

A METHOD FOR THE EVALUATION OF SONG TEXTS IN EVANGELICAL CHURCHES:  
A CRUCIAL FIRST STEP IN DEVELOPING INDIGENOUS SONGS

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## Abstract

How important are song texts in worship services? According to the Bible, these songs have a multi-faceted role. Not only do they contain truths about God's revelation of himself in Scripture, but they also call his people to respond with their whole being. The same song can express worship to God, teach believers truths about him, and challenge unbelievers to turn from their false gods. Therefore, the lyrical content of Christian congregational songs is of utmost importance.

However, a survey of ethnodoxological literature reveals a greater focus on songs' *musical* content. One reason for this may be the general emphasis on the emotional, experiential aspect of worship in evangelicalism today. While biblical worship does certainly include the heart (Psalm 32.11), it also involves the mind. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 14.15, "I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also" (ESV). Furthermore, while musical analysis requires specialized training, theological lyrical analysis can be conducted by any spiritually mature Christian.

Church leaders, musicians, and members need an objective way to evaluate song texts, whether for an annual repertory check-up, for the evaluation of a potential new song, or simply for a greater appreciation of the songs they already sing. Ethnodoxologists need a clear method to help churches evaluate the song texts of their active repertory as a preliminary step in song-writing workshops. Until the church leaders have a clear grasp of what songs they already have, how can they determine what new songs they need?

The following method leads Christians through textual analysis in two steps. First, participants analyze a song text found in Scripture on a micro- and macro-level. They look for what truths the song contains about God's revelation of himself and how his people should

respond. They also determine the general “nutritional value” of the song from a discipleship standpoint and describe its overall flavor according to several characteristics. Second, they apply the same analysis to song texts from their church’s active repertory. Along with the previous steps, they check each phrase for theological accuracy and clarity, discussing their findings as a group. Finally, they consider the three-fold nature of worship and discuss whether they need to give more attention to any area as a local church.

The method was tested in three phases. A workshop was conducted by videoconference with three different groups of people identifying as evangelical Christians. The first two workshops were conducted in English with Americans, and the last workshop was conducted in French with people residing in Europe. Participants found the method to be beneficial for them personally and spiritually, and they described it as potentially very useful in cross-cultural settings.

The method will need to be slightly adjusted for each group and cultural setting, but it has potential as a useful tool for churches and ethnodoxologists in both literary and oral cultures.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

“We’ve been singing a lot of worthless songs!” As the couples from Central Asia began comparing the content of their worship songs with the songs of Scripture, one of the women expressed her dismay. While their repertory did include some edifying songs, she realized that those songs were the minority. She and her husband have faithfully shepherded many souls in their underground church. They are constantly harassed by the police and others who oppose them. Over and over, they see people who seemed interested in the Gospel fall away because of the high price of following Christ. How important it is for these believers as well as those in all other churches to sing songs that have solid theology: songs that faithfully communicate both God’s revelation of himself in the Bible and our response to that revelation.

When these church leaders asked me to help them improve their music, I did not initially consider the importance of finding out which songs made up their active repertory, nor did I think about how to help them evaluate the theological content of those songs. I was more interested in analyzing the genres and styles in their repertory. Only a few years later did I realize that I needed to know what song texts they already had to identify what they most needed. Furthermore, if their lyrics were light on biblical truth, it would be more effective if they came to that realization themselves than if I as an outsider expressed criticism of their songs. In December 2019, I guided them through a simple method of textual analysis. They expressed both their awe at the richness of the song texts in Scripture and their desire to develop better song texts for their churches. I asked myself, “Why didn’t I think of this earlier? Have other ethnodoxologists developed methods for this step? How can I build on this method in future workshops not just with these believers, but also with those in other cultures who may be unaware of the importance of their song texts?”

## Overview of the Project

I have developed a method of analysis of song texts because I want to help church leaders exercise critical thinking in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of their current repertory. I desire to help congregations around the world become more intentional in choosing Scripture-saturated lyrics and be better equipped to write their own songs.

The method begins with an extended discussion of the reasons for congregational singing according to Scripture. Participants are also invited to consider ways in which they may have slipped into compromise: how might their culture have negatively influenced their motivations or practices in congregational singing?

Next, participants analyze song texts found in the Bible individually or in small groups by asking the following questions: According to this text, what is God like, what has he done, and how should we respond? Participants rate each song's "nutritional value" from a discipleship standpoint and consider its overall flavor or ethos. Since the indication "selah" is sprinkled throughout the Psalms and the song of Habakkuk, participants are also invited to consider possible meanings and practical applications of this term.

In the second step of the method, participants apply the same textual analysis to songs in their congregation's active repertory, concluding with an evaluation of the songs' theological content. The facilitator invites the participants to consider what song texts are most appropriate for children and new believers. Finally, they consider together the implications of worshipping God with their whole beings and brainstorm about ways to improve their church's active repertory.

## Significance of the Project

A survey of ethnodoxological literature reveals a greater emphasis on discovering a community's music genres than on learning about its current song texts. While ethnodoxologists have written about the importance of song texts that contain solid theology, they have not proposed a step-by-step method to guide church leaders through textual analysis. If leaders and musicians learn to do critical thinking about their songs' lyrical content, they will be better equipped to make discerning choices for their repertory long after the ethnodoxologist has left. Churches in both oral and literary cultures need spiritually nourishing song texts. Oral cultures are not at a disadvantage in this aspect of church life. On the contrary, they often have a special capacity to retain extended lyrics in their memories. Even churches in Western cultures who have a multitude of songs at their disposal would benefit from being more intentional and discerning about the texts that they choose to sing. What could be a more effective way for God's Word to "dwell richly" in hearts (Colossians 3.16) than to connect it to melody, harmony, and rhythm? Could this be why God commanded Christians to sing?

## Purpose of the Project

This project provides a step-by-step method for ethnodoxologists or other facilitators to follow in guiding evangelical church leaders and members in textual analysis of songs from their active repertory.

## Intended Outcomes of the Project

By following this method, indigenous church leaders will have a greater understanding of the vital role of congregational singing in the local church, a deeper appreciation for the rich lyrical content of the songs of Scripture, a higher awareness of the "nutritional" value,



theological content, and overall ethos of their churches' worship songs, a clearer grasp of what it means to worship God with their whole beings, and a blueprint of practical ways to improve their repertory. Ethnodoxologists will be able to conduct more effective worship song-writing workshops after having implemented this method.

### System of Assessment of the Project

The project's effectiveness was assessed by anonymous surveys given before and after each implementation of the method. Each survey measured participants' understanding of the role of congregational singing in corporate worship, their self-awareness regarding three broad aspects of worship, their knowledge of the process of textual analysis, their opinion of the "nutritional" value of the songs of Scripture and their church's songs, and their perspective of the theological content of their church's active repertory. Participants' evaluative comments during and after each workshop were also noted.

### Limitations of the Project

The study was limited in its scope and length. Three workshops were conducted by videoconference in February 2021 with a total of thirty participants, all from evangelical churches. Nine people participated in the first workshop (W1), eleven in the second (W2), and ten in the third (W3). The first two workshops were conducted in English with Americans and the third was conducted in French with European residents. All participants were either church leaders or members, and most had extended experience in music ministry.

## Glossary of Terms

**Active repertory:** Songs that are most frequently sung by the local church.<sup>1</sup>

**Ethnodoxology:** As defined by the board of the Global Ethnodoxology Network, ethnodoxology is the “interdisciplinary study of how Christians in every culture engage with God and the world through their own artistic expressions.”<sup>2</sup> Roberta King defines it as “the study of the worship of God in the world’s cultures; the theological and practical study of how and why people of other cultures praise and glorify the true and living God.”<sup>3</sup> Missionaries that specialized in ethnomusicology were first called “music missionaries” or “musicianaries” in the 1990s. Several of the most influential scholars were connected with the Ethnomusicology Department of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, a ministry of Wycliffe Bible Translators.<sup>4</sup> Annual conferences and resulting publications led to the organization of the International Council of Ethnodoxologists, later called the Global Ethnodoxology Network.

**Indigenous hymnody:** “A body of hymns and spiritual songs which are composed by the members of an ethnic group and thought of as being their own.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Titon, Jeff Todd, *Powerhouse for God: Speech, Chant, and Song in an Appalachian Baptist Church* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), quoted in Monique M. Ingalls, *Singing the Congregation: How Contemporary Worship Music Forms Evangelical Community* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018):121.

<sup>2</sup> “What Is Ethnodoxology?” Global Ethnodoxology Network (GEN), accessed April 18, 2020, <http://www.worldofworship.org/what-is-ethnodoxology/>.

<sup>3</sup> Russell G. Shubin, “Worship that Moves the Soul: A Conversation with Roberta King,” *Mission Frontiers* 23, no 2 (2001):11.

<sup>4</sup> Dianne Palmer-Quay, *Developing Indigenous Hymnody: Key Resources for Cross-Cultural Workers*, (Columbia, SC: Self-published, 1999), 6.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Schrag and Paul Neeley, eds. *All the World Will Worship: Helps for Developing Indigenous Hymns*. (Duncanville, TX: EthnoDoxology Publications, 2005), 3.

**Lyric theology:** A congregation’s song texts reveal their “lyric theology:” their comprehension and knowledge of God as expressed by their songs.<sup>6</sup>

**“Nutritional” value of song texts:** I developed this concept to build upon the idea of “text load” as described by ethnomusicologist Roberta King. She emphasized the importance of song texts that contain many truths about God.<sup>7</sup> The Bible often compares spiritual food to physical food. Just as our physical bodies are sustained by food, our spiritual lives are sustained by the truths of God’s Word (1 Peter 2.2, Matthew 4.4). The concept of physical and spiritual nutrition translates well across cultures.

**“Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” as referred to in the New Testament of the Bible**

(Colossians 3.16 and Ephesians 5.19): Bruce Leafblad believes these terms refer to three distinct genres of music: the Psalms exalted God for his attributes and works, hymns glorified Jesus Christ in the early church, and spiritual songs emphasized the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the daily lives of the early Christians.<sup>8</sup> However, some scholars believe that Paul was simply encouraging the believers to worship God with a variety of song forms.<sup>9</sup> It is also possible that this expression reflects an ongoing shift from Jewish songs based on the psalter of the Old Testament to new Gentile compositions.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Megan Marie Meyers attributes this idea to Roberta King in “Developing Disciples Through Contextualized Worship Arts in Mozambique: Grazing and Growing” (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2015), 47-48, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

<sup>7</sup> Roberta King, *A Time to Sing: A Manual for the African Church* (Nairobi, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1999), 61.

<sup>8</sup> Bruce Leafblad, Seminar on Worship.

<sup>9</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, in *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), chap. 2.

<sup>10</sup> James Krabill, *The Hymnody of the Harrist Church Among the Dida of South-Central Ivory Coast (1913-1949): A Historico-Religious Study* (Frankfurt, Germany: Peter Lang, 1995), 39.

**Summative content analysis:** Developed by Frances Rapport, this method is “a group collaborative analytic technique that concentrates on consensus-building activities.”<sup>11</sup>

**Text load:** This term refers to the amount of information in a song text. A song with high text load contains many different words or concepts, while a song with low text load has few changes throughout. Most of the words stay the same throughout the song.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Frances Rapport, “Summative Analysis: A Qualitative Method for Social Science and Health Research,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 9, no. 3 (2010): 270, <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940691000900303>.

<sup>12</sup> King, *A Time to Sing*, 61.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

“Let’s start our first session by singing praises to the Lord.” As we gathered with the leaders of several Central Asian churches for a week of training in theology and music, we invited them to begin with song. As they joyfully lifted their voices in praise, the American missionary who was leading the sessions noticed that several of them were weeping. When he asked them why, one of the pastors stood up and confessed, “We have not been singing together in our services for several months because we were afraid that our neighbors would hear us and report us.” His statement led to an extended discussion about the importance of congregational singing. Why does the God of the Bible command Christians to sing when they gather? The Psalms are full of these calls to sing: “Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the godly!” (Psalm 149.1, ESV)<sup>13</sup>

Our discussion and this experience in ethnodoxology have led me to other queries: How might congregations evaluate their song texts to determine if they are accomplishing the goals outlined in Scripture? Have ethnodoxologists developed any methods of textual analysis? Churches in oral societies do not use written song texts; would textual analysis be of any practical benefit to them? If so, how might they conduct it in an oral setting? Furthermore, does the ethnodoxological literature reflect a greater emphasis on the textual (cognitive) or musical (affective and physical) dimensions of congregational singing? What may be the underlying reasons for this emphasis? In the following pages, I will summarize responses to these questions.

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<sup>13</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the English Standard Version.

## Biblical Basis for Congregational Singing

Why does the Bible command believers to sing when they gather? Ethnodoxologists have identified three primary reasons. First, Christians sing to express worship to the God who has revealed himself to them. Ron Man describes worship as “a dialogue between God and his people, a rhythm of revelation and response,” according to passages such as Psalm 96.4: “For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised.”<sup>14</sup> He explains, “In worship God speaks to us through his word, and we respond with our hearts, voices, and bodies...All worship is a response to God’s prior revealing and saving initiative.”<sup>15</sup> Based on this understanding of worship, Man believes that corporate worship services should include a balance of God’s revelation (through Scripture readings, teaching, and songs based on Scripture) and of corporate response (through prayer, song, offerings, the Lord’s Supper, etc.).<sup>16</sup> Congregational singing therefore has a role in *both* aspects of worship.

