

MUSIC'S ROLE IN THE REVELATION RESPONSE
DIALOGUE OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

By Lorn Gieck

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Summary:

Throughout history music has had an assumed presence in the worship of the church, to the point where we view music and worship as synonymous terms. Evangelical use of music for worship is also heavily influenced by the secular culture. Starting from a biblical theology of worship this paper attempts to examine more closely how music can function within the corporate worship of the church.

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STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

It is an exciting time for the contemporary church in North America. Coming out of modernity we are finding the church exploring both the ancient and modern in search for authentic public worship in the new realities of our present day. This has led to new thoughts and practices as modernity morphs into the postmodern and we see trailblazing worship expressions in the emergent church movement. Technology has had a profound effect as worship is influenced by new techniques. Communication technology has expanded the local neighbourhood, placing our experience within a larger global community. We are also seeing renewal in liturgical expressions of worship and a reawakening of the ancient. Old traditions in the church are being re-explored in meaningful ways, transforming worship. The church of North America is reaping the benefit of all these elements and they make up an inspiring tapestry of diversity in the body of Christ.

Of all the diversity on display in our churches one area of worship that is receiving a lot of attention in worship renewal is that of music. Throughout church history music has almost without fail enjoyed a close association with true Christian worship. Nearly every church in North America will include music as an important part of its public form of worship. In evangelical circles music is often expressed as synonymous with the worship of the church. One is often asked in regards to a church, “How was the worship?” The question in its implication is actually about music. Almost without exception, the question is about the quality of the music in a particular church gathering. If there is any area in the contemporary evangelical church that inspires the greatest of passions and controversies it is in the area of how music is used within the gathering.

This has led to numerous debates over the content, form, style, and other external considerations of how music has been employed in worship. There have been many books written in defence of a particular musical setting or style as more preferable in worship to another.¹ Many manuals have been written regarding the proper application of musical techniques needed to emulate a particular worship music style. I believe much of this discussion comes from a general misunderstanding of how music is to function within the worship setting. In all of these discussions the use of music is always assumed, yet little thought is given to the function that it serves in the worship gathering. Overall there is very little attention given to the privileged place of music within the church and how it functions within the revelation and response model of worship. The fact that we have music present in the worship of the church is an apparent given. The particular style of music is of ongoing debate. More fundamentally, the questions we need to be asking are: Why do we have music in church? Are there times when it contributes to the worship of God, and times when it distracts? What purpose does it serve, and how does it function?

OBJECTIVES

My intention in this paper is to examine music as an element of the public congregational worship of the church and how it functions as a part of the revelation and response dialogue of worship. The purpose of this discussion will give freedom to allow music to fulfill its proper place in the gathering of worship, neither letting it become the subject or object of worship, but rather allowing it to maintain its transparent role so that the worshiper's true devotion is directed toward God.

¹ Take a look at Harold M. Best's *Music Through the Eyes of Faith* as a defence of traditional music styles, and Greg Scheer's *The Art of Worship: A Musicians Guide to Leading Modern Worship* as a textbook of more contemporary music styles.

I will also examine the current understandings and assumptions regarding the function of music within the church. Part of this will be to challenge its close association with the form and style of modern popular music, and whether the widespread embrace of the techniques of the rock concert is an appropriate model of Christian worship. This will include the function of the stage, the musicians, and the rock band. An important aspect of this exploration will also encompass a discussion of the use of the vernacular, as it is applied to music, and the ways in which the medium of music affects the form and function when it is transplanted into the worship setting.

The result will be to move us past the assumptions in regards to the use of music in worship and give us a clearer understanding of its place within the gathered community. Instead of limiting music to a religious concert performance, it can be shaped into the voice of devotion for the entire worshipping community. This is not to say that musical concerts are inappropriate, only that they do not essentially constitute worship. Understanding this will allow us to avoid errors that idolize or idealize what music is able to do, and give us a theological basis for the practice of church music. A result of this study will be the development of tools that can be used within the church congregation as a means to discover the quality of worship expression. The key is whether or not the gathered church is able to see God and then respond appropriately.

I want to deepen our understanding of how we use music in the worship of the church, so that it functions as a support to congregational worship. The current centrality of the stage may not be the ideal place for the dialogue of worship to unfold.² Unlike the concert hall of the fine

² I'm working here with a Biblical model that sees worship as a means of communing with God, initiated by His self-revelation and our subsequent response. Biblical worship is not a two-part form, but rather a continuous conversation, a cycle of revelation and response. I will elaborate on this more in the next section with a discussion on the theology of worship.

arts performance, music is not the central focus in the worship of the church. Instead, music is an accompaniment to the drama of worship in which we as the gathered saints are all participants.

ASSUMPTIONS & LIMITATIONS

There are several points of clarification that need to be made as we pursue this topic. First of all, while the worship of the church can include the use of music, music does not automatically equal worship. While this is a common perception because of the privileged place music has within contemporary Christian worship, it is simply not true. Music can function in a variety of ways including education, showcasing of technical artistic skill, or sentimentalism. Just because there is a performance of music with inspirational or biblical lyrics, does not mean that worship has taken place. In fact it is very possible to worship God without the use of music.³

In most situations regarding music and the church the question of style inevitably becomes a significant part of the discussion. Church leaders will always struggle with finding the tensions between cultural relevance and being a distinct people of God. This paper, while discussing the issue of style as it relates to the vernacular, is not meant to advocate any existing music as more suitable for worship than another. While critiquing the current vernacular in evangelical worship music I am not conversely advocating traditional music as a replacement. This is not an instruction manual in how to do a particular style of worship music with greater competence. Therefore, there will be no extended discussion regarding the diversity of musical techniques, nor their suitability or unsuitability.

³ Harold M. Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1993), 195.

Regarding the use of music in the church, I will be interpreting it specifically in regards to the North American evangelical church context. There are influences that have shaped the cultural practice of worship within this church tradition that are particular to this ministry setting. When referring to the vernacular in this case, it will be focused on the common music in use throughout this geographical location. Granted, North American popular music can encompass a wide variety of sub-genres, and this influence shows within contemporary evangelical worship. However despite a multitude of varieties, there is also a general mainstream approach. This study may also be of use in contexts well versed in western worship music styles and contemporary music in general. While some of the principles may be transferable to non-western cultures, they are ultimately being studied in regards to this specific context.

Finally, music in our culture is rarely a one-dimensional affair of sound coming from a stage. This discussion will assume the interrelationship of technology, media, and other performance mediums that are used in the performance of live music. Music is simply understood in current western culture as including many other disciplines as integrated into its whole. This is apparent in the amount of background support personnel that are an essential part of any instance where music is played in public. These auxiliary elements will be understood as a part of the musical presentation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I will begin my research by examining the various Biblical accounts of revelation and response as models for contemporary worship. There are a variety of key passages that will be used to extrapolate the ways in which music can function within the revelation/response dialogue of worship. This will be followed by a historical look into how the use of music in the church was variously understood and challenged. An important aspect of the historical perspectives on

worship and music will also include a contemporary history of the worship renewal movement, how music became the primary area of concern, and how the close association of secular popular music and sacred worship music developed. This will include an examination of the concept of the pop/rock concert as the vernacular of our North American culture and look into whether it is an appropriate starting point with which to model church worship.

In the next section I will examine music proper and begin to understand how it functions within the gathering of the worshipping church. I will look at specific worship actions of revelation and response and discuss how music can facilitate the religious interplay between human and divine. It will also be important to take a look at the dynamics of the musicians, and think about how they serve in the worship of the church. The goal will be to provide understanding for those involved in the production of worship music some of the theologically correct ways in which to ply their craft.

The final section will suggest ways in which we can adjust our understanding and practice of music to better facilitate the true worship of God. This will allow us some new tools to use in the evaluation of public worship and discover whether the gathered church was able to see God revealed clearly and respond appropriately. My desire is to reinvigorate the music of the church and draw it away from the baggage of contemporary culture. Instead, we should have confident freedom to create an art vocabulary that is exclusive to the worship of the church.

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

A THEOLOGICAL DEFINITION OF WORSHIP

BROAD DEFINITION OF WORSHIP (WORSHIP AS A LIFESTYLE)

We should begin by giving careful attention to what exactly we mean when we say the word worship. It is perhaps one of the most used words in the church, with a rather broad application of usage. One of the most common starting points in our understanding of worship is that for the Christian believer, all of life is meant to be an out pouring of worship to God.⁴ In this view there is no separation between the sacred and the secular, only that all the daily tasks of living life should in some way be an act of worship. The Biblical worldview is one that sees life not as a multitude of separate existences, but that we live within one reality founded on the creative work of God. “The regenerate should see all of life as a gift to be developed for the glorifying of the Creator.”⁵ Scriptures that support this kind of viewpoint include Romans 12:1, which implores believers “to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.” This is often identified as living a lifestyle of worship.

While there is much in scripture to support this understanding of worship as a life lived to glorify God, it is not the complete picture. This viewpoint has led to certain abuses that excuse individual believers from the need to have any kind of corporate expression of worship. It excuses believers to engage in various activities, whether science, sport, or entertainment, and define it as worship. Unfortunately this leads to a form of idolatry. Christian worship needs to have God as both the subject and object of worship. For example, playing sports ultimately has

⁴ Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1982), 25-26

⁵ Calvin M. Johanson, *Music and Ministry: A Biblical Counterpoint* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 87.

independent objectives that need to be followed in order to be successful. Thus while skill displayed can be pleasing to God, it is not an activity that focuses solely on God.

Scripture is also clear that the gathering of the church is an important part of Christian worship. The early church accounts in Acts tell us that “[e]very day they [the disciples] continued to meet together in the temple courts.”⁶ Hebrews teaches us further that we should “not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing.”⁷ Because of this, we have a long-standing history of church as being a place of people gathering.

CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP

Our next significant picture of worship comes from our experiences of the current expression of the gathered local church. We often use terminology such as “worship service” or “going to worship”. We identify the church building and its music, the preaching, and the community that gathers as worship.⁸ In this case, we accept worship as being associated with a particular event. This is the most common understanding of worship within contemporary North American evangelicalism. For many churches, this has become the central experience of corporate worship and many church leaders see a one-hour Sunday morning worship service as the power that propels the other ministry works of the church.⁹

And so, worship for us becomes a journey of finding the proper techniques in which to make this worship event occur. Jesus encounters this concern for discovering the proper art of

⁶ Acts 2:46 NIV

⁷ Hebrew 10:25 NIV

⁸ Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1982), 15.

⁹ Beach, Nancy. *An Hour on Sunday*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004. 23.

worship in his encounter with the woman at the well, and takes her beyond temporal worship concerns with his words “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”¹⁰ We tend to think that our participation in a worship service of the church is something important as a personal choice, as in, it is something we *decide* to do. The fact is God is seeking us out with more diligence than we look for him.¹¹ Jesus says to the woman at the well that those who worship in spirit and truth “are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.”¹² This pursuit of true worshipers occurred from the very beginning, as we see the contrast in offerings between Cain and his brother Abel. One was accepted and the other was not. It could be thought that Cain’s sacrifice was not accepted because it was grain and contained no blood, yet later instruction in tabernacle worship shows that grain offerings were appropriate. Instead what distinguishes the two is a lack of faith attitude on the part of Cain.¹³

REVELATION AND RESPONSE

What typically happens in Evangelical worship is that a congregation gathers facing some sort of a stage where a variety of worship actions are performed. One gets the impression that this is similar to the kind of performances that would occur in any other secular venue, whether for entertainment or education. What is done on the stage is then either praise worthy, or fodder for criticism. We need to understand that congregational worship works in a different way than a concert performance. It is important for the church to understand that instead of gathering to watch a spectacle of worship, and instead of participating in a spectacle of worship,

¹⁰ John 4:24 NIV

¹¹ Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1982), 33.

¹² John 4:23 NIV

¹³ Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1982), 34.

the church has instead come to communicate and participate. This is where the word “worship” itself is somewhat limited in that it is not specifically a Biblical term; it is rather an inferred English word meaning, “to attribute worth.”¹⁴ In this case worship becomes solely the realm of response: whatever actions we perform in worship, whether from the stage or the congregation, is all that matters. If we leave the concept of worship at this point, praising the praise worthy, it becomes rather one-dimensional, and often we are trapped into praising the worship actions on the stage.

Worship is meant to be a dialogue.¹⁵ God speaks and we listen, but then we also speak back. The church in worship responds to what God is saying. The subsequent question of worship then is not on how the externals of the performance are enacted. While a lot of time can be spent on technical concerns regarding the quality of worship on the stage, the better question is how can we “equip believers to commune more fully with God and each other in our liturgical [worship] actions.”¹⁶

Scripture has a lot to say about the role we as human beings play in the drama of worship. What we are often drawn to are the specific cultic activities as described in the Bible as these are most recognizable to us as a form of worship. We identify with and understand very readily the idea of people gathered and giving specific actions to glorify God. This is how we often come to identify praise and adoration of the divine as the working definition of worship.¹⁷ However, worship defined in this way does not automatically give us an adequate basis for integrating our actions of praise with the revelation of the Bible. “It leaves open the possibility of people

¹⁴ Ibid., 17.

