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The Historical Development of the Modern Worship Song Over The Past 100 Years

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A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Fall 2008

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program of Liberty University.

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Introduction

For centuries, followers of Christ have used music as a channel of communicating their love and adoration towards their Creator and Savior, Jesus Christ. In fact, the use of music with God's people is encouraged throughout the pages of Scripture. In the Old Testament, the psalmist writes, "Sing to him a new song; play skillfully and shout for joy."¹ In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians, "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs."² Throughout Christian history, wherever there has been renewal, revival and restoration, fresh songs of praise and worship have followed and in many cases serve as cultural and historical indicators of what the Lord was doing in His people at that particular time in history. As William Reynolds observed, "Christian song is never static, never quite the same from one generation to another. When viewed from two or three decades the changes appear rather small. However, a backward look of fifty years reveals more distinct differences, and these differences become more sharply defined over a passing century".³ This quote by Dr. William J. Reynolds provides a platform for a study of the distinct differences of music in the church during the past century.

The purpose of this thesis is to outline the historical development of the modern worship song between 1900-2000, outlining four basic styles of songs, their history, the

¹ Psalm 33:3 (NIV)

² Ephesians 5:19 (NIV)

³ William Jensen Reynolds, *A Survey of Christian Hymnody* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc, 1963), 124.

poetic-lyric relationship, and musical characteristics of each. In addition to specific examples, special consideration will be given to select composers and influences commonly identified with each particular style. Drawing from reliable and scholarly sources, this thesis will conclude with the development of the modern worship song. Suggestions will be made as to the direction modern worship music will take in the future.

Liturgical Hymns and Gospel Hymns

History and Influences

Revivals and the music that was birthed from them. The first style of song to be examined is hymns. In this discussion of hymns, it will be important to note the stylistic differences between liturgical and gospel hymns. In his book, *Singing with Understanding*, Kenneth Osbeck offers insight between the two:

Liturgical Hymns	Gospel Hymns
1. Primary purpose is to glorify one or all of the persons of the Triune God-head. Generally more objective and vertical in character	1. Primary purpose is to give a testimony or an exhortation, a warning or invitation. Generally very subjective and horizontal in character.
2. Used primarily for Christians in a worship service	2. Used primarily in evangelistic, revival and fellowship services.
3. Music is stately, dignified, and more devotional in character. Harmonically the songs are characterized by more frequent chord changes.	3. Music is usually rhythmically fast or lilting, generating a pervasive enthusiasm. Harmonically the songs are characterized by few chord changes.
4. Notes are generally of even time value. Comparatively few notes of eighth or sixteenth note values.	4. Notes of varied time value with the dotted notes especially predominant. Also the use of 'lilting' 6/8 rhythm is common.

5. The text is usually set to music so that the verses are complete in themselves without use of chorus or refrain techniques.	5. The text finds its complete expression with the use of a chorus or refrain at the end of each stanza. ⁴
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Many scholars regard Isaac Watts as the father of hymnody: “Isaac Watts, a Congregational minister had the most profound influence on his country’s transition to hymn singing and thus became known as the “father of English hymnody.”⁵ Watts, who lived from 1674-1748, led the reemergence of congregational singing after the Roman Catholic Church had been instructed to eliminate it in the fourth century Laodicean decree.⁶

The hymns of Isaac Watts are characterized by strong Calvinistic theology and an obligation to strict lyrical meter. His contribution to church music cannot be understated⁷. Had it not been for Watts’ desire to create music that would encourage congregations to sing theology, the modern worship music enjoyed today may have never evolved to what we have today.

Closely associated with many of the hymns written in the last two centuries are the great revivals that inspired them. Most notably are hymns and invitation songs written by Charles Wesley (1707-1788), brother of John Wesley (1703-1791), both leaders in the revival movements (later termed ‘The Wesleyan Movement’) in England in

⁴ Kenneth W. Osbeck, *Singing With Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1979), 23.

⁵ Robert E. Webber, *Music and the Arts in Christian Worship: Book One* (Nashville: Star Song Publishing Group, 1994), 228.

⁶ Kenneth W. Osbeck, *Singing With Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1979), 11.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

the eighteenth century. There is an inseparable relationship between religious revival and the composition of hymns and songs for congregational worship. In fact, the hymnologist Kenneth Osbeck, writes, “Every religious movement throughout history has always been accompanied with song.”⁸ Wesley’s approach to hymn writing demonstrates the ineffable value of penning songs that articulate doctrinal truths (many which were heavily influenced by Armenian theology). Like Watts, Wesley implemented simple rhythms and singable melodies to facilitate congregational singing. Influenced by the popular German folk music of the time, Wesley made use of newer, more contemporary melodies.⁹ Wesley’s hymns were devotional in nature and thus contributed to the development of gospel hymns.

Musical Form

Musical form is critical to understanding how effective music functions: “The overall design of a piece of music is referred to as form . . . repetition and contrast are the two most fundamental principles of musical form.”¹⁰ In hymnody, songs are usually written in strophic form, which deals with the relationship between the melody and the lyric. A song is considered strophic when the same music is repeated for each set of words.¹¹ Each set of lyrics within a song can be identified by the terms: verse, stanza or strophe, the latter from which we get the term, ‘strophic form’. First to be examined will

⁸ Kenneth W. Osbeck, *Singing With Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1979), 11.

⁹ Robert E. Webber, *Music and the Arts in Christian Worship: Book One* (Nashville: Star Song Publishing Group, 1994), 229.