The major work *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook* begins with a section on biblical worship. Andrew E. Hill’s Scripture-saturated essay lays an excellent foundation. Like Ron Man, he believes that worship involves both revelation and response. He notes, “In the OT, the Hebrew people were called to an active and whole-person response to the God who initiated covenant relationship with their ancestors.”<sup>17</sup> Hill describes the many attributes of God as revealed in Scripture and emphasizes that a greater

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<sup>14</sup> Ron Man, “The Bridge’: Worship Between Bible and Culture,” in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook*, ed. James R. Krabill et al. (Pasadena, CA: International Council of Ethnodoxologists and William Carey Library, 2013), 20.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew E. Hill, “Biblical Foundations of Christian Worship,” in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, 3.

knowledge of God “informs and enriches our worship of him.”<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, this knowledge reaches its climax through God’s supreme revelation of himself in Jesus Christ.<sup>19</sup>

Two theologian-musicians in France have described worship in a similar way. Philippe Viguier and Kevin Stauffer write, “We cannot worship someone whom we do not know.”<sup>20</sup> They believe that God has made himself known in Scripture through the Holy Spirit and that he is the one seeking worshipers, according to John 4.23-24: “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” In a sense, each believer who joins in corporate worship has been personally invited by God himself; therefore, God is the primary audience in congregational singing.<sup>21</sup>

The Bible instructs congregations to sing not only to worship God, but also to edify or teach each other. In his dissertation on American Evangelical worship music, Joshua Busman quotes a worship leader as saying, “Songs are sermons that people actually remember.”<sup>22</sup> Viguier and Stauffer believe that fellow Christians are the second audience in congregational singing, for they are nourished by the Scriptural content of worship songs.<sup>23</sup> They explain, “For better or for worse, our songs represent us... We are what we sing. The words that we recite define and construct us. This is why the apostle insisted in 1 Corinthians 14.26 that ‘all things should be done for building up’ in worship services.”<sup>24</sup> Stauffer compared Colossians 3.16 to the height

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<sup>18</sup> Hill, “Biblical Foundations,” 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>20</sup> Philippe Viguier and Kevin Stauffer, *Manuel pour la conduite du culte : Pour une louange intentionnelle dans l’Église* [Manual for the leadership of worship services : In favor of intentional praise in the church] (Lyon, France: Editions Clé, 2021), 64 (personal translation).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>22</sup> Joshua Kalin Busman, “(Re)sounding Passion: Listening to American Evangelical Worship Music, 1997-2015” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2015), 52, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

<sup>23</sup> Viguier and Stauffer, *Manuel pour la conduite*, 25.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-82.

requirement that children have to pass in order to ride a rollercoaster. Colossians 3.16 states, “Let the word of Christ well in your richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

According to Stauffer, if the worship song does not provide instruction and edification for the congregation, it is not “tall enough” to be sung in corporate worship.<sup>25</sup>

Songwriters and performers Keith and Kristyn Getty also highlight this horizontal aspect of congregational singing, citing Ephesians 5.19-20 and 1 Peter 2.4-5.<sup>26</sup> When the church sings, each person brings his or her contribution to the whole in the same way that each stone contributes to the construction of a building. This unity can be heard audibly as people put aside their personal musical preferences and raise their voices together as one, reminding each other of their mutual need and belonging as part of the body of Christ.<sup>27</sup>

The Bible calls Christians to sing together for a third reason. Viguier and Stauffer explain that as congregations sing, they testify to unbelievers who may be present that God alone is worthy of worship.<sup>28</sup> Israelites in the Old Testament called the nations to come worship their great God: “Praise the Lord, all nations! Extol him, all peoples! For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord!” (Psalm 117) Today when Christians sing in worship services, they may be observed by unbelieving relatives,

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<sup>25</sup> Viguier and Stauffer, *Manuel pour la conduite*, 87.

<sup>26</sup> Ephesians 5.19-20: “Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” 1 Peter 2.4-5: “As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

<sup>27</sup> Keith and Kristyn Getty, *Chantons! Comment transformer notre vie, notre famille et notre Eglise par la puissance de l'adoration [Sing! How worship transforms your life, family and church.]* Québec, Canada : Editions Cruciforme, 2018. 76-80. While this is the ideal, Busman contends that churches today have formed around musical expression and style rather than denominational allegiances (Busman, “(Re)sounding Passion,” 58-59).

<sup>28</sup> Viguier and Stauffer, 25.



skeptical teenagers, or interested friends and neighbors in attendance.<sup>29</sup> The Bible describes unbelievers as people who choose to worship other things (“idols”) instead of God (Romans 1). Their heart-secrets are revealed when they see believers worshiping God (1 Corinthians 14.24-25).<sup>30</sup>

At a workshop in the 1990s, ethnomusicologists Paul Neeley and Sue Hall saw Dagomba villagers in Ghana show lively interest as Christians composed Scripture songs. Hundreds of people gathered to observe the process and the final presentation. Although Christians were a minority among the Dagomba, their message resounded throughout their village on that occasion. “The villagers heard more Bible verses in this one day than in a month of Sunday services,” write Neeley and Hall.<sup>31</sup>

If song lyrics enable congregations to praise God, teach each other, and testify to unbelievers all at the same time, they are extremely important.<sup>32</sup> Many ethnodoxologists emphasize the significance of biblical song texts for this reason. Roberta King comments, “Enjoyable and entertaining as music is, the lyrical message is just as important and, at times, the most important component of a music performance.”<sup>33</sup>

In her essay on beauty and excellence in biblical worship, Emily R. Brink points out that although little information is given in the Bible about the music that accompanied the Psalms, the instruments mentioned most frequently would have provided a quiet (rather than powerful)

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<sup>29</sup> Getty and Getty, *Chantons!*, 93.

<sup>30</sup> 1 Corinthians 14.24-25: “If all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you” (cited by Viguier and Stauffer, *Manuel pour la conduite*, 110).

<sup>31</sup> Paul Neeley and Sue Hall, “Praising the High King of Heaven,” in *All the World is Singing: Glorifying God Through the Worship Music of the Nations*, eds. Frank Fortunato, Paul Neeley, and Carol Brinneman (Secunderabad, India: Authentic Media, 2006), 78.

<sup>32</sup> Viguier and Stauffer, *Manuel pour la conduite*, 86.

<sup>33</sup> Roberta Rose King, Thomas Oduro, James R. Krabill, and Jean Ngoya Kidula, *Music in the Life of the African Church*, (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2008), 121, Project MUSE.muse.jhu.edu/book/4074.

accompaniment. She attributes this to the fact that “in worship *the text was primary*, in contrast to the louder music and often orgiastic practices that some of the surrounding cultures used in their worship” (emphasis added).<sup>34</sup>

Viguiet and Stauffer encourage churches to find song texts that communicate profound spiritual truths. Music styles come and go, but the Bible remains unchanged. Superficial texts full of “Christianese” cannot call people to holiness.<sup>35</sup> The authors highlight the fact that Jesus and the apostles frequently quoted the Psalms in their teaching and preaching. In fact, Jesus cited the Psalms more than any other Old Testament book.<sup>36</sup>

In his “prelude” to the book *All the World is Singing: Glorifying God Through the Worship Music of the Nations*, Frank Fortunato describes a meeting during which he gave a report on ethnodoxology around the world. A member of Wycliffe Bible Translators responded immediately, declaring, “Here’s the experience of Wycliffe in two quick sentences. In areas where translators encouraged new believers to sing newly translated Scriptures, the churches grew rapidly. Where that did not happen, churches grew more slowly.”<sup>37</sup> Clearly, churches benefit from singing Bible-saturated lyrics.

### Analysis of Song Texts

If song texts have such an important role, how might congregations evaluate the contents of their texts periodically to determine if they meet the “height” requirement of Colossians 3.16? How might ethnodoxologists incorporate this textual analysis at the beginning of song-writing workshops so that participants grow in awareness of and appreciation for Scripture-saturated

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<sup>34</sup> Emily R. Brink, “The Significance of Beauty and Excellence in Biblical Worship,” in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, ed. Krabill et al., 10.

<sup>35</sup> John 17.17: “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”

<sup>36</sup> Viguiet and Stauffer, *Manuel pour la conduite*, 85-86.

<sup>37</sup> Frank Fortunato, prelude to *All the World Is Singing: Glorifying God Through the Worship Music of the Nations*, ed. Frank Fortunato, Paul Neeley, and Carol Brinneman (Secunderabad, India: Authentic Media, 2006), xiii.

lyrics? Several ethnomusicologists have developed methods which could be very useful for that end.

### **Active Repertory**

In her book *Singing the Congregation: How Contemporary Worship Music Forms Evangelical Community*, Monique Ingalls provides an ethnography of St. Bartholomew's Church, her congregation in Tennessee. To narrow down her research to the songs that were sung the most frequently, she adapted a method developed by ethnomusicologist Jeff Todd Titon in his study of an Appalachian Baptist church. Having obtained a list of all one hundred and four hymns sung over the course of eight weeks (an astonishing number!) he noted which of them were sung at least twice. He considered these to be the church's "active repertory." As Ingalls puts it, "The active repertory expresses a set of concerns unique to this congregation that could never had been derived from a study of all the repertory within the church's hymnal alone."<sup>38</sup> She followed a similar method for her ethnography, reducing a list of fifteen hundred songs sung during a three-year period to the seventy which were sung the most frequently.<sup>39</sup> No congregation would have time to analyze all of the song texts that they sing. Ingalls and Titon have demonstrated a simple way to narrow down the full repertory to the active repertory, by concentrating on the songs that are sung at least twice during a certain period of time.

### **Analysis of Songs of the Bible and of Text Load**

Roberta King has conducted numerous song-writing workshops with Christians in Africa. In her book *A Time to Sing* she outlines two steps for writing new songs. First, participants

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<sup>38</sup> Monique M. Ingalls, *Singing the Congregation: How Contemporary Worship Music Forms Evangelical Community*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 121.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-123.

should look at the songs that already exist in their culture. (Interestingly, she does not instruct them to assess their current repertory of their congregation.) Second, they should look at the songs of the Bible. She provides a sample chart for analysis of these songs. While the lyrical content is mentioned, most of the categories have to do with the context surrounding the songs, such as when they were sung, by whom, and for what purpose.<sup>40</sup> In the section entitled “A Checklist for Christian Songs,” she encourages believers to evaluate whether a song text is faithful to the Bible. King continues, “Christians should be able to feast on the message, God’s Word of the song, so much so, that they receive the message with their whole being.”<sup>41</sup> Although she does not provide a rubric for the evaluation of songs’ theological soundness, King does emphasize the need for songs with high text load: songs which contain “many different words or phrases.” The higher the text load, the more Scriptural truths are expressed in a song.<sup>42</sup> King’s instruction to consider the songs of the Bible as well as the text load of a song could be practical for textual analysis.

Dianne Palmer-Quay has made the important observation that strophic hymns, which support a high text load, do not work well in tonal languages. It is almost impossible to make the syntax of the language and the notes of the melody match for multiple verses.<sup>43</sup> For this reason, other genres should be prioritized in those cultures.

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<sup>40</sup> Roberta King, *A Time to Sing: A Manual for the African Church* (Nairobi, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1999), 44-46.

<sup>41</sup> King, *A Time to Sing*, 59.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-61.

<sup>43</sup> Dianne Palmer-Quay, *Developing Indigenous Hymnody*, 23.

## Summative Content Analysis

Ethnomusicologist Megan Meyers employed a research technique called summative content analysis to analyze the song texts of several Mozambican congregations.<sup>44</sup> She wanted to determine their “lyric theology,” a term that she had learned from her teacher Roberta King. The song texts of a congregation reveal its theology. Meyers compiled a chart of popular songs in her target churches by asking the pastor or worship leader of each church to make a list of twenty “frequently sung songs.” She did not impose any strict way for them to put together their list: it could be the songs they had sung the last few weeks, the first songs that they thought of, or simply their favorite songs.<sup>45</sup> Although this method was rather laborious (and undoubtedly less efficient and precise than the methods of Titon and Ingalls), it was probably quite necessary in the oral context. She did obtain a final list of one hundred fifty-four songs from nine different churches. Since some of the songs were in vernacular languages, she had them all translated into Portuguese for analysis. She was then able to identify the three self-determined genres of Mozambican worship music: *nossa música* (a local genre with a very low text load), Portuguese music from Brazil (including songs of Western origin), and Western hymns, which had the highest text load because of their strophic structure. One hundred and three of one hundred fifty-four songs in the list were *nossa música*.<sup>46</sup>

Once her list of songs was prepared, Meyers was able to conduct summative content analysis with the help of two research assistants. This step was particularly ingenious. They ranked the songs with a stop light according to whether the content was biblical (green), questionable (yellow), or unbiblical or confusing (red). Next, they compared notes to check for

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<sup>44</sup> Megan Marie Meyers, “Developing Disciples Through Contextualized Worship Arts in Mozambique: Grazing and Growing” (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2015), 47, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67, 81.

reliability. She triangulated her data by conducting follow-up interviews with the pastors of the participating churches, asking them whether the results of her study corresponded with the situation in their church. Through these research methods, she was able to obtain sufficient data to conduct the final phase of her study involving applied ethnomusicology.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to analyzing the theological accuracy of the lyrics, Meyers analyzed the different themes that were covered in each song. Her list included categories such as God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, believers, church, after-life, baptism, evangelism, offering, and prayer.<sup>48</sup> What she found enabled her to make an important deduction about the churches' lyric theology. She writes,

Church that sing primarily *nossa música* are being exposed to one-quarter of the theological concepts sung by churches that prefer Western hymns. **The couplet refrain form of Beira churches' preferred genre, *nossa música*, impedes discipleship through lyric theology.**<sup>49</sup> (emphasis added)

However, she understood that people do not necessarily *want* music that has more theological content. One pastor told her that he knew that Western hymns had richer texts, but that his people had a difficult time “diving into” the music. This led her to an important conclusion.

While theologically rich, western hymns feel foreign and don't connect to Mozambican hearts. Conversely, *nossa música*, though it conveys “simple” theology, engages people and ignites a passionate response to God. **The necessity to reach both the affective and the cognitive dimension through worship music is clear.**<sup>50</sup> (emphasis added)

In my personal communication with Meyers, I learned that the traffic light exercise was her personal invention and that she had found it to be very effective. She explained,

I've since used this method in a number of classes - with pastors, worship leaders, musicians and youth groups - challenging people to take a deeper look at what they're

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<sup>47</sup> Meyers, “Developing Disciples,” 49.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

singing and affirming week after week. It has also encouraged the creation of new songs to fill in the theological “holes” in our sung worship.

An example of this is from my primary case site. While the church proudly touts a missional agenda, at the time of research there wasn't one song that expressed that. In fact, the pastor (an accomplished musician in his own right) had bemoaned the lack of missions involvement in the church. Once we discovered this “hole” in the sung theology, we set to work creating songs about missions and singing them during services. Since that time, the church has planted seventeen new churches - and continues to send out missionaries to farther reaches of Mozambique. I don't mean to say that missions songs were the ONLY factor that contributed to this increased missional fervor, but they certainly helped put missions on the lips and hearts of the congregation more consistently.<sup>51</sup>

Congregations could greatly benefit from these methods developed by Titon, Ingalls, King, and Meyers by narrowing down their focus to their active repertory, prioritizing high text load songs while not disparaging the important role of low text load songs in local genres, and evaluating the themes and theological accuracy of the lyrics. Textual analysis should be primarily conducted by “insiders” rather than visiting ethnodoxologists. Local believers are best equipped to deduce the meaning and theological clarity of their song texts, particularly because of the nuances in language. Krabill states, “Textual analysis of oral materials presupposes first of all a profound understanding of the language which outsiders, with but a few exceptions, rarely achieve.”<sup>52</sup>

### Textual Analysis in Oral Societies

Krabill's reference to oral materials leads to a further question: are songs with high text load realistic and necessary in oral settings? Ethnomusicologist Tom Avery observed that Bible translators and literate indigenous believers tended to use a high text load when they compose new songs for worship. He believed this was problematic because of the difficulty of committing

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<sup>51</sup> Megan Meyers, personal communication, May 26, 2020.

