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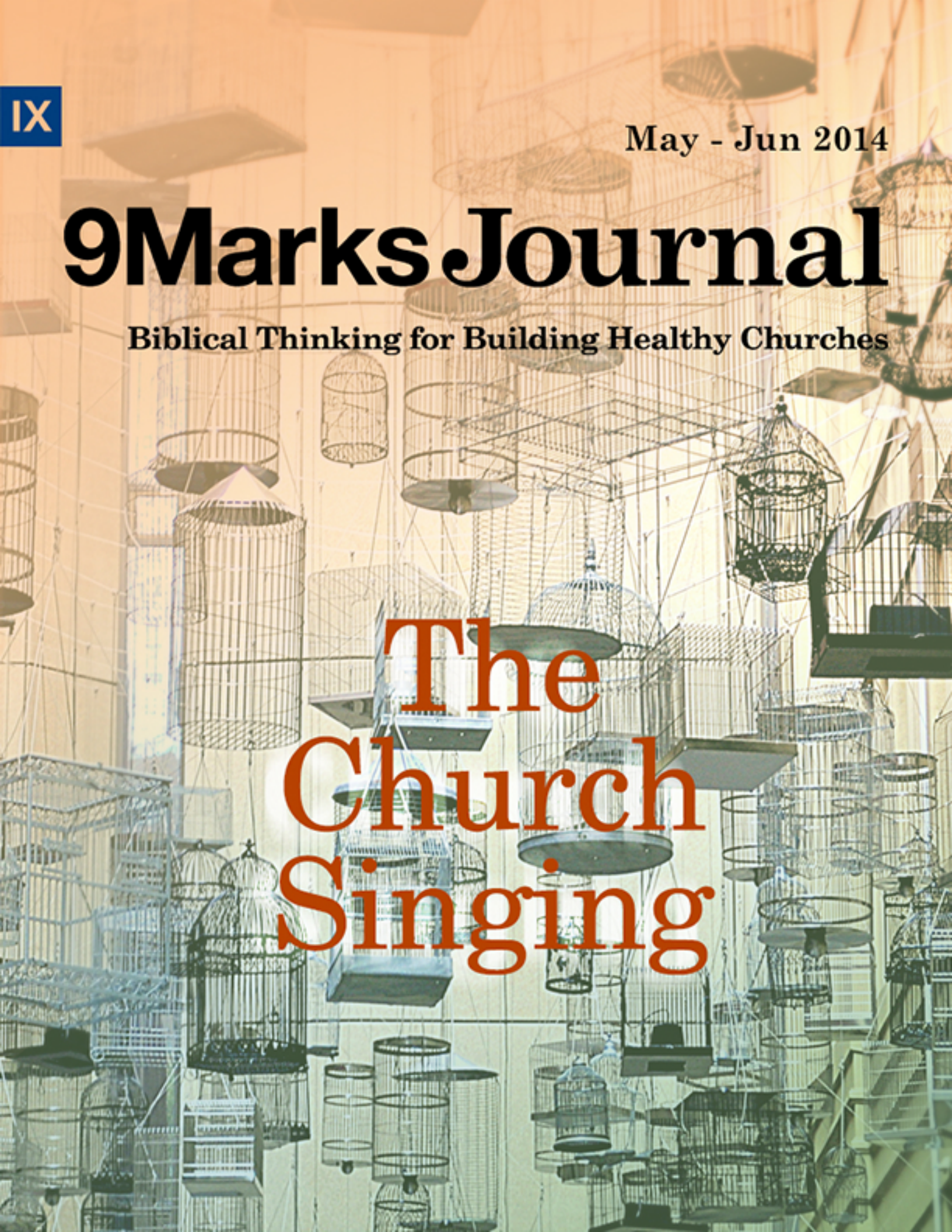
9Marks Journal

Biblical Thinking for Building Healthy Churches



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Contents

MUSIC

LEADING

CONTEXT

BOOK REVIEWS ON WORSHIP

OTHER BOOK REVIEWS

Audio

Expositional Preaching with David Helm

David Helm talks about training preachers, what makes good preaching, and what his new book adds to the mix.

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Jonathan Leeman

Editor's Note

Singing is not one of the nine marks, a point which, not surprisingly, has come up once or twice with my minister-of-music father.

That said, okay, yes, 9Marks does have a *few* opinions on music. Our understanding of the local church pushes us toward a slightly different perspective on church singing than some of our evangelical brothers and sisters.

The difference comes down to the question of performance. Who is performing? The congregation or the people on stage? Dimming the lights and turning up the volume of instruments and leaders doesn't necessarily mean you have turned the congregation into an audience, but it often does.

Or think about it like this: is the "worship experience" in your church a solo transaction between the individual worshipper and God as stimulated by a high-emotion performer up front?

Because here is an alternative: the musicians and song leaders help to facilitate an intellectually and emotionally engaged communal experience where members sing to one another while singing to God. The primary thing people *hear* is the faith-reinforcing praises and laments of their fellow saints. "I'm not the only one who rejoices like this…mourns like this…pleads like this. So does everyone around me!" They don't listen for the organ, electric guitar, or praise ensemble. They listen for the folksy and hearty voices of other pilgrims walking alongside them on this long and rocky road of Christian obedience, rehearsing old memories of Calvary and new hopes of the heavenly city.

Are these just my preferences that I'm trying to impose? I hope not. Think about what the New Testament emphasizes when it comes to the church's corporate music. It doesn't talk about crafting a highly charged worship "experience." Interestingly, it doesn't use the language of "worship" at all in this context (which is not to deny that corporate singing is worship). Instead, the Bible talks about the congregation singing to one another (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19), and doing everything for the sake of edifying one another (1 Cor. 14). That's it: people singing together. When it comes to the topic of music, Christians might do well to talk about the *church singing* or the *congregation singing* because that's what the Bible talks about.

In this edition of the 9Marks Journal, we start with singing and the song. Why do congregations sing, what should they sing about, and how can they sing better? We then think more carefully about the music itself, particularly with two different perspectives on whether or not some musical forms are better than others. Finally we think about what is involved in leading music.

By Jonathan Leeman

Why We Sing

At my church's Sunday gathering, the preacher and everyone leading the service sits on the stage facing the congregation.

In the past, I've been tempted to wonder if they're really worshipping, or just looking around. Doesn't someone who is really worshipping close his eyes, put up his hands, and wear an expression of rapture?

At least that's what I wondered until it was me sitting on stage, looking at the congregation. When the singing begins, I'm beholding God's people praise God. And it's unbelievable!

WHAT I BEHOLD

Some eyes are closed and some are open. Some hands are raised and some are not. But the posture of their bodies is not the point.

We're singing the sixteenth century words of "A Mighty Fortress," and I notice a woman who was recently assaulted now sing with all her might of a "bulwark never failing."

We're singing the eighteenth century words of "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessings" and I'm heartened by the older saint who has persevered in the faith for decades, still singing, "prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love; here's my heart, O, take and seal it; seal it for thy courts above."

We're singing the nineteenth century words of "It Is Well," and I look out and see the middle-aged brother struggling with discouragement over his fight against sinful anger now raising his voice to shout, "My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought: my sin, not in part, but the whole is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!"

We're singing the twenty-first century words of "In Christ Alone," and I see the talented young mother who is tempted to regret what she's given up to have children now exult in her new ambition: "In Christ alone my hope is found, he is my light, my strength, my song."

As I sit, look out, and behold, my own praises to God are strengthened by the stories and songs of others. My faith is invigorated and enlarged by his work in them.

THE ECHOING WORD

Churches sing because their new hearts can't help but echo the Word which has given them life. Whether those songs were written in the sixteenth century or today, they should echo Scripture. If there is any place where God's Word should literally reverberate, it should reverberate in the church's songs. Remember, Scripture alone gives life.

Therefore, a church's songs should contain nothing more than the words, paraphrases, or ideas of Scripture.

And churches sing together because it helps us to see that our hearts' praises, confessions, and resolutions are shared. We're not alone. Singing in the church, I believe, is about listening as much as it's about singing. So Paul commands us to "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19, NIV). If I'm to speak to others in song, I'm to listen to others as well. In fact, I do sometimes stop singing just to listen and thank God for the voices around me!

"These brothers and sisters share my new heart, my new identity, my Lord and Savior, my comfort and support, my hope and ambition, my glory and joy. I'm with them, they're with me, and we're with him."

WHY WE SING

Believers sing in churches because Christ has commanded us to sing (Col. 3:16, Eph. 5:19). And we're commanded to sing, I heard minister of music Bob Kauflin observe, because God means for creatures created in his image to do as he does (e.g. Zeph. 3:17; Heb. 2:12). Yet let me unpack what I've said so far by articulating three reasons for why I expect God would command his people to speak to one another not just in prose, but in poetry and melody.

We Sing To Own and Affirm the Word

Singing is how the congregation owns and affirms the Word for itself. In the Bible, singing is one God-ordained way for the members of a congregation to respond to God's revelation. It's how they raise their hand and say, "Yes, I believe and affirm these truths with my whole person." For instance, the Psalmist tells God's people to proclaim God's Word to others: "Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day" (Ps. 96:2). Singing of his salvation means we've owned it as our message.

We Sing to Engage Our Emotions with God's Word

Singing is how the congregation particularly engages its emotions and affections with God's Word. When we sing, it's hard to remain emotionally disengaged. Just as the sense of smell can evoke strong associations and memories, so the sound of music both evokes and provokes the heart's joys, griefs, longings, hopes, and sorrows. Jonathan Edwards proposed that God gave us music "wholly to excite and express religious affections." The Psalmist seems to embody this idea when he writes, "My heart overflows with a pleasing theme" (Ps. 45:1).

Singing, I'd say, is the medium by which God's people grab hold of his Word and align their emotions and affections to God's.

It's not surprising therefore that Paul would command churches to sing the psalms, and that the Psalter would be referred to as the church's hymnbook. John Calvin called the Psalms "An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul" since it offers readers words which they can place into their own mouths for properly expressing the whole range of human emotions. In the preface to his commentary on the Psalms, Calvin writes, "for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of

men are wont to be agitated." How can Christians express grief in godly fashion? Or sorrow, fear, and doubt? By echoing the Psalms, like Jesus did again and again.

Yet even if churches don't take their lyrics directly from the Psalter, they should consider the Psalm's balance of confession, lamentation, exaltation, and thanksgiving, and seek to mimic something similar in their own hymnody. Do we know how to lament in our churches through music? Or confess?

In seminary classrooms, budding preachers are sometimes warned, "A congregation will only be as careful with the Word as you are in the pulpit." The same is true, I'm convinced, of our singing in church, and our ability to emotionally encounter God throughout the week. A congregation which learns to sing in church with robust confession and contrite praise better knows how to sing to God with their hearts at home, whether they do it to melody or not.

We Sing To Demonstrate and Build Unity

Singing is one way of demonstrating and building corporate unity. Once again, it's not difficult to imagine how Israel used the Psalms to demonstrate and build the unity of their hearts with one another. Some psalms make this explicit:

> [Call] Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!
>
> [Response 1] Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever."
>
> [Response 2] Let the house of Aaron say, "His steadfast love endures forever."
>
> [Response 3] Let those who fear the Lord say, "His steadfast love endures forever." (Psalm 118:1-4; see also 124:1; 129:1; 136)

The psalmist makes a declaration, and then he asks three groups of people to echo him: the nation, the priests, and then all who fear God (including any foreigners and Gentiles in their midst?). The words "his steadfast love endures forever" is the source of unity, but the poetry and—perhaps—music encourages the people's hearts to embrace, own, and rejoice in this glorious truth.

The context of Paul's command to sing is worth noticing as well: "And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly…singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:15-16). Notice the train of thought: We're to let peace rule, since we're called to one body. We're to be thankful. And we can do all this by singing Christ's Word together. Again, the Word is the source of unity; but the music gives expression to that unity.

No doubt, this point can be combined with the last one. Singing God's Word is how a congregation tunes its heart together across the whole range of biblically-driven affections.

What should be clear in all three reasons for why we sing is that singing in church should be about the church singing—congregational singing. Perhaps choirs and soloists can be carefully used to call the church to respond, as in the Psalm above or as an exercise in "speaking to one another in song." And musical performances outside the gathered church are wonderful. But God has given music to the gathered church so that the people together can own, affirm, rejoice in, and unite around God's Word. Far better than the sweet harmonies of a few trained singers is the rough and hale sound of pardoned criminals, delighting with one voice in their Savior.

The most beautiful instrument in any Christian service is the sound of the congregation singing.

This article, which recently appeared at Creator Magazine, was excerpted from the book Reverberation and is used by permission of Moody Publishing.

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By Matt Boswell

Five Qualities of a Congregational Song

Christians are a singing people.

Muslims don't gather to sing. Neither do Hindus, Buddhists, or Rastafarians. Christians do. Also, while not everyone preaches, or leads in prayer, or publicly reads Scripture, we all sing.[1]

But what can we say about the nature of a corporate Christian song? What should it be like? Can we sing any kind of song when gathered together?

WHAT A CONGREGATIONAL SONG SHOULD BE

Whether our corporate worship is subject to the regulative principle or simply the principle of conscience, the exercise of singing ought to be seriously considered in light of Scripture. And Psalm 96 offers some crucial perspectives regarding the nature of a right song and its effects. Originally written for the covenant people of God for the entry of the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem (see 1 Chr. 16), this Psalm offers us much regarding the practice of singing today.

A Congregational Song Should Focus on God

God is at the center of a Christian song. When God calls his people to sing, it is a qualified type of song. In Psalm 96:1, God says, "Sing to the Lord."

When the church is gathered together in the name of God, the glory of God is the aim of our melody making. We are to sing to him, about him, and for him. We don't sing merely as the world sings of created things, our song is elevated to the Uncreated One. The songs of the church proclaim the character, attributes, and ways of the God of our salvation.

For those who choose songs for corporate worship, this is a task to be carried out with sobriety. Mark Dever and Paul Alexander give this advice to pastors: "As the main teaching pastor, it is your responsibility to shepherd the congregation into the green pastures of God-centered, gospel-centered songs, and away from the arid plains of theological vacuity, meditations on human experience, and emotional frenzy."[2] If our songs are never set above vacuity, human experience, and emotions, we have fallen short of our goal. God must be the center of our worship; therefore God must be the center of our songs.

A Congregational Song Should Be Biblical

The songs of the church ought to be built on, shaped by, and saturated with the word of God. Singing is a unique way to let the word of Christ dwell richly in us (Col. 3:16).

In Psalm 96:2, we see that we are to bless his name. Apart from God's revelation, we would not know his name, or how to bless his name. Our singing and the whole of our worship must be biblically informed in order to carry out these commands. The songs of the church should be intentionally biblical.

We might think of singing as a form of exposition that uses poetry to teach the word of God. When Isaac Watts published *Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs*, this was his intention. His goal was not to sing Scripture line by line, but to create poetic and emotive renditions of Scripture that allow a church to sing the truths of Scripture.

Songs are sermons. They don't work like homiletical exegesis, but they articulate, exegete, and pronounce biblical truths. Our hymns teach and shape the way people view God, man, Christ, and how we are to live in light of the gospel.

One way to ensure our singing is biblical is to comb through our songs to see if we cover the breadth of themes presented throughout the canon. Our songs should be held up to the light of God's word to ensure we are singing the glories of its truth.

A Congregational Song Should Point to the Gospel

The contours of the gospel should shape our hymnal. We should "tell of his salvation" (v. 2), so that the gospel rings forth as the theme of our songs. If we are convinced of the primacy of gospel-centered ministry, we should surely practice gospel-centered singing. The songs of our churches must be fluent in the gospel.

One approach toward gospel-centered singing is to build on the framework of God, man, Christ, response.

- We sing to God as the holy creator of all things, who is worthy of worship.
- We sing of man and our sinful nature, our alienation from God, and our need of forgiveness.
- We sing of Christ who is fully God and fully man, who lived a sinless life and died on the cross to bear the wrath of God.
- We sing a response. In these songs of consecration and repentance, faith and praise, we joyfully respond to the good news of Jesus.

A Congregational Song Should Be Congregational

The preface to this Psalm says it is to be sung by both Asaph and his sons (1 Chr. 16:7). Christian singing is congregational at its core.

The song of redemption is not meant for one, but for many. In the torrent of individualism and self-help, the people of God don't sing as a collection of individuals, but as one people united to Christ. Christian singing is not meant to highlight the talented few, but to include the voice of the many. Congregational participation protects the gathering from pageantry and pomp, and provides an environment for an exultant, grace-infused response to the revelation of God.

This choir of the redeemed lift a collective voice of praise as a testimony that we have been reconciled to God and to one another. Singing together in worship is a mark of unity within a church. The song of the redeemed is to be sung by

young and old, rich and poor, strong and weak. Verse 7 reminds us that families of peoples will ascribe praise to God: peoples from every tribe, tongue, and nation on the earth.

A Congregational Song Should be Evangelistic

While worship is theocentric, it is also declarative. Our singing is aimed at God, but it also rings in the ear of our neighbor. God-centered worship is proclamation. As we sing of the glory of God we understand that all have not seen his glory. As we sing of the goodness of the gospel, we realize that it is not good news to all.

Spurgeon called this Psalm the "Missionary Psalm," and for good reason. In verses 10 to 13, we see that God-centered singing intrinsically works as a declaration to the lost. God-centeredness and evangelism are not two competing targets but one inside of the other. The worship of God is the aim of evangelism.

In the same breath, we sing of the love and wrath of God. In the same melodies, we declare his holiness and the grave effect of sin. Christ is the king who will come to judge the world in his righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness. We say among the nations "The Lord reigns!" in the hope that men and women will repent of sin and trust in Christ.

A HOLY PRACTICE

The church has been given a song to sing, and Christ is its author, its substance, and its aim.
A church's songs are not a mere preamble to the sermon. Singing is not filler time to warm up a congregation. Singing is a holy practice. We sing because God has commanded us, and our songs should fill our hearts with delight.

1 Thanks to Collin Hansen for articulating this idea in a conversation.

2 Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 85.

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By Carl Trueman

Reflections on "What Can Miserable Christians Sing?"

Of all the things I have written, my little essay, "What Can Miserable Christians Sing?" has provided me with so many delightful surprises over the years.[1] I wrote it in about 45 minutes one afternoon, infuriated by some superficial comment about worship I had heard but which I have long since forgotten. And yet this little piece which took minimal time and energy to author has garnered more positive responses and more touching correspondence than anything else I have ever written. It resonated with people across the Christian spectrum, people from all different church backgrounds who had one thing in common: the understanding that life has a sad, melancholy, painful dimension which is too often ignored and sometimes even denied in our churches.