¹⁰ Daniel T. Politoske, *Music* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1979), 34.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

be the musical form of hymns in its most simplistic structure. This will be followed by a detailed explanation of more sophisticated hymnody.

Many hymns of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are written in this musical form and typically are used to tell an overall gospel or theological story.

Charles Wesley's great hymn, "O For a Thousand Tongues," is an example of strophic form. The first stanza reads:

O for a thousand tongues to sing,
My great Redeemer's praise!
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of His grace!¹²

As hymnody developed, writers began to add choruses/refrains to the strophic form. One of the most popular gospel hymn who employed this technique was the talented blind composer, Fanny Crosby. Her gospel hymns would go on to be the songs most associated with revivalist camp meetings, giving musical expression to what the Lord was doing at this time.

The addition of a chorus/refrain to the standard strophic form allowed the composer to isolate one thought and repeat it over and over. The addition of the chorus has stayed with popular music to the present day. An example of this style of writing can be seen in Fanny Crosby's popular gospel hymn, "To God be the Glory"

The first stanza and refrain of this classic gospel hymn are as follows:

To God be the glory, great things He hath done,
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,
And opened the life-gate that all may go in.

¹² *The Baptist Hymnal*, ed. Wesley L. Forbis, (Nashville: Convention Press, 1991), 216.

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Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
Let the earth hear His voice!
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
Let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father thro' Jesus the Son,
And give Him the glory,
Great things He hath done.¹³

One metric indicator seen in the writing of hymnody is called “irregular meter”.

This term is used to indicate that the text of the hymn does not always have the same number of syllables or structure of the meters mentioned in the previously discussed chart by hymnist, Kenneth W. Osbeck.¹⁴

Lyric and Musical Form in Hymns

The use of strophic structure in hymnody is identified by the number of syllables used in each lyrical phrase. These lyric lines are organized by poetic meter. Four of the most commonly used meters are: short meter (6.6.8.6.), common meter (8.6.8.6.), long meter (8.8.8.8.), and long perfect meter (8.8.8.8.8.). Hymn compositions that do not fall into any consistent pattern are noted as “irregular meter.” The numerical values in parenthesis beside each of these meters indicate the number of syllables contained in each line of poetry. Over the years, hymn writers have used one of these four types of meters to communicate lyric idea. This has enabled the composer to assign one melody to several texts. It also allows other writers to apply the same lyric to many melodies. For example, “Amazing Grace”, written in common meter, may be sung to several different melodies (i.e., “Gilligan’s Island” theme and “House of the Rising Sun”).

¹³ *The Baptist Hymnal*, ed. Wesley L. Forbis, (Nashville: Convention Press, 1991), 4.

¹⁴ Kenneth W. Osbeck, *Singing With Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1979), 6.

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Familiar examples of hymns composed in these four meters include: Timothy Dwight's poem, "I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord!" which follows a clear 6.6.8.6. short meter pattern; an example of common meter (8.6.8.6.) is "All Hail The Power of Jesus Name" by Edward Perronet; an example of long meter (8.8.8.8.) is "Jesus Shall Reign" by Isaac Watts; "Blessed be the Name" by William Clark and Ralph P. Hudson is example of long meter with refrain (8.8.8.8. with refrain); and finally, an example of a hymn with irregular meter would be Joseph Mohr and Franz Gruber's German Christmas hymn, "Silent Night! Holy Night!"¹⁵

As seen in Osbeck's chart on page two, the lyrical form of liturgical and gospel hymns differs. Poetically, liturgical hymns focus on objective truth and proclamation of doctrine. Gospel hymns, on the other hand, typically tell the gospel story and the power of God working in the composer's life. Sometimes the final stanza of both liturgical and gospel hymns are used to communicate eschatological truth, reminding the singers of the second coming, Heaven or the life to come. An example of this practice can be seen in comparing the first and final stanza's of "Amazing Grace" written by John Newton:

Amazing grace how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind but now I see!

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining like the sun!
We've no less days to sing God's praise,
Than when we first begun!¹⁶

¹⁵ Kenneth W. Osbeck, *Singing With Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1979), 6.

¹⁶ *The Baptist Hymnal*, ed. Wesley L. Forbis, (Nashville: Convention Press, 1991), 330.

Gospel Songs

History and Influences

The second style of music to be discussed in the development of modern worship is the gospel song. It can be identified by two different styles: black gospel and southern gospel.

Black Gospel music finds its roots in African-American worship, much of which was born out of the oppression many African American people faced during times of slavery and segregation. One author describes the dangerous and troublesome setting in which many African Americans worshipped during and following the Civil War:

“Because it was dangerous for slaves to worship God, they gathered in clandestine meetings held in cabins or outdoors that often lasted all night . . . Slave worship was frequently emotional and exuberant.”¹⁷ Early Black Gospel compositions are sometimes referred to as chants or spirituals.

The development of Southern Gospel music can be traced to the southeastern region of the United States. Southern gospel is an outgrowth of the singing school movement of the 1830-50s.¹⁸ They practiced singing from ‘shaped note’ hymnals. Later this developed into a type of singing called ‘Convention Style’ singing where individual

¹⁷ Rob Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening, Singing a New Song in the Post-Modern Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 26.

