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Book reviews for the journal should be between 700 and 900 words and should be submitted to the Editor.

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Editorial

SONGS THAT SHAPE US

Joshua A. Waggener¹

The issue of spiritual formation in Christian worship continues as a persistent topic in evangelical scholarship, as well as a critical question for local church worship ministry.² Theologically, the issue can be articulated in questions such as:

- For those “called according to [God’s] purpose” (Rom 8:28) to be glorified with Christ (Rom 8:17, 30), how can Christian worship help to conform them “to the image of [God’s] Son” (Rom 8:29)?
- How might Christian worship play a part in a believer being “transformed by the renewal of [his] mind” (Rom 12:2)?
- As a congregation, how might we “[behold] the glory of the Lord” and be “transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor 3:18)?

Practically speaking, many in worship ministry are caught up searching for the preferred local music style of expressing praise to God. Many a “worship war” has been fought over such preferences. The declared “winners” of such battles are those whose preferences, in the end, determine the instrumentation, arrangements, and song choices for public worship.

Still others emphasize the aesthetic quality of a worship experience, celebrating established forms of church music that represent the best of the Christian tradition, or achieving a level of production quality that meets professional standards. While musical excellence (carefully defined) remains a worthy goal, ministries who make it their exclusive objective may

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²Recent examples include Steven D. Brooks, *Worship Formation: A Call to Embrace Christian Growth in Each Element of the Worship Service* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2020); Rory Noland, *Transforming Worship: Planning and Leading Sunday Services as If Spiritual Formation Mattered* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2021); James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, vol. 2 of *Cultural Liturgies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013).

miss the formative potential of simply singing to one another, according to biblical principles (e.g., Eph 5:19, Col 3:16).

Others focus on the lyrics of our congregational singing, recognizing that what we sing in worship, we tend to believe—*lex orandi, lex credendi*. Indeed, the formative power of sung lyrical theology should not be overlooked or underestimated. But, have the endless arguments over particularities of song lyrics led to a level of Christian maturity that reflects the image of Christ?

This issue of the *Artistic Theologian* explores the formative power of Christian song, from biblical times to today, as well as more holistic aspects of corporate worship. First, Jordan Covarelli's article on the Lukan canticles finds that the songs of Zechariah, Mary, the angels, and Simeon recorded in Luke's Gospel serve to instruct as well as shape the identity of his audience of readers. Second, David Music's account of the increasingly hostile "Epistolary War" between the famous hymn writer Isaac Watts and his eighteenth-century contemporary Thomas Bradbury recognizes, in the end, the profound impact of Watts's lyrics over the past 300 years (despite intense criticisms). Third, Braden McKinley's essay evaluates confession of sin (or lack thereof) in the lyrics of Contemporary Worship Music, advocating for the importance of this practice for the sanctification of believers. Finally, Benjamin Snoek's article acknowledges both the formative *and expressive* power of Christian singing, but argues for the more powerful impact of balanced liturgies involving multiple worship elements. For Christian worship to accomplish its purpose, more than music matters.

As you consider the issue of spiritual formation in worship for yourself, we hope that this issue of the *Artistic Theologian* will help you pursue worship that is biblically faithful, musically excellent, and ministry focused. Also, we welcome article and book review submissions for our next volume. The deadline for submission is October 1, 2023.

IDENTITY FORMATION THROUGH THE LUKAN CANTICLES: Nativity Songs in the Heritage of Hebrew Inset Psalms

Jordan Covarelli¹

Luke has long been regarded as the artist of the New Testament.² Many scholars in the last century have written about the masterful literary craftsmanship in his two-volume work of Luke-Acts; however, few have written about the songs of praise he includes in the beginning of his Gospel. This is despite the fact that congregations around the world have read these narratives and sung these canticles throughout the last two millennia. Christian scholars and pastors have recently begun to ask why Luke preserved these stories the way he did, thereby recovering the theological value of Scripture's artistic forms. Among other efforts, biblical scholars like Robert Tannehill, Kindelee Pfremmer De Long, and I. Howard Marshall use narrative criticism to examine the aesthetic power and purpose that Scripture's narrative artform plays in biblical authority and Christian formation.³ Scholars like Kevin Vanhoozer and Abraham

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²Primarily because of Luke's exceptional literary artistry, the Orthodox church named him the patron saint of iconographers. For more information about this and other attributions to Luke's literary artistry, see Rebecca Raynor, "The Shaping of an Icon: St Luke, the Artist," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 39, no. 2 (2015): 161–72; Rebecca Raynor, "In the Image of Saint Luke: The Artist in Early Byzantium" (PhD thesis, University of Sussex, 2012); Robert J. Karris, *Luke: Artist and Theologian: Luke's Passion Account as Literature* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009); Nigel Turner, "The Quality of the Greek of Luke-Acts," in *Studies in New Testament Language and Text: Essays in Honour of George D. Kilpatrick on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. J. K. Elliott (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 378; J. M. Creed, *The Gospel according to St. Luke* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1930), lxxvi.

³Biblical narrative criticism examines Scripture as literature, seeking how the biblical author crafted their narratives to highlight key themes and patterns within the story of God at work in the world. I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970); I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978); Robert C.

Kuruvilla have continued the exploration of Scripture's aesthetic power by drawing upon speech-act theory.⁴ In a different discipline, artistic theologians like Jeremy Begbie and David Taylor have begun examining the proper function and use of liturgical arts in contemporary worship.⁵ Bridging these two disciplines, I seek to inspect the aesthetic power of the Lukan canticles for worship and formation in its early church context.⁶ By drawing on research into the aesthetic power of Old Testament songs, narrative criticism of Luke-Acts, the theological richness of the canticles, and a performance-critical approach to song, I will argue that Luke used the aesthetic powers of poetry and song for audience formation and discipleship.

First, I will summarize recent and seminal scholarship on Hebrew psalmody and position the songs in Luke's Gospel within that tradition. Second, I will establish these songs as overtures that forecast Luke's themes in his two-volume epic.⁷ Third, using biblical performance criticism, I will argue that Luke embeds songs in his Gospel to provide didactic instruction

Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, Updated ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999); Kindalee Pfremmer De Long, *Surprised by God: Praise Responses in the Narrative of Luke-Acts* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009). For an overview of narrative criticism as a field, see James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005) and Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

⁴See, for instance, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2014); Abraham Kuruvilla, "David v. Goliath (1 Samuel 17): What Is the Author Doing with What He Is Saying?," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58, no. 3 (September 2015): 487–506; Abraham Kuruvilla, "'What Is the Author Doing with What He Is Saying?' Pragmatics and Preaching—an Appeal!" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 60, no. 3 (September 2017): 557–80.

⁵See, for instance, Jeremy S. Begbie, ed., *Sounding the Depths: Theology through the Arts* (London: SCM Press, 2002); Jeremy Begbie, "The Theological Potential of Music: A Response to Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin," *Christian Scholar's Review* 33, no. 1 (Fall 2003): 135–41; W. David O. Taylor, *Glimpses of the New Creation: Worship and the Formative Power of the Arts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019).

⁶I use the term "songs" more often than "canticles" throughout this paper to highlight their true artform. While "cantic" means "song," it has taken on its own ethos, representing either only the scriptural texts themselves or later musical compositions used in the Latin offices or Anglican or other "high church" liturgies.

⁷Here I compare the Lukan canticles to a modern musical overture where all the main themes of a ballet or Broadway musical get played before the curtain opens. This style of musical overture alerts the learned ear to the upcoming leitmotifs or musical themes of the entire show. Similarly, Luke's songs alert the observant reader/listener to the upcoming themes and motifs throughout Luke-Acts.

and identity formation in a way that only song can. Although this essay focuses on the literary craftsmanship of Luke, the human writer, this in no way should be understood to dismiss the divine authorship and authority of Scripture. This study seeks to understand what creative elements Luke used as he composed this Spirit-inspired work.

THE CANTICLES AND HEBREW POETRY

Luke's songs follow in the footsteps of the great psalms of the Hebrew Scriptures. Robert Tannehill has outlined well that the canticles are modeled after OT poetry as found in the LXX.⁸ Robert Lowth, James Kugel, Tremper Longman III, Robert Alter, and Matthew Gordley all characterize Hebrew poetry more by its parallelism than any other feature.⁹ This parallelism found in OT poetry abounds in Luke's songs. Furthermore, they resonate with allusions to various OT narratives, which, to use a phrase from N. T. Wright, allows "Israel's Scriptures to resonate in the background."¹⁰

HEBREW POETRY

Tremper Longman III identifies three main features of Hebrew poetry: terseness, parallelism, and imagery.¹¹ The greatest of these is parallelism. Robert Lowth, the first modern scholar to codify parallelism in Hebrew poetry, defined it as "the correspondence of one verse or line with another."¹² Kugel famously gave the formula for parallelism, later championed

⁸Robert C. Tannehill, "The Magnificat as Poem," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93, no. 2 (1974): 266, 269.

⁹Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, trans. G. Gregory, 4th ed. (London: Thomas Tegg & Co., 1839); James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981; reprint, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Tremper Longman III, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 2011); Matthew E. Gordley, *New Testament Christological Hymns: Exploring Texts, Contexts, and Significance* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 64.

¹⁰N. T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World: Audio Lectures*, Audible Audio Book, vol. 2, Zondervan Biblical and Theological Lectures (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), pt. Luke-Acts, 19:04–21. For further evidence of this position, see John Drury, *Tradition and Design in Luke's Gospel: A Study in Early Christian Historiography* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976), 50–58.

¹¹Longman III, *Psalms*, 55.

¹²Lowth, *Sacred Poetry*, 204; Robert Lowth, *Isaiah: A New Translation, with a Preliminary Dissertation and Notes, Critical, Philological and Explanatory*, 11th ed. (London: Thomas Tegg & Son, 1835), viii; Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 752.

by Longman and Alter: “A, what’s more, B.”¹³ What line A states, line B expands, contrasts, or intensifies, bringing richer meaning to what line A first announced. While various scholars have identified numerous types of parallelism in Hebrew poetry, parallelism most commonly appears in one of three forms: synonymous parallelism, antithetical parallelism, and synthetic parallelism.¹⁴ Luke’s songs also contain another form of parallelism common to Hebrew poetry: chiasmic parallelism.

Longman states that the psalms were written and organized to allow for future readers and singers to use them in their own situation, such that “the reader becomes the ‘I’ of the psalm.”¹⁵ By stating this, he differentiates between the origins of a psalm and its primary use in Israel’s corporate worship. Robert Alter confirms this when he asserts that the *final* version of the Psalter “was meant to address the needs and concerns of the group.”¹⁶ The psalms served and continue to serve corporate worship foremost and individual worship secondarily.¹⁷

While Douglas Jones asserts that, “for their period, the Lukan psalms are unique,”¹⁸ they still embody many features of the OT psalms and came from the active psalm-composing intertestamental period.¹⁹

MARY’S SONG, THE *MAGNIFICAT*

While biblical scholars often connect Mary’s song, the *Magnificat*, to Hannah’s prayer in 1 Samuel 2,²⁰ Gordley identifies in Mary’s song—and

¹³Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*, 1.

¹⁴Lowth, *Sacred Poetry*, 205, 210–11; Longman III and Enns, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 753. Synonymous parallelism shows consonance between the two lines. Antithetical parallelism is when the second line contrasts, but not contradicts, the first line. Synthetic parallelism is when the second line expands or intensifies what the first line states. Chiasmic parallelism is a different kind of parallelism in which the word order of the second line reverses the word order of the first.

¹⁵Longman III, *Psalms*, 61.

¹⁶Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 258.

¹⁷Longman III, *Psalms*, 61.

¹⁸Douglas Jones, “The Background and Character of the Lukan Psalms,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 19, no. 1 (1968): 47.

¹⁹Consider, for example, Hodayat, the Psalms of Solomon, and the Odes of Solomon. For more information, see Mika S. Pajunen and Jeremy Penner, eds., *Functions of Psalms and Prayers in the Late Second Temple Period* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017); Larry R. Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period: A Guide for New Testament Students* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002); Brad Embry, Archie T. Wright, and Ronald Herms, eds., *Early Jewish Literature: An Anthology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018).

²⁰Because the common names for Luke’s canticles come from their Latin Vulgate translation, and I am dealing with Luke’s original Greek text, I will minimize the use of their Latin names and refer to each song by the person who sings it in the Gospel.

ZECHARIAH'S SONG, THE *BENEDICTUS*

Zechariah's song resumes Mary's theme of God's care for his people, including a reference to God's commitment that he promised to Abraham and Israel's fathers (Lk. 1:55, 72–73). Zechariah opens his prophetic song with a line from the Psalter's doxologies found at the end of Books 1, 2, and 4: "Bless the Lord God of Israel" (Lk. 1:68, Pss 41:13, 72:18, 106:48).²⁵ This flows into a parallelism between God redeeming his people and God raising up a horn of salvation (vv. 68–69).

The song's second section shifts from the corporate people of Israel to Zechariah's son. The second section's opening lines harken to Isaiah 40:3 ("a voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord'") as Zechariah declares that his child "will go before the Lord to prepare his ways" (Lk. 1:76). The next verse features a strong example of synonymous parallelism, pairing "knowledge of salvation" with "forgiveness of their sin" (v. 77). Next comes a frenzy of parallelisms. In verse 78, the theme of God's mercy returns from verse 72, tying the two sections together. Then, "the sunrise . . . from on high" (v. 78) synonymously parallels "to give light to those who sin in darkness" (v. 79), the back half of which synonymously parallels the next words "and in the shadow of death." The sunrise that served "to give light" also serves "to guide our feet into the way of peace" (v. 79), creating a chiasmic parallelism with the two functions of the sunrise bookending depictions of sin's darkness and death's shadow. Zechariah's concluding mention of peace introduces one theme in the next song.

THE ANGELS' SONG, THE *GLORIA*

Anyone familiar with the story of Christ's birth likely knows the story of an angel appearing to shepherds in the field to announce, like a regal herald, the newborn arrival of the earthly Messiah and heavenly king. To climax this declaration, a heavenly host joins the angel to sing: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased" (Luke 2:14). While this song is far shorter than even the shortest psalm, it does mirror many short choruses found throughout the Old Testament.²⁶ This heavenly praise chorus recalls Old Testament

²⁵Book 3's doxology ends with a similar but abbreviated "Blessed be the Lord forever! Amen and Amen" (Ps 89:13), and Book 5's doxology is weaker in anticipation of the five-psalm recapitulation of praise. Both the Book 5 doxology (Ps 145:21) and the final five psalms declare the Lord as God over all the world and not just Israel any longer, a theme that Zechariah's song also features.

²⁶The label of "Short Chorus" is taken from a chapter by the same name in Terry Giles and

antecedents like the Song of Miriam (Exod 15:21), the Song of Wells (Num 21:17–18), the Victory Ballad after Israel defeated King Sihon of the Amorites (Num 21:27–30), the women’s song praising David (“Saul has struck down his thousand, and David his ten thousands,” 1 Sam 18:7, 21:12, 29:5), the Temple Dedication Chorus (2 Chr 5:13, 7:3, 6), and Ezra’s Temple Foundation Chorus (Ezra 3:11). Giles and Doan identify each as OT short choruses.

In addition to mirroring an OT song genre, the Angels’ song also echoes many OT passages. Foremost, Luke’s heavenly host recalls Isaiah 6:3, mirrored in Psalm 72:19, depicting angels before God’s throne declaring of God, “the whole earth is full of His glory.” Similarly, Psalm 19:1 cries, “the heavens declare the glory of God.” Luke brings this verse to life as the heavenly host literally declares, “Glory to God” from the heavens. Luke’s ascription to glory “in the highest” reflects Psalm 8:1 testimony, “You have set your glory above the heavens.” Psalm 24:8 proclaims God the “King of glory” who is “mighty in battle.” God’s battle brings peace to the land. And so, just as the Angels’ song ends with peace, Luke’s final song begins with it.

SIMEON’S SONG, THE *NUNC DIMITTIS*

Simeon, an elderly, “righteous and devout” man (Lk. 2:25), had waited patiently to see the Christ, as the Holy Spirit had promised him. Upon the Spirit leading him to the temple to find the Christ child, Simeon “blessed God” with a sung prayer that finishes in Hebraic parallelism. Stephen Farris describes the song’s structure as such: “it consists of three bicola or couplets, the last of which contains synonymous parallelism.”²⁷ Simeon’s song harkens to an aspect of Hebrew poetry that neither Mary’s song nor Zechariah’s song does: it addresses God directly rather than singing about God.

The hymn follows the format of a Hebrew psalm of praise. It opens with a declaration of praise to God, gives a reason for praise, and then expounds on the reason for praise, testifying to God’s goodness.²⁸ Psalm 30:1–3 and 98:1–3 have parallel formats of extolling God, giving a brief statement of the reason for praise, and then expanding on why God deserves to be

William J. Doan, *Twice Used Songs: Performance Criticism of the Songs of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 119–34.

²⁷Stephen Farris, *The Hymns of Luke’s Infancy Narratives: Their Origin, Meaning and Significance* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1985), 144.

²⁸Farris, *The Hymns of Luke’s Infancy Narratives*, 145.

praised. Significantly, Psalm 98, like Simeon's song, highlights God's salvation being extended to the nations/Gentiles (Ps 98:2, Lk. 2:32). Simeon's declaration of salvation for the Gentiles also resonates with Isaiah 40–52, 56, and 65:18–23, which crescendos with the pronouncement: "all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the Lord" (65:23).

THE CANTICLES IN THEIR NARRATIVE CONTEXT

Just as Luke's songs draw from the poetic styles of the Old Testament, they also look forward to the major themes of Luke-Acts. Tannehill argues that the Nativity narratives "are parts of a unitary story" and "are related to a unifying purpose, the purpose of God," which Luke mentions throughout his two-volume work.²⁹ This argument for the significance of the Nativity narrative applies also to the Nativity songs. In a feat of both literary genius and divine inspiration, the main themes of each song reappear as key themes throughout Luke's epic.

MARY'S THEME: JUSTICE AND MERCY IN LUKE'S GOSPEL

Tom Wright calls Mary's song the "gospel before the gospel."³⁰ It sings of God's justice and mercy, introducing Luke's particular emphasis regarding the effects of the kingdom of heaven and the gospel: the empowerment of women, care for the poor, and the liberating of the oppressed.³¹ Luke features women in his Gospel more than any other gospel writer, including setting this "gospel before the gospel" on a woman's lips. Mary sings that God "has exalted those of humble estate" and "filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty" (Lk. 1:52–53). The oppressed find liberation as God shows "strength with his arm," scattering the proud, and bringing "down the mighty from their thrones" (vv. 51–52a). One can summarize these themes in one word: justice. The arrival of the kingdom that the Christ inaugurates means the inversion of the power structures of this evil world.

The themes in Mary's song predict Jesus's inaugural ministry address in Luke's Gospel, his reading from Isaiah 61 (Lk. 4:17–21)—which Luke alone records. Among the gospel writers, only Luke includes several parables depicting the inversion of power structures and reversal of fortunes for the oppressed: the Rich Fool (12:13–21), the Shrewd Manager (16:1–9),

²⁹Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 1:21.

³⁰Tom Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 14.

³¹For an extensive analysis of these three themes throughout Luke's Gospel, see Covarelli, "The Magnificat as the Overture of Luke's Gospel," 7–11, 14–16.

the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19–21), and the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge (18:1–18). Additionally, only Luke tells the story of the woman who anointed Jesus's feet in a way that champions the woman, as he emphasizes her forgiveness and her worship (7:36–50). Likewise, Luke alone names three women—and mentions the presence of more—that join Jesus and the Twelve as they minister throughout Galilee (8:1–3). And only Luke mentions that women receive a special blessing from Jesus on his death march to Calvary (23:27–31).

ZECHARIAH'S THEME: SALVATION AND EXODUSES IN LUKE-ACTS

Casimir Stroik surmises that “the Benedictus sounds salvation as a clarion note by describing the events that have begun with John and Jesus as another Exodus event.”³² Following Zechariah's redemption theme, Luke provides various exodus motifs throughout Luke-Acts. The exodus theme resonates on the Mount of Transfiguration as Moses appears next to the glorified Jesus (Lk. 9:30). Jesus not only meets with Moses, but Luke presents him as a better Moses. Moses ascended Sinai accompanied by only Joshua (Ex 24:13), hears God within a cloud of glory atop the mountain (19:18), and returns with a radiant face (34:10). Jesus ascends a mountain with only a select few disciples (Lk. 9:28), gains a radiant appearance (v. 29), and enters a cloud of glory in which he and the disciples hear the voice of God (vv. 34–35). God corrects Peter's fascination with all three radiant men that he sees, telling the disciples that Jesus alone is his son and to listen to him. In Acts 7, Stephen features the exodus narrative in his defense before the Jewish Council, mentioning the Israelites' rejection of Moses as an allusion to the Jews' rejection of Jesus (Acts 7:20–44). Finally, exodus overtones present themselves with each of Peter and Paul's escape pericopes (Acts 5:17–25, 9:23–27, 12:1–19, 16:24–34), each of which allows the gospel to continue to go forth.

THE ANGELS' THEME: GLORY AND PEACE IN LUKE-ACTS

The song of peace that goes forth from the angels' lips in Luke 2 returns on the lips of the people of Jerusalem in Luke 19 at Jesus's triumphal entry as they offer peace back to heaven: “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (v. 38). Peace and glory stand together as central to Luke's

³²Casimir B. Stroik, “The Benedictus, Lucan Narrative, and Poetic Discourse” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 2009), 240.

Christology throughout his epic.

Eight days before Jesus's ascent to the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus foretells of his return "in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels" (9:26). In his account of the Mount of Transfiguration (9:28–36), Luke depicts Jesus transforming into a glorious array alongside "Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory."

Luke contrasts Peter's bewilderment (as depicted by his proposal to build three tents) and fear as they entered the cloud of glory with the same peaceful silence with which they left the mountain after seeing these things and hearing the Father's instructions (vv. 35–36).

Again, Stephen begins his defense in Acts 7 by calling God "the God of glory" and ends with a vision of heaven, in which he sees "the God of glory, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (v. 56). Then, Stephen's death depicts God's peace given to those that please him. Juxtaposed against the mob's cries of rage as they stone Stephen to death (v. 57), Stephen only cries out for God to forgive them, after which he "fell asleep" in death (v. 60).

Luke's account of Saul's conversion and ministry begins with glory and peace. His Damascus road experience in Acts 9 includes seeing a glorious light from heaven (v. 3). After Paul's ministry in Judea and then journeying to Tarsus, Luke claims "the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace" (v. 31).

Luke's first account of the Gentiles hearing the gospel also echoes of glory and peace. Luke begins with Peter seeing something descending from heaven and "being taken back up" (Acts 10:11–16), much like the angels appeared to the shepherds and ascended again into the heavens. Cornelius also sees a man "in bright clothing" who tells him to send for Peter (v. 30). Finally, when Peter speaks to those in Cornelius's house, he describes his message as the "good news of *peace* through Jesus Christ" (v. 36, emphasis added).

Luke returns to his motif of a heavenly visitation and peace on earth with his account of Paul's shipwreck on the island of Malta. Luke records that, prior to the shipwreck, an angel appeared to Paul and brought good news (Acts 27:23) just as the heavenly host had done. After the shipwreck, Paul embodies "peace among those in whom [God] is pleased" as he shakes a viper off his hand with a peaceful defiance of death (28:3–6). This calm demeanor rose from his faith in God's promise that Paul would preach the gospel in Rome, the capital of the civilized world.