The article was intended to highlight what I saw as a major deficiency in Christian worship, a deficiency that is evident in both traditional and contemporary approaches: the absence of the language of lament. The Psalms, the Bible's own hymnbook, contains many notes of lamentation, reflecting the nature of the believer's life in a fallen world. And yet these cries of pain are on the whole absent from hymns and praise songs. The question that formed the article's title was thus a genuine one: what is it in the hymnody of your church that can be sung honestly by the woman who has just lost her baby, the husband who has just lost his wife, the child who has just lost a parent, when they come to church on Sunday? The answer, I suggested, was the Psalms, for in them one finds divinely inspired words which allow the believer to express their deepest pains and sorrows to God.

Would I write it differently today? Not in terms of substance. If anything, I would broaden its application since I believe that its message is more important now than it was at the time of composition. As I survey the contemporary church landscape, I am struck at how even the great gospel of sovereign grace is now so often focused on the youth market and consequently packaged with the aesthetics of worldly power, of celebrity, of the kind of superficial approaches to life which mark the childish and the immature. Things that were once (and sadly no more) the exclusive preserve of the proponents of the prosperity gospel now feature in mainstream evangelical circles without comment or criticism. The world has truly been turned upside down when Calvinism has in some quarters become known for its pyrotechnics and its cocksure swagger.

I am also more aware now than I was when I wrote it of how real mortality is and of how short life can be. I wrote the piece with others in mind; now I am older and only too aware of how it applies to me and to those I love. The older one is, the more one is acquainted with the loss of friends and family, and the more one's own mortality feels like a constant

and unwelcome dinner guest. As a father I rejoiced the first time my son beat me in a running race; but my delight in his growing strength was short-lived when in the coming months and years I realized it was also indicative of my own decline.

The world tells us to defy this as long as we can, whether by fitness, fashion choices or even surgery. But the world is a malevolently plausible confidence trickster who tells us what we want to hear. Weakness and then death ultimately come to us all; and it is the pastor's task to prepare both himself and his people for the inevitable. Thus, I now believe it is more important than ever that the church embrace weakness and tragedy in its worship. True, we look forward to the resurrection; but we often forget that the pathway to resurrection is necessarily and unavoidably through death. We need to remind our people in both what we preach, what we pray, and what we sing as a congregation that God's strength is made perfect in our weakness—and, where resurrection is concerned, in and through our total weakness at the hands of death.

Since writing the original piece, I have also become more aware of the power of liturgy to shape the mind of a Christian congregation. I am not talking here only of formal liturgies such as those in *The Book of Common Prayer*. I mean the form and content of any worship service claiming to be Christian. That which we say and sing as a congregation will over time subtly and imperceptibly inform our thinking about the Christian faith and thus about life in general in a powerful way. That is why an emphasis on the aesthetics of power and youth—perhaps we might say *liturgies of power and youth*—are problematic. They exclude the old or delude them into thinking that they are not old; and they deceive the young into thinking that they are the center of the universe and are destined to live forever. A liturgy which accurately reflects the expectations we can have for life in a fallen world, one that inculcates and reinforces that week by week, is important as a means of preparing our people for the suffering that must eventually come their way.

And that brings me once more to the psalms. True, there are Christian poets and even the occasional hymn writer who have captured the dark complexities of life; but there are none to compare with authors of the Psalter who set forth the riches and depths of human experience and existence with perfect poetic pitch. The church which makes the psalms part of her regular diet provides her people with the resources for truly living in this vale of tears, just as the church which does not do so has perversely denied her people a true treasure in pursuit of what? Relevance? There is nothing more universally relevant than preparing people for suffering and death. I have people in my congregation who have very hard lives, lives that are not going to become easier over time. To them I can only say: suffering comes to us all, but there is a resurrection; listen to how the notes of real, present lament in the Psalms are suffused with tangible, future hope and be encouraged: weeping may tarry for the night, and indeed be truly painful while it does, but joy will come in the morning.

When I married a young couple in my congregation a few years ago, I commented in the sermon that all human marriages begin with joy but end in tragedy. Whether it is divorce or death, the human bond of love is eventually torn apart. The marriage of Christ and his church, however, begins with tragedy and ends with a joyful and loving union which will never be rent asunder. There is joy to which we point in our worship, the joy of the Lamb's wedding feast. But our people need to know that in this world there will be mourning. Not worldly mourning with no hope. But real mourning nonetheless, and we must make them ready for that.

Still, as I look back to the original "Miserable Christians" piece, I never imagined I would still be commenting on it so many years later. I am grateful that it seems to have been a help and encouragement to so many.

1 "What Can Miserable Christians Sing?" in The Wages Of Spin: Critical Writings on Historical and Contemporary Evangelicalism (Christian Focus, 2005), 157-63.

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By Jonathan Leeman and David Leeman

My Congregation Barely Sings; How Can I Help?

Spend some time with members of a Khosa church in South Africa, and you will quickly discover how wonderfully they sing. No instruments. No microphones. One individual leading, the rest following. Many hands clapping. And how they join their voices in full-throated praise!

This article is not written for them. It's written for a traditional Western church. Westerners are accustomed to professional-quality and performance-oriented music. And for better or worse, this affects what Christians expect musically when we walk into the church gathering. Unless a church deliberately pushes in an alternative direction, we expect the music to demonstrate the same quality of performance as what we hear on the car radio or through our Mp3 ear buds. Anything less can sound clunky, tacky, even embarrassing.

What's more, there are few places in contemporary Western culture where people learn to sing together. Maybe at a Christmas event? Or in the seventh-inning stretch at Wrigley Field?

Church leaders underestimate how deliberately they must push against these cultural trends to get their church singing; to teach them that the untrained but united voices of the congregation make a far better sound than the Tonight Show Band; to teach them that singing loudly in the presence of other people is not awkward; to teach them that all our emotions don't have to be individually spontaneous to be worthy, but that there is place to guide and conform our individual emotions to the group's activity.

If church leaders want congregations that will really "speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19), they will have to work at it. They will have to try things that might seem strange or unnatural for people who are accustomed to sitting quietly and watching the performance on stage. Here are a few tips, many of which, no doubt, fall into the realm of prudence.

1. Teach the congregation the importance of worshipping God in song. Just as Christians must be taught the importance of prayer and other spiritual disciplines, so they must learn from Scripture how God intends for them to sing. When the Word of God dwells in us richly, singing is the natural result (see Col. 3:16). If God sings over us in happy song (Zeph. 3:17), we who reflect our Creator should sing in return.

2. Encourage thoughtful, purposeful singing through private and public prayer. How easy it is to honor God with our lips while our hearts are far from him (Is. 29:13; Matt. 15:8)! So pray privately and publicly against thoughtless and hypocritical singing.

3. Make sure the congregation knows why they are singing the chosen song. If it's a prayer, briefly remind them. If it's a song of commitment, point that out. If it reflects the preached message from God's Word, make that clear. Songs that are chosen just because they are favorite song of the song-chooser are often not well-sung. Although congregations are generally compliant enough to sing whatever song is suggested, they will sing it more enthusiastically if they know why they are singing that particular song. Help them to care about singing "in spirit and in truth."

4. Choose "congregational" rather than "performance" songs. Here is a general (not absolute) principle: the more a song depends on the musical accompaniment and cannot be sung by a couple of children in the car on the way home, the more performance-oriented and less congregational it probably is. Congregational songs tend to have singable and memorable melodies. Just because a Christian artist has created something wonderful does not mean it is appropriate for the congregation. The melody may not be very melodic. It may be too high, too low, or wide of range. It may be too rhythmic, perhaps syncopated in a way that's difficult for untrained singers. It may be too complex through bridges, tags, or multiple keys. Such music might sound wonderful with the recorded accompaniment. Maybe the praise band can perform it just fine. But the more a congregation needs the musicians up front to get through a song, the more you can expect them to mouth the words while watching the band do its thing.

5. Please, oh please, turn up the lights. Keeping stage lights bright while dimming lights among the people turns the people into an "audience" and everyone on stage into performers. It makes the whole event mimic the movie theater or the concert hall. Keeping the entire room lit up, however, suggests that everyone is called to participate in the "performance" before an "audience" of one—God.

6. Please, oh please, turn down the musical accompaniment. You don't want your electric guitars or your organ, your drums or your microphoned choir, to drown out the sound of the congregation singing. We might even say the loudest sound in a room should be the congregation. Lead singers might sing loudly on the first verse of a song, but then pull back a touch on subsequent verses. Good accompaniment accompanies. Facilitates. Encourages. It does not attract or overwhelm. If a small group or choir is leading, they should be an aural microcosm of the congregation. Let their volume be natural and without too much amplification. If they have prepared the hymn in rehearsal they will "lead" by their sound.

7. Consider the dangers of performance rehearsals, "excellent" music, and heavy instrumentation. There is a place for musical rehearsal. But why are you rehearsing? To what end? Musical rehearsals often involve the insertion of creative elements that make for good performances, but not for congregational singing. Musicians and singers should use any rehearsal time to ask themselves how to best facilitate congregational singing, not be impressive. The common focus on "excellence" and "quality" can, ironically, distract musicians from seeking to serve the congregation because "excellence" is unthinkingly defined in terms of performance. What would it instead mean to aim to *facilitate* excellently, not to *perform* excellently. By the same token, elaborate instrumentation can sometimes squelch congregational singing. Mere and acoustic instrumentation tends to help singing.

8. Look for a balance between new songs and old songs. On the one hand, people sing well when singing an old and beloved song. On the other hand, old songs can wear out, which can lead to thoughtless singing. On the one hand, songs that are new to a congregation (whether recently composed or not) are harder to sing. On the other hand, a congregation's musical repertoire should grow as the congregation grows in maturity and depth. Congregations, like people, go through different seasons, and new songs help it to grow through those seasons. All these hands mean that helping people to sing well involves both new and old songs, and figuring out the balance for your church. Never be closed to learning new songs, whether they are newly composed or old songs that are new to you. And teach those new songs more than once.

9. Use songs that represent a broad range of human experience and emotion. If all a church's music is exultant and gladsome, much of your church's singing will be inauthentic and affected. How true to life are they lyrics of "I Hear the Words of Love": "My love is ofttimes low, / My joy still ebbs and flows, / But peace with Him remains the same, / No change my Savior knows." Or that frank admission from "Come Thou Fount": "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, / Prone to leave the God I love…" A church's hymnody, like the Psalter, should have words for happy Christians, sad Christians, tempted Christians, and all the in-between Christians. Along these lines, a congregation is served by having a repertoire of 300 songs rather than 30. Life is complex and diverse. So should our worship be.

10. Vary the way a song is sung. Just as a preacher might speak the same words with a different tone between one Sunday and the next, adjusting for the mood of the day or the sermonic context in which the words are spoken, so a song might be led differently at different times. The dynamics of the accompaniment might vary. Maybe the volume rises; maybe it falls. Maybe that third stanza is sung quietly, maybe vigorously. Maybe a key change, maybe not. Maybe a cappella, maybe not. Certainly the text of a song should shape the mood of the accompaniment, but so can the mood of the church's life, or the place it occurs in the church service.

11. Where possible, arrange chairs or pews with some facing each other and not just the stage. Singing is a "team" effort, and often the only part of the worship that is a visible expression of togetherness. This is one way to remember the fact that Paul says to "speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19). There is nothing wrong with closing one's eyes when singing, to be sure, but the picture painted by Paul sounds like people are looking at one another! Church is not the place for a turbo-charged quiet time.

12. Consider the room's acoustics. Bad acoustics hurt congregational singing probably more than you realize. Are the floors entirely carpeted? Limit carpet to the aisles. Are there acoustic tiles on the ceiling? Remove them and replace with solid plaster. Heavy curtains? Take them down. Fully padded pews? Any chance of removing all padding except the seat? If your worship space is unusual in any way and needs help, maybe hire a professional acoustician to consult for what you can do to improve the reverberation time and limit unpleasant echoes.

Warning: acousticians will always assume you want "to improve the acoustics" in terms of what is projected from the platform. Many ask for an auditorium with "dead" acoustics in the audience so that coughing and extraneous noise is not heard during a concert. But you must inform them that you want improved congregational singing. Worship is not a concert, and the congregation is not an audience. Let them be heard through live acoustics. Why do people like to sing in the shower? Because the acoustics amplify our sound.

13. Perhaps place musicians and singers to the side for a season. Every room and congregational culture is different. Placing musicians and singers to the side might in some circumstances hinder congregational singing because the congregation needs stronger leadership. But if your congregation has fallen into a performance culture and orientation, where feasible, considering placing song leaders to the side. There was a good reasons some older churches placed their choirs in the balcony--so that they would be heard and not seen. When the song leader's stage presence yields a performance culture, God is less seen and heard.

14. Model enthusiastic singing. Whether the elders, staff, and deacons are sitting on a platform or in the congregation, they should model enthusiastic and appropriately-loud singing. Off-key singing is better than no singing. The pastor who is still looking over sermon notes during the singing is saying by example, "Singing in our worship is not that important!" In a culture that sometimes equates masculinity with the stoicism of a Clint Eastwood-like character, modeling enthusiastic singing is especially important for male leadership.

15. Print the music, pick songs with good parts, and look for other ways to promote musical literacy. Musical literacy is not what it used to be, thanks to declining music education in schools. But even if ten percent of the church sings the parts, everyone's singing will be invigorated. People talk about the advantages of "looking up," which reading an overhead screen requires. But why then is it that all the churches looking at screens don't seem to sing as well as an

older generation of churches staring down at their hymnals? Perhaps it's time for churches to think about hymnals again, or at least to start printing music in their bulletins. Pick music with good parts, and make sure any choir or song leaders sing the parts.

16. Hold a singing class. Following the example of the composer of "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," Lowell Mason, who created "Singing Schools" in the church, Justin Leighty, a member of Third Avenue Baptist Church in Louisville, offers his own church a monthly hymn singing class. They meet the first Sunday of every month for 45 minutes before the evening service. Attendees are grouped by their parts like a choir, and they practice music basics: "This is a quarter note; this is a whole note. Here's where the tenor line is: when it goes down, you go down, when it goes up, you go up...etc."

17. Occasionally sing a cappella (unaccompanied). Maybe the third verse; maybe the fourth. Or maybe even a whole song, with a piano or guitar starting the piece and then bridging transitions. And don't waste you're a cappella singing on melody-only songs; sing it when there are parts that are good and well known. A cappella singing helps the congregation to hear themselves and rely solely on their combined voices to sing at a volume that says they believe what they are singing! Slow the tempo down a bit and free the congregation to engage every part of their body, soul, and spirit in the song.

18. Regularly remind the congregation that they are the primary instrument in corporate worship. If they don't sing with gusto, musical worship won't happen. That doesn't mean acting like a cheerleader at a pep-rally: "Okay, let's really sing…I want to hear you…I know you can sing louder!" Such leadership detracts from the seriousness of the music, and doesn't treat their singing as a genuine spiritual expression of love, thanksgiving, and praise. Ultimately, congregational singing should be as natural as words of awe before an unusual sunset, or words of mourning with a hurting friend. Still, congregations must be taught that it is their responsibility to sing, and to teach one another through song. They must be taught to gather expecting to sing.

Mark Dever and Matt Merker contributed to this article.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Jonathan Leeman, the son of a music minister, was lavishly supplied with opportunities to participate in church music from an early age. Presently, he serves as an elder at the Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC and the editorial director of 9Marks. You can follow him on Twitter @JonathanDLeeman. David Leeman, Jonathan's father, is minister of music at Trinity Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Plano, Texas.

By Joe Holland

Rediscovering Jesus' Hymnbook

How interested would you be if archaeologists unearthed a hymnbook embossed with the name, "Jesus of Nazareth?" Overlooking the anachronism for a moment, wouldn't "Jesus' hymnbook" be immediately republished and rocket to the best-seller lists? Wouldn't those songs find instantaneous popularity in worship services across the globe?

We have that hymnbook. We do know what songs Jesus sang: he sang the psalms.

So a question arises: if you'd be excited about singing the hymns from our fictional archaeological find, then why aren't you more excited about singing the psalms? Two events in my life significantly nudged me into answering that question.

The first event was a dumbfounded stare in the seminary bookstore when I was a first year M.Div. student. I stood looking at the required reading for New Testament Greek and saw the Trinity Psalter as a required purchase. Why was I being asked to purchase an Old Testament book in English for a New Testament Greek course? It turns out my professor had a habit of beginning each class by requiring his students to sing a psalm together. So I become a psalm singer by requisite.

The second event happened in the Peruvian mountains. I led a group of students on a short-term mission trip. Our task was to dig a ditch around a church under construction. Our Peruvian host was a minister in the Peruvian Presbyterian Church and they mainly sang psalms.

We had a long conversation about why this was their practice, but one reason stood out to me. He was fighting heresy in the churches he pastored. False teaching slipped into his churches through folk songs adjusted for worship. Psalm singing was his attempt to guard his people from heresy sung to a familiar tune. Psalms served that growing community of churches as a biblical bulwark against encroaching syncretism. Reflecting on that conversation, I realized that I had become a psalm singer through missions.

You don't have to be a seminary student or a missionary to Peru to step into the world of psalm singing. You only need to do two things. First, consider the benefits that God attaches to worship in psalm. Second, decide practically how you will begin singing the psalms.

SIX BENEFITS OF PSALM SINGING

Here then are six benefits of congregational psalm singing.

1. When you sing psalms you literally sing the Bible.

Good hymns are theologically deep, artistically sound, and biblical in content, but they are not the actual words of Scripture. However, when we sing the psalms we are actually singing the Bible. The poetic structure, themes, and content of the psalms are the inspired Word of God for his church in every age.

2. When you sing the psalms you interact with a wealth of theology.

Martin Luther said of the Psalter, “It might well be entitled a Little Bible, wherein everything contained in the entire Bible is beautifully and briefly comprehended.” The 150 psalms cover the waterfront of theology. Psalm singing is theological study.

3. When you sing the psalms you are memorizing Scripture.

An important part of Christian maturity is the ability to recall passages of Scripture at need. Educational circles have long recognized how music aids memorization. This is no accident; it reflects the providential hand of our Creator God. He wants you to memorize his Word and has provided a mnemonic for easy memory—the Psalter as Scripture that was, and should be, set to music.

4. When you sing the psalms you guard against heresy.

Andrew Fletcher said, “Let me write a country’s songs, and I care not who writes its laws.” He was onto something. Songs drive information deep into our hearts. However, this power can be used for ill means. As long as the church has existed, songs have been used to inculcate heresy. Psalms are counter-heresy measures.

5. When you sing the psalms you sing with the full range of human emotion.

Godly anger, heart-wrenching sorrow, dark depression, effulgent joy, honest questioning, and exuberant praise are just a sampling of the emotional range covered by the psalms. Most churches sense the burden of teaching their people how to think. Very few consider their responsibility to teach their people how to feel. The psalms serve as the tutors of our affections.

