

American Choral Directors Association
National Convention

Wednesday, February 12-15, 2003
New York City



THIRTY CENTURIES OF
MUSIC AND WORSHIP:
FINDING ENCOURAGEMENT FOR
TODAY AND HOPE FOR TOMORROW

Dr. Bruce H. Leafblad
Professor of Church Music and Worship
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Fort Worth, Texas



Music and Worship Roundtable
Wednesday, February 12, 2003, 8:45am
Sheraton Hotel – Imperial Ballroom A

Thirty Centuries of Music and Worship
Finding Encouragement for Today
And Hope for Tomorrow

Bruce H. Leafblad
© 12 February 2003

Introduction

It was 45 years ago this September that I took my first position as a church choir director. I was just a sophomore in college. I was hooked right from the beginning. Nine years and three degrees later I began doctoral studies in church music at USC under Charles Hirt; there I was privileged to study with other giants like Ingolf Dahl and Halsey Stevens and Hans Beer. It was during those years that I became a member of ACDA and have enjoyed these national conventions for more than 30 years.

Having this Music and Worship round table at the front end of the convention reminds me of the earlier years when a day of workshops and lectures in church music subjects would precede the opening of the convention itself. I remember great sessions with Alice Parker and Erick Routley and others. In addition to Music and Worship Roundtables and Reading sessions, the Convention Worship Event featuring musical literature for worship has been an inspiring and encouraging part of these conventions for many years. If you were there, you could hardly forget such services as those in the St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans or at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. I am personally grateful for the continuing recognition by ACDA of the fact that a very large number of our members are church choir directors and are preparing choral music for worship on a weekly basis...which is what brings us all together on this Wednesday morning in the Big Apple!

A lot of changes have taken place since I first stood before a church choir in 1958. Some of those changes have been for the better, and some, not! Where we find ourselves as church musicians today seems at times to be somewhere between the proverbial rock and a hard place. I know that many church musicians today are quite discouraged over the changes taking place in their churches, over new pressures being put on them by their parishioners or their pastors. I know that some have given up on church music while others have been fired for not living up to new expectations.

At the same time many in our guild are seeking to find ways to meet the challenges of a new day without compromising their commitment to ministry and personal standards in their work. The choir director or music minister today is generally charged with the responsibility of selecting and preparing both choral and congregational music for worship and in both arenas there are major hurdles to be overcome.

This morning it is not my intention to major on the problems facing the church musician today, though I will need to acknowledge and address a number of them. My goal is rather to bring some hope and encouragement to you, my colleagues, in the midst of the battle. I firmly believe that the reasons to be encouraged and hopeful are greater than any of the reasons to give up hope and throw in the towel. And where

might we find such a source of hope and encouragement? That source is in our own STORY, in our Judeo-Christian history, in our sacred writings. The very entities and realities that have brought us to faith hold the promise of genuine encouragement for today and hope for tomorrow as we seek to help our congregations continue to sing the Lord's song in a strange time.

A Biblical Riddle

I begin with a biblical riddle.

Who am I?

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, I AM THERE.

When the Israelites are delivered from the hand of Pharaoh, I AM THERE.

When Moses comes to the close of his life, and Joshua is commissioned to lead Israel, I AM THERE.

When Israel is delivered out of the hands of the Canaanites, I AM THERE.

When the Lord answers Hannah's prayer and a son, Samuel, is born, I AM THERE.

When David is delivered from the hand of Saul, I AM THERE.

When the Ark of God is brought to Jerusalem, I AM THERE.

When worship is inaugurated at the new Tabernacle of David, I AM THERE.

When the Temple of Solomon is dedicated and the glory of God descends, I AM THERE.

At every daily service in the House of the Lord 365 days a year, day and night, I AM THERE.

At every restoration of true worship following idolatrous years under evil kings, I AM THERE.

In the prophetic ministries of those poets of the Lord who would prophesy with harps and lyres, I AM THERE.

Who am I? I am the SONG, the Lord's song, the song of creation, the song of salvation, the song of victory and deliverance, the song of praise, the song of thanks, the song of supplication, the song of joy and gladness, the song of worship. I am the song of the morning stars, the song of Moses and the sons of Israel, the song of Deborah and Barak and of Hannah, the song of the Levitical musicians Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun and the sons of Korah; the song of Kings David and Solomon; the song of priests and prophets; I am the song of choirs and congregations, the song of God's own people. I am the new song, the joyful song, the sacred song. I am the SONG UNENDING.