SIMEON'S THEME: SALVATION FOR THE GENTILES IN LUKE-ACTS

With Simeon's song, Luke foreshadows Peter and Paul's ministry "to the Jew first and also to the Greeks" (Rom 1:16). He describes Jesus as God's "salvation" and "light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to . . . Israel" (Lk. 2:30, 32). However, Luke's emphasis on the good news being extended to all nations begins in the early chapters of his Gospel. When the synagogue in Nazareth rejects Jesus for enacting Isaiah 61, he rebukes them with two Old Testament stories of God caring for Gentiles rather than Israelites. He recalls Elijah ministering to no Israelite widow during a three-year famine, but only the Sidonian widow of Zarephath. Likewise, Elisha heals a single leper: Naaman the Syrian (Lk. 4:25–27). Unlike Matthew's ending and Mark's extended ending, Luke does not end his Gospel with the Great Commission. Instead, he wrote an entire second volume narrating the church's early enactment of the Great Commission. Fittingly, Luke places the Great Commission not as the closing of his first volume, but as the opening scene of his second volume (Acts 1:7–8). The last line of the Great Commission, "the end of the earth" (v. 8), implies making disciples of the Gentiles. And one of the last verses of Acts declares: "the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles" (28:28).

THE POWER OF SONG

Having situated Luke's canticles firmly in both the hymnic legacy of Old Testament songs and their thematic significance in Luke's epic two-volume work, I will now propose why Luke chose the artform of song to embed in the beginning of his narrative. Robert Karris asserts: "Luke's artistry is a vehicle for his theology."³³ The songs function as more than just praise; they serve as didactic hymns, instructing the reader/singer. Additionally, these songs have identity-forming functions for Luke's collective reader/singers.

DIDACTIC HYMNS

While all songs inform or instruct in some way, Matthew Gordley identifies didactic hymns as those hymns of praise "whose primary purpose was to convey a lesson, idea, or theological truth to a human audience."³⁴ Finding didactic hymnody in ancient Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Christian writings, Gordley asserts:

Through their compositions these psalmists and poets expressed a par-

³³Karris, *Luke: Artist and Theologian*, 1.

³⁴Gordley, *Teaching through Song in Antiquity*, 5.

tical view of the world, of their community's place in it, and of the larger purposes of the divine among them. They espoused a way of seeing the world that was not always self-evident. In the simplest terms, they took on the role of teachers as they taught through their hymns.³⁵

In this way, Luke invites the reader through Mary's song to interpret the events of both the Nativity prologue and the entire Gospel through the lens of Israel's history of election and the promised divine visitation.³⁶ The logical response to the dawn of the divine kingdom's arrival could only be praise that magnifies the Lord.

Luke follows Mary's response of praise with Zechariah's emphasis on worship—much to the delight of contemporary praise and worship theologians. As a priest, Zechariah embodies worship, offering incense when he first receives the message that he would have a son (Lk. 1:8–11). Zechariah also explicitly references worship in his song (vv. 68, 74). This worship emphasis teaches a key theme of Luke-Acts. Gordley asserts that it “reveals Luke's view of the church as a worshipping community.”³⁷ Luke displays this worshipping ecclesiology immediately after Jesus's ascension (Lk. 24:52–53) and throughout Acts (1:14, 2:42–47, 4:24–31, 5:41–42, 9:20–21, 12:12, 13:1–3, 14:1–3, 17:1–3, 20:7–12). Luke Timothy Johnson connects Zechariah's worship to the exodus theme in Zechariah's song: “Luke has thereby made the experience of Zechariah a miniature enactment of his own canticle: God's mercy liberates the people to worship fearlessly.”³⁸ In this song that is “haunted” by Israel's past,³⁹ Luke engages social memory to instruct his readers to see the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as a liberating act of the God of Israel.⁴⁰

After Jesus's birth, the Angels' song expands the reader's vision from viewing the incarnation in a historical context to a transcendental context. Heavenly beings testify as “witnesses to the birth of the Messiah and to

³⁵Gordley, *Teaching through Song in Antiquity*, 1.

³⁶Gordley, *Teaching through Song in Antiquity*, 311.

³⁷Gordley, *Teaching through Song in Antiquity*, 313.

³⁸Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina, vol. 3 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 47.

³⁹I borrow this term “haunted” from Gordley, *Teaching through Song in Antiquity*, 218; additionally, early performance criticism is heavily influenced by Marvin Carlson's work *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003). Like Gordley, here I use the term to creatively express a concept akin to intertextuality. The songs in Luke's narrative conjure to mind the ghosts of ancient Hebrew poetry.

⁴⁰Gordley, *Teaching through Song in Antiquity*, 314.

its heavenly significance.⁴¹ The song expands the worldview of the reader/singer to see heaven and earth connected in Christ.

With Simeon's song, Luke returns the readers' attention to Israel's history, but this time to Isaiah's messianic prophecies. Simeon's song expands the Gospel's historical context laid by Mary's song. It causes the audience to remember the future work of salvation going to the Gentiles as prophesied by Isaiah. Mary and Simeon bookend Luke's historical context for his Gospel. Mary's song guides the reader/singer to see Jesus Christ in light of Israel's salvation history, and Simeon's song invites the reader/singer to see the salvation brought by Jesus going forth into the future for the Gentiles as well.⁴² These songs capture past, present, and future in a symphony of salvation.

TWICE-USED SONGS

In addition to the didactic purposes Luke's songs serve, they also shape the group identity of the reader/singers. To demonstrate this, I will draw from the performance-critical research of Terry Giles and Jonathan Doan. Performance criticism originates from speech-act theory and examines how "repeatable and socially recognizable events use specific techniques to powerfully express social values and themes."⁴³ Luke's songs are "chimeras" of written and oral word, to borrow a term from Matthias Hopf.⁴⁴ Giles and Doan argue that song texts "live on the boundary between the oral and the written, between the performed and the literate" and therefore research that only examines the text itself does only half the job.⁴⁵

Biblical inset psalms—or songs embedded in Scripture's narratives—come from oral cultures. Until the advent of the printing press, people primarily did not read a text silently or individually. They gathered to hear a text read aloud. And the distinctions between speaking, chanting, and singing a text were far more blurred in antiquity than they are in the modern era. By examining these songs as the performances they were designed to be, researchers can step into the "shared imaginative space of performance where the performer/presenter and the spectator meet."⁴⁶

⁴¹Gordley, *Teaching through Song in Antiquity*, 315.

⁴²Gordley, *Teaching through Song in Antiquity*, 317–18.

⁴³Giles and Doan, *Twice Used Songs*, 13.

⁴⁴Matthias Hopf, "Being in between: Canticles as a 'Chimera' between Written and Oral Styles of Speech," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 42, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 11–27.

⁴⁵Giles and Doan, *Twice Used Songs*, 5.

⁴⁶Giles and Doan, *Twice Used Songs*, 13.

Giles and Doan give seven criteria for inset or “twice-used” songs in the Hebrew Bible:

1. Invariably predate the narratives to which they have been added;
2. *Often identify an author or performer, making that persona present to the reading or listening audience;*
3. *Add little or nothing to the plot development of the narratives in which they now reside;*
4. Often conflict with the details of the narrative context and at times appear anachronistic in the narrative placement;
5. *Emphasize audience formation through the projection of a group identity;*
6. *Contribute to the narrative an influence and persuasiveness that goes far beyond the mere recitation of the words of the song;*
7. Were, at least on one occasion, performed by an identifiable group known as the *moshelim*, or Ballad singers.⁴⁷

The italicized criteria (numbers 2, 3, 5, and 6) apply to Luke’s songs as already evidenced in this essay. Luke identifies performers for each canticle. The canticles do not contribute to the Gospel’s plot, leading Robert Tannehill to helpfully compare them to opera arias.⁴⁸ As didactic hymns, Luke’s songs emphasize an audience formation that expands the meaning of the narrative far beyond the story and songs themselves.

Concerning the first criterion—the songs predating their narratives—John Drury argues that Luke “revives a favorite technique of Old Testament historical writing” of inserting pre-existing songs into a narrative.⁴⁹ Although Simeon’s song seems most dependent upon its narrative context for significance and origin, D. R. Jones gives a plausible way early Jesus-followers could have used Simeon’s song prior to Luke composing his Gospel.⁵⁰ Criterion 4—that the songs often conflict with the narrative—is

⁴⁷Giles and Doan, *Twice Used Songs*, 19, emphasis added.

⁴⁸Tannehill, “Magnificat as Poem,” 265.

⁴⁹Drury, *Tradition and Design in Luke’s Gospel*, 50–51. Scholars have suggested various origins for the Lukan Canticles. However, the consensus position holds that Luke includes pre-existing hymns given to him from his “eyewitnesses and ministers of the word” (Lk. 1:2) that are in the style of traditional Hebrew psalms or LXX texts. One highly probable explanation of Luke’s sourcing is that the hymns came to him from sources that trace back to the very people that sang or experienced the songs (Mary, Zechariah, or Elizabeth, etc.). The traditional ascriptions of the songs fit perfectly within source-critical categories.

⁵⁰Jones suggests that Simeon’s song “reflects an early Christian response to the problem of the death of a believer” and would have “perfectly illustrated” Simeon’s story. For more on this, see

not mandatory, as evidenced by the word “often.” Additionally, Luke’s well-established literary artistry could easily account for the harmony between song and narrative. Finally, the fact that the church adopted all of these canticles as songs for corporate worship at least as early as the fourth century may serve as an equivalency for criterion 7.

As twice-used songs, the canticles give to the narrative something quite important, because, as Kevin Vanhoozer attests, “praises may be spoken or sung but singing accomplishes something that saying cannot.”⁵¹ Terry and Giles demonstrate that twice-used songs “are quite powerful ‘moments frozen in time,’ pausing the narrative in order to pull the listener or reader into the story. The songs transform the audience and spectators from a group of individuals into a community—a ‘we’ with a shared identity.”⁵² They argue that twice-used songs

reconstruct the past in such a way as to assist in forming a *concrete social identity* among the reading and listening audience . . . in which the values, language, and thoughts of all involved are as identical as possible, making multiple communication not only possible but effective as well. *And this identity is not an accidental construct but an intentional project of the biblical storyteller. The storyteller wants to help shape the audience, to create values and priorities, to help spectators think of themselves in a specific fashion.* The twice-used songs are not casually inserted into the narrative to simply entertain the reading or listening audience but are employed skillfully by the storyteller to do nothing less than help the audience *reshape their own reality*. Twice-used songs are powerful tools in accomplishing this goal.⁵³

Based upon how strongly Luke’s songs satisfy Giles and Doan’s requirements for twice-used songs, I assert that Luke intentionally uses them to shape his listeners’ social identity and reality. In addition to Gordley’s claim that Luke uses the canticles to instruct his readers or listeners, Luke also seeks to help them craft their social values.⁵⁴ Luke’s songs can both

“The Background and Character of the Lukan Psalms,” 47–48.

⁵¹Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Praising in Song: Beauty and the Arts,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 112.

⁵²Giles and Doan, *Twice Used Songs*, 21.

⁵³Giles and Doan, *Twice Used Songs*, 22, emphasis added.

⁵⁴If this is true, it has massive repercussions on the theories surrounding who Theophilus was. It lends evidence to the arguments that Luke intended his two-volume work to be read by a

instruct the individual and shape the community because, as Vanhoozer observes, singing is both personal and social: it engages the individual's entire being and unites an entire assembly.⁵⁵

Luke aims to do more than just instruct and didactically shape Theophilus's worldview. He aims to engage, construct, and reinforce a social identity in his audience that aligns with the values, thoughts, ideals, and beliefs embodied in his canticles and characters. Luke's songs shape not just his audience's thoughts, but their behavior and even their being. Luke seeks more than changed minds. He seeks to change identities and change lives. Viewing the songs as the performances they are reveals that they "engage both the cognitive and the imaginative aspects of thought to conceive of reality not in proposition but in actions and being."⁵⁶ This is what Luke is *doing* with what he depicts *singing*. Readers and listeners of his Gospel come to identify with Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon, who sing of God's mercy, salvation, and rescue in the context of Jesus's birth. This changed identity then leads to actions similar to those of the apostles in the book of Acts. Luke wants his readers to do more than understand the work of God in its historical context. He wants his readers to embody the work of God in their own contexts. Performance criticism reveals that collectively known songs like Luke's canticles can do just that.

CONCLUSION

Through the songs he includes in his Gospel, Luke masterfully edifies and disciples his readers. His songs sit as equals alongside the greatest psalms and hymns from the Hebrew Scriptures. Likewise, they forecast the unique themes of his upcoming two-volume epic: salvation to Jews and Gentiles, the glory of God bringing peace to his people, and God's mercy bringing justice to the poor and oppressed. As the canticles both recall God's past works and anticipate his promises, they serve as both didactic and identity-shaping works of art. The songs instruct their reader/singers to see the saving work of Jesus in the context of biblical salvation history past, their own personal present, and the promised eternal kingdom of eternity future. And as his songs are sung, they shape the identity, beliefs, and behavior of their audience, leading to disciples that do not just think

collective and not just a single individual person named Theophilus. It also suggests that, if Luke aims to create an apologetic work, it is an apology meant to encourage disciples. In order for either Gordley's or Giles and Doan's theories to work, they require the songs to be experienced.

⁵⁵Vanhoozer, "Praising in Song," 112.

⁵⁶Giles and Doan, *Twice Used Songs*, 13.

rightly about Jesus, but live rightly unto him.

AN “EPISTOLARY WAR”: Letters on Hymnody between Isaac Watts and Thomas Bradbury

David W. Music¹

Isaac Watts was a voluminous letter writer who corresponded widely with people on both sides of the Atlantic about a variety of topics. However, apart from an occasional reference, Watts’s surviving letters seldom mention his work in hymnody. Two important exceptions are a letter he wrote to his friend Samuel Say on March 12, 1709, asking for advice about the revision of his *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* and one to the New England Congregationalist minister Cotton Mather requesting a pre-publication critique of *The Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament* (March 17, 1718).²

Another exception occurred during the period 1725–1726 when Watts carried on an extensive correspondence with a fellow Independent minister of London named Thomas Bradbury. These exchanges frequently referred to Watts’s writings of and about hymnody, and they shed light both on his views of his own work in this area and of critiques to which his publications were subjected.

Watts and Bradbury were almost exact contemporaries, and their lives and careers followed similar paths. Watts was born in 1674 and Bradbury in 1677. Both studied at academies run by Independent ministers, Watts at Newington Green and Bradbury at Attercliffe. Bradbury preached his first sermon in 1696, and Watts in 1698. Watts served as assistant pastor at the

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²For the texts of these letters to Say and Mather, see Thomas Milner, *The Life, Times, and Correspondence of the Rev. Isaac Watts, D.D.* (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1834), 229–30, and George Hood, *The History of Music in New England* (Boston: Wilkins, Carter & Co., 1846; reprint ed., New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1970), 155. Watts had more briefly requested Say’s help with the second edition of *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* in a letter of December 23, 1708 (Milner, 228–29). See also the brief hymnic references in Watts’s letters to the New England minister Benjamin Colman in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 2nd series (Boston: by the Society, 1895), 9:365, 368–69, 401, 408.

Mark Lane Independent chapel in London, became senior minister there in 1702, and remained as copastor at the church (which in the meantime had moved to Bury Street) until his death in 1748.³ Bradbury became an assistant or supply preacher in Leeds, Newcastle-on-Tyne, and Stepney (London), and was then chosen minister of the Independent congregation in New Street, London, in 1707, where he was ordained. He left the New Street church in 1728 and became pastor at the New Court Independent church. Bradbury died in 1759; both he and Watts were buried in Bunhill Fields, where many well-known dissenters were interred.

Bradbury was a frequent speaker at lectureships sponsored by Independents and was widely known as a preacher. He was also a controversial figure who was notorious for his outspokenness. Many of his sermons had a political cast to them, and some of these were considered to be “too violent” even “for men of his own party.”⁴ For instance, the nonconformist Daniel Defoe (author of *Robinson Crusoe*), writing anonymously (and deceptively) as “one of the people called Quakers” in *A Friendly Epistle by Way of Reproof ... to Thomas Bradbury* (1715), calls Bradbury “a Dealer in Many Words” who “hast been busie in the Antichristian ungodly Work of Strife: Thou hast fallen upon the Innocent, with Words of Bitterness, engendering Malice and Envy, whereby thou hast been the Occasion of much Evil-doing, and hast brought forth Wrath among thy Brethren.”⁵ Bradbury was particularly vocal about the doctrine of the Trinity, becoming one of the leaders of a group of Independent ministers who, at Salter’s Hall in 1719, subscribed to the first of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England and the fifth and sixth answers of the Westminster Shorter Catechism; both documents emphasized the orthodox view of the unity of the Godhead and the three-fold personhood of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The non-subscribers mostly held the same views but preferred for the matter to be left to “Christian liberty.”

In addition to his blunt speaking and writing, Bradbury exhibited an uncommon sense of humor, or, as some of his contemporaries expressed it, “levity.” This attribute of Bradbury was noted by the writer of *Christian*

³Because of Watts’s poor health an assistant pastor, Samuel Price, was appointed in 1703. After a more serious illness struck Watts in 1712, Price’s role was upgraded to that of copastor.

⁴A[lexander] G[ordon], “Thomas Bradbury,” in *Dictionary of National Biography* (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1886), 6:151. Much of the biographical information on Bradbury in this article is drawn from this source.

⁵[Daniel Defoe], *A Friendly Epistle by Way of Reproof from One of the People Called Quakers, to Thomas Bradbury, a Dealer in Many Words*, 2nd ed. (London: S. Keimer, 1715), t.p., 6. Defoe himself could also be quite sharp-tongued.

Liberty Asserted (1719), identified only as “a Dissenting Lay-Man,” who called Bradbury “abundantly Witty” and accused him of “unallowable Levity” that is “much beneath a Gospel Minister.”⁶

Isaac Watts and Thomas Bradbury probably became acquainted soon after the latter’s arrival in London in 1703. They certainly knew one another by 1709, when Watts published the second edition of his *Horæ Lyricæ*, for the book included a six-stanza poem titled “Paradise” that was dedicated “To Mr. T. Bradbury.” Writing from the perspective of a person who has already gone to heaven, Watts, like the “Dissenting Lay-Man,” gives a hint of Bradbury’s “levity.”

I long’d and wish’d my *BRADBURY* there;
 “Could he but hear these Notes, I said,
 His tuneful Soul wou’d never bear
 The dull unwinding of Life’s tedious Thread,
 But burst the vital Chords to reach the happy Dead.”⁷

“Tuneful soul” perhaps suggests an interest in music and song, and, indeed, that also appears to have been a part of Bradbury’s make-up. Perhaps this interest is partly the reason he was invited to preach (and subsequently print) a sermon in a series by various Independent ministers that appeared in 1708 as *Practical Discourses of Singing in the Worship of God*.⁸ Bradbury’s sermon was titled “Arguments for the Duty of Singing.” While Watts would have agreed with much of what Bradbury said in this essay, he would probably have been taken aback by a few statements that sound like direct contradictions of expressions in Watts’s *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, first published in the previous year (1707), as compared in the following table.

⁶ *Christian Liberty Asserted: In Opposition to Protestant Popery. In a Letter to Mr. Thomas Bradbury. By a Dissenting Lay-Man* (London: for J. Roberts, A. Dodd, and J. Harrison, 1719), 8.

⁷ I. Watts, *Horæ Lyricæ*, 2nd ed. (London: J. Humfreys for N. Cliff, 1709), 181. The last three lines all begin with quotation marks and there is no quotation mark after the last line; this aspect of the text has been modernized here.

⁸ *Practical Discourses of Singing in the Worship of God: Preach’d at the Friday Lecture in Eastcheap. By Several Ministers* (London: J. Darby for N. Cliff and J. Philips, 1708). Bradbury’s sermon covers pp. 19–54.

Watts, <i>Hymns and Spiritual Songs</i>	Bradbury, <i>Sermon</i>
<p>Some of 'em [the psalms] are . . . widely different from the present Circumstances of Christians. . . . Some Sentences of the Psalmist that are expressive of the Temper of our own Hearts and the Circumstances of our Lives may compose our Spirits to Seriousness, and allure us to a sweet Retirement within our selves; but we meet with a following Line which so peculiarly belongs but to one Action or Hour of the Life of David or Asaph, that breaks off our Song in the midst; our Consciences are affrighted lest we should speak a Fals[e]hood unto God. (pp. iv–vi)</p>	<p>David's Practice in this Duty [of singing] makes a whole Book. I know how quick some people are with their Objection, That our Case is not his; but I don't see how that's any bar to the concurrence of Faith and Hope with his Meditations. Nothing could be more personal than the changing [of] his Behaviour before Abimelech; and yet upon that occasion he desires others to magnify the Lord with him, and that they might exalt his Name together. And we find his Psalms us'd by People who were remov'd the length of several Ages from him. (pp. 46–47) [Bradbury goes on to provide other examples].</p>

These contrasting views give a hint of what lay in the future between the two men, but whatever Watts might have thought about Bradbury's comments—of which he was certainly aware since he owned a copy of *Practical Discourses*—it did not stop him from dedicating the *Horæ Lyricæ* poem to his fellow minister in the following year and continuing to publish it in later editions.⁹

THE RUPTURE

Unfortunately, whatever friendship existed between Watts and Bradbury did not survive Watts's writings of 1719 and following. Though other issues were also involved, the disagreement between the two men centered primarily on two subjects, Watts's writings on the doctrine of the Trinity and his belief that the psalms were unsuitable for Christians to sing without alteration or "Christianization." In 1719 Watts published

⁹*Practical Discourses* was listed in the sale catalogue of Watts's library after his death.

the first edition of *The Psalms of David Imitated*, bringing into being the kind of “Christianized psalms” for which he had advocated in *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*.¹⁰ In 1722 he issued *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity: or Father, Son, and Spirit, Three Persons and One God, Asserted and Prov’d*, following this two years later with *Three Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, then a second part to the latter book in 1725.¹¹ Watts’s expressed purpose in these writings on the Trinity was “to lead such as deny the proper Deity of Christ, into the Belief of that great Article”;¹² indeed, one of the *Three Dissertations* was titled “The Arian invited to the Orthodox Faith.” While these writings naturally provoked responses from persons who rejected Trinitarian doctrine, they also caused a reaction from people in orthodox Trinitarian circles, including Thomas Bradbury, who considered them to lean too far toward Arianism in their attempt at conversion of the sceptic.¹³ As noted above, Watts and Bradbury had publicly expressed divergent views about the psalms in 1707–1708, but it was apparently Watts’s publication of *The Psalms of David Imitated* and his books on the Trinity that drew Bradbury into renewed public objection to Watts’s view and treatment of these subjects.

Bradbury’s criticism, expressed both in speech and print, was taken by Watts as a personal attack and led to an increasingly harsh exchange of eleven letters, with misunderstandings and recriminations on both sides.¹⁴

¹⁰A few of Watts’s “Christianized” psalms had been published in the first edition of *Hore Lyrica* (London: S. and D. Bridge for John Lawrence, 1706); these reappeared in *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, along with a body of new psalm paraphrases, a total of fourteen texts in all. These fourteen items were dropped from the second edition of *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* and incorporated into *The Psalms of David Imitated*, mostly in revised versions.

