

# ♪ Worship Notes ♪

Volume 2, Number 6 ♪ June 2007

**THEME: Three in One**

## The Tri-Unity<sup>†</sup> of God

The Trinitarian nature of God is not merely an intellectual sidelight for the theologically sophisticated. Rather it speaks to the very heart of Who God is, who we are in Him, and how we can approach Him in worship. Indeed, that the One God should exist in Three Persons is an unfathomable mystery; yet it is the core of biblical teaching and Christian belief.

### Three Persons but One God

*Equal in glory and majesty.* Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all equally God in their perfections, attributes, counsel and will. They are one in essence and one in purpose. They were all actively involved in creation (Gen 1:1-2; Col 1:16) and redemption (John 3:16; Rom 5:8; 2 Cor 5:18-19; Heb 9:14).

*“In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity.”* (Westminster Confession of Faith II.3.)

*Equally worthy of worship.* Therefore the three Persons are equally deserving of the praises of God’s people and of the angelic hosts.

*“We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life . . . who with the Father is worshipped and glorified.”* (Nicene Creed)

<sup>†</sup> This is a literal translation of the German term for Trinity, *Dreieinigkeit*, which is perhaps a fuller and clearer designation.

### One God but Three Persons

*A distinction in roles.* It is clear, especially in the gospel of John, that the Father sent the Son to accomplish redemption for mankind; that the Son voluntarily subordinated Himself to the Father’s will and willingly undertook this task; and that the Spirit has undertaken a role to glorify the Son and the Father (John 16:13-14).

*Different roles in worship.* Though all three Persons are equally worthy of being worshiped, as seen above, yet the predominant New Testament pattern is that we worship the Father *through* the Son *in the power* of the Holy Spirit. Jesus in His continuing Incarnation has opened the way *and takes us with Him* into the Father’s presence (Heb 10:19-22). Not only was the Son subordinate to the Father during His earthly sojourn; but a somewhat more controversial teaching (because of implications for distinct gender roles in human relationships), yet also defensible biblically, is the doctrine of the *eternal* subordination of the Son to the Father (see Phil 2:11; 1 Cor 15:24,28). In light of this truth the Son as Worshiper can lead us in and perfect our worship, as our great High Priest (Heb 2:12; 8:1-2). The Holy Spirit in His behind-the-scenes way actualizes and energizes our worship (Phil 3:3).

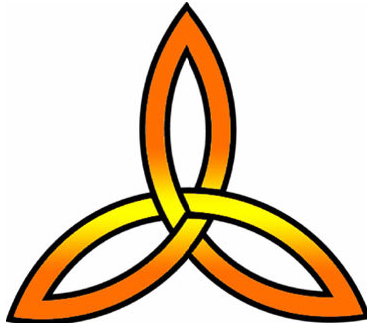
God  
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But what does this all mean practically for our worship? John Witvliet, in his article “The Trinitarian DNA of Christian Worship” (see link under “Important Resources” below), helpfully points out that the implications are so much

### Trinitarian Worship

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greater than “worship in which each of the persons of the Trinity gets some airtime.” It is more than just celebrating Trinity Sunday, or singing the Doxology or “Glorify Thy Name”; more



than singing “hymns with each divine person getting a stanza—a formal construct much more interested in symmetry than the New Testament, in which the Holy Spirit is always the shy member of the Trinity.”<sup>‡</sup>

Rather Witvliet suggests a number of other ways in which our worship can also be shaped by and infused with Trinitarian truth; some of these are:

1. As we learn the significance—for our walk with God, our life as a body, and our worship—of the fact that God exists Himself eternally in relationship and community, we can then see corporate worship as an opportunity for celebrating, enjoying and deepening our *relationship* with God and with one another.

2. We must recognize that, as James Torrance pointed out, God does not leave us to attempt worship in our own strength. Rather we need to understand, acknowledge and depend on the fact that in His grace God provides for us what He demands of us—that worship is *God’s work* in us, through the mediating role of our living and present High Priest (Heb 2:12; 8:1-2) and through the enabling, motivating and empowering work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts (Rom 8:15; Ephes 5:18-20; Phil 3:3).

