

Worship and Music, II

We will continue to talk about music and worship.

Father, we thank You for the gift of music in our lives as a creational gift that beautifies, enhances, and expresses many things. We thank You for the gift of music in worship to, in wonderful ways, carry forward, upward, and inward the truths and the realities of the Gospel of Christ. As we continue to strive to understand how to effectively steward this good gift in the places that we are in or the places that You may send us to in the future, give us wisdom. Put the Gospel song in our heart that would be ceaseless in its expression in our lives. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are the references that are used in both Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3. I do not necessarily see these as precise categories. Some people work hard at trying to put them into precise categories. Psalms certainly include the Psalter, but I find it helpful to think of the psalms as being already existing, inspired words of Scripture that can be sung. This would include Mary's song, Simeon's song, the song of Moses, and some of the songs in Revelation. If we are right about Philippians 2 and some of those other places that are hymn-like Scripture, it could include those too. There are at least these categories even if this is not what these words are most precisely supposed to be. There are inspired Scripture songs that include the Psalms and other portions of Scripture.

There are hymns, which fit the category of human compositions that develop biblical truths. Some examples are "And Can it be"; "Arise My Soul, Arise"; "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing"; and "Great is Thy Faithfulness." There may be biblical allusions like, "Here I raise my Ebenezer." That is a biblical allusion that a lot of people do not understand. It is basically saying, "Thus far the Lord has brought me in this Christian pilgrimage that I am on. I am going to mark this point, be thankful that You have brought me thus far, and look to You to continue to bring me further. Even though I am prone to wander, I am asking You to give me a zeal and a passion." This is the development of biblical Gospel truths.

Spiritual songs, in the original time and context of the church, probably were an expression of spontaneous songs that were sung as the Spirit led people to sing at the time. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 14, talks about speaking in the Spirit and singing in the Spirit. It is like my life when I was driving on that long trip with my family. We were spontaneously led to sing. My brother-in-law likes to sing in silly little ditties. I am not sure how Spirit-inspired some of our singing is. In worship, they had people break into song rather than words. I find it a helpful category to think of this as some of the simpler musical expressions. You have inspired words of Scripture in song, you have human compositions that develop biblical themes, doctrines, and the biblical story, and you have spiritual songs that may be a simpler chorus.

Let us talk about some ways to analyze and evaluate hymns. This is based on Colossians 3. A guy named Vernon Whaley in his book, *Understanding Music and Worship in the Church*, offers six questions for selecting music in worship: "Are the lyrics of the composition consistent with the biblical truth? Does the composition teach doctrinal truths? Does the composition admonish, warn, or encourage? Does the composition utilize the words of Scripture, a psalm, a hymn, focus attention on God, or emphasize what God is doing in the life of a Spirit-filled believer?" You can see how he develops those phrases. "Does the composition call more attention to its musical style or form of presentation than the lyrics or the melody?" When you walk away you may talk about how well the musicians did something in the song, but you may not remember what the song was about. You may

only remember the saxophone solo in between the stanzas. Lest we make too much fun of music that way, that can be done about a sermon, too. I know some sermons of which I remember some great illustrations, but I have no idea the point they were trying to make. They were just great stories. Sometimes we have orators more than we have preachers. We remember their great gift of oration, but we do not remember the context. “Does the composition cause those who play it, sing it, and listen to it have an inward spirit of thankfulness toward God?” These are some things by which you could evaluate hymns. Some of it you cannot evaluate because you do not know how the people who are actually singing it in a service are doing it. Roff talks about the kind of music God likes: “He likes music that is played skillfully, with the right volume, joy, and creativity. It invites participation and has a motivation of love toward God.”

