“Theologically astute, musically adept, and practical, Paul Jones’s *Singing and Making Music* is an important entry into the current discussion of public worship and music. For those serious about attaining a robust biblical understanding and practice of music as handmaiden to theology, Jones is a must-read. Constructively provocative, learned, and commonsensical, this volume is a treasure trove for pastors, church musicians and Christians who want to build a biblical theology of music and worship, as well as address the most pressing issues of today’s ‘worship wars’ positively and pastorally.”

**J. Ligon Duncan III**  
Senior Minister, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS  
President, Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals

“We live in an age of worship wars and worship controversies. Beyond all this, many evangelical churches have simply lost any vision of true Christian worship. The authority of our scriptural foundation and the riches of the church’s heritage are neglected in favor of superficial entertainment and endless innovations. Paul S. Jones offers a much-needed corrective in *Singing and Making Music*. A wonderfully skilled musician, Dr. Jones combines keen theological insights with fascinating historical background. This book arrives just in time and will help Christians to rethink worship—and to recover its authentic splendor.”

**R. Albert Mohler Jr.**  
President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY

“As Organist and Music Director of historic Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, Dr. Jones is at the center of Philadelphia’s arts community, halfway between Curtis Institute and the Kimmel Center, where the Philadelphia Orchestra has for generations shaped the musical edu-
cation of our nation. For the last several years it has been my privilege to have worshiped at Tenth Church and Sunday after Sunday to have been inspired by the worship music he has so brilliantly directed. Both my wife and my daughter have sung in his choir, which almost makes him a member of the family! Such high academic qualifications and such refined artistic taste are rarely found together in one person. This book gives us insight into the genius of his Christian witness in one of the music centers of our nation.”

Hughes Oliphant Old
Dean, Institute for Reformed Worship, Erskine Seminary
Lecturer, Princeton Theological Seminary

“Music and ministry are intimately woven together throughout the Scriptures. Paul Jones’s well-written and timely book provides our Reformed and Presbyterian churches with a fresh and passionate guide to the spiritual fabric of musical sound and sound theology. Pastors, teachers, and musicians will grow in wisdom and worship as they reflect on this study of the praise of our sovereign God of redeeming grace through church music.”

Peter A. Lillback
President, Westminster Theological Seminary
Senior Pastor, Proclamation Presbyterian Church, Bryn Mawr, PA

“The church in every generation needs to be reminded that true praise begins with God and his glory, and not man and his need. Paul Jones sounds this note loud and clear in what is a very helpful book.”

Alistair Begg
Truth for Life; Senior Pastor, Parkside Church, Cleveland, OH

“This book calls us back to biblical worship with theological content as the priority in today’s church.”

Clayton Erb
Minister of Worship and Music, Grace Community Church,
Sun Valley, CA
Singing and Making Music

Issues in Church Music Today

PAUL S. JONES

Foreword by Eric J. Alexander

PUBLISHING
P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817
© 2006 by Paul S. Jones

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—except for brief quotations for the purpose of review or comment, without the prior permission of the publisher, P&R Publishing Company, P.O. Box 817, Phillipsburg, New Jersey 08865-0817.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

*Page design and typesetting by Lakeside Design Plus*

Printed in the United States of America

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Jones, Paul S., 1969–
Singing and making music : issues in church music today / Paul S. Jones ; foreword by Eric J. Alexander.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN-10: 0-87552-617-9 (pbk.)
1. Music in churches. 2. Church music. I. Title.

ML3001.J66 2006
264'.2—dc22 2005057514
To

my parents, Eric and Sharon Jones
who taught me to think, work, live, and love

with deep gratitude to

Samuel Hsu
and
James Montgomery Boice

The LORD is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father’s God, and I will exalt him.
—Exodus 15:2
Contents

Foreword ix
Preface xi
Acknowledgments xvi

Part 1: Corporate Worship 1
1. Sermon in Song: Sacred Music as Proclamation 3
2. Sacred Music as Prayer 10
3. Applause: For Whom Are You Clapping? 18
5. King David’s Praise Team 32
6. Leading in Worship as Accompanist 41
7. Authenticity in Corporate Worship Music 50
8. Service Music: What’s It All About? 57

Part 2: Hymnody and Psalmody 69
9. Trinitarian Hymnody 71
10. Hymns in Your Church 77
11. What Psalm Ascriptions Tell Us 83
12. Writing Hymns 94
13. Song in the Bible 99
15. Why Every Christian Should Sing 123

