

THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN THE WORSHIP AND WITNESS OF THE CHURCH

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

—1 Peter 2:9 (ESV)

GOD'S SAVING MISSION IN CHRIST

The mission of the church is grounded in, nurtured by, and outflowing from the prior and larger reality of the mission of God, with Christ as the central character.¹ God's saving mission in Christ began before time in a covenant among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.² This covenant made by the Trinity is the opening act in the drama of redemption.³ It originates from God's incomprehensible and unchangeable love.⁴ The Apostle John writes, "For God so loved the

1. Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 531.

2. Reformed theologians refer to this covenant before time as the covenant of redemption. Michael G. Brown and Zach Keele define the covenant of redemption as "the covenant established in eternity between the Father, who gives the Son to be the redeemer of the elect and requires of him the conditions for their redemption; and the Son, who voluntarily agrees to fulfill these conditions; and the Spirit, who voluntarily applies the work of the Son to the elect." *Sacred Bond: Covenant Theology Explored* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 2012), 25.

3. Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 78.

4. Brown and Keele write, "The doctrine of the covenant of redemption reveals to us that there exists between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit perfect love and harmony. Their promises and commitments to each other demonstrate their love for each other. The Father's love for the Son is expressed in his reward of a people whom the Son will rule as King. The Son's love for the Father is expressed in his submission to the Father's will, even at the highest personal cost. The Spirit's love for the Father and the Son is expressed in his work to bring this plan to completion. And the Father and Son's love for the Spirit is expressed in pouring him out on the church as their special gift from heaven. . . . Yet the doctrine of the covenant of redemption also teaches us that God is eternally moved to communicate to others this love that he experiences within himself. . . . God has decided to share his love with his elect. In his sovereign will, he chose to make us the objects of the eternal, mutual love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We did nothing to move him to this love, for he loved us while we were still sinners and his enemies (Rom. 5:8-10). Rather, he acted first by setting his love on us before the foundation of the world in this great covenant involving each person of the Godhead. In the covenant of redemption, we see that our salvation is Trinitarian from beginning to end, carefully planned in eternity past and executed in human history. What amazing love is demonstrated by the fact that Christ came on a specific mission to fulfill his covenant obligations and obtain redemption for us!" *Sacred Bond*, 37.

world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him” (John 3:16-17). The immediate result of the love of God is the mission of the Son.⁵ The work of atonement originates from God’s love. God did not begin loving the believer when Christ died on the cross. One should not think that God hated the Christian and that the cross made it possible for Him to love him. Rather, God loved His people before the world began “so that He gave His only Son.”

Commenting on John 3:16, Calvin quotes Augustine:

God’s love . . . is incomprehensible and unchangeable. For it was not after we were reconciled to Him through the blood of His Son that He began to love us. Rather, He has loved us before the world was created, that we also might be His sons along with His only-begotten Son—before we became anything at all. The fact that we were reconciled through Christ’s death must not be understood as if His Son reconciled us to Him that He might now begin to love those whom He had hated. Rather, we have already been reconciled to Him who loves us, with whom we were enemies on account of sin.⁶

Some find it hard to reconcile God’s love for sinners with His wrath (Rom. 1:18). How could God love those who are among the condemned mass of humanity? Calvin explains,

Since there is a perpetual and irreconcilable disagreement between righteousness and unrighteousness, so long as we remain sinners He cannot receive us completely. Therefore, to take away all cause for enmity and to reconcile us utterly to Himself, He wipes out all evil in us by the expiation set forth in the death of Christ; that we, who were previously unclean and impure, may show ourselves righteous and holy in His sight. Therefore, by His love God the Father goes before and anticipates our reconciliation in Christ. Indeed, “because He first loved us” (I John 4:19),

5. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 206.

6. Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, *The Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 20:506-7. This truth is something to sing about.

He afterward reconciles us to Himself. But until Christ succors us by His death, the unrighteousness that deserves God's indignation remains in us, and is accursed and condemned before Him. Hence, we can be fully and firmly joined with God only when Christ joins us with Him. If, then, we would be assured that God is pleased with and kindly disposed toward us, we must fix our eyes and minds on Christ alone.⁷

Thus, preceding the mission of the church is the Triune God's mission, namely the sending of the Son and subsequently the Holy Spirit. Jesus, in John 20:21-22, says to His disciples, "As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you.' And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" The triune God of the Bible is on mission and we are God's co-workers (1 Cor. 3:9).⁸ Christopher Wright states,

Mission . . . in biblical terms, while it inescapably involves us in planning and action, is not *primarily* a matter of our activity or our initiative. Mission, from the point of view of our human endeavor, means the committed *participation* of God's people in the purposes of God for the redemption of the whole creation. The mission is God's. The marvel is that God invites us to join in.⁹

THE CHURCH'S PARTICIPATION IN MISSION

In 1 Peter 2:9, Peter reveals both how and why God has invited the church to join in His mission for the redemption of the whole creation. Peter writes, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." Before proclamation there is promise. Before a Great Commission there is a Great Communication.¹⁰ Peter's statement of

7. Ibid., 506.

8. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 532.

9. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 67. Jerram Barrs reminds us that "God is the eager evangelist!" *The Heart of Evangelism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 95.

10. Ibid., 60.

God's purpose for the church—proclamation—is grounded in God's fourfold foundational indicatives of the church.¹¹ It is by God's gracious calling that He has invited His people to participate in His mission.¹² God's mission—*calling*—precedes and compels the church's mission—*proclamation*.¹³

The indicatives of the gospel give rise to the missional imperatives of the church. Michael Horton writes, "The Great Commission actually begins with a great announcement. Before there can be a mission, there has to be a message. Behind the sending of the church lies the Father's sending of His Son and Spirit. Before we go, we must stop and hear—really hear—what has happened that we are to take to the world. The evangel comes before evangelism."¹⁴

God has graciously called His elect to Himself *so that* (ὅπως) they may *proclaim* (ἐξαγγέλλω) the excellencies of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvelous light (emphasis added). God's stated purpose for the church reflects His stated purpose for Israel: "the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise" (Isa. 43:21). The ultimate purpose of the church's mission is to glorify God. Commenting on 1 Peter 2:9, John Calvin writes, "The sum of what he says is, that God has favoured us with these immense benefits

11. "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession."