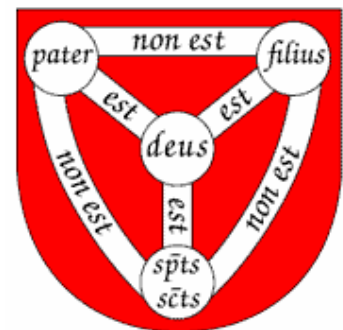
3. In worship we are not to meditate on some abstract, spiritualized conception of God as One who is way out there somewhere; but instead we

<sup>‡</sup> And speaking of “Glorify Thy Name,” the third verse seems glaringly inconsistent with the Spirit’s self-effacing role when it asks Him to “glorify Thy name in all the earth.” He deserves glory to be sure, but does not seek it in that way (John 16:13-14).

are to follow the biblical pattern of rehearsing the great acts of God *in history*—and especially when He stepped into history in the Incarnation of the Son for our salvation. In worship we hear of the work and works of God in the Scriptures; we respond to those mighty deeds in our praise and our prayers; we celebrate God’s saving deeds at special seasons of the church year (Christmas, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, etc.); and we commemorate and embrace anew the Father-initiated, Son-consummated, Spirit-applied work of redemption as we partake of the Lord’s Supper.

4. We are to guard against an incomplete or one-sided picture of God. He is indeed the supreme, transcendent Creator, the all-powerful Judge of all the earth; but He is also our gracious heavenly Father who has come close to us through Jesus Christ, and who is present among us through the Holy Spirit to preserve, bless and empower us. We dare not consider the work of Christ, or the Cross, or Christmas, apart from the interrelated activity of the Father and the Spirit, Witvliet warns. And we should avoid a solitary emphasis on either Jesus or the Holy Spirit.<sup>§</sup>

In the early centuries of the Christian era, it was the Church’s practice of Trinitarian worship which helped to lead to an understanding of the Trinity (finally est-



ablished as orthodox doctrine by the Council of Constantinople in 381 and codified in the Nicene Creed); now, an understanding of the Trinity should lead us to worship—because, as Robin Parry puts it, “*The Trinity should be at the core of our worship because the God who is at the heart of worship is Trinity.*” We must worship God as He really is—and that means worshipping Him in the rich fullness and weighty import of what it means for our God to be one God in three Persons.

<sup>§</sup> Along these lines, see Susan J. White, “Whatever Happened to the Father?” ([www.gbod.org/worship/white.pdf](http://www.gbod.org/worship/white.pdf)).

## TRINITARIAN TEXTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

**Matthew 3:16-17** And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; <sup>17</sup> and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

**Matthew 28:19** “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,”

**Mark 1:9-11** In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

**John 14:16** “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever”

**John 16:13-15** “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup> All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

**Romans 8:15-17** or you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs- heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ

**1 Corinthians 12:4-6** Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.

**2 Corinthians 3:17-18** Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

**2 Corinthians 13:14** The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**Ephesians 1:3-14** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. <sup>11</sup> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

**Ephesians 4:4-6** here is one body and one Spirit- just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call- <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

**Philippians 3:3** For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

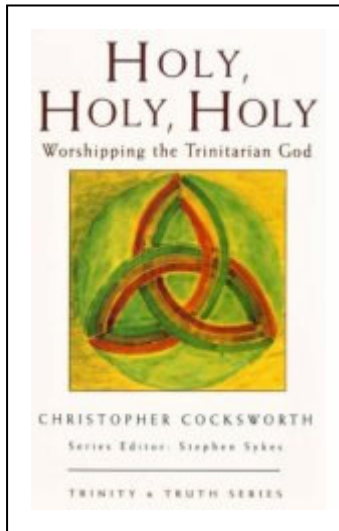
**1 Peter 1:1-2** Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, <sup>2</sup> according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:

**Jude 1:20-21** But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; <sup>21</sup> keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

**Revelation 1:4-5** John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, <sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

## IMPORTANT RESOURCES

### Books



## Holy, Holy, Holy Worshipping the Trinitarian God

Christopher Cocksworth

(Trinity & Truth Series; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1997)

“Our task in this book is to look at the Trinity through the lens of worship. This is not simply a very helpful and accessible way of approaching the Trinity but also a very proper way—perhaps *the* proper way. Here are three reasons why the perspective of worship is such an appropriate one to consider the Christian claim that the one God exists eternally as the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

1) *Because we encounter the Trinity in worship.* This is true in the sense that Christian worship has a necessarily trinitarian structure. In order to be Christian worship it must refer in some way to Jesus as well as to God and in so doing it will inevitably refer to Jesus’ Spirit at work amongst his people.