When Jerram Barrs, a professor here at Covenant, taught the doctorate of ministry course on worship, he organized much of the course around these nine aspects of worship principles that are to govern all of worship. These could also be applied to our selection of song in worship. They include being God-centered, Christ and redemption focused, Spirit led, according to the Word, filled with the Word, involving the worshiper totally, and embracing every aspect of our lives. Every hymn cannot do everything. You should look at the whole of the service. Look at the prayers, the songs, the readings, and the sermon. It is as though you are supposed to build something, and you have all of these elements that are building blocks on the floor. Together you are building something that is beautiful and accomplishes worship purposes. You cannot make every song, prayer, the sermon (by itself), or the Lord’s Supper (by itself) accomplish everything that God wants to do in corporate, public worship. When you look at music, some people say they cannot use a song that may not overtly name Christ in it or say something about His redeeming work. But the Psalter does not name Christ or talk about His redeeming work either. Does that mean we cannot sing the Psalms? You want to make sure that in the course of the service, you are not coming across as a Unitarian church or an Old Testament synagogue. The service should be clearly Gospel centered; that is why we call it Gospel-centered worship. Exalting God in a way that does not mention overtly the name of Christ or redemption at a point in the service that is responding to even His redeeming work is appropriate. You are looking at the whole of the service.

Jerram says, “Worship arises from the community of God’s people. It is directed out, toward the world, and up to God. Worship must be contemporary and culture specific.” Look at the incarnation. Jesus was born in a particular place, at a particular time, into a particular ethnicity or people. He spoke a particular language. It is important for worship to not be in a vacuum or timeless situation. It must be relevant to the people who have gathered. It must be contemporary in the sense that it happens in this moment. Even if you are singing an old, old song, it is still contemporary in the sense that we are singing it in this moment, with these people who are gathered to worship on this day. I sometimes say we could repeat the exact same worship service next week that we did last week, sermon and all. We could use all the same songs, the same prayers, the same readings, and the same sermon. I do not recommend that, but you could do it. It could be edifying to the congregation, all of whom were there last week, because you are freshly engaging God around the same timeless, eternal truths. God shows up to meet with us in this moment of this week. God comes to meet with us because we are gathered in Christ. Using the exact same service two weeks in a row is not a wise thing to do, but it makes the point about freshly engaging, “contemporary” being in this moment.

There are some questions to ask regarding song selection. Is the musical expression appropriate to the context? What effect will the musical expression have on the hearers? Is the quality of musical expression good or bad? Does the song promote and facilitate heartfelt emotion to the glory of God? Are the words faithful to the biblical text? Does the musical expression match the content of the words? I

remember a Johnny Carson show years ago with a singer named Neil Sedaka as a guest performer. He sings a song that says, "Breaking up is hard to do." I have an image fixed in my mind of Neil Sedaka sitting at the piano, facing the camera with a huge happy smile on his face while singing, "They say that breaking up is hard to do." He is singing about how hard it is to break up with a syrupy, smiley, happy face. There is a disconnect between the words of the song and the way the song is being sung. To his credit, when he recorded it in the studio, it sounds good on the CD. It is much slower; it does not have bounciness to it. It has more of the bad feeling of breaking up with someone you love. It is the same tune with the same words. The style and manner in which the song is performed needs to be consistent with and match the content of the words. Another question to ask regarding song selection is, is the congregational song singable, already known by most of the people or fairly easy to learn? Of "Come Thou Fount," "From the Depths of Woe" (based on Psalm 130), and "In Christ Alone," probably the least amount of people would know "From the Depths of Woe." But that is an easy song to pick up and sing. It is a very singable tune, as is "In Christ Alone." If you have never heard it before, you are probably joining if you have any sense of memory and music. By the third or fourth stanza, you are probably able to sing much of it, even without notes.