¹⁸ Vernon Whaley, *Trends in Gospel Music Publishing: 1940 to 1960* (Norman: Vernon M. Whaley, 1992), 45.

parts were sung independent of one another and well defined. A modern example of this type of singing is the Male Southern Gospel Quartet.¹⁹

Musical Form

Black Gospel music differs from Southern Gospel music style in that it often is more spontaneous as described by Dr. Vernon Whaley: “Modern African-American religious music is referred to as *black gospel* and characterized by spontaneous solos, and improvised vocal counterpoint. African gospel music is often highly rhythmic and most often taught as parts of an oral tradition. It’s roots lie in a much older European tradition of preaching, singing, shouting and clapping.”²⁰ The modern music of jazz and rhythm and blues had a significant influence on the musical form of Black Gospel music.

Anthony Heilbut, a historian on Black Gospel music, often regards much of the early black gospel spirituals as the “Baptist Blues” because the form of these songs is identical to the sixteen-bar blues made popular in secular jazz and rhythm and blues music.²¹

The musical form of Southern Gospel differs from the black gospel style in that it leaves little room for spontaneity. Southern Gospel music is typically arranged in SATB (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) and is characteristic for its use of tight harmonies highlighting a strong bass line.

The singing style of Southern Gospel music was taught in community groups and schools using a style of notation called “shaped notes” or “sacred heart singing,” a form

¹⁹ Vernon Whaley, *Trends in Gospel Music Publishing: 1940 to 1960* (Norman: Vernon M. Whaley, 1992), 45.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

²¹ Anthony Heilbut, *The Gospel Sound* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1989), 25.

of notation that indicated pitches and durations through the shape of the notes: “Singing from shaped-note books developed into a tradition that became a way of life for these Southern evangelicals. Right up through the 1960s, the singing school, with the singing school master, was an important method of music education for Southern churches.”²² As a result, the institutions, churches, publishers and music groups that endorsed its use popularized Southern Gospel music.

Lyrical Form

Common to both Black Gospel music and Southern Gospel music, is lyric form and content. Both are often characterized as being highly emotional “story songs” or “songs of testimony.” Heilbut comments on this characteristic in black gospel music saying, “. . . their song becomes a testimony, evoking public role – ‘I’ve come to lift your burdens’; and private needs – ‘I can’t sing your story, but I can moan mine.’”²³ A great example of this testimony style of singing can be seen in Robert Anderson’s composition, “Prayer Changes Things,” who through his lyrical form gives a strong, convincing testimony to the power of prayer:

I’ve heard the story of David,
I’ve heard of Daniel in the lion’s den.
I’ve heard of Job and his affliction,
How they all kept the faith to the end.
But when all hope had seemed to fail,
My God’s power did prevail,
I know, yes I know, prayer changes things.

I’ve traveled through sorrow valley,

²² Vernon Whaley, *Trends in Gospel Music Publishing: 1940 to 1960* (Norman: Vernon M. Whaley, 1992), 45.

²³ Anthony Heilbut, *The Gospel Sound* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1989), Introduction: xxxv.

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So many times my heart's been made to bleed.
By some friends whom I thought were with me,
Through disappointment, I was knocked down to my knees.
But I rose with faith and grace,
I found nobody to take God's place,
I know, yes I know, prayer changes things.²⁴

This testimonial style of lyric is also verified by Bill and Gloria Gaither's classic gospel song, "Because He Lives" demonstrates this testimonial style of writing in its second verse, written shortly after the birth of one of the Gaither's children:

How sweet to hold our newborn baby,
And feel the pride and joy He gives;
But greater still the calm assurance,
This child can face uncertain days
Because He lives.

Because He lives I can face tomorrow;
Because He lives all fear is gone;
Because I know He holds the future,
And life is worth the living
Just because He lives!²⁵

Praise and Worship Chorus

History (Composers and Influences)

The third genre of music to be discussed is the "praise and worship chorus." The rise of the worship chorus came about in the late 1970s and can trace its origin to the Youth For Christ Movement of the 1940s and 1950s and Jesus Movement of the late 1960s and 1970s.²⁶

The Youth Choir Genre

²⁴ Anthony Heilbut, *The Gospel Sound* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1989), Introduction: xxviii.

²⁵ *The Baptist Hymnal*, ed. Wesley L. Forbis, (Nashville: Convention Press, 1991), 407.

²⁶ Rob Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening, Singing a New Song in the Post-Modern Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 52-53.

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A significant move of God during this time that helped to popularize the “worship chorus” was what is referred to as the “youth movement”. Having its roots in the 1940s, youth choirs gained popularity in the 1970s through a number of Para-church organizations. Youth For Christ, co-founded by Billy Graham emerged during this time and with it a strong emphasis in youth choir singing: “They (*Youth For Christ*) introduced short, easy-to-sing, highly popular gospel choruses to the evangelical culture.”²⁷ One particular method in introducing these new worship choruses to the masses was through annual Youth For Christ rallies. These events showcased and featured large numbers of youth choirs.

Following the Youth For Christ movement was a period of time where youth musicals, produced by talented young arranger/composers, provided opportunity for theological and musical expression by American Youth. The musicals were hugely popular and quickly emerged as a new genre – unique to the growing evangelical youth ministry market. Like the material being introduced by the Youth For Christ movement, these youth musicals (penned by men like Ralph Carmichael, Kurt Keiser, Don Marsh, Don Wyrzten and Jimmy Owens) introduced a number of new songs and praise choruses to the church at large. Kurt Kaiser’s famous composition, “Pass It On” (from “Tell It Like It Is”) and Ralph Carmichael’s “He’s Everything to Me” eventually became a favorites for youth and college groups in the 1970s.”²⁸ In addition to introducing new

²⁷ Vernon Whaley, *Trends in Gospel Music Publishing: 1940 to 1960* (Norman: Vernon M. Whaley, 1992), 78.

