Worship

The History of Congregational Worship
George Canty on Worship
Glory—Experiencing the Atmosphere of Heaven
Juvenilisation

The History of Congregational Worship

Who Cares?

Before we begin to take a brief look at the history of Christian congregational song, we should answer the question, "**Why bother?**" After all, doesn't God give each new generation its own song to sing? In many churches, the face of corporate worship has been revolutionized in recent years. The organ has been replaced by the worship band, hymnbooks have been traded for PowerPoint presentations, and the "hymn sandwich" has given way to extended times of worship. What could we possibly learn from exploring how the church of Jesus Christ has worshiped God throughout the centuries? Here are four responses to that question.

First, studying the development of congregational song helps us appreciate God's sovereign hand working throughout history. While certain worship traditions have remained unchanged for centuries, many of our present traditions came about as Christians sought to improve the worship formats and styles they had inherited from previous generations. Many time-honoured practices are the result of extremely controversial attempts to establish a more biblical form of worship. We'll see how God has always been faithful to guide his people into worship that is truly in spirit and truth. Studying the history of congregational song will also help us avoid the imbalances and overreactions of the past. If we're all wrapped up in reacting to the problems of our day, we can lose perspective on how well our proposed solutions conform to

Scripture. A knowledge of the past helps put things in proper context. We can examine the long-term fruit of changes that were made. We can detect patterns and tendencies, and see how they line up with Scripture. Most of all, we can avoid the mistakes others have made when they allowed the pendulum to swing too far when seeking to address then-current excesses or abuses.

Another benefit of a long-term perspective is the humility it produces. Many of us are prone to what one writer has labelled "*temporal narcissism*"—thinking that anything more than 30 years old is irrelevant or boring. It shouldn't take us long to see that many who have gone before us were smarter, holier, more zealous for biblical truth, and more humble than we are. The hallowed halls of history are a powerful antidote to our usually narrow, self-focused viewpoint.

Finally, studying the history of congregational song can inspire us for the future. Most, if not all, of the writers of much-loved hymns from the past had no clue that the church would be benefiting from their labours hundreds of years after they were gone. They simply tried to be faithful to Scripture and their own generation. On the other hand, countless thousands of hymns which once seemed so relevant have drifted into obscurity. What makes a hymn timeless? How much of what we're doing will last beyond our own lifetime and truly serve generations to come?

I believe the answers to these and other questions will be revealed as we take a look at how congregational song has changed and developed over the years. Most of all, we'll be seeking to discover how congregational worship today can be more biblical, effective, and glorifying to God.

Congregational Song in the New Testament

There's no better place to begin a history of congregational song than the early church. Of course, the New Testament doesn't offer much information on the topic. What did worship sound

like in the first century? How long did it last? Who were the composers? No one knows. Still, two things are certain—God has excellent reasons for withholding such specifics, and there is much we can learn from what he has shown us.

First, the singing of the early church was scriptural. The hymn that Jesus and the disciples sang before going out to the Mount of Olives was most likely from the *Hallel* section of the Psalter (Psalms 115–118), typically sung after the Passover meal. Paul encouraged believers in Corinth, Colossae, and Ephesus to sing psalms. The lyrical songs on the lips of Simeon, Anna, Mary, and others had clear Old Testament themes running through them. A new age had dawned in the coming of the Messiah, but a strong link to the eternal truths of the Jewish Scriptures remained.

The songs of the early church were also focused on Jesus Christ. In his excellent book, *Worship in the Early Church*, Ralph Martin says, "*The Christ-centred nature of Christian worship is one of the most clearly attested facts of the New Testament literature*." Almost all the New Testament hymns refer directly or indirectly to who Christ was or what he did. We have the songs of Mary, Zachariah, and others at the birth of Christ. The book of Revelation includes songs extolling the Lamb who was slain. Paul's letters contain several unidentified quotations that focus on the Lord Jesus and are regarded by many as early Christian hymns (Phil.2:6–11; Rom.11:36; Col.1:15–20; 1Tim.3:16). These songs, produced and inspired by the Holy Spirit, paved the way for theological and doctrinal stands the church would take centuries later.

Another characteristic of New Testament corporate song is the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5:17–19 clearly implies that the singing of the early Christians was an overflow of the Spirit at work in their hearts. Corporate worship was never a lifeless, routine, or ritualistic event for the New Testament church. That may be one reason Paul says that we are those who "*worship by the Spirit of God*" (Phil.3:3). It may also explain why the

unbeliever who came into the Corinthian gathering declared, "*God is really among you*!" (1Cor.14:25) Certainly, that which set apart the gatherings of the early Christians was the presence of him who promised, "w*here two or three come together in my name, there am I with them*" (Matt.18:20).

Finally, congregational song in the New Testament was…congregational. We repeatedly find singing take place among people who had relationships, a shared joy, and a corporate purpose. "*The thought that the Church at worship is an accidental convergence in one place of a number of isolated individuals who practice, in hermetically sealed compartments, their own private devotional exercises, is foreign to the New Testament picture*."[1] In the age of CDs, Walkmans, and headphones, it's important to remember that worship songs are intended to be sung with others who "*like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*" (1Pet.2:5).

The First Thousand Years

Although the details are sketchy, there's no question that the Christian church was, as Ralph Martin says, "*born in song*." It would be difficult, if not impossible, to imagine a movement characterized by such energy, devotion, commitment, and joy not seeking expression in song.