2) *Because of the liturgical origins of the doctrine.* Christian worship assumed a distinctly Trinitarian character from the earliest stage, and this played a critical role in the process of understanding this experience and working through its implications which finally led to the credal statements of the fourth century when the doctrine of the Trinity was formally and officially stated. Worship served as a criterion of orthodoxy. The role of Jesus and the Spirit in the worshipping life of the Church led to a new way of conceiving the one God, a way which included them in the one reality of God.

3) *Because of the interconnection between worship and theology, or more strictly between doxology and theology.* The doctrine of the Trinity is about knowing God and its proper place is not in the textbooks of the scholars [only] but on the lips of the worshippers. The function of any theological study of the Trinity is to lead us into a deeper participation in the worship of the Triune God. Augustine would have agreed. He ended his great tome on the Trinity not with an argument but with a prayer.”

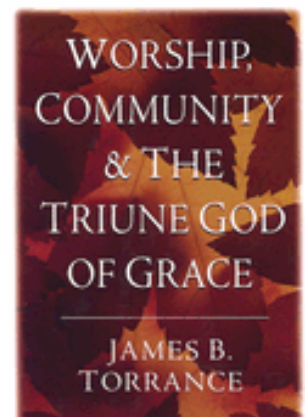
(excerpted from chapter 1)

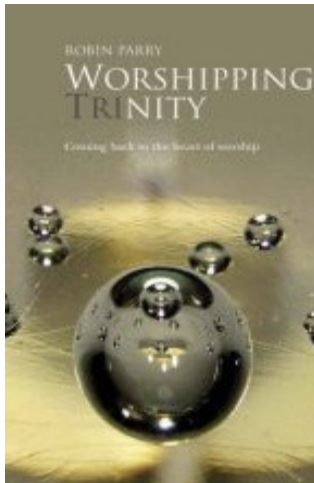
NOTE: This excellent book is inexplicably out of print, but is readily available through book search websites such as [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com))

## Worship, Community & the Triune God of Grace

James B. Torrance  
(InterVarsity Press, 1997)

According to Torrance, most evangelical worship is unitarian in practice: “worship is something *we* do before God . . . [a] kind of do-it-yourself-with-the-help-of-the-minister worship.” He powerfully advocates “the trinitarian view of worship—that worship is the gift of participating through the Spirit in the incarnate Son’s communion with the Father” (20,30). An amazing book!





# Worshipping Trinity

## Coming Back to the Heart of Worship

Robin Parry

(London: Paternoster Publishing, 2005)

“I also used to think that sorting out your doctrine and sorting out your worship were two quite separate things. I thought that both were important, but the connection between the two never really struck me. Now I see that ‘right belief’ about God is intimately connected to ‘right worship’ because believing right things about God is an essential component in honouring God appropriately. . . . If we are to give God the glory he deserves, we need to think and speak rightly about God. Thinking right about God involves having a Trinitarian framework for thinking about God. *The Trinity should be at the core of our worship because the God who is at the heart of worship is Trinity.* [emphasis mine]

Worship that has a deep Trinitarian structure and syntax will form congregations who will think about God in Trinitarian ways and relate to God in Trinitarian ways. . . . Trinitarian worship teaches people the grammar of God. . . . This view of communal worship calls attention to the crucial importance of the job of the person or people preparing and leading public worship. The songwriters and worship leaders of today play an enormous part in shaping the faith and life of the church of tomorrow. This is an awesome responsibility. Those who shape worship are the de facto theologians of the church, whether they want to be or not.”

(excerpted from chapter 1)

Link [HERE](#) to [WORSHIPBOOKS](#) to order important books on worship

## Online Resources

Resources on [Trinitarian Worship](#)  
(Calvin Institute of Christian Worship website)

John D. Witvliet,  
[“The Trinitarian DNA of Christian Worship:  
Perennial Themes in Recent Theological Literature”](#)  
(Yale University Institute of Sacred Music  
*Colloquium Journal*, Volume 2 [Autumn 2005])

Lester Ruth,  
[“Don't Lose the Trinity! A Plea to Songwriters”](#)

## QUOTABLES

### *The Trinity and Worship*

“The Trinity is not an add-on for those interested in theological niceties. Apart from God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, our speculations about God and God’s disposition toward us are futile. And apart from the action of the Holy Spirit, God’s self-disclosure in Christ, crucified and risen, is simply religious information that we may take or leave. God moves toward us in Christ, and by the Spirit connects with us, lifting us into God’s own life, which is, at its very heart and center, relational Holy Trinity. Worship that is profoundly Christian will be shaped in form and content by a Trinitarian faith.”

(Ronald P. Byars, *The Future of Protestant Worship*, 63)

“The doctrine of the Trinity shows us that in the very heart of God, there is community.”

