“NO LONGER SLAVES”

WEAK HAMARTIOLOGY IN BETHEL MUSIC

Tatiana Kalveks

Worcester College



A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

MICHAELMAS TERM 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, my gratitude to my supervisor, Joel Rasmussen, must be noted; this thesis would not have taken shape without Joel's encouragement and guidance. Apologies to Kierkegaard are also in sore order, as I have rudely neglected to give him a seat at the table, despite the very great merits of his hamartiology.

Fond thanks are due to the good folks of Worcester College, where I have spent four happy years. In particular, I must show my appreciation to the choir and chapel community, for the support, singing and miscellaneous edifying capers. Most significant of all is my debt of gratitude to Colin Edwards, without whose grounding presence I, and the thesis, would have been much worse off. Thank you for making the college my home.

I am fortunate to have squeezed much indispensable advice from my long-suffering friends. Travis LaCouter has been the patron saint of this exercise, valiantly assisted by James Lorenz, Joel Gutteridge, Lucinda Armstrong, Will Marshall, Veronica Della Foresta and Helena Fallstrom, amongst many others. Thanks also to Will Harmer for his scrupulous attention to detail. Jonnie Jenkins catalysed the whole project, the impulse fomented amidst the hospitality shown to me by the incomparable Ross/Locheads: Zara, Tom, Mhairi and Caitlin. Bernadette Ainsworth has been more motivational and pastoral than John Wesley could ever dream of being. I am deeply grateful to all my benefactors, and particularly hope that this thesis will be considered a worthwhile investment by the Church of England trusts that have supported it.

Lastly, to my family – my parents, Christine & Rudolph, and my brothers, Ivan & Alexei – thank you for encouraging me to get on with it.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SHORT ABSTRACT **5**
LONG ABSTRACT **6**
LIST OF FIGURES **9**

INTRODUCTION **12**
0.1 'NO LONGER SLAVES' 13
0.2 CONTENT 16
0.3 METHOD 19
0.4 STRUCTURE 20

CHAPTER ONE
Bethel Church: A Genealogy **23**
1.1 CONTEXTUALISING BETHEL 23
1.2 WESLEYAN METHODISM 27
1.3 HOLINESS, PENTECOSTALISM AND THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT 36
1.4 BETHEL CHURCH, REDDING 52
1.5 SUMMARY 62

CHAPTER TWO
John Wesley's Motivational Hamartiology **63**
2.1 JOHN WESLEY ON SIN 63
2.2 THE ORDO SALUTIS 68
2.3 SIN AND CHRISTIAN PERFECTION 72
2.4 COGNITIVE AND VOLITIONAL SIN, AFTER WESLEY 78
2.5 SUMMARY 84

CHAPTER THREE
The Weak Hamartiology of Bethel Church **86**
3.1 DEFINING SIN 87
3.2 ORIGINAL SIN 89
3.3 ACTUAL SIN 98
3.4 THE INCONVENIENCE OF SIN 107
3.5 SUMMARY 108

CHAPTER FOUR
The Functions of (Pop) Worship **110**
4.1 INTRODUCTION 110
4.2 WORSHIP AS FORMATIVE 113
4.3 WORSHIP AS DIVINE ENCOUNTER 125
4.4 WORSHIP AS PRAISE 138
4.5 SUMMARY 139

CHAPTER FIVE
A Musico-Theological Methodology 140
5.1 INTRODUCTION 140
5.2 MUSICO-THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS 142
5.3 THE EXPRESSIVE PROPERTIES OF FUNCTIONAL SONG 147
5.4 THE STIMULATION THESIS 153
5.5 THE CONTOUR THESIS 159
5.6 THE CONVENTION THESIS 165
5.7 A MUSICAL TYPOLOGY 168
5.8 SUMMARY 173

CHAPTER SIX
Therapeutic Devices in Pop Worship 174
6.1 INTRODUCTION 174
6.2 FROM WESLEY TO RIEFF 175
6.3 COSMIC AMBIENCE 186
6.4 EROTIC INFANTILISM 205
6.5 SUMMARY 229

CHAPTER SEVEN
Sin: A Retrospective 230
7.1 INTRODUCTION 230
7.2 CHRISTUS VICTOR 231
7.3 CLIMAX IN ATONEMENT NARRATIVES 237
7.4 CLIMAX, EVERYWHERE 254
7.5 THERAPEUTIC TRIUMPHALISM 264
7.6 SUMMARY 276

CHAPTER EIGHT
A Wesleyan Synthesis? Negative Affect in Pop Worship 283
8.1 INTRODUCTION 278
8.2 A WESLEYAN SYNTHESIS 282
8.3 GOD AGAINST WORSHIP 287
8.4 SANCTIFICATION AND NEGATIVE AFFECT 296
8.5 THE IDIOMATIC NORMS OF POP WORSHIP 299
8.6 SUMMARY 306

BIBLIOGRAPHY 307
DISCOGRAPHY 322
VIDEOGRAPHY 327

Copyright (©) Tatiana Kalveks 2021. All rights reserved.

SHORT ABSTRACT

Since 2009, Bethel Music has become one of the best-selling Christian worship outfits in the world. Bethel have produced a large number of pop worship songs, such as 'Forever' and 'No Longer Slaves,' that have been incorporated into contemporary worship services across the globe, as the pop idiom has become more popular in Christian worship. Critiques of pop worship music have, thus far, generally failed to identify any theological shortcomings of the musical idiom itself.

In this thesis, I argue that the pop idiom of contemporary mainstream worship music conveys a weak hamartiology that undermines the ongoing relevance of the doctrine of sin, and subsequently instrumentalises worship in the pursuit of "tangible" assurance of salvation (for example through positive affect or charismata). I demonstrate this by presenting three musico-theological devices, ubiquitous throughout the genre, which Bethel Music utilise to this end: cosmic ambience, erotic infantilism and triumphalist climax. These devices are created using musical features such as harmony, rhythm, melody and instrumentation. This use of the pop idiom shapes Bethel's theological message in such a way as to actively hinder the communication of a more robust hamartiology. In making this argument, I combine musicological and theological analysis in a method unused, so far, in theological analyses of pop music.

I begin by situating Bethel's Charismatic theology within the tradition of Methodism and Pentecostalism, before elucidating Bethel's distinctive hamartiology through a comparison with John Wesley's. I then outline the functions of pop worship, and three models of musical meaning. Two musico-theological chapters subsequently argue that Bethel's worship music conveys a therapeutic ambience that eclipses the significance of sin, and presents sin as a retrospective quality for justified Christians. I close with reflections on how Christian pop worship might strengthen its own doctrine of sin without abandoning the pop idiom.

LONG ABSTRACT

Described by Doug Geivett and Holly Pivec as 'a sort of NAR version of Lourdes' (2014: 188), Bethel Church in Redding, Northern California, is an internationally notorious site of Charismatic activity. Bethel is an 'Independent Network Church', loosely associated with a non-denominational network called the 'New Apostolic Reformation,' as evidenced by Bethel's mode of church governance, in which senior apostolic figures promulgate a highly intuitive approach to spiritual discernment and religious formation.[1] The NAR, INC and Bethel Church itself result from over two centuries of post-Reformation ecclesiology in America, wherein the participatory and affective elements of John Wesley's Methodism have developed into myriad different instantiations of experiential, and increasingly Charismatic, Christian practice.

Bethel Church is home to a worship outfit, Bethel Music, which is amongst the best-selling Christian artists in the world. Established in 2001, and dramatically growing in popularity since 2009, Bethel Music have produced a large number of pop worship songs, such as 'Forever,' 'No Longer Slaves' and 'It Is Well,' that have been incorporated into contemporary worship services across the globe. Use of pop musical idioms in contemporary worship music has increased in churches worldwide, notably in the later twentieth century until today. Robert Wuthnow has attributed this to the rise of individualistic religion: popular music, he argues, is increasingly valued as a stimulus for spiritual growth – as compared to, say, sermons – because congregants believe it better facilitates theological exploration than clear doctrinal dictates can (2003: 36-7). Further, the familiarity and simplicity of the style is thought to make church services accessible, relevant, popular and enjoyable.

The rise of pop worship music has been accompanied by critiques, frequently claiming that the form inculcates irreverence, narcissism or spiritual contamination through proximity to allegedly anti-Christian influences. Qualms regarding the spiritual formation of pop leaders are common, as well as the supposedly materialistic and therapeutic trappings of the genre.

[1] Costi W. Hinn & Anthony G. Wood, *Defining Deception* (El Cajon: Southern California Seminary Press: 2018), vii, n1.

Critiques of pop worship music, in these ways, have typically pertained either to the production of popular music in general, or superficial readings of worship song lyrics.

In this thesis, I present the deeper, theological problem underlying these criticisms: namely, that the pop idiom, as it is used in much contemporary worship music, conveys a weak hamartiology. This hamartiology undermines the purpose of the cross by presenting humans as innately sympathetic in the eyes of God, and eclipses any ongoing consequences of human fallenness, such as potential corruption of the noetic and desiderative faculties, with a radically optimistic account of Christians’ capacity for holy living. Together, the pop idiom and the weak hamartiology engenders create an anaesthetising, ‘therapeutic’ ambience that emphasises “tangible” assurances of salvation, such as the experience of positive affect, or spiritual gifts. This occurs at the expense of other functions of worship, for example as a means of spiritual formation, divine encounter, or simply the praise of God.

Whilst song lyrics determine the particularities of this weak hamartiology, using euphemistic language to describe sin, I argue that a triumphalist and therapeutic theology is, significantly, conveyed through the way the musical idiom is used. A positive, comforting theology neglects the negative side of the dialectic between sin and grace upheld in orthodox Christian belief. Instead, Bethel’s pop worship emphasises personal empowerment through religion, expressed using features such as simplistic and regular cadential resolutions, unwavering harmonic consonance, trance-like rhythms, a “cosmic” soundworld, repetition and more. These musical features support Bethel’s claim that justified Christians enjoy total freedom from sin, a claim compounded by their pursuit of “tangible” means of assurance of salvation, through positive affect and spiritual gifts.

I have chosen the Bethel Collective as my case study, because their international popularity has rendered them culturally influential across multiple denominations, and because their music is stylistically representative of the genre more broadly. Further, despite their international significance, little notice has been paid to them from within the academy. My argument combines musicological and theological analysis, investigating a genre that has been unsatisfactorily analysed from a musicological perspective and for a theological audience. The thesis first situates Bethel Church within a mainstream theological tradition,

before demonstrating how Bethel Music conveys theological norms through compositional techniques.

Thesis Structure

The thesis begins with a genealogy, locating Bethel Church's Charismatic theology within the broad tradition of certain popular forms of Christianity in America. Throughout the project, I will invite comparison between John Wesley's motivational-pastoral theology, and Bethel's. In the first chapter, I show that Methodism is a theological ancestor to Bethel, by way of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements that themselves develop out of Methodism. I explain the distinctive, doctrinal issues that still characterise Bethel's theology today, attending especially to the apparent conflict between doctrine and experience, and the extent of sanctification. In Chapter Two, I give a detailed account of John Wesley's hamartiology, introducing the disagreement he had with his brother Charles about the extent of Christian Perfection. This provides a useful basis for Chapter Three, where I attempt to explicate the unsystematised and somewhat vague hamartiology promulgated at Bethel Church. Both John Wesley and Bethel's hamartiologies are primarily concerned with actual, rather than original, sin, and use volitional and cognitive accounts of sin that render investigation of the potential ongoing effects of original sin, for example on the faculties of knowledge and will, highly inconvenient.

Chapter Four assesses the functions of worship, drawing from sociological literature concerning contemporary praise and worship practice. I examine how Charismatic pop worship engage functions as a means of spiritual formation, divine encounter, and praise of God, making particular use of Robert Wuthnow, Gordon Adnams and Monique Ingalls' work on pop worship practices. I also use the Church of England's 'Transforming Worship' report as a way of structuring my analysis. Chapter Five then outlines the parameters of musico-theological analysis, offering three models for how music might express meaning. Defining pop worship as a category of functional song, I propose a trifold model of musical expressive meaning: the stimulation thesis, the contour thesis and the convention thesis. These models provide parameters for the musico-theological claims I make later in the thesis. Chapters Four and Five facilitate my use of musicological analysis in Chapters Six and Seven. In Chapter Six, I argue that pop worship is predominantly therapeutic in function, demonstrating how hamartiological themes are

softened by two musico-theological devices: "cosmic ambience" and "erotic infantilism." My discussion of the therapeutic draws from Philip Rieff's account of therapeutic religion, which – he claims – is used to ameliorate anxieties in the individual, rather than having primarily to do with the relation between the individual and God. Chapter Seven examines the normative use of musical climax in Bethel's music, first in their atonement narratives, and then elsewhere. Noting the similar weaknesses between Gustav Aulén's account of Christus Victor and Bethel Music's proclivity towards using cosmic battle imagery, I suggest that the uniform usage of this musical device betrays an overrealised, triumphalist eschatology, wherein sin is only ever of retrospective concern to the justified Christian.

I conclude the project by revisiting the divergence in opinion between John and Charles Wesley regarding Christian Perfection. I propose a practical approach to hamartiology in pop worship music that draws from both, synthesising the encouraging tone of John (and avoiding the pessimistic rhetoric of Charles) with Charles' high concept of Christian Perfection, which maintains an account of sin as an ongoing corrupting influence on the faculties of knowledge and will. Drawing from Matthew Myer Boulton's argument that worship is always an occasion for sin, and Simeon Zahl's advocation for the transforming work of the Spirit through negative affect, I will argue that a more robust hamartiology in pop worship requires the expression of affective diversity. It also needs to diverge from unthinkingly triumphalist and therapeutic musical norms, a point I will elucidate with some musical examples.

The aim of this project is not to construct some musico-theological aesthetic treatise, or to denigrate pop worship as a worthwhile resource for Christian living. Nor am I attempting to "perfect" Christian worship. I simply intend, in the absence of any other critiques of pop worship that address compositional devices, to identify some of the specific ways in which the pop idiom actively hampers a robust hamartiology from being expressed in worship. Without a robust hamartiology, the orthodox dialectic of sin and grace is compromised, distorting the Gospel narrative, including the significance of the cross, and the relation of man and God. By contrast, engaging this dialectic also equips worship to problematise itself, as an act expressive of human failing as much as it is of praise. The therapeutic, if it is taken as the *ultimate* end of worship, is anathema to these endeavours, softening the Gospel of its mention of sin, and ebulliently presenting a most anodyne account of grace.

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Bethel Music, 'No Longer Slaves,' chorus 15
Figure 2. Bethel Music, 'I Really Love You,' excerpt (1:39) 55
Figure 3. Bethel Church, College View entrance (April 2019) 59
Figure 4. The relevant main characters at Bethel, and a list of comparable worship outfits and corresponding worship outfits 62
Figure 5. Bethel Music, 'Doxology' 122
Figure 6. Bethel Music, 'Doxology,' vocal improvisation (9:52) 123
Figure 7. Bethel Music, 'Ever Be,' introduction (0:07) 150
Figure 8. Bethel Music, 'Ever Be,' first verse melody (0:36) 150
Figure 9. Bethel Music, 'Ever Be,' chorus (1:15) 150
Figure 10. Bethel Music, 'Ever Be,' pre-chorus (1:03) 151
Figure 11. Bethel Music, 'Ever Be,' coda (3:22) 152
Figure 12. Bethel Music, 'Ever Be,' coda melody and range (1-2-3-5) 155
Figure 13. Bethel Music, 'Ever Be,' second verse (2:13) 156
Figure 14. 'Abide With Me' 161
Figure 15. Bethel Music, 'Ever Be,' chorus (plagal cadence) 161
Figure 16. Different forms of major triad 163
Figure 17. Adding notes to triads 164
Figure 18. Diatonic chord scale 172
Figure 19. Inverted chords 172
Figure 20. Bethel Music, 'Seas of Crimson,' introduction (0:01) 189
Figure 21. Bethel Music, 'I've Seen the Light,' titular motif (0:07) 192
Figure 22. Bethel Music, 'I've Seen the Light,' "shame" motif (0:33) 192
Figure 23. Bethel Music, 'I've Seen the Light,' "He loves me" motif (2:22) 193
Figure 24. Bethel Music, 'On the Shores,' spontaneous moment, I (9:03) 194
Figure 25. Bethel Music, 'On the Shores,' spontaneous moment, II (11:29) 195
Figure 26. Bethel Music, 'On the Shores,' spontaneous moment, III 196
Figure 27. Jenn Johnson's story 198
Figure 28. Bethel Music, 'The Joy of the Lord (Spontaneous),' I (2:13) 199
Figure 29. Bethel Music, 'The Joy of the Lord (Spontaneous),' II (2:36) 200
Figure 30. Bethel Music, 'The Joy of the Lord (Spontaneous),' III (3:13) 200

Figure 31. Bethel Music, 'The Joy of the Lord (Spontaneous),' IV (chorus) (4:17) 201
Figure 32. Bethel Music, 'Ever Be,' second verse (2:12) 208
Figure 33. Bethel Music, 'Ever Be,' pre-chorus (2:41) 209
Figure 34. Bethel Music, 'Ever Be,' chorus (1:16, 2:53, 4:21) 209
Figure 35. Bethel Music, 'Breathe' (1:25) 210
Figure 36. Bethel Music, 'Everything to You (Spontaneous),' I (0:31) 211
Figure 37. Bethel Music, 'Everything to You (Spontaneous),' II (2:12) 212
Figure 38. Bethel Music, 'We Dance,' introduction (0:00) 214
Figure 39. Bethel Music, 'We Dance,' first verse (0:15) 216
Figure 40. Bethel Music, 'We Dance,' chorus (1:02) 217
Figure 41. Bethel Music, 'We Dance,' middle eight (2:35) 218
Figure 42. Bethel Music, 'We Dance,' coda (4:03) 218
Figure 43. Bethel Music, 'Wonder' (0:09) 219
Figure 44. Bethel Music, 'You Are My One Thing' (0:29) 220
Figure 45. Bright Ones, 'We Dance,' chorus, with sample in italics (0:49) 221
Figure 46. Bethel Music, 'Letting Go,' chorus (1:15) 223
Figure 47. Bethel Music, 'My Dear,' chorus (2:00) 224
Figure 48. Bethel Music, 'Come Awaken Love,' chorus (1:11) 224
Figure 49. Bethel Music, 'Forever,' first verse (0:06) 239
Figure 50. Bethel Music, 'Forever,' pre-chorus (1:13) 241
Figure 51. Bethel Music, 'Forever,' chorus (with backing vocals) (1:37) 242
Figure 52. Bethel Music, 'Forever,' coda (3:51) 243
Figure 53. Bethel Music, 'Seas of Crimson,' introduction (0:00) 245
Figure 54. Bethel Music, 'Seas of Crimson,' first and second verses (0:20) 245
Figure 55. Bethel Music, 'Seas of Crimson,' chorus (1:04) 246
Figure 56. Bethel Music, 'Seas of Crimson,' third verse (1:34) 247
Figure 57. Matt Redman, 'Here Is Love,' coda (2:50) 248
Figure 58. Bethel Music, 'Seas of Crimson,' coda (3:21) 248
Figure 59. Bethel Music, 'Son of God,' first and second verses (0:13, 1:25) 250
Figure 60. Bethel Music, 'Son of God,' chorus (0:54) 250
Figure 61. Bethel Music, 'Son of God,' coda (3:01) 251
Figure 62. Bethel Music, 'What Would I Have Done,' introduction (0:02) 256
Figure 63. Bethel Music, 'What Would I Have Done,' first and second verses (0:29) 256
Figure 64. Bethel Music, 'What Would I Have Done,' pre-chorus (1:36) 257

Figure 65. Bethel Music, 'What Would I Have Done,' chorus (3:03) 257
Figure 66. Bethel Music, 'God of the Redeemed,' first and second verses (0:00)..... 259
Figure 67. Bethel Music, 'God of the Redeemed,' pre-chorus (0:27)..... 260
Figure 68. Bethel Music, 'God of the Redeemed,' chorus (0:41) 261
Figure 69. Bethel Music, 'Our Father,' verse and chorus (0:32)..... 263
Figure 70. Bethel Music, 'Our Father,' coda (3:58)..... 263
Figure 71. Bethel Music, 'Our Father,' interlude (2:30) 264
Figure 72. Bethel Music, 'No Longer Slaves,' first verse (0:05). 265
Figure 73. Bethel Music, 'No Longer Slaves,' chorus (0:31) 266
Figure 74. Bethel Music, 'No Longer Slaves,' middle eight (3:27)..... 266
Figure 75. Bethel Music, 'No Longer Slaves,' coda (4:06) 267
Figure 76. Cory Asbury, 'Reckless Love,' introduction (0:08)..... 269
Figure 77. Cory Asbury, 'Reckless Love,' verse one (0:26)..... 269
Figure 78. Cory Asbury, 'Reckless Love,' chorus (0:58) 270
Figure 79. Cory Asbury, 'Reckless Love,' coda (3:19)..... 271
Figure 80. Bethel Music, 'Reckless Love,' spontaneous moment (9:12)..... 272
Figure 81. The Eucharist at Bethel, 6 April 2019..... 295

INTRODUCTION

'NO LONGER SLAVES' * CONTENT * METHOD * STRUCTURE

0.1 'NO LONGER SLAVES'

Sin can be an unpopular subject. Whilst Christian theology has traditionally maintained a dialectic between sin and grace, resolved by and through the person and salvific work of Jesus Christ, a squeamishness towards hamartiology in Christian teaching and practice persists in many corners of the Church. This is particularly evidenced in the contemporary megachurches[2] that produce worship songs written in a pop idiom, for use in congregations across the world. The proliferation of pop worship songs from Charismatic quarters is a major cultural phenomenon, occurring in the fastest growing area of Christianity in the Western world, and is the source – I will argue – of a hamartiology so weak it risks radically unbalancing the theology found in modern Charismatic theology overall.[3]

The Christian songwriter Keith Getty has stated that 'we are what we sing' and that worship should express an 'authentic picture' of God for people to worship.[4] Another stalwart of Christian pop, Matt Redman, admits that the thought of Christians deriving their theology from worship songs has 'scared the singing daylights' out of him.[5] Attention is often – rightly – given to worship lyrics (Getty's own 'In Christ Alone,' co-written with Stuart Townend, was the subject of controversy amongst the Presbyterian Church USA in 2013, owing to its endorsement of satisfaction theology).[6] However, the pop music to which worship lyrics are set is less often assessed for its theological meaning, perhaps owing to its relatively greater semantic ineffability, and its apparent simplicity. This thesis addresses this blind spot in the theological analysis of contemporary worship music. In

[2] 'Megachurch Definition,' *Hartford Institute for Religion Research*. <http://hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/definition.html> Megachurches are typically Protestant congregations with a weekly attendance of over 2,000 people per week. Access dates for weblinks are provided in the bibliography.
[3] See Brad Christerson, & Richard Flory, *The Rise of Network Christianity* (New York: OUP, 2017).
[4] Robin A. Parry, *Worshipping Trinity* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2013), xvii.
[5] Ibid., xv-xvi.
[6] Mary Louise Bringle, 'Debating Hymns,' *The Christian Century* (1 May 2013). <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2013-04/debating-hymns>

particular, I will examine how contemporary (post-millennium) mainstream worship music, written in the pop idiom and produced by international megachurch bands, minimises the significance of hamartiology in the theology it espouses. I will argue that sin, insofar as it is addressed at all, is presented as a phenomenon external to the justified Christian, suffered passively and divorced from divine judgment. This, I suggest, renders much 'pop worship' (the shorthand I will use for my field of inquiry) a predominantly therapeutic endeavour, instrumentalising the worship event for the emotional benefit of the worshipper – this endeavour taking precedence over its function as praise of God. I will not suggest that orthodox Christian communities should refrain from incorporating pop music into their corporate worship. Nevertheless, my argument implies that localised responses to the effects of this weak hamartiology on particular worshipping communities, perhaps through service planning or theological teaching, are likely warranted.