12. "Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

13. Edmund Clowney writes, "Mission expresses the purpose for which Christ came into the world, and the purpose for which He sends us into the world. His purpose is the purpose of the Father. We are called to mission, not only as disciples of Christ, but as children of the Father... The heart of the gospel moves the church to mission and to deeds of mercy which have always been part of the Christian mission. The Christian who has tasted the compassionate love of God in Christ must ask the question put by Jesus: 'To whom am I a neighbor?...who is it that needs my compassion, the love that reflects the love of Calvary?'" *The Church: Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 161.

14. See Michael Horton, *The Gospel Commission: Recovering God's Strategy for Making Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 21.

and constantly manifests them, that His glory might by us be made known: for by praises, or virtues, He understands wisdom, goodness, power, righteousness, and everything else, in which the glory of God shines forth.”¹⁵

God’s goal is to produce genuine worshippers.¹⁶ In John 4:23, Jesus states, “A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.” Commenting on Romans 15:8-12, Thomas Schreiner writes, “The one people of God, both Jews and Gentiles, will praise God forever for his great mercy extended to them in Christ Jesus, showing that the worship of God is his ultimate aim in salvation history.”¹⁷ Since then the church is saved to proclaim God’s excellencies, what constitutes this proclamation?

MUSIC: AN IMPORTANT MEANS OF GRATITUDE

15. John Calvin, “The First Epistle of Peter,” *Calvin’s Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996), 22:77.

16. John Piper writes, “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Mission exists because worship doesn’t.” *Let the Nations Be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 11. However, Piper goes on to say, “Worship is also the fuel of missions” (11). Worship is indeed the goal of missions. But worship is not the fuel of missions. To say that worship is the fuel of missions is to confuse the law and the gospel. The believer’s work—worship—is not good enough to sustain such a mission. The gospel is the fuel of missions. Participation in God’s mission can only be motivated and sustained by God’s announcement—“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me,” and God’s comfort—“I am with you always, to the end of the age.” As previously noted, the indicative comes before the imperative. The gospel comes before worship. In fact, the gospel is the fuel not only of missions but also of worship. Making one’s worship the fuel for missions subtly makes the imperatives—worship—the motivation for another imperative—missions. Michael Horton cautions, “We must hear this gospel not just at first, for our own conversion, but every moment of our lives if the Great Commission is to be a joyful delight rather than an intolerable burden with an impossible goal.” *The Gospel Commission*, 21. The gospel not only comes before missions but also comes before worship. Indeed, without the gospel there is no mission and no worship.

17. Thomas R. Schreiner (2008), “The Letter of Paul to the Romans,” in Lane T. Dennis et al., *The ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles. p. 2182.

Martin Luther considered music so important that he wrote, “Next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise.”¹⁸ Music serves as a vital means of the church’s proclamation. Without question, the Scriptures have much to say about the important role music plays in the church’s worship¹⁹ and witness. However, before an examination of the role of music, it is important to distinguish between the means of grace and the means of gratitude. Michael Horton writes,

Preaching, baptism, and the Supper are means of grace—that is, God’s acts of delivering Christ to us—rather than means of obedience. We certainly are also commanded as well as assured through these means, but obedience is the “reasonable service of worship” that we render “in view of the mercies of God” (Rom. 12:1 KJV). Indicatives come before imperatives. Prayer, offering our service and gifts, personal and family worship, Bible reading, fellowship with other believers, sharing the gospel with others—these are all important responses of gratitude, but they are not means of grace.²⁰

Music—like prayer, personal family worship, and Bible reading—is an important response of gratitude.²¹ However, because of a failure to make this

18. Martin Luther, *Liturgy and Hymns, Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 53:323.

19. The focus of this paper is on the corporate aspect of the church’s worship as God’s people gather together on the Lord’s Day.

20. Michael Horton, *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 249.

21. The rhythm and flow of the church’s corporate worship is to be marked by reception and response—receiving grace and responding in gratitude/thankful action. Tim Keller refers to this as “gospel reenactment.” Concerning the rhythm and flow of gospel-centered worship, Keller writes, “Calvin saw the entire service, not as performance for God by the celebrants, but as a rhythm of receiving God’s word of grace and then responding in grateful praise. That is how the gospel operates. We do not perform duties, anxiously and wearily hoping that some day we will deserve to enter his kingdom and family. Rather, we hear the word of our acceptance now; and transformed by that understanding, we respond with a life of thankful joy (Rom. 5:1-5). For Calvin, then, each service reenacted the reception of the gospel.” Timothy J. Keller, “Reformed Worship in the Global City,” in *Worship by the Book*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Company, 2002), 215. Like Keller, Michael Horton characterizes the corporate worship of the church as the weekly “covenant renewal ceremony.” *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 24. Horton adds, “As in all covenants, there are two parties to the covenant of grace. God speaks and

proper distinction, it is not uncommon for Evangelicals to mistakenly speak and think of music as a “means of grace” rather than understanding it as a “means of gratitude.”²²

For example, musicians and singers are frequently spoken of as the “worship team” with the music director as “the worship leader,” whose task, it is said, is to bring the church into the presence of God. Yet the author of Hebrews reserves this title and function for Christ whom he designates as the “minister (λειτουργός—liturgy / worship leader) in the holy places” (Heb. 8:2). The ascended Christ, seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven (Heb. 8:1), is the “worship leader” of the church.

Moreover, “worship” is often viewed as a time of singing through which believers are drawn closer to God. However, neither “worship leaders” nor music and singing are the means by which God’s people enter the presence of God. It is by Christ alone, who is freely given in the gospel, that believers enter into the presence of God (Eph. 2:18; 3:12; Heb. 10:20; Jude 24). In other words, a believer does not draw near to God or enter His presence on the basis of what she does—music and singing. Rather, a Christian draws near to God on the basis of what Christ alone—*solus Christus*—has done for her. Christ, not music, is the believer’s mediator (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 12:24). No one enters God’s presence *by* singing. Rather, the Psalmist exhorts God’s people to come into His presence *with*

delivers; we respond in faith and repentance. . . . That’s why worship is dialogical: God speaks and we respond” (26).