6. When you sing the psalms you praise the person and work of Jesus Christ.

One of the most misinformed statements a Christian can make against psalm singing is, “I don't sing psalms because they aren't about Jesus.” When the earliest Christians wanted to sing about Jesus’ atoning death and glorious resurrection they turned to the psalms. A little stroll through the cross-references in the New Testament should be enough to convince even the staunchest critic that to sing the psalms is to sing of the person and work of Christ.

FOUR STEPS TO BEGIN SINGING PSALMS

If these benefits have piqued your interest, then these four steps should help you begin singing the psalms.

1. Find a Psalter you can sing.

Notice I didn't simply say, "Find a Psalter." The best Psalter is the one you actually sing. Different Psalters are suited to different musical abilities. Some set each psalm to a particular tune while others simply provide the suggested meter, allowing you to choose the tune.

Here are a few options:

- The *Trinity Psalter* (Crown and Covenant) provides a single suggested tune for each psalm and breaks long psalms up into suggested portions.

- The *Book of Psalms for Singing* or *The Book of Psalms for Worship* (Crown and Covenant) also suggests tunes for each psalm but provides multiple settings and smaller portions for each psalm taken from different historic Psalters.

- The psalter I use most is *The Psalms of David in Metre* (Trinitarian Bible Society) developed from the 1650 Scottish Psalter. It provides each psalm in the common meter. While lacking in musical sophistication, this version is immediately singable if you know a handful of common meter tunes like "Crimond" or "Amazing Grace."

2. Know your Bible.

Devote special study to the background of the psalms. Devote some public teaching and preaching to the psalms. Purchase a Bible with cross-references and note where psalms are quoted in the New Testament.

Let me also add the suggestion that you read a good book on redemptive history, like Vaughn Roberts' *God's Big Picture* or T.D. Alexander's *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*. A good foundation in the Bible's overarching plan of redemption and how it culminates in Jesus Christ is essential to singing the psalms well.

3. To sing the psalms well you must understand how the psalms direct us to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Many psalms are directly fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus. The authors of the New Testament regularly draw on the psalms to describe what was accomplished on the cross. The beauty of the psalms is magnified as they are placed in the setting of God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ.

4. The fourth thing you and your congregation will need is the willingness to try something new.

Psalm singing can be difficult for someone who has never been exposed to it. Psalm singing can be downright alien for someone who has only known modern praise songs. But the potential benefits are immense. It is not easy work but it is good work. It is not quick work but it provides long-term, lasting joys. And the question really is, "Why wouldn't you want to sing the psalms?"

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By Ken Myers

Music and Meaning: Some Forms Are Better than Others

Editor's note: We asked Harold Best and Ken Myers the same three questions:

- Can God employ any musical form for redemptive purposes?
- Even if God can employ any musical form redemptively, are some musical forms spiritually or morally "better" than others?
- Are some musical forms "better" for the sake of the gathered church?

Best's answers are in the article to follow. Myers answers the questions not specifically but broadly:

In a letter written in 1955, Flannery O'Connor remarked, "If you live today you breathe in nihilism….It's the gas you breathe." She went on to observe that she would have been perfectly content in this condition "if I hadn't had the Church to fight it with or to tell me the necessity of fighting it."

Almost sixty years later, the cultural atmosphere in which we live suffers from a much more intense state of toxicity. But many church leaders have not grown in the wisdom necessary for recognizing the forms our nihilism takes. Their churches are neither reliable allies in the fight against nihilism nor trustworthy tutors concerning the need for combat. One sign of their failure is the widespread assumption—evident in worship practices and the defense thereof—that musical forms are neutral and meaningless. Insisting that music is inherently meaningless, that all meaning in music is arbitrarily assigned, that only the words in songs provide meaning, and that true words can be suitably attached to any musical expression, is very close to saying that the universe itself is meaningless. Defenders of such claims are unwitting allies of nihilism, not its adversaries.

Postmodern nihilism is not conveyed so much by propositional claims that address the reason as by cultural forms that shape the imagination. Theologically conservative Christians adept at defending propositional truths often neglect the

task of learning to discern non-propositional meaning. Paul's command that we avoid cultural conformity and seek transformation by the renewing of our minds is not limited to honing the logical processes of deduction. It involves a more ancient understanding of the working of the mind, which included training the imagination and intuition as organs of meaning, linked to the powers of perception through the senses.

In that pre-Enlightenment understanding of the mind, music—ordered form aurally perceived—was understood to be meaningful because Creation was ordered by the Logos. In singing or hearing an ascending melody, for example, one was experiencing something of the nature of ascent. Ascending and descending are realities known in space and time that somatically represent realities beyond space and time. Heights and depths physically experienced—climbing mountains or falling into pits—are meaningful before one rationally analyzes the meaning. All of the vertical metaphors in Scripture—for example, setting our minds on things that are above (Col. 3:2), esteeming those over us in the Lord highly (1 Thess. 5:12), the ascent of incense, hands, and prayers (Ps. 141:2), and so on—rely on the experienced knowledge of ascending and descending. Such knowledge is expressed and experienced in artistic forms seen and heard as well as in more active, tactile activities.

Much musical meaning—like much verbal meaning—is metaphoric. In Psalm 19, the desirability of God's precepts is compared to gold and their sweetness to honey. We know what that means because we have seen and touched gold and tasted honey. The meaning of those sensory encounters—a meaning we knew before we reasoned about it—provides the basis for the meaning of the propositional claims of the psalmist. The meaning of gold or honey is ineffable, but it is not imaginary or capricious. God created gold and bees to grant us access to a form of knowledge that goes beyond words, but on which words depend.

God similarly created us and the world we live in so that the sound caused by vibrations is perceived as having metaphoric (usually spatial or tactile) qualities. We speak of people with a smooth or a raspy voice, or we refer to the sound of some instruments as mellow and others as harsh. Some harmonies are perceived as close or tight, some melodic lines as open or airy. We have also been created with a musical sense, a capacity for expression and experience of metamorphic meaning through melody, harmony, rhythm, sound texture, and musical form.

The forms of musical expression in any given culture often reflect the reigning assumptions in that culture about reality generally and the human condition specifically. Musical genres of the sixteenth century, for example, are more adept at conveying complex and mysterious realities. Jacob Handl's Nativity anthem, "Mirabile mysterium," proclaims: "A wondrous mystery is declared today, an innovation is made upon nature; God is made man; that which he was, he remains, and that which he was not, he takes on, suffering neither commixture nor division." The musical vocabulary available to Handl provided tools to express these intricate ideas because the cultural milieu of that time was sympathetic to and in many ways still guided by those mysteries. It's hard to imagine this text or the realities it represents being set to a polka or a march.

Since aesthetic forms—in "high" and popular culture—are often expressions of the Zeitgeist, Christians living in confused or rebellious cultures should never assume that they can obtain reliable materials for worship or discipleship off the shelf. As Calvin Stapert has observed, "Christians today live in a society whose musical thought…[has] largely bought into the ideas and practices that came out of the Enlightenment and Romanticism." Today, the mistakes of the Enlightenment and Romanticism—mistakes rooted in a defiant rejection of a Christian understanding of reality — have decomposed into the nihilism Flannery O'Connor sniffed out three generations ago. And our musical culture reflects this, not uniformly, to be sure, but more emphatically than many Christians recognize.

Can God use musical forms that evolved to express autonomy and defiance for "redemptive purposes"? Of course, but that is to say something about God, not about our responsibility to behave wisely. I believe God could use someone's steady diet of fatty and sugary foods to improve cardiac health, or that he could use the cultivation of aggression and vengeance to promote a spirit of gentle humility. But should we give our children stones when they ask for bread, insisting that God perform a work of transubstantiation at every meal?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Ken Myers is the host and producer of Mars Hill Audio, a bimonthly audio magazine that examines issues in contemporary culture from a framework shaped by Christian conviction. He lives in central Virginia with his wife and two children, and is a member of All Saints Anglican Church in Ivy, Virginia, where he serves as music director.

By Harold M. Best

Music and Meaning: All Forms Are Valid

Editor's note: We asked Harold Best and Ken Myers the same three questions:

- Can God employ any musical form for redemptive purposes?
- Even if God can employ any musical form redemptively, are some musical forms spiritually or morally "better" than others?
- Are some musical forms "better" for the sake of the gathered church?

Myers' answers are in the preceding article. Best's answers are below.

My answers to these questions derive from principle, not the music I love, like, tolerate, or loathe.

CAN GOD EMPLOY ANY MUSICAL FORM?

Can God employ any musical form for redemptive purposes? Yes he can, but note the following:

First, there are possible implications in the question that need clarification.

(1) The question seems to imply that some forms might be more useful to God than others based on assumed aesthetic or moral qualities. But this cannot be allowed, for two reasons. First, God doesn't judge music; he judges people for the reasons they make and use it. Second, christianized choices about acceptable music have never been stable: one generation's trash becomes another's treasure. Examples of this are too many to count. Meanwhile, in Luther's words, the gospel runs its course. But this does not mean that there should be no debate. Rather, the nature of the debate needs changing from philosophized theology to biblical theology.

(2) The question seems to imply that God might have to work harder with music x than music y because x is unfamiliar, overly complex, or overly simplistic, while y meets all “relevance” criteria. But this is flawed: God needs no outside leverage in doing his work. If he did, he surrenders his omnipotence.

Second, viewing the above from another angle, forms or genres are no more unredeemed or redeemed than a mountain sunset or a computer or a jazz tune. Who does God redeem? It’s humanity, uniquely imago Dei, the only save-able or lose-able entity in the creation. Because of the resurrected Christ, the redeemed are the only ones who by faith and in hope are already participants in the new creation.

The template is clear: God saves people, and uses created things in whatever way he pleases. It is in this sense that the rest of creation, dumb to redemption itself—camels and cathedrals can’t be saved—awaits re-creation. Artifacts—sunsets, computers, jazz tunes—remain themselves and are no-things outside of themselves. In all of their self-enclosed meaningfulness, they simply function as themselves, contingently pointing away from themselves to the One, the Truth, who alone redeems.

There are important principles at work here. The Creator is not the creation. The alternative is pantheism. Further, the creation could not make itself, but had to be made. And by being made, it is both less than, and under submission to, the sovereignty of the Maker. Let’s take this one step further. According to Scripture, God granted humankind extraordinary sovereignty over what He made, and by extension, over what it makes. Music does not make itself. We bring it into being, and it is neither one with us (we are not the music) nor empowered over us. If we allow this order to be reversed, the result is inevitable: We become shaped by what we have shaped and by allowing this, have turned to idolatry. But if music is in submission to us and not the reverse, we offer it freely as an act of worship—no more and no less—and are thus delivered from depending on it as a cause of worship. Even when we talk about music being an aid to, or tool for, worship, we are flirting with sovereignty-reversal, especially in this culture of narcissism and power mongering. Furthermore, if I look to music as an aid, and end up in a worship service where the music is stylistically upsetting or even offensive, does it then become an aid to non-worship? Not as long as I understand that the Holy Spirit is the sovereign Aid to worship, who can neutralize any temporary circumstance. Likewise, if I find myself in a musical setting that is rhapsodically wonderful, I must remember that the beauty of the music cannot approach the glory and wonder of Almighty God.

Third, the term “musical form” is benignly abstract. Take the following constructs:

- blah-62-blah;
- the nation’s Capitol Building;
- %+%;
- minuet-trio-minuet.

They are all in the same ABA (ternary) form but each is essentially different and differently shaped.

To live in a world of “forms” is to live in a world of essentialized dis-reality. By contrast, to live in a universe of nearly infinite shapes, each one real in itself, is quintessentially biblical. A pine tree is not a manifestation of an idealized pine tree, for there is no such thing “out there.”

God’s way is this way: each pine tree is an individualized completeness, good-in-itself. And while all pine trees are God’s personal handiwork, one pine tree can be more beautiful or crooked or symmetrical than another one. Meanwhile the Creator declares each one “good.” Further, a pine tree cannot be ultimately said to be more beautiful than a red-winged blackbird, even though one blackbird can be more beautiful than another.

At the musical level, the beauty of a jazz improvisation cannot be said to better a Renaissance motet, even though one jazz improvisation (or motet) can be deemed better than another. And if we want to insert the concept of taste into these examples, taste is the arbitrary exercise of deciding-among. Meanwhile, intrinsic worth is a given while quality varies.

ARE SOME MUSICAL FORMS "BETTER" THAN OTHERS?

Even if God can employ any musical form redemptively, are some musical forms spiritually or morally "better" than others?

The quick answer is "no", but the question deserves further consideration. I have no idea what "better" means except in a relative sense: x can be better than y even though x is never perfect. To complicate things, we often cross wires by using "better" in a moral sense, thus confusing taste and purity.

The Scherzo in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is in simple ternary form, as are a thousand third-movement works in as many classical compositions. The Beethoven is better by far, but is it better than the second movement of Brahms' German Requiem, also in ternary form? Who's to say? I can't.

However, I can say this: the most mediocre ternary form imaginable among those thousand compositions has intrinsic goodness and can be as spiritual as any choosing heart might say. Quality is a matter of taste, which, even among the most practiced connoisseurs, is straightforwardly arguable. And I disagree with those who bring taste—as important as it is in its comparative domain—into matters of spirituality. For who among them is expert enough to test the subtle nuances of sheer goodness without dipping into extremist comparatives: "good taste/bad taste"; "art/non-art"; "morally good/morally bad"?

God nowhere defines spiritual music, but he is unequivocal about what a spiritual person inwardly is, irrespective of the "betterness" of a cultural artifact. St. Paul, in talking about "spiritual songs," certainly meant text types before musical types. Otherwise, the terms "psalms" and "hymns" would imply "other-than-spiritual."

Furthermore, if we were to speak of something being of better moral quality, we're fudging, because there are no gradations in true morality. "Fudging" on tax returns is no less immoral than lust for a new Camaro or bed-mate. Sin is sin, both for believers and non-believers. But spirituality is a condition within which increasing christlikeness deepens and cleanses us but in no way lessens the exceeding sinfulness of sin or guarantees sinless perfection.

In short, any construct that even suggests an equation between Truth (absolute) and beauty (variable) walks into a theological morass.

ARE SOME FORMS "BETTER" FOR CHURCH?

Finally, are some musical forms "better" for the sake of the gathered church?

"Better" is the wrong word. "Appropriate" is better. "Better," as already explained, is relative, whereas "appropriate" in the biblical sense comes as the result of searching among things that are relative to each other.

Deciding among relativities is called discernment. The decision becomes absolute because it derives out of a solemn commitment made to the Lord. But this does not mean that the artifacts are absolutized. Nor does it mean that, as contexts change the artifacts can't change as God leads. For instance, I would be playing fast and loose with a commandment if I were to ask God for discernment as to whether I drink myself to drunkenness. But I can pray for discernment as to why and how much I drink and with whom I choose to drink, especially if he or she is weaker, in which

case, by discernment I abstain from what I know to be good. By the same token, the leadership in any local assembly is free to assume that all available musical options are on the table until, by prayerful discernment, a local template is cut that accords with what is best for that particular community, not in terms of "how to grow a church" or "how to get people to worship" but what informed wisdom demands.

If there are problems with music and the church in today's culture, it's not about the latest, newest, strangest, most secularized music, or picking on this or that style in the name of sanctified otherness. It's about the egregious errors that are regularly anointed by pastors and so-called worship leaders and ecclesiastical analysts.

These errors revolve around giving music—any music in any worship context—far more compartmentalized attention than even the best of it deserves. This is where we, not culture, have become paganized, in mirroring a post-Romanticist, culture-wide addiction to music. We're talking idolatry, but not just the kind where music is reputed to have the power to change lives—this alone is refutable—but where music, any music, any style, anywhere, becomes indispensable to doing anything and everything, including so-called Christian worship. Far too often, music means worship and worship means music. This is a blatant hook-up between things of the spirit and mere handiwork. And this hook-up takes us down the road to idolatrous pantheism sprinkled with holy water.

In short, if we were to stop our speculations about ideal forms, moral content, and good taste (as if we from our Western, post-Enlightenment duck blind had the only bead on them); if we were to get back to the simple wonder of the sheer fact of music, offered temperately, humbly, imaginatively, servingly, discerningly and in complete surrender to the sovereign Word of God, the conversation would be radically different.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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By Bobby Jamieson

Stylized Soundtracks and Sunday Morning

Whatever happened to headphones? Or even earbuds, their scrawny successors?

Since the advent of the iPhone, it seems to me that more and more people project their music into the air around them instead of into their ears. I see this—hear it, rather—everywhere: the gym, the airport, the reservoir I walk around near my home. I'm constantly bursting into other people's personal Beyoncé or Bieber bubbles.

I could talk about how technologies like tiny speakers only reveal the self-absorption already present in the heart, but I won't. Instead, there's a parable here I want to probe, a parable that portrays the difference between how we tend to listen to music individually and how we should approach music in church.

STYLIZED SOUNTRACKS

These projected musical spheres picture the fact that for many people today, music serves as a kind of stylized soundtrack to our lives.

Why do you listen to the music you listen to? The reasons are likely layered and sometimes subconscious. On some level, most people's aesthetic judgments are intuitive: you like what you like. But musical preferences are also influenced by where you grew up, what your parents listened to, what your parents forbid you to listen to, and—especially—what your friends listen to. And preferences can shift over time in large and small ways.

What you listen to also depends on the mood you're in and the mood you want to set. If you're depressed, melancholy music can feel cathartic. If you're exercising, you want to get your blood pumping. If you're working or studying, you probably want music that will tune out distractions without turning into a distraction.

And what you listen to depends on present company. Hence the eternal struggle, in some families, for control of the car radio.

What's the big picture here? In the late modern West, and increasingly throughout the world, music functions for many like a movie score writ small. It signals the cultural niche of the characters, sets the mood, and enhances the action.

That music works like this is more or less a fact of life today, but it's not a fact of nature. Customized music consumption is possible only because of the technology and commercial structures that enable it. To paint in broad strokes, prior to the advent of mass media most people's experience of music was just like all their neighbors': they heard and sang the songs of their people. People used to hum folk songs, the common property of generations, while they plowed the fields and baked the bread. By contrast, the cornucopia of choice that characterizes today's music consumption is a feature of advanced capitalism.

That doesn't make it wrong. But it does mean we should look out for instincts programmed by the habit of customized consumption that might need to be deprogrammed when we step into church on Sunday morning.

SUNDAY MORNING

Why? Because music in church is doing something very different from what it's doing on our iPhones.

In Colossians 3:16 Paul writes, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." The parallel passage in Ephesians 5:18–19 exhorts us not to get drunk, but instead to "be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart."

In these passages Paul addresses the whole congregation. He commands the whole church to sing, just as God frequently commands his people to sing to him throughout the Old Testament (e.g., Psalm 9:11, 30:4, 33:3, 47:6).

It's not that the band plays music up front while everyone listens or maybe sings along, like at a concert. Instead, the church is the band. What accompaniment there is simply serves and supports the church's singing.

In church, music isn't something we consume but something we create.