<sup>52</sup> James R. Krabill, *The Hymnody of the Harrist Church Among the Dida of South-Central Ivory Coast (1913-1949): A Historico-Religious Study*, (Frankfurt, Germany: Peter Lang, 1995), 345.

so much text to memory. He suggested instead that the bulk of the teaching be done in a non-musical way that is natural to the culture. For instance, in working with the Mamaindé Indians in Brazil, he produced cassettes that included spoken Bible stories as well as short songs that summarized them.<sup>53</sup>

However, others believe that members of oral societies are especially gifted in memorizing extensive information. Kari Kinard has been serving for over seven years as a nurse practitioner in an oral society in North Africa. She has been astounded by the ability of her medical assistants to retain a great amount of information verbatim having only heard it one time. She believes that they have a far greater capacity to memorize quickly because they are not dependent on constantly taking notes like members of literary societies. However, they are unused to the practice of critical thinking. Kinard says that while her assistants can repeat what she says perfectly, they find it difficult to “think outside the box.”<sup>54</sup> Therefore, textual analysis could potentially be very beneficial for churches in oral societies.

King has demonstrated that members of oral societies can set extensive Bible stories to music if they have the right tool. In one of her many song workshops with the Senfo, she helped them craft a high text-load song form that would allow them to practically preach while singing. She remarks, “Each time I return to the area, I am pleased to see how this song form has grown in cultural authenticity and musical complexity.”<sup>55</sup> Several years later, during a ten-day workshop, they used that genre to compose forty-seven new songs in four different Senufo

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<sup>53</sup> Tom Avery, “A Note on Literacy, Oral Culture and Indigenous Hymn Composition,” *Notes on Literature in Use and Language Programs* 41 (1994): 11-14, quoted in Dianne Palmer-Quay, *Developing Indigenous Hymnody*, 23.

<sup>54</sup> Kari Kinard, personal communication, May 2020.

<sup>55</sup> Roberta King, “Abraham Goes Senufo: Communicating the Scriptures Through Song,” in *All the World Is Singing: Glorifying God Through the Worship Music of the Nations*, eds. Frank Fortunato, Paul Neeley, and Carol Brinneman (Secunderabad, India: Authentic Media, 2006), 66.



language groups. These workshop settings are ideal opportunities for believers to put long sections of Scripture to music in local styles. Along with sessions on worship and music in the Bible, King assigned sections of the story of Abraham from the book of Genesis to different teams. After having worked diligently through the meaning of the text together, they hammered out a song text and put it to music. King insisted for purposes of song composition that each group should hear the Bible passage in their mother-tongue, “since melodic and rhythmic contours of the song are intimately wed to patterns in the language.”<sup>56</sup> King devoted much time to the lyrical aspect of indigenous hymnody because she recognized that believers in oral cultures are often dependent on songs and stories to teach them new information and to help them meditate on Scripture.<sup>57</sup>

King is not the only ethnodoxologist who has seen the need for biblical song lyrics in oral cultures. When Bible translators Colin and Dot Suggett and ethnomusicologist Mary Hendershott realized that the repertory of a Turka church in Burkina Faso had poor theology, they worked with them to create new Scripture songs. While the old repertory was full of “petty dos and don’ts,” the new songs contained descriptions of the attributes of God. They describe how biblical themes “emerge with quiet and refreshing authority that accompanies biblical truth...As a result, God is greatly honored, and people’s faith is strengthened.”<sup>58</sup>

A musical genre that has proven to be especially practical in oral settings is the call-and-response form. Its balance between repetition and new material greatly aids learning. When the Dagomba people of Ghana met for a Scripture song workshop, they worked in three groups, each led by an experienced composer. First, they chose what Scripture passage to set to music. Next,

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<sup>56</sup> King, “Abraham Goes Senufo,” in *All the World is Singing*, eds. Frank Fortunato, Paul Neeley, and Carol Brinneman, 63.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>58</sup> Colin and Dot Suggett and Mary Hendershott, “Pirouetting Toward Faith,” in *All the World is Singing*, 89.

they decided which phrase of the verse should be repeated by the choir. As the final step, the lead singer found a way to fit the rest of the text in between each response. This process proved to be quite efficient.<sup>59</sup>

Recording technologies are a third useful tool in helping Christians in oral cultures learn and remember extensive song lyrics. In 1994, Paul Neeley produced a cassette recording of Scripture readings and songs with a group of Achoday songwriters and singers in Ghana. Most of the songs reflected traditional Achoday styles. The interest shown in the recording was astonishing, considering that less than three percent of the Achoday were attending Christian churches at the time. Some asked, “How did these Bible stories get turned into our kind of songs?” In this way, the recordings were a practical tool not only for improving the Achoday church’s repertory but also for sharing their faith.<sup>60</sup> Oral cultures today have greater access to recordings than ever before, which makes the internalization of theologically rich song lyrics that much more attainable.

If members of oral societies are indeed able to remember extensive song texts constructed with text load-bearing genres, who should analyze their texts’ lyrical theology? What methods should they follow, and what criteria should they apply? When a scholar in 1967 analyzed a collection of African hymn-texts from a Western perspective, Bengt Sundkler expressed strong disapproval:

We suggest that Shembe’s Hymn-book should be understood, not from the outside, from a Western standpoint, measuring its contents according to the standards and ideas of a European catechism, but rather from its own presuppositions. [...] We suggest that one should discard such heavy and learned Western panoply and let Shembe walk along as he used to and loved to: moving light, barefoot.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Paul Neeley and Sue Hall, “Praising the High King of Heaven,” in *All the World Is Singing*, 76.

<sup>60</sup> Paul Neely, “User-Friendly Hymns for the Achoday,” in *All the World is Singing*, 69-71.

<sup>61</sup> Bengt Gustaf Malcom Sundkler, *Zulu Zion and Some Swazi Zionists* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976): 186, 190, quoted in Krabill, *The Hymnody of the Harrist Church*, 346.

Therefore, the local believers should analyze their own song texts according to their own criteria. While the questions commonly employed by members of literary cultures could be suggested to them as a starting point, they should be free to modify the process and each component as they desire. Repetition in song lyrics should be expected and accepted. Gordon K. Molyneux summarized writer W. J. Ong as follows: “Orally-based expression is redundant or copious. Whereas writing can be word-economical since the reader’s eye can ‘back-scan’ if necessary to pick up forgotten or missed information, orality depends on repetition of the ‘just-said,’ which keeps both speaker and hearer surely on the track.”<sup>62</sup>

Most of the methods for textual analysis described in the following chapter would be adaptable for an oral context. For example, a congregation could determine their active repertory if they kept a list of the songs sung during their services for a few months. Otherwise, they could adopt Meyers’ method of putting together a list of twenty “frequently sung songs.”<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore, congregations in oral cultures could conduct textual analysis in small discussion groups. Instead of consulting a written text, participants could sing the song together and analyze it as a group. Obviously, some texts could have multiple interpretations. Some oral cultures especially prize texts that contain many nuances. According to John Oswald, the people of Tibet have a special appreciation for a text that has many layers of meaning that are not immediately apparent. They enjoy Jesus’ parables for this reason.<sup>64</sup> Analyzing texts with multiple meanings could be a slow process, but the congregation would grow exponentially in

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<sup>62</sup> Gordon K. Molyneux, *African Christian Theology: Processes of Theological Reflection in Zaire* (University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1988), 141.

<sup>63</sup> Meyers, “Developing Disciples,” 48.

<sup>64</sup> John Oswald, “Gospel Communication in Tibetan Song: Seanet Missiological Forum 2006,” in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, ed. Krabill et al., CD-ROM, 18.

their appreciation of the words that they sing. Analysis of any artistic creation is known to increase enjoyment.

While room should be given for multiple interpretations, a text's primary meaning should be clear and biblical. Paul Neeley and Sue Hall provide an example from a song composed by the Dagomba church based on Colossians 1.16.

Biblical text: "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him."

Dagomba text, translated into English: "Through Christ, God created everything, and God put all things into his hands."<sup>65</sup>

The message is clear, faithful to the biblical text, and succinct. It could be argued that a Dagomba song form which repeats this truth at length with musical variations may be just as edifying (or even more so) than a long strophic Western hymn text with many different ideas and truths.

#### Need for a Method of Textual Analysis

A survey of the literature shows that while ethnodoxologists consider biblical lyrics to be important, no method has been proposed for textual analysis. The following pages will provide an overview of the primary sources.

In his essay on biblical worship, Andrew E. Hill describes how the texts of the songs of the Bible praise God for His power, wisdom, and redemption. He highlights the "pivotal" role of the Psalms as the church has worshiped, sung, and prayed over the centuries.<sup>66</sup> In addition, he

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<sup>65</sup> Paul Neeley and Sue Hall, "Praising the High King of Heaven," in *All the World is Singing*, eds. Fortunato, Neeley and Brinneman, 76.

<sup>66</sup> Andrew E. Hill, "Biblical Foundations of Christian Worship," in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, eds. Krabill et al., 4.

provides a thorough list of New Testament distinctives of Christian worship.<sup>67</sup> Although Hill does not suggest that the modern church use the songs of the Bible as a model for their own songs, his description of New Testament distinctives could be adapted as a framework for textual analysis.

In Brink's article on beauty and excellence in biblical worship, she states that because the Psalms are God's inspired Word, they "deserve a primary place in the sung repertory of the church."<sup>68</sup> She makes an excellent argument that "in each part of worship we honor God by using words either directly from Scripture or crafted with care to be totally consonant with Scripture." However, she does not provide a practical framework for ethnodoxologists to follow in evaluating the place of the Psalms or the Scriptural accuracy of a congregation's lyrics.

Ron Man believes that the Bible should have a central role in worship because God has exalted his name and his word above all things (Psalm 138.2). Man summarizes, "We should read the word, pray the word, preach the word, and sing the word in our corporate and private worship."<sup>69</sup> However, the handbook does not include an article that describes how to help congregations evaluate whether they are doing this.

Kenneth R. Hollingsworth and Héber Negrao provide practical instruction for ethnodoxologists in designing arts workshops for mother-tongue speakers. They advise leaders of hymn-writing workshops to find out whether any portions of the Bible have been translated in the participants' language. However, they do not suggest learning about the participants' active repertory of songs.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Hill, "Biblical Foundations," in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, eds. Krabill et al., 6-8.

<sup>68</sup> Brink, "The Significance of Beauty and Excellence," in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, 11.

<sup>69</sup> Man, "The Bridge," in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, 21.

<sup>70</sup> Kenneth R. Hollingsworth and Héber Negrao, "Designing Arts Workshops for Mother-Tongue Speakers," in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, 377.

Dianne Palmer-Quay compiled an extensive list of resources related to the development of indigenous hymnody in 1999. Several of the resources provide a theoretical and practical foundation for the development of *new* hymn texts, but they do not discuss ways to analyze a congregation's *current* texts.<sup>71</sup> She suggests two approaches to developing indigenous hymnody: the catalyst approach and the analyst approach. She describes a catalyst as someone who "purposefully supports and encourages the development of new music for the church...[leaving] musical decisions in the hands of the local believers."<sup>72</sup> While the analyst role requires specialized ethnomusicological training, most missionaries and church leaders could serve as catalysts for song text analysis if they were given a clear method to follow.

In Todd and Mary Beth Saurman's article on leading indigenous arts workshops, they state, "Whether or not new arts are created, we discuss ways to check existing or newly produced art forms for clarity, naturalness, and scriptural accuracy."<sup>73</sup> Although this is a worthy goal, the authors do not provide any details for this "checking" process.

Glenn Stallsmith's paper entitled "Facilitating Community Song-Writing Workshops" encourages ethnodoxologists to do as much preliminary research and analysis as possible about a people group's music before holding a song-writing workshop.<sup>74</sup> However, he does not mention gathering information about their song texts. While he encourages group interaction and self-discovery, he does not discuss applying these methods to textual analysis.<sup>75</sup> He advises aspiring lyricists to "try hard to think of meaningful ideas and themes that are not already the subject of

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<sup>71</sup> Palmer-Quay, *Developing Indigenous Hymnody*, 21.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>73</sup> Todd and Mary Beth Saurman, "Encouraging the Development of Relevant Arts in the Lives of Believers," in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, eds. Krabill et al., 384.

<sup>74</sup> Glenn Stallsmith, "Facilitating Community Song-Writing Workshops," In *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, CD-ROM, 13.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

many songs.”<sup>76</sup> If participants began their workshop by conducting preliminary textual analysis of songs of Scripture and of their active repertory, they would undoubtedly have ample inspiration and direction for new lyrics.

Wendy Atkins designed and implemented a music/Bible school program for church musicians in the Central African Republic. After the first year, she purposed to help her students identify what themes were missing in their Zande-language hymnbook in order to create relevant new songs.<sup>77</sup> The second year, they discussed together the positive and negative aspects of their music ministries. Once they had identified areas in which they wanted to grow spiritually, they studied Bible passages that addressed those areas. Finally, they composed songs based on those Bible passages. Atkins found this process to be very helpful in working with local communities. This process of “Appreciative Inquiry” by Sue Hasselbring was later incorporated into the ethnodoxology manual *Creating Local Arts Together: A Manual to Help Communities Reach Their Kingdom Goals* by Brian Schrag.<sup>78</sup>

The first step of Schrag’s manual is entitled “Meet a Community and its Arts.”<sup>79</sup> In this preliminary investigation, there is no mention of researching the community’s worship song lyrics. One of the activities in the fourth step of the manual is called “Evaluate Worship Meetings Using Biblical Principles.”<sup>80</sup> Participants are asked to identify how their surrounding community expresses itself in corporate ways, “focusing especially on values and practices common to biblical worship.”<sup>81</sup> Next, they study what the Bible teaches about the forms used in

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<sup>76</sup> Stallsmith, “Facilitating Community Song-Writing Workshops,” in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, eds. Krabill et al., 24.

<sup>77</sup> Wendy Atkins, “Heart Music Goes to School!” in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, eds. Krabill et al., CD-ROM, 9.

<sup>78</sup> Atkins, personal communication, March 14, 2021.

<sup>79</sup> Brian Schrag, *Creating Local Arts Together: A Manual to Help Communities Reach Their Kingdom Goals*, ed. James R. Krabill (Pasadena, CA: International Council of Ethnodoxologists, 2013), 1.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>81</sup> Schrag, *Creating Local Arts Together*, 179.

worship. Finally, they compare the two in order to find ways to express worship to God that resonate with their culture. This exercise in contextualization could be very helpful, but I would argue that the theological content of worship services and local arts is even more important than the forms that are used.

Ethnodoxologists clearly believe that biblical song texts are important. They are equipped to carefully analyze local forms of music and other arts. Why does the impetus seem to be missing to apply the same thorough analysis to the texts that congregations are already singing?