And you, my colleagues in this ancient guild, are the **keepers** of the SONG, the **teachers** of the SONG, the **singers** of the SONG, the **leaders** of the SONG in the church today.

But what is it that is causing the so-called worship wars today? What is producing so much tension, debate and even division in the churches? And what has caused so much discouragement for so many church musicians?

The Challenge of Change

One answer to all three of those questions revolves around the word "CHANGE". Much of the influential counsel in the American church today is coming from church growth experts, so-called. They have been telling us for the past thirty years that times are changing, culture is changing, American life is changing, and, if the church intends to stay viable and relevant in such changing times, the church is going to have to change too. Now that all sounds very reasonable at first; but when the experts begin to spell out what these changes must look like, the reasonableness of their thesis fades quickly for many. *While all growth involves change, not all change equals growth.* These are some of the observable changes which have resulted from the influence of the growth experts:

- 1) CHANGE OF PURPOSE. This change consists in a shift in the purpose of worship from the glorification and exaltation of God to the numerical enlargement of the local congregation. A virtual lust for size is changing the purpose of worship.
- 2) CHANGE OF GOALS. Helping people to enjoy themselves, have a good time and go away feeling good so they will want to come back again and again (and eventually join the church) – these have replaced the goals of facilitating the people's praise of God, their love and thanks, their humble confessions, their earnest commitments and statements of faith.
- 3) CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE. Worship – an event in the life of the church long understood to be an **end** in itself, is now an event being used as a **means** to other ends.

- 4) CHANGE OF AUTHORITY. The sacred writings of Old and New Testaments are being replaced by new authorities: (a) the pragmatists (“what works?”); (b) the researchers (“what is everyone else doing?”); and (c) the demographers (“they won’t come unless you...”). The gurus, the experts are the new authority for worship practice.
- 5) CHANGE OF FOCUS. In authentic worship the One on the throne is the center of attention. Today the focus is turning to people as central. The vertical is yielding to the horizontal. We sing, “It’s all about You, Lord,” while at the same time it appears to be very much “all about us.”
- 6) CHANGE OF THEOLOGY. Someone has observed that the foundation of worship today is shifting from theology to “me-ology”. There is a redefining of the essence and nature of worship taking place; in general it is a major departure from both biblical norms and historical practice.
- 7) CHANGE OF METHODOLOGY. Down through the centuries worship has been guided and shaped by turning first to our sacred writings – the record of God’s great and awesome deeds and the revelation of the Divine will and purposes. Today there is a going *first* to the culture, the community, the outsiders, asking them what they want, what they think worship should be – and then we shape worship to fit.
- 8) CHANGE OF DESIGN. Structuring a serious conversation between God and the people of God as the basic design of worship is giving way to the format of a religious program, a variety show – entertainment as worship.
- 9) CHANGE OF STRATEGY. Rather than planning worship for the entire multi-generational family of faith, the growth strategy is that of targeting a specific generation, tailoring all aspects of corporate worship services to that generation while expecting the other generations to adapt and adjust and bend.
- 10) CHANGE IN DIRECTION. This change consists in the intentional disconnecting with the past, moving away from associations with our own history on the grounds that it is too limiting and confining, too narrow and dated, even irrelevant in the 21st century.
- 11) CHANGE IN STYLE. The one thing that stylistically church should not look like, sound like, feel like is – church! The culture can’t identify with the ecclesial, the

“churchy”, the traditional. Today’s culture wants the church to look like, sound like and feel like their world – the secular culture in which they are most comfortable.

