

⁴John M. Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1997), 48, 49.

⁵*Ibid.*, 4.

of CWM is genuine, but interspersed with empathy toward those who oppose it. He purposes to give a defense

that hears the cries of those who sense best the rigors of the spiritual warfare in our time, who are not ignorant of Satan's devices, who are least inclined to compromise the lordship of Christ, and who seek through great exertions and tears to bring the evangelical church to maturity in Christ.⁶

In seeking coalescence between feuding factions, Frame confirms, "Both sides . . . need to learn from one another, to gain a better grasp of the application of Scripture," moving toward a "greater determination to live and worship according to biblical principle, rather than by the human traditions of the past or the innovations of the present."⁷ In the spirit of Christian fellowship and camaraderie, this thesis will now consider four of Frame's categories of critique of CWM in hopes of identifying problematic areas related to modern Christian music with an openness to correction and improvement.⁸

Correctives for Contemporary Worship Music

Frame lists eight categories of critique concerning CWM.⁹ Four of the eight will be examined in some detail in an attempt to provide assessment of significant issues in need of evaluation and correction. The first category is *subjectivism*. Frame calls CWM "too 'subjective,' rather than 'objective:' centered on the worshiper, his or her feelings and experiences, rather than on God."¹⁰ Marva Dawn, professor and author, warns, "Overwhelming subjectivism [focuses] only on the individual's feelings and needs and not on God's attributes or character."¹¹ For theologian and author David Wells, modern

⁶Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music*, 52.

⁷Ibid., 52, 53.

⁸Ibid., 48-50.

⁹Ibid., 48, 49.

¹⁰Ibid., 48.

¹¹Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship*

worship supplants the authoritative Word of God “to an internal source such as feeling or conscience,” leading ultimately to a state where “the subjective triumphs completely over the objective.”¹²

Experience-centered worship should concern modern worship leaders.

Experientialism, a valuing of the euphoria of the experience of worship over an authentic engagement with God, is a form of false worship and idolatry. Best warns,

Experientialism is narrow and short-lived; it can be addictive and basely profane. It thrives on feeling. It is suspicious of the mind and intellect. As tempting as it might be to go all-out for an experience, and as prevalent as experientialism is in the contemporary church, true worshipers should turn aside from this both out of spiritual integrity and out of deep hunger for the Lord rather than the experience.¹³

Many contemporary churches emphasize the “experience” aspect of worship.¹⁴

If not properly explained, the purpose for worship—encountering a holy God in the context of the corporate body of Christ—will be misplaced by the sheer thrill and enjoyment of the musical and technological elements of the event. Unless worshipers are encouraged and challenged to keep their focus on the true object of worship, another object becomes the focus and future expectation for the worshiper. When this happens, it is possible that they are worshiping worship.

When worship is subjectively centered on an experience rather than on God, authenticity and genuine encounter with God deteriorate. More significantly, when worshipers make a connection between the musical experience of the event and the genuineness of their worship, music becomes a mediator and an essential element in

for this Urgent Time (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 50.

¹²David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 105, 109.

¹³Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 71.

¹⁴Scheer, *The Art of Worship*, 94.

future encounters with God. Once again, Best warns, “If we are not careful, music will be added to the list of sacraments and perhaps with some Christians become another kind of transubstantiation, turned into the Lord’s presence . . . then the music, not the Holy Spirit, becomes the...advocate.”¹⁵

Another category in Frame’s list of critiques of CWM is *humanism*. Frame defines this as a condition where “God himself becomes ‘user-friendly,’ rather than the transcendent, awesome, sovereign Lord of biblical revelation.”¹⁶ When this condition exists in modern churches, God is not viewed as supreme authority but as someone “worshippers . . . can manipulate . . . for their own purposes.”¹⁷ Wells characterizes this situation as a “phenomenon of the weightlessness of God,” ultimately resulting in the “disappearance of God.”¹⁸ He advises, “The fundamental problem in the evangelical church world today is that God rests too inconsequentially upon the church. His truth is too distant, his grace is too ordinary, his judgment is too benign, his gospel is too easy, and his Christ is too common.”¹⁹

Wells is describing a modern tendency that views God as present but less significant in terms of importance. Wells is identifying an attitude among some believers that devalues God as something less than the sovereign, transcendent King of the universe, degrading him in their thinking to a diminished and accommodating role as one present only to “satisfy our needs.”²⁰ Twentieth-century pastor and author A. W. Tozer laments,

¹⁵Best, *Unceasing Worship*, 119.

¹⁶Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music*, 48.

¹⁷Ibid., 48.

¹⁸Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 89.

¹⁹Ibid., 30.

²⁰Ibid., 93.

“The church has surrendered her once lofty concept of God and has substituted for it one so low, so ignoble, as to be utterly unworthy of thinking, worshipping men.”²¹

Devaluing God leads to a false reality that fuels a humanistic tendency to trust feelings rather than the absolute truth of God and his Word. Dawn says that once biblical truth is replaced with a feelings-centered reality, worshipers begin to “depend upon feelings for faith,” and “the expression of feelings dominate worship in ways that focus on us instead of on God.”²²

As Frame suggests, worshipers with this humanistic orientation see God as “user-friendly,” and as such, easily approachable.²³ A user-friendly God requires no protocol; no required provisions for evoking and enjoying his presence. The notion of a user-friendly God is not only unbiblical, but disrespectful of the costly sacrifice of Christ that paved the way for believers to know God, ensuring them “confidence to enter the holy place (where God is) by the blood of Jesus” (Heb 10:19). Viewing God in this way encourages people to think of him essentially in human terms, as if he were more or less like them. In this misinterpretation of the holy and transcendent nature of God, worshipers are no longer worshipping him in truth, but rather, according to a worldly, humanist viewpoint. Tozer associates this erroneous viewpoint of God with idolatry: “The idolatrous heart assumes that God is other than he is—in itself a monstrous sin—and substitutes for the true God one made after its own likeness . . . the essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of him.”²⁴

²¹A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God: Their Meaning in the Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1961), vii.

²²Dawn, *Reaching Out*, 70.

²³Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music*, 48.

²⁴Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 3.

Best calls this kind of worship “golden calf-ism.”²⁵ Contrasting this humanistic slant with the story in Exodus 32, Best reasons, “The Israelites were not so much turning away from God as introducing things that would represent his presence and conform him to preconceived notions,” reducing God to a “recognizable size and [making] him referentially familiar.”²⁶ The people wanted something they could touch and feel—something reminiscent of former religious ties. In their worship of God, the Israelites thought they needed a visibly familiar object to mediate their divine connection. Aniol correctly notes, “They had introduced elements into the worship of Yahweh that he had not prescribed.”²⁷ Over familiarity with God leads to an imbalanced desire for immanence, finding reality inwardly rather than from the scriptural truths of God’s transcendence. Wells explains that, worshipping a God fashioned more in their own likeness, Christians will find themselves “rapidly growing deaf to the summons of the external God.”²⁸ If left unchecked, this anthropomorphic transference will portray a God that “has been so internalized, so tamed by the needs of religious commerce, so submerged beneath the traffic of modern psychological need that he has almost completely disappeared.”²⁹

A third category of Frame’s critique is *anti-intellectualism*. By anti-intellectualism, Frame speaks to the critics’ assessment of an undo emphasis on feelings as opposed to intellect. He refers to CWM as “simpler than traditional hymnody, and in contemporary language,” making “fewer intellectual demands on the worshiper.”³⁰

²⁵Best, *Unceasing Worship*, 165.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Scott Aniol, *By the Waters of Babylon: Worship in a Post-Christian Culture* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2015), 165.

²⁸Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 101.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music*, 48.

Additionally, according to Marva Dawn, CWM “does not presuppose high levels of education, a love for high art, or theological sophistication [but reflects a kind of] dumbing down of Christian worship.”³¹

In *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down*, Dawn actually connected the term *dumbing down* with CWM. She laments, “When we allow society to force us to ‘dumb down’ the church . . . we miss the infinitely faceted grandeur of God and destroy the awe and wonder that characterized worship before God became a ‘buddy’ ill-conceived and only subjectively experienced.”³² Hustad argues for “theologically loaded” music in Christian worship.³³ He encourages worship leaders to search diligently for meaningful texts that challenge the intellect of worshipers and to allow time for the “cognitive-rational process of assimilating the text’s meaning.”³⁴

Debra and Ron Reinstra observe, “Everything spoken or sung in worship has an inherently formative dimension.”³⁵ This means the words of the songs the congregation sings are forming theological thoughts and ideas that, over time, create belief systems that will last into eternity. It is essential for modern worship leaders to engage the minds of their congregants as they worship and to encourage them to apply themselves to serious contemplation of the truths they are singing.

The church should critically evaluate lyrics of all worship songs for biblical soundness and intellectual integrity. It is essential that pastors and worship leaders work

³¹Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music*, 50.

