

# Foundations

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# Foundations

Foundations is an international journal of evangelical theology published in the United Kingdom. Its aim is to cover contemporary theological issues by articles and reviews, taking in exegesis, biblical theology, church history and apologetics, and to indicate their relevance to pastoral

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PO Box 1958  
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Telephone: 07989 773043  
Website: [www.affinity.org.uk](http://www.affinity.org.uk)  
Email: [office@affinity.org.uk](mailto:office@affinity.org.uk)

## Editor

Vacant

## Book Review Editor

**Matthew Evans**  
[office@affinity.org.uk](mailto:office@affinity.org.uk)

## Associate Editors

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Vice-Principal (Academic), Highland Theological College,  
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Edinburgh Theological Seminary



## EDITORIAL

The current issue of *Foundations* is mainly comprised of the six papers on the subject of “worship”, delivered and discussed at the 2019 Affinity Theological Study Conference, which was held in March at The King’s Centre, Northampton.

In recent months Martin Salter has taken the decision to step down as editor of this journal and the Affinity council is very sorry to see him go. We are very thankful to him for his work on the previous two excellent issues and we trust that he will continue to know God’s blessing on his ministry as part of the leadership team at Grace Community Church, Bedford.

Since the vacancy for the editorship has not yet been filled, and since I retired at the recent Conference from the position of being its Chair – having occupied that “office” since the inception of Affinity – I have been invited to write this editorial. This being, therefore, a time of transition and change, it will be profitable to focus on those things which must change and on those which must never change.

### *Fixed and Flexible*

All Christians, all churches and church bodies need to be both fixed *and* flexible – fixed with respect to those things which never change but flexible with respect to the way in which one relates and applies those fixed realities in an ever-changing context. A classic verse which spells this out is Acts 13:36: “For when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep” (NIV). David’s generation was very different from those of Abraham, of Moses and of Joshua before him, just as Hezekiah’s would be very different from David’s generation after him. Some of the demands faced by Moses, leading God’s people in the wilderness, were quite different from those of Joshua, leading the people into the Promised Land. And the needs faced by David, now that God’s people had been settled in Canaan for generations, were yet different again. Some things, however, never change: God is unchangeable – the Father is the eternal Rock; the Son is “the same yesterday, today and forever”; and Hebrews 9:14 informs us that the Holy Spirit is “the eternal Spirit”. God’s Word is unchanging, and so is the gospel and the eternal realities of which it speaks. The perennial danger for us is to emphasise only one part of the tension in which we live: we may so emphasise the importance of being fixed on the unchanging realities that we fail properly to contextualise things in our time and place; or we become so attuned to cultural trends and changes that we fail to maintain continuity with the people of God in past ages and in other places than our own. We

may do something even worse: become fixed where we should be flexible and flexible where we need to be fixed.

What takes place when God's people gather together is one area where it is essential to be both fixed and flexible. To state the obvious, while we worship and praise the same God as Moses and the apostles, it would be absurd to read and preach from the Old Testament in biblical Hebrew and from the New Testament in *koine* Greek, or to sing the psalms in their original Hebrew. The semantic content of God's Word is unchangeable; the languages in which that content is to be expressed must change from nation to nation and, indeed, from one period to another. The papers in this issue address some of these matters.

The gospel is something that is fixed and is that upon which we must ever remain fixed. It is essential to stress both the definite article and the noun. First, it is *the* gospel – there is no other. In the modern global village, philosophies and life-style choices compete, side-by-side, for the allegiance of the twenty first century “consumer”. This is the context in which the gospel is to be made known. But although surrounded by a bewildering variety of world views, ideologies, religions and philosophies, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is called to proclaim, without compromise or equivocation, that the gospel is not simply one option amongst many, which is to be offered on a take-it-or-leave-it basis, but is the very truth of God and the *only* remedy for humanity's greatest need. Ancient Rome had a veritable pantheon of gods but Paul was utterly convinced that it was only the gospel which was the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes and this is why he was so eager to preach it to the people of Rome, whether they were of Roman or Greek origin, for it is precisely because there is only one gospel that it is universal in its scope and appeal.

The noun, of course, is equally important: the *gospel*. The good news is defined in various places within the pages of the New Testament, sometimes bringing out one particular emphasis, at other times a different one; but central to this message is a series of glorious events – the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, events which deal with the fundamental problem of human sin and God's wrath upon that sin. Whether it is Peter preaching in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost to his fellow Jews or in Caesarea to the household of Cornelius; whether it is Paul preaching in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch or proclaiming the divine message to the people of Athens at the Areopagus; or whether he is reminding his Corinthian readers of the gospel at the outset of the great fifteenth chapter of his first letter to them, or urging faithfulness in persecution upon young Timothy (2 Tim. 2:8), this is the message which the apostles identified as “the gospel” (1 Cor. 15:1-11).

Of course, this message needs to be “unpacked” – who is this Christ? Immediately, this raises the issue of his uniqueness and his nature(s), and

this, in turn, leads on to the being, nature and character of God. Why did Christ die for sins? What does this sentence *mean*? This inevitably necessitates defining and explaining the word “sin” and God’s view of it. Furthermore, the sermons in Acts 2, Acts 10 and Acts 13 make clear reference to the Old Testament Scriptures, and this is spelled out twice in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4: “according to the Scriptures”; and although Paul does not cite specific Bible passages in his message to the Areopagites (though he does quote a Greek poet – he was, after all, preaching to people who did not know the Old Testament Scriptures and who would not have recognised its unique nature, status and authority), it is abundantly clear that his discourse is saturated with the *truths* which the Old Testament proclaims, truths both about God and about humanity. This, of course, means that a certain view of the Bible is part and parcel of the one gospel. These truths are as relevant to twenty-first century humanity, whether in the “developed world” or the “developing world”, as they were to first-century humanity, whether Jew or Gentile, Roman or Greek, wise or foolish. The gospel is to be practised in the way that Christians live, in private, at home, at work, in society at large and in the church; it is to be proclaimed both to the world and to the people of God; and it must be protected against all attacks upon it.

The long history of the Church demonstrates, however, that at particular periods different gospel emphases need especially to be protected and proclaimed. One thinks of the ecumenical church councils of the early centuries when the doctrine of the Trinity was protected by being formally articulated in the Nicene and Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creeds, just as the unity of the Person of Christ in two natures was safeguarded in the great Chalcedonian statement. It was surely appropriate for the magisterial Protestant Reformers to press the importance of the doctrines of union with Christ, justification by faith, the sufficiency of Scripture and the right and duty of private judgment, just as the seventeenth-century Puritans were right to give massive attention to the doctrine of holiness, and the eighteenth-century evangelical leaders to assert the necessity and nature of new birth. The question, of course, arises as to what are the particular truths which need to be stressed in our day in the West? The answer must surely be similar to that which the poor, deranged demoniac gave to the Lord Jesus: “I am Legion, for we are many.” Where does one begin? I shall enumerate just a few matters which we need to emphasise.

First, no doubt, is something to which reference has already been made: the uniqueness of the gospel. As cultural trends push harder and harder for the Christian message to be confined to the private sphere, it is important for us to stress that the gospel deals with great objective realities and *for this very reason* we cannot allow them to be effectively privatised. But the gospel must be practised, as well as proclaimed. Where Christians and churches are actively seeking and promoting the welfare of their neighbours and are eager

to do what is good and helpful to those outside of the church of God, there will be less of a credibility gap when we speak into the public realm of the truth of the gospel. In this connection it is surely noteworthy that Rosaria Butterfield relates in her excellent book *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* that it was the kindness of a Presbyterian pastor and his wife in welcoming her into their home and genuinely befriending her that led, under the blessing of God, to her repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, one of the consequences of which was her abandonment of her lesbian lifestyle and of her championing the rightness of homosexual relationships. Much of the evangelical drum-beating against gay issues had simply alienated her, being harsh, strident, metallic and, therefore, so unlike the Lord Jesus himself: *grace*, as well as truth, came by Jesus Christ. Did not Augustine of Hippo comment on the fact that Bishop Ambrose of Milan had shown *kindness* to Augustine and how this had played a part in his coming to faith?

Following from what has just been said, we need to understand that we have not been created as exclusively cerebral beings but we are those who have a rich emotional life. The great B. B. Warfield wrote a wonderful essay entitled *The Emotional Life of Our Lord*. The Perfect Man did not deny his emotions but they played an important part in his incarnate life and death. Indeed, since Christ will forever be the God-Man, he still has a *human* emotional life. Possibly, in the realm of apologetics, it has not always been appreciated that the defending and the commending of the gospel must appeal to the emotions, as well as to the intellect: since we are whole people, the *affective* aspect of our nature is important as well as our *cognitive* faculties. The imagination can bring both elements together. This may well be part of the explanation for the effectiveness of C. S. Lewis as an apologist: he not only had a razor-sharp intellect, which could expose fallacious reasoning, but he also possessed a vivid imagination and knew how to appeal to the imaginative aspect of his readers. In this connection, Glyn Harrison's book *A Better Story* has much to teach. He identifies the way in which the gay community has been very effective in presenting a *narrative* which appeals to the emotions; evangelicals have often approached the whole gay issue – and, indeed, gender matters in general – with cogent arguments which all but fail to convince and persuade the unbeliever. The reason? No doubt we must reckon with the condition of the unregenerate heart. And it is surely right to appeal to the emotions *via* the mind, rather than directly. Was it not Socrates who said that the appeal to the emotions was the basest of all appeals? Well, yes, when it is the only or the primary appeal; but definitely no, if we ignore the emotions. Without necessarily believing in a *zeitgeist*, we need to reckon with the fact that we must not only engage the unbelieving *messages* of our day but also the *mood* of people. Possibly, conservative evangelicals in the West have not been as strong in recent years at engaging

the imagination and emotions of an unbelieving world as we have been at seeking to engage their critical faculties.

The whole gender and related matters are, in any event, but the symptoms of a much deeper issue which it is crucial to address both in evangelism and in the Church's pastoral and teaching ministry. I refer to the whole matter of human identity: what is a human being? The different influences which have led to the "dehumanised" view of humanity are various and it is beyond the brief for this editorial to trace those influences. Suffice it to say that in society at large the idea that there is something objective about human beings which confers a unique dignity and status upon us has long since vanished. The upshot of this is that, precisely because people *are* made in God's image, they still *feel* that there must be something special about them and thus there is a longing or a quest for transcendence; the tragedy is, however, that this sense of being unique is no longer underpinned by recognition of the objective reality which accounts for it, namely, the image of God. There has been a tragic loss of the nature of human identity. This lost sense of identity manifests itself in various ways, one of which is that some people seek their identity in their sexuality. This is one of the reasons why the whole gay and gender issues are so emotive: the moment one questions the rightness of a gay lifestyle or the decision to transition to a different gender, people may feel that their very identity *as human beings* is coming under attack. In this context it is essential that we stress that although humanity is in a state and condition of sin, it is *human beings* who are in this state. If Jesus' parables of the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost son teach us anything at all, one of the things must surely be that human beings – and very lost human beings – matter supremely to God. Indeed, nothing demonstrates this more wonderfully than the cross of the Lord Jesus. As Archbishop William Temple once expressed it when answering the question as to what he was worth: "I must be worth a tremendous amount because God gave his only Son to die for me." Unworthy, we most certainly are; worthless, most definitely not! Too frequently the gender issue is discussed by evangelicals without getting underneath to the bedrock issue that we are all God's image bearers.

Once we raise the matter of human identity as being in God's image, this inevitably raises the being and nature of God and the doctrine of creation. These are crucially important truths which our society desperately needs to hear articulated. Christian apologist William Lane Craig has observed that although he believes the cosmological argument to be one of the most powerful weapons in the apologetic armoury, it is not this which connects with most students these days. What does connect with them is the fact that for there to be objective moral standards there must be a transcendent Creator who has laid down those standards. Since everyone has some objective moral standards; and since these cannot be in place without an



adequate foundation, Craig has discovered that many have been led to belief in a Creator God through this approach. C. S. Lewis argued in a similar way in his famous work *Mere Christianity*.

Clearly, the gospel is not truly proclaimed unless Christ crucified and risen is proclaimed. But our context is vastly different from those evangelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who could assume that many of their hearers were living their lives in a theistic context. Even in the mid-twentieth century an evangelist such as Billy Graham saw much fruit from gospel proclamation which could still assume a fair bit of background awareness of certain aspects of biblical truth. Those days are now well and truly over. For the gospel to be meaningfully proclaimed today, it is essential that we first lay down deep foundations: the being and nature of God; the reality of the created order; the uniqueness of humanity as God's image-bearer. Only when this has been done does the gospel make sense. This does not mean that a vast period of time has to elapse before we preach Jesus and the resurrection – Paul got there pretty quickly when he was before the Areopagus. But he started far back with God as Creator, the uniqueness of humanity and the obligation not to worship idols, before coming to the summons to repent, a summons grounded in the resurrection of Jesus (which presupposed his death) and his judging the world on the last day.

So, as Affinity seeks a new editor for this journal and a new chair for its theological study conference, let us ensure that we serve God's purpose in our generation: that we remain fixed on great gospel realities and apply them flexibly in an ever-changing environment.

*Stephen Clark*

*Minister of Freeschool Court Evangelical Church, Bridgend, lecturer in systematic theology at the London Seminary, Principal and Director of the Theological Training Course of The Evangelical Movement of Wales, and lecturer in systematic theology.*

*May 2019*

# A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP

Mark Johnston<sup>\*</sup>

The task of Biblical Theology is to chart the unfolding history of redemption by following the contours of God's progressive revelation in Scripture. It is primarily about God, secondarily about salvation, but ultimately about worship as man's supreme response to God. If we are to formulate a theology of worship in terms of its place in a systematised schema of God's truth revealed, then it must be rooted in Biblical Theology. This is fundamental to all *loci* and sub-*loci* of theology proper.

A summary glance at the landscape of the divine self-revelation tells us far more than we might at first imagine. The Bible begins with God, ends with God and has God as its central focus throughout. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that everything else we encounter in its pages is presented either directly or inferentially as relating to God as well. Every atom of the created order owes its existence to God. Every detail in the unfolding history of the cosmos is under his control and woven into his eternal decree. And the *telos* of all things lies with God alone. The God of the Bible has tied his reputation to the work of his hands in creation, providence and most of all in his gracious work of salvation. It was his intent from the very beginning that he should be glorified through all of his works – even in his final judgment of the wicked.

It is hardly surprising, then, that as the apostle Paul explores these themes in light of the gospel in Romans, he explodes into spontaneous doxology with the words:

*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable his judgments,  
and his paths beyond tracing out!  
"Who has known the mind of the Lord?  
Or who has been his counsellor?"  
"Who has ever given to God,  
that God should repay him?"  
For from him and through him and to him are all things.  
To him be the glory forever! Amen (Rom 11:33-36).*

Our goal in what follows is to delve more deeply into the significance of pre- and post-fall Eden with regard to God's unique intention for humanity to be a worshipping species and follow it through the progress of God's self-

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<sup>\*</sup> Minister, Bethel Presbyterian Church, Cardiff (Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales).

revelation in Scripture – not only as the Creator God, but also as Redeemer – through to the fullness and consummation of this revelation in the new heavens and the new earth.

### *I. Eden: a Prototypical Temple?*

Detailed discussion of the proposition that the Garden of Eden is God's prototypical earthly sanctuary is relatively recent in the history of Biblical Theology, but it has gained widespread acceptance amongst scholars.<sup>1</sup> That said, Geerhardus Vos alluded to the idea when he described the principle of life being "sacramentally symbolised by the tree of life". He elaborated by saying,

The tree of life stands in the midst of the garden. The garden is "the garden of God", not in the first instance an abode for man as such, but specifically a place of reception of man into fellowship with God in God's own dwelling place. The God-centred character of religion finds its first, but already fundamental, expression in this arrangement [cp. Gen 2:8; Ezek 28:13, 16]. The correctness of this is verified by the recurrence of this piece of symbolism in eschatological form at the end of history, where there can be no doubt concerning the principle of paradise being the habitation of God, where he dwells in order to make man dwell with himself.<sup>2</sup>

Vos went on to develop this with reference to the Prophets, Psalms and the book of Revelation. Despite his relatively limited treatment of this interpretation of Eden, it indicates that the idea of Eden's being a temple is by no means novel in the field of biblical studies.

The key contributions to the corpus of study on this issue have been extensively summarised by Richard Davidson.<sup>3</sup> He cites no less than 23 scholars – including T. Desmond Alexander, G. K. Beale, William J. Dumbrell and Meredith G. Kline – as a "representative list" of the "scores of biblical scholars" who have supplied the evidence to support this conclusion concerning Eden.<sup>4</sup> It is worth summarising some of Davidson's key observations to appreciate the weight of this argument and recognise its foundational relevance to the theology of worship that unfolds in Scripture with the flow of salvation history.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted, however, that this line of interpretation has an ancient pedigree with, for example, the Book of Jubilees (c. 200 BC) referring to Eden as a "holy of holies" and the idea of seeing parallels between temple and cosmos being commonplace in the Ancient Near East.

<sup>2</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 27-28.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Davidson, "Earth's first Sanctuary: Genesis 1-3 and parallel Creation Accounts", *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 1, 65-89.

<sup>4</sup> In comparison to the number of those who endorse the view of Eden's being a prototypical temple, those who object are in the minority. Two who have offered a limited rebuttal are Daniel L. Block in Gurtner, D. M. & Gladd, B. L. (Eds.), *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis – Essays in Honour of G. K. Beale* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 2013) and P. Smith, "Was Eden a Garden Temple?" *Evangelical Times* August 2017.

In his words, “The most explicit indicator that the Garden of Eden is considered a sanctuary/temple, is the occurrence of the term ‘Eden’ (*eden*, which probably means “land of bliss, happy land”) and its identification as a garden (*gan*; Gen 2:8), viewed in comparison with identical terminology in Ezekiel 28<sup>5</sup>. In Ezek 28:13 the same two crucial words found in Gen 2:8 are used together again: the Covering Cherub is described as being ‘in Eden [*eden*], the Garden [*gan*] of God’ while he was yet perfect.”<sup>6</sup> Davidson convincingly argues that this must be a reference to the heavenly original because “the Covering Cherub was there *before* he sinned, *before* he was expelled from heaven”.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, what is being described in relation to the earthly pre-fall Eden should rightly be regarded as the counterpart to the heavenly original. “Before the rise of the sin problem in the universe, the heavenly sanctuary served as a place of assembly where unfallen beings gathered to worship and serve their Maker.”<sup>8</sup>

Davidson builds on this premise by highlighting twelve details in the way Eden is described which are in turn echoed in relation to the Tabernacle and Temple in the Old Testament and how these “sanctuary” themes are treated in the New. These recurring motifs are: eastward orientation, divine “planting”, a “garden/park/paradise” with plants and animals from the natural world, the “tree of life” and the menorah, “In the midst” terminology, a flowing river, the mountain of God, precious metals of the sanctuary, “building” from a “side”, priestly ministry, the tripartite (or four-part) structure (with spheres of ascending holiness) and wafting mist and incense.<sup>9</sup>

In his survey of the Genesis record, Davidson moves from pre-fall characteristics of the garden to what pertained post-fall. He notes the reference to God’s “walking around” the garden (Gen 3:8) and links it to its technical usage for God’s presence in the sanctuary (Lev 26:12; 2 Sam 7:6-7).<sup>10</sup> He points to the “divine trial judgment” that ensued when God confronted Adam and Eve in the garden-sanctuary, pointing out that the sanctuary – earthly, but ultimately heavenly – is the setting for subsequent legal proceedings (Deut 19:15-21; Dan 7:9-10; 8:14; Rev 14:6-7). This in turn leads him to highlight God’s gracious answer to his own judgment in the form of the atoning sacrifice that was necessary to “cover” the first pair and let them live.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Davidson’s arguments in relation to these parallels are open to dispute given the differences of genre between these two books and the degree of ambiguity surrounding the Ezekiel passage.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Davidson, “Earth’s first Sanctuary”, 67.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-74.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75.

<sup>11</sup> *Idem.*

The essential continuity between the pre- and post-fall epochs is highlighted by the connection between “the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1) and God’s saying through Isaiah, “Heaven *is* my throne, and earth *is* my footstool” (Isa 66:1-2).<sup>12</sup> In other words, the realities at the heart of worship have always been located ultimately in the heavenly realm; but their earthly counterparts are designed to mirror them from within the created order.

The extensive research into what pertained in Eden and its biblically revealed connections – not just to later expressions of the temple theme running through the Bible, but also to its heavenly counterpart – have profound implications for how we formulate a theology of worship proper. The depth and detail of what God reveals in the headwaters of the divine self-disclosure feeds into the very fabric of our self-understanding as God’s image-bearers, as well as to how we see our place and purpose in his world.

Michael Morales develops this thought in detail on two fronts:<sup>13</sup> The first, in relation to God’s purpose in constituting humanity in Adam “in his image and likeness”, was that “humanity [should] dwell in the divine Presence”.<sup>14</sup> The second is that the Sabbath day plays a critical role in what this means.<sup>15</sup> Citing Abraham Heschel, he describes it as “Last in creation, first in intention, the end of creation of heaven and earth” indicating that “the Sabbath is the *telos* of creation”.<sup>16</sup> Linking this to the role of the Sabbath he says,

The seventh day is not only the first to be blessed, and the only day mentioned three times, but it is also the first object ever to be set apart as holy by God. Moreover, the seventh day is the *only* object of sanctification in the entire book of Genesis; “he sanctified/made it holy” is the book’s only verbal use of the root *qds*. As the first, mid and final days [of creation] each relate to time, the account’s movement builds toward this sanctification: the reality of one day established by the creation of “evening and morning”, the ability to appoint times for annual cultic festivals established by the heavenly “lamps”, day seven’s consecration of the cultic day, the weekly Sabbath.<sup>17</sup>

This foundational significance of the Sabbath plays through, not merely into the unfolding theology of worship in Old Testament times, but also – given the organic as well as progressive nature of salvation history – into the New Covenant epoch. It belongs to the very fabric of God’s original intention in the pre-fall creation and, therefore, should be expected to find expression in his new creation and ultimately in the eschaton.

The very fact that humanity – collectively, as much as individually – has been constituted *imago dei* (Gen 1:26-31) is the supreme expression of our

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Davidson, “Earth’s first Sanctuary”, 80-89.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?* (Nottingham: Apollos, IVP, 2015), 39-74.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-42.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-49.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

being designed to honour God. The detail of what we do in worship must flow out of the essence of how we as human beings have been made in the first place.

The Reformers were deeply conscious of this, as witnessed by John Calvin in his tract, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*,<sup>18</sup> in which he sets out the two main reasons for the Reformation. The first was “a knowledge of the mode in which God is truly worshipped” and the second, “... of the source from which salvation is to be obtained”.<sup>19</sup> This priority of worship over salvation (as the means to its restoration) is reflected in later expressions of the Reformed faith, not least in the first Question and Answer of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever”. The Reformers and their successors recognised the roots of worship as lying in the pre-fall realm of Eden.

Jonathan Gibson has explored this more fully in his essay, “Worship: On Earth as it is in Heaven”.<sup>20</sup> Again, seeking to demonstrate that the roots of Reformation worship lie in a deep appreciation of the worship of Eden, he links worship to its inherent idea of “liturgy” [*leitourgia*]. Gibson builds on the reflections of biblical theologians in part to explain what lay behind some of the great liturgies of the Reformation and post-Reformation eras; but also to inform a new generation of worshippers that there is, and always has been, far more to worship than has often been acknowledged or appreciated. In so doing he provides convincing grounds for seeing that the inherent theological logic that shapes and controls the content and flow of worship has its roots in pre-fall Eden. We can trace this thread of revelation into what unfolds post-fall and in all that follows.

## II. East of Eden to the Abrahamic Covenant

Adam’s fall changed everything. The created order which, to that point, had known nothing but God’s good word of “all very good” (Gen 1:31) now hears the divine anathema pronounced, not merely on Adam as the federal head of a nascent humanity, but as God’s vicegerent over the earth. The very fact that, immediately after his act of rebellion, Adam along with his wife “hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden” (Gen 3:8) indicates that the unique relationship with God – which was essential to his ability to truly worship God – was broken in that instant. God had warned as much (Gen 2:17): Adam did not act in ignorance. He knew in advance what the consequences would entail.

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<sup>18</sup> John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church* (Protestant Heritage Press), 1995.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Gibson & Mark Earngey (Eds.), *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2018), 1-22.

There was a moment for our first parents, in light of God's words of judgment, when they must have wondered if this was the end for them. However, as Norman Shepherd stated in his *Prolegomena* classes, "the very fact that Adam lived to hear God's words of judgment indicated that he is a God of grace".<sup>21</sup> Adam had been estranged from God, but had not been abandoned by him. Although the essence of his existence as God's image-bearer and worship-bringer was impaired, it had not been obliterated. God's purpose from that point on was to restore.

Adam did not have to wait long to see the beginnings of this gracious restoration. The fig leaves hastily arranged by the first pair in a vain attempt to conceal their exposure before God were replaced by the skins of animals that God himself provided (Gen 3:21). Since their true "nakedness" was not merely physical, but moral and spiritual, God's provision was salvific and sacramental. The privilege of worship granted uniquely to humanity – but forfeited by its head and representative – was mercifully reinstated by the very God against whom he had sinned.

Though so greatly provoked, God graciously revealed the first steps in the wonderful covenant of redemption (Gen 3:15, 21). To the man and the woman, he restored something of their original ability to respond to and worship God – but now in connection with sacrifice.<sup>22</sup>

Worship had a future, but in a different format than if the fall had not occurred.

We encounter this immediately in the account of Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1-16). Although this episode is almost invariably remembered as the record of the first fratricide, what is easily overlooked is the fact it happened in the context of worship. The two brothers were presenting an "offering" [*minkhah*] to God. The issue at the heart of their fatal dispute was the fact God accepted Abel's offering, but not his brother's (Gen 4:4-5). However, there is something deeper at stake. In terms of what it says about worship, Allen P. Ross writes, "the use of Levitical terminology stresses that Israel's ritual preserves much of what had been there from the beginning".<sup>23</sup> This is further confirmed by the presence and role of the cherubim bearing flaming swords stationed at the eastern entrance to "guard the way to the tree of life" (Gen 3:24). The inference behind the sacrificial activities of Adam's children was their being a conscious act of worship towards the God who alone could be their Saviour and thus was worthy of their praise and thanksgiving.

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<sup>21</sup> Class notes from ST 101 *Westminster Theological Seminary*, Philadelphia 1981.

<sup>22</sup> Yoshiaki Hattori, "Theology of Worship in the Old Testament" in D. A. Carson, *Worship: Adoration and*

*Action* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993), 22.

<sup>23</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2006), 139.

A key marker in God's unfolding revelation of worship-as-it-was-meant-to-be is found in the statement linked to the birth of Enosh, the son of Seth: "At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD" (Gen 4:24). The semantic range of the Hebrew verb *qara* is wide – it includes "call, call out, cry out, proclaim, read aloud, name or summon".<sup>24</sup> In his discussion of how best to interpret the verb in this and related contexts in Genesis, Allen P. Ross helpfully argues for its pointing to an act of "proclamation" as opposed to merely "invocation" in light of God's use of it in relation to himself on Mount Sinai (Exod 33:19; 34:5-8). There – speaking out of the glory-cloud – "Yahweh himself came down to meet with Moses on the mountain, and as Yahweh passed by he made proclamation of Yahweh by name".<sup>25</sup> Calvin echoes this thought in his comment on Genesis 4:26: "In the verb 'to call upon' there is a *synecdoche*, for it embraces generally the whole worship of God".<sup>26</sup>

If this is a correct interpretation of what it means to "call upon the name of the LORD" it shows how the declarative element of worship that was present in Eden continues with fresh significance as the means of publicly proclaiming the attributes ["Name"] of the LORD in the post-Edenic world.

The importance of this becomes clear as we follow the trajectory of the race that had sunk so deeply into sin that God responded with a cataclysmic flood (Gen 6:1-9.17). Despite the symbolic fresh start granted to the world through Noah and his family, the new incipient race is all too soon plunged afresh into sinful patterns of behaviour with their concomitant consequences (Gen 9:18-29). So too the "generations" of Shem, Ham and Japheth (Gen 10:1) ultimately lead to Babel: the express effort on the part of fallen humanity to rob God of the honour that is his alone (Gen 11:1-9).

The theme of worship is never far from the surface in the timeframe between Adam's expulsion from Eden and God's scattering of the nations after Babel. It appears on two levels. On the one hand there is a perversion of worship-as-it-was-meant-to-be by those who follow in the line of Cain. But, on the other hand, there is preservation and cultivation of this worship through those belonging to the line of Seth. Their "proclamation" of the name of LORD by means of publicly professed faith and publicly presented praise provided a constant testimony before their fellow human beings to the God they were choosing to reject.

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<sup>24</sup> F. Brown, S. R. Driver & C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: OUP), 895, 2c.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>26</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries* Vol.1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, reprinted 1979), 223.



### III. Patriarchal Worship

When we are introduced to Abram in the sixth major section of Genesis, “the generations of Terah” (Gen 11:27), we begin to get a fuller picture of Yahweh worship as it develops in response to God’s unfolding revelation of himself.

The key element of sacrifice – instituted by God in the garden, seen in the primitive expression of worship with Cain and Abel and displayed by Noah in his worshipful act after God’s deliverance from the flood (Gen 8:20) – continues to be a central feature in the worship of the patriarch. In his case, however, we are given a fuller picture as to the context and significance of sacrifice. We notice, for example, that “building an altar” (Gen 12:7-8; 13:18; 22:9) becomes synonymous with sacrifice. Roland de Vaux says of this, “The altar is an essential element in a sanctuary; and in the stories about the patriarchs, the phrase, ‘setting up an altar’ means, in effect, founding a sanctuary.”<sup>27</sup> Also, the act of setting up an altar increasingly becomes linked to locations where God has revealed himself to his people, notably at Shechem, Bethel, Hebron and the region of Moriah (Gen 12:6-7; 13:18; 22:9).

Allen Ross helpfully points out that the action of building these altars was not some superstitious response on Abram’s part to his encounters with God. He had very real beliefs about God that were augmented and strengthened through God’s self-revelation, which, in turn, served to inform the patriarch’s acts of worship. He notes, in particular, that Abraham believed that Yahweh was “the living God, the sovereign God, the righteous Judge, the gracious God and the faithful God”.<sup>28</sup>

With this in mind and in light of what we have already noted about what it meant to “call upon the name of the LORD”, when the patriarch did this in conjunction with building altars and offering sacrifice (Gen 12:8; 13:4; 21:33), he was not merely calling upon God for his aid; he was declaring God to be worthy of praise as well as trust. We should also note in relation to this that, contrary to the objections raised by certain scholars that God was not known as “Yahweh” prior to the incident of the burning bush (Exod 3:13-15, cf. 6:2-3), there is abundant evidence from the text of Genesis that this was not the case.<sup>29</sup> In that sense, as the revelation of Yahweh was unfolding – not least as the God who has chosen from the beginning to bind himself to his people by a solemn covenant relationship – first of all in pre-fall Eden in the Covenant of Works (see e.g. Gen 2:17)<sup>30</sup> and thereafter in successive gracious

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<sup>27</sup> Cited by Yoshiaki Hattori, *op. cit.*, 23, fn. 15.

<sup>28</sup> A. P. Ross, *op. cit.*, 136-138.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-148.

<sup>30</sup> Although some scholars, notably John Murray, are not happy with overtly covenantal language in relation to the pre-fall situation, nevertheless there is widespread acknowledgement of some form of covenant relationship, as witnessed by the condition attached to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

administrations (Gen 9:8-17; 12:1-3 cf. 15:9-21, 17:1-27) – so the worship of Yahweh was being progressively deepened and enriched.

Despite the 430 years of Israel's bondage in Egypt, on which Scripture is largely silent and during which it may be assumed that Israel's worship of the LORD had gone into decline (Exod 2:24-25), there clearly was still a remnant of the faithful (Exod 1:17). We see this especially in how God makes himself known to Moses and the way in which Moses responds. God identifies himself as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Exod 3:6). More than this, as God tells Moses of the purpose behind his promised deliverance of his people from slavery, it is that they might "worship God on this mountain [Horeb]" (Exod 3:12).<sup>31</sup> As Hattori points out, "the covenant community was clearly conscious of being a people called to worship their ancestral God".<sup>32</sup>

Worship during the patriarchal period also gives us a glimpse of its essential components. We have already mentioned the significance of holy places where God made himself known to his people and their response of proclaiming his "Name" – that is, the fullness of what he had revealed himself to be. We must also note, however, the posture of worship: notably to "bow down" or "prostrate" oneself before God (see, e.g., Gen 22:5; 24:26, 48, 52).<sup>33</sup>

Ross also identifies solemn oaths, tithes, intercessory prayer, the covenantal rite [sacrament] of circumcision, commemorative thanksgiving and burial with faith, as worshipful responses to the God who had bound himself by covenant to the patriarchs.<sup>34</sup> Significantly, however, he adds "celebrating redemption" as a vital element of worship.<sup>35</sup> He highlights in particular the "Song of Moses" (Exod 15:1-21) as Israel's spontaneous, but nevertheless theologically occasioned and informed, response to God's great deliverance. As Ross points out, the "remarkably developed" form of this hymn would suggest that it might have already existed in some form in a corpus of sung praise among the Israelites.

Tying together what we have noted from this era in Israel's history, although religion was by no means exclusive to the early Israelites, through his covenant of grace God had bound himself uniquely to them as his people. In so doing, he had bound them to a form of worship that he alone would order and direct. Therefore, in the progress of redemptive history, the foundations and key components of God-honouring, covenant worship were already being put in place.

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<sup>31</sup> Y. Hattori, *op. cit.*, 25.

<sup>32</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.

<sup>34</sup> A. P. Ross, *op. cit.*, 149-151.

<sup>35</sup> *Idem.*, 162-163.

#### IV. *From Sinai to Solomon*

The events that took place on and around Sinai at the beginning of the Exodus constituted a defining moment, not only in the history of Israel as a nation, but also in the history of God's people through the ages. As a watershed moment in salvation history it formalised and crystallised what God had been revealing to his people up to this point. At the same time it paved the way for the forms and institutions of worship that would define and distinguish Israel in the Promised Land. Significantly, the foundation upon which this next stage of Israel's history rested was the decisive deliverance God's people had experienced from bondage in Egypt into a new life that would lead to a new Eden.

In his study of Leviticus, Michael Morales explores this in depth. He is careful to point out the importance of what he calls "the narrative context of Leviticus". This he identifies as "the arc of Genesis 1 to Exodus 40", which he summarises under the title, "Longing for Eden".<sup>36</sup> It is the inverse parabola of "Paradise Lost" to the anticipation of "Paradise Regained" – at least in prototypical form.

The two key elements of his argument are that humanity was "created to dwell in God's house"<sup>37</sup> and that the plotline of the Pentateuch charts the "deepening exile from the presence of God",<sup>38</sup> both of which are reflected in the parallels between the cosmos and the Tabernacle. Humanity, which was intended to exist for and to express God's glory, fell from this high privilege and calling through Adam's disobedience. But, in the "seed of the woman", God had promised restoration. Ever since that great rebellion and subsequent expulsion from God's garden-home, the human heart has longed – wittingly or otherwise – for a return to that blessed state.

Morales goes on to trace this "arc" of longing through the Exodus narrative – via Israel's "redemption" through the waters, their being brought to the mountain of God and then, through the tabernacle, restored to life in fellowship with God.<sup>39</sup> Against this background Morales opens up the structure and content of Leviticus to demonstrate how the God-instituted patterns of sacrifice and worship, the laws governing "clean" and "unclean", the pivotal significance of the Day of Atonement and the layout and furnishings of the tabernacle itself all combine to provide a typological portrayal of God's provision for his people's deepest need. In a visible/tangible form – appropriate to this stage of divine revelation (Gal 3:24) – God pictured not only what his great salvation would entail, but also

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Morales, *op. cit.*, 39.

<sup>37</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-106.

to where it would lead: restored union and communion with God himself. Morales ends his analysis of Leviticus by demonstrating how it ultimately leads from the earthly replica of God's dwelling place to the heavenly reality: through Christ and by the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>40</sup>

When it comes to seeing the contribution made by Numbers and Deuteronomy to the unfolding revelation of worship in the Pentateuch, Yoshiaki Hattori points out that "no noteworthy description of [religious] activities is preserved in the book of Numbers" and that the same is largely true for Deuteronomy.<sup>41</sup> He does, however, qualify this statement by referencing "the well-known '*Shema*' (Deut 6:4)" which, he argues, "could be adopted as a creed for our corporate worship".<sup>42</sup> He summarises the contribution these two books make to augment our understanding of worship by saying, "Much of Numbers and Deuteronomy can be viewed as the setting forth of the conditions and times in which God's people did, or more commonly did not, worship God aright".<sup>43</sup> This said, Moses' declaration regarding Israel's entry into the Promised Land that God himself would choose "the place" which would serve "as a dwelling for his Name" (Deut 12:11) – a thread that feeds through temple to church (Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pet 2:4-10) and ultimately to its consummation in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:22) – provides an early keynote as to what the sanctuary was intended to represent.

Allen P. Ross homes in on the tabernacle and its associated furnishings, rituals, personnel and calendar to demonstrate that, from Sinai onwards, this (along with its successor, the temple) would literally dominate the landscape of Israel's worship. Importantly, he points out that this provision and arrangement originated neither with Moses, nor the people, but with God.<sup>44</sup> And, despite the physicality and temporality of these structures for praise, the Israelites were well aware that they were merely pointers to the greater heavenly archetype.

It would be impossible to consider the place and function of the tabernacle at the heart of Israel's worship post-Sinai without some comment on its architecture, its layout and its furnishings in terms of their theological significance. These have received considerable attention from a variety of hermeneutical frameworks but have been helpfully summarised by Ross,<sup>45</sup> especially so because he links his observations to the pinnacle of divine revelation in Christ and the way the book of Hebrews in particular interprets these Old Testament phenomena in light of his Person, Offices and Work.

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<sup>40</sup> Michael Morales, 257-304.

<sup>41</sup> Hattori, *op. cit.*, 31.

<sup>42</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>44</sup> A. P. Ross, *op. cit.*, 187.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 187-208.

With regard to the God-given pattern and purpose of this structure and its controlling regulations, he indicates that the combination of beauty and holiness wrapped up in them is intended to demonstrate the beauty and sanctity of God himself and what is entailed in his worship.<sup>46</sup> The joy of worshipful communion with God in his dwelling place is never reckless, but a solemn rejoicing. This note carries through into what we see in Christ, not only as the object of worship, but also as the archetypal and representative worshipper, the man Christ Jesus. Furthermore, through him, this shows how the people of God in the New Covenant era are to approach God “with reverence and awe” in holy adoration (Heb 12:28-29).

In his survey of the parts of the tabernacle, its sacrificial ritual and its “qualified worship leaders”, Ross not only describes what God had instituted in such detail, but the underlying theology of worship woven into the divine instructions.<sup>47</sup> The space devoted to the tabernacle and its associated officers, rituals and calendar are not only meant to be analeptic, pointing back to Eden, but also proleptic, pointing forward to Christ and the eternal Eden he came to restore. The theology that underpins what may on the surface seem to be merely practical details is anything but a curiosity from Israel’s ancient past; it has huge significance for the worship of the church through the ages. There is arguably nowhere in Scripture where the theological “logic” of worship (which is so often absent from “worship” in churches today) is more graphically set out than in the tabernacle and later replicated in the temple.

With regard to this theological “logic”, we cannot help but note how the place of sacrifice looms large on its horizons from the precursors to the tabernacle and temple in the days of the patriarchs, through to their fulfilment in Christ. There can be no worship without atonement (in all its dimensions) and the reconciliation it secures. The climax of this is seen in the meaning-laden “sign” that coincided with the moment of Christ’s death on the cross: the tearing of the veil in the temple (Matt 27:51). This not only lies at the heart of the gospel, but also at the heart of worship. Even in the world to come, the focus of worship will be the “Lamb... in the centre of the throne” (Rev 5:6-14).

Despite the high-water mark of what happened at Sinai, the spiritual history of God’s people between Sinai and Solomon is largely depressing. At the very same time as God was taking his self-revelation to new heights at the summit of the mountain through Moses, at the base of the mountain his people were inciting Aaron to lead them into idolatry with the golden calf (Exod 32:1-35). So also, throughout the conquest of the land under Joshua, and more so throughout the long period of the Judges, Israel’s worship

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<sup>46</sup> A. P. Ross, *op. cit.*, 190-191.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 191-216.

suffered repeatedly from a downward spiritual gravitational pull. The worship of the Baals and Ashtoreths either displaced the worship of Yahweh, or else were syncretised with it. Although these portions of Holy Scripture can make for disheartening reading, in a very poignant way they confront every reader with the sober truth Paul spells out as the prelude to the gospel (Rom 1:21-25): The ugly truth at the heart of the human problem has to do with the deepest inclinations of the human heart, not only in its natural state, but also as a recurring malaise among God's professing people in the church.

When we grasp this, far from driving us away from worship because of our all too frequent failure, it should instead draw us to Christ in and through whom alone we are qualified to worship and by whose Spirit we are enabled to do so. In a strange way this was true also for those whose failure in worship is charted through the spiritual "Dark Ages" in the days of the Judges right through to the subsequent monarchy. Israel's own failure, along with that of their leaders, only served to highlight the importance of the Messianic hope that runs all the way through the Bible – even in its most ominous chapters.

The record of the era of the Kings of Israel begins at the end of the era of the Judges. Although Eli, the priest in charge of Shiloh at that time, was a godly man, his two sons, who also served, were corrupt. The main focus of the narrative shifts at this point to Samuel. He becomes the next "link in the chain" of the unfolding history of redemption who will bring God's purpose, briefly via Saul, to the king who was "the man after God's own heart", David.

The fact that God entered covenant with David in very specific terms (2 Sam 7:1-17) indicated that God's purpose in and through this particular king was larger than the man himself. Through his kingly office and all God chose to accomplish through him he would shine the spotlight forward in history to the descendant born into his line whose lineage was ultimately from God himself.

In terms of how the thread of "worship" is woven into this period of Israel's history and this stage of divine revelation, the key development is the building of the temple. David deeply desired to construct it, but this task was entrusted to his son and heir to the throne, Solomon.

Before passing from David and his contribution to God's unfolding revelation of worship-as-it-should-be, a few observations should be made. Hattori remarks, "Perhaps [David's] greatest bequest to the worshipping people of God is the body of psalms that reflect the astonishing diversity of his experiences – all tied to the knowledge of God".<sup>48</sup> More than this, "David was a man who praised God with his whole being... utilised various musical instruments for praising God with his people... organised the Lord's

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<sup>48</sup> Hattori, *op. cit.*, 36.

service...” as well as delegating worship duties to different groups of people all paving the way for the temple Solomon would eventually build.<sup>49</sup>

Ross devotes three entire chapters to the nature and place of sung praise in connection with this.<sup>50</sup> The first relates to “A Place for Praise” in which he links the location for worship with the pattern for praise taken up and developed in the New Testament by the apostles. The second addresses music, choirs and congregational singing. And the third takes up the question of the psalms in worship. Of the latter he notes, “The church could use the Psalter much more effectively than it does”.<sup>51</sup>

Once again, the strand of the biblical theological thread relating to worship at this point goes far beyond the Old Testament. In each of these areas Ross shows how they are all connected to the New Covenant epoch and demand serious consideration by the church of the present time. This is true not least in respect of the place of the psalms in public praise, especially so because of the way in which they lead us to Christ. He is not only the object of their revelation and adoration; he is also their subject in that he is the Singer of the Psalms *par excellence*. And the fact he repeatedly reaches for their language at critical moments in his earthly life – notably on the cross (Pss 22:1; 31:6) – indicates that their place in worship is much deeper than is often appreciated.

When it comes to the contribution under Solomon to God’s unfolding revelation of worship, it is easy to focus on the temple itself as the structure he erected to God’s glory, but that would be to miss its wider dimensions. Hattori captures this succinctly:

The construction of the Temple marks a decisive step in the development of Israelite worship. On the one hand this marks the culmination of the sacrificial system set out at Sinai, the concretisation of the laws and regulations often carried out more in breach than in faithfulness. It puts all faithful corporate worship into the centre – Jerusalem, Mount Zion, the city where God meets with his people. On the other hand, it sets up the dynamics that lead to the division of the kingdom, and ultimately to the exile and the razing of the Temple.<sup>52</sup>

However, as he goes on to point out, there is more in view than the physical aspect of this edifice. In his survey of the dedication of the temple in 1 Kings 8, Hattori sets out what he describes as “Solomon’s theology of the Temple” – or even “Solomon’s theology of worship”.<sup>53</sup> In this context he highlights the overt pre-eminence given to the Torah – “God’s word, his verbal self-disclosure, his law, was the essential element of the Temple”.<sup>54</sup> In all of this

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<sup>49</sup> Hattori, *op. cit.*, 36-37.

<sup>50</sup> A. P. Ross, *op. cit.*, 242-268.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>52</sup> Hattori, *op. cit.*, 37.

<sup>53</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38.

Solomon acknowledged that the material structure and visible/tangible expressions of worship attached to it could in no sense comprehend all that God is: "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built" (1 Kgs 8:27). However, the seal of divine approval on all that was put in place that day was dramatically displayed as the Shekinah glory of Yahweh descended upon it and filled the sanctuary (1 Kgs 8:10-11).

One other detail to emphasise in this context – which is more to the fore in the Chronicler's record of these events (2 Chr 5:2-7.22) – is the overtly covenantal character of the worship bound up with this place. It is seen especially in Solomon's prayer of dedication (2 Chr 6:14-42) and God's answer (2 Chr 7:12-22). The closing verses of the prayer constitute a plea for God's blessing on the sanctuary which echoes the Aaronic blessing of Numbers (Num 6:33) and God's answer to his prayer is unequivocally in the affirmative (2 Chr 14:15-16). God's benediction on the sanctuary provides his seal of approval on all the temple is at this stage of redemptive history, anticipating how it would be fulfilled when Christ, the true temple, ultimately appeared.

The hopes of Israel were raised with the dedication of Solomon's temple and God's manifest response to the occasion. The golden age in Israel's history ushered in by his father, David, seemed to be on the cusp of even greater glory. But, tragically and ironically, the very king whom God used to take his people to new heights in worship would be the catalyst for taking the desecration of Israel's worship to new lows. Through his multiple marriages to wives from pagan nations Solomon was instrumental in introducing pagan worship among his people. The full denouement of this would be seen in the division of the kingdom after Solomon's death and its impact upon worship as the heart of Israel. Whereas the Southern Kingdom maintained Jerusalem as the centre of Yahweh worship under Rehoboam, Jeroboam led the Israelites ever further into syncretistic worship in the Northern Kingdom. His setting up of the two golden calves in Bethel and Dan as, "your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt" (1 Kgs 12:28-33) was an ominous sign of the worship trajectory on which he would lead them.

It was during this period that the "high places" of Israel which, up until the time of Solomon had often been associated with faithful expressions of worship, were "more and more becoming the site of idolatry for the Israelites", with the expression eventually becoming "almost a synonym for idolatry".<sup>55</sup> The role of the prophets in relation to worship would very much come to the fore at this time.

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<sup>55</sup> Hattori, *op. cit.*, 41.



## V. *Worship under Prophetic Cross-Examination*

The description of tabernacle and temple worship in the historical books of the Old Testament is interspersed with and paralleled by a wider perspective through the prophets. We see it initially in the role of Samuel the “seer [prophet]” (1 Sam 9:9) from the time of his call while still under the tutelage of Eli in the sanctuary (1 Sam 3:1-4:1). God’s very first revelatory word to and through the boy Samuel was one of critical appraisal of the worship of Israel at that time and a warning of its consequences.

Indeed, from that point onwards, this would be a key feature of God’s word to his people through the prophets. Raymond B. Dillard described them as “God’s covenant barristers”,<sup>56</sup> basing this description on Micah’s charge against Israel as being “God’s case [*rib*]” (Mic 6:2) against his people, in response to their corruption of worship (Mic 6:6-8). It should be no surprise, therefore, to discover that the burden of the prophetic critique of God’s covenant community is directed against their worship.

Allen P. Ross picks up on this covenantal backdrop to the prophetic critique of Israel’s worship by spelling out the “covenant qualifications for worshippers”. He summarises these requirements as their being “faithful believers” who not only profess, but also proclaim their faith – by their works as well as by their words. In this sense they are also “confessing believers” who “follow after holiness” and are “spiritually motivated”.<sup>57</sup> The prophetic challenge to the worship of Israel (in both Kingdoms) always rested on what God had already revealed and stipulated.

Ross further roots this in the character of God himself. He, the LORD, declares that his name is “Jealous” (Exod 34:14) – signifying “God’s passionate intensity to protect what rightfully belongs to him. He would confront any threat to his relationship with his people.”<sup>58</sup> Although, as we have already noted, such spiritual defection from Yahweh was nothing new, the role of the prophets in directing God’s word against it takes on distinct proportions from the days of Elijah and Elisha onwards.

This becomes particularly apparent in the roles of the Major Prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, as a prelude the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom and the subsequent exile of Judah under Nebuchadnezzar. God’s declaration through Isaiah scathingly exposes the heart of the issue in relation to worship: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men” (Isa 29:13).<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Class notes from “Prophets” course, *Westminster Theological Seminary*, Philadelphia 1983.

<sup>57</sup> A. P. Ross, *op. cit.*, 297-307.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

<sup>59</sup> It is not without significance that Jesus himself quotes this denunciation to the religious leaders of his own day (Matt 15:8-9; Mark 7:6-7).

Ezekiel takes up the same theme from within the exilic community. He does so from the outset by means of the vision of God's transcendent glory in the opening chapter of his prophecy (Ezek 1:1-28). Then, against this backdrop of the divine reality, he shows how God's people – notably their leaders – had debased the worship of God through their idolatry and misconduct in the temple. The vision of God's glory departing from the temple (Ezek 10:1-22) – with all its echoes of the opening scene in this prophecy – could hardly have been more stark and ominous for those to whom it was first revealed. It would have seemed to them as though the worship of Israel had finally imploded.

Of course, this was not the case. The same prophet, whom God had used to show the exiles the reason for their banishment, would also be used to reveal the restoration of worship – in a limited sense when they were brought back to the land, but ultimately in the temple in its perfection.<sup>60</sup>

Allen addresses another aspect of corrupt worship as exposed by the prophets, namely, worship that is defiled through hypocrisy. He identifies the seriousness of this distortion in that it does not merely impact the sanctuary, but also “every aspect of society”.<sup>61</sup> Citing J. N. Oswalt he says, “the breakdown of morality and ethics and the neglect of social justice... is the result of refusing to entrust oneself to the sovereign, loving and just God”.<sup>62</sup> He goes on to say, “The whole orientation of pagan worship was for personal gain, not to serve the Lord; and without submission to the sovereign God at the core of their worship, there was no compelling reason to keep the laws. Thus, disobedience to the Word of God results from weak and corrupted worship.”<sup>63</sup>

Allen also notes how this prophetic challenge is woven into the Psalms as the canonical expression of worship for the Old Covenant epoch.<sup>64</sup> The words of David in his best-known penitential psalm express this thought most eloquently: “...the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Ps 51:17).