One of the students I had in a doctorate of ministry class did his major paper for the class on evaluating worship music. He came up with a way to evaluate songs. It is good, but you can find problems with everything we are going through. I am giving you a lot of resources to use. Brian Jansen's paper looked at preliminary concerns of a song and whether or not you would use it. The words need to be biblically true and doctrinally correct in every way. He said the words can be distinctively Christian, either trinitarian, referencing the atoning work of God in Christ, or mentioning grace, mercy, or redemption. For example, it might be awkward to sing this song in a Jewish synagogue. He also cautions that some songs that would be acceptable in a Jewish synagogue could also be acceptable in Christian worship. If that is all that all of the songs and prayers were, that would be a problem. The song should be about God as the subject of worship. It can focus on an aspect of God's character or works. The words need to have a progression of thought, not merely repetition of thoughts. Brian Jansen would not fail a song because it has repetition of thoughts. But he is saying hymnody generally should have some progression of thought. You may use something that does not have this progression as connecting music in the service, but you would not necessarily use it as a meatier hymn for the congregation to sing. The song should be to God. There are some songs that are about God that are not expressed to God. One of the blessings of much of Scripture songs, choruses, and repetitive songs is a lot of times they are sung directly to God. For example, "I love You, Lord" is speaking directly to Him. It is not bad to have songs that are about God. In the past I have had the congregation sing "O Worship the King," which is a great hymn that develops the trinitarian nature of God and has a lot of truth about worshiping God as king. Then we immediately sang in the same key "I Love You, Lord." It gives you time to process and say to God, "In light of who You are, we want to express love to You." It is a simple and repetitive chorus. In Frame's follow-up book, *Contemporary Worship Music*, he talks about an experience he had one time of being in a worship service where "I Love You, Lord" was sung over and over again for almost 20 minutes. He said there may be some value to that, but to him its value diminished after about two minutes. So we need to effectively use repetitive choruses. Jansen says that a song should help form Christian character. The words should avoid excessive narcissism or self-absorption. They should be more about God's work for us than our work for or feelings about God.

The music of a song should appropriately match the tone and message. It should exhibit excellence in composition and be musically interesting. To be singable and interesting is part of what you have to hold in tension in composing songs for congregational singing. There has clearly been a movement in the last five to eight years from Christian contemporary music being performance driven at a concert and contemporary music being for the worshiping people of God. Almost every contemporary musician who

does the concert circuit now has a worship CD. Part of that is there is a market for it. At the same time there are gifted musicians who have devoted their lives, not to writing pop songs that will hit the Christian charts, but to writing songs that will feed, nourish, and be able to be used by the people of God in worship. It does not have to be either one way or the other. It is a good movement to have some of the very gifted people who could be going in the concert direction (which can be done to the glory of God) to use their gifts to serve God's people in worship. That is a different song. Some of it has overlap. We are able to sing some songs in worship that are also done more for concerts or special music. And there are some great special music songs that gifted musicians can do and offer to God on our behalf that we would not try to do at home or at church. Let the gifted musicians do it. So those are some helpful thoughts for analyzing music in worship.

Now let us focus on the dynamics of corporate congregational singing. Congregational singing happens in a cultural context. It is a particular people, living in a particular place at a particular time. The whole person is involved. It is language in action because it is coming out of our hearts, through our vocal chords, and into the worshiping congregation where it can be heard by others. It is not just in our minds. We are not just thinking about a song; we are singing it. It is expressive of emotions joined to and responding to content. In most churches, particularly Presbyterian churches, the most emotional thing we tend to do in a worship service is sing. This is a good vehicle of expressing emotions that should be joined to and responding to content. In the article from the Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society that we talked about earlier, Guthrie says, "The words come off the page, into, and back out of our bodies." We read them with our eyes, they come in and join with our vocal chords, the voice comes out, and then the words come back in our ears as we hear ourselves sing. There is a physical dynamic that happens when you sing that is more fully entering into worship. I see, I speak, I hear, I feel when I sing. I am responding to and expressing biblical truth.

Brian Wren wrote a book called *Praying Twice*. I do not agree with his theology completely in this book, but he says some interesting things. Luther is the one who called singing "praying twice." He said you are both praying words and singing words at the same time. Calvin viewed songs in worship as prayers. That is where the title of the book comes from. Wren says some of the characteristics of corporate singing are that it is corporate, corporeal, and inclusive." It involves the body, is done together with others, and includes all the congregants. Do not let all the men of your church tell you that they are monotones as an excuse for not singing. It is proven scientific fact that only about five percent of the population is monotone. One of the great contributions of Promise Keepers to the church is that it helped men to feel all right about singing out loud with other men in worship. One of the Promise Keepers t-shirts says, "Real Men Sing Real Loud." Wren says corporate singing is "creedal, expressing our faith. It is ecclesial, connecting us with the communion of saints past and around the world today. It is inspirational, and it can be evangelistic before the watching world."