Various sources give support to that belief. Soon after the turn of the first century, the pagan historian Pliny reported that Christians gathered at dawn to sing a hymn "to Christ as God." Ignatius and Clement, from the same time period, encouraged the early Christians to sing with one voice as they met together. In the third century, Eusebius wrote about many sacred songs that had been written by the early church.

When Christianity was legalized by Constantine in 313, the church was beset by divisions from within. One of the most well-

[1] Ralph Martin

known heretics was Arius, born in 250. He was a public-relations expert who combined catchy tunes with lyrics that denied Christ's divine equality with the Father. Devout Arians would blanket local communities at dusk with the sound of their hymns. Leaders like Ambrose of Milan and Ephraim Syrus countered with doctrinally accurate songs that exalted Christ as God. Some of these were set to Arian melodies. In this pre-cursor to the battle of the bands, biblical truth eventually won out.

By the fourth century, the power and usefulness of congregational song as a teaching tool had been established beyond question. But church leaders had growing concerns. Partly to counteract heresy, and partly to exercise greater authority in a rapidly expanding church, church leaders began to address specific practices of congregational song. The use of instruments was discouraged due to their worldly associations with the theatre, immorality, and idolatry. Clement of Alexandria opposed songs in "*chromatic modes*" (whatever that means). There was a strong movement toward a professional clergy.

Finally, in 367, the Council of Laodicea declared, "*Besides the appointed singers who mount the ambo and sing from the book, others shall not sing in the church.*" The vibrant voice of the early church received a severe blow. As a formal liturgy developed, the congregation increasingly shifted from active worshipers to passive spectators.

Over time, the Mass became the approved liturgical pattern, and most of the singing was delegated to trained choirs. Songs became more complex and foreign to the congregation. At the end of the sixth century, Pope Gregory attempted to centralize the authority of the church by specifying what music could be sung in churches. It was characterized by a unison melody with little rhythmic emphasis, embodying attitudes of awe, beauty, and transcendence. We know it today as *Gregorian chant*.

Unfortunately, during the Middle Ages the people were forbidden to sing it. Not surprisingly, congregations became less and less familiar with the truths that singing had been designed to reinforce! Corporate worship was no longer truly corporate. The song of God's people was weakening. You might guess that the restrictions imposed by the church didn't completely stifle the song within the hearts of God's people. Throughout this time, various expressions of song erupted as birth pangs of the cataclysmic changes to come.

Martin Luther and Congregational Song

By the eleventh century, Christian congregations had lost much of their official musical voice due to increased restrictions and regulations imposed by church authorities. The people's part in the service had been reduced to a few simple responses. But God's view of the role of song in the life of the church had not changed. God has given his people a new song that can never be silenced.

While an increasingly complex and ornate art form developed within the church, the common people found an outlet for their voice in carols, religious processions, medieval dramas, and folk songs. Music, often initiated and led by traveling musicians, provided a soundtrack for much of daily life.

Significant contributions to congregational song were also being made by monks of the medieval ages. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) penned timeless and passionate hymns of devotion such as "*O Sacred Head Now Wounded*" and "*Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee*." In Italy, Francis of Assisi (1182–1226) often improvised songs of praise and devotion. Many churches still sing his adaptation of Psalm 145, "*All Creatures of Our God and King*." Despite the efforts of the church to control the use of music among God's people, song still flourished in the streets.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the stage was set for major changes in the church. Most importantly, crucial doctrines

such as justification by faith, the priesthood of all believers, and the authority of God's Word were being restored. At the same time, Gregorian chant was being criticized as unintelligible, too elaborate, and overly theatrical—and the invention of the printing press had finally made it possible for printed music to be widely disseminated. The song of God's people could be restrained no longer.

Among the many reformers who helped transform and establish congregational song, Martin Luther (1483–1546) may be the most noteworthy. He has been referred to as the "*father of congregational song*." Although that claim is probably overstated, hymnologist Eric Routley states that it was Luther "*who successfully propagated the idea that the communal singing of Christian songs could be an integral part of public worship*." Luther's success was due to a combination of his musical proficiency, his passion for restoring true worship to the people, and his belief that "*next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise*." He saw music as a gift from God intended to carry theological truths into our hearts. In a moment of extreme and colourful candour, he claimed that anyone who does not regard music "*as a marvellous creation of God, must be a clodhopper indeed and does not deserve to be called a human being*."

While that may not be the most persuasive way to win others over, Luther's passion for congregational song was powerfully expressed in the 37 hymns he composed in his native tongue. Partly due to his influence, 60 German hymnals had been published by the time of his death in 1546. Sixty years later, nearly 25,000 German hymns had been written. Now that is a worship explosion!

Two More Perspectives: Calvin and Zwingli

While Martin Luther's influence was transforming congregational worship in Germany in the sixteenth century, two other men—Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) and John Calvin (1509–1564)—were having a significant impact elsewhere. While all three men were

Reformers, none of them saw congregational worship in quite the same way. Paul Westermeyer, in his book *Te Deum*, comments that if "*Luther recovered the congregations' singing, Zwingli denied it, and Calvin restricted it.*"

Ulrich Zwingli was a Swiss Reformer who, ironically, was most likely a better musician than Luther. However, he was steeped in rationalist-humanist thinking and believed that worship should be oriented more toward teaching than toward expressive devotion. Zwingli approved of using music as a means of refreshment and encouragement outside the church, but banned it completely inside the church.