Part 3: Issues 131
17. What Does a Biblical Music Director Look Like? 139
18. Teaching Children Music at Church 148
19. Music in the Small Church: Where Do We Go from Here? 155
20. So You Want a Better Organ 164
21. Luther and Bar Song: The Truth, Please! 171
22. Misconceptions about Church Music 179
23. What Happened to Hymns? 189
24. Musical Ignorance versus Musical Arrogance 197

Part 4: Composers and Composition 205
25. J. S. Bach and Musical Hermeneutics—Part 1: Bach, the Evangelical Composer/Preacher 207
27. Heinrich Schütz: A Hermeneutical Composer 223
28. Felix Mendelssohn’s Psalm Settings 238
29. Evidence of Igor Stravinsky’s Faith: The Symphony of Psalms 251
30. The Anatomy of a Hymn Tune 267
31. Criteria for Good Church Music 276

Conclusion: Three Principles That Would Change Church Music Today 281

Appendix 1: Thoughts about Music 285
Appendix 2: A Philosophy–Theology of Music for Tenth Presbyterian Church 296
Index of Subjects and Names 307
Singing and Making Music is a splendid collection of essays, covering a very wide field. It is one of the most relevant books on the ministry of music for twenty-first-century churches seeking to deal biblically with this subject. Because it emphasizes biblical principles and not just local methodology, it applies not just to large churches like Tenth Presbyterian in Philadelphia, where the author serves as organist and music director, but to all kinds of fellowships of God’s people, large and small, urban, suburban, and rural.

Someone has described “any Tenth service” as “a cross section of racial, ethnic, socio-economic and age groups . . . students, young families and old, suits and dresses, jeans and T-shirts—all holding hymnbooks, standing side by side, singing all verses of a hymn.” The point is that by upholding biblical principles and musical excellence, we should be teaching and exemplifying what is as universally relevant as Scripture itself.

Dr. Paul Jones ranks among the finest church musicians I have ever known. His gifts, standards, and skills as a soloist, accompanist, and conductor, and as a trainer and teacher of choirs, are remarkable. He excels in inspiring congregations and pupils alike to seek biblical and musical excellence in their whole approach to worship, which is one of the great passions of his life.

Dr. James Montgomery Boice, with whom Dr. Jones worked fruitfully in Tenth Church, told me after one service at which I had been present, “Paul is everything I ever prayed for in a music director.” The harmony with which they served God in Tenth was a remarkable bless-
ing to the congregation in the all-too-brief time before Boice’s death. One lasting evidence of that partnership is the original hymns they mutually produced as author and composer. These hymns are distinguished by their biblical faithfulness, theological depth, and musical quality. They are illustrations of so many of the truths expounded in this book.

Paul Jones is not only highly trained and qualified as a professional musician, but also well read in the world of biblical theology and writings of the Reformers. It is this combination of musician and theologian that I think is the key to his wisdom in this outstanding material on the church’s musical worship. The key phrase in all this is the one with which the preface to this book closes. It is often abbreviated to the letters “SDG”—representing the Latin words soli Deo gloria ("to God alone be glory"). This is what leads Dr. Jones to his basic convictions about church music (it should honor and exalt God, not merely entertain the congregation) and church worship (it should glorify God, not merely satisfy the worshipers).

I pray that God may prosper this book abundantly; cause it to be widely read, digested, and heeded within the Christian church; and thereby bring to himself a new revenue of glory in our generation.

Eric J. Alexander
St. Andrews, Scotland
Preface

Why another book about church music? Surely the shelves of Christian bookstores are already lined with volumes devoted to worship music and to various perspectives on the “worship wars” debate. Other authors have provided historical information on the development of church music over the centuries. With penetrating insight, the culture-watchers have sought to guide us through the maze of recent trends. So what need is there for another book?

First and simply, this volume exists because it contains ideas that every worshiper (pastor and layperson) and Christian musician (performer and academic) may benefit from reading, since it is entirely possible to live in the subculture of the evangelical church without encountering some of them. God’s creation itself, through general revelation, informs wide-ranging aspects and principles of music. But more specifically, since the Bible is our infallible guide of Christian faith and practice, it contains sufficient instruction for us to understand the roles of music in the church. In considering these roles, I have sought to be practical, philosophical, and biblical. Thus, the volume in your hands is a collection of short essays organized into four categories that interact with the issues and people involved in the music of corporate worship, exploring what the Bible reveals. Any book that asserts ideas about church music will be provocative, but in so doing my goal is to speak clearly, not uncharitably. Engaging in church music ought to be a uniting, compelling, involving activity—not a divisive, troubling one.