The title of this thesis is drawn from a 2015 worship song, 'No Longer Slaves,' written by Jonathan and Melissa Helser from Bethel Music. 'No Longer Slaves' is one of the most popular worship songs produced by a megachurch in the past decade.[7] The song is one of Bethel's bestsellers, and has been listened to over 61 million times on Spotify alone. At the time of writing, Bethel's live performance has been viewed over 15 million times on YouTube,[8] whilst the cover version, sung by Zach Williams, has reached over 27 million views.[9] 'No Longer Slaves' is an anthem affirming the strength of the worshipper, drawing lyrically from Paul's proclamation in Romans:

> We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. (Romans 6:6-7 NRSV)

[7] Bethel Music, Jonathan David Helser, Melissa Helser, 'No Longer Slaves (Spontaneous) [Live],' *We Will Not Be Shaken* (Bethel Music: 2015).
[8] Bethel Music, 'No Longer Slaves (LIVE) – Jonathan and Melissa Helser | We Will Not Be Shaken,' *YouTube* (17 February 2015). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxkNj5hcy5E>
[9] Zach Williams, 'Zach Williams – No Longer Slaves (Live from Harding Prison),' *YouTube* (5 October 2018). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDnA_coA168> This recording, filmed in the USA's Harding Prison, was made as part of the 'Men of Valor' outreach mission, which aims to convert and disciple men in prison.

The lyrics to 'No Longer Slaves' paraphrase this idea:
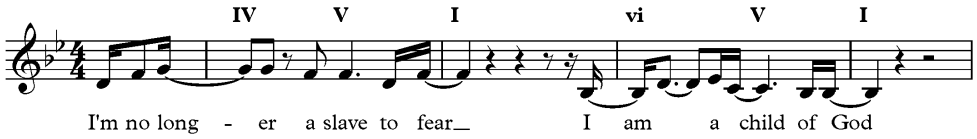


Figure 1. Bethel Music, 'No Longer Slaves,' chorus.

At first, the melody ascends triumphantly, as Jonathan Helser declares his rejection of the spiritual bondage of fear. Then, a perfect cadence creates a sense of stability, as the melody descends back to the tonic ($D_4 – C_4 – B\flat_3$) and Helser confidently declares his identity as a 'child of God.' In addition to this declaration, the lyrics transform Paul's mention of sin into the Helsers' concern with 'fear', neatly sidestepping the judgmental connotations of the category of 'sin'. In later chapters, I examine exactly how a melody might signify triumph, or a chord progression be suggestive of stability. More immediately, this brief example demonstrates some typical theological features of contemporary pop worship. 'No Longer Slaves' is concerned with empowering the worshipper, and does this by connecting their self-image to the idea of being intimately, in some way, related to God. This relation to God is underpinned by highly affective music: it is loud and triumphant, with heavy accompaniment, conveying a sense of power and certainty. The song also avoids the awkward subjects of sin and, by extension, divine judgment.

Bethel Church, and their band Bethel Music (also know as the Bethel Collective), are my focus, in this thesis. At points during my argument, and particularly in the footnotes, I offer examples from a handful of other, comparable worship bands that demonstrate my observations about Bethel's use of the pop idiom to be broadly applicable to the genre at large. The genre I refer to specifically concerns Christian worship music produced this side of the millennium, by internationally popular worship bands that belong to particular Charismatic megachurches. Especially similar bands include Hillsong Worship, Elevation Worship, IHOPKC and Jesus Culture (who originated at Bethel Church), although there are other related examples that I do not particularly discuss, such as Vineyard and Gateway. I focus largely on Bethel Music's period of international success, from 2009 onwards; if worship reform should be one of my concerns, it seems most appropriate to address the genre in its current form.

0.2 CONTENT

This project is methodologically broad, partly due to the difficulties of dealing with an unsystematic form of Christianity (one that often actively rejects the significance of "theology"), and partly due to its interdisciplinary nature. Bethel's teaching has an elusive quality, delivered by speakers who use evocative, rather than academic, language to communicate with their congregations on- and off-line, and who adopt different theological emphases from one another. The potential ensuing confusion is another motivation for me to focus on one particular church, and one particular band. As for the interdisciplinary orientation of this project: my aim is to combine musicological and theological analysis in my assessment of contemporary pop worship music, so as to identify working solutions to the theological critique of the pop worship idiom that I develop. These solutions should be actionable, not necessarily by academics, but by Christian worship ministers, songwriters and so on. My ideas pertain specifically to contemporary corporate worship music written in the pop idiom, and not theologically themed music in general, or some wider category.

Bethel's music is stylistically representative of its genre with respect to musical features such as structure, instrumentation, rhythm, and the treatment of harmony and melody. Although the various megachurch worship bands hold their own particular theological foci, Bethel represent well enough the broad neo-Charismatic brushstrokes of their *confrères*, particularly with respect to their weak hamartiology.[10] On these musical and theological bases, Bethel provides an opportunity to investigate the way particular musical formulae can shape the theological propositions conveyed alongside them. It would be wrong to assume that pop composition is a neutral means of expression, merely on account of its simplicity or ubiquity. (This point sounds obvious, but perhaps requires stating, given the tendency for theological literature to address pop music from a predominantly lyrical perspective – more on which in Chapter Five.)

Although my discussion of hamartiology in Bethel's worship music focuses on the music itself, I contextualise it within the church's theology in general, and the theology of the loose ecumenical "movement" to which they – and their peers – belong. This is not an

[10] Any language I use to refer collectively to these ministries is intended to convey their mutual non-affiliation (see INC discussion in Chapter One), not my disparagement of them.

organised movement, *per se*, hence the nomenclature of 'Independent Network Churches' that has been assigned to it.[11] The INC "movement" has arisen from a proliferation of ecumenical movements originating, some way back, from Wesleyan Methodism in America, by way of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. I will ground Bethel's theology in this context in my first chapter, but will also draw out the aspects of John Wesley's hamartiology which can be read as precursors, albeit better formulated, to Bethel's own hamartiology, and as influences upon the theology expressed in their worship music.

I am using John Wesley in part because Bethel is not an academic operation; its leaders Bill Johnson and Kris Vallotton have published several books, but these works are practical in their intent, and are not concerned with systematic theology. Bethel itself is not the subject of much scholarship, a fact that Abigail Shuttleworth's PhD on Bill Johnson has done something to rectify.[12] Shuttleworth summarises Bill Johnson's theological position thusly:

> It should be noted that in teaching, preaching and publishing books Johnson's intention is not to formulate a coherent theology but to address various issues in theological understanding...
>
> Johnson is driven by the need to create a model for Christian discipleship.[13]

Shuttleworth agrees that this drive towards application potentially compromises the orthodoxy and coherence of Johnson's theology, at points. Bethel's other teachers are similarly driven, and I show in Chapter Three how the resultant theology is simultaneously clear, with respect to certain practical implications, and vague, with respect to doctrinal

[11] See Christerson & Flory, *Network Christianity,* 6-8.
[12] See Abigail Delyth Shuttleworth, 'On Earth as it is in Heaven: A Study of the Healing Praxis of Bill Johnson,' doctoral dissertation (University of Birmingham: 2015). The most comprehensive overview of Bethel's theology more generally is a YouTube video by Mike Winger, which intersperses Winger's (conservative Evangelical) analysis with video clips of teaching at Bethel. See Mike Winger, 'Bill Johnson's Theology and Movement Examined Biblically,' *YouTube* (13 February 2018). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3tEv26OMTU> However, both of these studies focus on Bill Johnson, rather than the collective theology emerging from Bethel's leadership as a whole. Also, the ex-BSSM student Lindsay Davis has given several very critical accounts about her personal experience as a student at Bethel, commenting substantively on the content of the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry teaching program. See Apologia Studios, 'EXCLUSIVE: Defecting From Bethel,' *YouTube* (24 April 2019). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-TlYGF1_kJg&t=1135s> Also, Apologia Studios, 'Defecting From Bethel: Part 2 (Exclusive),' *YouTube* (11 May 2019). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GF2t_VRorXQ>
[13] Abigail D. Shuttleworth, 'On Earth as it is in Heaven': A Critical Discussion of the Theology of Bill Johnson,' in *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association*, Volume 35, No.2 (2015): 102, 114.

questions. The unsystematic nature of Bethel's teaching makes it expedient for me to compare the contours and particularities of their theology to a clearer, and similarly practically oriented, model such as John Wesley's.

Aside from his genealogical context, Wesley is an appropriate interlocutor due to the similarities between his hamartiology and Bethel's. Wesley's motivational-pastoral theology leads him to approach the subject of sin with a light touch, for fear of putting off new converts, as I discuss in Chapter Two. This approach – attractive to many – is a precursor to Bethel's. Furthermore, although this project is not *about* John Wesley, I find his approach to Christian Perfection a useful framing device for my examination of Bethel's hamartiology, and my constructive suggestions of alternatives to Bethel's weak hamartiology at the end of the project. Throughout the thesis, any mention of 'Wesley' alone refers to John; Charles Wesley will always be referred to by first name.

Lastly, my interest in this area of inquiry began with my encountering pop worship from megachurches such as Bethel and Hillsong in local parish churches belonging to the Anglican Communion. Prominent examples in the UK include Holy Trinity Brompton, and St Andrew's Church in Chorleywood. Bethel and their ilk maintain certain theological proclivities that are, in certain respects, quite different from those I defend in this thesis. In particular, they combine the pursuit of prophetic revelation, taken as a normal feature of everyday life, with a suspicion of academic theology, and hamartiology in particular. The fundamental theological differences this position and my own (namely, my enthusiasm for both academic theology and the doctrine of sin) suggest that this critique may not be especially meaningful to them. However, Christian communities that adopt more orthodox foundational theological commitments – including Anglican churches – might find my concerns about Bethel's hamartiology more pertinent. Given the context and direction of this thesis, my beginning with the Methodist departure from mainstream Anglicanism might helpfully contextualise the more contemporary practice of using pop worship in Anglican churches – a phenomenon that results, in a roundabout way, from Wesley's democratisation and simplification of worship.

Although Bethel are not an academic outfit, it is worthwhile addressing their theology simply due to its phenomenal, cross-denominational popularity, garnered at a time whilst

church attendance is declining in the West.[14] Bethel and Independent Network Churches of similar popularity consider the sharing of worship music to be a significant part of their international ministries, as I discuss in Chapter One. It is therefore prudent to interrogate the theological content of these resources, which perpetuate a musical idiom that has been theologically examined in only rather facile ways (more on which in Chapter Five). This idiom, in its current usage, is inadequate for expressing a distinctly Christian theology, insofar as its normative expression of positive affect, as a therapeutic tool, concomitantly neglects the serious expression of sin. This undermines the necessity of the cross and the radical nature of grace, even as it apparently professes the power of Jesus.

0.3 METHOD

I make this argument about the therapeutic end of Bethel's worship music with recourse to musicological analysis, examining songs from Bethel Music's body of work that are concerned, in some substantial way, with sin, or with the overcoming of sin. Thematically, this involves songs conveying an atonement narrative, gratitude for God's saving grace, or songs discussing the transformation of justified Christians in some fashion. I have tried to give a fair and broad account of Bethel's treatment of sin, but it should be noted that their songs that discuss sin are a small portion of their work, which otherwise typically neglects the subject. The examples that I give concern Bethel's use of musical features such as harmony, rhythm, instrumentation, timbre, melody and structure, and I transcribe songs into written notation to substantiate my argument. Although the usefulness of transcribing pop into musical notation is variable, I defend this approach in Chapter Four. When transcribing 'spontaneous songs,' I use stemless noteheads, because this better conveys the improvisatory nature of these worship moments, which are rhythmically very free.

There has been no musico-theological study of contemporary pop worship music, as yet. Pop music has certainly been addressed from a theological perspective, for example in Clive Marsh and Vaughan Williams' book *Personal Jesus: How Popular Music Shapes Our Souls.* However, the theological examination of pop music typically privileges lyrics,

[14] See Conrad Hackett & David McClendon, 'Christians remain world's largest religious group, but they are declining in Europe, *Pew Research Center* (5 April 2017). <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/05/christians-remain-worlds-largest-religious-group-but-they-are-declining-in-europe/> Also, 'America's Changing religious Landscape.' *Pew Forum* (12 May 2015). <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

and ephemeral descriptions of mood, over the music itself. Musicological analysis can bring a greater degree of specificity to this area of study, for example assessing the particular compositional devices that engender particular moods. The approach I take is closer to Jeremy Begbie's work on classical music, which I discuss in Chapter Five.

This is not a sociological project, although I draw from the sociological research available. I make particular use of Robert Wuthnow's study of Willow Creek Church, Monique Ingalls' examination of corporate praise & worship praxis, and Gordon Adnams' useful distinction between "just singing" and "really worshipping" – for the latter, positive affect appears to be substantive. This observation supports my suggestion that the pop worship idiom, in its current form, is incompatible with the expression of a robust hamartiology. I defend the case that music can express meaning in a manner unambiguous enough to significantly shape the theological propositions conveyed by worship lyrics.

0.4 STRUCTURE

The project begins with a genealogy in Chapter One, moving from John and Charles Wesley's establishing of Methodism, through developments in the Holiness, Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in America, towards the impact of John Wimber's theology on Independent Network Christianity. I show how signs of assurance have become more "tangible" in this trajectory, which adopts the motivational-pastoral orientation of John Wesley's theology, rather than the loftier and more angst-laden quality of Charles', which emphasises more the potential of ongoing corruption through sin. My references to "tangible assurance", as I will explain, include overwhelming affective experiences, typically of a positive inclination, and visible charismata, such as healing and prophecy.

Chapter Two presents John Wesley's theology in more detail, specifically examining his weak hamartiology. I address John's disagreement with Charles over the extent of Christian Perfection, to which I return in my conclusion. This provides a comparison point for my explication, in Chapter Three, of Bethel's hamartiology, which is presented as practically irrelevant to the justified Christian. These two chapters outline the specifically hamartiological contours of the discussion to follow; they do not address worship theology in depth, although especially pertinent issues are noted. I then change tack in Chapters

Four and Five, which review the literature pertaining to my field of inquiry (thereby accounting for the brevity of this introduction). Chapter Four consolidates some sociological literature on the subject of contemporary pop worship, and presents three major functions of worship: as a means of spiritual formation, as a means of encountering the divine, and as a means for praising God. Chapter Five establishes some parameters for my musico-theological method, offering three theses of musical expressive meaning, to which my later analysis will conform: the stimulation thesis, the contour thesis, and the convention thesis.

This foundational work facilitates my use of musico-theological analysis in Chapters Six and Seven, which address Bethel Music's worship songs directly. In Chapter Six, I argue that the pop idiom, as it is currently used in mainstream pop worship, renders the worship event a predominantly therapeutic endeavour. I show how mention of hamartiology is softened by two musico-theological devices: "cosmic ambience" and "erotic infantilism." My discussion of the therapeutic draws from the work of Philip Rieff. Chapter Seven examines the normative use of musical climax in Bethel's music, first in their atonement narratives, and then elsewhere. I suggest that the uniform usage of this musical device betrays an overrealised, triumphalist eschatology, wherein sin is only ever of retrospective concern to the justified Christian.

I conclude the project by revisiting the divergence in opinion between John and Charles Wesley regarding Christian Perfection outlined in Chapter Two. I propose a practical approach to hamartiology in pop worship music that draws from both, synthesising the encouraging tone of John (and avoiding the pessimistic rhetoric of Charles) with Charles' high concept of Christian Perfection, which maintains an account of sin as an ongoing corrupting influence on the faculties of knowledge and will. Drawing from Matthew Myer Boulton's argument that worship is always an occasion for sin, and Simeon Zahl's advocation for the transforming work of the Spirit through negative affect, I argue that a more robust hamartiology in pop worship requires the expression of affective diversity. It also needs to diverge from unthinkingly triumphalist and therapeutic musical norms, a point I will elucidate using musical examples.

The aim of this project is not to construct some musico-theological aesthetic treatise, or to denigrate pop worship as a worthwhile resource for Christian living. Nor am I attempting

to “perfect” Christian worship. I simply intend, in the absence of any other critiques of pop worship that address compositional devices, to identify some of the specific ways in which the pop idiom actively hampers a robust hamartiology from being expressed in worship. Without a robust hamartiology, the orthodox dialectic of sin and grace is compromised, distorting the Gospel narrative, including the significance of the cross, and the relation of man and God. By contrast, engaging this dialectic also equips worship to problematise itself, as an act expressive of human failing as much as it is of praise. The therapeutic, if it is taken as the *ultimate* end of worship, is anathema to these endeavours, softening the Gospel of its mention of sin, and ebulliently presenting a most anodyne account of grace.

CHAPTER ONE

Bethel Church: A Genealogy

CONTEXTUALISING BETHEL * WESLEYAN METHODISM * HOLINESS, PENTECOSTALISM AND THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT * BETHEL CHURCH, REDDING * SUMMARY

1.1 CONTEXTUALISING BETHEL

Described by Doug Geivett and Holly Pivec as 'a sort of NAR version of Lourdes', Bethel Church in Redding, Northern California, is an internationally notorious site of Charismatic activity.[15] Bethel is an 'Independent Network Church', loosely associated with a non-denominational network called the 'New Apostolic Reformation,' as evidenced by Bethel's mode of church governance, in which senior apostolic figures promulgate a highly intuitive approach to spiritual discernment and religious formation.[16] The NAR, INC and Bethel Church itself result from over two centuries of post-Reformation ecclesiology in America, wherein the participatory and affective elements of John Wesley's Methodism have developed into myriad different instantiations of experiential, and increasingly Charismatic, Christian practice.

Redding itself is a quiet town, known today for the megachurch in its midst, and for its extraordinarily high number of opioid addicts.[17] Local opinion is divided regarding the benefits of Bethel's presence in the town, exacerbated by the often-unfamiliar Charismatic practices Bethel's many devotees publicly perform, and the church's increasing influence over local government. Whilst having largely refrained from planting new churches, Bethel has grown from a Pentecostal church with 2000 members in the later twentieth century to a global church brand with multiple locations ('Twin View,' 'College View,' and the local

[15] R. Douglas Geivett & Holly Pivec, *A New Apostolic Reformation?* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2014), 188.
[16] Costi W. Hinn & Anthony G. Wood, *Defining Deception* (El Cajon: Southern California Seminary Press: 2018), vii, n1.
[17] Molly Hensley-Clancy, 'Meet The "Young Saints" Of Bethel Who Go To College To Perform Miracles,' *BuzzFeed* (12 October 2017). <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/mollyhensleyclancy/meet-the-young-saints-of-bethel-who-go-to-college-to>

Cascade Theatre), a record label, a non-accredited university, and a weekly attendance rate of around 6000 people.[18] Bethel's 'School of Supernatural Ministry' (BSSM) offers training in the gifts of the Holy Spirit to thousands of domestic and international students each year. The enhanced levels of spiritual activity reported at Bethel, and the leadership team's reputed spiritual authority and wisdom, bring in a huge number of visitors annually, often searching for healing, charismatic gifting or prophecies.

Although the church functions, in this way, as a site of pilgrimage and spiritual formation, Bethel's most internationally well-known ministry is their record label. Alongside other internationally recognised INC church bands, such as Hillsong United, IHOPKC and Gateway Worship, Bethel Music (also known as the Bethel Collective) are amongst the best-selling Christian artists in the world, performing well on secular as well as Christian music charts. Their 2016 album *Have It All* debuted at No. 6 on the Billboard Top Albums chart, for example, and was rated above secular Billboard staples Kendrick Lamar, Adele and Justin Bieber in the week of 2nd April 2016. Upon its release, *Have It All* remained at No. 1 on the iTunes Album Chart for six days, becoming the overall No. 1 album in Canada, as well as No. 3 in Australia and No. 7 in the UK.[19] Bethel Music have had several other albums reach the top ten of Billboard's Digital Albums chart, thirteen singles placed on the Billboard 200, and five No. 1 hits on Billboard's Top Christian Albums chart.[20]

Bethel Music do not exclusively create albums for private listening, however. Since achieving mainstream popularity, the Bethel Music label has produced countless songs, such as 'Forever', 'No Longer Slaves' and 'It Is Well,' that have been incorporated into contemporary worship services worldwide, not only in INC churches, but cross-denominationally. Bethel conceive of their mission as the advancement of a global revival that ushers in the Kingdom of God, deploying resources and training Charismatic leaders around the world to this end.[21] Revival, as they understand it, will involve the transformation of the universal church away from the 'spirit of religion' that stifles the

[18] Martyn Wendell Jones, 'Inside the Popular, Controversial Bethel Church,' *Christianity Today* (24 April 2016). <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/may/cover-story-inside-popular-controversial-bethel-church.html>
[19] Herb Longs, 'Bethel Music's "Have It All" Becomes Worship Ministry's Highest Billboard Top Albums Debut,' *The Christian Beat* (21 March 2016). <http://www.thechristianbeat.org/index.php/news/1810-bethel-music-s-have-it-all-becomes-worship-ministry-s-highest-billboard-top-albums-debut> Also, 'Digital Albums: April 2, 2016,' *Billboard*. <https://www.billboard.com/charts/digital-albums/2016-04-02>
[20] 'Bethel Music: Chart History,' *Billboard*. <https://www.billboard.com/music/Bethel-Music>
[21] 'Church,' *Bethel*. <https://www.bethel.com/church/>

unmediated experience of God.[22] I will revisit Bethel's mission in due course. At present, it suffices to note that I am attributing the particular theological significance of Bethel's worship music to its pedagogical and doxological functions, affective properties and international popularity.