¹⁵ Quentin Schultze, *High Tech Worship? Using Presentational Technologies Wisely* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 27.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 19.

making their own assessment of God's worth and the response which they consider to be adequate."¹⁸

This is a tenuous way to approach God, because as we understand from the scriptures, there are times when worship was rejected. There are many stories in which what the people offered was deemed not acceptable for the worship of God.¹⁹ We must understand that worship is not a peripheral concept of the scriptures. Rather, worship is an extremely broad concept that is infused throughout the Biblical narrative, connecting to theological themes such as "creation, sin, covenant, redemption, the people of God and the future hope."²⁰ Our understandings of these are ultimately as initiatives by God, in which we receive His love and favour; they are acted out upon us. It is God, as the one that seeks us, drawing us into relationship with him. "In particular we need to take seriously the extraordinary biblical perspective that acceptable worship is something made possible for us by God."²¹ The actions of God must radically inform our understanding of worship. Instead of concentrating solely on the area of our responses, we must acknowledge that it is God who is also active in the dialogue of worship.

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES

REVELATION AND RESPONSE IN THE COVENANT

In the ancient world, it was important for a tribe or village to discover where the presence of a god could be found, and how they were to communicate with it. This would include the discovery of the particular god's name, its specific area of dwelling and the means by which they

¹⁸ Ibid., 17.

¹⁹ Ibid., 17.

²⁰ David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 17.

²¹ Ibid., 19.

could appease and please this god. Shrines would be erected and worship would be instituted. In the Canaanite mythology, there were multiple gods, each with a dwelling place associated with a special, sacred mountain. These mountains were the sacred spaces in which heaven and earth in some way met, and the place in which the god would exert its influence.²²

The God of Israel was revealed against this cultural backdrop to the Patriarchs of Israel: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He revealed himself to them uniquely, as the creator and Lord over the entire universe, not dependent on any particular locale, or physical meeting place. What is significant in this case is that He did not initially reveal Himself with displays of power, or supernatural exhibition. Instead, God spoke to them in terms of covenant and promise. “Even before God engaged with them in this way the Bible indicates that those who called upon him and sought to serve him did so within the context of his continuing communication with them.”²³ It was never meant to be a one sided conversation, but rather a dynamic relationship in which there was interplay back and forth between the two. As the bond developed the patriarchs built altars to God in various places, however they were reminders of special manifestations and meetings between the human and divine, not temples of dwelling. Unlike the local Canaanite religions, God became associated not with a place, but rather with people. God choose to identify himself as the “God of Abraham”, “the God of Isaac”, and “the God of Jacob.”²⁴ So from the very beginning, we see that the religion demonstrated in the lives of the Patriarchs of Israel was largely focused on the intimate communion between God and man.

²² Ibid., 25.

²³ Ibid., 25.

²⁴ Ibid., 25.

REVELATION AND RESPONSE IN ISAIAH

The call of Isaiah to the prophetic ministry is another passage in which we see the dynamic of dialogue exchanged through revelation and response. God reveals Himself in glory and Isaiah is left to respond. There is much more to this encounter than the conscription of a servant to fulfill the orders of a deity. Instead we discover a dynamic exchange of conversation that leads to a real sense of movement.²⁵ We find that the revelation and response dialogue goes back and forth several times, God speaking four times in total, with Isaiah responding to each particular statement. So worship in this case again demonstrates a reciprocal relationship that is developing, as the meeting is unfolding.

This event has a significant impact on the person of Isaiah; he cannot leave the encounter unchanged. “At each step in the movement of alternation Isaiah grew in spiritual breadth and intensity until he went on his way, a new creature, rejoicing in the strength of a new peace, understanding, and vision.”²⁶ There is a supernatural impact in the life of Isaiah as he goes out to do the work revealed for him to do by God. We have to keep in mind that in this scenario Isaiah has been asked to embark as a prophet in which he will have little or no success. As God describes the assignment, it is heartbreaking as a reader to understand that God offers him nothing that is of personal benefit or gain. This is perhaps a key to understanding how revelation impacts response in spiritually ascendant ways. It also has a lot to say about how a revelation from God will lead ultimately to acts of service in the world, and that for those who follow God, their reward is in the revelation of God’s presence.

²⁵Stanley, L. Osborne, *The Strain of Praise* (Toronto, ON: Ryerson, 1957), 29.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 29

RESPONSE IN THE ABSENCE OF REVELATION

One of the most intriguing incidents in the Mt. Sinai account is in the debacle of the Golden calf (Exodus 32). The people were left to their own devices while Moses was on top of the mountain consulting with God. Apparently they had not seen Moses for some time and had become tired of waiting for him wondering, “what has happened to him.”²⁷ They then decided to take matters into their own hands and asked Aaron to fashion a golden calf for them to worship. This was not only an abandonment of God in exchange for the creation of a lesser man made god; it was also an attempt to worship God in an unauthorized way. The gold calf was going to be used by the people as their “own means of securing the presence of the Lord.”²⁸ It was an attempt to transfer what they understood regarding the worship of other pagan gods and applying it to the God of Israel. However God is not like the other gods, and cannot be approached in the same way. The Old Testament, over and over, makes it very clear that God can only be worshiped in the way that He specifies, particularly because He is the one who is actively involved in making worship possible.

What we have in this case is the response of the people, enthusiastic as it may be (they gave up their gold for it), uninformed by the particular revelation of God. As a result, they gave an unacceptable offering. What we see in the following chapters is how Moses begins to function as not only the leader, but also the connection to the divine presence. Moses sees the glory of God and reveals the law to the people, and we discover how closely connected God’s presence is with His word.²⁹ This is further developed in Exodus with the building of the

²⁷ Ex. 32:1 NIV

²⁸ David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 34.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

tabernacle, as means to express, and to respond appropriately to the reality of God being with them as their divine ruler.

THE ABUSE OF MUSIC AND RENEWAL

The prophet Amos takes exception with the cultic worship practices of the Israelites in chapter 5:21-27. Among the things he lists as detestable or displeasing to the Lord are the religious festivals, the burnt offerings, grain offerings, fellowship offerings and music. He says “Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.”³⁰ Here is an Old Testament case describing God’s rejection of worship, and on the surface, it seems like the prophet, wants to get rid of all the religious practices of the Israelites completely. This is particularly strong in that there are times in the Bible when the people are commanded to play instruments joyfully before God.³¹ Amos however, is using a rhetorical technique, in this case hyperbole, to argue strongly in hope to initiate some kind of change.³²

While the cultic expressions of worship are important to God, He is also concerned that the Israelite people engage in living lives of righteousness and justice. There is a “gap between ritual behaviour and ethical behaviour.”³³ Currently they are self-satisfied in their worship while the poor and needy suffer. What is happening is that the Lord is speaking to the Israelites at a particularly dark time in their history as a religious nation separated for His Glory. They are not following his commands, and that constitutes an abuse to the songs that they sing. It seems reasonable to suggest that Amos not only sees the moral lives of the Israelites inconsistent but that their worship also is inconsistent as a result. The music of the temple worshipers no longer

³⁰ Amos 5:23 NIV

³¹ See Psalm 33:2-3

³² Francis I. Anderson and David Noel Freedman, *Amos* (New York, NY: Double Day, 1989), 539.

³³ Ibid.

functioned as worship in that it lacked true prayer and true praise.³⁴ It is not meant to be an abolishment of music, but rather Amos' strong words are meant to lead to the renewal of the spiritual life of Israel and its cultic form of worship.³⁵

WHO CONTRIBUTES TO WORSHIP?

Paul speaks often of the body of Christ and the interconnection we are to have with each other. In his first letter to the believers at Corinth Paul is addressing divisions that have formed in the church through inappropriate worship.³⁶ He begins by speaking to the issue of gifts in the church, saying that “[t]here are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.”³⁷ He goes on to identify various gifts such as healing, wisdom, prophecy, and speaking in tongues. None of these are meant to be gifts that are owned by the individual; rather they are considered to be a part of the whole. Although we are intimately connected through our union in Christ, neither are we meant to be the same. The church is not envisioned as a homogenous group of people.³⁸ As such, everyone that is part of the worshipping church has something that they can contribute to corporate worship. For Paul, it is imperative that we “encourage and permit the use of each other’s gifts as God designed.”³⁹ In fact we may be inadvertently stanching the work of the Holy Spirit by ignoring the gifts the He has given for the benefit of the church. Paul tells the Corinthian church to be one where everyone comes to worship with some kind of contribution and that when they gather, “everyone has a hymn, or a

³⁴ David Allen Hubbard, *Joel and Amos: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 182.

³⁵ David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 45.

³⁶ 1 Corinthians 11:17-18

³⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 NIV

³⁸ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 210.

³⁹ Kevin J. Navarro, *The Complete Worship Leader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 147

word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation.”⁴⁰ These are meant to be for the benefit of the church. In this setting, worship is understood not as the work of a few talented leaders, but rather it is conceived as a group directed process with everyone having the same obligation to use their gifts as an integral part of the experience.⁴¹

Paul includes intelligibility as an important part of the worship of the church. He speaks in regards to the use of tongues and how that expression tends to be for the edification of the individual and not the group. “Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying?”⁴² Words that are not understood by others are actually useless, and worse, a point of separation. This was happening in the Corinthian church, as those who spoke in tongues perceived that they had obtained a special more spiritual status, one more suitable for worship.⁴³ Paul interjects that if communication is not possible between two people than they are simply foreigners, the exact opposite of the close association members of Christ’s family in the church should have.⁴⁴ There can be no sense of power from position within the church. If anything, Paul wants the Corinthian church to model a giving away of preference for the building up of another member.

If self-expression of devotion to God were the most important value in worship, than it may not matter at all whether our personal expression is intelligible to those around us. God would be able to understand what we are offering.⁴⁵ Paul suggests that the horizontal aspects of the congregation are also important. It is essential for worship acts to be for the benefit of the group and Paul suggests cultivating those gifts by saying, “try to excel in gifts that build up the

⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 14:26 NIV

⁴¹ Kevin J. Navarro, *The Complete Worship Leader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 148.

⁴² 1 Corinthians 14:9 NIV

⁴³ Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1995), 101.

⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 14:11 NIV

⁴⁵ Marcus Felde, “Truly Vernacular Worship for the Sake of the Gospel,” *International Review of Missions*, 87 (January 1998): 43.

church.”⁴⁶ Part of connecting in corporate worship is taking the time to bring others along, taking care that worshipers understand the worship dialogue as it unfolds.⁴⁷ If a particular practice makes no sense to another member should cause us to question its use.⁴⁸ We may need further teaching about the practice and its relevance in revelation and response, or evaluate its continued use. This challenge to intelligibility can apply to all aspects of worship: the sermon, music, architecture, and how we dress.⁴⁹

The members of the gathered church need to be exercising an active form of spiritual discernment over the various actions of corporate worship, testing them as authentic responses to words from God.⁵⁰ In this way we find that there is no spiritual elevation of one particular member, as Paul has already emphasized that they all have the same spirit, so no individual can “seize undue authority or influence.”⁵¹ Paul wanted the whole church to accept responsibility for testing public worship in the name of Christ.⁵² Without common intelligibility that was simply not possible.

THE DIRECTIONS OF WORSHIP

Paul also gives some instruction about the use of music within the worship of the church. He says to speak “to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord...”⁵³ There is a lot of discussion among scholars as to what exactly is

⁴⁶ 1 Corinthians 14:12 NIV

⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 14:31 NIV

⁴⁸ Marcus Felde, “Truly Vernacular Worship for the Sake of the Gospel,” *International Review of Missions*, 87 (January 1998): 43.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 242.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Jerome Murphy-O’Conner, *1 Corinthians* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1982), 129.

⁵³ Ephesians 5:19

meant by the three categories of songs that Paul identifies here.⁵⁴ It is interesting in that he does not go into detail in explaining exactly what they are. He is emphasizing an acceptable form of worship behaviour in contrast with a life of disorderly chaos as is described in the preceding verses. This is further emphasized if we keep in mind Paul wanting to maintain distance from the pagan culture of that time, and their self-pleasing behaviours.⁵⁵ Paul sets up positive language to unsure that the Christian community is built on mutual submission (vs 21).⁵⁶

In describing Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, Paul is not so concerned with the form of the music, but with the function. The key here is the phrase, “speaking to one another.” There was to be a horizontal relationship in the worship of the Ephesians church, in that they were to instruct, admonish, and exhort one another (see also Colossians 3:16). Unlike those outside of the church, they were to speak, or sing, a language that would build each other up, specifically as an outpouring of the song that the “Spirit puts in their mouths.”⁵⁷ This is further combined with a vertical orientation as they are instructed to sing and make music to the Lord. The argument Paul is developing is that worship is a spiritual, Spirit filled event, and it does not produce self-satisfaction in the worshiping community. It is not “religious enthusiasm for its own sake” but rather the fullness of the Spirit is experienced within an authentic worshiping community.⁵⁸ Paul gives the Ephesians permission to allow the Holy Spirit to guide their worship, not in such a way that flees from the immorality of the world around them, but as a means of recognizing and developing the special spiritual character of their worship.⁵⁹ And the source for this was in no

⁵⁴ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, 1990), 345.

⁵⁵ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 239.

⁵⁶ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 242.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 348.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 349.