Second, the book was written to be of aid to those pastors, church leaders, and musicians who desire help regarding the use of music in
the church, particularly as this applies to worship. Decisions about church music need not be made on the basis of limited experience, personal preference, or expediency. This volume asks questions to provoke thought about what we do and why we do it, and it endeavors to provide basic information about music’s relationship to the church. There are also things that one will not find in this book. It contains no list of acceptable and unacceptable repertoire. One will not encounter a subjective list of the names of good and bad contemporary composers. Throughout the book, however, assumptions about music in the church are challenged, and practical suggestions for change are offered.

Institutions of higher learning, particularly our seminaries, could be at the forefront of such change in church music. Fifty years ago, Frank E. Gaebelein suggested that “the theological seminaries might well give music a real place in the curriculum, for among Christian workers the pastor can least of all afford to remain musically illiterate.” Five hundred years ago, Martin Luther wrote, “We shouldn’t ordain young men to the ministry unless they be well schooled in music.” While seminaries may offer a course touching on the history of Christian worship, courses dealing with basic music appreciation and hymnology should also be included. The music that a seminarian encounters in chapel should reflect the theology taught in the school, in text, musical substance, and character. It is important to have a theology of worship music based on Scripture.

Evangelical Bible colleges and liberal-arts schools share this fertile ground for change with the seminaries, with the steady supply of young music and theology students that they enjoy. Such institutions should be standard-bearers. But if the mission of these schools does not rise above equipping the next generation of musical and biblical leaders with what churches currently believe they require in pastors and musicians, this precious opportunity will be lost. Rather, as Gaebelein so clearly articulated five decades ago:

The call is for Christian education to lead the way to higher things. But that call will not be fully answered until our schools, colleges, and seminaries espouse a philosophy of music befit-
ting the Gospel. So long as the lower levels of an art so closely linked to man’s emotions are cultivated at the expense of the best, we shall continue to have Christian leaders many of whom are deaf to the nobler elements of spiritual song. Evangelicalism is due for a musical reformation. The reformation will come only when Christian education, having set its face against the cheap in this greatest of the arts, seeks to develop in its students, response to a level of music worthy of the deep things of God.³

Christian schools at all levels should be preparing the next generation of well-educated leaders to correct the current disparity between faith and practice. Such schools need a high view of the arts. Academic vision starts at the top, with presidents, boards, and provosts, just as ecclesiastical vision begins with elders, sessions/boards, and pastors. Church and academic musicians must patiently seek to love, learn, and educate. Tough questions need to be asked. Do fiscal purposes regularly influence decision-making more than biblical purposes? Do tangible things rule over the intangible regardless of significance? At what point do programs and course offerings exist to attract students rather than to educate them appropriately? At what point does the music offered in worship become more about putting people in the pews than about God? And just how important are style, culture, and diversity to the musical choices we make? These are the kinds of difficult questions that we should be asking—questions that should lead to examination and systemic change, if necessary.

Third, these essays have been written in response to questions asked, situations encountered, and particular interests that have arisen from personal study. Above all, my desire, which I know others share, is to help shape music ministry by biblical standards for the glory of God. If man’s chief end truly is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever, then this applies nowhere more clearly or more vitally than in worship, both personal and corporate. As a trained church musician or professor, one is asked to explain, and at times even to defend, the existence of our profession, standards, livelihood, curriculum, and “people” (staff, students, colleagues). We can thank God for these circumstances, though they are dif-
ficult, since they compel us to think, read, and respond. Such experiences have been seminal to several of the essays included in this volume.

Music, it seems, is omnipresent in church work, but worship music should not be treated as a common, utilitarian object, or manipulated to achieve unbiblical ends. The light of the Word of God must inform our practices, and where it speaks clearly, there is no debate. Where it makes inferences, we must consider the whole counsel of Scripture as well as the teaching of great theologians and musicians, and think deeply along with them.

What has become increasingly apparent is that no presupposition in the realm of church music can be adequately defended outside the authority of Scripture—not by arguments of reason, history, taste, philosophy, or culture, although those bases are all significant. So I have attempted to study the Bible with music in mind, to verify what Luther, Schütz, Bach, Mendelssohn, Stravinsky, and others had previously discovered and displayed—that God created music for a purpose, ordained the office/calling/role of church musician, filled the Bible with song, and showed us the nature of heaven’s worship. The Lord God expects us to glorify him with excellent music that is written, played, and sung according to the principles that he has revealed in Scripture and in the cosmos. And there should be great joy in praising God through music! Musical praise is a wonderful individual and group response to Christ’s creation and redemption of his people. Music’s richness of expression and spiritual nature are among its greatest qualities.