It is difficult to fully systematise Bethel's theology, because it is a practical theology developed by a network of non-systematic thinkers. However, Bethel's genealogy can be traced back through the Charismatic, Pentecostal and Holiness movements, to Methodism in America. Doing this will contextualise Bethel Church's weak hamartiology, which is the product of an incremental subordination of doctrine and scripture to unmediated experience as an authoritative theological source. In this chapter, I explain the origins of Bethel as a church movement, whilst the following two chapters analyse Bethel's doctrine, by way of an extended comparison with John Wesley's hamartiology.

The development from Wesley's Methodism through Pentecostalism to contemporary Charismatic networks like Independent Network Christianity belies two major theological shifts. Firstly, increasing theological authority is attributed to unmediated religious experience. Affect, in particular, is associated with a more "direct" or "authentic" form of religion. Scripture is interpreted through an experiential lens, and concerns about the noetic effects of sin or the ineffability of God are minimised. Secondly, this turn towards subjective experience transforms the signs of assurance. Where Wesley associates assurance with affect, which can effect fruits of the Spirit and obedience to the Law, Pentecostals and Charismatics come to present spiritual signs themselves as assurances of faith. Thus the Wesleyan concern for participation in Christian disciplines is supplanted by the enthusiastic pursuit of "tangible" signs of assurance: for example, physiological changes such as healing, rather than subtler transformations such as the acquisition of virtue. I will continue to use the phrase "tangible assurance," to this effect.

Relying on tangible assurance entails an 'optimistic' or 'high' anthropology, which underemphasises the ongoing consequences of sin, for example noetic or desiderative

[22] Bethel's teaching often draws a dichotomy between the 'spirit of religion' and the 'spirit of truth', which pertains to a broad distaste for religious traditionalism, and preference for unmediated religious experience. I will return to this in more detail, later in this chapter.

corruption.[23] Simeon Zahl notes that Luther's *sola scriptura* offered a potential safeguard against the conscious and unconscious tendency to 'control God' by constructing an image of God according to our subjective tendencies. Contrary to the Charismatic movements I will address shortly, Luther rightly perceived that religious 'enthusiasm' could complicate assurance of salvation, by measuring faith according to tangible, but often elusive, feelings and relying overmuch on individual competence regarding their interpretation. This risk manifests in many of the movements that adopt Wesley's conception of faith as both intellectual and affective, as I will later show. Zahl further notes Luther's claim that the invention of a new form of legalism is inevitable when Scripture is no longer used as a primary, authoritative source for theology. Exactly this problem materialises throughout the last two centuries of American Christianity as movements and churches define themselves in contrast to the prevailing culture of their day.[24]

Zahl also notes Luther's suggestion that championing religious affect risks overstating the positive feelings induced by the Spirit, undermining the premise of human fallenness to which salvation responds, and leading to increasingly optimistic anthropology wherein fallenness retains no influence on mankind.[25] This optimistic anthropology finds form, during the 19th century, in movements such as Christian Science and New Thought, which claimed that one's mental and spiritual action can result in physical healing. New Thought, in particular, promulgated a radically exemplarist (rather than salvific) model of Christ as a 'friend' and 'way-shower.'[26] The movement significantly influenced the 20th-century Evangelical preacher Norman Peale, who claimed, in turn, that supernatural benefits resulted directly from human will, in collaboration with divine grace.[27] A similar theology is espoused by the contemporary pastor and televangelist Joel Osteen, who derives normative 'promises' from the Bible and encourages Christians to make daily 'declarations' of them, in order to 'affirm God's blessings in the areas of health, family legacy, decisions, finances, thoughts, outlook, and overcoming obstacles.'[28] Optimistic

[23] Simeon Zahl, *Pneumatology and Theology of the Cross in the Preaching of Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 4n4, 5: Zahl defines a 'low' anthropology as that which 'acknowledges a relatively greater ongoing power of sin, egoism and proclivity to self-deception in human beings, while 'high anthropology' signifies the reverse. An 'optimistic' or 'pessimistic' anthropology signifies an attitude towards Christians' corresponding capacity to do good, and tendency towards or away from evil.
[24] Ibid., 178-9.
[25] Ibid., 2.
[26] Carol George, *God's Salesman* (Oxford: OUP, 1993), 145.
[27] Ibid.,16; Norman Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (London: Vermilion, 2004), 60-1.
[28] See, for example, Joel Osteen, *I Declare: 31 Promises to Speak Over Your Life* (Brentwood: FaithWords, 2013).

anthropology of this sort is a hallmark of the Charismatic practical theology Bethel espouse, as the next chapter shows.[29]

Although this optimistic anthropology has its disadvantages, which I examine in later chapters, it also has its benefits. Zahl rightly perceives that Luther's attempt to 'safeguard' theology by stressing the universality of sin and God's judgment actually undermines the particularity of the individual, and their personal encounter with the Spirit in sanctification, in favour of the "objective" Word of God.[30] By contrast, the Methodist, Pentecostal and Charismatic movements I now detail are not only participatory ecclesiological models, but also attend to the individual, and, at best, are highly encouraging vehicles for religious formation. The following genealogy illustrates the motivational and affective thread running through Bethel's antecedents.

1.2 WESLEYAN METHODISM

John Wesley's Methodism was born jointly of a disappointing period in Anglican history, the 'unspiritual church' then replete with money-grubbing and neglectful parsons, and of Wesley's own dissatisfaction with Reformed doctrines, and Reformed soteriology in particular.[31] Wesley's concern was to preach a Gospel in which affective experience, informed by the Law, motivated the transformation of individuals by inaugurating a feeling of personal relationship with God.[32] This motivational quality and inclination towards personal religion has been replicated in the later, Charismatic movements that Methodism spawned.[33] In the pursuit of this endeavour, Wesley came to flout the ecclesiological rules and norms of the Church of England, compelled by the vitality of his own ministry and

[29] Anecdotally, I visited Bethel in April 2019. Whilst passively observing a healing event on Saturday 6th April, I noted that a member of the prayer team who shared a woman's healing testimony on stage claimed that 'when we declare and celebrate testimonies, we release them to happen again.'
[30] Zahl, *Blumhardt,* 182
[31] Albert Brown-Lawson, *John Wesley and the Anglican Evangelicals of the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh: The Pentland Press, 1994), 8.
[32] Kenneth J. Collins, 'Wesley's Life and Ministry' in Randy Maddox & Jason Vickers (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), 44.
[33] David Hempton, *The Religion of the People* (London: Routledge, 1996), 84. Also, Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 16: Maddox defends Albert Outler's description of John Wesley as a 'folk theologian', whilst making clear that this is not a pejorative or dismissive description. Maddox notes that Wesley was theologically learned, and Outler's description of him serves a call for academic theologians to 'recast' the 'dominant model of theology' in a manner more integrated with Christian life. Outler, notes Maddox, thought John Wesley a good example to follow in this respect. The "folk theologies" of the neo-Charismatic movement are not integrations of academic and practical theology in this way, but they do share Wesley's motivational tendency, and concern for religious affect.

undeterred by the objections of Anglican church government. He also developed a highly focused hamartiology, oriented towards self-discipline and religious assurance, which is my concern in the next chapter. Methodism begat a number of subsequent religious movements, proving especially prone to schism. This was due in part to the role of Wesley himself as a Charismatic leader, adopting ever more authority, and a liberal attitude, in his own case at least, towards Anglican rules about preaching and ordination. Methodist emphasis on individual responsibility for tangible personal transformation through the Spirit further fostered an antipathy to certain forms of Christian tradition and ritual. Yet Wesley did not set out to directly challenge church government and tradition – at least, not initially.

John and his brother Charles were raised outside the Anglican mainstream by the Reverend Samuel Wesley and his wife, Susannah; the household was 'a curious mixture of High Church Anglicanism and Puritanism.'[34] John and Charles became clergymen after studying at the University of Oxford, where the term 'Methodists' was established as a disparaging moniker to describe the evangelical coterie established by Charles and led by John. This nickname referred to the group's commitment to Christian disciplines, including fasting, ritualised prayer and daily reading of the Greek New Testament. The original Methodists at Oxford were thought unfashionable and fanatical, with opposition to the group prompted by their suspected religious enthusiasm.[35]

John Wesley's concern for Christian works was informed by the Arminianism instilled in him by his parents.[36] English Arminians, such as the Wesley brothers, conceived of religion as the result of a partnership between divine and human free will. They considered Calvin's doctrine of double-predestination doxologically problematic, for reducing the individual's response to God – a tyrant who arbitrarily elects some people and not others – to complacent election or helpless condemnation.[37] This is well demonstrated by 'The Horrible Decree,' perhaps Charles Wesley's most virulently anti-Calvinist hymn. The many verses describe the Spirit's grief over the blasphemous Calvinist doctrine that originates in hell:

[34] Brown-Lawson, *Wesley,* 135.
[35] Ibid., 11.
[36] Ibid., 151.
[37] Jason Vickers, 'Wesley's theological emphases,' in Maddox & Vickers, *Cambridge Companion,* 192.

[...] O horrible decree
Worthy of whence it came!
Forgive their hellish blasphemy
Who charge it on the Lamb:
Whose pity him inclin'd
To leave his throne above,
The friend, and Saviour of mankind,
The God of grace, and love.

O gracious, loving Lord,
I feel thy bowels yearn;
For those who slight the gospel word
I share in thy concern:
How art thou grieved to be
By ransom'd worms withstood!
How dost thou bleed afresh to see
Them trample on thy blood!

To limit thee they dare,
Blaspheme thee to thy face,
Deny their fellow-worms a share
In thy redeeming grace:
All for their own they take,
Thy righteousness engross,
Of none effect to most they make
The merits of thy cross. [...][38]

Although John and Charles Wesley shared their hatred of Calvinism, the brothers did not see eye to eye on all theological matters. Charles was more orthodox, and more loyal to the Church of England than his brother. His concepts of sin and sanctification were much higher than John's.[39] Charles qualified the sunny image John often painted of the Christian life, integrating suffering and negative affect into his account of the Gospel. Inspired by the

[38] John R. Tyson, *Charles Wesley: A Reader* (Oxford: OUP, 1989), 304.
[39] Ibid., 360 – 361.

ailments that plagued him all his life, Charles conceived of faith as a quiet feeling of inner comfort that persists despite the struggles of the material world.[40] The brothers' distinct approaches to sin will become more important in the next chapter.

Affect and Assurance

Wesley's Arminianism shaped his Methodist practical theology, not least evidenced in the significance he attributed to the motivation of believers, given the partly determinative role of free will in salvation.[41] Wesley also suspected Calvinism of encouraging antinomianism. However, he did not want to present the Law as some Pharisaical instrument to replace God with a cold moral code, claiming instead that the Law communicates the face of God to humankind (insofar as this is possible). For Wesley, the moral law resembles God in 'heart', 'nature' and 'mind', and is naturally comprehensible to humankind by virtue of the *imago dei*.[42] Wesley further argues that the covenant of works established in the creation narrative imbues the relationship between humankind and God with a practical quality. These convictions ground Wesley's idea that good works should naturally follow sanctifying grace. The importance Wesley attributes to personal motivation for good works is implied in Brown-Lawson's claim that Wesley was more concerned with 'the claims of Calvinism' and Arminianism, rather than the primary sources (of which it is not clear what, if anything, he read directly).[43] Wesley's Arminianism would eventually prove the root of many disagreements, notably with his fellow Methodist, George Whitefield, and with the English Evangelicals (or "Church-Men").[44]

In 1735, after serving his curacy and becoming a fellow at Lincoln College, Oxford, Wesley encountered a group of Moravians whilst travelling to Georgia. Wesley was particularly impressed by the composure of the Moravians, who calmly sang hymns during a fearsome sea storm.[45] The two-year mission in Georgia proved disappointing, but Wesley's time with the Moravians was formative, and he adopted one, Peter Böhler, as a spiritual director. Harold Lindström suggests that the influence of the Moravians upon Wesley did not simply guarantee the place of Lutheran justification by faith within his

[40] Ibid., 7, 40.
[41] Colin Williams, 'John Wesley's Theology Today on Authority and Experience', in Charles Yrigoyen (ed.), *T&T Clark Companion to Methodism* (London: T&T Clark, 2010).
[42] Vickers, 'Theological Emphases', 193-4.
[43] Brown-Lawson, *Wesley*, 150-1.
[44] Ibid., 166-7.
[45] Collins, 'Wesley's Life and Ministry,' 46.

theology, but also emphasised the significance of the love of God in the life of faith.[46] This theme, which would become central to Wesley's theology, was realised on the 24th May, 1738. Shortly after returning to England, Wesley had formed the Fetter Lane Society in London, an open society of multiple denominations. Here, Wesley had his famous Aldersgate experience, a formative moment of religious affect:

> ...while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation: and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death... herein I found the difference between this and my former state chiefly consisted. I was striving, yea, fighting with all my might under the law, as well as under grace. But then I was sometimes, if not often, conquered; now, I was always conqueror.[47]

The Aldersgate event marked Wesley's self-identified 'evangelical conversion.'[48] The 'strangely warmed heart' which Wesley experienced signified, to him, his acceptance of salvific grace and the transformation of his will in keeping with the will of God. Three days previously, Charles had undergone his own evangelical conversion, described in his hymn 'Where Shall my Wondering Soul Begin?' which the brothers allegedly sang together after Aldersgate:

> Where shall my wondering soul begin?
> How shall I all to heaven aspire?
> A slave redeemed from death and sin,
> a brand plucked from eternal fire,
> how shall I equal triumphs raise,
> or sing my great deliverer's praise?
>
> [...] For you the purple current flowed
> in pardon from his wounded side,

[46] Harald Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification* (London: The Epworth Press, 1956), 8.
[47] John Wesley, *The Journal of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2000), 36-7.
[48] Charles Wesley had his own evangelical conversion that same month: see Kenneth Newport, *The Sermons of Charles Wesley* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 54.

> languished for you the eternal God,
> for you the Prince of Glory died.
> Believe, and all your sin's forgiven,
> only believe - and yours is heaven.[49]

After Aldersgate, Wesley still felt beholden to sin, yet considered this an unwilling, rather than willing, captivity.[50] He sensed that he had received only a measure of grace, and vacillated, in his later teachings, regarding the extent to which he thought believers might be sanctified. Heitzenratzer has suggested that Wesley's optimistic attitude towards 'Christian Perfection,' which contrasted with his brother Charles' more pessimistic view, was often 'apologetic and propagandistic', and intended to motivate believers in the practical pursuit of Christian perfection.[51] Importantly, John Wesley's hamartiology, and his concept of Christian Perfection, pertain almost exclusively to actual, rather than original, sin. Consequently, 'freedom from sin,' for him, amounts to refraining from committing deliberate acts of sin.

Wesley's transformation at Aldersgate shaped his *ordo salutis*, and theology of assurance. I will revisit this in the next chapter, on Wesley's hamartiology, but note here that Wesley's soteriology emphasises individual agency – in accepting salvation, and in actualising its benefits. For example, Wesley states that unlimited atonement is available to anyone who chooses to assent, such assent being made available through irresistable 'prevenient' grace.[52] Further, Wesley considered 'Christian Perfection' the 'end of religion' that ought to be actualised in Christians. This entailed the full dedication of the individual to God, and therefore also to the neighbour, in love.[53] Lastly, Wesley conceives of faith as 'personal trust' in God, complicating the theology of assurance that Arminianism presents as the result of intellectual assent.[54] Sincerity in this regard could be assured by the 'inner witness' of the Holy Spirit to God's love for humanity, which would manifest naturally in

[49] Tyson, *Charles Wesley,* 102-3.
[50] Collins, 'Wesley's Life and Ministry,' 47-48.
[51] See Vickers, 'Theological Emphases', 205, and Richard Heitzenrater, 'John and Charles Wesley: Life, Ministry and Legacy,' in Yrigoyen (ed.), *Methodism*, 5. See also Randy Maddox, 'The Theology of John and Charles Wesley,' in Yrigoyen (ed.), *Methodism,* 30: whilst Charles thinks suffering is necessary for growth in holiness, John does not. Ultimately, John's less pronounced concern for the role of suffering in faith wins out, with many contemporary Charismatic movements, including Bethel Church, teaching that the message of the Gospel entails immediate, full relief from all physical suffering.
[52] Vickers, 'Theological Emphases,' 200.
[53] Vickers, 'Theological Emphases,' 205.
[54] Lindström, *Sanctification*, 58.

the fruits of the Spirit. (This is unlike Charles, who presents assurance as a feeling of inner peace, or conviction in God's goodness, despite appreciating miraculous signs.)[55]

Wesley's theology of assurance, in this respect, regrettably incentivises the religious enthusiasm with which he was charged during his Oxford days. John Wesley distinguishes between justifying faith and perfect faith, allowing for ongoing doubt and fear in the life of the saved Christian, unlike his estranged contemporaries, the sometime Methodists George Bell and Thomas Maxfield.[56] Although Wesley was concerned by the reputational damage caused to the Methodists by Bell and Maxfield's claims of entire sanctification, he did not develop his doctrine of assurance any further than the tautologous criteria detailed above: the presence of the Spirit is manifest in fruits that are to be discerned through the Spirit.[57]

Wesley was neither uncritically accepting or dubious of Charismatic experiences. In a journal entry on 17 March 1746, Wesley notes an 'odd accident' of healing, wherein he is relieved of a headache, and his horse of lameness, after inwardly uttering the cantankerous prayer, "Cannot God heal either man or beast, by any means, or without any?"[58] However, Maddox notes that Wesley was sceptical towards 'emotional expression or extravagant behaviour', even while he allowed it in his revival meetings, wanting to uphold Scripture as the measure of its legitimacy. Maddox offers a pneumatological dichotomy, for Wesley, between 'extraordinary' and 'ordinary operations' of the Spirit (Wesley being more interested in the latter).[59]

Wesley's complicated account of assurance as an affective phenomenon fuelled not only the practical streak in Methodism, but also foreran a shift in attitude towards signs of assurance. What Wesley considered 'extraordinary' operations of the Spirit, such as glossolalia, healing and affective experiences of unusual intensity, have since been presented increasingly as normative signs of assurance.[60] This appears to indicate an increasing desire for signs of assurance, and a raising standard regarding the tangibility, if

[55] Tyson, *Charles Wesley,* 7, 169. Charles was, nevertheless, suspicious of overreliance on religious experience, as per his response to the Moravian 'stillness' controversy. See Tyson, *Charles Wesley*, 33, 261, 271.
[56] Collins, 'Wesley's Life and Ministry', 50; Brown-Lawson, *Wesley,* 290-292.
[57] Vickers, 'Theological Emphases,' 201-2.
[58] Wesley, *The Journal of John Wesley*, 90.
[59] See Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 133.
[60] See, for example: 'Supernatural Weight Loss,' *Bethel* (4 April 2016). <https://www.bethel.com/testimonies/supernatural-weight-loss/> 'Youth Ministers On Airplane,' *Bethel* (5 April 2016). <https://www.bethel.com/testimonies/youth-ministers-on-airplane/> 'A Walking Miracle,' *Bethel* (10 May 2016). <https://www.bethel.com/testimonies/a-walking-miracle-2/>

not the quality, thereof. As "evidence" of the Spirit's presence becomes more tangible, discernment adopts an ever-shrinking degree of significance: anything observably extraordinary might be interpreted as a sign of the Spirit's presence.

Wesleyan Ecclesiology

By framing assurance as an affective, and therefore personal, matter, Wesley had also further removed religion from the exclusive purview of church government and tradition. This was reflected in Methodism's distinctive grassroots organisational structure. Wesley had, to the dismay of many Anglicans, commissioned lay preachers, preached outside, and engaged in denominationally pluralist activities.[61] For example, the Fetter Lane Society that Wesley had founded alongside the Moravian Peter Böhler incurred the disapproval of the Church of England, as it was necessarily diverse in this respect.[62]

John Wesley's maverick tendencies as a priest reached their zenith after the American colonies established their independence in 1776. Wesley was unable to find priests willing to minister in America, which had freshly disestablished itself from the Anglican church. Consequently, he interpreted the ordination practices of the early Church in Alexandria as authorising him, in these straitened circumstances, to ordain new priests himself.[63] Although John Wesley appeared blind to the notion that this was a significant moment in his long history of Anglican rule-breaking, his brother Charles was quite aware of the significance, 'deploring' the move that saw the likes of Thomas Coke, Richard Boardman, Joseph Pilmore and Francis Asbury travel to the newly independent United States of America in order to promote Methodism in America.[64]

Less controversially, the Methodist devolution towards individual responsibility and participation in the life of faith also manifested in their worship practices. Although hymn singing was not officially permitted in Anglican services until 1821,[65] Charles Wesley

[61] By 1739, both Wesleys had been effectively exiled from preaching in consecrated buildings. John's apparent willingness to disobey Anglican strictures had, further, alienated him more generally from many Evangelicals, who also opposed his Arminianism. See Brown-Lawson, *Wesley*, 35, 302. For consideration of Wesley's sense of 'extraordinary calling,' see Adrian Burdon, *Authority and Order* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 5, 26.
[62] Brown-Lawson, *Wesley*, 35, 47: Brown-Lawson also notes Charles' discomfort with the Wesley's rule-breaking, acquiescing in light of its apparent necessity. John Wesley was not opposed to ecclesial structure outright, as he confirms in a journal entry on 25 August 1763. Here, he writes that 'preaching like an apostle', without also putting in place corporate spiritual practices and disciplines, 'is only begetting children for the murderer... nine in ten of the once-awakened are now faster asleep than ever.' See Wesley, *Journal*, 169.
[63] Burdon, *Authority,* 57.
[64] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity* (London: Penguin, 2010), 752.
[65] S.T. Kimbrough Jr., 'Hymnody of Charles Wesley' in in Yrigoyen, *Methodism*, 57.

composed an especially vast body of devotional lyrics.[66] (It is worth noting that the Wesley brothers wrote lyrics only, and not music.)[67] The Wesley brothers produced multiple collections of hymns, such as the 1780 'Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists,' although the American Methodists asserted their own particular preferences in matters of hymnody. The 'renegade hymnal' created by Robert Spence in 1781 so inflamed Wesley's disapproval that he directed Coke and Asbury to write a new, less objectionable version. This became a bestseller, and was continually republished between 1790 and 1832.[68] For the Methodists, hymn singing encapsulated the combination of doctrine and affect the Wesleys advocated, within the spiritual discipline of sung praise. Tucker has noted that the doxological aspect of hymn singing rendered it especially important in the Wesleys' view: love of God and appreciation for the Law were combined in an accessible and moving medium.[69] Such participatory church praxis, evident in the Wesleys' approach to preaching and worship, would manifest again and again in the movements to which it gave rise.