³²Dawn, *Reaching Out*, 55.

³³Donald P. Hustad, *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing, 1993), 122.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 34.

³⁵Debra Rienstra and Ron Rienstra, *Worship Words: Discipling Language for Faithful Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 34.

to identify only the best, most biblically accurate texts in the songs they use in worship. Scheer stresses the importance of musical choices for worship: “Congregational singing puts the Christian faith on the tongues of the people, letting it work its way down to the soul.”³⁶ Scheer challenges church leaders to “think of the congregation as a ‘tree planted by the waters,’ planning worship that will sustain slow, long-term growth.”³⁷ Cherry reminds worship leaders that “they are shaping their congregation’s theology by the texts they select [thereby] holding tremendous power in determining what their congregants will come to believe.”³⁸ If edification and sanctification are truly desired outcomes in Christian worship, then leaders must be faithful gatekeepers of the textual content being absorbed in the minds and hearts of congregants each week.³⁹

Another of Frame’s categories is *consumerism*. This idea articulates the concern of many that CWM “aims to give people what they want and think they need,” diminishing the “real quality in music” in order to reach the “‘lowest common denominator’ of worshipers” and provide worship that is entertaining, “the ultimate consumer commodity.”⁴⁰ The bottom line with consumerism is “the bottom line.”⁴¹ The consumerist mentality is concerned primarily with providing things that consumers will purchase. Therefore, to place this label on CWM, critics are identifying the main motivation among

³⁶Scheer, *The Art of Worship*, 55.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 56.

³⁸Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 182.

³⁹David Peterson presses the “central importance of the concept of edification for the meeting of God’s people.” David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992), 196.

⁴⁰Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music*, 48.

⁴¹The “bottom line” is a colloquial way of identifying profit or loss. When someone asks what is the “bottom line,” they are asking what the profits are or what are the losses.

those who write, produce, and sell CWM as financial gain. According to CWM detractors, by creating items consumers want to purchase, marketers are assured of a strong bottom line profit.

Frame suggests that many who oppose pop styles in CWM suggest that “giving people what they want instead of what they ought to have” is “dumbing down quality” and succumbing to cultural pressures to turn “praise into entertainment.”⁴² Dawn correctly notes, “The greatest danger of a marketing approach to sharing the gospel . . . is that it treats people as consumers.”⁴³ Admittedly, consumers often do not purchase what is good for them, but rather, things that bring temporary satisfaction and immediate self-gratification. A label like *consumerism* tends to reflect a public consumed with insatiable cravings, interested only in satisfying earthly appetites in the pursuit of self-centered fulfillment. Dawn adds to her previous observation: “Since consumption can never keep its promises to fill the aching void in people’s lives, to create congregational members who treat religion as another consumer item is to train them not to appreciate the way in which God really does fill our emptiness.”⁴⁴

The point is valid: when worship leaders consistently choose music for worship based on what is most popular among congregants, they are yielding to a type of consumer-driven demand. Pastors and other church leadership should make ministry decisions based on Holy Spirit direction regardless of issues of popularity or demand.

Wells reflects, “Allowing the consumer to be sovereign” promotes a consumerist mentality in the church where “people keep entering, lured by the church’s attractions or just to check out the wares, but then they move on because they feel their needs, real or

⁴²Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music*, 50.

⁴³Dawn, *Reaching Out*, 64.

⁴⁴Ibid., 65.

otherwise, are not being met.”⁴⁵ The consumerist mentality drives people to choose a church as if they were choosing a supermarket. It must be close, it must offer the most up-to-date programs for the children, the sermons must be challenging but not too convicting, and the music must satisfy all preferential desires. The long-term commitment to this hypothetically-perfect church is so often conditional on the way the church continues to meet expectations. When these consumerist expectations are present, they are reflective of much deeper issues related to the worship of God. Stephen Miller, pastor and artist, identifies this as “consumerism-driven worship,” where people “have become critics of corporate worship.”⁴⁶ Miller admonishes,

We dare not approach the throne of an objectively great, timeless, and unchanging and holy God with a consumer mindset that says we can only worship him if our subjective preferential demands are met. That mindset only robs God of the glory he is due, robs the church of the encouragement it needs as it fights the true war of faith, and robs us of being encouraged and shaped by the truth of God’s word as we sing it.⁴⁷

A consumeristic approach to worship displaces the focus of the congregation from genuine engagement with Almighty God to the momentary indulgence of selfish desires. Attempting to pursue worship like just another purchasing decision diminishes people’s understanding of the sovereignty of God and the infinite value of divine encounter. Approaching worship as primarily an opportunity for self-gratification and the satisfying of personal needs greatly inhibits the flow of abundant blessings found by those who have learned to find in God a “fullness of joy . . . and pleasures forevermore” (Ps 16:17).

⁴⁵Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 75.

⁴⁶Stephen Miller, “The Modern Worship Music Wars,” *Relevant Magazine*, August 29, 2013, 6, accessed on September 1, 2016, <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/god/church/modern-worship-music-wars#FyfEKyMUzZTdV2FK.99>.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 1.

It is incumbent upon pastors and worship leaders to teach people that worship is not about them, but about God. The worship of God is not a time for people to critically evaluate musical choices based on personal tastes, but a time for redeemed believers to forsake personal expectations and glorify God with heart, mind, and soul. Frame's categories of critique should prompt church leaders to emphasize the importance of musical diversity while challenging congregations to lay aside tendencies toward worldly influences that might compromise biblically accurate, God-centered worship.

Conclusion

Though Frame levels valid and well-founded critiques concerning CWM, it should be noted that any style of music that enjoys a level of popularity within a certain group and is printed, marketed, and sold is susceptible to the same charges leveled against CWM. Someone listening to a conventional westernized hymn melody or an operatic aria is just as likely to step into the realm of subjectivism in the emotionally-charged moment of feeling-focused enjoyment as someone listening to a CWM praise song. The humanistic indulgence of me-centeredness is certainly a viable indictment against one who pressures the worship leader to include a favorite hymn in the service because it brings back pleasurable memories.

Frame has helped clarify the potential for the manifestation of subjectivism, humanism, anti-intellectualism, and consumerism in Christian worship. Subjective, feelings-oriented worship places more importance on the experience of worship than the Person of worship. God, the goal and object of Christian worship, is encountered by faith, by the blood of Christ (Heb 10:19-20). Validation of worshipful encounters with God comes not from attendant feelings but from scriptural truth; promises from God's Word that those who come "in spirit and truth . . . are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks" (John 4:23).

Humanistic tendencies in worship are revealed when believers seek to re-create God in their own image. When biblical realities of God are minimized to fit into a more manageable humanistic framework, people are inadvertently in danger of false worship. This dangerous misconception of the holy and transcendent nature of God will insidiously weaken biblical authority and spiritual power in Christian worship. Similar to humanism, the manifestation of what Frame calls *anti-intellectualism* will surface in song lyrics that dilute the truth about the nature and character of God. Occasionally, songs are written by individuals who are well-meaning but theologically ill-equipped to elucidate accurate views of God. These songs, though perhaps musically advantageous, should be carefully scrutinized for congregational use.

Frame sees the consumerist mindset of CWM as potentially troublesome only to the degree that music is produced and marketed solely for its profitability. Christian worship music should be created, primarily for providing believers and the church scripturally-based expressions suited for personal and corporate worship. When the underlying purpose of the making of this music becomes altogether profit-driven, a consumeristic mindset has taken over and has subverted the spiritual intention of providing positive sources of biblical encouragement and Christian devotion.

The music that accompanies Christian worship must be a balanced offering of scriptural integrity, musical quality, accessibility, and cultural sensitivity. When these criteria are met, worshipers will likely enjoy a more undistracted divine encounter, free of many of the worldly distractions that might otherwise interfere with authentic worship. Honest examination of any perceived tendencies toward worldly compromise in Christian worship, and a determination to return to biblical standards, will help modern worship leaders and worshipers move forward in pursuing biblically accurate and spiritually empowered worship.

CHAPTER 6

A CHARGE FOR MUSICAL DIVERSITY IN CORPORATE WORSHIP

Worship is not an option. Everyone worships. Worship is the ubiquitous pursuit of every human being. Harold Best writes,

We begin with one fundamental fact about worship: at this very moment, and for as long as this world endures, everybody inhabiting it is bowing down and serving something or someone—an artifact, a person, an institution, an idea, a spirit, or God through Christ . . . it is the central fact of our existence and drives every other fact.¹

Christian worship is, arguably, the most significant function of the Christian faith. Pastor and theologian John Piper states, “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t.”² Many believers point to the Great Commission as the ultimate and most important work of the church.³ However, even Christ’s announcement of the commission to “go and make disciples of all nations” was preceded by worship (Matt 28:19). The Great Commission typically includes Matthew 28:18-20, but verse 17 says, “When they saw him, they worshiped him.” Worship is essential to all that happens in God’s kingdom work on earth. Sadly, the area of worship has caused intense struggle between Christians and has drawn attention to the church over its inability to settle the issue of musical diversity.