Allen goes on to point out,

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<sup>60</sup> The description of the idealised future temple (Ezek 40:1-42.20) is punctuated by the vision of the divine glory returning to the temple (Ezek 43:1-12). This is followed by the reinstatement of those responsible for ordering worship in the sanctuary in tandem with the reordering of the land, the community and the religious calendar for God's people. The prophetically stylised presentation of these details – clearly never realised in the post-exilic community – is picked up in our Lord's teaching concerning the temple; but ultimately in the book of Revelation as it points to what will pertain in the glory of the world to come and the perfect worship found there.

<sup>61</sup> A. P. Ross, *op. cit.*, 329.

<sup>62</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>63</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 337-339.

This is a growing problem in the church today. It is not that the church is idolatrous (for the most part), but it has been influenced by the attitudes and practices of the prevailing culture. With little or no emphasis on the sovereignty of God as Creator and Lord, or on the authority of his Word, worship is weakened and covenant responsibilities are ignored.<sup>65</sup>

The linkage between worship and life that runs throughout the prophetic books is nothing more than a continuation of what we have noted regarding worship from the earliest stages of divine revelation. Formal expressions of worship can never be divorced from the everyday realities of life. Only as we are exposed to the glorious objective reality of God in his self-revelation are we constantly challenged to conform subjectively to him and to his standard of righteousness.

## VI. *Anticipating a New Order in a New Epoch*

So far as can be discerned, it was during the exile and in its aftermath for those Jews who chose to remain dispersed among the nations, that Jewish worship began to adapt to non-Jewish settings. Notably, with the Jerusalem temple in ruins, new foci for worship began to emerge. It is widely believed that synagogue worship originated during this time, possibly under the direction of Ezekiel.<sup>66</sup>

Significantly, Israel's restoration to the land included specific provision on the part of Cyrus for the restoration of temple worship (Ezra 1:1-4). Nevertheless, the eventually completed temple, finished under the prophetic leadership of Haggai, seemed a pale reflection of the glory of the Solomonic original (Hag 2:3). Yet God is able to declare through his prophet, "I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory" (Hag 2:7). Once again God was pointing beyond mere appearances to his ultimate purpose that would be realised through Christ.<sup>67</sup>

The restoration under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah would culminate with a religious celebration that was manifestly word-centred (Neh 9:1-38). This act of worship, as well as the covenant renewal that was part of it, was another defining moment in the spiritual history of God's people. However, it was not a stand-alone event. Through his pastoral leadership, Nehemiah sought to reinforce this renewal under God in every sphere of Israel's life as a nation.

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<sup>65</sup> A. P. Ross, *op. cit.*, 330.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 348-349.

<sup>67</sup> The reconstructed temple was never filled with the *shekinah* glory as were its predecessors, the tabernacle and Solomon's temple. Nevertheless, it was the restored temple that would one day be graced by the incarnate glory of the Son of God who frequented it from his earliest years right through to the week of his death.

In terms of the progress of God's written revelation, the restoration under Ezra and Nehemiah marks the beginning of a hiatus in divine revelation. The "gap" between the end of Malachi and the beginning of Matthew represents some 400 years of silence on God's part. This did not mean that his already-given word did not continue to be "living and active" (Heb 4:12), but it did mean that the worship of that era received no fresh light from God to shape and direct it. This being the case, it is interesting how the worship of Israel evolved during that time.

Allen P. Ross charts these developments from the destruction of the temple through to the religious scene into which Jesus stepped during his earthly life and ministry. As Ross points out, the razing of the temple was a body-blow to the worshipping community. This was the epicentre of their devotion to God and, not surprisingly, between the successive waves of deportation into exile, some semblance of worship continued in the ruins of the sanctuary.<sup>68</sup> However, even for those who had been scattered to Egypt and elsewhere, as well as for those who were carried off to Babylon, not only did they maintain their Jewish identity, many also sought to carry on some form of their God-given religion. We catch glimpses of this in Lamentations and Daniel as well as in the Psalms.

As noted above, the synagogue increasingly became the functional centre of worship for God's covenant people from the exile onwards. Once again Ross gathers the data available on this transition and seeks to summarise it.<sup>69</sup> His overview provides helpful insights into the central place of the Hebrew Bible in synagogue worship, its organisation in terms of leadership, its location and fabric within the community. He highlights in particular the inclusion of prayers and benedictions in their services and various examples of liturgy that shaped them.

In parallel with this, he surveys what he describes as the "sectarian worship" that evolved among the Samaritans and through the influence of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes among the Jews.<sup>70</sup> In the Gospels we see this to be the worship milieu into which Jesus steps from his upbringing in Nazareth through to the climax of his earthly ministry in Jerusalem. Concluding his survey of this long period of Israel's religious history, Ross notes that the threats to worship were largely no longer from the outside through pagan influence but, rather, from the inside and the distortions of God's law introduced through the various sects.

In all of this, God was preparing the way for the dawning of a new epoch in redemptive history. Despite the swirling influences of the various groupings of that time and the confusion they generated, there was still a

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<sup>68</sup> A. P. Ross, *op. cit.*, 348.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 356-366.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 366-371.

faithful remnant. We meet a cluster of them in the Gospels, notably Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, Simeon and Anna – all of whom were closely involved with the incarnation of Christ. They represented many others who, like Simeon, were “waiting for the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25).

This preparation for the dawning of God’s new day would be intensified on multiple levels by John the Baptist. The focus of his ministry was in part “a baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sins” (Luke 3:3), but also to herald the coming of the Lord in saving might (Luke 3:4-6). The epoch of promise was about to give way to that of deliverance.

In this context, Jesus’ role in progressing God’s revelation with regard to worship was in large part transitional. He stood at the interface between the two great redemptive epochs.

On the one hand, he exposed and opposed all that was false and corrupt in Israel’s worship at that time. The most vehement denunciations during his ministry are not directed against the sexually profane or other kinds of sinner we might expect; instead, it is against representatives of the religious establishment of the day who were guilty of all manner of hypocrisy. The main foil for much of the Sermon on the Mount is the misuse and ignoring of the Hebrew Scriptures by those who were ostensibly their guardians (Matt 5:1-7.29). Indeed, it is not without significance that Matthew’s Gospel, traditionally seen as written for a Jewish audience, has an entire chapter devoted to the “woes” Jesus pronounced against the teachers of the law and Pharisees (Matt 23:1-39).

The cutting edge of Jesus’ teaching and actions on this front is seen in his challenge to the Jews, “[you] destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days” (John 2:19) reinforced by his dramatic cleansing of the temple during Passion week (Matt 21:12-17). In the unfolding purpose of God, the heart of covenant worship was set for radical overhaul.

The other aspect to Jesus’ place and role during this transitional phase was to highlight the continuity within God’s unfolding purpose.<sup>71</sup> Whereas, through him, the forms and structures of Old Covenant worship would soon be fulfilled and end; the essence of what they represented would continue and indeed intensify. The very fact that the “New” Covenant promised by Jeremiah would also be “better” (Heb 8:6) indicates that worship for New Covenant believers would be taken to fresh heights through the revelation of Christ. So, although the outward forms of Old Covenant worship (the structures, furnishings, offices and ordinances of that epoch) that anticipated

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<sup>71</sup> A. P. Ross, *op. cit.*, 373-377. Ross surveys Jesus’ presence and involvement in the whole range of settings that were bound up with the worship of his day, on the one hand affirming what they were intended to represent, while at the same time challenging them where they were being distorted.

God's promised Saviour/salvation would end with the completion of Christ's work, the underlying realities to which they pointed would continue.

The key practical implication of this for the worshipping community of the New Covenant epoch is that the church cannot ignore Old Covenant worship as disconnected, or somehow irrelevant to us. The concluding pronouncement of Hebrews 11 makes this clear: "...that only together with us would they [the Old Covenant faithful] be made perfect" (Heb 11:40).

## VII. *In Spirit and in Truth*

Without question, one of the most significant elements in Jesus' overt teaching on worship appears in a most unlikely setting: his conversation with the woman at the well in Samaria (John 4:1-26). Although some may view this narrowly as a conversation about salvation, it actually turned on the question of what makes worship pleasing and acceptable to God.

The conversation began at the most ordinary level – Jesus requesting a drink of water (John 4:7) – but reached its climax in the question of what constitutes true worship (John 4:19-20). For the Samaritan woman, her focus was on the issue of location – Mt Gerizim, as the Samaritans believed, or Jerusalem according to the Jews. But Jesus' response took God's revelation of worship to a whole new level. He states definitively that true worship is bound up with salvation – specifically as being "from the Jews" (John 4:22). God-honouring worship is inseparably tied to the God-given salvation promised through Israel.

He then speaks of "a time" that "is coming and has now come" when this promise would be fulfilled (John 4:23). There is something epochal about this marker. It speaks of a time "when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks". The interpretation of "spirit and truth" has been a matter of debate. Does it refer to the worshipper – worshipping "with heart and mind engaged" – or to God as the enabler of worship: by his Holy Spirit under the direction of his Word? Given John's propensity for *double entendre*, there is good reason to think both are in view. Jesus presses this home with the assertion, "God is spirit and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

What is clear is that Jesus not only reaffirms the underlying truth of worship as revealed in the Old Testament – it too was to be "in spirit and in truth" – but also declares that his coming marks the dawn of the new of age of worship as God meant it to be in this world.

This assertion is intimately bound up with everything else expressed in Jesus' conversation with the woman up until this point. His request for ordinary "water" was the segue into her (and everyone's) deepest need for extraordinary "living water" (John 4:10) – water that "will become a spring

of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14). Since, as Jesus reveals later in this Gospel, the essence of "eternal life" is that people may "know you [the Father] and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3), this is the wellspring of worship that is real and which really pleases God.

Much of the quest for "authentic worship" in churches today has focused on the subjective introspection on the part of would-be worshippers. But such a focus, ironically, could hardly be more counter-productive. The more a person becomes inward-looking, the more disillusioned he or she becomes over what lurks within. Only as we are turned out from ourselves by the saving knowledge of God are we lifted up into the liberating joy of adoration for the God who is not only our Maker, but also our great Redeemer.

### *VIII. The Evolution of New Covenant Worship*

In a very real sense the New Covenant epoch began with the moment of the incarnation in the virginal conception. In that instant, "the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us" (John 1:4). John's choice of word to describe that single point in history (which would ultimately define everything for eternity) is, of course, bound up with worship in all its dimensions.

Nevertheless, the full significance and glory of that miraculous moment was to remain largely veiled and hidden for the best part of three decades. It was only in the Upper Room, on the eve of his crucifixion, that Jesus formally announced the inauguration of this new epoch in salvation history. He did so as he instituted the Lord's Supper with the inclusion of the words, "This cup is the New Covenant in my blood..." (Luke 22:20). He was pointing to the cross and how, by his becoming the true paschal Lamb, he would make full atonement for the sins of all his people through the ages. With his cry from the cross, "It is accomplished!" (John 19:30), the "Day of the LORD" foretold by the prophets had finally begun.

The fact too that, during the Last Supper, Jesus said he would not "drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt 26:29), was yet another pointer to the imminent dawn of a new epoch in God's plan of redemption. Post-Calvary and through the Holy Supper Christ would indeed commune with his people sacramentally "anew" in the New Covenant kingdom ushered in through his saving work.

The place and purpose of the communion meal is revealed in Scripture as having a vital place in the worship of the church. As Robert Letham points out, the terminology used in the New Testament to describe it brings out its multi-faceted significance. The Supper is presented as "the breaking of bread" (Acts 2:42; 20:7), "the Lord's table" (1 Cor 10:21), the "Lord's Supper" (1 Cor 11:20), "participation" or "communion" (1 Cor 10:16-17), "thanksgiving" [*eucharisteo*] (Mt 26:26-27; Mk 14:22-23; Lk 22:17-19; 1 Cor

11:23-24), a “memorial” (1 Cor 11:24), a “proclamation” (1 Cor 11:26).<sup>72</sup> Each one of these descriptors ties the Supper into the very heart of worship in its richest form. Indeed, if John’s record of the interaction between Jesus and the crowds after the “Bread of Life” discourse is understood as being a proleptic glimpse of the significance of Communion (John 6:43-59), then we begin to grasp just how deeply this sacrament informs, enables and declares the church’s worship in Christ.

The book of Acts provides us with limited glimpses of the church at worship in its early days after Pentecost. Luke identifies “the apostles” teaching... the fellowship... the breaking of bread and... prayer” and the fact the early believers “devoted themselves” to these things (Acts 2:42) as the core components of the newly constituted worshipping community. To this he adds “giving” (Acts 2:45), “singing” and “praising God” (Act 2:46-47). The fact these early Christians did not immediately break their ties with either the temple (Acts 2:46; 3:1) or synagogue (Acts 9:20) indicates at the very least that they saw this “new” epoch, into which they had been brought through Christ, as the extension and fulfilment of the “old” which was always meant to lead the Jews to Christ. In that sense the liturgical forms of synagogue worship played some part in shaping the worship of the embryonic New Testament church.<sup>73</sup>

Interestingly, the New Testament does not provide precise detail on what public worship looked like in given settings, nor does it provide a set liturgy that all churches were expected to follow. This in no sense meant that worship was a “free for all” to be determined according to the preference of either the people or the presiding pastor. Since the “Bible” of the church in New Testament times was the Hebrew Bible – taught in light of its fulfilment in Christ by the apostles – its theology of worship would in itself establish uniformity of essence within the diversity of expressions of God’s praise.

There is, however, one particular detail in relation to worship in the New Testament church that requires closer inspection. It relates to the question of what it meant for New Testament Christians to “worship”.

One answer to this question that has gained widespread acceptance in recent times is that of seeing congregational worship, in the words of David Peterson, “as a particular expression of the total life response that is the worship of the new covenant”.<sup>74</sup> His view of worship is not new – he builds on similar thoughts expressed earlier by, among others, I. Howard Marshall.<sup>75</sup> However it does represent an expansion of what had been mooted before.

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<sup>72</sup> Robert Letham, *The Lord's Supper* (Philipsburg, NJ : P&R Publishing, 2001), 5-7.

<sup>73</sup> A. P. Ross, *op. cit.*, 366.

<sup>74</sup> David Peterson, *Engaging with God* (Leicester: IVP, Apollos, 1992), 220.

<sup>75</sup> I Howard Marshall, “How far did the early Christians worship God?”, *Churchman* 99 (1985), 226-229.



Peterson expresses his view in summary form by saying,

Throughout the Bible, acceptable worship means approaching or engaging with God on the terms that he proposes and in the manner that he makes possible. It involves honouring, serving and respecting him, abandoning any loyalty or devotion that hinders an exclusive relationship with him. Although some of Scripture's terms for worship may refer to specific gestures of homage, rituals or priestly ministrations, worship is more fundamentally faith expressing itself in obedience and adoration. Consequently, in both Testaments it is often shown to be a personal and moral fellowship with God relevant to every sphere of life.<sup>76</sup>

He builds his case in part by a biblical theological survey of worship in the Old Testament, but more extensively on what the New Testament says on this theme. He rightly points out that true worship in the Bible is never a mere activity – it is deeply bound up with an expression of new life. However, where his views depart from those that have had more widespread acceptance in the history of interpretation is in his thesis that the primary purpose of the church's gathering is for mutual edification.<sup>77</sup>

In many respects Peterson is right in what he says about worship expressed existentially in the life of the saints both individually and corporately as the church; there is nothing new in this. It was clearly evident in the Old Testament's instruction concerning worship and it is carried through with greater intensity into the New. What is in question, however, is the balance of Peterson's argument. Despite his own protestation, "To put the focus on edification is not to suggest that the church service is the one area of the Christian life where we do not worship God!"<sup>78</sup> this is precisely the impression he creates (and why it seems he feels the need to defend it).

The constraint of space precludes the depth of critique Peterson's view deserves. Nevertheless, several observations may help to offer other important perspectives on his evaluation of the biblical data.

In the first place, as already noted and as Peterson himself argues, the Bible always presents worship as having two dimensions: that which is expressed in the life of God's people and that which they articulate in specific acts of worship. In both cases "worship" is both an individual and a corporate activity. Any act of worship that is not an extension of a redeemed and consecrated life is false worship (Isa 29:13). The issue, however, is which of these is the supreme expression of praise? The answer has to be those formal acts of worship in which God is given the undivided attention and adoration he alone deserves. We see this in the glimpses of worship in heaven throughout Scripture. For example, in the Old Testament, we see the vision of God's glory in the temple (Isa 6:1-4) and, in the New, worship in

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<sup>76</sup> D. Peterson, *op. cit.*, 283.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 196, 202, 206-221, 247-250, 287.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

heaven itself (Rev 4:1-11; 5:11-14; 7:9-12; 19:1-10) that the act of worship is the highest expression of praise to God in all his glory.

Secondly, not least in light of what has been argued from the outset in this paper, the worship of God's people on earth is intended to be a reflection of the great heavenly reality. The life of God's people under the Old Covenant was literally shaped, through the Sabbath principle, by the high points of worship designed to express and punctuate the God-ordained rhythm of life woven into what it means to be his image and likeness.

Thirdly, Peterson fails to recognise the weight given to the formal expressions of worship found in the New Testament. This comes out notably in Paul's instruction to the Corinthians in relation to public worship. He states explicitly that an unbeliever who is present when God's people meet for worship will "fall down and worship God" (1 Cor 14:25) in response to the sense of God's presence on the occasion. Another example of this is seen in Hebrews with the author's exhortation to "not give up meeting together" (Heb 10:25). He gives this injunction not merely because of the need for mutual edification (which is stated) but, as he goes on to write, because when God's people come together in this way, they have come "to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God... to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven, you have come to God, the Judge of all men, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" (Heb 12:22-24).

The closing words of this section bring what is in view into sharp focus: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:28-29). All eyes are on God and all hearts are devoted to him to the exclusion of everyone and everything else.

There is nothing "ordinary" about gathering to worship the triune God. Quite the opposite; such occasions are intended to lift us up into the heavenly realms in a unique way allowing us a glimpse and a taste of the glory of the world to come. One day, as Revelation makes clear, faith will give way to sight and the imperfection of even the best expressions of worship on earth to the perfect worship ushered in when Christ comes to "make all things new" (Rev 21:5).

## *IX. In Christ Alone*

The heart and highpoint of biblical theology is Jesus Christ himself. As he made clear on the Emmaus road, he is the central theme of Scripture and he is the apex of the divine revelation. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only,

who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). In this pivotal statement, the divine word and divine worship are ineffably conjoined and converge in one word: "glory"!

Too often, however, the church has failed to grasp just how much is bound up with the glory of God expressed both in and through Christ. This is true especially in terms of how the church has frequently embraced an inadequate understanding of Christ's high priestly and mediatorial role on behalf of his people. It is an understanding that fails to appreciate the rich Christology that took the Early Church some four centuries to crystallise in the catholic creeds. When this happens, Christ is effectively marginalised in worship.

In his book, *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ*, former Archbishop A. Michael Ramsey has this to say,

The perfect act of worship is seen only in the Son of Man. By him alone there is made a perfect acknowledgement upon earth of the glory of God and the perfect response to it. On the one hand the prophetic revelation of God is summed up in him as he is himself the glory of which the prophets, all unknowing, spake (cf. John 12:41). On the other hand the ancient sacrifices are fulfilled in him as he, priest and victim, makes the rational offering of his will in Gethsemane and on the cross. In Christ the praise of God, the wonder before God, the thirst for God, the zeal for God's righteousness, which fill the pages of the Psalter, find pure and flawless utterance. And in him, its perfect expression; for the sinless Christ made before God that perfect acknowledgement of man's sin which man cannot make for himself.<sup>79</sup>

Far from being some esoteric truth, as Ramsey goes on to point out, this crucial aspect of Christ's Person and Work lies at the very heart, not just of the church's very existence but, supremely, of its worship:

In the ascended Christ there exists *our* human nature [italics mine] rendering to the Father the glory man was created to render... In union with its heavenly Lord, the church on earth worships, looking back to what he did once on Calvary and looking up to what he now is with the Father. It is a worship in and through Christ... If it be called a worship of glorifying, it is so because it is through Christ who glorifies the Father: "wherefore through him is the Amen, unto the glory of God through us" (2 Cor 1:20).<sup>80</sup>

Thomas F. Torrance explores the significance of this at length in his chapter, "The Mind of Christ in Worship: The Problem of Apollinarianism in the Liturgy".<sup>81</sup> His main focus is the church's need to appreciate the significance of Christ's genuinely having "a human mind"<sup>82</sup> – *contra* the Apollinarian error. He shows this notably in his prayer in Gethsemane (Matt 26:36-46;

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<sup>79</sup> A. Michael Ramsey, *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 93.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-95.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1996), 139-214.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

Mark 14:32-42; Luke 21:40-44), where Jesus really wrestles with his Father in prayer in the full genuineness of his human nature. This he did in his people's place and on their behalf. As Torrance goes on to argue, when this is denied (or not fully appreciated), "...the Church's worship of God in the name of Jesus Christ... is damaged."<sup>83</sup>

It is at this point, more than any other, we realise that Biblical Theology is never a stand-alone discipline. It is inextricably bound, not just to the exegetical and hermeneutical principles on which it rests; it must go on to inform *and be informed* by the historical and systematic conclusions into which it feeds. Only with this balance can it safely inform the practical theology of the church, with all this entails for the worship and well-being of God's people. Then, and then alone, will it lead not just to the church's being the body which exists "for the praise of [God's] glory" (Eph 1:13); but, also, to "declare the praises of him who called [it] out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet 2:9). And all of this can only be, through Jesus Christ alone, *Soli Deo Gloria!*

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<sup>83</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *op. cit.*, 141.

# WHEN YOU COME TOGETHER: GATHERED WORSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

David R. Kirk\*

## *Introduction*

Gathering together is fundamental to the life of the church in the New Testament, but is this gathering to be understood as worship? After beginning with a consideration of the key New Testament term for the church (*ekklēsia*), this paper surveys the data on this gathering in Acts, in the letters of Paul, and in Hebrews.<sup>1</sup> Conclusions are drawn regarding the importance of gathering, and the content of these gatherings. Elements of Paul's understanding of worship are then used to consider the relationship of these gatherings to worship in a broad sense. Further New Testament data lead to the conclusion that "gathered worship" is a legitimate concept.

The question of why this might be the case is then addressed by proposing a Pauline theological framework for understanding worship. This is assembled from two metaphors for the church: the "new humanity" and the "body of Christ". This framework assists us in understanding the nature and the purpose of the gatherings of the church. In a final section this understanding is applied to a range of contemporary questions.

## *I. The Gathering of God's People in the New Testament*

### *1. Ekklēsia as the Gathered People of the God of Israel*

The NT designation for the church, *ekklēsia*, speaks of the fundamental importance of corporate identity and activity. In the LXX, *ekklēsia* translates

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\* Lecturer in New Testament Studies, Highland Theological College; minister, Free Church of Scotland.

<sup>1</sup> This survey is not exhaustive. My initial approach is driven by seeking data on early church gathering as praxis, and teaching related to praxis. So, for example, I do not utilise data from Revelation. Whilst I do acknowledge that this apocalypse does reflect a biblical theology of worship and the practice of the early church, the difficulties of interpreting apocalyptic literature are not to be under-estimated. On this, see my comment in n.70. Of course, other approaches to early New Testament worship have been followed, but these tend to have a slightly different goal. Note, for example, Cullmann, who utilises three verses in Acts, Paul's Corinthian correspondence, greetings and doxologies from the epistles, and also Revelation (Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978).

mainly from the Hebrew *qāhāl*, which refers to an assembly, a company or a congregation. The term does not carry any indication of the purpose of the gathering.<sup>2</sup> However, the term is deployed most significantly in the Old Testament to refer to the gathered people of the God of Israel (in the LXX, *ekklēsia Israēl* or *ekklēsia kyriou*). In the NT, *ekklēsia* becomes the term for the church, and immediately this carries a sense of continuity with the people of God in the Old Testament. The choice of Matthew in his Gospel to render Jesus' promise to build his own "assembly" using this term ("I will build my *ekklēsia*", Matt 16:18) is properly understood against this LXX background of the *ekklēsia Israēl* as the *ekklēsia kyriou*.<sup>3</sup> The assembly or gathering which Jesus is building is not only Jesus' gathering; it is the Lord's gathering, the gathering of the people of the God of Israel.<sup>4</sup> This continuity is clearly seen in Stephen's speech in Acts 7, where he speaks of Moses leading the *ekklēsia* in the wilderness (7:38).

In Acts and in Paul, in contrast to the LXX, the *ekklēsia* is found in multiple local expressions, subsets of Jesus' *ekklēsia*. The people of God in Antioch or in Jerusalem are an *ekklēsia* and these gatherings can collectively be referred to as churches (*ekklēsiai*).<sup>5</sup> Paul's reference to "the whole church" gathering together in Corinth (1 Cor 14:23) seems to indicate that smaller sub-units of the Corinthian church existed (for example, the *ekklēsia* which gathered in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, 16:19).<sup>6</sup> However, the sense of the singular *ekklēsia* carried in Matthew's Gospel is not lost (e.g. 1 Cor 12:28; Gal 1:13; Eph 1:22, 5:23, 29).

In the Graeco-Roman world, an *ekklēsia* was a regularly-summoned legislative body, and any gathering of people around a speaker or an inspirational figure could also be described in the same way.<sup>7</sup> Thus, as with *qāhāl*, the term itself does not carry any indication of purpose. The adoption of the term by the early church not only affirmed continuity with Israel as the people of God, it perhaps also helped to identify the early Christians – especially after the separation of the Way from the synagogue – as a *bona fide* society within wider Graeco-Roman culture.

We might also note here the synagogue, the life of which forms important background to the worship of the early church. In Greek, the word is *synagōgē*, derived from the verb *synagō*, meaning "to gather, assemble, or

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<sup>2</sup> TWOT 1991.

<sup>3</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 107-9.

<sup>4</sup> Ridderbos writes: "The redemptive-historical significance of the New Testament church as the people of God already finds clear expression in its most prevalent name, *ekklesia*", Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 328.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Acts 16:5; Rom 16:4, 16; 1 Cor 11:16; Rev 1:4.

<sup>6</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 541-42.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Pythagoras, or Orpheus, who brings together an *ekklēsia* of wild animals; BDAG, s.v. "ἐκκλησία".

bring together”.<sup>8</sup> In 36 instances in the LXX the word is also used to translate *qāhāl*.<sup>9</sup> The verb is in turn a compound of the preposition *syn*, the simple meaning of which is “with”, and the verb *agō*, meaning “to lead, or bring”.<sup>10</sup> *Syn* emphasises accompaniment or association in the compound words in which it appears, and noting this now is important for the survey of gathering in the New Testament which follows.<sup>11</sup>

Related to *ekklēsia* is the phrase *epi to auto*. The idiom has a background in the LXX and in the Gospels and is usually translated “together” or “in the same place”. However, its particular use in Acts (2:1, 44, 47) and 1 Corinthians (11:20; 14:23) suggests that the phrase may have carried, for the early Christians, a technical meaning akin to *en tē ekklēsia* that Metzger renders as “in church fellowship”, and Barrett casts as “in church”.<sup>12</sup> Hence, we find in the very designations of the church the concept of gathering as community.

[T]he focus of “church” is given by its character as “assembly”. This is probably the focus of Paul’s talk of believers “coming together in church”. For, obviously, Paul did not think of “in church” as “in a building”. He thought rather of Christians coming together to be church, as church. It was not as isolated individuals that believers functioned as “the church of God” for Paul. Rather, it was only as a gathering, for worship and for mutual support, that they could function as “the assembly of God”.<sup>13</sup>

From these initial lexical observations, we can now explore the New Testament data on the nature of the gathering of the *ekklēsia* in the New Testament.

## 2. “Gathering” and the Early Christians

### i) Introduction

During the ministry of Jesus and his disciples, gatherings are the context for many of Jesus’ recorded miracles and teachings, with shared meals assuming a special importance.<sup>14</sup> Matthew’s recording of Jesus’ words “where two or three are gathered (*synagō*) in my name, there I am in the midst” (Matt 18:20), even though cast in the context of discipline within the church, anticipates the

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<sup>8</sup> BDAG, s.v. “συνάγω”.

<sup>9</sup> TWOT 1991.

<sup>10</sup> BDAG, s.v. “ἄγω”.

<sup>11</sup> BDAG, s.v. “σύν”.

<sup>12</sup> Note the alteration in the Byzantine text from *epi to auto* to *tē ekklēsia* at Acts 2:47; Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd Edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 265; C. K. Barrett, *Acts: Volume 1: 1-14* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 173.

<sup>13</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 542.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. Mark 2:15-17; Luke 14:7-11; John 13:1-5.

presence of the risen Christ in the life of the church.<sup>15</sup> During his ministry, Jesus himself affirms the gatherings of God's people, in his own visits to synagogues.<sup>16</sup>

Within Luke's corpus the theme of gathering develops from this base. Bereft of Jesus, the Eleven continue the pattern which they were formed in by Jesus during his ministry: they gather together with other disciples (Luke 24:33). This is the context for the appearance of the risen Jesus, the sharing of a meal with him, and hearing his teaching about the programme of mission (Luke 24:36-49). Later, Luke casts Jesus as the one gathering his disciples together for the purpose of this teaching and possibly to share another meal (Acts 1:4, 6).<sup>17</sup> It is at one of these continued gatherings of the disciples (described here using *epi to auto*) that the eschatological gift of the Holy Spirit is received (2:1-2). The church is taught by Christ to gather, and is born in gathering. The church then continues to gather throughout the Acts narrative.

## ii) Acts

Acts traces the story of the early years of the *ekklēsia* of Jesus Christ, and is a well-mined source for data on early Christian gatherings. First, of course, there are the well-known passages describing the life of the early community. Acts 2:42-47 is foremost amongst these. The chapter begins with the disciples gathered together *epi to auto*, which noting the conclusions above might be best rendered "in the church", rather than the usual "in one place".<sup>18</sup> The chapter describes the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the life of the Christian community in Jerusalem in the immediate post-Pentecost period. First, the community – or subsections of the community – gather for frequent meals in one another's homes (Acts 2:46). Luke indicates here, through the close conjunction of "breaking of bread" (*klōntes arton*) and "sharing food" (*metelambanon trophēs*) that the Lord's Supper was probably a part of these shared meals.<sup>19</sup> This sharing was part of a wider sharing of resources (2:44). Apart from meeting in homes, the believers – probably focussed around the apostles – also gathered in the Temple (2:46). This was perhaps the primary venue for teaching and prayer (2:42; Cf. 4:1; 5:21).<sup>20</sup> If

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<sup>15</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew 13-28: The Churchbook* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 233-34.

<sup>16</sup> E.g. Matthew 12:9; 13:54.

<sup>17</sup> The difficult Greek participle in 1:4 is *synalizomenos*. It may indicate gathering over a meal (so, e.g. NIV, NLT), since its literal sense could be taken as "salting together" (BDAG, s.v. "συναλιζόμενος"). This is Cullmann's view (*Early Christian Worship*, 16). Or, it may indicate "staying with" (so, e.g. ESV). In any case, gathering is in view (so, e.g. KJV, NASB), which is reflected in the straightforward *synerchomai* in v.6.

<sup>18</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 795. Note also the Byzantine text at 2:47, see n.14.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 11:17-22. Keener, *Acts*, 1003-4.

<sup>20</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 1001.



this was the case, it does not preclude teaching and prayer also in the home setting.<sup>21</sup> Later in Acts, the combination of more public gatherings (Solomon's portico, 5:12; the synagogue, 19:8; and, the hall of Tyrannus, 19:9) and private gathering in homes seems to have continued.<sup>22</sup> This perhaps reflects a distinction between the proclamation (*kerygma*) of the church, which continued in more public locations, and instruction (*didachē*), which continued in homes.

Shared homes, meals and resources are all part of the devotion of these early believers to fellowship (*koinōnia*). The meaning of the Greek term is debated, but fundamental to *koinōnia* is commonality – a common, shared experience. It expresses, in wider use, harmonious partnership, forged in common purpose and labour.<sup>23</sup> It is preferable to understand *koinōnia* in Acts 2 in this way. The sharing of goods is not the *koinōnia*; neither is it merely an *expression of* the *koinōnia*. Rather, it is a *component of* the *koinōnia*.<sup>24</sup> It is commonality that is both *demonstrated* and *achieved* in the selling of possessions, and the redistribution of wealth to the poorer members of the community. The gathering of the early Christian community in Jerusalem (whether in the temple or in homes), also both *demonstrates* and *achieves* the commonality of *koinōnia*. This sense is also captured by the description that the believers were *epi to auto* (2:44).

In Acts 4, the community gathers together to pray after the arrest and release of Peter and John (4:31). Juxtaposed with this account of prayer is a second summary of the fellowship of the believers in Jerusalem. Here, Luke employs the emotive phrase *en kardia kai psychē mia* ("they were one in heart and life") to express their unity (4:32). This kind of phrase appears in the descriptions of idealised philosophical communities, and of friendship, in Hellenistic literature.<sup>25</sup> Luke is here deliberately emphasising, in terms that would be familiar to both Jewish and Gentile readers, the church as an *ideal*

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<sup>21</sup> Keener is probably correct in proposing that teaching occurred as part of the meal (*Acts I*, 1010).

<sup>22</sup> It is difficult to be certain whether the lecture hall of Tyrannus was a "public" venue, but given that it replaces the synagogue it would seem to be.

<sup>23</sup> BDAG s.v. "κοινωνία"; Keener, *Acts*, 1002. See also Kloha's examination of cognates and his argument that *koinōnia* is an "event word" (Jeffrey J. Kloha, "Koinonia and Life Together in the New Testament", *Concordia* 38.1 (2012): 23-32). Kloha states that *koinōnia* "is not the offering itself, nor the act of giving itself. It is the entire event, everything from the 'thing in common'..., the 'participating together'... and the people of the church who participate together in the giving, collecting, and delivering of the gift to the saints in Jerusalem; all this is the κοινωνία event", 26-7.

<sup>24</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 150. Note also Keener (*Acts*, 1003) on the sharing of possessions: "although it may represent only a concrete manifestation of their 'fellowship', the community's 'fellowship' was accomplished by sharing their possessions..."

<sup>25</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Volume 2* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 1176-77.

community.<sup>26</sup> However, in Luke's summary this common life is intertwined with the unique, powerful proclamation of the apostles concerning the resurrection of Jesus (4:32-34).

In Acts 12, in a similar pattern to Acts 4, when Peter is in prison the community are gathered for prayer in the house of Mary – and possibly in other locations (12:12, 17). Later, after Barnabas and Paul return to Antioch after their missionary journey – a journey during which they preach to gatherings in the synagogues (*synagōge*; 13:5, 14; 14:1) – the *ekklēsia* is gathered together (*synagagontes*) by the apostles to hear a report of all that God had done (14:27). It seems likely that the contrast between these gatherings is deliberate, as Luke casts the church as the new, authentic gathering of God's people.<sup>27</sup> The church in Antioch is again gathered by the apostles and the envoys to hear the deliverance from the Council of Jerusalem (15:30). At this gathering, the envoys Judas and Silas address the church at some length (15:32). The Jerusalem Council itself is a “coming together” of apostles and elders to discuss the relationship of Gentile believers to the Law of Moses (15:5-6). In Troas in Acts 20 the practice of meeting on the first day of the week to break bread is the context for Paul's own lengthy sermon. The community is meeting in a home, on the evening of the Lord's Day, not only for the Lord's Supper but also to hear teaching (20:7-12).

Luke's history of the early Christian church therefore paints a portrait of gathering together as critical to the identity and practice of these communities. The church gathers in the temple and in houses to fellowship together. The *koinōnia* of the community is seen in its prayer, breaking of bread, teaching and proclamation. In fact, their gathering is the expression of a common life, including a sharing of food and possessions, and a common proclamation. It is precisely in this context of a common life that the Lord's Supper is celebrated, and that teaching and prayer are practised.

### iii) The Pauline Correspondence

Whereas Luke's language is largely that of “gathering” (*synagō*), Paul's language in the first letter to the Corinthians is of “coming together” (*synerchomai*). The title of this paper, “When you come together”, is drawn from 1 Corinthians, where Paul uses “coming together” six times. In Chapter 14, he writes:

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<sup>26</sup> Keener (*Acts*, 1175) writes: “Luke also uses this summary to promote the Christian sect as the ideal community, appealing to popular perceptions of virtue in antiquity.” See also Keener, *Acts*, 1013; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 62.

<sup>27</sup> On the relationship between the church and the Jewish community in Acts, see Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 377–81.

When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. (1 Cor 14:26)

As edifying as these words may be, the context of Paul's uses of *synerchomai* is negative. Paul uses the verb in highlighting the difficulties in these early Christian house-gatherings.<sup>28</sup> The puzzle of 11:19 notwithstanding, Paul has knowledge of regrettable divisions when the believers "come together", at least in certain contexts (11:18).<sup>29</sup> Their so-called "Lord's Supper" is not in fact the sacrament, since when they "come together" to eat and to break bread it is an opportunity for the "strong" to lord it over the "weak" (11:22). Rather than a sharing of food, sustenance depends on status. Some are drunk and some go hungry during the meals which are the setting for the celebration of the Lord's Supper (11:21).<sup>30</sup> The language of "coming together" is repeated twice at the end of the section to urge unity and the well-being of the church (11:33-34). The problems are so great that, in Paul's assessment, the act of coming together is detrimental to the church rather than building it up (11:17). At no point here does Paul urge these believers not to come together, nor does he urge a subset of the believers to abandon those whose behaviour he sees as problematic. However, earlier in the letter he has set the gathering of the church as the context for church discipline. It is when the community have gathered (*synagō*) that the one guilty of sexual immorality is to be removed from their midst (5:1-7).

Paul's treatment of tongues and prophecy in the church in 1 Corinthians 14 similarly emphasises "coming together" as the context both for sung praise and prayer (14:3, cf. Eph 5:18-19), and for teaching (14:15, 26, 29). The emphasis in this chapter is that whatever is done must be done in order, rather than in confusion, and done for the building up of the church. Of special note is Paul's concern with the reaction of unbelievers who may be present in the coming together of the church (14:23-25).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The pattern of gathering in homes, established in the first Jewish gatherings, is maintained as the church attracts increasing numbers of Gentiles (Col 4:15-16; Philem 2; Rom 16:5).

<sup>29</sup> The relationship of v.18 and v.19 is notoriously difficult. See Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 858-59.

<sup>30</sup> In passing, we can note a possible parallel here with Paul's words in Ephesians 5 – "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit" (Eph 5:18-19). The setting here is also the gathering of the church, and the celebrating (and, possibly, the abuse) of the Lord's Supper or fellowship meal. In any case, the text witnesses to the place of sung praise in the gatherings. See Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 343-44. Lincoln does not detect any connection to the Lord's Supper or fellowship meal.

<sup>31</sup> Note the puzzle of 14:22-23; see Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1122-26.

Paul's love of compound *syn*-verbs expressing togetherness continues in his other letters. Paul writes to the Christians in Ephesus and Colossae that they have been made alive together (*syzōopoeiō*) with Christ (2:5); they are a building, with Christ as the cornerstone, or a body with Christ as the head. In both cases they are held together (*synarmologeō*) by Christ, and it is this togetherness that causes their growth (2:20-22; 4:15-16). In Philippians, Paul desires that the church might struggle together (*synathleō*) for the faith of the gospel, in a united spirit, as one person (*mia psychē*, 1:27).<sup>32</sup> The believers are to rejoice together with Paul and one another (*sygchairō*, Phil 2:17-18).

Paul's overriding concern with the unity of these early churches is well-recognised, and his understanding of how that unity is to be expressed reflects the portrait in Acts. Believers should share burdens, and do good to one another, especially to the one in need (Gal 6:2,10; Eph 4:28); good things are to be shared together, and especially with those who teach (1 Tim 6:18; Gal 6:6). The expressions of *koinōnia* in Acts accord in Paul's use of the same word and its cognates; sharing is a repeated theme.<sup>33</sup> This sharing is rooted in the *koinōnia* of believers with Jesus Christ, and this is expressed *in the midst of their meetings together* as they break bread, sharing together in the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor 1:9; 1 Cor 10:16). We see Paul's heart for the common life of these believers in this striking passage:

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing (*koinōnia*) in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in life (*sympsychoi*) and one in your thinking (Phil 2:1-2).

This *koinōnia* and sharing is not merely a high spiritual ideal for Paul. It finds concrete expression in the collection for the poor church in Jerusalem, which Paul champions (Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:13).

#### iv) Hebrews

In the letter to the Hebrews we find an exhortatory sermon to a faltering community of believers. It is a unique example of early Christian oral rhetoric, exposition and exhortation. The epideictic sections in 10:19-25 and 13:1-17 both emphasise the common life of the gathered community. Motivation towards love and good deeds is to be mutual, and is set alongside

<sup>32</sup> Translating *mia psychē* as "one mind" (so, ESV, NASB) does not capture adequately the meaning of this phrase, which signals to both Jew and Gentile the ideals of the community in strongly Hellenistic terms. See G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 97.

<sup>33</sup> E.g. Sharing needs (Rom 12:13); sharing with the poor saints in Jerusalem (Rom 15:26); sharing generously (1 Tim 6:18).

the absolute necessity of gathering together (*episynagōgēn heautōn*; 10:24-25). It is only active participation in the gathered life of the community that makes all these things possible.<sup>34</sup> The contrast in v.25 makes clear that gathering together is essential for the encouraging (*parakaleō*) that will strengthen faith.<sup>35</sup> The difficult circumstances faced by the congregation may have led, as Lane surmises, to a daily gathering of the believers for this purpose.<sup>36</sup> The range of *parakaleō* does not allow this encouragement to be conceived of simply as mutual reassurance, or comfort in one another's mere presence, but rather as exhortation, warning, or reproof – meaning that teaching from the scriptures (of the kind employed in the sermon itself) is probably in view.<sup>37</sup>

The community is strongly urged towards continuing the good works and sharing (*koinōnia*, 13:16) that have been their hallmark in the past (6:10). The believers are a body, and so they must also share with those who are unable to participate in this shared life because of incarceration – in this case identifying with them, remembering them (13:3). Hebrews 13 also furnishes information about the ethical life of the community: hospitality, sexual purity, contentment and respect for leaders are all part of their common life (13:1-7, 17). We do not have space to consider the wider ethical character of the church, but can notice that this is all part of the common context of worship (13:16).

This brief survey demonstrates the importance of the gathering of the church. Gathering is not simply for practising a defined set of rituals; it is the fundamental context for the expression of the common life of the members. In the modern west, in an age of telecommunications technology and motorised transport, and of failing community bonds, it is difficult for us to appreciate the localised nature of the early church, and the necessary physicality of their *koinōnia*. The New Testament scriptures witness to the importance of a common life for these early Christians.

### 3. *The Content of Gathering*

In addition, we can conclude that there were several important elements of content to the gatherings of these *ekklēsiai*. They gathered in a certain degree of continuity with the practice of the covenant community of Israel. The church in time replaced the synagogue for those who first believed in Jesus as Messiah. The content of church gatherings was similar to the synagogue (including the wider community functions), although both Jewish and,

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<sup>34</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, WBC 47B (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 289.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 289-90.

<sup>36</sup> Lane (*Ibid.*, 290) appeals to 3:13.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

increasingly, Gentile believers were present.<sup>38</sup> Paul's concerns in 1 Cor 12-14 are often thought to mirror the three main elements of synagogue worship: praise, prayer and instruction.<sup>39</sup> However, the central elements of content that emerge from our survey are somewhat broader: prayer; the proclamation and teaching of the scriptures; shared meals; the celebration of the Lord's Supper; a sharing of homes and resources, including possessions; the singing of songs.<sup>40</sup> To these core elements can be added: discipline, the collecting of alms, and reports from the wider church.

We can note, firstly, that there is an over-riding concern in the New Testament with what we might call the "practical" or human-focussed elements in the gathering of churches. Secondly, any neat division of "spiritual" or God-focussed elements from these that are "practical" cannot be observed in the texts. Neither can *koinōnia* properly be separated out as a practical element alongside other "spiritual" elements. Even if some aspects of the common life, such as the distribution of food, required apostolic oversight (which is what precipitates the developments in Acts 6), other informal sharing would take place in homes. Keener makes the point that such informal sharing would not be part of "a formal worship 'service'".<sup>41</sup> This is undoubtedly true. Nevertheless, such sharing *would* occur in the context of gathering in homes which was *also* the context for the more "formal" elements. Both "formal" sharing in elements of ritual, and informal sharing of life were part of the *same* gatherings.

At first, the church in Jerusalem seems to be gathering daily. In times of pressure, the church perhaps also met very frequently. However frequently believers met together, it was the first day of the week, the Lord's Day, that was designated early on as the day on which the *ekklēsia* of Christ would meet. This is attested in Acts 20:7, 1 Cor 16:2 and it seems in Revelation 1:10, a pattern that continues the circumstance of the very first gathering of the disciples of the Risen Christ.<sup>42</sup> This pattern of Lord's Day gathering is also attested in later sources: the *Didache*, Ignatius, Justin and the *Letter of*

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<sup>38</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 1004-5.

<sup>39</sup> See Ralph P. Martin, "Worship", in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Daniel G. Reid, Ralph P. Martin, and Gerald F. Hawthorne (Leicester: IVP, 2009), 985.

<sup>40</sup> Most scholars parse the summary in Acts 2:42 into four elements: teaching; fellowship; breaking bread; prayer. Some detect two elements: teaching and fellowship. See Keener, *Acts*, 1000. Frame summarises as: prayer; teaching; sacrament; discipline; alms; and he notes the "holy kiss" (John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1996), 30). He then develops a somewhat longer list: 1. Greetings/Benedictions; 2. Reading of Scripture; 3. Preaching/Teaching; 4. Charismatic Prophecy; 5. Prayer; 6. Song; 7. Vows; 8. Confession of Faith; 9. Sacraments; 10. Church Discipline; 11. Collections/Offerings; 12. Expressions of Fellowship (*Worship in Spirit and Truth*, 56-60).

<sup>41</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 1001.

<sup>42</sup> Luke 24:1,36.

Pliny.<sup>43</sup> In 1 Corinthians 16, the Lord's Day gathering is the context for the collection of alms for the church in Jerusalem, and it is clear that Paul has urged this practice on a wider front (16:1-3).

Within this elemental pattern, further liturgical details can be detected.<sup>44</sup> The Aramaic prayer *maranatha* ("Come, Lord") is a clear example (1 Cor 16:22), together with the scattered hymns, creeds and doxologies of the NT documents.<sup>45</sup> There is a mixture of the old and the new, the structured and the free. For example, psalms are sung alongside new hymns and songs, both of which can be found in the texts of the New Testament.<sup>46</sup> Teaching can also be distilled into the established and the new: the reading and exposition of Old Testament texts, with the newness of interpretation and application (as we find in, for example, the sermon of Hebrews, or in Paul's letter to the Galatians); the newness of prophecy, including speaking in tongues;<sup>47</sup> and the recitation of existing prayers from the synagogue, together with the Lord's Prayer, alongside the newness of new prayers in the Spirit.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 we find *the bare bones* of a Pauline order of service, although this is debated.<sup>49</sup> The basic elements seem to be similar wherever the church is gathered. By the mid-second century, a two-fold liturgy of instruction followed by the Lord's Supper seems to have become established.<sup>50</sup>

Here we must note two important points: First, the attention directed to these fairly limited data on gatherings is often out of balance with the actual concern of the texts in which they are found. For example, the tendency for historians and church leaders to look for liturgical detail in these small tracts

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<sup>43</sup> *Didache* 14:1; Ignatius, *Magn.*, 9.1; Justin, *Apol. I*, 67.3; *Letter of Pliny X*, 96.7. The *Letter of Pliny* (10.96) also attests to a practice of gathering early in the morning. See Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, 10.

<sup>44</sup> Although there has been a noticeable tendency to read details into these texts, rather than exegete them – we must proceed with that particular caution. See Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 2nd Edition (SPCK, 2002), 51-53.

<sup>45</sup> See Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, 13; Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 44-45.

<sup>46</sup> Psalm 2 and 110 are especially common in the NT texts. I take the view that the songs of Revelation fall into this category, alongside hymnic elements elsewhere (e.g. the Magnificat, Phil 2:6-11, etc.). Again, see Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, 21, 22, and also 22n22; Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 57-59.

<sup>47</sup> Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, 21.

<sup>48</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 1001.

<sup>49</sup> The elements of this could be cast as: opening adoration (16); prayer and thanksgiving (17-18); prophecy, or instruction, with examination (19-21a); exhortation to holiness (21b-22); benediction (23-24). See R. P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 135-8.

<sup>50</sup> As attested by Justin, *1 Apol.* 66-67. The order set out by Justin is: 1. Reading of the apostles and prophets; 2. Instruction and exhortation (based on the readings); 3. Prayer (standing); 4. The Lord's Supper (including distribution to those absent); 5. Collection of alms. See Keener (*Acts*, 1001-2.) for how this may relate to early reports in Acts.

of text must be tempered by the realisation that Luke himself seems rather disinterested in the precise content and order of these gatherings. As Bock notes:

With as much time and energy as we give to the structure and the makeup of church leadership and worship, it is somewhat surprising that Luke says so little about this topic in Acts... We are told nothing about what a worship service looked like, how long it was, or what kind of hymns were sung. It is bare bones in terms of detail. Luke is far more interested in how the church engages their calling to take the message of the gospel into the world.<sup>51</sup>

The same can be said of the sparse and scattered data in Paul.<sup>52</sup>

Second, it is the holy, common life of the church and its unity in and around Christ that is the thorough-going emphasis of the New Testament, rather than details of worship services. It is the *koinōnia*, the common life of the gathered church, that is the context for all of the elements noted above. There is no sense in which the New Testament can support the idea of a private Christianity. Neither does it support the idea of gathering for solely spiritual, rather than practical, reasons. The two are inseparably intertwined.

The above does not mean that the liturgy, or content, of Christian gatherings is unimportant, just that this question needs to be set within a perspective that apprehends the centre of gravity of Paul's or Luke's concern: the common life of the church. The important question to address now is this: can these gatherings be correctly understood as "worship"? Or, what is the intersection of "gathering" and "worship" in the New Testament?

## II. *Gathering and Worship in the NT*

### 1. *Everyone Worships*

In Paul's understanding of the world, everybody worships. The critical question is not *whether* someone worships or not, but *what* they worship. Although human beings have been created to worship God, those whose minds are darkened have exchanged worshipping (*sebazomai*) and serving (*latreuō*) God for the worship and service of created things (Romans 1:25).<sup>53</sup> Paul's use of *sebazomai* in Rom 1:25 is a *hapax legomenon*, but if it is taken as a semantic variation on the more usual *proskuneō* (perhaps to give it a pagan flavour), then Paul here can be understood as echoing strongly the common

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<sup>51</sup> Bock, *Theology of Luke-Acts*, 387.

<sup>52</sup> Note here the attempt of Cuming to reconstruct a "Pauline" order of service. See Martin, *Worship*, 986. See also Ridderbos' comments (*Paul*, 482).

<sup>53</sup> Romans 1:25.