²⁸ Rob Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening, Singing a New Song in the Post-Modern Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 23.

praise choruses to the church, the youth musical movement also validated many contemporary styles of music and demonstrated that Christian music could be both current and Christian simultaneously:

Youth musicals had a significant impact on young Christians in the 1960's and 70's. For one thing, they validated the popular musical styles kids were listening to on the radio, at least for youth meetings and evangelism. Although such composers as Buryl Red, Ralph Carmichael, Jimmy Owens, and Kurt Kaiser were not rock and rollers, they did encourage kids to use their instruments and their music.²⁹

The youth musical movement not only contributed to the development of the modern worship song through popularizing the “worship chorus” but also helped bring worship music into the style and language of the people.

The Jesus Movement

A second major influence on worship choruses in the 1960s and 1970s was the Jesus Movement. This was a revival that had its origin in the Hippie counter-culture in the United States and Canada. Unique to this great revival movement was the use of many short songs or “praise choruses” which articulated the new found hope and joy many young believers were finding in Jesus Christ. Much of the development of these “worship and praise choruses” can be traced back to the ministry of Pastor Chuck Smith at Calvary Chapel in Southern California. Smith’s ministry was particularly significant in shaping the Jesus Movement culture as he was one of few ministry leaders who welcomed hippies into his services, led them to the Lord, and then encouraged them to use their style of folk/rock music as a form of worship expression.

²⁹ Ibid., 52.

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Out of this movement emerged talented songwriters who penned short choruses associated with a real sense of honesty before the Lord, many focusing on themes of forgiveness and repentance. “Jesus music” came to be characterized by its simplicity and personal expressiveness.³⁰ Two composers who made indelible contributions to the catalog of “praise and worship chorus” were Keith Green and Anne Herring. Green’s, “Oh Lord, You’re Beautiful (1980)” and “Create In Me A Clean Heart (1984)” and Herring’s timeless classic, “Easter Song (1974),” are still sung in churches around the globe today.

Ralph Carmichael. One significant contributor and influence on “praise and worship music” of this era is Ralph Carmichael. Known to many as an innovator of music for Christian culture,³¹ Carmichael’s historical impact on Christian music is unparalleled. Having established himself in the 1960s as a highly skilled “secular” composer and arranger, Carmichael was integral in merging contemporary Christian culture with well-composed, contemporary music. Carmichael succeeded in uniting the Christian message and the style of popular rock and roll culture without compromising the message. Dr. Vernon Whaley, distinguishes four innovative contributions Carmichael made to the Christian music industry and development of the modern “praise and worship song”:

- (1) He introduced the writing technique and sound of 1940’s big band and commercial jazz as an alternative style for Traditional gospel music.
- (2) He merged the musical innovations created in the Hollywood studios with music for the Youth For Christ movement.
- (3) He established a standard of excellence in

³⁰ Rob Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening, Singing a New Song in the Post-Modern Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 53.

³¹ Vernon Whaley, *Trends in Gospel Music Publishing: 1940 to 1960* (Norman: Vernon M. Whaley, 1992), 115.

the recording of traditional gospel music equaled only by secular record labels. (4) He served as an example, mentor, and inspiration for hundreds of aspiring young evangelical arrangers.³²

Unlike others over the past hundred years, Carmichael's influence has helped to accelerate the development of worship music in unique ways, causing it to quickly embrace multiple styles and forms (jazz, big band etc.) while maintaining a clear gospel message. Carmichael's influence broadened the scope of what church music could be, giving permission for younger artists and arrangers to compose and create worship music that was diverse and relevant to the styles of the time.

The Scripture and Song Movement

In addition to the great outpouring of God's Spirit upon America during this time, He was also very much at work in New Zealand through the ministry of Dave and Dale Garrett. The Garrett's, a husband and wife duo, were the founders of "Scripture and Song Music," a company that was devoted to publishing Scriptural settings for congregational worship. Their roster of songs included Nadia Hern's, "Jesus, Name Above All Names" and Bob Cull's "Open Our Eyes, Lord." These short choruses made their way around the world and into the worship language of millions of churches. The Garrett's labor would prepare the soil for even greater moves of God in Australia and New Zealand through the ministries of Hillsong Church and Planet Shakers Church.

Musical Form

The musical form of many of these "praise and worship choruses" can be classified as either an AA format or an ABA format. The AA format is a refrain or

³² Vernon Whaley, *Trends in Gospel Music Publishing: 1940 to 1960* (Norman: Vernon M. Whaley, 1992), 121.

chorus that is repeated a number of times. Sometimes key changes are implemented to keep the song fresh if it is to be repeated multiple times. The ABA format consists of two parts, typically a refrain/chorus as well as a B part or bridge which breaks away from the A section melodically, employing a different tune before returning to the A section. A good example of this can be seen in Keith Green's classic, "Oh Lord You're Beautiful" which chorus and subsequent bridge (B section) is as follows:

Oh Lord, You're Beautiful,
Your face is all I seek
For when Your eyes are on this child,
Your grace abounds to me."