That divine calling of the church musician and its practical outworking is what this humble and, it is hoped, useful collection is about. It will not provide all the answers. I pray that it will, however, cause an open-minded reader to think about the significance of worship music and to reconsider its place in our churches. And I sincerely hope that some phrase or idea might encourage a deeper search for the truth of God’s Word as it relates to this wonderful gift of music, bestowed on us by God—for his own glory. S.D.G.

Paul Steven Jones
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Yes, if you call out for insight
and raise your voice for understanding,
if you seek it like silver
and search for it as for hidden treasures,
then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.
For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge
and understanding. —Proverbs 2:3–6

Notes
2. Martin Luther, Table Talk, German ed. (Irmischer) 62, no. 2848 (Erlangen: Verlag von Hender & Zimmer, 1854): 308ff. See also Ewald M. Plass, What Luther Says (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 980.
Acknowledgments

Many people contributed to the production of this volume. Some asked thought-provoking questions, among them a number of students and colleagues. Some engaged me, directly or indirectly, in searching the Scriptures for answers. And a host of musical and biblical teachers over the years have so deeply influenced my thinking that I am unaware of where their teaching ends and my own thoughts begin.

Specifically, however, I wish to thank those who sacrificially assisted me as readers/editors, among them Professor RoseLee Bancroft, Professor Samuel Hsu, Mary Beth McGreevy, and Philip Graham Ryken. I would also like to thank Allan Fisher, for whose guidance I am grateful, as well as editors Karen Magnuson and Thom Notaro. Then there are those who helped with specific sections of the work, including music educator Melissa Strong and Professors Julius Bosco, William Edgar, Dan McCartney, Fred Putnam, and Leland Ryken. Gratitude also goes to my colleague Jeremy Strong, who prepared the musical scores included, and to hymn collaborator and esteemed friend Eric J. Alexander for writing the foreword.

I am particularly appreciative of Philip Ryken’s encouragement as my pastor in the pursuit of this work, and to the session of Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for granting the study leave requisite to its production. It was James Montgomery Boice who first encouraged these written efforts by engaging me to speak to pastors, through our hymn collaboration, and by the efficacy of his powerful, biblical teaching. Truly, I am thankful to God to have had the privilege of knowing and working with all those mentioned above, and so many other teachers and friends who have influenced my life, thinking, and music.
1. Sermon in Song: Sacred Music as Proclamation
2. Sacred Music as Prayer
3. Applause: For Whom Are You Clapping?
4. A Biblical Case for Instruments in Worship
5. King David’s Praise Team
6. Leading in Worship as Accompanist
7. Authenticity in Corporate Worship Music
8. Service Music: What’s It All About?

Worship is more than an act in which we participate on Sundays; it is our very purpose for being. God created us to glorify him with our whole lives, which are to be, according to Romans 12:1, living sacrifices. In other words, all our activities, to some extent, should be acts of worship because they are to be done “as for the Lord” (Col. 3:23). Intentional worship should be a daily activity for the Christian, and a spirit of worship should encompass all we do.

Corporate worship—the gathering together of believers to worship God in the same time and place—is something both special and ordinary, or at least it should be. It is special in the sense that it is the unique activity of Christian people gathering to worship the one true and living God. It is ordinary in that it should be a way of life for us,
not an occasional experience. While God is both the subject and object of our worship, corporate worship is an activity with many participants. Worship properly involves every Christian and every part of the Christian—his mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional being. Both pastor and people (including the musicians) are active participants.

Over the years, and particularly in the last few decades, our understanding of what worship should be has changed. If it is not the essence of worship that is different, at least one can state that its activities have been altered. For instance, evangelicals did not encounter movies, drama teams, skits, puppets, magicians, dance, or pop-music bands as regular aspects of worship before 1970. The danger here is that some worship practices are more about us than they are about God; at least they have the potential to distract us from God. Music, unfortunately, is an area in which worship anomalies frequently occur. Sometimes they enter our services innocently, seeming to be good, helpful, or relevant; but such incongruities almost always take us further from the truth.