Old Testament dyad *proskuneō* – *latreuō*.<sup>54</sup> The occurrences of this dyad in the LXX are anchored in the prohibition against idolatry in Exodus 20:5: “you shall not worship them or serve them”. Both of these terms have strong cultic associations, although they are both used in a wider context. The veneration and worship expressed by *proskuneō* is rooted in the action of bowing or prostrating before a superior (including a deity) to kiss the superior (or the ground). It conveys the idea of complete dependence on, or submission to, one who is superior.<sup>55</sup> The sense of *latreuō* as worship is the performance of religious duties, with the simple meaning of the verb being to serve (things, people or deities).<sup>56</sup> In the LXX this dyad is overwhelmingly found in contexts of idolatry – which is Paul’s subject in Romans 1 – but is also used to describe the worship of Yahweh.<sup>57</sup> The *proskuneō* – *latreuō* dyad is used by Matthew and Luke to report the words of Jesus in rebutting the temptation of Satan: “Worship the Lord your God and serve him only” (Matt 4:10; Luke 4:8). This is interesting, since Deuteronomy 6:13, which Jesus quotes here, has the much less common combination (in the LXX) of *phobeō* – *latreuō*. Whatever combinations we have, the coupled verbs express, first, an attitude of dependence and reverence and, second, the ritual activities of the cult driven by this reverence.<sup>58</sup>

## 2. *Life as Worship*

In Romans 12, Paul appropriates the language of cultic worship, applying it in a broad sense:

present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship (*latreia*) (Rom 12:1).

This verse has received much attention in exploring the contours of worship in the New Testament. Some have used it as the key platform on which to build an argument that “we do not meet specifically to worship God” and that

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<sup>54</sup> See Douglas J. Moo, *Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 113 n.107. Jewett believes that the conjunction of these two verbs indicate an indictment of both Gentile and Jew, but given the context this seems unlikely (*Romans: A Commentary* (Augsburg: Fortress Press, 2007), 171).

<sup>55</sup> BDAG, s.v. “προσκυνέω”. This is true also of *hāwā* which lies behind it in the MT (*TWOT*, 267).

<sup>56</sup> BDAG, s.v. “λατρεύω”. Note also the MT equivalent ‘*abad*’ (*TWOT*, 639).

<sup>57</sup> Idolatry: e.g. Exod 20:5; 23:24; Josh 23:7, 16; Deut 4:19; 5:9; 8:19; 11:16; 17:3; 30:17; Judg 2:19; 2 Ki 17:35; 2 Chr 7:19; Dan 3:14; Worship of Yahweh: e.g. Josh 22:5. The conjunction of these two contexts in proximity in Joshua is significant.

<sup>58</sup> See David Peterson, “Worship”, in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, eds. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 856-57.

“we do not go to church to worship”.<sup>59</sup> Paul, in co-opting *latreia*, undoubtedly sets out a broadly-conceived view of life-as-worship (as he also does in Rom 6:12-13). However, the verses that immediately follow here in chapter 12, where the reference to worship is explicit, are striking in that Paul straightaway applies this exhortation to worship in the life of the church community as a body. In his exposition of this idea of cultic worship, he emphasises that the members of this one body are also members of one another (12:5). The individual bodies are offered in worship as *one* body. The themes of the exposition – humility, prophecy, prayer, exhortation, leadership, rejoicing, sharing in needs, hospitality – are all elements of the gathering of God’s people corresponding to our earlier survey. We might say that Paul in Romans 12:1 is writing about “gathered worship”.

So, worship as “service” involves serving God in our relationships with one another:

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honour; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord (*douleuō*); rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practising hospitality (Rom. 12:10-13).

The three injunctions in the centre of the section (not lagging, fervent, serving) are explanatory of the devotion to the Lord and one another. Serving God is seen in serving fellow Christians. This same correlation is seen at the end of the letter to the Philippians, where the gift sent to Paul from the church in Philippi is “an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God (Phil 4:18). This blurring of any neat boundary between “vertical” and “horizontal” elements is something to which we will return.

Whilst Paul’s emphasis here is on the fellowship of the church *as worship*, Paul elsewhere takes for granted that those elements of gatherings which are addressed *to God* are also worship. Particular elements are addressed to God verbally. Paul writes often about prayers, thanksgiving and singing to God. The New Testament also makes clear that in gathering, the church receives *from* God. The hearing of the word is at the centre of the gathered life of the church. Those that participate in the gathered life of the church experience “the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age” (Heb 6:5).

### 3. *The Ritual of Gathered Worship*

In addition to the above, Paul seems to have no difficulty at all with the concept of gathering in a particular place for worship. Luke reports Paul’s

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<sup>59</sup> The quotes are from Vaughan Roberts, *True Worship* (Milton Keynes: Authentic, 2002), 27, 30.

response to Felix in Acts 24, when he explains that “no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship (*proskuneō*)” (24:11). Paul attended synagogues during his visit, but it is the temple specifically that is presented as the site of his worship (21:26; 24:17-18). Whatever the complications of the circumstances surrounding this visit to the temple – the church in Jerusalem is responding to criticism from the Jewish community (21:21) – this is not nostalgic sightseeing for Paul. He sets his actions in the temple within a Christian context: “I admit that I worship (*latreuō*) the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect” (24:14). We can note that here again we find the *proskuneō* – *latreuō* dyad in the context of Christian worship.<sup>60</sup> The important point is that Paul himself clearly conceives of his actions in going to the location of the temple on a certain day *as worship*. Returning briefly to 1 Corinthians 14, and Paul’s concern with outsiders, we can also note his description of the reaction of the one who is convicted: “So they will fall down and worship (*proskuneō*) God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’” (14:25). Here, worship is God-directed, and takes place specifically in the encounter with the gathered, worshipping community.

Away from Paul, although from within the Pauline circle, we can note the emphasis in Hebrews 9. Here, worship (*latreia*) under the Mosaic Law (9:1) is transformed, through the ministry of Jesus Christ as high priest and the redemption he secures, into the worship (*latreia*) of God in the New Covenant (9:14). In the Old Covenant this worship was to do with the tabernacle and especially the sacrifices (9:2-10). We can then return to Hebrews 13:15-16, where the corresponding transformation of these sacrifices is seen:

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased (Heb. 13:15-16).

Here the writer likens spoken or sung praise to a sacrifice – offered to God by our lips. It is hard not to draw the conclusion that the author of Hebrews would have understood the sung praise of the gathered church as worship.<sup>61</sup> He also, like Paul in Romans 12, understands that “actions contributing to the welfare of others are essential to the sacrifice of praise that is ‘pleasing to God’”.<sup>62</sup> There is an explicit identification of fellowship with worship. The cultic language employed here reflects the preceding context where cultic

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<sup>60</sup> Perhaps Paul conceptualises the visit to the temple as an expression of reverence or submission to God, and his wider following of the Way as his dutiful service to Christ.

<sup>61</sup> Lane (*Hebrews 9-13*, 549-50.) notes the connections to Ps 49 LXX (which points to praise as a cultic, non-sacrificial offering) and Hosea 14:3 LXX (which seems to refer to songs of thanksgiving in a corporate setting).

<sup>62</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews*, NTL (Westminster John Knox, 2006), 350.

imagery is marshalled for the purposes of exhortation (13:10-13). As Koester notes, “[t]he author is not spiritualizing the notion of sacrifice, since the listeners are to serve fellow Christians, strangers, prisoners, and the afflicted in physical ways”.<sup>63</sup> So, here in Hebrews 13 we have both “vertical” and “horizontal” aspects of the gathering of the church cast in terms of cultic worship.<sup>64</sup>

In the New Testament, worship is explicitly an all-embracing approach to life.<sup>65</sup> The Pauline injunction to do all to the glory of God and the service of the Lord Christ, even activities which we often consider mundane such as eating and drinking (1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:24), was one impetus behind the Reformation recovery of the holiness of life, and that every good activity of life was to be undertaken to the glory of God. Therefore, any view of worship as something restricted to gatherings of the church cannot accord with the outlook of the New Testament. It is undoubtedly true that the church has not always spoken of life-as-worship, and this is one of the things that engenders the corrosive sacred-secular divide in the minds of many Christians.

However, neither can it accord with the New Testament outlook that the gatherings of the church are conceived of in some way as *not* worship.<sup>66</sup> If we adopt the biblical view of life-as-worship, and if we understand that this worship is something especially related to the relationships within the church community, then it is clearly legitimate to designate church gatherings as “worship”. Within life-as-worship, we specifically gather to worship together. Ridderbos observes that, “for Paul the meeting of the church nevertheless has a specific and highly important significance”.<sup>67</sup> The question then becomes: what is distinctive about gathered worship within life-as-worship? It is clear from the apostles’ practice and exhortation that gathered worship was considered essential for the early Christians, and that it was special and regular in nature. In the words of Jesus, in the testimony of Acts, and also in 1 Corinthians 14 it is in gathering that God, or Christ, is

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<sup>63</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews*, ABC (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 578.

<sup>64</sup> This is also noted by Miroslav Volf, “Worship as Adoration and Action: Reflections on a Christian Way of Being-in-the-World”, in *Worship: Adoration and Action*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 207.

<sup>65</sup> Theologically, this is also the case in the OT, but it is not as explicit under the Law of Moses.

<sup>66</sup> Roberts, in his commendable desire to re-emphasise life-as-worship downplays gathering-as-worship quite strongly. Although he casts the purpose of gathering as “encouragement” rather than “worship”, when he comes to describing the content of gatherings, he concedes that what is done has essential God-ward components that could not truly be thought of as anything other than worship. See Roberts, *True Worship*, 43-64, 72-77. Peterson, who also wants to emphasise edification, allows for the idea of “corporate worship” (David Peterson, “Worship in the New Testament”, in *Worship: Adoration and Action*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 82-83.).

<sup>67</sup> Ridderbos, *Paul*, 481. Ridderbos highlights the priestly and prophetic task of the church.

present in a mode different to his universal presence. Why is this? What is it about gathering that is distinctive and important?

### *III. Components of a Biblical Theological Framework for Gathered Worship*

To approach a theological rationale for answering these questions, I suggest here two elements of New Testament theology (in fact, both are primarily found in Pauline theology) that help us to understand the portrait of worship in the early church, and that could help us to resolve questions surrounding worship in the contemporary church.

#### *1. The Ekklēsia as the New Humanity*

We can begin with a distinctively Pauline metaphor: the *ekklēsia* as the new humanity, which we can only consider in a brief sketch. Paul employs this idea in Ephesians 2:

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two... (Eph 2:14-15).

Paul here has in mind a new eschatological humanity, inaugurated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and to be perfected at his appearing. He develops the metaphor from the indicative of chapter 2 to the imperative of chapter 4, where the audience are exhorted towards an anthropological *metanoia*, turning away from living as the old humanity, and embracing life as the new humanity. The concept is found in the parallel Col 3:9-10, and expressed in a different manner in the new creation of 2 Cor 5:17 and Gal 6:15.<sup>68</sup>

For Paul, the church expresses human community as it will be in the eschatological kingdom of God.<sup>69</sup> The vision of the cosmic redemption of God's creation in Jesus Christ, includes the redemption of human community in the age to come.<sup>70</sup> Since this age has already begun in the resurrection of

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<sup>68</sup> On this, see the excellent treatment of John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 2nd Edition., BST (Leicester: IVP, 1991), 101-2, 110-12.

<sup>69</sup> It is, in the words of Horton, "a partially realized form of the kingdom of God within history", (Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 845). Paul's concern with the ethical in the context of the eschatological kingdom is seen in, e.g. 1 Cor 6:9-11.

<sup>70</sup> This is where misunderstandings of Revelation can lead us away from a biblical concept of worship and the church. If the visions of heavenly worship are understood as a futurist heavenly "goal" for humanity (neglecting much of the content of Rev 21 and 22) then an

Jesus Christ, the eschatological *ekklēsia* is called to live the life of the age to come in the present.<sup>71</sup> The church is an anachronistic entity, a community of the age of “the restoration of all things”, living in the age of “this world”. The Now-Not Yet tension in the inaugurated eschatology of the New Testament is the foundation for the Now-Not Yet tension in the community ethic of the church. As the new humanity, the church must live out the community life of the new humanity. However, since its members remain entangled in the decaying old order, this lived life is imperfect, and repentance and faith in Jesus Christ for forgiveness must attend every step.<sup>72</sup>

The new humanity recovers God’s intentions for human beings as his image, which is achieved through believers being conformed to the image of Christ.<sup>73</sup> Jesus Christ is the exact imprint, the perfect image of God, whose image we will in turn bear.<sup>74</sup> God’s purpose is that the church would be conformed to its head, Christ, and live as a community of men and women functioning as the image of God in God’s world – a community communing with the Creator, and mediating his love and righteousness into his world – to all other entities in the created world, and especially to one another.<sup>75</sup>

Gathering together is not merely the context for the “horizontal” component of human beings as the *Imago dei*, but the “vertical”; communion with God is at the heart of Reformed ecclesiology. In the gathering of the church, in word and in sacrament, through the ministry of the Spirit we are made to share in the new creation through the means of grace.<sup>76</sup>

We need not – indeed must not – choose between a view of the church as a purely passive recipient of grace and a view of it as an active bearer of grace. We are always passive recipients of grace from God and active agents of love to our neighbour. Grace activates works; love flows from faith.<sup>77</sup>

This framework also helps in explaining why so much of Paul’s pastoral exhortation is towards a community ethic. This is the theological framework

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unbiblical pseudo-Gnostic eschatology disconnects our ideas of worship from their essential creational framework.

<sup>71</sup> This may be understood, as in Ridderbos, as part of the priestly and prophetic task of the church in the world: “[I]n these meetings the peculiar character of the church in the world is disclosed in an exemplary way”, *Paul*, 481. See n.69 above.

<sup>72</sup> This paradigm for the ethical life of the church is developed at some length by Tom Wright in *Virtue Reborn* (SPCK, 2011), 64-87.

<sup>73</sup> Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10.

<sup>74</sup> 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3.

<sup>75</sup> On this functional interpretation of the *Imago dei*, see J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 24-29. See Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 696.

<sup>76</sup> Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 867.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 869.

within which Paul's *syn*-verbs makes sense. This is why most of Paul's imperatives are plural.<sup>78</sup> As Wright points out, the calling to holiness in the life of the church is not a call towards individualistic ethics (in contrast to say, Plato), but towards "a community that embodies in its own life the wise ordering which is the creator's will".<sup>79</sup>

That the *ekklēsia* is to be fundamentally considered as an eschatological community is demonstrated in Jesus' statement that the "gates of Hades" will not prevail against his building of it. The gates of Hades here is a reference to the power of death.<sup>80</sup> In the understanding of Jesus, it is death that will not prevent the eschatological *ekklēsia* from standing complete in the new age. Its completion is secured through his own atoning death and resurrection, and realised on the day when death will be defeated. Hence Matthew 16:18, as the first *ekklēsia* text in the New Testament, is rooted in Jesus' power over death as the Resurrected One.

The resurrection of Jesus should be at the heart of Christian gathering and *koinōnia*. The day on which the church gathers is the day of his resurrection, the first day of the week.<sup>81</sup> In addition, the liturgical prayer *maranatha* expresses the eschatological focus of the early church, as it awaits the return of the Saviour who desires to gather with them again, in community, over a ritual meal in the kingdom of God (Matt 26:29). If we are seeking to recover a biblical conception of worship in the life of the church, it is still the case that "one of the most pressing needs of evangelicalism in the West is that of the recovery of the biblical priority given to eschatology".<sup>82</sup>

## 2. *The Church as the Body of Christ*

The second metaphor is more familiar: the church as the body of Christ.<sup>83</sup> It is found in close proximity to the first in the letter to the Ephesians; at the end of chapter 1 Paul states that, "God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (Eph 1:22-23). The new humanity as one body is realised through the offering of one body on the cross – Paul's language is deliberately ambiguous (2:16). Both the far-off Gentiles and the near Jews have been united *en Christō*. We may also note here, in passing, the significance in Paul's understanding of the Lord's Supper as a *koinōnia* in the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor 10:16).

<sup>78</sup> N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (SPCK, 2013), 1097.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 1097.

<sup>80</sup> Bruner, *Matthew*, 128-32.

<sup>81</sup> Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, 11.

<sup>82</sup> Noel Due, *Created for Worship: From Genesis to Revelation to You* (Fearn: Mentor, 2009), 237.

<sup>83</sup> See Horton's helpful treatment of this metaphor: Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 733-37.

In Romans 12, where Paul is dealing with the life of the church, he emphasises that believers are one body in Christ (12:5). This thought is developed further in 1 Corinthians 12, where not only are the believers one body and are baptised into it by one Spirit (12:12-13), but the church is referred to by the cipher “the Christ” (12:12). This is made more explicit later, where the care of the community in suffering together and rejoicing together leads to the statement, “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (12:27). Space precludes a detailed exploration, but Paul’s thought here is that the church is the embodied representation of Christ to the world.<sup>84</sup> This brings us back to Ephesians; there are strong connections between 1 Cor 12:27-31 and Eph 4:11-16. This latter text builds on the “body of Christ” in 2:22-23, and on Paul’s emphasis on the common life and worship of the church (the unity of the Spirit; one body; one Spirit; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 4:3-5). Christ has given grace and gift in the church to each member, and teachers specifically so that the “body of Christ” would be built up (4:12). The body grows when each part functions correctly amongst all the others (4:16).

The church as Christ’s body is more than metaphor. As Calvin writes, the believers “do not constitute a mere *body-politic*, but are the spiritual and mystical body of Christ”.<sup>85</sup> Paul’s theology of the body of Christ was undoubtedly formed in part by his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4). This identification of Christians with the risen Christ is seen in Paul’s emphasis, not only on believers being *in Christ*, but also on Christ being in believers (Rom 8:10; Col 1:27-28).

Gospel traditions form important background here. The vine imagery of John 15 aligns with the Pauline *en Christō*, and John 14:20 expresses both aspects of this mutual indwelling: “On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.” Perhaps most significant for our understanding of the life of the church is Jesus’ statement in the discourse of Matthew 25: “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matt 25:40).

#### IV. Questions of Contemporary Worship

This framework then is of (i) the church as the new humanity, the eschatological *ekklēsia* of Christ; and (ii) the body of Christ, in which Christ is present, in which Christ’s life is found through the Spirit, and in which the

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<sup>84</sup> Thiselton cites Käsemann’s understanding that Paul views the church as “the means whereby Christ reveals himself on earth and becomes incarnate in the world through his Spirit”, Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 466, 996.

<sup>85</sup> John Calvin, *First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 264.



image of Christ is being formed.<sup>86</sup> Both of the components of the framework are utilised by Paul in the context of the life and worship of the church. Both shed light on why it is that the shared, community life of the church – its *koinōnia* – is so important, and why the unity of the church as God’s family ought to be expressed in practical ways when the church gathers – both in formal or informal settings. This framework helps us to achieve a greater clarity in addressing contemporary questions. There follow brief suggestions in a number of areas.

### 1. *Polarities of Worship*

First, we can address what we might call the polarities of worship. There are two oft-mentioned polarities: first, “vertical” and “horizontal” elements of worship; second, “gathered worship” versus “life-as-worship”.

First, a few words on the vertical-horizontal duality: Vertical elements of worship are often conceived as spiritual elements – those elements directed towards God or which are thought to belong to the “spiritual” side of Christian experience. These are usually identified as prayer, praise, and the reading and preaching of the word. Horizontal elements are often identified as those directed towards the members of the church, for example sharing, alms-giving or discipline. As we have seen, in the New Testament these components of worship are intertwined. They all occur in the context of the gathered community. Moreover, the “horizontal” aspects of the *koinōnia* of the community are, as we have seen, also cast as worship of God by both Paul and the author of Hebrews.<sup>87</sup>

The framework of the church as the body of Christ illuminates why this is so: Christ is present in us as individuals and in the gathering of the church. We do not worship each other, but in our love one for another we are worshipping the Christ whose body we are members of, and the Father of the Christ, who has called us into his family. Whilst we may helpfully talk of the vertical and horizontal in worship, we must temper any stark polarity between these with the truth of Christ’s presence in our brothers and sisters. In the words of the song:

So let us learn how to serve, and in our lives enthrone him  
Each other’s needs to prefer, for it is Christ we’re serving.<sup>88</sup>

Second, we can briefly consider the place of gathered worship within life-as-worship. The framework above, and the data of the New Testament only

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<sup>86</sup> Space precludes a consideration of the theological relationship between these two metaphors.

<sup>87</sup> See sections 3.2 and 3.3 above.

<sup>88</sup> Graham Kendrick, *The Servant King*, Thankyou Music, 1983.

allows a conclusion that life is to be lived as worship. Any attempt to focus worship solely on the church's gatherings, or "services" is mistaken. In the New Testament, and in Reformed theology, worship is explicitly an all-embracing approach to life.

At the same time, as we have seen, there is no scriptural reason to be uncomfortable with the idea of gathering to worship. Again, the church as the body of Christ sheds light on this question. Since Christ is present especially in our gatherings, and since we partake of Christ together in the Lord's Supper, our gathering in one another's presence is a special expression of our worship of Christ. Christ is the absent one for whom we wait at our remembrance meal – we await the day when he will be present. So, gathering is a special moment, or mode, of the worship of the church. It is in the gathering of the church that someone may exclaim, "God is really among you!" (1 Cor 14:25). As Frame writes, "in the meeting, God draws near to his people in a special way".<sup>89</sup>

The framework component of the church as the new humanity also assists us here. The gathered church expresses most clearly the reality of this *Not Yet* community in the *Now*. The church scattered lives as salt and light in the present age, but the church's gatherings are the times in which the life of the eschatological *ekklēsia* ought to be most richly-expressed in the midst of this present age. This is why Paul is concerned about the reactions of outsiders that encounter it, and why the gathered worship of the church can rightly be conceived of as a missional event.<sup>90</sup>

In another sense, the worship of God's people as they are scattered and as they are gathered is not contingent upon this eschatological tension; it is simply a part of life in God's world. In the Old Testament, the people of God gathered to worship together according to a rhythm of festivals that was closely coupled to the rhythms of the natural world. This pattern was continued in the founding of the synagogue, where communities also gathered each Sabbath – a pattern that seems to be the foundation for the practice of the early church. We might argue that fruitful human community, enjoying God and serving him, exhibits a rhythm of gathering and scattering in the interplay between the personal and the corporate, between the private and the public, and between adoration and action (whether in this age or in the age to come).<sup>91</sup> We see this kind of rhythm in the life of Jesus as he seeks

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<sup>89</sup> Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, 30.

<sup>90</sup> Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 901-2.

<sup>91</sup> On this, see Volf's important essay, "Worship as Adoration and Action: Reflections on a Christian Way of Being-in-the-World," 203-11, esp. 207-8 (although, note Horton's critique, *The Christian Faith*, 867). Volf makes the important point (203) that the impetus of the Reformation was to overturn the mediaeval assessment of the "secular", in sanctifying not only the life of adoration ("spiritual worship", we might say), but also the life of action in the world ("life as worship", we might say). Volf sets out the "bivalent" nature of worship as adoration and action,

time alone, as well as time with others. The church lives and breathes – its gathering brings in the oxygen of God’s word, and the presence of Christ, as God is praised. It then lives in the world, breathing out the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed, imaging the Lord. Gathered worship plays a particular part in the rhythm of living for God’s glory in God’s world.

We can reasonably conclude that rather than polarising gathered worship and life-as-worship (either through a restricted view of what worship is, or through a desire to re-emphasise life-as-worship), the church rightly ought to understand worship in the broad sense (life-as-worship), and also speak of “gathered worship,” appreciating its necessity and investing in this special mode of worship.

## 2. *Scripture as Regulating and Scripture as Normative*

One of the questions that is often re-visited by the church is that of *how* we use the data of scripture to regulate our worship. Reformed churches have, historically, given the answer that scripture has a positive function in sanctioning the elements of worship, rather than a veto on those things that are expressly forbidden. This is the regulative principle – that whatever scripture does not positively command as part of worship is forbidden.<sup>92</sup>

In our survey above it was noted that at the birth of the church, whilst the importance of the cult ceased for Christians, the elements of worship associated with the synagogue were retained, both in early Jewish gatherings and in the increasingly Gentile gatherings later on. Even the distinctive new elements of baptism and the Lord’s Supper find their roots in Jewish rites. New prayers, songs and confessions were developed, but there was no explosion in innovations in the elements of worship for the early Christians. There is an undoubted simplicity in this worship – it is capable of being conducted in the average home with the only required items being a cup, bread and wine.

Paul seems to set store in the idea that elements of order and practice are standardised, at least in his mind, across the churches as a whole – not only those he has established (11:16). The basic pattern of worship established in the early church seems to be regulative to the apostles, and in the early church this pattern continues. However, we recall our earlier observation

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writing: “Fellowship with God is not possible without cooperation with God in the world; indeed, cooperation with God is a dimension of fellowship with God. As Christians worship God in adoration and action they anticipate the conditions of this world as God’s new creation” (208).

<sup>92</sup> Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, 38.

that scripture does not give very much detail, nor does it demonstrate a concern with detail, when it comes to gathered worship.

Bock addresses the question of the normative nature of the descriptions of the church in Acts. He focusses on the sharing of possessions, and points out that this was a voluntary behaviour of the community and not a command.<sup>93</sup> How the values of the church are worked out depends on the specific settings of our communities, and the Spirit will give direction.<sup>94</sup>

To return to the regulative principle, Frame sets out a helpful treatment. He affirms the principle, as set out in the Westminster Confession (21.1), as an important insight into the nature of worship: “[c]an any of us trust ourselves to determine, apart from Scripture, what God does and does not like in worship?”<sup>95</sup> However, Frame also points out that scripture does not furnish us with detailed guidance for our gathered worship. He proposes that human wisdom must also be applied to questions of worship, developing his view from the Confession’s acknowledgement that there are “circumstances concerning the worship of God,... common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed” (WCF 1.6).<sup>96</sup> We can note that the Confession sets worship within the context of the natural order of life in God’s world, which is a point of contact with the theological framework set out above. Frame builds on this particular point of contact:

Typically, Scripture tells us what we should do in general and then leaves us to determine the specifics by our own sanctified wisdom, according to the general rules of the Word. Determining the specifics is what I call “application”.<sup>97</sup>

The task of the church, according to Frame, is to apply scripture in wisdom to the particular setting of the church, recognising the particular purposes for gathered worship set out in scripture.<sup>98</sup> The strength of this idea of “application” is that it applies not only to gathered worship, but also to life-as-worship.<sup>99</sup> Frame’s position reflects, in my view, not only the data of the New Testament, but also the theological framework set out above.

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<sup>93</sup> “It showed their solidarity and their commitment to care for one another as a core value”, Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts*, 445.

<sup>94</sup> Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts*, 445.

<sup>95</sup> Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, 39.

<sup>96</sup> Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, 40.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>99</sup> As Frame notes: “the regulative principle for worship is no different from the principles by which God regulates all of our life. That is to be expected, because, as we have seen, worship is, in an important sense, all of life” (*Worship in Spirit and Truth*, 42).

### 3. *Cultural Concerns*

The observations above then assist us in another area of discussion: Should the church strive to be culturally relevant? Or should it maintain a culture of its own, as a counter-cultural society?

Of course, casting the options in this way presents false alternatives. The inclusion of Gentiles in the early church congregations leads to Paul's concern with sensitivity towards those from various cultural backgrounds within the church (e.g. Rom 14:1-8). Paul is also concerned about how the church is seen against the culture in which it is situated. He is concerned about the reactions of outsiders, and his teaching on the place of women in worship – in their speaking and not-speaking – makes most sense if understood as driven by cultural, or socio-religious, concerns (1 Cor 11:5-6; 14:34-35).<sup>100</sup> We have already noted how Luke appeals to cultural conventions in his descriptions of the church. Paul, too, appeals to the surrounding culture (Acts 17:28; Cf. 1 Cor 15:32-33). Yet, it is fundamental to the church that elements of the surrounding culture and its mores are rejected (e.g. 1 Cor 6:9-11).

The understanding of the church as the eschatological new humanity leads to the view that human life in all its richness is to be lived in God's world to God's glory. So, the church is to affirm everything in God's world that is good, expressed in human cultures, and these things are to be received with thanks (1 Tim 4:4). This reflects the Reformed doctrine of common grace. The church in every place and time in the world must glorify God in its own cultural setting (both by affirmation and by rejection) in its own unique manner.<sup>101</sup> There is a missional element to this determined engagement with, and participation in, culture. The church is to affirm what is good, not just in its own life but in the world outside. The church is to "seek the good of the city" in which it finds itself. This kind of thinking has resulted in Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City adopting "cultural renewal" into its vision and values.<sup>102</sup> The overflow of God's love and grace in the church is experienced by the world outside: "let us do good to all people", urges Paul (Gal 6:10), and "overcome evil with good" (Rom 12:21). An encounter with a community seeking to live as the new humanity

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<sup>100</sup> The issues have been endlessly debated, but for an example of a thorough examination of cultural backgrounds, see Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 828-33, 1150-61.

<sup>101</sup> Frame's understanding (*Worship in Spirit and Truth*, 46) of the regulative principle is that it "sets us free, within limits, to worship God in the language of our own time, to seek those applications of God's commandments which most edify worshipers in our contemporary cultures".

<sup>102</sup> See [www.redeemer.com/learn/vision\\_and\\_values/](http://www.redeemer.com/learn/vision_and_values/) (accessed December 2018). For the thinking itself, see Keller, "The Bible on Church and Culture," April 2009 at [www.redeemer.com/redeemer-report/article/the-bible-on-church-and-culture](http://www.redeemer.com/redeemer-report/article/the-bible-on-church-and-culture) (accessed December 2018).

in Christ ought to be a deeply challenging experience, especially in its celebratory, gathered worship, where the love, joy and peace of the new humanity is most clearly displayed, and the new life of Christ through the Spirit is evident.

#### 4. *Priorities for Gathered Worship*

At so many points, the individualised and spiritualised conceptions of life and of salvation which history has bequeathed to evangelicalism have prevented an appreciation of *koinōnia*. In our own day, many of the debates which have consumed the energies of our churches have revolved around the “vertical” components of gathered worship. The “horizontal” elements of worship have, in comparison, been neglected – and sometimes seen as unnecessary accoutrements to the “serious” business of God-focussed worship. The New Testament’s over-riding concern with the *ekklēsia* as a community of *koinōnia* sets these rumbling debates in an unfavourable light. The energy expended on which hymn-book to use in church gatherings, which instruments to allow, or on discussions as to whether drinking tea is an appropriate activity to follow a service of worship must in this light be seen to be precious energy misdirected. All of this has eroded a commitment to gathered worship.<sup>103</sup>

This eroded commitment has precipitated further, particular neglects – of church discipline and almsgiving. The portrait of the New Testament church especially challenges our contemporary practice in these areas. The life and character, the integrity of the *koinōnia* of the new humanity *must* be protected through discipline, by corporately, prayerfully and mercifully exercising the authority that comes with the keys of the kingdom (Matt 16:19).<sup>104</sup> In addition, any members of this eschatological community who face hardship ought to be provided for by collective giving. In our modern Western context this might look somewhat different to the early church, where the realities of poverty were borne by the individual families with no assistance from the state – but perhaps ought not to look *that* different. The uncomfortable reality is that many of our churches reflect wider society’s division between those who have and those who do not. Any diaconal redistribution of resources is absent because poorer Christians are themselves absent. A social and economic vision driven by the eschatological vision of the new humanity must take root in the minds and hearts of the disciples of Jesus.

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<sup>103</sup> In the 2018 Ligonier Ministries State of Theology survey, a majority of US adults (58%) said that worshipping alone or with one’s family is a valid replacement for regularly attending church. Only 30 percent disagree. Amongst evangelicals, 47 percent agree with this statement; 51 percent disagree.

<sup>104</sup> See Bruner, *Matthew*, 132-35.

Often, the realities of our comings together ought to be a cause for humility. It is an indictment on the modern church in so many places that the gathering of the *ekklēsia* precipitates mistrust and friction. Ministers and elders are more aware than anyone of the divisions that can stalk our gatherings. In the Reformed church there is rightly a strong emphasis on: “you cannot be a Christian on your own.” And yet, it strikes me, it is often *easier* for people to be Christians on their own. In some places, as in Corinth, the coming together of the church is not for better, but for worse.

We need to recover a passion and care for gathered worship, not only in its vertical, but also in its horizontal components. And, as pressure on Western churches grows in increasingly secular societies, the need for a commitment to gathered worship becomes more acute, not less.<sup>105</sup> We need to recapture a sense of its importance, of the local *ekklēsia* of Christ as an instantiation in time and space of a redeemed and renewed humanity, as a shining city set on a hill against the dark backdrop of this world. We must renew our love of gathering, this important and particular mode of worship – it is ritual, part of the rhythm of life in God’s world. We need to recapture the nitty-gritty implications of the church as the body of Christ and of our service to one another as worship of our Lord. We need, in short, to be captivated by the idea of *koinōnia*.

The words of John Stott, written almost twenty years ago, are as apposite today as they were then:

It is simply impossible, with any shred of Christian integrity, to go on proclaiming that Jesus by his cross has abolished the old divisions and created a new single humanity of love, while at the same time we are contradicting our message... We need to get the failures of the church on our conscience, to feel the offence to Christ and the world which these failures are, to weep over the credibility gap between the church’s talk and the church’s walk, to repent of our readiness to excuse and even condone our failures and to determine to do something about it. I wonder if anything is more urgent today, for the honour of Christ and for the spread of the gospel, than that the church should be, and should be seen to be, what by God’s purpose and Christ’s achievement it already is – a single new humanity, a model of human community, a family of reconciled brothers and sisters who love their Father and love each other, the evident dwelling place of God by his Spirit. Only then will the world believe in Christ as Peacemaker. Only then will God receive the glory due to his name.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Lane, in his commentary on Hebrews, observes that, “[a]ctive support and concern for the welfare of one another are matters of critical urgency in the life of a community exposed to testing and disappointment” (*Hebrews 9-13*, 289).

<sup>106</sup> Stott, *God’s New Society*, 111.

# WHAT IS SWEETER TO US IS CLEARER: THE AESTHETICS OF WORSHIP – A HISTORICAL SURVEY

*Robert Letham\**

What is sweeter to us is clearer (*illa nobis dulcior, ista clarior*)

Augustine, *De ordine*, 2:17.

It should be self-evident that Christian worship is to be shaped by the nature of its object. God, the Holy Trinity, is the only object of worship. Basic to God's self-revelation is his glory. This is not some abstract concept to which he conforms but is simply the very nature of God, "who dwells in inapproachable light" (1 Tim 1:17), such that no one can look on him as he is and live (Exod 33:20), yet who has made himself known to us as man (John 1:14-15). His glory is beautiful, the quintessence of what beauty is.

This was the experience of the emissaries of Vladimir, Prince of Kiev, who wanted to discover the true religion. In the year 987, his envoys visited the Bulgars but were not impressed, for their worship was devoid of joy and, besides, they had a bad smell. Rome was hardly better. Finally, they came to Divine Liturgy at the Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. They reported as follows:

We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth, for surely there is no such splendour or beauty anywhere upon earth. We cannot describe it to you: only this we know, that God dwells there among men, and that their service surpasses the worship of all other places. For we cannot forget that beauty.<sup>1</sup>

We cannot forget that beauty, we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth, God dwells there among men: given appropriate content in the gospel, what could better describe worship as it should be? Yet much evangelical worship, under the façade of plainness and simplicity, has moved far from such a place, to the tired, banal and mediocre. Talk of beauty in relation to worship in such a context seems anachronistic and irrelevant. Moreover, it is not a concept that is noticeably present in evangelical discussion.

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\* Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology, Union School of Theology.

<sup>1</sup> Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1969), 269.



## I. *The Beauty of God*

Barth has a striking discussion of the beauty of God as an aspect of his glory:

If we can and must say that God is beautiful, to say this is to say how he enlightens and convinces and persuades us. It is to describe not merely the naked fact of his revelation or its power, but the shape and form in which it is a fact and is power. It is to say that God has this superior force, this power of attraction, which speaks for itself, which wins and conquers, in the fact that he is beautiful, divinely beautiful, beautiful in his own way, in a way that is his alone, beautiful as the unattainable primal beauty, yet really beautiful. He does not have it, therefore, merely as a fact or a power. Or rather, he has it as a fact and a power in such a way that he acts as the one who gives pleasure, creates desire and rewards with enjoyment. And he does it because he is pleasant, desirable, full of enjoyment, because first and last he alone is that which is pleasant, desirable and full of enjoyment. God loves us as the one who is worthy of love as God. This is what we mean when we say that God is beautiful.<sup>2</sup>

It is, perhaps, what was intended by the Westminster divines in affirming that the chief purpose for humanity is “to glorify God and enjoy him for ever”.<sup>3</sup>

Barth recognises the dangers of constructing an autonomous concept of beauty into which God can be fitted. Aestheticism cannot have the last word. In the same place he refers to Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius as exemplifying a hardly-veiled Platonism.<sup>4</sup> But, he insists, that is no reason to go to the other extreme and take the “tragic attitude to the danger that threatens from the side of aesthetics – which is what Protestantism has done”.<sup>5</sup>

The Psalms are full of admiration for God’s work in creation, his glory seen in its various elements, singularly and together: “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps 19:1), while Psalm 104 presents a kaleidoscopic picture of God’s providential care for the world he made. Psalm 148 calls on the whole creation, with united voice, to praise its maker. Creation and the exodus are the two main foci and in both the wonders of God are made known. Since redemption is the renewal of creation it follows that it embraces the same reach. As Barth goes on to say, “We have already said that God’s glory is his overflowing, self-communicating joy. By its very nature it is that which gives joy”.<sup>6</sup> He cites a wide range of passages in Isaiah and the Psalms to demonstrate that human sin makes no difference to the fact that “the God who stoops down to the man whose heart is like this in judgment and mercy... is himself most supremely and most strictly an object of desire,

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Barth, *CD*, II/1: 650–51.

<sup>3</sup> *WSC*, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Barth, *CD*, II/1, 651.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 652.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 653.

joy, pleasure, yearning and enjoyment”.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, where this is neglected “the proclamation of his glory will always have in a slight or dangerous degree something joyless, without sparkle or humour, not to say tedious and there finally neither persuasive nor convincing”.<sup>8</sup> God defines what is beautiful, enjoyable and desirable – *non ideo Deus Deus, quia pulcher est, sed ideo pulcher, quia Deus est*.<sup>9</sup> The Trinity and the incarnation demonstrate this supremely.<sup>10</sup> Some might say that this is dangerous. Indeed it is, but so too is the doctrine of justification only by faith dangerous, so too is preaching. The gospel calls us to a place of danger, not to a haven safe and secure from all alarms.

This theme of the beauty of God in creation, and its implicate in redemption, is superbly voiced by Calvin, in the introduction to his commentary on Genesis. Moses’ intention, he argues, is “to render God, as it were, visible to us in his works”. The Lord, “that he may invite us to the knowledge of himself, places the fabric of heaven and earth before our eyes rendering himself, in a certain manner, manifest in them”. The heavens “are eloquent heralds of the glory of God, and... this most beautiful order of nature silently proclaims his admirable wisdom”. He “clothes himself, so to speak, with the image of the world... magnificently arrayed in the incomparable vesture of the heavens and the earth”. In short, the world is “a mirror in which we ought to behold God”.<sup>11</sup> There is a symmetry in God’s works to which nothing can be added.<sup>12</sup> The divine artificer arranged the creation in such a wonderful order that nothing more beautiful in appearance can be imagined.<sup>13</sup> The world around us, and the universe beyond, is the clothes God wears to display his glory – through his clothes we perceive something of his infinite majesty and desirability. The clothes are not the person; their beauty points beyond to the transcendent glory.

If so with the creation, how much more in the reality of redemption? There the staggering wonder of the eternal Son of the Father taking human nature, living the whole gamut of human experience to the point of human death and human burial, in our flesh offering himself as an atoning sacrifice to the Father, then raising our human nature in the clouds to God’s right hand so that “man with God is on the throne”<sup>14</sup> – this is the most beautiful thing in the world.

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<sup>7</sup> Barth, *CD*, II/1, 654.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 655.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 656.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 659–65.

<sup>11</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, Argument.

<sup>12</sup> Calvin, *Genesis*, on 1:31.

<sup>13</sup> John Calvin, *Institute*, 1:14:21.

<sup>14</sup> From the hymn “See, the conqueror mounts in triumph” by Bishop Christopher Wordsworth, 1862.

Nevertheless, the church has followed differing paths in approaching this matter. Some decisions have proved seminal, producing quite dissimilar understandings of the way in which the church should worship. First on the scene was the early commitment of the Greek church to visual modes in church worship.

## II. *The Visual and the Auditory*<sup>15</sup>

On entry to an Orthodox church, the most prominent sight is the iconostasis, dividing the sanctuary, symbolising the spiritual, immaterial world beyond, from the nave, the image of the material world, these two in reality parts of one whole, the meeting place of heaven and earth.

On the iconostasis are several levels of icons, although icons are found throughout. Starting at the top and moving down are images of the OT patriarchs; then the OT prophets; the liturgical feasts (the fulfilment of OT prophecy); the *tchin* or order, with John the Baptist and the Mother of God in prayer before the icon of Christ on his throne, together with various angels and others, representing the result of the incarnation and the intercession of the church; and a variety of locally significant icons. There is a careful theological point to the arrangement. Before the service begins, the Orthodox obtain a candle, go up to the icons on the lower level, cross themselves, kiss their favourite icon and light the candle.

This arrangement signifies the meeting of heaven and earth (Heb 12:19-24), a great cloud of witnesses present (Heb 12:1f), represented by the icons, pointing to the church opening out on to eternity. The priest or deacon will cense the icons and the congregation, “thus paying homage to the image of God in man and uniting in one gesture the saints represented in the icons and the congregation – the heavenly and the earthly church”.<sup>16</sup> The entire building is full of theological symbolism.<sup>17</sup>

Behind all this lies a conception of the cosmos as semiotic, in which man, who straddles the material and spiritual, is enabled to grasp invisible, spiritual reality through material signs. In turn, this entails a significant role for the imagination. Ouspensky argues that the truth of Christianity underlies icons, for the image is its basic truth and “the preaching of

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<sup>15</sup> The next paragraphs are a summary of a section of my book, *Through Western Eyes: Eastern Orthodoxy; A Reformed Perspective* (Fearn: Mentor, 2007), 143-46.

<sup>16</sup> Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons* (Trans., G. E. H. Palmer and E. Kadloubovsky; Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982), 68.

<sup>17</sup> See *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church* (Third ed.; Isabel Florence Hapgood; Brooklyn, New York: Syrian Antiochene Orthodox Archdiocese of New York and all North America, 1956), 28-40.

Christianity to the world was from the beginning carried out by the Church through word and image".<sup>18</sup>

Gregory of Nyssa, in opposing the heretic Eunomius, following Psalm 19:1-6 and Romans 1:20, pointed to the creation declaring the glory and power of God. He argued that,

this is not given in articulate speech, but by the things which are seen, and it instils into our minds the knowledge of Divine power more than if speech proclaimed it with a voice.<sup>19</sup>

For Gregory the visible revelation of God in creation is superior to a verbal declaration by God's voice. This is because "we are not told that God is the creator of words, but of things made known to us by the signification of our words". Apprehension through the senses is more readily accessible to us and so is an aid to intellectual knowledge.<sup>20</sup>

Gregory thought that language is inherently ambiguous. Each word contains an implicit reference to its contrary. Thus, language is inappropriate to describe God, since God's existence entails no opposition, whereas creation positively indicates his existence. Eunomius, the leading anti-Nicene, held to the objectivity of language; Gregory opposed it. For Gregory, sense knowledge is clear; intellectual knowledge is not.<sup>21</sup> The issue of icons points to deeper and far-reaching questions concerning revelation. This was a momentous statement.

Icons (from *eikon*, image) are held to be teaching devices, windows to heaven, through which to perceive greater realities beyond; in the words of Leontius of Neapolis, "opened books to remind us of God".<sup>22</sup> They portray the saint in a two-dimensional mode made according to strict guidelines by iconographers. These iconographers are not individualist artists but monks, who compose their work in an ethos of prayer and contemplation. Titus Burkhardt writes, "The art of icons is a sacred art in the true sense of the word. It is nourished wholly in the spiritual truth to which it gives pictorial expression." It gives "access to a living and inexhaustible source".<sup>23</sup> Novelty is anathema, faithfulness to the archetype all-important. The iconographer's concern is not to express himself but to transmit tradition and to convey the

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<sup>18</sup> Ouspensky and Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, 26.

<sup>19</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, 2; *NPNF*<sup>2</sup>, 5:272-73.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Michel René Barnes, *The Power of God: Dynamis in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 250-259. See also Michel R. Barnes, "The Background and Use of Eunomius' Causal Language", in *Arianism After Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts* (Michel R. Barnes; Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1993), 217-36.

<sup>22</sup> *PG* 94:1276a, cited by Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 40.

<sup>23</sup> Titus Burkhardt, "Foreword", in Ouspensky and Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, 7.

gospel teaching.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the Orthodox believe that the archetype takes the initiative. Tales are told of occasions when an iconographer breaks off work, goes elsewhere, and on his return finds that the icon has finished the job itself! In 2005, an icon of St. Anna, the mother of the virgin Mary, visited a local Orthodox church near my home; it was reported to have wept tears of myrrh on a number of occasions, which the bishop – in my hearing – suggested could as much be tears of joy as of sorrow. Either way, the idea was that St. Anna was communicating with the faithful through the icon. The church, note, was Antiochene Syrian Orthodox.

The Orthodox claim that the first icons date from the lifetime of Jesus. Eusebius records that not only had he seen a large number of portraits of Jesus and the apostles that had been preserved to his own day but that there was a statue of Jesus in Caesarea Philippi put up by the woman who had the issue of blood (Matt 9:20-3 and parallels).<sup>25</sup> Jewish synagogues in the first century AD had pictures in them, while portraiture was popular throughout the Roman Empire. An early report, no doubt apocryphal, claimed that King Agbar of Edessa sent messengers to Jesus, requesting some likeness of him; Jesus, so the story goes, made an impression of his face in a cloth and sent the cloth back to the King.<sup>26</sup> Eusebius does not mention this, although he provides details of an exchange of letters between Jesus and Agbar, and the latter's healing by Nathanael.<sup>27</sup>

Nicaea II (787 AD) insisted that icons are not to be worshipped. John of Damascus, in his earlier landmark treatise in defence of icons, distinguished between *latreia* (worship) given only to God, and *proskunēsis* (veneration) given to the saints. He also differentiated clearly between the icon and the one signified. While it might be tempting for a Westerner to denounce this as idolatry, the Orthodox equally emphatically deny it and point, *inter alia*, to the same law that forbade the worship of graven images also requiring the carved images of the cherubim to be placed over the ark in the holy of holies itself. Moreover, they argue, the incarnation has happened. The Son has come *as man*; to oppose icons betrays a docetic Christology and a Manicheian doctrine of creation.

In the West, stained glass windows were commonly used as teaching devices to instruct the illiterate – the windows of King's College Chapel, Cambridge contain a rich biblical-theological lesson, demonstrating the unity of redemptive history and its fulfilment in Christ.

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<sup>24</sup> Ouspensky and Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, 27.

<sup>25</sup> Eusebius, *History of the Church*, 7:18, PG 20:680. See Ouspensky and Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, 25.

<sup>26</sup> J. B. Segal, *Edessa: The Blessed City* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 62-81.

<sup>27</sup> Andrew Louth, *Eusebius: The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine* (G. A. Williamson; London: Penguin, 1989), 30-34.

In all these practices, the icons or pictures are ancillary to worship. The King's College Chapel windows were teaching aids, the Orthodox icons are evocative pointers to the reality of church worship as something that unites heaven and earth – the elders, the living creatures, the multitude without number, the church militant and triumphant, with angels straining to search and learn (Heb 12:19-24, 1 Pet 1:12, Rev 4:1-5:14, 7:9-8:5, 11:15-19, 14:1-5, 19:1-8).

It seems to me that something of this reality is missing in Protestant worship. The transcendent dimension is forgotten, practices being largely shaped by the post-Enlightenment world, the focus the felt needs of the congregants.

### *The limitations of the visual*

The turn taken at the time of Gregory of Nyssa was unfortunate. What is missed is that God's primary appeal to humanity, as Calvin wrote, comes more through the ears than the eyes.<sup>28</sup> Thus, Moses emphasised to Israel that at Sinai "you heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice" (Deut 4:11-12). While, uniquely, a form was to be seen in the incarnation, yet God continues to communicate with humanity and his church through words, read or preached. Thus, Paul urges the need for preachers to be sent in order to declare the message of the gospel (Rom 10:14-17). Elsewhere I have drawn attention to the point that the declaration of the word of God in preaching by those lawfully called is the word of God (Rom 10:14, Eph 2:17, *Second Helvetic Confession*, 1).<sup>29</sup>

A claim has often been made that worship must relate to all aspects of the human being, not just the mind. Clowney exposes this fallacy with a *reductio ad absurdum*. It was Canaanite religion that had this as its premise. Worship of these deities engaged the full range of human passions, most obviously the sexual, with cult prostitutes abounding. If this were a true and valid approach to worship, beds should be made available in the church building, with sexual activity incorporated into the liturgy.<sup>30</sup>

T. F. Torrance, in commenting on Calvin, underlines the hermeneutical breakthrough he and other Reformers made in rooting the knowledge of God in the auditory, rather than visual, realm. Medieval Western theology was preoccupied with the essence and existence of God. Metaphysical speculation was the order of the day. Essentially, the main question for medieval

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<sup>28</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on Exodus*, 33:19: CO 25:108.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Letham, "The Authority of Preaching", *Baptist Reformation Review* 3, no. 4 (1974): 21-29; *idem*, "The Necessity of Preaching in the Modern World; Part 2" *Ordained Servant Online*, November 2013, accessible at [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=387](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=387)

<sup>30</sup> Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 125-26.

scientific enquiry was *quid sit* (what is it? referring to the essence of God)? At the root was the primacy of vision as a means of knowledge. Since God in his essence cannot be seen, a bifurcation developed between intuitive knowledge of God (face to face cognition of his essence as it is in itself), impossible in this life, and abstractive knowledge (logical and linguistic statements about God through contemplation of his effects in the created world). Thus, the faithful were left with the pronouncements of the church or its representatives. Direct personal knowledge of God was ultimately possible only beyond the present age. Calvin resolved this dilemma, Torrance continued, crystallising Reformation teaching, with profound effects for faith and assurance. He effects a shift in the basis of knowledge of God from vision to hearing. Consequently, direct auditive, intuitive knowledge of God is possible as God reveals himself in his word by his Spirit. The Spirit, as God confronting man, is God speaking to us in his own person. Calvin's doctrine of the *testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti*, giving us evident intuitive knowledge of God and resolving the seemingly unbridgeable gulf between intuitive and abstractive knowledge, demands a new question as the start of theological enquiry. This new question, *qualis sit?* (of what sort is it?) presupposes a start with actuality and not with abstract essence or with the possibility of existence.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, God does not leave visual elements aside. He has provided the sacraments, the Lord's Supper being "a kind of visible word of God",<sup>32</sup> while the Word has priority, creating the sacrament, and both establishing and expounding it.

In the sacraments the gospel is proclaimed before our very eyes. In baptism there is a washing – "rise and be baptised and wash away your sins" (Acts 22:16). In the Eucharist there is giving of thanks, there the broken body and blood of our Lord is paraded before us as we feed on Christ by the Holy Spirit. The evidence is that on the first day of the week the apostolic church was accustomed to meet precisely for the purpose of breaking bread, of observing the Supper, of participating in the body and blood of Christ (Acts 20:7, 1 Cor 10:16-17, 11:18-20).