Methodism became an enormously popular component of America's Second Great Awakening of the early 19th century. From 1776 to 1850, the percentage of Methodists amongst religious people in the United States soared from 2.5% to 34.2%.[70] The growing Methodist movement presented itself as a dynamic and spontaneous grassroots operation that emphasised individual affect and pious praxis.[71] Virginia became the first 'stronghold' of American Methodism in the late 18th century, stewarded by the Reverend Devereaux Jarratt, and attending more to personal religion than creeds, liturgy or tradition.[72] Vinson Synan describes a positive 'swing' in concern for feeling, experience and morality at this point in the development of Methodism. He attributes this to a collective desire, during the

[66] Maddox, 'The Theology of John and Charles Wesley,' in Yrigoyen, *Methodism*, 26-27.
[67] Although Charles never wrote any music, Samuel Wesley (son of John) and Samuel Sebastian Wesley (grandson of John) were both renowned composers and organists in the Anglican tradition. Whilst many of Samuel's works were forgotten shortly after publication, Samuel Sebastian's compositions – hymn tunes, anthems and services alike – have remained in fond use by the Church of England. See Nicholas Temperly, Philip Olleson, Stanley C. Pelkey, and Peter Horton, 'Wesley Family', *Grove Music Online* (2001). <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:10246/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000044468>
[68] John R. Tyson, 'The Methodist National Anthem: "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing" and the Development of American Methodism,' in Mark Noll & Edith Blumhofer (ed.), *Sing Them Over to Me Again* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006), 23.
[69] Karen Westerfield Tucker, 'Wesley's Emphases on Worship and the Means of Grace', in Maddox & Vickers, *Cambridge Companion*, 232.
[70] Hempton, *Religion,* 9.
[71] Russell Richey, 'Early American Methodism', in Vickers, Jason E. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 45.
[72] Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 21.

turbulent Antebellum period, for a more hopeful religion than Calvinism.[73] This desire for hope also manifested in the peaceable Unitarianism and Transcendentalism of the early 19th century, which, like Methodism, emphasised the opportunity for individual self-improvement.

1. 3 HOLINESS, PENTECOSTALISM AND THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT

By 1840, religious perfectionism had become a major feature of American life, resulting in social movements agitating for women's rights and the abolition of slavery, as well as prohibition and anti-Masonry.[74] Christian Perfection entailed a calling, following conversion, to live a 'holy and religious' life in the world,[75] but certain traits were thought to aid or result in this endeavour, such as virginity, temperance and voluntary poverty.[76] Religious perfectionism underpinned the Holiness movement, the origins of which had been established within Methodism in the 1830s and 1840s.[77] Charles H. Lippy has described the Antebellum Holiness movement as something of an urban equivalent to the rural Methodist camp meeting tradition, wherein people would meet together to listen to itinerant preachers and to sing in worship.[78] The 'crusade for holiness' of the 1830s and 1840s began in the New York home of Sarah Lankford, who established the 'Tuesday Meetings for the Promotion of Holiness' in 1835, around which the movement coalesced.[79]

Holiness advocated a Wesleyan Arminianism with respect to the active pursuit of sanctification; Lankford's sister, Phoebe Palmer, claimed to receive full sanctification through faith and obedience to Scripture in 1837. Palmer began promoting what she described as a 'shorter way' to Wesley's Christian perfection, her success in this respect resulting in her leadership of the Tuesday meetings from 1839 onwards.[80] Palmer wrote numerous books claiming that believers could attain entire sanctification as a 'second

[73] Synan, *Holiness*, 22.
[74] Ibid., 28.
[75] Brown-Lawson, *Wesley*, 142-3.
[76] Ibid., 145.
[77] Randall Stephens, 'The Holiness/Pentecostal/Charismatic Extension of the Wesleyan Tradition', in Vickers, *American Methodism*, 264.
[78] Charles H. Lippy, 'The Camp Meeting in Transition: The Character and Legacy of the Late Nineteenth Century,' in *Methodist History,* Volume 34, No.1 (October 1995): 4-5.
[79] Synan, *Holiness*, 29; 54.
[80] Synan, *Holiness*, 29-30. Palmer's daughter, Phoebe Palmer Knapp, went on to become an organist and composer of hymns. Examples of her work include 'All For Jesus! All For Jesus!' and 'O Now I See the Crimson Wave.' See Phoebe Palmer Knapp, *Notes of Joy for the Sabbath School* (New York: W.C. Palmer Jr., 1869).

blessing' following baptism.[81] William K. Kay argues that Palmer's Holiness theology 'took an overtly Pentecostal turn' in her book *The Promise of the Father* (1859), wherein she identified entire sanctification with baptism in the Holy Spirit.[82] This significantly diverged from John Wesley's Christian Perfection, not only predicating entire sanctification upon faith and the will, but actively attributing supernatural gifts of the Spirit to the entirely sanctified. According to Kay, this shifts the Holiness Movement's centre of gravity from soteriology to pneumatology, grounding the later Pentecostal and Charismatic movements' emphasis on supernatural empowerment, for example for physical healing.[83]

Holiness teaching attributed the initial offer of regeneration to the grace of God alone, and claimed that believers could avoid wilful sin after receiving full sanctification. This went further than either of the Wesleys, who had, ultimately, refuted the possibility of full sanctification in this life (using, instead, their distinctive concepts of Christian Perfection). The Holiness approach to actualised sin resulted in an increasingly perfectionist tendency, with crusaders disapproving of various vices, such as smoking and drinking. This eventually led to a political schism between Northern and Southern Methodism: Northern Methodist strongholds began to develop an 'evangelically anti-slavery' outlook, unlike their Southern counterparts.[84]

The Holiness movement thrived through this schism. After the Civil War ended in 1865, graduates of formal seminary training, often undertaken in Germany, began infiltrating the ranks of Methodist clergy, much to the dismay of their congregants. Methodist fixtures such as plain dress, class meetings and congregational hymn singing were compromised, with robed choirs, clerical gowns and progressive theology introduced in their stead.[85] Congregants were, once again, alienated from the doxologically important act of sung praise, listening passively to choral music, rather than participating in rousing hymnody themselves. The Holiness movement was accepted in many Methodist churches as a bastion of older Methodist principles against the combination of theological progressivism and high-church ritual latent amongst the new clergymen.[86] Synan describes Holiness as a

[81] Stephens, 'The Wesleyan Tradition,' 265.
[82] William Kay, *Pentecostalism* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 31.
[83] Ibid., 33.
[84] Synan, *Holiness*, 30
[85] Ibid., 34-35
[86] Ibid., 40-41. Amongst the 'offensive' progressive ideas Synan cites are Albert Schweitzer's work on the historical Jesus, and Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.

'conservative counterweight among the lower classes to the liberal thinking of the upper and middle classes', peaking in popularity during the 1880s and giving rise to its own churches between 1890 and 1917.[87]

The Azusa Street Revival

By the turn of the 20th century, several strains of Holiness had developed variations on the idea that, subsequent to regeneration, further imputation of grace might be available in the form of 'full sanctification', entailing 'sinless perfection'. This, and the desire for the resultant charismata, formed the foundation of Pentecostalism: some Holiness factions had begun to chafe against the constraints of American Protestantism, expressing a desire for a 'new Pentecost' that seemed to be willed into being.[88] The decisive split that emerged between Methodist Holiness and Pentecostalism was, argues Synan, the 'logical outcome of the Holiness crusade,' and its growing affective dimensions.[89]

This split is commonly attributed to the catalytic events of the 1906 Azusa Street revival, although those events were not entirely unprecedented. For example, there had been several outbreaks of glossolalia in England and Wales and America at the end of the 19th century, known to prominent 'fringe' pastors in Los Angeles such as Joseph Smale and Frank Bartleman.[90] The 'apostle' of the Azusa Street revival was W. J. Seymour, a Southern Holiness preacher who precipitated the events when he fell into a religious ecstasy and an outbreak of glossolalia, during a fringe Holiness meeting in April 1906, held in an abandoned Methodist church building at 312 Azusa Street. Seymour had been preaching that glossolalia was a sure sign of the inbreaking of the Holy Spirit, much to the chagrin of local Holiness associations.[91] Three years of glossolalia and claims of prophecy followed, and the Pentecostal movement was born amidst signs, wonders and notoriety.[92]

Like Holiness and Methodism before it, Pentecostalism sought a "fuller", more affective and embodied, experience of God. Its adherents believed that the Church had lost its way after Pentecost, adhering to lifeless formalism, and neglecting spiritual activity. The movement affirmed justification by faith, and suggested that true faith would correlate with

[87] Ibid., 57.
[88] Ibid., 142.
[89] Ibid., 115.
[90] Ibid., 99.
[91] Ibid., 105-6.
[92] Ibid., 112, 144.

tangible gifts of the Spirit such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing and signs.[93] Healing, specifically, was thought to have been made available for all by Christ's atonement, a claim that would become central to the ministry of Bethel Church a century later.[94] Spiritual gifts were now attributed to a distinctive 'third blessing' of 'spirit baptism.' Contrasting with Phoebe Palmer's 'second blessing,' the three stages of blessing were now typically taken to indicate belief and repentance, incorporation into the body of Christ, and empowerment with the gifts of the Spirit. This 'spirit baptism' was thought to commission the believer specifically into a life of service to God, manifest not only in Christian works, but also in gifts of the Spirit, such as glossolalia and miracles.[95] Kay notes that disagreements have persisted amongst Pentecostals regarding which of these blessings, if any, might be conferred simultaneously.[96]

Land has noted the continuing Arminianism of Pentecostalism's emphasis on human agency in the outworking of salvation and sanctification. He has suggested additionally that it is somewhat Calvinist in its use of Law as the basis of spiritual formation. (Synan notes the parallels between Methodist perfectionism and the early Pentecostals' criticism of 'social sins' as diverse as tobacco, life insurance, medicine, dance halls, movies, Coca-Cola, public swimming, professional sports, beauty parlours and jewellery.)[97] Land has also compared the Pentecostal understanding of sanctification as participation in the activity of God to the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of *theosis.*[98] The authority of Scripture was subordinated to the illumination of Scripture by the Spirit, which could only be discerned experientially.[99]

The Assemblies of God Controversies

The early days of Pentecostalism saw several internal doctrinal issues emerge, relevant to the contemporary distinction between the New Apostolic Reformation and Independent Network Christianity. An acrimonious theological dispute between Pentecostals followed a 1910 sermon in which W. H. Durham argued that full sanctification and conversion are

[93] Allan Anderson, *An Introduction To Pentecostalism* (New York: CUP, 2004), 44.
[94] Steven Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 18.
[95] Anderson, *Introduction*, 28-30. See also Synan, *Holiness*, 99: Synan argues that the Reverend Charles Fox Parham's claim that glossolalia is the 'only evidence' of Spirit baptism is the foundation of the Azusa Street revival, and the Pentecostal movement it inaugurates.
[96] Kay, *Pentecostalism*, 232.
[97] Synan, *Holiness*, 185.
[98] Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality,* 30.
[99] Ibid., 39.

coterminous, because of the 'finished work' of Christ on the cross. Durham departed from Wesley's conviction that sanctification is an ongoing process, in which the primary consequence of original sin – namely, actual sin – is minimised through the conformation of individual will to the will of God. Southern Pentecostals in particular took objection to Durham's theology, believing sanctification to be a distinct 'second work of grace' following conversion.[100] In 1914, a council entitled the 'General Council of the Assemblies of God,' consisting of around three hundred clergy and lay people, was established as a unified 'denominational home' for Pentecostals inclined towards Durham's 'finished work' theology, in response to Durham's controversy.

Synan identifies this, the 'first formal division in the Pentecostal movement', as hugely significant: not only for ending Pentecostal doctrinal unity (the Assemblies quickly abandoned the Holiness movement's 'second blessing'), but also for creating racial division in the Pentecostal movement, between the largely white Assemblies of God and the mostly black Church of God in Christ.[101] Stephens identifies the Assemblies' splinter sect as the root of the subsequent Charismatic movement, to which he attributes a tendency towards prosperity gospel teachings, and a practical pursuit of gifts of the spirit (healing, tongues and prophecy).[102] The Assemblies of God were soon faced with their own internal doctrinal issue, regarding the place of the Trinity. In 1914, Frank J. Ewart delivered a sermon entitled 'Jesus Only,' in Belvedere, California. Ewart advocated a 'Pentecostal Unitarian' theology, presenting Christ as the only personality of the Godhead, with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit merely titles used to describe aspects of his personality.[103] This Sabellian theology, which argued that the doctrine of the Trinity was an error written into canon law at the Council of Nicea, was outlawed by the General Council on October 1916.[104]

The Assemblies of God against the apostolic office

The Pentecostal revival was seen by many to be the 'latter rain' referred to in Joel 2:23, connecting the Pentecostals' sense that the Church had supplanted God for ritual with their belief that international Christian revival, replete with signs and wonders, would precede

[100] Synan, *Holiness*, 148-150.
[101] Ibid., 153.
[102] Stephens, 'The Wesleyan Tradition,' 277.
[103] Synan, *Holiness*, 154.
[104] Ibid., 157.

the Second Coming of Christ.[105] However, these signs and wonders began to dwindle in prominence towards the mid-century; Stephens argues that, just as Methodist practices in the 19th century had become more genteel and less raucous, so did Pentecostal meetings in the 20th century.[106] In 1948, the 'Latter Rain Revival' was born in Saskatchewan, from the dissatisfaction of some Canadian Pentecostals at this state of affairs. The Revival promoted the need of Christians to 'manifest' the Kingdom of God on Earth in signs and wonders, to usher in Christ's return.[107] Lasting from 1948 to 1952, the Revival initially comprised prophecy, the apparent impartation of spiritual gifts through the laying on of hands, and other 'visible manifestations of charismata.' The laying on of hands was important, because it demonstrated the Revival's belief that charismata required human willing in order to manifest. Prophecy was wielded in an individualised fashion, advising people even on their prospective marriage partners, in a rather extreme manifestation of the Wesleyan pursuit of personal religion. The Bible was interpreted experientially and ecstatically, apparently distinguishing 'the letter that kills' from 'the Spirit that gives life,' foreshadowing Bethel's later distinction between the 'spirit of religion' and the 'spirit of truth'.[108]

The Latter Rain Revival spread across Canada and North America, and was condemned in 1949 by the Assemblies of God, creating another official Pentecostal schism.[109] This occurred due the Council's qualms about Latter Rain teaching regarding the offices of apostles and prophets. The Revival claimed that these offices had been neglected by the historic church (another instance of the new schism alleging the Church's failure safeguard "true" Christian praxis), and ought to be reinstated, with total authority afforded to these spokesmen for God.[110] This claim, and the group's propensity to prophesy, were deemed 'unfounded Scripturally' by the council.[111] After its condemnation, a Latter Rain Movement remained active throughout the 1950s and 1960s, maintaining the original claims regarding the visible Charismatic empowerment of believers, but less concerned to proselytise.[112]

[105] Anderson, *Introduction*, 44.
[106] Stephens, 'The Wesleyan Tradition,' 278 – 279.
[107] Geivett & Pivec, *New Apostolic Reformation,* 4.
[108] L. Thomas Holdcroft, 'The New Order of the Latter Rain', in *Pneuma*, Volume 2, No.1 (1 January 1980): 50.
[109] Holdcroft, 'Latter Rain': 48.
[110] Ibid., 52.
[111] Christerson & Flory, *Network Christianity,* 23.
[112] Holdcroft, 'Latter Rain': 55.

Although Latter Rain theology was a fringe element of Pentecostalism, officially condemned by the Assemblies of God, it came to influence one of the most pervasive and well-organised Christian movements of the current era. Land argues that the theological task of Pentecostalism is to 'integrate the language of holiness with the language of power,' supposing that power is an important object of faith.[113] Citing Macchia, he notes that this pursuit of power is oriented towards the Kingdom of God, thought to manifest with the sanctification of its individual constituent parts.[114] For example, Land writes that early Pentecostals were less interested in justification than in the

> impartation of righteousness and sanctification, the transformation of lives and the empowered mobilization of the Church.[115]

Iain H. Murray suggests that a particularly materialistic approach to sanctification is enabled by Pentecostal soteriology, wherein the believer is 'consecrated and called' into God's service, and transformed by the Holy Spirit 'into the very image of Christ.'[116] Murray implies that this demonstrates less concern for the lingering impact of sin than for the active ministry of each individual. This betrays the optimistic anthropology typical of Pentecostalism, wherein the individual is able to discern and manifest the will of God, without being obstructed by an innately fallen nature. The apostolic and prophetic offices of the Latter Rain mediated and stewarded this God-given power, in a move later replicated by the New Apostolic Reformation, who reinforce this theology through pop worship music.[117] Meanwhile, the schisms and splinter sects of the Holiness and Pentecostal movements had been joined by a Charismatic movement described by Stephens as more 'amorphous.' This movement consisted in those mainstream churches that adopted certain features of Pentecostalism, such as speaking in tongues:

> The term "Charismatic" emerged to identify such believers who experience the "in-filling" of the Holy Spirit, commend ecstatic "prayer language," and prefer "free" worship styles, but are not members of Pentecostal churches.[118]

---

[113] Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality,* 23.
[114] Ibid., 62-3, 44.
[115] Ibid., 76.
[116] Iain Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 81, 83.
[117] Christerson & Flory, *Network Christianity,* 10.
[118] Stephens, 'The Wesleyan Tradition,' 263.

These Charismatic churches were usually affiliated with mainstream denominations (Kay notes mid-century Pentecostals' surprise at such Charismatic outbreaks). Kay has distinguished between three factions of the Charismatic movement at this time: 'classical' Pentecostals, itinerant Pentecostals who had left their denominations and were 'answerable to no higher human authority than themselves,' and the aforementioned Charismatics emergent in mainstream denominations.[119] (Bethel's ecclesiology, as will become apparent, most resembles this second approach.)

Between the relative normalisation of Charismatic phenomena, the increasing presence of Pentecostal figures in the public eye, and their increasing integration with Evangelical public speakers, charismata became a fairly established part of church praxis in the mid-20th century.[120] Pentecostal ministries such as Oral Roberts' and the Assemblies of God's had begun investing in radio and television broadcasting, introducing their stirring public preaching to a wider audience.[121] In 1955, the prominent Evangelical speaker Billy Graham stopped advocating for separatism, and began supporting integration, between Evangelicalism and other (Charismatic) denominations.[122] Graham demonstrated his commitment to this position not only by speaking alongside Pentecostals at public events, but even by participating in the dedication of Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1967.[123] Meanwhile, Norman Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952) became a household bestseller. Peale taught an individualistic doctrine of spiritual empowerment, wherein the mind provides a vessel for the presence of God, whose powers are made accessible through human will and feeling alone.[124]

Vineyard Church and the Kansas City Prophets

The Charismatic movement perpetuated the schismatic dynamic from which it emerged, and saw the continuation of many of the themes that had developed since Wesley's Methodism boomed in America. These included new movements' claims to greater religious 'authenticity' than their predecessors, the prioritisation of experience as an authoritative theological source, and the pursuit of visible charismata and affective experience, which I have referred to as "tangible" signs of assurance. These features

[119] Kay, *Pentecostalism*, 175-177.
[120] Synan, *Holiness*, 200.
[121] Kay, *Pentecostalism,* 167.
[122] Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided*, 28.
[123] Synan, *Holiness*, 210. Strangely, Roberts becomes a Methodist a year later, in March 1968.
[124] George, *God's Salesman,* 161-2.

became eventually more significant, for many, than the heritages that led to their flourishing. From the mid-twentieth century's intermingling of Charismatic denominations arose the two figures whose work most shaped the development of Independent Network Christianity, and the New Apostolic Reformation in particular: These figures were John Wimber and Peter Wagner, both of whom recanted their initial scepticism towards Charismatic empowerment.

John Wimber was converted to Christianity in 1963 through a Bible group led by the Californian Quaker Gunner Payne. The aftermath of his conversion was reportedly dramatic, with Wimber experiencing baptism in the Spirit the following year, and reportedly persuading 'several hundred' people to convert to Christianity by the end of the decade.[125] Church growth became the feature for which Wimber was known, and in 1970 he joined the staff at an affiliate of Chuck Smith's popular Calvary Chapel, called Yorba Linda Calvary Chapel. His expansion of the congregation by several hundred people occurred much to the chagrin of some longer-standing (and more theologically conservative) congregants.[126] Wimber's initial spiritual experiences were soon laid aside for a more 'evangelical' and 'fundamentalist' dispensationalism.[127] Wimber later described his wife, Carol, as especially suspicious of Charismatic Christianity, comparing her behaviour unfavourably to the Apostle Paul's Pharisaic persecution of Christians prior to his encounter with Christ.[128]

Wimber began experimenting with visible charismata such as glossolalia and healing. In 1974, Wimber was invited by Peter Wagner, the self-identified apostle who would later title the New Apostolic Reformation, to work at the Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth. Wimber and Wagner identified, around this time, as broadly Evangelical (notwithstanding Wimber's Quaker roots). Both became increasingly interested in Pentecostalism as they began travelling together, Wimber working for Wagner as a church growth consultant.[129] Wimber's scepticism towards charismata was

[125] Connie Dawson, *John Wimber: A Biographical Sketch of his Life and Ministry in America*, doctoral dissertation. (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing: 2012), 348.
[126] Ibid., 47-49.
[127] Carol Wimber, *John Wimber* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1999), 49: Carol Wimber writes that the 'magic' had gone out of the Wimbers' religion by 1974.
[128] Dawson, *Wimber,* 61-63.
[129] Christerson & Flory, *Network Christianity,* 27; Dawson, *Wimber*, 52, 56. Also, Carol Wimber, *John Wimber*, 118: according to Carol Wimber, manifestations of the Spirit were less important to the Wimbers than the revival they were thought to indicate.

dispelled by 1977, concluding with the 'self-appointed Pharisee' Carol's unexpected experience of involuntary glossolalia.[130]

In 1977, Wimber established his own Calvary Chapel Yorba Linda, an informal-feeling community that actively pursued Charismatic activity. The church eventually split from the Calvary Chapel affiliation in 1982: Chuck Smith had wanted to establish standardised teaching between the Calvary Chapels, but was uncomfortable with the emphasis Wimber was placing on manifestations of the Spirit.[131] Calvary Chapel Yorba Linda was renamed 'Yorba Linda Friends Church,' and Wimber himself was asked to leave the church some months later, also on the basis of his Charismatic practices and inaugurated eschatology. Along with the forty-odd congregants he took with him, Wimber established the first of his Vineyard churches. The Vineyard movement began planting churches at a swift rate, and Wimber became a leading figure in the Third Wave of Evangelicalism that swept America in the 1980s.