¹¹I. Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity: or Father, Son, and Spirit, Three Persons and One God, Asserted and Prov’d* (London: for J. Clark, E. Matthews, and R. Ford, 1722); I. Watts, *Three Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: for J. Clark, E. Matthews, and R. Ford, 1724); I. Watts, *Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, the Second Part (London: for J. Clark and R. Hett, E. Matthews, and R. Ford, 1725).

¹²Watts, *Three Dissertations*, 1.

¹³For a non-Trinitarian rejoinder see *A Sober Appeal to a Turk or an Indian, . . . Being an Answer to Mr. J. [sic] Watts’s Late Book, Intituled, The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: John Darby for John Noon, 1722); the unusual title of this book reflects a statement in Watts’s volume that “*A Turk, or an Indian*, that reads them [the Scripture passages he has cited] without any Prepossession, would certainly understand most of them” as distinguishing “Three Personal Agents” in the Godhead (p. 142). For an important study of Watts’s writings on the Trinity, see Scott Aniol, “Was Isaac Watts Unitarian? Athanasian Trinitarianism and the Boundary of Christian Fellowship,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 22 (2017): 91–103.

¹⁴The letters appear in *The Posthumous Works of the Late Learned and Reverend Isaac Watts, D.D. in Two Volumes. Compiled from Papers in Possession of His Immediate Successors: Adjusted and Published by a Gentleman of the University of Cambridge* (London: for T. Becket and J. Bew, 1779), 2:168–240.

While the disagreement was unpleasant, it did have the result of bringing out comments from Watts on his own writing of and about hymnody. As noted earlier, these statements are among the few extant direct references he made to his texts outside the publications in which they appeared and thus are of considerable interest.

THE LETTERS

The correspondence began on February 26, 1725, when Watts wrote to Bradbury, addressing him as “Dear Brother,” though claiming that Bradbury’s “late conduct in several instances seems to have renounced the paternal bonds and duties of love.”¹⁵ “Among other things,” Watts says,

I could not but be surprized [*sic*] that you should fall so foul both in preaching and in print upon my books of Psalms and Hymns; when, while I was composing the Book of Psalms, I have consulted with you particularly about the various metres, and have received directions from you in a little note under your own hand, which was sent me many years ago by my brother, wherein you desired me to fit the fiftieth and one hundred and twenty second Psalms to their proper metre: though I cannot say that I am much obliged to you for the directions you then gave me, for they led me into a mistake in both those Psalms with regard to the metre, as I can particularly inform you if desired.¹⁶

Watts goes on to point out that Bradbury’s falling “foul both in preaching and in print” on his psalms and hymns refers at least partly to Bradbury’s most recent book of sermons, *The Power of Christ over Plagues and Health* (1724). In the preface to that volume, Bradbury named Watts as his “*dear and worthy Friend*” but confessed that he “*was rather amazed than allured*” by some of the analogies Watts used in *Three Dissertations* in trying to explain the Trinity. In the seventh sermon, Bradbury—without naming Watts—critiqued the hymn writer’s views on singing the psalms by claiming that he cannot

¹⁵ *Posthumous Works*, 2:168. Watts probably intended the word “fraternal” but either mistakenly wrote “paternal” or the transcriber of the letter misinterpreted what he had written. Most of the letters give the dating in both Old Style (where the new year began on March 25) and New Style (January 1 as the start of the year), as in this one that appears as “1724–5.” Throughout this article the dates are given in New Style.

¹⁶ *Posthumous Works*, 2:170–71. For discussion of the metrical suggestions made by Bradbury, see below.

be brought to believe, by all that I have read upon the Argument, that the Devotion of the one [Testament] is not evangelical enough for the other. *David* speaks in a way becoming Saints. The Supposition that his Psalms are too severe and harsh, and not proper for a Christian Assembly, and putting into his Mouth a Sett of Words that *Man's Wisdom teaches*, argues an Inadvertency to what [he] himself has told us, *That the Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his Word was in my Tongue*. The Writings of the Prophets are design'd to be our Rule, as well as those of the Apostles. To say that the Imprecations in the *Psalms* are offensive to Christian Ears, is talking with a Boldness that I dare not imitate. Morality is the same now that it ever was, and I cannot think that the Holy Spirit has made that Language Divine in the Old Testament, which is uncharitable in the New. We have *no new Commandment*, but what was deliver'd to us from the Beginning. And I look upon several Phrases in the New Testament to be as harsh as those in the Old, if we must call any thing so that God has revealed.¹⁷

For Watts, the critical mention by Bradbury of his book on the Trinity without a discussion of the specific points of disagreement, plus the thinly veiled reference to his views on the psalms and the claim that he had put into David's mouth "a Sett of Words that *Man's Wisdom teaches*," constituted a personal and very public attack to which he apparently felt he must respond.

Watts's letter either went unanswered or Bradbury's response has been lost, for the next letter, dating from November 1, 1725, is again from Watts to Bradbury.¹⁸ The letter begins in a friendly enough manner with thanks for a favor Bradbury had done for a friend. But then Watts goes on to criticize Bradbury for a letter the latter had written around the beginning of the previous June to an Independent board of which Watts was a member. According to Watts, the missive contained "censures" upon him and other board members, and Bradbury's "conduct" since that time was also considered unsuitable.¹⁹ What exactly these "censures" and "conduct" were is not said, and there is no mention of hymnody in Watts's letter.

Bradbury responded to this second letter from Watts on December 23,

¹⁷Thomas Bradbury, *The Power of Christ over Plagues and Health . . . in Ten Sermons* (London: for John Clark and Richard Hett, 1724), viii, 97–98.

¹⁸It seems most likely that Watts's letter went unanswered since he covered much the same ground in a later letter (see below). It is possible that Bradbury never received the first letter.

¹⁹*Posthumous Works*, 2:229, 230.

1725, indicating that it was never his intent to cast personal aspersions on Watts. “I call you the best divine poet in England,” he said, “and the liberty you have taken with David’s Psalms, affirming ‘that they are shocking to pious ears,’ is a harsher phrase than I ever used of you.” Still, he acknowledges “that my adherence to the things that I have learned and been assured of, has made me think in a very different way from what you have now printed, both about the Psalms and the son of David.”²⁰ But then he pours fuel onto the fire.

I can assure you, I am not behind-hand in hearty wishes . . . that your poetical furniture [i.e., adornments] may never make you suppose that the highest of human fancy is equal to the lowest of a divine inspiration; that you will learn to speak with more decency of words that the Holy Ghost teaches, and less vanity for your own, and never rival it with David, whether he or you are the sweet psalmist of Israel.²¹

As might be expected, the last clause of the quotation called forth a strong rejoinder from Watts in a letter of January 24, 1726.

You tell me that “I rival it with David, whether he or I be the sweet psalmist of Israel.” I abhor the thought; while yet at the same time I am fully persuaded, that the Jewish psalm book was never designed to be the only psalter for the christian [*sic*] church; and though we may borrow many parts of the prayers of Ezra, Job and Daniel, as well as of David, yet if we take them entire as they stand, and join nothing of the gospel with them, I think there [are] few of them [that] will be found proper prayers for a christian church; and yet I think it would be very unjust to say, “we rival it with Ezra, Job, &c.” Surely their prayers are not best for us, since we are commanded to ask every thing in the name of Christ. Now, I know no reason why the glorious discoveries of the New Testament should not be mingled with our songs and praises, as well as with our prayers. I give solemn thanks to my Saviour, with all my soul, that he hath honoured me so far, as to bring his name and gospel in a more evident and express manner into christian psalmody.²²

²⁰ *Posthumous Works*, 2:235, 237. The reference to “the son of David” concerns Watts’s Trinitarian writings. See below for discussion of Watts’s alleged statement about the psalms being “shocking to pious ears.”

²¹ *Posthumous Works*, 2:240.

²² *Posthumous Works*, 2:182.

Watts then reiterates what he had said in his first letter to Bradbury of nearly a year before.

. . . did I not consult with you while I was translating the psalms in this manner, fourteen or fifteen years ago? Whether I was not encouraged by you in this work, even when you fully knew my design, by what I had printed, as well as by conversation? Did you not send me a note, under your own hand, by my brother, with a request, that I would form the fiftieth and the hundred and twenty-second psalms into their proper old metre? And in that note you told me too, that one was six lines of heroic verse, or ten syllables, and the other six lines of shorter metre: by following those directions precisely, I confess I committed a mistake in both of them, or at least in the last; nor had I ever thought of putting in those metres, nor considered the number of the lines, nor the measure of them, but by your direction, and at your request.²³

The “mistakes” into which Watts was led by following Bradbury’s advice can be readily discerned. If Bradbury indeed told him that the “proper old metre” for Psalm 50 was six lines of ten syllables, he was in error, since the traditional tune for that psalm has the line/syllable count 10.10.10.10.11.11 (Ex. 1).

²³ *Posthumous Works*, 2:182–83.

Example. 2. Stanzas 1–2 of Watts’s “Proper” and “New Tune” versions of Psalm 50 from the first edition of *The Psalms of David Imitated* (1719).

“Proper”	“New Tune”
<p>The God of Glory sends his Summons forth, Calls the <i>South</i> Nations, and awakes the <i>North</i>; From <i>East</i> to <i>West</i> the sovereign Orders spread, Thro’ distant Worlds and Regions of the Dead. <i>The Trumpet sounds; Hell trem- bles; Heaven rejoices; Lift up your Heads, ye Saints, with chearful Voices.</i></p>	<p>The Lord, the Sovereign sends his Summons forth, Calls the <i>South</i> Nations, and awakes the <i>North</i>; From <i>East</i> to <i>West</i> the sounding Orders spread Thro’ distant Worlds and Regions of the Dead; No more shall Atheists mock his long Delay; His Vengeance sleeps no more: Behold the Day.</p>
<p>No more shall Atheists mock his long Delay; His Vengeance sleeps no more; Behold the Day: Behold the Judge descends; His Guards are nigh; Tempest and Fire attend him down the Sky. <i>When God appears, all Nature shall adore him; While Sinners tremble, Saints rejoyce before him.</i></p>	<p>Behold the Judge descends: his Guards are nigh, Tempest and Fire attend him down the Sky: Heaven, Earth and Hell draw near; let all Things come To hear his Justice and the Sinner’s Doom; But gather first my Saints (the Judge commands) Bring them, ye Angels, from their distant Lands.</p>

The proper tune for Psalm 122 follows the pattern 668668D but Watts, again evidently relying on Bradbury’s advice, wrote “How pleas’d and blest was I” in five 668668 stanzas, which means there would either be an

“extra” stanza left over after the tune was completed twice or only the first half of the tune would be sung with the last stanza. In the second edition of *The Psalms of David Imitated* (published later in 1719) Watts corrected this problem by including a note to “Repeat the 4th Stanza to compleat the Tune,” thus giving the text an even number of stanzas.²⁵

Bradbury responded to Watts three days later (January 27) and the exchange grew even more heated. He asked if Watts believed that the latter’s passages “on the Trinity or Psalmody” that he had criticized were the only ones “that have stumbled me and many others.” “No,” he said, “I had my affliction almost in every page; and as mean as my abilities are, I always thought them sufficient to shew, that you had departed from the plain text of scripture, and allowed yourself in dangerous vagaries of human invention.”²⁶ Later in the letter Bradbury critiques Watts’s writings about psalmody and explains his intentions regarding his earlier encouragement of Watts in making versions of the psalms.

Your notions about psalmody, and your satyrical [*sic*] flourishes in which you have expressed them, are fitter for one who pays no regard to inspiration, than for a gospel minister, as I may hereafter shew in a more public way.

But I must tell you, there is hardly any foundation for what you say about my encouraging that work fifteen years ago. I was glad to hear that your thoughts were turned to a translation of David’s Psalms; I thought it was a good evidence that you begun to come in to them, as others do; that they are not of private interpretation, but what God designed for his churches under the New Testament. In order therefore to make your work more useful, I desired you to put in two measures which Dr. [John] Patrick has omitted, because we have admirable tunes fitted to them.

²⁵Watts also used the traditional Ps. 50 proper meter in a paraphrase of Ps. 93 (“The Lord of glory reigns; he reigns on high”), and the Ps. 122 meter for another version of Ps. 93 (“The Lord Jehovah reigns”) and one of his renditions of Ps. 133 (“How pleasant ’tis to see”); all these versions likewise had to be corrected in subsequent editions of *The Psalms of David Imitated*. The “new tune” meter of Ps. 50 was employed again for Ps. 115. A melody and bass line to fit Watts’s “new tune” version of Ps. 50 was published in William Lawrence’s *A Collection of Tunes, Suited to the Metres in Mr. Watts’s Imitation of the Psalms of David, or Dr. Patrick’s Version* (London: W. Pearson for John Clark, R. Ford, and R. Cruttenden, 1719), which probably appeared shortly after the first edition of *The Psalms of David Imitated*. See David W. Music, *Studies in the Hymnody of Isaac Watts* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 206–9.

²⁶*Posthumous Works*, 2:186. It is not entirely clear whether Bradbury is referring primarily to Watts’s writings on the Trinity, psalmody, or both, though the first-named seems most likely.

Bradbury then attacks Watts's method of paraphrasing the psalms: "But you are mistaken if you think I ever knew, and much less admired, your mangling, garbling, transforming, &c. so many of your songs of Sion; your preface to your work is of the same strain with what you had writ before [i.e., in *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*]; and if I remember that, you had my opinion very freely, in company with the late Mr. Thomas Collings."²⁷

Watts, of course, could not let the matter stand there. In his February 2, 1726, reply, he told Bradbury that "I easily believe, indeed, that your natural talent of wit is richly sufficient to have taken occasions from an hundred passages in my writings to have filled your pages with much severer censures." He goes on to say (perhaps with tongue in cheek) that "In the vivacity of wit, in the copiousness of style, in readiness of scripture phrases, and other useful talents, I freely own you far my superior, and will never pretend to become your rival," then defends himself against the "satirical flourishes" charge.

I know not of any thing in all my writings on the subject of psalmody that can deserve the name of a "satirical flourish," unless it be one sentence in the Appendix to my first edition of *Hymns*, which was written near twenty years ago, and should have been revoked or corrected long since, had I ever reprinted it; and therefore I shall by no means support or defend that expression now.²⁸

The appendix to which Watts refers was "A Short Essay Toward the Improvement of Psalmody: Or, An Enquiry of how the *Psalms of David* ought to be translated into Christian Songs, and how lawful and necessary it is to compose other Hymns according to the clearer Revelations of the Gospel, for the Use of the Christian Church." In the second edition of *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* Watts left out the "Short Essay" "partly lest the Bulk [of the book] should swell too much, but chiefly because I intend a more compleat Treatise of Psalmody"; this "compleat Treatise of

²⁷ *Posthumous Works*, 2:189. The public critique of Watts's "satirical flourishes" Bradbury hinted at in his letter apparently never came to fruition. The book by John Patrick he mentioned was *A Century of* [i.e., 100] *Select Psalms*, first published in 1679 and subsequently enlarged into a complete psalter.

²⁸ *Posthumous Works*, 2:193. Though written in early February, Watts's letter was not sent until a month later (see p. 191).

Psalmody” was never published and the “Short Essay” was never reprinted, though some of its arguments reappeared in the preface to *The Psalms of David Imitated*.²⁹ Watts did not identify in this letter the sentence that contained the “satirical flourish” but the passage is made explicit in later correspondence, as will be seen below. Surprisingly, Watts did not respond to Bradbury’s charge about his “mangling, garbling, transforming, &c.” the psalms.

In his reply of March 7, 1726, Bradbury indicates that “What you say about my talent for ‘satirical flourishes’ may be true . . . but I never used them upon the Psalms of David, or any of the words that the Holy Ghost has taught. I durst not be so merry as you have been with a book that was ever received as a treasure of all divine experience.”³⁰ He then quotes (and partly misquotes) a passage from Watts’s “Short Essay” in which the hymn writer points out passages in the psalms that the “unthinking Multitude” sing “in cheerful Ignorance”; Bradbury calls Watts’s words a “lampoon.”

. . . (the people) “follow with a chearful ignorance, whenever the clerk [i.e., the song leader] leads them across the river Jordan, through the land of Gebal and Ammon, and Amalek, he takes them into the strong city, he brings them into Edom, anon they follow him through the valley of Baca, till they come up to Jerusalem; they wait upon him into the court of burnt offering, and bind their sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar; they enter so far into the temple, till they join their songs in concert with the high-sounding cymbals, their thoughts are bedarkened with the smoke of incense, and covered with Jewish veils.”

Should any one take the liberty of burlesquing your poetry, as you have done that of the most high God, you might call it “personal reflection,” indeed.³¹

Bradbury next proceeds to point out “that most of these expressions [in

²⁹I. Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, 2nd ed. (London: J. H. for John Lawrence, 1709), xiv.

³⁰Watts did not actually use the phrase “satirical flourishes” to describe Bradbury, though he did point to the latter’s wit. An example of Bradbury’s “satirical flourishes” that is perhaps apocryphal, but does suggest both his “levity” and his opinion of Watts’s texts, was related by Milner: “It is said, that an unlucky clerk, on one occasion, having stumbled upon one of Watts’s stanzas, Bradbury got up and reproved him with, ‘Let us have none of Mr. Watts’s whims’” (*Life, Times, and Correspondence*, 395). Bradbury’s pun (“whims” = “hymns”) seems entirely in keeping with what is known of his character.

³¹*Posthumous Works*, 2:202. The passage from Watts that Bradbury quotes appears on pp. 251–52 of the first edition of *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (London: J. Humfreys for John Lawrence, 1707).

the psalms] are adopted either by the New Testament, or the Evangelical Prophets.”³² But that is not the end of the critique.

This is not the only offensive passage in the book; I have observed almost one hundred. And though it is left almost entirely of the same complexion in your later editions, yet that nothing might be lost, you have taken care to tell your readers, that they shall be gathered up again in your Treatise of Psalmody; these are your “satyrical flourishes” that I complained of.

Finally, in a sentence that was guaranteed to raise Watts’s hackles, Bradbury suggests that “You have shewn a thousand times more meekness to an Arian, who is the enemy of Jesus, than you have done to king David who sung his praises.”³³ His statement is perhaps a reflection of one by Watts himself in his *Three Dissertations*: “Some think, That I do not write with Indignation and Zeal enough, and that I treat the Adversaries of the Divinity of Christ with too much Gentleness for any Man who professes to be a Friend to that Sacred Article, and a Lover of the Blessed Saviour” (p. xv).

Watts’s return letter (March 15, 1726) acknowledges that the extract Bradbury quoted from the “Short Essay” is the one he would have retracted had he ever republished the writing, saying “I now condemn it.”³⁴ In a postscript he points out what he believes are “personal reflections” on him (as opposed simply to differences of opinion), including the charge of “burlesquing the poetry of the most high God:’ whereas I only shewed the impropriety of using even inspired forms of worship, peculiarly Jewish, in Christian assemblies, and assuming them as our songs of praise to God; though I have confessed to you that I condemn the manner in which I have expressed it in the offensive sentence which you cite.” He also quotes Bradbury’s statement about showing “a thousand times more meekness to an Arian, who is an enemy of Jesus, than I have done to king David” as an example of “personal reflection.”³⁵

On March 17, 1726, Bradbury wrote that, while he had been “offended” over Watts’s “notions about psalmody, and the personality of Christ Jesus”

³² *Posthumous Works*, 2:203–4.

³³ *Posthumous Works*, 2:204.

³⁴ *Posthumous Works*, 2:210.

³⁵ *Posthumous Works*, 2:212. As was the case earlier with Bradbury, Watts slightly misquotes the phrase about showing too much “meekness to an Arian.”

and had “delivered” himself “upon those subjects, when they came in my way,” this was not “done with indignity to your character, or hatred of your person.”³⁶ Later, Bradbury expresses his gladness that Watts now rejects the phrase in the “Short Essay” “that has been so wounding to me” and suggests that “a public retraction” would be in order, though how this would be done is difficult to see since the essay was never reprinted.

Unfortunately, Bradbury could not leave it at that, for he goes on to say, “I read with terror your assertion, that the Psalms of David are shocking to pious ears. Such a notion as that lets in deism like a flood: but I will not debate this matter in private epistles.”³⁷ Where Bradbury encountered the phrase about the psalms being “shocking to pious ears” is unknown, since that wording does not appear in either *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* or *The Psalms of David Imitated*, nor, so far as I have been able to determine, in any other works by Watts. About the closest Watts ever came to printing something like that was in *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, where he says that some of the psalms “are almost opposite to the Spirit of the Gospel” and begs leave “to mention several Passages [in the psalms] which were hardly made for Christian Lips to assume without some Alteration,”³⁸ but these statements are a long way from calling them “shocking to pious ears.” In fact, the first use of this phrase that has been located is in Bradbury’s own letter of December 23, 1725, quoted above, where he also attributes these words to Watts.

“I am quite tired with this *epistolary war* (as you please to call it),” Watts wrote on March 18, 1726, in one of the shortest letters of the exchange. He went on to say, “I desire this letter may entirely finish it.”³⁹ Given Bradbury’s tenacious nature, that was a forlorn hope, and, on March 22, Bradbury addressed to Watts another lengthy complaint from “your abused and injured brother.”⁴⁰ Neither of these messages make any mention of congregational song. The trading of letters between the two men seems to have ended after this writing from Bradbury, with Watts—who in one of them confessed that he had “more important affairs that demand the few hours wherein I am capable of applying myself to read or write”⁴¹—tiring of the situation and Bradbury probably feeling that he had gotten

³⁶ *Posthumous Works*, 2:216.

³⁷ *Posthumous Works*, 2:217.

³⁸ *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707), iv, 248.

³⁹ *Posthumous Works*, 2:219.

⁴⁰ *Posthumous Works*, 2:228.

⁴¹ *Posthumous Works*, 2:195.

in the last word.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Several aspects of the exchange of letters call for additional comment. One is that neither man appears in a particularly positive light. While the letters are often couched in a polite tone, this is stiffly formal and is frequently counterbalanced by accusations and retaliations. Misunderstandings abound, and the letters are often parsed by the receiver to give them a derogatory reading that may not have been intended by the sender. The letters began as an attempt to protest “personal reflections,” but the longer the correspondence went on the more personal and vehement the reflections became on both sides.

Another feature of the letters is that Bradbury’s criticisms of Watts’s views on the psalms are almost entirely responses to passages from *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, and especially to the “Short Essay” from that book. Indeed, the only time he refers directly to the published version of *The Psalms of David Imitated* is in his letter of January 27, 1726, when he calls Watts’s work a “mangling, garbling, transforming, &c.” of the psalms and mentions that Watts’s preface to that book “is of the same strain with what you had writ before.” This emphasis upon the “Short Essay” is surprising, since that work was nearly twenty years old at the time of the letters and had never been reprinted. The exchange also shows that Watts’s views of and work on the psalms were not universally admired.

The correspondence provides further evidence of Watts’s authorial humility and willingness to receive constructive criticism of his hymns. As noted above, he had sought advice from friends and correspondents about the second edition of *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* and the first edition of *The Psalms of David Imitated*. His letters to Bradbury likewise reveal this readiness to accept and implement advice, even when following it led to “mistakes.” But the correspondence also indicates his unwillingness to let what he considers to be unjust attacks on his hymns go unchallenged. In addition, the letters show the reasons for his unusual six-line, ten-syllable version of Psalm 50 and his misjudgment in the meter of Psalm 122, both cases resulting either from incomplete advice on Bradbury’s part or a misunderstanding of that advice by Watts.