If the gospel is so clearly proclaimed in the sacraments, why have evangelical churches neglected them to the point of having the Lord's Supper only occasionally, in some cases requiring special admission tickets? Why have evangelical declarations of faith been so anxious to claim that nothing happens in them? A widely accepted statement of faith asserts that baptism

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, "Intuitive and Abstractive Knowledge: From Duns Scotus to John Calvin", in *De Doctrina Ioannis Duns Scoti: Acta Congressus Scotistici Internationalis Oxonii et Edimburgi 11-17 Sept. 1966 Celebrati* (Romae: Curae Commissionis Scotisticae, 1968), 4:291-305. See, Thomas F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988).

<sup>32</sup> Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 80:3; *PL*, 35:1840; *NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 7:344.

does not impart spiritual life and the Eucharist involves no change in the bread and wine. While both statements are correct the overall definition expresses what the sacraments purportedly do not do.

In evangelicalism the sacraments have been sidelined. Possibly out of a reaction to the Oxford Movement, a predominantly Zwinglian or anabaptist mentality developed in which baptism was a symbol of something that had already occurred elsewhere but was not a vehicle through which the Spirit conveyed grace. What a contrast to John Knox!<sup>33</sup> A dualistic division between “water baptism” and “Spirit baptism” became commonplace.

Similarly, the Lord’s Supper was considered simply as a memorial – not in the sense of the OT memorials that marked epochal redemptive events but rather as an introspective trip down memory lane. All was seen as purely symbolic. Evangelical statements of faith today frequently deny that anything happens in the sacraments (not that they are ever called sacraments – that would be too much like Rome, wouldn’t it?). In short, evangelicalism is basically reactive.

This downgrading of the sacraments has encouraged the idea that there is nothing special in the worship of the church that is not found elsewhere, so that the whole of life is to be understood as worship. In some circles, the church does not meet for worship but for instruction and fellowship, activities on a purely horizontal level. However, the sacraments are integral to, and distinctive of, the life of the church. In Jesus’ parting instructions to the apostles about their task of discipling the nations, baptism comes first (Matt 28:19-20). The Reformers and Puritans, and the confessions that they produced, all recognised the efficacy of the sacraments, an efficacy given by the Holy Spirit; this is distinctive *and is not found outside the church or its worship*.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The *Scots Confession*, composed by John Knox in 1560, Article 21, asserts that the sacraments are instituted to “seill in their hearts the assurance of his promise, and of that most blessed conjunction, union, and societie, quhilk the elect have with their head Christ Jesus. And this we utterlie damne the vanitie of thay that affirme Sacramentes to be nathing ellis bot naked and baire signes. No, wee assuredlie beleewe that be Baptisme we ar ingrafted in Christ Jesus, to be made partakers of his justice, be quhilk our sinnes ar covered and remitted”. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966), 3:467-70.

<sup>34</sup> Iain H. Murray, in his two-volume biography of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, does not even mention whether or when Lloyd-Jones was baptised. This is astonishing, given that Murray regards his subject as the greatest preacher of the twentieth century and that Jesus’ first command to the church in making the nations disciples is by baptism. Further, the entire history of the Christian church stands in opposition to Vaughan Roberts, in his dismissive reduction of the worship of the church by the phrase “Christian meetings” and his assertion that worship is to be understood of the whole of life; see Vaughan Roberts, *True Worship* (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2012). At best this is a misleading confusion of categories. I am indebted to Dr. Pete Sanlon for directing me to the book by Roberts.



### III. *The auditive parts of worship*

#### 1. *Preaching*

In *De doctrina Christiana*, one of the great classics of the church, Augustine discusses principles of biblical interpretation, how to exegete Scripture and its main focus on Christ and love. In Book 4 he moves on to consider preaching.

Augustine argues that part of the preacher's task is to delight. It is not the only part or even the most important part but it is nonetheless integral. The duty of the Christian teacher is "both to teach what is right and refute what is wrong... to conciliate the hostile, to rouse the careless, and to tell the ignorant both what is occurring at present and what is probable in the future".<sup>35</sup> But the sacred writers unite eloquence with wisdom,<sup>36</sup> Augustine citing a range of biblical examples.<sup>37</sup> The first priority is clarity, for expositors "ought in all their deliverances to make it their first and chief aim to be understood".<sup>38</sup> Hence, a clear style is imperative: "He... who teaches will avoid all words that do not teach". This is especially so, since in a public speech it is neither customary nor appropriate for listeners to ask questions, unlike in private conversation.<sup>39</sup> True eloquence consists in making clear what is obscure.<sup>40</sup> Clear and accurate teaching is foundational.

Augustine cites Cicero on the aim of the orator and applies it to preaching: "An eloquent man must speak so as to teach, to delight and to persuade.... To teach is a necessity, to delight is a beauty, to persuade is a triumph (*probare, necessitas est; delectare, suavitatis; flectere, victoria*)."<sup>41</sup> *Probare, delectare, flectere*, to teach, to delight, to persuade: these are the tasks of the preacher. The hearer must be pleased, in order to secure his attention, and persuaded in order to move him to action. "The eloquent divine... must not only teach so as to give instruction, and please so as to keep up the attention, but he must also sway the mind so as to subdue the will."<sup>42</sup>

When push comes to shove, to teach is a necessity but to delight and to persuade is not. Indeed, when it is clearly proclaimed, the truth itself gives pleasure because it is the truth.<sup>43</sup> But it cannot be heard with pleasure

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<sup>35</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 4:4:6; *NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 2:576.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:6:9; *NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 2:577.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:7:11–4:7:21; *NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 2:577–81.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:8:22; *NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 2:581.

<sup>39</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 4:10:24; *NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 2:582.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:11:26; *NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 2:583.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:12:27; *NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 2:583.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:13:29; *NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 2:584.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:12:28; *NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 2:583.

without eloquence.<sup>44</sup> All this assumes that prayer is most important, as is the life of the speaker:<sup>45</sup>

To speak eloquently, then, is just to express truths which it is expedient to teach in fit and proper words – words which in the subdued style are adequate, in the temperate, elegant, and in the majestic, forcible. But the man who cannot speak both eloquently and wisely should speak wisely without eloquence, rather than eloquently without wisdom.<sup>46</sup>

Given the prime necessity to teach the word of God with accuracy and clarity, next in order of priority is to do so in a way that delights, that is attractive and pleasing, while being true to what is taught. In the nineteenth century, in the age of pulpit orators, this element was overdone. In our day, possibly in fear of breaching these limits, there has been a retreat into the banal. Command of language is essential to be able to delight one's congregation in the way Augustine suggests. It is necessary to maintain the focus of the listener at a time of decreasing attention spans. Reading classic English prose, grasping, as Churchill put it, "the essential structure of the ordinary British sentence – which is a noble thing"<sup>47</sup> should be the aim of every preacher; familiarity with writings that are clear, lucid, and elegant should assist in this endeavour.

## 2. *Prayer*

This question of delight is needed also in public prayer. Here the legacy of the nineteenth century is still with us, with Spurgeon's strictures about a preacher who was supposed to have composed "the most eloquent [prayer] ever offered to a Boston congregation" still ringing in the ear.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, leading the congregation in prayer requires the ability to retain its attention and, prior to that, the mastery of language. This is not a private prayer. It is not merely a prayer as such. The question of its being offered in faith and its acceptability to God is at this point on one side. At stake is the vocalising of prayer in which the whole congregation can participate. For this, it must engage the people, delighting them so that it becomes not merely the preacher's prayer but their own or, as William Perkins wrote, "expressing the prayer so that it is made in public in a way that is edifying for the congregation".<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 4:14:30; NPNF<sup>1</sup> 2:584.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:27:59; NPNF<sup>1</sup> 2:595.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:28:61; NPNF<sup>1</sup> 2:596.

<sup>47</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *Roving Commission: My Early Years* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), 17.

<sup>48</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1900), 1:56.

<sup>49</sup> William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying with the Calling of the Ministry* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996), 78.

My experience of being in a congregation in Cambridge, *sans* minister, in 1977-78, has shaped my subsequent outlook pervasively. The entire pantheon of conservative evangelical ministers was on display, from that preacher than whom none greater can be thought, down to the merest tyro, myself. I considered myself to be reasonably intelligent and, as an opening batsman, with a good level of concentration. However, I discovered that after about one minute of the minister's congregational prayer my mind shut down. Some might allege that I was extremely backslidden and have continued in that unhappy state ever since; however, I concluded there must be something substantial to it. Either few preachers have sufficient command of language to hold the attention of a congregation for a length of time while they pray, *without the eye contact so important in preaching*, or the practice of long prayers composed by an individual is deeply flawed, or both. Either way there was precious little of *delectare* and so even less of *flectere*.

It was this, among other things, that led me back to Reformation worship. Whereas I could not remember a single phrase from anyone I ever heard who prayed such prayers, yet the prayers of Thomas Cranmer are printed indelibly on my memory and on those of a countless multitude. When we are at a loss of what to say in prayer, they come to our aid. When we need to repent, God says through Hosea "take with you words and return to the Lord" (Hos 14:2). The Reformation liturgies give us words; the Psalms are even better.<sup>50</sup>

The absence of *delectatio* is also notable in most evangelical worship in that it is thoroughly sacerdotal, far more than the Roman church ever was. In conservative evangelicalism the minister is a priest. He prays on behalf of the people, confesses sins on behalf of the people, the people listening, passive. There is no congregational participation beyond this, no opportunity for the members of the church to join in the public confession of sins; the priest does it for them. Conservative evangelical worship deprives the congregation of their right to confess their sins.

Moreover, conservative evangelical worship frequently deprives the congregation of its right to hear the pronouncement of the absolution of sins. What could incite *delectatio* more than this? According to William Perkins, this is one of the main tasks God has given to the ministry – the preaching of the Word, administration of the sacraments, and the pronouncement of the absolution of sins.<sup>51</sup> Sinclair Ferguson affirms that Perkins "insists... that it is the distinctive privilege of the minister of the gospel to pronounce the forgiveness of sins".<sup>52</sup> What a delight, what an aesthetic delight, what *delectatio*, it is to hear from the pulpit that one's sins are forgiven. Yet many

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<sup>50</sup> See Jonathan Gibson and Mark Earngey, eds., *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present* (Greensboro, N.C.: New Growth Press, 2018), 684pp.

<sup>51</sup> Perkins, *Art of Prophesying*, 102-14.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv-xv.

have gone years, even a lifetime, without this. Some have joined the stampede to the counsellor's office or the psychiatrist's couch. If you are a minister *of the gospel* this should be a matter for concern.

Sometimes, to stress the alleged superiority of personal piety, the minister prays with fervour. He is then performing his private devotions in public, with the congregation as spiritual voyeurs. This crosses the boundary between the individual and the corporate. A congregation cannot meaningfully participate in a prayer peculiar to the individual praying it, with passion and emotion of his own; they of necessity become observers, or auditors.

In contrast, Cranmer's liturgy has a theological richness with a brilliant understanding of the beauty and cadences of the English language. We remarked on Hosea 14:2 – in repentance “take with you words and return to the Lord”. The *Book of Common Prayer* gives people the words to use when they are unable to vocalise them for themselves. If you are a minister, how many can remember a single prayer you have made from the pulpit? If you are regularly in the congregation, how many such prayers can you recall?

The practice of most conservative evangelical churches rests on a basic fallacy. It assumes that faith and spontaneity go together, with the formal inevitably linked with the perfunctory.<sup>53</sup> That this is erroneous is evident from the Psalms. Here we have written prayers and thanksgivings that were used in corporate worship settings. If the premise above is accepted then we should remove the Psalms from the canon of Scripture, abandon hymn books, compose on the spot (word and music), and not prepare sermons. Indeed, the assumption owes much to the inwardness of Descartes and the individualism of the Enlightenment.

The Westminster divines were not opposed to liturgies. The *Directory for the Publick Worship of God* contains many set prayers. They are given for the start of the service, before the sermon, after the sermon, before baptism, exhortations to the parents of the child to be baptised, prayer after the baptism, for blessing the bread and wine in the communion, after communion, and at the visitation of the sick.<sup>54</sup> Even John Owen was not opposed to liturgies; it was the imposition of a fixed liturgy by the civil authorities together with draconian penalties for infringing it that was the problem.<sup>55</sup> I am not suggesting that individually compiled prayers should be abandoned; rather there is scope for both and both should be used. However,

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<sup>53</sup> See Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:53-55.

<sup>54</sup> *The Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms with the Scripture Proofs at Large, Together with The Sum of Saving Knowledge* (Applecross: The Publications Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1970), 369-94.

<sup>55</sup> John Owen, *A Discourse Concerning Liturgies, and Their Imposition [1662]* [The Works of John Owen; William H. Goold; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1972], 15:33.

they should be short or, when longer, broken into segments so that the whole congregation can participate in and with them.

### 3. *Music*

Music provides an extra dimension to worship that lifts it above the merely prosaic. Here *delectatio* comes prominently into play, viewed in an appropriate way. Not that Clement of Alexandria thought so. Impacted by his Platonism, of which he was among the most affected, he had a strongly ascetic outlook, with a negative attitude to music and even to laughter.<sup>56</sup> Clearly there was little interest with Clement in worship as a delight. Of the Reformers, Zwingli was notably hostile to music in church worship. In his case he was profoundly influenced by neo-Platonism, which found expression in his sacramental theology and his inability to see how God could use material means to transmit spiritual blessings.<sup>57</sup> In both cases, forms of ontological dualism were at work, with implications to which we will refer later. In contrast, both Augustine and Calvin had a positive appreciation for the place music could occupy in assisting the worship of the church.

#### i) Basil

Basil had an appreciation for music in worship. He stresses the need for faith and sincerity but also harmonious singing. Both spiritual and musical qualities go together to enhance the worship of the congregation. Thus, in his Sermon on Psalm 29 (LXX),<sup>58</sup> commenting on verse 1, he compares the body to a harp, and to instruments adapted to sing hymns harmoniously to God. When there is nothing out of tune in our actions it is like a psalm: "Wherever lofty contemplation and theology are joined together, so the word of the psalm is music, when the instrument is played harmoniously."<sup>59</sup> Again, "A psalm is a musical word, when the instrument plays it harmoniously and according to the appropriate words".<sup>60</sup> In preaching on verse 5 he says,

Not that anyone by the mouth produces the words of the psalm so as to sing to the Lord, but whoever offers up the singing of psalms from a pure heart, and whoever is holy, maintaining righteousness in respect to God, these are able to sing psalms to God, harmonising fittingly spiritual realities.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 7:6; *ANE* 2:532.

<sup>57</sup> W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 180-93 Robert Letham, "Baptism in the Writings of the Reformers", *SBET* 7, no. 2 (Autumn 1989): 21-44, here 31-34.

<sup>58</sup> J.P. Migne, et.al., eds. *Patrologia cursus completus: Series graeca*. Paris, 1857-1866, 29:209-404. [PG]

<sup>59</sup> See the Greek text, *PG*, 29:305.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *PG*, 29:311.

Later, on verse 7, he remarks that every soul is beautiful who contemplates the truth, and is reconciled by the grace of God, with souls purified. So we begin to take on its radiance, “whence Moses, by participation in that beauty in speaking with God, his face was glorified”.<sup>62</sup> Clearly, Basil had an appreciation for music and its relationship to worship.<sup>63</sup>

## ii) Augustine

However, the most thorough treatment of music among the Fathers is by Augustine. He reflected on his own experience in the church at Milan, where Ambrose was bishop:

How greatly did I weep in thy hymns and canticles, deeply moved by the voices of thy sweet-speaking church! The voices flowed into my ears, and the truth was poured forth into my heart.<sup>64</sup>

Commenting in general on the practice of singing in the worship of the church, he wrote,

it was instituted that, after the manner of the Eastern church, hymns and psalms should be sung... which custom, retained from then until now, is imitated by many, yea, by almost all of thy congregations throughout the world.<sup>65</sup>

On his own practice and his attitude to singing in the church, he felt the danger of focusing on its beauty rather than its content:

Notwithstanding, when I call to mind the tears I shed at the songs of thy church... and how even now I am moved not by the singing but by what is sung, when they are sung with a clear and skilfully modulated voice, then I acknowledge the great utility of this custom.<sup>66</sup>

Augustine’s early works, *De ordine* and *De musica*, develop his ideas at some length, although there is much also in his sermons, *The City of God*, and the *Confessions*. In *The City of God* he has an extensive section expounding the beauty of creation as a gift of God.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, Augustine has a healthy attitude to beauty in creation; he sees it as exhibiting the lavish gifts of God. He

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<sup>62</sup> PG, 29:317.

<sup>63</sup> See Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: Volume 2: The Patristic Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 2:38-42, 229-30.

<sup>64</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 9:6:14; NPNF<sup>1</sup> 1:134, PL 32:770.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 9:7:15; NPNF<sup>1</sup> 1:134, PL 32:770.

<sup>66</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 10:23:50; NPNF<sup>1</sup> 1:156, PL 32:800.

<sup>67</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, 22:24:, cited in Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 329.

describes God as *largitor* (lavisher of gifts), showing benign liberality.<sup>68</sup> He remarks in Sermon 88.15 on the exceptional beauty of the women of the earthly city.<sup>69</sup>

Music, Augustine comments, is similar to grammar but distinguished from it by the number and especially variety of its individual sounds, making music much more susceptible to memory.<sup>70</sup> What is joined by the ear voluptuously remains perpetually.<sup>71</sup> This connects with his comments in *De doctrina Christiana* on *delectatio* in preaching. Aesthetic quality enables memory and so, in preaching and worship, assists in its long-term impact.

Augustine has a positive view of music, its harmony, variety, connections and movement: “what wealth of song is there to captivate the ear! how many musical instruments and strains of harmony have been devised!”<sup>72</sup> It is the science of good pitch and rhythm (*musica est scientia bene modulandi*)<sup>73</sup> and good movement, with inherent dynamism (*bene movendi*).<sup>74</sup> In fact, Augustine’s theoretical discussion in these early works was to underlie the theory of Western music for well over a millennium. Music displays connections, with both rhythmic and metric continuity. A *versus* – a cogent, deliberate, fashioned block of musical material – is formed of parts, the totality accommodating and connecting divisions and so “establishing through beauty a concordant parallelism”.<sup>75</sup> Music establishes connections of individual moments within time.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, “rhythmic pattern is an outward access to internal intrinsic emotional substance”, and it is the “intrinsic emotional material [that] is responsible for music’s profound effect on the listener”.<sup>77</sup>

This leads to a consideration of how Augustine understands beauty in music. In *De ordine*, he argues that the successful placing together of constructive units is *suavitas* (beauty). This consists both of a purely flowing rhythm and also a pleasant pitch.<sup>78</sup> This careful construction of a musical unit is necessary since God is not to be believed or sought after in a

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<sup>68</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, 19:13; *NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 2:410; *PL*, 41:640-42.

<sup>69</sup> Brown, *Augustine*, 325-26.

<sup>70</sup> Nancy Van Deusen, in Allan D. Fitzgerald, *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 572.

<sup>71</sup> Fitzgerald, *Augustine*, 573.

<sup>72</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, 22:24; *NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 2:503.

<sup>73</sup> Augustine, *De Musica*, 1:2:2; *PL*, 32:1083.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:3:4; *PL*, 32:1085.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:3; *PL*, 32:1148; see Fitzgerald, *Augustine*, 573.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:2; *PL*, 32:1100-1101.

<sup>77</sup> Fitzgerald, *Augustine*, 573.

<sup>78</sup> “Quod vero ad aures, quando rationalem concentum dicimus, cantumque numerosum rationabiliter esse compositum; suavitas vocatur proprio iam nomine. Sed neque in pulchris rebus cum nos color illicit, neque in aurium suavitate cum pulsa chorda quasi liquide sonat atque pure, rationabile illud dicere solemus. Restat ergo ut in istorum sensuum voluptate id ad rationem pertinere fateamur, ubi quaedam dimensio est atque modulatio.” Augustine, *De Ordine*, 2:11; *PL*, 32:1010.

haphazard manner but in a disciplined and contemplated way.<sup>79</sup> There is therefore a connection in Augustine's thought between music and the gospel, reflected in faith.

Music is sonorous substance within motion and time. Because of its immensely varied possibilities its beauty is remembered. "What is sweeter to us is clearer (*illa nobis dulcior, ista clarior*)", he writes,<sup>80</sup> which we saw was a major theme in his theology of preaching. Again, in *De musica* he repeatedly states that whatever is delectable commends itself to the memory.

*De musica* deals with issues of particularity, connection, order and time. These realities – order and variety, unity and diversity, structure and continuity, beauty, teleology – are all inherent to the creation and thus revelatory of God. They are all present in redemptive history. Indeed, harmony – the combination of multiple notes at the same time, performed in sequence – distinguishes Western music from other cultures.<sup>81</sup> I have argued elsewhere that this distinctiveness arose in a culture permeated by the Christian faith and is an outflow of the unity in diversity of God's creation, which in turn reflects the character of its maker.<sup>82</sup> Music thus expresses in a beautiful and memorable way, *if done well*, the heart of creation and re-creation.<sup>83</sup> "Music is the science of connections" (*musica scientia bene modulandi*) and is related to beauty, desirability and attraction throughout. As such it is analogously reflective of the beauty of God, delectable, hence memorable, "when properly undertaken".<sup>84</sup> In this, rhythm is the main focus of *De musica*, patterns within metre rather than tonal intervals. This is so, once again, when it is done well for "*Unde aliud est modulari, aliud bene modulari*".<sup>85</sup>

In reality, only a very small fraction of the work of classic hymnwriters was ever sung in church worship. In contrast, a vastly higher proportion of recent compositions (I am not including those by such as Timothy Dudley-Smith) are regularly sung, with accompaniment that never remotely threatens to reach the dizzying heights of mediocrity.<sup>86</sup> Many have an emotionally manipulative "hook", including some of the most commonly

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<sup>79</sup> Augustine, *De Ordine*, 2:16; *PL*, 32:1015.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:17; *PL*, 32:1017.

<sup>81</sup> Stefan Kostka and Dorothy Payne, *Tonal Harmony: with an Introduction to Twentieth-Century Music* (4<sup>th</sup> edition; Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2000), xi.

<sup>82</sup> Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity; In Scripture, History, Theology and Worship* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2004), 437-39.

<sup>83</sup> Fitzgerald, *Augustine*, 575.

<sup>84</sup> Augustine, *De Musica*, 1:4:5; *PL*, 32:1085.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:3:4; *PL*, 32:1085.

<sup>86</sup> Isaac Watts composed 750 hymns, 39 of which are listed in the *Trinity Hymnal*, 95% not used. Charles Wesley wrote 6,000 hymns, of which only 21 are in the *Trinity Hymnal*, 99.7% not used, probably because every one he wrote was a full-blooded attack on the Reformed faith.



sung. Meanwhile, many congregations mumble or else practise full-throttle bawling irrespective of the nature of the words.

### iii) Calvin

Calvin, like Augustine, appreciated natural beauty and understood it as a provision of God for us:

Has the Lord clothed the flowers with the great beauty that greets our eyes, and sweetness of smell that is wafted upon our nostrils, and yet will it be unlawful for our eyes to be affected by that beauty, or our sense of smell by the sweetness of that odour? What? Did he not so distinguish colours as to make some more lovely than others? What? ... Did he not, in short, render many things attractive to us, apart from their necessary use?<sup>87</sup>

In particular, music and the arts are excellent gifts of the Lord, indicative of the riches of his favour. The harp and other instruments minister to our pleasure, rather than our necessity, but they are not superfluous. Music can be adapted to religion if it is freed from foolish delight.<sup>88</sup>

In the church, Calvin says, voice and song must spring from the heart or it has no value or profit with God. He strongly commended it. It exercises the mind and heart and keeps us attentive. The tongue was designed for this. Music was created to proclaim the praises of God, mainly through the assembly of believers.<sup>89</sup> Singing was an ancient practice going back to the apostles. In it the godly mutually edify one another. Singing, with gravity, lends dignity and praise, kindles our hearts to an eagerness to pray. Our ears should be more attentive to the meaning of the words than to the melody. It is a holy and salutary practice.<sup>90</sup>

In his commentary on Amos 5:21-24 Calvin says nothing against musical instruments in worship or the writing of Christian hymns apart from the psalms. Old remarks, "If Calvin were as much opposed to the use of an organ and Christian hymns as we are sometimes told, surely this would have been the place to have made this opposition clear."<sup>91</sup>

### iv) The Westminster Confession of Faith

When the Confession refers to the singing of psalms (*WCF*, 21:5), it is unquestioned that it has in mind the Psalms of David. However, does it

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<sup>87</sup> Calvin, *Institute*, 3:10:2.

<sup>88</sup> Calvin, *Genesis*, on Gen 4:20.

<sup>89</sup> Calvin, *Institute*, 3:20:31.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:20:32.

<sup>91</sup> Hughes Oliphant Old, "John Calvin and the Prophetic Criticism of Worship", in *John Calvin and the Church: A Prism of Reform* (Timothy George; Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1990), 230-46, here 233.

require us to hold that it believed only these should be sung in the worship of the church? Or was this simply a reflection that these were the staple diet of the Church of England at the time? In short, is this prescriptive or purely descriptive? If the former, how are we to understand what the Assembly meant by “psalms”?

Nick Needham has presented evidence to establish that the Assembly did not restrict itself to the Psalms of David when it mentioned “psalms” in the Confession.<sup>92</sup> Of course, it regarded the Psalter as the backbone of the singing of the church; there was much debate on the production of a suitable Psalter. Needham presents comprehensive evidence to show the widespread acceptance in the Reformed churches of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of songs other than the Davidic Psalms, although the latter provided the main diet in song. He concludes that “there is abundant evidence that in 17th century English, the word ‘psalm’ often meant simply a religious song”.<sup>93</sup> The verb *psallo* meant to pluck or twang, referring to a song sung to stringed musical accompaniment.<sup>94</sup> He unearths evidence from Richard Baxter, Zwingli and Bullinger, Calvin, and the French, German and Dutch Reformed churches, concluding that “the pattern of sung worship in the Continental Reformed Churches, then, does not fit into an exclusive psalmodist framework”.<sup>95</sup> The English Protestants in Geneva were not opposed to singing other Scriptural passages in worship, while the standard English Psalter by Sternhold and Hopkins contained a considerably greater number of non-Davidic songs and was definitive until 1696.<sup>96</sup>

While in Scotland, exclusive psalm singing was the rule, its existence does not prove the Scots were opposed in principle to non-Davidic compositions.<sup>97</sup> Indeed, before the Assembly the Scots used the *Gloria patri* but were required to desist by the Puritans.<sup>98</sup> Thus, Needham considers “the weight of evidence decisively favours interpreting *WCF* 21:5 as referring to a broader category of song than the Davidic psalter”.<sup>99</sup> On the other hand, the Assembly is silent about instrumental worship.<sup>100</sup> Parliament decreed on 9 May 1644 that all ecclesiastical organs be destroyed, in keeping with the Reformed churches’ belief that instrumental worship belonged to the Mosaic

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<sup>92</sup> Nick Needham, “Westminster and Worship: Psalms, Hymns? and Musical Instruments?” in *The Westminster Confession Into the 21st Century* (J. L. Duncan III; Fearn: Mentor, 2005), 223-306.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 250-51.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 252-60.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 260-63.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

covenant.<sup>101</sup> However, the *Annotations* refer “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” to three different things, with *psallo* explained as a song plucked with stringed instruments!

Behind this question is the interpretation of the Reformed regulative principle. This is the claim that church worship should consist of only what the Bible requires, in contrast to the Lutheran and Anglican position of anything that the Bible does not prohibit. This is a reason why the church does not make provision for sexual union in worship, unlike in many other religions.<sup>102</sup> However, the principle must be understood in terms of the doctrine of Scripture, for “God’s revealed will” (*WCF* 21:1) includes not only what is “expressly set down in Scripture” but also “what by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture” (*WCF* 1:6). At the time of the Westminster Assembly it was a liberative principle rather than a restrictive one.<sup>103</sup> That the regulative principle cannot possibly be understood to require explicit proof texts for worship items is evident insofar as the principle itself has no explicit text to support it.

#### v) Cardinal Ratzinger (Benedict XVI)

Where better to end a paper at the Affinity Conference than with a pope?! Ratzinger points to the capacity of music to express in wordless forms what cannot be expressed otherwise. In particular, it is a response to God that emerges spontaneously: “When man comes into contact with God, mere speech is not enough. Areas of his existence are awakened that spontaneously turn into song.”<sup>104</sup> Since a definitive new thing has happened in the resurrection of Christ, a new song emerges.<sup>105</sup>

Ratzinger continues, “The book of the Psalms is the proper source for us to rely on” for it indicates the richness of the instruments and different kinds of singing, even though it lacks musical notation and cannot be reconstructed. “The whole of human life is reflected here, as it is unfolded in dialogue with God.” It is “nourished out of the common store of God’s saving deeds in the past”. Indeed, the psalter is “the prayer book of the infant church”.<sup>106</sup> It is clear that David in the Holy Spirit prays through and with the Son of God:

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<sup>101</sup> Needham, “Westminster and Worship”, 291.

<sup>102</sup> Clowney, *The Church*, 126.

<sup>103</sup> Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2009), 300-310.

<sup>104</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (John Saward; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 136.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

The Holy Spirit, who had inspired David to sing and to pray, moves him to speak of Christ, indeed causes him to become the very mouth of Christ, thus enabling us in the Psalms to speak through Christ, in the Holy Spirit, to the Father.<sup>107</sup>

This includes music. Church music is “a gift of the Spirit, the true *glossolalia*”.<sup>108</sup> Ratzinger has a trinitarian interpretation of church music.

The word used in the Psalms for singing denotes singing supported by instruments, probably strings, the words related to a text. It is a speech song allowing melodic changes only at the start and the end. The LXX translated *zamir* by *psallo*, meaning to pluck, referring to the stringed instruments. It is ordered artistic singing.<sup>109</sup> Biblical faith created a culture appropriate to its inner nature.<sup>110</sup> New Christian hymns and canticles were composed – the Benedictus, the Magnificat, texts such as John 1:1-18, Philippians 2:6-11, 1 Timothy 3:16 and the like.<sup>111</sup> Pliny, shortly after 100AD refers to the church singing hymns to Christ as God.

Over the centuries various problems arose in relation to church music. Platonic mysticism gained ground, forcing the church, in the 59th Canon of the Council of Laodicea to forbid “the use of privately composed psalms and non-canonical writings in divine worship”. The 15th canon restricted singing to the choir – “other people in church should not sing”. This was necessary at the time but it was restrictive, following a synagogue form.<sup>112</sup> In the East, the church kept strictly to vocal music. The West developed psalm singing, in Gregorian chant, “which set a permanent standard for sacred music”. Polyphony developed in the late Middle Ages. Musical instruments returned. The connection of church music with ordinary music grew. Artistic freedom developed. Tunes were borrowed from the wider world, often from the popular level. Music was no longer developing out of prayer, and was moving away from the liturgy.<sup>113</sup> The Council of Trent intervened – “liturgical music should be at the service of the Word, the use of instruments was substantially reduced; and the difference between sacred and secular music was clearly affirmed”.<sup>114</sup>

Pius X, at the turn of the twentieth century, also intervened. The music of Bach and Mozart in church “reached such a high point in this period of cultural history, to the glorifying of God” that “we have a sense in either case of what *gloria Dei*, the glory of God, means. The mystery of infinite beauty is there”. But there were dangers. Subjective experience was held in check by

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<sup>107</sup> Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 140.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 142-43.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

the order of the musical universe “reflecting as it does the order of the divine creation itself”. But the threat of the virtuoso mentality was always at hand. The nineteenth century was the century of self-emancipating subjectivity, obscuring the sacred by the operatic. Pius X tried to remove the operatic from the liturgy and “declared Gregorian chant and the great polyphony of the age of the Catholic Reformation... to be the standard for liturgical music”. In this, he made a distinction between liturgical music and religious music.<sup>115</sup>

The cultural revolution of recent decades has led to a cultural universalisation that needs to be done if the church is to go beyond the boundaries of the European mind. Parallel developments in music in the West have forced classical music into an élitist ghetto which only specialists may enter. In contrast, the music of the masses has become “a cult of the banal”, Ratzinger contends. Rock music is an expression of elemental passions, opposed to Christian worship.<sup>116</sup>

The music of Christian worship is related to the events of God’s saving action to which the Bible bears witness and the liturgy makes present. The gift of singing and playing before God is from the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the Word leads us out of individualism into the communion of the saints: Christian liturgy is a cosmic liturgy.<sup>117</sup>

Ratzinger refers back to Augustine’s classic discussion in *De musica*. The beauty of music depends on its conformity to the rhythmic and harmonic laws of the universe which reflect the mind of its maker.<sup>118</sup> For Christians, at its deepest level, it reflects the mind of the creator – “the Father, the Logos, and the Pneuma” for “the Logos himself is the great artist, in whom all works of art – the beauty of the universe – have their origin”.<sup>119</sup>

In contrast, Hegel interpreted music as the expression of the subject and of subjectivity – what it does for me: a matter of personal taste – whereas Schopenhauer saw it as the pure expression of human will that creates the world, prior to reason, so that music should not be connected to the word.<sup>120</sup> This turns Christianity upside down.

This, may I suggest, is the mindset that has come to affect evangelicalism. The focus has been on catering to the surrounding culture. Worship has been made the servant of evangelism. Personal taste has become a criterion. A subjective view of music – “what it does for me” – rules. Recent popular church music carries a manipulative, emotional hook drawn from the world of popular culture. The objectivity of music, its rootedness in creation, tonality based in physics by related patterns of sound waves, its structure

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<sup>115</sup> Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 147.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 147-48.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 148-51.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 152-53.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

combining unity and particularity, the one and the many, its modulations and contrapuntalism, rhythm, metre, harmony and pitch echoing the variety that God has set in the midst of order, its teleological orientation, is not considered a significant datum. Over against this, the impact of trinitarianism on the musical culture in which the Christian faith became rooted was to bring to the surface its variety and depth. Ratzinger's comment is pertinent: "The cosmic character of liturgical music stands in opposition to the two tendencies of the modern age" – music as pure subjectivity, or as an expression of will.<sup>121</sup> Transcendence, in contrast to the cult of the banal, is the appropriate goal, which reflects in measure the innate harmonic and rhythmic character of the universe God has made and, beyond that, the flow of redemptive history.

"What is sweeter to us is clearer", Augustine wrote. Has the neglect of *delectatio* in Reformed and evangelical circles muted the gospel? Has its studied indifference to beauty cast a veil over the nature of God? Furthermore, if God has made us in such a manner that we see and understand more clearly the more attractive the preaching and the liturgy, does our neglect indicate a deficient anthropology, a radical separation between God and creation<sup>122</sup> that breeds an inadequate appreciation of the incarnation? *Lex credendi lex statuit supplicandi*, Prosper of Aquitaine wrote, in what became an axiom – the rule of faith establishes the rule of prayer. The way we worship is indicative of what we believe.

*Note: The views expressed in this article are entirely those of the author and do not necessarily represent the position of any other person or institution. In turn, this statement is entirely the initiative of the author.*

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<sup>121</sup> Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 155.

<sup>122</sup> I am again indebted to Dr. Pete Sanlon for suggesting these consequences.

# TUNING THE HEART: A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE AFFECTIONS IN CORPORATE WORSHIP, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO JONATHAN EDWARDS

*Graham Beynon*<sup>\*</sup>

## *Introduction*

The title of this paper promises rather more than it will deliver. The history of corporate worship is a vast topic spanning not only twenty centuries but different countries and cultures, and numerous church groups and denominations. We could explore everything from Greek Orthodox to Brethren worship, High Anglicanism in England to Pentecostalism in South America, John Calvin's reformed liturgy to John Wesley's class meetings. This we cannot attempt.<sup>1</sup> Instead there will be some "soundings" from a very limited number of sources through history, followed by a more in-depth analysis based on Jonathan Edwards.

We should also acknowledge the complexity of the issues involved in this topic. Affections within corporate worship includes an understanding of corporate worship itself, anthropology and the affections in general, the work of the Spirit in religious experience, and the shaping of ecclesiology. Indeed, corporate worship can be seen as the expression and embodiment of an entire theological system. As a result, the affections in corporate worship are the tip of a very large iceberg and we will not be able to plumb the depths below. Further complicating factors are those of historical and cultural placement.<sup>2</sup>

Lastly, we would ideally consider the affections involved in all components of corporate worship. That would, however, require

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<sup>\*</sup> Pastor, Grace Church, Cambridge; Director, Independent Ministry Training, Oak Hill Theological College.

<sup>1</sup> For something of a broader overview see Robert E. Webber, ed. *Twenty Centuries of Christian Worship*, vol. 2, The Complete Library of Christian Worship (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1994); Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, *The Oxford History of Christian Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> For an introduction to some of these issues see Michael P. Jensen, ed. *True Feelings: Perspectives on Emotions in Christian Life and Ministry* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2012); Graham Beynon, *Emotions: Living Life in Colour* (Nottingham: IVP, 2012).

consideration of each element: confession, sacraments, preaching, etc. Instead we will focus our attention on the element of worship most often connected to the affections, i.e. singing, with some occasional glances at other elements.

The last introductory comment is over terminology. “Affections” can mean different things to different people.<sup>3</sup> For our purposes it primarily refers to something that is “felt” in corporate worship: the subjective experience of emotion. The language used is often generic terms such as affections or passions; or it can be more specific such as zeal, ardour or warmth; or general descriptors such as being “moved”.

Having stated these limitations, what we hope for is an overview that gives us perspective on our current situation and practice, and a degree of analysis which helps us see the issues involved in greater light. All this we trust will aid us in what we should expect and desire in our churches.

## *I. Historical soundings*

We will consider the thoughts of a number of leading figures within church history.

### *1. Augustine*

Augustine makes very revealing comments about the place of music and the affections in his *Confessions*. In a section on the various temptations of the body he admits that he finds it hard to judge the right estimation of singing because of its seeming appropriateness and yet the possibility of being led astray:

I must allow [music] a position of some honour in my heart, and I find it difficult to assign it to its proper place. For sometimes I feel that I treat it with more honour than it deserves. I realise that when they are sung these sacred words stir my mind to greater religious fervour and kindle in me a more ardent form of piety than they would if they were not sung; and I also know that there are particular modes in song and the voice, corresponding to my various emotions and able to stimulate them because of some mysterious relationship between the two. But I ought not to allow my mind to be paralysed by the gratification of my senses, which often leads it astray. For the senses are not content to take second place. Simply because I allow them their due, as adjuncts to reason, they attempt to take precedence and forge ahead of it, with the result that I sometimes sin in this way but am not aware of it until later.<sup>4</sup>

We note the connection between music and the emotions, which Augustine regards as mysterious but very real. This connection means that singing

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<sup>3</sup> For an overview of the meaning of terms see Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 1961), 33:49, 238.



religious words can stimulate far greater feeling in the singer than if they were simply spoken, and the ability of different types of music to stimulate different affections. However, Augustine also realises the danger of gratifying his senses, presumably because he is stimulated by the music alone and not the content of the words. As Helen Dell says, “He has difficulty distinguishing precisely between a rational and a sensual enjoyment and is unsure, at the time, which is taking precedence.”<sup>5</sup>

This uncertainty means Augustine feels he is sometimes over-cautious:

Sometimes, too, from over-anxiety to avoid this particular trap I make the mistake of being too strict. When this happens, I have no wish but to exclude from my ears, and from the ears of the Church as well, all the melody of those lovely chants to which the Psalms of David are habitually sung.

On reflection, he desires the helpfulness of music but with a caution:

But when I remember the tears that I shed on hearing the songs of the Church in the early days, soon after I had recovered my faith, and when I realise that nowadays it is not the singing that moves me but the meaning of the words when they are sung in a clear voice to the most appropriate tune, I again acknowledge the great value of this practice... Without committing myself to an irrevocable opinion, I am inclined to approve of the custom of singing in church, in order that by indulging the ears weaker spirits may be inspired with feelings of devotion. Yet when I find the singing itself more moving than the truth which it conveys, I confess that this is a grievous sin, and at those times I would prefer not to hear the singer.<sup>6</sup>

There is repetition of the crucial tension: the practice of singing can give a moving experience in itself, and yet singing true spiritual content is helpful in giving an appropriately moving experience. For Augustine the key issue is what is driving the experience: music or truth. He ends up positive but cautious.

Augustine also comments on a well-known element of worship in his day called a “jubilation”. This is a form of wordless prayer or praise, not dissimilar to charismatic versions of tongues.<sup>7</sup> Augustine explains what is happening:

One who jubilates, utters not words, but it is a certain sound of joy without words: for it is the expression of a mind poured forth in joy, expressing, as far as it is able, the affection, but not compassing the feeling.<sup>8</sup>

As the jubilation was a known medium of expressing one’s joy Augustine says if it is used by people over earthly joy we should use it for heavenly joy:

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<sup>5</sup> Helen Dell, “Musical Medievalism and the harmony of spheres”, in *Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*, ed. D’Arcens (Cambridge: CUP, 2016), 64.

<sup>6</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*: 33:39, 238.

<sup>7</sup> It involved a singing aloud on vowel sounds. The term itself comes from the Latin for “loud call” (linked to the word “yodel”). See Eddie Ensley, “A Brief History of Jubilation”, in *Music and the Arts in Christian Worship*, ed. Robert E. Webber (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 282-88.

<sup>8</sup> Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, NPNF (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 488.

Where speech does not suffice... they break into singing on vowel sounds, that through this means the feeling of the soul may be expressed, words failing to explain the heart's conceptions. Therefore, if they jubilate from earthly exhilaration, should we not sing the jubilation out of heavenly joy, which words cannot express?<sup>9</sup>

It seems that many church services involved times of spontaneous calling out of praise and thanksgiving, including this "jubilation".

In Augustine, then, we see two key ideas: there is the commendation of right use of music to stir passionate expression while being aware of its temptations, and there is the expectation too of affectionate expressions of joy within corporate worship.

## 2. Luther

Luther is well known for his positive approach to music and singing; he wrote a variety of liturgies for corporate worship, as well as hymns, and he was also an accomplished musician.<sup>10</sup> In the prefaces to various hymnals Luther expresses something of his view of music and its use. In discussing the benefits of music he says:

We can mention only one point (which experience confirms), namely, that next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise. She is mistress and governess of those human emotions... which as masters govern men or more often overwhelm them. No greater commendation than this can be found – at least not by us. For whether you wish to comfort the sad, to terrify the happy, to encourage the despairing, to humble the proud, to calm the passionate, or to appease those full of hate... what more effective means than music could you find?<sup>11</sup>

This power of music means it is to be used along with words of Scripture:

Thus it was not without reason that the fathers and prophets wanted nothing else to be associated as closely with the Word of God as music. Therefore we have so many hymns and Psalms where message and music join to move the listener's soul...<sup>12</sup>

Commenting on the Psalms Luther speaks of the difference music can make:

Since it proclaims and sings of the Messiah, the Book of Psalms is for such hearts a sweet, comforting, and lovely song; this is the case even when one speaks or recites the mere words and does not employ the aid of music. Nevertheless, music and notes, which are wonderful gifts and creations of God, do help gain a better understanding of the text, especially when sung by a congregation and when sung earnestly.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Augustine, cited on Worship Training, <https://www.worshiptraining.com/media/jubilation-in-the-patristic-era/>.

<sup>10</sup> Carl Schalk, *Music in Early Lutheranism* (St Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 2001), 16.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 53 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 323.

<sup>12</sup> Luther, *Luther's Works*, 53: 323.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Walter E. Buszin, "Luther on Music", *The Musical Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (1946): 92.

We see the power of music and the helpfulness of its link with the truth of Scripture to both aid understanding and to move the affections appropriately. In sum: “we are made better and stronger in faith when his holy Word is impressed on our hearts by sweet music”.<sup>14</sup> So Reuning says:

One of the most frequent themes in Luther’s writings was that music, independent of any text or other influence, is a unique dynamic that either reinforces or undermines the meaning of the words.<sup>15</sup>

This meant that Luther was concerned that the music be appropriately reinforcing. When presented with some choral canons that he did not think were suitable musically, Luther commented that the composer “has enough of art and skill but is lacking in warmth”.<sup>16</sup> Luther wanted appropriate tunes, but he was also positive about more elaborate polyphonic singing:

How strange and wonderful it is that one voice sings a simple unpretentious tune while three, four, or five other voices are also sung; these voices play and sway in joyful exuberance around the tune and with ever-varying art and tuneful sound wondrously adorn and beautify it... He must be a coarse clod and not worthy of hearing such charming music, who does not delight in this, and is not moved by such a marvel. He should rather listen to the donkey braying of the [Gregorian] chorale, or the barking of dogs and pigs, than to such music.<sup>17</sup>

Luther, then, has a positive view of music as a gift from God, including an appreciation of its complexity and art, and a desire to employ it in corporate worship, so harnessing its emotive power.<sup>18</sup> He went so far as to say that the positive effects of music made it a weapon against the devil:

I am not ashamed to confess publicly that next to theology there is no art which is the equal of music, for she alone, after theology, can do what otherwise only theology can accomplish, namely, quiet and cheer up the soul of man, which is clear evidence that the devil, the originator of depressing worries and troubled thoughts, flees from the voice of music just as he flees from the words of theology. For this very reason the prophets cultivated no art so much as music in that they attached their theology not to geometry, nor to arithmetic, nor to astronomy, but to music, speaking the truth through psalms and hymns.<sup>19</sup>

However, Luther also recognised the presence of “carnal and lascivious songs” which should be rejected. Instead, music, along with all art forms, needed to be used in the “service of Him who has given and created them”.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Luther, *Luther’s Works*, 53: 328.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel G. Reuning, “Luther and Music”, *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 48, no. 1: 18.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Schalk, *Music in Early Lutheranism*, 24.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in P. Nettl, *Luther and Music*, trans. Frida Best and Ralph Wood (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), 15-16.

<sup>18</sup> Carl Schalk, “Philosophy of Music in Lutheran Worship”, in *Music and the Arts in Christian Worship*, ed. Robert E. Webber (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 112-19.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Buszin, “Luther on Music”, 84.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

This positive view of singing and concern for expertise in its exercise had some very practical outworking: Luther implored the Elector of Saxony to pay for a capable musician for the church in Wittenberg.<sup>21</sup>

### 3. Calvin

Calvin is often portrayed as being indifferent or even hostile to music with such statements usually drawing the contrast between him and Luther.<sup>22</sup> Such a negative view is not warranted, however, even if Calvin's statements are less effusive.<sup>23</sup> Calvin was responsible for the overhaul of liturgy in which he emphasised the need for clarity and understanding (compared to his view of the abuses within medieval Catholicism).

Calvin places music, like many elements of the natural world, as part of God's good gifts which are to be enjoyed, but must be handled carefully because of the potential dangers of wrong use. For example:

And we have never been forbidden to laugh or to be filled... or to delight in musical harmony, or to drink wine. True indeed. But where there is plenty, to wallow in delight, or gorge oneself, to intoxicate mind and heart with present pleasures and be always panting after new ones – such are very far removed from a lawful use of God's gifts.<sup>24</sup>

With regard to music specifically, Calvin readily acknowledges its power:

Song has great force and vigour to arouse and inflame people's hearts to invoke and praise God with a more vehement and ardent zeal.<sup>25</sup>

We all know from experience how great a power music has for moving men's feelings, so that Plato teaches, quite rightly, that in one way or another music is of the greatest value in shaping the moral tone of the state.<sup>26</sup>

For Calvin, the ability of singing to kindle godly affection is one of its great benefits:

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<sup>21</sup> Buszin, "Luther on Music", 93.

<sup>22</sup> For example Garside quotes Doen as saying that Calvin was an "enemy of all pleasure and of all distraction, even of the arts and of music". Charles Garside, "The Origins of Calvin's Theology of Music: 1536-1543", *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 69, no. 4 (1979), 6.

<sup>23</sup> For an overview of Calvin's view of worship see W. Robert Godfrey, "Calvin, Worship and the Sacraments", in *Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A Lillback (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2008). For the development of Calvin's views on music see Garside, "Calvin's Theology of Music".

<sup>24</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 3.19.9: 841.

<sup>25</sup> John Calvin, "Preface to the Genevan Psalter", [http://www.genevanpsalter.com/attachments/Gen\\_Psal\\_intro\\_Calvin.pdf](http://www.genevanpsalter.com/attachments/Gen_Psal_intro_Calvin.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John W. Fraser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 289.

And certainly if singing is tempered to a gravity befitting the presence of God and angels, it both gives dignity and grace to sacred actions, and has a very powerful tendency to stir up the mind to true zeal and ardour in prayer.<sup>27</sup>

Hence Calvin says music has great power and we must take care not to abuse it:

Now among the other things which are proper for recreating man and giving him pleasure, music is either the first, or one of the principal; and it is necessary for us to think that it is a gift of God deputed for that use. Moreover, because of this, we ought to be the more careful not to abuse it, for fear of soiling and contaminating it, converting it our condemnation, where it was dedicated to our profit and use.<sup>28</sup>

The power of music is seen specifically in the depth of absorption of what is sung:

Moreover, in speaking now of music, I understand two parts: namely the letter, or subject and matter; secondly, the song, or the melody. It is true that every bad word (as St. Paul has said) perverts good manner, but when the melody is with it, it pierces the heart much more strongly, and enters into it; in a like manner as through a funnel, the wine is poured into the vessel; so also the venom and the corruption is distilled to the depths of the heart by the melody.<sup>29</sup>

Hence, we should make use of songs “which will be like spurs to incite us to pray to and praise God, and to meditate upon his works in order to love, fear, honour and glorify him.”<sup>30</sup> Such songs, argues Calvin, should be made up of the words of the Psalter (and other sections of Scripture).

As well as reflecting on the power of music to stir our hearts, Calvin also argues for the necessity of affection in corporate worship to guard against mere lip service:

It is perfectly clear that neither words nor singing (if used in prayer) are of the least consequence, or avail one iota with God, unless they proceed from deep feeling in the heart. [...] Still we do not condemn words or singing but rather greatly commend them, provided the feeling of the mind goes along with them.<sup>31</sup>

Calvin speaks of the benefit that comes from the use of singing, which has to be personally experienced to be appreciated:

We are not able to estimate the benefit and edification which will derive from this until after having experienced it. Certainly at present the prayers of the faithful are so cold that we should be greatly ashamed and confused. The psalms can stimulate us to raise our hearts to God and arouse us to an ardour in invoking, as well as in exalting with praises the glory of His name.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*: 3.20.32: 181-82.

<sup>28</sup> Calvin, “Preface to the Genevan Psalter”.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*: 3.20.31: 180-81.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Garside, “Calvin’s Theology of Music”, 10.