Zwingli understood—and feared—the innate power of music to sway people's hearts. So, rather than use music to stimulate and promote godly passions, he ruled it out altogether. Zwingli's influence was so strong that in Zurich—just 30 miles from the German border—no vibrant congregational song existed until 1598, more than a half-century after Luther's death.

John Calvin came to Geneva, Switzerland, in 1536, not long after Zwingli had died. He believed strongly in the importance of congregational song, but mistrusted the practices of the institutionalized church. Part of the difference between Luther and Calvin stemmed from their response to the Mass. "*Picture in your mind a huge kettle filled to the brim with Roman doctrine and worship practice. Luther reached in to remove whatever was unbiblical and kept the rest; Calvin dumped out the contents and started over again, placing in the pot only what the Scripture warranted. This was the beginning of the regulative principle of worship.*"[2]

Whereas Luther believed that, in worship, God's people should sing hymns, and Zwingli thought they should not sing at all, Calvin took the middle ground: they should sing—but they should only sing directly from God's Word. Calvin saw "*hymns of human*

[2] Lawrence Roff, Let Us Sing

composure" as unfit for the sacred assembly. What words then should be used in public praise and prayer? Why, the Psalms, of course. Thus began the practice of metrical psalmody that ruled the church for the next hundred years, and continues to this day.

To promote the singing of Psalms, Calvin enlisted the help of two poets (Clement Marot and Theodore Beza) and one musician (Louis Bourgeois). The result of their labour was the *Genevan Psalter* (1562). It took twenty years to compile, and inspired similar works in England and Scotland. Calvin drew a distinction between music for entertainment and music for public worship. He wanted his hymns to be monophonic (without harmony), with one note for each syllable of text, and without instrumental accompaniment. These restrictions, while well-intentioned, were not found in the pages of Scripture. Nevertheless, they greatly shaped the practice of congregational singing.

However imperfect, metrical psalmody brought immediate benefits to the church. God's people were being fed and encouraged by his Word. For the first time in centuries, congregations were singing together. However, at times the singing was languid and chaotic. Old Testament terminology and types were not always understood by the congregation. The poetry, especially in Scotland, was sometimes boorish and poorly constructed. The church seemed to have taken two steps forward and one step back.

However, in God's providence, these problems only set the stage for the dramatic changes to come in the seventeenth century.

Our Debt to Isaac Watts

By the end of the seventeenth century, many Christian churches were singing biblical Psalms set to verse. Because of the lack of general musical knowledge, the singing frequently involved the practice of "*lining out*." Andrew Wilson-Dickson, in *A Brief History of Christian Music*, describes it this way:

> *Each line of the psalm verse was recited—and often sung—by the leading voice, which the congregation would then follow.…Both leader and individual members of the congregation tended to take their own time (and a very long time indeed it was—perhaps half a minute for each line!). Where harmonization was attempted it was unsupported by any organ or instruments, probably improvised, and most unlikely to conform to the four parts of a printed book. The slow pace of the singing allowed the possibility of decoration and ornamentation of the melody by extra notes, though these might be spontaneously and simultaneously created by several singers at once. The result was a kind of semi-improvised chaos.*

In response, it seems that a young Isaac Watts (1674–1748) came home one Sunday complaining that the hymns were dull and lifeless. In a moment of providential brilliance, his father challenged, "*Then write something better*!" He did. That following Sunday the congregation sang a hymn that began, "*Behold the Glories of the Lamb amidst his Father's throne: Prepare new honours for his name, and songs before unknown*." This became the first of more than 650 hymns Watts would compose for the church. His two most successful volumes were *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707) and *Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament* (1719). In the latter hymnal, Watts revised all but twelve of the 150 psalms "**to make David speak like a Christian**." Some of these lyrics, including "*Joy to the World*" and "*O God, Our Help in Ages Past,*" are still sung throughout the world today.

The extent of Watts' influence on congregational singing is nearly impossible to overestimate. Watts believed that the songs the church sings should be based on Scripture but "freely composed," including scriptural allusions and responses to the truths being sung. He believed that the Psalms, as valuable as they are in Christian worship, were insufficient to express the full range of Christian experience. Over time, his influence was

dramatic. Within 150 years of his death a survey of 750 hymnals revealed that 40 per cent of the songs were by Isaac Watts!

There are good reasons why the hymns of Isaac Watts have endured. He wrote in a style that was purposefully simple. His lyrics are appreciated and understood by the scholar and uneducated alike. **He was also committed to New Testament truth**. "**He always directed attention to the person and work of Jesus Christ and was not content to speak in general terms about God and mercy**."[3] He paraphrased Scripture frequently, and often used direct quotations. This gives his lyrics a timeless element that transcends cultural trappings. Despite his avoidance of complexity, he used vivid imagery and sought to touch the emotions. His hymns are full of wonder and awe. For these reasons and others, it was obvious that he wrote with the congregation in mind, often preferring plural pronouns over singular.

The legacy of Watts was carried on and amplified by another writer of the eighteenth century, Charles Wesley.

Our Debt to Charles Wesley

Hymnologist Eric Routley writes, "*The gates that Watts had opened, Wesley joyously entered; and the field that Watts sowed he reaped, literally, a hundredfold.*" These "*gates*" and "*fields*" Routley describes were the full expression of congregational song in the church. The effect of Charles Wesley's songs can still be felt today.

