

FEAST *AND* FAMINE:
DOCTRINAL TOPICS ADDRESSED IN PUBLISHED
COLLECTIONS OF CONTEMPORARY CHORUSES

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Feast *and* Famine:

Doctrinal Topics Addressed in Published Collections of Contemporary Choruses

The use of “praise and worship” choruses in corporate worship has generated a myriad of books and articles pro and con in the last several years. A steady stream of new worship material seems to flow into a growing number of our churches. Publishers research which songs are being used in corporate worship, and assess the breadth of their usage among different groups of believers before print versions of the collections are made available.¹ Does the new hymnody found in these new collections represent a shift of doctrinal emphasis? How might such a shift be discovered?

One way of determining changes in doctrinal emphasis is to investigate the number of songs in the various themes in the new publications and compare that to similar themes in a more traditional collection. The *Baptist Hymnal* 1991 contains various indices to aid in worship planning. One of these indices is the “Topical Index” which groups together songs and hymns found in the hymnal according to similar themes. A review of the index’s subtitles reveals that they are more than just a regrouping of thematic titles, but a reflection of the range and depth of

¹A phone conversation last month with Ken Barker of Word and editor for the *Songs for Praise and Worship* series, revealed that they sent out about 1000 songs to be tested for suitability to get a little more than 100 usable ones, besides studying the Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) reports indicating which songs have the greatest usage.

doctrinal statements contained in the texts of the songs.² The themes represent aspects of doctrine

organized in alphabetical order. For example, the doctrine of God would include themes about the Trinity, God the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. The themes in the topical index that relate to “God the Father” include: “God the Father— Love, Mercy, and Grace,” “God the Father— Love for Us,” “God the Father— Majesty and Power,” and “God the Father— Providence.” The more titles found within a given theme would imply greater interest or importance of that theme. Conversely, relatively few titles under a specific theme would imply less importance. If the topical indices of major collections of contemporary songs were compared, what themes would surface as dominant? Are there doctrinal themes bypassed or neglected? The purpose of the following study is to investigate the doctrinal emphasis of major contemporary collections through a comparison of their respective topical indices.

Two representative collections of contemporary choruses are used to provide observations for this study. Since a thorough study of all published collections is not practical in a brief study such as the present one, only the texts of Marantha’s *Praise Hymns and Choruses* and Word’s *Songs for Praise and Worship* series are used. In order to be able to compare the growth or decline of specific themes in relation to traditional hymnological collections, the topical index of the *Baptist Hymnal* 1991 is used in the comparison. Observations are drawn

²Hugh T. McElrath, “The Hymnbook as a Compendium of Theology,” *Review and Expositor*, 87:1 (Winter 1990): 12.

from the grouping of similar themes to produce a concordance of the topical indices of the three sources.

Although the comparison and analysis of the musical aspects related to contemporary worship is a topic worthy of further research, it is outside of the purpose of this study. Nor will the question of the addition of certain instrumentation and more rhythmic effects to a more “traditional” song to make it sound “contemporary” be investigated. Musical style and its influence in the acceptance or rejection of a particular piece of music is a topic that merits research, but is also outside the purpose of this study. Another area that is beyond the purpose of this paper is an analysis of the theology of the texts used in the contemporary collections.

There are certain assumptions that should be mentioned for a clearer understanding of the analysis that follows. First, the reader should understand that the determination of the placement of a song within a specific topical subject heading is not an exact science. The topical indices are compiled by different individuals for each hymnal or collection. At best, one may say that at least some part of the text relates with some aspect of the topic ascribed. This does not imply that the text might not also be fitting for another topical heading. There are no universal set of criteria for such placement, or even the determination of the titles to be used for subject headings. Editors provide such topical groupings as a planning tool for worship leaders, not as doctrinal outlines. Nevertheless, the headings do provide a general way to see what themes are purported to exist, and in this manner, shed light on doctrines observed. Observations and reflections must be understood in that context.

Another assumption for this study is that a local body of believers is not limited to using only these collections. Literally hundreds of other sources are available to the local church

through the various media of radio, television, and compact disks. Nor is it assumed that all songs in the given collections or even the *Baptist Hymnal* 1991, are known and sung. Existence does not equate use. The significance in the comparison lies in (a) *what themes are being addressed* and (b) *their accessibility or availability for use* in corporate worship.

Basic Definitions

Worship: Since entire volumes exist that provide broader discussions on worship than is feasible here, only two definitions will be mentioned, that of the late Archbishop William Temple and that of Bruce Leafblad. Leafblad describes worship as “communion with God in which believers by grace center their mind’s attention and heart’s affection in the Lord himself, humbly glorifying God in response to his greatness and his Word.”³ Temple’s definition relates worship to every aspect of the human condition:

Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by his holiness; the nourishment of mind with his truth; the purifying of imagination by his beauty; the opening of the heart to his love; the surrender of will to his purpose— and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy for that self-centeredness which is our original sin and source of all actual sin.⁴

Contemporary Praise and Worship Song or Chorus: As simple as this may seem on the surface, defining exactly what is a contemporary praise and worship song is one of the most complex aspects of the entire study. If the emphasis is placed on the word “contemporary,” when

³Bruce Leafblad, from chapel message presented at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1 February 1983, as quoted in *Music and Worship: A Guided Learning Book*, Edward W. Nelson, (El Paso, Texas: Carib Baptist Publications, 1985), 24.