And what exactly is this music for? It is a means by which we make melody to the Lord and give thanks to him. It is also a means by which we address, admonish, and instruct one another. Our singing in church is directed to God and each other. It aims at God's glory and the good of the body. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14:26, "What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson…Let all things be done for building up."

That this singing is corporate rather than individual is not accidental but essential. Paul prays for the church in Rome, "May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:5–6). Paul wants the church in Rome to live as one so they can glorify God as one. He wants their unified songs of praise to express their unified life as a church. We glorify God by singing together because in Christ God has brought us together.

In the church, music is a means by which we all, as one body, glorify the Lord and edify each other by singing the excellencies of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

DIFFERENCES

Far from being a stylized personal soundtrack, music in church is more like a score for an orchestra: the church is the orchestra, and every single member is an instrument. Note that in moving from everyday music to music in church we've switched from passive to active. Again, you don't consume music in church; you create it.

We've also switched from individual to corporate. The point of music in church is not that you would have a private spiritual experience of the presence of God as you sing or as others perform. Instead, the point is that your voice would combine with dozens or hundreds of others into one voice which praises God and proclaims his grace to his people.

When an orchestra shows up to perform, everyone knows it's a team effort. Dozens of musicians play from one score so that the orchestra plays as one. Out of the dozens of musicians comes one unified sound. It's unthinkable that the members of the orchestra would insist on only playing the parts that resonated with their personal preferences. For many to sound as one, the many must lay down any agendas that have potential to fragment their unity.

In moving from everyday music to Sunday morning, we've also switched from personal to prescribed purposes. On your own time, as long as you're loving God and your neighbor, you can do whatever you want with music. But as we've seen, music in church has purposes that are precisely prescribed by God.

All music in church must enable the church to build each other up and praise God. That's a matter of the whole church's obedience or disobedience to the word of God. What matters most in church music is that it causes the word of Christ to dwell in the church richly. Substance, therefore, is more important than style. And the most important questions about style are not whether it meshes with someone's preferences, but whether a song's style serves the divinely mandated purposes of whole-church praise and admonition.

PREFERENCES

What then should you do about your musical preferences in church? To put it bluntly, leave them at the door.

You can turn your iPod back on as soon as you hop into the car and drive home. In church, though, lay down your preferences and gladly sing what the body sings. The eye, ear, hand, and foot may all have their preferences, but the body sings as one.

You should expect to check your preferences at the door, first, because of the differences between how we typically consume music as individuals and how we are to create music in the church. I'm not suggesting that most Christians think they can treat their church's order of service like an iTunes playlist. But I do think our musical consumer culture is so pervasive that it takes hard work to give up preferences rather than insisting on them. We're so used to crafting our own soundtracks that it takes effort to cultivate a musical culture where the many matters more than the one.

And giving up our preferences for the good of the body is exactly what the gospel calls us to do. The gospel calls us to give up so others can gain, to count others more significant than ourselves, just as Christ did for us (Phil. 2:1–11). So imitate Christ as you sing to Christ in the body Christ. If glorifying God in song is a sacrifice of praise (Heb. 13:15), don't be surprised if it costs you something.

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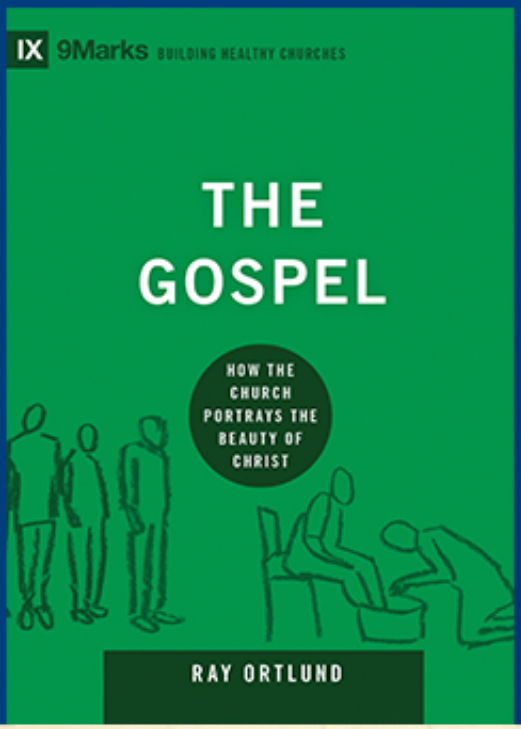

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By Matt Merker

Beyond the Worship Set

The worship set is something of a fixture among evangelical congregations, whether the music is accompanied by a choir and orchestra or by an 8-piece indie-folk band. Step into a church sometime between the opening greeting and the sermon, and you'll likely find yourself in the middle of a 20-30 minute block of music.

So, what exactly is the worship set? And should it be a given in our churches?

Simply put, the worship set is a consecutive group of deliberately chosen worship songs or hymns. It reflects forethought and creativity. It's a far better option than picking a few popular songs and tossing them up on the canvas like a Jackson Pollock painting.

Similar to a meal with an appetizer, entrée, and dessert, the worship set follows a dynamic arc or storyline. A set might begin with a call to worship or song of invitation. This song sets a particular theme and invites worshipers to praise God. Next, a couple more songs develop the theme both musically and lyrically. This is the "entrée" portion. If the first song focused on the character of God, these selections might move the church to consider our sin and redemption in Christ. The final song of the set is the theological and musical climax. It could consist of a celebration of the resurrection, or a call to respond in faith and discipleship, or simply a declaration of praise. Bob Kauflin argues for this kind of deliberate thematic development in his book *Worship Matters*, and he outlines a number of helpful worship set frameworks to try.[1]

On the whole, I think the worship set is a wonderful idea if it is used well. In a former church, serving as director of worship, I devoted substantial time each week to crafting and preparing sets of music. My hope was that this process would aid believers in responding to God in robust praise with their heads and their hearts, and I believe God blessed this effort.

The worship set can be a God-glorifying approach because deliberately shaping the order of songs aids in "the strengthening of the church" that is to characterize our corporate praise (1 Cor. 14:26). It unifies the songs around a central concept, which promotes understanding. If used well, the worship set prepares the congregation for the specific questions and priorities that the sermon will address. Like a narrative with a beginning, middle and end, a worship set can capture our imagination and help us engage with God through the implicit story being told in the sequence of songs.

THE WORSHIP SET: POTENTIAL PITFALLS AND SOLUTIONS

So I don't want to declare that the worship set is a terrible concept altogether. But I do want to take that glass sculpture off grandma's shelf and see if it can be improved.

Why? While the worship set has much to commend it, it's not without dangers. Here are three potential pitfalls it presents. For each, I'll identify some ways to think and move "beyond" the worship set.

1. The worship set can fragment the order of service.

First, the worship set can fragment the order of service. If pastors and other leaders aren't careful, using a worship set can subtly convey that the worship service basically has two parts: the singing and the sermon. The worship leader presides over the first half, then passes the baton to the pastor for the message.

I fear that because of this, many evangelicals have a bifurcated picture of public worship: the music part of the service is geared at those who relate to God through emotional experiences, while the sermon exists to engage heady, left-brain types. At worst, this false dichotomy can also perpetuate the common misconception that worship through song is the church's worship, leading to comments like, "The worship (read: music) today was incredible, but the sermon was a bit dry"—as if preaching is not doxology too.

However we structure our services, we must take pains to convey that both music and preaching (and other elements—see point 2) are properly "worship" to God, and that they're essential for all Christians.

Here are some suggestions to circumvent this danger. First, if your services usually fall into the "30 minutes of music and 30 minutes of preaching" formula, then change up your order of service regularly. Consider breaking up the music set with prayer, Scripture reading, or silent reflection. Try occasionally placing the sermon closer to the beginning of the service and leaving most of the singing for after the message.

Have an individual other than the worship leader or preacher, preferably an elder, lead the whole service. Call this man a "host," an "MC," a "service leader" (that's the term we use at my church), or whatever you like. But make sure he's not the music leader or the preacher. If this individual gives the welcome and announcements, introduces the songs, presides over the offering, leads the prayers, and so on, then he can bring unity to the whole service.

Pick a theme for the service based on the theme of the sermon text. Ensure that the songs, prayers, and even the announcements relate to this theme. When the congregation realizes that the whole service is about "the faithfulness of God" or "knowing Christ in suffering," it will mitigate against the feeling that the worship service is merely a concert followed by an unrelated talk.

2. The worship set can lead a church to undervalue non-musical worship elements.

Another danger of the worship set is that it can lead a church to undervalue non-musical worship elements. Paul told Timothy, "Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture" (1 Tim. 4:13). He instructed the young pastor to lead his church in offering up "requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving" (1 Tim. 2:1). His expectation was that the members of the Corinthian church would set aside their offering "on the first day of every week" (1 Cor. 16:2), from which many have inferred that giving was an integral part of the New Testament church's public worship. Jesus commanded his followers to baptize new disciples (Matt. 28:19), and he gave them his Supper so they could proclaim his death until he comes (1 Cor. 11:26). There's a lot more to do in church than sing and preach.

The danger with the worship set is that these other elements of biblical worship can fade into the background. If the congregation expects (or even demands?) to experience a well-rehearsed, creative musical progression, that can force out these other mandated expressions of worship. Of course, I'm not suggesting that anyone intentionally sidelines biblical elements of worship. I only mean to highlight a pattern I've noticed: when a church privileges worship through song by giving it the lion's share of time and focus, these other elements of worship tend to become thin and perfunctory.

How can pastors and those who lead worship through song work against this tendency?

If you use a worship set, resist the idea that the set must only contain music in order for it to have maximum impact. This isn't a concert. Intersperse prayers and readings between the songs.

Promote a culture of worshipful, robust prayer in your services. If you devote substantial time to prayer during the public meeting, it shouldn't be a surprise if your church members learn to prioritize prayer in their private lives.

How do we bolster our public prayers? By saturating them with scriptural truths: "Do we not learn the language of confession and penitence from the Bible? Do we not learn the promises of God to believe and claim in prayer from the Bible? Don't we learn the will of God, the commands of God, and the desires of God for His people for which we are to plead in prayer, from the Bible? Since these things are so, public prayers should repeat and echo the language of the Bible throughout."[2]

There is also a correlation between rehearsal time and value. If your church values well-crafted music, it's likely that your band or choir spend hours in rehearsal. Why not spend as much time and effort on preparing public prayers?

Finally, promote a culture of worshipful Scripture reading in your services. If we believe that the Word of God is "sharper than any double-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12) let's take it out of the sheath and let it do its work. Read in such a way that the majestic truths of Scripture echo in the ears of your congregation. Consider training up a number of congregants to read Scripture well: with meaning, emphasis, gravity, and joy. We hand out Tim Challies' excellent article on how to read Scripture publicly to everyone who reads at our church.

3. The worship set can foster an entertainment culture.

Third, the worship set can foster an entertainment culture. This danger is ironic, of course, because one of the purposes of the worship set is to unify a group of songs along the lines of theological content. But I fear that often, what the congregation experiences as they sing through a worship set is not a new appreciation for a biblical theme, but a concert-like journey through a stirring series of songs.

Although I'm not against creativity and emotion in public worship, I believe it is possible to so prioritize the emotional response that comes from music that biblical truth is overlooked rather than illuminated. One implication of Colossians 3:16 is that if the word of Christ does not dwell in us richly as we sing, then something about the way we're singing needs to change.

As Neil Postman argued in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, entertainment has become the dominant discourse of our age. While the church must recognize this fact, it shouldn't capitulate to it. Our services don't have to feel like a concert or TV show, even if those modes of discourse define the manner in which postmodern people experience the flow of ideas. Rather, we have the opportunity in our services to model a different type of discourse, one that begins with the self-revelation of God. Our worship—whether contemporary or traditional, high church or low—should eschew man-focused experientialism and embrace the transcendent God.

So, if a worship set can help people adore, treasure, and understand more of our holy Creator, then by all means use one. But if in your church the worship set tends to place more focus on the artistry of the band than on the awesomeness of the Redeemer, something needs to change.

How can we resist the way a worship set might slowly pull a church toward entertainment-ism?

Do all that you can to prioritize the congregation being able to hear one another sing. This is a basic biblical principle, given that Paul exhorts believers to speak "to one another" with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19). But it

also goes a long way in cultivating an atmosphere of joy and engagement with the lyrics.

Awareness of others in corporate worship, and of how the volume and expression of your own singing actually encourages others, helps to thwart self-centeredness. Practically, this may involve turning down the volume of the band or orchestra, and instructing the musicians to focus on tasteful, simple accompaniment rather than complex or virtuosic performing.

Provide a framework that helps to interpret the worship through song. For example, instead of beginning the service with dark lighting and a reverb-heavy guitar line (which feels a lot like a concert), begin with a call to worship from God's Word or a brief prayer.

Before the music begins, have the service leader give a few words of instruction or exhortation to set the song(s) in context. This interpretation of what is about to come is invaluable not only for believers, but also for unbelievers who may not know what to make of the music they're about to hear. (See 1 Corinthians 14:24 on the priority of making the service understandable to non-Christian visitors). Yes, it might feel a bit wooden and awkward to have a few remarks before the singing. But even this speed bump in the service is a good thing, because it engages the congregation's minds and inhibits the passivity that an entertainment culture thrives on.

Also, keep the main lights turned up. Darkness, smoke machines, and spotlights all scream that the focus should be on musicians up front. In contrast, bright lighting and modest staging—even placing the musicians off to the side if possible—convey that what really matters here is not the choir or the worship team, but the content of the songs and the whole congregation's participation.

See silence as a friend, not an enemy. If there are a few moments of quiet between a song and a prayer, or between the offering and the sermon, it's not a disaster. After all, this is a gathering of Christians for praise, not a TV production. In fact, allowing silent space in transitions can refresh people's mental palates and allow the church to reflect on what has come before in the service. In addition, use planned moments of silence for reflection and prayer. Sitting in a room with dozens or hundreds of other believers and simply being quiet before the Lord is bracingly countercultural in our noisy, distracted age.

MORE TOOLS IN THE TOOLBOX

In all of this, I'm not trying to make the worship set a bogeyman. It's a useful tool. But for these three reasons, I don't think it should be the only tool in our toolbox. And if we do use a worship set, we should do so in a way that unifies rather than divides the order of service, that highlights rather than downplays other elements of worship, and that promotes awe before God rather than an entertainment experience.

When it comes to planning a worship service, there is much freedom with regard to the forms and circumstances in which a congregation reads the Word, sings the Word, prays the Word, hears the Word preached, and sees the Word in the ordinances. I pray that as pastors and music directors think beyond the worship set, God would give us wisdom to lead our congregations in offering him an appropriate sacrifice of praise. I pray that our churches, filled by God's Spirit, would increasingly delight in God's Son, the one who gave himself for us that we might be worshipers of him.

1 Bob Kauflin, Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 114.

2 Terry Johnson, Reformed Worship: Worship That Is according to Scripture (Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic Press, 2000), 35.

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By Bob Kauflin

Should Your Second Hire Be a Music Pastor?

When a solo pastor recognizes the need for an additional hire it's both an exciting and fearful proposition. Exciting because your church has grown to the place where you can afford another person to serve the congregation. Fearful because you can only hire one.

Consider the options. Last year Ryan Townsend suggested your second hire might be an administrative pastor. There's much wisdom in that and Ryan makes a good case for it. Some would recommend a pastor-evangelist as your second hire. After all, you're adding another salary so you'll need more people in the church to support the additional financial burden. Others might make the case for a children's pastor, especially when the demographic of your church is largely young families. Still others would opt for a youth or family pastor, for similar reasons.

But what about a music pastor? Many people today choose churches based on the music as much as the preaching. Wouldn't it be wise to have someone who can effectively manage, lead, and train musicians? That could be as effective, if not more so, as hiring an evangelist-pastor.

Here's where I come down on that question. If your church has grown to the size where it's ready for a second hire, you should hire a *pastor*. An overseer. A shepherd. Someone who meets the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Someone who can lead and care for the flock. *That* is essential.

Now, if he happens to be skilled in leading congregational song, that's great. But not crucial. Scour the New Testament all you want and you won't find a position devoted entirely to music. That doesn't mean a church shouldn't ever hire full time musicians. But it does suggest that as a church is starting out, the focus should be on the roles God has spelled out, not on secondary or strictly specialized positions: music, media, admin, and so on. An exception might be a part-time administrator who will help a pastor do everything he does more effectively.

Being a pastor and a musician who has participated in two church plants, I know the advantage of having a paid staff member who can lead worship in song. But I'm also aware of many young churches are led well musically by volunteers.

Having a musician as your second hire is appealing because many pastors would love to simply hand over the musical responsibilities to someone who has more gifting and time. But leading congregational song is a pastoral function before it's a musical one. Every senior pastor should be very aware of what songs are being sung in his church. If the individual you're considering to lead the music in your church isn't willing and eager to follow you in this area, call someone else.

It's no small irony that C.J., the pastor who has taught me the most about leading congregational song, is not a musician. Some of the values I've learned from him are the importance of esteeming God's Word, understanding lyrics, emotional engagement, expression, spontaneity, pastoring through song, and more.

Obviously, musical skills are helpful for leading congregational song. It's nice to know what keys are best to sing in (a rare skill these days), what songs go together musically, and what songs are out there. But all a church's pastors together are responsible for the teaching diet of the church, and that includes the songs your congregation sings. Hiring a full-time music minister won't free you from the responsibility of knowing what lyrics you're singing and how music is serving the Word.

A second hire depends on a number of factors including the present pastor's strengths and weaknesses, the available candidates, the needs of a congregation, and relational considerations. Rather than limit the field to someone who can lead worship in song, ask God to give you the individual who will serve and care for the church most effectively.

And if he happens to be a great musician, I don't think you'll be disappointed.

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By Alex Duke

Nine Marks of a Healthy Worship Leader

My local church is in search of a worship leader.[1] To that end, our senior pastor cobbled together a group of twelve members for a Worship Leader Search Committee. Despite my musical ineptitude, I was among those asked to serve.

I suppose I'm equal parts grateful and terrified. After all, the title "worship leader" is nowhere in the New Testament. This fact tempts even the most levelheaded toward the subjective and superficial, where already drawn lines and white-knuckled commitments merely evidence what we've previously seen, known, or been comfortable with.

So I wanted to pass along a few thoughts I've developed as I've prayed through what my church is undertaking in the coming weeks, and what your church may be going through right now. I've unoriginally titled them "Nine Marks of a Healthy Worship Leader."

NINE MARKS OF A HEALTHY WORSHIP LEADER

I'm convinced these nine things are must-haves for anyone leading a congregation in song week after week. Far from exhaustive, they are a set of traits, postures, and characteristics I believe are informed by Scripture and ought to transcend culture and denomination.