Finally, the correspondence affirms Watts’s estimation of his own work. In the seventh edition of *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1720) he had indicated his belief that that book, plus *The Psalms of David Imitated*, were

“the greatest Work that ever he has publish’d, or ever hopes to do, for the Use of the Churches.”⁴² His January 24, 1726, letter shows that he had not changed his mind, as he unapologetically gives “solemn thanks” that he has been “honoured” to bring Christ’s “name and gospel in a more evident and express manner into christian psalmody,” and reiterates one of his primary goals: that the songs of the Christian church should reflect the gospel message as expressed through the New Testament. That Watts’s pride in his work was not misplaced is evident from the widespread use his hymns and psalm versions have received in the ensuing 300 years. In the end, while Bradbury might have gotten the last word in the correspondence, Watts got the last word in the singing practice of English-speaking congregations, a last word that is still being sung today.

⁴²I. Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, 7th ed. (London: J. H. for R. Ford, 1720), xiv.

THE NEGLECT OF CONFESSION IN CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP MUSIC

Braden J. McKinley¹

Worship at its core is a proclamation and enactment of God’s salvation narrative.² As such, worship encompasses the three-fold work of salvation in how its content reflects on justification, nourishes sanctification, and anticipates glorification. In this way, progressive sanctification is an underlying intent of worship practice. Every liturgical gathering is a Spirit-enabled opportunity for the worshipping community to grow in holiness.

While Scripture instructs that confession of sin is a necessary component of progressive sanctification, found particularly in Matthew 6:9–13 (the Lord’s Prayer), 1 John 1:9, and James 5:16, this biblical foundation appears to be obscured in the sphere of contemporary worship music (CWM). Lester Ruth and Swee Hong Lim’s informative and helpful *Lovin’ on Jesus* shares a convicting insight that between 1989 and 2016 there was a considerable absence of CWM songs that function as a confession of sin. The authors write, “There is very little confession of sin, failure, or fault and absolutely no laments of complaints or distress with God.”³

The purpose of this study is to evaluate more closely Lim and Ruth’s observation indicating a deficiency of sin-confession songs in CWM. To undergird this discussion, I will briefly present a biblical understanding of confession. Following this, I will report findings from evaluating the top one hundred worship songs documented through Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI), with special attention to mention of sin, confession, and lament.⁴ From these results, I will draw conclusions

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² See Robert Webber, *Planning Blended Worship: The Creative Mixture of Old and New* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 41.

³ Swee Hong Lim and Lester Ruth, *Lovin’ on Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017), 95.

⁴ CCLI Top 100 Worship Songs, <https://songselect.ccli.com/Search/Results?List=top100>, accessed January 2021

regarding the form and content of confession in CWM, and devote discussion concerning the underlying theological and philosophical influences contributing to this trend. I will argue that while confession of sin in CWM is ostensibly practiced, it is altered into a reflective notion rather than a present action.

A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF CONFESSION OF SIN

Biblical confession is always God-centered, for it is a component of a full response to God's self-revelation of his all-surpassing worth.⁵ Bryan Chapell aptly notes, "Recognition of who God truly is leads to awareness of who we really are."⁶ Thus, in Scripture the concept of confession unfolds in two aspects. First is the aspect of confessing the sovereign holiness of God, including a creedal element affirming his nature, character, and saving acts.⁷ The second aspect is confessing human unworthiness to be in His presence. To confess the name of the Lord is to be in agreement and alignment with God in his self-revelation and commands, thereby exposing human sin. When confessing the sovereign, glorious, redemptive qualities of God, one's unholiness and unworthiness become all the more pronounced. Two scriptures in particular illustrate this pattern of response. The first is Isaiah's encounter with God in Isaiah 6:1–8, where upon witnessing God's unparalleled glory he responds with "Woe is me! For I am lost." The second example is in response to Jesus's revelation through the miraculous catch of fish in Luke 5. As Simon Peter witnesses Jesus's divinity, he implores, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Lk 5:8). Common to each instance, both Isaiah and Peter are struck by the awareness they have inadvertently encroached on forbidden territory as sinful creatures in the presence of Almighty God.⁸

Building upon this biblical pattern, multiple psalms and prayers of confession for private and corporate use appear in the biblical canon. In the Old Testament, David's Psalms 32 and 51, for example, express laments over his violation of the Law and his fervent desire to restore fellowship with God. Psalms such as 78 and 106, as well as Nehemiah 9, address

⁵ Richard C. Leonard, "Confession of Sin," in *The Biblical Foundations of Christian Worship*, ed. Robert Webber, 8 vols., The Complete Library of Christian Worship (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 1:304–6.

⁶ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 88.

⁷ Leonard, "Confession of Sin," 305.

⁸ Leonard, "Confession of Sin," 305.

corporate, national sin that narrate the cycles of Yahweh's redemption and faithfulness that were met by Israel's further rebellion. Other corporate confessions of sin expressed by an individual include Nehemiah 1 and Daniel 9.

The New Testament church gathered within the all-encompassing reality of Christ's redemptive work by the cross, resurrection, and ongoing intercession, establishing the covenant and ushering in the Church age. These realities could seemingly make ongoing corporate confession of sin appear unnecessary. Yet New Testament theology describes a continuing tension with the flesh being prone to sin as one strives to walk with the Spirit.⁹ Thus James 5:16 instructs: "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." Likewise John 1:9 teaches: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Biblical confession is not to induce self-pity and self-deprecation or striving to *earn* mercy but is a means to be renewed in grace and mature in sanctification.¹⁰

CONFESSION IN LITURGY

Bryan Chapell starkly contends, "If there has been no confession of sin then there has been no real apprehension of God."¹¹ As biblical liturgy rehearses the gospel, embodying what is commonly known as gospel-shaped worship,¹² confession assumes a vital role in the gospel enactment while lending manifold implications for the divine-human dialogue taking place in worship.¹³ The gospel enactment of worship carries the worshiper through the contours of the gospel by sequencing its worship events to follow the narrative logic of salvation history. Its purpose is for the congregation to be regularly renewed in the gospel realities of the new covenant set forth in Christ.¹⁴ Furthermore, repeated habits and rituals assembled

⁹ Leonard, "Confession of Sin," 306.

¹⁰ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 183.

¹¹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 88.

¹² See Robbie F. Castleman, *Story-Shaped Worship: Following Patterns from the Bible and History* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016); Mike Cosper, *Rhythms of Grace: How the Church's Worship Tells the Story of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013); Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*; James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016).

¹³ See Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010). In this work, Cherry contends for the gospel-shaped, or four-fold order, while maintaining worship is a divine-human dialogue of revelation and response.

¹⁴ Andrew E. Hill, "Biblical Foundations of Christian Worship," in *Worship and Mission for the*

by this particular gospel narrative gradually form belief, model practices of spiritual formation, and shape desire towards God.¹⁵ Naturally, the liturgical parallel to the salvation narrative component of the Fall is an explicit acknowledgement of humankind's failure and depraved condition outside of God's gracious intervention.¹⁶ Liturgical elements could include corporate recited confession of sin, individual confession facilitated by a pastor, congregational hymns or songs of confession, or intercessory prayer (corporate and individual) for the sins of each other.¹⁷ Maintaining these practices not only preserves the integrity of the full gospel narrative in worship, but also these practices are rich with theological implications that are both instructional and formative for sanctification. Through the pattern of confession and assurance of pardon, one is reoriented to the reality that worship does not come naturally due to our sin condition; moreover, worship itself is a gift bestowed and enabled by God's grace.¹⁸ Confession also serves to reorient one to the reality of sin, which causes brokenness and discord on both minute and cosmic levels.¹⁹ Lastly, confession is a reorientation to the fact that Christ has once and for all atoned for the sins of the world. As the believer still undergoes conflict with the flesh and regularly returns to Christ in confession, the reality of the atonement is impressed on the affections of the believer.²⁰

PSALM 51: A MODEL FOR BIBLICAL CONFESSION

Five key aspects of biblical confession are imbedded in David's prayer in Psalm 51. The first is acknowledgment of sin: "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight" (Ps 51:4a). The second is a plea for forgiveness: "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Ps 51:7b). The third is lament over one's sin: "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me" (Ps 51:3). The fourth aspect is a resolve to flee from sin and restore one's relationship to God: "Then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings" (Ps 51:19).

Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook, ed. James R. Krabill et al. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), 6.

¹⁵ See Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 22.

¹⁶ Castleman, *Story-Shaped Worship*, 83.

¹⁷ Emily Brink and John D. Witvliet, eds., *The Worship Sourcebook*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013). This resource provides several rich and relevant examples, models, and texts.

¹⁸ William A. Dyrness, "Confession and Assurance," in *A More Profound Alleluia: Theology and Worship in Harmony*, ed. Leanne Van Dyk (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 32.

¹⁹ Dyrness, "Confession and Assurance," 47.

²⁰ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 94.

The final aspect is appealing to the grace and mercy of God: “According to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions” (Ps 51:1b). The prayer of confession of sin offered in the Book of Common Prayer well follows this biblical model:

Most merciful God,	<i>Address God</i>
We confess that we have sinned against you	<i>Acknowledgement of sin</i>
In thought, word, and deed,	
By what we have done,	
And by what we have left undone.	
We have not loved you with our whole heart;	
We have not loved our neighbor as ourselves.	
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.	<i>Lament for sin</i>
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,	<i>Appeal to God's grace</i>
Have mercy on us and forgive us;	<i>Plea for forgiveness</i>
That we may delight in your will,	<i>Resolve to flee from sin</i>
And walk in your ways,	
To the glory of your Name. Amen. ²¹	

EVALUATION OF CCLI'S TOP 100 WORSHIP SONGS REGARDING CONFESSION OF SIN

While there are multiple components that contribute to the liturgical phenomenon of “contemporary worship,” song lyrics provide a concrete documentation that depicts an ethos of popular trends in contemporary worship.²² Under this guise, this discussion will now shift focus to the current canon of popular CWM songs for congregational use to determine their feasibility to function as corporate confession of sin.²³ The subsequent criteria have been used to identify which songs relate in some way to the concept of confession: (1) songs that reference a depraved human nature, (2) songs that express a plea for forgiveness or show sin as an ongoing struggle, (3) songs that express regret or lament over sin and its effects, and (4) songs that describe or appeal to the atonement as payment for

²¹ The Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 79.

²² Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, 9.

²³ This study is put forth with the cognizance that utilizing data available from CCLI is merely one way to gauge the prevalence of certain trends in the Church. There are other ways to gain insight, such as radio plays, YouTube views, surveys, and other forms of empirical data. However, since CCLI is a widely used resource among most churches, it is a fitting starting point for gathering a picture of influential trends.

sin. Of the one hundred songs on this list, thirty-three meet at least one of these criteria. The lyrical content of those songs will now be examined by answering a set of questions that correlate to the aspects of biblical confession found in Psalm 51.²⁴

QUESTION 1: DO THE SONGS CONFESS PREVIOUSLY UNCONFESSED SIN ASKING FOR FORGIVENESS?

Of the thirty-three songs chosen, only seven remotely function in a way to ask for forgiveness for previously unforgiven sin. The most compelling example is the song “Lord I Need You” by Matt Maher. Its lyrics contain direct confessional language: “Lord I come, I confess, bowing here I find my rest,” and “Where sin runs deep, Your grace is more,” and finally the chorus, “Lord I need You, oh I need you, every hour I need You” as a direct echo of the Hawks and Lowry 1872 hymn, “I Need Thee Every Hour.” A second and relatively solid example of confession also by Matt Maher, in collaboration with Cody Carnes, is their song “Run to the Father.” The first verse sings:

I’ve carried a burden for too long on my own
 I wasn’t created to bear it alone
 I hear your invitation to let it all go
 I see it now; I’m laying it down
 And I know that I need you.

The text goes on to evoke the imagery of the return of the prodigal son in Luke 15 with the words, “I run to the Father, I fall into grace. I’m done with the hiding, no reason to wait. My heart needs a surgeon, my soul needs a friend.” The song depicts the action of turning to God for forgiveness not as a one-time event, but as a consistent rhythm of the Christian life shown through the lyrics, “So I’ll run to the Father *again* and *again* and *again*” (emphasis mine).²⁵

Within the scope of songs pertaining to the first question, two additional subcategories of song loosely function as confession of sin. The first grouping contains songs that confess one’s diminishing reverence and waning adoration in musical worship. Matt Redman’s “The Heart of

²⁴ See the appendix for a table identifying which of the songs relate to confession and how they do so.

²⁵ Cody Carnes, Run to the Father, Run to the Father (Nashville: Sparrow Records, 2020).

Worship” and Carnes’s “Nothing Else” both express this inward sentiment and contrition. Referencing worship, Redman’s text reads: “I’m sorry, Lord, for the thing I’ve made it—when it’s all about you, it’s all about you, Jesus.”²⁶ Carnes’s song conveys a longing for rekindled intimacy with the Savior: “I’m sorry when I’ve just gone through the motions; I’m sorry when I just sang another song. Take me back to where we started, I open up my heart to You.”²⁷

The second grouping of songs are those with lyrical imagery of an altar call summoning the unbeliever to repentance, yet these lyrics can also easily apply to the believer approaching God in confession. These texts induce the sense of a cathartic release of bringing one’s burden of sin and brokenness to God in an act of contrition, confession, and in some cases, conversion. A prime example is the song “O Come to the Altar” with the chorus lyrics: “O Come to the altar, the Father’s arms are open wide. Forgiveness was bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ.” The verse lyrics amplify a sense of beckoning: “Are you hurting and broken within? Overwhelmed by the weight of your sin? Jesus is calling.”²⁸ The dual focus of an altar call and confession is not made explicit in the lyrics but appears to be implied. We The Kingdom’s “God So Loved” also provides an apt example: “Come all you weary, come all you thirsty, come to the well that never runs dry. . . . Bring all your failures, bring your addictions, come lay them down at the foot of the cross.” The text proceeds to proclaim the gospel promise of John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that He gave us, His one and only Son to save us, whoever believes in Him will live forever.”²⁹

While none of the previously described songs meet all the criteria of biblical confession set forth in Psalm 51, these songs still bring sin into the vocabulary of congregational song texts, which is a necessary and positive trajectory.

QUESTION 2: DO THE SONGS DEPICT SIN TO BE AN ONGOING STRUGGLE?

While thirteen songs of the thirty-three songs reference this second question, the idea of sin as a present reality is mainly implied and mostly vague in description. A fitting example of such a nebulous idea of present

²⁶ Matt Redman, *The Heart of Worship*, Intimacy (East Sussex, UK: Survivor Records, 1998).

²⁷ Cody Carnes, *Nothing Else*, Run to the Father (Nashville: Sparrow Records, 2020).

²⁸ Elevation Worship, *O Come to the Altar*, Here as in Heaven (Franklin, TN: Essential Worship, 2015).

²⁹ We The Kingdom, *God So Loved*, Holy Water (Nashville: Sparrow Records, 2020).

sin appears in the song “Way Maker” with the lyrics: “You are here, healing every heart. I worship you; I worship you.” In subsequent verses, “healing every heart” is changed to “mending every heart.”³⁰ The words “mending” and “healing” imply there is some form of brokenness that needs be dealt with in the present, yet the cause and nature of the brokenness is unclear. Elevation Worship’s “Graves into Gardens” provides a second lyrical example suggesting an impression of ongoing struggles with sin: “I’m not afraid to show you my weakness. My failures and flaws, you’ve seen them all, and you still call me friend.”³¹ The song builds to a climactic bridge offering biblical imagery of rescue and resurrection: mourning to dancing, bones into armies, seas into highways, and the song’s title phrase, graves into gardens. Although not overtly described within the text, the impression that God will continue his work of rescue and renewal despite one’s continual proneness to spiritual weakness and wandering is implied. Yet the unclear nature of the text could lend itself to a myriad of interpretations.

There are, however, several biblically rooted texts within the current canon of popular CWM songs that depict sin as an ongoing reality. One excellent example is Matt Boswell and Matt Papa’s modern hymn “His Mercy Is More,” in which the lyrics concluding each refrain read “Our sins they are many, his mercy is more.”³² The lyric choice of “*are* many” instead of “*were* many” communicates sin to be a present actuality rather than a past problem. Yet the hymn does not wallow in self-deprecation, but rather the verses are rich in scriptural references that affirm God’s grace and forgiveness.³³ In a similar vein, Andrew Peterson’s “Is He Worthy?,” based on Revelation 5, depicts sin and its effects as a present reality for the Church awaiting Christ’s return. Peterson’s lyrical device of a call and response effectively expresses the Church’s felt tension of living by faith in Christ in the midst of the ongoing brokenness and sin that plagues humanity. The lyrics read:

(Call) Do you feel the world is broken?

(Response) We do.

³⁰ Passion, *Way Maker*, Roar (Atlanta: sixstepsrecords, 2020).

³¹ Elevation Worship, *Graves into Gardens*, Graves into Gardens (Charlotte, NC: Elevation Worship, 2020).

³² Matt Boswell and Matt Papa, *His Mercy Is More*, His Mercy Is More: The Hymns of Matt Boswell and Matt Papa (Nashville: Getty Music, 2019).

³³ A few of the references are Jeremiah 31:34, Micah 7:18-20, Romans 3:21-26, and 1 John 3:1.

(Call) Do you feel the shadows deepen?

(Response) We do.

(Call) But do you know that all the dark

Won't stop the light from getting through?

(Response) We do.

(Call) Do you wish that you could see it all made new?

(Response) We do.³⁴

The text continues to affirm God's immanent salvation and the Church's secure hope through Christ's atoning work. The lyrics culminate in depicting the heavenly vision of the throne room of God in Revelation 5. This text and "His Mercy Is More" both fittingly communicate a present conflict with sin and are thus the best available options within this category of song.

Question 3: Do the songs express lament over sin and its effects?

Of the thirty-three songs identified, only seven nebulously imply lament over sin. Moreover, none of these songs directly mention sin as the source of lament but instead focus on embracing human emotional frailty. A pointed example is the song "Yes I Will" with the lyrics, "Yes I will, lift You high in the lowest valley. Yes I will, sing for joy when my heart is heavy."³⁵ This text acknowledges a general sense of human frailty, internal discord, and heartache, but nowhere does the text indicate sin as the source of these ailments. A second common characteristic of songs within this category is the acknowledgment of brokenness and unrest, followed by an affirmation of God's salvation in a lyrical turn of events. Elevation Worship's "Here Again" well demonstrates this pattern. Upon lamenting that "I'm not enough" outside of God's presence predicated upon a feeling of walking through a valley of weakness, the text turns to hope in God's salvation: "Not for a minute was I forsaken, the Lord is in this place. Come Holy Spirit, dry bones awaken, the Lord is in this place."³⁶

In addition to the aforementioned songs, some songs convey a *reflective* lament over sin, referencing the lament one experienced at a certain time in the past. Notable examples include "Death Was Arrested" with the lyrics "Alone in my sorrow and dead in my sin"³⁷ and "Glorious Day"

³⁴ Andrew Peterson, *Is He Worthy?*, Resurrection Letters: Volume One (Nashville: Centricity Music, 2018).

³⁵ Vertical Worship, *Yes I Will*, Bold Faith Bright Future (Franklin, TN: Essential Worship, 2018).

³⁶ Elevation Worship, *Here Again*, Hallelujah Here Below (Charlotte, NC: Elevation Worship, 2018).

³⁷ North Point Worship, *Death Was Arrested*, Nothing Ordinary (Nashville: Centricity Music,

with the lyrics:

I was buried beneath my shame.
 Who could carry that kind of weight?
 It was my tomb 'til I met You.
 I was breathing but not alive.
 All my failures I tried to hide.
 It was my tomb 'til I met You.³⁸

Both texts communicate a sense of lament over sin; however, the expressed lament is not a *present* lament over present sin. Instead, the texts convey the lament one previously experienced while in an unregenerated state before placing faith in Christ, or before a certain spiritual “break-through.” Furthermore, as one might predict, both songs refer to a past lament in a remarkably brief manner, rapidly progressing towards jubilant celebration. For example, in “Glorious Day,” after less than a minute of reflecting upon a past feeling of lament, the song launches the defining crux of the song, “You called my name – and I ran out of that grave!”

QUESTION 4: DO THE SONGS APPEAL TO THE SAVING WORK OF CHRIST?

Yes, overwhelmingly so; of the songs, twenty-five of them appeal to the saving work of Christ as payment for sin in some fashion. Phil Wickham and Brian Johnson’s “Living Hope” provides a suitable example with the lyrics, “The God of ages stepped down from heaven to wear my sin and bear my shame. The cross has spoken, I am forgiven.”³⁹ Other songs that reference substitutionary atonement include Hillsong Worship’s “Who You Say I Am” (“While I was a slave to sin, Jesus died for me”)⁴⁰ and Phil Wickham and Jeremy Riddle’s “This Is Amazing Grace” (“You laid down your life, so I would be set free”).⁴¹ While brief, these texts convey how the atonement is the source of forgiveness by which the believer is saved.

In addition, several current songs expand their reference to the atonement to retell the gospel narrative of the death, resurrection, and imminent return of Christ. Songs such as “In Christ Alone” (Townend and Getty),

2017).

³⁸ Passion, *Glorious Day*, Worthy of Your Name (Atlanta: sixstepsrecords, 2017).

³⁹ Phil Wickham, *Living Hope*, Living Hope (Hollywood: Capitol Records, 2018).

⁴⁰ Hillsong Worship, *Who You Say I Am*, There Is More (Sydney: Hillsong Music, 2018).

⁴¹ Phil Wickham, *This Is Amazing Grace*, The Ascension (Brentwood, TN: INO Records, 2013).

“King of Kings” (Hillsong Worship), and “Man of Sorrows” (Hillsong Worship) each exhibit these lyrical qualities.⁴² This category of song illustrates a prevalent trend among evangelical worship. Songs that rehearse the gospel narrative play a vital role in evangelicalism by re-centering the worshiper upon the core features of the gospel and thereby the core tenets of Christianity. Furthermore, gospel-narrative songs help the worshiper recount and recall the moment of their conversion. This type of spiritual recollection, Sarah Koenig contends, can function “sacramentally” as a form of eucharistic anamnesis.⁴³ While these songs rightly display a central focus on gospel narrative, the allusions to sin almost entirely reference *past* sin that has been covered and is no longer an ongoing reality. Thus, with respect to confession, these songs barely qualify to carry an aspect of biblical confession.

QUESTION 5: DO THE SONGS EXPRESS A RESOLVE TO FLEE FROM SIN?

Somewhat, in the sense that several of these songs express a recommitment to exhibit all-encompassing submission to God’s purposes, which by implication involves living a more pure and sinless life. Only eight songs display this impression in their lyrics, and in doing so the word “sin” is not said outright. Two examples include CityAlight’s “Yet Not I” (“With every breath I long to follow Jesus”)⁴⁴ and the Gettys’s “In Christ Alone” (“From life’s first cry to final breath Jesus commands my destiny”).⁴⁵ Maher’s “Lord I Need You” makes a stronger implication of fleeing from sin with the lyric, “Teach my song to rise to you when temptation comes my way. And when I cannot stand, I’ll fall on you.”

The clearest recent example is the song “So Will I (100 Billion X).” This seven-minute composition guides the worshiper through the salvation narrative, beginning at creation and leading toward the Pascal event, with the phrase “so will I” repeated throughout to express the devotion the worshiper will now display in response to comprehending God’s mighty acts of

⁴² While not in the top 100 songs on CCLI, Matt Boswell and Matt Papa’s “Come Behold the Wondrous Mystery” is, in the humble opinion of this author, the strongest current song of this nature.

⁴³ Sarah Koenig, “This Is My Daily Bread: Toward a Sacramental Theology of Evangelical Praise and Worship,” *Worship* 82, no. 2 (2008): 152.