The essays in this section seek to reexamine what the Bible teaches us about music in worship, with a desire to be biblically authentic. We begin with a concept derived from Scripture—that biblical music-making shares many of the same roles and goals as the teaching or pulpit ministry. This idea, while simple, may have radical implications for the individual believer or church that has not previously considered it. Indeed, the concept of the pastoral musician may be novel to some or at least atypical, and the partnership that pastors and music directors should share in their spiritual work (the gospel ministry) is more foreign an experience than one might think.
Sermon in Song: Sacred Music as Proclamation

My tongue will sing of your word,
for all your commandments are right. —Psalm 119:172

In the modern evangelical church, singing, praying, giving, and other congregational acts of worship are regarded at times as preambles to the sermon. Music, in particular, appears separate from elements of worship that seem to be more spiritual, such as praying and preaching. This worship dichotomy does not exist in Scripture, and our thinking is more biblical when we understand that musicians and preachers actually share in the ministry of the Word. Proclamation and interpretation of the Bible, and the edification and encouragement of the saints, with the ultimate goal of giving glory to God—these are also purposes of sacred music delineated in the Word of God and heralded by theologians and musicians throughout the history of the church.

Luther’s View

Martin Luther (1483–1546) realized the significant role that music could play in the spiritual growth of the Christian. He declared, “Music and notes, which are wonderful gifts and creations of God, do help gain
a better understanding of the text, especially when sung by a congregation and when sung earnestly”; and, “We have put this music to the living and holy Word of God in order to sing, praise and honor it. We want the beautiful art of music to be properly used to serve her dear Creator and his Christians. He is thereby praised and honored and we are made better and stronger in faith when his holy Word is impressed on our hearts by sweet music.” Paul Westermeyer, professor of church music at Luther Seminary, expands on these statements:

Luther was not simply fond of music. Luther thought music has a theological reason for being: it is a gift of God, which comes from the “sphere of miraculous audible things,” just like the Word of God. Music is unique in that it can carry words. Since words carry the Word of God, music and the Word of God are closely related . . . It almost seems as if Luther sees music in its own right as a parallel to preaching . . . But the weight falls on its association with the Word and words that carry the Word.

With Johann Walter, Luther compiled and edited several hymn collections, and for many of these he wrote prefaces. One goal, Luther explained, was to properly educate the youth of his day:

Therefore, I too, with the help of others, have brought together some sacred songs in order to make a good beginning and to give an incentive to those who can better carry on the Gospel and bring it to the people . . . And these songs were arranged in four parts for no other reason than that I wanted to attract the youth (who should and must be trained in music and other fine arts) away from love songs and carnal pieces and to give them something wholesome to learn instead . . . It is unfortunate that everyone else forgets to teach and train the poor young people; we must not be responsible for this too.

Luther did not invent the notion that music and the proclamation of the gospel are related. He found its basis in Scripture (see “Biblical
Support” below). The Bible contains more than six hundred references to music, and we know from Scripture that singing is an eternal occupation. Singing should be a daily activity of the Christian. Luther believed that music should be composed to teach doctrine and to instruct young people—that by singing the Word of God, one’s faith can be strengthened.

**Bach’s Example**

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) has been called a musical preacher, and his church music can be properly termed “hermeneutical.” (See chapters 25 and 26, “J. S. Bach and Musical Hermeneutics.”) Georg Motz, a German contemporary of Bach, added his voice in support of this idea when he compared composers and preachers: “You only have to look at an honorable composition to detect exactly what you find in a good preacher. For he takes as much care to guide his listeners toward what is good as a musician stimulates his audience toward the same goal through different variations and motions.” In fact, Motz posits that music may be an especially evocative type of sermon:

> What is more, when such a composition is performed . . . you can also hear a charming and beautiful harmony, in which the great God grants His people on earth a foretaste of heavenly joy and the marvelous and sweet sound of the “englische Kapelle” (choir of angels), so that they can be reminded even better of the divine being . . .

Motz maintained that good church music possesses the qualities of a good sermon. In his view, an excellent church-music composer is the equal of an excellent preacher. It may prove challenging to find many church-music composers of whom this is true, but in Bach’s case the claim is justified.
Biblical Support

Within the context of proclamation, we expect to find elements of exhortation and admonition, of teaching and doctrine. Isaac Watts’s position on this was clear. According to Horton Davies, in Watts’s “belief in the didactic value of praise, as in his insistence upon intelligibility, his aim, like that of the Puritans, was edification.” What does the Bible teach about the instructive use of music? We know that a number of the psalms record the works of the Lord so that these might be passed on by oral tradition from priests to people and from parents to children. Psalm 60 actually has the ascription “For Instruction.” But clearly all the psalms were meant to be taught and sung. A New Testament statement is found in Colossians 3:16: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Music (singing in particular) is advocated for instructing and exhorting one another. The Bible is unambiguous in stating that sacred music has a spiritually educational purpose.