- 12) CHANGE IN PACKAGING. The forms, the wineskins of worship must change. The old forms, the traditional forms, the historic, the ancient forms must go. **Only** the new, the most recent, the totally “contemporary” forms will do.
- 13) CHANGE OF LEADERSHIP MODELS. The pastoral, priestly, prophetic and Levitical paradigms for worship leadership now must go. The new models come from the entertainment world, the world of marketing and the world of corporate management.
- 14) CHANGE OF VOCABULARY. The special vocabulary of the church, the Scriptures, her faith categories, her doctrines are part of what distinguishes the church from other institutions in society. But that, we are told, must go. People today don’t understand it, can’t identify with it.
- 15) CHANGE OF IMAGERY. Religious symbols, at least the historic ones, do not work anymore. Nobody knows what they mean – the cross, the flame, the triangle, the dove. People just don’t relate to symbols today. (Yeah, right! Tell that to Nike, Izod and Apple!). Actually new symbols are replacing the old – the hand-held mic, the giant video screen, the minimalist pulpits (with sermons to match!).
- 16) CHANGE OF ETHOS. The worship space as a place to meditate, to contemplate the majesty and mystery of God, to commune and communicate with our Creator is seen as too remote and removed from today’s kind of people. The worship center should be geared to comfort, social contact, ease and acceptance. It should be friendly, not intimidating. It should be informal and casual. It should not appear too much like – a church. The narthex becomes a food court. The sanctuary, an entertainment center. People will love it!

Well, these are some of the changes you and I have heard about, read about and, perhaps, experienced. While I will be quick to admit to grains of truth and insight in some of these ideas, the manner in which they have been enacted has often left us confused and astonished, even disillusioned and discouraged.

A Biblical Case Study

But now for some good news from an old story – a case study, if you please. More than 1,000 years before Christ, David is anointed King. This is the man who led a nation into spiritual revival and worship renewal; and this is the man who had it in his heart to build a permanent house for the worship of God; and this is the man who gave his nation a song – the Lord’s song – a song which has lasted for thirty centuries.

David establishes his reign in the city of Jerusalem and erects a Tabernacle there. After one failed attempt, he brings the Ark of God to Jerusalem and sets it in its new, though temporary, quarters until the Temple is built. Now we have two functioning worship “centers”: the Tabernacle of Moses in Gibeon where the traditional rites of sacrificial worship continue (without the ark of God present); and the new Tabernacle of David in Jerusalem where worship undergoes some major renovations during his reign.

As military, political and spiritual leader of the nation, David ushers in a liturgical renewal, a spiritual revival and an artistic renaissance – truly a golden age in the history of the Old Testament people of God.

What are the characteristics of this renewal? (A) First, this liturgical revival was profoundly *spiritual* to its core. As the “man after God’s own heart,” David led the nation to full fidelity to God – there was no idolatry scandalizing his reign. A protracted period of worshiping the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob with unswerving loyalty was sustained during David’s reign and continued on into the reign of his son, Solomon, The fruits of such faithfulness to God are clearly seen, for *as worship goes, so goes the rest of life*. The positive results from pure worship include: (1) a God-centered spirituality; (2) a high level of personal morality; (3) a sensitive social conscience demonstrated in compassion and the pursuit of justice in the social order; (4) the manifest blessings of God poured out upon them; and (5) the mighty protection of God which surrounded the nation. The liturgical renewal was profoundly *spiritual* at its core.

(B) Second, this renewal was *charismatic* in style; it was a taste of Pentecost a thousand years in advance! The new worship of the Tabernacle of David was characterized by freedom, unbounded joy, dancing and singing, instruments and clapping, the lifting of hands, processions and banners, a spirit of celebration, a sense of the nearness of God and the role of the Holy Spirit. This renewal was *charismatic* in style.

(C) Third, this renewal was *prophetic* in substance. The prophetic orientation is seen in two primary manifestations:

- (1) First, the literary output of this period contains more and more prophetic pictures of Christ, shadows of the coming Messiah;
- (2) Second, the subsequent schools of prophet-musicians gain their impetus out of this period.

From this time on we read of prophets who “prophesy with harps and lyres.” It is impressive to note that a vast amount of the Old Testament prophetic material is in poetic form. In the ancient world such poetry was customarily sung. The prophets were musically skilled and able to sing their prophecies to the accompaniment of stringed

instruments, which they themselves played. This liturgical renewal was *prophetic* in character.

(D) A fourth observation: the renewal was *artistic* in expression. This period was marked by a virtual explosion in music and the arts. A worship practice which had for hundreds of years been stark and stern and devoid of music is suddenly bursting into song at the Tabernacle of David.