1. Your worship leader should meet the biblical qualifications of an elder.

This is important. Even if he won't be called an elder, the congregation will likely treat him like one. And it's important to remember the qualifications for an elder/pastor/shepherd include being "apt to teach." This is what worship leaders do, and their aptness to teach (or lack thereof) is evident every week in the songs they select and the way they facilitate the congregation's worship.

I need to add a caveat here. Depending on what song-leading looks like in your particular congregation, meeting the qualifications of an elder may be unnecessary. A friend of mine helpfully pushed back on this point and offered a helpful distinction: "A person who is simply leading *musically* needs to have the biblical qualifications of a deacon/deaconess. A person who is leading that portion of the service which includes songs, prayers, and readings needs to have the qualifications of an elder." I agree, under the assumption this second scenario naturally propels the "song leader" or what have you into a more pastoral function.

2. Your worship leader should be musically capable.

This is obvious, I know. Perhaps a more specific and helpful exhortation would be that he should select songs within his skill set. You really love that new riff on that old hymn? Yeah, me too, but it's hard to sing along when I can't decipher the words or melody as easily as I can the oh-boy-gotta-catch-up look in the drummer's and rhythm guitarist's eyes.

Also, it's unwise to let this qualification steer the ship; in fact, it should be subservient to almost everything else. A godly and mediocre musician will serve our churches far better in the long run than a sublime talent who reads his chord charts more than his Bible.

3. Your worship leader should be invisible (almost).

A guest leaving the Sunday gathering should be more struck by the corporate witness of the congregation praising God in song than by the ability or presence of one man. "Whoa, those people love to sing about Jesus!" is always better than "Man, that guy is great!"

4. Your worship leader should be committed to gospel-anchored liturgy.

I'm using "liturgy" in a general sense, as in the "flow" of the gathering, not a rote, recited form of standing and sitting and singing that must be repeated weekly. Every church gathering follows some kind of liturgy; the question is whether it reflects the character of the God and the content of the gospel or just the "whatever strikes us" approach.

Anchoring liturgy in the gospel may mean scripted transitions between songs that help to move the congregation through the service. Scripture readings, prayers, testimonies of God's grace tethered to the theme of the passage about to be preached—all of these till the hearts and minds of those present. Prayerful, thoughtful preparation beforehand cultivates an appropriately intentional culture in a church. Don't assume the Holy Spirit only works "in the moment."

5. Your worship leader should work in close tandem with the preacher.

The worship leader doesn't make decisions on an island. Every song should be in service of the preached Word. This reminds the church of an important truth: the preacher is a worship leader, too. One worships God no less through hearing a sermon than through signing a song.

This isn't to say the themes of the sermon and the songs must be identical in a narrow sense. But if, say, your pastor is preaching on the resurrection, sing songs which unpack the meaning of that event as opposed to songs that refer to God's goodness in his general interactions with his people. The latter is a more-than-worthy topic, of course, but the resurrection is a specific event that reveals specific things about God and us. This kind of cooperation between song and sermon provides an opportunity to praise God specifically and uniquely in response to his revelation.

6. Your worship leader should be committed to the expression of a vast range of emotions.

Every Sunday gathering should have moments of adoration, thanksgiving, confession, celebration, and the like. The church should be a space where a range of emotions are acceptable: guilt, shame, sadness, joy, thankfulness, and so on. When we only sing upbeat songs about how happy we are to be in the house of the Lord, or how we're going to serve our guts out this next week because Jesus is awesome, we tacitly teach people that feeling sad or guilty or downtrodden is somehow sub-Christian, a posture unfit for praising God.

There are many songs that extol Jesus while also being honest about feeling sorrow and pain. I'll never forget singing "Be Still My Soul" a few days after hearing of a friend's terminal cancer diagnosis. Though somber and designed to elicit emotions perhaps few present were feeling, this song hoisted me into the loving arms of Jesus. Can happy songs can do

that, too? Of course. But when there's never any seasoning of sorrow in our gatherings we risk broadcasting a counterfeit, sub-Christian message about what it means to be a human pursuing Christlikeness in a fallen world. We're communicating to both our members and our visitors that Christians are always happy and that a relationship with Christ eradicates grief. We're setting people up for disappointment or unpreparedness in the face of difficulty.

7. Your worship leader should be committed to the explicit worship of Jesus.

This is less about the tone and more about the words of certain songs. The vast majority of a church's music must be distinctly Christian—exalting not only the characteristics of God but the truths of the gospel. We should sing few songs an unconverted Jew could happily sing—that is, we should sing about Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Words like "sin" and "gospel" and "cross" should come up frequently and perhaps even be explained for those in attendance who, frankly, don't know the difference between a Baptist church and a Jewish synagogue. Assuming all present are Christians and know what words mean is a recipe for confusion.

8. Your worship leader should encourage and enlist congregational participation.

In addition to encouraging loud congregational singing, the worship leader could also ask various church members to pray during the service. This provides opportunities for visibility and participation for many, not just the few with musical talent.

9. Your worship leader should be chiefly concerned with honoring God and upholding Jesus and the gospel, more than reaching the next generation or any other pre-determined demographic.

Every church needs to be culturally informed (this is why you likely avoid African tribal songs), but no church should be culturally driven. If conversations about fruitfulness begin displacing those about faithfulness, then the first step has been taken toward a mindset of man-centered worship that will need updating in a few short years.

Apart from Christ, every generation from the root of Adam is dead in their sins, in desperate need of the enlivening words of Christ. Because of this, after leaving your church on Sunday, no one needs to think to themselves, "Man, that music was great!" More than anything, they need to have heard the gospel clearly and explicitly; they need to be have been made aware of their dire situation apart from Christ and—even more—his held-out hand as their all-sufficient and ever-gracious Savior.

1 The parlance for this kind of job is amorphous: music minister, pastor of music, pastor of music and arts, director of contemporary arena jamz and the occasional traditional dirge, defense against the dark arts teacher, etc. I'm only using "worship leader" since it seems to me a catch-all.

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By Michael Lawrence

Who Should Pick the Music?

"I just want to know who's in charge?" That sentence brought light to my situation. I had just preached my candidating sermon, and was about to grab a brief lunch before Q&A with the congregation. But instead of eating, the chairman of elders and the interim executive pastor whisked me to a back room for a hastily convened meeting with the pastor of worship. He didn't beat around the bush but got right to the point:

If I was called as lead pastor, who would decide what happened in the Sunday morning service prior to the sermon? Who would pick the music? Who would determine the order? Who, in short, would be in charge?

It was a reasonable question. He had been responsible for those decisions in the church up to that point, and apparently I had dropped enough hints in my candidacy that he had begun to wonder if things were going to change. And, in fact, I did plan, as the new lead pastor, to assume final responsibility for the whole service. I even planned to choose the music. So that's what I told him.

While there are biblical principles that undergirded my answer, in the end it is prudential and pragmatic. Biblically, I believe that *some* elder should exercise oversight over picking the music and all the other details of the worship service. Prudentially, I think it's good for the lead preaching pastor to be that individual.

Here are the three reasons for these convictions.

SINGING IS TEACHING

We usually think of our singing as the expression of our worship to God. And that's correct. But that is not all that is going on. Our songs teach and reinforce what we believe about God, and because they are set to music, our songs may often exert a more profound influence upon our members than we realize. As R. W. Dale, a nineteenth-century English Congregationalist minister, remarked in a set of lectures he gave on preaching at Yale University, "Let me write the hymns and the music of a Church and I care very little who writes the theology" (*Nine Lectures on Preaching*, 1878, p. 271). He may have been overstating the case a bit, but not by much.

Paul instructed the Colossians to admonish and teach one another by "singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Col. 3:16). Since teaching occurs when we sing corporately, the elders are responsible to give oversight, and particularly the pastor/elder who's been given primary responsibility for the teaching ministry of the church (Titus 1:9). If we're not

giving attention to the words that are being sung at our church week in and week out, then we are not being obedient to our calling as elders. Admittedly, this doesn't require that the lead pastor pick all the music personally. But it does require that he is familiar with it and approves it. In my own church, I work closely with our worship leader who is far more familiar with contemporary music than I am, while I'm more familiar with the hymns. We make a good team, but in the end, as the elder, I'm responsible.

MUSIC IS CULTURE SHAPING

Beyond the overt teaching of our songs, it is undeniable that the music we use and the way we use it shapes and defines the culture of our church. I hardly need to explain this to those who've lived through the worship wars in their local church. Those wars have been so intense because they are essentially culture wars, in which music is the proxy for a larger divide between the generations. It is why every church planter wants a like-minded musician on his team. It is why church growth experts advise you to adopt the preferred musical style(s) of your target demographic. So from a purely pragmatic perspective, if the pastor wants to give leadership to the shaping of his church's culture, he has to be involved in decisions about the music.

But what if you want to lead your church in a biblically informed counter-cultural direction? What if you want a multi-generational congregation that is eager to love one another by singing one another's music? What if you want to promote congregational singing, rather than a passive concert experience? What if you want to encourage a culture of worship that isn't driven by performance values? What if you want to have corporate worship that expresses itself in more registers than the triumphant and the happy?

Carl Trueman has incisively asked, "What can miserable Christians sing?" (*The Wages of Spin*, p. 158). That's a good question in our incessantly happy clappy CCM world. If all you want is a club for twenty-somethings, or baby-boomers, or urban hipsters, then hand the music over to the band. They'll do a great job. But if you want a culture that is richly textured and diverse, profoundly congregational, and allergic to the values of the entertainment world, then, pastor, you must lead it in that direction, because it won't go there on its own.

THE WHOLE SERVICE SERVES THE WORD

There is very little explicit instruction in the Bible on what should happen in our corporate worship services. But as Protestants, we're convinced that the Word is the center and climax, because it is the preaching of the Word that gives us Christ, and it's the hearing of the Word that elicits faith by the power of the Spirit (Rom. 10:14). Because of that singular and profound truth, it makes sense that the person who is preaching the Word gives time and thought to planning the rest of the service, including picking the songs, so that the entire service prepares for, and then responds to, the preached Word.

In my church, that means settling on a theological theme that arises out of the passage I'm going to preach on, and then selecting a variety of songs and Scripture readings that develop and interact with that theme. What's more, since the point of Christian worship is the exaltation of Christ in the gospel, there's an opportunity to arrange the songs, prayer, and readings so that the gospel is explored from the thematic perspective of the sermon text, before the gospel is preached from the sermon text. The whole service then is not only in service of the Word preached, but is a publication of the gospel itself. While other elders could do this work, it seems to me that the person who's going to preach the text is in the best position to select and arrange songs with the specific emphasis of the sermon in mind.

In practice, what this looks like is thinking through my preaching schedule and then the themes of the services well in advance. I then spend a couple days thinking though the songs we're going to sing, the Scriptures that will be read, and the arrangement of it all. Joel Harris, our music leader, is deeply involved with me in that process, adding his expertise

and drawing on his admittedly superior musical sensibilities. Once that's done, each week I sit down with my staff team and go over the plan for that Sunday. Occasionally, we don't change anything at all. But quite often the team has great suggestions and together we change my original service plan. After all, the responsibility to plan the service doesn't convey infallibility! But all of this fine-tuning (and sometimes wholesale revision) takes place within the context of something that the staff can't do for me, and that's careful meditation on the sermon text.

If he is able, the pastor should give leadership to the selection of music. If there are others that can help, he should use them. But one way or another, elders, not the band, should choose the music. I'm not the only person in the conversation about what happens each Sunday morning, but as servant of the Word, I begin the conversation and set the destination. My goal isn't micromanagement or control. It's simply that from start to finish, every song we sing, and every other element of the service, serves the Word. Because it is through the Word that we have Christ.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Michael Lawrence is the senior pastor of Hinson Baptist Church in Portland, Oregon and the author of *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church* (Crossway).

Answers from Dave Furman, Kevin Hsu, Paul Martin, John Onwuchekwa, and Juan Sanchez

Pastors' Forum: What do you do and not do to accommodate ethnic diversity in your worship service planning?

DAVE FURMAN

I will never lose the gospel for the sake of unity in diversity, but I will preach the unadjusted gospel consistently.

I will never water down theology to a lowest common denominator in order to accommodate more people and cultures, but I will consistently preach rich doctrine as seen in Scripture.

I will never focus on things in our worship gathering in order to please any specific culture, but I will instead focus on things that all Christians do: We practice the sacraments (baptism and Lord's Supper), pray, sing, read, and listen to the word of God read and preached.

I will never do anything to unnecessarily alienate or elevate any one culture, but I will strive to have people from different ethnic backgrounds assume roles in our worship service, participate in ministry, and serve the church together as one body.

I will never plan and create vision for our worship services alone, but I will seek the input from a diverse group of leaders from within our church.

Dave Furman is the senior pastor of Redeemer Church of Dubai, which has members from over 50 countries.

KEVIN HSU

What We Do:

- Preach the Word of God that crosses all cultures and ethnic groups.
- Intentionally think through how to apply God's Word to members of various ethnic groups.
- Intentionally include members in good standing from different ethnic groups in the service.

- Pray for God's Word to deeply penetrate every ethnic group in our diverse Bay Area, and to the nations.

- Ask people to bring their ethnic dishes to our church potlucks.

What We Don't Do:

- Under-value ethnic diversity by thinking the gospel eliminates all differences. In re-making us into one new race in Jesus Christ, the Gospel brings unity amidst diversity, not uniformity.

- Over-value ethnic diversity by intentionally dividing people into different classes, small groups, or ministries based on ethnicity

Kevin Hsu is the pastor of Urban Grace Church in Oakland, California.

PAUL MARTIN

I pastor in what the United Nations considers to be the most culturally diverse city in the world. Nearly 52 percent of the millions who live in Toronto were born outside of Canada. Thankfully, that diversity is represented in our church.

Here are our top five ways we try to promote diversity in our services:

5. Ask qualified members of different backgrounds to read, pray, and serve in our services.

4. Sing songs we can sing. Avoid trying to be what we are not as a congregation.

3. Celebrate and enjoy diversity, especially in the preaching. Apply and illustrate cross-culturally.

2. Stay Word-focused. The Bible crosses all cultural boundaries, is immediately relevant to everyone, and its faithful application guards against cultural snobbery.

1. Be a normal church. Don't specialize on cultural diversity or uniformity. The number one thing to avoid is elevating any culture over authentic gospel-culture.

Paul Martin is pastor for preaching and vision at Grace Fellowship Church in Toronto, Canada.

JOHN ONWUCHEKWA

What We Do:

We look carefully at songs, language, or references that could estrange a particular demographic. When we find these things, we don't necessarily take them out, we just want to be mindful of them so that we can explain them and invite other people to participate. That may look like us changing certain lyrics in songs, musical arrangements, and so on.

Our musical selection is the place where this is the most visible. We try to sing a healthy mix of hymns, contemporary, and gospel, although we never have as much of balance as we'd like.

We encourage people to engage with others who don't look like them. The battle for ethnic diversity is won and lost in the hallways before and after church.

We try to make what goes on up front reflect the makeup of the congregation. Whether you call them a service leader or emcee or host, we try to make sure this group is diverse.

In our preaching, conversations, and worship leading, we don't assume that everyone in the room has the same family structure. We're mindful of single moms and kids that don't know their mothers or fathers or have been raised by grandparents.

What We Don't Do:

We don't track measure diversity with any official metrics—at least not anymore. We don't make it the North Star and become overly consumed with it.

At the end of the day, we can do all of the right things and not be a very diverse church. If we're faithful and sensitive with what we do and say, then we trust that the results are up to God and him alone.

John Onwuchekwa is the teaching pastor of Blueprint Church in Atlanta, Georgia.

JUAN SANCHEZ

At High Pointe Baptist Church we have learned that the miracle of the gospel is not mere ethnic diversity but harmony among the diversity. So, perhaps it is better to point out what we don't do first, followed in each case by what we do:

We don't focus on a particular ethnicity/demographic in our music. Instead, we seek to select music that is gospel-centered and congregationally singable.

We don't plan ethnic diversity on the platform each service. Instead, we encourage everyone to serve in various capacities and diversity is regularly witnessed.

We don't emphasize Americanism in our services and avoid "patriotic" emphases. Instead, we speak about being world Christians who are strangers and aliens on this earth. We also display flags of different countries in our auditorium and outside our building.

We don't promote men as elders on the basis of ethnicity. Instead, we train all men; ask the Lord to raise up qualified men to serve as elders; and we have gratefully seen God raise up a diverse elder board.

Juan Sanchez is the senior pastor of High Pointe Baptist Church in Austin, Texas.

Answers from Murray Campbell, Tim Cantrell, John Folmar, Matthias Lohmann, Michael Prodigalidad, and Harshit Singh

Voices from Abroad: Biblical Faithfulness and Cultural Sensitivity

Editor's Note: We asked a handful of pastors around the world the following question: "You are familiar with American churches. Yet you pastor in a non-American context. What has your present experience taught you about how to be biblically faithful yet cultural sensitive when it comes to selecting the songs that your church sings?" Their responses are below.

MURRAY CAMPBELL

When it comes to selecting songs for church, one doesn't need to choose between being biblically faithful and being culturally sensitive. Instead, the latter helps the former. With "biblically faithful" I am looking for songs that are true and clear. With "culturally sensitive" I am looking for songs that are singable and engaging for the congregation.

Biblical faithfulness takes priority, but we don't have to choose between them. We are always choosing a musical language, whether consciously or intuitively. If part of the aim of singing is communication, should we not aim to choose a musical language that fits the cultural milieu of our church? We are naïve if we think cultural sensitivity is irrelevant, and we will be irrelevant if our songs are untrue or unclear.

During a recent sabbatical that my family and I enjoyed in America we had opportunity to visit several churches across the country. I appreciated that the churches we visited were thoughtful about song choice; not only were lyrics true but the music served to prepare people for and respond to the sermon.

Poor lyrics confuse and mislead people, and poorly considered musical style can build communication barriers. I am not sufficiently adept with American culture to know how successful each church was in communicating songs with the appropriate musical language, but my impression was that some churches clearly thought about this issue, others less so.

What I most appreciated was that even when the musical style seemed to be dictated by long-term tradition or hindered by a lack of skilled musicians, all the congregations we visited sang with conviction and joy, and we rejoiced with them. I may personally prefer to sing "And Can It Be" to indie-rock accompaniment, but when I heard a thousand voices singing the same hymn to a traditional piano accompaniment I was encouraged and wanted to sing. God's people singing God's truth trumps the limitations of our musicians and the foibles of church tradition.

Murray Campbell is the lead pastor of Mentone Baptist Church in Melbourne, Australia.

TIM CANTRELL

I will always be a lover of the great English hymns. It's a Christian legacy worth remembering here in South Africa. But in our many years here we have also enjoyed the rich heritage of biblically sound and singable African hymns and songs. Many African believers today, familiar only with the shallow contemporary Charismatic and prosperity gospel songs, are not even aware of their own Christian heritage of older hymns in Zulu and other native languages. Helping them rediscover these beloved and meaty songs can make an African congregation come alive in a way that Watts or Wesley may not.