22. Sally Morgenthaler makes this mistake when she writes, “First, aside from the Spirit of God, music is the most potent element in a worship service. It has an incredible, matchless capacity to open the human heart to God, accessing the soul more quickly, deeply, and permanently than any other art form or human speech (yes, that includes the message!).” *Worship Evangelism: Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1999), 211.

singing (Ps. 100:2). The invitation—in fact, privilege—to come into His presence with singing results from believers having been brought into His presence through Christ by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 27:51; Rom. 5:2; Eph. 2:18; 3:12). Making music and singing the means by which a believer comes into God’s presence is to confuse law (what a believer is to do) with gospel (what Christ has already done, is doing, and will do for the believer).²³

In addition, music has the ability to evoke profoundly powerful emotions.²⁴ But it is a mistake to equate God’s presence with such emotions. Vaughan Roberts writes, “The Bible never teaches that a feeling can take us into the presence of God. If that had been possible, God would have sent us a musician rather than a saviour. Only Christ can take us into the Most Holy Place in heaven, where we have direct access to the Father through faith in him.”²⁵

It is also important to note that the worship of the church involves more than singing. It has become commonplace for believers to speak of the music portion of a Sunday morning service as the “worship.” Worship certainly includes singing but it is a mistake to reduce worship to just singing. The public worship of the church also consists of the invocation,²⁶ reading of the law and

23. Horton writes, “If worship is a covenantal renewal ceremony, the service must reflect the divine initiative in the covenant itself. There must be response—and there will be response, if there is something to which we are inclined to respond. At the same time, there should be an emphasis here on God’s work: God renews the covenant with us, assuring us of that which we easily lose sight of unless Christ is publicly placarded before our eyes each week.” *A Better Way*, 26-27.

24. See Point 5 below.

25. Vaughan Roberts, “The Place of Music and Singing in Church,” <http://www.theologian.org.uk/pastoralia/music.html> (accessed February 1, 2013).

26. To teach his people the necessity of living upon and by God’s service in Christ, Calvin began his Lord’s Day liturgy with an invocation from Psalm 124:8: “Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” See Elsie Anne McKee, ed., *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001). Commenting on Psalm 124:8, Calvin writes, “As I

confession of sin, the declaration of pardon, the public reading of Scripture, the teaching and preaching of God's Word, the proper observance of the sacraments, the giving of offerings and prayers. All of these together with music and singing constitute important elements in corporate worship.²⁷

Lastly, worship in song must extend to the whole of the Christian's life (cf. Rom. 12:1; Eph. 5:2). Thomas Watson wrote, "A good Christian is like the sun, which not only sends forth heat, but goes its circuit round the world. Thus, he who glorifies God has not only his affections heated with love to God, but he goes his circuit too; he moves vigorously in the sphere of obedience."²⁸

While worship is more than singing, it is not less. One must not overreact and go to the opposite extreme.²⁹ The priority of the means of grace coming before the means of gratitude—gospel before law—does not preclude the means of gratitude or lessen their importance. Rather, it properly establishes them. All acts of obedience—music and singing—are the Christian's "spiritual act of worship" that he or she offers "in view of God's mercy" (Rom. 12:1 NIV).

Music and singing are indeed important responses of gratitude. The Bible is full of references to music and exhortations to sing.³⁰ Music and singing are not

interpret the verse, he not only gives thanks to God for one benefit, but affirms that the Church cannot continue safe except in so far as she is protected by the hand of God. His object is to animate the children of God with the assured hope, that their life is in perfect safety under the divine guardianship." John Calvin, "Hebrews," *Calvin's Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996), 22:332.

27. See Horton, *A Better Way*, 141-62.

28. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), p. 9.

29. See Paul Westermeyer's discussion of the Swiss Reformer Ulrich Zwingli in *Te Deum: The Church and Music* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 149-53.

30. Cf. Ps. 33:3; 95:1; 96:1; Isa. 42:10a; Eph. 5:19; Paul S. Jones notes that there are more than six hundred references to music in the Bible. "Hymnody in a Post-Hymnody World," in *Give*

an option but a command (Ex. 15:21; 1 Chr. 16:23; Ps. 96:2; Isa. 42:10; Ja. 5:13). God wants to be served with gladness and singing (Ps. 100:2). The Lord calls His people to give Him praise with musical instruments (e.g., Ps. 33:1-3; 81:2; 98:4-6; 147:7; 149:3; 150). The Bible sets forth a high view of the role of music in the church's worship and witness and believers should as well. Why then does the church gather to sing? What is the role of music in the worship and witness of the church?

THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN THE WORSHIP AND WITNESS OF THE CHURCH

First, music is a gift of God's good creation.³¹ Music has a creative, artistic dimension. God created music and songs to capture and portray His truth in a beautiful, unique and eloquent fashion. The artistic value of music aids in the witness of the church.³² Skillful music (Ps. 33:3) contributes to the beauty, grandeur, and intimacy of worship.

The Christian must not value music for music's sake. However, a Christian ought to recognize that music is a wonderful and powerful³³ gift from the Lord to His church. Martin Luther writes, "I would certainly like to praise music with all my heart as the excellent gift of God which it is and to commend it to everyone."³⁴ Music accompanied God in creation. In Job 38:7, Job declares that

Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship, ed. Philip Graham Ryken, Derek W. H. Thomas, and J. Ligon Duncan III (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 2003), 239.

31. See Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 145.

32. See point 5 below concerning the discussion on why music of the church should be done with excellence.

33. Even secular clinical researchers acknowledge the power of music. For example, see Oliver Sacks, "The Power of Music," *Brain: A Journal of Neurology* 129, no. 10 (2006), 2528-32. <http://brain.oxfordjournals.org/content/129/10/2528.extract> (accessed January 31, 2013).

34. Luther, *Liturgy and Hymns*, 321.

when God laid the foundations of the universe, “The morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy.”³⁵ Luther writes,

First then, looking at music itself, you will find that from the beginning of the world it has been instilled and implanted in all creatures, individually and collectively. For nothing is without sound or harmony. Even the air, which of itself is invisible and imperceptible to all our senses, and which, since it lacks both voice and speech, is the least musical of all things, becomes sonorous, audible, and comprehensible when it is set in motion. . . . Music is still more wonderful in living things, especially birds. . . . And yet, compared to the human voice, all this hardly deserves the name of music, so abundant and incomprehensible is here the munificence and wisdom of our most gracious Creator.³⁶

By design, the Lord created man as a musical being. Oliver Sacks, a clinical professor of neurology, writes, “Our auditory systems, our nervous systems, are tuned for music.”³⁷ Luther points out how philosophers have “labored to explain the marvelous instrument of the human voice.”³⁸ Luther continues, “Philosophers for all their labor cannot find the explanation; and baffled they end in perplexity; for none of them has yet been able to define or demonstrate the original components of the human voice. . . . They marvel, but they do not understand.”³⁹ Because this “lovely gift” of creation can be prostituted by “perverted minds,” Martin Luther taught that music is to be reclaimed and refined from this present evil age by the church in order to “taste

35. Just as creation began with music, so it is appropriate that creation concludes with an eternal song of praise to the Creator (Rev. 4:11).

