The Style Debate: Introduction

March 17, 2004

I. Historical background
   A. The roots of praise and worship music: Robb Redman identifies three historical sources of praise and worship music (which he calls “contemporary worship music”):
      1. Revivalist worship music (i.e., gospel songs)
      2. Youth music of the 1960s (e.g., Kurt Kaiser’s enormously popular “Pass It On,” from the youth musical *Tell It Like It Is*)
      3. Jesus music — the rock-and-roll based music of the Jesus People, also called “Jesus freaks”; that is, Christian hippies (hippies were young people who embraced a countercultural movement who adopted a communal or nomadic lifestyle, renounced corporate nationalism and the Vietnam War and in general rejected the Establishment; i.e., paternalistic government, corporate industry and traditional social mores. They were associated with sexual liberation and mind expansion through drugs and alcohol.)
   B. Early development
      1. By the mid-1970s Jesus music had become more mainstream and was being called “Contemporary Christian Music.” Its abbreviation “CCM” is actually a registered trademark of the publishers of *CCM Magazine*.
      2. Hardly any churches found such music acceptable for use in services. One church that did, though, was Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California. The Los Angeles area was home to a large number of both hippies and Jesus People, and Calvary’s pastor, Chuck Smith, established a ministry to them. He encouraged them to sing their songs in church, and in 1969 the first praise team was established at Calvary, a group of four young people who later called themselves “Children of the Day.” Two years later Calvary began its own record label, Maranatha! Music, and in 1974 the pathbreaking “Praise Album” was released, the first widely selling album of what today is called “praise and worship music.” [Play examples] P&W differs from CCM in that the latter is a performance genre; that is, it is sung by soloists and groups for an audience. P&W, on the other hand, consists of songs intended to be sung by a worshiping community.
   C. The spread of praise and worship music
      1. The widespread distribution of praise and worship music was facilitated by the rise of a new industry dedicated to contemporary Christian music and, by association, its sister praise and worship music. Components of the industry, all of which have appeared since the 1970s, include:
         a. Christian record labels
         b. Christian music magazines
         c. Christian radio stations
      2. Today there are four major producers of praise and worship music and a number of smaller ones. The four major ones are:
         a. Maranatha! Music — the company originating at Calvary Chapel
         b. Vineyard Music — a publishing company affiliated with Vineyard Ministries, an association of Pentecostal churches begun in California in the 1970s as part of a mission endeavor by John Wimber, founding pastor of the Anaheim Vineyard Christian Fellowship
         c. Integrity Incorporated — headquarters in Mobile, Alabama; was founded in the 1980s by several independent charismatic churches whose musicians were unable to get
Maranatha! or Vineyard to publish their music
d. EMI Christian Music Group — a subsidiary of the huge EMI music conglomerate; major labels are Sparrow and WorshipTogether

3. The principal periodical for praise and worship music is *Worship Leader*, which has a circulation of about 50,000.

D. Modern worship — a very recent spinoff of P&W featuring a harder rock sound, but still intended for public participation

II. Entrance of praise and worship music into Lutheran churches
A. Youth songs
1. The July 1967 issue of *Workers Quarterly*, a publication of the Board of Youth Ministry of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, was a trifle unusual. Subtitled *Hymns for Now*, it was a songbook which was, in the words of a contemporary description, “a unity of music and lyrics, art and pictures, image and design that combines into a feelingful folk-style piece.” [Hold it up] The songs were of the “youth music” type I described earlier. [Demonstrate with no. 24 “They’ll know we are Christians by our love” (Peter Scholtes) and no. 25 “Song maybe for teenage Christians”]

2. The following five years saw the publication of *Hymns for Now II* and *Hymns for Now III* with such songs as Richard Koehneke’s “Christ is changing everything” and Kurt Kaiser’s “Pass it on.”

3. These songs became widely known throughout the Missouri Synod through youth ministry events, Lutheran summer camps and parachurch youth organizations such as Ongoing Ambassadors for Christ, which was founded in 1970.

4. Despite their popularity, no one seriously proposed using these songs in worship except perhaps for an occasional “youth service”; and there was never any serious consideration given to including them in a Lutheran hymnal. For this a theological imperative was needed, and this found expression in what is termed the “church growth movement.”