One reason for Wesley's continued influence is the staggering number of songs he produced. From his conversion in 1738 until his death 50 years later, he averaged almost three hymns a week—more than 6500 in all. Among them are "*Hark, the Herald Angels Sing*," "*O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing*," and "*Christ the Lord Is Risen Today.*"

Volume alone, however, doesn't create a legacy. Charles' hymns are a wealth of biblical theology and sound doctrine. His brother, John, had one of the most significant preaching ministries in

[3] Lawrence Roff, Let Us Sing

history. He viewed the "*world as his parish*" and often ministered to those in lower classes who were illiterate, simple, and unaffected by the traditional church. Both brothers viewed songs as a powerful tool for working the doctrines they preached into the hearts of their listeners. In *Jubilate II*, Donald Hustad writes, "*Charles Wesley's hymns were fundamentally a compendium of Methodist theology, covering every aspect of Christian spiritual experience.*"

That emphasis on spiritual experience is another reason Wesley's hymns retain their popularity. Prior to the eighteenth century, hymns had primarily functioned as restatements of objective scriptural truth. The fact that such truth might, or ought to, have an emotional impact on hymn-singers rarely entered the picture. However, both John and Charles had been profoundly influenced by their experiences with the Moravians, who sang with passion and focused on the more subjective aspects of the Christian faith. This resulted in Charles penning songs like "*Jesus, Lover of My Soul,*" which John initially felt was too emotional for inclusion in their hymnals. Throughout his life, Charles attempted to draw out the present effects of truth upon the heart of the singer. His songs are also wonderful examples of evangelical zeal, often inviting the sinner to respond to the truths being sung.

Charles' brother, John, served as editor for the 56 hymnals they produced in 53 years. He took great pains to ensure that hymns were wedded to specific tunes, which had not previously been the church's practice. John also saw to it that the tunes he suggested were sung properly. In the introduction to a collection of hymns in 1751, he specified they were to be sung exactly, completely, modestly, lustily, in time, and in tune. Above all else, John counselled, "**Sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing him more than yourself or any other creature. In order to do this, attend strictly to the sense of what you sing, and see that your heart is not**

carried away with the sound, but offered to God continuously." **Sound counsel for any generation!**

Watts and Wesley together had an immeasurable effect on congregational song in the church. "*Between them they ensured…that the Christian faith should never be without songs for its full expression*."[4] They also threw open the door to the role of emotions in Christian congregational worship. This was, in sum, surely a good thing, but not without risks.

Congregational Song in the Nineteenth Century

Congregational singing in the eighteenth century sprang from three primary sources: metrical psalmody (begun in the mid-sixteenth century), the hymns of Isaac Watts (written mid-seventeenth to early eighteenth century), and the hymns of Charles Wesley (written mid- to late-eighteenth century). All three shared a goal of placing the expression of rich theological truths into the mouths, ears, and minds of congregants. By the nineteenth century, however—partly in reaction to the uninspired singing of many congregations—an emphasis on the emotional impact of public worship emerged as pastors and songwriters sought to stir hearts and ignite affections.

While some seeds of emotional expression are found in Watts' hymns, Charles Wesley strengthened the connection between doctrinal truth and personal experience. He was deeply affected by the practices and singing of the Moravians, who sang with gusto, energy, and life. The Moravians were part of a group known as German pietists, who, unlike Wesley, tended to emphasize piety and personal experience with God over against doctrinal exactness. (Although few Moravian songs are in use today, the pietist approach to spirituality remains influential.) From them, Charles realized the significance of hymnody in expressing Christian devotion.

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[4] Eric Routley

In the New World, other factors were contributing to the increasing emphasis on experience. Many immigrants had initially sought to maintain the worship traditions of their homelands (for example, the *Bay Psalm Book* was produced in 1640, giving embryonic churches their own rendition of metrical psalms). However, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, evangelism and revivalism exerted a major influence in America.

As new communities sprang up and frontier borders expanded, newly converted settlers—poor, and often culturally naïve—tended to express their worship through simple, folk-like songs with repetitive lyrics involving salvation, heaven, and the effects of the Holy Spirit.

Then, in 1801, thousands of people gathered in Kentucky for the Cane Ridge "*camp meeting*." Jointly sponsored by Presbyterians and Methodists, it lasted several days and was characterized by sighs, groaning, dancing, physical jerking, and trances. Such an event did not lend itself to the refined, doctrinally based hymnody of Watts and Wesley. Instead, music was used primarily to stir up emotions and stimulate a physical response.

The effects of the revivalism movement, spread by events such as Cane Ridge, included the writing of many "*hymns*" that were weak in content but strong in emotional expression, with tunes and words anyone could learn quickly and easily. The gap between songs that emphasized personal experience and those that expounded biblical truth continued to widen throughout the 19th century.

Asahel Nettleton (1783–1844) attempted to raise the standard of revivalistic hymnody by producing *Village Hymns for Social Worship*. On the other side, Joshua Leavitt (1794–1873) produced *The Christian Lyre*, an eclectic mix intended to provide immediate and expressive songs for evangelistic campaigns.

It would be hard to overestimate the impact on congregational song of Ira Sankey. He formalized revivalism by leading the music for D.L. Moody's evangelistic campaigns. Their meetings

were dominated by expressive, emotional group singing, interspersed with the intensely personal voice and style of Sankey. Through his efforts, the "*gospel song*" becomes a model and outlet for many of the hymn writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. No writer contributed more to the genre than Fanny Crosby, a blind composer who wrote more than 8,500 hymns including "*Blessed Assurance*" and "*Jesus, Keep Me near the Cross*."