By this point, Wimber had decisively surmised that 'effective evangelisation' entailed 'demonstration' of the Gospel, through signs such as healing and glossolalia, showing the theological slippage that had occurred since Wesley first argued that assurance was not simply an intellectual issue.[132] Where Wesley had posited affect as one sign of assurance, Wimber now presented manifestations of the Spirit as a crude proof of the Gospel, providing a blueprint for many New Apostolic Reformation and Independent Network churches later. Wimber and the Third Wave did a lot to normalise Charismatic practices internationally, in Evangelical and Anglican churches: Wimber developed a working relationship with London's Holy Trinity Brompton in 1982, and founded Vineyard as a worldwide movement of 'Christian Fellowship' that same year.[133] Vineyard became a group of 200 churches by 1985, and developed their own music labels, Vineyard Worship (in America) and Vineyard Records (in the UK).[134] Since being established, the Vineyard

[130] Christerson & Flory, *Network Christianity,* 18-20. Dawson, *Wimber*, 46 notes that Wimber preferred justify his teaching with recourse to scripture, not experience.
[131] Dawson, *Wimber*, 9.
[132] Ibid., 349
[133] Anderson, *Introduction,* 159. It is worth noting that the Vineyard Movement is Evangelical, rather than Pentecostal: see Rich Nathan & Ken Wilson, *Empowered Evangelicals* (Bosie: Ampelon, 2009).
[134] See Nekola, Anna, 'I'll Take you There': The Promise of Transformation in the Marketing of Worship Media in US Christian Music Magazines,' in M. Ingalls, C. Landau, & T. Wagner (ed.), *Christian Congregational Music* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 120, 123. Nekola writes that the Vineyard movement, in particular its musical ministry, 'strengthened' the 'influence' of Third Wave Charismatic Christianity, particularly in the USA. Radio, and – later – the Walkman and iPod, have made private listening to worship music 'more intimate and personal while simultaneously enhancing the experience of connectivity.'

labels have produced hundreds of worship songs, such as 'Lord Reign in Me' and 'He is Yahweh,' that have become contemporary worship staples across the world. Numerous Vineyard leaders have attested to the mission focus of the movement's songs, which are intended for non-Christian as well as Christian listening.[135] This sentiment is echoed, later, by worship bands such as Hillsong United and Bethel Music, who conceive of their music as a vital catalyst for Christian revival across the globe.[136]

Amidst its successes, the Vineyard movement was not without its controversies. In the winter of 1982, Wagner instantiated an experimental class on 'Signs, Wonders and Church Growth' at the Evangelical Fuller Theological Seminary, which he co-taught with Wimber.[137] The course was unique for not only discussing 'signs and wonders' with respect to their significance in contemporary and historical churches, but for also offering 'practical sessions', where supernatural events such as healings would be performed. The course was popular with students, and tolerated initially by the less supportive faculty on the basis that much church growth worldwide was occurring in Charismatic churches.[138] However, it was terminated in 1986 after losing the support of the faculty, who diplomatically suggested that, whilst critical examination of religious phenomena might be taught in the classroom, practically exercising such phenomena ought not be.[139]

The 1980s also saw a controversial affiliation emerge between Wimber and the Kansas City Prophets. This group of four men – Bob Jones, John Paul Jackson, Paul Cain and Mike Bickle – maintained a theology akin to the earlier Latter Rain Movement's. They claimed that an outpouring of the Holy Spirit was occurring, signalling the nearness of the rapture, and advocated apostolic and prophetic leadership of the Church in preparation.[140] Their connection to Wimber was inaugurated when Mike Bickle led the group to Wimber's class at Fuller Theological Seminary in 1984.[141] As the Vineyard enterprise expanded, other Vineyard leaders urged Wimber to disassociate from the KCP. However, Wimber's

[135] Lucinda Borkett-Jones, 'Vineyard worship music is having a moment' *Christian Today* (28 February 2015). <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/vineyard.worship.is.having.a.moment/48563.htm>
[136] Gesa Hartje-Döll, '(Hillsong) United Through Music: Praise and Worship Music and the Evangelical Imagined Community,' in *Congregational Music*, 143-5.
[137] Dawson, *Wimber*, 349.
[138] George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 290-2.
[139] Dawson, *Wimber*, 12. See also Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 294: faculty members further suggested that such emphasis on healings might 'reflect the standards of the secular "culture of entitlement,"' rather than any Christian commitment to share in the sufferings of Christ, and that healings were perhaps being celebrated disproportionately to how people were celebrating salvation.
[140] Christerson & Flory, *Network Christianity,* 22.
[141] Dawson, *Wimber,* 12.

work with the KCP ushered in a 'prophetic era' in 1988, with Wimber travelling around the world to teach priests about prophecy, for example to HTB and St Andrew's Chorleywood in the UK.[142] Wimber's notoriety reached its zenith in 1994, with the Toronto Blessing: a year of physical manifestations of the Spirit led by John and Carol Arnott of the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church, and the evangelical preacher Randy Clark. The manifestations were described by other Vineyard leaders as 'chaotic, extreme, or even demonic'.[143] After much urging, Wimber entreated the TAVC leadership team to reign in their work, afraid that such spiritual manifestations were becoming the focus of their ministry.[144] When rebuffed, Wimber eventually disaffiliated TAVC from the Vineyard network.

Wimber died in 1997 of a brain haemorrhage during open heart surgery, following a heart attack and a stroke. An unnamed former Vineyard leader later told Christerson and Flory that, in the aftermath of Wimber's death, he had suggested to the more radically Charismatic Vineyard leaders – the 'Bickle-ites and the Arnott-ites' – that they disassociate from Vineyard, given that their values were so divergent. This suggestion went unheeded, the Charismatic leaders enjoying the deferral of personal responsibility for their church movements that the Vineyard brand allowed for. Vineyard officially became a 'mix': more of an 'affinity network' than a uniform theological movement.[145] Christerson and Flory have suggested that this

> shift from "movement" to "network" [...] is most significant in the emergence of INC Christianity.[146]

By 1998 there were five hundred Vineyard churches in the USA. Beyond the Vineyard network, however, Wimber had had a considerable influence in the UK. Anderson notes that

> his laid-back ministry of 'power evangelism' was widely accepted by older churches, especially Anglicans.[147]

[142] Christerson & Flory, *Network Christianity,* 38-39.
[143] Ibid., 24.
[144] Wimber, *Wimber,* 181.
[145] Christerson & Flory, *Network Christianity,* 25.
[146] Ibid., 26.
[147] Anderson, *Introduction*, 159

Wimber and Wagner, together, developed a Charismatic network still thriving today, having shared their theology of Charismatic empowerment as 'demonstration' of the Gospel with prominent Christian leaders. Holy Trinity Brompton in London and St Andrew's Chorleywood were, and still are, at the forefront of Charismatic activity in the Church of England today. After he began working with Wimber, HTB's Nicky Gumble developed the Alpha course, an interdenominational template for evangelism that specifically advocated the awareness and use of spiritual gifts, introducing them to non-Charismatic churches worldwide. By 1998 five thousand British churches were teaching from the Alpha course.[148] The New Wine movement – the UK branch of Vineyard established by David Pytches and Barry Kissell – is home to over 2000 churches.[149] Back in America, Mike Bickle's International House of Prayer (IHOPKC), established in Kansas City in 1999, now owns one of the most visited websites in the world, where visitors can watch a livestream of the 24/7 prayer room. Taking its inspiration from the tabernacle of David, the prayer room is a house of constant sung worship with band accompaniment.[150] Musicians are employed full-time, in rotating shifts, to 'minister to the Lord and serve the community,' interspersing contemporary worship songs are interspersed with segments of free sung prayer.[151]

The NAR and INC

Wagner attributed the extraordinary growth of Charismatic movements, and Vineyard in particular, not only to the blessing of the Holy Spirit, but also to the style of church government exercised by figures like Wimber and Bickle. This style, wherein self-declared apostles and prophets presided over a governmental hierarchy, rather than serving a democratically established body of elders, allowed for the great freedom of the Vineyard network, made evident in the disparity between different leadership styles.[152] In order to propagate the apostolic, hierarchical form of church leadership, Wagner formed two

[148] 'Alpha is running all around the globe', *Internet Archive* (22 March 2015). <https://web.archive.org/web/20150322141016/http://alpha.org/global> The Alpha organisation claimed in 2015 that 24 million people had taken the course, in 169 countries and 112 different languages.
[149] 'About,' *New Wine*. <https://www.new-wine.org/about>
[150] Christerson & Flory, *Network Christianity,* 38-39.
[151] See 'Global Prayer Room', *IHOPKC*. <https://www.IHOPKC.org/prayerroom/>
[152] Geivett & Pivec, *New Apostolic Reformation*, 85-94: Geivett & Pivec explain that, for Wagner, the qualities of an apostle include but do not necessitate: seeing Christ, being commissioned by Christ, being able to perform miracles, consistency of teaching with Scripture, and an exemplary virtuous life. They note that apostles are expected to lead in pairings with prophets, who are thought to receive the direct intelligence from God necessary for the apostle to lead in an informed way.

"apostolic networks", entitled the Eagles Vision Apostolic Team, and the International Coalition of Apostles. These networks imbued Wagner himself with a source of power and authority, EVAT paying the bulk of his salary until he relinquished the role in retirement.[153] He further devoted himself to explicating his theology of church leadership in print, explaining in his book *Apostles Today* the idea behind the name of his new movement, the New Apostolic Reformation:

> It is a "reformation" because we are currently witnessing the most radical change in the way of "doing church" since the Protestant Reformation. It is "apostolic" because the recognition of the gift and office of apostle is the most radical of a whole list of changes from the old wineskin. And it is "new" to distinguish it from several older traditional church groups that have incorporated the term "apostolic" into their official name... Protestant denominationalism over the past 500 years has been, for the most part, governed by teachers and administrators rather than by apostles and prophets.[154]

Geveitt and Pivec link Wagner's attribution of church governance to individuals with special apostolic offices to the Latter Rain theology of the 1940s, as well as the Apostolic Church of the early 1900s, and the Irvingites of the 1830s.[155] As in the earlier movements, from Methodism to the Third Wave, the New Apostolic Reformation is energised by a sense that something vital to Christianity had been forgotten amidst the formalities of church tradition. Just like the Latter Rain Movement before them, the New Apostolic Reformation emphasises 'relational networks' over bureaucratic or hierarchical church structures, and want to restore the roles of apostle and prophet as the key offices of church government, rather than pastors and elders. This would, they think, facilitate the healings, prophecy and other supernatural occurrences enabled by the Holy Spirit, 'so that God's end-time plans can be fulfilled and Christ can return.'[156] Further, like Latter Rain, NAR churches have continued to split from the Assemblies of God, often on the basis of their

[153] Christerson & Flory, *Network Christianity,* 30.
[154] C. Peter Wagner, *Apostles Today: Biblical Government for Biblical Power* (Bloomington: Chosen Books, 2006), 3.
[155] Geivett & Pivec, *New Apostolic Reformation*, 3.
[156] Ibid., 1.

affirmation of the apostolic office.[157] As summarised by Geivett and Pivec, the NAR believe that apostles

> have governing authority equal to the original apostles. On this permissive conception, apostles hold an official church office and wield unexcelled authority extending to workplaces, cities and nations.[158]

Wagner, who was an official NAR spokesman prior to his death in 2016, has argued that the year 2001 marked the beginning of a 'Second Apostolic Age', in which the rightful place of Apostles within the church would be reinstated, defeating the 'spirit of religion' that has oppressed the churches.[159] The New Apostolic Reformation holds a distinct, and often contentious, theological position, and is not the same as mainstream Charismatic Christianity. In fact, some Charismatic leaders and churches profess their aversion to it, even whilst they might remain situated within NAR networks.[160] Others, such as IHOPKC, have cast aspersions on the claim that the NAR is an organised movement, arguing instead that Wagner was simply describing a phenomenon as he saw it.[161] By Geivett and Pivec's own admission, NAR ministries can often be hard to spot, except through their mentions of 'fivefold' ministry. However, Wagner's establishment of apostolic networks does indicate that he has spearheaded something of an organised effort to deploy apostles within the global church.

The practical theologian Michael L. Brown has taken issue with Geivett and Pivec's concern regarding the 'extraordinary authority' afforded to apostles by the New Apostolic Reformation, arguing that the pair have confused the claims made by NAR leaders with the

---

[157] Ibid., 2.
[158] Ibid., 31-32; 45-46. Functions of NAR apostles include: receiving revelation (from God and from prophets), have a vision for the church, governing the church, 'birthing' ministries, leading through spiritual warfare, teaching and imparting blessings, fundraising, and equipping and deploying people for ministry, including future leadership.
[159] Ibid., 2. See also Peter C. Wagner, *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World* (Ada: Chosen Books, 2008), on the detrimental effects of the spirit of religion.
[160] Christerson & Flory, *Network Christianity,* 140: particularly contentious is the obvious problem of accountability, Wagner's solution being that apostles must voluntarily submit themselves to one another. See Hinn & Wood, *Defining Deception,* 73: Hinn and Wood problematise this approach, citing the case of Pastor Todd Bentley. See also John Weaver, *The New Apostolic Reformation* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2016), 94 – 143 for an overview of major figures within the NAR.
[161] 'What is IHOPKC's stance on the New Apostolic Reformation?' *IHOPKC*. <https://www.IHOPKC.org/press-center/faq/IHOPKC-part-new-apostolic-reformation/> 'IHOPKC has never claimed any membership or part in the NAR movement...'

way they are perceived.[162] Brown's distinction between intention and perception is significant, because it is emphasised by the NAR approach to mission, which is to deploy resources for evangelisation and religious formation, rather than to plant churches. This leads to variance between the theologies of live church communities, within which conversational exchange can be held, and the objectified resources that they broadcast. However, the successful deployment of objectified resources has grown the New Apostolic Reformation into a huge movement worldwide, through teaching institutes, media and academia, and a vigorous youth training program.[163] Having emerged from independent Charismatic churches, and informed the church praxis of Charismatic churches in multiple denominations in this fashion, the NAR therefore retains a presence throughout much of the Charismatic movement. In this respect, the NAR exemplifies the 'affinity network' approach to church government and mission, which Christerson and Flory have christened 'Independent Network Christianity.'

The complications associated with the NAR, on account of the movement's contentious theology, renders 'Independent Network Christianity' a better term, in this thesis, for describing this approach to church governance that forms 'networks of cooperation' between Charismatic leaders, without establishing itself formally as a unified movement.[164] Generally eschewing church planting, Independent Network Christianity 'seek[s] to transform society as a whole' by developing and making available resources for ministry that can be used across denominations, such as worship albums or lesson plans.[165] The rise of Independent Network Christianity is therefore linked to other cultural factors, like globalisation and resource access enabled by the Internet.[166] Christerson and Flory identify Redding, California, and Kansas City as two particularly important centres of Charismatic Independent Network Christianity at present, due to the presence of Bill Johnson's Bethel megachurch and its associated ministries in the former, and Mike Bickle's International House of Prayer in the latter. Worship music is a substantial export for both of these ministries.

---

[162] Michael Brown, 'An Appeal to Holly Pivec and Prof. Doug Geivett to Separate Yourselves From the Hyper-Critics' *Christian Post* (14 May 2018). <https://www.christianpost.com/voice/an-appeal-to-holly-pivec-and-prof-doug-geivett-to-separate-yourselves-from-the-hyper-critics.html>

[163] Geivett & Pivec, *New Apostolic Reformation*, 9, 19.

[164] Christerson & Flory, *Network Christianity,* 7-10.

[165] Wimber*, Wimber*, 121: Interestingly, Carol Wimber has spoken against the notion of having independent churches, despite John Wimber playing an indispensable role in bringing about Independent Network Christianity.

[166] Monique M. Ingalls, *Singing the Congregation* (New York: OUP, 2018), 102, 202; Riches & Wagner, 'The Evolution of Hillsong Music' in *Australian Journal of Communication,* Volume 39, No. 1 (2012): 19; John Blanchard & Dan Lucarini*, Can We Rock the Gospel?* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2006), 15-16.

1.4 BETHEL CHURCH, REDDING

Bethel Church is a nondenominational, independent megachurch, home to a hugely successful and influential worship outfit: Bethel Music (also known as the Bethel Collective). Bethel Church subscribes to New Apostolic Reformation theology, regarding the apostolic office, and is led by well-known self-identified apostles and prophets, notably Bill Johnson and Kris Vallotton, who co-founded Bethel in its current form in the 1990s.[167] Bethel Church was first established in 1952 by Robert Doherty, and affiliated with the Assemblies of God two years later. The church is not new to the Johnson family; Bill Johnson's father, M. Earl Johnson, pastored Bethel as an Assemblies of God church between 1968 and 1982. Bill Johnson's supernatural focus in ministry was established and honed between 1978 and 1996, when he pastored Mountain Chapel, a small Assemblies of God church in Weaverville, California. Johnson grew the congregation from 40 to 300 people, developing an interest in, and teaching about, the 'gifts of the spirit.' As Christerson and Flory report, one leader of Mountain Chapel identified Johnson's attendance at a Vineyard leadership conference in 1987 as a pivotal moment in Johnson's ministry, after which supernatural occurrences became increasingly frequent in the church.[168]

Johnson further encouraged this Charismatic inclination in 1995, when he and his wife Bennie visited Toronto Airport Vineyard Church during the Toronto Blessing. Both were 'radically altered,' and laughter and collapsing in the spirit became much more common in the Weaverville congregation upon their return.[169] In 1996, Johnson was invited to pastor Bethel Church. In the early days of his ministry there, around half the 2000-person congregation left, objecting to Johnson's Charismatic practices. In 1998, Kris Vallotton, a born-again Christian who had worked with Johnson at the Weaverville church, joined the

[167] Shuttleworth, ''On Earth as it is in Heaven': A Critical Discussion of the Theology of Bill Johnson': 102. 'Johnson is also a part of the Revival Alliance network, consisting of Rolland and Heidi Baker, Georgian and Winnie Banov, Che and Sue Ahn, Randy and DeAnn Clark and John and Carol Arnott, who partner to pursue revival worldwide.' John Weaver also refers to Bethel's 'revivalist oriented culture,' and the church's use of music as an 'evangelizing tool'. See Weaver, John, *The New Apostolic Reformation,* 111.
[168] Christerson & Flory, *Network Christianity,* 34.
[169] Christerson & Flory, *Network Christianity,* 35. Recall Holdcroft's paper on the Latter Rain Movement, in which he notes that the laying on of hands was practiced because human participation through physical action was thought to facilitate the transferral of supernatural empowerment: a similar idea is evidenced here, in the notion that charismata are imparted to willing believers through their physical presence during a Charismatic event.

ministry team at Bethel in order to set up Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry. Christerson and Flory have described the foundation of BSSM as a 'key turning point in transforming Bethel from a fast-growing but isolated congregation to a faster-growing node in an international network.' Like Wimber's class at Fuller Theological Seminary, BSSM classes have a strong practical element:

> Classes include practical courses on how to pray for healing, how to deliver someone from a demonic presence, and how to receive prophetic words directly from God. BSSM students regularly go out into the Redding community and practice these techniques in shopping centres, parks, and other public places. Students enroll initially for a one-year program. If they show promise and maturity, they are asked to complete a second year. Only a small number are asked to complete a third year, which is a yearlong ministry internship for those who are being groomed for leadership.[170]

BSSM frequently invites guest speakers to impart their spiritual knowledge to students, and its teachers encourage students to discern their role within the fivefold ministry outlined in Ephesians 4:11.[171] This role is expected to be recognised and prophetically confirmed by others, and that students will learn to 'walk in the authority' that their role affords them.[172] This recalls Zahl's comments on 'what is seen as the self-authenticating nature of Pentecostal experience,' to which he attributes the Pentecostal tendency to avoid the topic of sin, lest it complicate the idea the Spirit is 'straightforwardly recognisable to the community by its fruits.' Zahl calls this belief tautologous: in assuming that discernment through the Spirit will overcome self-deception, the ongoing consequences of sin and its corruption of knowledge and desire are underestimated.[173] Bethel takes a similarly 'self-authenticating' approach to religious formation, and its theological teachings are typically premised on the witnessing of affective experience, as a result.

---

[170] Ibid., 35.
[171] 'Academics,' *BSSM*. <http://bssm.net/school/academics/>
[172] 'Introduction,' *BSSM*. <http://bssm.net/school/introduction/> 'BSSM is designed to be a ministry training center where our students embrace their royal identity, learn the values of the Kingdom and walk in the authority and power of the King. It is a transformational experience and your life will be forever impacted!'
[173] Zahl, *Blumhardt*, 7.