I want to take Your Word and shine it all around
But first help me just to live it, Lord!
And when I'm doing well help me to never seek a crown,
For my reward is giving glory to You!³³

Lyrical Form

Common to the characteristic of lyrical form in this style is the expression of an honest, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Rob Redman, author of *The Great Worship Awakening* comments on this particular lyric practice, "The positive perspective was their high esteem for authenticity and simplicity."³⁴ This type of authenticity and simplicity can be seen in Laurie Klein's famous chorus, "I Love You Lord" originally composed in 1978:

I love you, Lord
And I lift my voice
To worship You, oh my soul rejoice

³³ *Maranatha Praise Chorus Book*, ed. George Baldwin, (Nashville: Word, 1993), 310.

³⁴ Rob Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening, Singing a New Song in the Post-Modern Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 53.

Take joy my King in what You hear
Let it be a sweet, sweet sound in your ear³⁵

One can easily see the simple, yet powerful poetry contained in this song. The effortlessness of this lyric is what has made it both popular and enduring. More than 25 years after this song's publication it is still recognized as one of the most popular worship choruses of all time.³⁶

Another popular chorus written in this time that demonstrates a lyric that demonstrates a straightforward, honest and reflective lyric is the popular chorus, "Father I Adore You" written by Terrye Coelho. This song is unique in that it is written harmonically and lyrically as a "round", meaning that certain sections of the songs can be sung over other sections as simple counterpoint. In this particular lyric we see simplicity and honesty reflected in the usage of relational language that is vertical. The uncomplicated lyrics of this composition are as follows:

Father I adore You,
Lay my life before you,
How I love You.³⁷

This lyric demonstrates a slow shift in the way composers expressed their thoughts *to God*. This shift to more personal lyrics gave worshippers opportunity to use intimate language as a form of expression *to their Creator*.

The Modern Worship Song

History and Influences

³⁵ *Maranatha Praise Chorus Book*, ed. George Baldwin, (Nashville: Word, 1993), 21.

³⁶ Word Music, "CCLI Top 100"; available from <http://wordmusicnow.com/CCLI.asp>; Internet; accessed 12 October 2008.

³⁷ *Maranatha Praise Chorus Book*, ed. George Baldwin, (Nashville: Word, 1993), 151.

The modern worship song is a product of the latter part of the twentieth century, particularly since the 1990s. The modern worship song integrates popular song forms with technological innovation. Its use has been influential in propagating its popularity and securing it as a sub-genre of popular, contemporary Christian music.

Throughout the 1970s and the early 1980s Christian artists were expressing their faith in fresh ways that provided worshippers with a new language to communicate to God. Paul Basden notes, “For us and for our friends, to draw near to God in an authentic and heartfelt way was going to require a new way of communicating with him. Out of these longings and concerns contemporary church music began to emerge.”³⁸

During this time period, the evangelical Christian church struggled to accept popular music forms broadcast on radio and television. Popular music genres like rock and roll had been around and influenced a new generation of artists and songwriters. Christian artists and songwriters mimicked popular music style, using them as templates for their compositions.

Worship songs written in the early 1980s often began as solo pieces made famous by artists like Sandi Patti and Steve Green, arranged in the tradition of Ralph Carmichael. Christian music publishers would take these songs originally intended for Christian artists and re-arrange them for choir and congregation. Eventually as these songs grew in popularity, they were added to hymnals and, over time, became part of a church’s regular repertoire.

³⁸ Paul A. Basden, ed., *Exploring the Worship Spectrum: 6 Views* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 105.

Terry W. York, author of *America's Worship Wars* outlines the stylistic transition from artist driven to congregational worship songs, "In many, perhaps most, cases, that congregational love for songs from the Christian popular music repertory came after hearing arrangements. 'We Shall Behold Him,' 'There Is a Savior,' and 'People Need The Lord' are examples. If accessibility was a factor when bringing Christian popular songs from recordings to the choir, it certainly was when such a song moved to the congregation."³⁹ The increase of influence popular music had on Christian music during this time cannot be underestimated. The development of artist-driven Christian music, and the integrating role it played in influencing and popularizing the modern worship song, is still recognized today.

The Vineyard Movement

Founded by the late John Wimber in 1977 at Fuller Theological Seminary, the Vineyard Movement played a significant role in birthing many new modern worship songs. Founded heavily in charismatic theology, the Vineyard *denomination* and its host of churches began to produce modern worship music. Different from other evangelical churches at the time, Vineyard music drew from California rock and stressed the need for Christian believers to have an intimate, personal relationship with their creator through the work of the Holy Spirit. Rob Redman notes, "The songs were a personal expression of worship and faith."⁴⁰ These songs were typically written in first person and reflected an intimate relationship with God. Songs like "Spirit Song", "Change My Heart, Oh

³⁹ Terry W. York, *America's Worship Wars* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 48.

⁴⁰ Rob Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening, Singing a New Song in the Post-Modern Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 54.

God,” and “Hosanna” quickly became modern worship standards within many churches both inside and outside the Vineyard *denomination*.

Expansion of Worship Music As A Genre

At the end of the 1980s, modern worship music was marketed as a genre in and of itself. In an effort to reach lost people and speak in relevant musical language, modern worship music found a home in churches embracing charismatic theology. A significant number of modern worship composers had established themselves as worship leaders in strategic charismatic congregations, thus bringing to this genre their theology. This was encouraged by the formulation of record labels that were dedicated exclusively to the production and distribution of modern worship music.