I must also add that when Bob Kauflin was here last year, the African folks also loved his music and came alive. His leading is so encouraging and contagious (and expressive, like Africans), and his songs are so biblical and singable, that his music had a unifying effect in this very divided, post-apartheid country. The more communal African culture here also understands better how we can "sing to one another," as Scripture says, ministering to one another in how we sing.

In training African pastors in various contexts, we urge them to find the most Scripture-saturated, God-centered, gospel-driven, edifying, and singable songs they can find, both old and new, and let them loose! In any culture, God's people need songs that will teach them to live and to die for Christ.

Tim Cantrell is the senior pastor of Antioch Bible Church in Johannesberg, South Africa.

JOHN FOLMAR

I confess that I struggle with this one. Our congregation consists of people from sixty nationalities. So whose culture and musical forms do we choose? I'm convinced that the most important element of our songs is not the musical accompaniment, but the words being sung. So we sing the best songs that I'm aware of—written by people like Isaac Watts, William Cowper, Charles Wesley, Bob Kauflin, and Keith Getty. As for the musical accompaniment, we typically use the common arrangements, with some amount of acapella. If we can add a musical instrument that is more reflective of our demographic—say, a Pakistani tabla drum—then we try to incorporate it.

In all of our music, our goal is to enhance the congregational singing, not suppress it. We also aim for congregational participation, as opposed to an entertainment focus. By God's grace, our congregation is singing better than ever. However, I am still not satisfied with the musical accompaniment we use (I feel it's still too Western) and I'm looking for more indigenous forms of music (Arab, African, Indian) to go along with the solid lyrics we are singing.

John Folmar is the senior pastor of United Christian Church of Dubai.

MATTHIAS LOHMANN

Germans love U.S. music. This is reflected in many of our churches. It is not unusual that the majority of the songs during a Sunday church service will be in English, pretty much all being "contemporary worship music."

The problem is that while most Germans do speak some English, some don't, and many don't understand everything. This means that we often claim to worship God without even knowing what we are singing to him.

In order to facilitate true worship in song, we are trying to encourage the writing of new, biblically faithful German songs, the translation of solid English songs (a good number of Getty and Townend and Sovereign Grace songs have recently been translated), and the re-introduction of some old German hymns, sometimes set to a contemporary tune.

Germany has a rich treasury of wonderful hymns written by Martin Luther, Paul Gerhardt, and others, many of which have been translated into English. The one great challenge is to teach Germans to pay attention to the words. Sadly, some American contemporary worship songs have led many Christians away from true worship, and our churches have adopted these songs without even realizing this. So the greatest challenge is not the difference in culture, but gleaning the good from the U.S. while rejecting the bad, and then translating it into the heart language of our people.

Matthias Lohmann is the pastor of Freie Evangelische Gemeinde München-Mitte in Munich, Germany.

MICHAEL PRODIGALIDAD

I pastor a multicultural church with people from the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas in Sydney. The songs we sing are a mix of old and new, reminding us of God's redemptive work throughout history. And they also hail from as many different cultures as possible, reminding us of the global reach of the gospel.

As Australia is a cultural melting pot, an ideal scenario would be for us to sing a breadth of songs reflecting the nation's cultural diversity. However, it's hard to escape the dominant historical connection Australia has to the UK and American Christian culture. Therefore, many songs we sing originate from these countries. (The CCLI top 100 Christian songs from the UK, USA, and Australia are very similar). It's also difficult to source songs from other cultures as they may have not had the same rich heritage as the UK or USA in songwriting.

Nevertheless, we deliberately select as much from Australian composers as we can to remind the congregation of God's saving work in our own country. We also encourage those in our own congregation with gifts in musical composition to help express universal truths about God in a culturally relevant way.

Michael Prodigalidad is the pastor of Stanmore Baptist Church in Sydney, Australia.

HARSHIT SINGH

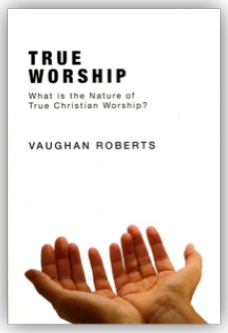
The repertoire of theologically solid, contextually relevant songs in Hindi is very small. Most songs that have good theology have been translated from older Western hymns or contemporary worship songs. So although the words might be faithful, the music is not indigenous and the local people find them difficult to sing. Also, such songs only confirm people's suspicion that Christianity is a Western religion.

On the other hand, Hindi songs that are musically contextualized are often light on theology, repetitive, and devoid of Scripture. Sometimes songs pick up tunes that are currently used in the temples; many new believers find these tunes very unhelpful. In our church we try to avoid both these kinds of songs.

Therefore the first thing that I look at when choosing songs is its doctrinal soundness. If a song is theologically unsound, then we won't sing it, however contextualized it might be. And if the words are good but the tune is not Indian then we will not sing it either.

So we choose songs with Indian tunes and faithful words. Granted, there are not many songs that fall in this category. But we are slowly building our repertoire.

Harshit Singh is the pastor of Zion Church in Lucknow, India.



Book Review: *True Worship*

Reviewed by Isaac Adams

Vaughn Roberts, *True Worship: What Is the Nature of True Christian Worship?* Image Media, 2010. 106 pages. $9.99

Ask Trey, a college student in your church, what he thinks it is. You might hear, "It's kind of like…well, you know…I mean—I don't know. It's private—a me and God thing. It's like love – hard to define but you know it when you're in it."

Ask Granny Susie, who's led the church choir longer than you've been alive, and you might hear, "Well, it's Sunday mornin' praise, baby!"

Ask Steven, the church band's guitarist, and you might hear, "It's the surge of God's presence that I lead people into."

What is true worship? Many in our churches define worship however they please.

But does God's Word grant such freedom? Does it define worship, and if so, how? These are the questions Vaughan Roberts, rector of St Ebbe's Church in Oxford, answers in his short book *True Worship*. He wrote it out of concern "that much of our thinking about worship is confused and often unbiblical" (Loc. 46).[1]

Pastor, let me be frank: this book is excellent. I think you should buy 30 copies and pass them out like lemonade on a summer day. Folks in your congregation are thirsting to worship God in a way that pleases him; surely, many people think they already doing this. But thoroughly working through Scripture, Roberts draws heart-checking implications like this: "there is such a thing as false worship that does not please God" (Loc. 46).

Those words would probably surprise and offend many folks in our churches. But they'll challenge some to test their own worship. Here are a few types of people this testing would serve.

THE "CHURCHED-SINCE-CHILDHOOD" WORSHIPPER

Many people who grow up in churches assume worship as a standard part of life. It's one more thing they do, like VBS, communicants' class, or Christmas pageants.

Roberts grants that Christian activities and behaviors may be a part of worship, but he clarifies that they are not all of worship. Consider this sobering statement, "It may be that you have been going to church for years. You've been baptized and received the Lord's Supper often… You love to sing Christian songs. But it's still possible that you have never begun to worship God" (Loc. 175). Roberts serves readers by biblically defining true worship: it's "submitting to Jesus Christ in every area of life" (Loc. 135).

THE "WRONG WAY!" WORSHIPPER

Giving clear definitions, Roberts also serves those who confuse the direction of worship. We wake up. We get in our cars. We drive to church. We naturally think we've come to worship God. The direction of our worship, then, begins with us going to God's certain residing place, the church building, to worship him.

But Roberts employs rich, concise, and accessible biblical theology to explain why this direction, man-to-God, errs by disregarding Christ's work; it's closer to how the Old Testament understands worship (Loc. 469). But the need for holy places and priests' mediation was "fulfilled by the worship of the Lord Jesus, when he offered himself as a perfect sacrifice to his father" (Loc. 551). So "true worship now depends on a person (Christ), not a place…it never begins with us; it is always a response to…who God is and what he has done for us in Christ" (Loc. 116, 216). The book's heavy reliance on Christ's blood serves the misdirected worshipper like red "WRONG WAY" signs serve those who turn into oncoming traffic on one-way streets.

THE "IT'S JUST ME AND GOD" WORSHIPPER

Roberts shows worship's biblical definition and direction; he also shows its dependency. Misdirected worship is birthed by misplaced dependency. Every sinner leans toward self-reliance, and this shows in our worship. Yet Roberts reminds us that we need "God's help, by his Spirit, to worship him properly…it takes a miracle of God to make a worshipper" (Loc.135, 155).

Roberts also makes clear why we need God's people (Loc. 892). With great compassion, he explains the fundamentals of why Christians must gather together in local churches. For example, "It's hard being a Christian while we wait for [Christ's coming]. That's why we need to meet together: to spur one another on" (Loc. 651).

Roberts doesn't ignore our gatherings' music, either. He explains music's significant part in corporate worship and ties this into the body's service of one another. "When we sing, we're not simply a collection of individuals praising our God. We are a community addressing one another" (Loc. 1104). Lone-wolf "Christians" beware—this book will call you out.

THE "SNORTING, FEELING DRIVEN" WORSHIPPER

It's good and helpful to desire intimacy with God and to know how you might best serve his people, but it's harmful to base this intimacy on your emotions and to compare your spiritual gifts to others'. Roberts comments on how Christianity has been affected by the culture's desire for a spiritual high, "as if worship was something you snorted through your nose" (Loc. 317). Often people who crave spiritual highs plummet to spiritual lows. Roberts encourages

those who feel far from God by reminding them to remember that “our assurance of God’s love does not depend on our feelings. Our assurance depends instead on the finished work of Christ” (Loc. 1002). The book humbles and uplifts.

CALLING ALL WORSHIPPERS

You might not be one of the types listed above. Maybe you pick the songs your church sings. Maybe you’re wondering how to explain what it means to worship “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Maybe you’re tired of me guessing where you are. But regardless of where that is, I think this book will bless you and those around you, who probably fit one of these molds in some capacity.

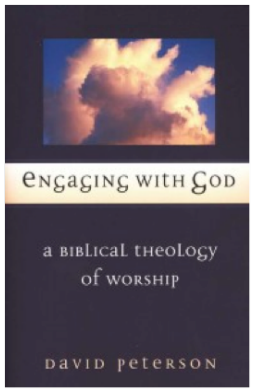
The book doesn’t offer an exhaustive account of what does and doesn’t belong in a Christian worship service. And Roberts’ approval of taking the Lord’s Supper in small groups, not as the entire church, makes me a little uneasy (Loc. 1382). But I’m happy to recommend the book. The fundamentals of the gospel, the church, music, and worship are so easily confused today; this book offers much-needed clarity.

It’ll take you an afternoon to read it. Maybe your afternoon is free?

1 All citations refer to location in the Kindle edition.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Isaac Adams, a member of Capitol Hill Baptist Church, works on staff helping support the efforts of CROSS, Together for the Gospel, and The Front Porch. You can follow him on twitter.



Book Review: *Engaging with God*

Reviewed by John Power

David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*. InterVarsity Press, 2002. 318 pages. $26.00

David Peterson's *Engaging with God* is one of those books that ends too soon. Not only that, but you want to reread nearly every sentence because you're afraid you've missed something.

So I just want to be clear from the starting block: anyone involved with the worship ministry of a church should read this book. Those interested in good biblical theology should read this book. Pretty much everyone reading this review should read this book. Let me show you why.

Peterson proposes to test the following hypothesis against the data of Scripture: "[The] worship of the living and true God is essentially *an engagement with him on the terms that he proposes and in the way that he alone makes possible*" (20, emphasis his).

He begins his test by surveying the Old Testament to determine its overall view of worship. The key to understanding its view, he says, is that "the God of heaven and earth has taken the initiative in making himself known." And this action on God's part is progressive. It was given "first to the patriarchs of Israel and then, through the events of the exodus from Egypt and the encounter on Mount Sinai, to the nation as a whole" (48). The symbols of the ark, the tabernacle, and then the temple entailed a whole system of worship that acknowledged God's initiative to make himself known.

Peterson then examines Old Testament vocabulary for worship, describing the human side of engaging with God. This enlightening chapter covers terminology that demonstrates Old Testament worship as grateful submission, service, and reverence. Each of these terms connects these attitudes with actions associated with the tabernacle and temple. These attitudes are not limited to those particular actions, but instead spread out into "faithfulness and obedience to all the covenant demands of God." In other words, worship is a matter of one's "total lifestyle" (73).

Peterson's next terrain to cover is the Gospels. Focusing on Matthew and John in particular, he demonstrates how these two Gospels "develop a picture of Jesus as the fulfillment of everything that the temple stood for and the focus of worship under the new covenant" (81). "Develop" is the right word since Jesus' life and ministry demonstrate a massive shift: his coming marks the end of the temple's role in the life of a true worshiper. In other words, "Jesus fulfills the hopes of the Old Testament writers and replaces all the provisions for engaging with God that were laid upon Israel" (102). He lives his life as a faithful Jew even as he ushers in this great change.

Because Christ replaces the temple and because "his ministry opens up a new way to engage with God," what he accomplishes is "the messianic salvation." His work makes available "the blessings of the new covenant" (109). It is this last point that primarily demonstrates the transformation of worship that has taken place from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The law, with its sacrificial system, is fulfilled in Jesus, and so the whole Old Testament pattern of worship is transformed in Jesus. Therefore, engagement with God in worship must occur through Jesus.

Sweeping through the book of Acts, Peterson notes that "Christ fulfills and replaces the temple and the whole method of approach to God associated with it" (137). Thus the first Christians engaged with God in quite a new way. It's true that they kept meeting in the temple to pray at first, but eventually there were significant changes. Individually they could only engage with God through personal repentance and faith in Christ. But then on the corporate level they "met to *express their relationship together* to the Lord and *their responsibilities* in that relationship" (159, emphasis added). As worship, these expressions were quite different from those found in the Old Testament.

For the Apostle Paul, this centering of worship on Jesus means that "expressions of faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ and ministries that encourage such faith are specifically the worship acceptable and pleasing to God in the gospel era" (187). Thus, when the church meets, "the concept of edification" gains "central importance" (196). This edification comes through the Holy Spirit's application of Scripture, building up the new temple: the church in union with Christ.

The book of Hebrews shows that the people of God "may now draw near without the aid of human priesthood, but only because they rely on the priestly mediation of Jesus Christ" (239). And the book of Revelation—with its call to faithfulness to Christ amidst persecution—defines worship as "*faith in God's promises worked out in the obedience of everyday life*" (269, emphasis his). This faith springs from "confidence in the finished work of Jesus and his promises about the future" (279).

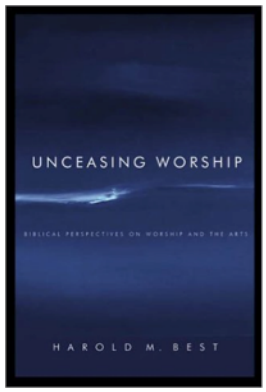
In a summary chapter, Peterson brings things together by saying that "worship is . . . fundamentally faith expressing itself in obedience and adoration" (283).

One might quibble with Peterson's exegetical conclusions here and there. For example, not all readers will agree with Peterson's view of prophecy in the New Testament. He basically follows Wayne Grudem's view that New Testament prophets cannot be equated with Old Testament prophets (196ff).

But you get the sense as you read that Peterson has very carefully read the Bible at multiple levels. He consistently lays out the plain meaning of texts even as he digs deeper, showing that, as Jesus said, "everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44). Peterson takes the theme of worship and follows its biblical-theological path through the canon of Scripture. The result of that journey is this excellent, important book.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

John Power is the pastor of New Covenant Christian Fellowship in Attleboro, Massachusetts.



Book Review: *Unceasing Worship*

Reviewed by John Power

Harold Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts*. IVP, 2003. 228 pages. $18.00

My worship journey includes a time as a thirteen-year-old novice guitarist with braces and a bowl cut. Many a Wednesday evening was spent thrashing out my cutting-edge acoustic guitar under the soul-stirring lyrics of "fun songs." These were the songs that required teenagers to sing lyrics tinged with Bible verses accompanied by various awkward motions. Those were the days.

As a result of such less-than-soul-stirring experiences, I'm always grateful for an opportunity to sharpen my theology of worship. What is worship? How does it work? What does it have to do with Sunday morning?

Harold Best's rather original work *Unceasing Worship* provides an opportunity for such sharpening. Further, Best puts forth a biblical framework through which pastors and church can think generally about the arts, which is useful since we all use at least one art form (music) every week in our gatherings.

So even if you don't find yourself in complete agreement with Best, this book will still get you thinking about your own theology of worship. Personally, I was struck by how quick I am to think that I've got everything figured out when it comes to worship. You'd think my bowl-cut, braces-wearing experiences would have taught me that sooner.

CONTINUOUS OUTPOURING

Best writes, "The burden of this book develops the concept of continuous outpouring as the rubric for our worship. As God eternally outpours within his triune self, and as we are created in his image, it follows that we too are continuous outpourers, incurably so." But man's fall into sin means that "we spend our outpouring on false gods appearing to us in any number of guises" (10).

This continuous outpouring entails that “at this very moment, and for as long as this world endures, everybody inhabiting it is bowing down and serving something or someone—an artifact, a person, an institution, an idea, a spirit, or God through Christ.” In other words, “Nobody does not worship” (17).

Authentic worship is only that which is lived out in faith, hope, and love. And it is only possible because of “the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ” (36). It’s “saturated with truth, whatever the context, time and place” (41). As a result, “We do not go to church to worship. But as continuing worshipers, we gather ourselves together to continue to worship, but now in the company of brothers and sisters” (47). Even evangelism exists in light of this continual outpouring as it becomes an act of “overheard” worship (84). Prayer and preaching are at their best when they are not isolated events, but rather the overflow of unceasing worship (ch. 6).

That was Part One. Part Two turns its focus to the arts and their role in light of unceasing worship. Best consistently maintains that the arts are “but one part of the creative ecology of our living” (111). In other words, carpenters and plumbers are to perform their work out of the overflow of unceasing worship just as much as musicians and painters are. Thus, for the artist, unceasing worship requires creating art with excellence and focus (ch. 7), imitating God’s diverse creativity (ch. 8).

Best appropriately brings music into special focus. He warns of the danger of thinking that “music empowers text” (147). This view implies that “the strength of the text per se is at the beck and call of the music” (148). And it “must mean that people come to corporate worship unprepared for worship…expecting worship to be initiated, and the music segment becomes the tool for this” (149). But a life of unceasing worship will not tolerate such a practice.

The remaining chapters include an exploration of the need to keep art within its own limitations (e.g., a painting cannot literally speak words of truth; ch. 10), a warning against idolatry (ch. 11), and finally a discussion of culture and quality (chs. 12-14).

A FEW MINOR WEAKNESSES

With that summary, allow me to observe a few minor weaknesses.

Lack of Exegesis

First, there’s a lack of exegesis. I know. Spoken like a preacher. I just wanted to see more wrestling with various passages, and thus more text-driven conclusions.