⁵⁹ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 240.

way influenced by external influences; it was a matter of the Holy Spirit working internally, which would cause the wellspring of an outward song.⁶⁰

THE USE OF THE VERNACULAR

One of Paul's overwhelming priorities is his missionary work. Paul at his core was an evangelist, and spent his life pouring himself out so that others outside of the fold of Christ's love would come inside of it. You can almost hear the desperation of technique and the lengths he will go to win others for Christ, in his desire to enter into a wide variety of life situations in 1 Corinthians chapter 9. He says, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some."⁶¹ We must be careful not to over exaggerate the meaning here. This is more rightly understood as Paul not wanting to be a hindrance to belief, as opposed to his aggressively pursuing specific people groups with customized ministry techniques.⁶² The passage in context is speaking of the issues of money in ministry and meat offered to idols, and it is always with the attitude of humility, not wanting to abuse his freedom rights in Christ at the expense of others, hindering their spiritual well being. In fact, Paul is referencing slavery terms here, as a slave to Christ, and the freedom he is exercising is in reality a submission of his own religious preferences to the higher priority gospel mission.⁶³

As such Paul is not promoting a situational ethic but instead a desire to be accommodating to practices that are culturally neutral.⁶⁴ He believes in the importance of contextualizing the gospel in such a way that, while the form is changed, the content is

⁶⁰ Ibid., 238

⁶¹ 1 Corinthians 9:22 NIV

⁶² Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 183.

⁶³ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 153

⁶⁴ Ibid., 186.

preserved. This has a lot to teach us as we approach methods of evangelism in our contemporary culture. Paul is clearly not talking about corporate worship in this context; he is talking about outreach. This passage while instructive does not have a lot of immediate application within the gathered community of faith. It must be understood that this is Paul's understanding of reaching out to people outside of the church. And if we label it as evangelism, it must clearly be distinguished from our contemporary methods of mass evangelism through special evangelistic meetings, crusades, and special church programs. Paul envisioned this kind of cultural accommodation occurring not so much in large-scale production but rather through personal connection.⁶⁵ The contextualization of the gospel as Paul envisions it in this passage is not only programmatic in nature, but also depends on authentic building of relationships. It is important to live in community both inside of the church, and in the world. Programmatic aspects of worship would be transformed when they are supported by a close relational dynamic. We should be forewarned that this is not meant to be an easy approach to life and ministry. Paul clearly understood the demanding difficulty of this approach as he compares it to the disciplined life of the athlete in the following verses.⁶⁶

The gospel should be a central consideration in contextualizing our worship as it reflects on the presence of Christ with us. People looking at our worship should perceive that "God is really among you!"⁶⁷ Christ himself embodied the vernacular, bringing God to us in a form we could more easily grasp. His goal: the salvation of the world. The introduction to the Gospel of John uses the Greek term "*logos*" to identify the person of Jesus and His entry into our world. The use of this word is not accidental as it echoes the personification of wisdom in Proverbs 8.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 188.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 187.

⁶⁷ 1 Corinthians 14:25

This passage is meant to help us understand the truly wide scope of God's new creation plan.⁶⁸ Through Jesus we are able to relate through commonality of the incarnation and understand that following Him is not only a personal means of salvation in a hyper-individualist way. "The Christian church is called not only to save human individuals from the world, but to save the world itself."⁶⁹ That is not to say we are free to shape creation as we like. Our role as Christians is to partner with the divine in the renewal of our world and culture holding the tensions between the transcendent and immanent. And so worshiping in an accessible way "must not be thought of as just another "new wind" that would blow us in the direction of worship that is stylistically local."⁷⁰ It is also informed by the new reality of salvation that the church is shaping in the world through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

SUMMARY

We have a lot of assumptions about how we engage in the act of worship in our contemporary churches. It is important to remember that God initiates true worship, and out of His self-revelation we are able to respond in an authentic relationship with him. The Patriarchs remind us of God's desire to be in relationship, while Isaiah reminds us that that relationship is by nature transforming. Human nature is prone to looking for alternatives to true worship, sometimes abusing correct forms with improper heart attitudes. Yet in this mess the church is to be a witness as a unique spiritual community serving God. Every member is to contribute to worship in a way that is helpful and intelligible to the body, even while reaching out meaningfully to draw others on the outside into a relationship with God. The church is to

⁶⁸ John Meyendorff, "Christ as Word: Gospel and Culture," *International Review of Mission* 74 (April 1985): 247-248.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁷⁰ Marcus Felde, "Truly Vernacular Worship for the Sake of the Gospel," *International Review of Missions*, 87 (January 1998): 45.

embody the vernacular in such a way as to embody salvation, working toward a renewal of all creation, and the surrounding culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

The early church fathers affirmed highly the use of psalms and hymns in the worship of the church and this resulted in a very high view of music. However they were not overly concerned with how to relate to the artistic forms of popular culture. As such it was very natural for them to wholly reject the music of the culture around them, the music of the pagan Roman society of which they were a part.⁷¹ They complained that the people were “addicted to dishonest and shameless songs...mortal and Satanic poison for the corruption of the world.”⁷² For them, popularity was not a sufficient reason for the embracing of the common music in their culture. It was Tertullian that spoke to this in opposition to those who saw music as a neutral entity, and that all music made for God is good. He said that the root of this argument comes from a thinly veiled fear “of losing some delight or enjoyment of the world.”⁷³ The overwhelming consideration of the early church fathers was that music should not allow believers to relish in the sensual pleasures of the world. They were also concerned with using music as a stimulus to manipulate the congregation. Their concern was in protecting the unique function of music in Christian worship. Further, they were also aware that just because people can get caught up in the moment, and declare the moment “spiritual” does not necessarily mean it was a movement of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁴ They wanted to ensure that the dialogue in worship was grounded in truth.

⁷¹ Calvin R. Stapert, *A New Song for an Old World: Musical Thought in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 195

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 198

⁷⁴ Ibid., 202.

While I am not suggesting we need to draw the same lines as they did in regards to the use of cultural music as direct historical transference is usually ill advised, I think this does teach us that it is possible for the church to go in a different direction than popular culture, and that it can flourish if it makes that choice.⁷⁵ It must be stated that they were not anti-music; they held it in very high regard. In fact what history generally tells us is that the thoughts of the church fathers set the stage for the medieval period. As Christianity spread, eventually becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire, church worship was redeveloped for a larger and more public scale, aligning itself and imitating in many ways with the structures of the empire.⁷⁶ On the surface it could be observed as a tendency to compromise within the safety of the culture. However, “[o]ne observes again and again that Christian thinking, while working within patterns of thought and conceptions rooted in Greco-Roman culture, transformed them so profoundly that in the end something quite new came into being.”⁷⁷ The music of the Church developed as a result, and the church to become a standard bearer of the arts, based in the imaginative power stemming from the person of Christ.⁷⁸

ZWINGLI AND THE REJECTION OF MUSIC

The rise of Protestantism had a profound affect on the use of the arts within the worship gathering. Due to the ascendancy of the church in culture, and combined with the high view of arts by the church fathers, the use of the arts had centred on the liturgical tradition of the Catholic Church and in particular the form of the Mass. Public worship expression was exclusively understood within the constraints of this centuries old formal structure of church practice. Over

⁷⁵ Ibid., 200.

⁷⁶ James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 42.

⁷⁷ Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), xvii.

⁷⁸ Ibid., xvi.

this long period of time there developed a large body of work that came to have an intimate relationship to the form of the mass. “For public worship in general, for the celebration of the Mass above all else, the church for centuries had ceaselessly created a total art bound to it by liturgy.”⁷⁹ Even at the dawn of the Reformation, the artistic activity of Europe was still largely focused on the public worship of the gathered church. There was an integrated and supporting role played by art within the work and purpose of the church. The creation of new art and the support of artists were under the sole direction of the Holy Church. This is very different than how we understand the role of art in our world today. The influential world of art is no longer so closely associated with the worship of the church. Whereas music’s function in pre-reformation Christianity was to serve the liturgy, today musicians and artists are autonomously creating art outside of the influence of the church to their own independent ends. This separation of art from the church is an inheritance we received from the work of the reformation.⁸⁰

One important reformation figure that spoke on the role of music is reformed preacher Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531). He is one of the first figures to come along and question the place of music within worship. From the formation of the church to Zwingli’s time there was plenty of debate regarding certain aspects of the use of music, matters such as its performance, instrumentation and style. However, music’s presence was always taken for granted. So while the form and significance of music had been debated in the church, no one until Zwingli had ever questioned the “right as such to employ music.”⁸¹ This led Zwingli to the radical conclusion that

⁷⁹ Charles Garside Jr., *Zwingli and the Arts*, Edited by David Horne (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 5.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

music was wholly inappropriate in the public worship and should be abandoned. In 1523 he publicly declared his intention to remove all music from the worship of the churches of Zurich.⁸²

While I do not agree that music should be abandoned in worship, there are some important thoughts he offers regarding the function of music in worship. At the very least he reminds us that the use of music is not essential to the public worship of the church, and that the church can function in worship without it.⁸³ His conclusions are keyed to the revelation of God that is needed in public worship, and he found music as lacking in this regard. That is not to say that Zwingli did not appreciate music. Compared to his contemporaries, Calvin and Luther, he was the most accomplished musician and composed and played several instruments up until his last years. However, he felt music was a wholly secular art, useful in personal recreation and renewal, but nothing beyond that.⁸⁴

Zwingli was increasingly frustrated by the abuses of music that he was seeing within the liturgical practice of his time. In its history, the church has often oscillated between values of professionalism and congregational participation.⁸⁵ The musical practice of the church at the time of Zwingli became increasingly one of professionalism and public display.⁸⁶ It did not matter whether or not the musicians were paid staff or amateur, what he was concerned with was singers who he perceived as guilty of one of two grievances: the display of personal piety for personal praise and fame, and/or the financial benefit that came from being a musician involved in worship.⁸⁷ In reaction to the excess of the liturgy Zwingli looked into Scripture and he was unconvinced that it permitted the use of music in the worship of God. There were two

⁸² Ibid., 57

⁸³ Stanley, L. Osborne, *The Strain of Praise* (Toronto, ON: Ryerson, 1957), 3.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 68-69.

⁸⁵ Keith Drury, *The Wonder of Worship: Why We Worship The Way We Do* (Marion, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2002), 9.

⁸⁶ James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship*, 136.

⁸⁷ Charles Garside Jr., *Zwingli and the Arts*, 47-48.

contrasting conceptions of worship that he was identifying, the first being the external forms of worship and its spectacle for the benefit of man, and the internal, which was an expression of “spirit and truth.”⁸⁸ He appealed to the words of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount contrasting the public prayer of the hypocrites (Matthew 6:5) and the private prayer of the pious (6:6). This teaching of Christ became the central part of his thinking regarding public worship, “private prayer is now seen to be unconditionally the prototype of true worship as set forth by the law of Christ; all other forms, above all the plethora of ceremonial forms in use by the contemporary Church, are by necessity antitypes of varying inadequacy.”⁸⁹

The extension of Zwingli’s reasoning led him logically to an abandonment of all liturgical forms of worship. For him there were no boundaries in terms of time or circumstance that could get in the way of a believer’s engagement with God through private prayer. It seems he actually preferred worship as the activity of an individual in preference to the gathered church, which is summarized in his statement “If you are reverent, then let it be alone.”⁹⁰ However, he also understood that the worship of the church in a visible public form should be maintained. While the content of this private prayer needed to be given some kind expression in the life of the public, Zwingli was also hypersensitive to the weakness of human sin. He understood that even with the most idealized of religious intentions people were still prone to present a different face in public than the one they would reveal in private. He was simply unconvinced that anyone could sing well and at the same time maintain an attitude of reverence. Thus he would interpret Ephesians 5:19 quite literally; the Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs were to be spoken to each other, and that the Singing to the Lord was done silently in ones

⁸⁸ Ibid., 40.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 42.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 42.

heart.⁹¹ “For the whole congregation, real concentration in prayer is difficult at all times,”⁹² and he thought that with the added distraction and noise of music it would be much more difficult to maintain an attitude of worshipful reverence before God.

While Zwingli is an over reaction to the use of music in worship there is a significant lesson to be learned here in regards to the over use of music within the public worship of church. Much of contemporary evangelical worship is so dependant on the use of music that even moments of silence are observed with the accompaniment of instrumental music. Music can become a focal point in such a way that it can lead us away from a proper response in worship. There may be times when complete silence may be more functionally appropriate.⁹³ An important lesson in any musician developing their artistic sensibilities is finding that tenuous balance between notes and silence. Space is where music really begins to live and breathe, and where in church worship we may have lost our aesthetic sense. Combined with this is the matter of accessibility: not everyone connects with music. There are those who through lack of interest or understanding find music to be a barrier to their participation in congregational expressions of worship.⁹⁴ Some that are musically gifted, while acknowledging that music is a significant personal expression of worship, will admit that the use of music is not that significant for them in congregational settings. That is not to say that we eliminate music’s use for their sake, but we do need to remain sensitive to enabling the entire body of Christ to be a part of the worship dialogue.

Curiously, the debate between congregational and professional music in the worship of the church seems to never fully resolve itself. Moving into the eighteenth century in England

⁹¹ Ibid., 59

⁹² Ibid., 48.