### Worship “Lenses”

Catholic liturgist Gerard Moore has identified three primary paradigms or “lenses” through which people view worship: experience, teaching, and ritual.<sup>82</sup> His “experience” lens refers to the emotional aspect of worship - what Meyers calls the “affective” dimension.<sup>83</sup> Moore’s “teaching” lens is equivalent to what Meyers calls the “cognitive” dimension. Roberta King’s encouragement of Africans to use songs with high text load demonstrates her desire to see them develop this cognitive dimension. Moore’s “ritual” lens refers to forms and to physical involvement in worship through actions such as baptism, the Lord’s supper, and singing. According to Moore, while people use all three lenses when they worship, they tend to see one as primary and the others as secondary. While this is both natural and necessary, Moore suggests an “integrated” approach.<sup>84</sup> If Moore’s assessment is correct, each ethnodoxologist’s primary worship lens necessarily affects his or her ministry goals and methods.

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<sup>82</sup> Gerard Moore, “Appreciating Worship in All Its Variety,” *Australian Journal of Liturgy* 10, no. 3 (2006): 80, quoted in Tanya Riches, “The Evolving Theological Emphasis of Hillsong Worship (1996-2007),” *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 13, 89.

<sup>83</sup> Meyers, “Developing Disciples,” 75.

<sup>84</sup> Moore, “Appreciating Worship,” 89, quoted in Riches, 89.



For example, Ron Man teaches that worship begins with God’s self-revelation (teaching), and is followed by people’s response, both emotional and physical (the lenses of experience and ritual). Brian Schrag’s primary lens can be surmised from the follow paragraph from his manual:

What do you need to do to prepare yourself to encounter more of God’s presence? First, there are spiritual factors, but second, we more easily draw near to God when we use the languages and cultural forms that are most familiar to us. For example, some believers sense God’s presence in quiet reverence, structure, and formality. Others experience the Holy Spirit in exuberance, spontaneity, and informality. Most need a bit of both! But what forms are they? How should they be used? <sup>85</sup>

Schrag describes worship as “encountering more of God’s presence,” “drawing near to God,” “sensing God’s presence,” and “experiencing the Holy Spirit.” He also refers to “cultural forms.” Therefore, he seems to see worship primarily through the lens of experience and secondarily through the lens of ritual. Although he mentions “spiritual factors,” he does not extrapolate.

Song texts belong to the cognitive aspect of worship. They correspond to Moore’s lens of “teaching.” The music that congregations sing is tied to the affective and physical dimensions of worship. What dimension of worship is primary in broader evangelicalism? Are the methods in ethnodoxology reflective of the same worship “lens”? The final section of this chapter will consider these broad questions.

Ingalls has observed that evangelical leaders often say that music and worship are not synonymous. They feel that this is necessary because the two activities have become conflated in many congregants’ minds.<sup>86</sup> Joshua Busman traces this phenomenon to the 1970s and the development of music in evangelical youth groups. He writes, “Worship became a category of experience that was increasingly indistinguishable from music. Even more specifically, worship

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<sup>85</sup> Schrag, *Creating Local Arts Together*, 178.

<sup>86</sup> Ingalls, *Singing the Congregation*, 18.

became equivalent to singing along with pop-styled songs that featured acoustic guitar accompaniment.”<sup>87</sup>

Many ethnomusicologists have written about the emphasis that contemporary worshipers place on “experiencing” God. While an in-depth consideration of this idea in American evangelicalism is beyond the scope of this study, the literature makes a good case for the rise of Pentecostalism and charismatic renewal movements around the world as a major factor in its widespread popularity. According to Tanya Riches in Australia, Pentecostals view worship through the lens of experience.<sup>88</sup> Shane Clifton writes that they see worship as a spiral “which moves from the experience of the Spirit in the community of faith, to the text of scripture, and back again.”<sup>89</sup> Wen Regan states that the modern worship music genres can trace their origins to the charismatic movement, which was “steeped in an affective intimacy with God.”<sup>90</sup>

To better understand this connection, it is helpful to briefly consider the contemporary mega-church Hillsong as a case study. E. H. McIntyre writes, “music and religious experience are nowhere more mutually influential than in Hillsong live worship services.”<sup>91</sup> In his description of Hillsong services, his choice of adjectives points to the lens of experience: “a sense of freedom and feeling within the music...worship which is lively, free and exuberant...the emotional response of the congregation...the excitement of the crowd.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Joshua Busman, “(Re)sounding Passion: Listening to American Evangelical Worship Music,” 46.

<sup>88</sup> Tanya Riches, “The Evolving Theological Emphasis of Hillsong Worship (1996-2007),” *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 13: 90, <https://www.academia.edu/1910386>.

<sup>89</sup> Shane Clifton, “An Analysis of the Developing Ecclesiology of the Assemblies of God in Australia,” PhD diss. (Australian Catholic University, 2005), 19.

<sup>90</sup> Wen Regan, “‘The Music That Just About Everyone Sings’: Hillsong in American Evangelical Media,” in *The Hillsong Movement Examined: You Call Me Out Upon the Waters* (Cham, CH: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), chap. 8, section “Under the Theological and Denominational Radar,” Kindle.

<sup>91</sup> E. H. McIntyre, “Brand of Choice: Why Hillsong Music is Winning Sales and Souls,” *Australian Religious Studies Review* 20, no. 2 (2007): 178, <http://doi.org/10.1558/arsr.v20i2.175>.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

When scholar and Hillsong insider Riches evaluated Hillsong lyrics from 1996-2007, she found that they became more fragmented with time. She concludes that this phenomenon demonstrates that “experience and emotion [are] prioritized above rational logic in the text.”<sup>93</sup> She also explains that the function of the lyrics is not to summarize or communicate the entire theological content of the church, but rather to “encourage and challenge believers with Spirit-inspired meditations pertinent to their context.”<sup>94</sup>

Kinga Povedák studied the phenomenon of Hillsong music’s popularity in Hungary. She connects its rise in popularity with the Hungarians’ increased accessibility to YouTube. Since Hungarians have a relatively low level of English comprehension, she believes that the draw for Hungarians was not due to the message of the songs, but rather to the emotional experience that the music offers. One of her interviewees, Boton Rozgonyi, stated the following:

The text does not really matter. The majority pay no attention to the text. They are looking for the mystic experience, the presence of God and they do not search intellectually. The music, the melody and the rhythm bring people into a state where they experience their mystic encounter with God.”<sup>95</sup>

### Conclusion

This review of the literature has demonstrated that congregational singing has an important role in worship according to the Bible. It accomplishes several tasks at once, including expressing praise, teaching fellow believers, and testifying to unbelievers. Song lyrics are vital in the accomplishment of these tasks. Congregations would greatly benefit from periodically and carefully analyzing the content of their lyrics in order to determine what new songs should be added to their repertory. Ethnodoxologists could help congregations narrow down their analysis

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<sup>93</sup> Riches, “The Evolving Theological Emphasis of Hillsong Worship,” 105.

<sup>94</sup> Riches, 91.

<sup>95</sup> Kinga Povedák, “Hillsongization, Religious Ecumenism, and Uniformity: A Hungarian Case Study,” In *The Hillsong Movement Examined: You Call Me Out Upon the Waters*, chap. 10, section “The Catholic Hillsong Songs, Hillsong Ecumenism,” Kindle.

to their active repertory by applying the techniques of Titon and Ingalls. Genres that support high text load, including call-and-response forms, should be prioritized, while not discouraging the use of simple, short texts, if their primary message is clear and biblical. Meyer's traffic light method of summative content analysis could be very effective in enabling church members to check the theological accuracy of song texts.

Congregations in oral societies would benefit greatly from this process of song text analysis. It could be argued that they need well-balanced, nourishing lyrics even more than congregations in literary societies since they rely on songs and stories to learn and retain information. Most of the techniques previously described could be easily adapted for oral settings.

Although ethnodoxologists have written about the importance of biblical song texts, no clear method for textual analysis has been proposed. The method of "Appreciative Inquiry" has been adapted and applied to enable congregations to choose themes for new song texts based on their felt needs (or "kingdom goals," according to Brian Schrag). While this method has merit because of its practical and encouraging nature, it does not take into account what the church may already be singing. Furthermore, it could be argued that if churches are singing the major themes of the Scriptures, their songs will be nourishing, well-balanced, and beautifully relevant. According to 2 Timothy 3.16-17, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

One reason why analysis of song texts has not gained much attention could be because the cognitive dimension of worship (what Moore calls the lens of teaching) is not the primary dimension across evangelicalism today. The primary focus has been on the affective, experiential

dimension of worship. Scholars have attributed this emphasis to the rise of the Pentecostal movement around the world. The international popularity of groups like Hillsong could reflect this emphasis. Nonetheless, theologian-musicians such as Man, Viguier, and Stauffer believe that worship begins a cognitive understanding of God's self-revelation. Therefore, song lyrics merit careful analysis and attention.

### Chapter Three: Project Design and Implementation

This chapter provides a description of the process of designing and testing a heuristic method of song text analysis for ethnodoxologists, church leaders, and members. Participants were led to discover for themselves what the Bible teaches about the importance of congregational singing and to appreciate the breadth and depth of the song texts found in Scripture. They were also shown how to apply critical thinking to the song texts in their church's active repertory. Finally, the method helped them make a connection between the lyrics they sing and three broad aspects of worship, stimulating them to further growth.

I approached the design and implementation of this project as a Bible-believing American Christian with an independent Baptist background. For the past thirteen years I have served in cross-cultural ministry in France with a specialization in training church musicians.

#### Project Design

The overall project design was a compressed ethnographic assessment involving mixed-methods research. According to Margaret D. LeCompte and Jean J. Schensul, applied ethnographic research should be conducted primarily to solve problems identified by the researcher and local experts.<sup>96</sup> I developed this method to address a problem that I had discovered through my experience. A review of the literature and discussions with ethnodoxologists, missiologists, and pastors helped to confirm my conviction that this project was necessary.

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<sup>96</sup> Margaret D. LeCompte and Jean J. Schensul, *Designing and Conducting Ethnographic Research*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Alta Mira Press, 2010), 11, 122-123.

LeCompte and Schensul explain that several factors are necessary for compressed ethnographic research. As I began to design my project, the COVID-19 crisis erupted and effectively ended any opportunity to conduct traditional field research. Thankfully, I was able to adapt my project to fit each ethnographic requirement by condensing it into a workshop format that could be administered through an online platform. I tested the workshop with three groups of people. LeCompte and Schensul's three requirements for effective compressed research include a limited population, a familiarity with the cultural setting and language, and a limited topic.<sup>97</sup> My project met these criteria. First, I limited the population to personal acquaintances who had experience in local church ministry. Second, I am very familiar with both American and French cultural settings and I speak both languages fluently. Third, the workshop was designed to focus on one particular aspect of church music: song text analysis.

I assessed the effectiveness of my method by conducting surveys of the participants before and after each workshop, by evaluating the recording of each session, and by noting both positive and negative feedback from participants.

As I planned my project, I anticipated several potential obstacles. First, I recognized that cultural differences between the American and French groups would require me to adjust my material and expectations. I knew that the Americans would appreciate efficiency, clarity, and punctuality. As for the French, I knew that they would like to have the opportunity to catch up on each other's news at the beginning of the workshop, since they place a high value on relationships. While my American acquaintances would probably gladly accept my request for a specific person to close the workshop in prayer, I knew that the French prefer spontaneous participation. Also, I expected the French workshop to exceed the proposed three-hour timeframe

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<sup>97</sup> LeCompte & Schensul, *Designing and Conducting*, 122, 158

since the French generally relish nuance and debate. This aspect of culture is reflected in language: English is very direct and concise, while French requires about 20% more words in expressing ideas. As it turned out, my expectations were very accurate. In fact, the cultural differences in these areas were even more dramatic than I had imagined.

In addition to cultural considerations, I also anticipated that my female gender could be a possible obstacle. My personal conviction from Scripture is that God has entrusted the spiritual leadership of local churches to men. For this reason, while I enjoy teaching theology to women, I prefer not to teach men theology in a mixed setting. I knew my potential audience, and I expected they would share my theological convictions. Because this workshop falls into more of a “gray” area, I took a proactive approach. First, I asked participants to read and study specific Bible passages and to share their conclusions with us. In this way, they were the ones teaching theology rather than me. (This method also had a distinct pedagogical advantage since people retain information longer when they discover it for themselves.) Also, I purposefully mentioned my gender at the beginning of the workshop, explaining, “I will simply be the moderator this morning. I’m looking forward to learning from each of you.” Judging from their reactions, I believe that my approach was successful in putting everyone at ease.

I expected that time constraints could present a third obstacle. I had originally planned to implement my method of textual analysis in a field setting over the course of several days. To reduce it to a three-hour online format, I asked participants to complete two of the exercises ahead of time. I expected that some of the participants might not have time to do that important preparatory work, and I was concerned that this would potentially diminish the method’s effectiveness. However, my fears proved to be unfounded. The only person who openly admitted not having done the homework stood out as one of the most enthusiastic participants.



Fourth, I anticipated technological challenges. Although I had participated in other online workshops, I had not yet led one myself. I did a few practice runs with family members and my project advisor. One of my main concerns was a possible lag time between slides, but the purchase of a long Ethernet cable eliminated that issue. I knew that the online format would be tiring for everyone, so I gave them an extended break at the halfway point. Moderating group discussions by videoconference was just as challenging as I anticipated. Although I was able to maximize the usefulness of the format, online settings cannot compare with the true essence of fieldwork: physically experiencing life with people.

#### Relationship of the Literature to the Project Design

Based on my survey of the literature, I designed my project to include the applied research methods of planned discussion groups, elicitation techniques, surveys, and summative content analysis. My primary pedagogical method was Socratic questioning.

I chose to organize what Karen O'Reilly calls "planned discussion groups" rather than the more common "focus groups" because I wanted an informal setting conducive to people who already know each other and who are committed to a common cause.<sup>98</sup> My workshops were similar to the "corporate worship" workshop that Brian Schrag describes in his manual *Creating Local Arts Together*.<sup>99</sup> He encourages ethnodoxologists to get well-acquainted with a community and its arts before launching new arts creation. My project addresses one specific step in that information-gathering process.

My elicitation techniques included asking participants to compile a list of songs that their congregation had sung recently and to narrow it down to the active repertory, based on the

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<sup>98</sup> Karen O'Reilly, *Ethnographic Methods* (London: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2004), 135.

<sup>99</sup> Schrag, *Creating Local Arts Together*, 226-227.

applied research of Titon and Ingalls. Although I knew that they would only have time to analyze one song during the workshop, I wanted them to become more aware of the songs they had been singing. This proved effective since one of the participants told me a few weeks before phase one, “I started my data collection, and it has certainly given me a greater awareness of what I was singing.”