We talked about theologians and musicians with Claudia in the last lesson. I mentioned before that there is value in having a pastor and a musician working together in composing songs. The idea of a singer-songwriter is relatively rare in the history of the church and is somewhat of a recent phenomenon. You have people who are not trained biblically and theologically writing the words and the music. I challenge those who are studying and being trained theologically to write hymn words because a music director challenged me about it. He said instead of complaining about musicians writing the words to hymns, I needed to urge the future pastors and ministry leaders to apply their training and try their hand at writing some poetic expressions of doctrine. Then the musicians will have something to work with and not have to come up with words as well. Kevin Twit at Belmont College urges musicians to write songs and not just come up with their own words. Those musicians are only 19 years old and have not studied the Bible much. It does not mean that God cannot give good words to a 19-year-old. He

encourages them to take old hymns, meditate on them, and see what the Spirit leads them to that expresses what is in their heart and what God has put there. They may have a musical giftedness to be able to take a hymn off the page for other people to be blessed by singing it. Many of these hymns have been lost to the church because they have not been popular or they have been attached to an unsingable tune. The tune may have served people for a time but it did not last. I mentioned before that Paul Jones was the music director at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. He said that the role of song in corporate, public worship is prayer, praise, and proclamation. That is helpful. There is a new tune to the old hymn, "Jesus with Thy Church Abide," that is on the latest Indelible Grace CD. Whenever we sing that I remind the congregation or people in chapel that we are praying to God. The words are our prayer to God. "Jesus, with Thy church abide." We are praying and interceding for the church as we sing. Similarly, with "In Christ Alone," we are expressing what we believe as we sing. It is proclamation. There are a few books that are helpful if you want to explore this more. They are *Te Deum: The Church and Music* and *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* by Harold Best, who taught for years at Wheaton College. When I list these books, I am not saying I agree with everything theologically about all of them. There is a lot of helpful information in them. They ask some good questions that we need to explore and have answers for.

Let us talk about style of music for a bit. At the top of the worship chart we talked about before is this quote: "Biblical, Reformed, and Gospel-driven worship glorifies God, transcends style, edifies the church, and evangelizes the unbeliever." Too often the focus of our discussion about song in worship is on the style. That turns a manner of expressing something into what is most important itself. It takes the focus off of what we are serving regarding Gospel worship when we write, select, or sing songs. Best, on page 145 of his book, *Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts*, looks at Psalm 96:1, which says, "Sing a new song to the Lord." He says it is a command to sing; it is not optional. All believers are to sing. It is to the Lord, it is an offering to the Lord, not to people. Though it is to be edifying to people (Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3), it is singing to the Lord. It is first to the Lord, then to one another. Choirs and soloists are not primarily singing to the congregation. They are singing to the Lord on behalf of the congregation who are joining their hearts and their worship to the choir or the special music people. That is helpful to remember. How you handle that is different from church to church. Some churches forbid clapping after special music because they want it not to be a performance. For some people their clapping can be unto the Lord. Just because you ask to give a clap offering to the Lord does not mean that everybody is clapping to the Lord. They may be clapping for the performer. You cannot make everybody's heart where you want it to be when you do that. I am not going to set a hard-and-fast rule against clapping. It is interesting that, when our little children's choir comes up and sings, from a musical excellence standpoint, they are not necessarily doing all that well. But everybody claps because they want to encourage the children to offer their voices up to the Lord. You could say that the adult choir could be similarly encouraged. We are praising God; we are encouraging those who are using their gifts in music. It is important to define "a clap." It is fairly confusing in our culture. It is the same with the phrase, "sing a new song." Whether it is borrowed, repeated, or brand new, it should be new in this moment, whether it is sung for the thousandth time or for the first time.

In the back of most hymnals there is a metrical index. In the Trinity Hymnal it is a page called Meters. It says CM partway down the page, which stands for common meter. "Amazing Grace" is in there. It lists the titles of hymns and the pages they are on. You may find words in a hymnal that you really love, but look at the tune and find that it is not too singable. You could ask a musician to write something that is more singable. Or you can look at the meter listed at the bottom of the hymn, for example 8.7.8.7, and interchange it with one of the other hymn tunes with the same meter. The words will match up with the notes. You will not be trying to fit three syllables in one quarter note.