⁹³ Stanley, L. Osborne, *The Strain of Praise*, 31.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

there were advocates of congregational hymns such as the Watts and the Wesleys, but they tended to be on the fringes of the church. Mainstream expressions of worship tended to insist that a trained choir and orchestra best achieved worship.⁹⁵

THE LECTURE HALL AS VERNACULAR

While the reformation triggered many changes in regards to scripture and theology it also had sweeping effects of change in how the church worshiped. Liturgical practices centring on the celebration of the Eucharist gave way to the art of preaching.⁹⁶ Ministers in the new reformation began to see the sermon as their main role of responsibility equating it with the worship of the church, seeing the written word and the spoken language as “exclusive representations of divine power.”⁹⁷ This led to sermon centred worship. Generally it was understood that the people who gathered to worship still lacked basics of devout fervour, Christian commitment, knowledge of the scriptures and basic teaching.⁹⁸ It was the role of the preacher to make up for these deficiencies in the education of their congregants. It was the more evangelical aspects of the reformation, those movements that were chiefly concerned with obtaining new conversions, which triggered the move from the lecture hall to the theatre as a model of gathering. While still maintaining the central place of the pulpit in worship, the role of the preacher was seen less as an educator and more as a spiritual engineer, appealing to the listener’s emotions as to establish an atmosphere conducive to conversion.⁹⁹ This may include the use of music as it emphasized

⁹⁵ Bernhard Lang, *Sacred Games: A History of Christian Worship* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 60.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁹⁷ Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in 19th century America* (New York: Oxford University Press US, 2002), 11.

⁹⁸ Bernhard Lang, *Sacred Games: A History of Christian Worship*, 172.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 174-175.

enthusiasm and religious fervour instead of “learned arguments, theological jargon and pleasing rhetoric.”¹⁰⁰

In the reformed tradition following Zwingli, we find a stronger intellectual approach to the worship of the church. Karl Barth (1886-1968) rejected liturgical pageantry, and the emotional engineering of the evangelicals. He was careful with the use of music, wanting to ensure music did not become the object of worship, nor should it be a second pulpit.¹⁰¹ For Barth and the Reformed tradition the worship space was unadorned and utterly simple so as not to interfere with the congregation’s ability to concentrate on the words of the sermon. Barth reportedly approved when seeing pictures of the recently built Christ Church of Eiserfeld, Germany that demonstrates the church embracing architecturally the lecture hall as a model for the worshiping church.¹⁰² All sightlines are focused to the front, and there is nothing in the way of art or religious artifacts to distract those seated from concentrating on the scripture lesson being taught from the front of the room.

Protestant church traditions centred on the sermon, and depended on the preacher’s careful thought and argumentation, as well as the attentiveness of the congregation. The absence of the sermon would be to not worship at all and it is this centrality of the sermon that gave the church “a distinctly intellectual note.”¹⁰³ Sermons could involve complex reasoning, accompanied by language that would not be out of place in an academic paper.¹⁰⁴ “It also radically transformed traditional power relationships between clergy and laity.”¹⁰⁵ While traditionally the Catholic Church found the power of the clergy through apostolic succession, the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 175.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 185.

¹⁰² Ibid., 186-187.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 203

¹⁰⁴ Shane Hipps, *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 57.

¹⁰⁵ Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in 19th century America*, 12.

protestant tradition found its power through the delivery of the spoken language, and the preacher's skills of exposition of scripture.¹⁰⁶ They also mirrored secular identification of authority through the physical elevation of the preacher, the elevation of pulpit.¹⁰⁷ This intellectual focus became the reformation pattern of worship until music increasingly found a place within the worship of the church.

THE THEATRE AS VERNACULAR

It was during the enlightenment period that music began to shift away from the influence of the church and became a realm with its own independent sets of values and purposes. The church generally, both the Catholic Church and the new Reformation expressions of the Church, did not hold up well as new ideas began to challenge the long protected Christian worldview promulgated by the church. A newly secular society began to form and as church lost its privileged place in western culture it found itself separating from its connection to the state.¹⁰⁸ In this period the church made attempts to accommodate as best as possible the spirit of the age. The Protestant movements tended to see God's actions as limited to the past, thus worship was less a sacrament received but instead the sacrament became the human element in the performance of Christian worship.¹⁰⁹ "Religion was gradually transformed into an ethical humanitarianism."¹¹⁰ As the church aligned itself with the ideals of the Enlightenment it became increasingly distrustful of religious fanaticism, which in practice meant that the church avoided "anything to do with the mysterious or supernatural."¹¹¹ In this weakened state the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 12-13.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 18.

¹⁰⁸ Quentin Faulkner, *Wiser Than Despair: The Evolution of Ideas in the Relationship of Music and the Christian Church* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 179.

¹⁰⁹ James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship*, 144.

¹¹⁰ Quentin Faulkner, *Wiser Than Despair*, 179.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

church did not have the resources to spend much time considering the function of music in worship in this new cultural climate. As a result music, which prior to the reformation was at the forefront of the church's ministry, was sent to the background or even negated in church life.

Yet even from the background, the cultural ideas of the enlightenment were powerful enough to affect the church's ideas about the use of music. As music "cast off its traditional subservience to the church" the role of the artist shifted and the prominence and influence of the artist rose as well.¹¹² Composers became successful independent entities guided by their own artistic muse. While they continued to write music with sacred themes, it was reformed and written outside of the traditional liturgical functions of the church. An easily identifiable composer from that period is George Fredric Handel, popular at that time for the religious themes in his oratorios such as *The Messiah*. While the music was religious in theme it had no home in the worship of the church, instead it was much more appropriate to the concert hall where it is still performed to this day.¹¹³

This changed the understanding of what music was understood to do in the congregation. Music instead of being a work of the people was something performed for the pleasure of the audience: it was meant to evoke a positive emotional expression in those who watched. Thus music began to function as a means of edification in that it was to create a vague sense of spiritual feelings, and an uplifting of the spirit.¹¹⁴ Instead of music appealing to the intellect it was meant to appeal specifically to the emotions. As a result "[s]ecular elements, indeed entire secular works, were adopted or adapted into church music."¹¹⁵ Unique church music slowly evaporated in all of Europe to slowly adopt secular music practices. It was a time of unique

¹¹² Ibid., 180.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 181.

turmoil as the church struggled to adjust. It is interesting to note that there are also records of the begrudging acceptance of secular instrumentation, and the adoption of their use within the liturgy.¹¹⁶

Understanding of the worship of the church as edification continued its prevalence in North America as the Revival movement waned in late 19th century.¹¹⁷ There was a widespread adoption of new techniques for the purpose of evangelism during the revival movement and at its end the church gathering inherited a few of its principles. Understanding that the people in the church primarily were believers, they still held to a results based ministry strategy. Instead of the salvation of the souls of those in the pews the focus shifted and worship became a means to “elevate, improve and refine” the believers gathered in the church.¹¹⁸

The spiritual life of the church was thriving in a significant way at this time as people became quite involved in their churches. More than ever the lay involvement became a significant driving force in the life of the church as leadership was removed from the concentrated power base in the clergy, and was distributed on the shoulders of a larger base of people.¹¹⁹ This environment led to higher expectations of the church in general and specifically the space where gathered worship took place became the focus of some changes. The physical needs of the congregation became important in terms of their comfort and acoustics.¹²⁰ Balconies became prevalent as it brought the congregation closer to the stage.¹²¹ There was also the desire for church growth, and the need for extra spaciousness in order to accommodate a great mass of people.¹²² It must be noted that there was not necessarily a negative, self-serving

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre*, 78.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 114-115.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship*, 139.

¹²² Ibid.

attitude that drove this, but rather a revitalized and reinvested laity attempting to be more engaged in the worship of the church.

The discipline of architecture in North America was undergoing some changes during this, as the amphitheatre became the primary model for opera houses and concert halls. Much of the experimentation with that form carried over into the church.¹²³ In this case it is not fair to say that the church stole directly from the secular model, but rather that both of them were developing in tandem with various differences¹²⁴ The most prominent placement, often with a choir behind, given to the pulpit which was understood as the central performance area of the church.¹²⁵ As the North American theatre style matured, any adoptions the church made from the world of secular theatre were intentional, and they were quite comfortable with the similarities. It seems there were two key reasons for this, the first being pragmatic, in that the secular theatre addressed what they would consider as the long neglected needs of the congregation, and this was the adoption of a consumer value in preference to values in traditional religious architecture.¹²⁶ This was also further influenced by the ideals of democracy that saw God as a friendly host to worship, and that "...being a democratic God, respects our independence..."¹²⁷ The second had to do with the relaxing of the condemnation of secular theatre and its entertainments as evangelicals slowly became more engaged in the entertainments of the culture. The church even justified itself as being a place where artistically great non-religious music could be performed as a part of religious events.¹²⁸ In the end the church

¹²³ Ibid., 118.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 119.

¹²⁵ James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship*, 175.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 130.

¹²⁷ Russel N. Squire, *Church Music: Musical and Hymnological Developments in Western Christianity* (St. Louis, MO: Bethany Press, 1962), 242-243

¹²⁸ Ibid., 255.

building as a religious theatre became a point of pride as it showed a congregation that was relevant and “engaged with the rapidly changing modern world.”¹²⁹

Music had a role to play here as it began to challenge the sermon as the central act of public worship.¹³⁰ The discussion followed two opposing tendencies: whether music should be the vehicle of the congregation through the singing of hymns, or whether it should focus more on the professional musician and European art music.¹³¹ As in earlier times, the role of the professional led to abuses and congregations began questioning the self-indulgent virtuosity of the performers; the high cost of their wages, and their lacklustre modeling of Christian moral values. Horror stories included musician’s loud socializing between performances, arguments with the minister, and artistic display for attention.¹³²

The complicated fact was that the church seemed to need professional musicians. Part of their ministry strategy to upper middle class members required the use of excellent music. It was common church practice to employ professional groups in presenting concerts of worship music or other religious compositions.¹³³ Unfortunately, it led to the practice of competition between churches, and the one with the greatest spectacle would draw the largest crowd.¹³⁴ The church used music to draw in the people it needed to volunteer in its programs and provide funding for its religious infrastructure. In this way the music became the attraction of the worship service and the sermon became something to be endured.

An important lesson from this post-revival time period is to see the initial desire of the congregation for a fuller religious experience being shaped by their desire to participate in the

¹²⁹ Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre*, 131.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*, 135.

¹³³ Russel N. Squire, *Church Music*, 255.

¹³⁴ Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre*, 137.

development of modern culture. They received indications on the way that this may not be the best choice for shaping the worship of the church as the music and musicians of the church became increasingly self-serving. Yet the trend persisted. Overall it seemed to lead to decline in religious engagement and worship participation.¹³⁵

THE WORSHIP RENEWAL MOVEMENT

Recent currents in the use of music in the worship of the church originate in the 1960's and 1970's as an "evangelical spiritual revival emerged out of the counter-cultural American Hippie movement."¹³⁶ This is the one commonly referred to as "The Jesus Movement". Coming from the most unlikely of sources it became an extremely influential starting point as it developed into the basis of worship music in our evangelical churches today. It was primarily a youth movement that developed a set of spiritual disciplines including outreach, Bible studies, and communes.¹³⁷ Young people in this movement were essentially hippies in that they had an inherent distrust for institutions, including the church, and had a passion for faith experience outside of a rational experience.¹³⁸ Their musical contribution was in how they employed the instrumentation of popular music, organizing music groups or bands for the purposes of evangelization and the discipleship of believers.¹³⁹

Two direct descendents emerged: Contemporary Christian Music, and Scripture Songs and Choruses.¹⁴⁰ Contemporary Christian Music modeled itself on the popular music of secular culture, only substituting it with strongly evangelical lyrics. It arose not as a movement of the

¹³⁵ Ibid., 139.

¹³⁶ Vernon M. Whaley, *Understanding Music and Worship in the Local Church* (Wheaton, IL: Evangelical Training Association, 1995), 56

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Charlie Peacock, *At the Crossroads: An Insiders Look at the Past, Present and Future of Contemporary Christian Music* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 42.

¹³⁹ Vernon M. Whaley, *Understanding Music and Worship in the Local Church*, 56.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

church but rather as an industry, in which artists were developed and careers formed. As such it relied on the sales of recorded music and the national touring of various acts. Amidst initial controversy it became quite influential in the evangelical church during the 1970's and 1980's.¹⁴¹ Later on into the 1990's it experimented with music videos and secular radio airplay in the hopes of achieving crossover acceptance in the secular music world. While as an industry it had its roots in evangelism and a desire to reach out to the mainstream market, it perceives itself today as a marketing segment that finds its success within the church.¹⁴²

The second descendent was that of the Scripture Songs or as they are more commonly known today, the Praise and Worship Choruses. These were oriented around the life of the church, written specifically for use by the gathered congregation, and were significant for their simplicity and accessibility. At the beginning they were “often based on a direct quotation or paraphrase of scripture.”¹⁴³ They found most of their initial uses in the small group Bible study or in meetings specifically for youth. It was through the Charismatic branch of the church in the 1970's and 1980's that the “Praise and Worship movement” was brought out of the sidelines, and gradually became the musical language of worship for the entire church (I remember this happening within my own church experience).¹⁴⁴ This renewal in worship song led to a new emphasis on the congregation's voice in public worship singing.¹⁴⁵

What is interesting is that while these two distinct branches of the Jesus movement diverged sharply in purpose and function at their genesis they have merged into a single entity again in the present day. Praise and Worship Choruses developed into an industry of its own with the sales of recorded product, the promotion of worship artists and ticket sales to worship

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Charlie Peacock, *At the Crossroads*, 173, 177.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Keith Drury, *The Wonder of Worship: Why We Worship the Way We Do*, 233.

¹⁴⁵ Charlie Peacock, *At the Crossroads*, 173, 177.

concerts. The Contemporary Christian Music industry has observed this trend and some of its most prominent artists have become more involved in the composition and recording of songs intended for congregational worship. This brings the values of the rock concert into the very heart of the worship of the church.