⁴William Temple, *Readings in St. John’s Gospel*, 68, as quoted in Donald P. Hustad *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing

exactly does a song cease to exist as “new?” Is there a specific period of time — a month, a year, five years, etc., — that one may consider a song to be still “new?” After it is no longer “contemporary,” does it become “traditional?” Those who prefer using older hymns may consider some of the songs in the *Baptist Hymnal* 1991 to be contemporary, while others may consider the latest compact disk to be “new” and the previous one “old.”

What if the “praise and worship” aspect is emphasized? The fact that the genre gathers its name from the phrase is a thematic indicator for the text. Emphasizing the “praise and worship” aspect leads to many questions. While some general textual analysis will follow later in the study, should the genre be limited to only those texts which are centered around praise and worship themes? Is comparison to other texts and themes of a traditional congregational hymnal valid? Is the praise and worship movement itself an attempt by a segment of the Body of Christ to “fill in the gaps” of the Church’s song with a contemporary voice that heralds new depths of knowing and relating to God in worship? Is it an attempt to replace a language of praise replete with obsolete or archaic words that do not reflect a post-modern culture? To continue that idea, if the language used to describe God is obsolete and needs to be updated, what about the other aspects of doctrinal belief? Should not the language in all aspects of doctrine go through the same transformation?

Centering the discussion around the words “song” or “chorus” may be just as mystifying. Perhaps few additions to church bulletins have caused more “heat than light” than the use of the word “chorus.”⁵ Because this study will not relate to the musical aspects of the controversy and

Company 1993), 123-124.

⁵One music director received a crumpled bulletin from the offering plate one Sunday with

because there is no one standard definition that neatly fits all the possibilities, no attempt will be made to distinguish between “song” and “chorus.” For the purposes of this discussion the term “praise and worship song” will be defined as those texts of songs found in published collections after the *Baptist Hymnal* 1991, that were not already in publication in a major collection.

Hymn: The Hymn Society of America defines a hymn as the following:

A Christian Hymn is a lyric poem, reverently and devotionally conceived, which is designed to be sung and which expresses the worshiper’s attitude God or God’s purposes in human life. It should be simple and metrical in form, genuinely emotional, poetic and literary in style, spiritual in quality, and in its ideas so direct and so immediately apparent as to unify a congregation while singing it.⁶

The most simple understanding of a hymn is “any song found in a hymnal.” The problem with the latter definition is that there are many texts included in hymnals that are truly choruses, and not hymns in a traditional understanding of the word, such as the chorus “Alleluia” (*Baptist Hymnal* 1991: #223). Choruses like “Alleluia” have long-term use in congregational worship and have earned a place in many hymnals in the past decades. Although a chorus, it could not be considered “contemporary,” and would probably be grouped with “traditional” hymns. For the purposes of this study, hymn will be defined as those texts published in denominational collections such as *Baptist Hymnal* 1991.

Any definition of a genre that covers such a broad spectrum of textual issues is bound to be laced with qualification and weakness. The given definitions are no exception. An entire paper may be written attempting to narrow the definitions while covering all aspects, and

the word “chorus” boldly circled, communicating the disgust in having had to have sung something other than a hymn.

⁶Harry Eskew and Hugh T. McElrath, *Sing with Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Hymnology*. (Nashville: Church Street Press, 2nd edition, 1995):ix.

certainly such a paper is welcome, but for the purposes of this presentation the functional definitions given in the previous paragraphs are more useful than many filled with nuance and multiple exceptions.

The Collections

Songs for Praise and Worship from Word is a series of three collections published in 1992, 2000, and 2002, respectively. These are considered as a whole for several reasons. The titles indicate that they are related: *Songs for Praise and Worship*, *More Songs for Praise and Worship* and *More Songs for Praise and Worship II*. Another reason is the lack of repetition of songs in the series. This is especially noted in that the last song of *More Songs* is “55” and the first of *More Songs II* is “56.” Another key factor is that the three are treated together in the “Worship Planner’s Edition.” A later addition to the series, *Hymns for Praise and Worship* was not included in the original series according to the editor, therefore not included in this study.⁷ The *More Songs* editions comprise 115 songs or 32 % of the total 368.

The publication format of the *More Songs* series generally differs from that of traditional hymnals in that the worship planning resources are sold separately and not included in the collections. The publication format for these newer collections is more specific to the user: “Singer’s Edition,” “Keyboard Edition,” “Guitar Edition,” “Worship Planner’s Edition,” etc. Within the pages of the worship planner edition lie various important tools to use in crafting the musical part of the worship service, such as modulation charts, thematic medleys, indices for scripture texts, and allusions of scripture in the songs, keys, topical indices, etc.

⁷Ken Barker, phone conversation.

The Maranatha collection, *Praise Hymns and Choruses*, is also one of a series, but each was probably not considered to be part of the previous, but more to replace the last. The first was the *Praise Chorus Book 1st edition* or “Beige Book” published in 1983, followed by the *Praise Chorus Book 2nd edition* or “Purple Book” (1990) and the *Praise Chorus Book 3rd edition* or “Red Book” of 1993. The most current edition is *Praise Hymns and Choruses*, or the “Green Book.” In each of the four editions, several songs were repeated from previous editions. In addition, the last edition added sixty hymns to its collection of choruses to make a total of 255. None of the previous editions had hymns. Limited worship planning helps are found in the various indices.