¹Harold Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 17,18.

²John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 11.

³Oswald Sanders defines the Great Commission as “the command, ‘Go and make disciples of all nations,’ the true calling and function of the church. It is the privilege and responsibility of the whole church to respond in obedience and give the whole gospel to the world.” J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Discipleship: Principles of Following Christ for Every Believer* (Chicago: Moody, 1990), 7,8.

This chapter offers a culminating synthesis of the information developed thus far in this research to provide the groundwork and ultimately offer a charge for worship leaders, pastors, and churches to consider embracing musical pluralism in Christian worship. Finally, in hopes of identifying areas of agreement more significant than those of musical choices, a call for unity among those of differing opinions on the topic of musical pluralism will be presented based on Romans 14.

While the previous chapters dealt with rationale for the defense of contemporary music as a viable stylistic choice in Christian worship, no intention or implication has been made to demean or disparage more traditional musical expressions. On the contrary, the very heart of this research has been to advocate for the expansion of musical vocabularies and stylistic expressions in corporate worship.

Although some aspects of worship, such as musical style, are methodological in nature, all artistic decisions should be rooted theologically. Two significant and unchanging biblical priorities provide a strong foundation for the promotion and implementation of musical pluralism in Christian worship: the vertical priority and the horizontal priority of worship.

The Vertical Priority of Worship

The first essential in worship is God. The most important consideration in the acceptance of musical diversity in Christian worship is the prioritization of God. Worship is fundamentally about God and for God. Paul's doxology at the end of Romans 11 rightly identifies God as the ultimate object of worship: "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen" (v. 36).

From verse 36, Schreiner clarifies, "Not only is God the source of all things and the means by which all things are accomplished, he is also the goal of all things."⁴ God is

⁴Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 638.

the object and the goal of Christian worship. The worship of God can never be a means to some other end. It is possible for people to unintentionally place themselves and their desires ahead of God in worship. Often, the experience of worship, with its attendant feelings, becomes more of the focus for the worshiper than authentic engagement with God. As discussed in chapter 5, when this happens, an experience-orientation of worship becomes the goal rather than a meaningful encounter with God.

If God is to be the goal of worship, he must be elevated above all rivaling interests. Pastors and worship leaders must consistently present an accurate biblical view of God so that people will worship him as they should. A. W. Tozer stresses, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us . . . the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like.”⁵

Many in the post-modern world, if they think about God at all, think of him as weak, disengaged, and ineffectual. Even those who frequent American churches often are not challenged with the depth and breadth of the scriptural doctrines of God. Christians and non-Christians alike live virtually disengaged from the biblical reality of a real God. Teaching and preaching the biblical truth of the nature and character of God is necessary to counteract worldly disinterest and unbelief. God must be known for who he truly is. Tozer warns, “The heaviest obligation lying upon the Christian Church today is to purify and elevate her concept of God until it is once more worthy of him—and of her.”⁶

Part of the prioritization of a loving and devoted relationship with God in worship is the understanding that he is the source and initiator of worship. Paul writes, “For from him and through him and to him are all things” (Rom 11:36). Worshipers can

⁵A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1961), 1.

⁶*Ibid.*, 4.

worship God only because he has chosen to reveal himself to them. “From him” indicates the reality that he has given humanity the ability to know him and the spiritual understanding to worship him.

More important than any dialogue over musical diversity is the acknowledgement that God initiates worship. Worship begins with God as he makes people aware of his presence and his work. Though God is omni-present, his presence is not always recognized. Even in the midst of corporate worship, people are not always made aware of his presence. The awareness of God’s presence is only possible through the work of the Holy Spirit. Wayne Grudem states,

It seems that one of his [Holy Spirit] primary purposes in the new covenant age is to manifest the presence of God, to give indications that make the presence of God known. And when the Holy Spirit works in various ways that can be perceived by believers and unbelievers, this encourages people’s faith that God is near and that he is working to fulfill his purposes in the church and to bring blessing to his people.⁷

God, himself, through his Holy Spirit reveals his presence and his desire to meet with his people in worship. If God did not initiate the process of worship, then his people would have no knowledge of his presence nor the inclination to respond to his gracious invitation to worship him. Through the illumination of the indwelling Spirit of God, believers are reminded of their relationship to God and of his presence among them. Paul says in Romans 8:15-16: “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit, himself, testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”

Believers, indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God, should enter corporate worship expectantly aware of God’s presence, desiring to meet with him in significant moments of worship. It is the Holy Spirit that reminds them of their standing with God and of the immanent presence of God among them. The work of the Holy Spirit, initiated by God,

⁷Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 641.

through Christ, is to instruct and inspire believers to acknowledge God for who he is and all he has done for them in Christ.

Understanding the vertical priority of God is ultimately grasped by a full appreciation of the cost of worship. Paul said, “From him and through him and to him are all things.” “Through him” speaks of the unfathomable expense of redemption. The ability for believers to worship God is only possible through Christ. Redeemed believers are able to know and worship God in loving relationship because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The vertical priority of God in worship is preeminently validated in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote, “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). God’s commitment to redeem man compelled him to sacrifice his only Son, that “those who once were far away” could be “brought near through the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13). The implausible willingness of a holy and righteous God to allow his Son to die in sinful man’s place demands a response of gratitude and fully devoted worship from redeemed believers. The writer of Hebrews clarifies the significance of the sacrificial death of Christ in terms of its impact on worship: “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God” (Heb 10:19-22a).

Peterson explains, “The power of Christ’s blood . . . opens the way for believers to enter that ‘Most Holy Place’ with confidence.”⁸ Without the shed blood of Christ, there would be no hope for divine/human connection; there would be no hope for worship. The priority of God in Christian worship cannot be overstated. “For from him and through him and to him are all things,” declares the essentiality of God’s preeminence in worship. Therefore, the means and the goal of worship is Jesus Christ—to the glory of

⁸David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992), 235.

God the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. To infer that a particular musical style is absolutely necessary in order for authentic Christian worship to take place is to potentially diminish the centrality of Christ's atoning work on the cross.

The Horizontal Priority of Worship

If God is the vertical priority of worship, then the gathered congregation is the horizontal priority of worship. Mike Cosper identifies the congregation as one of the "audiences" of worship.⁹ Cosper writes, "The Bible makes it very clear that the church is an audience of worship and that the purpose of the gathering, in many ways, speaks to this audience."¹⁰ Paul indicates in two similar passages in the New Testament that corporate worship is an opportunity for believers to encourage each other in the singing of their worship. One should notice the similarities between Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16: "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord" (Eph 5:19). "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" (Col 3:16).

The repetition of "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" is important, but the significance to this discussion is the apparent direction of the singing. The Ephesians passage clearly indicates a horizontal direction in the singing of songs. The New American Standard Version of Colossians 3:16 connects "teaching and admonishing one another," and "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" by means of the preposition, "with," thus indicating teaching and admonishing is being accomplished through the singing of the

⁹Mike Cosper, *Rhythms of Grace: How the Churches Worship Tells the Story of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 84.

¹⁰Ibid.

songs (Col 3:16 NASB). The NASB translation applies the “instrumental emphasis” to this verse and is preferred by Liesch, Peterson, Fee and others.¹¹

These passages demonstrate the biblical precedent of mutual edification in corporate worship. Peterson explains, “Paul’s teaching requires us to recognize also the central importance of the concept of edification for the meeting of God’s people.”¹² Peterson characterizes Paul’s directive for edification as a priority for Christian worship. These passages suggest a biblical mandate for the horizontal building up of the body of Christ through corporate worship.

Cherry describes the “horizontal direction of worship” as “a way in which worship is relational . . . people-to-people.”¹³ Consideration of the horizontal priority of worship highlights the importance of relational congruence and spiritual unity among believers. The priority of Christ in the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself,” should motivate the church to an inexorable pursuit of unity in corporate worship (Mark 12:31). Misapprehension of this command by the church, corporately and individually, goes to the very heart of the necessity of the discussion of musical pluralism in worship. Disagreement and division among churches and church members over musical tastes in worship directly and adversely affect the unity of corporate worship. The church, the gathered assembly of individual followers of Christ, demonstrating love and concern for each other in every aspect of communal service should take precedence over any consideration of stylistic preferences in worship.

¹¹Barry Liesch, *The New Worship: Straight Talk on Music and the Church*, expanded ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 239.

¹²Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 196.

¹³Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 12.