THE ROCK CONCERT AS VERNACULAR

In any kind of public event there is a certain presence of power. This is a phenomenon that can be observed in a sports gathering (ie. the Stanley Cup playoffs), political gatherings, educational gatherings. A power presence is also typical of the contemporary rock concert. It is a synergistic sense of power where the group is caught up in the shared experience and “it can be quite legitimate, often overwhelming, even uplifting.”¹⁴⁶ The appropriateness of this kind of public gathering cannot be stressed enough. A lot of positive things occur in all of these venues. However, it must be considered profane (as in not pertaining to religious matters) in that its force comes out of a horizontal focus of energy. It is an experience that is based on its “own components, objectives and processes.”¹⁴⁷ Despite its contextual appropriateness, it is not a proper place to begin a modeling of contemporary Christian worship. It is similar in that if we take the revelation of God out of worship we could still participate in a very real and powerful experience. But it would not be worship.

We must not make the mistake of looking at the rock concert and the worship gathering as the same, even though in our culture they seemingly have merged. That takes us down the path of treating the worship of the church as merely a behavioural phenomenon.¹⁴⁸ So instead of

¹⁴⁶ Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003. 70

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

distinguishing the spiritual realities of public worship we focus our energies on learning techniques for better stage performance, crowd control, and presentation; techniques that are transplanted from the contemporary vernacular of the rock concert. We gain the experience of the rock concert, but our devotion is found lacking when compared to the true dialogue of revelation and response that Christian worship should be. We cannot allow ourselves to confuse temporal ordinary power with the power of God alive in our midst. It is important for us to step back from the culture and critique the rock concert form so that we become more aware of its effect, particularly on the public worship of the church.¹⁴⁹

INSTANT GRATIFICATION OR SUSTAINABLE SUBSTANCE

In the rock concert the main form of music is contained in the pop song structure. It has proven to be a highly elastic form with many variations used to encompass short two-minute punk rock rants to the lengthier symphonic influences of progressive rock. However in the mainstream, at its most accessible, it is a short composition of three to five minutes in length. The pop song form has been critiqued as one that has difficulty containing or conveying any true sense of spiritual depth. One of the significant problems is in the nature of its immediacy. This was initially its greatest strength as it was used extensively in the gospel music of evangelistic crusades and camp meetings to appeal immediately to listeners and thus draw people in to engage with the revival worship.¹⁵⁰ Done well it can be an extremely engaging and irresistible form of music, but at its worst it is trivial and sentimental.¹⁵¹ On the surface these are largely issues of music sophistication and taste that may appeal to a certain side of a stylistic argument

¹⁴⁹ Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York, NY: Vintage Books), 138.

¹⁵⁰ Paul Westermeyer, *Te Deum: The Church and Music* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), 290-291.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

but ultimately gain nothing, however they are connected to other significant problems with the form. It relates to how these types of song allow the church worshiper to understand a proper sense of sacred time and place. There is a tension in popular song that the church must face in that they have an open accessibility of understanding. Historically, liturgical church tradition was more concerned with a long term sustaining of discipline. Instead of the worship in the church being subject to various cultural currents and fads, the worship of the church is by nature to be set on more solid ground. “They [that is, liturgical church movements] were strands against the cultural tide, [that] refused to identify Christ with fragmentary popularity, and perceived a depth of meaning in the Christian gospel which transcends the moment.”¹⁵²

There is a difficulty in contemporary worship in its ability to transcend the moment in favour of a sustainable practice of worship. It is much more difficult to create discipline in spiritual worship when more immediately pleasing music is available. This is connected with the rock concert’s value of entertainment, which has been its dominant message.¹⁵³ While Len Wilson describes this in his book *The Wired Church*, he also feels that it has moved beyond entertainment and now defines how we are able to communicate. He identifies the new field of “edutainment” as another model to follow and is reasonably sure that as the church improves its techniques we will have an uninterrupted “God-moment.”¹⁵⁴ This is an idealized spiritualised language that has much in common with how the theatre wants to create “magic moments” of connection.¹⁵⁵ Len Wilson is trying to come to grips with how to communicate in what he sees as the current language of our culture. What is problematic is that he interprets worship as an attention holding entertainment that should disconnect the worshiper from a sense of self-

¹⁵² Ibid., 291.

¹⁵³ Len Wilson, *The Wired Church*, Nashville (TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 103

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 104

¹⁵⁵ Judy Harder, “Theatre: A Seeing Place,” *Ministry Compass* 1 (Spring 2005): 96.

awareness.¹⁵⁶ Shane Hipps argues this is case by acknowledging that medium, regardless of its content, can have adverse effects on our capacity for intelligent discernment, and lead us to prefer more accessible and immediate individual concerns.¹⁵⁷

The desire for immediate pleasure also comes out of the use of music for evangelism that originated in the camp meeting revivals of the 1800's. One of the largest defining factors of the evangelical church is its desire to spread the gospel. Music became a significant tool for this purpose as it relied heavily on its emotional and subjective functions. This succeeded largely due to pragmatic concerns; it was highly effective in drawing people into the church.¹⁵⁸ As the rock concert has been moving into the churches of North America there is an "implicit assumption that the end justifies the means."¹⁵⁹ However, it became confused in that the function of music for evangelism is significantly different than the function of music for worship.¹⁶⁰ What was understood as a special circumstance or technique used for drawing those outside the church in, found itself transferred into the regular worship of the church. Donald P. Hustad, a musician who performed regularly as part of Billy Graham's crusades identified them as "extraordinary events" yet found "that normal church life needs a pattern of worship that is less specialized and more complete."¹⁶¹

Transplanting the extraordinary into the regular rhythms of evangelical worship has proven to be ineffectual. In contemporary evangelicalism the ultimate expressions of significant worship are often understood in comparison to rock concert experiences. One common reaction when people come back from a stadium with twenty thousand other worshipers is that they

¹⁵⁶ Len Wilson, *The Wired Church*, 103.

¹⁵⁷ Shane Hipps, *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church*, 38.

¹⁵⁸ Keith Drury, *The Wonder of Worship: Why We Worship The Way We Do*, 232.

¹⁵⁹ Quentin Faulkner, *Wiser Than Despair*, 198.

¹⁶⁰ Quentin Schultze, *High Tech Worship?: Using Presentational Technologies Wisely* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 80.

¹⁶¹ Paul Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 291-292.

identify that experience as real worship (though we are now finding a reaction against this). Unfortunately, what happens when a worshiper compares the concert experience with what they come back to in their home church the next week, they are disappointed and wonder why the worship at home cannot be like that. It is simply not possible to have the special everyday, and we set up worshipers for a significant let down when we cannot provide the revival experience in their regular diet of worship. It is important to teach our congregations that not all of worship is a mountain top experience. Spiritual discipline has been slowly eroded from our worship and we can no longer seem to identify why the artificial in worship cannot satisfy.

Not all of life is a season of revival. If the presence of God and the worship of and music around that presence are tied exclusively, primarily, or even ideally to such season, the dark places of life are made darker because God's faithfulness is denied. The possibility of sustained and disciplined growth in the communal Christian life around word and sacrament along with music that attends that life are threatened, destroyed, or not even allowed to take root. And the conflicts the American church has known are inevitable.¹⁶²

Those who write on the need of the church to accept the rock concert vernacular tend to argue their point in a strong fashion. In his book *Out on the Edge*, Michael Slaughter is quite passionate that the church needs to embrace this form for the worship of the church in the postmodern world. He sees that holding on to traditional models of church worship is more a matter of comfort and congregational protection than a matter of true doctrine.¹⁶³ He looks at Jesus as the true model of ministry and as a counter-cultural figure not content with the religious status quo.¹⁶⁴ However, it seems that if we embrace the rock concert as the model for contemporary Christian worship we are doing anything but being counter-cultural. As we will observe, the rock concert vernacular has aligned the church more fully with the values of our contemporary culture.

¹⁶² Ibid., 292-293.

¹⁶³ Michael Slaughter, *Out On The Edge: A Wake-Up Call For Church Leaders On The Edge Of The Media Reformation* (Nashville TN: Abingdon), 110-111.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 111.

COMMERICALIZATION OF MUSIC

Part of the difficulty in embracing the rock concert vernacular is in the use of music as a commodity. There is a problem when we begin to see worship as a product we consume, either in the purchase of a worship CD or in the purchase of tickets to a live, as opposed to not-live worship concert. The vernacular of the rock concert is one that is largely driven by economics and is concerned ultimately with profits as it appeals to our consumer driven society.¹⁶⁵ In the beginning, gospel music and secular music were seen as separate entities. But from its roots in the church, Christian music slowly caught the attention of the popular music world. Pioneering artists such as Mahalia Jackson, and Tommy Dorsey were in the awkward position of straddling the two worlds of church and concert hall.¹⁶⁶ However the temptation of money and success has slowly eroded the separation of Christian music from the music industry. The gospel music industry has now arisen and as a part of the rock concert has found its way into the worship of the church. It is suggested that moving music out of the church and into the concert hall can in fact have an effect on the message in that the appealing external packaging may “conceal the very message that lies at its heart for those who are not used to Christian worship.”¹⁶⁷ Relying heavily on the rock concert model, the message of music in the church increasingly becomes one of entertainment; at the very least the content is diluted by secular concepts such as “personal enjoyment, ease of understanding, and freedom of individual choice.”¹⁶⁸ There is a glossing over of the inherent cost in living the life of the disciple. The worshipping church should also be cautious of worship music as a part of the music industry, for its goals are to sell albums, and

¹⁶⁵ Quentin Faulkner, *Wiser Than Despair*, 194.

¹⁶⁶ Andrew Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 205.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Quentin Schultze, *High Tech Worship?*, 81

artists, and they are concerned with assisting the worship of the church only in that they can then sell more albums.

We also need to discuss the impact of marketing on the worship of the church. For some, this is simply a part of the vernacular that needs to be embraced.¹⁶⁹ While we generally see the excesses of modern marketing techniques and their transformation of consumer wants into needs, there is a generally acceptable and healthy way that the church can engage in the practice of advertising its worship. Mark Slaughter suggests that the only form of communication possible in our contemporary post modern society is one that identifies the felt needs of a demographic and is able to present the church in such a way as to draw them in.¹⁷⁰ I am somewhat uncomfortable in focusing in on people's felt needs as a means to draw them into worship. Advertising's mechanism is to identify an idealized lifestyle and associate it with a particular product as a means for fulfilling that lifestyle need. It is a deception in that the product cannot be the fulfilment or solution to an artificial reality. While I agree that the church needs to be intentional and clear in communicating its message, we simply cannot present the church as another product, nor can we idealize Christian life in advertising. If we do, then we send an inaccurate message about the true nature of Christian worship, and at the end of the day, worship becomes just another disposable lifestyle choice among many.

The unique place of the artist also becomes lost in the process of commercialization. Creativity becomes subject to the appetite of the audience.¹⁷¹ The creation of an artist's image, and the development of a stage persona then become important. Musicians not only have their core gifts to develop but must also scrutinize how they look and what they wear in the interests

¹⁶⁹ Slaughter, Michael. *Out On The Edge*, 36.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁷¹ Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York, NY: Vintage Books), 136.

of appealing to their public.¹⁷² In order to be a musician one must be trained; this includes subject matter such as musical tradition and history, a cultivation of musical aesthetic, as well as developing a skill set for artistic technique. A Church musician will also need to add training in Christian character as well as theological understanding. Yet increasingly these elements are sidelined so that audiences are served by at times a false image of what Christianity should look like.¹⁷³ Commercialization of music props up an appealing invitation to the world of the Christian and as a result the artist's role to help us see beyond the temporal is diminished. What happens is that content can become trivial as marketing techniques lead down empty roads in their desire to create sales, or whatever the transferable religious results may be.¹⁷⁴

WORSHIP TEAM = ROCK BAND

What has become common, as the church has embraced the rock concert vernacular, is the presence of what we call the worship team. Just as the rock band is at the centre of the rock concert, the worship team is now at the centre of the worship of the evangelical church. It is now regular practice to include instrumentation such as guitar, bass, drums, synthesizer and piano as the soundtrack accompanying music in the church. *The Art of Worship: A Musician's Guide to Leading Modern Worship* is very straightforward in identifying this approach "This list of equipment should make it clear what has happened – today's worship is lead by a rock band. A tame version with twice as many vocalists as NSYNC, but a rock band nonetheless."¹⁷⁵ The author, Scheer, then goes on to give a lot of detail as to how each of the instruments function within the rock band context. While he does give a certain amount of attention to leading the

¹⁷² G. A. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services: Evaluating A New Way Of Doing Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996), 211.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 211.

¹⁷⁴ Neil Postman, *Technopoly*, 137.