⁴⁴ CityAlight, *Yet Not I but through Christ in Me*, Yet Not I (Colorado Springs, CO: Integrity Music, 2018).

⁴⁵ Keith Getty and Kristyn Getty, *In Christ Alone*, In Christ Alone (Nashville: Getty Music, 2006).

salvation. The climactic moment focusing on the passion of Christ sings,

God of salvation
 You chased down my heart
 Through all of my failure and pride
 On a hill You created
 The light of the world
 Abandoned in darkness to die
 And as You speak
 A hundred billion failures disappear
 Where You lost Your life so I could find it here
 If You left the grave behind You, so will I.⁴⁶

The word “failure” is used twice and “pride” once, clearly indicating sin. Payment for sin is loosely described, and the lyrics “leaving the grave behind” suggests a commitment to henceforth renounce works of sin and darkness.

ANALYSIS

As the song evaluation illustrates, the current leaning in popular CWM songs shows confession of sin to be notably reduced from a comprehensive model of biblical confession. At best, confession of sin in CWM adopts the impression of being an acknowledgment of previously forgiven sin by recounting the Pascal event, or an expression of spiritual need or weakness. This trend signifies four primary shifts. First, it reveals a departure from gospel-shaped liturgy, where corporate confession of sin is a fundamental aspect of enacting the gospel narrative. Second, the trend suggests a collective avoidance of the subject of sin in worship. Third, it implies a shared view that confession of sin is of peripheral importance to the sanctification of a worshiping community. And last, it overlooks a common scriptural response to God’s self-revelation (Is 6:5; Lk 5:8). Each of these changes is indicative of an overarching ideological move regarding the primary objective of corporate worship. This pervasive change sets the priority of worship to be a *subjective experience of intimacy with God* above the idea that worship is *corporate covenant renewal*. The first model of worship seeks to primarily generate a feeling of nearness to God for the worshiper, while the second seeks to retell and enact God’s salvation narrative for

⁴⁶ Hillsong United, *So Will I (100 Billion X)*, Wonder (Sydney: Hillsong Music, 2017).

the purpose of inscribing gospel truths deep within the worshiper. Two primary sources have contributed to the prevailing ethos of contemporary worship to be subjective intimate experience: the charismatic movement and the church-growth/seeker-sensitive movements.

PRAISE TO WORSHIP: CHARISMATIC INFLUENCE

Contemporary worship finds its roots in Pentecostalism in a convergence of the Jesus People movement of the late-1960s and aspects of the charismatic revival.⁴⁷ Developments within this confluence include affirmation of outward manifestations of gifts of the Spirit, prolonged periods of singing, and encouragement of physical expressions.⁴⁸ A key aspect of charismatic influence on contemporary worship is displayed in how *intensity* is a sought-after goal.⁴⁹ To the charismatic, to *truly* worship is to worship with the whole self: body, soul, and spirit and doing so with complete abandon shown through singing, shouting, dancing, clapping, raising hands, kneeling, laying prostrate, and verbal manifestation such as singing and speaking in tongues.⁵⁰ Therefore, the intent and expectation of worship is to cultivate an “intense intimacy” with God and viscerally encounter His presence.⁵¹

In charismatic worship philosophy, intimacy with God is achieved and obtained as the worshiper takes the proper steps in a journey from *praise* to *worship*, encouraged through the continuous movement and flow of musical worship. The idea of “praise” and “worship” as two separate ideas runs throughout charismatic theology. Judson Cornwall describes how *praise* is the beginning of worship, applauding God’s power and shown in outward exuberance, and is an activity of the soul; whereas *worship* focuses on God’s personhood, and is “God calling to God from within redeemed men” and is an experience of the spirit. “Worship is the end,” Cornwall writes, “all other activities, ceremonies, and ordinances merely serve as a means to that end.”⁵²

In parallel to the imagery of the Jewish tabernacle, praise is what

⁴⁷ Don Williams, “Charismatic Worship,” in *Exploring the Worship Spectrum: Six Views*, ed. Paul A. Basden and Paul E. Engle (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 139.

⁴⁸ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin’ on Jesus*, 17.

⁴⁹ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin’ on Jesus*, 18.

⁵⁰ Frank Macchia, “Signs of Grace: Towards a Charismatic Theology of Worship,” in *Towards a Pentecostal Theology of Worship*, ed. Lee Roy Brown (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2016), 153–55.

⁵¹ Terry Law, *How to Enter the Presence of God: You’ve Always Yearned To—Now Here’s How!* (Tulsa, OK: Victory House, 1994), 152.

⁵² Judson Cornwall, *Let Us Worship* (Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 2013), 148.

happens in the “outer courts.” Praise emphasizes songs *about* worship and encountering God as a way of anticipating the experience. As the worshiper progresses into the inner courts and then into the holy of holies, the believer now passes from *praise* into *worship*, experiencing the sought-after intimacy with God. Terry Law describes this experience: “You are praising the Lord, you are thanking Him for all He is, when all of a sudden, the words of your mouth move to an attitude of the heart. Love wells up, and adoration comes exploding out of your innermost being.”⁵³ To amplify the general tabernacle imagery behind “praise-and-worship,” the tabernacle furnishings such as the Brazen Altar, the Laver, and the Golden Table also carry meaning for the worship progression. These items signify points of access that having properly adhered to them grant the worshiper closer proximity to the holy of holies.⁵⁴

A second variation of the worship progression towards intimacy with God is through the five-phase model developed by John Wimber and his community of the Anaheim Vineyard Fellowship.⁵⁵ These phases begin with *invitation*: setting the tone and expectation of worship; *engagement*: praising God for his nature and evolving into more intimate loving language; and *exaltation*: shown in jubilant physical, vocal, and bodily expressiveness. Exaltation, Wimber explains/claims, “moves to a zenith, a climactic point, not unlike physical lovemaking.” The final phases are *adoration*: described as a visitation where God’s presence is tangibly felt through the Spirit’s work among the people; and lastly, *intimacy*: the underlying goal within each phase and according to Wimber, the highest calling of humanity.⁵⁶

While subjective experience remains paramount in the tabernacle and five-phase models, confession of sin is not intended to be entirely absent. Cornwall and Law both contend that some sort of confession ought to be made in order to draw near to God, represented by the Brazen Altar.⁵⁷ Similarly, Wimber also affirms the possibility for confession while describing his “engagement” phase in a quasi-covenant renewal sense: “Often this

⁵³ Law, *How to Enter the Presence of God*, 149.

⁵⁴ See Barry Liesch, *People in the Presence of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988); Judson Cornwall, *Let Us Draw Near* (Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Logos Foundation, 1977); Law, *How to Enter the Presence of God*.

⁵⁵ See Andy Park, Lester Ruth, and Cindy Rethmeier, *Worshiping with the Anaheim Vineyard: The Emergence of Contemporary Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

⁵⁶ John Wimber, *The Way In Is the Way On*, ed. Christy Wimber (Boise, ID: Ampelion Publishing, 2006), 121–24.

⁵⁷ Law, *How to Enter the Presence of God*, 16–17; Cornwall, *Let Us Draw Near*, 48.

intimacy causes us to meditate, even as we are singing, on our relationship with the Lord. Sometimes *we recall vows* we have made before our God. God might call to our mind our disharmony or failure in our life, thus *confession of sin is involved*” (emphasis mine).⁵⁸ Yet, while a leaning towards confession is present, it is subsumed into the motive of cultivating intimacy with God, not necessarily corporate covenant renewal.

Another charismatic influence on contemporary worship affecting its use of confession is the need for worship experiences to “flow.” If the goal of worship is intimacy with God, then the worship environment needs to nourish and prompt the inward journey of the worshiper through uninterrupted expressions of praise, devotion, and love.⁵⁹ To achieve flow is to generate a seamless tapestry of song, chorus, prayer, spoken word, and perhaps scripture reading interwoven to create a worship atmosphere that simulates the elapsing of time and facilitates an encounter with God. The intent of worship flow is that the congregation can better experience the eternity of God’s nature, creating a deeper impression of heavenly realities as flow sustains an ambiance of worship with perpetual sight and sound.⁶⁰ David Blomgren proposes three means in achieving flow. First, flow should move continuously; second, flow should progress logically using the key, tempo, and content of the songs as points of connection; and lastly, flow should progress and compound toward cultivating a climactic experience in worship.⁶¹ This heightened expectation to experience the presence of the Lord during a worship set has been said to function sacramentally for the contemporary worshiper. Sarah Koenig contends how in charismatic-evangelical contexts the “praise-and-worship” time of a gathering becomes a vital means through which the congregant experiences a close encounter with God, rather than through the Word and Table.⁶² Since music carries a sacramental function to mediate the presence of God to the worshiper, other biblically rooted practices like confession and absolution are pushed to the fringes as they are no longer necessary to generate the feeling of God’s immanence. Furthermore, the concept that worship is a journey towards intimacy enabled through free-flowing musical worship

⁵⁸ John Wimber and Carol Wimber, “Why We Worship and the Phases of Worship,” December 12, 2012, <http://www.thevineyardfw.org/wordpress/why-we-worship-the-phases-of-worship-by-john-wimber/>.

⁵⁹ Koenig, “This Is My Daily Bread,” 143.

⁶⁰ Zachary Barnes, “How Flow Became the Thing,” in *Flow: The Ancient Way to Do Contemporary Worship*, ed. Lester Ruth (Nashville: Abingdon, 2020), 21.

⁶¹ David K. Blomgren, *Song of the Lord* (Portland, OR: Bible Temple Publishing, 1989), 29–31.

⁶² Koenig, “This Is My Daily Bread,” 143, 147.

has been implanted into the general ethos of evangelical worship due to its adaptation by influential church-growth practitioners.

WORSHIP FOR SEEKERS

Thom Rainer cites five elements of an atmosphere of growing churches as celebrative, friendly, relaxed, positive, and expectant.⁶³ Quality, style, and delivery of music are of paramount importance as the worship gathering is the primary “entry point” for new congregants. Thus, to the church-growth practitioner the experience of celebrative engagement cultivated through musical worship becomes a crucial matter. In efforts to create an “experience,” the service needs to flow seamlessly in a well-rehearsed yet ostensibly spontaneous manner. In seeker-sensitive methodology the primary intent of a worship gathering is not to build up the Body of believers but to present an “event” for unchurched non-believers that is accessible, welcoming, entertaining, and informative in order to kindle their curiosity of faith.⁶⁴

As the seeker movement emerged in the 1980s, pioneering pastors such as Bill Hybels and Rick Warren sought to adopt aspects of charismatic worship into their contexts due to the attractiveness of its celebratory nature, seeming authenticity, and ability to put churchgoers at ease. Former Willow Creek Church worship pastor Joe Horness recounts when Hybels attended a charismatic worship service in 1982 and witnessed “the kind of worship we’ve been dreaming about, worship that was rich and heartfelt, where the presence of God was deep and real, and where hearts were changed as a result of being there.”⁶⁵ Similarly, Rick Muchow of Saddleback Church attributes the methodological approach adopted by him and Warren to a charismatic worship experience he attended in 1985.⁶⁶ These and similar occurrences contributed to general charismatic ideas beginning to take shape in the larger milieu of evangelicalism,⁶⁷ mainly the ideas that God resides in the praises of his people (Ps 22:3) and that music functions sacramentally to gather, mediate, and transform the worshiper through

⁶³ Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 1998), 228.

⁶⁴ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 103.

⁶⁵ Joe Horness, “Contemporary Music-Driven Worship,” in *Exploring the Worship Spectrum: Six Views*, ed. Paul A. Basden (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 108.

⁶⁶ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin’ on Jesus*, 34.

⁶⁷ Larry Eskridge, *God’s Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 275.

elongated periods of musical worship.⁶⁸ But supreme to these ideas is the conviction that worship ought to be a celebration.

The concept of celebratory worship is deeply imbedded within church-growth philosophy. C. Peter Wagner, the pioneer of third-wave charismaticism and heavily influenced by John Wimber's theology and methods,⁶⁹ speaks to this assumption. He describes the unique experience of the gathered Body, who have come expectant and hungry to encounter God, and when people gather under these conditions, a special, celebratory worship experience occurs.⁷⁰ Moreover, for a local church to grow, it is vital that worship gatherings are exciting, engaging, and celebratory as it is a sign that the people are earnest and the power of God is potently near. Wagner argues that celebration and festival are prominent activities for God's people, appealing to biblical history, citing the centrality of the Temple and yearly festivals within Israel's worship, and to church history, citing camp meetings, Finney's revivals, and Billy Graham crusades.⁷¹ The prevailing philosophy is that churchgoers will not be motivated or attracted to worship if it is somber, reserved, and "no fun."⁷² Following Wagner's thinking, confession can easily be relocated as a fringe priority. For the congregation to pause and directly confess sin would disrupt the flow and sense of jubilation, a clear aim of celebratory worship.

Celebratory worship as a means to promote church growth runs in tandem with a driving ambition of seeker-sensitive worship of eliminating any barriers that could repel or confuse a seeker. Early practitioners of seeker-sensitive worship thus employed guiding principles such as informality of style, dress, and décor, and an overall casual atmosphere. Moreover, they emphasized relevancy of content, using the textual and musical language of the demographic, visual appeal, and a low-pressure environment regarding participation.⁷³ Overarching each of these principles is the desire to be relevant to the contemporary needs of the participant.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Barnes, "How Flow Became the Thing," 17. For a critical evaluation of the meaning of Psalm 22:3, see Matthew Sikes, "Does God Inhabit the Praises of His People? An Examination of Psalm 22:3," *Artistic Theologian* 8 (2020): 5–22.

⁶⁹ See C. Peter Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit: Encountering the Power of Signs and Wonders Today* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publishing, 1988). Wagner describes his experience and influence from Wimber in chapter one, "How I Learned about the Power."

⁷⁰ C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1976), 97.

⁷¹ Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow*, 98.

⁷² Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow*, 98.

⁷³ Edward G. Dobson, *Starting a Seeker-Sensitive Service* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 23.

⁷⁴ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, 2–3.

Thus liturgical content is less concerned with conveying theological and biblical substance, and more set on speaking to the immediate emotional or practical needs of the congregant. The presumptive result is that to the seeker, God will appear more immanent and intimate, conveying a faith that pragmatically “works” and is authentic about the struggles of everyday life.⁷⁵ Since contemporaneity is of high concern in seeker-sensitive worship, ancient practices are then irrelevant, confession of sin being no exception.

Pastor and writer Timothy Wright explains, “Irreligious people do not necessarily perceive sin as their problem. The rite of confession and absolution can come across to them as condemning. If not done with their needs and perceptions in mind, confession and absolution will alienate visitors.”⁷⁶ This is not to obliterate mention of sin in a worship setting, but instead of overtly confronting sin in confession, sin is addressed by first relating to the need of the congregant and to later introduce the source of the need (sin). The solution for Wright is to intersperse and embed confession throughout the service with warmer colloquial language through a variety of opportunities, such as informal prayer, songs that could mention weakness and need, or moments of silence.⁷⁷ While confession is loosely recognized, its adaptation to suit a seeker-sensitive context subverts its crucial function. The Bible portrays confession as coming face-to-face with our sin that raises challenging questions and unsettling truths about ourselves, which are then met with an assurance of pardon.⁷⁸ The seeker-sensitive solution to make confession seem more palatable confines it to the periphery, but within that limitation it cannot achieve the full scope of its implications.

CONCLUSION

This discussion has argued that confession of sin in CWM has been reduced to a reflective notion rather than a present action. Biblical confession throughout Scripture contains open acknowledgement of sin, lament over sin, and a resolve to flee from sin. Confession of sin is a God-centered activity that expresses full dependency on God’s grace and mercy for life and salvation. Ultimately, confession of sin plays a vital function in the regular covenant renewal that gospel-shaped liturgy enacts in how it reinstates the redeemed Body as recipients of a God-initiated covenant

⁷⁵ Timothy K. Wright, *A Community of Joy: How to Create Contemporary Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 25.

⁷⁶ Wright, *A Community of Joy*, 125.

⁷⁷ Wright, *A Community of Joy*, 125.

⁷⁸ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 104.

through the atonement and baptism in the Spirit.

The data presented in the song evaluation of CWM indicates weak adherence to the parameters of biblical confession. This finding is in part due to elevating the idea of worship as subjective intimate experience above the concept of worship as corporate covenant renewal. This evolution stems from two streams of Christian thought. The first is the charismatic movement, which promotes that the goal of liturgy is to cultivate intimacy with God by passing from praise to worship. While confession can be part of the worship journey, it is subsumed into the motive of achieving intimacy with God. The second stream is the church-growth and subsequent seeker-sensitive movements that promote the need for celebratory, dynamic, and relevant worship experiences that will attract, relax, and retain the congregant. Thus, the counterintuitive nature of confession and its disquieting implications appear in conflict with generating an appealing “event” for seekers.⁷⁹ Confession may still be integrated into the “flow” of seeker-sensitive worship experiences but is reduced to maintain a palatable quality for the congregant.

While this discussion contends that gospel-shaped liturgy that includes habitual confession of sin provides ample opportunity for the worshiping community to grow in sanctification, it is not to presume that some of the aforementioned aspects of charismatic and seeker-sensitive worship are inherently discordant with gospel-shaped liturgy. For example, worship *is* in part an inward journey of the worshiper towards intimacy, worship *should* be a celebration of the gospel, and corporate gatherings *ought* to be hospitable to seekers and be mindful of their perspective. Moreover, a worshiping community should embrace gospel-shaped liturgy while maintaining a sense of “flow” in which its contents unfold in a logical and progressive manner displaying preparation and thorough forethought.⁸⁰ However, each of these concerns in and of themselves cannot embody the full scope of biblical worship. Worship is more than an individual subjective experience, or an “entry point” for seekers, and crafting “the perfect worship set” is not the end goal of liturgy. Rather, these facets of a worship gathering ought to be considered as merely components within the overarching motive of renewal in the new covenant set forth in Christ.

⁷⁹ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 105.

⁸⁰ Lester Ruth, “Beatific Flow: Overarching Guidelines,” in *Flow: The Ancient Way to Do Contemporary Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2020), 91–93.

Appendix: Analysis of CCLI Top 100 Worship Songs referencing an Aspect of Biblical Confession of Sin

Song (ordered by popularity)	Confession of unconfessed sin	Ongoing tension with sin	Lament over sin	Atonement	Resolve to flee from sin
1. Way Maker		X			
2. Graves into Gardens		X		X	
3. What a Beautiful Name				X	
4. This Is Amazing Grace				X	
5. Lord I Need You	X	X	X		X
6. Living Hope				X	
7. Who You Say I Am				X	
8. Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)			X	X	
9. O Come to the Altar	X		X	X	
10. In Christ Alone				X	X
11. Glorious Day					
12. King of Kings			X	X	X

Song (ordered by popularity)	Confession of unconfessed sin	Ongoing tension with sin	Lament over sin	Atonement	Resolve to flee from sin
13. Blessed Be Your Name		X	X		
14. The Heart of Worship	X				X
15. Nothing Else	X				
16. God So Loved	X			X	
17. Yes I Will			X		
18. Yet Not I but through Christ in Me		X		X	X
19. How Deep the Father's Love				X	
20. His Mercy Is More		X		X	
21. Run to the Father	X	X		X	
22. Death Was Arrested			X	X	
23. Jesus Paid it All				X	
24. Holy Water	X	X		X	X

Song (ordered by popularity)	Confession of unconfessed sin	Ongoing tension with sin	Lament over sin	Atonement	Resolve to flee from sin
25. You Are My King (Amazing Love)				X	
26. There's Nothing that Our God Can't Do		X			
27. Here Again		X	X		
28. Is He Worthy?		X		X	
29. At the Cross (Love Ran Red)				X	X
30. Before the Throne of God Alone		X		X	
31. He Will Hold Me Fast		X		X	
32. Man of Sorrows				X	
33. So Will I (100 Billion X)				X	X

“I’LL BRING YOU MORE THAN A SONG”: Right Worship in Evangelical Perspective

Benjamin P. Snoek¹

Since the debut of contemporary music and instrumentation in public worship services, American Christians have fought vehemently over so-called “worship wars.” Mark Evans notes that “a revolution in Christian music took place in the second half of the twentieth century as the delineation between sacred and secular became increasingly blurred.”² The use of secular rock-and-roll styles, initially designed to appeal to unchurched surfers at Chuck Smith’s Costa Mesa Calvary Chapel, quickly spread across the country. Fueled by music distribution companies such as Maranatha! Music, these new musical influences became perceived as an affront to the organ-driven European worship style that dominated American Protestant worship. Acrimonious, incendiary fights broke out in churches, many of which split congregations. As Lester Ruth writes, “Around 1993, American Protestants declared war on each other. . . . Bitter disagreements, angry arguments, and political machinations spilled across the church. . . . Congregations voted with their feet, or their wallets, or with raised hands if the question of which worship style was right was brought to a vote.”³ Musical style became conflated with good or bad worship; in Monique Ingalls’s words, “musical instruments, ensembles, and media became charged symbols used to represent ‘traditional’ and ‘contemporary’ factions in worship.”⁴

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²Mark Evans, *Open Up the Doors: Music in the Modern Church* (Oakville, CT: Equinox Publishing, 2006), 38.

³Lester Ruth, “The Eruption of the Worship Wars: The Coming of Conflict,” *Liturgy* 32, no. 1 (2017): 3.

⁴Monique M. Ingalls, *Singing the Congregation: How Contemporary Worship Music Forms Evangelical Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 6.

Arguably, these worship wars persist in many congregations today, albeit at a simmered level. Constance Cherry claims that “while there are still some uprisings here and there, after decades of discord a truce has been called in most places.”⁵ Although this war over musical styles may have subsided, what if there is another conflict—more covert yet equally urgent—facing contemporary worshiping communities? John Witvliet argues that the true worship war goes beyond the traditional/contemporary divide. “I used to think that the largest worship-related division among Protestant churches in the Northern Hemisphere was between worship in so-called traditional and contemporary styles,” Witvliet admits. “But I no longer think that this is the most significant division among congregations. Another, more subtle division emerges over time as far more significant, I believe, for the health and well-being of both individual congregations and Christianity as a whole.”⁶ Witvliet submits that the most pressing issue facing Christian worship—particularly within evangelicalism—is whether a worshiping community views worship as primarily formative or as primarily expressive.

This article probes and expands Witvliet’s hypothesis and applies it to an understanding of right or (in Melanie Ross’s words) “good” worship.⁷ It will then attempt to understand the worship wars through this divide, as opposed to a stylistic divide. Indeed, what makes worship “good” goes beyond a matter of style—right, proper worship recognizes its formative and expressive dimensions and brings them out in healthy, wise ways.

DEFINING EXPRESSIVE AND FORMATIVE WORSHIP

These terms carry a host of connotations in liturgical theology; thus, it is important to parse them as Witvliet understands them.⁸ By *expressive worship*, Witvliet is describing “worship which articulates what a congregation is already experiencing. . . . The focus in these contexts is almost entirely on relevance, on matching what happens in the assembly to ‘where

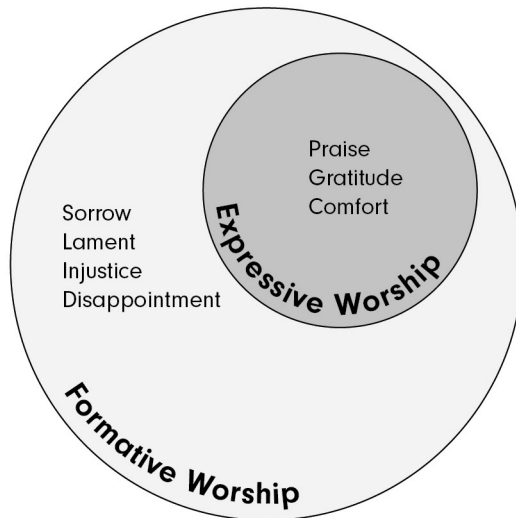
⁵Constance M. Cherry, *The Music Architect: Blueprints for Engaging Worshipers in Song* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 176.