- (1) First, the writing of sacred prayer-poems becomes a major new development for the Jewish people. The canonical Psalms are a mere fraction of the huge literary output which comes from this historical period.
- (2) Second, the development of a sung musical prayer language is one of the most important features of this time. The challenge of creating a vocal music which would serve both the delightful peculiarities of Hebrew poetry and the liturgical requirements of an evolving worship practice was taken up by David and his 4,000 Levitical musicians.
- (3) Third, the foundation of the Levitical choirs by divine command brought an entirely new dimension into Old Testament worship.
- (4) A fourth aspect of this musical explosion is the instrumental practice which supported the new forms of sung prayer. This vocalized prayer-poetry was, from the beginning, instrumentally accompanied by strings. Additional instruments were also added to that foundation. Harps were the most basic accompanimental instrument for Psalmody and the other forms of Old Testament sung-poetry.
- (5) Just as a special musical language had to be created for sung poetry, so new musical instruments were sought to accompany this vocal music. Hence, the invention of new instruments became another dimension of the dynamic and creative artistic activity of this period. New voices. New instruments. New sounds. New songs.

All this creativity was released as a result of a divine instruction to reorganize the priests and Levites for a new era of worship practice. Of the 38,000 Levites at the time, 4,000 were appointed to the ministry of music. Never before had there been any leadership for music ministry among God's people. The Mosaic worship tradition was essentially a non-musical practice. Thus, there was no need of musicians or of musical leadership. However, all of that is changing now, for the worship practice of the Tabernacle of David is rich with

the music of voices and instruments, choirs and congregation – chanting the Scriptures and singing their prayers and praises to God.

Metaphorically speaking, two important and impressive marriages take place during this period: (1) First, the marriage of music and worship; from this time onward, sung prayer and sung praise will be the norm for God's people in corporate worship. (2) Second, the marriage of musical leadership and spiritual leadership. The musical Levites embodied the second marriage. Their responsibility was to keep the first marriage alive and strong.

(E) Last, one final observation must be made regarding this renewal. It was *congregational* in its compass. Until now, the Mosaic tradition gave the congregation a limited participative role in worship; but as we have seen, that all changes during the reign of David.

During this period of David's leadership we witness an explosion of literary productivity, vocal composition, instrumental practice and instrument-making. At the same time we witness a major restructuring of Levitical ministry responsibilities to include the ministry of music. The founding of both congregational song practice and choral music practice takes place at this time. During the subsequent reign of Solomon the arts continue to find new impetus for creative release in the design, construction and furnishing of the Temple. All of this creativity in the arts – musical and otherwise – was for one purpose only – the worship of God. And at the heart of this new worship revolution was the song of the LORD – the SONG UNENDING.

Rarely in the Judeo-Christian history has there been a period of such dramatic change in worship practice as we observe during this time. The differences between the Mosaic sacrificial worship tradition and the Davidic musical worship tradition create a stark contrast. And yet, when the Temple is completed in Jerusalem, it is precisely these two liturgical traditions which unite and form an authentic convergence into one rich and lasting worship practice. And all without a hint of worship wars!

Words of Encouragement

The encouragement we can draw from David is to stay committed to the true, unchanging purpose of worship and to the historic goals of facilitating the corporate prayers and praises of the community of faith in response to God's majestic revelation of Himself and His purposes; to maintain the perspective of worship as a glorious end in itself; to submit eagerly and consistently to the one supreme authority which brought the people of God into being and which has shaped our character and our relationship with God down through our history – that authority being God's own Word. Be encouraged not to trade true theology for a post-modern me-ology; do not give up dialogue with God in favor of religious entertainment. Stay connected with our story – we cannot know our

true identity outside of it. Let us be encouraged to draw our leadership models from the Scriptures and the Savior – not from business, marketing, and entertainment. Be encouraged to let the church be the church and not disparage its uniqueness, its difference from the world.

Our hope for the present and future of music and worship lies not in ourselves, or in our grasp of things, or in our gifts and abilities, but in our confidence in the One who established both the rites of worship and the role of music in worship. No matter what harm or injury we mortals may do to this priceless union, we won't kill it; we can't destroy it; it's not going away. And this current battle we may find ourselves in is not the end of the story.

And as regards the church choir, this institution, this ministry was divinely-established; and it, too, is not going away. The Levitical choral ministry was a profoundly gracious gift of God to the life of worship that has survived thirty centuries.

The Biblical Riddle, Part 2

Back to the riddle.

Who am I?

When Mary is told that she will give birth to the Savior and shares the good news with Elizabeth, I AM THERE.

When Elizabeth gives birth to a son, John, known as the baptizer, I AM THERE.