¹⁷⁵ Scheer, Greg. *The Art of Worship: A Musicians Guide to Leading Modern Worship*. (Grand Rapids, IM: Baker, 2006), 121.

congregation and encouraging the singing of the congregation, his concerns are mostly in stylistically recreating the rock concert sound. In his discussion of vocal sound he identifies that traditional worship teams have from four to eight vocalists, and he seems to find that strange and “not typical in today’s pop music,” though he finds examples in ABBA, the Mamas and the Papas, Up With People and the Backstreet Boys.¹⁷⁶ He does find some merit in diffusing the potential spotlight away from individual performers in hopes that they will be able to focus on God. The instrumental sections all list various concert artists as stylistic models. He fundamentally sees praise and worship music as “a derivative of rock/pop music.”¹⁷⁷ This is ironic in that much of the dialogue about the arts and the church engenders a desire to reengage with culture in such a way that the culture looks to the church as the example to follow in the arts. This is clearly not happening as we see that “church music is on the fringe of modern creativity. It sets no trends; it only follows trends established by the surrounding culture.”¹⁷⁸

TECHNOLOGY AND WORSHIP

As an added element in the revolution of music in the worship renewal movement there was a revolution in how we perceived the sound of worship. The use of technology in the worship setting has had profound effects on congregational participation, as microphones, mixers and amplifiers have become more prevalent.¹⁷⁹ In the rock concert, technology moves beyond sound to incorporate image projection and the use of video technology. It is argued that technology is a harmless transmitter of information, yet it is a biased tool and our use of it shapes

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 127

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 122.

¹⁷⁸ Quentin Faulkner, *Wiser Than Despair*, 192.

¹⁷⁹ Paul Westermeyer, *Te Deum: The Church and Music*, 302.

“how we perceive the world and hear others’ words and messages.”¹⁸⁰ Willow Creek is one of the pioneering churches in the contemporary use of the arts, and they have high standards and a high budget to give the best theatrical experience.¹⁸¹ If they run out of ideas from their own they will hire outside experts to help them, and their sources are from the best in the secular world. The motivation for Willow Creek’s embracing of technology in worship is their desire to connect with the language of unchurched people, which they understand to be one of media. They use technology to gain and keep people’s attention, a form of competition with the outside world to keep someone’s mind focused on the things of God.¹⁸²

The message that comes from the entertainment industry increasingly says “watch”. Instead of music in the church setting being the canvas for a large group of people, technology has enabled fewer more elite musicians to emulate the sound projection of a larger group of people. Part of the effect of this has been to focus attention and prominence on the performers and effectively silence the congregation.¹⁸³ It is fascinating that the congregation can even be singing along quite loudly, yet their performance can literally be relegated to the sidelines simply because they cannot compete in volume with the smaller group on stage. Congregational singing thus becomes the accompaniment to the rock band and not the other way around.

It is very important that music facilitate worship for the benefit of the entire congregation, not just the few on stage. However, we have a well-established contemporary liturgy that is based on the vernacular of music. Day to day engagement of music by the majority of our congregation is through recorded music, CD’s MP3’s, and soundtracks for television and movies. These mediums have become “substitutes for individual participation in

¹⁸⁰ Quentin Schultze, *High Tech Worship?*, 43

¹⁸¹ G. A. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services: Evaluating A New Way Of Doing Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996), 102.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

the arts”.¹⁸⁴ Because there is very little personal music making is going on in our society the development of the musical voice of our congregation is stunted. Even within the church, music is limited as a communal experience due to its dependence on a “preexistent package.”¹⁸⁵ The challenge for musicians in the church is to be able to use the vernacular tools at their disposal without carrying over the idea that it may be a listening only approach.¹⁸⁶ If that is not possible it may necessitate having less of a music orientation in our worship services understanding that it truly is not the voice of the contemporary worshiper. At the very least it may be necessary to limit its use in response.

Response is ultimately the key in struggling with how we use technology within the worship of the church. While technology is a powerful means of dispersing information into the cultural atmosphere, it may be somewhat like a NASA probe in the farthest reaches of space. The transmission of information may be occurring but true communication does not occur until the transmission is received.¹⁸⁷ Revelation and response understands worship as dialogue and not merely a matter of information transmission, a presenting of Christian religious content. Worship is a matter of communication.¹⁸⁸ The gathered public worship of the church is actively engaged in two-way dialogue between the human and divine. Music as an extension of technology needs to facilitate communion.

SUMMARY

As we enter the postmodern era we see the end of the church’s privileged place within society. We look back at church history and see it as the sole patron and encourager of the arts

¹⁸⁴ Quentin Faulkner, *Wiser Than Despair*, 194.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 303.

¹⁸⁶ G. A. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services*, 105.

¹⁸⁷ Quentin Schultze, *High Tech Worship?*, 21-22.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

and one of our desires is to place the church again at the head of culture. The church's reengagement in the vernacular of the rock concert then becomes a necessary catch up so that once again the church can become ascendant in setting the artistic agenda for the world, perhaps believing that we can reinstate Christendom through aligning ourselves with the culture. Yet as we looked to provide Godly influence in the common language, the rock concert vernacular has inevitably had its own influence on the church, and not always for the best. Christians need to be increasingly careful in how we hold the tensions between relevance and accessibility with our culture. The church is a transforming presence in the world, and in the scriptures that extends not only to the individual but also to the culture.¹⁸⁹ I suggest that perhaps there is another way to go. There are many vast universes yet to create, and we can still craft a more Biblically and theologically correct form in which we can employ the art of music to uniquely assist in the worship of the church.

¹⁸⁹ Robbert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 169.

PROJECT NARRATIVE

MOVING PAST THE ROCK CONCERT WORSHIP MODEL

The rock concert has risen to become a particularly influential part of contemporary western culture. It has become the trendsetter of spectacle, the definer of how people in the world connect with each other, and is influential in how we understand ourselves as individuals. The techniques learned through this marriage of technological, theatrical, and musical elements have become highly transportable and have been applied across all artistic disciplines. This is also true within the church. The use of sound technology: microphones, loudspeakers, in-ear monitors, lighting, image projection, band techniques, and visual performance, have transferred into the sanctuary of many local evangelical churches. Many of our musicians are professionals that perform regularly on the concert circuit, so our technical knowledge comes from experts that are well versed in concert techniques. From the worship renewal movement we have seen the rebirth of music in the church wholly embracing the template of the rock concert. What happens in any form of art is “that ultimately the method of how one communicates, tends to shape the message.”¹⁹⁰ We must be wise then to understand what inherent messages in the medium are being carried over and whether they are positive or negative. When one looks at the medium of the rock concert there are certain integral elements of its approach that as church musicians we must be cautious with.

When we consider the rock concert model for worship we find problems with the roles of the performer and the audience. The performer is the central figure in the rock concert drama. While the performer may speak often to the audience of their importance in the dialogue, what

¹⁹⁰ G. A. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services: Evaluating A New Way Of Doing Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996), 193.

happens is that the performer is often using the audience for their own fulfilment “to draw from their audience while ostensibly giving to them.”¹⁹¹ Through the sheer spectacle of the show, the energy exerted, and the hard work of the performer, the audience is caught up in believing that this is for their benefit, when instead it becomes a vehicle for the artist’s satisfaction in their own innate value, giftedness, talents, and transcendence. This may not even be the musician’s intentional goal, they may genuinely care about the people to whom they are performing, yet the audience celebrates the performer even as they begin to imitate them. The unspoken lesson that the audience is taught: that this is the appropriate pinnacle of success, and that they should pursue it with all their being. “Thus the performers and the audiences are united by a common question: ‘What is this doing for me?’”¹⁹² So while the identity of the performer is being confirmed through the audiences adulation, the audience’s identity is formed in their response of emulation of the performer. The ascension to the performer is where the audience finds their sense of personal satisfaction and identity.

In the rock concert worship model a false sense of community is developed. While everyday life occurs in a physical community complete with a job, a home, schools, and community centres, an alternative interpretation of reality is formed through the connection with the concert artist. Instead of the local physical community being the where one understands a real sense of self, the rock concert becomes the place where one begins to define their personal identity.¹⁹³ Unfortunately, this understanding of self is based on the fabrication of a world that is artificial in all its facets. And this pseudo-reality begins to bridge back over to reality. As a result, all of society can become formed as some kind of show. Rather than a true revelation of

¹⁹¹ Harold M. Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1993), 162.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 162-163.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.* 161.

the world, a show can only conceal, or at the very least cheapen the richness of the world we inhabit. That is not to say that all entertainment is inappropriate, but only that the best use of the arts will direct us toward better understanding our world, not ignoring it through escapism.

This also relates to the modern problem of anonymity. In the rock concert one can hide within the crowd risking no real engagement, participation, relationship, or even authentic identity. It is much easier to escape the monotony of everyday life in preference over the hard work of truly communicating with one another.¹⁹⁴ People actually have begun to prefer this as their main means of engagement in culture, providing comfort and exercising their own personal control.¹⁹⁵ However, it is this kind of unaccountable engagement that makes the congregational performance of true worship difficult.

Since the rock concert is not a sufficient model for the use of music in the worship of the church we must begin to look at ways in moving beyond it. I would like to suggest that we need to begin with the biblical model of worship as a revelation and response dialogue, and see how we can reform the use of music within the public worship of the church. What concerns us then is to understand more specifically the role music is playing. But first we must discontinue a naïve assumption that music's presence is inherently beneficial in worship and instead become more intentional in shaping its function within the church. We will need to learn the tensions inherent to the artistic goals and worship function.

¹⁹⁴ Quentin Schultze, *High Tech Worship? Using Presentational Technologies Wisely* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 22.

¹⁹⁵ G. A. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services*, 105-106.

FUNCTIONALISM AND MUSIC

As mentioned earlier, one of the most fascinating evolutions in the world of art and music in Western culture is in how the concert hall arose as a separate meeting place for the enjoyment of musical performances. This occurred not just in music, but in the wider art world with the development of art galleries, museums, theatres and other such edifices designed exclusively for the display and performance of art. Music in this setting became increasingly disconnected from any kind of functional boundaries that were previously placed upon it. Instead, music became an end purpose unto itself “that art should have no other function than to be perceived on its own terms and for its own sake.”¹⁹⁶ In this way, art is created and performed as the object for contemplation and devotion. As an artist, I hold to a high view of art, and am very cautious to make sure that art is produced in its purest form. I believe that the act of creation by an artist has intrinsic worth as an expression of the *Imageo Deo*, that is the fingerprint of God on us as created beings.

However this must also be contrasted with the idea of functionalism in art, in which art and its expression are not the end purpose. In this viewpoint, music is supposed to serve some other purpose other than its own ends. Functionalists understand “that music and the rest of the arts do not have to be so isolated and singularly perceived. According to them, the arts should be useful, near at hand, and at work with other activities.”¹⁹⁷ I think this is key to understanding the role music is to have in the gathered community of the church. The presentation of music cannot be the end point within the worship gathering.

Functionalism and “art for art’s sake” mentalities are usually held up as opposites, and those who follow either way are prone to some significant errors. When art is the ascendant

¹⁹⁶ Harold M. Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, 27.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

value it falls into two significant traps: it is generally ignorant of the fact that it is impossible to divorce function completely from art performance and it concerns itself more with quality than content.¹⁹⁸ Any time that music is played, it is going to function in some way. Many of these ways can be positive: such as education, contemplation, inspiration, entertainment, and the building of community. When understanding music within the worship context it is important to perceive at any given moment the precise way in which it is functioning, and not leave it as a monument to art. Also, in regards to quality, the content of worship must always remain of primary importance over performance values.¹⁹⁹ Guarding the content is at the heart of the revelation and response dialogue we should see embodied in gathered worship. The importance of biblical worship simply cannot become a secondary concern in the gathered body of Christ.

Functionalists fall into error when they begin to overlook quality of artistic expression for the sake of results and when they approach art as a consumable commodity that is easily disposed of.²⁰⁰ It is important to approach all aspects of ministry within the church with integrity and that extends to our use of musical expressions. When the body of Christ gathers to engage in public worship, as musicians in the church we are not to engage only as far as the results demand. We may then be presenting music only to elicit reaction from people as opposed to an appropriately worshipful response. What becomes difficult is identifying the precise nature of results, and the function must again be keyed to guiding the congregation in a proper worship response. The subject of consumption must also be considered as consumer culture continues to influence the mindset of the church. The revelation/response dialogue of worship by nature

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 28.

¹⁹⁹ As followers of Christ the central content of our worship is always going to center on the Christ event; His death and resurrection. Christ is both the subject and object of our worship.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

incorporates a different understanding of time also relating beyond the temporal to the eternal. Values based solely on the “here and now” need to be carefully discerned.

These two approaches to art then are not the standard by which we can approach the use of music within the church, though they do inform it significantly. Neither approach can be pursued to the exclusion of the other. This is understood as a result of God’s work in creation. In God’s creative work we see the ultimate marriage of art and function. “Everything that God creates has intrinsic worth, and everything that has worth functions.”²⁰¹ There is little debate that when God set his hand to create the universe that he did it with aesthetic excellence. We only know beauty because God left the ultimate example for us, and it is a beauty that is physically contained in our bodies and in all that we can experience around us. What is remarkable is the way in which beauty is so fully integrated into the workings of creation. All that God has created contributes to the functioning of life on this earth. For God, the values of art and function are connected.

This gives us a very high standard to follow and a tension to always maintain. “God the Creator has made it clear that function and worth, usefulness and integrity, are to be joined in every action.”²⁰² We must not be accused in church music of poor aesthetic values, nor should we elevate them so that art becomes the object of worship. Instead the music within the church must in some way be expected to support the practice of the liturgy. I use the word liturgy very specifically in this context because of it being best understood as a work of the people. All churches perform some kind of liturgy, whether contemporary or ancient. We must continually ask how we can take the best artistic expressions of music and use them in such a way as to serve the worshiping work of the gathered body.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 26.

²⁰² Ibid., 30.