⁶John D. Witvliet, Series Preface to *What Language Shall I Borrow?: The Bible and Christian Worship*, by Ronald P. Byars (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), xi.

⁷Melanie Ross, “Good Worship: An Evangelical Free Church Perspective,” *Liturgy* 29, no. 2 (2014), 3.

⁸Witvliet is not the only liturgical scholar who speaks of worship in terms of formation and expression, to be sure. It is noteworthy, nonetheless, that Witvliet locates the true source of liturgical conflict within formative and expressive substances rather than contemporary and traditional styles.

the people are at.”⁹ By *formative worship*, Witvliet is describing “worship which does acknowledge where a congregation is at, but is also eager for a congregation to grow beyond where it is into something deeper. . . . The focus is on growth, discipleship, and sanctification—even when these words aren’t explicitly used.”¹⁰ Whereas expressive worship emphasizes *connecting* with people through liturgical practices, formative worship emphasizes *shaping* people through liturgical practices. Melanie Ross compares formative and expressive worship to two views of a city: expressive worship is a street-level view, focusing more on a worshiper’s immediate needs and surroundings, and formative worship is a bird’s-eye view, focusing more on the holistic sweep of a community’s identity.¹¹ To be sure, it is flawed to perceive formative worship as the opposite of expressive worship. Formation and expression are distinct from one another, with formative worship including all elements of expressive worship and then offering additional elements (fig. 1). Worship, at its best, captures the experiences relevant to a particular community while simultaneously encouraging growth beyond the bounds of what is expressed.



⁹Witvliet, Series Preface to *What Language Shall I Borrow?*, xi–xii.

¹⁰Witvliet, Series Preface to *What Language Shall I Borrow?*, xi–xii.

¹¹Ross, “Good Worship,” 3.

Figure 1. One possible relationship between formative and expressive worship.

The degree to which the liturgies of a worshipping community are formative or expressive is a matter of content, not of style. Witvliet asserts that “expressive worship arises from congregations deeply attached to the status quo, whether or not the status quo features pipe organs or praise teams.”¹² Moreover, the liturgies that make worship formative or expressive are not standardized across cultures. What is formative for some contexts may be expressive for others (fig. 2). For instance, lament in the Black worship tradition could be a natural, expected element of a community’s ethos, while that expression may be unusual for a suburban, Anglo-Saxon congregation. In turn, a white megachurch congregation that relies on music from the Christian Copyright Licensing International Top 100 charts may find that expressive worship emphasizes praise and celebration of God’s blessings over emotions of doubt or sorrow.

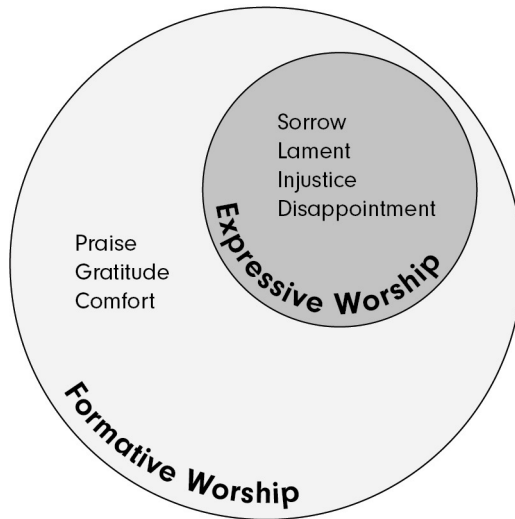


Figure 2. One possible relationship between formative and expressive worship that might depict the Black worship tradition, in contrast to fig. 1, which may more likely depict the relationship

¹²Witvliet, Series Preface to *What Language Shall I Borrow?*, xi. This claim could also be applied to formative worship.

in a white evangelical congregation.

FORMATIVE AND EXPRESSIVE WORSHIP IN TENSION

The nuances of formative and expressive worship can be elucidated when placed on a matrix (fig. 3). Witvliet suggests that congregations of any size or style understand worship at varying levels of formation and expression. This section will explore each of these quadrants, from lowest to highest values.

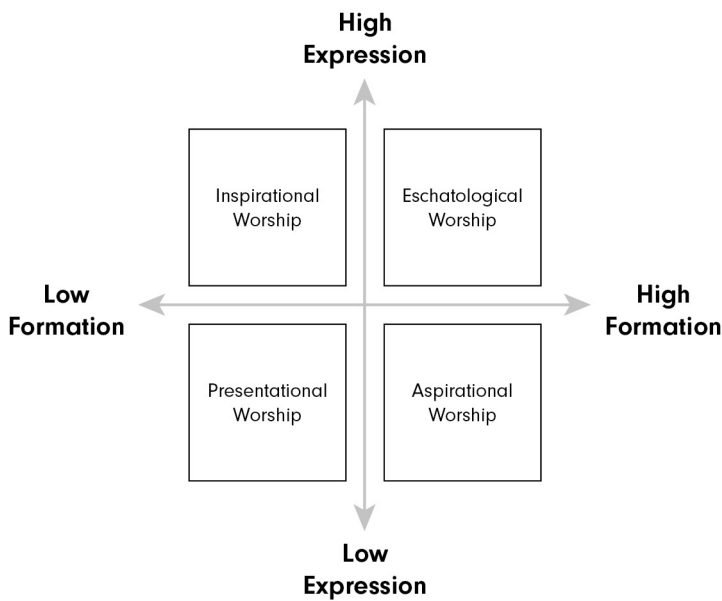


Figure 3. A matrix of formative and expressive worship

**LOW FORMATION, LOW EXPRESSION:
PRESENTATIONAL WORSHIP**

Worship that is neither expressive nor formative could be called *presentational worship*, as it seeks to do nothing but present worship without expecting any participation in God’s true intentions for the event.¹³ The

¹³It is worth considering whether such worship even exists in a way that could be considered decidedly Christian. Since this article focuses on worship when it is formative and/or expressive, less attention will be given to this quadrant of the matrix.

biblical prophets seemed concerned with Israel's hollow ritualism, presenting worship devoid of substance. God speaks through Amos to rebuke the Israelites' empty religion. "I hate, I despise your religious festivals," God laments. "Your assemblies are a stench to me. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them" (Amos 5:21–22, NIV). Likewise, through Malachi, God rejects the unclean offerings of the post-exilic Jews, accusing them of "lighting useless fires on my altar" (Mal 1:10). God's expectations for worship are clear: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hos 6:6). Worshipers are not asked to obsess over the acts of worship but to engage with and become like the one toward whom worship is offered. Matthew Myer Boulton equates presentational worship with idolatry, a continuation of the Fall, for "the crisis of sin, of separation, of being away and apart from God, takes place as the human attempt to carry out—apart from God—the 'work of the people.'"¹⁴ When God's standards for worship are ignored in favor of passive rituals that are neither expressive nor formative, presentational worship occurs, and worship fails to achieve its purposes.

LOW FORMATION, HIGH EXPRESSION: INSPIRATIONAL WORSHIP

Worship that is overly expressive but rarely formative could be called *inspirational worship*. This approach is a common practice among evangelical/free church worship traditions. Embracing Paul's motto to "become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Cor 9:22), worship becomes a pragmatic tool to express limited emotions; chief among them is praise. Scott Aniol claims that "worship for most evangelicals tends to focus on methodology: How many songs will we sing? What instrumentation will we use? In what order will we organize the service?" He concludes that evangelical worship, in general, values immediate needs and preferences. "How we worship is based on cultural conventions, preferences of the people, or tradition," Aniol writes. "What matters is what we believe and the sincerity of our hearts; how we worship is simply the authentic overflow of our hearts toward God."¹⁵ For Aniol,

¹⁴Matthew Myer Boulton, *God against Religion: Rethinking Christian Theology through Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 50.

¹⁵Scott Aniol, "As We Worship, So We Believe," *Artistic Theologian* 8, no. 1 (2020): 2.

evangelical worship is prone to pragmatism—selecting liturgical elements and expressions that are most fitting to the context of the particular congregation. When left unbalanced by formative liturgy, this approach to worship can become primarily inspirational. Hyper-expressive worship, then, merely inspires worshipers by confirming their present emotions and experiences.

It could be said that this attitude is prevalent among evangelical Christians, many of whom desire for worship to “fill them up” and create a spiritual “atmosphere.”¹⁶ A cursory analysis of many contemporary Christian worship songs would reveal lyrics of enraptured love to or from a vague deity. Worship leaders supplant liturgies of confession with motivational, relevant messages to avoid compounding guilt and to alleviate the cares amassed at the end of a difficult week.¹⁷ In some evangelical circles, electronic dance music (EDM) has gained traction in some American congregations, most notably through artists such as Hillsong Young & Free. Although not every congregation relies on an entirely EDM musical style, EDM-influenced worship music is more accessible with the growing popularity of instrumental loop tracks for church worship bands. Explaining the explosion of this new style, Jeff Neely does not cite the worship wars but hints at the allure of expressive worship. “In the case of EDM,” Neely observes, “the genre brings a context for creating a sense of tension and release (e.g., sin and redemption), as well as a sense of community and collective experience. . . . Different musical styles create familiar atmospheres that prime listeners for specific emotional experiences.”¹⁸ Neely locates the power of EDM worship in its ability to musically express the theological desires of a congregation. In other words, EDM forms a musical hype that, when left by itself, results in specific and delimited spiritual experiences that are primarily emotional.

The appeal of expressive worship resonates with other cultural contexts that may be suspicious of formative worship, viewing formativeness as stifling to the spontaneous work of the Holy Spirit. Among African Initiated Churches (AICs), many church leaders resist preparation. Peter Nyende

¹⁶From observation, these vague terms are ubiquitous in the evangelical worship vernacular.

¹⁷Witvliet raises an interesting question on this topic: “Why do so many churches resist confessing sin or lamenting brokenness ‘because sincerity on these matters can’t be forced,’ while singing songs demanding extravagant praise without a similar concern?” (John D. Witvliet, “The Mysteries of Liturgical Sincerity,” *Worship* 92 [May 2018]: 200).

¹⁸Jeff Neely, “Worship with a Drop: Why Churches Are Turning to Club Music to Elevate Praise,” *Christianity Today* 61, no. 6 (August 2017): 53.

notes that African ecclesiology and worship, situated in a syncretistic milieu that is aware of the spirit world, are sourced in “the intersection of Africa’s spiritual enchanted world and the Christian faith.”¹⁹ Cas Wepener and Mzwandile Nyawuza observe that, among South African indigenous leadership in worship, “the most important aspect . . . is what we will call ‘life in the Spirit,’ meaning a certain kind of spirituality that connects closely to an African worldview regarding the world of the Spirit and the spirits.”²⁰ By “life in the Spirit,” Wepener and Nyawuza refer to spiritual gifts such as prophecy, gift recognition, and healing as marks of liturgical leadership—a Christian reaction against a pagan worldview.²¹ Worship in AICs, generally speaking, favors expression over formation, for it is in the immediateness of expressive liturgy that the Holy Spirit can demonstrate God’s power among false spirits.

There is a necessary place in worship for expressing immediate desires and experiences. The problem with hyper-expressive (inspirational) worship, however, is that it does not represent the multitude of experiences that people bring to worship. Not all who gather for worship are ready to offer words of praise before God. Consider a family who comes to church mere days after grieving a miscarriage, or a blue-collar worker laid off due to a pandemic from a job she held for decades, or a white college student confused about how to steward his privilege in light of racial inequality. A liturgical *telos* of inspiration is insufficient when there are other emotions that urgently long to be expressed. Indeed, “bearing one another’s burdens” (Gal 6:2) and “offering your bodies as a living sacrifice” (Rom 12:1) require that those gathered for worship corporately express the fullness of their collective imagination—even if an individual has not experienced it yet—before God and each other. In short, inspirational worship fails to adequately communicate a worshipping community’s entire prayer to God.

Furthermore, if expressive worship does not include formative elements, it forfeits the ability to truly shape the ethos of a worshipping community. When faced with the choice between expressive or formative worship, Ross argues that “the temptation for many congregations is to focus on

¹⁹Peter Nyende, “The Church as an Assembly on Mt. Zion: An Ecclesiology from Hebrews for African Christianity,” in *The Church from Every Tribe and Tongue: Ecclesiology in the Majority World*, ed. Gene L. Green, Stephen T. Pardue, and K. K. Yeo (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2018), 151.

²⁰Cas Wepener and Mzwandile Nyawuza, “‘Sermon Preparation Is Dangerous’: Liturgical Formation in African Initiated Churches,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 157 (March 2017): 181.

²¹Wepener and Nyawuza, “Liturgical Formation,” 181.

the former at the expense at the latter,” which results in “an enormous amount of literature on how to improve or maximize the experience of worship, but relatively few resources that address what kind of people we are forming with our worship over the course of their lifetimes.”²² Worship is meant to express more emotions and experiences beyond those which are individualized or preferred, given that worship forms a congregation’s identity. Rhys Bezzant asserts that “the responsibility for corporate identity formation falls ever more heavily on the local congregation. God’s people respond to God’s voice, not just individually, but primarily as a body.”²³ When a congregation “learns to clothe itself with corporate categories and experiences,” worship shapes the entirety of Christian community’s spiritual ethos.²⁴ Thus, inspirational worship falls short in its ability to represent a decidedly corporate identity through its liturgy.

HIGH FORMATION, LOW EXPRESSION: ASPIRATIONAL WORSHIP

In contrast, worship that is excessively formative but barely expressive becomes *aspirational worship*. This approach is a common understanding of worship among so-called “liturgical” traditions.²⁵ Of course, it is unrealistic to express the entirety of a congregation’s experiences in a seventy-minute service. Nonetheless, traditions that rely on slower, repetitive rituals with less immediate results capture the beauty of formative worship. When liturgy is formative, it offers a rich, balanced diet of prayer to God, facilitated by tools such as the lectionary and the Christian year. Rather than selecting Scripture readings according to topical needs, the lectionary gradually covers most of the biblical terrain with corresponding collect prayers each week. Similarly, the Christian calendar allows worshipers to participate in God’s redemptive story through the calendar year—the contours of anticipation during Advent, wonder during Epiphany, penitence during Lent, joy during Easter, and mission during Pentecost. Robert Webber advocated for “Christian-year spirituality,” where “piety is based

²²Ross, “Good Worship,” 3.

²³Rhys Bezzant, “The Future of Liturgy: An Evangelical Perspective” (Spiritual Studies Institute, Ridley College, Melbourne, 2012), 5.

²⁴Bezzant, “The Future of Liturgy,” 5.

²⁵The liturgical tradition is an established term referring to a worship style with relatively fixed liturgies, often featuring prescribed prayer books or missals. This term is not a comment on its ritualistic qualities; to be sure, all worship is, in a sense, liturgical.

on this pilgrimage throughout the year.”²⁶ Webber refers to such practices that shape worshipers over time as “a formative approach to God’s saving events.”²⁷ Whereas expressive worship may highlight a congregation’s immediate “holy days” (such as Mother’s Day, Independence Day, or Baptism Sunday for local parishes, or Commencement, Revival Week, or Alumni Day for college and university chapel congregations), formative worship insists on wider liturgies that accompany longer-range formation.

Although formative worship has immense strengths, it can become burdensome when left unbalanced. Aspirational worship creates unmanageable goals, as these formative elements are not sourced within the needs of a particular context. It may seem ironic that worship can be hyper-formative. However, just as the prophets criticized the ritualism of presentational worship, aspirational worship can easily slip into liturgy for liturgy’s sake, devoid of meaning for the worshiper. The season of Advent may call forth a longing for Christ’s return, but this desire for peace is more spiritually significant when expressed through the prayers in a global pandemic, lamenting loneliness, divisiveness, and the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives. Put another way, formation may be the ending point of liturgy, but expression offers the starting point. Expressive liturgy strengthens formative liturgy by locating formation within the needs of a particular worshipping community. Like a spiritual guide, formative worship gives new words of prayer into which worshipers can grow, while its expressive dimension anchors their prayers in their current spiritual status.

Accordingly, worship that does not attempt to connect with a congregation by means of expressive liturgy creates barriers to participation. Curiously, even excessively formative worship can inhibit long-term spiritual formation. Ruth traces the formalization of worship to the medieval period, when “prayers and other liturgical texts became written down, edited, combined, scrutinized, shared, and standardized as families of liturgical rites associated with large regions developed,” leading to services that were almost “entirely scripted.”²⁸ “The danger . . . of such acts of worship,” Ruth worries, “is that it becomes easy to see them as things or objects to be checked off in the order of worship. It is easy to forget what they essentially are: a way of doing some vital worshipping activity

²⁶Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Time: Forming Spirituality through the Christian Year* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 32.

²⁷Webber, *Ancient-Future Time*, 32.

²⁸Lester Ruth, “An Ancient Way to Do Contemporary Worship,” in *Flow: The Ancient Way to Do Contemporary Worship*, ed. Lester Ruth (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020), 8.

toward God.”²⁹ Left unbalanced, treasured liturgies such as the *Te Deum*, the *Kyrie Eleison*, or the Doxology can easily become “a sequence of liturgical objects, not a flow of worshipful actions.”³⁰ As Bezzant writes, “One of the chief concerns expressed by evangelicals regarding formal liturgies is their power to alienate. . . . Repetition or recitation is thought to conform to an infantile pedagogy. A set-piece order does not take into account local needs or opportunities.”³¹ Proper worship resists the perils of aspirational worship—liturgical ritual with no clear relevance for the worshipping community.

In short, for formative liturgy to be truly formative, it must also contain expressive elements. Here is where an “empathetic imagination,” to borrow Fred Craddock’s words, becomes imperative. Craddock defines this type of empathy as “the capacity to achieve a large measure of understanding of another person without having had that person’s experiences.”³² By gaining a sufficient understanding of worshipers’ desires, struggles, values, and circumstances, a worship pastor can use empathy in order to build bridges from the world of the liturgy to the world of the worshiper. Those who lead worship in ways that attend only to the liturgy but not to the people performing the liturgical acts neglect pastoral awareness. Indeed, a myopic approach, for Witvliet, creates liturgists who “will lack the motivation to diagnose and treat the liturgical diseases that keep congregations from genuine spiritual health.”³³ Formative worship becomes aspirational worship when it remains irrelevant and artificial, failing to recognize the unique context in which it is expressed.³⁴ Wise are the worship leaders who take seriously their pastoral duties, fashioning words of prayer that are both accessible and challenging.

²⁹Ruth, “An Ancient Way to Do Contemporary Worship,” 9.

³⁰Ruth, “An Ancient Way to Do Contemporary Worship.” A similar claim could be made for the free church tradition: Left unbalanced, the three-song setlist, prayer, and sermon can easily become “a sequence of liturgical objects, not a flow of worshipful actions.”

³¹Bezzant, “Future of Liturgy,” 4.

³²Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 39.

³³John D. Witvliet, “Teaching Worship as a Christian Practice,” in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theology Education, and Christian Ministry*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 145.

³⁴For instance, penitence may be a formative element for a congregation, but perhaps a confession liturgy may need to be adapted with progressively targeted language. Likewise, perhaps the opening prayer should include a reference to a recent local tragedy.

HIGH FORMATION, HIGH EXPRESSION: ESCHATOLOGICAL WORSHIP

At its best, worship is both highly expressive and highly formative. Thankfully, there is neither a choice nor a compromise needed between them. “Good worship is both formative and expressive,” Ross declares. “It is attentive to both the short-term impact of a seventy-five-minute service, and the long-term spiritual formation that happens over the course of several decades.”³⁵ The rituals of the church are inherently multivalent. Bernard Cooke and Gary Macy refer to rituals as, in part, containing a “hermeneutic of experience” and a tool for maturation—a similar parallel to Witvliet’s binary division of expressive and formative worship. As a “hermeneutic of experience,” rituals give “a particular way of understanding the world” and “celebrate and reinforce this understanding.”³⁶ As a tool for spiritual development, rituals “help Christians ‘grow up’ . . . and each ritual offers the possibility of a further maturation.”³⁷ Worship must address immediate needs while simultaneously recognizing that one of these needs is to shape worshipers for a life of discipleship.³⁸ The rituals that constitute Christian worship “mark the many stages of maturation within groups and societies,”³⁹ offering means through which worshipers can “work out their salvation” (Phil 2:12) and “grow in grace” (2 Pet 3:18).

Worship can be both expressive and formative regardless of style or context. For instance, Orbelina Eguizabal challenges notions of Latino worship that portray it as a mere expression of Latino culture or a sacred fiesta. Instead, Eguizabal asserts, Latino worship is a highly formative event expressed within a Latino context. She explains that “spiritual formation evolves around the activities that are held on Sunday morning or afternoon, because the Sunday gathering is the main activity for members. Church leaders try to make it work for everybody’s needs.”⁴⁰ In addition to a worship service and Sunday school class, Eguizabal observes that Latino worship typically includes times of fellowship throughout the gathering,

³⁵Ross, “Good Worship,” 4.

³⁶Bernard J. Cooke and Gary Macy, *Christian Symbol and Ritual: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 52.

³⁷Cooke and Macy, *Christian Symbol and Ritual*, 52.

³⁸This approach reframes conversations about liturgies such as the prayers of the people and even the announcements—both of which express the needs of a congregation with a view to long-term formation.

³⁹Cooke and Macy, *Christian Symbol and Ritual*, 28.

⁴⁰Orbelina Eguizabal, “Spiritual Formation of Believers among Latino Protestant Churches in the United States,” *Christian Education Journal* 15, no. 3 (2018): 429.

which may include refreshments, greeting with hugs, short prayers that interrupt conversations, or even complete meals.⁴¹ An extended fellowship time is a formative ritual rooted in an expressive desire (“making it work for everybody’s needs” on an important day for Latino Christians). This time “helps adults and children get to know each other, encourage each other in their walk with the Lord, and build community.”⁴² Intentionally structured according to its cultural style, this form of worship among Latino communities pays attention to immediate needs while facilitating opportunities for long-term, corporate growth.

Witvliet’s vision of formative and expressive worship is sourced in a robust understanding of covenantal worship. Witvliet refers to worship as “God’s language school,” a metaphor borrowed from Thomas Long.⁴³ The liturgies of Christian worship are pedagogical devices, training worshipers to speak to God in ways that are both familiar (expressive prayer) and distant (formative prayer). As Witvliet writes, “When we gather for worship, the church invites us to join together and say to God . . . a series of communal speech acts. . . . The problem is that, like toddlers, we don’t have a natural inclination to say any of these things to God. . . . If we are not formed to do so, none of us are all that likely to say to God half the things we say in the liturgy.”⁴⁴ Witvliet presupposes public worship as a covenant renewal ceremony, an event that allows the exchange of “communal speech acts.” Scripture describes such ceremonies, during which God’s promises with God’s people are sealed through ritual (cf. Exod 34; Josh 24). God makes promises, and God’s people make promises back.⁴⁵ Liturgy allows this conversation to be “genuinely formative of nothing less than a corporate covenantal relationship with God.”⁴⁶ This interaction—an active dialogue, not a monologue—is made possible through the work of Jesus, the “mediator of a new covenant” (Heb 9:15).