I won’t say that Best’s use of Scripture is irresponsible. I suppose what I mean is that it’s sort of like a math teacher looking at a student’s correct answer to a problem, but where the student hasn’t shown his work. More exegesis would really have strengthened Best’s conclusions.

Lack of Interaction with Other Works

Second, there’s a lack of interaction with other works. The endnotes are fairly minimal, and there are few direct quotations from other authors. Best’s work fits within the field of systematics, in particular as a study of the doctrine of man, since he frequently refers to mankind as created in the image of God. Interaction with other theological works would bring his own useful conclusions into a new light. His conclusions are thought-provoking, but, like the student, he hasn’t shown his work.

Occasionally Opaque

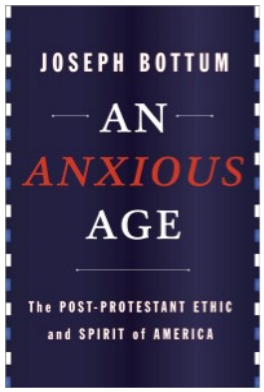
Finally, Best writes with slightly unusual terminology and turns of phrase that are occasionally opaque. So the earlier chapters which lay the groundwork for his thesis are a bit of a challenge, requiring some rereading. However, I found that the book grew easier to read as I adjusted to Best's style.

THOUGHTFUL AND ORIGINAL

Overall this book is a thoughtful, original contribution to the worship discussion. Pastors and others involved in the weekly gathering of the local church will find here a good dialogue partner on the path to gaining a solid theology of worship.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

John Power is pastor of New Covenant Christian Fellowship in Attleboro, Massachusetts.



Book Review: *An Anxious Age*

Reviewed by Matt McCullough

Joseph Bottum, *An Anxious Age: The Post-Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of America*. Image, 2014. 320 pages. $18.54

An Anxious Age—the latest from Catholic essayist and pundit Joseph Bottum—is a book about the religious dimension of American public life. And it's about the rise of a social class with an outsized influence on the shape of American culture, a group he calls post-Protestants.

But it's a tough book to categorize, and perhaps even tougher to evaluate. It's an interpretation of America's past, but I wouldn't call it a work of history. There are no footnotes, not many direct quotes, and regular sweeping assertions with little attempt at support. Its main conversation partners are sociological standards, but I wouldn't call it a work of sociology either. There are no charts, no surveys collected and analyzed, and no field research to speak of.

There's not much analytical precision or hard data in Bottum's portrait of the post-Protestants. Instead, much like a work of fiction, the trustworthiness of this book rests on the author's close personal observations, and on what you might call the self-attesting resonance of his descriptions—whether the character development is believable, whether you recognize from experience who he's talking about.

WHO ARE THE POST-PROTESTANTS?

In some ways the earliest chapters of the book reminded me of Bottum's fellow Catholic writer of an earlier generation, Flannery O'Connor. O'Connor is known in part for her distinctive ability to make Protestant self-righteousness come to life, especially its rural southern variety. Bottum's focus is self-righteousness too, but not among the usual suspects. His focus is not the right wing religious fundamentalists of O'Connor's rural Georgia, but the left-leaning, city-dwelling, well-educated and well-off descendants of the social gospelers.

These folks aren't self-consciously religious (though they may consider themselves "spiritual"). They blame the Protestant Christianity of their parents for much of what's worst in the world. But if they've cast off their parents' theological and ecclesial commitments, they have inherited a robust confidence in their own "essential moral rightness" (13). In fact, without the work of Christ or the fellowship of the church to fall back on, their sense of moral enlightenment becomes all the more crucial. It's how they know their lives are justified; it's how they know they belong among those who "get it."

Conservative pundits have referred to this class as the new "elites." But Bottum's main argument is that we'd understand them better if we see them as they see themselves. "They do not feel themselves *elite* in any economic or political sense of real personal power. What they do feel is that they are *redeemed*" (130). They're set apart as a class by their ability to recognize and personally reject the forces of evil—especially bigotry, militarism, oppression, and (sexual) repression. And they enjoy a calm assurance that they're insiders to a better world coming just around the corner. They saw a vote for Obama in 2008 as an important step toward that new world. And they move closer to that world every time they buy a pair of Tom's shoes or tote their organic groceries in reusable bags.

WHERE DID THEY COME FROM?

The description of the post-Protestant class I've tried to summarize makes up only a small portion of *An Anxious Age*. Bottum gives more space to explaining where this class came from and how things might have been different.

He contends that the post-Protestants emerged to fill a void in American public life that opened with the collapse of Mainline Protestantism. Until the 1960s-70s, Bottum argues, American society held together as a sort of three-legged stool—there was democracy in politics, capitalism in economics, and Protestantism in ethics. Protestant Christianity supplied a certain moral vision for the nation that helped support and held in check the contributions of democracy and capitalism to the American experiment. By celebrating America's values and rebuking America's failures, Protestant Christianity made sure that America followed a different course from the nations of Europe.

Mainline Protestantism lost its place as America's moral center in the turbulence of the 1960s and 70s. But Bottum argues the crippling damage was done long before the sexual revolution, the Vietnam War, or legalized abortion. In Bottum's account, the figure who best represents what happened to Mainline Protestantism and best explains the shape of post-Protestant sensibilities is Walter Rauschenbusch.

I'm not convinced that Rauschenbusch, even in a representative sense, should be called the "single most significant figure since the Civil War" as the "sign of the entire age" (38). Nor am I convinced that his *Christianity and the Social Crisis* was a book that "quickly came to dominate its moment" as "the watershed that divided Protestants into conservatives and liberals" (54-55). I believe Bottum overplays Rauschenbush's significance, and the significance of Mainline Protestantism in general.

But whether nor not Rauschenbusch was as influential as claimed here, Bottum's insight into his thought and into its implications for the Mainline and for post-Protestants is one of the book's chief contributions. Two points are especially important.

First, according to Bottum Rauschenbusch redefined sin and redemption. Sin is not an offense against God but an anti-social force, "the evil of bigotry, power, corrupt law, the mob, militarism, and class contempt" (66). Redemption is not peace with God by faith in Christ, but "essentially an attitude of mind," a "personal, interior rejection" of the forces of evil in society (66). To quote Rauschenbusch, this "redeemed personality" is the "fundamental contribution of every man" to what he called the "progressive regeneration of social life" (quoted on p. 70).

Second, Bottum highlights what Machen and Niebuhr recognized about the social gospel, what ultimately undermined the usefulness of Mainline Protestantism, and what put the "post" in the post-Protestant class: Rauschenbusch's view of sin and salvation left little room for Jesus. Jesus' teaching may have clarified the nature of evil and the kingdom of righteousness. But, in Bottum's excellent image, "Christ seems to be only the ladder with which we climbed to a higher ledge. And once there, we no longer need the ladder" (67).

So far I've failed to mention what makes up fully half of *An Anxious Age*: the rise and fall of Catholicism as a potential supplier of a moral vocabulary in American public life after the evacuation of the Protestant Mainline. Bottum charts the emergence of an enthusiastic class of converts drawn to the intellectual coherence of Catholicism, a class codified by the papal tenure of John Paul II. According to Bottum, natural law theory was this movement's key contribution to public life, but evangelicals were the primary political beneficiaries. Catholics themselves never consolidated as a political force to be reckoned with. Bottum blames this on the lack of a vibrant Catholic subculture to go with Catholic ideas, and the devastating toll of the sexual abuse scandals.

To me, despite its length and its consistent insightfulness, this half reads like an aside to the book's main argument. The chapters are worth reading in their own right, but deserve treatment as a second book (and a second review).

WHAT'S THE PAYOFF?

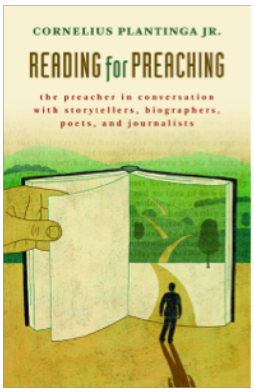
This is not the book I would recommend if you want a full sense of 20th century American religious history. And for an account of the lost influence of Christianity in American public life, Ross Douthat's *Bad Religion* is more comprehensive and—I believe—more compelling. But *An Anxious Age* is an enjoyable and engaging read, thought provoking even where it isn't fully convincing.

Two lessons seem especially important. First, those of us who hold a traditional Christian view of human sexuality and marriage must get comfortable being dismissed as bigots. If Bottum is right about the post-Protestant "redeemed personality," there is a tremendous psychological reward for identifying bigotry and very little social cost to condemning it. In this climate, there is no incentive to consider the nuance by which one can love a person and disapprove of their behavior, disapprove even because you love them and want to see them flourish.

Second, we've got to be willing to accept our status as outcasts from the power centers of American society before we'll be of any use to American society. According to Bottum, Protestant Christianity was most influential in public life when Protestants were more interested in theological faithfulness than public usefulness. As he puts it, "religion actually works to ground the American experiment because we take religion more seriously than the American experiment" (291). The decline of Mainline Protestantism is a powerful cautionary tale. If we assume the gospel while we aim for cultural renewal—if we redefine it in the name of cultural relevance—we'll end up irrelevant anyway.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Matt McCullough is the pastor of Trinity Church in Nashville, Tennessee and the author of *The Cross of War: Christian Nationalism and U.S. Expansion in the Spanish-American War* (University of Wisconsin Press, forthcoming).



Book Review: *Reading for Preaching*

Reviewed by Bobby Jamieson

Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Reading for Preaching: The Preacher in Conversation with Storytellers, Biographers, Poets, and Journalists*. Eerdmans, 2013. 136 pages. $14.00

At this point in my life I write a lot and preach a little. My job involves reviewing, editing, and writing books, so you could say I'm a professional reader, but an amateur preacher.

That's why I'm a little skeptical of my own bias toward a book like Cornelius Plantinga's *Reading for Preaching: The Preacher in Conversation with Storytellers, Biographers, Poets, and Journalists*. "Of course!" says the writer. "Preachers should read more! And more widely!" But should they really?

Yes, says Plantinga, president emeritus of Calvin Theological Seminary. Why? To sum up the book with a phrase borrowed from it, a preacher should be the kind of person on whom nothing is lost, and reading widely helps (72).

"Helps" reflects the book's refreshing modesty. Plantinga wants preachers to read widely—that is, outside the fields of Bible and theology—for a number of reasons: to find illustrations, yes, but also to tune their ears to the power of well-chosen words, and to meet wisdom in street clothes (chs. 2-6). Yet his recommended yoke is light: one novel, one biography, and a fifth of a book of poetry each year, with a weekly visit to the Arts & Letters Daily website thrown in (42).

In Chapter 3, "Tuning the Preacher's Ear," Plantinga covers "clarity and her best children" and four aspects of diction: rhetorical pitch, narrative movement, economy, and evocativeness. In his analysis of one model sermon's rhetorical pitch, Plantinga commends a register that "is neither tuxedo formal nor tank top casual. We might call it 'upscale colloquial' or 'business casual,' and add that it will engage a great many listeners." This pitch "makes the sermon formal enough to be serious and casual enough to be comfortable to wear" (49).

This is sound advice elegantly stated—which I could say of just about the whole book. But my point in drawing attention to rhetorical pitch is that this is an issue more preachers could afford to critically consider. The same goes for the other stylistic tools Plantinga probes. Words are the preacher's raw material, and most preachers could use help learning how to mine their potential.

But great writers don't just know their way around words, they know their way around the world. This too can assist preachers with their daunting weekly task of pressing God's Word into the reluctant corners of people's lives. To take just one example, Plantinga sifts a sequence in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* in which a grizzled short-order cook had compassion on a migrant family, but cloaked that compassion in a curse barked at the waitress as he ordered her to give them a loaf of bread. Plantinga observes: "Compassion with a curse because maybe compassion is a soft virtue, and people who let themselves show it, even for a moment, then want to take revenge on their softness and brace everything up with a reassuring curse" (123).

The existential insight Plantinga displays here is exactly what it is needed for searching sermon application. Thus, Plantinga's goal isn't for preachers to stuff their sermons full of Steinbeck:

> Everything depends on whether the quotations and phrases serve to make the gospel of grace sound more urgently alive or whether they serve merely to make the sermon more aesthetically pleasing. When the sermon is over, does the preacher want hearers to say "Thanks be to God!" or "How lovely that was, really?" (5)

When it comes to reading for wisdom, the primary payoff Plantinga seeks is less obvious than a stack of illustrations. He wants preachers to accrue a stock of "'middle wisdom'…insights into life that are more profound than commonplaces, but less so than great proverbs" (74). Fiction, biography, and poetry can also texture a preacher's perception of people. They can explode his tidy boxes, invert his assumptions, rewrite standard scripts.

One of the key ingredients great writing and great preaching share is attentiveness: being alive to the hidden devices of the heart, and equally alert to words, phrases, and stories that can bring those devices to light. If an attentive preacher reads great literature, that preacher will find much to feed his sermons, and reading great literature will further enhance his attentiveness to life (24ff.).

Think of Plantinga's program as a mild regimen of pastoral cross-training. Pay attention to how great writers put words on paper to sharpen your skills for speaking them in a sermon. Study how great narratives unfold to refine how you read the tussles and triumphs in your own congregation's stories.

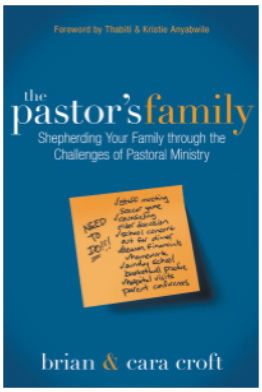
Does it work? I'd highly encourage you to find out for yourself. The book is brief and a delightful read. You'll find things to disagree with here and there, but nothing that will spoil the fun.

I'm far from preaching weekly, but I will say this. Over the past few years I've ramped up my reading in the areas Plantinga recommends, and I think it has helped my language grow more colorful and my application more vivid.

The book's a lot of fun, and its program is plenty fun too. I can think of few more homiletically helpful hobbies than keeping company with the likes of Shakespeare and Steinbeck.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Bobby Jamieson is assistant editor for 9Marks, a member of Third Avenue Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, and the author of *Sound Doctrine: How a Church Grows in the Love and Holiness of God* (Crossway, 2013). You can follow him on Twitter.



Book Review: *The Pastor's Family*

Reviewed by Bob Buchanan

Brian and Cara Croft. The *Pastor's Family: Shepherding Your Family through the Challenges of Pastoral Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013. 171 pages. $14.29

Brian and Cara Croft co-wrote *The Pastor's Family: Shepherding Your Family through the Challenges of Pastoral Ministry*. Brian has been the senior pastor of Auburndale Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky since 2003. He is also the founder of Practical Shepherding, a website dedicated to being "a Gospel-driven resource center for pastors and church leaders to equip them in the practical matters of pastoral ministry," and the author of numerous books in the "Ministering the Master's Way" series. Brian and Cara have four children. Cara serves alongside Brian by teaching and discipling the women of Auburndale.

The book is divided into three parts that encourage pastors and church leaders to faithfully serve the church while faithfully serving their families. Brian and Cara's twenty years of ministry qualify them to address balancing the "demands of the ministry with the demands of being a father and husband" and wife and mother (13).

In part one, Brian analyzes problems and offers practical solutions for the pressures of pastoral ministry that might lead to family neglect. Church and home are a constant swirl of expectations and scheduling demands. Some of these expectations and demands expose fears (and weaknesses) that tempt a pastor to neglect to shepherd at home. Brian accurately writes,

A pastor's heart is no different from any other heart (in desiring significance, or success). A pastor's neglect of his family cannot simply be blamed on the pressures, demands, and unrealistic expectations that have been placed on him. In the end, the struggle he faces—and the neglect of the family—has one root cause: a sinful heart. (45)

In part two, Cara becomes the dominant voice explaining the struggles of a pastor's wife. With refreshing openness, Cara, who distinctly remembers *not* saying "I Do" to becoming a pastor's wife at their wedding, reveals the struggles she

has faced, both personal and as “the pastor’s wife.” She describes how she has maneuvered her way through the loneliness and invisibility of being a pastor’s wife. She discusses the demanding schedules that crowd out family time and the stereotypes of the pastor’s wife. And through all these challenges she has discovered the “joys of being a pastor’s wife.”

Kudos to Cara for her helpful candor. For instance, she relieves pastors’ wives of the notion that they need to be theological giants. If someone were to ask her, “How is your soteriology formed by your convictions about the doctrine of predestination?” Cara would reply, “No hablo seminary.” She likes Austen (Jane); Brian likes Carson (D.A.). Please don’t misunderstand her motives or attitude. She is not being cavalier; she is asking that pastors’ wives’ be received for their gifts and not be expected to be clones of their husbands. “It’s important for women to be in the Bible…Learn the overall picture of the Bible. Know the gospel.” But never be afraid to say, “I don’t know. Let’s go talk to my husband” (85).

In part three, Brian returns to address the needs of children. Here is a treasure trove of down-to-earth suggestions for fathers who serve as pastors to enrich how they pastor their families.

Each of the three parts concludes with a reflection from a close friend on the theme of that section. Pay close attention to these, especially the anonymous “Thoughts from a PK” who also became a pastor (149-50). My wife and I intend to ask our own to children to read that reflection and offer their feedback.

The book is creatively laid out and very encouraging. Brian writes a section and Cara “graciously interrupts,” offering a complementary view to Brian’s from her point of view. Cara writes a section and Brian interjects some thoughts for a pastor about his wife’s needs. The whole tone of the book is easy and conversational, as if you were at their kitchen table talking over how to respond to ministry and family demands.

The book has two great strengths. First, it is honest and clear about the problems, pressures, and joys pastors and their families encounter in the work. “This book is meant to equip pastors to shepherd their family through the difficulties and sufferings they will encounter in ministry, not try to avoid them” (15).

Second, Cara. Cara’s honest and sometimes blunt—but never harsh—explanations will do good for a pastor and especially his wife. I asked my wife, a pastor’s wife for thirty-plus years (that is all I will say), to contribute to this review, and here’s what she had to say: “A breath of fresh air! A must read for every young woman called to be a pastor’s wife. This book will help you to embrace your role for God’s purposes and glory.” This comes from a woman who has faced the same challenges that Cara and every other pastor’s wife face. (Like the time a man working on the crew for our new building came over to our house to use the shower before he went home for the night. He brought his own towel! He thought the home we lived in belonged to the church and someone told him to consider our shower his shower. My wife handled the situation skillfully.)

Read this book. If you are considering the pastorate, are already in seminary, just received a call to a church, or have been there a few years, read this book. If you have friends new to the pastorate, give them this book. They will thank you for your foresight.

If you are not yet a married man but intend to be someday and want a great gift for your wife long before your wedding day, wrap up this book with very expensive wrapping, and give it to her when she comes along. Reread it every five years until your children are grown, out the door, and married with children of their own. Then read it again. Now that I’m done with this review, I’m giving a copy to my associate who is relatively new to the ministry.