THE TWO DIRECTIONS OF WORSHIP MUSIC

For music to have relevance within worship it must fulfill one of two roles. The first is that it can be employed as a “vehicle for worship.”²⁰³ In this case, it must be associated with knowledge and be understood as to the significance of the role it is playing. Music here is a carrier of doctrine and meaning. It has to signify the object of Christian worship in a way that is understandable and has the possibility of being accepted by the gathered church. If it is empty of divine content, it ceases to function effectively in this form. Music in congregational worship then becomes an empty shell and the use and performance of it becomes an empty ritual. This is how music can function within the revelation part of the worship dialogue. The second role music can fulfill is as “an aid to worship.”²⁰⁴ This is a facilitating role in which music becomes the vehicle of response. Music does not exist for its own purpose in worship and can be used to enhance and expand the way in which the congregation engages with God.²⁰⁵ Used wisely, it can also promote a movement of ascent in a truly congregational form, as it can bring the many voices of the group into unified expression of praise.

Music in worship is not meant to be a merely programmatic element whose insertion is meant to allow people to participate. Music used in the church must have a ritual form in that it “serves and underscores the liturgical action.”²⁰⁶ Not always is our use of music so intentional. Often music is inserted in such a way that gives very little thought to what is occurring in the ordering of the worship service. Again it is approached as if it is a sacred concert.²⁰⁷ It is

²⁰³ Stanley L. Osborne, *The Strain of Praise* (Toronto, ON: Ryerson, 1957), 27.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 27

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ Louis Weil, *A Theology of Worship* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 2002), 93.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

important to take greater care in using music so that it is allowed to “take into account the sequence and meaning of the liturgical actions, not just the text.”²⁰⁸

MOVING TOWARD REVELATION AND RESPONSE IN THE CONGREGATION

Often because the congregation sings, the presumption is that music mostly fulfils the role of response. While this may often be the case, it is not exclusively so. It is very important to understand that Christian worship is a dialogue and that music can be on the side of revelation as it facilitates in this communication between God and mankind. Music is capable of proclaiming truths about God in its own way; a way that is coherent, understandable and accountable.²⁰⁹ Often we tend to see music as a separate section in the contemporary worship gathering, perhaps only as a means to wake us up and warm up our hearts to the more substantive content of a sermonic presentation. Of, course the public worship of the church should be understood more holistically than this separated dual element response (singing) and then revelation (sermon). We need to be seeing how the music can add value to the revelation aspects of dialogue in worship, and measure it by its responses.

This is another area where the vernacular of the concert hall does not supply a satisfying model for the worship of the church. The centre of revelation in that context is never towards an understanding of God; it is instead interested in evoking praise for the created thing. The subject revealed in the concert hall is either the art form itself, or the artist performing the music, for the purpose of eliciting a response from the crowd. The revelations of these two aspects are inadequate to accomplish the purpose of worship in the gathered church. The church instead is unique in that it should be consumed in the revelation of God and specifically in the cross of

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 94-95.

²⁰⁹ Harold M. Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, 188.

Jesus Christ. In this sense the content of the church is to be guarded rigorously in its worship understanding that “the church is a prescriptive organism, ready to go to the point of death, deprivation, and even shrinkage in order to keep the prerogatives of the cross in focus.”²¹⁰

Directly copying popular music styles may not always be the best form for this. While Paul asserted in the spread of the gospel to be “all things to all people” this cannot be rigorously applied to Christian worship as a means to merely increase our audience. While the musical vernacular of our culture is an important starting point in that we are able to speak a similar musical language, it cannot be a static recreation. A static transference of musical language will bring across more than just notes and rhythms but also with it the various underlying worldview and understandings that may be contrary to biblical worship patterns. As a result, we may increase the size of an individual church without growing any true sense of discipleship. “Indiscriminate musical choice for the sake of attracting everybody means that there is no real centeredness, no practical authenticity.”²¹¹ Instead the music employed in the corporate worship of God must begin to diverge significantly from the forms and functions of the vernacular.

This may be a difficult concept for the church move toward because it is one that is not easily definable. Often secular and liturgical music are too close to really be defined as separate disciplines, and the question of how different they should be is a difficult one.²¹² Direct transference of musical style is a much easier road to follow, while suggesting that secular music and church music should diverge leaves us as church musicians very exposed. It is an extremely lofty goal to suggest, that in the worship of God we can maintain accessibility through the

²¹⁰ Ibid., 189.

²¹¹ Ibid., 190.

²¹² Stanley L. Osborne, *The Strain of Praise*, 22.

vernacular while creating a distinctive art for the worshiping church. It may require us to pursue a path that no one has traveled before.

This will result ultimately because of our sensitivity to the centrality of the cross, combined with the work of the Holy Spirit. While the church may make musical choices to reflect its understanding of the current musical language of its immediate cultural context, the church will also be increasingly changed through the content with which it is being formed. As the church we should not allow ourselves to have the lesser power of culture guiding us. Nor should we settle for the power of music, even though music is significantly powerful. Through worship we remember that the greater power of God is in us.²¹³ “The recalibrating of power, which was done at the cross and is remembered in our practices of worship, will transform our lives.” As the music of the church flows in and out of revelation and response it will begin to be redefined in a new way. It will be possible to create a new musical aesthetic for the church that is informed by the dialogue of revelation and response within the church. The active work of the Holy Spirit will be the guiding factor as we continue to discern the use of music within the congregational worship of the church.

THE FUNCTIONS OF MUSIC AS REVELATION

As I begin now to suggest out how music can function in worship, something must be said of how music is usually associated with lyrics in the church. A common quality critique of worship music is whether or not the words are distinguishable from the background of sound. My assumption is that not all music in the use of worship needs to be so closely connected to words. Part of the beauty of music is its ability to fill in where the symbols of language become inadequate for understanding. Music is a fundamentally different means of communication.

²¹³ Mark Labberton, *The Dangerous Act of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL:InterVarsity Press, 2007), 111.

However, because Christian worship is largely dependant on the revelation of God to us through the text of the Bible, words will be a significant part of music that functions in worship, especially in regards to revelation. That is not to say it is exclusively so: just as images of nature can function as a significant general revelation of God, we would understand music as an abstract art that can fulfill this role as well.

I will specify in each function how it is best suited to lyrical or instrumental forms. Also, these categories are not intended to be quite as separate and artificial as they appear in written form. Since worship is a dialogue, many of these functions may coexist, overlap, or occur in different ways at different times. This is the dynamic of worship in the church when we understand the active presence of the Holy Spirit. Despite this organic quality, my desire is to give church musicians a better toolset for understanding the functions of music and thus enabling a more theologically rich shaping of musical elements. There may also be a tendency to label the revelation functions as “watch” and the response functions as “participate” but I think the congregation can be involved in revealing aspects of God to each other. We should work hard to expand our vocabulary to include words like “listen” and “act”. Neither do I think the specific functions I identified are exhaustive of the possibilities in which music may function, but I trust they are a starting point for leaders to start thinking more intentionally on what liturgical elements are core in the worship of God²¹⁴ and how music assists them.

Proclamation: Part of the revelation of God in public worship is in understanding the limitless vistas of His reign. This includes revealing the truth about the nature of God and who He is, His role as the creator and sovereign ruler of the universe, and proclaiming the second coming of Christ and a warning of judgement and hope. We can proclaim that all of creation is

²¹⁴ Quentin Schultze, *High Tech Worship? Using Presentational Technologies Wisely* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 33.

in existence to glorify God and that every human being is invited to join in the worship of God Almighty.²¹⁵ There is a lot of scriptural content that could be worked into this kind of music and it would work well as a congregational lyrical music form. It may also work with a proclamation from a worship leader answered with a response by the congregation thus creating a revelation response dialogue of worship.

The Lord's Supper: The redemption work of Jesus Christ on the cross is the central act of Christian worship. While communion has a responsive element, it is at its core a means of revelation. Paul emphasizes this in his instructions to the Corinthian church.²¹⁶ It is a more specific proclamation to the world of God's pursuing of the human race.²¹⁷ This is the defining act whereby we are able as Christians to respond with understanding to the past present and future redemption work of God. Typically celebrating the Lord's Supper is a solemn occasion in which music plays a practical role as a transitional element while the elements are being given over to the congregation. Yet the mystery of the cross is so profound that music can be used more than just ornamentally to fill space, but rather to expose the glory of Christ's work on the cross. Non-lyrical music can speak deeply here, as well as lyrical songs that expand our understanding of the cross, and of the imminent return of Christ.

Preaching & Teaching: The sermon has been the core of the evangelical worship service for a long time as the main mode of delivering religious information. However, despite its centrality, it has in recent times been associated with tedium and anti-intellectual heavy handedness. This may be especially important to understand as we see the preaching and teaching disciplines of worship almost exclusively stranded in oration. The Hebrew

²¹⁵ Whaley, Vernon M. *Understanding Music and Worship in the Local Church*. Wheaton, IL: Evangelical Training Association, 1995, 27.

²¹⁶ I Corinthians 11:26

²¹⁷ Kevin J. Navarro, *The Complete Worship Leader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 44.

understanding of the spoken word was not like our inert world of letters and print, but rather as an event, a “holy action” or an “occurrence of the gospel”.²¹⁸ We see this in Hebrews where the writer says: “For the word of God is living and active.”²¹⁹

Recent Homiletic theory has reawakened itself to the idea that preaching and teaching are in fact an art form in and of themselves, guided by their own set of aesthetic principles.²²⁰ In this way, we can begin to see the strengthening of lyrical content and a broader application of music in the congregational worship of the church. Instead of seeing music as only serving a supporting role to the communication of religious instruction, we can begin to realize it has strength, power, and integrity on its own to develop significantly the themes of the gospel.²²¹ We can also recognize that words alone are not always sufficient in communication. “Let the dancer sometimes say, “Let us pray” before he dances, the organist, “Listen for the word of God” before she plays.”²²²

Leadership: There are two dimensions in this concept of leadership using music, that of group direction, and that of modeling. Music in the first case is a means to structure and order the congregational gathering. It can arbitrarily be used as a means of crowd management in that people expect a certain amount of music in order for a worship service to have occurred.²²³ I am more concerned with the how music can function as a modeling experience as musicians demonstrate what singing songs of worship looks like. Telling people how to worship can only

²¹⁸ Martin Nicol. “Dramaturgical Homiletic in Germany -- Preaching as Art Among the Arts,” *Homiletic* 29 (Winter 2004): 17

²¹⁹ Hebrews 4:12, NIV

²²⁰ Martin Nicol. “Dramaturgical Homiletic in Germany -- Preaching as Art Among the Arts,” 13.

²²¹ Sue Mitchell-Wallace, “New Dimensions: Easter Music as a Resource for Preaching,” *Journal for Preachers*, 25 (Easter 2002): 27.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York, NY: Vintage Books), 138.

go so far, we need to show people.²²⁴ Great care must be taken to ensure that the church is not merely inspired by watching gifted musicians worship; that musical abilities do not become the centre of attention. So the focus of the modeling musician is the congregation. They will see their use of music as a revelation, knowing that it is God that teaches us how to engage with Him, and they will observe success if the church is appropriately responding. This can encompass both instrumental and lyrical music.

Prayer (Listening): Praise and worship music is commonly understood as functioning as a vehicle for our prayers. However, in music that is quite dependent on lyrics it is difficult to find space to actually listen to the voice of God as it speaks to us. Lyrical music is a prayer of our own human expression. Yet prayer is also a dialogue and can hold this function in congregational settings. Musical interludes, and instrumental songs can create the necessary atmosphere for meditative reflection. Of course, silence may also be adequate, but music can also be of benefit as a soundtrack to listening for the revealing presence of God.

Mystery: One of the most important things we can discover about the person and nature of God is that to our finite mortal minds he is ultimately undiscoverable. That is not to say that we cannot know God in personal relationship, it is just that we can never fully comprehend all that God is.²²⁵ He is fundamentally separate from our human existence and understanding. The prophet Isaiah communicates this in scripture most succinctly: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.”²²⁶ This incomprehensibility is connected to our sense of awe. God is holy and while we tend to understand holiness as having implications on behaviour, in God it is an intrinsic part of what He is, and thus a mystery beyond

²²⁴ Kevin J. Navarro, *The Complete Worship Leader*, 130.

²²⁵ Calvin M. Johanson, *Music and Ministry: A Biblical Counterpoint* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 123.

²²⁶ Isaiah 55:8 NIV

our grasp. This is often described as the *numinous* and how one is “shaken to the core when confronted with the eternal mystery of God’s holiness.”²²⁷ In corporate worship we make attempts to communicate with and understand God in His transcendent nature.

This engagement of the mysterious is a particular area where music can fulfill an important role serving as revelation in the corporate gathering. While we can understand the mystery of God as a theological concept, theological words do not necessarily help us in engagement with the numinous. Music has the unique ability to be a dynamic vehicle to understanding things that are beyond what our words can describe.²²⁸ Most of our worship music is lyrical, in that the musical elements are meant to be the conveyance for the more specific symbols of language. However, music is the most abstract form of the arts in that it can have profound life and breath even in the absence of lyrical or ideological associations.²²⁹ This may require a different kind of music than the one used in many of our churches. Unlike vernacular worship founded on the immediate accessibility of the pop song form, this is a music that will need to be cultivated in such a way as to draw us in to what is not accessible.²³⁰ I do not think that we have any particular expression of this in the contemporary worship form, especially due to our dependence on words. But as we move into the postmodern world this will become a significant means of knowing about God.