36. Luther, *Liturgy and Hymns*, 322.

37. Sacks, “Power of Music,” 2532.

38. Luther, *Liturgy and Hymns*, 322.

39. *Ibid.*

with wonder (yet not to comprehend) God’s absolute and perfect wisdom in his wondrous work of music.”⁴⁰

Second, music joins proclamation to praise.⁴¹ Music has a declarative dimension. Singing praise is a form of proclamation to others (Ps. 40:3; 96:1-3; 149:1). Paul Westermeyer writes, “To praise is to proclaim, and to proclaim is to praise. They both take sounding form. There is a circle of musical doing here where exegesis and proclamation run into each other on a circuit of sound.”⁴² Without question, music and singing serve as vital means—gratitude—of the church’s proclamation, particularly the gospel. In this way, music and singing play a key role in the mission of the church. Communicating the word of God—law and gospel—clearly through music and song is vital to the church’s witness.⁴³

The proclamation of the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light is certainly a fundamental part of the church’s mission.⁴⁴ The gospel gives rise to proclamation. Proclamation is the chief

40. Ibid., 324.

41. Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 146.

42. Ibid.

43. Morgenthaler notes that “even though Seeker Bob needs to observe us worshipping and candidly expressing our love for God, he also needs to know who it is we are worshipping. Doctrine (truth about God) packaged in accessible musical form is a refreshing and effective way of communicating who that God is and what that God has done for us in Jesus Christ.” *Worship Evangelism*, 217.

44. Concerning the message and mission of the church, Horton writes, “The gospel not only determines the message, but also defines the ministry and mission of the church. In other words, Christ retains the sole authority to determine not only what we say in his name, but also what we do and how we do it, so that the mission is consistent with the message. The message determines the mission, but the mission delivers the message. We cannot choose between being doctrinal and being missional.” *People and Place*, 249.

implication of the gospel being the gospel.⁴⁵ Simon Kistemaker writes, “Everywhere they [believers-J.F.] should vocally proclaim God’s praiseworthy virtues, deeds, power, glory, wisdom, grace, mercy, love, and holiness.”⁴⁶

The ordinary means of proclamation entrusted to the church is the preaching of the gospel.⁴⁷ Question 155 of the Westminster Larger Catechism asks, “How is the Word made effectual to salvation?” Here’s the answer,

The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.⁴⁸

That the preaching of the gospel is central to the church’s ministry and mission does not mean that it is the exclusive means of the church’s proclamation. Proclaiming God’s praises through music is also a powerful way the church proclaims—as a means of response—“the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” With song, the story—the gospel—is proclaimed.

45. See Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 131.

46. Simon Kistemaker, “James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude,” *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 93.

47. Concerning the marks of the church, Horton writes, “The marks define the mission. Preaching, baptism, and the Supper are means of grace—that is, God’s acts of delivering Christ to us—rather than means of obedience.” *People and Place*, 249.

48. Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, *The Westminster Larger Catechism*. http://www.reformed.org/documents/wlc_w_proofs/index.html (accessed February 1, 2013). Question 65 of the *Heidelberg Catechism* asks, “Since then faith alone makes us share in Christ and all His benefits, where does this faith come from?” Here’s the response, “From the Holy Spirit, who works it in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and strengthens it by the use of the sacraments.”

Proclamation of God's excellencies through music is an important response of gratitude. Proclamation through song is the natural response of a heart filled with the grace of God. David in Psalm 59:17 writes, "O my Strength, I will sing praises to you, for you, O God, are my fortress, the God who shows me *steadfast love*" (emphasis added).⁴⁹ In Psalm 149:1-3, God's people are called to praise the Lord and sing a new⁵⁰ song because "the LORD takes pleasure in His people; He adorns the humble with salvation" (v. 4). Surely that cheers the heart and is something to sing about.

Such proclamation of God's salvation has a built-in witness to the nations.⁵¹ In Psalm 57:9, David declares, "I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations." There is an inseparable connection between the church's worship—proclamation of God's excellencies—and its witness. Sally Morgenthaler notes that

Today when lost people have turned a deaf ear to "churchianity" but their hearts are being drawn to spiritual things, heartfelt Christian worship can meet their need for both truth and experience, for hearing the 'claims of Christ' and seeing 'Christ in us.' Seekers can pick up a religious experience at any New Age quick-stop. But they won't get Jesus Christ in their take-out bags. Worship such as that in the Philippian jail—exaltation of the God incarnate and present with God's people—this is what seekers really need to see in our churches. We may not want worship to witness. We may not believe it can witness. We may point to the blemished lambs of worship we offer up each week as proof that it cannot witness. But effective worship, real worship—worship that is what it was meant to be

49. See "The Role of Music" below.

50. Concerning a "new song," John Collins notes that a "new song" does not necessarily mean a newly composed song but rather singing a song as a response to a fresh experience of God's grace. See *ESV Study Bible*, 977. Dennis Johnson writes, "In the history of salvation new songs were composed to celebrate new events in which the Lord rescued His people." *The Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, PA: P & R Publishing, 2001), 108.

51. See Don McCurry, "A Church Planted through Songs in the Night: Kyrgyzstan," Frank Fortunato with Paul Neeley and Carol Brinneman, *All the World Is Singing: Glorifying God through the Worship Music of the Nations*. Colorado Springs, CO: Authentic Publishing, 2006.

and does what it was meant to do—will witness. As Handst Hanson says, “Worship is evangelism.”⁵²

Singing praise is a wonderful way the church publicly proclaims and lifts up God's name in the world, magnifying Him in the eyes of others. Here the relationship between the church's worship and witness (mission) is seen. Music and singing assist the church in declaring to fellow Christians and non-Christians the good news about Christ, who loved us and gave Himself for us (Ps. 40:3; Gal. 2:20). Concerning proclamation, Bob Kauflin states,

Proclamation—declaring what's true about God—is often underrated. Why proclaim scriptural truths we've previously heard and already know? Because we forget. We lose track of who God is and what he's done. Proclamation helps set our minds and hearts right. It reminds us of the convictions and realities that should guide and govern our daily lives. To proclaim is to announce something officially or publicly. We aren't keeping a secret. We want others to hear. It also means declaring something important with the appropriate degree of emphasis. We're saying, *This* really matters. To me and to you. To everyone. Biblical worship involves proclamation and leads to proclaiming God's truth with our lives. We're doing more than emoting or having a 'worship experience.' We're declaring why God is so great, what he has accomplished, and all that he has promised. We all need to be reminded, and proclamation helps us remember.⁵³

Third, music joins praise to proclamation.⁵⁴ Music has a vertical dimension (Pss. 135:1, 3; 146:2; 147:1; 149:1). Part of glorifying God consists in singing praise (Pss. 22:23; 66:2, 8; 67:3, 5). Singing praise includes singing songs directly to God as well as about God—His person and work. As noted above, a Christian has been saved to praise God (1 Pet. 2:9). When a believer praises God, he is doing exactly what he was created and saved to do.

52. Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism*, 91-92.

53. Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 129.

54. Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 146.

The church's music team is not about entertainment, singing for the enjoyment of singing, fund-raising projects, crowd-gathering, the adoption of contemporary forms for church growth or pep rallies for improving church morale. Rather, the music team's purpose is to lead the congregation to praise God ("sing the glory of His name; give to Him glorious praise," Ps. 66:2). Corporate worship is to be characterized by the public praise of the "excellencies" of God, namely His grace, love, power, wisdom, righteousness, holiness, justice, mercy. Martin Luther writes, "The gift of language combined with the gift of song was given to human beings to let us know that we should praise God with both word and music, namely, by proclaiming the Word of God through music."⁵⁵

Fourth, music bears the Word of God.⁵⁶ Music has an educational dimension (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). God created music to carry the Word of God in a unique fashion. It has been said that Martin Luther recovered the congregation's singing while Zwingli denied it and Calvin restricted it.⁵⁷ However, Martin Luther was not fond of music simply for music's sake. Paul Westermeyer writes, "Luther thought music has a theological reason for being: it is a gift of God, which comes from the 'sphere of miraculous audible things,' just like the Word of God. Music is unique in that it can carry words. Since words carry the Word of God, music and the Word of God are closely related."⁵⁸

55. Quoted in Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 146.

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*, 141.

58. *Ibid.*, 144-45.

Luther understood the educational value of marrying music and message. For example, Luther writes, “Music and notes . . . do help gain a better understanding of the text.”⁵⁹ Again, “Our plan is to follow the example of the prophets and the ancient fathers of the church, and to compose psalms for the people in the vernacular, that is, spiritual songs, so that the word of God may be among the people also in the form of music.”⁶⁰

In addition to sermons and Bible studies, music and singing are one of the ways believers learn the truths of Scripture. In Ephesians 5:18-19, Paul writes, “Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.” The command “be filled with the Spirit” is followed in verses 19-21 by a string of five participles denoting the results of one who is filled with the Spirit.⁶¹ Significantly, three of the five participles have to do with singing. One thing is for sure, Spirit-filled Christians sing.

Ephesians 5:18-19 shows that music has both a vertical as well as horizontal dimension. Music and singing are to be addressed not only to God but also to “one another.” Even while singing and making melody with their hearts to the Lord, believers also “speak God’s Word to one another” by means of “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Eph. 5:19-20). The church gathers in

59. Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 146.

60. Quoted in J. I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 189.

61. ¹⁹ λαλοῦντες . . . ἄδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες . . . ²⁰ εὐχαριστοῦντες . . . ²¹ ὑποτασσόμενοι” Cf. Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 706.

corporate worship not only to praise God but also to address one another in song for the purpose of mutual edification.

Music then plays a vital role in the educational ministry of the church. The Great Commission involves teaching God's disciples to obey everything He has commanded (Matt. 28:20). Music certainly is one of the ways disciples are taught the Word of God. J. I. Packer and Gary Parrett write,

There is one particular catechetical strategy that has the potential to deeply engage our minds, hearts, and bodies at the same time in a unique way—the singing of well chosen hymns of the Faith. Such singing was often a key feature in the history of catechesis. Ambrose of Milan wrote congregational hymns to catechize, and said of their usage in his church, “All therefore have been made teachers, who before were scarcely able to be learners.” Among those who were present singing the Faith under Ambrose's ministry was Augustine himself.⁶²

Modern Christians in Mozambique, for example, turn sermon notes into songs.⁶³ Greg Kernaghan, reporting how a congregation in Nigula responded in a surprising way to his forty-minute teaching of Scripture, gives this account:

I asked the translator what they were singing, and his answer was unexpected. “This is an oral culture; few if any of these men can read,” he explained. “They will compare notes, so to speak, of what you have taught, and then ‘pack’ the teaching into a song that all will learn. Then they can sing this song as they walk the long journey home, after which they will unpack the teaching and give it to their people over the next weeks.”⁶⁴

Since one of the main purposes of music is to rehearse the great truths of Scripture to each other, it is of paramount importance that the leadership chooses songs that faithfully set forth the orthodox teaching of Scripture, particularly the

62. Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 189.

63. Greg Kernaghan, “Turning Sermon Notes into Song,” *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook*, ed. James R. Krabill (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), 216-17.

64. Kernaghan, 216. See also Sue Hall and Richard Shawyer, “Chanting the Gospel of John: An Experimental Approach,” in Krabill, ed., *Worship and Mission*, 209-10.

gospel.⁶⁵ Paul reveals how God has designed music to bring the gospel fully to bear upon the listener's soul. He exhorts the Colossian believers, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16). The phrase "word of Christ" means the gospel.⁶⁶ One of the ways that the gospel dwells richly in the believer's heart is by "singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."⁶⁷

The church is to sing the gospel. Paul Jones writes, "The biblical model is to sing of God's deliverance, to sing what we preach. We preach Christ's work of redemption—His birth, life, death, [burial-J.F.] and resurrection—the message of the book. The Bible sings this gospel time and time again, and so should we."⁶⁸ Such singing of the gospel is a powerful⁶⁹ witness to unbelievers as well as a powerful source of encouragement and edification of believers.⁷⁰ Consequently,

65. Music played a significant role in the early church's conflict with the heretic Arius and his followers (Arians). Arius composed hymns in order to spread his heretical view that Christ was not fully God. Arian hymns became so popular with "ordinary churchgoers" they increasingly became ensnared in this heresy. See Paul Lusher, "Singing Hymns: God's Vehicle for Truth," <http://songsandhymns.org/music-worship/article/singing-hymns:-gods-vehicle-for-truth> (accessed January 31, 2012).

66. Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 206.

67. Whether the phrase "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" is to be linked with the preceding words "teaching and admonishing" or linked with the following participle "singing," the fact remains that music and singing play a key role in ensuring that the gospel dwells richly in the believer's heart. For discussion of the two main possibilities, see William Hendriksen, *Philippians, Colossians and Philemon*, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1994), 161n138.

68. Paul S. Jones, "Hymnody," 227.

69. The gospel is the "power of God" for salvation (Rom. 1:16).

70. Michael Horton observes, "We must never take Christ's work for granted. The gospel is not merely something we take to unbelievers; it is the Word that created and continues to sustain the whole church in its earthly pilgrimage." *The Gospel Commission: Recovering God's Strategy for Making Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 27. The gospel is to be preached to the church (Rom. 1:15).

worship, evangelism, and edification are inseparably related. There is an intrinsic missional⁷¹ element to the church's music and singing. Sally Morgenthaler writes, "Whether evangelism through worship was direct or indirect, the cause-effect relationship of New Testament worship and evangelism is undeniable."⁷²

Since one of the main purposes of music is to sing the gospel, it is of paramount importance to choose songs that faithfully and explicitly communicate the unsearchable riches of Christ. Paul Westermeyer writes, "Luther was both radical and conservative. He used all of the past, and he welcomed new texts and music as long as they were well-crafted and durable. Texts that denied the centrality of justification by grace through faith were unacceptable, but a wide variety of fine musical craft from the past and present was warmly welcomed."⁷³

The content of the church's songs is to be gospel-saturated—songs that are self-consciously gospel-driven substance.⁷⁴ Michael Horton warns that "vagueness about the object of our praise inevitably leads to making our own praise the object. Praise therefore becomes an end in itself, and we are caught up in our own 'worship experience' rather than in the God whose character and acts are the only proper focus."⁷⁵ Some aspect of the person and work of Christ—His

71. Wright defines the term "missional" as "simply an adjective denoting something that is related to or characterized by mission, or has the qualities, attributes or dynamics of mission." *The Mission of God*, 24.

72. Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism*, 40.

73. Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 149.

74. The Pastoral Letters repeatedly emphasize the need for "sound/healthy" doctrine, which gives life and nourishment to the believer's faith (cf. 1 Tim. 1:10; 6:3; 2 Tim. 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:9, 13; 2:1-2, 8).

75. Horton, *A Better Way*, 26.

humanity, deity, birth, obedience, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, reign, second coming—is to be sung every Lord’s Day. Certainly in addition to the educational benefits, such gospel-rich music serves as an evangelistic witness.

Since God has created music to carry the word of God, a word about style is necessary. Bryan Chapell is certainly correct when he writes, “I realize the stumbling block hindering many churches’ progress toward unity in worship is music. . . . [R]eactions to musical choices are often more visceral than reasonable.”⁷⁶ In a chapter titled “Is Style Neutral?” Michael Horton replies to those who argue for contemporary styles of music.⁷⁷ But, the fact is music can be contemporary in style and still aid believers in a better understanding of the text.⁷⁸

Traditional hymnody, as a style, is not necessarily more effective in helping believers gain a better understanding of the text.⁷⁹ In some cases, well-beloved traditional hymns distort the gospel message.⁸⁰ Take for example the well-known hymn, “Come, Thou Fount.” The first line in the fourth stanza reads,

76. Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 296.

77. Horton, *A Better Way*, 163-87.

78. For a helpful defense of contemporary worship music, see John Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense* (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1997).

79. The debate about style within American cultural settings is typically over contemporary versus non-contemporary types of musical genres. However, ethnomusicologists point out that not all people groups structure their musical ideas in the same way. Rhythm and melody are produced in ways entirely different from European, Western styles. Thus, in some cases, European, Western styles of music may be unhelpful. See Vida Chenoweth, “Spare Them Western Music!” in Krabil, *Worship and Mission*, 119-23.

80. Horton writes, “Unlike the psalms themselves, many of the hymns and praise choruses of the last century and a half have become increasingly human-centered. This is why I am always somewhat nervous when people argue for the ‘old hymns’ as opposed to the ‘new choruses.’” *A Better Way*, 26.

“O to grace how great a debtor; Daily I’m constrained to be!” Concerning this line, Michael Horton writes,

Debt is the wrong correlate to grace. We can never be debtors to grace: “Who has given a gift to Him, to receive a gift in return? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11:35-36). We were once debtors to the law, but in Christ we are justified. Therefore, there is no debt relation to God whatsoever through faith in Christ.⁸¹

The church is a debt-free zone and its music ought to uphold and emphasize this good news. The church’s songs should never teach believers to be debtors but rather living sacrifices of thanksgiving (Rom. 12:1).

The point is that music can be contemporary or traditional, Western or Eastern, celebratory or contemplative, energetic or mild, loud or quiet. However, style must never take precedence over content. Because music bears the Word of God, particularly the gospel, it is important that songs teach biblical truth clearly, accurately, and explicitly regardless of style. Furthermore, adopting contemporary styles can aid the church in its missional focus.⁸²

The purpose of music is to drive the truths of the gospel deeper and deeper into the believer’s heart so that these truths dwell richly therein. Thus, it is incumbent upon church leaders and those who lead in music to select songs that clearly and self-consciously teach, declare, celebrate, and communicate the life-changing truths of the gospel.

81. Horton, *People and Place*, 299.

82. Chapell explains, “The Reformers were willing to borrow musical forms from the secular culture to encourage congregational singing. And virtually every great mission effort has profited by allowing words in different languages to be used with traditional hymn tunes. All hymns were ‘contemporary’ when they were written. Some hymns we now consider noble were considered edgy in their day (e.g., Isaac Watt’s ‘When I Survey the Wondrous Cross’). Keeping the church rooted in its worship history and reaching toward its worship future is never without challenges, but those rooted in and reaching for gospel priorities will have the greatest potential for meeting those challenges.” *Christ-Centered Worship*, 299.