When liturgy is both formative and expressive, it enables worshipers to

⁴¹Eguizabal, “Spiritual Formation of Believers among Latino Protestant Churches,” 429.

⁴²Eguizabal, “Spiritual Formation of Believers among Latino Protestant Churches,” 430.

⁴³“Worship is a key element in the church’s ‘language school’ for life. . . . It’s a provocative idea—worship as a soundtrack for the rest of life, the words and music and actions of worship inside the sanctuary playing the background as we live our lives outside, in the world” (Thomas G. Long, *Testimony: Talking Ourselves into Being Christian* [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004], 47–48).

⁴⁴John D. Witvliet, “Liturgy as God’s Language School,” *Pastoral Music* 31, no. 4 (2007): 19.

⁴⁵Witvliet—true to his Reformed identity—relies heavily on the Psalms as the “script” and “mentor” for this covenantal interaction. For Witvliet, the Psalms capture the fullness of the human experience toward God, self, and world. See John D. Witvliet, *The Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship: A Brief Introduction and Guide to Resources* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

⁴⁶Witvliet, “Liturgy as God’s Language School,” 23.

hear from God and speak to God in ways that are both familiar and fresh, comforting and challenging. It recognizes that God's covenantal relationship encompasses more expressions of faith than those of a single worshiper. Hence Witvliet writes:

The liturgy, fortunately, gives room for all these essential words. It helps each of us express our particular experience, but it also invites us to practice the language that represents what someone else is experiencing. Authentic worship involves both expressing our deepest feelings in the moment and practicing the best relational habits in our common covenant with God in Christ.⁴⁷

Bezzant likens proper worship to a formative, holistic drill in which “a well-conceived liturgy provides for individual Christians an opportunity to exercise several spiritual muscles, using various apparatuses.”⁴⁸ Bezzant is careful to note that the exchange of words does not limit itself to cognitive understanding. In liturgical contexts, he claims, “minds, hearts, wills and imaginations can all be engaged through the power of words. Cumulatively, words are performative apparatuses (not merely information manuals) when embedded within a ritual structure.”⁴⁹ This “power of words,” located within the dynamism of formative and expressive worship, allows worship to transform lives.

This form of worship could be labeled *eschatological worship*, as it recognizes the healthy tension between the “already” (expression) and the “not yet” (formation). True enough, all worship is eschatological; through the liturgy, worshipers participate in the kingdom of heaven on earth.⁵⁰ Thus, the worshipping community is an eschatological community, participating

⁴⁷Witvliet, “Liturgy as God’s Language School,” 19–20.

⁴⁸Bezzant, “Future of Liturgy,” 9.

⁴⁹Bezzant, “Future of Liturgy,” 9. Lutheran theologians also see worship as a “foretaste of eternity”; see Eric Chafe, *Tears into Wine: J. S. Bach’s Cantata 21 in Its Musical and Theological Contexts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁵⁰The eschatological dimensions of evangelical ecclesiology are indebted to Catholic and Orthodox theologies, which emphasize the intersection of heaven and earth. The *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, a constitution on liturgical renewal from the Second Vatican Council, states: “In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, a minister of the holies and of the true tabernacle” (“*In terrena Liturgia caelestem illam praegustando participamus, quae in sancta civitate Ierusalem, ad quam peregrini tendimus, celebratur, ubi Christus est in dextera Dei sedens, sanctorum minister et tabernaculi verus*”) (Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, quoted in David Lysik, ed., *The Liturgy Documents: A Parish Resource*, 4th ed. [Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2004], 1:5).

in rituals that point toward and usher in God's kingdom. Jean-Jacques von Allmen spoke of worship as an "eschatological game,"⁵¹ and Geoffrey Wainwright envisions the church at worship as a representation of the already-not-yet eschatological tension. "The worship of God is the most eschatological activity of the church, since it will endure into the final kingdom and indeed become so all-pervasive that there will be no need for a temple in the city of God," he states.⁵² When worship is both highly expressive and highly formative, worship is highly eschatological.

In the liturgies of an eschatological worshipping community, the formative dimensions prepare worshipers for citizenship in heaven (cf. Phil 2:20), while the expressive dimensions ground worship on earth. Earthly worship intersects with eternal worship in its rituals. Stanley Hauerwas asserts that "those rites, baptism and Eucharist, are not just 'religious things' that Christian people do. . . . It is in baptism and eucharist that we see most clearly the marks of God's kingdom in the world."⁵³ For Hauerwas, worship, particularly the sacraments, marks the presence of a countercultural reality on earth and points toward God's kingdom. These ordinary signs and symbols, expressed within a particular worshipping community, become portals into a future hope. Thus, God expects songs of celebration and prayers of thanksgiving. At the same time, God expects worshipers to pray for their enemies and preach sermons that mourn and decry sins of injustice, for these "communal speech acts" point toward the world that God is shaping. These formative acts are not politically motivated but kingdom-motivated—indeed, such are the liturgies that Jesus sees as necessary in his kingdom (Matt 5).

Another clear example of eschatological worship can be observed in singing songs from other cultures. Swee Hong Lim insists that singing global songs in North American contexts is not a matter of increasing diversity, satisfying preferences, or cultivating authenticity. Instead, through music-making, the Holy Spirit "enfolds the singing community into a fellowship that includes the Other."⁵⁴ Thus, "the songs are no longer songs of the Other but are our songs as well—particularly when we subscribe

⁵¹Jean-Jacques von Allmen, "Worship and the Holy Spirit," *Studia Liturgica* 2 (1963): 124–35.

⁵²Geoffrey Wainwright, *Worship with One Accord: Where Liturgy and Ecumenism Embrace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 31.

⁵³Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 108.

⁵⁴Swee Hong Lim, "What Is the Right Kind of Worship . . . If You Want North American Congregations to Sing Global Songs?," *Global Forum on Arts and Christian Faith* 5, no. 1 (2017): 51.

to the understanding of being united in the one Spirit.”⁵⁵ For Lim, good worship incorporates songs from foreign lands into a familiar community for the sake of “sonic hospitality.” “The ‘right’ worship is worship that actively divests power from the empire to the subaltern—even in the choice of worship leadership,” Lim declares. “It is worship that endeavors to honor diversity at God’s table, recognizing that all are in one fellowship of the Spirit. This worship approach recognizes that diversity provides a clearer perspective into the realm of God, which has justice and peace as its hallmark.”⁵⁶ Worship leaders do not incorporate global songs into the liturgy of an English-speaking, North American congregation to be politically sensitive or culturally relevant; there is a much larger agenda dominating such decisions. When worshipping communities welcome and sing the “songs of the Other,” these once-formative words become expressive while signaling a future reality, where the liturgy includes songs that voice the faith of “every nation, tribe, people, and language” (Rev 7:9).

Put simply, proper worship inculcates an eschatological worldview. When worship contains a wise mix of liturgies that are both highly expressive and highly formative, these rituals shape worshipers into people who see the world as God sees it and who treat the world as God treats it. Alexander Schmemmann describes corporate worship as “a vantage point from which we can see more deeply into the reality of the world.”⁵⁷ Similarly, Wolfhart Pannenberg looks to the church’s gathering as a signal of the eschaton. “What the church does most distinctively serves the world most powerfully,” Pannenberg writes. “It is precisely as a liturgical worshipping community that the church is most effectively a sign of the ultimate destiny of every human being and of humanity as a whole.”⁵⁸ The qualities of proper worship, then, move beyond relevance or preference; instead, right worship shapes worshipers into the people of God.

RE-INTERPRETING THE WORSHIP WARS IN LIGHT OF THE FORMATIVE/EXPRESSIVE DIVIDE

Witvliet explains that the issue of music was at the “front line of combat” in the worship wars.⁵⁹ “The worship wars of the past decade are about

⁵⁵Lim, “What Is the Right Kind of Worship?,” 51.

⁵⁶Lim, “What Is the Right Kind of Worship?,” 53.

⁵⁷Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, 2nd ed. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004), 27.

⁵⁸Wolfhart Pannenberg, “The Present and Future Church,” *First Things*, November 1991, 49.

⁵⁹John D. Witvliet, “Beyond Style: Rethinking the Role of Music in Worship,” in *Worship at the*

nothing more than music—what music will be sung, what style it will be, who will lead it, what instruments will be used, and how loud it will be,” he claims.⁶⁰ Witvliet now maintains that the primary divide between congregations is not over superficial matters of musical style. Instead, the real dispute behind the worship wars is whether a congregation chooses to view worship as primarily formative or primarily expressive. Perhaps it is possible to re-interpret the worship wars in light of Witvliet’s proposed divide. If debates over worship have largely surrounded “nothing more than music,” then how could issues of formation and expression enhance these conversations?

Undergirding the ardent cases for a particular style, whether traditional hymns, contemporary music, or a blend of both, is a theological preference—a decision on how to view the essence of worship. Common arguments for one style over another tend to target the function of the style. An expected case for hymns, for instance, might say that hymns are superior because they teach theology, while contemporary Christian music (CCM) does not. This argument describes a theological preference within a style, claiming that hymns are formative (in that they teach a wide variety of experiences with God), and CCM is not. Conversely, an expected case for CCM might say that CCM emphasizes a new, fresh expression of a relationship with God. Hymns, in turn, are stale and lifeless. This theological preference favors the expressiveness found in CCM lyrics and music, perceived as more relevant and therefore better.

There are significant limitations to viewing the worship wars merely as a style debate. The fault lines become apparent when one extrapolates these arguments. Doctrinal truth may be formed in hymns such as Fanny Crosby’s “To God Be the Glory,” but how could the same standards apply to subjective hymns like Charles Wesley’s “Jesus, Lover of My Soul”? Likewise, Cory Asbury’s “Reckless Love” and Sinach’s “Way Maker” may long for a new inbreaking of the Spirit, but what about contemporary songs such as Hillsong’s “King of Kings” or “This I Believe (The Creed),” which teach a strong Christology? It is no surprise that Witvliet calls these style-driven debates “problematic discussions” that “tolerate abstract and nebulous arguments.”⁶¹ The worship wars have become a pragmatic lens through which a worshiping community chooses to understand the

Next Level: Insight from Contemporary Voices, ed. Tim Dearborn and Scott Coil (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 164.

⁶⁰Witvliet, “Beyond Style,” 164.

⁶¹Witvliet, “Beyond Style,” 165.

essence—formative or expressive—of worship.

Placing the worship wars along a formative/expressive divide rather than a traditional/contemporary divide reveals an urgent issue. A functional or pragmatic approach to worship style lacks the opportunity for deeper conversations on why worship matters. As Byron Anderson writes, “Missing in both this pragmatic turn and in the conflict between ‘traditional’ and ‘contemporary’ worship is significant discussion of what is at stake for the identity of Christian persons and communities in the shape and practice of worship.”⁶² Conversations that operate on lower-level issues of style threaten genuine worship renewal efforts, as they will never ascend to the more pressing conversations on whether worship will be formative or expressive. Witvliet is correct: “Questions about ‘right liturgy’ deserve more than an answer. They beg for a discussion of underlying rationale.”⁶³ Although there may be lively, endless discussions on what makes worship preferable or relevant, there will be far fewer on what makes worship, at its very essence, “good.”

CONCLUSION: THE ANGULARITY OF LITURGICAL THEOLOGY

“Right” worship is both formative and expressive, resisting the respective extremes of aspirational and inspirational worship. Witvliet insists that worship not only allows worshipers to express what is on their hearts now but prepares them for the many emotions and words that they will find themselves hearing from and speaking to God. Cherry summarizes the matter well: “Songs influence us. They both express who we are and call us to who we can become.”⁶⁴ Such could be said of any liturgy: sung or spoken, public or private, formal or informal. Regardless of cultural context or musical style, from organs to guitars to congas, worship leaders, pastors, and church musicians will always face the decision to include primarily expressive or primarily formative liturgies—whether they realize it or not.

Christian worship is shared faith expressed and formed through ritual. This article explored Witvliet’s understanding of worship as formative and expressive and argued that this framework is a clearer lens through which one can view the divide between today’s and tomorrow’s worshipping communities. Further research is necessary on this issue, especially to connect

⁶²E. Byron Anderson, *Worship and Christian Identity: Practicing Ourselves* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 2.

⁶³Witvliet, “Teaching Worship,” 144.

⁶⁴Cherry, *Music Architect*, 236.

the theological dimensions of formative and expressive worship with the historical development of contemporary evangelical worship. This article has called for conversations among scholars of liturgy and church music on the essence of worship that dig deeper than stylistic preferences. A matrix of formation and expression reframes the worship wars by its substance rather than its style, allowing researchers and practitioners in liturgy to have more profound conversations about proper worship.

ABSTRACTS OF RECENT SWBTS SCHOOL OF CHURCH MUSIC AND WORSHIP DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS

HYMNS, HYMNALS, AND THE TRINITY IN CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Derald J. Bulls, Jr., Ph.D.

Since the earliest days of the Restoration Movement founded by Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone, there has been a neglect of and great controversy surrounding historical creedalism, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the word “Trinity” itself. Such neglect has led to the hymnody of Churches of Christ demonstrating a practice of eliminating songs about or directed to of the Trinity. This has contributed to a vast chasm of time-honored hymns being absent and unknown from the movement as a whole.

This research explores the movement’s position surrounding the Trinity and how its hymns and hymnals have ignored and redacted the Trinity from its congregational worship practice. In doing so, a comparison of this body of hymns alongside Baptist hymnals of the same era yields important comparative data. These hymns as well as present practices among Churches of Christ suggest possible opportunities for rectifying such an important theological pillar’s absence from the worship life of these churches and from the spiritual life of congregants.

THEOLOGY INSPIRES DOXOLOGY: THE HYMNODY OF ANNE DUTTON AND ANNE STEELE

Holly Mulherin Farrow, Ph.D.

The relationship between theology and doxology is an underexplored topic that warrants additional research, particularly through concrete examination of materials that are both expressly theological and doxological—such as hymns. This study contributes such an analysis, utilizing the

hymnody of two British hymnwriters of the eighteenth century: Particular Baptists Anne Dutton (1692–1765) and her younger contemporary Anne Steele (1717–1778).

The dissertation shows that the hymnody of Dutton and Steele illustrates an interconnection between theology and doxology that is revealed and bound together by the Word of God. The purpose of the study is to emphasize the importance of fidelity to Scripture—both in theological reflections of the mind and in doxological engagement of the heart—since biblical faithfulness enables believers to present a more complete and excellent offering to God.

Following an introductory chapter, the second chapter introduces Dutton and Steele within the various contexts in which they carried out their Christian callings as hymnwriters. Chapter three presents the unique differences in their poetic language while chapter four highlights their many thematic similarities through their shared connection with the book of Psalms. The final chapter summarizes the findings of the study and points out potential applications and areas for further research.

In addition to contributing to the academic discussion about the interconnection between theology and doxology, the study also presents an extended comparison and analysis of the hymns of Dutton and Steele together. Additionally, the three extensive appendices contain all their published hymns (as well as the psalm versifications of Steele and the Scriptures the hymns are based upon), in an effort to both highlight the works of Dutton and Steele and to offer a useful contribution to eighteenth-century hymnological research.

In essence, this dissertation, comprised of linguistic and thematic analyses of the hymnody of Dutton and Steele, illustrates their doctrinal and hymnic fidelity to Scripture as well as the close kinship that exists between the knowledge of God and the praise of God—between theology and doxology.

BOOK REVIEWS

HERL, JOSEPH. *WORSHIP WARS IN EARLY LUTHERANISM: CHOIR, CONGREGATION, AND THREE CENTURIES OF CONFLICT*. NEW YORK: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2004. XI+354 PP. \$65.00.

This book allows readers to investigate the role of music and congregational involvement in the development of Lutheran liturgy over three centuries. Joseph Herl, professor of music at Concordia University, Nebraska, has done an excellent job of analyzing sources concerning choral and congregational singing in Lutheran churches during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. He argues that many congregations sang poorly and that the choir frequently played a more significant musical role than the congregation in the sixteenth century. Thus, the early Lutheran liturgy was primarily choral and only gradually transitioned to congregational. His argument begins with a thorough examination of church traditions and their requirements for choral or congregational singing.

The book is divided into nine chapters and a conclusion. The functions of the choir and congregation in the sixteenth century are examined in Chapters 1 through 6. It starts with Martin Luther and the liturgy in Wittenberg. Then it examines the Catholic liturgical traditions that existed before the Reformation and traces them through the sixteenth century as a background for Luther's changes. In Chapter 7, Herl follows the "worship wars" over musical form. How hymns were sung in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is described in Chapters 8 and 9. Then Chapter 9 summarizes the key issues in hymn performance practice, such as tempo and repertory selection. An overall conclusion summarizes the book.

In Herl's discussion, the congregation was expected to sing the Credo, a hymn before or after the sermon, and hymns during communion in many regions; other parts of the Mass, such as the Kyrie, were reserved for the choir (55–62). The choir was still in charge of singing most of the liturgy. In terms of choral versus congregational services, Herl suggests that the

liturgy was more likely to be congregational in smaller parishes. He also mentions that the style of music appropriate for church services was a topic of debate throughout the period. Herl avoids the usual analyses of musical repertoire in favor of focusing on events, people, and ideas, drawing readers into the story, and allowing them to imagine what a Lutheran church must have been like in the sixteenth through the eighteenth century. He states that congregational singing was not unknown before the Reformation, but it is unclear how widespread the practice was. According to reports, congregational hymnals were not introduced in most parts of Germany until the seventeenth or eighteenth century. Although Luther thought congregational singing was beneficial and desirable, he did not endorse it over the choral liturgy. As a result, the Latin choral mass remained the primary service in Wittenberg throughout Luther's lifetime.

If congregational singing was limited in the early decades of the Reformation, Herl claims it flourished between the late sixteenth and early eighteenth centuries. He describes four reasons for this change: (1) the development of organ accompaniment for congregational singing (131–50); (2) the introduction of hymnals for congregational use, particularly the *cantional* books in which the melody was harmonized in four or five parts (113–14); (3) the influence of Pietism, which promoted literacy and hymnal ownership as tools for personal devotion (126); and (4) the choir's increased performance of difficult, sophisticated music, leaving chorales to the congregation (117).

Furthermore, Herl claims that the development of organ accompaniment for congregational singing arose because of the organists' select repertoires and abuses of their roles. Organists only played sacred motets, responsories, and hymns on the organ, not frivolous secular songs and dances. The organist abused his roles when, for example, he played an unnecessarily long postlude or, in some cases, played drunkenly and loudly (149–51). As a result, the organ's role shifted from performing the liturgy in parallel with the choir to accompanying a singing congregation or choir. Herl claims that the accompaniment of hymns encouraged the people to sing, "putting the final nail into the coffin of the choral liturgy among the Lutherans" (151).

The book contains valuable explanations for terminology used in sixteenth-century sources, as well as details such as the location and size of the choir, different types of church spaces, and different styles of music. Furthermore, his examination of singing in sixteenth-century church

services is based on an impressively comprehensive and thorough survey of contemporary reports.

The book presents choral services against congregational singing, arguing that “the congregational conception of the service won out” after “about two hundred and fifty years” (175–78). The work is organized analytically rather than chronologically. *Worship Wars in Early Lutheranism* will help worship leaders and scholars to see how congregational singing evolved from choir singing after the Reformation. I highly recommend this book as an academic resource.

ZauNaw Chyinghtawng

COSTEN, MELVA WILSON. *AFRICAN AMERICAN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP*. 2ND ED. NASHVILLE: ABINGDON PRESS, 2007. 144 PP. \$20.99.

Melva Wilson Costen is the former Helmar Emil Nielson Professor of Worship and Music at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta, Georgia. In *African American Christian Worship*, Costen provides an informative historical, theological, denominational, and ritual survey of Black worship traditions in North America. This introductory book on worship research is essential to liturgical studies, memorializing a historical oral liturgical tradition for instructional purposes. The primary purpose of Costen’s work is to provide historical resources that chronicle the origin of African American Christianity in North America through the interplay of African religion and European American Christianity. She focuses on the emergence of worship in African American history, introducing the reader to the text with a “talking drums” prelude that encourages worship in a culturally appropriate manner.

Focusing on the history of various traditions, Costen opens the book with a theological foundation for African American worship based on traditional liturgical and sacramental categories. According to Costen, the supremacy of God, the African battle for existence under horrific slavery, engaging with God experientially, and a strong feeling of connection are all essential shapers of worship in the African American context. She sees them as shared components of an African primordial worldview that

underpins a theology of worship, yet she recognizes that there is no one African ancestry. Costen observes that African American worship is a profoundly and distinctively evolved style that combines at least four streams of tradition: “traditional African primal world views; Judeo-Christian religion; African American folk religion, which emanated from world views shaped in the American context in a crisis of slavery and oppression; and Western/Euro-American Christianity” (23).

The second chapter presents an overview of the heritage of African American religious life, with a specific focus on North America. Through an Afro-Christian lens, Costen investigates the colonial slavery foundations of African American worship, particularly stressing the political, economic, and theological difficulties over the rite of baptism and release of the enslaved people. The third and fourth chapters are devoted to aspects of slave culture, including the invisible institution of slave-led worship and the praise house. As a method of resistance to tyranny, enslaved people worshiped secretly by praying, singing, and preaching in these invisible institutions. Praise houses are also briefly discussed in the text. These were the first “visible” institutions of worship for African Americans because enslaved people were permitted to worship freely, albeit under the supervision of a slaveholder at times.

The fifth chapter focuses on the sacramental and liturgical components of African American worship. Costen examines the enslaved person’s rituals, sacraments, and ordinances, as well as the role of preaching and music within these ceremonies. The sixth chapter examines African American Protestant congregations and denominations. The author analyzes the origins and practices of Black faiths and congregations in this chapter, highlighting the “anti-structure” role of ritual for African Americans as well as certain shared liturgical aspects among churches.

The seventh chapter further examines various typical liturgical aspects of African American worship life. Though these aspects are mentioned in previous chapters, Costen uses the present moment to speak to their elevation in modern African American church life. Despite her efforts to find common elements of worship, Costen reminds the reader that African Americans are not all the same, as demonstrated through discussions of Baptist, Pentecostal, Methodist, and Holiness traditions.

Costen wishes to foster discussion about the cultural worship rituals covered in the literature. This book promotes a much-needed dialogue regarding African American Christian worship by providing a historical

review of its origins in slavery and how it now presents itself via significant rituals in diverse churches. This is a good analysis that may be used as a guide for congregations and schools interested in investigating the nature of worship as it manifests itself among specific communities of religion. The study questions at the conclusion of each chapter make this work valuable in academic and pastoral settings, and it should even assist ecumenical groups in engaging in discourse with African American churches about their distinctive contributions to the liturgical life of the larger Christian faith. A suggested worship planning model that supports the use of a lectionary and inclusive language describing believers, coupled with ample bibliographic material, adds to the great strength of this book.

Despite many strong qualities, this reviewer also believes there were several missed opportunities. Costen exclusively emphasizes various Protestant African American Christian worship communities, excluding African American Catholics. In both Catholic and Protestant traditions, African American worship is an essential ecclesiastical tradition in the United States. The lack of African American Catholic worship experiences in a book about Christian worship is an unfortunate oversight.

Also, Costen offers a call to worship through the preface of her book. This reviewer would have welcomed a benedictory or sending postlude to help summarize and synthesize the thoughts contained within the chapters.