THE FUNCTIONS OF MUSIC AS RESPONSE

Sacrifice: One of the most significant dangers we fall into in the contemporary church is the belief that worship is fundamentally for us. There is an inspiring amount of positive

²²⁷ Calvin M. Johanson, *Music and Ministry: A Biblical Counterpoint*, 124.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 126

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 136.

stimulation that occurs when music is added to the soundtrack of corporate worship. It can capture our emotions and cause us a lot of self-gratification.²³¹ In a world where we enjoy music, and are entertained by it one can understand how easy it is to transplant those expectations into the corporate worship gathering, especially when music is employed. I do not think that pleasure is unrelated to worship, but our pleasure should be in the proper object when we talk about worship, and that is in the person of God. Instead, we are often prone to allow the music in our churches to be a sensation for our own satisfaction, which we then begin to pursue in our craving for the worship experience that best serves our needs. “When man demands merely the satisfaction of his emotions, he is demanding that which worship is not designed to give...Actually, what we have here is the return of the old error of using the things of God to satisfy the appetites of man.”²³²

Instead a proper worship response is one that causes us to give up something as we enter into the worship dialogue. We tend to think of sacrifice in the common terms of giving something up in the present in favour of a future benefit. The Biblical understanding of sacrifice instead sets apart something specifically for the use of God.²³³ For a congregation responding to God with music this will mean performing your role as a worshiper whether or not you feel like it, or find the music immediately accessible. It is a music that is not meant for human consumption but offered up to God.

Lament: One of the more serious negative influences of the rock concert has been the virtual elimination of unhappy material in favour of what makes us feel good. We seem to be in denial thinking that faith in God means we should not acknowledge any feelings that are

²³¹ Stanley, L. Osborne, *The Strain of Praise*, 13.

²³² *Ibid.*, 13-14.

²³³ David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992),36.

negative.²³⁴ This has long been the trend in Christian worship and we have ignored songs of lament in favour of upbeat songs of praise and worship.²³⁵ But a richness of faith will abound when we let the raw edges of reality hang out and we declare to God the world is not right. This song has a lot of relevance today because it is ultimately a song about the injustice in the world, and asking God to act. It acknowledges that God is with us in the very real valleys of life. Also important here is confession; lament over our own sin. We tend to want our worship to confirm our righteousness and at the most, adjust minute imperfections in our character. Confession is an appeal to God's character; instead of the judgement we deserve for our sin, we call on Him to act toward us out of his unfailing love. This could be vocal, but instrumental music may be more significant in that it allows us to grapple with difficult feelings with greater depth.

Thanksgiving: Giving thanks to God is a significant response of worship in the scriptures and there are records of it not only as a personal response but also as a part of the organized liturgy of the Israelites. The personal and communal merged in the songs of thanksgiving as observed in the worship in Chronicles. During the reign of Hezekiah, after the burnt offerings, the people made their individual thank offerings to God accompanied by the musician's songs of thanksgiving to the Lord.²³⁶ This is a case where the music functioned both as a teaching of God's goodness, while enabling the response of the worshipers. "Through the musicians, their thanksgiving and joy was linked with the thanksgiving and joy of the whole congregation."²³⁷ Singing praises as a congregation will largely be a lyrical music, and its content will include thanksgiving for broad theological topics such as salvation through Christ,

²³⁴ J. Clinton McCann Jr. *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1993), 85.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

²³⁶ 2 Chronicles 29:29-31 NIV

²³⁷ John W. Kleinig, *The Lord's Song: The Basis, Function and Significance of Choral Music in Chronicles* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 131.

as well more personal responses of thanksgiving for God's provision. This is a very counter-cultural response in that it requires worshipers to move away from individualism and self-sufficiency and humble themselves before God with thanks.

Prayer (intercessory): As mentioned earlier, prayer involves two-way communication. While Christ is our High Priest making intercessions for us at God's right hand, we are also taught by scripture to pray and place requests before God. Lyrical prayers can have an intercessory nature in asking God for world wide justice, healing, and disaster relief (prayers that evangelical churches do not often publicly pray). It is important to be daring in our requests, going beyond safe, seemingly "answerable" prayers, boldly asking God to bring about change in our world.²³⁸ The music of our prayers can very powerful in displaying our tension with the way things are, asking God to reach in and make the world as it should be. This could be both lyrical and non-lyrical music, knowing that the Holy Spirit can also engage in intercessory prayer with us in a language beyond our words.²³⁹

Building of Community: The public worship of the church is a community oriented activity and it is important that our response to the revelation of God demonstrates this reality. Evangelical churches endeavour to be warm and hospitable places yet the community of believers is much more than social in nature. Worship is a spiritual dialogue between God and His called out people. Thus one of the responses in the dialogue will be to reach out to one another as human beings to display in "visible, audible, flesh-and-blood sign" the presence of God's kingdom.²⁴⁰ This would be a great opportunity to sing songs to one another, perhaps in

²³⁸ Thomas Howard, *Evangelical Is Not Enough: Worship Of God in Liturgy and Sacrament* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), 123

²³⁹ Romans 8:26-27

²⁴⁰ Thomas Howard, *Evangelical Is Not Enough: Worship Of God in Liturgy and Sacrament* 126.

antiphonal form, as the church experiences Christian community as a response to Divine revelation.

Artistic Expression: As mentioned, part of the appropriate response of worship is sacrifice. Having high artistic standards and capable artists leading the way is a part of using the arts as a sacrificial response to God.²⁴¹ Artistic work in the church is grounded in the talents that God has given and then offered back for Him to enjoy.²⁴² There is a tension here in that the church will need to reject the secular idea of the artist as an independent creative god.²⁴³ The work of the artist and their personal interaction with corporate worship must be utterly responsive to the revelation of God. Artists today will have great difficulty in accepting this; the core philosophy of their creative work is often the right to be exclusively self-determined. Yet it is a mistake to think that there is an either/or relationship between God's work and the artist, as if more of God inversely means less of the artist.²⁴⁴ God is not tyrannical in His relationship with us as human beings, and truly the artist has everything to gain when understanding again that art, especially music, is not meant to be an academic museum piece, but rather to live and breathe in the function of communication with the divine. This is where artists expressing themselves in response to God's revelation will truly be innovative and at the same time utterly authentic in their relationship with created reality. They may also be able guide congregations in recapturing artistic expressions they previously enjoyed yet lost as they moved from childhood to adulthood. Artistic expressions can then become community based, another mode of developing a community hermeneutic.

²⁴¹ Quentin Schultze, *High Tech Worship? Using Presentational Technologies Wisely*, 36.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ Jeremy Begbie, ed., *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation Through the Arts*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 7.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 143.

THE FUNCTION OF THE MUSICIANS

One significant area of challenge in transforming the values of the concert hall into the values of revelation and response in worship is dependant on the role of the musician. In the rock concert, the roles between musician and audience become reciprocal in their relationships as the musician's performance is elevated while the audience's performance is stunted. What happens in popular performance is that the musician often becomes the object of worship for the adoring audience. This would be grossly inappropriate in Christian worship to have the idolization of mankind into god, usurping the honour that is given to God in a proper response to revelation. This is quite simply one of the main areas in which the rock concert model is woefully inadequate. And of course there is a great temptation for worship musicians to allow themselves to enter into the spotlight. "[A]udiences love to be entertained...The public's fascination with colourful, larger-than-life personalities is ably demonstrated in the media exposure granted to or visited upon icons of popular culture."²⁴⁵ There are many personal benefits that can come as a result of playing for and to the audience. As a worship musician in the church it may be a simple matter of prestige that one receives from the enthusiasm of the audience and their enthusiastic applause. It is generally thrilling to be caught up in that kind of response. For others employed by the church as staff musicians there is also the very real need to maintain congregational approval so as to maintain your livelihood.²⁴⁶ The musician is caught in a spiralling trap that distorts both their role and that of the body.

The role of the musician in the worship gathering is meant to be beyond self-interest and congregational pandering. As the musician performs in public worship there should be other

²⁴⁵Jane O'Dea, *Virtue or Virtuosity?: Explorations in the Ethics of Musical Performance*, Contributions to the Study of Music and Dance (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2000), 40.

²⁴⁶Ibid., 46.

loyalties at play. One interesting suggestion comes from the world of art music in that the artist's role is to be faithful to the music that they are performing, specifically as a fulfillment of the composer's understanding of their work.²⁴⁷ I do agree that faithfulness will be a key component of a church musician's focus in the performance of worship music. I am intrigued about how to apply this concept of a composer's intentions in worship music. Much of our model for the worship musician includes the worship leader as an artist, who is ultimately the vehicle for the composition of new song material for congregational worship. This is very different than in art music where the composer and performer are typically very separate. Also, in art music the composer's purpose could be to display any number of emotions or issues. The roles of compositions used in worship need to be in service to the functions of revelation and response. Perhaps it would be of greater benefit to the body to spread out the song creation process to include a wider variety of spiritually sensitive writers. Ideally, a skilfully prepared song for worship should include Biblically correct concepts and a proper sense of revelation and response. If that were the case, then faithfulness to the reproduction of the song could have significant benefit. At the very least, it would be a great place to start. Ultimately, the musician in the church's context is to use music not to promote music, the self, or entertainment, it is to promote God.

So how does the musician then perform music and assume their proper role? The first is to understand that they are most successful in leading the congregation in worship when their performances are transparent. The music is not to be performed in such a way as to exclusively draw attention to itself or the performer. "Technical skills serve as a distraction only when they are conspicuous."²⁴⁸ Jane O'Dea suggests two important considerations in the performing of

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 47.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 49.

music the first is *generosity of spirit* and the second is *truthfulness*.²⁴⁹ While she applies them specifically to the performance of art music, they can inform the worship musician as well. *Generosity of spirit* is the ability to take ones skills as a musician and hold them loosely so that instead of feeling the need to satisfy ones impulse to perform, the church musician instead puts them into service making them “virtually inconspicuous.”²⁵⁰ *Truthfulness* is understood as a rigorous examination of motives to ensure that musicians have served God and the church in worship instead of serving another lesser master. This one requires an internal discipline of self-honesty that all musicians serving the church can learn.

SUMMARY

The rock concert, despite the cultural influence, is limited in being able to provide the structure needed to lead the church in a Biblical model of worship and its dialogue of revelation and response. In the worship of the church Music is not an art form that serves itself, rather it will function to focus believers on the Christ event. Thankfully, music is very able to communicate the content of worship as well as facilitate in response. We applied revelation and response using music in a few examples; there are probably more worship elements to explore. The challenge for musicians in the church then is to avoid the spotlight, and instead stay faithful to the content of Biblical worship. The role of the church musician is to remain inconspicuous in such a way that they serve God through the offering of their gifts.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 60.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

CONCLUSIONS AND EVALUATIONS

I want to conclude finally with an encouraging call to leaders within the church. As musicians, worship leaders, and pastors we have challenge before us. As we begin to understand music in worship we must be careful that we look beyond merely pragmatic concerns as we evaluate its use.²⁵¹ We are to continue to uphold high standards in the worship of God, but hopefully we can know with better certainty how to evaluate our roles as leaders in the dialogue of worship. Hopefully it is liberating to understand that instead of always looking into the vernacular for inspiration and legitimization we can understand a better way to engage with culture. The word engagement is a good one befitting artists serving the King of kings. Instead of being servants or slaves to what we see around us, we are liberated to shape musical expressions based on the redeemed reality with which we live “[t]o think up and make art that would not have otherwise come to being in that way.”²⁵² While we cannot help but be influenced by the world in which we live, we must continue to diverge from it, redeeming the vernacular. There is of course validity in musical expressions that occur outside of the worship of the church; art can glorify God without functioning in worship. It is shallow and limiting to expect the content of every song ever written to be centered on the Christ event. For example, art can also function as entertainment, or social commentary. Yet when it comes to congregational worship, one wonders how we can be more faithful in our musical expressions.

It is unreasonable to think that we can continue to follow the trends of popular culture and directly transplant musical dialects. The results can only be artificial, and people from both the outside of the church and from within, hungry for authentic worship, are already reacting to

²⁵¹ Quentin Schultze, *High Tech Worship? Using Presentational Technologies Wisely* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 17-18.

²⁵² Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 177.

what they see as a superficial worship.²⁵³ This is unfortunate because the people of God are to be a fruit bearing people, a people of vigorous internal growth. Our final goal as church musicians is not to forge an ascendant artistic language that we can impose on the world around us as if we can recapture an idealized form of medieval cultural superiority. The music that will function within the revelation response dialogue of the church will need to come from within, crafting its own particular voice for the service of worship.²⁵⁴

This should continue to be accompanied by the radical understanding of worship being a discipline, a work of the people. Musical work within the church should never serve itself or even the congregation. Music must serve the dialogue so that God can be heard clearly, and His people respond appropriately. “Christian artists in direct service to the corporate assembly must understand from the start that the arts must function differently here than in any other circumstance, and this takes an enormous amount of creative humility, skill and wisdom.”²⁵⁵

I love music a lot; it is a part of what God has placed into my life. It defines to some extent the person I am. However, I cannot love music, or what it may do for me, more than God. When it comes to the unique place of music in the church we cannot make the mistake of giving music too prominent a place. It serves. The church is a house of worship, not a concert hall.²⁵⁶

²⁵³ Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 189-190.

²⁵⁴ Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* 178.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 179

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

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