Baptist Hymnal 1991 contains 642 hymns and choruses organized into four major sections: “The Glory of God, The Love of God, The People of God, and The Witness of the People of God.” This appears to be an expansion of William Hendrick’s theocentric outline used in the 1975 edition of the *Baptist Hymnal*: “God, God Speaks, God’s Work, God’s People and Special Occasions.”⁸ The topical index of the *Baptist Hymnal* 1991 contains seventy-three topics arranged in alphabetical order from “Assurance” to “Victory.” These thematic divisions were the basis for the comparison with the other collections.

Results of the Comparison

After a brief explanation on the organization of the Appendix, the topics which have shown the most increase in the number of titles will be discussed, followed by a discussion of those topics not covered in the hymnal or the collections. As mentioned earlier, there is no standard for acceptable titles for the topics or for determining how a song may be assigned to one

⁸William L. Hendricks “The New Hymnal: Its Theological Dimension,” *The Church*

or more topics. Since these observations involve three different editorial philosophies over a period of thirteen years, care must be taken in making sweeping statements about which themes are and are not covered in the collections. Attempts were made to match as best possible titles that were related. For example, the hymnal gives the topical title “Church,” while the Word series gives three: “Church: Fellowship of Believers,” “Church: Nature and Foundation,” and “Kingdom of God: see also Church: Nature and Foundation.” The songs under the heading were appropriate for the larger heading that related to the hymnal’s organization. When appropriate, related topics such as the above titles were consolidated under the general heading. When a topical title represented a broader perspective it was reserved as a new separate category.

The table in Appendix A lists the subjects and themes from the *Baptist Hymnal* 1991 that formed the basis for the comparison with other collections and the number of how many titles represented in each. The total number of titles for each subject or theme is followed by the percentage of the total number of songs or hymns for the whole collection or hymnal, as illustrated in Table 1. For example, of the 642 hymns and choruses in the *Baptist Hymnal 1991*, twenty-three are found under the topic “Assurance.” To the right of the topic title “Assurance,” “23” is listed followed by 4 (%), for the percentage of the whole, compared to “30” or 8% of the 368 of the *Songs for Praise and Worship* series and “13 ” or 5% of the 255 of the *Praise Hymns and Choruses* for the same topic.⁹

Table 1
EXAMPLE OF APPENDIX A

Musician, (March 1975): 8.

⁹Because the detailed listing of the compared indices is some 63 pages long in 9 point Times New Roman font, it will not be included, but is available upon request.

Topic	Number of Titles / % of Total					
	BH 642	BH %	SPW 368	SPW %	PHC 255	PHC %
Assurance	23	4	30	8	13	5

Contemporary collections reviewed reveal the greatest increases in the number of texts that relate to worship. Since the genre as a whole is generally referred to as “praise songs,” this should be of little surprise. Some 53% of the songs in the *Songs for Praise and Worship* series fall under the topical heading of “Praise and Adoration: Jesus Christ,” compared to 17% in the *Baptist Hymnal*. Almost one-fifth (19%) of the songs in the Maranatha collection fall within the same category. There were additions to the names of topics in both the contemporary collections related to worship such as “Aspiration,” “Deliverance,” “Exaltation,” “God-Holiness, Greatness, Goodness, Glory,” “Passion for God,” “Intimacy with God,” “Presence of God” and “Zeal.” Another thematic area of the collections with a higher percentage was under the topic entitled: “Confession and Repentance” (SPW-10%; PCH-8%; BH-2%). The Word collection had a higher percentage of songs related to Jesus Christ as Lord and King (15%) compared to the hymnal (5%), as well as the topics “Jesus Christ-Life and Ministry” (SPW-10%; BH-2%), and “Thankfulness and Thanksgiving” (SPW-5%; BH-2%). Table 2 provides a summary of these findings and Appendix A contains the general comparisons of the collections, theme by theme.

Table 2
TOPICAL COMPARISONS: INCREASES IN COLLECTIONS

Topic	# of Titles BH	% of Totals BH	# of Titles SPW	% of Totals SPW	# of Titles PCH	% of Totals PCH
Confession and Repentance	15	2	38	10	20	8
Jesus Christ-Lord	35	5	57	15	13	5
Jesus Christ-Life and Ministry	16	2	35	10		
Praise & Adoration of Jesus Christ	108	17	195	53	49	19

Thankfulness and Thanksgiving	15	2	20	5	6	2
Aspiration			36	10		
Benediction love					8	3
Christ-Love see also God's love			23	6		
Dedication of life			23	6		
Deliverance			17	5		
Exaltation			63	17		
God-Glory			35	10		
God-Goodness			3	.8		
God-Greatness			19	5		
God-Holiness			30	8		
Healing			14	4	6	3
Humility					7	3
Love-Our love for God			37	10		
Offertory					8	3
Passion for God			18	5		
Perseverance					3	1
Presence of God					10	4
Power			15	4		
Reconciliation					4	2
Zeal			10	3		

Some of the individual songs are repeated within multiple topics, as in “God of Wonders,” which is found in “God-Glory,” “God-Greatness,” and “God-Holiness.” The importance of the latter portion of Table 2 lies more in the perceived need to add or extend additional categories, rather than the lack of hymns for that theme. The hymn, “Holy, Holy, Holy” could obviously be placed in the theme of “God-Holiness,” but no such category exists in the *Baptist Hymnal* 1991.

The *Baptist Hymnal* included several topics not covered in the collections. These topics included “Children’s Hymns,” “Education,” “Growth,” “Home and Family,” “Jesus Christ-Advent,” “Jesus Christ-Triumphal Entry,” “The Lord’s Day,” “Lord’s Supper,” “Nurture,” “Priesthood of the Believer,” “Service Music,” “Sin,” “Social Concerns,” and “Tithe.” There were also some topics which had a higher percentage than those of the collections. The following table will summarize these findings.