Fifth, music enables believers to express their emotions. Music has an emotional dimension. Music is emotive. Music aids the believer in expressing his or her emotions. God designed music with a unique ability to combine accurate reflection with fervent affection. Martin Luther writes, “The fathers and prophets wanted nothing else to be associated with the Word of God as music. Therefore we have many hymns and Psalms where *message and music join to move the listener’s soul*” (emphasis added).⁸³ Luther spoke of music as “a mistress and governess of those human emotions.”⁸⁴ For Luther there was no more effective means than music by which to evoke emotions in men. He asks, “What more effective means than music could you find?”⁸⁵ The public worship of God’s people ought to be marked by both gravity and gladness, which are emotions (cf. Heb. 12:18-29). Music assists believers in expressing such gravity and gladness.

A genuine worshipper is committed to both knowing and enjoying God. A common misguided notion is that profound reflection dries up fervent affection. The Scriptures, however, refute the notion that intense emotion thrives only in the absence of a coherent, exposition of doctrine. The songs of Moses (Exod. 15), Deborah and Barak (Judg. 5), David (2 Sam. 22), Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon (Luke 1) are all grounded in rich, biblical truth and yet express great emotion.⁸⁶

83. Luther, *Liturgy and Hymns*, 53:323.

84. *Ibid.*

85. *Ibid.*

86. All of these songs are the responses of God’s people to God’s saving works. See point 6 below.

Music and singing are God's means by which a coherent exposition of doctrine can be joined with intense emotion. Music helps believers give expression to ignited affections, which are grounded in biblical truth. Vaughan Roberts writes that "music helps us to feel something of the wonder of the truths we are singing about. The words 'ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven' might not move us especially when we see them written on a page; but they can come alive as we sing them and reflect on all that they describe."⁸⁷ Thus, singing enables believers to express deeply felt emotions in a way that mere speaking cannot.

Church musicians and singers should not be performers seeking to manipulate people's emotions through learned techniques. Instead, their aim should be to lead people to a profound sense of the wonder and celebration of the person and work of Christ rather than stir up warm, fuzzy feelings devoid of a clear understanding of the gospel.⁸⁸ The music of the church should focus the congregation's minds and affections on Christ alone, who is freely given in the gospel.

Sixth, music awakens by the gospel. Music has a celebrative dimension (Ps. 13:5-6; Luke 1:46-55; Eph. 1:3-14; Rom. 11:33-36; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15-16; Rev. 5:9-14). Paul Westermeyer writes, "Here is the Christus Victor motif. In Christ, God has won the victory. Those who know it are compelled to sing. That is, music is

87. Roberts, "The Place of Music."

88. Roberts writes, "I said earlier that we should not equate emotions with the presence of God. I might get 'the liver shiver' when my side scores a goal at a football match or I listen to some beautiful music at a concert, but I do not say, 'I've met with God.' We should not assume that we have encountered God just because we get emotional. It might simply have been the skill of the musicians or the beauty of the songs that moved us. But please do not conclude from that that we should be wary of all emotion." Ibid.

an important way the Christian community celebrates the victory Christ has won.”⁸⁹ It is not music but mercy that is intended to move the believer’s soul. It is not good tunes but lavish grace that compels the believer to sing. When a believer’s heart is filled with good news, he or she sings. The good news of Christ produces joy and joyful hearts sing. Music and singing are vital ways the church corporately celebrates and gives joyful expression for and delight in the victory Christ has won. Clearly, this has a missional implication. Paul Westermeyer writes, “*Bold, vigorous rejoicing tells the story of God’s victory and our deliverance. The battle is won in Christ, and we sing with jubilation*” (emphasis added).

The scriptures repeatedly reveal how God's great acts of deliverance spontaneously elicit a celebrative and joyful response of music and singing in the hearts of God's people. Moses and Miriam sang songs of praise in response to God's deliverance in the Exodus (Exod. 15:1-18, 21). Deborah and Barak sang a song of victory in response to God's triumph over the Canaanites (Judg. 5:1-31). In Psalm 89:1, the Psalmist declares, “I will sing of the steadfast love (חֶסֶד, *hesed*) of the LORD, forever; with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations.” Mary spontaneously erupts in a song of praise to God for the great things He had done for her (Luke 1:46-55). Paul shows how the gospel leads both Jew and Gentile to praise God through song for His mercy in Christ (Rom. 15:8-12). Such gospel-soaked songs of praise belong exclusively to God’s redeemed people. Edmund Clowney writes, “The adoring church hymns praises that even

89. Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 147.

the angels cannot sing, for only the church has known the divine love that bore the doom of lost sinners and gave them sonship with the Beloved.”⁹⁰

The gospel awakens a spontaneous outburst of praise in the heart of man (1 Tim. 1:17). A heart richly filled with the “word of Christ” (Col. 3:16) will be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). A gospel-filled, Spirit-filled heart results in “singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in one’s heart to God.” Walter Marshall writes, “God wants to be served with gladness and singing. In the Old Testament, God filled the temple with music and musicians—as well as now in the church. This is to show how Christ speaks in the gospel, that ‘His joy may abide in you, and that your joy may be full’ (John 15:11).”⁹¹ How does Christ speak in the gospel? Consider, “Fear not, I bring you good news of great joy” (Luke 2:10).

The gospel gives rise to strong, powerful affections for Christ. Whereas the gospel creates an invisible explosion in the soul, music gives sounding form and visible expression to this invisible explosion. Christ has purchased a great salvation for His people with the result that those who have come to experience it are compelled by grace (i.e., gospel-driven) to sing. Truly, the gospel tunes the believer’s heart to sing. Martin Luther writes, “For God has cheered our hearts and minds through His dear Son, whom He gave for us to redeem us from sin,

90. *The Church*, 120. cf. 1 Peter 1:12, “It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.”

91. Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification: Growing in Holiness by Living in Union with Christ*, put into modern English by Bruce H. McRae (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), 124.

death and the devil. He who believes this earnestly cannot be quiet about it. But he must gladly and willingly sing.”⁹²

GENUINE WORSHIP AND EFFECTIVE WITNESS

In view of the preceding discussion, the following are a few practical suggestions to help ensure that the church’s music promotes genuine worship and effective witness. First, genuine worship is possible only where sound doctrine is present. In John 4:24, Jesus says, “God is spirit, and those who worship Him *must* worship in spirit and truth” (emphasis added).⁹³ Worshipping God in truth is a divine imperative. Thus, write J. I. Packer and Gary Parrett, “We do well to ask about the catechetical value of our songs of worship. What vision of God do they convey? Do they serve well the proclamation of the biblical gospel? Are the doctrines they exposit or imply sound doctrines that conform to the gospel? Are our songs biblically based, and clearly so?”⁹⁴

Second, it is imperative to utilize songs both for formation and for worship.⁹⁵ Packer and Parrett write,

Scripture itself points us toward the wisdom of utilizing our hymnody for formation as well as for worship. The Psalms of the Bible, for example—Spirit-inspired song-prayers each one of them—were plainly intended for such a two-fold emphasis. . . . What we sing when we come together in congregational worship is not only a matter of our proper doxology. It also has power to help clarify for the congregation matters of doctrine, devotion, and duty and to enhance our delight in the Lord.⁹⁶

92. Luther, *Liturgy and Hymns*, 53:333.

93. The preposition “ἐν” governs both nouns “spirit and truth.” Thus, as D. A. Carson points out, “There are not two separable characteristics of the worship that must be offered: it must be ‘in spirit and truth,’ i.e., essentially God-centered, made possible by the gift of the Holy Spirit, and in personal knowledge of and conformity to God’s Word-made-flesh.” *The Gospel According to John*, 225.

94. Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 189.

95. *Ibid.*, 200.

96. *Ibid.*, 200-1.

Third, the music and singing of the church is the responsibility of the elders. The elders are given the divinely ordained task of overseeing the church, which includes its singing (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7). Packer and Parrett write, “It is an unwise pastor who pays little attention to the song choices of the song leader. . . . When all is said and done, the songs of the saints in worship may well have more lasting, formative power than the sermons preached by the pastor. We had best choose our songs carefully.”⁹⁷

Fourth, music leaders and teams need to be missional-minded.⁹⁸ Such a goal involves choosing songs with culturally relevant language. Archaic King James English is not inspired. “Thee’s,” “thou’s” and “thy’s” do not increase reverence. Songs do not have to utilize archaic language to be doctrinally sound. Sally Morgenthaler writes, “To [use archaic language] is not more reverent. It is just old. And God is not old—He is eternal. There is a difference! Our faith speaks of living issues in real time expressed by real people in real language.”⁹⁹ Not using archaic language, of course, does not mean believers ignore the songs of the past. Ignoring the historical tradition of the church is a big mistake. It evidences pride and a lack of humility. But it does mean that one may need to rewrite archaic language to reflect current speech styles and patterns. Bryan Chapell recommends that churches can show respect for traditional hymns by introducing new tunes for historical lyrics.¹⁰⁰

97. Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 201.

98. See Josh Davis, “Designing Multicultural Worship with the *Missio Dei* in Mind,” in Krabil, *Worship and Mission*, 57-60.

99. Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism*, 218.

100. Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 298.

In addition, to be missional-minded in music is to be concerned about the issue of singability. According to Sally Morgenthaler, “One of the most important questions to ask when evaluating a worship song concerns ‘percentage of singability.’”¹⁰¹ Some songs—traditional or contemporary—are simply hard to sing. Such difficulty could be because the lyrics are wordy or perhaps the melody line is boring, the key too high, or the rhythm too tricky. The wise music leader and team will always be seeking to evaluate the singability of songs. Poorly written songs and bad arrangements hinder congregational participation thereby stifling the church’s witness in song.¹⁰²

Fifth and finally, the music of the church should be done with excellence.¹⁰³ Psalm 33:3 exhorts, “Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.” Tim Keller writes, “Sloppiness drains the ‘vertical’ dimension out of gathered worship immediately.”¹⁰⁴ The goal of worshipping God with excellence is to make God “spiritually real” to all who are present.¹⁰⁵ A

101. Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism*, 219.

102. In an article on the CNN Belief Blog entitled, “Chris Tomlin, king of the sing-along,” Eric Marrapodi and Tom Foreman, report that Chris Tomlin is now “the undisputed king of worship music.” According to the article, CCLI estimates that every Sunday in the United States, 60,000-120,000 churches are singing Tomlin’s songs. This means that roughly 20 to 30 million people are singing his songs each week. According to Tomlin, the secret to his success is not the stage, the lights or the band. Rather Tomlin says that his aim is to get his audience singing in church. Tomlin states, “I strive for trying to write something that people can sing, that people want to sing, and that people need to sing.” <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2013/03/09/the-most-sung-artist-on-the-planet> (accessed March 4, 2013).

103. Emily R. Brink writes, “Two enduring and overarching biblical themes or norms set the direction for all the arts in public worship: beauty and excellence. Another word describes the aim of worship: glory—all our worship is to glorify God. God provided for us a beautiful creation, each aspect of which he declared ‘very good.’ We are called to offer back to God our very best of the good gifts he has given.” “The Significance of Beauty and Excellence in Biblical Worship,” in Krabil, *Worship and Mission*, 9.

104. *Ibid.*, 211.

105. Tim Keller, commenting in “Reformed Worship in the Global City” on the worship leading of John Calvin, writes, “For Calvin the goal of gathered worship is to make God ‘spiritually real’ to our hearts. That is where truths (that we may have known intellectually) now

sense of amazement toward God—transcendence—is dependent upon the quality of speaking, reading, praying, and singing.¹⁰⁶ Excellence translates into transcendence whereas mediocrity promotes sentimentality.¹⁰⁷ God is a God of beauty and excellence. He does all things well. Thus, both the church leadership and music team should ensure all things be done with excellence.¹⁰⁸

God’s saving mission in Christ began before time in a covenant among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As the Faithful Servant, the Incarnate Son accomplished the mission of God for all creation.¹⁰⁹ Christ crucified, buried and risen is the key to all history. Jesus Himself said that He is the focal point of redemptive history (Luke 24:27, 44). Thus, it is fitting that Scripture concludes with all of creation (Rev. 5:13) singing a new song of ceaseless¹¹⁰ praise—the song of the Lamb:

And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

–Rev. 5:9-10 (ESV)

by the Spirit’s influence become fiery, powerful, and profoundly affecting (e.g., Rom. 8:15-16). They now thrill, comfort, empower (or even) disturb you in a way they did not before (Eph. 1:18-22; 3:14-21). It was not enough, for Calvin, to be told about grace. You had to be amazed by grace.” Carson, *Worship by the Book*, 211.

106. Tim Keller, in Carson, *Worship by the Book*, 211.

107. “At least he/she means well” is the wrong response.

108. See Paul S. Jones, *What Is Worship Music?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2010), 36.

109. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 535.

110. The Greek phrase “εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων” literally means “into the ages of the ages.”

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