Four prominent record labels were identified with charismatic theology, including: Maranatha Music, Vineyard Music, Integrity Music, and Worship Together (presently owned by EMI). Chuck Smith, pastor at Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa founded Maranatha Music, the oldest ‘praise and worship’ music label.⁴¹

Concentrating primarily on songs written exclusively by Vineyard worship leaders in the US and Canada, the *Vineyard Music Group* released a host of CD projects. Most significant is their series, “Touching The Father’s Heart” through which songs like “Breathe” and “Draw Me Close” were brought into the modern worship repertoire of the church at large.

⁴¹ Rob Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening, Singing a New Song in the Post-Modern Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 55.

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Formed out of the growing need for modern worship songwriters to have an outlet for publishing their music, Integrity Music was founded in 1987 by Michael Coleman. Integrity Music helped provide for their songwriters a platform for the release of new worship songs. This was done through a subscription service released to subscribers every 30 days: “Collecting songs from around the country and connecting with leading independent songwriters and worship leaders, the company began releasing a steady stream of projects in a variety of music styles, among them pop, country, Hebrew-style folk, and gospel.”⁴² Over the years, Integrity Music has been home to many well-known praise and worship artists and songwriters including Paul Baloche, Kent Henry and Bob Fitts.

In an effort to provide relevant music to a new generation, WorshipTogether, now a subsidiary of EMI music, produces music in the style of secular artists such as Coldplay, U2, and REM: “Started in the late 1990’s, WorshipTogether quickly emerged as a platform for a new generation of younger worship leaders and songwriters from the United Kingdom such as Martin Smith of Delirious, Matt Redman, Stuart Townend, and Noel Richards . . .”⁴³ Modern worship songs published by Worship Together include: “I Could Sing of Your Love Forever”, “Forever”, and “The Heart of Worship”. Although initially using composers from the United Kingdom, Worship Together also includes

⁴² Rob Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening, Singing a New Song in the Post-Modern Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 56-57.

⁴³ Rob Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening, Singing a New Song in the Post-Modern Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 57.

contributions from American worship leaders, Charlie Hall, David Crowder and Chris Tomlin.

Musical Form

Modern worship song form is best described as a combination of all the forms previously discussed in this paper including strophic form, AB, ABA, AABA with refrain etc. By the time of these developments pop music and rock and roll had been around for nearly 30 years. Pop composers were becoming more experimental and innovative by adding new sections to song forms. Three significant additions to the modern worship song form between the late 1980s and 2000 include the ‘pre-chorus’, ‘tags’, and extended (and sometimes multiple) ‘bridges’.

Introduction of the “pre-chorus” or “channel”. The pre-chorus, sometimes known as the channel, is typically a melodic and lyrical departure from the verse. It acts as a channel or a connecting point with the intention of building momentum before returning to the chorus. Paul Baloche in his book, *God Songs* defines the channel as “a short musical passage leading from one section of a song to another.”⁴⁴ Many times, the pre-chorus is a very short section, so that it will not be confused as another verse. It often employs a different rhythmic structure.

An example of the pre-chorus can be seen in Darlene Zschech’s 1997 composition “The Potter’s Hand”:

Beautiful Lord, wonderful Savior, I know for sure all of my days are
Held in Your hand; crafted into Your perfect plan.
You gently call me into Your presence, guiding me by Your Holy Spirit;

⁴⁴ Paul Baloche and Jimmy and Carol Owens, *God Songs* (Lindale, TX: leadworship.com, 2004), 277.

Teach me, dear Lord, to live all of my life through Your eyes.

*I'm captured by Your holy calling, set me apart,
I know You're drawing me to Yourself; Lead me, Lord, I pray*

Take me, mold me, use me, fill me; I give me life to the Potter's hand.
Call me, You guide me, lead me, walk beside me;
I give my life to the Potter's hand.⁴⁵

In this example, the pre-chorus *italicized* follows the verse and precedes the chorus.

Introduction of "tags". The usage of 'tags' in modern worship music is similar in some ways to the pre-chorus. Like the pre-chorus, tags are often a departure from the melodic structure, although many times they can be the repetition of one phrase used previously in the song. When this is the case, the repeated section or 'tag-line' is typically taken from the last line of the chorus. A great example of a 'tag' in a modern worship song can be seen in the popular Chris Tomlin and Jesse Reeves composition, "Not to Us". (The tag in this song has been italicized to indicate where it flows in musical structure.) The song form is: verse, chorus, bridge and then *tags* (V, C, B, T):

The cross before me, the world behind
No turning back, raise the banner high
It's not for us, It's all for You.
Let the heavens shake and split the sky
Let the people clap their hands and cry
It's not for us, it's all for you

Not to us, but to Your name, be the glory
Not to us, but to Your name, be the glory

The Earth is shaking, the mountains shouting
It's all for You.
The waves are crashing, the sun is raging
It's all for You.

⁴⁵ Ken Barker, ed., *More Songs for Praise and Worship 2: Worship Planner Edition* (Nashville: Word Music, 2005), 85.

The universe is spinning and singing
It's all for You.
Your children dancing, dancing, dancing,
It's all for you, it's all for You.

*All glory and honor and praise,
All glory and honor and praise,
All glory and honor and praise,
All glory and honor and praise.*⁴⁶

Introduction of "bridges". The use of bridges in musical form is not new to pop music or even Contemporary Christian Music. The practice of using a bridge in Christian music gained popularity with the development of the modern worship song. The bridge is a cousin of the tag and pre-chorus, sharing the same purpose and some similar characteristics. The bridge always contrasts in melodic and lyrical content from the verse and chorus. Simply put, the bridge is "a section of a song that "bridges" from one section to the next".⁴⁷ It often is a short departure from other familiar parts of the song, it typically acts as a catapult to build up to the chorus before the close of a song. An example of a bridge implemented in a modern worship song is in Tim Hughes composition, "Here I am to Worship":

Light of the world, You stepped down into darkness
Opened my eyes, let me see.
Beauty that made this heart adore You,
Hope of a life spent with You.

