

♪ Worship Notes ♪

THEME: Song in Scripture
(part 7)

"I WILL SING WITH MY MIND ALSO"

(1 Corinthians 14:15)

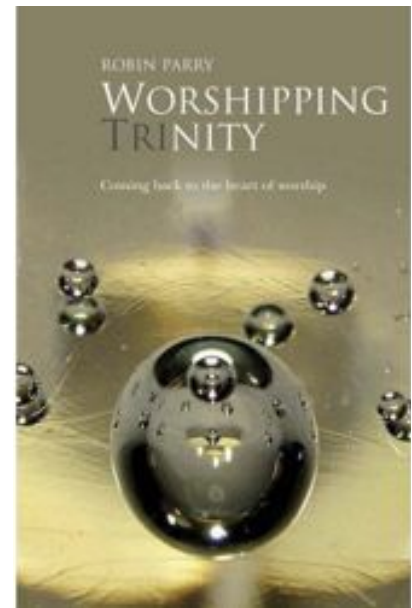
It Matters *What* We Sing

Last month we examined Vern Poythress' case for singing in public worship texts that are reflective of and true the teachings of scripture. We saw that this is indeed one way to "let the Word of Christ dwell richly among" us (Colossians 3:16).

Of course, to ensure that the songs we use are biblically true, the texts need to be carefully scrutinized. If (as Paul in the above passage, and Poythress, suggest) songs are another tool (along with sermons, readings, etc.) of teaching God's revealed truth, then there needs to be a painstaking evaluation of how faithfully the song texts communicate that truth.

Two recent books give helpful guidelines for and examples of such scrutiny. In *Worshipping Trinity* (2005, Paternoster Publishing), Englishman Robin Parry calls for a recovery of the distinct roles of the members of the Trinity in our biblical understanding, in our Christian lives, and in our worship. (This is a reflection of the resurgent interest in recent years in Trinitarian issues in biblical and theological studies). He examines the new songs written and recorded as part of the

Vineyard movement between the years of 1999 AND 2004. Of the 362 songs produced, Parry notes that only 5 (or 1.4%) give recognition (explicitly or implicitly) to all three Persons of the Godhead; 32 songs (8.8%) make mention of two members of the Trinity (Father and Son; Father and Spirit, or Son and Spirit); 140 songs (38.7%) make reference to only one member of the Trinity. Most striking is the category he calls “**You, Lord**” songs, which Parry describes as “ambiguous songs that do not clarify exactly what person the song is about or being addresses to” (p. 140); he does not feel that it is necessarily wrong to speak generically in terms of God, without any recognition of the distinctive roles and ministries among the members of the Trinity, but he does feel that there is an imbalanced preponderance of such songs in the corpus he studied: for into this category fell **185** (or **51.1%**) of the songs! Parry’s call is for a renewed appreciation of the unique roles played by the Father, Song and Holy Spirit, and a richer reflection of that diversity in the songs we use for worship—more biblical and theological depth to the songs we sing about and to God.



In *The Message in the Music* (2007, Abingdon Press) the editors, Robert Woods and Brian Walrath, have invited a number of writers to examine from different angles the “top 77” contemporary Christian worship songs from the years 1989-2005 (according to usage statistics reported by Christian Copyright Licensing International [CCLI]). The first chapter looks again at the issue of Trinitarian language—or, rather, the predominate lack of it, in the songs studied. A couple of chapters deal analytically with the oft-noted issue of romantic imagery in contemporary worship songs, and look at the impact of this trend on worshipers. Other chapters examine the treatment of such them as social justice, suffering, the body of Christ, and Christian growth in these songs. A unique feature of the book is the several chapters devoted to the examination of the music of the songs in terms of musical quality and creativity, as well as the stylistic fit with the theme and text of the songs.



This book provides a real service in its careful, objective, and fair treatment of actual songs in common use in many of our churches. And John D. Witvliet adds an excellent conclusion in which focuses the book’s findings into some very wise and practical suggestions in his “A Call to Students and Scholars” (advocating the serious study of worship and of worship songs), “A Call to Songwriters” (encouraging biblical depth and artistic craft in the songs they produce), “A Call to Worship Leaders and Pastors” (endorsing a careful and reasoned selection for songs used in church worship), and “A Call to Worshipers” (allowing that the ultimate test of a song’s vitality is the fruit it bears in the worship and walk of God’s people).

Songs for worship are indeed not ends in themselves, but, on the other hand, they are indeed powerful tools for giving powerful, memorable and participatory expression to God’s truth. For that reason, we need to give careful prayer full attention to the texts we sing, so that “I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also” (1 Corinthians 14:15).

For more on language in worship songs, see ["A Plea to Songwriters: Don't Lose the Trinity"](#) by Lester Ruth; and *Whatever Happened to the Father? The Jesus Heresy in Modern Worship* by Susan White (2002, Methodist Sacramental Fellowship).

COMING WORSHIP EVENTS




LifeWay Worship 2010
Leadership Conference

July 28 - July 2, 2010
Ridgecrest, North Carolina
LifeWay Ridgecrest Conference Center


August 2 - 6, 2010
Glorieta, New Mexico
LifeWay Glorieta Conference Center

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July 12-14, 2010
Music Road Inn
Pigeon Forge, Tenn.



**GComm Asia
2010
Singapore**
July 4-7, 2010
[INFO](#)



**Baylor University
Waco, Texas**
July 20-23, 2010
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alleluia many voices | one song

JULY 20-23, 2010

Baylor Center for Christian Music Studies Presents the Annual Music and Worship Conference

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