I also asked participants to analyze two song texts of their choosing: a song text found in Scripture (see list in Appendix B) and a song text from their church’s active repertory. King recommends analysis of biblical song texts in song-writing workshops in her manual *A Time to Sing*.<sup>100</sup> I proposed three simple questions which I had learned many years before in Bible college: What does this text say about who God is, what he has done, and what my response should be? During the workshop, I asked for volunteers to share their analyses. These elicitation techniques showed me how participants organized and understood information.<sup>101</sup>

I decided to adapt King’s concept of text load by asking participants to analyze the overall “nutritional” value of a song. By counting the number of distinct truths in a song text and comparing it with the overall length of the song, participants could quickly estimate the song’s potential to edify or instruct the congregation. This idea of “nutritional” value is similar to what Stauffer calls the “height requirement.”<sup>102</sup> Knowing that the Bible often compares spiritual food to physical food, I hoped that the term would immediately resonate with the participants.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> King, *A Time to Sing*, 44-46.

<sup>101</sup> LeCompte & Schensul, *Designing and Conducting*, 176-177.

<sup>102</sup> Viguier and Stauffer, *Manuel pour la conduite*, 87.

<sup>103</sup> For example: “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.” (Isaiah 55.1-2)

In addition to discussion groups and elicitation techniques, my project design also included summative content analysis. In this analysis, participants work together to come to a consensus about data interpretation and analysis. This kind of group analysis is ideal when working with nuanced, complex data that the researcher would have difficulty interpreting correctly on his or her own.<sup>104</sup> Meyers conducted this analysis of song texts with her two research assistants in Mozambique.<sup>105</sup> I implemented her “traffic light” exercise with the participants of my workshop. Summative content analysis would be particularly important in a cross-cultural setting when the song texts are in languages that the ethnodoxologist does not speak. It is far better for native speakers than for outsiders to do the careful analysis of worship song texts.

To gauge the effectiveness of my method, I conducted surveys at the beginning and end of each workshop. Since the survey was conducted on the Zoom platform, I had very high participation. I have summarized the results of these surveys in Appendix C.

Since I was well-acquainted with most of the workshop participants, I did not conduct key informant interviews. However, a few people heard about the workshop by word of mouth and requested permission to attend, which I granted. After phase one, I realized I should have scheduled a personal meeting ahead of time with each of them for the purpose of getting to know them, finding out why they were interested in the workshop, explaining my project, and answering any questions they had. In the final days before W1 (Workshop 1), one participant emailed me several times with questions about the preliminary work I had asked everyone to complete. I sensed that she had not fully understood the purpose of the workshop. Then, at the beginning of W1, she expressed that she had only agreed to participate because she had been told

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<sup>104</sup> Rapport, “Summative Analysis,” 271-272.

<sup>105</sup> Meyers, “Developing Disciples,” 82.

that one more person was needed. However, what she had been told was incorrect: I had no minimum number requirements. I realized that I should have taken the time to talk with her personally ahead of time to make sure she both understood the project and did not feel obligated to attend.

I was not able to do traditional participant observation because of travel restrictions. However, I did observe several of the participants' livestreamed worship services and took notes about the songs that were sung as well as the expressed and perceived values of the congregation. McKinney describes values as "accepted or normative ideals of behavior... Values within various groups are part of their ethical systems that define what is perceived as right, moral, and good within society versus what is disapproved of, immoral, and viewed as wrong."<sup>106</sup> In my observation of participants' worship services, I was particularly curious to compare the nutritional value of their song lyrics with that of the preaching. In the services that I observed from participants' churches in the United States and in Africa, both were very high.

In addition to the research techniques that I have described, my primary pedagogical technique for this project was Socratic questioning. According to Linda Elder and Richard Paul, all thinking involves questions. Once an answer has been provided to students, thinking is no longer required of them. Elder and Paul argue, "Feeding students endless content to remember (i.e., declarative sentences or 'facts') is akin to repeatedly stepping on the brakes in a vehicle that is, unfortunately, already at rest. Instead, students need questions to turn on their intellectual engines."<sup>107</sup> My method included many of the deep questions described by Elder and Paul. I

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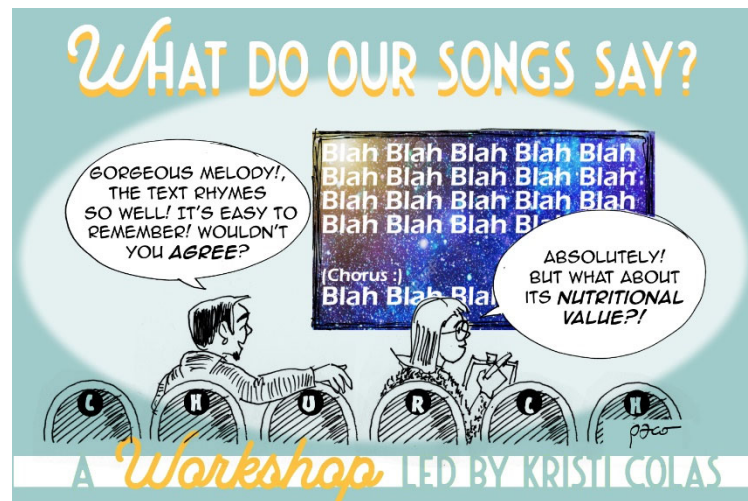
<sup>106</sup> Carol V. McKinney, *Globe-Trotting in Sandals: A Field Guide to Cultural Research* (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2000), 215.

<sup>107</sup> Linda Elder & Richard Paul, "The Role of Socratic Questioning in Thinking, Teaching, and Learning," in *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 71, no. 5 (May/June 1998): 297, DOI: 10.1080/00098659809602729.

began with questions of **purpose**: “According to the Bible, why do we sing as a congregation?” “How might our culture have influenced the reasons why we sing?” Second, I asked questions of **information and precision**: “What exactly does this song text teach about God’s character or actions, or about how we should respond?”<sup>108</sup> Third, I asked questions of **interpretation**: “What could the term ‘selah’ signify?” Fourth, I asked questions of **accuracy**: “How accurate and clear is the theology in this song text?” Finally, I asked questions of **point of view**: “Which of the three approaches to worship do you consider as primary (affective/heart, cognitive/mind, or physical/body)?” During the workshop, I gave participants permission to interject their own questions, hoping that our discussion would generate such questions and get them thinking on deeper levels.<sup>109</sup>

### Phase One

After obtaining IRB approval in January 2021, I prepared for the first phase of implementation by writing an outline for the workshop, preparing slides using Prezi software, writing out full teaching notes, and creating brief pre- and post-workshop participant surveys. I chose the dates for the two American workshops and began recruiting potential participants. I sent them a consent form along



(Image used with permission)

<sup>108</sup> Interestingly, when James Krabill analyzed the hymn-texts of the Harrist church in Côte d’Ivoire, he began with the opposite question. His first column was entitled “What we must do,” and the second, “How God responds.” The hymn-texts instructed people to repent, have faith, obey, etc. The lyrics indicate that God in response shows compassion, forgives, cleanses, protects, judges, etc. Could this order reflect an aspect of the theology of the Harrist church?

<sup>109</sup> Elder & Paul, 297-298.

with instructions and examples for two exercises to complete before the workshop: the song list and the analysis of a song of the Bible (see appendices A and B). A French friend created a cartoon to accompany my recruitment materials. The chart in Appendix D summarizes the content of the workshop and method of textual analysis in phase one.

Nine people attended the first workshop held on February 1, 2021 from 9 AM to noon. Most of them were staff members of my missions agency in South Carolina. Other participants joined us from Arizona, South Carolina, and Zambia, Africa. The majority of the participants had a similar American-European ethnic background, and all of them had extensive cross-cultural experience. Many of them were fluent in a foreign language. Most were current or retired missionaries and one was a music professor. Since I was particularly interested in their cross-cultural perspective on my project, I asked them to keep in mind an indigenous congregation that they knew well as we began the workshop. I hoped that they could give me feedback about whether this method might work in that context. Since most of the participants are not the decision-makers about the songs that are sung in their churches each week, I expected that they had accepted my invitation primarily to help me complete the final requirements for my project.

The workshop went very well, with excellent interaction among the participants. Although at times I felt pressure as the moderator to keep moving through the material, the three-hour time slot was sufficient. Participants gave fascinating examples from their various places of ministry. I believe that each person benefited from the process of critical thinking.

During the discussion about the possible interpretations and applications for the term “selah,” a man made the following comment: “In contrast with more liturgical denominations, we don’t stop enough to quietly meditate. It’s refreshing when the pastor tells us to bow our heads and think. We are too busy for that in this culture.” A few hours after the workshop had

ended, I received an email from one of the participants. He had continued to reflect on the implications of the three approaches or lenses to worship. He created the following list to show what might happen if one of the lenses is over-emphasized at the expense of another.

Experience without teaching tends toward mysticism.  
 Experience without ritual tends toward individualism.  
 Teaching without experience tends toward intellectualism.  
 [...]  
 Ritual without experience tends toward formalism.  
 Ritual without teaching tends toward sacramentalism.

I noted several changes to make in my materials and methods before the second phase of implementation. First, I needed a more detailed pre-workshop checklist to reduce stress and to avoid forgetting important items. For example, I had forgotten to make a handout. I noticed right away that many of the participants were trying to take notes. Although I had given them an overview of the main points of the workshop, I knew they could have followed the method more easily if they had been provided with an advanced organizer. I decided to slightly adjust the section on song themes to reflect my deepened understanding of the Psalms after personal Bible study.

Second, I realized that I needed to refine my thoughts about what kinds of song texts are most appropriate for children and new believers. A friend in the medical profession reminded me that babies are able to start eating table food at about six months of age. At that point, they can digest it, but they need it to be mashed or chopped into tiny pieces to prevent choking. While they receive the same nutrients from the food as their parents and older siblings, they are not able to appreciate the texture until they get a bit older. The same is true for worship songs. Little children and new believers benefit from learning songs with rich doctrinal content. Simple song structures are ideal as they start to grow. While they may not grasp the texture or meanings of the text at first, they will appreciate them more with time.

I encountered a technical difficulty in phase one. I had requested that all the participants log in to the Zoom meeting on separate devices in order to take the surveys, including the people who were joining from the same room. Once the pre-workshop survey was over, I had expected them to turn off the extra devices and to participate together. However, they chose to remain on separate devices, so they may have misunderstood my instructions. Each time they tried to speak, their microphones caused echoes and unpleasant screeches for all of the participants. Therefore, I resolved to give clearer instructions for the next phase.

### Phase Two

I recruited participants for phase two by email as I had done for phase one. I also send them the consent forms and exercises to do ahead of time. A couple and an individual heard about the second workshop (W2) by word of mouth and communicated to me their interest in attending. I set up an online meeting with them to get acquainted and to explain the goals of the workshop. This prior contact proved to be invaluable in gaining a better understanding of their expectations, backgrounds, and personalities. I learned more about them and the other participants by observing their churches' livestreamed worship services. However, some of their churches did not broadcast the musical portion of their service or provide a livestream.

Based on my fieldnotes from phase one, I made adjustments to the slides and teaching notes and prepared a handout. I added several questions to the section on Bible song themes as indicated in Appendix D.

Eleven adults attended the second workshop by Zoom on February 13, 2021 from 9 AM to noon. Participants included the pastor and two members of my sending church in New Hampshire (the church that is primarily responsible for my ministry in France). I am very familiar with its cultural setting, having lived on the property for two years while teaching at its



Christian school. The other participants were members of churches in New Hampshire, South Carolina, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Arizona. Most of them were highly involved in the music ministries of their churches; some of them choose the songs for worship each week. A few of them had taught music and worship on the university level. Unlike the previous group, most of them were mono-cultural and mono-lingual, having lived only in the United States. Other than the three new people, I knew the participants very well: they were my former teachers, co-workers, classmates, and students. It was enjoyable to interact with them throughout the workshop.

Overall, the second workshop went very smoothly. Just as in the first workshop, I found the time of Scriptural analysis and discussion very enriching and stimulating. One man pointed out that we do not know exactly how the Jews performed the Psalms; they may have sung them straight through, or they may have repeated sections. Another person remarked that the God of the Bible did not “dumb down” the Psalms for children. Knowing that children constantly ask their parents questions, he surely expected families to provide simple explanations at home.

During our discussion about the three worship “lenses” or approaches, one participant shared the following:

I grew up charismatic, so a lot of the emphasis there was definitely very experiential worship. Then I learned a lot of different things about theology and I took a hard swing towards the teaching aspect: making sure it was true, honoring who God actually shows Himself to be in Scripture. But now I’m learning the balance between [experience, teaching, and ritual]...What songs are we choosing that highlight these different lenses?

I once again was frustrated with the challenges involved in having a group of people gather together to participate in a Zoom meeting, although for a different reason than in phase one. I sensed that when people watch a presentation together, they are less inclined to contribute to discussions than they would be if they were connected on separate devices. Also, as the

moderator, I could not see each of them well enough to judge whether they were engaged or bored. One participant wrote to me after the workshop to apologize that his group had been so quiet. He explained that they had preferred to let the more knowledgeable people contribute to the discussions. I wondered if they may have felt intimidated by those who had more experience, and I resolved in the future to make two adjustments to account for this. During the time of introductions at the beginning, I would start with the “non-experts” so that they would not feel intimidated. I would also specifically involve them during the time of text analysis to help make up for their lack of contribution during the longer discussions.

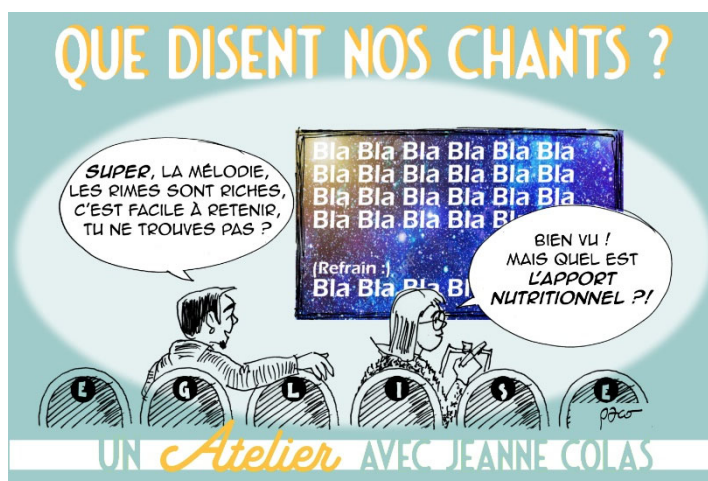
As I watched the recording of the workshop and analyzed my fieldnotes, I realized with pleasure that I had once again learned much from participants. Their questions and comments revealed weaknesses in my method and presentation, and they contributed their experiences and insights to the discussion. For example, one of the participants asked if I had developed a rubric for the nutritional value of a song text. Was he supposed to compare the number of distinct truths to the number of lines, phrases, or verses? I decided that the most logical rubric would be comparing the number of truths to the number of lines in the song. I also realized that a few of my questions were too rhetorical: if they were framed better, they would stimulate deeper thought. Some of the participants’ comments were so helpful that I decided to incorporate them into my material for phase three. For example, when we discussed options for songs that lacked theological clarity, one person mentioned that he would choose a Scripture portion to be read just before the song to make the message clearer. Another person shared how he prepared an order of service by purposefully alternating songs that were primarily about God’s self-revelation with songs that expressed response.