Congregational Song in the Twentieth Century

The emotional model of revivalism developed in the nineteenth century continued to evolve throughout the twentieth century. Following in the footsteps of D.L. Moody and Ira Sankey, additional evangelist/song leader teams emerged. Homer Rodeheaver sang and played his trombone with athlete-turned-evangelist Billy Sunday. The preaching of R.A. Torrey was supplemented by the flamboyant style of Charles Alexander. Songs of this era were characterized by musical simplicity, sentimental value, and non-demanding content.

In fact, the century had barely begun when the famous Azusa Street revival broke out. This spontaneous outpouring of spiritual gifts and fervour was characterized by lively singing that was undirected and often unaccompanied. The influence of Azusa Street and emotional revivalism in general is still evident today.

Indeed, throughout the twentieth century, congregational song was deeply influenced by emotional revivalism. One development that had a huge impact on congregational song was the nationwide proliferation of religious publishing houses. Led by Christian entrepreneurs, these publishers produced collections of songs that were lighter, semi-sacred, and more commercial. Examples include "*His Eye Is on the Sparrow*," "*The Old Rugged Cross*," and "*In the Garden*." Suddenly, publishers, para-church organizations, and promoters were exercising a controlling influence over which hymns were being used in church services across the country. For

the first time in the history of Christianity, commercial and financial motivations were playing a larger role than pastors and church leaders in defining congregational song. The result was a diminishing focus on theological content and a greater emphasis on entertainment and emotional impact.

As the century progressed, the influence on the church of Christians working within the communications revolution continued to expand. Visionaries like Jarrell McCracken, founder of *Word Records*, saw how Christian music could simultaneously be used to promote the gospel, serve the church, and build a viable company. "*The mushrooming new market for religious music (over the radio, on records, and in sheet music) created completely new and utterly baffling problems and tension.*"[5]

The influence of the communications revolution upon the church cannot be overestimated. Even liturgical forms were being affected. Both in England and the United States, leaders sought to bring religion and relevance together in music. Probably the most common result was a folk style that pervaded many denominations.

In the late 1960s, a combination of crises in culture and the church served as a backdrop for what is now known as the "*Jesus Movement.*" Hundreds of thousands of young people were converted to Christianity as God sovereignly poured out his Holy Spirit throughout the world. Some broke away from their roots, while others remained in their churches and sought to bring change from within. While the theological implications can be debated, the musical results were undeniable and widespread. The songs produced during this time were typically short, easy to learn, and often Scripture-saturated (even if only brief passages were being utilized). Examples include "*Seek Ye First*," "*This Is the Day*," and "*I Exalt Thee.*" The songs birthed in the *Jesus Movement* anticipated today's "*modern worship movement.*" It's hard to pinpoint

[5] Chuck Fromm

exactly when the current phenomenon began, but it's safe to say that we are still in the midst of it.

Where Do We Go from Here?

We've been taking a brief look at the first 2,000 years of Christian congregational song. I'll be the first to acknowledge the vast amount of material we have not been able to discuss due to time and space constraints. We've limited our focus to some of the highlights of the Protestant Western world, leaving out other significant developments, including black spirituals, liturgical traditions, hymnody from other cultures and countries, and more.

There are a few lessons we can learn, even from our limited overview. First, nothing can stop the church from singing. Even when laws, opinion, or misinformed tradition dictate against it, congregational song will always be common among God's redeemed people. Whether a cappella or with instruments, whether slow and reverent or up-tempo and celebratory, whether accompanied by a contemporary band or a pipe organ, one thing is certain: God's people will sing.

Second, stylistic changes are a fact of life. As much as we'd like to hold on to our traditions and personal or corporate preferences, God's Spirit consistently inspires fresh and meaningful ways to communicate unchanging truths to contemporary cultures. (Otherwise, our worship songs would probably sound a lot like modern-day Arabic folk music!) In fact, it seems that every time a scriptural truth or emphasis brings genuine spiritual awakening to the church, new songs are birthed that proclaim the message of renewal and unite God's people in worship.

Third, we have seen how composers can play a central role in shaping church history. John Calvin and others taught the church to prize the singing of God's Word, especially the Psalms. Isaac Watts opened the door for personal expressions of faith. The songs of Charles Wesley enabled the church to climb to new

heights of freedom and passion. Because they combine sound doctrine with Godward devotion, the influence of these musical vehicles upon the church has continued long after their composers passed on. What an inspiration for today's songwriters!

Most songs composed for congregational worship provide a brief light for a single generation. Only a few stand the test of time, shining brightly decades or centuries after they were written. In light of this truth, those who love modern worship, with all its advantages and blessings, ought to exercise caution. A passion for the contemporary, the relevant, and the modern can cause us to forsake the rich store of powerful spiritual truth available in the time-tested music of our Christian heritage.

"*While we should never say that popular music is out of place in Christian expression, we must protest when shallowness is the chief preference. The gospel is heavy and it is deep. The question is: How can CCM [or the modern worship movement] point beyond shallowness toward deeper engagement with deepening content*?"[6]

On the other hand, those of us who look only to the distant past for congregational song will miss many opportunities to sing newer songs that can inspire worship with fresh, godly vigour. The great hymns of the church are invaluable, but they do not represent all that God has done or will do in the area of musical composition for congregational worship. No one culture says it all, past or present, sophisticated or simple.