Best describes the corporate gathering of Christian worshipers as “mutually indwelling” brought together “in Christ.”¹⁴ He expands on the concept of mutual indwelling, describing it as Christian worshipers bringing their various religious ideologies, cultural backgrounds, and personal preferences together with the intention of somehow synthesizing these individual differences into a unifying, corporate expression of worship. Best admonishes,

Christ in us demands that each of us seek out who the rest of us are. It means realizing that we actually *have* each other, that we are already at one with each other, greeting each other, blessing each other, settling on acceptable ways to express ourselves to God’s glory. Then we craft these into a liturgy, knowing that it is at best a passing reference to the one who abides from the eternities and lights our path wherever we walk.¹⁵

A community of believers demonstrating mutual consideration of others’ ideas and preferences for worship, though seemingly idealistic, is the exact picture of the unified oneness that Christ desires for his church. Notice his prayerful petition in John 17:22-23: “I have given them [the church] the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

According to Christ, unity in the church is a prerequisite for a global recognition of the validity of the gospel message. The demonstrative evidence of mutual love among believers is, according to Christ, a necessary condition for unbelievers to comprehend the love that God has for all people (John 13:34-35). His command for the disciples to love each other as he loved them is proof of their relationship to him and the essence of Christian unity, not to mention the condition for a convincing evidence to the world of the authenticity of Christianity.

¹⁴Best, *Unceasing Worship*, 52.

¹⁵Ibid., 62. The italicized “*have*” signifies the interpersonal, spiritual connectedness mutual indwelling brings among individual worshipers in a corporate setting.

If next to a preeminent love and devotion for God, the observable, expressive affection believers have for one another is the priority of Christ for his church, how should pastors and worship leaders work to initiate this kind of relationship among congregants? Certainly attempts have been made, in terms of corporate worship, to achieve a measure of congregational harmony. Examples of such attempts might include the segregation of congregations according to generational boundaries. Pastor and author Peter Menconi observes,

When confronted with generational resistance [to musical style], it is tempting for pastors and church leaders to give everyone what they want . . . it is also tempting to create multiple services to offer traditional worship, contemporary worship, postmodern worship, or any other worship style.¹⁶

Dividing congregants over musical style might temporarily solve issues of disagreement, but by definition reinforces the issue of division. Menconi describes the resulting situation of providing multiple services based on style as the creation of a “church-within-a-church” model of worship ministry.¹⁷ Some churches are forced to offer multiple services and times for corporate worship based upon insufficient space. However, when worshipers are divided based only on musical preference, unnecessary and undesirable consequences can follow.

Pastor and author Dan Kimball presents a compelling argument for the creation of “alternative worship gatherings.”¹⁸ He advocates for worship services built around the cultural expectations of younger generations of worshipers. Kimball shares genuine concern over potential issues caused by alternative services co-existing with more traditional services in a single location. Though he strongly defends this corporate worship

¹⁶Peter Menconi, *The Intergenerational Church: Understanding Congregations from WWII to WWW.com* (Littleton, CO: Mt. Sage Publishing, 2010), 176.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Dan Kimball, *Emerging Worship: Creating Worship Gatherings for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 15.

paradigm, he warns, “The reality is that thinking through new approaches to ministry, starting new forms of worship gatherings, and fitting them within an existing church can lead to power and control struggles as well as disagreements, heartache, pain, and tension.”¹⁹

Another well-intentioned attempt to appease congregants’ musical preferences is to offer what has become known as “blended worship.”²⁰ Blended worship is simply the combining of both traditional and contemporary musical elements into one service. Scheer concedes a “strong argument can be made that blended worship is a biblically and historically sound paradigm,” but the successful blend of such divergent elements “calls for great sensitivity and discernment.”²¹ Scheer voices critics’ complaints of blended worship characterizing it as a “buffet approach,” attempting only to “accommodate selfish and lazy worshipers, destroying the vigor and balance of historic worship traditions.”²² Scheer does recognize a positive aspect of blended services in that they give “worship both relevance to modern culture and roots in tradition.”²³

These are but a few examples of pastoral attempts to bridge cultural gaps in the musical preferences of congregations. Some worship alternatives have proven successful, but often even the most promising and well-conceived plans for enlarging worship opportunities ultimately fail to achieve the biblical mandate for mutually edifying worship.

¹⁹Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 16.

²⁰Blended worship, also known as “convergence,” is attributed to Robert Webber, who defines it as “both the old and the new, a worship that respects the traditions yet seeks to incorporate worship styles formed by the contemporary church.” He also calls this “worship old and new.” Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old and New*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 12.

²¹Greg Scheer, *The Art of Worship: A Musician’s Guide to Leading Modern Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 98.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

While advocating for musical diversity in Christian worship does encourage congregational choice in musical style, it is important to distinguish between an acceptance of musical alternatives based on cultural sensitivities and the arbitrary expectations of certain styles based on preferential demands.

Is there an alternative style of worship that does not divide the congregation down generational, cultural, preferential or theological boundaries? Are there other possible solutions pastors have not thoroughly investigated? Is musical preference the real issue or could it be only symptomatic of a deeper problem? Certainly, the priority of horizontal worship calls for sensitivity to the needs of worshipers, but in the pursuit of authentic biblical worship, do some responsibilities also belong to worshipers?

Worship alternatives will continue to provide the church options based upon musical preferences. But another solution might transcend preferential issues and lead the church toward a more biblical approach to authentic Christian worship. This solution requires the acceptance of musical pluralism as a cultural necessity. Musical diversity will have to be embraced by modern congregations as a methodological approach for fully engaging the peoples of the world with relevant expressions of worship. However, if there is to be an acceptance of musical pluralism in the church, there must be a coinciding strategy among pastors and worship leaders to help worshipers address the issue of preferential demands regarding musical tastes.

It is important at this point in the discussion of worship priorities to distinguish between issues of musical taste leading to subjective preferential demands, and theological convictions resulting from prayerful, scriptural reflection. Doxological scholars, such as Aniol and Johansson, have proffered arguments forged in the fires of spiritual meditation and thorough scriptural investigation. Though disagreement exists over their findings in the area of musical pluralism, their purpose and motivation is to be commended.

However, preferential demands of worshipers based upon musical tastes resulting in dissension and congregational discord cannot be justified nor disregarded.

Selfish and irresponsible demands that lead to bitterness and resentment in the church must be confronted. If the integrity of the horizontal priority of worship is to be maintained, then believers must embrace musical diversity and the more important issue of loving their fellow worshipers.

A Loving Approach to the Application of Musical Diversity in Christian Worship

Ultimately, differing tastes in musical style is only a superficial symptom of the deeper issue of the self-absorbed, self-centered, carnal human heart. If the church is going to make any headway in eradicating stylistic struggles in worship, it must address the core issue of preference-driven selfishness. Self-interest and the pursuit of personal happiness is common to all humanity. It is what drives people to claim certain rights and privileges that may be a part of the American dream but should not be expectations of the citizenry of God's kingdom. Pastor and author Mark Labberton asserts, "The most popular idol in our culture is the idol of self."²⁴ He further describes the thinking associated with the idolatrous self as more to do with "entitlement than arrogance and pride."²⁵ Reflecting one with this attitude he mimics, "I should get to feel, be and do what I want, when and how I want to do it."²⁶ The idol of self is the core issue the church must address. Frame brings clarity to the issue:

We should conclude that in music as in every other area we must seek to love one another, honoring the diversity of the body to protect its unity. As we have seen, diversity presents problems of musical communication. But we can now see that problem as at least in part a problem of love. When sophisticated members of the church insist that worship employ only the most sophisticated music of their own culture, what has happened to their love for those who are poorly educated or of a different culture stream? Or, from the opposite side of our musical wars: when

²⁴Mark Labberton, *The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God's Call to Justice* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 62.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

advocates of contemporaneity want to set traditions of the church completely aside and replace them with something largely meaningless to the older generation, are they acting in love?²⁷

Pastoral leaders should teach and preach the truths of God's Word urging Christians to "be devoted to one another in brotherly love" and honoring "one another above yourselves" (Rom 12:10). According to Witvliet, establishing a communal context where differences of opinion over musical style can be considered "requires tender, empathetic love as we take seriously the testimonies of fellow Christians about their own experiences of worship."²⁸ Unfortunately, musical tastes can be entrenched and hard to objectively debate. Gordon correctly notes, "Music is one of the most difficult things for Christians to discuss dispassionately . . . it is difficult for us to establish the philosophical distance necessary to evaluate it."²⁹

Everyone has preferences in musical styles. Having a favorite kind of music is not at issue in this discussion—the issue is the dogged insistence of some, that having their kind of music is essential for worship to be done correctly. As difficult as it may be, pastors should confront the selfish and unbiblical attitude that musical preference in worship is a normal and reasonable expectation of worshipers. Pastor and author Bryan Chapell argues, "Regard for Christ's purposes and love for his people must trump personal preferences."³⁰ Convincing scriptural exhortation should challenge the hope of personal satisfaction with the priority of love in congregational worship. Gentle but firm correction

²⁷John M. Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1997), 24-25.