It occurs to me that there is one more audience who should read this book. I suggest giving this book as a gift to your church members. The pastor’s home should not be like the riddle of a mystery novel to our churches. I believe that many of them would not mind knowing these things because they care for us.

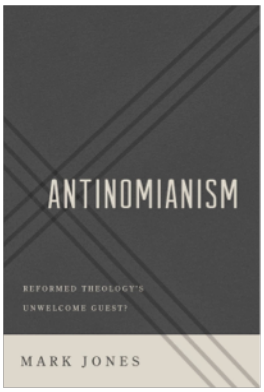
I have anecdotal evidence to support this statement. At a recent one-day conference on prayer in the local church, a few members of our church accompanied the staff. One of the speakers urged the audience to pray for their pastors because studies show they are the loneliest people in the church. (Imagine their wives. Thanks, Cara!) Pastors, the speaker went on to say, have very few, if any, close friends. One of our church's dearest praying saints was sitting next to me. She turned to ask me if that was true *for me*. I took a while to answer, weighing my options. I did not want her to feel the sting of regret or remorse that did not belong to her. So I simply said, "Yes, that is often true."

She thought about it. She patted my hand with a knowing smile and returned her attention to the speaker. I suspect she has been praying for us more urgently than she was before.

In case you missed it: read this book.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Bob Buchanan is the senior pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Parker, Colorado.



Book Review: *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology's Unwelcome Guest?*

Reviewed by Justin Dillehay

Mark Jones, *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology's Unwelcome Guest?* P&R, 2013. 176 pages. $14.48

Would you recognize antinomian theology if you heard it? How about if you preached it? Almost anyone who moves in Reformed Christian circles, whether traditional or young and restless, knows that antinomianism is supposed to be a bad thing. Yet judging by the little attention paid to it, many don't seem to view it as a major threat.

I suspect that most of us would consider legalism a much weightier accusation than antinomianism. Indeed, we might even wear the charge of antinomianism as a badge of honor. After all, didn't people hurl this same accusation at the apostle Paul (Rom. 3:8; 6:1)?

It seems that for many contemporary pastors, antinomianism is like smallpox: extremely dangerous, but thankfully rare in our day. After all, how many people really teach that Christians don't have to obey Jesus?

In his book *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology's Unwelcome Guest?*, Mark Jones seeks to persuade you that antinomianism is more prevalent than you think. As Reformed theology's unwelcome guest, it springs up like tares wherever sovereign grace is rediscovered and proclaimed. And according to Jones, the contemporary Reformed resurgence is no exception to this pattern. As a historical theologian, Jones wants you to recognize antinomianism when you hear it—whether in podcasts, blog posts, or in your own sermons. By the time you're done, you may realize that you're more antinomian than you think.

RAPID-FIRE SUMMARY

In case you are skeptical about that last sentence, let me give you a rapid-fire summary of the errors that characterize antinomians. Remember, these are what Jones considers errors, which he proceeds to critique.

Antinomians downplay Christ's role as our example for godliness (ch. 2). They "insist that true sanctification is nothing but believing the gospel more and more" (27). They teach that Christians obey the Law "only because they are so enamored with their free justification" (34). They effectively deny the need for specific moral exhortation in the Christian life—though when pressed, they will usually concede key points, only to revert to their imbalance once the pressure is lifted (128). They believe that the gospel is synonymous with justification (40). They posit an absolute distinction between law and gospel, in which the law does nothing but threaten and the gospel does nothing but promise (50).

Antinomians also struggle with the idea of God rewarding good works, viewing rewards as a poor motivation for obedience (72). They argue that our obedience or disobedience does not affect God's love for us in any way (84). They base assurance solely on justification, and deny that believers should ever draw assurance from their spiritual fruit (98). They often speak as though they are the only ones who understand grace, and disparage as legalists those who criticize them (ch. 8). Their sermons tend to all sound the same, because they have a "sort of 'systematic theology' that they need to declare every Lord's Day" (118).

Feeling antinomian yet?

WELL-INTENTIONED REDUCTIONISM

For preachers, one of the attractions of antinomianism is its simplicity. Yet Jones highlights that this simplicity owes to reductionism. Whether the question is "Does my disobedience affect God's love for me?" or "Should I look within for assurance of my salvation?" antinomians tend to give overly simplistic answers that leave gobs of Scripture unaccounted for.

God's love gets reduced to his unconditional regard, to the eclipse of his Fatherly displeasure. Sanctification is reduced to getting used to your justification at the expense of Spirit-driven obedience to God's commands. Like Unitarianism, antinomianism is much less complicated than orthodoxy, but it fails to do justice to all the biblical data.

OVEREMPHASIZING JUSTIFICATION

A key example of this is the antinomian focus on justification. Jones remarks, "In their yearning to give assurance of salvation to their people, they stripped away a number of biblical truths and attempted to give justification by faith an all-controlling place in the life of the Christian" (127).

We must reckon with the pastoral implications of this issue. An antinomian-style focus on justification will undercut biblical self-examination. Believing that "gospel = justification" will lead you to look upon any kind of fruit inspection as a form of "grace-plus" legalism.

We must also reckon with the exegetical implications. Antinomians tend to make justification their "only or governing hermeneutical principle" (41). This will lead us to take texts dealing with practical holiness and force them into a forensic mold.

Test yourself here with Psalm 24:3-4. Question: who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? Answer: he who has clean hands and pure heart. Is your first instinct to exclude everyone but Jesus from this description? That's not what the psalmist

does (v. 6)! Try Matthew 5:20 and Hebrews 12:14 as well. The problem with antinomians is not their belief in justification through imputed righteousness, but their propensity to read it into texts where it isn't found.

OVERSIMPLIFYING GOD'S LOVE

Few questions are as pressing for Christians as "Does God's love for me change when I disobey?" The antinomians' answer to this sensitive question is another instance of well-intentioned reductionism.

Antinomians argue that our behavior has no effect on God's love. But Jones demonstrates that the biblical teaching isn't that simple. It's true that, at one level, God's love for his people is unconditional—it doesn't depend on anything we do. Theologians have referred to this as God's *love of benevolence*. Nevertheless, at another level, Scripture clearly affirms that God's love for his people (including Jesus!) is affected by their behavior (see especially John 14:21-23, 15:10; Jude 21; cf. Luke 2:5; John 10:17). Theologians have referred to this as God's *love of complacence*.

Here Jones takes aim at the only contemporary writer whom he explicitly charges with antinomianism: Tullian Tchividjian. Commenting on Tchividjian's approach to this question, Jones states:

> Tullian Tchividjian's book *Jesus + Nothing = Everything* lacks the theological framework to deal with Christ's words in John 14:21, 23 (and 15:10)….His book fails to distinguish between God's love of benevolence and his love of complacence. Moreover, he often states things as either-or, when in fact, the doctrine in question is more both-and….Of course, one hyperbolic statement here or there…should not evoke harsh criticism...But his whole book is one lengthy antinomian diatribe, and it bears a striking resemblance to the content and rhetoric of 17th century antinomian writings." (90-91; cf. 116, 128).

Some may think this last sentence constitutes guilt by association. But the association only brings guilt if the 17th century antinomians were wrong. Tchividjian's readers must compare his theology with that of Tobias Crisp, John Eaton, and the like to see if he shares their emphases. And we must compare them all with Scripture to see if their emphases are healthy. More than that, we need to ask, "Does *my* theology have a place for John 14:21-23 and 15:10?"

JESUS, THE WHOLE JESUS, AND NOTHING BUT JESUS

What solution does Jones offer us to this antinomian reductionism?

Jones argues that instead of making justification or assurance or even grace central to salvation, Scripture makes *Christ* central. When Christ is made central, salvation can be rightly seen not primarily as justification, but as *union with the whole Christ*. Union with Christ in his life, death, resurrection, and session offers a more robust view of salvation than antinomianism ever could. In Christ, God both justifies and transforms us.

What is the solution to antinomianism? Not more imperatives, but a "Reformed understanding of Christ's person and work" (xvi). Jesus is not only a priest to be trusted, but also a prophet be heeded and a king to be obeyed. Jesus not only demands a righteousness surpassing that of the scribes and Pharisees, but gives what he demands—not only by imputing it to us, but by putting his Spirit within us, and causing us to walk in his statutes (Ezek. 36:27; Rom. 8:4). This, too, is the work of Christ, and the cure for antinomianism.

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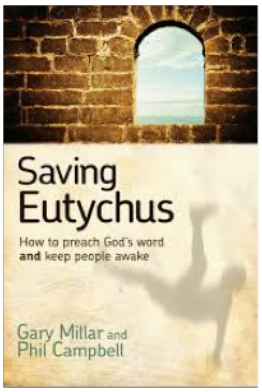

Book Review: *Saving Eutychus*

Reviewed by Bert Daniel

Gary Millar and Phil Campbell, *Saving Eutychus: How to Preach God's Word and Keep People Awake*. Matthias Media, 2013. 176 pages.

If you are a preacher or an aspiring preacher, you should buy, read, and put this book into practice. Don't take my word for it. D.A. Carson asserts, "Many books on preaching are published every year; this one is a 'must.'" And Alistair Begg adds, "This book deserves to be included in the 'must read' category of preachers." The strength of *Saving Eutychus* is the authors' ability to make a persuasive appeal for expository preaching and then to practically show us how to do it.

Millar emphasizes two key elements in his definition of expository preaching: the text and the heart. True expository preaching is bringing the text of God's Word to bear upon the hearts of people. Millar writes, "Expository preaching happens when the message of the text = the message of the sermon. Or perhaps better, expository preaching happens when the vibe of the passage = the vibe of the sermon" (31). Every text possesses a message and an ethos. The preacher's task is to craft and communicate his sermon so that the main point and ethos of the text is main point and ethos of the sermon.

Expository preaching is not simply the relaying of knowledge or a download of information. The goal is that we both understand and feel the message of the text. So, authentic expository preaching includes the mind and the heart, the intellect and the affections. As you read the authors' definition of preaching, you might want to stand up and preach. I did.

Although they don't address it until chapter five, the authors' definition and understanding of expository preaching is not complete without mentioning their insistence that every sermon be a gospel sermon. Millar writes, "…no matter what the passage is, it's essential that we never bury the gospel of *what Jesus had done* in an avalanche of great ideas about *what we need to do*. We want to preach *the gospel*—that is, we want to remind people of the grace that God has shown us in the Lord Jesus Christ" (77).

Gospel preaching demands that the preacher understand that the message of the Bible is the message of the gospel, from Genesis to Revelation. Therefore, the preacher's ability to read and preach every smaller text in light of this one grand story is "absolutely fundamental" (86). This means that the preacher must be committed to learning and doing biblical theology. As Millar writes, "So our aim is *to preach in a way that is shaped by biblical theology*. This requires doing the hard word of hermeneutics and biblical theology…" (99). Millar goes on to explain nine different paths that will lead the preacher from Old Testament text to the hope of the gospel found in Jesus.

Although the book's definition of expository preaching is strong, the unique contribution of Saving Eutychus is that the authors go on to explain *how* we can actually preach an expositional sermon. Some fear that expositional preaching is necessarily "dull and boring" (43). Should this be the case? No, because the Bible is anything but boring! Some will simply not listen to a biblical sermon, but the authors rightly recognize the preacher's responsibility to work at clearly and effectively communicating what is an inherently captivating message. At this point, the authors offer a wealth of practical counsel.

My favorites included the authors' stress on the importance of clarity. "Clarity is the new black" (47). How can we achieve clarity? The authors propose that we "master the art of natural scripting—writing exactly the words you'd naturally speak, exactly the way you'd naturally say them" (45). When done rightly, natural scripting increases clarity while at the same time allowing for spontaneity.

Another favorite is to "make the 'big idea' shape everything you say" (51). State the big idea of your sermon in one sentence; everything else in the sermon should serve to support the big idea. The authors also provide a number of helpful tips for clear, engaging communication such as using ordinary words and short sentences, repeating yourself often, and retelling narratives in the present tense.

In chapter seven, Millar explains the benefits of submitting ourselves to regular sermon critique from a group of trusted peers. And, finally, in chapter eight, Campbell allows us to walk with him through his process of writing a sermon.

Although any preacher would benefit greatly from reading *Saving Eutychus*, I do offer a couple of friendly critiques. In chapter eight, Campbell provides us with an example of one of his sermons, which he concludes with a video. Video can obviously be powerful, but I question the wisdom of regularly using video in the context of a sermon. A regular use of videos tends to make the preacher lazy. The preacher doesn't have to think through illustration and application; just plug and play (See Millar's critique of Campbell's sermon, 143-44). Further, the regular use of video in preaching has the potential to communicate that the Bible cannot hold a congregation's attention and is less than the most interesting, captivating book ever written.

I also wish the authors would have discussed how the preacher can faithfully feed the sheep and effectively speak to the non-Christian from every biblical text. Christians and non-Christians have both similar and unique questions, concerns, hopes, and fears. How can the expositor address each while faithfully preaching through biblical texts?

Saving Eutychus is one of the most helpful books I've read on preaching. Millar and Campbell have written a book that is both theologically sound and immensely practical. I hope you find it as helpful as I did.

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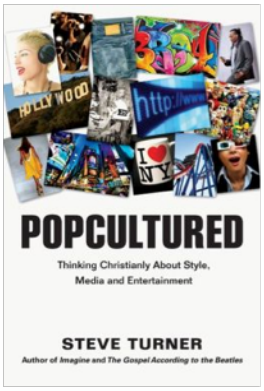

Book Review: *Popcultured*

Reviewed by Graham Shearer

Steve Turner, *Popcultured: Thinking Christianly about Style, Media, and Entertainment*. InterVarsity Press, 2013. 257 pages. $17.00

The weekend I wrote this review included two activities so regular in our household they are almost liturgical. On Saturday, my wife and I ordered takeaway from our usual Chinese restaurant and settled down to watch the finale of X-Factor, the British version of American Idol. On Sunday, we passed through the door of our local Baptist church where we are members. This pattern is so typical that our two-month-old daughter knows of no other kind of weekend.

I imagine that for many Christians such a combination is not unusual. The kind of takeout may differ. The choice of entertainment may vary, and be less embarrassing. But that our lives involve us both in church and popular culture is almost inevitable for 21st-century Christians.

But it raises some questions: are these two areas of life—popular culture and Christian living—related? Does one affect the other in any way? Is watching lightweight TV tantamount to sin, a waste of the precious time that God has given us? Or is popular culture simply a nothing, like an inert, colourless gas, unable to affect anything or change anything due to its inherent weightlessness; harmless but unworthy of serious attention from the Christian?

Steve Turner's book *Popcultured* takes issue with both of those perspectives. Turner argues that "it's possible to understand pop culture using a biblically informed mind and that this doesn't lessen the appreciation but increases it" (250).

Turner writes from the unusual perspective of a committed evangelical Christian who has firsthand knowledge of creating popular culture. As a professional writer and journalist, he has written books about Johnny Cash, Marvin Gaye, U2, and Van Morrison, among others. He includes Cliff Richard in his acknowledgements, and his chapter on celebrity begins with a personal anecdote about David Bowie pestering him to attend his gigs in the early 1970s.

None of this means that his insights are above contradiction. But he writes as an artist and as someone who has intimate knowledge of how the creators of popular culture think and work. He is aware of subtleties and details that Christians

writing from outside the creative industries may lack. For instance, his section on how the vocabulary of an article will reveal the hidden assumptions of the journalist was particularly illuminating.

Popcultured aims to help the Christian to live in a world surrounded by popular cultural expressions, TV, music, film, games, and more while managing, "the hard task of being simultaneously critical and spiritually engaged" (14). The book begins with three introductory chapters: the first lists ten reasons why popular culture is worth caring about, the second gives a short definition of culture in general and popular culture in particular, and the third a brief biblical framework of how to understand culture.

This is not the book for a detailed, carefully argued theology of cultural engagement. Those looking for that can turn to Ted Turnau's definitive *Popologetics*. The strength of Turner's work is in dealing with specific areas of popular culture: cinema, journalism, celebrity, fashion, thrill-seeking, comedy, and more. These chapters often feature an overview of the subject, an exploration of its historical development, and then an application of a biblical worldview to the topic, concluding with some discussion questions and further reading suggestions.

Not everyone will agree with Turner's views, but he has given thought to areas that most of us ignore. Consider, for example, his critique of some Christian approaches to fashion and clothes:

> Some Christians have resisted the dictates of fashion by not caring about their personal appearance, but this too communicates a message. Christians have often been not merely out of step with fashion but dowdy, boring and unadventurous. Their clothes suggest that they have no pride in their bodies, are content to be disconnected from the times they live in, don't value creativity or imagination and have no desire to provide aesthetic pleasure for those they meet….If…clothes are "the furniture of the mind made visible," what do shabby and dull clothes tell us about the minds that choose them? (123)

I quote this not because I think it's the key insight of the book but because I had never thought about clothing in that way before—as my wardrobe choices will testify. All of us make daily choices about what to wear, yet how many of us consider whether we are allowing God's word to shape those choices? Are we sure that God has nothing to say to those choices?

Popcultured is that rare thing, a book full of original thought that challenges our complacency and slothfulness in thinking about popular culture. It would be wrong to give the impression that Turner's book is simply a condemnation of Christian disengagement with popular culture. He is well aware of the sin and rebellion that is displayed and glorified by popular culture and the dangers that it poses for Christian discipleship. But, ultimately, it is the call of Christian discipleship that requires us to engage with these topics.

I imagine that many pastors and elders will see a book like this as a kind of "nice-to-have book" perhaps a little light diversion from the latest Puritan paperback from the Banner of Truth. I would argue it is much a more vital book than that. Ask yourself, what's the ratio between the amount of journalism, advertising, photography, fashion, comedy that you or your congregation consume, and the amount of thoughtful Christian teaching you've heard on those topics?

To put popular culture in the category of *adiaphora* or indifferent things is a double mistake. It blinds us to where the Devil has laid traps for our affections and stops us from giving glory to Christ for the beauty, truth, and goodness we see in it that is rightfully his.

Some may see *Popcultured* as another example of what one celebrity Christian blogger called the "trendy Christian infatuation with cultural interaction." But cultural interaction, particularly popular cultural interaction, is precisely where Christ's call of discipleship must find its expression.

Unless I know how, or whether, to watch the *X-Factor*, or read the local paper, or laugh at the stand-up comedian in the name of Jesus, then I am failing to obey the "whatever you do" of 1 Corinthians 10:31. In his magisterial *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* John Frame argues, "When one lacks knowledge of how to 'apply' a text, his claim to know the "meaning" becomes an empty-meaningless-claim."[1] Unless we know how our theology applies to the myriad of popular cultural expressions so ubiquitous in modern life, then we cannot claim to really understand it. For those looking for help with that, *Popcultured* will be a valuable resource.

1 John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1987), kindle location 949-950.

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