Table 3
TOPICAL COMPARISONS: INCREASES IN *BAPTIST HYMNAL* 1991

Topic	# of Titles BH	% of Totals BH	# of Titles SPW	% of Totals SPW	# of Titles PCH	% of Totals PCH
Discipleship	61	10	12	3	0	0
Evangelism	54	8	9	2	9	4
Jesus Christ-Birth	38	6	7	2	12*	5*
Jesus Christ-Savior	89	14	21	6	0	0
Testimony	81	13	12	3	0	0

* Titles represent traditional hymns in the collection, not contemporary songs.

Observations

Observations will center around a brief discussion on some of the new additional worship texts, followed by the need to evaluate the texts and the need to address those topics not emphasized in the collections, such as contemporary worship music for children. The section ends with specific questions for consideration.

Which doctrinal themes are enjoying a “feast” of sorts and which are suffering from “famine?” Certainly the hundreds of new songs specifically addressing the worship of God is a welcome feast. The search to find modern expressions of a deep abiding relationship expressed in wonder and awe has produced an abundance of new texts and new reflections on biblical passages that have enhanced worship. Set in non-traditional meters and generally without regular rhyme, many of these updated statements of belief reflect the post-modern culture from which they were born. The new songs speak the language of the masses in short often-repeated phrases, fit for a culture rooted in sound bites and short-order meals. Like the facets on a diamond, these new texts aid in articulating the beauty and awe of who God is and how he works and moves.

An example of the short, often repeated text is Chris Tomlin’s “Forever.”¹⁰ The song is a partial restatement of Psalm 136. The psalmist has arranged the text so that the congregation responds antiphonally “His love endures forever”(NIV) 26 times, once after each phrase. Tomlin’s version is originally written in a similar fashion, but can be sung without the antiphonal response. The following chart compares the text of Tomlin’s verse with that of Psalm 136.

Table 4
TEXTUAL COMPARISONS

Forever ¹¹	Psalm 136 ¹²
Give thanks to the Lord, our God and King <i>His love endures forever.*</i> For He is good, He is above all things. <i>His love endures forever.</i>	Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. <i>His love endures forever.*</i> Give thanks to the God of gods. <i>His love endures forever.</i>

¹⁰Chris Tomlin, “Forever,” as found in Ken Barker, *More Songs for Praise and Worship* 2 (Nashville: Word Music, Inc. 2002), 68

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Psalm 136 NIV (New International Version).

Sing praise, sing praise.
 With a mighty hand and outstretched arm,
His love endures forever.
 For the life that's been reborn
His love endures forever.
 Sing praise, sing praise.
 Sing praise, sing praise.
 Forever God is faithful. Forever God is strong.
 Forever God is with us, forever.
 Forever God is faithful. Forever God is strong.
 Forever God is with us, forever.
 Forever.
 From the rising to the setting sun
His love endures forever.
 And by the grace of God we will carry on.
His love endures forever.
 Sing praise, sing praise.
 Sing praise, sing praise.
 Forever God is faithful. Forever God is strong.
 Forever God is with us, forever.
 Forever God is faithful. Forever God is strong.
 Forever God is with us, forever.
 Forever.
 Forever God is faithful. Forever God is strong.
 Forever God is with us, forever.
 Forever God is faithful. Forever God is strong.
 Forever God is with us, forever.
 Forever

Give thanks to the Lord of lords:
His love endures forever.
 to him who alone does great wonders,
His love endures forever.
 who by his understanding made the heavens,
His love endures forever.
 who spread out the earth upon the waters,
His love endures forever.
 who made the great lights—
His love endures forever.
 the sun to govern the day,
His love endures forever.
 the moon and stars to govern the night;
His love endures forever.
 to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt
His love endures forever.
 and brought Israel out from among them
His love endures forever.
 with a mighty hand and outstretched arm;
His love endures forever.
 to him who divided the Red Sea asunder
His love endures forever.
 and brought Israel through the midst of it,
His love endures forever.
 but swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea.
His love endures forever.
 to him who led his people through the desert,
His love endures forever.
 who struck down great kings,
His love endures forever.
 and killed mighty kings—
 Sihon king of the Amorites
His love endures forever.
 and Og king of Bashan—
His love endures forever.
 and gave their land as an inheritance,
His love endures forever.
 an inheritance to his servant Israel;
His love endures forever.
 to the On who remembered us in our low estate
 and who gives food to every creature.
His love endures forever.
 Give thanks to the God of heaven.
His love endures forever.

*Sung as a response.

“Forever,” © 2001 worshiptogether.com Songs / Six Steps Music (All Rights adm. EMI Christian Music Publishing) ASCAP. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission.

Some of the songs have longer texts that are not repeated in short phrases, such as Graham Kendrick’s “Amazing Love,”¹³ but the repetition occurs in the final refrain. Table 4 provides the text for Kendrick’s song.

Table 5
TEXTUAL REPETITIONS

Amazing Love¹⁴

My Lord, what love is this that pays so dearly;
That I, the guilty one may go free.

Amazing love, O what sacrifice,
The Son of God given for me;
My debt He pays and my death He dies,
That I might live, That I might live.

And so they watched Him die despised, rejected;
But O, the blood He shed flowed for me.

Amazing love, O what sacrifice,
The Son of God given for me;
My debt He pays and my death He dies,
That I might live, That I might live.

And now this love of Christ shall flow like rivers;
Come wash your guilt away, live again.