May our gratitude to God for the hymn writers of the past be regular and profuse. May our appreciation for those he has given us today be equally as passionate.[7]

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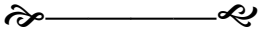

[6] Harold Best, Music through the Eyes of Faith , p 175

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We have wandered far, not only from the teachings of the Faith Giants of Old, but also from the music they played and sang that brought the Glory of God into manifestation.
It is my hope that Christians, and even Praise and Worship Leaders, will rediscover this glorious music that is seldom sung anymore, and that we can begin singing these songs again.
Elizabeth Pruitt Sloan has said countless times, "*Much of today's Christian songs don't do anything for me. They have no tune, no melody, and no anointing. But give me some of the old songs, or new ones that exalt the Blood of Jesus, and my spirit just soars*!" To that, all I can add is, "Amen!" – Mel Montgomery[8]

George Canty on Worship

Think?

Should we think? Isn't Scripture enough? Well, the Bible recommends it. "Whatever things are beautiful ... think on these things". I had combative letters signed "*Yours sincerely in the name of Jesus*", scorning my writing as '*Man's word not God's Word*'. How penetrating! I can't write God's Word. Could he? Were my critic's own words 'God's Word?'
Should we only quote Scripture, like animated tape recorders? Well, thinking is a weakness to which some of us are prone. The Bible itself tends to bring it on!
Today Christians have to meet 'the thinking man', when we stand up for Jesus. The thinking man thinks he thinks anyway, even if he only swims along with the stream of popular agnosticism. Newspaper writers, unabashed, proclaim their brilliant achievement of unbelief looking down upon us believers like H.G. Well's giant-brain Martians looked upon mere earthlings.

[8] www.brothermel.org

It is very clever how unbelievers attain religious conclusions lacking any basic knowledge either of God, Scripture or what Christians say. Watch TV's '*Do you want to be a millionaire*?' with contestants firmly 'not into religion'! One puzzled man had to ask the audience which garden Adam and Eve lived in, and some said it was the Garden of Kent. Scripture commands "*Preach the Word*" and surely doesn't mean 'recite it'? Reading a verse or passage is like looking through a telescope, or a microscope, to see new things, living things. Naturally then we want to say what we see, like having a companion in Switzerland to talk about the majesty of the scenery.

That is what Christian songs are for – just our exclamation in the face of the wonders of Christ in God. They excite us, especially when articulated by gifted poets and composers. *'Singing, and making melody in our hearts to the Lord'* we can savour the great Bible truths.

The Gospel is compacted of the most exalted themes on earth: **The glory of the Son of God! The mystery of His incarnation! His incredible life! The fathomless depths opened at Calvary and the awesome vistas of His Resurrection**! Such transcendent themes make, and need, more than jingles.

Worship may be about God's greatness, but **Christian worship extols what Jesus was, what Jesus is, Jesus did, and what Jesus does.** He is the reason we worship. Acts 2 says the Spirit gave the disciples utterance. That is our experience also. It is a distinction possessed by no other faith on earth, echoed by the redeemed myriads in heaven and earth like the sound of many waters. **Sing! Make His praise glorious!**

Traditional or contemporary?

Thousands have drifted from churches they belonged for many years, unable to tolerate the music now in vogue. This is not the first time music has brought division. On TV 'Countdown', Richard Whiteley mentioned '*Hymns Ancient and Modern*' to a competing Anglican vicar. The vicar

enlightened him. "We don't use it now. We have *Mission Praise*". Yes, but to come up to date, *Mission Praise* also often sits with hymns *Ancient and Modern* gathering dust in church cupboards.

There is a revolution in church worship and much of the old has been guillotined, the greatest disturbance for a century. Thousands have left churches they attended for a lifetime to find somewhere more traditional. Contemporary styles however are a bridge to the pop, rap, rock generation. It is a touchy matter but there are things that ought to be said.

Facts first. "*Worship music*", "*worship leader*" are new terms. Churches want fresh music constantly rather than the familiar. The fashion creates a vast market and is big business; companies exist by it, and encourage it with hype for their output of the new. Songs come off the production line never intended to be immortal or used for centuries like hymns. An Australian composer said she wrote her most popular song in 10 or 15 minutes. To me, that goes without saying. However such Christian songs for what they are, are meeting the spirit of an aged calling for the spontaneous and changing.

Church music has always been a vexatious issue. One must try to move with the times and accept that the pop age will affect modern church services like everything else from shaved heads and torn jeans to the *Tate Gallery's* '*art*' of unmade beds.

Music is only a matter of taste and taste always comes by conditioning, but what we sing about is not a matter of taste. The best of the older Christian praise came from inspired and mature Christians with poetic and creative genius. Charles Wesley, a classical scholar wrote about 7300 hymns. The liberal magazine, '*Expository Times*' (December 2002) analyses Wesley's hymn "*Let earth and heaven combine*". Admiring Wesley's poetry the writer shows it had a background rich with Scripture, theology, Latin songs, and doctrine drawn from east and west: "*full of faith and profundity in easily singable form*". The apostle Paul said "*teach one*

another" in spiritual songs - always a major means of instruction. Wesley's "*Hark the Herald angels sing*", is a real Gospel packet. His best-known hymn "*Love Divine all loves excelling*", takes us through Bible truth to the new creation ending with "*Lost in wonder, love and praise*". The *Expository Times* says, "*Only the most ecstatic can be offered for such a theme.*"