(Ronald P. Byars, *Christian Worship*, 13)

“This doctrine was not simply dreamed up by folks lodged in some ivory tower. It’s not the result of some mad philosopher in love with the idea of making the simple into something complex. The doctrine of the Trinity doesn’t trace its origins to some library, or a seminar, or to a hermit driven to distraction by the need to describe God. The doctrine of the Trinity is rooted, first and foremost, in the experience of the Christian community. It begins with the first Christians’ encounter with Jesus Christ.”

(Ronald P. Byars, *Christian Worship*, 7)

“The essence of the doctrine of the Trinity was first articulated in worship. Furthermore, during the whole process of the formulation of the doctrine, worship acted as a custodian of the Trinitarian revelation of God and as a criterion for judging whether theological statements remained faithful to the way God has shown himself to be.”

(Christopher Cocksworth, *Holy, Holy, Holy*, 123)

“Worship is rather the gift of participating through the Spirit in the (incarnate) Son’s communion with the Father. . . . The Gospel of grace, that our Father in the gift of his Son and the gift of the Spirit, gives us what he demands—the worship of our hearts and minds—lifting us up out of ourselves to participate in the very life of the Godhead. . . .

(James F. Torrance, “The Doctrine of the Trinity in Our Contemporary Situation,” in *The Forgotten Trinity*, ed. Alasdair I.C. Heron [London: BCC/CCBI, 1991], pp. 5-6)

“The New Testament does not use the word ‘Trinity,’ but forms of worship expressed the Trinity before the doctrine was formalized in the Nicene Creed. In the New Testament, doxologies, benedictions and baptismal formulae are triune. In the early church, the Apostles’ Creed, the Eucharistic prayers, and forms of worship were triune long before Arius opposed the Trinitarian doctrine in the fourth century. Athanasius, the defender of the Trinitarian form within the liturgy, used the liturgy as an argument against the non-Trinitarian views of Arius. Why, he asked, is the liturgy triune or, to put it another way, how can you deny the Trinitarian nature of Christian worship from its very beginnings? My point is that in the development of Christian doctrine, the church was practicing Orthodoxy (right praise) before it developed more formed universal creeds of faith (Nicene Creed).”

(Robert Webber, “A Blended Worship Response” in *Exploring the Worship Spectrum: Six Views*, 49)

“In contrast to a Deist or Unitarian theology that tends to view divine life as one of pristine isolation, Trinitarian theology stresses that God’s life is one of abundant communion, a kind of fellowship (or *koinonia*) that overflows to include us.”

(John D. Witvliet, “The Opening of Worship/Trinity” in *A More Profound Alleluia*, 8)

“Ponder Robert Jenson’s evocative image: ‘The particular God of Scripture does not just stand over against us; he envelops us.’ In this vision, we still pray and sing ‘to’ each divine person ‘Holy, holy, holy. . .blessed Trinity!’, but we are also aware that we pray and sing ‘through Christ,’ ‘in the power of the Spirit.’ This is also a remarkably active vision of God. The picture here is not of God as a passive being up in heaven, waiting for us to sing a little louder and pray a little harder before conferring a blessing. That description better fits Baal! (1 Kings 18). No, God is active in prompting our worship, in receiving it, and in perfecting it.”

(John D. Witvliet, “The Opening of Worship/Trinity” in *A More Profound Alleluia*, 8)

“The aim of the whole liturgy is entrance into communion with God, a communion in the divine life and love that constitute the Trinity.”  
(J. D. Crichton, “A Theology of Worship” in *The Study of Liturgy* 19)

“If God is unitarian, then He didn’t start loving until He created something—therefore love is not part of His eternal essence.”

(Steve Childers, Global Church Advancement churchplanting conference, February 2, 2006)

“Through the Son, our High Priest, and in the Spirit, we offer ourselves in our praises to the Father. Or, we can equally say that the Son offers us with Himself in the Spirit to the Father.”  
(Peter Leithart, “Trinity, Worship and Dialogue” [www.leithart.com])

“FATHER: God *before* us, **receiving** our worship  
SON: God *alongside* us, **perfecting** our worship  
HOLY SPIRIT: God *within* us, **prompting** our worship”

(John D. Witvliet, “Visions of Divine Splendor: Toward Inculturated Trinitarian Worship,” *Global Consultation on Music in Missions* July 13, 2006)

“We need to see first and foremost that God is God—that he is perfect and complete in himself, that he is overflowingly happy in the eternal fellowship of the Trinity, and that he does not need us to complete his fullness and is not deficient without us. . . . Unless we begin with God in this way, when the gospel comes to us, we will inevi-

tably put ourselves at the center of it. We will feel that our value rather than God’s value is the driving force of the gospel. We will trace the gospel back to God’s need for us instead of tracing it back to the sovereign grace that rescues sinners who need God.”