Amazing love, O what sacrifice,

¹³Graham Kendrick, “Amazing Love,” as found in Ken Barker, *More Songs for Praise and Worship 2*, (Nashville: Word Music, Inc. 2002), 81.

¹⁴Ibid.

The Son of God given for me;
My debt He pays and my death He dies,
That I might live, That I might live.

Amazing love, O what sacrifice,
The Son of God given for me;
My debt He pays and my death He dies,
That I might live, That I might live.

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Many times the repetition simply lies with the performance practice and not the text itself. The previous examples are only representative of a host that have provided new avenues for worship.

Can these new texts be used in worship? The fact is they already are. Nevertheless their use should not be without filters. The first filter must be a theological one. As stated previously, there exists a need for theological analysis of the texts, since many are being written by those with little theological training. One must only recall the devastating results of the Arian controversy and its restrictions on congregational song to underscore the point. Another filter needed is that of historical understanding. David Music mentions three historical approaches that Christians have had in the past as they have wrestled with the use of “new music.” The first approach was that of complete restriction, as in the *Laudi spirituali*¹⁵ in the Middle Ages and some of the Pietists hymns among the Orthodox Lutherans in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Interestingly enough, many of these additions found their way into use in the liturgy anyway. Luther even

¹⁵*Laudi spirituali* were freely composed spiritual songs or canticles that were not a part of the chant used for the mass during the Middle Ages.

encouraged folksongs, secular melodies and paraphrased secular texts.¹⁶ The second approach was the exclusion of everything except the popular form. Many churches in the nineteenth century embraced the parlor-song style of the Gospel and Sunday School songs to the abandonment of older hymns. After a time, however, as the churches grew, some of the older hymnic forms were restored. The third approach was acceptance with balance, as in the development of the *jubilus*, a vocalization of the last syllable of an “alleluia.” Early church leaders allowed the long, extended melodies added to the end of the alleluia as long as they were surrounded by scripture readings and more “rational” material within the Mass. Years later Bach used one of these very melodies and texts for his Cantata #4, “Christ lag in Todesbanden”(In death's strong grasp the Savior lay).¹⁷

A third filter needed is the careful selection of relevant texts that do not compromise biblical theology. The quest for relevancy in the 1970's produced many collections with songs such as “Drop Kick Me, Jesus, Through the Goal Posts of Life.” In 1973 Agape Press produced *The Genesis Songbook* that targeted Catholic youth with favorites such as: “Hello, Mrs. Robinson, Jesus loves you more than you can know; wow, wow wow,” and John Lennon’s “Imagine.” Lennon’s song begins with “Imagine there’s no heaven, it’s easy if you try.”¹⁸ Consider the observation of Keith Pecklers, a professor of liturgical history at the Pontifical Liturgical Institute of Sant’Anselmo in Rome:

¹⁶Parenthetically, the idea that he used bar room tunes is more likely a misunderstanding of the use of the German bar form.

¹⁷David Music, “Renewing Church Music Through a Rediscovery of the Past,” *Southern Baptist Church Music Journal* (Vol. 13, 1996): 8-10.

¹⁸Young, Calton, ed. *The Genesis Songbook*, (Carol Stream, IL: Agape Press, 1973).

Liturgical experimentation reached great heights in the 1970s with home-grown Eucharistic Prayers prayed aloud at time by the entire assembly, home-made Eucharistic bread of various shapes and sizes, and the use of popular music such as Bob Dylan's 'Blowin' in the Wind' or John Lennon's 'Imagine' as the Opening or Closing songs at Sunday Worship.¹⁹

Time, space, nor purpose allow for the many examples that are readily available. The important point is the observation that when popularity and relevance supercede doctrine, virtually any music that mentions Jesus will do.

Balance is a key component in the filtering of songs that reflect individual experience. Many of the Psalms are wonderful examples of personal experiences of praise, worship, and wonder. Although the element of personal experience exists, God remains the central focus of the Psalm. For example, the 23rd Psalm is intimately personal; yet the central focus is on the Shepherd, not the feelings of the sheep. Brian Wren has written a short poem that illustrates the point:

I'm thinking of me praising Jesus
And loving the feelings I feel
When I think of his touch that I'm feeling so much
[That] tomorrow I'll praise him for real.²⁰

Referring to some praise songs, Michael Horton calls the elevation of personal experience and happiness above God and his glory not only self-centered, but Gnostic.²¹ The filtering of personal feelings and worship is subjective and not an easy process, but a very necessary one if the church is to center worship on

¹⁹Keith F. Pecklers, *Worship: A Primer in Christian Ritual*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003): 113.

²⁰Brian Wren, "God Talk and Congregational Song: An Interview with Brian Wren," *The Christian Century*, (May 3, 2000): 507.

²¹Michael Horton, "Are Your Hymns Too Spiritual?" Available from <http://www.modernreformation.org/mr95/julaug/mr9504hymns.html>, Internet, accessed 30 January 2004.

God and his working, not the personal feelings of the process. John Webster Grant recalls the adage that heresies tend to arise from the emphasizing of one aspect of truth to the neglect or exclusion of others.

He adds:

If this is so, our hymnody is likely always to be drawn toward heresy as one concern or another threatens to monopolize attention. Probably this is as it should be, if congregations are to sing with any sense of reality, so long as we are alert to right the balance when we see it tipping too far and too long. The best emphasis will not serve us well if we allow it to crowd out others that are also valid and may speak more directly and helpfully to the needs of some members of a worshipping community.²²

To paraphrase the Apostle Paul, “I will sing the new songs, but I will sing with the understanding also.”