²⁸John D. Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding: Windows into Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 272.

²⁹T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Sing Hymns: How Pop Culture Rewrote the Hymnal* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010), 39.

³⁰Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 122.

will help believers see that musical preferences are secondary to demonstrating love for others. Chapell continues, “Enthusiasm for worship is to be stimulated not simply by how well the music pleases one’s sensibilities but by the awe-inspiring recognition that my worship engages . . . the eternal soul of my neighbor.”³¹

When believers are challenged with the eternal implications of their attitudes and actions in worship, they will hopefully demonstrate more compassion and sensitivity toward the musical preferences of others. If Chapell is correct, and believers can have significant impact on meaningful connections of fellow worshipers, then this possibility should inspire mature believers to lay aside their own interests for the interests of others. This is the reason for Christ’s command to love others, and the essence of the horizontal priority of worship.

Mike Cospers, cultural commentator and founder/director of Harbor Media, underscores the importance of communal worship as an opportunity to encourage one another through difficult situations in life:

The gathering should be a place where believers are built up and encouraged in the midst of various trials and circumstances of their lives . . . when you sing you are “speaking the truth in love” to your church around you, and your bold confession of faith may be exactly what someone nearby needs to hear in the midst of his or her dark hours.³²

The opportunity for congregants to be an encouragement to other believers is much more important and satisfying than the fleeting personal pleasure found in a preferred style of music. As believers “speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs,” the effectiveness of this sung speech is contingent upon its intelligibility within the particular cultural context (Eph 5:19). Believers willing to lay aside personal preferences in deference to the needs of others demonstrate the loving attitude necessary to combat

³¹Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 76.

³²Cospers, *Rhythms of Grace*, 85.

struggles over musical diversity in the church's worship. Frame suggests, "We must constantly search our hearts for evidence of selfishness . . . seeking [instead] to honor the preferences of others."

Addressing the inevitability of cultural adjustment in Christian worship, John Calvin counseled, "Love will best judge what may hurt or edify; and if we let love be our guide, all will be safe."³³ If the root problem of the conflict over musical diversity in Christian worship is the selfishness in the hearts of some, then believers must commit to a change of heart. For love to prevail in dialogues over musical differences in worship, Christians will have to choose the biblical mandate of fellowship over a cultural appetite for individual rights.

Musical Pluralism Calls for Discernment

When love prevails and the people begin to repent of self-centeredness, choosing instead to defer to the needs of others, openness to musical diversity and the potential for authentic worship is enhanced. The stasis and inflexibility of worship environments characterized by musical boundaries will be energized by a new vibrancy and enthusiasm moving the church to greater freedom in Christ. Worshipers will enjoy a new freedom from preferential expectations of those who would prohibit cultural sensitivities from influencing the use of multiple styles of music in Christian worship.

As positive changes in congregants' attitudes begin to surface and new opportunities for broadening the musical diversity of the worship repertoire emerge, how will pastors and worship leaders manage the holy process of choosing songs for worship? How will those in charge of selecting worship repertoire, asks Scheer, ensure the scriptural

³³John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* [1559], ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20-21 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960), 4.10.30, quoted in Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, 272.

integrity of words placed on the “tongues of the people” that ultimately “works its way down to the soul?”³⁴

Constance Cherry explains the importance of song selection as “one of the most significant things worship architects do because they are shaping their congregation’s theology by the texts they select. . . . Worship architects hold tremendous power in determining what their congregants will come to believe.”³⁵ Debra and Ron Reinstra agree: “Leaders who choose music have an enormous responsibility. They are not only providing words with which members of the congregation express themselves to God, they are also forming the congregation’s spirituality in powerful ways.”³⁶ The task of choosing substantive worship repertoire calls for a pastoral heart. Pastors and worship leaders must pursue only the best songs which not only fit their particular cultural setting, but articulate biblical truth formative to the congregation’s beliefs about God. This aspect of pastoral ministry calls for a heart of discernment.

Vine’s biblical definition of discernment is the ability “to distinguish, or separate out so as to investigate . . . to examine, scrutinize, question.”³⁷ Witvliet offers a more practical explanation:

Discernment helps us learn to tell the difference between evangelistic zeal and personal aggrandizement, between aesthetic critiques that are spiritually astute and

³⁴Scheer, *The Art of Worship*, 55.

³⁵Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 182.

³⁶Debra Rienstra and Ron Rienstra, *Worship Words: Discipling Language for Faithful Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 89.

³⁷W. E. Vine, *The Expanded Vines: Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, ed. John R. Kohlenberger (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1984), 306.

those that are simply pretentious, between theological arguments that truly defend the gospel and those used to protect somebody's turf.³⁸

Specifically pertaining to this discussion, discernment is an essential quality for pastors and worship leaders to discover God's will in the selection of songs for worship. Assuming worship leaders have experienced a sense of calling to ministry and have come to the position of worship leadership with sufficient preparation musically and theologically, spiritual discernment is the necessary ingredient for the selection of biblically-based musical texts for worship. Wisdom and discernment are the qualities that distinguish pastoral worship leaders from church musicians. Cherry uses the term "pastoral musician" in describing the role of worship leader.³⁹ She submits,

A pastoral musician is a leader with developed skill and God-given responsibility for selecting and employing music in worship that will serve the actions of the liturgy, while reflecting on theological, contextual, and cultural considerations, all for the ultimate purpose of glorifying God.⁴⁰

Bob Kauflin summarizes the expectations for an effective pastoral musician:

"To reach, train, and encourage God's people in praising him rightly and living for his glory . . . in that sense [following] in the footsteps of Old Testament Levites."⁴¹

Specifically, Kauflin challenges worship leaders to help their people "see through the eyes of faith how great God has actually revealed himself to be."⁴² In selecting songs for worship, Kauflin cautions,

³⁸Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, 178.

³⁹Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 180.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 62. Old Testament Levites were priests appointed from the tribe of Levi to mediate the worship of God for the Israelites. They were to oversee the worship activities of the Tabernacle and later the Temple. A brief description and list of responsibilities can be found in Num 1:47-54.

⁴²Ibid., 54.

If our songs aren't specific about God's nature, character, and acts, we'll tend to associate worship with a style of music, a heightened emotional state, a type of architecture, a day of the week, a meeting, a reverent mood, a time of singing, or a sound. We'll think of all the things that accompany worship rather than the One we're worshipping. Worse, we'll create our own views of God, portraying him as we like to think of him.⁴³

Discernment is the answer for ensuring that worship expressions are biblically sound and culturally intelligible. Cultural engagement is an area where wisdom and discernment are needed in terms of communicating the gospel in modern Christian worship. Choosing culturally-appropriate music is key for effective engagement.

Cherry suggests steps for evaluating music for Christian worship: "Each song to be considered for Christian worship should be evaluated in at least three areas: theological strength, lyrical strength, and musical strength."⁴⁴ Worship leaders must evaluate each song text for its doctrinal integrity. They must scrutinize each text for clarity of biblical truth, its depiction of a correct view of God, and declaration of significant doctrinal principles in culturally intelligible terms. This is not an easy task but one that must be assumed by serious-minded, God-called worship leaders.

In considering context, Cherry questions,

Does the text speak to the experience of our congregation? Is this a song our congregation can sing well? Does it represent the perspective of my worshipping community? Can my people relate to the imagery, metaphors, ideas, and so forth, that are employed? Is it inclusive to all groups in my congregation?⁴⁵

Cherry quotes Westermeyer speaking to the responsibility of worship leaders to commit to "sense the capacities and resources of a particular people, then write and choose music that expresses the praise of God with those particular capacities and resources."⁴⁶ Worship leaders have a duty to carefully examine potential worship

⁴³Kauflin, *Worship Matters*, 62.

⁴⁴Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 183.

⁴⁵Ibid., 186.

⁴⁶Paul Westermeyer, *The Heart of the Matter: Church Music as Praise, Prayer, Proclamation, Story, an Gift* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2001), 18, quoted in

repertoire in terms of content and expressive tendencies that speak clearly to the congregation's cultural capacities.

Discernment is also needed to identify those songs that would prove most useful in a particular congregational context. In identifying the usefulness of songs to specific worship contexts, functionality must be seen as a basic component in the musical planning and execution of Christian worship. Art created purely for aesthetic appreciation has no responsibility to demonstrate inherent value or usefulness. However, art created for use in the church's kingdom work must adhere to a certain degree of functionality. Best asserts, "In all contexts of worship, art and music can have no higher role than to function—to be at work—within the liturgy."⁴⁷ This kind of liturgical art is not art for art's sake, but art that provides expressive offerings for the people of God to voice their praise to God in Christian worship. Discerning worship leaders must see it as functional art.