My point is that Christian worship in song should give passionate expression to the wonderful works of God in Christ. A new book title is "Wh*y I left The Contemporary Christian Music Movement. (Confessions of a former worship leader)*", author Dan Lucarini. He complains contemporary worship programmes are often worldly performances. Well ... perhaps that depends on the worshipper, not the music! Another well-known musician confessed he had written songs we've all sung, before he even knew what true salvation was. I've wondered if other songsters really know either, judging by their lyrics. Basing songs on the Psalms alone won't do when we have the New Testament. **We have a right in church to expect songs with Christian content**. John Wesley was always anxious that Charles' verses should have sound theology. Today congregations fervently sing lines that have no identifiable Bible base. Often no deity is named, some could be sung by followers of any religion. One I heard recently addressed fervent love just to 'you' in language that would have suited any secular song. In any case it is His love, not ours that should be our theme. The new also includes the bizarre, such as asking an (unnamed) potter to mould and fill us and we will soar on eagles' wings. Potters don't remould or fill pots, and pots don't fly off on eagle's wings. One song often sung speaks of building a throne and asks, "*Come Lord Jesus and take your place*". It is very queer theology. The name of Jesus, is used less and less, substituted by *you* and *your*, so unless songs express unmistakeable Christian truth they might be songs to Allah or Buddha. John Lennon's '*My sweet Lord*', meant Krishna. We used to sing "*Oh how*

I love the Saviour's name!" Don't we love the name of Jesus anymore? Are Bernard of Clairvaux's inspired verses of "*Jesus the very thought of Thee, with sweetness fills my breast*" too passionate for our lips today? People may have Jesus in mind when singing about '*you*', but His name itself is vital to our prayer and worship. "*Whatsoever things you do, do all in the name of Jesus*". Surely this applies to worship songs? **At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,** not at the name of *'you'*. By popular request I never sing solos, they are nobody's preferred music, but I can let go and indulge in church. Well, once I could, but every church has its own ever-changing repertoire, not the universal and familiar, so visiting churches I may not know a single song. Still it keeps the music industry going.

Lovely modern compositions are being produced which I greatly appreciate; if they exalt Jesus the music is secondary. We can discard the old-fashioned but what is old is not always old-fashioned. Sing to the Lord!

Hearing others say what we said often surprises us.

Responses to my piece "*Traditional or contemporary*?" (see above) drove me to read my own article to see if I had said things some believed I had.

I intended it to sum up the pros and cons briefly, not give vent to my own prejudices. But … I make no bones about insisting that Christian worship relate to Christ Jesus. I realise that great doctrinal and Gospel themes are not easily fitted to a single repeating musical phrase, and I do accept that melodies, tunes, belong the "traditional" school, but I still claim the Christian right to sing about the work of God in Christ and by name, whatever the music.

However one issue arose that should be mentioned. It was said that people leaving their church because of the music, were intolerant, putting the brakes on progress. Well, those I know are not intolerant die-hards in any sense. They simply can't stomach

the particular music at their church. To them it is earache, especially long sessions. The fact must be understood that we only like what we are brought up to like. Popular music is a matter of conditioning an acquired taste. There are different brands of contemporary music and a church may adopt a form hard on the ear and as foreign to some as Chinese music. Not even all younger people want the more aggressive and clamorous performances. The under-40s took in the disco sound with their mother's milk, but half the British public was reared with an instinct for different sounds than a 2003 pop group. An aversion for contemporary pop is not intolerance. Many stay with their churches who prefer the traditional but try to get along with the new.

Part of the difficulty is that churches now use only recent songs, unrelieved. The range used to be very wide, from different periods, 18th, 19th, 20th century, as any hymn book shows.

Incidentally one or two defended songs I criticised, but too long for me to reply sentence by sentence. It bothered me that such songs were defended, as if they were of ranking importance. Are they then the kind of worship songs now wanted, as standard? Brought up on better spiritual fare people are likely to shop around to find it.

One or two also stood up for songs composed in a few minutes. What did I say about them anyway? They have a niche in the temple of praise for "*everything in his temple cries glory*," big or small. But is the 'inspiration' of a few minutes competing with the thought and verse of greatly gifted men and women? Shouldn't we **love God with <u>all</u> our mind**? They have their merit, but can a five minute refrain really cope with the great themes of the faith? They can contribute however to the symphony of praise, but they are not a symphony themselves. God's glory and greatness is worthy of our best efforts of mind and heart.

'Worship'? leaders

The greatest change in our churches for a century has taken place. Here is a short survey. Actually this short article arises from a reader's perceptive question "*Should worship leaders really be called music leaders*?"

Music leaders or worship leaders? Obviously it depends. To lead worship needs more than the ability to play a guitar. Ideally leaders need the leadership gift, mature spiritual experience and sensitivity to the winds of the Spirit. However not every church can call on people so ideally qualified. Thankfully God uses people, even young folk, who humbly seek to promote His praise and are not out to cut a dash themselves on the platform.

Now, regarding "*worship leaders*". They are an innovation brought in about 20 years ago. Evangelistic meetings always had a '*song leader*' for community singing. This followed the pattern of Torrey-Alexandra and George Jeffreys' campaigns. In church Gospel meetings some younger man would lead '*chorus time*'.