Let all rejoice in the feast and new abundance of these worship songs with a grateful and watchful eye.

What about those themes the present contemporary songs appear to be overlooking, such as songs for Christmas, missions, evangelism, discipleship and songs for children? A simple answer might be to call attention of the need to those who are involved in the writing and performing of songs. However, this may not prove to be as simple as it might sound. The lack of missing themes may be a result of the commercial process. Much of the newer music in contemporary worship is taken from recordings of popular Christian artists and performers. Not totally unlike the sale and distribution of Sankey’s “Hallowed Songs” in his work with D. L. Moody in England in the late nineteenth century, the sale of music at concerts, worship services, and the promotion through radio air play and Christian bookstores supports the artist’s ministry, and increases name recognition and marketability. Because record companies rise and fall on the “success” of their artists, Christian or not, the company’s “bottom line” is generally more focused on profit margin than discerning the finer

²²John Webster Grant, “The Hymn as Theological Statement,” *The Hymn*, 37:4 (October 1986):10.

nuances of theology. The result may mean that what is heard on the radio is more a product of company-promoted songs, which are played on the radio and heard by the listeners. What is heard becomes what is bought and eventually appears on the music stands of the praise team leaders for use in the service. What is sung in the services is reported through the CCLI reports and is analyzed by the companies that publish the collections. Such a generalization is not always the case, but serves to illustrate the problem of meeting a perceived need, when so many other factors are involved.

The lack of contemporary worship music for children is a good example. The few texts that are available generally do not make it into collections possibly because of the commercial implications, or other issues involved. (Although beyond the scope of the present topic, the role of intergenerational worship needs to be addressed.) Are children being involved in worship and being taught what worship is? Is it modeled for them? Even if materials involving children in the fullness of worship were available, would it be used, if the worship model for the church is to provide a specific style for each target audience? Perhaps others questions should be asked:

- Should the genre of praise and worship choruses be expected to be a full expression of doctrinal belief?
- What are some of the implications of the limited doctrinal expressions?
- Should the texts be supplemental to present hymnody or substitutional?
- How can these issues be addressed and by whom?
- If the local shepherd of the congregation is charged with presenting the “whole counsel of God,” should not the music reflect the same, or should it just focus on “praise?”
- Are all of the Psalms actually statements of praise?
- If congregational music is limited to only expressions of praise, is the power and effectiveness of music as a tool in teaching and learning being forfeited?
- If one hymnody is substituted for another, will there be important areas of doctrine and theology understated or ignored?
- In that case, is the message that certain doctrines are not important?
- Is the problem so big that it is too confusing even to start?

Conclusion

Since its inception, the ebb and flow of the church’s song has been a history of emerging streams

from various sources, with none completely supplanting the other. At the point where the streams have met there has always been turbulence. Some of the incoming streams have been a dominating force, but eventually the waters became calm again, waiting for the next intrusion. The inevitable blending has been repeated from the time of the chant, the influx of the songs of the Reformation, the Priestists, the psalters, the rise of the hymnody of Watts and Wesley, the growth of the gospel song, the folk music of the *Sacred Harp*, jazz, and rock and roll. Collections reflecting these streams of hymnody have mixed themselves into the ever-changing river of praise. Sometimes only a trace of one is left, while others seem to command the entire stream, but in the end, the best of each seem to continue as lasting testaments of its source. If history is any indicator at all, the fear that some have of the complete annihilation of all “traditional” hymns can probably be put to rest. The best of what is traditional now will probably survive and the “contemporary” will soon become the “traditional” for a coming generation.

What are some practical implications from this study? One point centers around exclusivity of use. New songs on missions, evangelism, discipleship, and Christ’s life and work must be written. If a congregation or group focuses its attention on a narrow portion of the stream of hymnody, it risks theological vacuum. Hymnody should cover the total expression of Christ’s relationship with his body. The church’s song must be inclusive of all Biblical doctrine.

Not only does Christian hymnody need to extend the gamut of doctrine, but needs to reflect the understanding of doctrine both past and present. If a church sings only songs written in the 1700 and 1800’s, they risk bypassing how God is working and revealing his nature and work in the present. Prophetic messages in Scriptures often ended with the phrase “The mouth of the LORD has spoken it.” The “LORD” referred to the “I AM,” the One who exists in an eternal present tense. His Word speaks in every age. As the Word of God speaks to every age, so must every age respond to God in the present tense. The “new song” may be that response and expression of understanding.

At the same time, if a group were to focus its congregational worship solely around present expressions of praise, it might bypass understand of how worked in the past. God instructed Moses to teach the Israelites the song in Deuteronomy 32 to remind them of all that he had done for them and to warn them not to worship other gods. Moses' song was to be taught and sung generation after generation. The issue is not "old or new" songs, but "old *and* new." Each generation must seek to express through song the richness of the whole gospel in a comprehensible manner, while retaining the best the past has offered.

The concern of this study has been the various theological themes that have been enhanced or omitted as the stream of contemporary praise music joins the larger stream of the church's song. No one person or group of persons controls the flow. What might be the best response to avoid being simply "swept up" or "pulled under" by the conflicting currents as they mix? Perhaps the best way is to embrace the new texts with one hand and pass them through the filters mentioned with the other. As a point of departure for some, at least, here are some personal admonitions to keep at the forefront of textual consideration:

1. The importance of doctrine and biblical clarity
2. A clear and mutual understanding of biblical worship
3. The distinctions between musical style and message
4. The need for balance and avoidance of extremes
5. Responses directed by love, not reaction from personal taste and preference
6. The addressing of weakness or absences of specific doctrinal themes
7. The involvement from those who are theologically trained in text writing
8. The need for theological reflection of present worship practice
9. The need for continual revision for cultural relevance and doctrinal purity

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.²³

²³Colossians 3:16-17, NIV (New International Version).