Once again, Frame brings balance and clarity to the discussion:

I certainly oppose any pragmatism that begins in the fear of man rather than the fear of the Lord. But once we believe God's word, we have illumination to see what works and does not work in God's world . . . on ultimate matters, we should not be pragmatists. But in matters of specific application, in which God has given us freedom to choose among alternatives, we should choose what works.⁴⁸

Frame is not alone in his pragmatic approach to adopting those cultural expressions that "work in God's world." Kauflin notes, "Music functions in worshipping God . . . music isn't an end in itself but rather a means of expressing the worship already present in our hearts."⁴⁹ Musical expressions must function in such a way as to provide worshipers appropriate and understandable communication by which to offer their worship

Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 186.

⁴⁷Harold M. Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 28.

⁴⁸Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music*, 73.

⁴⁹Kauflin, *Worship Matters*, 30.

to God. Witvliet cautions worship leaders to reflect upon a “functional understanding of music in worship.”⁵⁰ He believes that music intended for worship “finds its highest purpose in the enactment of the liturgy,” and that “the primary criterion for liturgical music is whether it serves or enables liturgical action.”⁵¹

Embracing the concept of musical functionality in worship dissuades temptations to assume that certain kinds of music have inherent abilities to bring about genuine worship. Worship leaders must continually oppose the notion that genuine engagement with God is something that can be mediated by a particular style of music. Again, music is not an end in itself, not even the mediator, but simply a means of offering worship to God. Cherry explains,

Music may be viewed as a means of providing an emotional environment so that individuals are more likely to feel a certain way and respond favorably to the goal of the sermon; or music may be viewed as entertainment so that a church can attract persons who are unfamiliar with Christianity . . . to think of music as a tool for these or other purposes is to misunderstand music as a true element of worship . . . instead we must think of music as providing a legitimate voice for communication throughout the service as it performs its liturgical function in the community’s conversation with God.⁵²

Discernment will transcend the demands for certain tastes and individual stylistic proclivities moving worship song choices to a higher level of examination and discussion. The selection of songs for Christian worship cannot rest entirely upon what the people want in terms of form, it must be elevated to a work of spiritual discernment identifying particular songs that best suit the needs of the entire congregation. Platinga and Rozeboom summarize, “We need spiritual discernment to judge what’s fitting for Christian worship.”⁵³ A brief synthesis of biblical priorities and historical verification

⁵⁰Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, 240.

⁵¹Ibid., 239.

⁵²Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 191.

⁵³Cornelius Platinga, Jr., and Sue A. Rozeboom, *Discerning the Spirits: A Guide to Thinking about Christian Worship Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 51.

will provide the foundation upon which the culminating charge to pastors and leaders will be articulated.

Synthesizing Biblical and Historical Evidence as a Foundation to Musical Diversity

David Peterson defines authentic worship as an “engagement with [God] on the terms that he proposes and in the way that he alone makes possible.”⁵⁴ Peterson affirms there are biblical mandates for proper worship. However, musical style does not fall into the area of scripturally-mandated considerations for worship. The Bible does not delineate a particular kind of musical style that is acceptable in the worship of God, nor does Scripture condemn any particular musical style as inappropriate for the worship of God. Scripture simply does not speak to musical style. David Pass maintains, “There is no style of music which is distinctively ‘biblical.’ The Old Testament is indifferent to such matters. The Old Testament, in other words, is more interested in the music maker than the style of music made.”⁵⁵ Platinga echoes the scarcity of biblical specificity in stating, “The New Testament hardly provides a prescription for what must take place in worship, in what order, or in what manner.”⁵⁶

While refraining from specific details related to musical style, the New Testament does, however, indicate the presence of musical diversity in worship. As

⁵⁴Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 20.

⁵⁵David B. Pass, *Music and the Church: A Theology of Church Music* (Nashville: Broadman, 1989), 34.

⁵⁶Platinga and Rozeboom, *Discerning the Spirits*, 61. Some Reformed leaders might view Platinga’s statement as potentially contradictory to the Regulative Principle of New Testament worship. However, the context of Platinga’s statement deals not with the biblically prescribed elements of worship but the stylistic nature of the elements. Dever views adherence to the Regulative Principle as including only those things that are “clearly warranted by scripture” by “employing a variety of musical styles so that people’s musical tastes broaden over time with wider exposure to different musical genres and time periods.” Mark Dever, *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 81-84.

mentioned in chapter 2, Paul's letters to the churches at Ephesus and Colossae contain passages calling for the singing of "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). Though scholars differ as to the exact meaning of the three terms, Hustad maintains Paul was referring to a "broad expression of congregational music" in these parallel passages.⁵⁷

The story of Pentecost in Acts 2 provides a biblical example of God's willingness to embrace cultural diversity in the proclamation of the gospel. Barry Liesch makes a connection between the multiplicity of languages represented in this passage and the multiplicity of musical styles used in modern worship. He believes that "musical style is tied to language."⁵⁸ The significance of the gospel being preached in many languages implies the necessity of the gospel to be sung in many different cultural expressions.

Scripture itself is a prime example of God's determination to reveal the gospel message in familiar, popular idioms. The New Testament was written in what is known as koine Greek.⁵⁹ Koine Greek was believed to be the informal dialect of the Greco-Roman world during the time of Jesus. It was the language of the people. Eugene Peterson describes the language of the New Testament as "writing . . . that [was] done in the street language of the day, the idiom of the playground and marketplace."⁶⁰ Peterson further depicts the vocabulary of the New Testament not as "a refined language that appeals to

⁵⁷Donald P. Hustad, *True Worship: Reclaiming the Wonder and Majesty* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing, 1998), 223.

⁵⁸Liesch, *The New Worship*, 180.

⁵⁹Koine Greek, or "common" Greek was the dominant Greek dialect of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. David Noel Freedman, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 532.

⁶⁰Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 1327.

our aspirations after the best but a rough and earthy language that reveals God's presence and action where we least expect it."⁶¹

The simplicity of the language of Scripture makes its message accessible to everyone. The fact that God would use the most popular idiom of the day to speak to humanity implies a divine openness to a diversity of musical expressions aptly suited to the native tongues of early believers. Purposefully using the popular vocabulary of the day, God attached the gospel message to the language of the empire. Platinga explains that the words of Jesus "were recorded in Greek, not, apparently, because Greek was an inherently superior language, but because it was the broadband signal of the Greco-Roman world."⁶²

God used the most common and widely understood language to propel the message of salvation into the world. Apparently God was not concerned about social convention or impressing the religious elite. Paul seems to address this divine preference for simplicity in 1 Corinthians 1:27-28: "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are."

Should God's desire to take what the world considers foolish, weak, and lowly and, through them accomplish his divine mission, lead one to believe that even the crudest and most unsophisticated musical expression might be perfectly acceptable in Christian worship? Though Scripture provides little to no guidance on the subject of musical style, it does speak to the issues of considering "others better than yourselves" and the importance of bearing "with the failings of the weak," seeking to "please [your] neighbor for his good, to build him up" (Phil 2:3; Rom 15:1-2). These scriptural principles drive

⁶¹Peterson, *The Message*, 1328.

⁶²Platinga and Rozeboom, *Discerning the Spirits*, 52.

home the value God places upon laying aside the expectation of personal satisfaction in worship music.

Historical evidence for diversity in musical styles was demonstrated in chapter 3. The tradition of early church unison singing evolved into the Ambrosian antiphonal chant with strophic harmonies indicative of the secular music of the day.⁶³ The *Schola Cantorum* of Pope Gregory the Great and the standardization of chant was eventually improved upon by the parallel 5ths and 4ths of *organum*.⁶⁴ And the singable hymns of the *lauda spirituali*, familiar refrains derived from popular song, became the prototype for the congregational music of the reformation.⁶⁵

After 300 years, the Sternhold and Hopkins psalm collection would become the “Old Version,” systematically replaced by the “Tate and Brady.”⁶⁶ The strict psalmody of Calvin would capitulate to the inventive nuance of Watts and his unique ability to translate the Old Testament Psalms with New Testament theology in contemporary language.⁶⁷ John and Charles Wesley renovated the technique of Watts into “an ideal popular vehicle for Christian devotion, renewal, evangelism and theological teaching.”⁶⁸ And the revivalist hymns of the nineteenth century influenced by Charles Finney emphasized “freedom and innovation over tradition.”⁶⁹

⁶³Harry Eskew and Hugh T. McElrath, *Sing with Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Hymnology*, 2nd rev. and expanded ed. (Nashville: Church Street, 1995), 86.

⁶⁴Paul Westermeyer, *Te Deum: The Church and Music* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 118.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 136.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 170-71.

⁶⁷Tim Dowley, *Christian Music: A Global History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 115-16.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 117.