Yet he also is mindful of the dangers involved: “We must, however, carefully beware, lest our ears be more intent on the music than our minds on the spiritual meaning of the words.”<sup>33</sup> Calvin here references Augustine in his vacillations over music that we noted earlier. However, he concludes that when “this moderation is used, there cannot be a doubt that the practice is most sacred and salutary.”<sup>34</sup>

As is well known, Calvin did not believe that instrumentation should be used in the church: his comments on the use of instruments in the Old Testament refers to their belonging to the age of shadows and smacking of popery. For example:

We are to remember that the worship of God was never understood to consist in such outward services, which were only necessary to help forward a people as yet weak and rude in knowledge in the spiritual worship of God. A difference is to observed in this respect between his people under the Old and under the New Testament.<sup>35</sup>

Calvin also restricted the words sung to the Psalms (and other sections of Scripture). However, we must not mistake Calvin’s limitations here as negativity towards singing in general and the appropriate stimulation and expression of the affections. Speaking of the Psalms themselves he says:

There is no other book in which we are more perfectly taught the right manner of praising God, or in which we are more powerfully stirred up to the performance of this religious exercise.<sup>36</sup>

#### 4. *Isaac Watts*

Isaac Watts is seen as the “father of hymnody” (at least English hymnody). He was not the first to write what we know of as the modern hymn, but his publications broke the back of the exclusive psalmody of the seventeenth century in England.<sup>37</sup> His revolution of the praise of the church was driven by two key concerns:

To see the dull indifference, the negligent and the thoughtless air that sits upon the faces of a whole assembly, while the psalm is on their lips, might tempt even a charitable observer to suspect the fervency of inward religion; and ‘tis much to be feared that the minds of most of the worshippers are absent or unconcerned.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*: 3.20.32: 181-82.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.20.32: 182.

<sup>35</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Printing Company, 1847), 495.

<sup>36</sup> John Calvin, *Psalms, Commentary*, trans. James Anderson, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids Baker, 1993), xxxviii–xxxix.

<sup>37</sup> For an overview of Watts’ view of praise see Graham Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, Studies in English Theology (London: Bloomsbury T.&T. Clark, 2016); Graham Beynon, *Isaac Watts: His Life and Thought* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2013).

<sup>38</sup> Isaac Watts, *The Works of the Late Reverend and Learned Isaac Watts, D.D. published by himself, and now collected into six volumes. Revised and corrected by D. Jennings, D.D. and the late P.*

Watts questions both the “fervency” of singing and the “mind” of the worshipper. And he felt these two areas were connected; being limited to metrical psalms meant people often sang about topics they did not understand which did not then touch their hearts. As he put it: “By keeping too close to *David* in the house of God, the veil of *Moses* is thrown over our hearts”.<sup>39</sup> This led Watts to write both new hymns and a new version of the psalter which applied the psalms to Christ and the Christian life.

Watts’s desire for right comprehension and expression of affection in praise was because of his view of singing:

Let us remember, that the very power of singing was given to human nature chiefly for this purpose, that our own warmest affections of soul might break out into natural or divine melody, and that the tongue of the worshipper might express his own heart.<sup>40</sup>

The first and chief intent of this part of worship, is to express unto God what sense and apprehensions we have of his essential glories; and what notice we take of his works of wisdom and power, vengeance and mercy; it is to vent the inward devotion of our spirits in words of melody, to speak our own experience of divine things, especially our religious joy.<sup>41</sup>

In this picture of heartfelt, responsive praise to God, Watts sees times of singing as the nearest the church gets to the heavenly state:

While we sing the praises of our God in his Church, we are employed in that part of worship which of all others is the nearest a-kin to Heaven...<sup>42</sup>

Praise is the sweetest part of divine worship; it is a short heaven here on earth.<sup>43</sup>

Watts’s understanding of the theology of praise and his concerns for the praise of his day drive his reforms. He writes hymns which give a clear and dramatic portrayal of Christian truth in terms we can understand and then leads us to express how we feel about that truth. Hence, he aids the worshipper in clarity of understanding and in depth of affection.

The second of these means he did not shy away from putting emotional expressions on the lips of the worshipper. These give us an insight into the affections he desired and expected believers to express. Consider what the congregation are being led to express in the following selection of lyrics:

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*Doddridge, D.D.* (London: T. and T. Longman, and J. Buckland; J. Oswald; J. Waugh; and J. Ward, 1753), “Hymns”, Volume 4, 147.

<sup>39</sup> Watts, *Works*: “Hymns”, Volume 4, 147.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, “Psalms”, Volume 4, xiv.

<sup>41</sup> Watts, *Works*, “Psalmody”, Volume 4, 282.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, “Hymns”, Volume 4, 147.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, “Remnants”, Volume 4, 628.

Such wond'rous love awakes the lip  
Of saints that were almost asleep,  
To speak the praises of thy name,  
And makes our cold affections flame.

Now shall my inward joys arise,  
And burst into a song;  
Almighty love inspires my heart,  
And pleasure tunes my tongue.

'Twere you that pulled the vengeance down  
Upon his guiltless head:  
Break, break, my heart! O burst mine eyes!  
And let my sorrows bleed.

O! What immortal joys I felt,  
And raptures all divine,  
When Jesus told me, I was his,  
And my Beloved mine!

So Marshall and Todd say: "He took the singers and their feelings by the hand and led them along an instructive pathway."<sup>44</sup>

Watts not only gave the worshipper appropriate words to use to express affection, he also thought that the act of singing such words stimulated affection. Elsewhere Watts commended meditation in acts of personal reflection and he saw the same dynamic at work in praise. Acts of praise involve "kindling into divine love by the meditations of the loving kindness of God, and the multitude of his tender mercies".<sup>45</sup> In this regard Watts comments on the wisdom of God in commanding singing:

How happily suited is this ordinance to give a loose to the devout soul in its pious and cheerful affections? What a variety of sanctified desires, and hopes and joys, may exert themselves in this religious practice, may kindle the souls of Christians into holy fervour, may raise them near to gates of heaven, and the harmony of the blessed inhabitants there?<sup>46</sup>

### 5. John Wesley

Both John and Charles Wesley had significant impact on the corporate worship of the church in England. We will only consider John Wesley because of the contribution he made to the theology and liturgy of worship which are more pertinent to our topic.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Madeleine Forell Marshall and Janet M. Todd, *English Congregational Hymns in the Eighteenth Century* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1982), 33.

<sup>45</sup> Watts, *Works*: "Hymns", Volume 4, 147.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, "Love of God", Volume 2, 679.

<sup>47</sup> For an overview see Steve Johnson, "John Wesley's Liturgical Theology: His Sources, Unique Contributions and Synthetic Practices" (Manchester, 2016).



In surveying Wesley's response to the pre-existing liturgy with the Church of England Johnson argues that he stands for its ongoing use but only as the means of expressing an affectionate heart response to God. He speaks of "Wesley's insistence on the use of external forms of religion, not to the exclusion of, but rather co-operant with, the internal experience of the heart made right with God".<sup>48</sup> This fits with the emphases of personal appropriation and expression of "heart religion" which were central to Wesley and Methodism.<sup>49</sup>

This focus on heart experience is expressed in Wesley's comments on singing. In the preface to *A Collection of Hymns, for the Use of the People Called Methodists* (1780) he speaks about the spirit of piety contained in the hymns and the use people will find in singing them:

That which is of infinitely more moment than the spirit of poetry, is the spirit of piety. And I trust, all persons of real judgment will find this breathing through the whole Collection. It is in this view chiefly, that I would recommend it to every truly pious reader, as a means of raising or quickening the spirit of devotion; of confirming his faith; of enlivening his hope; and of kindling and increasing his love to God and man. When Poetry thus keeps its place, as the handmaid of Piety, it shall attain, not a poor perishable wreath, but a crown that fadeth not away.<sup>50</sup>

Wesley clearly sees the singing of hymns as a means of stimulating affection for God. Elsewhere he writes about the power of music and laments the use of counterpoint in church singing which he believes limits the inherent power of melody.<sup>51</sup> For Wesley the ideal is that of the simplicity of a whole congregation united in song, both understanding and feeling what they are saying.<sup>52</sup>

So Wesley describes Methodist singing as follows:

When it is seasonable to sing praise to God they do it with the spirit and the understanding also... in psalms and hymns which are both sense and poetry... [They sing] as may best raise the soul to God, especially when sung in well-composed and well-adapted tunes; not by a handful of wild unawakened striplings, but by a whole serious congregation; and these not lolling at ease, or in the indecent posture of sitting, drawling out one word after another, but all standing before God and praising him lustily and with a good courage.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Johnson, "Wesley's Liturgical Theology", 90.

<sup>49</sup> See Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, "Wesley's emphases on worship and the means of grace", in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers (Cambridge: CUP, 2010).

<sup>50</sup> John Wesley, "Preface, A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists", <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/1780-a-collection-of-hymns-for-the-use-of-the-people-called-methodists#preface>.

<sup>51</sup> See "Thoughts on the Power of Music", John Wesley, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, vol. 15 (London: Thomas Cordeux, 1812), 360-63.

<sup>52</sup> Tucker, "Wesley's emphases on worship and the means of grace", 232-33.

<sup>53</sup> Robert Southey, *The Life of Wesley and the Rise and Progress of Methodism* (New York: Evert Duyckinck, 1820), 102.

Wesley's desire for affectionate worship also led him to develop what were novel meetings for the Church of England at the time: namely the watchnight service and love feast.<sup>54</sup> The watchnight often included preaching and testimony, but the main content was prayer, praise and thanksgiving. Johnson argues that the purpose of such times was the focusing of the affections to achieve a series of "exchanges":

Allowing God to change our heart, enabling us to form holy tempers through the practice of the means of grace, we begin to hear about, sing about and experience joy rather than sorrow, solemnity and reverence rather than mirth and revelry, freedom from rather than bondage to sin and comfort in Christ instead of anxiety and fear.<sup>55</sup>

The love feast comprised singing, thanksgiving, testimony and prayer, as well as the eating and drinking of the "feast". Wesley describes its aim and practice:

In order to increase in them a grateful sense of all his mercies, I desired that... we might together "eat bread", as the ancient Christians did, "with gladness and singleness of heart". At these lovefeasts (so we termed them, retaining the name, as well as the thing, which was in use from the beginning) our food is only a little plain cake and water. But we seldom return from them without being fed, not only with the "meat which perisheth", but with "that which endureth to everlasting life".<sup>56</sup>

Again, the desire to stir up appropriate affections was foremost in Wesley's mind.<sup>57</sup>

Wesley also reports a variety of more extreme spiritual experiences within the Evangelical Revivals. These include people screaming, falling over, shaking and crying excessively. Some of these can be understood as heightened versions of the affections we have already noted. Others falls into a broader category of ecstatic religious experience.<sup>58</sup>

## II. *Analysis from Jonathan Edwards*

Edwards stands virtually alone in the depth of his analysis of the affections. We cannot explore all that he says but will apply some of his key insights to our specific topic of corporate worship. Edwards' writing on this topic was of

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<sup>54</sup> Wesley is also well known for the class meeting but the focus there was on accountability and fellowship. For the Moravian background to these meetings see Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 247-49.

<sup>55</sup> Johnson, "Wesley's Liturgical Theology", 188-89.

<sup>56</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, vol. 4 (New York: Harper, 1826), A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists, 336.

<sup>57</sup> See Johnson, "Wesley's Liturgical Theology", 190-98.

<sup>58</sup> See "Spiritual Ecstasy" in Bernhard Lang, *Sacred Games: A History of Christian Worship* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

course within the events of the Great Awakenings in New England. His works examining experiences within these revivals gravitated around the larger question: "What is the nature of true religion?"<sup>59</sup> His work *The Religious Affections* was the most in-depth analysis of this question.<sup>60</sup>

### 1. *The understanding of the affections*

Edwards' maxim will be well known: "True religion, consists in great part, of holy affections".<sup>61</sup> By affections Edwards means the inclination of the will towards or away from an object along with the subjective feelings such inclinations involve. The primary inclinations are those of love and hate but these then result in the full spectrum of affections: desire, fear, hope, etc. Edwards sees the affections as being within the soul of a person but that they are felt in the body:

Such seems to be our nature, and such the laws of the union of soul and body, that there never is any case whatsoever, any lively and vigorous exercise of the will or inclination of the soul, without some effect upon the body, in some alteration of the motion of its fluids, and especially of the animal spirits.<sup>62</sup>

Hence God has so joined the soul and body that feelings will result. Edwards also sees a "reverse" movement:

And on the other hand, from the same laws of the union of soul and body, the constitution of the body, and the motion of its fluids, may promote the exercise of the affections. But yet it is not the body, but the mind only, that is the proper seat of the affections.<sup>63</sup>

This seems to recognise the possibility of a physical cause creating affections. Edwards comments later that for some people the "first ground of their affection is some bodily sensation" where the "animal spirits" are put in to an agreeable motion.<sup>64</sup> For our purposes we might think of the power of a piece of music to move the emotions directly.

Edwards argues for the place of spiritual affections, produced by the work of the Spirit, as a key part of true religion:

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<sup>59</sup> John E. Smith, "Introduction", in *Religious Affections* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 2.

<sup>60</sup> For an overview of Edwards' theology of the affections see Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), Chapter 20. For a more in-depth analysis see Brad Walton, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Affections and the Puritan Analysis of True Piety, Spiritual Sensation and Heart Religion*, vol. 74, Studies in American Religion (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002).

<sup>61</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith, vol. 2, The Works of Jonathan Edwards (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 95.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

That religion which God requires, and will accept, does not consist in weak, dull, and lifeless wouldings [i.e. wishes to act] raising us but a little above a state of indifference. God in his word, greatly insists upon it that we be in good earnest, fervent in spirit and our hearts be vigorously engaged in religion.<sup>65</sup>

## 2. *Affections and corporate worship*<sup>66</sup>

Part of Edwards' argument for the importance of the affections comes from God's commands regarding corporate worship. Preaching, praise, prayer and the sacraments are all designed to have an effect on our affections. He comments on singing in particular:

The duty of singing praises to God, seems to be appointed wholly to excite and express religious affections. No other reason can be assigned, why we should express ourselves to God in verse, rather than in prose, and do it with music, but only, that such is our nature and frame, that these things have a tendency to move our affections.<sup>67</sup>

This is a key statement of the purpose of song for Edwards. The same points of excitement and expression of affection are seen in a sermon on singing where Edwards says the ends of this duty are to: (1) "excite and raise devout affections of soul" in ourselves and in others, and to (2) "express and manifest devout and gracious affections".<sup>68</sup>

Edwards sees a parallel with preaching: God's word must be preached rather than only read in books because,

...although these may tend as well as preaching to give men a good doctrinal or speculative understanding of the things of the word of God, yet they have not an equal tendency to impress them on men's hearts and affections.<sup>69</sup>

The ability of music to excite godly affections was taken as read in his *Religious Affections*. However, Edwards comments on the mechanism at work in the sermon mentioned. Singing can give "a due sense in the heart of God and his perfections and Christ the grace and love through him and of heavenly enjoyments".<sup>70</sup> He attributed this to the following:

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<sup>65</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 99.

<sup>66</sup> For an overview of Edwards' theology of worship in general see Rhys S. Bezzant, *Jonathan Edwards and the Church* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), especially chapter 5, "Ordered Ecclesiological Life". Also see Ted Rivera, *Jonathan Edwards on worship: public and private devotion to God* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications, 2010), Chapter 2, Public Worship.

<sup>67</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 2: 115.

<sup>68</sup> David W. Music, "Jonathan Edwards' Singing Lecture Sermon", in *From Ann Bradstreet to Abraham Lincoln: Puritanism in America*, ed. Michael Schuldiner (New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 2004), 141-42.

<sup>69</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 2: 115.

<sup>70</sup> Music, "Singing Lecture Sermon", 141. Note, this is a direct transcription from Edwards' sermon notes and hence does not have appropriate punctuation.

There is an excellent and glorious harmony in divine things, of which the harmony that is in singing seems to give some shadow, and by the resemblance helps the mind the better to conceive of that sweet harmony that is in divine things.<sup>71</sup>

In addition, Edwards sees something about singing with others that aids excitement of affection and resembles the worship of heaven. Hence music and singing can enable the heart to “taste” the sweetness of God and be shaped by it. Elsewhere he commented:

Music, especially sacred music, has a powerful efficacy to soften the heart into tenderness, to harmonise the affections, and to give the mind a relish for objects of a superior character.<sup>72</sup>

We see from this that Edwards’s understanding of the “new heart” and “spiritual taste” are intimately involved in the activity of singing. Edwards comments on this in a sermon on the “new song” sung by the saints (Revelation 14:3); he uses the analogy of learning a tune:

As in order to learn the music of other songs the voice must be tuned, so to learn the music of this song, the heart must be tuned. The music of this new song consists in holy admiration, in exalting thoughts of the glory of God and the Lamb and the great things of the gospel; and in divine love, in loving God for his excellent appearing in the face of Christ, in holy rejoicing in God and in delight and complacency of the soul in Jesus, whereby we, having not seen him, do love him and “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory”.<sup>73</sup>

In the same sermon Edwards later speaks of the pleasure and benefit that comes from singing this sort of gospel song:

The act of praise is an abundant reward to itself. He that sings it has communion with God in it, for in the same time that there flows a stream of love out of the heart towards God, there flows a more full stream of love from God into the soul. At the same time that he praises God with a sweet voice, Christ with a sweeter voice speaks peace to the soul and manifests his love to it.<sup>74</sup>

Edwards moves from his basic thesis in *Religious Affections* to infer that we should desire such a way of worshipping as most influences the affections:

If it be so, that true religion lies much in the affections, hence we may infer, that such means are to be desired, as have much of a tendency to move the affections. Such books, and such a way of preaching the word, and administration of ordinances, and such a way of worshipping God in prayer, and singing praises, is much to be desired, as has a tendency deeply to affect the hearts of those who attend these means.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Music, “Singing Lecture Sermon”, 141.

<sup>72</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn, vol. 16, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998): Jonathan Edwards to Sir William Pepperell, November 28, 1751, 411.

<sup>73</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses 1739-1742*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch Harry S. Stout, Kyle P. Farley, vol. 22, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003): “They Sing a New Song”, 236.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>75</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 2: 121.

Edwards' approach is effectively: the more affectionate, the better. He knows, however, that even if affections are stirred by such worship, they may not necessarily be true affections:

Indeed there may be such means, as may have a great tendency to stir up the passions of weak and ignorant persons, and yet have no great tendency to benefit their souls: for though they may have a tendency to excite affections, they may have little or none to excite gracious affections, or any affections tending to grace.<sup>76</sup>

However, he still concludes with an expectation of appropriate means leading to appropriate results, and hence a confident endorsement of affectionate worship:

But undoubtedly, if the things of religion, in the means used, are treated according to their nature, and exhibited truly, so as tends to convey just apprehensions, and a right judgment of them; the more they have a tendency to move the affections the better.<sup>77</sup>

In practice, then, Edwards was very positive about singing. He enforced the duty of singing on the whole congregation as part of their worship and so encouraged the practical step of singing lessons.<sup>78</sup> Similarly he urged parents to provide lessons in singing for their children.<sup>79</sup>

While he was concerned for the performance of singing, Edwards' understanding of the dynamics of singing meant he emphasised the internal state of the heart as most important: "the external is good for nothing but as the means or expression of the internal".<sup>80</sup> In speaking of the effect of the "Awakening" in Northampton, Edwards specifically comments on the singing of the congregation:

Our public praises were then greatly enlivened... It has been observable that there has been scarce any part of divine worship, wherein good men amongst us have had grace so drawn forth and their hearts so lifted up in the ways of God, as in singing his praise.<sup>81</sup>

This was one of the reasons why Edwards introduced the use of Isaac Watts' hymns rather than only singing metrical psalms (being one of the first New England churches to do so).<sup>82</sup> Edwards comments that his congregation had

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<sup>76</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 2: 122.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Music, "Singing Lecture Sermon", 142-44.

<sup>79</sup> For discussion of the influence of "Singing Schools" see David W. Music, "Edwards and the Theology and Practice of Congregational Song". See also Mark R. Talbot, "Godly Emotions (Religious Affections)", in *A God Entranced Vision of All Things: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 241-42.

<sup>80</sup> Music, "Singing Lecture Sermon", 137. Also see Music, "Edwards and the Theology and Practice of Congregational Song", 113, 22.

<sup>81</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Great Awakening*, ed. C. C. Goen, vol. 4, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972): "A Faithful Narrative", 151.

<sup>82</sup> See David P. Barshinger, *Jonathan Edwards and the Psalms: A Redemptive Historical Vision of Scripture* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), 71-75; Bezzant, *Jonathan Edwards and the Church*, 218-25.

a “very general inclination” towards Watts’ hymns, and that they were “greatly pleased with it”.<sup>83</sup> He made sure the Psalms continued to be sung as well as new hymns, but his comments suggest a flexibility towards what the congregation found most helpful.

As we will see, distinguishing work is required for any one person and their experience, but despite this it seems that Edwards leant towards whatever style of singing moved the affections the most. Reflecting on the content of preaching and worship generally, Edwards lamented the lack of affection present saying, “Where are the exercises of our affections proper, if not here?”<sup>84</sup>

### 3. *Distinguishing between true and false affections*

Within the various experiences reported during the Awakenings Edwards recognised the presence of mixed sources of affections. Describing the more dramatic experiences he had witnessed such as crying out in agony over sin or being exalted in love and comfort, he said:

...there may be some mixtures of natural affection, and sometimes of temptation, and some imprudences and irregularities, as there always was, and always will be in this imperfect state; yet as to the work in general, the main of what is observed in these extraordinary things, they all have the clear and incontestable evidences of a true divine work.<sup>85</sup>

Edwards’ expectation of mixed sources is significant in and of itself and we will return to consider it later. However, it first raises the question: how then do we distinguish true spiritual affections? This is the focus of much of Edwards’s writing regarding the awakenings, not least his *Religious Affections*.

Edwards clears the ground by saying certain factors should not lead us to conclude that an experience was truly spiritual. These are his twelve “negative signs” which include factors such as the intensity of experience, being passive in it, being able to speak eloquently of it, or even that it leads us to praise and thank God. These and other cautions from Edwards would dampen down the confidence some might draw from their experience in corporate worship.

We should be clear: Edwards does not mean that the presence of these features is a negative factor in evaluation, only that by themselves they do not act as confirmation of a true spiritual origin. Their presence is neither good nor bad in themselves. Roberts suggests that Edwards’ caution in this

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<sup>83</sup> Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, 16: 144.

<sup>84</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 2: 123.

<sup>85</sup> Edwards, *The Great Awakening*, 4: “Some Letters Relating to the Revival”, Letter to Deacon Lyman, 31 August 1741, 533.

vein means he would be against highlighting intense experiences or praying that people would experience them.<sup>86</sup> Certainly Edwards would not have us make these signs indicative of true spiritual experience and it behoves us to consider explicit or implicit ways in which we might do so. However, we have seen already that Edwards was desirous of worship in which people's affections were moved, and so Roberts may be over cautious.

What, then, of positive signs to evaluate our affections in corporate worship? The answer in general terms from Edwards' analysis is clear: true affections come from the work of the Spirit who gives us a new sensation or taste for spiritual realities which are then seen in the life of the believer. The question is how, within corporate worship, one can perceive this spiritual source of affections.

It is helpful here to distinguish between a "wider angle" and "narrower angle" of questioning.<sup>87</sup> Wider angle signs are those seen in life in general and over a longer period of time. For example, Edwards says that true affections should result in greater obedience, true humility, Christ-like tenderness and so on. This is true of many of his twelve positive signs in *Religious Affections*; in addition, the five marks in *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* are all of that nature.<sup>88</sup> Such "wide angle" signs cannot be perceived within the moment of worship. Of course, they remain relevant for the question regarding corporate worship but they operate at much wider level of application across life. Ross argues that these signs can be reassuring for those who feel little in worship because of their focus on constancy and disciplined habits.<sup>89</sup>

Some of the signs however, or elements of them, are amenable to a narrower angle of questioning on the experience of corporate worship itself and we will consider these:

1. The first is the source of affections. Edwards' fourth sign of gracious affections is that they "arise from the mind's being enlightened, rightly and spiritually to understand or apprehend divine things". Edwards was emphatic:

Holy affections are not heat without light; but evermore arise from some information of the understanding, some spiritual instruction that the mind receives, some light or actual knowledge.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Phil Roberts, "Lessons from the Past - The Discernment of Signs: Jonathan Edwards and the Toronto Blessing", *Churchman* 110, no. 1 (1996): 38.

<sup>87</sup> This is my own distinction for the purposes of this paper as opposed to a recognised taxonomy of Edwards' signs.

<sup>88</sup> See discussion by Roberts, "Edwards and the Toronto Blessing", 37.

<sup>89</sup> Melanie Ross, "Jonathan Edwards: Advice to Weary Theologians", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 59, no 1 (2006).

<sup>90</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 2: 266.



Edwards describes this spiritual understanding as a “sense of the heart, of the supreme beauty and sweetness of the holiness or moral perfection of divine things”.<sup>91</sup> It is not speculative knowledge or mental assent. This leads him to his famous comparison of tasting honey: this knowledge is an experiential relishing of divine things. For our purposes the point is that such true knowledge is what should lie behind our affections in worship.

It is noteworthy to see comparable comments Edwards makes about preaching in this regard:

Therefore the thing to be inquired into is whether the application or notions of divine and eternal things, that are raised in people’s minds by these affectionate preachers, whence their affections are excited, be apprehensions that are agreeable to truth, or whether they are mistakes. If the former, then the affections are raised the way they should be, viz. by informing the mind, or conveying light to the understanding.<sup>92</sup>

So as Roberts says, “If stimulus came from the impartation of the truth of the Bible then the emotion experienced was a genuine and welcomed response to truth”.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, affections while singing should only arise from such understanding; they should not be from any other source than tasting the goodness and beauty of God in worship.

This point regarding the source of affections connects with a warning Edwards gives in distinguishing between the effect of manner or style as opposed the effect of the content.<sup>94</sup> Speaking with regard to the words of Scripture, Edwards argues that we should beware our affections being raised by the manner of words coming to us rather than the understanding and apprehension of them.<sup>95</sup> Edwards is thinking of words suddenly coming to mind or sensing that God is speaking directly to you.

This principle can be expanded to cover a broader range of “manner” versus “understanding”. So we can easily be moved by the manner of a song, or the way in which a thought strikes us within a song, rather than the understanding of what we are singing. We saw above that Edwards recognises there are ways of stimulating the affections which are only to do with “manner”. He says: “there may be such means, as may have a great tendency to stir up the passions of weak and ignorant persons, and yet have no great tendency to benefit their souls”.<sup>96</sup> Hence we should be aware that there can be ways of leading corporate worship with similar results.

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<sup>91</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 2: 272.

<sup>92</sup> Edwards, *The Great Awakening*, 4: “Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival”, 386.

<sup>93</sup> Roberts, “Edwards and the Toronto Blessing”, 39.

<sup>94</sup> This comes from within his first sign that spiritual affections arise from influences which are spiritual, supernatural and divine.

<sup>95</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 2: 219-26

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

2. The second area comes from Edwards' second sign: the "first objective ground of gracious affections is the transcendently excellent and amiable nature of divine things, as they are in themselves; and not any conceived relation they bear to self, or self-interest".<sup>97</sup> This is again connected to the source of affection but is more particularly concerned with the focal point of the understanding: do affections come to the believer from an appreciation of the beauty of spiritual reality itself, or from an appreciation of the benefits received from that reality? So, for example, when we consider God's love, do we admire it for itself and then move to the benefits it brings us, or are our affections raised only as we think of ourselves? It is the difference between a theocentric and anthropocentric view.

Edwards says that there can be a right appreciation of the benefits to self but the way in which the affection arises is very different. Using the example of love for a person he says:

When the first thing that draws a man's benevolence to another, is the beholding of those qualifications and properties in him, which appear to him lovely in themselves, and the subject of them, on this account, worthy of esteem and goodwill, love arises in very different manner, than when it first arises from some gift bestowed by another, or depended on from him, as a judge loves and favours a man what has bribed him.<sup>98</sup>

Of course, the believer may go on to appreciate the gifts and benefits from God, but they are an addition and not the "first objective ground" of the affection: "The saint's affections begin with God; and self-love has a hand in these affections consequentially, and secondarily only."<sup>99</sup>

Hence Edwards says, "that which is the saint's superstructure, is the hypocrite's foundation".<sup>100</sup> The hypocrite<sup>101</sup> may be filled with joy but:

... if their joy be examined, it will be found to have no other foundation than this, that they look upon these things as theirs, all this exalts them... So that their joy is really a joy in themselves and not in God.<sup>102</sup>

This false affection flows from true theological content but its centre of gravity is the believer rather than God. Truth is made to revolve around them and their affections come from a high estimate of self rather than of God. So Edwards says:

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<sup>97</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 240.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 241-42.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>101</sup> We should note here that the "hypocrite" in Edwards' writings refers to someone who is self-deceived themselves, rather than putting on a mask for the sake of others. See Ava Chamberlain, "Self-Deception as a Theological Problem in Jonathan Edwards's 'Treatise Concerning Religious Affections'", *Church History* 63, no. 4 (1994): 542-43.

<sup>102</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 2: 251.

The high affections of many are all built on the supposition of their being eminent saints. If that opinion which they have of themselves were taken away, if they thought they were some of the lower form of saints (though they should yet suppose themselves to be real saints), their high affections would fall to the ground... it would knock their affections on the head; because their affections are built upon self, therefore self-knowledge would destroy them. But as to truly gracious affections, they are built elsewhere; they have their foundation out of self in God and Jesus Christ; and therefore a discovery of themselves, of their own deformity, and the meanness of their experiences, though it will purify their affections, yet it will not destroy them, but in some respects sweeten and heighten them.<sup>103</sup>

This connects to a later sign: that gracious affections are attended with “evangelical humiliation”. Rather than making the believer think well of themselves they have a sense of their insufficiency and sinfulness and so a greater appreciation of God and his grace.

This raises a number of questions for corporate worship: if my affections are raised within it, why are they? What truth am I relishing? Does it make me feel better about myself and affirm me, or does it lead to love and appreciate God for who he is in himself? Alternatively, we could ask: what would true self-knowledge do to our affections? How would I feel if I was reminded of my sin in worship? Would it in fact sweeten my affection for God, because I appreciate him all the more, or would it dampen my affections because I cannot think as well of myself?

More generally we can ask whether our corporate worship focuses primarily on the benefits of the gospel for us, or on the nature of the gospel in showing us the glory of God. And, when it does focus on the benefits of the gospel for us, what is the “centre of gravity” operative?

3. A third factor flows from the eleventh sign: the higher gracious affections are raised, “the more is a spiritual appetite and longing of soul after spiritual attainments, increased”. By comparison false affections “rest satisfied in themselves”.<sup>104</sup> This is a question about the nature of enjoyment within worship and where that enjoyment leaves us. So, Edwards explains:

The more a true saint loves God with a gracious love, the more he desires to love him, and the more uneasy is he at his want of love to him: the more he hates sin, the more he desires to hate it, and laments that he has so much remaining love to it.<sup>105</sup>

The reason for this effect is because true affections involve the spiritual taste and appreciation described earlier. Having tasted something so true and good, the believer wants more of it; in addition, in seeing themselves truly they see their greater need of grace. Edwards summarises: “The kindling and

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<sup>103</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 2: 253.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 376.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 377.

raising of gracious affections is like kindling a flame; the higher it burns, the more vehemently does it tend and seek to burn.”<sup>106</sup>

Edwards realises he is in danger of suggesting that spiritual affections may actually leave one “empty” rather than satisfied and so he goes on to clarify how gracious affections are satisfying to the soul in certain respects: (1) They swallow up desire for any other kind of enjoyment; (2) they meet our expectations rather than leaving us disappointed; (3) their pleasure is permanent; and (4) their extent is boundless.<sup>107</sup> So the saint wants more of God not because what they have experienced has not satisfied them, but precisely because it has satisfied them and they want more of it. By contrast, “Hypocrites long for discoveries, more for the present comfort of the discovery, and the high manifestation of God’s love in it, than for any sanctifying influence of it.”<sup>108</sup>

True affections in corporate worship then do not have a “cloying nature” such that we feel we have had enough of them. Nor is there a desire only for what I gain “in the moment” but rather the sense of ongoing growth and longing for further growth.

This sign is perhaps harder to apply within the experience of worship but again raises questions for us. Do we feel satisfied in our experience of corporate worship or does it lead us on to love God and long for him more? Do we look for the “buzz” of the moment or greater closeness to God? Do we long for an experience in corporate worship only for the comfort of that experience, rather than the effect it will have on my life?

### III. *Further comments*

A few further comments and caveats are in order:

First, we should be aware that Edwards’ main assessment of affections relate to the “wider angle” areas of discernment already mentioned. That raises the question as to how much he would suggest we attempt to discern “in the moment” of worship at all. Edwards might simply encourage us not to restrict or condemn high affections in worship, nor to read too much into their presence, but rather examine their effect over time. This would effectively allow no assessment of affections in corporate worship specifically, because any evaluation over time turns on multiple causes rather than the experience of corporate worship alone. That is why we have attempted the narrower angle assessment above, but we should be aware in doing so that we are skewing Edwards’ own balanced assessment.

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<sup>106</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 2: 377.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 378-79.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

Secondly, we should emphasise that Edwards is desirous of an experiential Christianity where one's affections are raised. Having described the heightened experiences of his wife he concludes:

Now if such things are enthusiasm, and the fruits of a distempered brain, let my brain be evermore possessed of that happy distemper! If this be distraction, I pray God that the world of mankind may be all seized with this benign, meek, beneficent, beatifical, glorious distraction!<sup>109</sup>

Thirdly, we should reflect on Edwards' expectation of mixed sources of affections which we noted earlier. In discussing the sources of error within the awakenings he began as follows:

The first thing is the mixture there oftentimes is in the experiences of true Christians; whereby when they have truly gracious experiences, and divine and spiritual discoveries and exercises, they have something else mixed with them besides what is spiritual: there is a mixture of that which is natural, and that which is corrupt, with that which is divine. This is what Christians are liable to in the present exceeding imperfect state.<sup>110</sup>

He goes on to say that Christians never have experiences that are "wholly pure, entirely spiritual, without any mixture of what is natural and carnal". He believes the most common causes of unspiritual affection are "human, or natural affection and passion; impressions on the imagination; and a degree of self-righteousness or spiritual pride". Some of these sources are not sinful in themselves but are part of a person's emotional "make up". Edwards says that "the same degrees of divine communications from heaven shall have vastly different effects, in what outwardly appears, in persons of different natural tempers". He goes on:

The same is also evident by the different effects of divine communication on the same person at different times, and in different circumstances... And sometimes there is not only a mixture of that which is common and natural with gracious experience, but even that which is animal, that which is in a great measure from the body, and is properly the result of the animal frame.<sup>111</sup>

This type of variation between people, and for the same person at different times, is not spiritual but neither is it wrong and our expectations of affection in corporate worship should allow for it. This certainly means we should not judge an affection by its intensity, which is helpful pastoral counsel for those with both high and low experiences.

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<sup>109</sup> Edwards, *The Great Awakening*, 4: 341.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, "Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival", 458-59.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 459-60.

#### IV. *Concluding reflections*

Our historical soundings and analysis from Edwards give a number of reflections on the place of affections in corporate worship. We will present them in a series of statements with some occasional further comments:

1. There is a consistent expectation and desire for affection within worship, not as a luxury but as a necessary element of true spirituality.
2. There is a consistent appreciation of music and singing because of their aid to both stimulate the presence, and aid the expression, of affection in worship. This links to an expectation of the positive effects of corporate singing because of the effect on the affections. This is considered a means of grace ordained by God for our good.
3. There is a frequent awareness and concern for affections that are stimulated by unspiritual means within the act of singing. This can simply be a natural effect or it can involve explicit sin.

We should note that rather than being balanced between a positive and negative position, and so ending up in a no-man's land, there is usually positivity about the right use and negativity about wrong use alongside each other. Is it the case that our positivity and negativity over affection in worship somewhat balance each other out? By comparison is it that many of these writers are simultaneously more positive and more negative than we are today?

4. There is recognition of the ordinary means of music as part of God's created order.

This recognises the presence of aesthetics – good or poor poetry and music. There is a need for appropriate tunes that are consonant with the truth of the words being sung and that allow for appropriate stimulation and expression of affection. There is then ready appropriation of what is affective aesthetically.

There is greater variety within our survey over what makes music suitable, how simple or elaborate it might be, and whether instrumentation is appropriate. These factors show both cultural variation and the subjective nature of such judgements. However, the general recognition of means remains. We do not expect the Spirit to use a poorly delivered sermon, with no appropriate emotion, even if the truth content is high. Similarly then we do not expect the Spirit to use poor tunes, badly played, and with terrible lyrics, even if the truth content is high.

Edwards especially would seem to lean towards utilising effective means, rather than having concern over unspiritual affections holding him back. He

is of course aware of the presence of unspiritual affections but the answer for him was not to therefore have less affectionate worship.

5. There is consistent recognition that true affections must flow from the truth being reflected on rather than the circumstances of singing. Edwards takes this further than others in distinguishing between manner and content, and between an anthropological and theological centre to our affections.

This points to the need for people's engagement within corporate worship; it should be a cognitive as well as affectionate act. Indeed, it is affectionate precisely because of the content of the cognition. Edwards directs his congregation: "Diligently attend to what is sung. Don't let your mind be on the ends of the earth as regarding only the music of the voice."<sup>112</sup>

There is also an implication for those leading corporate worship. They should ask, "What will most appropriately present the truths being reflected on, and what will aid engagement with them?", rather than asking, "What will, of itself, produce a certain atmosphere or response?".

6. There is the implication that in addition to clarity of content we should organise our services and our singing with the aim of stimulating and allowing expression of affection. Paying attention to this is not (necessarily) to be manipulative of people's emotions; rather it is to try to be helpful of people's affections. There is a sense in which we cannot feel too much in response to God. So if music is an aid to that feeling I should be glad for it, and if singing is an appropriate vehicle for my feelings I should embrace it.

Speaking of preaching, Edwards says:

I should think myself in the way of my duty to raise the affections of my hearers as high as possibly I can, provided that they are affected with nothing but truth, and with affections that are not disagreeable to the nature of what they are affected with.<sup>113</sup>

Applying this to corporate singing one would say we have a duty to lead in whatever way would raise the affections of the congregation as high as we can – with the same proviso of being affected only by the truth and with affections that are consonant with it.

7. We should be positive about depth of feeling within corporate worship rather than being sceptical.

Edwards says:

There are false affections and there are true. A man's having much affection, don't prove that he has any true religion: but if he has no affection, it proves that he has no true religion.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Music, "Singing Lecture Sermon", 145.

<sup>113</sup> Edwards, *The Great Awakening*, 4: 387.

We know that if we feel deeply for God we may well be expressing true affection towards him, even if there are mixed sources, but if we are not feeling deeply then we are certainly not.

8. We should not set too much store by what we feel in corporate worship. The natural movement of the affections, especially in a corporate experience of singing, can generate feelings by itself. We should beware attributing all that we experience within a religious setting to the work of the Spirit.

9. We should pray for God to use singing as a means of grace to excite and express true affection. We know that true affections are ultimately only produced by the work of the Spirit, hence we should pray for that work, knowing that God has ordained singing as a means by which the Spirit will work. Edwards says that only Christ can teach us the new song of the redeemed in the truths of the gospel:

Therefore you must go to God. You must cry to him to grant you instruction, to impart the knowledge of the subject matter of this song, and to put your heart in tune, [to] give you that blessed skill.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 2: 121.

<sup>115</sup> Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses 1739-1742*, 22: "They Sing a New Song", 243.



# WORSHIP TODAY: MAINTAINING CONTINUITY WITH THE PAST AND ACROSS THE WORLD

*Ray Evans\**

## *Introduction*

On this subject of worship, insights from all kinds of Christian believers and “traditions” abound. Even views and practices with which one may profoundly disagree, will contain aspects of truth from which we can learn. In the following descriptions of trends which I have noted, it is all too easy to see the problems which have been caused by them (a middle-aged man’s default mode?) and miss the emphases which have brought refreshment to many believers and glory to God.

Equally, there is something in that aphorism, “The whole world is queer but thee and me... and I am not sure about thee”. That is, we will all have something about another’s “position” on an issue and its practical outworking with which we have some, even if slight, disagreement. It can be hard to know when wise discernment has developed into critical nit-picking.

Given the theme of the paper I have found that “maintaining tension” is difficult. There is so much one could say, and getting a right sense of proportion is challenging. In Antioch in Acts 11 some eyes would have seen differently from Barnabas’ (Acts 11:23 and 15:1f). He must have beheld many other things too, but amidst it all he saw evidence of gospel grace and worked with that as of primary importance.

So, too, in this area of contemporary practice in worship. What to prioritise, what to see as secondary? Or tertiary? What to categorise as “of first importance” and what to see as “adiaphora” (things indifferent)? What to call a legitimate cultural expression (e.g. musical style) and what an absolute moral requirement?

Sadly, Christians have been disagreeing about all this for ages. In a paper describing Reformed Baptist singing (a fairly tightly-defined issue within a fairly tightly-defined group, one would have thought), Sharon James comments,

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\* Lead Minister, Grace Community Church, Bedford and Church Leadership Consultant, FIEC.

At different times church meetings have divided over whether congregations should sing at all, whether they should sing hymns at all, whether to use hymn books at all, whether there should be any musical accompaniment at all and, if so, what it should be.<sup>1</sup>

I certainly have no mandate nor desire to prolong a conflict!

But I want to open with these caveats as otherwise we might not sense the emphases we need to hear from Scripture for ourselves, or for the family of God we belong to back in our home setting.

I intend to cover two areas: First I want to describe what, in my observation, have been trends that have shaped modern churches. Then second, I want to suggest some practical outworking of principles which can help us be faithful to the Bible, relevant to our own church family, and, by God's grace and power, bring a sense of spiritual awe and joy to the believers with whom we worship, and conviction to those not-yet-believers who may join with us.

## *I. Spot the Trends*

### *1. Fashionistas, chronological snobbery and the "democracy of the dead"*

"You're fiercely fashion-forward, always looking for The New & The Next. The sidewalk is your catwalk and you're always the first of your friends to try the new trends".<sup>2</sup> Thus haute-couturier Henri Bedel introduced a word new to me – fashionista. Could he have been talking about churches and their leaders too?

Certainly, there have been trends in church life over the last fifty years which have illustrated the sentiment, "Newest is best, latest is greatest". Some churches have charged forward to keep on the crest of a wave and ahead of the pack. Innovation has been the name of the game, and woe betide anything that smacks of last decade's fashion in style, sound or look: "Oh, that song is sooo 1990s!"

We live in a time of rapid transition; youthfulness is exalted; everything is up for grabs. That is how many Christians feel about the way that worship has changed in their experience. It is not a new problem; C. S. Lewis didn't like ecclesiastical developments amending worship in his day and noted sardonically, "I wish they'd remember that the charge to Peter was Feed my sheep; not... Teach my performing dogs new tricks."<sup>3</sup>

Behind that comment lies a deeper issue, summed up in the famous warning, "He who marries the spirit of the age will be a widower in the next." Lewis described the dangers of "chronological snobbery": the assumption

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<sup>1</sup> Sharon James, "Musical Discord", *Evangelicals Now*, January 2001, 14.

<sup>2</sup> [www.henribendel.com/us/gifts/shop-by-personality/fashionista](http://www.henribendel.com/us/gifts/shop-by-personality/fashionista). Accessed 14 July 2018.

<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcom, Chiefly on Prayer* (Glasgow: Fount, 1977), 6.

that our ancestors were fairly ignorant and backward while we, who happen to be alive just at the moment, conceitedly begin to think that we are “the people” and wisdom will die with us (Job 12:2).<sup>4</sup> We often fail to recognise that those coming after will soon look upon us as quaint at best, or seriously flawed at worst.

G. K. Chesterton also pleaded for a better perspective in his “The Ethics of Elfland” essay:

Tradition means giving a vote to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead... Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition object to their being disqualified by the accident of death. Democracy tells us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our groom; tradition asks us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our father.<sup>5</sup>

My sense is that many in the contemporary church have stopped listening to these voices for too long. In an attempt to be “relevant”, a depth of historical heritage has been ditched; modern music styles, in particular, have changed so quickly in many Christian traditions that a virtual wholesale rejection of the past has become normal.

We need to heed the past; believers in Jesus' day still used the wisdom of the ages in their worship (prescribed as it was in many ways by Scripture) as they sang age-old Psalms and followed practices of generations.

But it is not a simple issue to connect to the past and also to relate to the present. “Old songs” were once brand new, and often met with a resistance in their time because of that. Isaac Watts, for example, came in for plenty of criticism for writing hymns.

Holding on to the past for the sake of it presents its own big problems. Even a voice as conservative as Dr Peter Masters notes,

We feel that language has changed far more in the 125 years since Spurgeon's hymnbook than during the 150 years which separated Spurgeon from Watts. We are now confronted with numerous quaint and jarring words or phrases which ought to be edited... Editorial changes have aimed at achieving instant comprehension wherever possible, thus enabling worshippers to honour the apostolic principle – “I will sing with understanding also”... Another modernisation will be seen in our treatment of the words “man” or “men”, together with male pronouns, where these convey the unintended impression to a new generation that all Christians are male. This use of language occurs to an excessive degree in older hymns, and in most cases a way has been found to eliminate it.”<sup>6</sup>

And it would be curmudgeonly not to joyfully celebrate some of the great

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<sup>4</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1966), 167.

<sup>5</sup> G. K. Chesterton, “The Ethics of Elfland”, ch. 4, *Orthodoxy* [1908] (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Peter Masters, Preface, *Psalms & Hymns of Reformed Worship* (London: The Wakeman Trust, 1994).

hymns and songs which have been written to inspiring tunes very recently. There has been a blossoming of musical initiatives over the last fifty years; well-trained and wonderfully gifted writers and musicians have hugely enriched the world-wide church's repertoire of songs which glorify the Lord.

The movements over the last half-century have probably got more "ordinary" Christians engaging with the subject of worship than previous generations which, according to the class culture of the past, just did as they were told by their superiors. The democratisation of worship has been a significant plus and has put the honouring of God right to the top of the agenda. Which brings us on to trend 2.

## 2. *Individualism and being part of the "joyful assembly"*

In traditional societies, people are primarily identified by class, caste, country, tribe or family. There is a deep sense of solidarity with others of their own kind and members live according to the expectation relevant to each group. In this setting, worship cannot be anything but a corporate activity.

But somewhere in it all the individual may easily be devalued and lost; group solidarity matters most. The gospel can be lost as personal salvation is often less prominent in the religious landscape of pre-modern societies.

In modern and post-modern societies this is not so; here the "i-world" dominates. According to Robert Bellah two types of individualism can be identified. One he calls "utilitarian individualism", which takes as given basic human appetites and fears and sees human life as an effort to maximise self-interest relative to these ends. The other he dubs "expressive individualism" which holds that each person has a unique core of feeling and intuition that should unfold and be expressed if individuality is to be realised.<sup>7</sup> Either way, the modern West is dominated by such "what's in it for me?" individualism. Characteristics of belonging to a group, such as taking part in civic activities, volunteering, giving to charitable foundations and so forth, are all declining. The social capital of modern societies has plummeted.

In her incisive analysis of several generations of young American adults, Jean Twenge has picked up significant and rapid changes in their lives, especially since the widespread adoption of smartphones. In a world in which a teenage woman will spend on average over five hours a day accessing media, usually through a hand-held device, Twenge has traced profound ways that modern technology, combined with expressive individualism, is changing the values and habits of countless people.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Robert N. Bellah et al, *Habits of the Heart*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 333-335.

<sup>8</sup> Jean M. Twenge, *i-Gen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy – and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood – and What That Means for the Rest of Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017).

The church has not been immune to these changes; they surface in many ways, for example in measurable changes to patterns of church attendance and membership, mobility and migration pathways – and a struggle to gain disciplined commitment to church and corporate activities. Churches seem to have less of a sense of “we are in this together as we joyfully assemble”, and more of an, “I’m being authentic doing my own thing; I hope you are doing yours too.” Pastors are made to feel legalistic by simply echoing the apostolic call for everything to be done in a decent and orderly way. Confusion somehow seems more “authentic” – the critical marker for an expressive individualist.

Post-modernism has taught us that we each have our own truth and so if I have my own subjective sense of what God is saying to me, none should question it. Such a culture values the “here and now” above the “then and there”. This seems more real and more spiritual than an emphasis on forms of the past, which can seem phony, hackneyed and imposed. Some have also noted that there is a focus on “how I am” during worship, for we value highly the “inward”, but play down the “upward.” As Don Carson has said, we end up worshipping worship, rather than God.<sup>9</sup>

The trend, however, has its positives too. The answer to the problems highlighted above is not to retreat back into the “good old days” of pre-modern corporate cultures, but to recognise the wonderful tension and resolution *the gospel* brings – a genuine third way of valuing both the “one” and the “many”. A truly *personal* salvation and relationship with the risen Lord, but also a *belonging* to a family, a body, a temple, a building made without hands, a people, and a kingdom where, as I lose myself, paradoxically, I find myself. As I am overwhelmed by God’s love, I cannot help but love and worship him, and want to bless others for his sake.

The church needs a robust theology of grace that gives us the both/and of personal *and* corporate. Though there may be a creeping individualism seeping into much that we do, we can acknowledge two great realities that flow from this recent trend: 1) Individuals do matter. Paul said that Jesus, “loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*” (Gal 2:20). Rediscovering that personal note has been a very big plus in the modern church. 2) It makes us all think much harder about true “self-forgetfulness” rather than a false humility. Precisely because we are becoming aware of the problem, we can counter it more effectively with a proper place for the self.

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Matt Boswell, *Doxology and Theology* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2013), 16; see also D. A. Carson, *Worship by the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 310; Mark Evans, *Open up the doors: Music in the modern church* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2006); Clive Marsh and Vaughan S. Roberts, *Personal Jesus: How popular music shapes our souls* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012).

### 3. *The Illuminati, neo-Gnosticism and spiritual indwelling*

They were a secret society called “the Illuminati” – 18th century enlightened ones who were “in the know”. Such societies have blossomed throughout time; the Apostle Paul had to contend with false teachers – “super-apostles” – who claimed to be so much more powerful than he and his gospel. The early Christian churches were blighted the Gnostic heretics, special groups who “really worshipped” because they “really knew”, having been introduced into the secrets of true spirituality.

Some of the “holiness” and “second blessing” teaching of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries may echo this. Francis Schaeffer warned in the late 1950s and early 60s of the dawning of what he called a new “super-spirituality” which appealed to the need to belong to a special group who had been “truly blessed”.<sup>10</sup>

It is hard to deny that the church has experienced waves of teaching that tend towards an emphasis on the “special ones” who *truly worship*. In the past, in formalised religion, this meant those who worshipped in the equivalent of the “holy place” – the chancel, with its robed choir, and priests who approached an altar in some confused extension of Old Covenant rituals.

In the modern church this is much more likely to be the band who vicariously “truly worship”, led by the doyen of modern churches, the worship leader. The spotlight is on them in more than one way; they seem to be “in the Spirit” while they sing, eyes closed, and perhaps sway – while the rest of us in the gloom of the unlit and muffled world of the congregation try our best, but clearly can’t match the real worshippers.

Mix into this theologies which seem to legitimise an “extra blessing” in one way or another, and it is easy to see how the modern church in effect has its “exalted ones” – even if they in no way choose that moniker. It can be so hard to remember the great biblical teaching, reclaimed at the Reformation, of the priesthood of all believers.