The idea that singing the Word of God will strengthen one’s understanding of it has biblical support. Singing should, in fact, be a result of hearing and meditating on God’s Word, as the psalmist said in the last section of Psalm 119, that great song of the Word: “My lips will pour forth praise, for you teach me your statutes. My tongue will sing of your word, for all your commandments are right . . . I long for your salvation, O Lord, and your law is my delight. Let my soul live and praise you, and let your rules help me” (vv. 171–72, 174–75). Psalm 119, which is also an extensive acrostic poem, earlier reads, “Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my sojourning” (v. 54). Since singing is a biblical response to God’s Word, it follows that the singing of psalms, hymns, or other musical responses rightly follow the reading and preaching of Scripture in our worship.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul again articulates the gospel, which he had preached and proclaimed to his Corinthian brothers. The euangelion, or “good news,” was the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ’s resurrection power over death is celebrated, particularly at the
end of the chapter: “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (vv. 54b–55). Here Paul quotes Isaiah 25:8, which is a song of praise, and Hosea 13:14, which delivers God’s Word through the prophet. Intentionally or unintentionally, Paul relates song and the proclamation of the gospel, something he does again in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. Luther’s commentary on 1 Corinthians 15 summarizes the Pauline conclusion in this manner:

And now St. Paul appropriately concludes with a song which he sings: “Thanks and praise be to God, who gave us such a victory!” We can join in that song and in that way always celebrate Easter, praising and extolling God for a victory that was not won or achieved in battle by us . . . but we must . . . sing of this victory in Christ.  

And in his foreword to one of Johann Walter’s hymnals, Luther wrote, “We may boast, as Moses does in his song in Exodus 15, that Christ is our praise and our song and that we should know nothing to sing or say but Jesus Christ our Savior, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians [1:31].”

Proclamatory Hymns

Luther frequently employed the phrase “say and sing” or “sing and say” to describe the proper work of a believer. The content of the proclamation is always the gospel—the work of Christ. He wrote in his commentary on Psalm 118, “They [the righteous] praise only God’s grace, works, words, and power as they are revealed to them in Christ. This is their sermon and song, their hymn of praise.” One of his best-loved Christmas chorales, *Vom Himmel hoch*, states it this way:

From heav’n above to earth I come  
To bear good news to ev’ry home;  
Glad tidings of great joy I bring,  
Whereof I now will say and sing.  
[Davon ich sing’ n und sagen will.]
Musical proclamation can be broadly defined to include any text that teaches or sets a passage of Scripture, recounts God’s work, issues a call to repentance, or reminds us of God’s promises. Many proclamatory hymns focus on the basic tenets of the gospel—the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ—and the life available to us because of Christ’s sacrifice. Some examples of such hymns are these: “Arise, My Soul, Arise” (Charles Wesley); “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less” (Edward Mote); and “Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed” (Isaac Watts).

Since the gospel can be preached through music, and since biblical teaching can be recalled through music and appropriated, then there is an obligation to ensure that this is done well. When music is like a sermon, it follows that it must have responsibilities and characteristics similar to those of a sermon. Many of the same criteria we use to define great preaching and teaching can be employed to define great church music. Church music needs to be well prepared and presented. It requires unity and coherence. It should make sense to the listener. It should evidence thought and skill. Church music should feed the people by teaching the Word of God. It is a work of the Spirit of God.

Thinking about music ministry in such terms today will change the nature of worship in the evangelical church. As Donald Hustad points out, “Though mainline evangelicals claim to be leaders in Scripture study, biblical research to determine worship practice seems to be at the bottom of their priority list.” It is time for that record to change.

Notes

5. Ibid., 195.


7. Psalms 78, 105, and 136 come to mind. This was a form of instruction as well as worship, particularly tied in with the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. The Jewish feast of Passover and other high holy days also featured the use of songs in the celebration of deliverance and as reminder of God’s works. In addition, the 288 Levites set apart because of their special musical abilities were teachers of the other 3,712, who in turn taught their own sons and daughters.