When Jesus the Christ is born in Bethlehem a host of angels appears and I AM THERE.

When the young child Jesus is presented to the Lord in the Temple, I AM THERE.

Every time the Savior attends the Temple or the Sabbath service of the synagogue, as was His custom, I AM THERE.

When Jesus takes up the scroll of Isaiah in the temple courts and begins to read, I AM THERE.

When Our Lord gathers with His disciples in the upper room for their Last Supper together, I AM THERE.

When Paul and Silas are arrested, imprisoned, severely beaten and put in stocks in a cell without windows, I AM THERE.

When New Testament believers gather together for worship and fellowship, I AM THERE.

Who am I? I am the SONG, the Lord's song, the song of praise to God, the song that magnifies the Lord, the song of rejoicing, the song of thanksgiving, the song of glory, the song of revelation and light, the song of peace on earth, the song of salvation, the song of good news, the song of hope and promise. I am the song of Mary, the song of Zechariah, the song of Simeon, the song of angels, the song of temple musicians and synagogue cantors, the song of faithful disciples and fearless Apostles, the song of the first Christian believers – I am the SONG UNENDING.

And you, my colleagues in this ancient guild, are the **keepers** of the SONG, the **teachers** of the SONG, the **singers** of the SONG, the **leaders** of the SONG.

Challenge from Pastoral Leadership

And yet all is not well in Zion. While the growth gurus are pressuring the church on one hand, there are many pastoral problems affecting us on the other hand.

(1) **Pastoral imperialism** is spreading like a plague through much of the church today. This “domination” style of leadership devalues the gifts, the talents and the call of many church musicians and often reduces their role to that of a puppet under clerical control. Musicians are frequently marginalized and often fired for their inability to please such controlling leaders.

(2) **Pastoral ignorance** is another obstacle facing many church musicians who often know and understand more about the nature and workings of public worship than their pastors. The training of ministers in our American seminaries often omits any required studies in worship. The training of church musicians in such institutions generally includes numerous courses in the area of worship and liturgical studies. The many calls and letters I receive from former students bears up the fact that this is a source of frequent conflict in our churches.

(3) **A spirit of disestablishmentarianism** is another problem affecting the church today. A blatant disregard for the personal investment of time, energy and resources of previous generations often results in the total disestablishment of their works of faithful stewardship and the virtual dismantling of authentic works of God accomplished through both leaders and laity in the past.

(4) **A pastoral insensitivity** to the nature of the local church as a multi-generational family often leads to the dividing of the congregation which every pastor has a responsibility to seek to unite. How tragic it is when a pastor will cater to one generation at the expense of the rest in matters of style and packaging and other secondary things. Such a pastoral failure often disenfranchises the wisest, most mature and most highly-invested members of a congregation. Pastoral decisions about music are often the means by which such divisions in the family take place.

(5) **Pastoral pre-occupation** with other agenda in worship often creates conflicts for church musicians. Following the aforementioned misadvice from church growth experts, pastors often position themselves at odds with their musicians – each pursuing different goals in the worship service.

These are some of the sources of conflict which church musicians encounter on the pastoral/clerical level. But, I want to be quick to say that there are just as many pastors who are the exact opposite to the type of cleric I just described.

A Second Biblical Case Study

A second case study comes from II Chronicles 30. Let me set this up for you. Hezekiah has just become King – a good one following a bad one. In the first month of his reign he re-opened the Temple. He instructed the priests and Levites to cleanse the Temple and consecrate themselves – which they did – and Temple worship was restored. The Levites played their cymbals and harps and lyres and the priests blew their trumpets and the Levitical choir sang its heart out. Then Hezekiah called on them to prepare for the first Passover celebration in years, and they did everything to get ready. Passover was re-instituted. The Chronicler records it like this: “And the sons of Israel present in Jerusalem celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days with great joy, and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day after day with loud instruments to the Lord.”

Now, this part is for you. You are the Levites; Hezekiah is your pastor. O.K.? Listen. “Then Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to the Levites who showed good insight in the things of the Lord.” He spoke *encouragingly*. You see he appreciated them and respected them. He knows they have done well and he honors them and encourages them. I imagine we have all had a Hezekiah somewhere in our past – a pastor who has encouraged us and supported us in our important mission. Perhaps you’re stuck with Ahaz for now, but he won’t be there forever. Hezekiah is on his way!