C. S. Lewis struggled with this too. In one of his most well-known quotes he says of the music in his own church,

I disliked very much their hymns which I considered to be fifth-rate poems set to sixth-rate music. But as I went on I saw the merit of it. I came up against people of quite different outlooks and education, and then gradually my conceit just began peeling off. I realised that those hymns (which were just sixth-rate music) were, nevertheless, being sung with devotion and benefit by an old saint in elastic side-boots in the opposite pew, and then you realise that you aren’t fit to clean those boots. It gets you out of your solitary conceit.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *The New Super-Spirituality* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1973).

<sup>11</sup> C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 51-52.

This note has been rediscovered over the last fifty years. Whereas older generations *believed* in the theology of “the priesthood of all believers”, the more recent generations have sought to *practise* this in various ways. Although we can see weaknesses in the individualism of this generation, it has also sought to emphasise that the members of the body of Christ come together to *bless one another*.

#### 4. *The technology revolution, and the revolutionaries that shape it*

Part of the explanation for the rapid pace of change in our society is the breath-taking technological advances that the third great revolution (after the Agrarian and Industrial) – the Information Revolution – has triggered.

In worship, changes in music have been most notable. *A capella* has given way to powerful sound systems and electronically-dominated singing. Voice amplification, stage and auditorium lighting, sophisticated music mixing, vision projection and various other technical hardware and software developments allow a range of presentations unavailable until very recently. For all this to work well, churches and organisations have to invest significant amounts of money and expertise. For behind the well-lit, on-stage personas, there is a small army of tech people making sure it all works smoothly.

And technology shapes services. The timeframe for choosing material so that it can be printed, rehearsed and made available to the wide number of people who need it, will mean that much of the worship content (songs, prayers, Bible readings, sermon titles and content) needs to be planned well in advance. Services need to be tightly scheduled so that all taking part know what is expected and can keep to the running order.

Some churches have fully adopted the modern concert style with dark auditorium and no natural lighting, a well-lit stage utilising a wide variety of lighting tools, and singers/worship leaders who are amplified so loudly that the congregation (audience?) sings along with them as the accompaniment, and not *vice versa*. A worship atmosphere is developed which relies heavily on technology to make it “work”.

Even if your own church is not like that, significant numbers of Christians now attend big inter-church or para-church jamborees, conferences, holiday events etc., so that this style is experienced by many. The home church is then, sometimes subliminally and sometimes consciously, compared negatively to the larger event.

In one sense, it has long been thus. Medieval cathedrals with their stunning architecture, stained glass and multiple staff with various kinds of expertise once “set the bar”; classical nonconformist chapels made use of high pulpits and balconies to keep everyone easily within ear-shot; Victorian and early twentieth-century worship was often dominated by a powerful

machine – the pipe organ – which could only be played by a trained organist. Large chapels required heating and lighting and used technological advances such as gas lights to make this possible. What is unprecedented today is that the latest technological improvements provide so many worship alternatives.

Critiquing is easy to do, but new technology has also provided many benefits: it has brought great Christian music to the masses; God's word can be listened to on a phone; those without strong voices can preach to large groups; people have been able to take part who might otherwise never be heard. It has led to a range of musical accompaniment that enriches the singing. It can even enable a small group of Christians in an out-of-the way church or chapel to sing with other believers via a CD player. Great resources can be accessed at the touch of the button, even in societies that ban Christianity; technology has greatly extended the reach of the gospel.

These issues that have understandably led to confusion amongst Christians: What is biblical, what is right, what is pleasing to God? How would we know?

Which brings me on to the fifth trend.

##### 5. *Bibles, hermeneutical gymnastics and Lordship*

Previous generations of Christians had to work out what they believed about worship. The Protestant Reformation brought this issue very much to the fore. Rather than following tradition, it was the Bible that was to shape how a faithful church should worship. Much debate led to what has been dubbed the Regulative Principle – that no practice should be part of true Christian worship unless it is commanded, properly exemplified, or a good and necessary outworking of a clear principle in Scripture.

This Principle was to guard believers from idolatry, but also to give freedom, both of conscience and practice, within boundaries. Stemming from this, Christians also worked out what were the legitimate powers of leaders to innovate and to organise:

The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture (*The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 21:1).

Calvin stated,

Moreover the rule which distinguishes between pure and vitiated worship is of universal application... we may not adopt any device which seems fit to ourselves, but look to the injunction of Him who alone is entitled to prescribe... I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, 1543,  
[https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/calvin\\_necessityreform.html](https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/calvin_necessityreform.html)



Some felt the Principle was too restrictive and opted instead for the Normative Principle; that is, anything is permissible unless it is specifically forbidden, within broad biblical principles. Up until the recent modern era, most Protestant churches were a) willing to base worship on what the Bible taught about it; and b) outworked a combination of the above two principles. Thus, most shared a common understanding and a relatively common experience of worship.

This seems to have all changed; styles vary enormously amongst churches in the same denomination and between churches of varying confessional commitments. Some of this is due to a less-than-straightforward approach to interpreting Scripture. Rather than asking, "What is the original author's intention?" and being under that authority, the whole modern trend in hermeneutics is to make the reader king, based on the assumption that we cannot really know what the original author meant, and maybe we are not under their authority anyway.

Now meaning is determined by "what I think it means for me". Individualism, combined with post-modern hermeneutical gymnastics, means that the church has been set adrift from its strong biblical moorings into a world where "If it feels good and right it must be okay". Experimentation in worship is now *de rigueur*. Reacting to the perception of a buttoned-down, tight-lipped past, new movements have emphasised freedom to express oneself. Biblical principles can be circumvented by various means. As Gershwin in *Porgy and Bess* put it, what it says in the Bible "ain't necessarily so".<sup>13</sup>

Conservative evangelicals sensing this have responded in a number of ways. Some see only problems, dangers and disobedience, and long for a past when worship was "pure" and untainted by the world.

Others see both weaknesses *and* strengths: New doesn't mean wrong, as recent gifted theologians, preachers and song writers have demonstrated; music and style are often matters of taste and preference, not absolute right and wrong; freedom is a biblical principle that needs endorsing. This has led to some churches being willing to think biblically and face up to some of the prejudices against wise change, and thus adopting some of the more recent developments in worship. Modern does not necessarily mean a challenge to the Lordship of Christ.

## 6. Summary of Part One

Powerful movements and trends have been experienced by churches and Christians over these last fifty years. Changes have come at a fast pace and older believers often found it difficult to adapt. Younger believers have

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<sup>13</sup> George Gershwin, "It Ain't Necessarily So", *Porgy and Bess* (Opera, first performed 1935).

warmly embraced musical styles more familiar to their culture.

The power of that culture to shape church worship is undeniable. What we have found is that as well as problematic developments, we can also identify things which are good and right. Each trend emphasises something that has biblical warrant, and is important for the church to practise.

The gospel has to be clothed in contemporary words and idioms so that outsiders find it intelligible, challenging and attractive. And insiders must worship with mind and heart so that they express worship in their own language and fitting to their own times. Calvin so famously said years ago,

The Master... did not will in outward discipline and ceremonies to prescribe in detail what we ought to do (because he foresaw that this depended upon the state of the times, and he did not deem one form suitable for all ages)... Because he has taught nothing specifically, and because these things are not necessary to salvation, and for the upbuilding of the church ought to be variously accommodated to the customs of each nation and age, it will be fitting (as the advantage of the church will require) to change and abrogate traditional practices and to establish new ones. Indeed, I admit that we ought not to charge into innovation rashly, suddenly, for insufficient cause. But love will best judge what many hurt or edify; and if we let love be our guide, all will be safe.<sup>14</sup>

But, on the other hand, these powerful movements have all tended to loosen our links to the Christians who have gone before us. It can generate a sense that it is all about “now” and it is all about “us”. A heritage of millennia can be, and for the younger generation is, being lost. That sense of continuity all the way back to the Lord and his Apostles, is becoming a distant memory, or even no memory at all.

Without realising it the gospel can also be subtly altered to what God is doing “here and now” not what God has done “there and then”. Instead of good news of a great victory won for us at the cross, it becomes a great experience of how I feel. This kind of distorted gospel drags us back to religiosity and what it can offer by way of positive feelings. Religion is adept at fooling its adherents that they are acceptable because of the way they are worshipping, and especially if they are feeling good about it. Such a gospel cannot save.

So how do we negotiate the minefield? Wholesale rejection is neither right nor wise, but an uncritical embracing of everything will not get us far either.

In the following points I want to attempt some practical suggestions which may help us outwork biblical principles in a contemporary place, which also preserves continuity with the past and connection to believers around the globe. Each suggestion relates to the corresponding trend and seeks to ameliorate its weaknesses and make the most of its strengths.

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<sup>14</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), 4:10:30.

## *II. Try the Applications*

### *1. Blended worship - not driven by fashion or locked into the past*

The attempt to use the best of the present and the best of the past has been labelled “blended worship”. Its danger? The worst of everything. Its advantage? Connectivity to the past and a reinforcement both that we stand in the long line of witnesses, and also that we are the people who worship God now.

A connection to the past will enable believers to develop a resilience that being imprisoned in the now cannot provide. It may also humble us, as we realise that other Christians have had very rich experiences of the blessings of God, and it may help us not to be trite and superficial. Margaret Thatcher used to comment that as she walked the staircase of 10 Downing Street and saw the photographs of previous Prime Ministers, it helped put the challenges she, and Britain, faced into perspective and gave encouragement to press on.

Blended worship may mean we utilise songs and hymns, prayers, quotes and stories from the past which enrich our lives. A strong sense of heritage and privilege will enable us to be as bold as we live for Christ in our times, as they were in theirs. Introducing elements from the past may require a deal of explanation of the very different styles; poetry, for example, was much denser than we are used to, language was more educated than present day common usage.

There are perils, of course, in such time travelling. We may put past heroes on platforms, not realising that all had weaknesses; we may see the past through rose-tinted spectacles, thinking all was bliss. Without realism about the past, we may unconsciously create a longing for a time which never really existed. Instead of galvanising us to confront the challenges we face now, we may cultivate a wish to be somewhere else, at some time other than now. So blended worship needs discernment.

Charles Wesley reputedly wrote more than 8,000 hymns, yet we sing but a small fraction of them. We do not need to work through the whole repertoire to find the gems; that has been done for us. Though we still have to use discernment, the passage of time has left us with the best work of the great poets and hymnwriters of the eighteenth century. They stand out as some of the very best examples of Christian doctrine and experience expressed in worshipful wonder of the living God.

But for modern songs, we are the sifters! It is as we use, and then abandon or keep them, that we compile the “good and great” category for future generations. To this end, it may mean a congregation that adopts a “best of the past and best of the present” approach will end up singing far

more modern songs than older ones, just because it is only as they are used that they can find the best.

Decisions regarding what type of worship should be used in our churches might be described as four-dimensional. On one axis is the *right/wrong* polarity. This, for example could be connected to words and doctrines in prayers, songs etc. But it may also be with the issue of extra-biblical matters such as “new expressions”. Depending on one’s stance on the “normative/regulative” argument this category may come into play over such things, for example, as flag waving, giving the Lord a clap of appreciation, utilising arts ministry, and other new forms. The Regulative Principle would see these as having little or no scriptural endorsement and thus an imposition onto the pure worship of God’s people. A normative stance would mean they would be judged on other criteria.

The second axis is the *helpful/unhelpful* decision and is more difficult to judge: Is the practice edifying even if it is right? An overly long prayer, for example, may deaden a meeting; a really long time of singing may help one, but drive another to distraction due to fatigue. What one may find helpful, another will not.

The third axis relates to the *aesthetic* question: is something good or poor in terms of excellence, quality, suitability, appropriateness, and so forth? We are now getting into strongly subjective territory. But it must be explored if we are to make wise decisions about what to include and what to reject. We need to recall Frame’s helpful comment:

When sophisticated members of the church insist that worship only employ the most sophisticated music of their own culture, what has happened to their love for those who are poorly educated or of a different cultural stream?... when advocates of contemporaneity want to set the traditions of the church completely aside and replace them with something largely meaningless to the older generation are they acting in love?<sup>15</sup>

John Piper adds,

By “fine” culture I have in mind the pattern of life that puts a high priority on intellectual and artistic expression that require extraordinary ability to produce and often demand disciplined efforts to understand and appreciate. By “folk” culture I have in mind the pattern of life that puts a high priority on expressions of heart and mind that please and help average people without demanding unusual effort.<sup>16</sup>

He goes on to comment that one tends to snobbishness and élitism, performance not participation, the other towards lazy, slipshod, ill-disciplined, short-circuiting of the mind. One can help the mind think clearly

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<sup>15</sup> John Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1997), 25-26. See also John Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1996)

<sup>16</sup> John Piper, *Gravity and Gladness on Sunday Morning* (Desiring God Ministries), 37.

and stir a sense of beauty and excellence, the other meets people where they are and is very inclusive and accessible. We are all on a continuum between these one or the other and need to be ourselves, making the most of the strengths of each.

Finally, we come to the axis of *preference*: do I like it or not? It is okay to have strong preferences, either way. It is also perfectly permissible to share your thoughts in appropriate settings. Paul strongly urged Apollos to go to Corinth, but Apollos was not sure and Paul left it there (1 Cor 16:12). It seems to have been a preference issue.

In the debate over worship, Christians have all too often made fundamental category errors. In an attempt to protect “pure worship” by dubbing a practice they do not like as wrong, they have instead baptised their tastes and preferences as the only truly biblical option. Labelling other views as fundamental departures from the faith has led to acrimony and the so-called “worship wars”.

John Frame comments,

I confess unhappiness with the methods used by critics... They draw all sorts of things together into one big conceptual lump: the health and wealth gospel, Church Growth Movement “follow the directions” approach to church planting, goal-centred ministry, contemporary worship, Contemporary Worship Music. Then they present these as one large and deeply flawed religious movement that we must repudiate in toto. Therefore Contemporary Worship Music becomes the scapegoat for everything bad in modern Christendom. In my view this kind of argument represents poor logic, theology and ethics. It is not valid, edifying, or fair to tie everything together in this fashion.<sup>17</sup>

Michael Hamilton notes,

Every complaint about worship music, no matter which style, claims to be rooted in theological principles. Yet in every critique, the theology aligns perfectly with the critic’s own musical taste.<sup>18</sup>

Ron Man says,

Words like “deform” and “trivialize” are very serious terms in theological discussion. Normally to speak of deformed worship is to speak of alleged worship that is not worship at all. I hope that X doesn’t mean to make such a strong point. But either his rhetoric has gotten away from him, or he is condemning a whole branch of the church of Jesus Christ for no good reason... If God is looking above all else for faces turned heavenward toward him in adoration and worship, how it must grieve him when instead he sees us facing off against one another in our provincialism, our territorialism and our narrow-mindedness.<sup>19</sup>

Using this four-dimensional matrix to explain the difference between the

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<sup>17</sup> Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music*, 70-71.

<sup>18</sup> quoted in John Armstrong ed., *Reformation and Revival*, vol. 9, no. 2, 100.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

various poles will help believers make better choices for all of the worship they engage in, and especially as they seek to keep a balance between different times and places.

## 2. *Gathered and scattered worship – not individualism run riot*

Three notes can be sounded when we come together to worship which can help counter the powerful trends we noted above:

i) First, we need to keep emphasising that we come together *as the family of God* in this place. The most well-known two words in the Bible? “Our Father”. Known still by millions even in our culture, they immediately challenge the rampant individualism of our age. The prayer was meant to always reinforce the fact that, having been justified, each and every believer is adopted into the family of God. There we find our identity. Now we can say, “I am the child of the Heavenly Father, and part of the family in which my Elder Brother is not ashamed to call the rest of us brothers and sisters, and in me and in all of us the Holy Spirit dwells.”

The gospel is the way to preserve the “one and the many” without either being lost. So gathered worship must not be seen as a group of individuals who happen to be together, but as the family coming to the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Spirit. That note must not only be sounded, but practically outworked. The NT has that great “when you come together, each one...” (1 Cor 14:26). We must give careful attention to how we can best practically implement that.

So, lots of “we and us” language in songs, prayers and comments is helpful. Gordon MacDonald argues there should be a regular place for the classic “Pastoral Prayer” where one of the leaders of the church brings the concerns of the whole congregation to our Father in heaven.<sup>20</sup> Spoken corporately, and said out loud, liturgical prayers, including the Lord’s Prayer, and also reciting classic creedal confessions, underscore this sense that we are here *together* to worship.

ii) The second note to be repeated regularly, is to include the global church in our sense of gathering. Introductory prayers can remind all that even as we meet, all over the world believers have been, and will be, meeting in almost countless numbers. Prayers of thanksgiving for parts of the world experiencing great blessing can be presented alongside regular prayers for the persecuted church. Remembering mission partners on a regular basis is extremely important. It is all too tempting for church leaders, in a culture in

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<sup>20</sup> Gordon MacDonald, *Building Below the Waterline* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2011), 107-120.

which we don't see many converts, to concentrate on church growth in our own locality. But global and "kingdom" prayers again serve to deliver us from our self-absorption.

Given the mobility of modern life, and the massive migration movements that we all have witnessed, it is important to acknowledge that the global church will often be represented in microcosm in our own assembly. At a recent count I noted over forty nationalities present in our own church meeting. The blended worship mentioned above serves to help people from other cultures as they may be more familiar with classic songs of the faith, rather than only the newest. It will help them feel they belong more easily.

iii) The third important, and often neglected, note is to emphasise that the church is still the church when we are living for God on Monday – it is the church scattered, not gathered. Without getting into the debate whether "worship" is a "Sunday meeting thing" or an "everything we do" thing (the one tends to devalue the rest of the week, the other the actual gathering for "vertical" worship on Sundays), it seems to me that it is a both/and not an either/or thing. We leave church worship to go into a time of worship – living for God's honour during the rest of the week in all that we do.

Thankfully some great "whole of life" resources to be used in Sunday worship are being provided more often now. Songs which emphasise that we live for our King all the time in all that we do redress the pietistic tendency which has been dominant in British evangelicalism. Of course, strengths abound in any movement that emphasises personal holiness and prayerfulness, but corresponding weaknesses may result in a sacred/secular divide. In a highly secular society the week ahead becomes something to escape from rather than a place and time in which to serve God.

Churches which develop a strong "whole of life" worship where Sundays equip people to energetically live for the Lord in their homes, neighbourhoods, places of employment and leisure time will reinforce a better sense of corporate worship on a Sunday. Rich community life is what our Father wants for us, and sensitivity to both gathered and scattered worship can help develop it.<sup>21</sup>

These three notes can help to counter the individualistic tide we are experiencing without negating the importance of the personal. They are worth working at.

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<sup>21</sup> Neil Hudson, *Imagine Church: Releasing Whole-Life Disciples* (Leicester: IVP, 2012).

### 3. *Missionally sensitive worshippers - not a select and superior elite*

The Apostle Paul gives some very helpful guidance on corporate worship in a sustained section of directives in 1 Corinthians 9-14. They guide the believer away from what is wrong, harmful and unhelpful towards what is right, good and beneficial for others.

He emphasises that when all believers come together there should be no division between any kind of inner circle and the rest. The body metaphor that the Apostle employs is a significant reminder that each person is necessary for all others to thrive and for the whole church to function properly. Fifty-nine times in the New Testament the phrase “one another” is mentioned, covering a whole range of issues; it emphasises the mutual indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the ministry that each has to others.

Intelligibility is important for both Christians and outsiders. It is crucial that believers understand what is going on. Words must be used which convey meaning, not just noise. All must be able to say “Amen” (1 Cor 14:8-9, 16) to the prayers. This principle of intelligibility applies also to unbelievers. The worship is to be accessible to them in terms of language and “real” so that they can sense “God is among you”, rather than that we are all mad (1 Cor 14:23-25). The truth of the gospel may cause them to think so, but observing how we worship should not! (Acts 26:24).

Timothy Keller, in an exceedingly helpful short paper, alludes to what he calls the “as if” principle enshrined in this section of Scripture.<sup>22</sup> He argues that we should speak and act in such a way that we expect outsiders to be present. We should not unnecessarily adopt forms, styles and expressions which only the insiders “get”. This will affect the way we explain what we do, give out notices, speak about others and so forth. Worship leaders and preachers will work hard at being “overheard” well by those in attendance who do not yet believe.

Stuart Olyott refers to three “quality” markers, which if present will help a church to thrive and grow: i) quality welcome; ii) quality teaching; and iii) quality hospitality.<sup>23</sup> James alludes to the first in 2:1-13 in quite some detail. Many churches do not help themselves here. Some attendees will decide just because of a poor welcome that they will not give it another go.

Quality teaching is a complex thing, but a strong combination of “normative, situational and existential” would help.<sup>24</sup> My sense is that too many preachers lose the overall sense of the Bible’s “great story”, with its wonderful central Hero. They home in on the “instructions to obey” before

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<sup>22</sup> Timothy Keller, “The Missional Church”, occasional paper (Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City, June 2001); see also *Center Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 250-290.

<sup>23</sup> Stuart Olyott, personal communication.

<sup>24</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1987), 167-346.



they have proclaimed winsomely enough the lovely Saviour who gives these instructions.

Even good Bible handling can become stale without working on the situational aspect. Every preacher must remember that he is bringing a message *to these people here*. Introductions, conclusions, illustrations and application *for them* means the “as if” principle is being outworked by the preacher all the time.

This is also where the third marker Stuart Olyott mentions is key. Hospitality refers to “after care” and is a common Christian grace, not a specialist gift, according to the Apostle Peter (1 Pet 4:7-11). It is where the “organised” aspects of corporate church life, and the “organic” of what individual believers can do, interface. It is vital but too often absent. It connects the gathered to the scattered via food and home. It is where the individual translates what has been said in the corporate context (“You are very welcome”) into practice. It is where each and every believer can play a vital part in church health and growth. It only needs a cup of cold water, and bonds are built that can last a lifetime and beyond (Matt 25:35; Lk 16:9).

In a period of history, and in a part of the world, where so few believe the gospel, the church has to recognise its missionary mandate. Even in its corporate worship, where what is offered is for the Lord’s glory and honour, these principles shape and encourage an outward-looking sensitivity.

#### 4. *Encultured worship – not a rejection of technical progress*

Churches did not possess their own buildings for the first three hundred years of church history; they met where they could. “The Temple” was the family of God – the key “building” was his very own people. The place in which they met was a matter of convenience and circumstance. Churches also met in specific places and became “local” with geographically-defined names. That specificity also inevitably brought with it cultural loading, which varied between the differing localities.

Early churches were often a mixture of cultures too. For example, they had to work out what it meant for Jew and Gentile to join together in Christian fellowship and worship. Some matters required great sensitivity and flexibility while others were non-negotiable in all situations (see Acts 15:24-29).

Although a *lingua franca* existed, each area, like today, had its local cultural expressions, tastes, baggage, concerns etc. We are often unaware of those particular to our own culture until someone from another points them out (Titus 1:12!). It takes spiritual wisdom and mature insight to work out what is an indifferent cultural vehicle, and what works against a Biblical priority, or may do spiritual damage.

Christians will sometimes disagree over cultural styles; some fear that certain cultural developments will move the church in a worldly fashion, while others will not see a problem. It is reminiscent of the early debates over food offered to idols, and the weak and strong believers.

In one sense, place and space are “indifferent things” in that buildings, architecture and technological advances do not *essentially* bring you closer, nor lead you further away, from spiritual reality and honouring God. But they can hinder or help. The Westminster Confession, when discussing the power of leaders to help organise the church’s worship, left it to the wisdom and common insights that all human organisations needed to function well.<sup>25</sup>

In the past the technological revolution that produced the printed book changed church worship meetings, and in so many ways for the better. Cheaper Bibles meant people could follow the exposition of the Word more easily, and there could be a greater repertoire of songs through printed music and song books.

For us today, having a good, technically better, sound environment can help people listen. Jesus asked Peter to put a boat out onto the water so that he would be heard by all and not just by those in the immediate vicinity who were pressing close to him (Lk 5:1-3). It was a simple practical solution to the problem. Today that will usually mean investment in a sound reinforcement system, rather than training all to speak louder (once a prerequisite for preachers, especially those speaking regularly in the open air). Modern technology has helped the message not to be lost and also made it accessible to many others through recordings and various forms of broadcasting. Those with less strong voices can also take part in readings, prayers, sharing news and so forth.

Vision, too, is an important part of communication. If we cannot see a speaker, and given that the brain processes about 65% of its information in any given communication through visual stimuli, then using some kind of camera and projection in a large auditorium makes sense and helps the listener. It is not necessarily caving in to a fad, nor inflating the ego of someone on a stage. So, for both sound and vision, taking advantage of technology in our worship environment is part of wise cultural adaption.

When we move on to consider music, it is important to remember that it is an aid to help worshippers to actually *sing!*<sup>26</sup> The goal is not an accomplished performance of high-quality entertainment; music should be a

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<sup>25</sup> The Westminster Confession says, “there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and the government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed” (Section 1.6) quoted by Tim Challies, [www.challies.com/articles/worship-elements-and-circumstances/](http://www.challies.com/articles/worship-elements-and-circumstances/) accessed 27 October 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Keith and Kristyn Getty, *Sing! How Worship Transforms Your Life, Family and Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2017).

vehicle to promote the worship of the Lord through the voices of God's people expressing their delight together in him.

We also need the humility to learn from different worldwide musical traditions. Global migration has helped to make other expressions more accessible. While not everything travels well across cultures, some does, and the global church has been enriched by songs, music and words from believers around the world.

### 5. *Gracious worship – not a human invention*

The final practical outworking is a re-emphasising that we worship the God who is Trinity. He is family, with each person giving glory to the others in an endless "dance", as Lewis described it.<sup>27</sup> Community, love, adoration, communication and goodness are at the heart of this reality. Before the world began, he who is from everlasting to everlasting, experienced all this (Ps 90:2). We are called to enter into this in our experience, and all because of amazing grace.

I sense that in the past the Trinity was seen mainly as a doctrine which clever people argued over, rather than a reality to which we must keep relating – the One God who is three Divine Persons. Even some of the great systematic theologies start on a slightly Unitarian note, with the Trinity appearing at the end of the first few chapters once the existence of God has been established.

The Trinity brings sharply into focus the "One and the Many" even if it is a mystery to our minds. This is not a philosophical puzzle to solve, but a reality to know, for it points to *someone* to worship. It is a glorious truth which helps us overcome the weaknesses of both traditional Western culture where the "one" is lost in the "many", and our present day in which the one lives at the expense of the many.

So, we must keep our focus on *who* we worship, rather than how we *feel* about that worship. As Piper says,

Worship has a horizontal effect while being vertical in focus. All the people should think of how others are helped to experience God by their Godward hunger and demeanour... all the circumstances – sound, light, music, welcome, heat, ushers, parking should not distract from a focus on God.<sup>28</sup>

Lewis reminds us:

Both musical parties, the Highbrows and the Low, assume far too easily the spiritual value of the music they want... Our music is valued for the intention, not the act; our Father doesn't "need" our music to please him, but is like a human father who values a worthless but beloved child's present.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* [1952] (Glasgow: Harper Collins, 2001), 174-176.

<sup>28</sup> Piper, *Gravity and Gladness on Sunday Morning*, 34.

<sup>29</sup> C. S. Lewis, "On Church Music", in *Christian Reflections* (Glasgow: Fount, 1988), 96.

And this God has spoken; the human authors were not just giving their opinions, but through them he was speaking his truth to us. He has revealed how we should worship, and his Word is authoritative. Authentic Christian worship will be based firmly on the Lord's will for us, not our human inventions. We follow what he says about the elements of worship. It will shape what we include and what we exclude for the gathered people of God's worship.

It will also affect the way that we thoughtfully plan and lead our services of worship. Throughout history believers have carefully crafted approaches to worship and we can learn much from them. We may not employ exactly the liturgy they did, for it is often studded with archaisms which are now obscure to us, but we can certainly benefit from their insights.

Try using a "journey in worship" outline to help lead the people of God into a fully rounded sense of worship. A pattern of "Call, exalt, confess, hear, believe, take, respond" framework is useful. And there are many others which can be utilised to overcome a drift into thoughtless repetition, seen both in the traditional "hymn sandwich" service, and in modern churches with their predictable music and recurring choruses.

We need to encourage one another, bear with one another, weep with one another and rejoice with one another. Services can be crafted which provide a vertical emphasis, but also reflect the truth that it is people, in all their variety and experience of the highs and lows of life, who are the worshippers. Grace can abound both vertically and horizontally, so that all can sense that they are in the presence of a holy God who, in Christ Jesus, has shown us wonderful mercy. It will be for ever the theme of the songs we sing in his new heaven and new earth.

### *Conclusion*

John Frame challenges us with these comments:

Simply opposing the modern world at every point is an entirely inadequate approach. I say that for theological reasons. I certainly wish to be counted among those whose thoughts and actions are based on principle, not pragmatism. But I confess to find myself, on the basis on biblical principle itself, very often siding with those who are considered pragmatists rather than those who are regarded as the most principled among us. The fact is that when we seriously turn to Scripture for guidance, that guidance usually turns out to be more complex, more nuanced, than anything we would come up with ourselves... Certainly scriptural principle is more complex than any mere negation of existing cultural trends.<sup>30</sup>

We cannot just critique what we do not like, point out the dangers we fancy we see, and then retreat into a cosy past that never did exist, and will not

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<sup>30</sup> Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music*, 113.

return. We have to grapple with real concerns, but react with Christian maturity and sensitivity. We need a clear mind about what Scripture teaches and requires, and what are actual freedoms to be explored and enjoyed, celebrating the diversity built into God's creation and all its peoples. I trust that this paper will stimulate a better approach to keeping the tension between past and present, and between "here and there". We need to hear those who have gone before, cheering us on to be faithful in our own times (Heb 12:1).

# WORSHIP TODAY: CONTEMPORARY EXPRESSION OF WORSHIP IN ONE'S OWN CULTURE(S)

*Stephen Clark*\*

## *Introduction*

In the days of the former Soviet Union, a visitor to one of its cities wished to look around a particular church, only to discover that it had been turned into a museum.<sup>1</sup> This might almost serve as a kind of enacted parable as far as some Christians are concerned: for it has become a cliché amongst many evangelicals in the UK that the church must not allow itself to be caught in a time warp or to be guilty of “cultural drag”. On the other hand, there are believers who fear the opposite danger, that the church which marries herself to the spirit of the age will become a widow in the following generation. Although the so-called “worship wars” have died down, this may well be because churches have opted either to be traditional or to be contemporary; therefore the tensions which once existed are no longer there because the church has identified itself either with a traditional culture (and those of a different outlook have moved on) or with a contemporary culture (in which case those of the opposite view have left). It is not at all uncommon in areas which are blessed with a number of evangelical churches for believers moving into such an area to settle in the church where they feel *culturally* most at home. Where, however, there is only one evangelical church within reasonable travelling distance, it may well be the case that tensions continue to exist.

The cultural “feel” to a church does not, of course, relate only to the contrast between that which is contemporary or traditional; it also relates to its racial make-up and the socio-economic, educational and cultural background of its members, in general, and of its officers in particular. All of these factors may well influence a particular “church culture”. And this, in

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\* Pastor, Freeschool Court Evangelical Church, Bridgend, Director, EMW Theological Training Course and Lecturer in Systematic Theology, London Seminary.

<sup>1</sup> I heard this story during the course of a sermon on 1 Peter 2:4-12 preached by the late Dr D. M. Lloyd-Jones on Sunday morning, 13 November 1977 at the opening of the new building of Emmanuel Evangelical Church, Newport, S. E. Wales. His point was that a church is a living community and must never become a museum or a monument to dead ideas.

turn, can affect the cultural approach and “style” of the church’s worship. Added to all of this are some of the wider cultural influences: in a day of instant electronic communication, where a church in an isolated area can access videos and other material from churches in distant places, it is becoming increasingly the case that those Christians who once lived and moved and had their being in a fairly sheltered ecclesial context are now regularly exposed to ways of doing things which some may find to be truly liberating but which others view as a serious threat to the integrity of their church life.

I have not yet addressed the all-important question of what *Scripture* says concerning the relationship of the church to culture in a contemporary context and, in particular, what is the nature of that relationship as it affects the church’s worship. The answer is to be found by grappling with the teaching of the entire Bible, quarrying timeless principles from it, and then seeking to ascertain how those principles apply to the very diverse cultures which characterise many modern western societies. Since this paper is prepared for a *study conference*, where much of the time is devoted to conferring in small groups and then in plenary sessions, I shall give heavy emphasis to questions, rather than to answers. The reason for this is that it is crucial for us to identify the key issues and the questions arising from them before exploring how churches are to give contemporary expression of worship in their own culture. I shall raise the questions in the hope that I shall stimulate thought at the conference itself and that in conferring together we may arrive at biblically informed answers. This having been said, I shall seek in this paper to crystallise certain biblical teaching and suggest ways in which it might be applied.

One final word by way of introduction: although the title assigned to me refers to one’s own culture, I have substituted the word “cultures”. My reason for so doing is that, as I shall seek to make clear, the church must give expression to her worship in what is becoming in the West – and has already largely become in many areas – a multi-cultural context.

## *I. Definitions*

Three terms in this paper’s title cry out for definition. The first is the word “contemporary”, for although its meaning may appear to be pretty straightforward, a moment’s reflection should demonstrate that this is far from being the case. I, as a 65-year-old, may speak of “my contemporaries”. I am, of course, referring to those in roughly the same age bracket as me. Someone who is half my age may refer to their contemporaries, in which case they are speaking of those in their late twenties and early thirties. But both groups are living in 2019 and, in this sense, are living in the

contemporary world. This, however, will inevitably mean different things to different people. It is obvious that what the contemporary world *means* to a 15-year-old will be very different from what it means for an 85-year-old. What will be a contemporary expression of something for the former may well be very different from what it will be for the latter. And this, of course, is true for all the various ages in between. Thus, what is quaint and archaic to one generation may still be modern to another. Indeed, what may be quaint and archaic to one generation in one cultural context may well be ultra-modern to those of the same generation in a very different cultural context.

One final observation is needed with respect to defining the word “contemporary”. Each and every period has its own distinctive emphases and blind spots. If, however, a church understands “contemporary expression of worship in its own culture” as doing that which is *only* contemporary (bearing in mind the difficulties I have already identified with respect to this term), it will inevitably be the case that the church will fail to give expression to all- important things which are mandated by God in his Word but which do not resonate with contemporary cultures. This is a hugely important matter to which I shall later return.

The second word which needs to be defined is “culture”. This term has generated a vast literature and has been variously understood. A classic treatment of the nature of culture and its relationship with the Christian message is to be found in Niebuhr’s seminal and celebrated book *Christ and Culture*.<sup>2</sup> In recent years Don Carson has made a penetrating critique of Niebuhr’s work the point of departure for his own treatment of this subject. Carson’s work in this area, as well as that of Kevin Vanhoozer, is especially helpful. Some quotations from both of these writers will help to elucidate, if not to define, culture. Here is a selection of material from Vanhoozer: “A culture is the objectification, the expression in words and works, of the ‘spirit’ of a particular people who inhabit a particular time and place.”<sup>3</sup> Again: “Culture is the effort of the human spirit to express itself by building and embodying values and beliefs into concrete forms (e.g., cathedrals, colosseums, cemeteries, cinemas, colleges, cash stations, car washes, etc).”<sup>4</sup> Vanhoozer draws a fascinating contrast between culture, which he understands to be a *human* product, from that which may be created within the rest of the animal kingdom:

A spider’s web is not a cultural product because it is not a work of freedom. The spider’s web, despite its intricacy, is neither a message nor an expression of a set of values and beliefs. There

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<sup>2</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951).

<sup>3</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer, “The World Well Staged? Theology, Culture, and Hermeneutics”, in D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (eds.), *God and Culture: Essays In Honour Of Carl F. H. Henry* (Grand Rapids: Michigan; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1993), 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*



are no arachnid equivalents of our Gothic, Enlightenment, or Romantic... cultural styles. The spider's web has no meaning; rather, it serves an instrumental purpose. The weaving of the web may be admired; it cannot be interpreted.<sup>5</sup>

The distinction which Vanhoozer makes here between the instrumental and the cultural is not without its difficulties.<sup>6</sup> With respect to the fact that culture is something which can be interpreted, he makes the following penetrating observation: "...there is more need than ever for the theologian to be interpreter and critic of contemporary culture, as well as champion of a counterculture that should be embodied in ecclesial existence – that is, in the church."<sup>7</sup>

Carson broadly adopts a number of proposals from other writers as a working definition of culture. Here is one of them:

[T]he culture concept... denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life."<sup>8</sup>

Both Vanhoozer's definition and that adopted by Carson are open to certain criticisms but I shall adopt them as working definitions.<sup>9</sup> What this means, of course, is that "culture" is a word which is, in some respects, very similar to "language". Language is an umbrella term, for language is expressed in specific languages. Similarly, culture is expressed in different cultures. In this

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<sup>5</sup> Vanhoozer, "The World Well Staged?", 6.

<sup>6</sup> One may question aspects of what Vanhoozer says here. The waggle dance of the honey bee, for example, certainly conveys a *message* to other bees as to where nectar may be found. Indeed, that dance has been *interpreted* by entomologists. Furthermore, Vanhoozer's positing of something which serves an instrumental purpose as being a binary opposite of that which is cultural is a distinction which surely breaks down in the human sphere. Historically, some of what we today term "art" was, in its own day, perceived to be "craft", which served an instrumental purpose. A bridge, which was designed to serve an instrumental purpose, may well be seen to be a cultural artefact. A comparison of Brunel's Clifton Suspension Bridge with the second Severn Bridge on the M4 motorway clearly indicates that although both of these were built for functional or instrumental purposes, they belong to different "cultural periods". Although Vanhoozer's definitions avoid equating "culture" with a kind of élitism, his distinguishing between that which is "cultural" and that which is "instrumental" may bring a kind of élitism in through the back door. One is reminded, in this connection, of the work of F. R. Leavis, the Cambridge literary critic and founder and editor of *Scrutiny*, who believed that certain works of literature were necessary to maintain civilisation and were a bulwark against the "Philistinism" of science and technology. Elizabeth Gaskell's exploration of the different nineteenth-century "cultures" found in the "literary south" and the "industrial north" (one might, employing Vanhoozer's terminology, refer to them as the cultural south and the instrumental north!) in *North and South* (1854-5) helps to guard against the cultural myopia displayed by Leavis and implicit in the above quotation from Vanhoozer.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Carson, *op. cit.*, 89. This quotation is taken by Carson from Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretations of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89.

<sup>9</sup> For criticism of Vanhoozer's definition, see note 6, *supra*.

respect the term “sub-culture” and “sub-cultures” can be somewhat misleading because they suggest that there is one dominant culture in which are to be found certain cultures which, although existing within and alongside the dominant culture, are quite different from (and even alien to) it. Although it is undoubtedly true that some societies are characterised by a dominant culture, in many western countries today there is no one dominant culture but, rather, a plethora of different, sometimes competing, cultures; the very term “multi-culturalism” expresses this reality.

Within the rough working definitions which have been given, at least two key questions need to be addressed in this paper: first, what is the relationship of the church, especially in its worship, to contemporary cultures? Secondly, does the Bible teach that the church has, and must express, a unique, Christian culture, especially with respect to its worship? Vanhoozer’s plea that the theologian be not only interpreter and critic of contemporary culture but also “champion of a counter-culture that should be embodied in ecclesial existence – that is, the church” suggests that at least one leading contemporary theologian is of the view that there should be a distinctive, Christian culture. It is difficult to see how this cannot fail to have implications for how the church is to worship. Such an idea goes clean contrary to much contemporary (that word, again!) Christian thought and practice, and is, therefore, not only counter-cultural with respect to secular society but also in relation to much present-day evangelicalism.

These remarks lead on to the third term in this paper’s title which needs to be defined: “worship”. I shall need to say more by way of definition and explanation of this word than I did for culture. Numerous words are used in the Hebrew Bible, in the LXX, and in the New Testament, which are either translated by our English word “worship”, or which are, in one way or another, associated with “worship terminology”. A brief consideration of the main terms is found in the footnote to this sentence.<sup>10</sup> Such a survey of the

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<sup>10</sup> The Hebrew word *hištaḥ<sup>a</sup>wâ* is used one hundred and seventy times in the Hebrew Bible. The word means to bend oneself at the waist, hence to bow down. When used with an adverbial phrase, such as “to the ground”, it usually carries the primary, postural meaning. When such postural indicators are not present or when the word is used with other Hebrew terms which carry the idea of bowing down, *hištaḥ<sup>a</sup>wâ* then conveys the idea of worship or homage. The word is translated in the LXX by the Greek word *proskynein*. A similar semantic range exists with respect to this Greek term, although early on “*proskynein*” came to be used for the inward attitude of homage or respect which the outward gesture represented” (David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A biblical theology of worship* [Leicester: Apollos/IVP, 1992], 56). The Hebrew term “*ʿāḇaḏ*” is often juxtaposed with *hištaḥ<sup>a</sup>wâ*. It conveys the idea of service, and is used in both religious and non-religious contexts. Although it is sometimes used as a parallel expression to that which is rendered by “sacrifice to the Lord” – and thus has clear cultic associations and connotations – it is clear from passages such as Dt 10:12-13 and Jos 22:5 that it could refer to one’s entire lifestyle. This is usually translated in the LXX by the Greek word *latreuein*, a word which sometimes refers to the cultic service of the people, in contradistinction to that of the priests; but, as with the Hebrew term “*ʿāḇaḏ*”, it may also denote the whole life of

biblical language leads to the view that it is a serious mistake to confine the idea of worship to what takes place when the people of God gather together, and still less to confine it to one aspect of a church gathering – the singing. It is something of a theological category error to identify worship *solely* with vocal praise, be that said or sung. Once this point has been grasped, it not

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service. In the New Testament it is used of the temple or cultic worship in the following passages: Luke 2:37 (the link with the temple in this verse indicates a cultic reference, though what this was precisely it is difficult to say); Acts 7:7 (though it is possible that it is being used in this verse in contrast with *douleusousin* – which refers to the Israelites serving the Egyptians as slaves – which is found earlier in the same verse); Rom 9:4 (where although the word “temple” is not present in the Greek text, the NIV supplies this word to bring out the fact that the reference here is cultic); Heb 9:1. It is used, however, in the wider sense of service in the following verses: Matt 4:10 (where, although it is juxtaposed with *proskynein*, the Old Testament Hebrew has a different word from *hištaḥ<sup>a</sup>wā* [*yārē* = “fear”, rendered by the Greek equivalent in the LXX]); Acts 24:14 (rendered by numerous English versions as “worship”); Rom 1:9; 12:1; etc. Although Romans 12:1 clearly refers to the whole of life, two elements in this verse indicate that Paul appears to be “transposing” cultic language and applying it to the whole of life. First, *parastēsai* (“present” or “offer”) is a word which, though never used in the LXX, was a standard Hellenistic term for the offering of a sacrifice. Secondly, what is to be offered is *ta sōmata hymōn thysian zōsan hagian euaraston tō Theō* (“your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God”). This is cultic language, yet with a difference: the sacrifice is to be living, not dead. What emerges from this very brief survey of *‘āḇaḍ* and *latreuein* is that in the Old Testament the “boundary line” between “cultic worship” and “all-of-life service” can be somewhat hazy, whereas New Testament writers – especially Paul – can take the cultic usage of the term and transpose it to cover the whole of life. Thus, we may say that true worship is expressed in service and that the whole-of-life service may be viewed as cultic. Worship, therefore, is most emphatically not to be confined to what takes place when God’s people meet together. A more technical term found in the Hebrew Bible is *šērēṭ*. Although in a small number of passages this verb can refer to non-cultic service and, indeed, to non-divine service (e.g., Gen 39:4; 40:4; 1 Kings 1:15), most Old Testament references are either to the priests “ministering to” or “serving” God, or to the Levites serving the priests. In other words, the word is mostly associated with the cult and to the work associated with the priests’ office. The LXX translates this Hebrew word with the Greek *leitourgein*. The cognate noun is used in Heb 8:2 of Christ, as the high priest who “serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man”. This is clearly a cultic usage. In Rom 13:6 Paul applies the noun to the rulers in the Roman Empire, who, Paul says, “are servants of God”. Dunn comments that “it is generally agreed that the context here is that of the secular technical usage in Hellenistic society, where *leitourgein*” (i.e. *leitourgein*) “and *leitourgia*” (i.e. *leitourgia*) “refer to the rendering of public services to the body politic...”: James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary Volume 38B: Romans 9-16* (Dallas: Word, 1988), 767. In Rom 15:16 Paul says that he is a “minister” or “servant” (*leitourgon*) of Christ Jesus, and goes on to say that he serves the gospel of God as a priest (*hierougounta to euangelion to Theou*) in order that the “offering up” (*prosphora*) of the Gentiles might be “acceptable” (*euprosdektos*). This is language heavily indebted to that of the cult but it has clearly been somewhat transposed. In verse 17 Paul uses the verb of the Gentiles sharing or “ministering” material things to the Jewish believers, a usage which is very similar to that of the noun in Phil 2:25, where Paul says that Epaphroditus had ministered to his needs. There are, of course, other Hebrew and Greek words which are employed in Scripture with respect to “worship” but the above maps out the broad features of this area of biblical truth.

only enables one to view some past controversies in a different perspective and a fresh light but also to see that the title of the present paper could raise much wider and broader issues and questions than those which simply relate to how we “do church”, if by “doing church” nothing other is meant than how our meetings together are ordered.

It is important to keep in mind, therefore, that the whole of one's life is worship *and* that we come together to worship in a specific way. Since the conference brochure states that the purpose of the conference is to examine “The principles, practice and history of what Christians do when they gather to praise God”, I shall confine my treatment of worship to what is usually understood by the phrase “worship service”; but it has been important to locate such usage within the wider biblical categories of worship.

## *II. Culture and cultures: good, bad, and neutral*

Culture, as we have seen, is a human phenomenon; therefore cultures are human phenomena and cultural activity is human activity. Cultures will, therefore, express our humanness. Just as God causes his sun to rise on good and evil alike and sends rain to the righteous and unrighteous, so he restrains people from being as bad as they might be. Furthermore, at certain periods and places people are capable of acts of extraordinary kindness, generosity, and so on. This means, of course, that the cultural activities which such people practise may well display positive and noble qualities. And this being so, it follows that some of those things which are often associated with the word “culture” may also be classified as good, not only in an aesthetic sense but also morally. Thus, a great work of literature may explore some moral dilemma in such a way as to extol certain virtues and to make them appear desirable and attractive. And this, of course, may be the case when the work is produced by someone who is not a Christian and not even a theist. The fact that Paul could quote approvingly from Greek poets demonstrates this fact.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12. The quotation in the former passage, “We are his offspring”, is from Aratus, *Phaenomena*. The possibility of the phrase being found also in Cleanthes, *Hymn to Zeus*, is less certain and is dismissed by some scholars: see Darrell L. Bock, *Acts: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 568. The latter quotation, from Epimenides, is of course interesting because of the paradoxical nature of the quotation: since Epimenides was a Cretan, then, if all Cretans were always liars, then Epimenides was lying when he wrote these words about them. But if he was lying when he wrote these words about them, then they could not be true. But if they were true, then Epimenides was not lying when he wrote this, which would mean that what he wrote was not true because he was not always a liar. In other words, if what he said was true, it was false! The resolution of such a paradox being found in Scripture is probably to be sought along the lines that Paul is not quoting Epimenides as making a *statistical* statement to the effect that every single thing which every single Cretan spoke or wrote was always untrue.

Some things in culture may, of course, be nothing other than evil. Phrases such as “gang culture” and “gambling culture” spring to mind. Other things, however, are neither good nor evil but neutral; it is the use to which they are put which is good or evil. The sharp knife, which is surely a “cultural product”, may be used to cut food to prepare a delicious meal for homeless people or it may be used to kill someone. Furthermore, it is quite clear that certain cultural activities which would characterise the people of God and which would be endorsed by God in his Word originated outside of the covenant people of God; the things themselves were neutral and could be put to evil or good use.<sup>12</sup> The fact that such things originated amongst the ungodly seed does not necessarily, therefore, mean that they are inappropriate for the people of God or even for the set worship of God. To think otherwise is to be guilty of something that is not dissimilar to the genetic fallacy. This is an important point to which I shall later return.

Indeed, something which has been directly created by God and which, at one level, may be regarded by him as good can be turned to evil use. Thus, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was created by God. Like the other trees in the Garden of Eden, its fruit was edible (“the fruit of the tree was good for food”) and the tree itself was “pleasing to the eye”.<sup>13</sup> Yet the woman used it in an illegitimate way. The first mention of wine in the Bible has negative connotations: Noah drank some and became drunk.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, the second mention of wine is entirely positive: Melchizedek greeted Abraham as he returned from battle and “brought out bread and wine”.<sup>15</sup> Wine may be seen as a good gift of God and used positively.<sup>16</sup> Equally, the Scriptures warn of the dangers which it can pose, and of the need to avoid abuse of this gift of God.<sup>17</sup> Something may be neutral and thus be used in either a good way or a bad way. In this connection, it should be noted that things specifically prescribed for the worship of God, understanding the term “worship” fairly broadly, may also be abused and put to sinful use. This was surely the case with the bringing of the Ark of the Covenant onto the field of battle during the priesthood of Eli’s sons; it had been turned into an idol.<sup>18</sup> The same kind of thing happened to the brass serpent which the LORD had

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<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Gen 4:21. The harp, as well as the flute, would be played by evil people (Job 21:12) but it would also be played by David (1 Sam. 16:16, 23). Furthermore, it would also feature in the praise of God prescribed in the Psalter (Pss 33:2; 43:4; etc.) and practised in the temple (2 Chron 5:12).

<sup>13</sup> Compare Genesis 2:9 with 3:6.

<sup>14</sup> Gen 9:20-21.

<sup>15</sup> Gen 14:18.

<sup>16</sup> Ps 104:14-15. The same Hebrew word is used here as is found in Gen. 9:21 and 14:18. Note the linking of bread with wine in both Gen 14:18 and Ps 104:14-15. See also 1 Tim 4:4-5.

<sup>17</sup> Pr 23:29-35; 31:4. It is the same Hebrew word that is used in Gen 9:21; 14:18 and in Ps 104:15.

<sup>18</sup> 1 Sam 4:3-11.

told Moses to set up on a pole. By Hezekiah's time, the people had turned it into an object of worship, and it had to be destroyed.<sup>19</sup> Both of these occurrences, the first with the ark and the second with the brass serpent, demonstrate the danger and propensity of God's people to turn *means* which God has appointed for one purpose into an idolatrous *end*, where the means are worshipped in place of and instead of God. There can be little doubt that in the "worship wars" some have been guilty of this. Trust can be placed in Bible versions: some have undoubtedly placed a confidence in the AV or KJV, rather than in God himself and in his holy truth, in a translation of God's Word instead of in God's Word itself. This has sometimes gone hand-in-hand with a belief that only hymns written before a certain date or which use a certain language can be fit vehicles of praise to the LORD. On the other hand, others have given the impression that unless the latest technology is employed in every gathering for corporate worship, the Holy Spirit will be mysteriously absent. To a certain extent I caricature, but the fearful thing is that there *are* these realities to caricature.