Here I am to worship,
Here I am to bow down,
Here I am to say that You're my God.

⁴⁶ Chris Tomlin and Jesse Reeves, "Not to Us" in accompanying booklet, *Chris Tomlin: Not To Us*. Six Steps Records (EMI), 2002, compact disc.

⁴⁷ Paul Baloche and Jimmy and Carol Owens, *God Songs* (Lindale, TX: leadworship.com, 2004), 277.

You're all together lovely,
All together worthy,
All together wonderful to me.

*And I'll never know
How much it cost
To see my sin
Upon that cross.*⁴⁸

In the example above the italicized lyric comprises the bridge and follows the verse and chorus. Typically, the bridge would lead back to the chorus. It is interesting to note that while this song has a bridge, it does not include any tag of pre-chorus. This underscores the versatility and variety contained in many modern worship songs.

Lyrical Form

The lyrical form of the modern worship song differs greatly from earlier lyric forms from the 20th century. Beginning in the 1980s the emergence of more intimate songs, with lyrics that were sung *to* God, were becoming more prominent. Now, many writers of text were being influenced by the gospel song of the late 19th century. They employed more frequent use of personal pronouns, testimony and emotional, romantic poetry. An example of a modern worship song which exemplifies a more personal, vertical expression *to* God rather than an impersonal declarative expression *about* God is found in Vineyard worship leader, Andy Park's composition, "In the Secret":

"In the secret, in the quiet place
In the stillness You are there.
In the secret, in the quiet hour I wait only for You
'Cause I want to know You more.

I want to know You

⁴⁸ Ken Barker, ed., *More Songs for Praise and Worship 3: Worship Planner Edition* (Nashville: Word Music, 2005), 7.

I want to hear Your voice
I want to know You more
I want to touch You
I want to see Your face
I want to know You more.”⁴⁹

The lyrics not only express a vertical emphasis in speaking directly to God, but also stress a personal expression of worship. Take note of the language Andy Park uses to engage the singer with the senses (to touch, hear, and see). Songs like these, coming through the charismatic renewal movement are characteristic of a large number of modern worship songs. It may be argued that songs that express this type of lyrical content did exist in earlier forms of worship music (perhaps as testimony songs), but in recent history it was not until the rise of the modern worship song that lyrics like these were embraced and utilized as acceptable congregational responses in corporate worship.

The Future of Modern Worship Music

One may only speculate as to what the future may hold in terms of congregational worship music. However, from understanding the historical background of where the modern worship song has come from, one could make some educated guesses as to where the winds of change will blow next. The purpose of this final section is to examine some of the most recent developments within the modern worship music movement and provide examples that may be used for establishing future trends.

The Resurgence of Hymns

The cyclical pattern we observe in history can be viewed in worship music as well. This has clearly been seen through the resurgence of *the hymn*. Although hymns

⁴⁹ Ken Barker, ed., *More Songs for Praise and Worship: Worship Planner Edition* (Nashville: Word Music, 2005), 38.

have never departed from the musical repertoire of the church at large, in the past 10-15 years a considerable portion of the evangelical church has given preference to modern worship songs and choruses. However, in recent years there has been a rediscovery of the old hymns. Significant numbers of Christian artists (including “Passion Worship Band” and Bart Millard of “Mercy Me”) have released hymn related projects that have provided listeners with fresh arrangements of timeless hymns. Because of the shift in church instrumentation towards a full 5-10 piece worship band, many old hymns have been re-arranged for this new configuration of instruments, making these hymns more palatable for the 21st century church.

Musical Changes

In many liturgical hymns, the harmonic structure changed on nearly every beat, making arrangements for the modern worship band very stiff and awkward. With the instrumentation of a band relying more on “groove” and “feel,” the restructuring of the harmonic foundation of a song has made hymns more accessible for singing and playing in a modern worship context. Instead of changing chords on every beat, the harmonic rhythm is simplified and delayed. This allows hymns to be set into a “groove,” providing harmonic space for rhythmic players, such as guitarists to perform with fewer chord changes.

Lyrical Changes

One may argue that the reemergence of these hymns came in part because of their rich lyrical content. This practice involves taking strophic hymns and adding to it a

newly composed chorus. An excellent example of this is Chris Tomlin's addition to the classic gospel hymn, "Amazing Grace". His additional chorus is italicized below:

Amazing grace how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind but now I see

*My chains are gone!
I've been set free!
My God, my Savior has ransomed me.
And like a flood His mercy reigns,
Unending love, Amazing grace!"*

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun.
We've no less days to sing God's praise,
Then when we've first begun.⁵⁰

As seen above, the strophic form of the original hymn (common meter) is maintained while adding a brand new chorus. This fresh arrangement now resembles more of a modern worship song in ABA form. In essence, examples like these demonstrate a convergence of two styles that unite two varying musical forms. Interestingly, this is the exact same practice used in writing the gospel songs written between 1875-1950 (strophic verse, followed by a chorus).