⁶⁹Robb Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening: Singing a New Song in the*

The emergence of the Pentecostal Holiness movement at the beginning of the twentieth century sparked another revolution in musical innovation encouraging the use of the “musical idiom of popular culture to present the gospel.”⁷⁰ The 1960s and 1970s witnessed the introduction of the Jesus movement and the Charismatic renewal movement,⁷¹ influencing mainline protestant churches to ultimately adopt a form of the popular music used by Charismatics. The specialized style of pop/rock music used in many evangelical churches became known as “praise and worship music.”⁷²

Historical evidence points to the sequential rise and fall of musical traditions. When a conventional musical style begins to lose its popularity and innovative styles emerge, people who prefer the traditional style protest. Replacement of the old with the new can cause feelings of resentment and disconnection among generational factions. This is why it is so important for Christians to seek speedy and peaceful resolutions for the issues of musical diversity in worship. Relational aspects of Christianity are essential in promoting and furthering the kingdom of God.

A Pastoral Charge for Musical Diversity in Corporate Worship

The purpose of this research has been to identify and clarify the importance of the church embracing multiple musical styles in an ever-expanding worship language. Thus far, this chapter has provided priorities for worship, possible solutions to the acceptance of musical diversity in Christian worship, a call for pastoral discernment in the selection of worship repertoire, and a recap of biblical and historical precedent justifying multiple styles of music in worship.

Postmodern Church (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 8.

⁷⁰Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 123.

⁷¹Ibid., 127.

⁷²Liesch, *The New Worship*, 53.

Finally, a pastoral charge for musical diversity in Christian worship will be offered based upon Romans 14. In this passage, Paul outlines his plan for unity in the church in his discussion of the resolution of relational tensions between Jewish and Gentile converts. Though the central issue of Paul's discussion in this chapter relates to dietary preference, biblical principles established in this passage generate significant implications for the discussion of musical diversity in corporate worship.

Beginning in Romans 12, Paul brings application of God's gracious gift of salvation to specific areas of Christian living and relationships. In chapter 14, Paul narrows his discussion to the particular issue of eating meat. Jewish converts to Christianity, still adhering to Jewish dietary restrictions, found fault with Hellenistic/Gentile converts who felt no conscientious need to refrain from the eating of any kind of meat. Paul identifies this controversy as a threat to the unity of the church and takes aim at finding a resolution.

Paul quickly characterizes the issue at hand as one involving "disputable matters," minimizing the problem to one of preference instead of doctrine (Rom 14:1). Tim Keller comments on the confusion among early believers: "Some of the church members cannot distinguish between matters of basic principle and of individual preference."⁷³ Commentators Everett Harrison and Donald Hagner translate "disputable matters" as "getting into quarrels about opinions."⁷⁴ Since the issue did not reach the level of doctrinal controversy, Paul finds no need for dogmatic correction but for relational understanding. He identifies the "weak" and the "strong" as rivaling factions and immediately admonishes both parties against judgmental attitudes (Rom 14:1, 15:1).⁷⁵

⁷³Timothy Keller, *Romans 8-16 for You* (Purcellville, VA: Good Book, 2015), 145.

⁷⁴Everett F. Harrison and Donald A. Hagner, *Romans*, in vol. 11 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 205.

⁷⁵Kruse explains, "The most widely accepted view . . . is that the 'weak' are Jewish Christians who practiced essentially Jewish customs, and the 'strong' were mainly

The phrase “faith is weak” seems pejorative, but according to Kruse, “to be ‘weak in faith’ in this context does not denote some lack in fundamental Christian belief, but it is equivalent to being troubled in conscience.”⁷⁶ Paul is not questioning the salvation of the “weak,” but rather denoting their lack of understanding of the freedom they have in Christ from previous ritualistic requirements. He is, in fact, directing those who are “strong” to accept those still struggling with an inability to accept the full measure of their liberation from the Law.

In essence, Paul is speaking to believers who are at different places in their faith journey. Because the issue is not over doctrinal purity, Paul is not demanding unanimity in agreement, but only mutual respect and a willingness to accept each other despite differing opinions. Harrison and Hagner concur, “There is, therefore, no need for a common mind here, but only an attitude of tolerance and a nonjudgmental spirit.”⁷⁷ Essentially, there is no heretical deception to rebuke, but only a relational dispute to repair. Paul is telling believers in the Roman church, despite their differences in religious practice and cultural backgrounds, to accept each other in Christian love.

Liesch reflects, “Paul looks evenhandedly at both the ‘weak’ and the ‘strong’ in disputable matters, attempting to avoid attitudes of snobbery and exclusivity.”⁷⁸ In Romans 14, Paul establishes a biblical mandate for Christians to lay aside “disputable matters,” things that do not involve biblical essentials of faith, and find ways to not just tolerate, but joyfully welcome others of differing opinions into warm fellowship.

Gentile Christians who felt no obligation to practice these customs.” Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 510.

⁷⁶Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, 511.

⁷⁷Harrison and Hagner, *Romans*, 205.

⁷⁸Liesch, *The New Worship*, 191.

Differences in musical tastes can often become areas of conflict among Christian worshipers. Romans 14 would seem to suggest a solution to the contentious debate over which kind of music is most appropriate for worship.

Though Paul would undoubtedly count himself among the “strong” in his Romans 14 discourse, he demands more from this contingent than from the “weak.”⁷⁹ He warns the “weak” not to “condemn” those who are free in their conscience to eat anything (v. 3). However, he emphasizes the necessity of those who are “strong” to “make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way” (v. 13). In verse 15 Paul cautions, “If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love.”

Paul is placing the greater responsibility upon the “strong” to defer to the needs of the weaker brother as an act of Christian love. It is imperative for those who are secure in their freedom in Christ to be willing to adjust attitudes, behaviors, and reasonable pursuits that might cause the weaker Christian to stumble. Schreiner concurs, “The ‘strong’ should not contribute to the destruction of the ‘weak’ since this would violate the principle of love.”⁸⁰ The “strong” are obviously considered by Paul to have the greater obligation in removing potential obstacles that might hinder the spiritual maturity of the “weak.” However, the “weak” do bear some responsibility in this relational tension.

Condemnation and judgment from those who believe they stand on a higher plain of ethical and religious piety, betray attitudes of pride and self-righteousness. Often, with the purest of intentions, “weaker” brothers place unnecessary religious baggage on themselves and others in dutiful service resulting in passionless, lifeless outcomes. Keller views “the ‘weak’ [as] any Christians who tend to promote and regard non-essential

⁷⁹Schreiner, *Romans*, 730, concedes, “In principle [Paul] obviously sides with the ‘strong.’”

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 727.

cultural and ceremonial customs as being critical for Christian maturity and effectiveness.”⁸¹ He hypothesizes,

For example, the older generation in a particular church might feel very superior to the younger folk who like contemporary music in their worship. They do not deny that the younger people are Christians, but they could claim their music displeases and offends the Lord simply because it displeases and offends them. Thus they have taken an issue of taste, custom or culture and elevated it to an abiding, transcultural mark of spiritual maturity.⁸²

When Christians place the unnecessary burdens of traditionalism and religious regulations on each other, the freedom Christ died to provide is greatly repressed and often devastated. The scenario above paints a dismal picture of the possibility for well-intentioned but extremely misguided believers to smother the creative potential for inter-generational worship renewal in the church. Rather than criticize and reject innovation, Paul’s admonition for traditionalists is to acknowledge the divine source of contemporary expressions of worship and view them as authentic offerings of thankfulness to God (Rom 14:6).⁸³

Conversely, liberated believers—those who have successfully cast off the restraints of religiosity—should wisely consider the affect their free exercise of faith is having on the conscientious and sensitive scruples of fellow believers. Paul cautions the “strong” to use their freedom in light of their accountability to God and commitment to the spiritual maturity of fellow believers (Rom 14:15-19). Harrison and Hagner comment on Paul’s apparent juxtaposition of responsibilities, clarifying, “Now the appeal is not to liberty but to love, which may call for a measure of sacrifice.”⁸⁴

⁸¹Keller, *Romans 8-16 for You*, 148.

⁸²Ibid., 149.

⁸³Schreiner, *Romans*, 720, clarifies, “What matters to Paul, since no absolute moral norm is involved in the issues at hand, are not specific behaviors practiced but the motivation that informs the behavior.”

⁸⁴Harrison and Hagner, *Romans*, 209.

The essence of Paul's argument is not to solicit pity from the "strong" for the "weak," somehow fueling a sympathetic condescension among believers, but to call for a spirit of unity that causes both sides to reject judgmental and contemptuous attitudes toward the other. Romans 14:19 summarizes Paul's expectation for both groups: "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification."

This summation dismisses both the condemning judgment of the "weak" and the scornful contempt of the "strong," calling instead for a mutual submission to the building up of each other to the glory of God. Ultimately, Christian faith and practice should be characterized by followers who embody Christ's commandments to love God and love others. The principle of mutual submission among Christians is mandated by Paul in Ephesians 5:21: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

And again, with slightly different language, Philippians 2:3-4 says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

The pursuit of peace and mutual edification among believers should exemplify personal and corporate relationships in the church. Paul extends his discussion of expectations on relational interaction among believers in Romans 15, emphasizing the priority of "[bearing] with the failings" of fellow believers "not to please ourselves," but instead, "to build [them] up" (vv. 1-2). Paul consummates his argument for interpersonal unity in the church with a reference to corporate worship: "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give 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" (vv. 5-6).