Despite these critiques, Costen's writing engages in the academic debate on African American worship rituals by demonstrating how practices are entrenched in cultural history and theology. This book fills a significant void in the existing literature on American worship by providing a practical and academic introduction to this overlooked worship tradition. This digestible book comes highly recommended by this reviewer. Every professor, pastor, and parishioner should read Costen's *African American Christian Worship*.

James Anthony Plenty

JOHNSON, TERRY L. *WORSHIPPING WITH CALVIN: RECOVERING THE HISTORIC MINISTRY AND WORSHIP OF REFORMED PROTESTANTISM*. LEYLAND, ENGLAND: EP BOOKS, 2014. 433 PP. \$22.99.

“Evangelical Christianity faces a crisis” (19); the “theological and moral decline of the heirs of fundamentalism” is evident (21). As a Presbyterian pastor (PCA) and author of several books, Terry Johnson has spent much of his ministry calling Evangelicals back to a Reformed approach to worship. In *Worshipping with Calvin*, Johnson advocates for a “biblical, historical, traditional, catholic form of ministry” (316). In doing so, he looks back to Calvin, one of the “most influential liturgists in the history of the church,” (12) to find a path forward. Johnson’s work—which seeks renewal through retrieval—is necessary because most of the “standard works on Calvin fail to deal with his liturgical ideas” (11), and “few contemporary examples of historic Reformed ministry and worship exist” (14). The author states that the aim of this work is to show that the worship and ministry of the Reformers are “to be preferred to all the currently available alternatives” (17). Although this work has a grasp on the historical context of the Reformation in Geneva under Calvin, its primary goal is not historical research; rather, the goal of *Worshipping with Calvin* is practical worship ministry.

Johnson’s book is divided into three main sections: an introduction that surveys the Evangelical church today (10–35), an argument for the importance of Reformed worship and ministry (36–61), and the strengths of Reformed worship as seen in Calvin’s ministry (62–320). The author also provides an extensive bibliography (321–68) which is divided into four main categories: original sources, background reading, history of worship, and practice of worship. The “practice of worship” category provides seven helpful sections: pastoral theology, preaching, reading Scripture, prayer, church song, sacraments, and setting of worship. Readers who are considering Reformed worship will find this bibliography a great starting place.

In the first major section (10–35), the introduction, Johnson provides an overview of the dismal ecclesiastical state of Evangelical worship. Until the 1800s, low-church Protestants maintained a form of worship that had its roots in Reformation worship, and prior to the 1960s, “worship was not a matter of controversy” (24) among Reformed people. The earliest rumblings of the decline of Reformed worship can be traced to a 1968 article

in the *Presbyterian Journal* that mocked the use of things like electronic instruments, dance, and “something called ‘liturgical balls’” (26). More than 50 years later, churches should be asking: “What kind of people are our liturgical practices forming us to be? This indeed is *the* question” (23). Hope for the modern church is rooted in a long-held philosophy of the relationship between Christian living and worship—*Lex orandi, lex credenda, lex vivendi*. “We pray as we believe; we live as we pray” (22).

In the second major section (36–61), the author presents the historical, exegetical, and theological case for Reformed worship. The approach that Johnson argues for was not invented in the 1500s; rather, as the author shows, the Reformers were dependent on the apostles and the early church fathers (39–43). For the author, the theological case can be summarized in the five Solas of the Reformation (44–52). The section is closed with a call for stewardship. Congregations meet each Lord’s Day for a limited time each week, so it is unwise to insert “alternatives” in place of prescribed forms like prayer, preaching, singing, and preaching, which do “a vastly better job” of ministering grace (60).

In the largest portion of the book (62–320), Johnson presents the strengths of Reformed worship. It is especially important to note that, while Johnson’s first 60 pages are polemical in nature, this final section positively demonstrates the strengths and benefits of Reformed worship. The author provides five strengths of Reformed worship: God-centered, Bible-filled, gospel-structured, church-aware, and Spirit-dependent. When the author addresses the topic of psalmody and hymnody, he concedes that psalmody became the preferred expression of early Christians but departs from Calvin’s psalms-mainly/Scripture-only position for singing (123–48) in his personal philosophy of worship. One particularly helpful contribution is the author’s advocacy for the Church’s unique culture that “transcends individual and group cultural tastes” (285). He promotes a form of worship that is not bound to a single generation or ethnic group (285–96).

I recommend *Worshipping with Calvin* by Terry Johnson for laypersons, pastors, and scholars who are looking for a biblical philosophy of worship and ministry that is concerned with how Christians of the last 2,000 years sought to understand Scripture’s expectations for worship.

Baptist readers will not agree with the author’s position on pedobaptism, which is only prevalent in his portion on baptism (197–205), but will find a helpful explanation for the pedobaptist perspective that will aid

Baptists in accurately and charitably characterizing this position. Although worship falls within the broader category of ecclesiology, Johnson steers clear of the issue of Presbyterian and congregational forms of church government, and he even identifies non-Presbyterians as his allies in the revival of historic Reformed worship (10–11). Johnson closes with his hope for Evangelicalism: This “is not the first time a sanctified church culture has encountered a morally degraded pagan culture...” (319). We must remember that “fundamental things do not change: the gospel, human nature, and the ordinary means of grace” (320).

Daniel Aaron Webster

TAYLOR, W. DAVID O. *THE THEATER OF GOD'S GLORY: CALVIN, CREATION, AND THE LITURGICAL ARTS*. GRAND RAPIDS: WILLIAM B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING COMPANY, 2017. 240 PP. \$31.50

The Reformers' views of liturgy and music are often considered settled research. Luther supported singing and musical instruments in corporate worship, Calvin supported singing but not instruments for worship, and Zwingli allowed no music whatsoever in worship. However, David Taylor offers a new view of Calvin and worship by exploring his views of the arts in worship and contrasting them with his views on the Trinity and Creation.

In *The Theater of God's Glory: Calvin, Creation, and the Liturgical Arts*, W. David O. Taylor finds inconsistencies and draws conclusions from Calvin's own works to support the inclusion of the arts in worship. Taylor pits Calvin against Calvin to tear down his opposition to the arts in worship. Taylor's goal is to “examine Calvin's Trinitarian Theology as it intersects his theology of materiality to argue for a positive theological account of the liturgical arts” (5). Rather than a historical examination, Taylor probes Calvin's own theological writings to develop and support this thesis.

Calvin believed the faithful needed nothing more than preaching and the Scriptures to worship God rightly. Anything additional was an accommodation to human weakness. Taylor points to four areas stressed by Calvin, noting, “the church's worship should be (1) devoid of the ‘figures

and shadows' that marked Israel's praise and should emphasize instead a (2) 'spiritual,' (3) 'simple,' and (4) 'articulate' worship, suitable to a new covenantal era" (5). Instrumental music and other artistic expressions would fall into the category of figures and shadows. They were allowed before Christ, but since Christ has come, they are no longer necessary for worship. The only music allowed by Calvin is unaccompanied metrical psalmody (15).

In the opening chapter, Taylor moves directly to Calvin's inconsistencies regarding the use of instruments. On the affirmative side, "they incite the heart to exuberant praise: they express ardent affection for God, they stimulate increased devotion to God" (16). Yet Calvin also states, "musical instruments risk contaminating the true praise of God" (18). Chapter 2 introduces Calvin's five roles of creation: (1) an epiphanic role, (2) an aesthetic role, (3) a pedagogical role, (4) an admonitory role, and (5) a doxological role (36). Calvin concludes that creation was designed for worship.

Chapter 3 explores the use of material symbols to signify or represent the presence of the Lord in both the Old and New Testaments. The question that arises for Taylor is the issue of continuity, which he addresses in Chapters 4 and 5. Taylor writes, "Calvin fails to see how throughout Scripture creation provides the mediation context for all enactments of public worship, now and in the age to come. He likewise fails to press to its logical conclusion the mediating work of Christ and the Spirit in all activities proper to the human creature" (71).

Taylor counters Calvin's views on each point regarding New Testament worship with ideas and quotations from Calvin, which make his position on music and the arts in worship appear short-sighted at best and hypocritical at worst. For example, creation, according to Calvin, is designed both to point to the glory of God and to be enjoyed. Taylor notes, "Calvin also believes that a delight in earthly things may lead to a delight in heavenly things" (41). Created symbols were an integral part of Old Testament worship, and Calvin viewed them as a physical testimony of God's grace.

Calvin dismisses the role of created symbols in the church as he is more concerned that people will cling to earthly things. Taylor writes, "I propose . . . that Calvin's original instincts about creation were the right ones, even if he failed to carry them far enough" (75).

Taylor analyzes Calvin's view of material creation and materiality in public worship through a Trinitarian lens. Taylor writes, "The human

body in its most fundamental sense is both a *corpus Christi* and a *corpus ecclesiasticus*" (129). We are the body of Christ and a gathered body. Taylor points to two doctrines held by Calvin as evidence that physical materiality is not entirely corrupt: (1) salvation being impossible without the physical body of Jesus Christ and (2) the indwelling of the Holy Spirit into the physical bodies of believers. Taylor finishes his argument by working through John's Gospel and its approach to materiality.

Taylor's reasoning is sound, and his point that Calvin is setting up a false dichotomy is persuasive. Calvin's views on creation are vastly different from those on creation (material forms) in worship. While Calvin is rightly concerned about human nature and our tendency toward idolatry, he inappropriately discounts the goodness of creation. One of Taylor's strongest points is that "the primary theological language of the New Testament is heaven on earth, not heaven against earth" (84). Taylor is generally sympathetic to Calvin's theology, supporting in broad form the teachings of Calvin. However, Taylor takes Calvin's creation views much further than Calvin himself toward accepting physical materiality in worship, pressing Calvin's own teaching to its logical conclusion despite Calvin's opposition to the use of arts in worship.

Taylor carefully articulates the views of Calvin on creation, worship, and the Trinity as well as his view on materiality in worship. He helpfully points to the views Calvin holds, which are incongruent with one another, explaining why Calvin's view of creation and the Trinity should have more significant influence over his view of worship. While it would be inaccurate to say Calvin argued for the inclusion of the arts in worship, I believe Taylor is correct in arguing that Calvin's theology supports their presence in worship. This book is important, challenging long-held views of Calvin's theology of worship. Reformation scholars, those interested in Reformed worship, worship leaders, and Christians involved in the arts would benefit from its teachings.

C. Trent Broussard

INGALLS, MONIQUE M. *SINGING THE CONGREGATION: HOW CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP MUSIC FORMS EVANGELICAL COMMUNITY*. NEW YORK: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2018. 272 PP. \$41.66.

Monique Ingalls is Associate Professor of Music and Director of Research and Graduate Programs in Church Music at Baylor University. She holds a Ph.D. in the Anthropology of Music from the University of Pennsylvania. She also serves as the senior editor of the Congregational Music Studies book series for Routledge Press.

In *Singing the Congregation* Ingalls argues that the idea of “the congregation” has become much more fluid in regard to contemporary worship practices. It is no longer confined to the inside of a traditional church sanctuary or worship center. She better explains this as she writes, “The central aim of this book is to identify how the collective performance of contemporary worship music shapes the activities that evangelicals define as ‘worship’ and how these musically centered performances have brought into being new social constellations” (4). She goes on to explain that these “constellations” are new congregations in her mind formed around shared experiences of worship.

Chapter 1 addresses the congregation formed around concert worship experiences. Worship concerts draw on some preexisting expectations of worship, and they often reinforce some practices of evangelical worshippers, but, as Ingalls states, “They promote new songs and styles and, crucially, help to set aesthetic expectations and discipline the worshipping body in particular ways” (42). This is very important, because by understanding the worship concert activities as “worship” shapes what evangelicals expect of a “worship experience” in other settings such as their home church.

In Chapter 2, Ingalls turns her attention to conference worship experiences. Ingalls describes conferences as “gatherings of evangelicals across denominations, regions, and sometimes nations to a central location where a powerful, memorable mass ‘worship experience’ with thousands of other believers is one of the main draws” (72). She believes that attendees to these conferences share two things in common: they are pilgrim gatherings, and they are eschatological communities. Conference attendees are transported from their normal religious setting and experience a glimpse of heaven.

Ingalls then addresses the voice of local church congregations within this contemporary matrix. Song repertoire, style, and performance are all

integral parts of local church worship ministry, and she writes, “Examining how local church congregations navigate choices between competing musical options for worship provides crucial insights on how they understand and negotiate various sources of religious authority and how music is used to establish, maintain, or challenge ecclesial traditions” (111).

Chapter 4 is a fascinating chapter dealing with the concept of public worship displayed in worship marches. Ingalls writes, “In marching, the central goal was to confront and defeat the powers of evil by proclaiming the rule of the Kingdom of God in those places. The rule of the Kingdom was both announced and enacted (if temporarily) through the worshipful proclamation of the gathered assembly—through ‘lifting up the name of Jesus’” (147). This is taking the act of worship into the public square for the main purpose of taking part in spiritual warfare. The idea of pushing back the darkness undergirds the thought process of march organizers.

The final “congregation” that Ingalls addresses is one formed around worship on a screen. This mode of congregating extends the congregation into the virtual realm. Many people participate in worship through the use of digitally projected song lyrics or video elements. Ingalls notes, “The networked mode of congregating centered around these audiovisual worship experiences challenges the boundaries between public and private worship as it blurs the lines between individual, institutional, and industry authority” (172). In this type of worship the screen plays a central role. She concludes her work with several thoughts, but they can be summarized as she writes, “Understanding congregations as social groups that are defined by shared practices rather than fixed structures enables us to gain a more accurate picture of contemporary religious practice and experience” (207).

The observations that Ingalls makes in this book help the reader to understand the way things are, not how they used to be or how the church wants them to be or needs them to be. This is vital because it allows honest assessment of where the church is. If the church ever wants to grow or change or improve, then she must be honest about her current state. This is also important because it helps worship pastors and leaders lead worshipers to be on the same page about the meaning of the activities they are participating in.

In the way of critique, Ingalls only offers observational information in *Singing the Congregation*. There is no evaluation of the data found in the work. Admittedly, this does fall within the scope she sets at the beginning of the work. However, it would have been helpful for there to be some

evaluative commentary either within each chapter or in the conclusion. Overall, the work that Ingalls has compiled in this volume is invaluable to those seeking a way forward as the church worship landscape continues to change.

Jason Arrowood

CRIDER, JOSEPH R. *SCRIPTURE-GUIDED WORSHIP: A CALL TO PASTORS AND WORSHIP LEADERS*. FORT WORTH: SEMINARY HILL PRESS, 2021. 234 PP. \$12.99.

In the growing, cross-disciplinary field of the theology of worship, Joseph Crider has provided a rich resource that draws from many of the current voices in the field while remaining anchored firmly on the titular Scriptures. Crider serves as dean and professor of church music and worship in the School of Church Music and Worship at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Before this position, Crider taught at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Liberty University, Southwest Baptist University, and Westmont College. He has also served on staff with local churches. In *Scripture-Guided Worship*, Crider often references his own experiences and admits the ways in which he has needed to learn the principles he outlines in the book. He occasionally even phrases warnings as if addressing his younger self, desiring to cultivate wisdom especially for younger worship leaders.

In the introduction, Crider establishes the guiding metaphor for the book—the story of David’s grand worship experience bringing the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem in an extravagant procession, with the aid of 3,000 young men. This particular story ends in the death of one of these men, Uzzah, as the cart carrying the Ark hits a “pothole” and Uzzah reaches out his hand to steady the Ark. David then leaves the Ark at Obed-edom without continuing to Jerusalem. Crider utilizes this metaphor well throughout the text, stretching it without breaking, and it bears the weight of his many applications. If David had moved the Ark according to God’s Word, as opposed to the pragmatic cart of the Philistines, the deadly consequences would have been avoided.

In Chapters 1–4 of *Scripture-Guided Worship*, Crider diagnoses current

evangelical worship practices, or “worship on the cart of experience.” As Crider describes contemporary worship, the many non-denominational churches that fill the gaps between Baptist and Charismatic/Pentecostal denominations are frequently in view. Crafting a book for worship leaders with life-and-death stakes is wholly appropriate, and a helpful reminder of the formative power of liturgy. He uses these beginning chapters to make the dangers clear by describing ten potholes and their potential implications for leaders and their congregations. Almost hidden among his observations is Crider’s definition of worship: “[God] initiates the rhythm by revealing Himself to His redeemed. The redeemed receive His revelation by faith and then respond to Him, acknowledging His infinite glory and perfection through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit” (22–23). This definition undergirds the next section of the book.

Chapters 5–12 consist of Crider’s seven rhythms of biblical worship. These biblical-theological “poles” are culled from many of the outstanding resources from the bibliography, highlighting the work of Bryan Chappell, Ron Man, Allen P. Ross, Mike Cospers, Constance Cherry, Lester Ruth, and others. Even as he draws from so many important theologians, Crider’s seven rhythms are defined by the Word. While describing the rhythm of revelation and response, Crider boldly states, “Wordless worship leads to Christ-less worship, which leads to Spirit-less worship” (83). This conviction drives the passion with which Crider implores pastors and worship leaders to let Scripture inform how we plan worship gatherings.

Chapters 13–16 present Crider’s application of the rhythms in ways that avoid the potholes outlined in the opening chapters. Crider reiterates several principles of Scripture-guided worship planning and claims, “Scripture-guided worship is the most effective design strategy in providing a biblical framework and an apologetic for every element in the corporate gathering” (155). Crider moves quickly to examples from his own ministry with outlines from two Sunday morning liturgies and explanatory comments to lay bare the Scripture-guided methodology at work. His examples demonstrate the effectiveness of the method and show the ability of Scripture to shape each element of corporate worship.

Crider writes for leaders in the broadly evangelical churches that saturate the United States, which includes Southern Baptists, among whom he currently serves. The subtitle directly addresses “pastors” and “worship leaders.” However, this work may have a limited audience because of the scope of Crider’s observations and applications. The experiences of the

global church are not universally encumbered by technology, pragmatism, or the experiential models that Crider critiques. The Scripture-guided method should still be applicable, but Crider is most concerned with addressing worship leaders in western, evangelical contexts.

Scripture-Guided Worship is an outstanding synthesis of current work being done in theology of worship, with a rich interaction with theologians and scholars of liturgy, church history, and worship. This work has a robust bibliography as well as valuable appendixes and indexes. Crider has done important observational work, insightfully describing “modern worship” in evangelical churches in the United States, and he has given an impassioned call for a way forward by removing corporate worship from the cart of experience and placing it on the balanced poles of Scripture-guided worship. I commend this book to all students of worship planning, especially interns or volunteers who are in a position to apply the principles from *Scripture-Guided Worship* or engage in conversation with pastors or mentors using the discussion questions in each chapter.

David J. Calvert

LIM, SWEE HONG, AND LESTER RUTH. *A HISTORY OF CONTEMPORARY PRAISE & WORSHIP: UNDERSTANDING THE IDEAS THAT RESHAPED THE PROTESTANT CHURCH.* GRAND RAPIDS: BAKER ACADEMIC, 2021. 350 PP. \$30.99.

Methodist scholars Lester Ruth of Duke Divinity School and Lim Swee Hong of the University of Toronto have been researching the field of Contemporary Praise & Worship for years, and together they published *Lovin' on Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship* in 2017. Ruth and Lim are trustworthy, expert authors, and they employ comprehensive historical research in this excellent follow-up book.

To begin, the authors assert that the worship style of Contemporary Praise & Worship has become the “standard operating practice” (1) in Protestant congregations across North America today. Their purpose in this volume is to show how Contemporary Praise & Worship is the merging of two multifaceted liturgical theologies known as “Praise & Worship” and “Contemporary Worship.” Many other attempts only focus on one possible

source of this liturgical style, such as the Jesus People, baby boomers, or the Charismatic Renewal movement (xv). Lim and Ruth pinpoint the scriptural basis for the Praise & Worship movement as Psalm 22:3 and call it the “Gift River.” They define the scriptural basis for Contemporary Worship as 1 Corinthians 9:22b and call it the “Gap River” (3). They aim to show how these two scriptures drove the theologies behind these two rivers, starting in the 1940s. Each river sometimes met and influenced the other, until the 1990s when “the two rivers melded into one” (3).

The clear structure of the book is helpful. Part one traces the history of Praise & Worship. Part two traces the history of Contemporary Worship. Part three describes the confluence of Praise & Worship and Contemporary Worship into Contemporary Praise & Worship. There is a helpful appendix that summarizes the two histories in parallel columns (311–14).

Chapter 1 retells the story of Reg Layzell, a Canadian Pentecostal preacher, who was drawn to Psalm 22:3 in January 1946 (9). Psalm 22:3 reads, “But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel” (KJV). Layzell received this verse as a divine promise, “As you praise me, I will be present with you” (11). Through his association with the Latter Rain movement, Layzell’s theology of praise influenced many others (39). Chapters 2 and 3 illustrate how the channel of Praise & Worship eventually “spilled beyond its Latter Rain origins” to influence a variety of adopters (85). Chapter 4 describes Praise & Worship’s developed theology and four core beliefs by the era of 1985–1995 (128) and the five settled practices of Praise & Worship (132–37).

Chapter 5 explains how the starting point for the Contemporary Worship ideology was not a single, clear “headwater,” like Reg Layzell, but rather “several subtle outlets for subterranean groundwater” (170). Eventually, organizations like Young Life and Youth for Christ (186–88) started utilizing music and large events to reach youth with the gospel. Chapter 6 analyzes the first wave of contemporary worship from 1965 to 1985, including youth musical composers like Ralph Carmichael. In Chapter 7, the authors examine the second wave of Contemporary Worship from 1985 through the mid-1990s. They show how Church Growth movement pastors Bill Hybels, Rick Warren, Walt Kallestad, and Mike Slaughter had a “theological commitment” that “led to Contemporary Worship as we have known it over the past several decades” (268).

In every chapter, the authors support their thesis that these two rivers were defined and carried along by the distinct ideas of “presence” and

“purpose” (xiii). They note when influential individuals referenced the key scripture of Psalm 22:3, citing James Beall (31), Judson Cornwall (71), and Buddy Owens (161). They also cite Contemporary Worship adherents alluding to 1 Corinthians 9:22, including Torrey Johnson (189), Thurlow Spurr (203), Ralph Carmichael (206), and the Church Growth movement pastors (266).

By the end of the book, Lim and Ruth show the clear convergence of Praise & Worship and Contemporary Worship. Their “neologism” of Contemporary Praise & Worship describes the current practice better than many of the other terms.

In this comprehensive work, there is much to learn and not much to critique. The authors adhere to their purpose of providing a “descriptive history, leaving to another time the task of assessing” if Contemporary Praise & Worship has been good or bad for the church (xiv). However, they do occasionally provide opinions. At the end of Chapter 4, they express their concern of the “danger” that Praise & Worship, and now Contemporary Praise & Worship, can be “adopted without its grounding in a biblical theology” (155). Perhaps one helpful addition would have been a more thorough summary of *Lovin’ on Jesus*, to help the reader know more precisely the difference between this book and their former book.

This book is certain to be the definitive history of Contemporary Praise & Worship music for years to come. Not only did Lim and Ruth clearly show the development of the two streams and their convergence in the end, but the research and methods they used to do so are convincing. They conducted ninety-three interviews with eighty-seven people and consulted hundreds of additional primary and secondary sources. The book is scholarly in approach, including copious helpful footnotes, yet the writing style is effortless and engaging. It is a useful textbook for graduate worship studies, though it may be too dense for undergraduates. Those teaching congregational song or worship studies at any level should read and learn from this book to teach well on the subject.

James Cheesman

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