One of the things that is very helpful in Best's book is his discussion of the danger of idolatry in music. This speaks into where some of our struggles are. He says there are three kinds of idolatry. Usually we stand in one of them and accuse the other two of being idolatrous. The idolatry of quality would say if it is beautiful we should use it whether it is effective or not. Whether it has any Gospel purpose or impact on people's lives, we should use it because of the quality or beauty. The second form of idolatry is the idolatry of effectiveness. If it is effective we will use it whether it has quality or not. We will take our campfire songs and bring them into worship. It moved the youth of yesteryear, so surely it will move the youth of today. People may love it, even though it does not have any substance to it. All you sing are repetitive choruses, which would have some value but not necessarily as much value in a more balanced musical diet. The third form of idolatry is the idol of stasis. If it worked well in the past, do not change it. Best says, "There is no church, large or small, rich or poor, ethnically diverse or homogenous, that will not face one, two, or all three of these dilemmas. It usually works out that the high culture, high taste arts face the first idol [quality], the church growth, seeker sensitive leadership the second, and the traditionalists the third." He is giving an equal opportunity admonition to all kinds of people.

Sometimes there is the problem of association with music. We have talked about this before. From Bach to rock there is a wide range of strong associations. Most people think of association and think of the sixties rock and roll, drug culture music. I read an interesting story about a young man who was converted out of a cult that denied essential biblical truth. In that cult a lot of the time they used the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. As a result, he had closely connected in his mind the music of Bach with the teachings of this church. After he was converted, he went into a worship service with a friend who had invited him. The long opening prelude was a Bach number on the organ. The man left. The music was so troubling to him because of these things he had just been delivered from that were, in his mind, associated with the music of Bach. What do you do? Romans 14 and 15 would say, out of love for this weaker brother, we probably should not use Bach for a little while. Hopefully it does not mean that you could never use Bach again because he is a weaker brother and has a bad association. Hopefully he would learn to understand that the problem with the cult was not the music of Bach. The problem with the cult was the bad theology. In fact, you would instruct him on who Bach was and how God used him to write music to the glory of God for the church that believes the truths of the Gospel. He needs to grow and mature in his understanding of Bach.

When I was about 17 years old, over Christmas vacation when there was a lot of snow, two things captivated me as I stayed in the living room. I did not do much else but eat, read a book, and listen to music. The music I listened to that I loved was Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker Suite." The book that I was reading that captivated me was *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* by Adolph Hitler. In my mind, over the few days that I read that book and listened to that music over and over, a connection was made between the *Nutcracker Suite* and Adolph Hitler. It was deeply seared in my mind and understanding. It was so much so that every time I heard Tchaikovsky's music of the *Nutcracker Suite* all I could think about was Adolph Hitler and the Third Reich. That was not Tchaikovsky's fault. It was great music, and it was not intended to extol and praise Nazi Germany. Finally, many years later, I attended the ballet of the *Nutcracker Suite* and was able to have something else associated with it. I was there with Beth and watched the ballet. Gradually my old association has been disconnected. It was never intended to be connected but in my circumstances it was.

The improper use of something does not negate its proper use. We talked about this before. I mentioned the church in Indiana that I served. For some there a full drum set was associated with potentially bad rock music experiences. People had to grow past that. I remember telling a woman who said to me that all she could hear in worship was the beating of the drum. I apologized about that and felt bad about it. It was probably because she was thinking too much about how much she did not like the drum that made

her hear it all the more. I told her I longed for the day that she would greet me at the door and tell me that she went through a worship service and did not notice the drums. It is not that we played them on every song or played them loudly, though at times I am sure we did. One Sunday she came and told me that it happened; she did not hear the drums. She thanked me for encouraging her to think beyond that.