The technological revolution with respect to modern means of communication and mass media has been every bit as epoch-making as was the invention of the printing press. Podcasts of interviews with Christians and Christian leaders who are expert on a whole range of subjects; the availability of a vast treasure-trove of sermon material which can be downloaded; interviews on YouTube; the sharing and dissemination of wholesome gospel and biblical material on social media platforms; the possibility of hearing fine renderings of sung Christian praise – all these are great blessings indeed. The internet and social media are neutral but the Christian material to which I have just referred is in the category of good, not neutral. It can, however, be abused and is being abused by some. While it is a great blessing for a house-bound Christian to be able to live-stream a church service on the Lord's Day and to be able to download other good material through the week, this becomes spiritually harmful when a believer who is in perfectly good health chooses to stay at home to do this rather than meet with the Lord's people in his or her local church. The singing may be vastly superior in the large congregation which can be seen and heard on the computer screen than it is in that believer's local church; the believer may feel that the preaching has an impact upon him that is far greater than he has ever known in the church which he has now ceased to attend; but in essence, what has happened is that he has become a consumer of piped religion rather than a worshipper with God's people of the living and awesome God. This is so because he or she cannot *contribute* to the other worshippers who have gathered together. Gathering for worship is a *communal* and *corporate*

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<sup>19</sup> Num 21:8-9; 2 Kings 18:4.

affair, hence the biblical injunction that we forsake not the assembling of ourselves together.<sup>20</sup>

It is significant that this command to continue meeting together is followed by specifying one of the great purposes of our gathering together – that we might encourage each other. In other words, one vital aspect of corporate worship is the ministering to one another which should take place. Furthermore, as Paul makes abundantly clear in his treatment of the Lord's Supper, this means of grace is most emphatically not a privatised affair but, rather, is communal, where we are to have regard for one another.<sup>21</sup> In addition, being under the pastoral care and discipline of the church is a privilege for each believer; this cannot be had completely on the internet. This is one of the reasons why it is important to locate “worship” in the narrow sense of what happens when we gather together for praise, teaching, and fellowship within the context of worship understood in its widest sense.

### *III. The Christian's and the Church's Relationship to Culture*

Niebuhr identified five different ways in which Christians have thought about the relationship of the Christian to culture. They are: Christ *against* culture; the Christ *of* culture; Christ *above* culture; Christ and culture *in paradox*; Christ the *transformer of culture*.<sup>22</sup> Niebuhr's work can hardly be ignored but neither should his paradigms and analyses be taken as definitive. As previously stated, Carson makes penetrating criticisms of Niebuhr's approach. In recent years the word “engage” has almost become something of a cliché amongst some evangelicals to define what they see as their task with respect to culture: we must “engage” with it.<sup>23</sup> Given the wealth of literature upon this subject, it is hardly possible to do little more than scratch the surface in a paper of this length. Instead of evaluating different approaches, I shall seek to identify a number of key biblical principles which, hopefully, will help us to navigate our way through what some Christians have discovered to be particularly difficult and hazardous waters.

The first and most obvious point is that the Christian must respond differently to different aspects of culture. Where aspects of a culture are good, he or she may surely identify with and endorse these. On the other hand, the Christian must not conform to those aspects of culture which are sinful or bad. Whether more is required than mere nonconformity is something which is beyond the scope of this paper. In the third place, where

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<sup>20</sup> Heb 10:25.

<sup>21</sup> 1 Cor 11:17-34.

<sup>22</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> The Quarterly comment from the Jubilee Centre in Cambridge is entitled “Engage”. The word has also featured extensively in literature emanating from the Cardiff Institute of Contemporary Christianity.

culture is neutral the Christian is free to go along with it or not. I shall now seek to set out the biblical underpinning for the foregoing observations.

In 1 Corinthians 1 Paul refers to the way in which different cultural groups had different desires, aspirations and expectations, and goes on to describe his response to these different groups in his gospel presentation. Jews wanted and demanded miraculous signs.<sup>24</sup> The Greeks, however, were not interested in such things; they sought wisdom.<sup>25</sup> Paul, however, did not bend his message to satisfy or indulge the predilections of either group. He preached Christ crucified.<sup>26</sup> It is surely significant that later in this letter Paul can refer to people, whether Jews or Greeks, as not receiving the message of the Spirit precisely because they do not have the Spirit.<sup>27</sup> The effect of this is that the gospel message is regarded as foolishness.<sup>28</sup> In chapter 1 verse 23, however, he states that the cultural difference between Jewish and Greek expectations is such that the gospel message is a stumbling block or scandal to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. Thus, human sinfulness expressed itself differently in different racial groups with respect to rejection of the gospel message. Paul's gospel message was decidedly counter-cultural. When God called Jews and Greeks into fellowship with his Son, Christ then became to them the power of God and the wisdom of God.<sup>29</sup> Signs, of course, were all to do with divine power. But under the influence of God's Spirit, Jews who embraced Jesus saw his cross-work as the supreme revelation of divine power and, therefore, they no longer demanded signs. Similarly, Greeks who saw the cross as the supreme disclosure of divine wisdom no longer sought from Paul the kind of wisdom which they had hitherto sought; it had been given in Christ.

1 Corinthians chapter 9, however, shows that Paul could be remarkably flexible with respect to cultural matters. The man who in chapter 1 did not indulge the expectations of different racial and cultural groups with respect to the message he proclaimed tells us in chapter 9 that he was remarkably adaptable with respect to certain cultural matters. The spine of the argument which runs through 1 Corinthians 8-10 is that of not insisting on one's

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<sup>24</sup> 1 Cor 1:22. The gospels make it quite clear that this was a characteristic of the Jews, especially when confronted with the person and message of Jesus: e.g., Matt 12:38-39; 16:1-4; Luke 16:27-30; Jn 6:30.

<sup>25</sup> 1 Cor 1:22. An example of this is to be seen in the Athenians whom Paul encounters in Acts 17. Verse 32, in referring to those who sneered at Paul when he spoke of the resurrection of the dead, describes what this "wisdom" was like: its shape and contours were limited by a kind of rationalism which had already foreclosed upon certain things, bodily resurrection being one of them. Thus, the wisdom sought by the Greeks was very different from the wisdom inculcated by the "wisdom literature" of the Old Testament and endorsed in and by the New Testament.

<sup>26</sup> 1 Cor 1:23.

<sup>27</sup> 1 Cor 2:14.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> 1 Cor 1:9, 24.



“rights” or freedoms. And this is a crucially important disposition which *all* Christians should possess when the subject of church worship is under consideration. In chapter 9 Paul explains how he had not insisted on various rights and how he accommodated himself to different people so that by all possible means he might save some. Possibly the most extraordinary statement that he makes is found in verse 20: “To the Jews I became like a Jew to win the Jews.” What is so remarkable about this statement is the fact that elsewhere Paul makes it clear that he was a “Hebrew of the Hebrews” and that, as a disciple of Jesus, he still regarded the Jews as his fellow countrymen, his brothers.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, by saying that to the Jews he became like or as a Jew, he is signalling that his sense of identity is no longer defined by anything racial or cultural but, rather, with respect to his now being “in Christ”. This, therefore, enabled him in certain respects to be “outside cultures” and to be able to step into any and every culture and adopt its norms, *provided those norms were not contrary to the gospel of Christ and its entailments*. It was only because he had thus been set free from being imprisoned within and by his culture that he could not only become as a Jew to the Jews but also become as one without law (though “in-lawed” to Christ) to those without law – that is, people who were culturally very different from the Jews.<sup>31</sup>

The practical implications of the foregoing for the subject of this paper are enormous. It is impossible to consider contemporary expression of worship in one’s own culture unless and until one has addressed the following issues. First, one must distinguish cultural practices and norms which are contrary to the gospel and its entailments from those which are either good or neutral. Secondly, one needs to define one’s fundamental identity – and the church’s fundamental identity – as that of being “in Christ”. Only when an individual and a church has done this is it in a position to be able to be extraordinarily flexible on certain cultural matters while being immovably fixed with respect to the gospel and its entailments. This, however, raises what is in many ways the most acute problem which must be faced when exploring the relationship of the Christian to culture. It is this: what are Christians and churches to do when there is not one culture but a multitude of cultures in a particular geographical and historical context? This leads us to the next area which requires exploration.

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<sup>30</sup> Phil 3:5; Rom 9:3.

<sup>31</sup> 1 Cor 9:21.

#### *IV. The Relationship of Christians and Churches to Different Cultures*

In an article in a recent edition of Affinity's online theological journal, *Foundations*, Stephen Kneale addressed the phenomenon of assuming certain cultural values without having first assessed them biblically. He gave the following example, which he had first given to a meeting of the Affinity Council:

A middle-class man and working-class man both hear a sermon and think it boring. The middle-class man makes some vaguely positive comment and the working-class man wonders why he is lying. The working-class man says it was boring and the middle-class man thinks he's rude. This is just one example of how we can talk past each other's cultures. But when the majority culture is middle class, most people in the church – not least the middle-class elders – think the working-class man is rude, so who is going to make that guy an elder? He's too blunt. He's insensitive. He's not careful how he speaks. Never mind that, biblically, he might be entirely qualified for the role; according to the dominant middle-class culture, he is deemed unfit.<sup>32</sup>

One of the points which Stephen is making is this: what is regarded as rude in one culture is seen as simple honesty in another. What one culture regards as politeness may be viewed by those from another culture as being dishonest. Which culture is one to follow? What if one of those cultures has become dominant within a church? And these differences are not only found to exist between different social groupings within a country: they also exist between countries. What an Australian might regard as an exercise in speaking the plain truth may well be viewed by a Japanese as insufferably bad manners. Likewise, the Australian may think the Japanese to be as inscrutable as the sphinx, whereas the Japanese is merely seeking to be courteous. Although not all of these differences are immediately relevant to the subject of worship services (though they *are* relevant to “all-of-life worship”), cultural differences can have a huge impact upon a service of worship. I shall give a number of examples.

A very close friend of mine was once due to preach in a church in the West Indies. The service was being led by someone else and so my friend was seated towards the front of the church before he got up to preach. While sitting at the front he could hear a strange and loud “sucking” noise from the back of the church building, and he wondered if some of the congregation had brought animals with them. When he eventually got up to preach and thus face the congregation, he was somewhat surprised, not to say shocked, to see the back row of the church filled with nursing mothers whose breasts were in full view of the preacher as he preached and as they fed their babies.

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<sup>32</sup> Stephen Kneale, “Assumptions Without Reflection: Assessing Cultural Values in Light of Biblical Values”: *Foundations*, No. 75 Autumn 2018. [www.affinity.org.uk](http://www.affinity.org.uk) Accessed 5 February, 2019.

It was not what he had been used to in South Wales! But, as he was later to learn, in *that* context the baring of the breasts by these mothers to feed their babies had no erotic or sexual connotations for the locals; if, however, an unmarried woman were to bare her breasts, this *would* have been viewed by everyone in that society as sexually provocative and thus wholly inappropriate. In other words, there was a “cultural signalling” element to who was baring their breasts and as to when and how this was done. It is easy to see, however, that someone from a different culture might interpret those cultural signals in a very different way. What then? Should the mothers of those babies be encouraged or told to abandon their practice in favour of a more discreet way of feeding their babies?

Some Christians genuinely equate silence before a service begins as an expression of reverence before God, as one “prepares one’s heart for worship” by engaging in silent prayer. They may also hold to the view that to speak in the building at the end of the meeting is the surest way to be robbed of any spiritual help that one has received from the preaching of God’s Word and the impression of the total worship service. Believers from a different background may well regard such an approach as being somewhat unnatural and cold. They may reason that one should prepare oneself before getting into the building; that “encouraging one another” as part of the worship service necessarily implies and entails that people will talk to each other; that bearing one another’s burdens is part of worship and this demands that we speak together. This again pinpoints the importance of locating the gatherings of God’s people for worship within the context of the whole-of-life worship. While what goes on at a gathering of God’s people on the Lord’s Day is necessarily different from what goes on if the church has an outing or a family day at the beach or in a park on a Saturday, we do not lose our humanness when we gather together for a worship service. It is not difficult to see how Christians from these differing “church cultures” may fail to understand each other and feel uncomfortable in a culture different from that of which they approve. Clearly, it is essential to work out the biblical principles and teaching on an issue such as this.

Some years ago an elderly adherent of the church I currently serve as pastor (he had, in fact, once been a pastor and is now with the Lord) expressed to me his dismay and disapproval at the fact that the person who had been giving a children’s message during the morning meeting had referred to the children as “kids”. He was outraged; kids, he told me, were animals, young goats, and, this being so, he considered it degrading to refer to children in such terms. The person taking that part of the meeting had obviously intended no slight upon the children but was simply using a word the meaning of which had been extended in common parlance to include children. Again, one thinks of the way in which a younger believer might say of a fellow Christian that he is really wicked, thereby meaning that he is very

special. An elderly Christian on hearing this may be perplexed at the way in which his younger brother can speak so enthusiastically of someone who is so sinful. Language is clearly a part of culture. The foregoing are examples of believers being in the contemporary world where certain cultural symbols – words – convey entirely different meanings, depending upon one's age.

Symbolism is important in culture – and associations are important when one comes to deciphering symbols. Music is one such area, as is musical accompaniment. Take the following quotation from a sermon preached by the late Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones on the subject of singing:

...we must be careful as to what musical instruments we use. There are musical instruments that are sensuous, that belong to the world, and have no place in Christian worship – saxophones and things of that type. They do not belong to this realm, they are essentially of the world and primitive, and are incompatible with the thoughtfulness and wisdom that characterise the Christian.<sup>33</sup>

The obvious questions to ask here are these: is the saxophone *inherently* sensuous? Does the saxophone inherently belong to the world and is it essentially primitive and incompatible with the thoughtfulness and wisdom that characterise the Christian? Or was the late and good “Doctor” confusing something that had for him become worldly by virtue of certain associations with something that was inherently of the world? Does this not raise the spectre of the genetic fallacy to which I referred earlier? These questions are so important and open up such fruitful lines of investigation with respect to the relationship of Christians and the church to different cultures that I shall probe them more deeply by analysing the issues behind them.

To begin with, it should be fairly obvious that there can be nothing which is inherently sinful about a collection of musical notes. Air waves of different lengths (and therefore of different frequency and pitch) and different amplitude (and therefore of different volume) hit the ear drum and thereby, through various processes in the auditory system, we “hear” sounds and distinguish different sounds, notes, tones, etc. Since air waves are part of God's inanimate creation, it follows that they cannot belong to the category of that which is sinful, if we define sin, as the apostle John does, as lawlessness.<sup>34</sup> This being so, one cannot say that certain sounds are inherently sinful and, therefore, worldly.

Sin may attach to certain sounds in a number of ways. If the intention in producing them is to induce loss of self-control or sin in the hearer, or if the effect of the sounds leads to loss of self-control or to sin, then clearly sin *attaches* to the sounds, though it is not objectively inherent within them. An analogy with pornography may help to elucidate this point. The human body

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<sup>33</sup> Sermon entitled “Walking In The Light”, *The Westminster Record*, Vol. 43, No. 10, 156.

<sup>34</sup> 1 John 3:4.

is clearly not sinful *per se*. Likewise, there is nothing inherently sinful with points on paper or pixels on a screen. We regard it as necessary and perfectly appropriate for someone to produce high resolution photographs of human genitalia for publication in an anatomical text book and we see nothing wrong with a medical student carefully studying such a photo. Wherein, therefore, lies the sin in publishing and looking at pornographic photographs of naked men or naked women, whether those photographs consist of points on paper or pixels on a screen?<sup>35</sup> The answer is to be found in the following areas: in the intent of those posing for, producing and publishing the photos to stir up lust and in the effect upon those who look at such photographs, as well as upon those who pose for them and those who take them. In a similar way there is nothing inherently sinful in congeries of air waves which strike the human ear drum. Where, however, the *intent* in producing them is to lead people to commit sin or where the *result* of them is sin, sin has then been committed.

A few examples will illustrate the point that I am seeking to make. Certain forms of torture have involved subjecting the victim to sounds which are so loud and / or discordant that his or her resistance to questioning breaks down. It is not that the sounds themselves are sinful; rather, the intention to induce loss of self-control and the effect of that – quite apart from the infringement of the liberty of the victim in this way – is where evil is to be located. In the same way, music which is intended to lead its auditors to loss of self-control is not evil *per se*: but the intention to induce loss of self-control is the locus of evil. Of course, whether certain music *does* knock out the higher control centres of the brain, in the way that alcohol and other chemical depressants do, is a factual question the answer to which can only be empirically and experimentally determined.

We are, of course, at this stage dealing with *music*, rather than with musical instruments. So let me now apply the analysis thus far to musical instruments. Are the notes produced by a saxophone “incompatible with the thoughtfulness and wisdom that characterise the Christian” in a way in which the same notes produced by an organ, piano, violin or cello are not thus incompatible? The answer to this is, again, a factual matter, rather than one of opinion and taste, and can only be determined empirically and experimentally. There may be studies which have established this but my guess is that this is doubtful. It is far more likely to be the case that, given Lloyd-Jones’ historical context – having been a young man in the “roaring twenties”, when jazz bands, with their saxophones, were commonplace in night clubs – that it was the *associations* of the saxophone and the like,

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<sup>35</sup> I say “men or women” because pastoral experience indicates that although looking at pornography may be a more widespread problem with men than women, it is most certainly not confined to men. One has also to keep in mind the phenomenon of homosexual pornography.

playing music to which the post-First World War generation danced and “let their hair down”, which led the late Doctor to the view that the saxophone was “worldly”. The problem is, of course, that to many young people today – and not-so-young people, for that matter, the author of this paper included! – saxophones do not have those associations of sleazy, smoked-filled clubs in which scantily dressed “flappers” danced into the early hours. And therein lies a major problem: what does one do when the associations some make with certain instruments are not made by others?

Many people associate the pipe organ or an electronic version of the same with that which is high-brow, at best and, at worst, that which is stuffy. How does sung praise within a church meeting give a contemporary expression of worship in one’s own culture in a church where for some of the members the pipe organ is associated with “sweet and solemn pleasure” when others feel that they are being forced into being stiff, stuffy and starchy?<sup>36</sup> Will a new convert for whom the organ has these negative associations think that conversion to Christ means that he must become “high-brow” or, in his view, something worse? On the other hand, if someone whose musical tastes have been high-brow comes to faith in Christ and joins a church which has a band where the music is more popular, will he or she feel that they must deny themselves in this area truly to worship God?

It is important to appreciate the fact that some of the differences upon which I am touching may have a generational aspect but that this is not always the case. Taste is also part of the “total mix”. Some thirty years or so ago some fairly culturally conservative evangelical churches began to have the organ and piano playing together, thinking that they were thereby making a great leap forward. But a friend of mine who is a very fine cellist and pianist, who trained at the Royal Academy and was a contemporary of Sir Simon Rattle while there, told me that she knew of no composer of note who had composed music to be played simply by the organ and piano together. Most of her unconverted musical colleagues would be aghast at such a thing and, if invited to a church service where piano and organ were being played together, would find it utterly “cringeworthy” and, if not so offensive to their taste, utterly comical. Whose tastes does one suit?

The question of taste is problematic in numerous ways. Many contemporary hymns and Christian songs are written to be sung in unison. For some who are musically blessed it is a real loss not to be able to sing in

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<sup>36</sup> The words “sweet and solemn pleasure” come from the hymn “O what matchless condescension” by the “Gospel Standard” Baptist preacher William Gadsby (1773-1844). Part of the fifth and final verse reads: “True, ‘tis sweet and solemn pleasure, / God to view in Christ the Lord”. The hymn is 514 in *A Selection Of Hymns For Public Worship By William Gadsby* (London: The Gospel Standard Publications, 1960). It is also found as hymn number 110 in *Christian Hymns* (Bridgend: The Evangelical Movement of Wales, 1977) and 135 in the 2004 new edition of that hymn book.

parts and in harmony and they lament the fact that usually it is mostly only older hymns which allow for this. C. S. Lewis once referred to the cultural leap he had to make when he began attending church services after his conversion but the blessing which this was to him:

I disliked very much their hymns, which I considered to be fifth-rate poems set to sixth-rate music. But as I went on I saw the great merit of it. I came up against different people of quite different outlooks and different education, and then gradually my conceit just began peeling off. I realized that the hymns (which were just sixth-rate music) were, nevertheless, being sung with devotion and benefit by an old saint in elastic-side boots in the opposite pew, and then you realize that you aren't fit to clean those boots. It gets you out of your solitary conceit.<sup>37</sup>

I shall return to the importance of this shrewd comment of Lewis'. It has much to teach.

Earlier I suggested that Dr Lloyd-Jones' antipathy to the use of the saxophone in a church service possibly had more to do with the associations of the instrument *for him* than with anything inherent in the instrument itself. Some associations, however, are so strong that it is quite likely that everybody finds some tunes to be inappropriate for hymns. I think it would be either a bold person or a very foolish one who would want a church to sing a hymn on the Lord's death – or any hymn, for that matter – to the tune "The Stripper"! Likewise, many would find it difficult to sing a hymn on prayer to the tune of Madonna's "Like A Prayer": the associations – especially for those who have seen the video which accompanied the song – would render it wholly inappropriate for them.<sup>38</sup> Yet the whole issue of associations is even more complex. Thus, the hymn tune "Cranbrook" first appeared in a hymn book in the early 1800s and Doddridge's "Grace, 'tis a charming sound" was sung to it, as was "While shepherds watched their flocks by night". Later, the words of "On Ilkley Moor Bah T'At" were set to it and it is with this song that the tune is now widely associated. Such is the strong association of these somewhat ludicrously humorous words that many would find it difficult to sing a serious hymn to this tune. Yet in the past it was not so.

The problems are even more acute. I have just been exploring the issues of taste and association. But let me for a moment return to the whole question of which music is so discordant that it affects one psychologically. Although this is a factual matter which needs to be determined empirically and

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<sup>37</sup> C. S. Lewis, "Answers to Questions on Christianity", in Walter Hooper (Ed.) *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 51-52.

<sup>38</sup> "Like the startling music video that would accompany it, the song is a series of button-pushing anomalies. Like the clip, it is filled with references to both the spiritual / religious and the carnal – a joyful celebration of love... but for whom... While the song feels distinctively religious, the underlying sexual tension is undeniable": J. Randy Taraborrelli, *Madonna: An Intimate Biography* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson / Pan MacMillan, 2001), 169. In fact, Taraborrelli identifies the anomalies in this song in terms of a *double entendre* which refers to a particular sexual act.

experimentally, rather than anecdotally and impressionistically, it may nevertheless be the case that some people will enjoy certain music which adversely affects others. Some years ago I was in a very large book shop which belonged to a nationwide chain of book stores. Music was being piped throughout the store. I found it to be so cacophonous that I was unable to think straight: it so disturbed me that I asked one of the assistants if it could be switched off or else I would have to leave. It was not simply a matter of taste, of me not liking the music; rather, I found it to be so unpleasantly intrusive that it was impossible for me to concentrate. There is no way that I could have sung a hymn or song of praise to that music. But other customers appeared to be perfectly happy with it. How is a church to resolve issues such as this?

The reply might be made that in terms of instrumentation the sensible thing would be to sing *a cappella* – that is, without musical instruments. Before one dismisses such an idea as being culturally alien to many, the following should be borne in mind: First, historically there have been many churches who sang without musical instruments and this is still true of some churches. Secondly, it may not be without significance that the phrase *a cappella* comes from the Italian and means “in church style”.<sup>39</sup> In the third place, singing without instrumentation certainly resolves the differences that exist amongst Christians as to which instruments are suitable and which are not. Furthermore, it puts the emphasis upon the words and the tunes not on the accompaniment. Fourthly, there have been some sections of the church which have maintained that musical accompaniment is something which belongs to the Old Testament people of God and is not authorised or approved for the New Testament church.

In response to the above points the following may be said. First, many churches would struggle to sing without the help of an instrument or instruments. Secondly, it is not honouring to God if the singing is so poor or even “quaint” that an outsider thinks that there is something decidedly “odd” or strange about the singing practices of a church.<sup>40</sup> The use of a tuning fork may have been quite adequate in the Metropolitan Tabernacle of Spurgeon’s day, when thousands attended the church, but one cannot help but think that it would appear passing strange for a small country church to attempt to do the same today. And while the views of unbelievers who turn in to a church worship service are not to be *the* determining factor of what goes on, the New Testament makes it abundantly clear that the impression upon such people is not irrelevant to how we do what we do.<sup>41</sup> Thus, while the absence of instruments would remove the problem of the associations which certain instruments have for some Christians, this would come at a price, and for

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<sup>39</sup> Literally, “in church”.

<sup>40</sup> In this connection the principle found in 1 Cor 14:23 is not irrelevant.

<sup>41</sup> See the reference in note 40, *supra*.



some churches a somewhat high price at that. At the same time, it would be a bold person who claimed that the New Testament *commands* the use of musical instruments.

The final sentence of the previous paragraph leads on to the whole question of the regulative principle. I am, of course, mindful of the fact that there is a considerable body of Christians and churches – some of which belong to Affinity and which have made very valuable contributions to it over many years – for whom it is a matter of biblical principle not to have musical instruments. This position is held conscientiously and sincerely by many fine believers and there are many illustrious Christians of the past for whom this was a settled conviction. Certainly, theirs is a more consistent position than that of some Christians and churches who seek to justify the inclusion of certain instruments but the exclusion of others purely on the basis of what they like or have come to accept. Arguments for and against the regulative principle and the normative principle are beyond the brief for my paper and properly belong within the first two papers. Since, however, it is possible to argue that differences over this issue exist even amongst those who agree in holding to the regulative principle but who disagree as to its application, I shall say a few words which are relevant to this issue as it relates to musical accompaniment.

First, it is not the case that things belong only within the categories of what is commanded or what is forbidden. There is a third category: that which is permitted. Secondly, it is undoubtedly the case that there is a shift between the two testaments with respect to the emphasis upon the senses in some of the gatherings of God's people. The Old Testament tabernacle made an impression upon many of the senses: the sight and smell of blood; the smell of incense; the clothing of the high priest; the various objects in the temple; and so on. The whole thrust of passages such as John 2:19-22; 4:19-24; 7:37-39; 2 Corinthians 3:4-18; Galatians 3:15-4:7; and the whole of the letter to the Hebrews indicates that there is a movement from the Old Testament, which is more sensual, to the New Testament, which is more spiritual. The all-important word here, however, is *more*, for the differences are relative, not absolute. For example, the sensual is not wholly absent from that which is *commanded* in the New Testament: in addition to the obvious point that the reading and preaching of God's Word to the church means that the church *hears*, baptism and the Lord's Supper are things which are *seen*. Furthermore, contrary to popular, current-day evangelical misconceptions, the Holy Spirit was active during the Old Testament, both in regenerating individuals and in sanctifying them.<sup>42</sup> So the differences are *relative*, not

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<sup>42</sup> That regeneration took place flows from the fact that, as Romans 4 and Hebrews 11 indicate, faith – and *saving* faith – was in exercise during the Old Testament period. Since men and women were as dead in sin during the Old Testament period as in the New; since the Holy

absolute. This being so, although it is bad exegesis, based on a faulty hermeneutic to jump straight from those Old Testament passages which speak of many instruments accompanying God's praise in order to claim that this proves that they should be used today, it is equally mistaken to claim that the shift into the New Testament inevitably means that such things have ceased. It is surely more accurate to say that they are no longer mandatory but they are permissible. Moreover, although one would not expect the same emphasis upon musical accompaniment today, this is not the same as saying that there cannot be any or that everything must be confined to one instrument. But this being so, we are left with the question as to what the church must do when some believers find the associations of some instruments such that they cannot sing to them, whereas others feel differently. This leads to the final section of exposition and analysis before I make some suggestions as to application.

### *V. Christian Culture?*

Our survey of the difficult terrain which needs to be negotiated when churches seek to reason biblically, rather than simply follow tradition or the latest fads, when thinking through the whole issue of contemporary expression of worship in one's own culture has brought us to the point where we need to ask if there is a case to be made for a specifically "Christian culture", especially in our meetings for praise, prayer, teaching, fellowship and celebration of the sacraments. In other words, although, since we are human, there will be points of overlap with the cultures around us, because we are regenerate humans, will not this mean that there will inevitably be various things which are quite distinctive and different from any other culture? By this I do not mean that we shall be different in giving attention to Scripture, praying and so on. This should go without saying; rather, I am referring to those issues of "taste" which can be so problematic. A number of key biblical principles should help us at this point.

First, since the church consists of people from diverse backgrounds but who are all one in Christ Jesus, it follows that unity is to be expressed in diversity – and this unity-in-diversity is to be expressed as much in the church's praise and "worship services" as in every other aspect of its life. Many of the churches of the New Testament period were made up of

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Spirit's enabling power is necessary in the New Testament period for faith to be exercised, therefore, it follows that during the Old Testament period, there were those who were truly regenerate. Similarly, virtues which passages in the New Testament attribute to the Holy Spirit's ministry (e.g., Gal 5:22-23) were present in the lives of some Old Testament characters. This entails the proposition, therefore, that the Holy Spirit was active in sanctifying such people.

converted Jews and Gentiles. Clearly singing together was a feature of the gatherings of such churches.<sup>43</sup> Significantly, Paul tells both the Ephesians and the Colossians that psalms are to be a feature of their singing together.<sup>44</sup> Since many of the psalms had been written by David, this means that much of the psalter was already a thousand years old. Yet Paul expected *Gentile* Christians to sing these. It is possible that many of these psalms had been sung in the temple to traditional tunes. If Jewish Christians carried these over into their church gatherings, it means that Gentile Christians were singing not only very old compositions but were also singing them to quite old music. At the same time, it appears to be fairly clear that contemporary compositions were also being sung.<sup>45</sup>

Gentiles – certainly Greeks – were, of course, familiar with gatherings together where, amongst other things, they sang, often under the influence of alcohol; this is what a *symposium* was. It seems fairly clear from Paul's words in Ephesians 5:17-19 that this kind of thing was the background to his injunction that his readers were not to get drunk with wine but to be filled by the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Thus, something which belonged to their culture – social events where discussion and drinking occurred, *inter alia*, with singing – were now to be transformed, so that what they sang (psalms, hymns and spiritual songs), why and how they sang (under the influence of the Spirit, rather than wine, and to the Lord, giving thanks to God) were fundamentally different from what they had done in the past. This means, however, that while there were certain similarities and commonalities with the culture from which they had come (meeting together to sing), there were also significant differences (some of what they would sing would come from the "Jewish hymn book" – the book of Psalms). In other words, while not so culturally isolated and disengaged from what they had known, there was sufficient difference for this to be a distinctively "Christian culture". Likewise, for the Jewish Christians: for they were now not only singing the psalms of the past but fresh compositions by Gentiles *which were being sung alongside their sacred Scriptures*.

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<sup>43</sup> 1 Cor 14:13-15, 26; Eph 5:15-20; Col 3:15-17.

<sup>44</sup> Eph 5:19; Col 3:16.

<sup>45</sup> 1 Cor 14:26; Eph 5:19 and Col 3:16 – "hymns and spiritual songs". Those committed to exclusive psalmody argue that although the word "hymn" is used in Matt 26:30 of Jesus and his disciples singing after the celebration of the Passover, it is well known that it was traditional to sing a psalm after the Passover. This being so, the claim is then made that "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" is a kind of "lock, stock and barrel" type expression, where different terms are used to denote the entire range of psalms. For a very full and thorough refutation of this view from the standpoint of biblical exegesis, theological reasoning, and the practice of the very early church, reference should be made to a sermon by Dr D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Walking In The Light: VIII Christian Praise" in *Westminster Record*, Vol. 43, No. 9, 132-143.

Another, somewhat different kind of example of this type of thing is to be seen from the way in which certain words acquired a transformed meaning for Christians. Words, we have seen, are symbols within a culture. The language of sacrifice was fairly common in the Greek-speaking world. Terms such as *hilaskomai* and *hilasmos* denoted the propitiating of a god and the resultant propitiation. But these words were understood in terms of a whole thought-world of sacrifice where the worshipper was, in effect, “buying off” one of the gods. Agamemnon’s sacrificial slaughter of his daughter, to appease the gods which were thwarting his armies’ expedition to recover Princess Helen from her captor in Troy, is a good example of the crude commercialism by which the ancients thought that they could appease the angry gods. By contrast, the LXX uses this sacrificial language but the entire thought-world is different: it is the LORD himself who provides the sacrifice and its benefits, and the monetary or personal value of the sacrifice is not what determines its efficacy.<sup>46</sup> Significantly, the New Testament writers preserved the LXX terminology with respect to sacrifice, even though those Gentiles who were converted but who had had no contact with the synagogue and the LXX would have been used to understand this terminology against its pagan, rather than its LXX and biblical background. This, of course, means that they not only had to learn a different thought-world but a different language, in that certain cultural signs and symbols – that is to say, words – meant something quite different from what they had hitherto been understood to denote. They had to be instructed or educated into the different meaning of these cultural symbols – words – from that which they had hitherto attached to them.

The preceding paragraphs have set out some arguments for the fact that the New Testament church was something of a unique culture. Although it bore certain affinities with the cultures from which the first Christians were drawn, it was also different in significant ways. Thus, it was not completely culturally alien to what its members had been accustomed to but neither was it the same. This being so, churches today should seek to develop a similar culture: one where people from each kind of cultural background make contributions; but this, of course means, that at certain points *everyone* is challenged. Just as Jewish Christians had to get used to Gentile Christians bringing their own fresh compositions, so Gentile Christians had to get used to singing psalms. Today, Christians who have been raised in churches and who have been used to doing things in a certain way need to be prepared to allow Christians converted straight from the world to bring some of their cultural background into the church, *provided that this is allowed or*

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<sup>46</sup> It is anticipated in Gen 22:8: “God himself will provide the lamb...” That the Lord provided the value of the sacrifice is clear from the following words in Lev 17:11: “For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement... it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life”.

*sanctified by Scripture*. Equally, those freshly converted from the world must learn to adapt and to assimilate, absorb and accept much that is new and that may appear to be alien to them. The same applies to a church which is comprised of people of various ethnic groups.

The wall of division between Jews and Gentiles in the ancient world was very high indeed and its foundations ran deep throughout the Roman Empire. But part of the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that that middle wall of division, symbolised in the Jerusalem temple by the wall which separated the court of the Gentiles off from areas where only Jews were allowed, has been destroyed in Christ; Christ's purpose is to create in himself one new man; Gentiles are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's household; Gentile branches have been grafted into the one olive tree, which had hitherto consisted only of Jews and of those who had been fully "judaised"; and consequently, there is now "neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for... all are one in Christ Jesus".<sup>47</sup> It is quite clear that the New Testament churches consisted of people from different socio-economic backgrounds, as well as having different racial and ethnic identities, and, of course, different genders.<sup>48</sup> The "homogenous unit" idea of the church, beloved of the "church growth" movement and associated with names such as Donald McGavran, finds no support from New Testament principle or practice. Indeed, how significant is the fact that the "kings of the earth will bring their splendour" into the heavenly Jerusalem which will "come down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" and that the "glory and honour of the nations will be brought into" it!<sup>49</sup> Although there will be major discontinuities between life as it now is and the eternal state, it is equally clear that there will also be continuity, and one area where, it appears, continuity will exist will be with respect to unity-in-diversity. This, therefore, is something which churches should glory in, and display and exhibit.

The New Testament makes it clear that tensions could arise as a result of cultural differences but that these issues were to be worked through in the spirit of the gospel. Romans chapter 14 through to chapter 15:13 is a classic treatment of such a theme. Although this passage is not directly addressing the question of worship services, it is not difficult to see that differences over food and "sacred days" could well have implications for the gatherings of God's people: what food was to be served at a fellowship meal or "love feast"? Was it mandatory for the church to meet on certain days which still had an "emotional-cultural-cum-spiritual" significance and appeal to Jewish

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<sup>47</sup> Eph 2:14-19; Rom 11:16-24; Gal 3:28.

<sup>48</sup> Eph 5:22-6:9; Col 3:18-4:1 etc.

<sup>49</sup> Rev 21:2, 24, 26.

Christians, when these things meant nothing to Gentile Christians?<sup>50</sup> Indeed, the sub-section beginning with 15:5 and closed at 15:13 is studded with references to joint, corporate praise and singing.<sup>51</sup>

It is in this connection that the words quoted earlier from C. S. Lewis are so important. His point was that part of adapting and coming out of one's cultural comfort zone is good for one and is a means of sanctification. So what, if the music is sixth-rate and the poetry of the hymns is fifth-rate? The church is neither a music society nor a literary group. This, of course, is not an argument for deliberately writing bad music and doggerel, nor is it an excuse for being lazy and seeking only mediocrity in our worship rather than excellence; it is an argument for saying that someone with what may be termed refined or classical taste can appreciate the fact that someone of very different taste can be truly praising the Lord. And, of course, the opposite is equally true. It is surely significant that for all its many words, the Bible does not contain one musical note. In his messages to the seven churches of Asia Minor in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, Jesus makes no reference at all to the quality of their singing or of their music. He is concerned with their faith, repentance, love, obedience, humility, patience, or the absence of these things. It is here that the emphasis has always been placed in God's Word, both in the Old and in the New Testament. One thinks of Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount that one should leave one's gift at the altar and first be reconciled to a brother and only after this has been done should the gift be offered.<sup>52</sup> This, of course, was in line with what the Old Testament had already said.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Paul places the church's worship services in the context of living under the influence of God's Word and Spirit, an influence which is worked out not only in singing but in relationships within the church, family household, the work place and society at large.<sup>54</sup> Worship and ethics must go together.

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<sup>50</sup> Although the tensions referred to in this passage do not necessarily have to be confined to the Jew / Gentile issue, I agree with Dunn (*op. cit.*) that , the entire context of the letter, as well as the fact that 15:8-12 – which is an integral part of the discussion begun in 14:1 – is clearly dealing with Jew / Gentile relations within the church, clearly indicates that it was tensions concerning Jewish food laws and holy days which lay behind Paul's writing of this passage. While I have severe reservations about aspects of Dunn's treatment of this letter and disagree strongly with his understanding of what justification means in this and other Pauline material, one area where, I believe, the so called "New Perspective(s) on Paul" (not so new now) broke important ground was in the greater appreciation of the fact, than hitherto had been the case, that Jewish / Gentile relations within the church dominates much of Romans.

<sup>51</sup> In vv. 6, 9-11, praise, singing and rejoicing are referenced seven times.

<sup>52</sup> Matt 5:23-24.

<sup>53</sup> See, e.g., Is 1:10-17.

<sup>54</sup> Eph 5:18-6:9; Col 3:15-4:6.

## *VI. Applications: contemporary expression of worship in one's own culture*

One needs to distinguish a culture which has not had the gospel and one which has already been influenced by the gospel, especially where this has been so for many years. A country which has no gospel history, and thus no heritage of hymns, must do one of a number of things: translate a large body of material, or compose fresh hymns, or both. The last course of action is the ideal because it expresses the church's link in that society with the church across the world and across the ages. Of course, they may also sing psalms – indeed, should sing them – though this will require that these be arranged to be sung. Where, however, a church belongs to a country which has been greatly influenced by the gospel in the past, there will already be a rich heritage of hymnody indigenous to that country, as well as material translated from other countries and other periods. Ray Evans has dealt with the subject of maintaining continuity with the past and across the world; I shall not, therefore, seek to repeat or duplicate what may be in his paper.<sup>55</sup> Suffice it to say from what I have written thus far with respect to the fact that Gentiles would have been singing the psalms of the Jewish “church”, a contemporary expression of worship in one's culture should not entail the jettisoning of earlier hymn material. The one qualification to this is as follows: where the language of a hymn has become so archaic as to be unintelligible in today's world to all except the *cognoscenti* or where the language, though intelligible, is “quaint”, either the hymn needs to be modernised or it may have to be put to one side. Equally, however, modern hymns need to be sung. There is something profoundly wrong when older believers, who have expressed their praise for decades in what to them are very well-known hymns, are told that such things belong to the past and that they are meaningless to new converts, and therefore only what is contemporary is to be sung. Equally, there is something profoundly wrong when younger believers who have thrilled to sing God's praise in modern compositions in their CU or at conferences can never sing such things in their home church because only what is old is regarded as gold.

What of the issue of associations of certain types of instruments? Surely, the pastoral ministry of the church has, amongst other things, an educational role. This means that Christians, no matter how many years they have been in the faith, need to be helped to see that instruments *per se* are not evil: it is the associations in their minds which may lead them to think this. And once this has been done, it is surely incumbent upon those in pastoral leadership

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<sup>55</sup> At the time of writing this I have not seen Ray Evans' paper and have no idea at all what it says. Given its title, however, I assume that he will be arguing that we should maintain continuity with the past to a greater or lesser degree.

to help such believers to see that such associations are contingent, incidental things, not matter of ontological necessity. Surely it is part of spiritual maturity to be able to see such things. It really comes to this: is this only a matter of opinion or of conscience? If it is the former, then a Christian must learn to be forbearing with those whose opinions differ from his own. If it is the latter, then, in line with the teaching found in Romans 14, such a believer must not violate his conscience; but, this having been said, conscience needs to be enlightened and educated. The issue here, of course, is that the conscience of, say, one believer is not to be the yardstick for the whole church. At the same time, it is wrong for a church to do anything which forces a believer to do something which violates his or her conscience: "God alone is Lord of the conscience."<sup>56</sup> How this might work out in practice is something which is eminently discussable!<sup>57</sup>

One major problem with some contemporary worship in our culture is the emphasis which is given to singing at the expense of other things. On numerous occasions I have preached in large churches of a "charismatic" flavour. Although on each occasion I have thoroughly enjoyed the fellowship in these churches, I have been dismayed at the paucity of Bible reading and prayer that was offered. I realise that many hymns are prayers, and it is possible that where there is a lot of singing there may well be prayer in and through those hymns. Alas! The heavy subjectivism of many of the hymns was such that the result was that very little prayer was offered and certainly none for world leaders and for the work of the Lord in all the world. Yet these things are commanded in Scripture, as is the reading of God's Word.<sup>58</sup> Music plays a huge part in much modern culture. I fear that in the churches to which I have just referred, culture was driving their practice, rather than Scripture. Likewise, in a culture where feelings and subjectivism are very predominant, we need the corrective of hymns from earlier periods, where great objective truths are sung, truths which may well stir the affections, as well as some of the excellent modern hymns which do the same thing.

Where do "worship leaders" fit into this? We do not, of course, find them in the New Testament. But are they permitted? It depends what one means by this. Given the fact that God is triune, this surely means that sung praise demands that there are either explicitly Trinitarian hymns or a mix where each of the Persons of the Godhead is addressed. Then, since the church is a

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<sup>56</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter XX, paragraph II.

<sup>57</sup> For a masterly treatment of issues of conscience (especially where some regard adiaphora as having morally obligatory status), and the relationship of 'the weak' to 'the strong' and their respective temptations, see: "The Weak and the Strong", in John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray. Volume 4: Studies in Theology*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 142-157. This is also available in *The Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. XII, 2, 1950, where it was first published. For a detailed treatment of conscience, see Kenneth E. Kirk, *Conscience and its Problems: An Introduction to Casuistry*, (London: Longmans, 1948).

<sup>58</sup> 1 Tim 2:1-4; 3:14-15; 4:13.



corporate or communal gathering, there surely need to be hymns which are in the first-person plural. Equally, since numerous psalms which were written to be sung by God's people as a whole were nevertheless in the first person singular, we do need such hymns. There needs to be a balance between objective and subjective. Furthermore, on the subjective side of things, the whole range of Christian experience needs to be addressed. And so one could go on. What this means is that if there is to be a worship leader, such a person needs to be far more than musically gifted. There is need for a very thorough knowledge of theology and how this relates to doxology. There needs to be wide and deep knowledge of both contemporary hymns and hymns reaching right back to the early church. And there surely needs to be a link between what is sung and what will be preached. In many situations the person best placed to do this will be the one who is preaching. This does not mean that he is to lead the singing. It does mean that he is best placed to choose what will be sung.

Another area where culture can become wrongly predominant and eclipse Scripture is in the area of formality and informality, structure and spontaneity, form and freedom. Sadly, some of an older generation identified reverence with formality, structure and form. This could extend to dress codes as well as to every item of "the service". The mood in society today is, of course, much more informal than it was in the past. This has led some Christians to assume that spirituality and "real worship" must be marked by informality, spontaneity and freedom. The biblical metaphor of the church as a body surely teaches that both elements are important in church life. The human body is remarkably well structured and formed. It is this very structure and form which enable it to express itself freely and spontaneously. In the total life of the church there is surely need for both these elements to be expressed and for this to be the case in the church's worship. *How* this is done will vary from situation to situation but it must surely be done. A comparison of 1 Corinthians chapter 14 with 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 and the teaching found in the Pastoral Epistles, as well as in some sections of the book of Acts, indicates that leadership and authority were to be exercised in the gatherings of God's people; it was not to be a "free-for-all". Equally, structure is not the same as a straitjacket.

Contemporary western societies are marked by an emphasis on discontinuity, where change is invariably regarded as being "change for the better". This can lead to a mentality in the life of God's people where constant change in the worship services is something which is regarded as desirable. Indeed, Philip Jensen, an Anglican minister in the Diocese of Sydney, has argued for a theological underpinning to such a mentality: the gospel is all about change because repentance means and demands change and, therefore, this should be modelled and mirrored in the church's

gatherings for worship.<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, C. S. Lewis once said that he could cope with any manner of form of worship as long as it did not change. He maintained that one great advantage of liturgy and ritual is that one does not have to concentrate on the mechanics of the ritual or liturgy but, rather, on what it is *about*. In the case of worship, therefore, one is not endlessly wondering what will come next, because the liturgy ensures that one knows what will come next; instead one is able to focus on what worship is really about: God.<sup>60</sup> The Bible surely emphasises the importance of both: constant change and nobody knows where they are and everybody is concentrating on the mechanics of worship, rather than upon God; on the other hand, a never changing liturgy can degenerate into a rut. We should not put asunder what God has joined together. This having been said, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit are essential in both that which is structured and that which is spontaneous.

Given that the gatherings of God's people in the New Testament are governed more by principles and general commands, whereas the Old Testament was very detailed and specific in its regulations for worship, it surely follows that the various cultures in the area in which a church is found will and should have more influence than was the case in the Old Testament period. The natural exuberance which is a general characteristic of some nations is such that one would expect greater spontaneity and even "colour", as it were, in their gatherings than would be the case in a church located in a nation where the people are generally more sombre in their demeanour. Of course, spiritual joy should mean that in the latter case one would expect Christians to rise above what their unbelieving compatriots are like; equally, the natural exuberance which some nations display may be moderated somewhat by the realisation that one is coming before the Lord who is truly awesome. John did not exactly dance a jig when the risen Lord appeared to him in apocalyptic form on the Isle of Patmos! But after due allowance has been made for the sanctifying work of the Spirit, who may liberate the more restrained and restrain somewhat the more exuberant, the fact remains that what is "natural" should surely be expressed. (I am using the term "natural" here not to denote that which is sinful – "the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit" – but, rather, that which is authentically human and which expresses the diversity within the human race.) It is surely cause for

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<sup>59</sup> I heard Jensen say this in a sermon which he delivered at a Proclamation Trust Meeting. I am going on memory and believe that it was said at an annual Evangelical Ministry Assembly in London.

<sup>60</sup> The following words of Lewis are not irrelevant at this point: "When our participation in a rite becomes perfect we think no more of ritual, but are engrossed by that *about which* the rite is performed; but afterwards we recognize that ritual was the sole method by which this concentration could be achieved" (emphasis original). C. S. Lewis, *A Preface To Paradise Lost* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 61.

regret that some well-meaning western missionaries of the past, in uprooting godless practices within certain nations where they took the gospel, went beyond that and forbade perfectly legitimate aspects of the culture of the people whom they were evangelising by stamping western cultural values upon them.

This leads on to a consideration of the relationship of evangelism to worship. Earlier I expressed criticism of the Church Growth Movement's principle of homogeneity. This, however, related to its ideas of the church and its gatherings. In terms of evangelising people, there is much to be said for this principle. It is surely part of Paul's different approach to Gentiles and Jews to which he refers in 1 Corinthians chapter 9, and which we see exemplified in his different approach to those in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch in Acts chapter 13 and his approach to the people of Athens, especially as expressed in his message on the Areopagus and recorded in Acts chapter 17. Churches may work this out in a variety of ways. What is crucial is that those who are made disciples are then to be baptised. Amongst other things, this identifies them with the visible church. They are then to be taught everything which Christ commanded. In other words, a church may have a variety of ways of evangelising its community and using all (legitimate) means to save some. Such people then need to be identified with the church. It is important that the gap between such evangelism and the regular meetings of the church is not so great as to be itself a culture shock for those who have been converted in a "homogenous unit" but who then find the gatherings of the church to be quite alien to them. This being so, especially if the evangelistic meeting is very informal and the church services are very formal, there is need at some points to make the worship service nearer in style to the evangelistic meeting and vice versa, without causing either to lose their own distinctive identity. All this having been said, we should expect unbelievers or enquirers to turn into the regular meetings of the church and not to find them entirely culturally alien.<sup>61</sup>

So much more needs to be said concerning things such as the right use of the internet in the church's gatherings, such as the use of Skype or the like to speak directly to gospel workers overseas before a time of prayer. With respect to leading worship, what, for example, is the significance of verses such as Ps. 22:22? And there is so much more to say!

## *VII. Conclusions*

This paper has not attempted to answer all the questions but to raise some of the important ones. Some of my suggested applications have been intended more to stir up thought rather than to express my own convictions. My

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<sup>61</sup> 1 Cor 14:23-25.

prayer and hope is that such thought will lead to profitable and peaceable discussion in conferring together and for light to be thrown upon what is still, for some, a hotly disputed topic.

## REVIEW ARTICLE: OUTSIDE IN

### *MARGINS OF ISLAM: MINISTRY IN DIVERSE MUSLIM CONTEXTS*

edited by Gene Daniels and Warrick Farah (Pasadena: William Carey), 2018, 240pp, £12.30 (Amazon), £7.66 (Kindle)

I was in Indonesia last year, teaching in a couple of seminaries.<sup>1</sup> That vast archipelago constitutes the most populous Muslim-majority nation on Earth. Just a few months earlier, the country was shocked when radical Islamists (from one family as it happens) killed thirteen worshippers at Easter services in the city of Surabaya.<sup>2</sup> That violent extremism seemed far away from the folk I met there, such as the middle-aged *hijabi* who sat next to me on the long train journey across the island and offered me a share of her snacks. I also met the leader of a movement of people, outside mainstream evangelicalism, who meet regularly in small groups to read the Bible and worship Jesus. After twenty years, the movement's leaders reckon their numbers have now reached six figures. The key feature of these vignettes for our purposes is that *all* these people would identify as Muslims.

Since then, I have met a number of Muslims as I have visited universities around the UK. Let me introduce some of them to you: the young Mancunian woman in her *hijab*, the mature Iranian man who dare not go home for fear of the state, the Algerian researcher trying to make sense of the modern world, the Egyptian postgraduate student who asked me why Christians are so private about their religion, and the young Saudi woman who told me she had rejected Wahabi Islam when she saw what IS was doing.

What staggering diversity. How do we make sense of Islam in a world of such variety? What, after all, is Islam? Is it a religion or a way of life or something else? This question has vexed our politicians for some time. It is ten years since the then French President Nicholas Sarkozy said, "The problem of the burka is not a religious problem, it is a problem of liberty and women's dignity. It's not a religious symbol, but a sign of subservience and debasement."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Adam Thomas for feedback on an earlier draft of this paper. Any shortcomings are, of course, entirely mine.