The Modern Day Hymn

Alongside the resurgence of traditional hymns within the modern worship movement has come what many scholars call the 'modern hymn'. Professor John Kinchen of Liberty University refers to and defines this style of writing as "neo-

⁵⁰ John Newton, John P. Rees, Edwin Othello Excell, Chris Tomlin and Louie Giglio, "Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)" in accompanying booklet, *Chris Tomlin: See The Morning*. Six Steps Records (EMI), 2006, compact disc.

hymnody”. This style of writing resembles the hymns composed immediately after the reformation. They employ the structural makeup of liturgical hymns, particularly in the metric and strophic form while using lyrics that are intentionally intellectual in doctrine and theology. These modern worship songs utilize hymn-like melodies free of complicated rhythmic syncopation, providing balance to the modern worship music genre.

The most celebrated current writers of the “modern hymn” are Stuart Townend and Keith Getty. Their most famous modern hymn is “In Christ Alone.” Getty describes how he composed this popular modern hymn on his website: “I had a strong very Irish melody that I could imagine a large crowd singing. I wanted it to become a hymn that would declare the whole life of Christ and what it meant. Something that could teach people the foundations of what we believed in Christ – the God who changed all of history and who wants a relationship with each us.”⁵¹ The lyrics of the first stanza (or verse) are as follows:

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My comforter, my all in all
Here in the love of Christ I stand.⁵²

⁵¹ Getty Music, “Story behind “In Christ Alone””; available from <http://gettymusic.com/insight2.asp?id=28>; Internet; accessed 12 October 2008.

⁵² Ken Barker, ed., *More Songs for Praise and Worship 3: Worship Planner Edition* (Nashville: Word Music, 2005), 138.

You can see from the strophic form and lyrical rhyming structure above, that this hymn, although written in the past 10 years resembles the characteristics of hymns composed in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Hymns like these give modern day worshippers a new, fresh language in which to respond to God. They unite a fresh expression of faith with a time-tested musical and lyrical form used and enjoyed by previous generations of worshippers.

From Vertical to Horizontal In Lyrical Form

As modern worship music continues to develop and evolve, one interesting transition currently taking place is the slow but certain shift from vertical to horizontal lyrics. In other words, it appears that God is impressing upon this generation to write congregational worship songs that are about reaching out and being the hands and feet of Jesus Christ. This is not new. God did the same thing during the great revivals from the 1880s through 1910.

In the last twenty years congregations have learned what it means to sing *to* Christ, using intimate and relational lyrics. Now it appears that God is leading congregations to sing more horizontally, to one another. This gives opportunity for every worshipper to evangelize a dying world. If the current worship music being released is any indication of this move from vertical to horizontal worship lyrics, it is happening alongside a larger work God is doing in His church. Clearly God is awakening believers to *be the church* as opposed to just *going to church*. Take for example the verse and chorus of “Give Love Away” a recently recorded worship song by Liberty University worship band, Exodus:

Hear the sound of a generation
Living out the love we sing
We have found the greatest joy in giving
To be Your hands, to be Your feet
To give our love away

I can't deny, I won't deny
What You have said, what You have done for us
I will do for You

*We are the revolution
Holding the one solution
This the call: to give our love away
And we will go where You lead us
Shining the light of Jesus
Leaving it all to give our love away.*⁵³

The lyric of this song, particularly in the chorus (italicized), is outward focused. It rallies believers to rise up and be the church. While addressing God, it also addresses the church at large, calling them to one biblical principle. It admonishes and encourages them to do more than just sing, but put feet to their faith and give themselves away for a greater cause.

The emergence of this change in modern worship lyrical content is not isolated to this one song. Another example of this shift to more horizontal lyrics is seen in Brooke Fraser's song, "Hosanna":

Heal my heart and make it clean
Open up my eyes to the things unseen
Show me how to love like You have loved me
Break my heart for what breaks Yours
Everything I am for Your kingdom's cause
As I work from Earth into eternity⁵⁴

⁵³ Travis Doucette, "Give Love Away" in accompanying booklet, *Exodus: Give Love Away*. Red Tie Records (Liberty University), 2008, compact disc.

⁵⁴ Brooke Fraser "Hosanna" in accompanying booklet, *Hillsong Church: Savior King*. Integrity Media, 2007, compact disc.

Although the lyrics above are very much an intimate, honest prayer to Christ, they still encourage a horizontal mindset. They express the need for a worship lifestyle not contained by four walls. Rather, this is an outward expression of an inward conviction. Note the lyric “Show me how to love like you have loved me, break my heart for what breaks Yours.”⁵⁵ This underscores that biblical worship is diminished if it only amounts to singing songs with fellow believers on a Sunday morning.

As the modern worship movement progresses as in renewal movements of the past, it can be expected that more horizontal songs will emerge, reminding the church that there is a task at hand to radically love the unlovable. Our greatest fulfillment as worshippers will come as we first love Christ with all our heart, soul, mind and strength while loving others as ourselves.⁵⁶

Conclusion

Through this brief overview of the historical development of the modern worship song, we have documented the hand of God on His people. In every decade, the Lord has inspired a new generation to write and compose music for Him. Each generation demonstrates a worship language that reflects what He is doing in their hearts. Each movement has experienced a manna-like worship expression that has been sustenance for each specific generation. Each subsequent generation must engage God for themselves

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Matthew 22:37-40 (NIV).

with their own outpouring of adoration, bringing up to date the relevancy of God and His Word. With every revival or special move of God on His people, a change in the way they have worshipped has occurred. This has impacted the musical and lyrical form of their expressions in song, but the message has always been the same: Jesus Christ magnified and glorified through song.

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