As mentioned, Paul's discussion in Romans 14 is specifically about meat, special days, and the consumption of wine. However, possible implications for the accommodation of musical diversity in corporate worship exist. The larger scope of Paul's

discussion involves the recognition of “disputable matters,” or issues of opinion and preference, and the determination of believers to find mutually beneficial ways to resolve such issues.

Musical style does not rise to the level of doctrinal import. Musical choices for worship fall into the category of “disputable matters.” Therefore, Christians must learn to co-exist in stylistically diverse corporate worship environments, seeking “what leads to peace and to mutual edification” with fellow believers (Rom 14:19). Differences in musical taste are unavoidable realities of human nature. Liking certain kinds of music more than others is normal and acceptable. It is when expectations for personal preferences become demands, that problems of disunity begin to arise.

The pastoral charge of this thesis, while acknowledging the lingering presence of resistance to musical diversity in Christian worship, calls for a renewed commitment among pastors and worship leaders to lay aside disputes and disagreements over style, uniting in a mutual determination to identify relational areas of accord and seek the glory of God in unified Christian worship. My prayerful hope is that Christian leaders, both pastors and academicians, might find a peaceful resolution to their differences over musical styles in worship.

To borrow a familiar colloquialism, it might require a willingness to agree to disagree. Would not a compromise in the application of multiple styles of music in worship be better than the continuation of damaged relationships, or worse, loss of fellowship? Stiffened rejection must move toward tolerant recognition, eventually evolving into a welcoming acceptance of each other’s music, thus demonstrating a love for God that manifests itself in mutual deference. Douglass Moo effectively summarizes Paul’s admonition in Romans 14 and 15:

For the Christian, like the Christ he or she follows, should not be seeking to please him—or herself, but others (15:2-3). That same Christ is their Lord, who demands that those who belong to his kingdom “walk in love” (14:15), pursue peace with

others (14:17,19), and do everything they can to “build up” their fellow disciples (14:17,19).⁸⁵

Conclusion

David Wells offers a unique perspective on the discussion of musical pluralism in modern Christian worship:

Our worship wars, which are almost wholly music wars, are really obscuring the larger issues that are in play. These lie below the surface. They are more in the content of our worship and less in the outward forms. The most fundamental of these issues is whether the focus will be on the triune God or on our experience of ourselves as worshipers, whether our worship will be God-centered or needs-driven.⁸⁶

Wells drives the discussion to a higher level and deals with deeper motivations than mere stylistic preferences and musical tastes. While the presence of musical pluralism—the use of multiple styles of music in Christian worship—is central to this thesis, preeminently important is a commitment to glorify and honor God above all else.

The worship of God does not happen in a vacuum but in the cultural reality of planet earth in which human beings, by God’s grace, are able to respond to God’s revelation of himself. Worship has always been a rather messy affair, fraught with human failures and idolatrous tendencies. Yet, through it all God has remained steadfast in his loving posture toward his creation. His provision has always been the source of divine/human engagement, ultimately costing him his own Son, Jesus Christ, who became the final sacrifice for sin (Heb 9:12).

And now, as Best says, followers of Christ are called to be “living sacrifices” (Rom 12:1) “living continuously in love toward God, toward other people and toward oneself in a richly fitted vocabulary of work, service and obedience, knowing that with

⁸⁵Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 882.

⁸⁶David F. Wells, *God in the Whirlwind: How the Holy-Love of God Reorients Our World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 190.

such sacrifices God is pleased.”⁸⁷ The words “living sacrifice” provide an apt closure to this discussion, for the attitude tied up in this phrase is precisely the attitude needed to accomplish the task of bringing the church together in a sort of unified diversity, able to offer mutually edifying worship to God.

When Christian worshipers can fully embrace the priorities of worship, God first and then others, and truly see themselves as living sacrifices, committed to placing the needs of others above themselves, “music wars”⁸⁸ will greatly diminish. The fuel of self-centeredness and intellectual arrogance will be discarded and replaced with a spirit of brokenness and humility, inspiring believers to consider others and their desires more important than gratifying the idol of self. These things will happen when worship, and all the accoutrements associated with it, more accurately reflects genuine Christ-centeredness.

To center worship on Christ is to focus hearts and minds on the provisional source of worship. Without the work of Christ, there can be no divine connection in worship. According to Chapell, “Christo-centrality commits us to honor Father, Son and Holy Spirit by worshiping them in the context of the redeeming work that culminates in Christ.”⁸⁹ It is only by the blood of Jesus Christ that believers gain access to the Father (Heb 10:19-20; Eph 2:13). This gospel reality must be retold each week in corporate worship. Chapell clarifies, “We make our worship Christ-centered by shaping it to help God’s people understand and appreciate the grace in all scripture that culminates in their Savior’s ministry.”⁹⁰

Grateful hearts provide fertile soil for kindness and hospitality toward others. This was Paul’s reasoning in Romans 12:1: “I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy,

⁸⁷Best, *Unceasing Worship*, 42.

⁸⁸“Music wars” refers to Wells’ quote.

⁸⁹Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 114.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 115.

offer your bodies a living sacrifice.” Paul is urging believers to consider the great mercy of God as motive to love others sacrificially. This is appropriate motivation for modern worshipers to forsake self-serving thoughts and behaviors and consider how they might serve others. Worship leaders must help their people refocus their minds and hearts, primarily on Christ. As Christians are able to shift the focus from themselves to Jesus Christ (and others), they will experience the reality of the one who brings them real and lasting satisfaction and fulfillment.

An acceptance of musical pluralism will help modern churches as they seek to offer a balanced stylistic approach to corporate worship. Stylistic diversity is necessary to provide culturally appropriate choices for the expression of modern worship. It is unfortunate that some have decided to place more significance on music than it rightly deserves. Best emphasizes,

How perplexing to think of the burden we have placed on music, this fleeting human construct! The problem is not with any one style but with the reluctance of people to rub up against a multiplicity of styles, for it is the rubbing—the creative friction—that could bring about the stylistic syntheses that the body of Christ so desperately needs.⁹¹

Music has no intrinsic ability to communicate ideas or, more specifically, propositional truth. Musical idioms of all cultures simply provide people a resource by which to offer their praises to God.

This thesis attempted to provide a biblical exegesis of key New Testament passages that show clear and compelling scriptural evidence for the presence and acceptance of musical diversity in Christian worship. Furthermore, a thorough investigation of historical aspects of Christian worship reveals a continual cycle of resistance to new forms of music, preferring traditions over innovation. This recurring cycle begins with initial rejection of new forms, but ultimately results in an acceptance of a modified modernization of the old, eventually becoming the new “tradition.”

⁹¹Best, *Unceasing Worship*, 75.

Robust engagement with contemporary voices within the field of modern worship has identified specific areas of disagreement over the use of multiple styles of music in Christian worship. Much of this disagreement stems from an assumption of the presence of biblical evidence leading to a determination of acceptable aesthetic forms (i.e., music forms) found in Scripture. This thesis finds such an assumption difficult to objectively verify, and more of a subjective interpretation by those who maintain it.

As a result, this thesis holds to its original premise that the church must embrace the practice of musical pluralism by including multiple styles of music in Christian worship. In addition, Christian worshipers must adopt a biblical view of mutual edification, acknowledging its significance and essentiality to worship, which will manifest itself in a spirit of unselfish deference to others.

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ABSTRACT

SERVING THE BODY OF CHRIST IN CORPORATE WORSHIP: AN APOLOGETIC FOR EMBRACING MULTIPLE STYLES OF MUSIC

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Contrary to exclusionist views on worship, the church must embrace the practice of musical pluralism by including multiple styles of music in Christian worship. The adoption of a biblical view of mutual edification and ecclesiastical unity will provide motivation for the resolution of this issue. Chapter 1 introduces the concept of musical pluralism as an acceptance of different musical styles in Christian worship. In chapter 2, a biblical exegesis of key passages deals with the Old and New Testament directives toward forms in worship and Paul's insistence upon an attitude of inclusion and mutual edification will be explained. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the change and transformation that has occurred in Christian worship since the beginning of the New Testament church. Chapter 4 includes a discussion from opposing sides of this issue including arguments from authors with an "elitist" view of acceptable musical styles contrasted with positions of those who hold to a more open, multi-cultural application of musical styles in the Christian Church. Chapter 5 presents a critical analysis of contemporary worship music providing an objective examination of potential cultural entanglements that weaken the integrity of Christian worship. Finally, chapter 6 presents a pastoral charge for the presence of musical diversity in worship.

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