APPENDIX A: COMPARISON OF THEMES FROM COLLECTIONS

Topic	Number of Titles / % of Total					
	BH 642	BH %	SPW 368	SPW %	PHC 255	PHC %
ASSURANCE (see also: FAITH AND TRUST; SECURITY OF THE BELIEVER)	<u>23</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>5</u>
BAPTISM	<u>4</u>	<u>0.6</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>5</u>
BIBLE	<u>12</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
CHILDREN'S HYMNS (see also: HOME AND FAMILY)	<u>37</u>	<u>6</u>				
CHURCH (see also: FAMILY OF GOD; FELLOWSHIP OF BELIEVERS; GROWTH; MISSION)	<u>23</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>3</u>
CITIZENSHIP, CHRISTIAN (see Social Concerns)	<u>7</u>	<u>1</u>				
COMFORT (see also: GUIDANCE AND CARE; SECURITY OF THE BELIEVER; GOD THE FATHER-PROVIDENCE; GOD THE "FATHER-LOVE FOR US)	<u>66</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>37</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>10</u>
COMMITMENT AND CONSECRATION (see also: COURAGE; DISCIPLESHIP; GROWTH; HOLINESS AND PURITY; SERVANTHOOD)	<u>79</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>52</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>3</u>
CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE (see also: INVITATION-CONSECRATION; INVITATION-SALVATION; FORGIVENESS)	<u>15</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>38</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>8</u>
COURAGE (see also: COMMITMENT AND CONSECRATION)	<u>18</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>3</u>
CREATION (see also: GOD THE FATHER-MAJESTY AND POWER)	<u>19</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>3</u>		
DISCIPLESHIP (see also: COMMITMENT AND CONSECRATION; FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD; SERVANTHOOD)	<u>61</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>3</u>		
EDUCATION (see also: GROWTH; GUIDANCE AND CARE; NURTURE)	<u>10</u>	<u>2</u>				
ETERNAL LIFE (see also: FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD; HEAVEN; JESUS CHRIST RETURN; SECURITY OF THE BELIEVER)	<u>39</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>3</u>		
EVANGELISM (see also: MISSION; TESTIMONY)	<u>54</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>4</u>
FAITH AND TRUST (see also: ASSURANCE; GOD THE FATHER-PROVIDENCE; GUIDANCE AND CARE; HOPE)	<u>39</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>3</u>
FELLOWSHIP OF BELIEVERS (see also: CHURCH)	<u>22</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>6</u>
FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD (see also: DISCIPLESHIP; JESUS)	<u>44</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>5</u>
FORGIVENESS (see also: CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE; INVITATION- CONSECRATION; INVITATION-SALVATION; JESUS "CHRIST-LOVE FOR US; SALVATION).	<u>33</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>4</u>
GOD THE FATHER FAITHFULNESS	<u>11</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>5</u>		
GOD THE FATHER-LOVE, MERCY, AND GRACE (see also: GRACE; REDEMPTION; SALVATION)	<u>38</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>5</u>
GOD THE FATHER-LOVE FOR US (see also: COMFORT)	<u>21</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>9</u>		

GOD THE FATHER-MAJESTY AND POWER (see also: CREATION)	<u>39</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>48</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>7</u>	
GOD THE FATHER PROVIDENCE (see also: COMFORT; FAITH AND TRUST; SECURITY OF THE BELIEVER)	<u>24</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>9</u>	
				GRACE (see also: GOD THE		<u>11</u>	
GROWTH (see also CHURCH; EDUCATION; COMMITMENT AND CONSECRATION; NURTURE)	<u>29</u>	<u>5</u>					
GUIDANCE AND CARE (see also: COMFORT; EDUCATION; FAITH AND TRUST)	<u>54</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>5</u>	
HEAVEN (see also: ETERNAL LIFE)	<u>25</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>3</u>			
HOLINESS AND PURITY (see also: COMMITMENT AND CONSECRATION)	<u>18</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>4</u>	
HOLY SPIRIT (see also: PRAYER; TRINITY)	<u>17</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>3</u>	
HOME AND FAMILY (see also: CHILDREN'S HYMNS)	<u>10</u>	<u>2</u>					
HOPE (see also: FAITH AND TRUST)	<u>21</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>2</u>	
INVITATION-CONSECRATION (see also: FORGIVENESS; CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE)	<u>31</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>9</u>	
INVITATION-SALVATION (see also: FORGIVENESS; CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE)	<u>30</u>	<u>5</u>					
JESUS CHRIST-ADVENT	<u>6</u>	<u>1</u>					
JESUS CHRIST-ASCENSION	<u>4</u>	<u>0.6</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>2</u>			
JESUS CHRIST-BIRTH	<u>38</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>5</u>	
JESUS CHRIST-BLOOD	<u>35</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>5</u>			
JESUS CHRIST-CROSS (see also: REDEMPTION; SALVATION)	<u>61</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>5</u>	
JESUS CHRIST-FRIEND (see also: FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD)	<u>25</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>6</u>	
JESUS CHRIST-KING / JESUS CHRIST-LORDSHIP	<u>35</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>57</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>5</u>	
JESUS CHRIST-LIFE AND MINISTRY	<u>16</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>10</u>			
JESUS CHRIST-LOVE FOR US (see also: FORGIVENESS)	<u>41</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>3</u>	
JESUS CHRIST-NAME	<u>34</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>5</u>	
JESUS CHRIST-RESURRECTION	<u>31</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>7</u>	
JESUS CHRIST-RETURN (see also: ETERNAL LIFE)	<u>18</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>3</u>			
JESUS CHRIST-SAVIOR	<u>89</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>6</u>			
JESUS CHRIST-TRIUMPHAL ENTRY JOY (see also: PRAISE AND ADORATION-GOD THE FATHER; PRAISE AND ADORATION-JESUS	<u>6</u>	<u>1</u>					
'CHRIST; THANKFULNESS AND THANKSGIVING; VICTORY)							