<sup>2</sup> "Family of Six Behind Deadly Indonesian Church Bombings", BBC News n.p. [cited 8 May 2019]. Online: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-asia-44099773/family-of-six-behind-deadly-indonesian-church-bombings>.

<sup>3</sup> Angelique Chrisafis, "Nicolas Sarkozy Says Islamic Veils Are Not Welcome in France", *The Guardian*, 22 June 2009. Cited 8 May 2019. Online: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jun/22/islamic-veils-sarkozy-speech-france>.

Not wishing to be outdone by a Frenchman, the then British Foreign Office minister, Chris Bryant, made this pronouncement:

I should make it absolutely clear there is no culture and there is no religion in which forced marriage should be acceptable or indeed is acceptable. I know there are maybe some people who think this is an issue about Islam – it is not. Islam does not recommend or accept forced marriage. Marriage in every religion has to be freely and openly consented to.<sup>4</sup>

Since then, however, we have watched the upheaval of the Arab Spring, the spectacle of the rise and fall of a self-declared caliphate, the bloody civil war in Syria, the mass migration of millions of refugees, and the egregious terrorist attacks in London and Paris as well as the Middle East.

An outspoken British pastor writes this about the “Muslim menace”: “While the BBC and the Left do their best to shield the Muslim community from blame, it cannot be denied that the *Muslim religion* itself is the root cause of the atrocities.”<sup>5</sup> He goes on,

Such a horrific and spine-chilling verdict is demanded ever since IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared in May 2015: “Islam was never a religion of peace. Islam is the religion of fighting. No one should believe that the war we are waging is the war of the Islamic State [IS]. It is the war of all Muslims, but the Islamic State is spearheading it. It is the war of Muslims against infidels. Oh Muslims, go to war everywhere.” This is the purest expression of the vicious Prophet Muhammad’s mission to turn the world into a global Caliphate.<sup>6</sup>

Is “Muslim religion” the cause of the atrocities? What, after all, is Islam? And who is a Muslim: the ranting al-Baghdadi or the quietly-spoken Iranian refugee? The Surabaya bombers or the Algerian academic? Furthermore, who speaks for Islam: French politicians or British pastors? Or Muslims themselves?

### *Purpose and Structure*

In our day, an unprecedented number of Muslims are coming to Christ. This tremendous answer to prayer should not leave us complacent, however, as the number of Muslims in the world grows by thirty-two million per year, mainly through high birth rates (204). So, the challenge of engaging the Muslim world with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is undiminished.

One of the editors of *Margins of Islam*, Warrick Farah, argues that, “Islam is perhaps the greatest challenge the church has ever faced. Yet it is not

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<sup>4</sup> Dominic Casciani, “Forced Marriage Plea to Schools.” BBC News n.p. [cited 8 May 2019]. Online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8129466.stm>.

<sup>5</sup> Alan Clifford, “The Finsbury Fiasco: How Not to Deal with the Muslim Menace”, 1. Cited 13 December 2018. Online: <http://www.nrchurch.co.uk/pdf/ISLAM - the Finsbury Fiasco.pdf>. (Emphasis mine.)

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

simply that we do not know the answers; we are also unsure of the nature of the problem” (205). As we have seen in politics, so also in making disciples. This slim volume, written by seventeen reflective practitioners with significant experience of a wide variety of Muslim contexts, is a major contribution to examining that problem.

Farah’s co-editor, Gene Daniels, tells us three reasons why this book was compiled: to show that “even in our age of globalization and mass-marketed mission methodologies, context still matters”; to demonstrate how this works out in various situations, through case studies; and to help the reader apply the insights to their own ministry (209-10).

After an introduction by Daniels, the book is divided into three parts:

1. In “Conceptualizing Islam” two big foundational questions are asked: who represents Islam? and how do Muslims shape and use Islam?
2. “Engaging Muslims” consists of fourteen case studies from various parts of world, from North Africa to Indonesia to Central Asia and Britain.
3. In “Reframing Missiology” the editors return to reflect on the case studies and pull together the various threads to draw conclusions and application to the missiological challenge.

### *Central Concern*

The central concern of the book is, quite simply, to aid cross-cultural workers seeking to communicate the gospel to Muslims by helping them to understand Islam better. Consider it an exploration of the following questions: what is Islam, who is a Muslim, and what difference does it make?

Most books about Islam, by Muslims as well as by evangelicals, describe normative or classical Islam and might be called “Islam from above”. Such books are not wrong. They are just inadequate to explain the huge variety of expressions of Islam one actually finds around the world.

The approach of the contributors to this book is to look at Islam *from below*. As such, then, they examine Islam from the “margins” (xviii). The margins are the places where someone who is used to normative Islam might be tempted to say, “They’re not even real Muslims” (105). And these margins are found wherever there are Muslims.

The difference between top-down and bottom-up approaches is missiologically foundational, as Daniels explains: “These precise religious boundaries do not work well for us in mission because biblically based ministry is not about engaging the *religion* of Islam; rather it is about engaging *people* who are Muslim” (xvi, original emphasis).

Throughout the book we encounter contributors wrestling with what this means in the contexts with which they are most familiar: Robin Dale Hadaway, for example, writing about Sufi-oriented Islam and African Traditional Religion, asserts that, “Folk Islam blends pure Islam with early

religious customs and habits of everyday people” (70). Ted Esler, discussing the status of non-observant Muslims in Bosnia, suggests that, “It may be better to call these... nominal, not secular” (41). Daniels, observing Russified Muslims of the former Soviet Union, reports that the people themselves use the word “Muslimness” to mean, “a shared community identity which is prioritized over the practice of religion” (134).<sup>7</sup>

These quotes highlight the difficulty of the issue: is “Muslimness” a question of identity, beliefs, practices or heritage? If you were hoping the book would give you a definitive answer, you will be disappointed. On the one hand, we are given so many variations. On the other hand, we are told that, “Of course, there are limits to how much any religion can stretch. At a certain point a group’s beliefs or practices move so far from the core that they become recognized as a distinctly different faith” (xviii), the case of Baha’i being the exception that proves the rule.

Evelyn A. Reisacher – as far as I can tell the only female contributor – in her foundational chapter, “Who Represents Islam”, suggests four possible ways to approach the problem, and commends Talal Asad’s model, combining the universal and local forms, and past and present expressions in a “discursive tradition” (7-8).<sup>8</sup>

Paraphrasing the work of Shahab Ahmed, Farah defines Islam as “a process of ‘meaning-making’ undertaken by Muslims as they interact in their context with the revelation given to Muhammad” (14).<sup>9</sup> He goes on to propose that we consider viewing Islam as “*one strand in the braided rope of society*” (18, original emphasis), a model that makes so much sense when one reads the case studies.

Reviewing his own ministry journey, Farah suggests that the braided rope analogy has aided him in forming a *missiological* understanding.

I assumed Muslims believed the things I thought Islam taught. But when I started to listen and enter the challenge of exploring my Muslim friends’ faith, I discovered that the search for true Islam was not only illusive but also irrelevant. Instead, I decided to build my understanding of Islam on my friend’s understanding because that is what Islam was to *him*, and in the context of genuine dialogue and witness that is what is most important. (19)

### *Research Methodology*

A recent article in a missiological journal argues that, “The Western world, and Evangelical Christians must understand Islam ‘as it is’, not as they

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<sup>7</sup> Quoting Bruce Privratsky, *Muslim Turkistan: Kazak Religion and Collective Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 78.

<sup>8</sup> Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University), 1986.

<sup>9</sup> Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015).



imagine it to be.”<sup>10</sup> This begs the question, *how* exactly can we know what Islam is? What should be our methodology?

### *Historical Perspectives*

Though a number of the case studies include a short historical outline, a few major on a historical approach to explicating their subject. Such is the case with Rick Kronk’s chapter on Magrebi Muslims in France and Patrick Brittenden’s chapter on the Berbers of North Africa.

Brittenden draws at least two helpful lessons from the history of Berber engagement with the gospel: firstly, that rapid and wholesale conversion to Islam was largely a result of the failure of the church in North Africa (122); and, secondly, that resistance to the message of an outsider has deep roots.

Recognizing this history of resistance to the power of universalizing ideologies (whatever the flavour) is therefore a key dimension to sensitive cross-cultural ministry in this context. The evangelist or the church planter will need to recognize both this feature of resistance and the quest for identity behind it” (124).

Is the gospel a “universalising ideology”? Much missionary activity of the past two hundred years has been from centres of economic, political and military power out to the global periphery. It is, therefore, a difficult task to disentangle the gospel message from that totalising association. The fact that the centre of gravity of the world church is now in the southern hemisphere is a helpful apologetic against such an association. But it seems to me that global Christianity continues to have strong associations with Western culture and, because of this, continues to be unattractive to vast swathes of people of other religious traditions. As gospel communicators we would do well to examine our life and message to see if we are indeed commending Christ, as we may think we are doing, or if, as many Muslims continue to think, we are unwittingly commending a totalising theory that has its roots as much in the Enlightenment as it does in Scripture. Professor Richard Bauckham, in his excellent exposition of the central storyline of Scripture in *Bible and Mission*, demonstrates how the gospel, though universal, is not in fact, a “totalising metanarrative”.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Anonymous-Two, “Essentialism and Islam” *Global Missiology* April 2017: 7. Cited 7 May 2019. Online: <http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/viewFile/1990/4449>.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), 90-94 and *passim*.

### *Ethnographic Perspectives*

I have argued before, in the pages of this journal, for an ethnographic approach to understanding religions.<sup>12</sup> It is encouraging, therefore, to see the value of ethnography being recognised more by others recently.<sup>13</sup> Many of the writers of this volume have clearly approached their quest for understanding through ethnography. Gene Daniels spent more than a decade in ethnography alongside his church planting among Muslims of the former Soviet Union and it shows: he is able to draw on extensive quotations of key informants to make a point (134).

Patrick Brittenden, however, writing out of his experience of ministry among the Berbers of North Africa, sounds a note of caution on ethnography by outsiders (124). The Berber community has experienced significant oppression by both French colonial powers and Arab nationalists and is, therefore, resistant to attempts by outsiders to create a Berber identity for them, something that has been a feature of ethnographies written by outsiders.

In his helpful book on the history of the concept of religion, Brent Nongbri points out that, in academic discussions, the vocabulary of “religion” is used in two quite different ways that are often confused.<sup>14</sup> These are “*descriptive* and *redescriptive* accounts” (equivalent to the older terms “*emic*” and “*etic*”).<sup>15</sup> Both accounts are by outsiders, but in the former the observer is attempting to reproduce the classification systems of a group of people being studied. It is not the native viewpoint but the observer’s best attempt at reproducing it. A redescriptive account, however, makes no such effort but “freely employs classification systems foreign to those of the people being studied”, something that is essential if any cross-cultural comparisons are to be made.<sup>16</sup> I take it that the ethnographies that Brittenden is referring to, and to which the Berbers take exception, tend to *impose* categories on the data elucidated, rather than seek to allow categories to emerge out of the data, a problem with which anyone seeking to interpret Scripture is well familiar.

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<sup>12</sup> Mark Pickett, “Review Article: Hard Rock Theology: ‘For Their Rock Is Not as Our Rock’: *An Evangelical Theology of Religions*, Daniel Strange, Apollos, 2014, 384pp, £19.99.” *Foundations*: 67 (Autumn 2014): 78-91. Cited 16 January 2015. Online: <http://www.affinity.org.uk/foundations-issues/issue-67-article-5---review-article-a-for-their-rock-is-not-as-our-rock-a-dan-strange>. In the discipline of ethnography, the participant-observer enters a community in order to write a coherent account of the group on its own terms.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Strange, “A Wiser Idiot” *Themelios* 43.1 (2018): 4–9. Cited 9 May 2019. Online: <http://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/a-wiser-idiot>.

<sup>14</sup> Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (London: Yale University Press, 2013), 21.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

For the most part, *Margins of Islam* is a compilation of *redescriptive* accounts. This is inevitable given the purpose of the book. If it were not, it would be very difficult to draw out missiological lessons, as the editors do in the concluding part. Having said that, however, it is clear that a number of the authors are drawing on deep local knowledge. This would seem to be the case, for example, with Michael A. Kilgore's chapter on Java, in which, after the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, he outlines three categories of Javanese Muslim (107).<sup>17</sup>

Daniels tells us that missionaries are often not familiar with a case-study method of learning and therefore find it difficult to learn from those who have reflected on their ministry situations (210). Many are tempted, rather, to learn a model for ministry and then seek to apply it when they arrive in their host community, content with a superficial analysis of the context. The value of case studies, however, is that they force us to think concretely and ask careful questions of the situation in hand; they push us to think about real people and communities encountering existential issues. The case studies in this book, then, make it hugely valuable for those in ministry to Muslims.

### *Philosophical Perspectives*

It would not be surprising in a book of this sort to find inconsistency in the way terms and concepts are used. What is surprising, however, is that terms and concepts are used in contradictory ways without comment. These difficulties coalesce around the question of Muslim identity and highlight a fundamental philosophical issue: the distinction between essentialism and non-essentialism or, as some would see it, nominalism.

One recent advocate for essentialism puts it thus: "Essentialism is the idea that a philosophy, ideology or religion has a set of defining characteristics, and that without those characteristics, one cannot say that a particular stance belongs to that philosophy, ideology or religion."<sup>18</sup> The non-essentialist approach is exemplified in this quote of Bishop Kenneth Cragg (1913-2012): "A Muslim is what Islam tells them to be and Islam is what a Muslim tells you it is" (119).

Farah argues *against* an essentialist view of Islam. Such a view, he argues, rightly in my view, is a product of the Orientalist movement in scholarship, that emerged in the nineteenth century (196-99). While the editors, at least, want to shun essentialism, they do accept that there are boundaries. Though

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<sup>17</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

<sup>18</sup> Anonymous Three, "Why I Am an Essentialist about Islam and Why That Matters" *Global Missiology* English, Vol 3, No 14 (2017). Cited 10 May 2019. Online: <http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/view/1991/4453>. Cf. Anonymous-Two, "Essentialism and Islam".

they do not say so, it would seem that they prefer to view religions as, in Paul Hiebert's terminology, centred sets rather than bounded sets.<sup>19</sup> Farah wants not only to avoid the false objectivity of a modern approach but also the relativism of a postmodern one (198). Religion, then, is *socially constructed* – “it would not exist if there were no people” (199). For this reason, we “desperately need to be alert to how we use the category ‘religion’ in mission” (199). This is a vital discussion and, for me, is worth the price of the book.

Nevertheless, one wonders where this leaves the issue of syncretism. After all, if religions are not essentialist categories with hard boundaries how can we talk about their mixing?<sup>20</sup> And yet a number of the contributors do so talk (84, 139, 165, 188-89 & fn., 212), a tension that Farah seems to realise but not resolve (199).<sup>21</sup>

Does this not also make talk of “dual belonging” at the very least confusing (167, 188)? If being a member of a Muslim community is not an equivalent category to that of being in Christ, then surely talk of dual belonging runs the risk of making it seem it is. That is not Arthur Brown's intention, as he makes clear in his chapter on Muslim youth in a “glocal” world (188), but this danger seems to be inherent in such terminology.

Likewise, talk about conversion is also problematic. Ted Esler argues that, “conversion is a process”, and rightly warns the cross-cultural worker that, “being challenged to make a decision without adequate time to understand and process the ramifications of those decisions may create a serious misunderstanding about the gospel” (44). Too right. But the terminology of conversion is itself part of the problem. It is invariably understood in cultural and social ways and would best be abandoned altogether, without jettisoning the biblical concepts of repentance and regeneration. Talal Asad's “discursive tradition” approach, mentioned earlier, would seem to be better able to handle these difficulties.

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<sup>19</sup> Paul Hiebert, “The Category ‘Christian’ in the Mission Task” *International Review of Missions* (July 1983): 421-27. Cf. Michael Hakmin Lee, “Rethinking How We Understand ‘Christian’: Assessment of Paul Hiebert's Centered-Set Approach to the Category ‘Christian’” (Writing Sample for the PhD Program in Systematic Theology; Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; unpublished paper), n.d. (Bounded sets are those that have a defining characteristic that is internal. Centred sets are defined by external criteria – that is by how they relate to each other or to something outside of themselves rather than by what they are in themselves. I think calling the intrinsic well-formed set “bounded” is something of a misnomer as the centred set also has a boundary. Perhaps this is why there appears to be some confusion in the way these labels are used in popular literature.)

<sup>20</sup> Running with A. Scott Moreau's general definition in “Syncretism”, *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (ed. A. Scott Moreau; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 924–925.

<sup>21</sup> See also H. L. Richard, “Religious Syncretism as a Syncretistic Concept: The Inadequacy of the ‘World Religions’ Paradigm in Cross-Cultural Encounter”, *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 31(4): 209-15. Cited 13 My 2019. Online: [https://www.ijfm.org/PDFs/IJFM/31\\_4\\_PDFs/IJFM\\_31\\_4-EntireIssue.pdf](https://www.ijfm.org/PDFs/IJFM/31_4_PDFs/IJFM_31_4-EntireIssue.pdf).

## *Paradigms for Ministry among Muslims*

In a book of this sort one would expect a variety of ministry paradigms to be proposed. And that is what you get. I will identify four, though these should not be seen as exclusive models.

### *1. Incarnational Ministry*

Implicitly, the contributors to this book advocate an incarnational posture, that is, that the minister to Muslims must seek to adapt and adjust to the culture of their host community in order to be effective. One of the leading advocates of this approach, Paul Hiebert (1932-2007), however, is criticised by Kim for his “one-way incarnational posture” (98-99).<sup>22</sup> Kim believes that incarnational models fall short because they “ignore the fact that cultures are constantly evolving” (98). I don’t think the fact that cultures change undermines an incarnational approach at all. One does not have to think of cultures as static in order to benefit from such a posture, as Hiebert himself clearly understood.<sup>23</sup> I want to highlight three issues that arise out of an incarnational approach, one from the case study on Bosnia and two from the one on South Asia.

Ted Esler urges us to appreciate the differences that an orientation to shame or guilt brings to the task of intercultural communication (45). In Bosnia, it means that a Socratic dialogue may not be appropriate, as people in a shame-oriented culture always expect a way out of an embarrassing situation. Failing to provide a way out, therefore, might scupper the relationships one has worked so hard to form and that are key to fruitful gospel work.

On South Asia, Kevin Higgins makes a fascinating point in his discussion of ministry among Sufis, who love the tales of Nasrudin. These tales, he explains, “are often intended to slow comprehension rather than to aid it” (29), rather like the parables of the Lord Jesus (Mark 4:10-12). “The communication of Jesus, and of the Sufis, is often both allusive (pointing elsewhere) and elusive (difficult to actually define)... and it presents us with the opportunity to learn more of the mystery to be discovered in the ways God works to draw people to the Way”. This point deserves further reflection.

Higgins also observes that models of evangelical personal devotion presented to Muslims are often “noisy,... contrived and shallow... or dry and

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<sup>22</sup> Cf., e.g., Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985).

<sup>23</sup> Paul G. Hiebert and Eloise Hiebert Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 364-67.

stale and... offer no encouragement or opportunity for actual experience of God" (30). He argues, rightly in my view, that this is a "major challenge for evangelical witness" among people who desire a deep experience of God. His suggestions of other models of spirituality, however, are drawn largely from Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions. The rich vein of devotion found in the writings of the Puritans, for example, seems to be unknown.

## 2. *Open Discipleship in Society*

Alan Johnson describes two patterns of church among Thai Muslims (166-67):

1. Abandonment, in which Muslim Background Believers physically leave their community and integrate into a Thai church; and
2. Secret disciples, who remain in their community but leave it to meet with others to read the Bible and pray with an individual or house group.

Clearly neither of these patterns enable the open witness of disciples in their community. Johnson reports, however, that attempts are being made to develop new patterns of corporate witness of Christ-followers in which Malay identity markers are visible. Johnson argues that, "Since the perceived loss of Malay identity is the greatest obstacle to reaching these Muslims, the key to developing context-sensitive ministry should [be to] allow believers from this background to follow Christ within their social setting" (166). This must surely be the case throughout the Muslim communities that are described in this book and many others that are not.

One context where this issue of identity and community is significant is in the UK. Phil Rawlings notes that the church in the UK is slowly learning to engage with Muslims (154). However, a "further challenge for them... is to learn how to provide a true spiritual home for those from a Muslim background who do come to faith in Jesus". Whilst Iranian asylum seekers might integrate into local British churches – they have burned the bridges to their natal communities – it remains a huge obstacle to the majority of British Muslims to do so, as their communities are very much intact and the act of joining a British church is seen as a betrayal. If we want to see British Muslims coming to Christ in their families and in larger numbers, we must create groups in which they can openly read the Bible and pray together without being thought of as having rejected their birth communities. Such an approach demands great patience and understanding on the part of existing local churches as well as on the part of those who send and support those who work in this way.

### 3. *Liberating Liminality*

In Patrick Brittenden's contribution on the Berbers of North Africa, he makes much of the liminal nature of the Berber experience, living between the two realities of their own ethnicity and the universalising forces of Islam. Followers of Christ also inhabit a liminal space, the "liminality of discipleship" (126). This liminality is corporate: "As disciples called into the body of Christ, the visible church must intentionally take up a place between church and culture...." I struggle here to understand how the church can occupy a space "between the church and culture". Individual disciples may well feel that they live in such a space, but how can the church? In the context it would appear he means between global Christianity and the wider Berber culture. This is readily understandable to anyone who has sought to make disciples among those of other religious traditions. Christians of other backgrounds may indeed cause Berber believers to feel a radical pull away from their birth communities. And when that happens, the liminal space occupied is not one in which the believer is isolated and unfruitful but one that creates a bridge, "'translating' the gospel in the national context so that it facilitates the church's contribution to the ongoing story of *algérienneté* (Algerian-ness)" (128), what the author calls "liberating liminality".

### 4. *Power Ministry*

For at least one contributor, "animistic" beliefs figure strongly in a discussion of ministry approaches. People often described as animistic have a desire for power over malevolent spirits and forces. Taking his cue from Charles Kraft's philosophy of dynamic equivalence, C. G. Gordon argues that, "cross-cultural workers who desire to see real transformation of that society must be aware of the underlying reasons why these Muslims continue to connect with their animistic practices and rituals". And, "since the people of the Tarim Basin intuitively seek for life-giving power, missionaries among them must find ways to teach, demonstrate, and live out the gospel as the very power of God" (180).<sup>24</sup>

While I do not disagree with this, I am concerned that, in his efforts to explicate Uyghur culture, the author seems to engage in insufficient critical reflection. Does the author believe that, "There are many places in the Tarim Basin where people encounter the spirit world" (175) or is he merely using phenomenological language? Clarity would be appreciated here. Sadly, the

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis, 1979).

importance of this has been proved in the uncritical acceptance that marks the writing of Kraft, leading to bizarre and destructive ministry practices.<sup>25</sup>

Likewise, Robin Dale Hadaway elucidates the fear factor in the culture of some Muslims, such as the Beja tribe of Sudan, who maintain elements of both Sufism and African Tribal Religion (78): “Thus gospel messengers to the Beja must... focus their presentation on the area of fear-power” (79). Agreed. But that presentation must not be rooted in the Bible as divine “case-book” (after Kraft).<sup>26</sup> Rather, it must be rooted in the Bible as understood through the lens of the great arc of salvation history.

### *An Adaptive Approach to Mission*

The final part of the book seeks to bring the threads of the fourteen case studies together in missiological application. Here Farah proposes an “adaptive” approach to mission (196-97):

If we don’t begin with the local expressions of Islam, we end up assuming something other than what our friends hold to be true, and therefore miss the vital and necessary connection for the power of the gospel to do its transformational work specifically in that context. (200)

Farah argues that, because the concept of religion is so flexible, dealing with Muslims on that level may end up clouding mission. So, he proposes, “instead of bypassing religion in our missiological approaches,... a more fruitful way of engaging Muslims is to deal with idolatry, which, depending on the context, may be a much more specific topic than Islam” (201).

### *An Evaluation*

The great strength of the book is that it is written by reflective practitioners, that is by gospel workers who have thought long and hard about their ministries. Sadly, this sort of reflective practice is too uncommon. If they have had any training, such as at Bible college or seminary, many workers

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. e.g., Charles H. Kraft, *Deep Wounds Deep Healing: Discovering the Vital Link between Spiritual Warfare and Inner Healing* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant, 1993) 268-69, 270, 271-72 (quoted by Robert J. Priest, Thomas Campbell, and Bradford A. Mullen, “Missiological Syncretism: the New Animistic Paradigm” in *Spiritual Power and Missions: Raising the Issues*, Evangelical Missiological Society Series No. 3 (ed. Edward Rommen; Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1995), 28; Mark Johnson, “Wrestling with Spiritual Warfare” *Voice of Bhakti* 2 (February 2003). Cited 8 May 2019. Online: <http://www.bhaktivani.com/volume2/number1/intro.html>; and Chuck Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation?* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus and OMF, 1998).

<sup>26</sup> Kraft views the Bible as an “*inspired collection of classic cases* from history.” Charles Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 398 (original emphasis). Granted that this is not all he says about the Bible, but his dynamic equivalence model is over-extended so that, for instance, examples of leadership in the Bible are all considered to be valid models for the church today (ibid., 322-27).



seem to plunge into cross-cultural ministry with hardly a thought about the context in which they find themselves.

Daniels tells of a missionary he met who had gone to Central Asia to work with students (xviii). It was two years before the missionary realised, to his great surprise, that the students were Muslims. As you can imagine, he was completely unprepared. Training for gospel ministry must include preparation to exegete the context as well as to exegete the text. If that is absent from the beginning, the likelihood of a worker becoming a fruitful, reflective practitioner is not encouraging.

Another strength of this book is the academic rigour with which each of the authors tackles his or her subject; in fact, nearly all the authors have a doctorate in a relevant subject. This is no guarantee of faithfulness to the Lord, of course, but it does reflect the seriousness with which these writers approach their work. Footnotes and references are judicious rather than exhaustive. Scholarship is not paraded but kept low-profile, making the work accessible to the non-specialist.

One is struck also by the depth of experience of the writers. In Ted Esler's account of the secular Muslims of Bosnia, for instance, he writes about what women were wearing as he strolled down the main streets of Sarajevo in 1990 (41). And such decades-long observation is the rule in this cohort of gospel ministers. This makes it an immensely practical book. Not that the writers go into detailed mechanics of ministry to Muslims. Such an approach would violate the important principle that they are attempting to inculcate in the reader: to discover for oneself, by careful attention to both the New Testament and the precise context, how to apply principles of ministry.

Weaknesses in the book are few and far between. Two practical omissions lessen its general usefulness: there is no glossary for the non-specialist to consult – what is “baraka” (120)? – and serious study is hampered by the lack of an index.

Three more substantial issues, however, need further attention. These are worldview, animism, and the transmission of culture.

### 1. *Worldview*

A number of the writers employ the term “worldview” in their writings. Their use of the term, however, is not consistent. Rick Kronk talks about the “Muslim worldview” (48) while C. G. Gordon talks about the “Uyghur worldview” (172). One wonders whether such terminology means anything more than simply “the way Muslims think” or “Uyghur culture”. If it is anything more substantial, then, going with Kronk and Gordon would there be a Uyghur Muslim worldview and a completely different one for a Uyghur who comes to Christ? I am not sure how to resolve this. The concept of

worldview has been so much a part of evangelical thinking, including my own, for decades, but it seems to bring as much confusion as clarification.

To add to the complexity, Esler writes that, "secularism is not a worldview" but "secular humanism" is (41, see also fn. 5). Secularism, as he expounds it, would better be labelled "secularity" as, he argues, it is "primarily the absence of religion, rather than a cohesive belief system". And so, we come back to "religion". Perhaps, in the light of these studies, it would be better to say that secularity is the presence of religion without it being acknowledged.

## 2. Animism

At least two contributors describe the Muslims of their region as being heavily influenced by animism. C. G. Gordon's chapter on the Uyghurs of north-western China focusses on the assertion that "the Islam practised today in the Tarim Basin is a complex amalgamation of various belief systems mixed with an animistic foundation" (174). "Animism", says Gordon, is a term that, "describes people who generally believe the problems they experience in life are the result of spiritual forces that can be controlled by special people using special techniques during special times and in special places" (174). Likewise, in describing the richly adorned trucks in Pakistan, Warren Larson asserts that, "behind these paintings is an animistic worldview", which is an indication of syncretism (85).

I think the use of term "animism" is unfortunate. Coined by the early anthropologist E. B. Tylor it continues to carry connotations of the evolution of religion.<sup>27</sup> I prefer to use the term "primal religions" to describe the phenomena described by these writers. The word "primal" is not the same as "primitive" and does not have an evolutionistic connotation. Andrew Walls asserts that "the word helpfully underlines two features of the religions of the people indicated: their historical anteriority and their basic, elemental status in human experience".<sup>28</sup> All other faiths, Walls adds, are secondary to that basic primal experience. A key aspect of the culture and religion of primal peoples is a shared belief in a multitude of spirits or other non-material phenomena that interact freely with the material world. "All other faiths are subsequent and represent, as it were, second thoughts; all other believers, and for that matter non-believers, are primalists underneath."<sup>29</sup> For this reason, talk of primal impulses undergirding Muslim experience as

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<sup>27</sup> Robert J. Priest, "Animism," *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (ed. A. Scott Moreau; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 63.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew F. Walls, "Primal Religious Traditions in Today's World," in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of the Faith*. Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis, 1996, 121.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

syncretistic is surely to impose on the ethnographic data an unwarranted framework, as if Islam and animism are two species of the same genus.

### 3. *The Transmission of Culture*

Another area in which more work may be fruitful is in the relationship of culture and ethnicity. The Hui are the largest Muslim ethnic group officially recognised in China. Enoch Jinsik Kim proposes a “two-layered cultural settings model” for understand the group, with a “surface layer forged by urbanization and a core of traditional life” (97). Younger Hui are more heavily influenced by the dominant Han Chinese in their attitudes and lifestyles than their parents are. And yet one wonders if some of the shared cultural features between Han and Hui are not because of recent cultural assimilation but vestiges of a much older reality. Recent genetic studies have concluded that the Hui are *not* a demic group, i.e. they are not the result of a migration of peoples from the Central Asia and the Middle East, as claimed by Kim (94), but a group that has resulted from the cultural assimilation of Islamic forms by indigenous Han Chinese during Islam’s expansion into China.<sup>30</sup> The upshot of this is that shared cultural features do not necessarily point to the impact of modernisation but rather may be the expression of long-cherished shared values that have continued in spite of 1400 years of allegiance to Islam.

Likewise, Alan Johnson suggests that Thai Muslims are the descendants of Malay and other outsiders who settled in Thailand in the 1500s. But recent genetic studies on the Thai-Malay Muslims and Thai Buddhists “showed significant genetic homogeneity between these two populations, suggesting a common biological ancestry”.<sup>31</sup> The significance of this to ministry among minority groups is not to dismiss the influence of deeply held traditional values in the face of modernisation. Modernity might not be that powerful after all.

Apart from several typographical errors a number of other minor issues also crept in that should have been spotted by a copy editor:

- Rant alert: ‘homogenous’ (198) is an annoying habit of missiologists on both sides of the pond. It should be homogeneous (pronounced with five

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<sup>30</sup> Yao, Hong-Bing, Chuan-Chao Wang, Xiaolan Tao, Lei Shang, Shao-Qing Wen, Bofeng Zhu, Longli Kang, Li Jin and Hui Li, “Genetic Evidence for an East Asian Origin of Chinese Muslim Populations Dongxiang and Hui” *Scientific Reports* vol. 6, no.: 38656 (2016). Cited 7 May 2019. Online: <https://www.nature.com/articles/srep38656#auth-1>.

<sup>31</sup> Kutanen, Wibhu, Thitika Kitpipit, Sukanya Phetpeng, and Phuvaradol Thanakiatkrai, (2014). “Forensic STR Loci Reveal Common Genetic Ancestry of the Thai-Malay Muslims and Thai Buddhists in the Deep Southern Region of Thailand” *Journal of Human Genetics* 59 (12) October 2014, n.p. [cited 7 May 2019]. Online: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267739766\\_Forensic\\_STR\\_loci\\_reveal\\_common\\_genetic\\_ancestry\\_of\\_the\\_Thai-Malay\\_Muslims\\_and\\_Thai\\_Buddhists\\_in\\_the\\_deep\\_Southern\\_region\\_of\\_Thailand](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267739766_Forensic_STR_loci_reveal_common_genetic_ancestry_of_the_Thai-Malay_Muslims_and_Thai_Buddhists_in_the_deep_Southern_region_of_Thailand).

syllables). The former is a biological term and has nothing to do with homogeneity. Arthur Brown spells it correctly (190);

- I am not sure this is an error but, if not, it is at least confusing: *qingzhen* is glossed three different ways (95 twice and 101);

- A bizarre geographical error seems to have crept into the account of Islam in Britain. We are told that “the first mosque in Britain was established in Liverpool” and that “this mosque was situated in the neighbourhood of Woking” which is over 200 miles away (148). They are, in fact, two separate mosques about which there seems to be some dispute over which is the oldest.

These issues should not detract from the overall value of the book. Rather, this volume is a welcome contribution to the rethinking of Muslim ministry. I have attempted in this review article to demonstrate its strengths while also picking up on more questionable issues. I hope my criticisms do not overshadow my compliments.

*Mark Pickett*

*Mark Pickett works with UFM Worldwide, teaching cross-cultural ministry in face-to-face settings and online at <http://infusion.global>. He has ministry experience in South Asia and the UK.*

## BOOK REVIEWS

### *Pure Church*

David Skull, Andrew King, Jim Sayers (Editors), Grace Publications Trust,  
2018, 256pp, £8.99

“Have Grace Baptist Churches had their day?” is the first sentence of the preface. The book is written by some reformed Baptist pastors from the UK who got together and wrote “The ERGO Statement – Encouraging the Recovery of Gospel Order”. This statement was eventually renamed the TitusOneFive Statement, and this is how the book begins. It is a concise, three-page summary of church order that forms the structure of the book. It reaffirms the connection between conversion, baptism, church membership and the Lord’s Supper. Ten statements are explored and defended in the ten chapters, each written by a different pastor:

We want this book to be a beginning of a wider conversation in the UK and beyond. We intend to publish a series of smaller spin-off books under the brand #TitusOneFive, exploring areas that we have had to cover rather briefly here.

In the introduction John Benton commends the endeavour to pursue good ecclesiology; it is not a matter of bolting on a new ideas to the old existing structure, but “the church needs to be rethought in a joined-up way, so that the whole organisation and organic life of the church works for building up God’s people to his glory” (8).

### *1. The visible church*

The local church is defined as “organised gatherings of Christians” who are “united by a statement of faith”, “shaped by the ministry of the word” and “aided by the gospel signs of baptism and communion”. With wider evangelicalism losing touch with the authoritative rule of the doctrines of Scripture, this first section needs to be continually affirmed. But it is in the second section that differences will immerge between conservative evangelicals: “If infant baptism and believer’s baptism are treated as equally valid in one church, baptism becomes a sign with many and conflicted meanings” (22)’ “If communion is separated from baptism, it likewise loses its corporate identity as a sign of belonging to the local church, and becomes much more a sign of the invisible church than the disciplined local church” (22); “So are Grace Baptist churches being unnecessarily divisive and separatist because we believe that baptism as a believer is the sign that brings a Christian into the membership of the visible church, and that the

Lord's Supper is an expression of belonging to that local church? We don't think so" (24).

## 2. *Conversion*

The Christian is defined as "someone who has been genuinely converted by God". We read that "our understanding of biblical conversion affects almost every aspect of local church life" (46).

## 3. *Baptism*

Baptism is defined as both "a local church's act" and "a converted person's act". Additionally, it is "the act which commences a converted person's membership of a local church". The argument for baptism as being the responsibility of the local church is built on the linkage between Matthew 16, 18 and 28; the keys of the kingdom are given to the church. Consistent with baptism as a converted person's act the author states "I do not consider the baptism of infants to be baptism" (51). Conversion is the prerequisite for baptism; membership is initiated by baptism (65).

## 4. *Membership*

Membership requirements include the candidate "agreeing to the church's statement of faith and values", the church affirming them based on the "explanation of their conversion and the gospel" and that the candidate "has been baptised as a believer".

## 5. *The Lord's Supper*

The Lord's Supper is defined in four statements: It is "a local church's act", "a converted, baptised person's act", "Christ's ongoing means of binding the members of a local church together" and "for baptised members of local churches". At the Supper we should be "communing with Christ and each other" and "commemorating Christ's death" – both affirmed, along with the twin responses of "receiving Christ's benefits" and "renewing commitment to Christ". Helpfully, this chapter builds its case from both the Old and New Testaments. For example, in the OT "the gift of food from the King also acknowledges that one is subject to that King" (98). We are also challenged that a Christian who regularly attends, but is not a member of the local church should not be included in the Supper. "For many, such a stance seems harsh" yet "the Supper is not a private devotion but a communal meal... To participate regularly without real commitment to a local church shows a disregard for Christ's people which Paul warns against" (103).

## 6. *Discipleship*

“Each local church should be characterised by a shared life of discipleship... to grow in holiness... and in witness”. All members are to be equipped to serve by participation in the formal and informal life of the church – “it takes a church to grow every disciple” (118). An over-reliance on preaching or on formal church activities will hinder a balanced process of discipleship.

## 7. *Discipline*

Church discipline is defined as the “removal from church membership and withholding of the Lord’s Supper” and is necessary when a member’s “life or doctrine renders their profession of faith in Christ incredible”. The process involves “much pastoral care” and has the aim of bringing the offender “back to repentance and faith, and... church membership”. Wisely, the emphasis is not on developing a list of sins, but on a clear gospel framework – the sin must be outward, serious and unrepented of. The idea of “suspension” (being refused the Supper but retaining membership) before “discipline” (loss of membership) is rejected as without biblical support.

## 8. *Independency*

The independence of the local church is defined: “each local church has final authority” over its membership, leadership and its doctrinal and moral standards. This is an excellent chapter in which the author argues, “that congregationalism is in fact more fundamental to the government of the local church than even the existence of elders in each church” (151). In each of the three areas mentioned above he shows how the NT teaches this both negatively and, by implication, positively too. For example, “the church has the final authority of putting people out of church membership through church discipline. An implication of this will be that the church also must have final responsibility for admitting people into membership” (152). And, in regard to the balance of authority between elders and members, he writes, “mutually accountable authorities are wise in this fallen world” (162).

## 9. *Leadership*

The leadership of the church should be by a plurality of godly elders; godly deacons should serve the church.

## 10. *Gospel Unity*

Local churches should “foster good relationships with all other gospel-preaching churches within their locality”. We are to avoid “ecumenism which

compromises the gospel” and the opposite danger of “hyper-critical isolationism” (191).

Andrew King summarises the book in a final chapter: “This collective ‘box set’ of ten interlocking aspects of church life are those practised by Grace Baptist churches... *Many* other churches hold to *much* of what this book has laid out. We hope what we have written has been generous and respectful yet has also helpfully explained our position” (216).

My assessment of the book is that it has accomplished its aims very well; it is a clear reaffirmation of Grace Baptist church order. It seeks to defend the position from a careful interpretation of Scripture. It is not polemical, rather it is characterised by thoughtfulness and hope: “the local church... is to be a growing display of heaven on earth”. The authors have collaborated well, each chapter emphasising biblical exposition, helpful illustration and practical application.

Evangelicalism needs books like this that encourage us to think more carefully about the nature of the church, that are doctrinally rooted, and challenge the prevailing culture of individualism and consumerism. The carefully-worded statement of church order also helps us to avoid fuzzy thinking and a compromising ambiguity. We can be thankful for the authors’ hard work and collaborative effort.

Taking the role of the critic:

1. I would challenge some of the authors to be more careful in making the distinction between what the Scriptures explicitly teach and what we may take as implications. For example, regarding membership, clearly the NT teaches the necessity of belonging to a local church, but it does not explicitly teach “formal” membership that involves affirming every aspect of a church’s doctrine, rules and values. This sort of membership is a wise deduction from Scripture but it should be not to be held on a par with the explicit Scriptural command to be baptised, for example. It may therefore be wiser to view formal membership as a next step after baptism.
2. As a Baptist, I fully agree that baptism is only valid when it is “a converted person’s act”, and that only those who are baptised can become members of the local church, but I believe we should be more accommodating to believers who are paedobaptist and who meet with us regularly and desire to partake of the Lord’s Supper. It may not be logical to permit this in the light of Baptist church order, but is it not wise to permit it because it is rooted in a higher gospel principle? Union with Christ transcends baptismal divides.



3. Formal statements of belief (such as the TitusOneFive Statement) should be careful not to absolutise normal practice so that exceptions are excluded. I have in mind here the statement regarding baptism “by immersing”. I fully agree this is the best and normal practice of the NT, but I think that there may be legitimate exceptions in cases of infirmity where effusion would show wise compassion.
4. Regarding gospel unity and partnership, maybe more thought could be given (in the spin-off books) to the responsibility of the local church not only to co-operate in world evangelism but also in support of theological training of pastors and the support of seminaries.

*Nathan Pomeroy*

*Pastor, Arnold Road Evangelical Church, Nottingham*

*The New Calvinism: New Reformation or Theological Fad?*

Josh Buice (Editor), Christian Focus, 2017, 127pp,

£9.99 (Amazon) / £4.33 (Kindle)

Collin Hansen's *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists*, published in 2008, brought the movement to the attention of a worldwide audience, and spoke of it as a “Reformed resurgence”. This book, which is a symposium with five contributors, attempts to evaluate the movement, and although many healthy features are identified, the lasting impression is that the verdict tends more towards “Theological Fad” than “New Reformation”. The “fad” also seems to be more cultural than it is theological.

Josh Buice comments that “the people who make up the movement are not necessarily young” (11), but it is nevertheless quite clear that the appeal is mainly to a youthful, largely white, educated, American, and generally social-media-savvy section of the population. One of his more worrying observations is that “many New Calvinists have a lack of desire to submit to pastoral authority and to be used in a stable local church over a long period of successive years”. There appears to be “an anti-institutional vein that runs through this modern movement that doesn’t follow in the footsteps of the leaders” (13).

Buice identifies a pragmatism which characterises so much of this movement. In a telling observation, he notes that “perhaps at the heart of pragmatic methodology is the fact that nobody wants to be viewed as a failure. Success is a drug that entices Christians across the evangelical spectrum” (24). The real danger here is that pastors and churches which are

not slick and sophisticated in terms of their presentation might be viewed as “failures” and will be shunned by a younger generation who are on the lookout for a certain style of church rather than the substance of what is believed and taught. Buice adds that “Historic Calvinism was not about an edgy cultural appearance or a rogue religious attitude – it was about the gospel... The world will never think the gospel is cool” (27).

Paul Washer’s analysis is typically courageous, searching and indeed unsettling. In particular, he underlines the need for careful and responsible stewardship of the local church. He highlights the distinction between the character of a theological conference, which he likens to “three or four days of heaven on earth”, and that of the local church, where the minister “knows no such glory” (53). Washer rightly argues that a true reformation ushers in changes which are not merely doctrinal, but which “make real changes in our own personal lives and in the Lord’s church” (47). His chapter is less a critique of New Calvinism and more an exhortation to pastors not to trust in an arm of flesh, while they shepherd God’s flock.

Stephen Lawson deals with the subject of holiness, and his central argument is that God “is fundamentally concerned with our godliness before He is with our giftedness... God is principally focused upon the depth of our maturity before the breadth of our ministry” (73). He calls Christians to a life of disciplined thinking, to gird up their minds with God’s truth: “Every aspect of living a holy life begins with sound thinking” (77). Lawson hits one particular nail on the head when he identifies the tendency for many Christians to confuse holiness with legalism, which takes place “when we isolate divine grace from divine law” (75).

Conrad Mbewe writes against a background of charismatic excess and confusion which he has encountered during his ministry. He counsels against believers seeking “individual Pentecosts” without denying that God can himself work in ways that we might reasonably label miraculous. Mbewe longs to see “Spirit empowerment” but he looks for it not in the demonstration of “extraordinary revelations” (108) but in biblical preaching which is effective.

Finally, Tim Challies, in one of the more balanced chapters of the book, sets out the historical context of the development of New Calvinism, demonstrating that it was “a response to the church growth movement” (116) which found its focus in the ministries of Rick Warren and Bill Hybels. These observations might more helpfully have been made at the beginning of the book. He rightly cautions against the cult of “celebrityism” and warns that mega-conferences “point to a desire to hear celebrities and be where the action is” (122). Challies shows that the reaction to the church growth movement took two forms: the first focused on “authentic Christian *community*” and became the Emerging Church. The second sought to recover “authentic Christian *doctrine*” and this became the New Calvinism this book describes.

But a genuine work of God will surely *not* result in a community-doctrine dichotomy. The immediate consequence of Pentecost was that the early church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching *and* the fellowship” (Acts 2:42). Doctrine was studied within the context of community; this becomes the prototype for the church in every age.

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that New Calvinism is inseparably connected to new technologies. These technologies, and even the presentational means used to try and draw people, are not necessarily bad or sinful. It could be argued, quite reasonably, that the Protestant Reformation five hundred years ago would not have happened without the advent of the printing press. But as the philosopher Neil Postman has perceptively noted elsewhere, it is easy for the medium to so shape the message that the medium actually *becomes* the message.

A work of God which takes place within in a certain culture must, of course, interact with that culture. But which factor will determine the essential character of a movement like New Calvinism: the Word of God or the culture in which it takes place? The present dominance of social media may well result in people being more concerned about gaining “likes”, and the instant acclaim of fellow human-beings, rather than to spend time in prayer with the Father who sees in secret.

It is worth noting that Jonathan Edwards and Robert Murray M’Cheyne are both mentioned several times in the course of this book. Whilst much of Edwards’ theology has been well-publicised in New Calvinism, especially by John Piper, it is the inner, *coram deo* piety of these two men of God, and others, that so needs rediscovery. The best doctrine arises out of this genuine piety and it tends towards doxology. Theology must never be pursued as if it were an intellectual hobby that can be detached from the heart, the attitudes, the emotions and the whole of life.

It is not easy to define the limits of “New Calvinism” and to state precisely which individuals and agencies belong within it. Would it be accurate to class Ligonier Ministries, or the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, as part of the New Calvinist movement? At one point Challies appears to name Washer, among others, as proponents of “theology in mission” and in so doing appears to identify him with New Calvinism. This is somewhat confusing because, as this book amply demonstrates, Washer is critical of the movement – can it be claimed that he stands within it?

My own reflection is that this book is not so much a critique of “New Calvinism” as of contemporary trends across the western evangelical church, and for that reason it is of interest to Christians on both sides of the Atlantic. It is a necessary and healthy call to wisdom rather than sophistication, to piety rather than popularity, to faithfulness rather than fame.

*Paul Yeulett*

*Pastor, Grove Chapel, Camberwell, London*

*Can we trust the Gospels?*

Peter J Williams, Crossway, 2018, 160pp, £6.35 (Amazon) / £6.03 (Kindle)

Dr Peter Williams is the Principal of Tyndale House, Cambridge, which describes itself as a research institute “housing one of the world’s most advanced libraries for biblical scholarship”. As a leading centre for biblical scholarship, its in-house academic programmes facilitate the research of the history, language and context of the Bible.

This new publication seeks to look at evidence for the trustworthiness of the biblical Gospels. It is deceptively brief and punches well above its weight. In short compass Dr Williams tackles some eight questions of an apologetic nature. He is brief but wide-ranging.

The opening chapter looks at three writers outside the Bible, namely Tacitus, Pliny and Josephus. This chapter not only serves to show that these sources do not necessarily contradict anything in Scripture but sets the tone for the rest of the book – a serious, historical approach that is nevertheless accessible to the layman who truly wants to get at the truth about these much-discussed matters.

We then move on to a brief introduction to the four biblical Gospels, followed by a chapter headed “Did the Gospel writers know their stuff?” This fascinating chapter pursues lines of argument that were previously unfamiliar to me and maybe to you. It helpfully highlights the way the geographical references and the nomenclature that we find in the Gospels strongly suggest that these people are reporting real events, events that they knew plenty about rather than some invented world of their own devising, as is sometimes suggested. Similar points are made more briefly with regard to finance, language and customs.

Chapter 4 is on the subject of “undesigned coincidences”, a rather forgotten line of argument pioneered by John James Blunt in the 19th Century and that has been revived in more recent years by Lydia McGrew in her 2018 book *Hidden in plain view*. Williams takes up the cudgels here, giving just four examples of coincidences in the Gospels that must surely be there because the authors are writing of what is true rather than because of some sort of conspiracy they have devised.

Next comes a useful discussion of why we can be sure that the Gospel writers give accurate – if not verbatim – reports of what Jesus said, and then a brief survey of textual criticism and a reassurance that the text we have in our Bibles is a text that can be trusted.

Chapter 7 is another fascinating chapter that deals with the question of whether there are contradictions in the Gospels. Counter-intuitively, this is approached by pointing out six places where John’s Gospel deliberately contains apparent contradictions. Yes, there are apparent contradictions but none that cannot be reasonably explained.

The final chapter, “Who would make all this up?”, touching on miracles and the resurrection, boldly argues for the reasonable supposition that all of history hangs on Jesus.

This attractively produced paperback from Crossway is enhanced by a general and a scriptural index at the end of the book. Can we trust the Gospels? Yes, we can. We recommend this little stick of dynamite to pastors and church members alike. As the blurb suggests, “Everyone from the sceptic to the scholar will find powerful arguments in favour of trusting the Gospels as trustworthy accounts of Jesus’ earthly life.”

*The Pastor’s Soul: The Call and Care of an Undershepherd*

Brian Croft & Jim Savastio, Evangelical Press, 2018, 100pp,  
£7.71 (Amazon) / £5.26 (Kindle)

From the Reformed Baptist stable, this book is written by two American pastors, both based in Louisville, Kentucky. Brian is Senior Pastor of Auburndale Baptist Church and Senior Fellow of the Mathena Centre for Church Revitalization at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Jim is one of the pastors at the Reformed Baptist Church in Louisville. Both are very much involved in *Practical Shepherding*, a Gospel-driven resource centre for pastors and church leaders to equip them in the practical matters of pastoral ministry. The book has grown out of this work and is a helpful contribution to thinking about the practical side of Christian ministry in the twenty-first century. It is in four parts, alternating sections being written by the two men.

Jim starts by looking at the biblical commands to a pastor – taking heed to oneself, to doctrine, to the flock – and why these matter. Brian then contributes a section on the need for every minister to be converted and called.

In part three Jim has two chapters on the public and private means of grace. Brian’s last section deals with six important topics with regard to the pastor’s wellbeing – eating, sleeping, exercise, friendship, silence and rest (including his day off, his holidays and having sabbaticals).

I recall hearing Joel Beeke say that a pastor should read at least one of these sorts of books every year. If you are a pastor, we commend this little book for your perusal. Dr Beeke also said at that time (with tongue in cheek) that you cannot follow everything recommended in such books as there are not enough hours in the day! That is probably true of this volume, although it tries hard not to be prescriptive. Few will agree with everything that is said here but it will stimulate thought on these important subjects. It would make a great book for a ministers’ fraternal to discuss.

*Gary Brady*

*Pastor, Childs Hill Baptist Church, London*