Bethel frequently attribute affective experience of this sort, and the discernment thereof, to the 'spirit of truth', which they contrast with the 'spirit of religion': a distinction that responds to the problematisation of experience in much Protestant theology.[174] Kris Vallotton memorably describes the 'spirit of religion', in his book *Spirit Wars*, as 'hollowed out, Spock-like Vulcan Christianity.'[175] This reflects the NAR concern that "traditional" Christianity has forgotten core components of Christianity, such as apostolic succession and charismata, instead promulgating a Pharisaical legalism. This concern pertains in large part to the Christian's embodied faith and identity; Bethel's references to the spirit of religion suggest that "religion" promotes abstract doctrine with little bearing on Christian experience, dampens love of God from an affective phenomenon to an intellectual exercise, and fails to equip and deploy Christians to materially transform the world through spiritual means. Bill Johnson claims that the spirit of religion 'want[s] to impart the gift of suspicion', creating a 'counterfeit prophetic anointing' of offense; the individual concerned is unable to 'recognis[e] that the origin of the information is actually the spirit of deception.'[176] He also associates the spirit of religion with being 'agenda driven'. This sentiment is echoed with some levity by Vallotton, who states that 'grace is like magic dust!' in the sermon 'Grace, Mercy, Righteousness and Justice,' before joking that those imbued with the spirit of religion will persecute him for saying so.[177]

Concerns about the spirit of religion are promoted by Bethel's leaders. Pastor Seth Dahl preaches on the adulterous woman in John 8, associating her accusers with the 'spirit of religion', associating the Bible with grace, and the spirit of religion with legalism:

> The spirit of religion will [...] say repentance leads to God's goodness for our lives, but that's not what the Bible says. The Bible says the goodness of God leads to repentance.[178]

Kris Vallotton focuses on the Charismatic 'power' to which justified Christians can aspire:

---

[174] See Simeon Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience* (Oxford: OUP, 2020), 30, 170.
[175] Kris Vallotton, *Spirit Wars* (Bloomington, MN: Chosen Books, 2012), 199.
[176] Emiliana Martín, 'Recognize Political Religious Spirit', *YouTube* (15 August 2016). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lp0CrBLL5k> 3:30. Also Parry, *Trinity*, 5: Parry testifies to his experience as a teen of the 'Word of Faith' (or 'health and wealth') movement, which was 'hostile' to theology, which it conceived of as opposed to the word of God.
[177] Kris Vallotton, 'Grace, Mercy, Righteousness, And Justice,' *BethelTV* (4 February 2018). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/5155>
[178] Seth Dahl, 'Goodness Leads To Repentence', *BethelTV* (2 April 2018). <https://www.bethel.tv/shows/seeds/season-1/7121>

> Religion is left when the spirit leaves the room. People hate religion, but everyone's looking to be clothed with power.[179]

Eric Johnson similarly expresses concern with the constraints of 'religion':

> Religion keeps us in the four walls of the church, grace actually allows us to thrive outside of it.[180]

Jenn Johnson, meanwhile, spontaneously dissociates from the spirit of religion, with affective lyrics, in the song 'I Really Love You':[181]

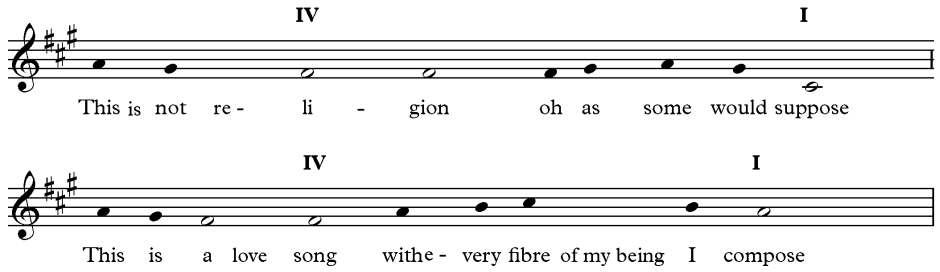


Figure 2. Bethel Music, 'I Really Love You,' excerpt (1:39).

The dichotomy Bethel leaders consistently draw between the spirit of religion and the spirit of truth recalls the schismatic tendency, as well as the significance of affect, in the denominations that gave rise to Charismatic Christianity and the INC. In keeping with this contrast between abstract, legalistic 'religion' and affective, embodied 'truth', Bethel's school, BSSM, professes that the eschaton has been inaugurated, and the duty of believers is to manifest the Kingdom of God through healing and other miracles. Students are trained to this end, the 2016 first year syllabus including classes such as:

> **Kingdom Theology and Identity**
> The core objective of the course is to convince students of the "royalty" they possess as children of the king and mobilize them into the holy, supernatural

[179] Kris Vallotton, 'The Redemptive Story - Sunday AM,' *BethelTV* (4 March 2018). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/5185>
[180] Eric Johnson 'The Joy of Consecration,' *BethelTV* (29 August 2013). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/1733>
[181] Bethel Music, Brian Johnson, Jenn Johnson, 'I Really Love You (Spontaneous).' *For The Sake of the World* (Bethel Music: 2012).

lifestyle that flows from this belief.

and

> **The Supernatural Nature of the Gospel**
> This course is designed as a "do and teach and do" course. There will be demonstrations of God's ability and willingness to move in power with and for his people. It will highlight the Biblical basis, emphasis and necessity of the supernatural in the furtherance of the Gospel. There is extensive examination of the life and teachings of Jesus as the prototype for the ministry of the believer. His intimacy, dependence and expectation are the blueprint for the Christian life. Keeping in step with the Holy Spirit as the apostle Paul commands will result in a naturally supernatural lifestyle. The instructor and guest speakers will provide testimony of the national and international implications and success concerning the supernatural nature of the Gospel and its power for explosive church growth and cultural transformation, as well as demonstrate its availability & rationale.[182]

As with Wimber's class at Fuller, Bethel have been criticised for presenting physical healing as the central message of the Gospel, rather than salvation, and for 'overreaching' prophecies that do not come true.[183] In this respect, Bethel's theology results from the shift between Methodist and Pentecostal doctrine of assurance, wherein Wesley's affective assurance of salvation transforms into Parham and Seymour's evidence of the Spirit, through signs. Christerson and Flory summarise the 'product' offered by Independent Network Christianity as

> 1) direct access to miraculous power, 2) opportunities for participation in public practices, and 3) a narrative of supernatural social transformation.[184]

[182] 'BSSM First Year Syllabus', *BSSM*. <https://bssm.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/BSSM-First-Year-Syllabus.pdf> Recently cited guest lecturers include John and Carol Arnott from Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship.
[183] Christerson & Flory, *Network Christianity,* 127; Geivett & Pivec, *New Apostolic Reformation*, 202. John Weaver also refers to the story, notorious in Redding, where two Bethel students allegedly almost caused an injured man's death by refraining to call for help before they had prayed for his healing. See Weaver, *New Apostolic Reformation*, 114.
[184] Christerson & Flory, *Network Christianity,* 74.

This is echoed by some BSSM students interviewed for their book, who emphasise the 'authenticity' of tangible experience of God, and participation in supernatural activities. One identifies this theological focus as the locus of Bethel's significance and success:

> Our culture is so focused on experience. The idea of a God who interacts with us in a physical and tangible way – it's not new, but it hasn't been the emphasis in whole congregations. Bethel – I feel like it's the first church that is actually preaching: "God touches you and wants to touch you." That draws in people who do really want an experience with God... On the one hand I think it attracts really needy people, but on the other hand it really attracts people who really do want to change the world and want to understand the power of God.[185]

In 1998, BSSM had 37 enrollments. The following year this almost doubled, to 68. The number grew to over 200 students by the early millennium, and the school now teaches around 2000 students each year.[186] BSSM now has the highest international intake for vocational courses in America, and performs a key role in Bethel's mission, by training and deploying like-minded Charismatic Christians all over the world.[187]

In 2005, Johnson disaffiliated Bethel from the Assemblies of God, with the near-unanimous approval of his congregation, feeling that its denominational bounds were hampering his ministry at Bethel.[188] In a statement to the congregation that explained some administrative difficulties Johnson had encountered in the disaffiliation process, he elaborated upon the decision thusly:

---

[185] Ibid., 85. This student's language of physicality and tactility supports the appropriateness of my phrase 'tangible assurance'. This is also a common theme in pop worship. See, for example, Bethel Music, Jenn Johnson, 'I Can Feel You,' *Tides* (Bethel Music: 2013); Hillsong Worship, 'Touch Of Heaven,' *There Is More* (Hillsong Music and Resources LLC: 2018); Hillsong Worship, 'Here With You,' *Open Heaven / River Wild* (Hillsong Music and Resources LLC: 2015); Hillsong Worship, 'You Hold Me Now,' *Hillsong Chapel: Yahweh* (Hillsong Music and Resources LLC: 2010); Hillsong Worship, 'Glorious Ruins,' *Glorious Ruins* (Hillsong Music and Resources LLC: 2013); Forerunner Music, Abi Bennett, 'Fingerprints,' *Fully Alive* (Forerunner Music/The Fuel Music: 2018); Forerunner Music, Brandon Oaks, 'Drawing Close,' *Fully Alive* (Forerunner Music/The Fuel Music: 2018); Kristine DiMarco, 'I Will Follow You - Live,' *Mighty (Live)* (Jesus Culture Music: 2015); and, most famously of all, Jesus Culture, Kim Walker-Smith, 'How He Loves - Live,' *We Cry Out (Live)* (Jesus Culture Music: 2007) (which declares that 'heaven meets earth like a sloppy wet kiss').
[186] Christerson & Flory, *Network Christianity,* 36; 'BSSM,' *BSSM*. <http://bssm.net/>
[187] 'Vocational' in the broad sense, not meaning Christian vocations specifically.
[188] Christerson & Flory, *Network Christianity*, 34.

> Though we haven't yet articulated it very clearly, we feel called to create a network that helps other networks thrive - to be one of many ongoing catalysts in this continuing revival. Our call feels unique enough theologically and practically from the call on the Assemblies of God that this change is appropriate. We believe we have heard the voice of the Lord very clearly concerning this transition. We are in the process of inviting several apostolic leaders that have had a long-term relationship with us to be integral in the spiritual covering of our church.[189]

Bethel officially became a nondenominational independent church, Johnson's affirmation of the apostolic office perhaps offering an insight into the theological differences to which he alludes. Bethel Church now has around 6000 members, and the Johnson family is intimately involved in the running of several ministries and the church's busy network of services. These are held across their two campuses, Twin View and College View, and in Redding's local Cascade Theatre. Dean of BSSM and resident theologian Dann Farrelly, a graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary, runs classes before Sunday services to induct new congregants into the church's core beliefs, for example regarding spiritual warfare and revival.[190] Bill Johnson's oldest son, Eric, took over as senior pastor of Bethel in 2015 alongside his wife, Candace, absolving Bill of some of his leadership duties in order that he could spend more time doing 'apostolic work' such as meeting with church leaders and 'spreading his influence'.[191]

[189] iBethel, 'Bethel and the Assemblies of God,' *Web Archive* (1 July 2011). <https://web.archive.org/web/20110701134709/http://www.ibethel.org/bethel-and-the-assemblies-of-god>
[190] 'Classes', *Bethel Redding*. <http://bethelredding.com/classes?page=1>
[191] Christerson & Flory, *Network Christianity,* 37.



Figure 3. Bethel Church, College View entrance (April 2019).

As Christerson and Flory note, Bill Johnson's main focus is not the congregation of Bethel Church, but rather the brand of theology that he espouses. Alongside other Charismatic leaders of the 'Revival Alliance', such as Heidi Baker and John Arnott, he seeks to spread his theology through his own teaching and through the creation of resources that encourage people to pursue spiritual empowerment,

> promoting techniques and practices that anyone can participate in regardless of whether they are part of a congregation. Thus, the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry (BSSM), conferences, media sales and web-based materials are more important to the finances of the organisation than the congregation. The advantages of this, from a marketing and finance perspective, is that leadership techniques can be taught through media with very low overhead costs, and revenue can be accessed by members of the network who are far from the local congregation.[192]

Another son, Brian Johnson, established the Bethel Music record label in 2001 alongside his wife, Jenn. The couple has led the Bethel Collective, a group of musicians and singers passionate about pop worship music, ever since. They have also established WorshipU, an online, subscription-based worship school. This resource uses online videos and blogs to

[192] Christerson & Flory, *Network Christianity,* 107.

train and connect worship leaders around the world.[193] Reaching acclaim on Christian and secular charts for their first studio album, *Tides* (2013), Bethel Music is now an internationally chart topping worship music outfit that raises nearly a quarter of the church's annual funds.[194] Bethel's web media, including music sales and BethelTV subscriptions, draws 23% of their annual intake (approximately $8.4 million per year), their largest single block of income. This is followed closely by BSSM tuition and plate donations from their congregation, each of which rakes in 19% of their budget at $7 million per year.[195] Bethel's music has been incorporated into Charismatic church services around the world, including throughout the Anglican Communion (notably HTB, in the UK, and those churches that follow its example).[196]

As well as being Bethel Church's main ministerial export, worship is also the focal part of Bethel's church services. Each service hosts an extended worship set, where songs are played back to back, with climaxes, anticlimaxes and repeated refrains to enhance the intensity of the experience. Congregants face a stage, the worship band looking over them as the leader encourages congregants to reiterate theological ideas (such as 'I am a child of God', or 'worthy is the lamb who was slain') and pursue unmediated experience of God, manifest in affect and Charismatic gifts. The countercultural air effected through Bethel's juxtaposition of the spirits of religion and truth is further reflected in their deriving a musical idiom from secular pop music. (Molly Worthen notes that countercultural Christian movements of this sort are often quickly perceived to be 'prim and uptight' themselves by their successors.)[197]

---

[193] 'WorshipU,' *WorshipU*. <https://worshipu.com/>

[194] Hoganson Media, 'DOVE NOMINATED BETHEL MUSIC GATHERS ITS BIGGEST RETAIL DEBUT EVER WITH FIRST STUDIO ALBUM, TIDES,' *Jesus Freak Hideout* (11 September 2013). <https://www.jesusfreakhideout.com/news/2013/09/11.DOVE%20NOMINATED%20BETHEL%20MUSIC%20GATHERS%20ITS%20BIGGEST%20RETAIL%20DEBUT%20EVER%20WITH%20FIRST%20STUDIO%20ALBUM,%20TIDES.asp> 'Bethel Music: Chart History: Billboard 200: Tides', *Billboard*. <https://www.billboard.com/music/Bethel-Music/chart-history/billboard-200/song/795509> 'Bethel Music: Chart History: Christian Albums: Tides,' *Billboard*. <https://www.billboard.com/music/Bethel-Music/chart-history/christian-albums/song/795509>

[195] Christerson & Flory, *Network Christianity,* 105. Bethel's annual intake, as recorded by Christerson and Flory, is as follows: plate donations from congregation: $7 million (19% of budget); web media, including music: $8.4 million (23%); BSSM tuition: $7 million (19%); conferences: $4 million (11%); "Global Legacy": $1 million (3%); misson support: $1.4 million (4%); "Advance Redding": $3 million (9%); other: $5 million (12%). See also Ingalls, *Singing,* 199-204: As reported by Ingalls, Bethel TV has over one million viewers per month, and different levels of paid access. Ingalls describes this 'networked congregation' as both an individualising and a participatory model, arguing that it 'concentrat[es] cultural power' and creates a normative cultural prototype to be imitated by those worship outfits that would be successful. Ingalls also refers to self-described 'worship-junkies', the existence of whom 'evidences the overwhelming success of the major worship bands in not just responding to felt needs, but also actively producing desire.'

[196] 'About', *Bethel Music*. <https://bethelmusic.com/about/> 'The purpose of Bethel Music Publishing is to equip the church with worship songs that carry God's presence and bring Him glory. Our aim is to operate with a high standard of excellence in business organization and effectively manage music licensing and copyright processes, song promotion, royalty collection, and key partnerships around the world.'

[197] Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), 256.

Bethel is not the only megachurch that houses a "countercultural" pop worship outfit that spreads its message through worship songs. Throughout this thesis, I draw comparisons between the musical norms employed by the Bethel Collective and other megachurch bands working in the same musical idiom and theological tradition. These include Jesus Culture, Hillsong, Elevation Worship, Vineyard Worship and IHOPKC. Jesus Culture is a youth ministry organised by Banning Liebscher that originated at Bethel Church. (Much of their 'What We Believe' statement matches Bethel's.)[198] Since 2013, Jesus Culture and the record label it established in 2006, have been based in Sacramento, CA. Hillsong was founded in Sydney, Australia in 1983, but has since planted in over twenty countries across the world. Hillsong began releasing music in 1992, and has three worship groups: Hillsong Worship, Hillsong United and Young & Free. Between them, they have released over sixty albums, toured internationally and repeatedly topped Christian music charts.[199]

Elevation Church is a megachurch in Charlotte, North Carolina, run by the pastor and songwriter Steven Furtick. Although Southern Baptist by denomination, Elevation Worship's aesthetic is virtually identical to Bethel's, and the band has toured with Hillsong Worship and Bethel Music.[200] I have already introduced IHOPKC, established by Wimber's acolyte Mike Bickle. IHOPKC's in-house record label is called Forerunner Music, and several of their recorded albums come from their 'Onething' youth conferences. Spontaneous songs are a substantial part of the IHOPKC worship ministry, and perhaps for this reason, the church has taken greater pains than some of its peers to pin down their orthodox beliefs. For example, IHOPKC affirms the Nicene and Athanasian creeds and limits the extent to which their eschatological beliefs require a materialistic response.[201] I have not given an exhaustive list of pop worship acts that resemble Bethel Music in style, context or mission. However, these main examples suffice as my reference points for claiming that Bethel Music is stylistically representative of the genre.

[198] 'What We Believe', *Jesus Culture*. <https://jesusculture.com/sacramento/statement-of-faith/>
[199] 'Fact Sheet', *Hillsong*. <https://hillsong.com/fact-sheet/>
[200] 'About', *Elevation Worship*. <https://elevationworship.com/about/>
[201] See 'Christian Creeds,' *IHOPKC*. <https://www.ihopkc.org/about/christian-creeds/> Also, 'Statement of Faith,' *IHOPKC*. <*https*://www.ihopkc.org/about/statement-of-faith/>

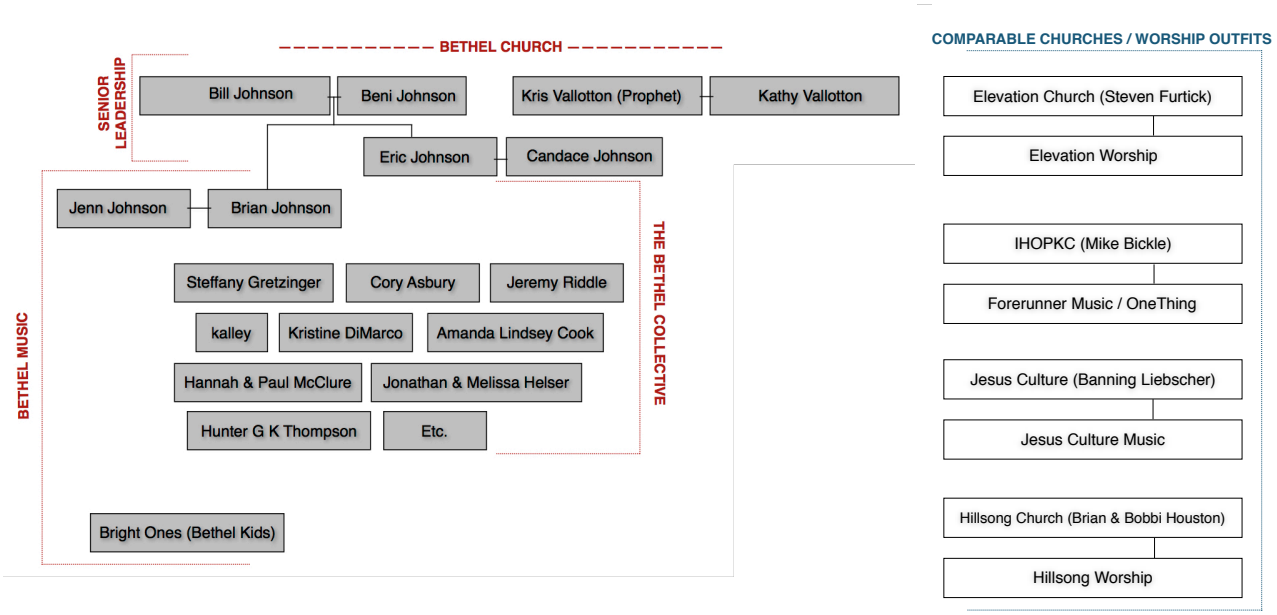


Figure 4. The relevant main characters at Bethel, and a list of comparable worship outfits. I will refer to Bethel’s various Johnsons by first name, for clarity.

1.5 SUMMARY

The development from Wesleyan Methodism to Independent Network Christianity demonstrates a neglect of Scripture and the Law as theologically authoritative sources, independent of personal experience. Instead, the affective dimension of Wesley’s sanctification has been amplified, with an increasing focus on ‘tangible assurance’. Independent Network Christianity shows the democratising and participatory instincts of Methodism, championing participation in church services, and enabling the distinctive theological visions of individual Charismatic leaders to flourish. The following two chapters present John Wesley’s motivational and pastoral hamartiology as a precursor to Bethel’s less considered account.

CHAPTER TWO

John Wesley's Motivational Hamartiology

JOHN WESLEY ON SIN * THE ORDO SALUTIS * SIN AND CHRISTIAN PERFECTION * VOLITIONAL AND COGNITIVE SIN, AFTER WESLEY * SUMMARY

Bethel Church's weak hamartiology is hard to systematise, being conveyed through vague terminology. It can, nevertheless, be clarified by comparison to John Wesley's hamartiology, which is similar in foci, but more theologically robust. In this chapter, I demonstrate Wesley's practical, "motivational-pastoral" approach to hamartiology. It is motivational insofar as it focuses on actual sin and the avoidance thereof, and pastoral in its sensitivity to the doctrine of original sin's propensity to alienate new believers. Wesley classifies the seriousness of sin with respect to will and knowledge – in other words, moral intent. This gives individual agency an all but determinative role in the pursuit of Christian Perfection, as John Wesley conceives of it; Charles Wesley, as I will explain, has a much higher concept of Christian Perfection, due to his greater concern for original sin and its capacity for ongoing corruption. I return to Bethel in the next chapter; the detail in which I discuss John and Charles Wesley's hamartiologies here will provide essential definition for Bethel's practical, but often unclear, use of theological language.

2.1 JOHN WESLEY ON SIN

John Wesley's doctrine of sin is shaped by his practical aim to encourage the pursuit of religious formation. His motivational theology presents good works as a natural result and sign of faith. Faith, in turn, is supported by Christian works, such as obeying the Law, and refraining from actualised sin. Wesley's concern for actual, rather than original, sin is

pastoral in nature.[202] He argues that the doctrine of original sin undermines the potency of moral willpower, pushing Christians to backslide: either because they believe their acts of sin demonstrate a lack of faith, or because their lack of faith in God's power to transform them leads inevitably to complacent acts of sin.[203] As such, Wesley's doctrine of sin is shaped more by its affective salience than by the legal or ontological dimensions of faith.