(John Piper, *The Pleasures of God*, 22)

“To speak of God as triune is to set all of our prior understandings of what is divine in question. God is not a solitary monad but free, self-communicating love. God is not the supreme will-to-power over others but the supreme will-to-community in which power and life are shared. God consists not in dominating others but in sharing life with others.”

(Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 72)

“Fortunately, the Trinitarian logic of worship is true even when we don’t sing hymns to the Trinity or think much about Jesus’ work in perfecting our worship and the Spirit’s work in prompting it.”

(John D. Witvliet, “The Opening of Worship/Trinity” in *A More Profound Alleluia*, 9)

“In its own non-reflective way, Colossians 3:16 is a crucial ‘Trinitarian’ text. There are more than a score of such texts in Paul. But in contrast to the others, where the Father initiates salvation, which the Son effects and the Spirit applies, here the order is reversed. Christ still plays the central role, hence they must let the ‘word of Christ’ dwell lavishly in their midst. But the same Spirit who applied salvation now helps to initiate response through Spirit-inspired songs reflecting the message about Christ, and all to the praise of God.

The God who created and redeemed is worthy of all praise. The Spirit who was present at creation and became present to bring us to life in redemption, now leads us in the worship and praise of our Redeemer and Creator. In Paul, therefore, our worship is as Trinitarian as our experience of God and our theology. Obviously, it is the presence of the Spirit among us as we gather in Christ’s name that makes it so.”

(Gordon Fee, “The Holy Spirit and Worship in the Pauline Churches, Part 2,”

<http://www.allelon.org/articles/article.cfm?id=42&page=2>)

“Elsewhere as in the Roman mass and the Zwinglian liturgy for example the minister begins with the words: ‘In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost’ in order to emphasize the fact that the whole service is taking place in the presence, under the authority and with the power of the Holy Trinity.”  
(Jean-Jacques von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, 138-39)

“God is the One who graciously invites our worship and then hears our response [Father]. God is the One who perfects and mediates our praise and petitions [Son]. God is also the One who helps us comprehend what we hear and prompts us to respond [Holy Spirit].”  
(*The Worship Sourcebook*, 16)

“Sometimes we hear people say that God created man because he was lonely. So they say,

‘God created us so that we would be with him.’ Does Jesus agree with this? Well, he does say that he really wants us to be with him! Yes, but why? Consider the rest of the verse. Why does Jesus want us to be with him? ‘. . . to see my glory that you [Father] have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world’ (John 17:3).

That would be a strange way of expressing his loneliness. ‘I want them with me so they can see my glory.’ In fact it doesn’t express his loneliness. It expresses his concern for the satisfaction of our longing, not his loneliness. Jesus is not lonely. He and the Father and the Spirit are profoundly satisfied in the fellowship of the Trinity. We, not he, are starving for something.”  
(John Piper, “What Does Jesus Want for Christmas?” sermon December 11, 2001)

## HUMOR

### A Template for Songwriters

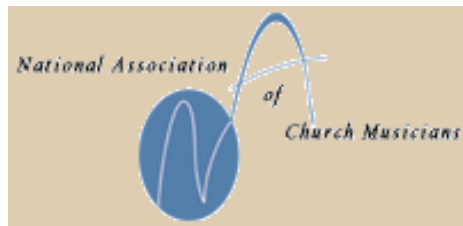
(Title), You're so (Adjective)  
(Title), You're so (Adjective)  
(Title), You're more (Adjective) than anything I've ever (Verb) before  
 And I'm gonna (Verb) You (Period of Time)  
 I'm gonna (Verb) You (Period of Time)  
 Because you're (Adjective), you're so (Adjective)  
 I wish I had the words to say.

(from *The Wittenburg Door*;  
 complete version [HERE](#) )

## WORSHIP EVENTS



[Info](#)



## Summer Conference 2007

July 18-21, 2007 Camarillo, California

[Info](#)

## national worship leader conference

JULY 23-26, 2007 • AUSTIN TEXAS

presented by Worship leader magazine

[Details](#)

## COMING NEXT MONTH:

The Gospel and Worship



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