The heart language of worship is reflected in song. People say music is a universal language. There are aspects of it that allow music to transcend language sometimes. But in other ways music is its own language. It is particular to a certain culture, group of people, or subculture. For someone who has never heard rap or hip hop music, to say that this is a universal language that transcends culture that everyone can understand is quite a bit of an overstatement. You have to get into the genre and, for some of us, have the words in front of you to understand what is being said sometimes. I grew up in the sixties and seventies during which time our parents were saying they could not understand a word that the rock and roll singers were singing. Meanwhile we were mouthing all the words without even thinking about them because we were able to hear and understand them. Now we have the rising generation with certain musical genres having the same problem generationally. It is amazing how that happens with people. The meaning of music is understood by its cultural context. There are customs, traditions, and circumstances of those who are in a particular time and place, making use of particular musical forms and instruments in the gathered worship service. We need to learn to appreciate generational and ethnic differences in musical expression. This is back full circle to our first lesson on expanding our musical palette and exercising heroic forbearance where we cannot. For whatever reasons in my own life experience I have a broad appreciation of musical genres. I am thankful that I do. I am not sure what all contributed to that. All of those unknown shaping influences of my life in terms of learning to value a wide range of musical expressions have served me well as a pastor in churches. It reflects diversity of personal preferences, likes, and dislikes. Part of it is considering other people's music that is meaningful to them. Because it is meaningful to them and powerfully expresses their faith, I should not devalue that because it does not do the same thing for me.

One time my family was driving on a long car trip. There were three teenage children, Beth, and me. Beth and I do not like exactly the same music. The question was what music we would listen to in the car as we drove across Kansas on the way to Colorado. At that particular time, our daughter Kristen liked the new country music, and I liked it too. It was like country rock with a little bit of blue grass mixed in. Beth liked the oldies. Eric loved close harmony, including barbershop music. And Steven loved rap. So how do you solve this problem? We all had headphones and listened to the music we liked. What if we could do that in church? But that would not solve the problem. On our trip across Kansas it solved some problems at times. But we were not a family traveling across Kansas together. We were five individuals absorbed by the music we loved. Then we decided to listen to music together. And sometimes we turned the music off and talked. There are other elements in worship besides music, and there are other elements of a vacation than listening to music on your headphones. We decided what music to listen to by picking two songs out of each repertoire that had the most "musicality." This was especially important for Steven, who was listening to rap. These needed to be songs to which we might be able to exercise heroic forbearance and say, "Steven, it is great that you like that. We will tolerate it while it is playing." We had to find things that people like in our genres as much as possible. It helped each of us learn to appreciate the value to each of the songs.

That is a family illustration of what might happen in a local congregation. The five of us could not agree; how can you get 500 people to agree? You develop worship music personalities in local churches. It is not a static thing; it is a dynamic thing. Some older people go home to be with the Lord, or some people move away. The next generation comes in, or you reach out, and all of a sudden you have Hispanic people who start coming to your church. You need to figure out what would be meaningful to

them in expressions of worship. Appreciate generational and ethnic differences.

Reggie Kidd, in his book *With One Voice*, says there are three categories of music. There is high culture (Bach), there is folk culture (Bubba), and there is popular contemporary (Blues Brothers). The Bach category is high culture, like Bach himself. The folk category comes from a people that usually do not even have an author associated with it. The Blues Brothers category is what we would call contemporary hymns. Most of the hymns in the Trinity Hymnal are in the Bubba category. It is more folk. The second most prevalent category is Bach, and the Blues Brothers category of hymns is few and far between in this particular hymnal. That would not necessarily be true of other hymnals. Most hymns in most hymnals would come from the Bubba category. “Bubba” may not be the best term, some people stumble over that. It is almost a southern term of speaking poorly about someone. Reggie Kidd values Bubba. It is an expression of a people that withstands the test of time that grows out of a folk culture. We think of Bubba as bad country music in the South. It is a generic term, though. Celtic music would be Bubba. It is an expression of the common people of a culture that has a distinctive sound to it. Appalachian folk music is where we got “Amazing Grace” and the original tune to “And Can it be.” It has some roots in some of the Celtic mountain people who came from Scotland and Ireland. They came to the mountains of Virginia, Tennessee, and West Virginia and incorporated the culture into their music.