Wesley embodied this symbiosis between faith and works throughout his life, from his leadership of the Holy Club in Oxford, to his increasingly serious infractions against Anglican protocol as a clergyman.[204] His practical streak – particularly in its more maverick iterations – was driven by the feeling that he had an 'extraordinary calling' to motivate people towards Christian Perfection.[205] In this way, Wesley's praxis belies an experiential hermeneutic, his interpretation of scripture being filtered through his sense of personal vocation.[206] This Wesleyan confidence in individual experience recurs throughout the subsequent American religious movements detailed in my genealogy, wherein Wesley's simultaneous devotion to the Law is gradually superseded by the primacy of religious affect. Thus whilst the personal and experiential elements found in John Wesley's theology have flourished in contemporary movements, the checking influence of the Law, and his already-meagre concerns regarding the noetic effects of sin, have often been significantly diminished in later movements.

John Wesley's doctrine of sin has two clarifying features, with respect to later Charismatic theologies such as Bethel's. Firstly, Wesley draws a correlation between moral intent and the seriousness of sin, distinguishing on this basis between 'sin properly so called' (namely, deliberate sin) and 'sin improperly so called' (or, accidental sin). Secondly,

---

[202] See Maddox, *Responsible Grace,* 23, 121, 82, 182: Maddox repeatedly refers to the 'fundamentally... therapeutic' and 'characteristically pastoral' orientation of Wesley's theology, meaning his relatively greater concern for salvation healing the individual of corruption (through the work of the 'Divine Physician', or Holy Spirit) than for salvation relieving them of guilt.

[203] John Wesley *A Discourse on Sin in Believers* (London: R. Hawes, 1776), 8-9.

[204] See Philip Ott, 'Medicine as Metaphor: John Wesley on Therapy of the Soul', in *Methodist History,* Volume 33 (1995): 178-181. Wesley is not concerned with faith and works, so much as living in a manner that supports faith. Ott writes that Wesley 'consistently urged the Methodists toward a life style conducive to good health.' Wesley was very interested in physical health, which Ott suggests is therapeutic and soteriological in nature: hence Wesley's use of medical metaphor to talk about salvation, for example as the 'cure' of 'disease'.

[205] Burdon, *Authority*, 5.

[206] Wesley's independent ordination of clergymen to supply America with priests, which caused a furor in the Anglican Church, is a good example; although Wesley felt able, himself, to flout Anglican authority, he was later infuriated by his protégées' similar actions. See Burdon, *Authority,* 74, and also MacCulloch, *History*, 752. Bryant, further, astutely notes that Wesley appears to pave the way to his Anglican infractions with excuses, in his 'Thoughts on God's Sovereignty,' where Wesley declares that 'if I was not permitted to remain therein without omitting what God requires me to do, it would then become meet, and right, and my bounden duty to separate from it without delay.' See Barry Edward Bryant, *John Wesley's Doctrine of Sin*, doctoral dissertation (Kings College London: 1992), 217-8.

Wesley links assurance of faith to the manifest effects of Christian Perfection, which he presents as the regulation of desire to resemble the will of God. Together, these qualities present Christian Perfection as significantly determined by individual agency, but thwarted primarily by mistakes rather than deliberate fault: Wesley's account of Christian Perfection minimises the potential, ongoing negative consequences of fallenness, with individuals not being thought especially culpable for accidental sin. Wesley's association between faith and Christian Perfection also risks entrenching a very positive and normative account of affect and desire for the justified Christian. This implicitly problematises "negative" affect – by which I mean affect potentially indicative of human alienation from God, such as doubt, despair or boredom. These issues are similarly raised by Bethel's music, as later chapters will show.

Wesley's primarily motivational and apologetic concern for sin leads him to accept certain features of the doctrine of sin at face value whilst skimming past the whys and wherefores of others. For example, he understands original sin to be a universal condition comprising a defective relationship with God and corrupted faculties of knowledge and will. He identifies these qualities as the root of actual sin. Wesley states, in his sermon 'Original Sin,' that all men are evil and born into estrangement from God as consequences of the Fall. Reading the description in Genesis 6 of Noah's absolutely corrupt contemporaries, Wesley argues that Scripture gives Christians no reason to think humanity's innate evilness changes after the flood. Quite the contrary: this state of affairs, he says, is 'confirmed by daily experience' of man's failure to know, fear or love God. Instead, people are idolatrous, following their own pride, or even the devil.[207]

Wesley does not concern himself with how original sin might be transmitted from Adam and Eve to their progeny, admitting his ignorance on this point.[208] (Bryant argues that Wesley nevertheless thinks original sin a much more likely explanation for the presence of sin in the world than, say, bad education or corrupt spiritual formation.)[209] Nor is Wesley especially interested in the hermeneutical difficulties that corruption through original sin might pose. He accepts the historicity of the Fall, and presents the Fall as the foundation of the Incarnation and the fuller reconciliation with God that Christ enables on the cross,

[207] John Wesley, 'Original Sin,' in Albert C. Outler (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: Volume II* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 176, 179-182.
[208] Bryant, *Sin,* 183.
[209] Ibid., 140.

without worrying that this idea makes God the ground of sin.[210] Wesley, further, does not much consider how original sin should be understood to be a universal phenomenon without compromising the just nature of a God who apparently sets humanity up to fail.

Nevertheless, that Wesley's theology is predominantly practical and motivational does not mean he is entirely unconcerned with the fallenness of man. He presents it as the basis of the Gospel message, in his sermon on original sin:

> Know your disease! Know your cure![211]

The core components of Wesley's hamartiology more or less resemble the classical doctrine as articulated by Augustine, a useful reference point given the somewhat-Wesleyan but utterly un-Augustinian hamartiology Bethel will later espouse. Like Augustine, Wesley distinguishes between the original act of sin attributed to Adam from the state of original sin in which humankind are thought to share in: *peccatum originale originans,* indicating the historical event of the first act of sin, and *peccatum originale originatum*, indicating the condition of humankind it precipitates.[212] Wesley affirms that sin enters humanity from Adam's act of knowing rebellion. This act identifies Adam as the representative of humankind to whom Christ's salvific work acts as foil. He further agrees with Augustine that original sin results in a human proclivity towards disordered desire.[213]

In certain telling respects, Wesley's account of original sin is gentler than Augustine's. Wesley claims that man is not wholly corrupt, but is afforded, through divine prevenient grace, a 'dim light' within: namely, reason. This small good in man, which enables discernment of innate human corruption, is evident even in 'heathens', according to Wesley (although heathens, unlike Christians, fail to comprehend their inability to self-correct this corruption).[214] Wesley's divergence from classical hamartiology on this point demonstrates the central role of individual agency in his account of salvation. Further,

---

[210] See Frank Baker (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: Volume 25: Letters I: 1721-1739* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 264: Wesley attempts to prove in a letter to his father that 'to permit evils in the world is consistent with, nay, necessarily results from, infinite goodness.' See also John Wesley, 'The Fall of Man,' in Outler, *Works II*, 411, and Stephen K. Moroney, *The Noetic Effects of Sin* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2000), 3, on overlooking the implications of faculties corrupted through original sin.
[211] John Wesley, 'A Sermon on Original Sin,' in Outler, *Works II*, 185.
[212] Tatha Wiley, *Original Sin* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989), 5.
[213] John Wesley, 'On the Fall of Man', in Outler, *Works II*, 400-401.
[214] Wesley, 'A Sermon on Original Sin,' 173. See also Moroney, *Noetic Effects*, 9-11, on how this diverges with Calvin's notion of total depravity, and reliance upon 'light from heaven.'

Wesley's insistence upon the 'dim light' of reason and on individual capacity for good works, underscores his blind spot for the potential ongoing noetic consequences of sin.

Of the two key themes in Wesley's account of sin – volition and cognition – the greater significance of the former is made evident in his account of the Fall. Wesley distinguishes between two forms of actualised sin illustrated by Adam and Eve, described in a 1731 letter as 'sin properly so called' and 'sin improperly so called.'[215] These might otherwise be described as mortal sins and venial sins, and the faculties of will and knowledge are intrinsic to his distinction between them. According to Wesley, mortal sins – 'sins properly so called' – involve the deliberate transgression of a known law, and induce estrangement from God until they are repented of. Venial sins – 'improperly so called' – are involuntary transgressions resulting from error, for example in knowledge or judgment. They are symptoms, rather than causes, of estrangement, and do not have a serious impact on individual relationship with God.[216]

Importantly, Wesley understands the Law not as an abstract moral code, but as the face of God as humanity can experience it, prevailing obscurely in the conscience through prevenient grace, and illuminated in Christians by the Spirit. The Law therefore has a relational aspect, as well as providing an objective standard against which human guilt can be established.[217] As Josef Pieper remarks, one cannot simultaneously believe that original sin is significant enough to have drastic historical consequences for all humankind and also that sin is merely the infraction of a behavioural rule.[218] However, by classifying sin according to intent, Wesley implicitly deems accidental sins relatively insignificant infractions, because they do not necessarily demonstrate an attitude towards the person of God. For example, Eve's sin, according to Wesley, was 'improperly so called,' arising from her belief in the distorted account of God that the serpent fed her. The erroneous belief was not sin, but resulted in an act of sin when she ate the forbidden fruit.[219] Adam, however, sinned deliberately, consciously contravening God's known commandments. Wesley quotes John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, saying that Adam was

[215] Bryant, *Sin*, 212.
[216] Ibid., 198.
[217] Ibid., 243-6. See also Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 56, and Maddox & Vickers, *Cambridge Companion,* 44.
[218] Josef Pieper, *The Concept of Sin,* trans. Edward Oakes (South Bend: St Augustine's Press, 2001), 13-14.
[219] Wesley, 'On the Fall of Man', in in Outler, *Works II*, 402-3.

Not by stronger reason moved, but fondly overcome with female charms...[220]

Thus Eve sinned outwardly, but Adam sinned both inwardly and outwardly, by idolising Eve and consequently disobeying God's law. For this reason, Wesley suggests that Adam's infraction is more serious than Eve's, because Adam's deliberate rebellion results in estrangement from God: sin properly so called.

By associating volition, and therefore intent, with seriousness of sin, Wesley emphasises the motivational bent of his theology, limiting the extent to which a Christian, in his view, ought to be condemned by themselves or others, and alleviating religious guilt.[221] Simultaneously, by prioritising volition above cognition as a means for determining the seriousness of sin, he diminishes the apparent significance of the potential ongoing noetic corruption of original sin, because sins through error do not have such moral or spiritual significance. It is worth noting that because the Spirit both convicts sinners and illuminates the moral law, it is implausible, in Wesley's view, for Christians to attribute their sin to outright ignorance of the moral law. However, ignorance regarding its application might be possible, he concedes.[222] This leaves an unexamined grey area, regarding volition and cognition, whereby Wesley, unlike Augustine, Luther or Calvin, assumes the faculties of knowledge and will are reliably adequate means for distinguishing good and evil, even as he notes their potential limitations. Wesley does identify certain definite ongoing results of sin, such as pride, but is not as systematic in his treatment of the corrupting properties of sin as is, say, Augustine, or Calvin. This allows for a weak spot in his theology (and a similar weak spot in Bethel's, later) where Wesley refrains from examining the noetic consequences of original sin, with respect to his experiential hermeneutic, in order to facilitate the motivational benefits of religious affect.

2.2 THE ORDO SALUTIS

The primary function of Wesley's doctrine of sin is to ground his *ordo salutis*, and, importantly, its practical application. The *ordo salutis* is often presented in an overly

[220] See Milton, *Paradise Lost,* Book IX.998-999. Milton (like Wesley, later) is Augustinian on this point; see Augustine, *City of God,* XI – XIV.
[221] John Wesley, 'The First-Fruits of the Spirit,' in Outler, *Works II,* 240-1.
[222] Bryant, *Sin,* 245-6.

schematic fashion, in numbered or lettered steps, and sub-steps.[223] However, Wesley does not present it systematically as a series of steps to be taken, but explains it more episodically, through different sermons which I will synthesise here.[224] Wesley's intention to motivate believers into holy living results in an Arminian soteriology, wherein God partners with human free will in order to counteract the free disobedience of Adam. Wesley's Arminianism responds to a long history of soteriologies distorted, in his view, to spiritually damaging ends. The Catholic proclivity to preach justification by works had resulted in the religious striving and sale of indulgences to which Martin Luther took objection. The Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith alone had subsequently relieved believers of this burden, but risked inculcating complacency in faith – according to Wesley, who considered Lutheranism prone to undermining Christian works. Calvinists were, in Wesley's view, the worst of all: Calvin's doctrine of double predestination risked totally demotivating believers, suggesting that they need not bother to try to be good, nor evangelise, nor love the condemned.[225]

The rather dire Gospel that Wesley extrapolated from the main principles of classical Calvinism was the premise for his Arminian *ordo salutis*, wherein individuals must participate actively in their own salvation, and are neither elected in complacency nor condemned without recourse. Wesley's emphases upon individual agency and practical theology should *not* be taken as an indication that man can save himself. In 'Justification by Faith', Wesley states that there is no justification without faith in Christ as the saviour of mankind through his sacrifice on the cross.[226] Christ's sacrifice is, for Wesley, unambiguously the means that enables the redemption of humankind.

[223] For example, this online archive of Wesley's sermons introduces the *ordo salutis* with a ten step process, beginning with divine foreknowledge and ending in glorification: 'Regeneration: Preaching Like the God of Small Beginnings', *Wesleyan Sermons* (21 October 2013). <http://wesleyansermons.com/2013/10/21/regeneration-preaching-like-the-god-of-small-beginnings/> Kenneth Collins takes a similarly schematic approach, albeit in long form – see Kenneth Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), and Kenneth Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), particularly chapters 2, 5 and 6. See Maddox, *Responsible Grace,* 20-23, on a common trifold schema for the development of Wesley's thought, and his shifting emphasis on different parts of the *ordo salutis*.

[224] For example, in Wesley's sermon 'The Circumcision of the Heart,' he refers to faith, love and so on as stages within a process. However, Wesley is demonstrably concerned with the *current* state of fallibility in his congregants, and an overly schematic account of the *ordo salutis* risks overlooking the non-linear nature of Wesley's sanctification. See Outler, *Works I,* 403.

[225] Wesley, 'Free Grace', in Outler, *Works III*, 554: Wesley wholeheartedly rejects the 'horrible doctrine' of Calvinism, although he is particularly concerned about the risk of antinomianism.

[226] Wesley, 'Justification by Faith,' in in Outler, *Works I,* 195.

Wesley's *ordo salutis* distinguishes between several forms of divine grace that lead to salvation, in order to argue that holy living is a worthwhile endeavour for which individuals are responsible, and which they might confidently pursue. The *ordo* begins with prevenient grace. Wesley explicitly states that the grace of God from which salvation comes is neither dependent on human capability or merit, nor predestined in condemnation or election without regard for human choice.[227] Rather, there is a 'natural conscience,' 'more properly termed preventing grace,' which is possessed by both the saved and unsaved.[228] This reinscribes the moral law on the heart of the fallen individual and is the basis for the "supernatural gift" of the conscience, which offers them 'basic knowledge of the attributes of God'.[229] The primary purposes of prevenient grace include illuminating the seriousness of personal sin, and personal conviction, enabling individual agency to accept, or forego, salvation.[230] Kenneth Collins suggests that Wesley uses the term 'prevenient grace' in two ways: narrowly, to indicate the divine grace that precedes justifying and sanctifying grace allowing for Wesley's Arminianism, and broadly, in the sense that all grace is prevenient because human response to grace always relies on the prior graciousness of God that makes such response available.[231]

After prevenient grace has offered the individual the information required to perceive their sinfulness, convicting grace offers them the ability to acknowlege their 'corrupted nature', 'wretched[ness]' and need for God.[232] For Wesley, the individual agency required to accept (resistible) convicting grace is not Pelagian precisely because it is premised on the prior action of God in effecting (irresistible) prevenient grace. Hence Wesley's claim that salvation is universally available, although not universally accepted. Although Wesley admits that the 'dim light' of reason illuminates the moral conscience to some degree, he states in his sermon 'The Circumcision of the Heart' that only by the Holy Spirit can humans will and do good. Evidence of the Spirit within can be discerned in individuals who forsake the good judgment of men for foolishness in Christ.[233] There is therefore a

[227] Wesley, 'Free Grace', in Outler, *Works III*, 545: Wesley notes that the grace of God from which salvation comes is free 'in' and 'for' all. 'In', meaning that it is not dependent on human capability or merit. 'For' refuting predestination of condemnation or election, lest evangelism be made redundant (and a misleading task, given the command to Christians to preach the word of God).
[228] Wesley, 'On Working Out Our Own Salvation', in Outler, *Works III*, 207.
[229] Collins, *John Wesley,* 78. Collins notes that the restoration of the faculties is distinct from the call to salvation that occurs through the restored faculties.
[230] Bryant, *Sin*, 253.
[231] Collins, *Holy Love*, 75.
[232] Wesley, 'The Circumcision of the Heart,' in Outler, *Works I,* 403
[233] Wesley, 'The Circumcision of the Heart,' in Outler, *Works I,* 404.

partnership between individual agency and the preveniently available Holy Spirit, and this enables the individual to act rightly in accepting convicting grace.

After conviction and repentance, the believer receives justifying grace. This amounts to a divine pardon for their sins. Wesley states that justifying grace comes through faith alone (not works), and consists in our being made right in the eyes of God. This righteousness is imputed to us by Christ: Wesley emphasises that justification is not God forgetting about human sinfulness, or placing an erroneously high value upon humans.[234] Rather, it entails God choosing to attribute to justified Christians the righteousness of Christ, so that, through the gracious forgiveness of their sins, they might be considered justified.

Once again, this emphasises the relational, rather than transactional, nature of Wesley's soteriology. For Wesley, saving faith is a 'disposition of the heart' and not merely a 'speculative, rational thing'.[235] That is to say, saving faith requires assent to certain intellectual propositions, including the necessity of the crucifixion and the actuality of the resurrection as the means by which Christ redeems mankind, but also requires a feeling of personal trust in, and reliance upon, Christ's salvific work. Assured salvation saves the individual from guilt, fear and the 'power of sin', the meaning of which I will shortly examine. However, the affective element of Wesley's saving faith complicates assurance of faith, feelings being more nebulous than intellectual definitions. I will revisit this problem of assurance, because it is also important for Bethel's theology.

Distinguishing thereafter between mortal and venial sin on the basis of individual volition, Wesley argues that sanctifying grace enables believers to refrain from actualising inward sin. Sanctifying grace is the fruit of justification, and the means by which the righteousness of Christ is imparted to believers. It manifests in holy living, or Christian Perfection.[236] Wesley (like his brother Charles) is clear that works *follow* salvation by faith; his affirmation of 'working out our own salvation' is a rhetorical flourish motivating his listeners to utilise their preveniently enabled agency to do good. In this way, Wesley presents God's work and human work as complementary, rather than opposing, forces. He argues that God has overcome the incapacity for good that results from human fallenness,

[234] Wesley, 'The First-Fruits of the Spirit,' in Outler, *Works I*, 186.
[235] Wesley, 'Salvation by Faith,' in Outler, *Works I,* 120.
[236] Bryant, *Sin,* 265.

and that disobedience to God's Law indicates a lack of faith in God's gracious power to redeem the individual.[237] This idea demonstrates well the link Wesley draws between motivation, faith and works, favouring active faith over passive. Wesley's account of religious formation, through sanctifying grace, relies heavily on a sense of personal relationship with God. However, it takes an overly optimistic approach to the ongoing corruption of original sin that is continually present in Methodism's successor movements.

Prevenient grace, which establishes the grounds for sinful man's free will within the *ordo salutis*, and sanctifying grace, the basis for Christian (sinless) perfection after justification, are the two most significant stages of Wesley's *ordo salutis,* as regards his doctrine of sin. Prevenient grace preserves the free will that Wesley considers essential to the endeavour of Christian Perfection (as well as potential backsliding), whilst sanctifying grace enables and establishes the possible extent of Christian Perfection in this life. The correlation Wesley presents between the different levels of grace received, and a steadfastly positive attitude towards God, will reemerge later in Bethel's theology, wherein supernatural empowerment is thought to result, more or less directly, from the positive affective experiences engendered by belief. Although oriented towards Christian Perfection, Wesley's *ordo salutis* is not a form of salvation by works. Rather, it is founded upon a doctrine of sin that elucidates mankind's *need* for prevenient grace. (In this respect it is congruent with the claims of Classical Arminianism, as articulated in the Five Articles of Remonstrance.)[238] The essential characteristics of Wesley's *ordo salutis* are its dependence upon free will and cooperation between mankind and God, and its insistence that sanctification naturally manifests in the overcoming, to some degree, of certain sorts of sin.

2.3 SIN AND CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

John Wesley claims that justifying grace releases the Christian from 'fear, guilt and the power of sin', enabling them to confidently pursue Christian Perfection.[239] John and Charles' accounts of Christian Perfection differ from one another in one significant respect. John emphasises that Christian Perfection is an attainable goal, albeit a serious undertaking that requires self-discipline, and ultimately a matter of volition. If the Fall

[237] Wesley, 'On Working Out Our Own Salvation', in Outler, *Works III*, 208.
[238] See Peter Ymen DeJong, *Crisis in the Reformed Churches* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), 222 – 229.
[239] Wesley, 'Salvation by Faith,' in in Outler, *Works I,* 122-3.

results in the corruption of Adam as the moral image of God, resulting in relational estrangement more broadly, the Spirit gradually renews this image after justification**:**

> By nature ye are wholly corrupted. By grace ye shall be wholly renewed.[240]

Bryant argues that this primarily relational way of understanding sin, as the knowing transgression of God's precepts, turns sin into a mere 'deprivation of God's image', rather than a quality with its own distinct character.[241] Yet Wesley does not claim that man can be wholly renewed by grace in *this* life. After spiritual rebirth, sin can maintain an actualised presence, as Wesley notes in 'On Sin in Believers':

> "Sin cannot, in any kind or degree, exist where it does not reign." Absolutely contrary this to all experience, all Scripture, all common sense.[242]

Citing Galatians 5:17, Wesley affirms an ongoing tension between the 'two contrary principles' of spirit and flesh, indicating that Christians can still actualise sin. The task of the believer is to pursue Christian Perfection, which, for Wesley, is distinct from sanctification.[243] Bryant rightly perceives that Wesley's discussion of actual sin is less about the consequences of original sin, and more about the extent to which Christian Perfection is possible, and can be encouraged.[244] This again demonstrates the ancillary character of the doctrine of sin in Wesley's theology. It is important to understand that Wesley is not a covert Pelagian, but rather aims to present an account of universally available grace that saves mankind from total depravity. It is unfortunate that his motivational bent so weakens his hamartiology; the result is that Wesley's account of Christian Perfection might easily overestimate the capacity of the justified Christian's capacity for God and holy living.