Another case study from II Chronicles

Judah is about to be engaged in a battle with three enemy armies who join forces to destroy her. The morning of the military action, Jehoshaphat assembled his troops

and sent them into battle. But the king did a very strange thing: he put the Levitical choir out in front of the army! That's right! Picture this with me. There they were in their freshly pressed choir robes, the army behind them in their battle gear. And guess who's out in front of the choir! That would be you – the choir director. As they took their battle stations the choir sang with all their might; "Give thanks to the Lord, for His loving kindness is everlasting." Now there was an act of faith! And when they began singing and praising the Lord, their enemies turned on each other and completely destroyed themselves.

Now what I want you to hear is what they were told *before* they went into battle. This is what the Lord said to them: "Do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude, for **the battle is not yours, but God's.**" Sometimes we forget who the church belongs to, whose story this is, whose work we are about. And during these so-called "worship wars" it would be good for us to hear these words for ourselves, in our circumstances: "The battle is not yours, but God's!" This thing is not going to end in disaster. There is victory up ahead. This is a battle worth waging. The "good guys" must not give up. Take the advice of the Levitical choir: "Give thanks to the Lord, for His loving kindness is everlasting!" I submit that seeds of hope and encouragement for us church musicians are found here in our own choral history recorded in Scripture.

To this point we have considered some of the challenges which current church growth philosophy presents to us and some of the challenges which we receive from pastoral leadership. Both are sources which have created varying measures of tension and conflict for today's church musicians.

The Challenge of The New Music

A third and final area of conflict and challenge is found totally within the context of music itself. Some call it "the new music"; my students refer to it as "contemporary worship music." While it is not so new as my students think, it is nonetheless part of the "new versus old" skirmish going on within the larger worship wars. This new congregational song is rooted partly in a number of causes: (1) a reaction to what is perceived to be overly rational and cerebral worship practice; (2) the phenomenon of declining attention spans; (3) an emphasis on the moment, the NOW – immediate satisfaction and gratification, a craving for a "feel good" music; (4) a demand for a more culturally universal musical style, namely, popular; (5) a desire to be freed from hymnals, worship books, and even Bibles in order to use hands expressively as in clapping and raising hands in worship; (6) a certain amount of reaction to passivity in worship; (7) an anti-historical attitude, an aversion to anything that could be considered traditional (such as the hymnal, the organ, the choir); (8) a reaction to depersonalization; (9) multi-cultural awareness; (10) a renewed interest in the centrality

and primacy of worship; (11) a pre-occupation with the “new” the “latest thing;” and finally, (12) the commercial para-church music industry.

The Concept of The New Song

For a moment I would like us to reflect on the concept of “the new song”. We trace this concept back to the Old Testament and especially to the Psalms where we find a strong inference that each generation be expected to express its faith, its joy, its life in God through its own new songs. There is also the implication that new works of God, new victories, new blessings should give rise to new-made songs of gratitude, praise and celebration. There are, on the contrary, some significant inferences that are nowhere present in this concept: (1) there is no hint or suggestion that the new song should be the **only** song; (2) there is no inference that the new song must distinguish itself stylistically from any existing song; (3) there is no suggestion that the new song would be seen as set against the song of any other generation or be seen as competing with any older song; (4) there is not the slightest indication that the new song should be deemed to be superior simply because it is new, or that the “old songs” would be deemed to be inferior because they are old; (5) nor is there any suggestion that a given generation’s contribution to the body of sacred song be made in its youth or its immaturity or that youth is ever or always or necessarily the best stage in life in which to make its contribution to the treasury of congregational song; (6) and there is no suggestion that the new song should be the special property of one segment of the body rather than belonging to the whole.

A Case Study from the New Testament

A thousand years of Psalmody are the backdrop against which two new, specifically Christian, song forms enter the picture. In two separate letters the Apostle Paul describes the developing congregational song repertoire as being comprised of Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Note that the very old (ancient!) Psalms are not discarded or replaced. The new music is simply added to the old repertoire. And during the next two thousand years this additive process has yielded a constantly growing and ever-richer treasury of sacred song. The process of blending the new into the mix of corporate worship is truly not a new challenge or a new idea. What **is** thoroughly new, and beyond reason, is the notion that the current generation’s contemporary congregational song could be deemed so supremely valuable and superior in liturgical substance and theological insight and devotional expression that without the test of time it should immediately displace and replace two thousand years of Hebrew Psalms and Christian chants and hymns and chorales and spirituals in one stroke. The lesson from

the New Testament is that the church is actually much smarter than that. This momentary lapse of sanity will not last. The young will mature and the greater mind of whole church will again prevail.