There is a quote from Hughes Oliphant Old in a book called *Leading in Prayer* that I want to discuss for a moment. It is very helpful and balanced. He spoke at our worship conference here two years ago. He is generally a hero to the traditionalists. He probably knows more about Reformed worship than any living being on the planet right now. He spent several years in Europe traveling around and learning about the roots of Reformed worship. Probably his best-known book and most scholarly book that he has written is called *The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship*. It shows how in the early church fathers there are a lot of things that are the roots for what Calvin and others did. He says, “Hymnody needs to be popular. It is more closely related to folk song than to art song because hymnody is in its very essence a kind of folk song. We must never close the door to new hymns written in the idiom of our day. Time has a way of selecting the classics. We do not have to worry about that. What is important is that we give each generation its turn at expressing its devotion in the idiom of its day. Christian hymnody is like a great art museum. It has treasures from a great variety of ages and cultures. But it always seems to have room to show the best of contemporary works as well.” I think that is a great quote, but I might expound a little bit on it. If you go to an art gallery, there is probably a room right now in which there is contemporary art. Everybody there and almost everyone who walks through knows that a pretty small percentage of that will be in that art museum 100 years from now. Most of it will not stand the test of time, though it may be meaningful and engaging to people now. It is the same thing with new hymnody. There are a lot of songs that are being written right now that I love. My grandchildren probably will not like to sing those same hymns in worship years from now, though. They will probably say it is their grandparents’ music. They will like something else. Who decides what music stands the test of time? Write songs that engage people today. Write songs that serve a wider community, and hopefully some of your songs and hymn words will stand the test of time. Your hymn words are more likely to stand the test of time if they are well written and people love to sing them. They will find new musical expressions for them. For a lot of music in worship, the musical expression is more disposable. Most great hymn words have had multiple musical expressions over generations and from one ethnic group to another.

Charles Wesley is a non-Presbyterian who wrote thousands of hymns. In the Trinity Hymnal, we have altered some of the public-domain words to make his hymns more Presbyterian. This is a liberty you can take with most songs in the public domain but not with songs that have copyrights. Do not use them if you do not like them; do not change them to what you think the author should have said. There are 22 hymns in the Trinity Hymnal written by Charles Wesley. Next to hymns from the 1912 Psalter and Isaac

Watts, Charles Wesley has more hymns in the Trinity Hymnal than anyone else. He has written so many more than that. These are what the editors of the Trinity Hymnal considered the best loved and most theologically sound. We cannot have a hymnal of 1000 Wesley hymns, and we do not have tunes to 1000 Wesley hymns. Wesley did not write tunes to any of his hymns.

I was at a General Assembly (a large, yearly meeting of the Presbyterian Church in America) one time in Louisville where our stated clerk of the presbytery and I planned two of the worship services. We incorporated the Scott Roley version of “And Can it be,” along with a number of other songs. Somebody made a complaint against the actions of the host committee in having music that was entertainment oriented. They stood up and complained against the action of the assembly in allowing such worship. I had just finished my dissertation, and I said to the person sitting next to me that I was going to have to give a speech on the floor pretty soon. I jotted a couple of things down on a napkin. A guy got up and said, “I think Charles Wesley would be rolling over in his grave today to see what we did with his tune tonight.” Larry Roff wrote the book *Let Us Sing* and is known to love traditional music but is open to the value of some contemporary things. He is the General Assembly organist every year, and people see him as probably being sympathetic with this complaint. At that point Larry Roff stood up and said, “I want to correct the previous speaker. Charles Wesley did not write any tunes to any of his hymns. And the tune we most sing to “And Can it be” was an Appalachian folk tune of its day.” Then he sat down, and some people started cheering. But it was out of order to be clapping, so that had to stop. After that I made a little speech that is a summary of much of what I say in this class about being balanced about music. The moderator asked if the assembly wanted to make my speech the response of the general assembly. They voted 90% to say that the official response to the complaint would be my speech. Bryan Chapell, the president of Covenant Seminary, was sitting next to me, and I had just recently accepted the call to come to Covenant Seminary. When this discussion was going on, I looked at Bryan and said, “Are you sure you want me to come to the denominational seminary?” He reassured me that he was glad I was coming.