After further reflection about the workshop’s concluding discussion, I decided to try replacing Moore’s categories of experience, teaching, and ritual with the terms heart, mind, and body. The term “ritual” was especially problematic for some of the participants who tended to associate it with formal liturgical denominations. However, they did recognize that every church service has a physical, ceremonial aspect. One of the participants made the following insightful comment about the effect of the COVID-19 crisis on his congregation’s perspective of corporate worship. I decided to transform his comment into a question for phase three.

One thing that the “corona” has been teaching us: it evaporated/removed ritual. It has given us as churches an awakening, maybe? I’m just thinking of my church where people realized, “Man, I miss the Lord’s Supper!” ... It has helped us as a church to realize that we’re kind of wobbly... It has opened up hearts and minds and thoughts. I miss singing, I miss [taking] communion, I miss corporate reading of the Scriptures. [The situation has] helped me to see the balance that has been missed.

### Phase Three

Since the third phase of the project was to be conducted in French rather than in English, I translated all the material and asked a French woman in my church for help with proofreading. Although she did so very graciously, she expressed strong disapproval of my comparison of song texts with spiritual food. As she wrote in an email,



(Image used with permission)

The writers of Scripture were not thinking of spiritual meals when they wrote their songs. Most of them wrote to tell of God’s great works on their behalf, or on behalf of God’s people, to keep a record of his deeds, to express their thanksgiving to God, to celebrate something they had learned about his character...None of them wrote to satisfy themselves or to nourish themselves.

I reached out to several people to get their opinions about the question, including my project advisor. He told me that he was surprised at the woman's reaction since Jesus often used the analogy of physical food for the Word of God. I knew that Old Testament prophets like Jeremiah spoke of partaking of God's words like that of food: "Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts." (Jeremiah 15.16) A music pastor who had participated in W2 mentioned the close relationship between worship and edification in the Bible. He said that while the authors of the Old Testament may not have understood the full implication of everything they wrote, God clearly intended their writings to feed his people (Romans 15.3). Although the edification aspect of worship should not be over-emphasized, it does play a role. Since I believed that my idea of nutritional value was indeed biblical, I kept it in my presentation for the final workshop. However, I decided to provide a more balanced approach in the textual analysis by having participants consider nutritional value alongside other characteristics that have equal merit.

After making these changes to my materials, I reduced my teaching notes to the bare minimum to account for cultural and linguistic differences in phase three. A summary of these changes can be found in Appendix D.

The third workshop was held in French on February 26, 2021 with ten participants. This group was composed of French pastors, church members, American missionaries, and French-speaking friends. All of them were my personal acquaintances, and most live and work in France. One couple joined us from their new place of retirement in another European country. The ten participants represented nine local churches. Nine of them could speak at least one other language fluently, including English, Korean, Arabic, Luxembourgish, and German. Most of

them already knew each other, with varying degrees of relationship. Several were the decision-makers for their church's repertory of songs, and two have written many original compositions. Eight were accomplished musicians.

As I had expected, the participants enjoyed catching up on each other's news. After I launched the pre-workshop survey, I noticed that this group took longer to complete it than the other groups had. As we began the first discussion of the morning, I immediately sensed the vast cultural difference in their approach to questions. Whereas Americans tend to be satisfied with a good answer and are eager to move on, the French love to explore all the nuances of a question. (It is no wonder that French was once the language of diplomacy!) Interestingly, the American missionaries were just as "French" in their approach as the French natives, which revealed their level of cultural adaptation.

Since the workshop was entirely based on questions and analysis, I knew that it would be difficult to finish by noon even though I had already reduced my material to the bare minimum. However, I was not terribly worried, expecting that the participants would enjoy themselves and not be frustrated if we went a little overtime. When noon arrived, I informed them that they were free to go, or that they could stay if they wanted to cover the last point on the handout. All of them stayed until we finished at 12:30 PM.

The workshop went smoothly. Thankfully, we did not experience any technical difficulties. During our first discussion, one man expressed his admiration for the way the Bible ties together the three aspects of congregational singing: worship, edification, and evangelism. He used a baking analogy to illustrate how inseparable they are:

All three are present in our songs, but just like the ingredients in a cake - we often have the same ingredients – but in different proportions, or different methods of cooking them. We can't take away one from other. It's about proportion and nuance.

There was some disagreement among participants about whether children are able to “digest” songs with high nutritional value. Should we encourage children to sing that which they cannot yet fully embrace or understand? One woman said that she believes that songs are one of the best ways to teach children biblical theology. She explained, “A child will not have ‘indigestion’ if we give him biblical truth. Of course, we should explain it with words he understands.” She concluded by stating that songs cement biblical truth in children’s memories, and when they get older, they decide whether to believe it for themselves. Another participant mentioned that babies need the richest possible food, which is exactly what they receive in their mother’s milk. Wise parents introduce their children to many different foods when they are young, since taste is acquired over time. In the same way, children can learn to appreciate songs that have solid biblical content.

I especially enjoyed the participants’ discussion about possible interpretations for the biblical term “selah.” One suggested that it could mean a pause to create expectation for the next section, much like suspended notes in a symphony. He continued, “We should give ourselves time to digest [the message of the song], to enjoy the flavor like wine-tasters, to let [its] richness sink tranquilly into our hearts.” A clarinetist and a violinist suggested that “selah” could refer to moments of rest for one particular instrument, or to moments of “tutti” when all the instruments played together. Everyone agreed that while we cannot be sure of the original meaning of the Hebrew term, it is good for our congregations to have moments throughout the service to reflect on the words sung, especially if our songs have high text load.

When discussing songs’ overall flavor, a participant commented that he believes that the people in his church sometimes choose a song for what it evokes, such as joy or triumph, rather

than for its specific content. My pastor used an analogy of fruit salad to illustrate the value of considering both individual truths and the overall flavor of a song:

“Each fruit has its unique taste and flavor, but when we mix those flavors in a fruit salad, that creates a different experience, another taste. Although the individual fruits haven’t changed their taste...they create something new together. There is value in looking at individual truths, but there is another value, another kind of richness, in putting them together.”

I had been curious whether the French participants would share my French proofreader’s aversion to the idea of nutritional value in church music. On the contrary, they fully embraced it and developed it further.

During the workshop, several participants pointed out some sneaky typos I had missed. Along with those corrections, I decided to reword a few questions for the future, having sensed that participants had not understood what I was looking for. Two participants called me afterwards to provide more concrete feedback. Both had thoroughly enjoyed the workshop. One of them requested clarification on the connection between the workshop and my thesis project. The other said that when he had read the attachments to my recruitment email two weeks prior, he had been perplexed. Was not the workshop supposed to be about analyzing the song texts that we sing in our churches, rather than the song texts found in Scripture? However, his misgivings subsided when he understood that the workshop was originally designed to be conducted over the course of several days. In the end, he fully approved of my decision to start with biblical analysis. He also recommended that I include a reference to Jesus specifically in analysis of song texts in the New Testament, and he suggested adding Hebrews 13:20 and Romans 12.1 to the section on the physical aspect of worship.

Having completed all three phases of the project, I then analyzed results of the survey and participants' comments about the effectiveness of the method. I will summarize these results in the following chapter.



## Chapter Four: Research Findings

### Short-Term Results

Twenty-five of the thirty participants responded to the post-workshop survey. All of the respondents found the workshop to be beneficial for them personally. In response to the question, “Rate the usefulness of this workshop for your own edification on a scale of 1-10 (1 being not at all useful, and 10 being very useful),” 100% of the participants rated the workshop as 8 or above, and 84% rated it as 9 or above.

In response to the question, “Rate how useful you believe this workshop could be in cross-cultural ministry contexts (1 being not at all useful, and 10 being very useful),” 92% rated it as 8 or above. Significantly, the group with the most experience in non-Western cultures gave the workshop the highest ratings in cross-cultural potential: all but one of them gave it a “10.” Although one respondent from phase two rated it as 1 (not at all useful) in cross-cultural ministry contexts, he or she may have simply misread the scale, for all of the others gave it a positive rating. While the multi-lingual, bi-cultural group from phase three rated the workshop slightly lower for cross-cultural ministry potential than the group in phase one (75% gave it a 9 or above), half of them have served exclusively in Western cultures with a plethora of excellent songs at their disposal.

Both during and after the workshop, participants described specific ways in which the method was beneficial for them personally. During the second workshop, a music pastor made the following comment after having completed the analysis of a song text from his church’s repertory.

Having to do that exercise is *such* a good thing. I chose [the hymn] “His Robes for Mine” because I always think of it as a really dense, theological hymn, but singing it doesn’t necessarily make me get at the density. Meditating on the density of it...is just a different

kind of experience. I just got to experience the truth of it in a way I've never done before...Meditating on a song is so good for the soul.

A friend who sings in her church's worship team shared, "This has awakened or renewed a love of the music we have in our churches." Another musician mentioned that he had especially benefited from putting together his church's song list. He was pleasantly surprised and reassured by the Christ-centeredness of his church's modern repertory. A pastor said that the workshop would help him to be more intentional in the choices of songs for services.

Participants also envisioned the workshop as potentially beneficial for specific audiences. A retired missionary expressed his regret for not having incorporated more songs from indigenous Christian groups in his church's repertory: "they had good, solid Christian words." Therefore, this method could help contemporary missionaries objectively evaluate and promote local hymnody. One participant commented that it would be an excellent exercise for the hymnology students at her church's Bible institute. Another wrote, "I think that this would be very good to do as a potential Sunday School Series or a Wednesday night study at church. I feel that many of our believers today do not necessarily think fully through the texts of the songs they sing." He and several others asked for a copy of the presentation.

The most enthusiastic feedback that I received came from one of the French participants, "Daniel." He is particularly passionate about the textual content of songs, having written many of his own. He has taught sessions on church music as part of his itinerant ministry in local churches. During the third workshop, he expressed approval for the three-question grid for textual analysis: "This [allows people to conduct] a simple, accessible, and methodical analysis." A week after the workshop, he called to provide further feedback. Along with a few suggestions for improvement, which I summarized in the previous chapter, he made the following comments.

I thoroughly enjoyed myself. It was very deep, well-organized, well-directed, and edifying. *Je me suis éclaté*.<sup>110</sup> Some of the points about congregational singing had never occurred to me before...Our churches need this workshop. Young people want new songs, and your workshop could help church leaders to evaluate [those] new songs objectively. The stoplight analogy that you showed us is extremely important [for that reason]. The musical aspect is so subjective; it depends greatly on musical tastes. But theological content is very objective.

This workshop would be useful for them at every level: not only to help them evaluate songs, but also to help them appreciate them. We are so used to our songs. The ones that are truly rich deserve to be put in the limelight. The two verses in the New Testament that speak of music emphasize the textual content: the Word of God must dwell in us richly. The Bible gives primary emphasis to songs' textual content.

A few weeks after this phone conversation, a different French pastor invited me to do the workshop in conjunction with his church's regional program of theological training. "Daniel highly recommended it," he told me. Such recommendations indicate that this project was successful.

#### Anticipated Long-Term Results

While the immediate results and feedback from participants was encouraging, I believe that the real value of this method will be seen over the long term. One of the participants from phase one agreed, saying, "To reach your goals with this project, there is no substitute for time."

If church leaders and musicians learn this method for textual analysis, they may be more purposeful in their choice of songs for worship each week, giving greater consideration to the textual content. They may begin to ask themselves, "Do we have a balance of songs that express God's revelation and songs that express our response? If we sing many high text load songs, are we providing enough 'selah' moments during the service to give people time to meditate on the content? How theologically accurate and clear are the lyrics in these songs?" Some church

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<sup>110</sup> The closest English equivalent to this French expression is "I had a blast."

leaders and musicians may see the usefulness of keeping track of their repertory week by week in order to do an annual check-up.

If ethnodoxologists apply this method with indigenous church leaders and members, it will give them a greater knowledge of the church's current repertory and will therefore enable them to conduct more efficient and effective song workshops. If I had used this method with the Central Asian believers during our first workshop instead of our third, I would have had a much better idea of what songs they were already singing and what new songs they needed. The Central Asian pastors would also be better equipped today to evaluate potential new songs.

Finally, I believe that this workshop could be beneficial long-term to all participants by causing them to reflect on their overall approach to worship. Are they seeking to worship God with their whole beings, or are they focusing primarily on one aspect of worship and neglecting the other two?

#### Possible Objections

I will now address possible objections to this method of textual analysis, based on comments and questions received during the three phases. First, some might question the validity of analyzing text apart from the musical medium. However, the method that I have proposed is only the first step in helping a congregation evaluate its repertory and develop new hymnody. Music must certainly be taken into account. During the third workshop, a participant asked, "Why is it that some songs 'stick' in a church's repertory and others don't?" For a song to last, people must judge it to have both memorable text *and* satisfying, enjoyable music. Otherwise, even the best texts fall into oblivion and remain there unless they are rediscovered and revived

with new melodies.<sup>111</sup> My method of analysis can help address the tendency to judge a worship song uniquely by its music. One of my professors, Dr. John Benham, often asks his students how many of them decided whether they liked a worship song based on the message. Virtually none of them did! Furthermore, they admitted that if the music appealed to them, they usually did not process the text.<sup>112</sup>

Others may object that this method minimizes the importance of simple song texts in corporate worship. However, this method does not focus on analyzing just one textual characteristic like complexity or simplicity. Rather, it invites participants to also consider aspects such as an emphasis on revelation or response and an expression of celebration or lament. Churches would do well to seek for the kind of balance in these categories that God provided in the Psalms. Some of the most beloved Psalms are short and simple, like Psalm 23, while Psalm 119 is a massive 176-verse acrostic akin to a feast lasting for weeks. Some Psalms contain much objective truth about God, others emphasize the response of the worshiper, and many of them intertwine both themes. We find both celebration and lamentation in the Psalms. Variety is always appreciated in corporate worship, both in song texts and in the other aspects of the service.

Some may wonder how the method could be applied effectively if the participants are not already well-trained in theology. After all, they are the ones who decide during the workshop if any of the song texts contain “yellow” (vague) or “red” (unbiblical) phrases. It is true that participants will approach their analysis from different levels of maturity and knowledge. If thorny theological questions spring up during the workshop, the ethnodoxologist could alert the

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<sup>111</sup> For example, Matt Merker revitalized the 1906 hymn “He Will Hold Me Fast.” Text by Ada Habershon (1861-1918) and Matt Merker, music by Matt Merker (Getty Music Publishing (BMI) / Matthew Merker Music (BMI), 2013). Admin. by MusicServices.org.