But worship then was the essential responsibility of a pastor, as part of his ministry. He did not '*conduct*' it. Nothing was programmed. Prayer and worship in some churches hardly needed a leader. It arose spontaneously from the whole congregation, the pastor only guiding it. Often for an hour or more I remember I did not have to say a word. The musicians followed the congregation. The congregation was not led by musicians.

Many pastors do keep their original privilege to lead worship themselves, usually with a guitar.

A change came when worship and Gospel meetings lost their distinctness. This came mainly when a New Zealand musician, promoted here about 1980, taught church pianists to '*lead worship*' (instead of the pastor) from their keyboard and '*singing in the Spirit*' was sparked off by the pianist beginning to play rolling cords. This free worship was sometimes led by the drummer.

Musicians having become the worship leaders, they also led in what was then the Gospel meeting using the same kind of songs. Piano and organ were largely replaced by guitar and percussive instruments. Evangelistic hymns were hard to play on guitars. This gradually changed the traditional Gospel meeting.

I think this is the basic change that so many feel anxious about with the loss of the revivalist atmosphere, and community singing of hymns of appeal and redemption.

That is how remember the change. Younger pastors, I imagine, fitted into the new pattern without knowing or even realising it was new or how it had come about.

However, God will have His way. People now are far more sophisticated. The Government's recent census revealed 72 per cent call themselves Christians in the UK. But folk have become wary about meetings they know very well are directly designed to convert them! But they have far less aversion for Christian worship as such, especially with warm fellowship and good preaching.

Preaching the Gospel means preaching the whole counsel of God, not a few evangelistic texts from John 3 and Romans 10. My own recent converts have come through Bible teaching. In a truly Pentecostal Bible church people will find the Lord. Every service will carry an implicit Gospel appeal. Many years ago I wrote insisting that Communion was ideal for winning men and women for Christ. At that time the Lord's table was almost a cult secret and the presence of outsiders embarrassing.

In evangelism the body of Christ breathes. It should be in the music, the worship, and the ministry. The salvation Gospel should be undiluted, leaving nobody in doubt about Christ and the need to repent and pass from death to life.

From *I Was Thinking (IWT)* by George Canty[9]

George Canty knew many Pentecostal fathers and leaders and was later elected Elim President. His long ministry involved every type of Christian work, with over 45

[9] Available from www.dealpentecostal.co.uk

years in evangelism. George pioneered some 20 churches and his work also included academic lecturing, children's work, TV artistry contracts, radio broadcasting and extensive musical ministry. Specialising as a journalist he authored 20 books and other literary work going out in 100 languages. With worldwide experience, theological knowledge and Bible insight he has partnered Reinhard Bonnke in 15 years of CfaN literary output.

Glory—Experiencing the Atmosphere of Heaven

by Ruth Heflin

Praise... until the spirit of worship comes. Worship... until the glory comes. Then... stand in the glory.

Don't let anyone else do your singing for you. When we are lifted up in singing, God begins to give the answers. First, He lifts us up above the cares, the problems, the needs. There is a realm of ease in God. We make spiritual things difficult. He wants to make them easy. He wants the King of Glory to come in and fight our battles for us.

Most of the time we are so busy fighting our own battles that we don't let the Lord do it for us. Remember when Jehoshaphat went out against the kings, the singers and the dancers - the praisers - went before the army. Because the praisers went before the army, they didn't even need to fight.[2Chronicles 20:21-24] And you will never need to fight your own battle if you'll move into this realm of praise and worship unto the Lord.[10]

Juvenilisation

Jesus had a question for Peter: '*Do you love me more than these*?' (Jn.21:15). Jesus required of Peter an honest and courageous personal evaluation. It was about Peter himself, not about comparing himself to others. As so often, the process ended up hurting Peter's feelings (Jn.21:17b); he had to assess his heart, and Jesus was not going to soften the hurt. Jesus' pastoral approach

[10] From Ruth Heflin's book "**Glory**" Available from www.dealpentecostal.co.uk

had little to do with soft, feel-good psychology and much about helping the person to grow up. Being soft would not have taken Peter to higher ground.

Juvenilisation delays the maturing process by keeping the person in an adolescent mindset rather than maturing in life. Thomas E Bergler wrote a well-researched paper about the juvenilisation of North American Christianity. He defined juvenilisation as '*the process by which religious beliefs, practices, and developmental characteristics of adolescents become accepted as appropriate for Christians of all ages'*. He demonstrated that juvenilisation is manifested in all four Christian traditions he researched: evangelicals, liberals, blacks and Catholics. He saw in all of them **symptoms of immaturity accepted as normal**. Christians need to seek the painful path towards maturity. **Accepting a juvenile appearance and lifestyle may look appealing, but does not lead to developing a whole person** (Ephesians 4:13).

I have a lot more to say about this, but it is hard to get it across to you since you've picked up this bad habit of not listening. By this time you ought to be teachers yourselves, yet here I find you need someone to sit down with you and go over the basics on God again, starting from square one—baby's milk, when you should have been on solid food long ago! Milk is for beginners, inexperienced in God's ways; solid food is for the mature, who have some practice in telling right from wrong. So come on, let's leave the preschool finger-painting exercises on Christ and get on with the grand work of art. Grow up in Christ. The basic foundational truths are in place: turning your back on "salvation by self-help" and turning in trust toward God; baptismal instructions; laying on of hands; resurrection of the dead; eternal judgment. God helping us, we'll stay true to all that. But there's so much more. Let's get on with it! *Hebrews 5:11-6:3TM*