In the meantime what do we do? It does not work to put our heads in the sand, pretending it's not here, because the new music **is** here! (1) First, we must evaluate it using the same criteria we have always used in evaluating congregational song, and use only those songs that we can believe in and defend on the basis of those criteria. (2) Whatever we do, we must make every effort to keep the intergenerational family of faith together; the unity of the body is so important that we must not allow music to split the family. (3) We must not ask any one generation to do all the bending. A spirit of "give-and-take" must be shared by all generations. And no generation should be disenfranchised in the process. (4) We should be as willing to embrace new songs of value and worth because they are of value and worth, as we are unwilling to discard old songs of value and worth simply because they are old. (5) If the music of the past is not in the musical mother tongue of the younger generation, let us resolve to teach them to understand and utilize this music as a second language. And if the music of the present day is not in the musical mother tongue of the rest of us, let us resolve to listen and learn and appreciate what our children are saying to us in their own musical language. (6) We must continue to communicate. The worship wars are draining. Many of us are battle-weary. We want so desperately to move on and move beyond the present conflicts. However, we cannot be silent. We must continue the discussion. We must strive patiently and prayerfully to work for the best outcomes. Let us insure that our efforts are positive and constructive, with a view to edifying and building up the church to the end that the church's song in our time may be the song of the **whole** church.

The Biblical Riddle, Part 3

Back to my riddle one last time.

Who am I?

In the midst of circles of heavenly worshipers there is the very throne of God; and I AM THERE.

Whenever the twenty-four elders fall down and worship Him who sits on the throne, laying their crowns before Him, I AM THERE.

When the Lion of the Tribe of Judah is found to be the only one worthy to open the great Scroll with the seven seals, I AM THERE.

When the Lamb of God is exalted and his glories are extolled, I AM THERE.

When all creatures on heaven, on earth and under the earth and in the sea behold the enthroned Lamb of God, I AM THERE.

When the fifth seal of the great scroll is broken, I AM THERE.

When the great multitude which no one can number is gathered together before the throne, I AM THERE.

When the angels and elders witness the appearing of those who come victorious out of the great tribulation, I AM THERE.

When the seventh angel sounds the seventh trumpet, I AM THERE.

When the Temple of God in Heaven is opened and the Ark of His covenant appears, I AM THERE.

When Satan and his angels are defeated and cast out of heaven, I AM THERE.

When the great company of victors over the Beast is revealed, I AM THERE.

When the great city of Babylon is judged and destroyed, I AM THERE.

When the announcement of the great Marriage Supper of the Lamb is proclaimed, I AM THERE.

When all whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life take up their residence in the new Jerusalem to live eternally with God, I AM THERE.

Who am I? I am the SONG, the Lord's song, the song of the future, the song of the great marriage feast, the song of the new heaven and the new earth, the song of the new Jerusalem. I am the Lord's song, the song of cherubim and seraphim, the song of elders and angels, the song of overcomers and martyrs, the song of a multitude too large to count. I am the Lord's song, the song of enduring victory and unfading glory, the song of perpetual honor and abiding adoration, the song of persistent praise and tireless thanks, the song of ceaseless celebration and eternal worship.

I am the SONG UNENDING!

And you, my colleagues in this ancient and honorable guild – you are the **keepers** of the SONG, the **teachers** of the SONG, the **singers** of the SONG, the **leaders** of the SONG in the church today.

Be encouraged – the marriage of music and worship was truly a marriage made in heaven. It will survive the worship wars of this present age. The battle is not ours, but God's. Ours is but to be faithful to the call we have, and the light we have been given. And as to the church choir? Well, rumors of its demise are quite premature and false. The choir has a divine origin and an impressive track record, and a great future. It's not going away. The choir that welcomed Christ into the world on the night of His birth is the choir-in-residence in the celestial city, and choral music will fill the corridors of eternity.

“When we've been there ten thousand years
bright, shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.”

Given our bright future, I'd say:

“Let's keep rehearsing, till we get it right!”