<sup>112</sup> John Benham, personal communication, February 13, 2021.

local church leaders or missionary mentors and suggest that they provide additional teaching. According to Dr. David Smith, the director of the agency with whom I serve, the method described in this thesis project would work well as a complement to theological training. Seminary professors and pastors often provide theological training in short modules to indigenous church leaders, including many who serve in restricted countries. Dr. Smith stated the following:

Your proposal fits perfectly in conjunction with this model. Honestly, it is not too difficult to find current and retired pastors and/or Bible college professors to come with me [overseas] to teach theology to national pastors and missionaries. The much greater challenge is to find qualified teachers and trainers to teach linguistics, music, counseling, etc... I see [your method of textual analysis] as a critical part of a greater and more comprehensive whole.<sup>113</sup>

Even young believers can detect unbiblical lyrics if they set their minds to it. A French pastor recently challenged the young adults in his congregation to pinpoint a problematic phrase in the song they had presented the day before. “The first person to find the phrase that is theologically inaccurate gets chocolate!” he told them. Not only did the young people find the phrase, but they also learned a valuable lesson about paying closer attention to the message of their songs.<sup>114</sup>

A fourth possible objection could be related to the application of the method: how does it account for differences in lyrical content and style between generations and cultures? For example, the song texts of first-generation Christians may be very different from those of later generations. An ethnodoxologist found that the song texts of Tibetan Christians primarily contained testimonies of coming to faith in Christ, experiencing forgiveness of sins, and finding deliverance from deep internal suffering. A significant number of the texts invite unbelievers to

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<sup>113</sup> David Smith, personal communication, July 9, 2020.

<sup>114</sup> Alliance M., personal communication, April 7, 2021.

believe on Jesus.<sup>115</sup> Such themes are biblical, appropriate, and perfectly natural for first-generation Christians. As believers mature, their knowledge of God grows deeper, and new themes will emerge. This method could help them discover and incorporate some of those new themes.

Also, it could potentially be adapted for different cultural contexts and languages by modifying the questions to reflect local preferences. For instance, Tibetan hymn texts tend to focus on the community rather than the individual.<sup>116</sup> The third question in this method of textual analysis could be changed from “According to the text, how should **I** respond?” to “How should **we** respond?” In some cultures, language syntax is pictorial rather than sequential and logical. Hebrew poetry, for example, is packed with images. Examples include “The Lord is my shepherd” (Psalm 23.1) and “He drew me out of the pit of destruction, and out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.” (Psalm 40.2) For highly pictorial languages, the text analysis could begin with the question, “What **images** are used to describe God’s character or actions, or to describe our response?” The stoplight grid could be adjusted as follows: “How biblically accurate and clear are the **images** in the text?”

Although it needs to be tested further in various cultural contexts, I believe that this method has potential to benefit congregations around the world because it helps them take a closer look at the texts that they are singing. Also, the principles in parts one and three of the method regarding the role of congregational singing and the three worship “lenses” are applicable universally.

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<sup>115</sup> John Oswald, in “Gospel Communication in Tibetan Song: Seonet Missiological Forum, 2006,” in Krabill et al., CD-ROM, 23.

<sup>116</sup> John Oswald, “Gospel Communication in Tibetan Song,” 14, 20.

## Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### Summary

This project involved the creation and testing of a method for church leaders, musicians and members to analyze the song texts both of the Bible and of their active repertory. This method builds on the work of several ethnomusicologists and addresses a step that was missing in ethnodoxological literature. By application of this method, Christians can evaluate song texts objectively and grow in awareness of what they are singing, appreciation for nourishing lyrics, and discernment in adding new songs to their church's repertory. Ethnodoxologists who apply this method will lay a foundation for effective indigenous song-writing workshops.

Due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, fieldwork was conducted virtually by videoconference with thirty people in three groups. The method was tested in both English and French with participants from local churches in Europe and the United States. Despite the limitations of the online platform, the data show that the participants benefitted from the method. Most of them were personal acquaintances of the researcher, so their positive responses were undoubtedly biased in her favor. However, an invitation to conduct the workshop again with another church indicates that it does have genuine potential. The method will be made available in various digital formats for facilitators, possibly including checklists, a video summary, and slides with teaching notes.

### Conclusions

Why should ethnodoxologists and church leaders consider using this method? Excellent song texts are vital in local church ministry. While many church leaders are probably aware of the importance of good lyrics, they may not have a clear grasp of their active repertory or a way to evaluate what they are actually singing. This step-by-step method could be applied by church



leaders or ethnodoxologists cross-culturally with minor adjustments. Specialized ethnomusicological training is not required. It has a holistic perspective, inviting participants to consider the cognitive, affective, and physical aspects of worship. It is grounded in biblical theology and objective since it focuses on textual rather than musical content. Finally, it is adaptable for both in-person and online sessions.

### Recommendations

For this method to be conducted effectively, several recommendations are in order for facilitators. First, they should communicate well in advance with the congregation, requesting that a song list be compiled from each week's worship service. A list of songs from the past six to nine months would be ideal for establishing a church's active repertory. However, it is possible to conduct the workshop with a much shorter list if data is unavailable.

Second, they should conduct preliminary research about the congregation with the goal of adapting the presentation and analysis to the local context. In addition to general research about the cultural setting, they should learn about the history of the congregation. Was the church founded by foreign missionaries or nationals? Who is the "gate-keeper" for the church's repertory: who chooses the music that is sung each week? Is there a procedure for integrating new songs? Have the church leaders and members ever studied the biblical basis for congregational singing? What are the participants' expectations for the workshop? Who has already influenced leaders' and members' perspectives on worship and congregational singing? According to ethnomusicologists Gregory Barz and Timothy Cooley, "our shadows join with others, past and present, in a web of histories."<sup>117</sup> Learning these stories and gathering

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<sup>117</sup> Gregory Barz and Timothy J. Cooley, *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5.

information can reduce misunderstandings and frustrations for both the facilitator and the participants.

Third, facilitators should be less concerned about the number of attendees than about the participants' roles in their local churches. For the workshop to have lasting results, it is crucial that the person who controls the church's repertory be present. Also, "meristem" members are very important, according to Brian Schrag. The meristem is the nexus of growth in a plant. "Meristem" church members have the creativity, vision, and influence to take new ideas and develop them in culturally appropriate ways.<sup>118</sup> The attendance of such people is far more important than sheer numbers.

Fourth, facilitators should hold the workshop in person unless extenuating circumstances oblige them to conduct it by videoconference. Virtual fieldwork's lack of context is a major handicap.<sup>119</sup> The method would be far more effective if it is conducted in person over several days with plenty of time for small-group discussion, singing, and prayer. In such settings, individuals, couples, or small groups can do analysis in real time (rather than ahead of time) and provide a summary for the group. One of the highlights of my workshop in 2019 with the Central Asian believers was hearing one of the men share his analysis of the song of Habbakuk from the Old Testament. It gave all of us a glimpse of his comprehension of the text and the depth of his relationship with God.

Fifth, if translation is needed, facilitators should expect the workshop to take twice as long as it would in their native language. They should also be aware of the additional difficulty in assessing the method's effectiveness since they will not understand the chatter between

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<sup>118</sup> Schrag, *Creating Local Arts Together*, 194.

<sup>119</sup> Timothy J. Cooley, Katherine Meizel, and Nasir Syed, "Virtual Fieldwork: Three Case Studies," in *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, ed. Gregory Barz and Timothy J. Cooley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 99.

participants. Therefore, they should consider applying the retranslation method suggested by ethnomusicologist Nicole Beaudry. After getting permission to record her interaction with the people she was studying, she arranged for her translator to stay for an extra day to listen to the recording together and fill in the gaps.<sup>120</sup> Beaudry suggests providing adequate compensation for the translator and cultivating a genuine friendship with him or her so that the process of retranslation is enjoyable. While labor- and time-intensive, these steps exponentially increase a facilitator's ability to assess the effectiveness of the method and to make further improvements.

In the book of Revelation, God provides a glimpse of the resounding praises of his people gathered from every tribe, kindred, tongue, and nation. The writer John describes the incredible volume of their praises as “the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder.” (Revelation 19.6) Other than the majestic, awe-inspiring volume, Christians do not know how this music will sound. They do know the song text, however! “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready...” (Revelation 19.6-7)

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<sup>120</sup> Nicole Beaudry, “The Challenges of Human Relations in Ethnographic Enquiry,” in *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, eds. Barz and Cooley, 237-238.

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**List #3 : Complete text of songs from list #2 (at least three songs for the purposes of this workshop)**

Example :

**Thine Be the Glory**

Thine be the glory / Risen, conquering Son ;  
 Endless is the victory / Thou o'er death hast won.  
 Angels in bright raiment / Rolled the stone away,  
 Kept the folded graveclothes / Where thy body lay.

Lo ! Jesus meets us / Risen from the tomb ;  
 Lovingly He greets us / Scatters fear and gloom.  
 Let the church with gladness / Hymns of triumph sing,  
 For her Lord now liveth ; / Death has lost its sting.

No more we doubt Thee / Glorious Prince of life !  
 Life is naught without Thee ; / Aid us in our strife.  
 Make us more than conquerors / Through thy deathless love,  
 Bring us safe through Jordan / To thy home above.

## Appendix B: Analysis of a Song of the Bible

(This explanation was sent to participants ahead of time in all three phases.)

In God’s Word, we have songs that were inspired by the Holy Spirit. What a priceless treasure! The first step in our journey is to look intently at these musical masterpieces. They are like delicious meals, both enjoyable and nourishing for our souls. As we analyze these songs, keep in mind what is special about Hebrew poetry: **ideas rhyme rather than words**. Author Kathleen Nielson explains further:

Hebrew poetry’s central characteristic is its balancing of lines (or units of thought) in a structure often called parallelism. Most often, two (or sometimes three) “parallel lines” balance together to create meaning.<sup>121</sup>

There are three primary kinds of **parallel rhymes** in Hebrew poetry.

1. The two or three lines can *repeat the same idea, but with different words*, as in Psalm 3.1-2: “O Lord, how many are my foes! / Many are rising against me; / Many are saying of my soul, ‘There is no salvation for him in God.’”
2. The two or three lines can describe *opposite ideas*, as in Psalm 18.27: “For you save a humble people, / but the haughty eyes you bring down.”
3. The second line can *develop more fully an idea* from the first line, as in Psalm 7.10: “My shield is with God, / who saves the upright in heart.”<sup>122</sup>

Take note of the expression “**selah**” or “pause” when it occurs.

**Method:** I propose **three steps** for the analysis of a song of the Bible. A list of these songs is provided below.

The song of Moses and Israel (Ex. 15)  
 The song of testimony (Deut. 31-32)  
 Deborah’s song (Judges 5)  
 Hannah’s song (1 Samuel 2)  
 The Psalms of David and others  
 The songs of the redeemed (Isaiah 12, 25-26)  
 The Song of songs (in a category of its own!)  
 Habakkuk’s song (Hab. 3)  
 Mary’s song (Luc 1.46-55)  
 Zachariah’s song (Luke 1. 68-79)  
 Simeon’s song (Luke 2.29-32)  
 The song of the redeemed (Rev. 5.9-14, 15.3-4)

1. **Choose a song from the list**
2. **Interrogate the text: According to this song...**

5.

<sup>121</sup> Kathleen Buswell Nielson, *Psalms : Songs Along the Way, Vol. I* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009),

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

- Who is God?
- What has God done? (past, present, or future)
- How should I respond?

### 3. Analyze the “nutritional value”

- Count the “ingredients” (the answers to your interrogation of the text; if the same idea is repeated with different words, count those lines as just one “ingredient”)
- Identify the “courses” (the main themes of the song)
- Determine the “nutritional value” (text load) of the song by comparing the number of distinct truths with the number of verses in the song.

#### Example: Analysis of Psalm 84

- Dedication: To the choirmaster (of the temple)
- Instrumentation: According to the “gittith” (for the harp of Gath, or perhaps to the “winepress melody”)
- Authors: The sons of Korah
- Context: Unknown

#### Interrogate the text

Who is God?	What has God done?	How should I respond?
His dwelling place is lovely (v.1)	He blesses His people. (v.4-5, 12)	I long for and faint for the courts of the Lord. (v.2)
The Lord of hosts (v. 1)	He transforms the desert (the “valley of Baca/of tears”) into an oasis. (v.6)	My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. (v.2)
The living God (v. 2)	He directs His people. (v.5)	I am jealous of the little birds that can make their nest near His altars. (v.3)
The King (v. 3)	He increases the strength of His people. (v.7)	I want to dwell in His home so I can continually sing His praise. (v.4)
The God of His people (v. 3)	He gives grace and glory. (v.11)	I would rather spend a day in His courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather have the most insignificant of jobs in His house than live in luxury in the tents of the wicked. (v.10)
The shield of His people (v.9, 11)	He does not withhold any good thing from those who walk uprightly. (v.11)	
A sun (v.11)		

#### Analyze the “nutritional value”

- **Count the ingredients:** 16 (from the three columns above)
- **Identify the courses:** The overall theme is the blessedness of fellowship with God.

- **First course:** “Blessed are those who dwell in your house!” (verses 1-4)  
We (should) deeply yearn for greater fellowship with God.
- **Second course:** “Blessed are those whose strength is in You!” (verses 5-8)  
This fellowship is the fruit of our trust in Him: His goodness, His wisdom, His protection, His direction.
- **Conclusion/dessert:** (versets 10-13)  
When we trust Him in this way, even in the most difficult of circumstances, we walk uprightly and we enjoy His grace and glory.
- **Determine the nutritional value of this song:** high (it contains 16 distinct statements of truth in just 12 verses)

It is now your opportunity to analyze a song of the Bible by using the following chart.

**1. Choose a song from the list:** \_\_\_\_\_

- Dedication:
- Instrumentation:
- Author(s):
- Context:

**2. Interrogate the text**

Who is God?	What has God done?	How should I respond?

**3. Analyze the “nutritional value”**

- **Count the ingredients:**
- **Identify the courses:** The overall theme of the song is...
  - **First course:** (theme) (verses)
  - **Second course, etc.:** (theme) (verses)
  - **Conclusion/dessert:** (verses)
- **Determine the nutritional value:** High, medium, or low? Approximately how many distinct truths are mentioned, in how many verses?

### Appendix C: Survey Results

All surveys were anonymous. W1 refers to the first workshop and W2 to the second. Results from W3 are given separately since the questions were significantly altered.