B. Church growth movement
1. Beginnings
   a. In the 1950s a Disciples of Christ missionary to India named Donald McGavran became interested in why some mission churches were gaining converts and others seemed to be floundering. He began to develop some ideas concerning this, which led him to establish the Institute of Church Growth in Eugene, Oregon in 1957. As his ideas spread, Fuller Theological Seminary in California invited him to establish a School of World Mission there in 1965.
   
   b. In 1970, McGavran published a book containing his findings. The book, *Understanding Church Growth*, became an instant best seller among Christian leaders. The thesis of the book is that mission churches that have concerned themselves with social action have largely failed to grow, but those dedicated wholeheartedly to winning souls have flourished. His conclusion was that churches have one main job; namely, to multiply themselves.
   
   c. McGavran went further by suggesting that much of the problem lay not in people’s resistance to the gospel message, but rather in faulty procedures by missionaries. His basic principle was that churches should remove any cultural obstacles that prevent people from becoming Christians. They are less likely to do so, he argued, if they have to cross racial, linguistic or class boundaries. To solve this problem, he developed the idea of the “homogeneous unit,” which he defined as “a section of society in which all the members have some characteristic in common.” His “homogeneous unit principle,” as applied to evangelism, was that churches should select a target group of people
(defined in terms of race, economic class, and so on) and direct their evangelism efforts to that group, making their church as accessible as possible to people from the target group.

d. If the church’s primary task is to grow, then everything else the church does should be subordinate to that. Worship, for example, is seen not as a primary activity of the church but as the door through which new members are attracted and added. The obvious implication is that the worship service should be designed to be as attractive as possible to the target group.

2. Entry into the Missouri Synod
   a. During the 1970s and 80s, several pastors from the Missouri Synod studied at Fuller Seminary’s School of World Mission, where they were schooled in church growth teachings. One such pastor was David Luecke, who in 1988 published a book entitled *Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance: Facing America’s Mission Challenge*.
   b. The word “evangelical” in Luecke’s title refers to American Evangelicalism, the dominant form of Protestantism in America today. It stems from the Methodist and Baptist traditions and is characterized by biblical literalism, an emphasis on individual conversion and “accepting Christ as personal Savior,” a corresponding lack of emphasis on sacraments, a theology of End Times called dispensational premillenialism (the theme of the popular *Left Behind* books), and an openness to the Pentecostal and charismatic movements.
   c. Luecke noted that traditional denominational churches were declining in numbers, while evangelical churches were gaining members. His solution for Lutherans was for them to adapt an evangelical style of worship, which he believed was the key in attracting the unchurched, while still retaining the substance, that is, the doctrines, of Lutheranism.
   d. The evangelical worship style is what James White calls the “frontier tradition,” which has its roots in the campmeeting revivals of the nineteenth century. The goal in these campmeetings was to convince people to accept Christ as Savior, and the modern form of worship reflects this. The service consists of three parts. In White’s words, “The first part begins with a service of song and praise, which places great emphasis on music. A special type of hymn developed, the gospel song, which was deeply introspective and highly individualistic, expressing the feelings of the devout. The first portion of the service also included prayer and reading of a scripture lesson. The second portion was the sermon, which was and remains highly evangelistic, calling souls to conversion and the converted to renew their commitment. All of it climaxes in the final harvest, a call to those who have been converted to acknowledge this change in their lives by coming forward, being baptized, or making some other indication of their new being.”
   e. The purpose of music in an evangelical service is to move worshipers into the presence of God to prepare them for hearing His Word. This is typically done at the beginning of the service through a medley of songs lasting anywhere from fifteen to forty minutes. Your reading “A structure runs through it” gives five stages that worship planners try to incorporate into the medley: invitation, engagement, exaltation, adoration, and intimacy. Worshipers start far away from God, but through the songs are brought into His presence.
   f. This is the style that Luecke proposes that Lutheran churches use. Many of our churches have adopted his proposal. Because the books you are reading deal with this further, I’m not going to say any more about it now.

C. Inculturation
   1. Although the concern for church growth provided a theological reason for importing praise and worship music into Lutheran churches, it is not the only factor supporting its use.
Another is inculturation.

2. *Inculturation* refers to adaptations made to the liturgy for the sake of a particular culture. An equivalent term is *indigenization*. References to it are found especially in writings about world missions. We use white on Easter, but what if that color symbolizes death in a particular society? Is it proper for native dance to find a place in the liturgy? Should mission churches sing translated European hymns or hymns written in a native style? What if the native style is associated with their previous religion?

3. Many churches using praise and worship music today do so not because they are targeting a specific group of unchurched people and want to attract them with that music, but rather because the church members themselves feel comfortable with it. As a friend of mine said to me recently, “I just don’t identify with organs and hymns; my kind of music, the kind that touches my soul, is rock.” And so the justification for having praise bands in church is one of inculturation, bringing something familiar into the church to make the service more relevant to those participating in it.

4. Much has been written both for and against praise bands in worship, but I have yet to find any writer who clearly distinguishes their use for reasons of church growth from inculturation. If we allow ourselves to make this distinction, we may come to different conclusions about their propriety. At the very least, we have to ask different sorts of questions.

III. Questions to ask
   A. Is praise and worship music being espoused for reasons of church growth or inculturation?
   B. Is the issue truly one of musical style, or is it more fundamental, having to do with the purpose of worship and of the church in general?
   C. How much of the debate is theological and how much is sociological?