JOY	<u>31</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>4</u>
THE LORD'S DAY	<u>5</u>	<u>1</u>				
LORD'S SUPPER	<u>15</u>	<u>2</u>				
MINISTRY, CHRISTIAN (see also: SERVANTHOOD)	<u>36</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>2</u>
MISSION (see also: CHURCH; EVANGELISM; TESTIMONY)	<u>37</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>5</u>
				NURTURE (see also:		<u>16</u>
OBEDIENCE (see: DISCIPLESHP; COMMITMENT AND CONSECRATION)	<u>0</u>		<u>9</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>4</u>
PEACE ON EARTH (see also: SOCIAL CONCERNS)	<u>12</u>	<u>2</u>				
PEACE WITH GOD	<u>25</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>4</u>
PENTECOST (see: HOLY SPIRIT) PRAISE AND ADORATION GOD THE FATHER (see also: JOY; THANKFULNESS AND THANKSGIVING)	<u>65</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>3</u>
PRAISE AND ADORATION JESUS CHRIST (see also: JOY; THANKFULNESS AND THANKSGIVING)	<u>108</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>195</u>	<u>53</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>19</u>
PRAYER (see also: FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD; HOLY SPIRIT)	<u>21</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>3</u>
PRIESTHOOD OF THE BELIEVER	<u>4</u>	<u>0.6</u>				
REDEMPTION (see also: GOD THE FATHER-LOVE, MERCY, AND GRACE; JESUS CHRIST-CROSS; SALVATION)	<u>12</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>6</u>		
SALVATION (see also: GOD THE FATHER-LOVE, MERCY, AND GRACE; JESUS CHRIST- CROSS; FORGIVENESS, REDEMPTION)	<u>32</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>4</u>		
SECURITY OF THE BELIEVER (see also: ASSURANCE; GOD THE FATHER- PROVIDENCE; COMFORT; ETERNAL LIFE)	<u>14</u>	<u>2</u>				
SERVANTHOOD (see also: COMMITMENT AND CONSECRATION; DISCIPLESHP; MINISTRY, CHRISTIAN; SERVICE; STEWARDSHIP; TESTIMONY)	<u>13</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>0.8</u>		
SERVICE MUSIC	<u>28</u>	<u>4</u>				
SIN	<u>23</u>	<u>4</u>				
SOCIAL CONCERNS (see also: CITIZENSHIP, CHRISTIAN; PEACE ON EARTH)	<u>35</u>	<u>5</u>				
STEWARDSHIP (see also: SERVANTHOOD)	<u>15</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>1</u>		
TESTIMONY (see also: EVANGELISM; MISSION; SERVANTHOOD; SERVICE)	<u>81</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>3</u>		
THANKFULNESS AND /THANKSGIVING (see also: PRAISE AND ADORATION-GOD THE FATHER; JESUS CHRIST-OUR LOVE FOR HIM; PRAISE AND ADORATION-JESUS CHRIST; JOY)	<u>15</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>2</u>
TITHE (see: STEWARDSHIP) TRINITY (see also: HOLY SPIRIT)	<u>20</u>	<u>3</u>				
VICTORY (see also: JOY)	<u>36</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>5</u>

Topics not found in Baptist Hymnal						
<u>Aspiration</u>			<u>36</u>	<u>10</u>		
<u>Benediction</u>					<u>8</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Christ - Love see also God's love</u>			<u>23</u>	<u>6</u>		
<u>Dedication of Life-see also Commitment & Consecration</u>			<u>23</u>	<u>6</u>		
<u>Deliverance</u>			<u>17</u>	<u>5</u>		
<u>Exaltation</u>			<u>63</u>	<u>17</u>		
				<u>God</u>		
<u>God - Goodness</u>			<u>3</u>	<u>0.8</u>		
<u>God - Greatness see also God-Glory, God Majesty and Power</u>			<u>19</u>	<u>5</u>		
<u>God - Holiness see also Holiness and Purity</u>			<u>30</u>	<u>8</u>		
<u>Healing</u>			<u>14</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Humility</u>					<u>7</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Love-Our Love for God see Intimacy with God, Passion for God, Zeal</u>			<u>37</u>	<u>10</u>		
<u>Offertory</u>					<u>8</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Passion for God- see Intimacy with God, Love - Our Love for God</u>			<u>18</u>	<u>5</u>		
<u>Perseverance</u>					<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Presence of God</u>					<u>10</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Power see also Holy Spirit</u>			<u>15</u>	<u>4</u>		
<u>Reconciliation</u>					<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Zeal see also Love- Our Love for God, Passion for God</u>			<u>10</u>	<u>3</u>		

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