**Phase 1:** All 9 participants took the pre-workshop survey, but only 8 took the post-workshop survey.

**Phase 2:** All 9 participants took both pre- and post-surveys.

Question 1	W1 pre-	W1 post-	Conclusions
According to the Bible, congregational singing has an important role in: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Celebration of God's works</li> <li>2. Edification</li> <li>3. Worship</li> <li>4. Evangelism</li> <li>5. All of the above</li> </ol>	Six people answered: "All of the above"  Two answered: "Worship"  One answered: "Celebration, edification, and worship" (not evangelism)	Seven of them answered: "All of the above"  One answered: "Worship"	One person was not convinced, or perhaps he or she missed the discussion of this question during the workshop. Overall, progress from the first survey.
	W2 pre-	W2 post-	Conclusions
	Eight answered: "All of the above"  One answered: "Celebration, edification, and worship" (not evangelism)	All answered: "All of the above"	Overall progress. Further explanation of the "testimony/evangelism" aspect of congregational singing was needed.
Question 2	W1 pre-	W1 post-	Conclusions
Why might the writers of the Psalms have indicated "selah" (pause) in their songs? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. So that singers could catch their breath</li> <li>2. So that singers could stop and think about what they just sang</li> <li>3. I don't know</li> </ol>	All answered: "So that singers could stop and think about what they just sang"	All answered: "So that singers could stop and think about what they just sang"	No change.
	W2 pre-	W2 post-	Conclusions
	Eight answered: "So that singers could stop and think about what they just sang"	Six answered: "So that singers could stop and think about what they just sang"	One person was not convinced and another stayed unconvinced.

	One answered: “I don’t know”	Two answered: “I don’t know”	
<b>Question 3</b>	<b>W1 pre-</b>	<b>W1 post-</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
What questions might we ask ourselves in analyzing the text of a worship song? 1. What does it teach us about God’s character and His works? 2. What does it exhort me to do? 3. What is the main theme? 4. All of the above	All answered: “All of the above”	All answered: “All of the above”	No change.
	<b>W2 pre-</b>	<b>W2 post-</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
	All answered: “All of the above”	All answered: “All of the above”	No change.
<b>Question 4</b>	<b>W1 pre-</b>	<b>W1 post-</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
The “nutritional value” of a song is determined by: 1. How many words are in the song 2. How many distinct truths are in the song 3. I don’t know	All answered: “How many distinct truths are in the song”	All answered: “How many distinct truths are in the song”	No change.
	<b>W2 pre-</b>	<b>W2 post-</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
	All answered: “How many distinct truths are in the song”	All answered: “How many distinct truths are in the song”	No change.
<b>Question 5</b>	<b>W1 pre-</b>	<b>W1 post-</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
In general, my church’s song texts are: 1. Biblical and clear 2. Vague 3. Unbiblical 4. I don’t know	All answered: “Biblical and clear”	Seven answered: “Biblical and clear” One answered: “I don’t know”	One participant seemed to be dissatisfied with his or her church’s repertory.
	<b>W2 pre-</b>	<b>W2 post-</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
	Eight answered: “Biblical and clear.” One answered: “I don’t know.”	All nine answered “Biblical and clear.”	The one unsure participant seemed reassured by the end.

<b>Question 6</b>	<b>W1 pre-</b>	<b>W1 post-</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
In general, the Bible’s songs have: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. High nutritional value</li> <li>2. Medium nutritional value</li> <li>3. Low nutritional value</li> </ol>	(Question not asked in pre-workshop surveys.)	All answered: “High value”	This question is too rhetorical.
		<b>W2 post-</b>	
<b>Question 7</b>	<b>W1 pre-</b>	<b>W1 post-</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
What is most important to you in corporate worship? (Choose only one.) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Feeling the joy of my personal relationship with God</li> <li>2. Learning more about God</li> <li>3. Observing the Lord’s Supper</li> <li>4. Other</li> </ol>	Four answered: “Feeling the joy,” four answered: “Learning more about God,” one answered: “Other.”	(Question not asked in post-workshop surveys.)	During the workshop, they all said that the “teaching” lens is primary in their churches. Their responses indicate their desire to see a better balance with experience. The “other” option is not useful for this question; the videoconference platform does not allow for participants to explain their answer.
	<b>W2 pre-</b>	<b>W2 post-</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
	Three answered: “Feeling the joy,” four answered: “Learning more about God,” and two answered “Other.”	(Question not asked in post-workshop surveys.)	Some of them said teaching was their primary lens, but two of them said that they are learning to balance the two. This question should be expanded and clarified.
<b>Question 8</b>	<b>W1 pre-</b>	<b>W1 post-</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
Which worship “lens” is primary in Colossians 3.16 ? (“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with	(Question not asked in pre-workshop surveys.)	All answered: “Teaching”	This question was not retained in phase three since it only addressed one aspect of worship. All three “lenses” are clear in Scripture.
		<b>W2 post-</b>	

thankfulness in your hearts to God.”)			
<b>Question 9</b>	<b>W1 pre-</b>	<b>W1 post-</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
Rate the usefulness of this workshop for your own edification on a scale of 1-10 (1 being not at all useful, and 10 being very useful).	(Question not asked in pre-workshop surveys.)	Six rated it as 10, one as 9, and one as 8.	Very high ratings.
		<b>W2 post-</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
		All rated it as 9.	High ratings, but they all held back from the 10.
<b>Question 10</b>	<b>W1 pre-</b>	<b>W1 post-</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
Rate how useful you believe this workshop could be in cross-cultural ministry contexts (1 being not at all useful, and 10 being very useful).	(Question not asked in pre-workshop surveys.)	Seven rated it as 10, one as 8.	This group had the most non-Western cultural experience.
		<b>W2 post-</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
		Eight rated it as 10, one rated it as 1.	This group has the least cross-cultural experience but they rated it highly. The one person who rated it as 1 may have misread the scale.

**Phase 3 (W3):** 9 out of 10 participants took the pre-workshop survey, and 8 took the post-workshop survey. The survey was administered in French.

<b>Question 1</b>	<b>W3 pre-</b>	<b>W3 post-</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
According to the Bible, what comes first: God’s revelation or our response? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. God’s revelation</li> <li>2. Our response</li> <li>3. I don’t know</li> </ol>	Eight answered: “God’s revelation.” One answered: “Our response.”	Seven answered: “God’s revelation.” One answered: “Our response.”	No change.
<b>Question 2</b>			
According to the Bible, congregational singing has a vital role in: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Communicating God’s revelation (in the Bible)</li> <li>2. Worshiping God</li> <li>3. Both</li> </ol>	Seven answered: “Both.” Two answered: “Worship.”	Seven answered: “Both.” One answered: “Communicating God’s revelation.”	Although the majority understood it to have a role in both areas, a few were unsure.



<b>Question 3</b>			
<p>According to the Bible, who is potentially blessed when the congregation sings to God?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. God</li> <li>2. God's people</li> <li>3. Unbelievers</li> <li>4. All of the above</li> </ol>	<p>Five answered: "All of the above." Two answered: "God and God's people." One answered: "God's people and unbelievers." One answered: "God's people."</p>	<p>Seven answered: "All of the above." One answered: "God's people and unbelievers."</p>	<p>Responses were extremely varied in the pre-workshop survey. At the end, they seemed to grasp how congregational singing speaks to all three "groups."</p>
<b>Question 4</b>			
<p>What sort of questions could we ask ourselves when analyzing a song text?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What does this song teach us about God's character?</li> <li>2. What does this song teach us to do in response?</li> <li>3. What is the unique "flavor" of this song?</li> <li>4. All of the above</li> </ol>	<p>Seven answered "All of the above." One answered: "What does it teach us about God's character and about our response?" One answered only: "What does this song teach us about God's character?"</p>	<p>All answered: "All of the above."</p>	<p>Their answers indicate that they learned how to better interrogate a song text.</p>
<b>Question 5</b>			
<p>The "nutritional value" of a song depends upon:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The number of words that it contains</li> <li>2. The number of distinct truths that it contains</li> <li>3. I don't know</li> </ol>	<p>Eight answered: "The number of distinct truths that it contains." One answered: "I don't know."</p>	<p>All answered: "The number of distinct truths that it contains."</p>	<p>Progress.</p>
<b>Question 6</b>			
<p>In general, my church's song texts are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Biblical and clear</li> <li>2. Vague</li> <li>3. Unbiblical</li> <li>4. I don't know</li> </ol>	<p>Eight answered: "Biblical and clear." One answered: "I don't know."</p>	<p>Seven answered: "Biblical and clear." One answered: "I don't know."</p>	<p>No change.</p>

<b>Question 7</b>			
<p>What aspect of worship do you consider to be the most important?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Understanding and communicating God's revelation</li> <li>2. Responding emotionally to God's revelation</li> <li>3. Acting upon God's revelation (putting it into practice)</li> </ol>	<p>Six answered: "Understanding and communicating God's revelation." Two answered: "Responding emotionally." One answered: "Acting upon God's revelation."</p>	<p>(Question not asked in post-workshop survey.)</p>	<p>Responses were varied, but the majority in this group see the cognitive aspect of worship as the most important.</p>
<b>Question 8</b>			
<p>In which aspect of worship would you like to progress?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Understanding and communicating God's revelation</li> <li>2. Responding emotionally to God's revelation</li> <li>3. Acting upon God's revelation (putting it into practice)</li> </ol>	<p>(Question not asked in pre-workshop survey.)</p>	<p>Four answered: All three aspects. Two answered: "Understanding and communicating God's revelation." One answered "Understanding and acting upon God's revelation." One answered: "Responding emotionally."</p>	<p>Answers varied widely, which was to be expected.</p>

### Appendix D: Summary of Presentations in Phases 1, 2, and 3

Phase 1 (Original)		Phase 2 (Changes)		Phase 3 (Changes)	
Questions	Tasks	Questions	Tasks	Questions	Tasks
<p><b>(part one)</b> Why do we sing as a congregation?</p>	<p>Read the following Bible passages and identify reasons for congregational singing.</p> <p>-1 Peter 2.9, Psalm 96.1-2, 7 (to worship God)</p> <p>-Exodus 15.1-7, Revelation 5.5, 9-10 (to celebrate God's works, especially his triumphant victories)</p> <p>-Ephesians 5.19-20, Colossians 3.16 (to teach and exhort each other)</p> <p>-Acts 16.25, Psalm 40.3 (to communicate the Gospel to unbelievers)</p>			<p>(Additional questions to accompany each pair of Bible passages)</p> <p>What comes first: God's revelation or our response?</p> <p>What do we praise God for when we sing?</p> <p>What sacrifices do we offer to God?</p> <p>What does God seek to accomplish in our hearts as we worship him?</p>	<p>-Hebrews 1.1-2, 2.12 (We sing to worship the God who has revealed himself to us)</p> <p>-Psalm 100 (We praise him for his character and his works)</p> <p>-Hebrews 13.15, Romans 12.1 (We offer ourselves and our praise as spiritual sacrifices)</p> <p>- Ephesians 5.19, Colossians 3.16, 2 Corinthians 3.18 (He edifies and transforms us)</p>

Phase 1 (Original)		Phase 2 (Changes)		Phase 3 (Changes)	
Questions	Tasks	Questions	Tasks	Questions	Tasks
				What does God seek to accomplish in the hearts of unbelievers who observe us worshiping?	-Romans 1.25, Psalm 96.4-5, 1 Corinthians 14.24-25 (God confronts unbelievers with their idolatry when they observe us worshiping him)
Can you think of other reasons from Scripture why we sing? How might our culture have influenced in a negative way the reasons why we sing?					
<b>(part two)</b> What are we singing as a congregation? How can we evaluate our song texts to determine if we are accomplishing the goals in Scripture?					
What are the contents of the song texts of Scripture?	Choose one of the songs of Scripture and analyze it in the following ways.				

Phase 1 (Original)		Phase 2 (Changes)		Phase 3 (Changes)	
Questions	Tasks	Questions	Tasks	Questions	Tasks
	<p>-Interrogate the text: What does it teach about who God is, what he has done, and how we should respond?</p> <p>-Count how many distinct truths (“ingredients”) are in the song text.</p> <p>-Describe the overall “nutritional” value: high, medium, or low</p> <p>-Describe the overall theme of the song as well as any sub-themes (the “meal” and the “courses” that make up the meal)</p>				<p>-Interrogate the text: What does it contain about God’s self-revelation (who he is, what he has done) and about our response?</p> <p>-Describe the overall “flavor” of the song: What makes it unique? Note on a scale from 1-10 the following characteristics of the song: Does it focus more on God’s revelation or on our response? Is it simple or complex? Does it express celebration or lamentation?</p>

What kind of songs are appropriate for children and new believers?					
What are possible meanings and practical applications for the term “selah” found in the song texts of Scripture (the Psalms and Habbakuk)?					
What are the contents of the song texts in your church’s active repertory?	Prepare a list of songs that your congregation has sung over the past few months and make note of any songs that have been sung at least twice. Apply the same steps of textual analysis that you followed for the songs of Scripture (see above).				
How biblical and clear is the theology in your church’s song texts?	Using the analogy of a traffic light, look for any phrases in the song that you would				

	qualify as “yellow” (vague) or “red” (unbiblical).				
How might churches deal with problematic theology in song texts? Why do churches sometimes sing texts that contain unclear or unbiblical theology?					
What song themes are needed for a healthy lyric theology?  Are any of these themes missing in your church’s active repertory?		(Additional questions) What are the major themes of the Psalms and other songs of Scripture? How do the Psalms reflect the double reality of life (rejoicing and lament)?			
<b>(part three)</b> Whether or not textual analysis is really necessary depends largely on your view of worship. Therefore, what is your “wide-angle lens” of worship? Do you	Read the following passages of Scripture that describe these aspects of worship: -Luke 1.47, Revelation 7.9-10 (the emotional aspect of worship)			(Rephrased questions)  What aspect of worship do you consider to be the most important: the affective/heart, cognitive/mind, or	Read the following passages of Scripture that describe these aspects of worship: -Colossians 3.16, Romans 10.14, 17, Deuteronomy 4.36, 39 (cognitive:

<p>approach it primarily as experience, teaching, or ritual?</p>	<p>-Colossians 3.16, John 4.10 (the intellectual aspect of worship) -1 Corinthians 11.26, 14.40 (the ceremonial, physical aspect of worship)</p>			<p>physical/body aspect?</p>	<p>understanding God's revelation)</p> <p>-Psalm 32.11, Psalm 51.19, Hebrews 12.28: (affective: responding emotionally to God's revelation)</p> <p>-The book of James; 1 Corinthians 11.26, Hebrews 13.16 (physical: responding physically and actively to God's revelation)</p>
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<p>Which lens tends to be primary in your church? Which lens is primary across contemporary evangelicalism? How might we strive to have a better balance between the three aspects of worship in our services?</p>				<p>Do you see a hierarchy in these three aspects of worship, or do you see them as being of equal importance?</p> <p>Which aspect has suffered the most because of COVID-19? What might be the short- and long-term consequences?</p>	
<p><b>(application)</b> What are some practical ways that you could improve your church's repertory of songs? (I provided several ideas, including conducting an annual worship song "health check-up" by analyzing the repertory, holding a Scripture song workshop, and choosing a hymn of the month.)</p>					<p>I also suggested that they keep a record of what songs they sing in church each week.</p>