---

[240] Wesley, 'Original Sin,' in Outler, *Works I*, 185. See also 'On the Fall of Man' in Outler, *Works II*, 410: '..."If any one have sinned, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." And here is a remedy for all our disease, all the corruption of our nature. For God hath also, through the intercession of his Son, given us his Holy Spirit, to renew us both "in knowledge," [...] and also in his moral image.'
[241] Bryant, *Sin,* 180.
[242] Wesley, *Discourse*, 13. See also 'Christian Perfection' in in Outler, *Works II*, 107, on the sins of David and Moses.
[243] Ibid., 6.
[244] Bryant, *Sin,* 229.

John Wesley presents Christian Perfection as one end of the *ordo salutis*, pertaining to everyday religious praxis.[245] He defines it in a letter to Charles, written on the 27th January 1767, thus:

> By perfection I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God and man ruling all the tempers, words, and action, the whole heart, and the whole life... I believe this perfection is always wrought in the soul by faith, by a simple act of faith, consequently in an instant. But I believe in a gradual work both preceding and following that instant.[246]

In his sermon 'On Perfection,' John Wesley elucidates the limited transformation signified by the term, stating that Christians still possess infirmities such as ignorance, and are prone to err.[247] Christian Perfection is summarised by John as 'love', of God and of the neighbour, and manifests in obedience to the will of God, as well as fruit of the Spirit, such as goodness and joy.[248] Wesley, alluding to Paul, describes the perfected individual as a 'living sacrifice,' and comments:

> Thus you experience that He whose name is called Jesus does not bear that name in vain: That he does, in fact, 'save his people from their sins;' the root as well as the branches. And this salvation from sin, from all sin, is another description of perfection...[249]

This passage is not merely motivational, proclaiming to listeners that they 'experience' the formative process of Christian perfection after salvation, and thereby encouraging listeners to be disciplined about not sinning. It further offers a helpful metaphor for understanding the distinction between Wesley's Christian Perfection and sanctification. If sanctification deals with the 'root' – original sin – Christian perfection pertains to the branches, comprising holy living. However, because Wesley thinks sanctification is not immediately completed, he argues that Christians remain susceptible to inward sin, although not totally in bondage to it. This susceptibility involves 'any sinful temper, passion, or affection; such as pride, self-will,

[245] Brown-Lawson, *Wesley*, 142-145.
[246] Tyson, *Charles Wesley,* 391.
[247] Wesley, 'On Perfection,' in Outler, *Works III*, 72-3.
[248] Ibid., 74-5.
[249] Ibid., 76.

love of the world, in any kind or degree; such as lust, anger, peevishness; any disposition contrary to the mind which was in Christ.'[250]

The difference between John and Charles' accounts is, broadly, one of degree: Charles maintains a higher definition of Christian Perfection, defining the term as the total removal of original sin and full reinscription of the *imago dei.*[251] Although John's theology was not totally devoid of 'negative superlatives' regarding the seriousness of sin,[252] Charles' language is especially vivid in this respect. In particular, his hymns demonstrate an affinity for visceral sickness imagery as a means of illustrating the all-pervasive significance of original sin (although Tyson notes Charles' varied use of Biblical imagery).[253] One notable example is the hymn 'The Bloody Issue Cured.' Quite apart from the title, this hymn speaks of the sinner's 'fountain of polluted blood' as a 'plague', the 'infection' transmitted from Adam, the 'stubborn evil,' 'poison' and 'loathsome sore' of sin, and the sinner's 'soul and life unclean'.[254] Charles' hymns also repeatedly refer to disreputable sorts such as 'harlots,' 'publicans' and 'thieves', to demonstrate the extent of human sinfulness and divine grace. (Indeed, John censored the original verses fifteen and sixteen of 'O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing' from his 1780 *Collection*, due to this 'inappropriate' content.)[255]

Charles' concern for original sin resulted in a lofty definition of Christian Perfection that elicited the following complaint from his brother, in a letter dated the 9th July 1764:

> That perfection which I believe, I can boldly preach, because I think I see five hundred witnesses of it. Of that perfection which you preach, you do not even see any witnesses at all. Why, then you must have far more courage than me, or you could not persist in preaching it.... [t]here is no such perfection as you describe – at least, I never met an instance of it; and I doubt I never shall. Therefore, I still think to set perfection so high is effectually to renounce it.[256]

[250] Wesley, 'The Circumcision of the Heart,' in Outler, *Works I,* 320.
[251] Tyson, *Charles Wesley,* 40, 360-1.
[252] Bryant, *Sin*, 76.
[253] Tyson, *Charles Wesley,* 19-20, 36.
[254] Tyson, *Charles Wesley,* 273-6.
[255] Tyson, 'The Methodist National Anthem,' 23.
[256] Tyson, *Charles Wesley*, 384. Charles, for his part, *did* witness Christian Perfection, as he conceived of it, for example in the passing of the pious Mrs Hooper. See Julie A. Lunn, *The Theology of Sanctification and Resignation in Charles Wesley's Hymns* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 57.

Both brothers present Christian Perfection as both instantaneous and ongoing, and their hymns emphasise these coexistent present and 'pilgrimage' aspects.[257] However, whereas John argues that Christian Perfection might be attained at any time, though likely after a great many years of Christian formation, Charles maintains that it would manifest only upon the threshold of death.[258] The brothers' relatively more and less optimistic accounts of Christian Perfection correspond with more and less overt means by which salvation can be assured. For John, who emphasises the volitional nature of sin and formative aspect of Christian Perfection, assurance is found in holy works and the fruit of the Spirit.[259] In his letter, he suggests that the visibility of Christian Perfection and its effects are substantive of its veracity, foreshadowing the slide towards ever more tangible forms of assurance that I detailed in the previous chapter. For Charles, meanwhile, it transpires inwardly, through a feeling of peace and comfort attainable even as the ontological burden of original sin persists.[260] There is, thus, a more well-defined place for struggle in Charles Wesley's theology of sin and salvation.

The divergence between the brothers, regarding Christian Perfection, is significant not only because it shines a light upon their quite distinct hamartiologies, but also because it starkly reveals the extent of what John Wesley's hamartiology, which provides something of a blueprint for Methodism's successor movements, does and does not concern. In short, John Wesley's doctrine of Christian Perfection is vital to his motivational theology, because holy living, and the related religious affect, is the clearest means of assurance of salvation that he can articulate, given the affective aspect of his account of faith. It is therefore expedient for him to frame sin as a largely volitional phenomenon, focusing on actualisation as the most significant form of sin, and refraining from dwelling on the inconvenient doctrine of original sin (and its potential ongoing consequences).

[257] Tyson *Charles Wesley*, 360-1
[258] See Bryant, *Sin*, 282-3, and Tyson, *Charles Wesley*, 376 for the brothers' respective positions. See Brown-Lawson, *Wesley*, 148-9, on the poor reception of John Wesley's position. Also, Newport, *Sermons*, 61-2.
[259] On this subject, Zahl issues caution regarding John Wesley's sermon 'On the Marks of the New Birth', suggesting that in Wesley's work 'the pattern of experience is instrumentalized as a tool for determining who is and is not saved and for deriving assurance of salvation via a kind of syllogism ("I have had X experience; X experience is the reliable mark of the 'new birth'; therefore I can safely conclude that I have been saved")... From an affective Augustinian perspective, the "prescriptive" aspect of this sort of pietist model is excluded on the grounds that it turns the experience of grace into a kind of law.' Zahl, *Holy Spirit*, 198-199.
[260] Tyson, *Charles Wesley,* 7, 20, 40.

Difficulties still arise from John Wesley's focus on actualised sin, and the manifestation of faith in works, which, as I noted in the previous chapter, is a problematic criterion for assurance. Wesley argues that habitual sin does not exist in those who are reborn in faith. Nor does wilful sin, because faith aligns the will against sin, nor desiring sin, because the faithful one desires the will of God, and alternative tendencies are stifled through grace. Sin by infirmity of act, word or thought need not result in sin, because the disadvantageousness of infirmity is mitigated by the advantage of a holy will.[261] Similarly, in 'A Discourse on Sin in Believers,' Wesley states that

> A man may be in God's favour though he feel sin; but not if he yields to it. Having sin does not forfeit the favour of God; giving way to sin does.[262]

Thus Wesley argues that Christians might experience inward sin but need not actualise it. Wesley's confidence regarding the actualisation of inward sin fails to consider that the fallibility of knowledge and desire should cast aspersions on human ability to reliably identify inward sin, in order to avoid actualising it. Acknowledgement of one's mortal sinfulness in general is not the same as reliably acknowledging the particular ways in which it manifests. Nor does it entail reliably distinguishing between one's own ignorance and one's mistake. Wesley additionally suggests that some Christians might incorrectly think they are saved, acknowledging the blurry line between ignorance and mistake (such Christians as these presumably being ignorant), but he does not pursue the issue. Although Wesley is more concerned with the estrangement from God that results from the Fall than the corruption of particular faculties, he nevertheless establishes that, at the very least, individuals are corrupt in some fashion, and prone to mistakes. For example, Wesley's account of Noah's contemporaries claims that individuals tend to behave idolatrously, even after the flood.[263] It is clear, then, that by Wesley's own reckoning, one might well be deceived by fraudulent or illusory spiritual works, despite his claim that Christians need not sin.

[261] Wesley, 'Salvation by Faith,' in Outler, *Works I,* 123.
[262] Wesley, *Discourse,* 15.
[263] Wesley, 'On Original Sin', Outler, *Works II,* 176.

2.4 COGNITIVE AND VOLITIONAL SIN, AFTER WESLEY

Wesley's proclivity for framing sin according to volition and intent, imposing a subjective standard for judgment, is also a feature of much later hamartiology. Bethel's insubstantial account of sin is presaged by a centuries-long shift, in Western thought, from the universal reason of modernity to postmodernist concerns regarding individual lived experiences and the resistance of metanarratives. This context shapes Bethel's "non-judgmental" understanding of sin, which treats the individual therapeutically (as Chapter Six demonstrates).[264] A full account is too much for this chapter, although I revisit therapeutic religion later in this thesis. However, a brief sketch of the immediate hamartiological context for Bethel's account of sin might note certain significant strokes in 20th century theology in which subjective experience is paramount for understanding the nature of God. Some memeable ideas that have been incorporated into popular Charismatic Christianity include Jurgen Moltmann's account of the passible God, constructive theologies of Christ on the margins, and the development of social accounts of original sin. These moves all subordinate "objective", and possibly systematically problematic, notions of reason to individual subjective experience, in a way that recalls Bethel's dichotomy between the spirits of religion and truth.[265]

In the 20th century, the dichotomisation of experience and reason seen in numerous movements – such as Wesleyan Methodism, Pietism and liberal Protestantism – is shaped further by narratives of suffering and oppression during the twentieth century. For example, Jurgen Moltmann responds to the unfathomable horror of the Holocaust with a theology of the 'crucified God'. Moltmann presents God as passible, arguing that a God unmoved by human suffering could not be understood as righteous or loving.[266] The cross, for Moltmann, becomes a vital means by which God protests in solidarity alongside man,

[264] This shift is also influenced by the pietistic and Evangelical desire for affective religious experience, which caught on throughout popular Western forms of Christianity, as I discussed in the previous chapter. This broader phenomenon is beyond the scope of this thesis, extending far further than the genealogy from Methodism to the contemporary Charismatic and Pentecostal moments, more immediately including parts of the Evangelical movement, German Pietism, Romantic theology and William James' examination of religious experience.
[265] See Ari Kelman, *Shout to the Lord* (New York: NYU Press, 2018), 29: Kelman writes that he has, on several occasions, heard worship leaders or pastors make statements such as 'I have Jesus; I don't need religion.' Kelman observes that this 'formulation captured an approach to faith that sought to dispense with formalities and empty ritual in favor of an immediacy of connection between humans and the divine.'
[266] Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 234.

against human suffering.[267] Faced with the alternative – that God might not suffer empathetically in himself – Moltmann assumes the position of Ivan Karamazov:

> I accept God, understand that, but I cannot accept the world that he has made.[268]

David Bentley Hart rightly, albeit grotesquely, critiques Moltmann and his sympathisers for attempting to delineate the person of God according to the desires and understanding of mankind. Hart mimics Moltmann's perspective:

> The cross, one might say, was good for him, if unpleasant, for now he understands me, accepts me, and so I can accept him.[269]

Hart describes the desire for a passible God as mere 'self indulgence and apologetical plaintiveness.' It implies that God ought to sympathise with, rather than judge, fallen humanity, and undermines the divinely-ordained standards of sin and righteousness themselves.[270] This, Hart claims, expresses a desire to avoid culpability for sin, and cheapens grace (which cannot be understood apart from in dialectic with sin). Hart suggests that divine judgment of human failing is an essential component of Christian doctrine, rather than the Moltmann-esque eclipse of a judgmental God with the sympathetic divine identification with mankind. For Hart, acknowledging God's judgment of man (rather than Karamazov's judgment of God) preserves an awareness of the seriousness of sin, and the radical grace of Christ's sympathetic identification with mankind. By comparison, Hart claims, Moltmann's approach actually makes God the ground of evil, which becomes the starting point for divine redemptive work.

The attitude towards divine passibility and sympathy that Hart critiques in Moltmann is present in many developments of liberation theology and its postmodern offshoots, such as feminist theology, race theology, womanist theology, queer theology and those other constructive theologies premised on particular identity markers that have emerged since.

---

[267] Richard Bauckham, 'Jurgen Moltmann,' in David Ford (ed.), *The Modern Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 153.
[268] Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 227; Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (Mineola: Dover, 2005), 374.
[269] David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 374.
[270] Ibid., 159.

Gustav Gutiérrez's 'preferential option for the poor,' which signifies God's particular sympathy for the materially downtrodden is, in later constructive theologies, extended to those downtrodden on account of systemic biases pertaining to gender, sexuality and so on, shaping the understanding of God according to political perspective.[271] For example, Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker reject atonement theology, on the understanding that it shapes women and children's acceptance of abuse.[272] They present original sin, or spiritual corruption, as a merely abstract construct, paling in significance compared to the "real world" corruptions of social and cultural structures:

> We do not need to be saved by Jesus' death from some original sin. We need to be liberated from the oppression of racism, classism, and sexism, that is, from patriarchy.[273]

Brown and Parker present spiritual and social concerns as antithetical, and prioritise the latter as the concern of theology.[274] Faced with the Church's failure to sympathise with the oppressed under myriad circumstances, kindred notions emerge, such as Carter Heyward's 'right relation.' Heyward develops a distinctly social account of salvation that covers over the particularities of sin, as though taking a Wesleyan approach to cognition and volition, rather than using the Law as an absolute moral standard. For example, Heyward argues that Christ is made incarnate through believers engaging in mutually supportive relationships, and presents polyamorous lesbian sex as a means by which this occurs in her own life.[275]

Following in Heyward's stead, Marcella Althaus-Reid's 'indecent theology' resists the desexualisation of God, framing this as heteronormative oppression of the Other. Althaus-Reid presents relation as the most fundamental mode of being, through which God reveals Godself in history, and sexuality, consequently, as a means of engendering personal closeness with God. Althaus-Reid's project is to diversify theological language, rendering it accessible to all sexual Others. She undertakes this using deliberately provocative

---

[271] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History* (London: SCM Press, 1983)
[272] Joanna Carlson Brown & Rebecca Parker, 'For God So Loved the World?' in Joanne Carlson Brown & Carole R. Bohn (ed.), *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1990), 2, 7.
[273] Brown & Parker, 'For God So Loved the World?' 27.
[274] Robert Cummings Neville, who I will discuss in later chapters, remarks that Brown and Parker fail to understand that suffering does *not* have salvific power, and that this is the reason for the cross. Their critique, he suggests, is a little Pelagian, and they apply the symbol of Christ's suffering on the cross too widely, and too literally, to Christians at large. See Robert Cummings Neville, *The Truth of Broken Symbols* (Albany: SUNY, 1996), 209, 212, 224.
[275] Carter Heyward, *Touching Our Strength* (New York: Harper, 1989).

language, for example describing theology as a sexual act,[276] and referring to the 'genderfucking process' of God's 'omnisexual kenosis'.[277] For Althaus-Reid, the attributes of God are represented by sexual 'indecency', characterised by promiscuity and perversion (this being her preferred language). Her method defies interpretation of the Law as an objective moral standard or literal ethical guide, attributing greater importance to abstract values, such as loving relation.

This trajectory is relevant because people like Heyward and Althaus-Reid specifically use the language of non-normative sexuality, which has often been associated with sin, to present the reconciliation effected through divine grace.[278] This shows, firstly, that they interpret sin according to cognition and volition, not religious law. Secondly, it demonstrates that there is a strong therapeutic dimension to this interpretation of sin, with the above figures using marginal qualities to defend the oppressed. The developments of these constructive theologies present systemic epistemological biases as an alternative to "original sin", and social structures such as patriarchy, white supremacy, heteronormativity and so on as the mediators of such "original sin." Social models of sin such as these represent an attempt to reconcile the understanding of morality as premised on cognition and volition – which Wesley advocates – with the affront to personal agency that original sin can be thought to represent.[279] (These models attempt to avoid drawing a simplistic line of causation between those who suffer and the reason for their suffering. For example, Brown and Parker reject the doctrines of original sin and the atonement on the understanding that, together, they imply that a woman deserves to be oppressed by patriarchy, and that her suffering under patriarchy is redemptive.)[280]

Alasdair McFadyen argues against replacing a heritable doctrine of orignal sin with such social models of original sin as these. McFadyen says it is unsatisfactory to think of original sin merely as the contextual 'pre-conditioning of our free agency', citing Rahner's social/historical conception of original sin as a distorted set of conditions for communication and relation in which all people are inextricably situated.[281] In social

[276] Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology* (NYC: Routledge, 2000), 87.
[277] Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (NYC: Routledge, 2003), 57.
[278] See, for example, Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), or for a less polemical argument, Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 395-6.
[279] Alasdair McFadyen, *Bound to Sin* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 31.
[280] Brown & Parker, 'For God So Loved the World?' 13.
[281] McFadyen, *Bound to Sin,* 33-6. Derek Nelson, for his part, suggests that models of structural sin often suffer from a lack of clarity, using rhetoric that conflates structures that support sin with sin itself, and failing to clearly identify the

models of original sin, summarises McFadyen, sin is 'propagated through forms of sociality distorted through a history of sinning' which 'infect' us with pathologies that alienate us from God.[282] However, he continues, this approach implies moral determinism through social structures that negate the possibility of free moral choice. Rather, it suggests both that agency is determined by a 'social transcendental' and that humans, prior to their engagement in the social world, have a sin-free core. This actually negates the existence of original sin, unbalancing any potential dialectic of sin and grace in a very fundamental way, by making sin non-universal, if it is entirely actual, and reducing the category of sin in its scope. McFadyen claims that social models of sin such as these display a 'reluctance' to proffer personal responsibility for social structures of sin, and typically only account for passive participation in them.[283] Thus

> social reinterpretation of the doctrine of original sin actually excises, rather than interprets, the traditional notion of the non-personal transmission and inheritance of guilt. What is not capable of interpretation through the filter of modern culture [...] is filtered out. What is socially inherited and communicated, passively received, cannot be guilt. At most, it is a socially mediated deprivation of the good.[284]

McFadyen argues that modern theology tends to attribute culpability for sin insofar as we actualise sin, for example by actively propagating patriarchy or white supremacy.[285] A whisper of this idea can be heard in Wesley, for whom volitional participation in deliberate sin determines 'sin properly so called' from 'sin improperly so called.' The same idea can be heard louder still in Bethel's theology and music, in their imagery of externalising sin in justified Christians (for example describing it as 'fear', 'tiredness', 'pain' or 'storms').[286] Ironically, by implying that victims are blameless, such social models of sin either annihilate standards of justice (by arbitrarily considering only certain sorts of sin worthy of judgment) or suggest that suffering is, in fact, the true means of absolution for sin. This

---

object of social sin, whether God, the neighbour, the self, or creation. Sin, he argues, should not be 'hypostatized.' '... human nature is one thing, and sin is quite another.' See Derek Nelson, *What's Wrong with Sin?* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 184-5.

[282] McFadyen, *Bound to Sin,* 37.

[283] Ibid., 38.

[284] Ibid., 39.

[285] Ibid., 39-40.

[286] I will discuss this in Chapter Six, alongside the therapeutic model of faith proposed by Philip Rieff, who argues that, after Freud, faith is increasingly utilised as a means for attaining psychological wellbeing, rather than for spiritual formation.

idea – that 'suffering is a prelude to triumph' – is exactly what Brown and Parker attempt, unsuccessfully, to critique.[287] Attempting to expunge universality from any account of sin can therefore be counterproductive, undermining the universality of the Gospel, and the givenness of grace – as my musical examples evidence, in later chapters. Yet co-opting sin into salvation, as per Hart's critique of Moltmann, makes God the author of sin, synthesising sin and grace rather than preserving them in dialectic. The alternative – to eclipse the significance of sin altogether, as John Wesley often does – risks undermining the magnitude of divine grace.

These problems are all related to an overly volitional and cognitive account of sin, wherein sin is interpreted primarily as a moral category, and the capacity for holy living of the noetic and desiderative faculties left unproblematised. Where sin of this sort is eclipsed, so is judgment, as Zahl has remarked.[288] Zahl points to McFadyen's assertions regarding the offensiveness of the doctrine of sin to contemporary assumptions about human moral autonomy, and the capacity for good judgment:

> [C]ontemporary narratives about the implausibility of the Christian doctrine of sin tend to take for granted the modern idea that a concept like "sin" is primarily meaningful insofar as it aids in the moral-philosophical project of establishing culpability—that the category of "sin" is basically a tool for adjudicating about morality... But in the history of theology the value of the category of sin is by no means limited to its usefulness for establishing culpability for immoral actions.[289]

Zahl is interested in the affective and psychological experience of sin, which I return to in my conclusive chapter. What is worth noting here is that these experiences, according to Zahl, are typically uncomfortable or distressing, and often precede repentance. Thus, despite their affective unpleasantness, they have a potentially vital function. Nor are these experiences obsolete, despite the predominantly moral interpretation of sin that eclipses them:

[287] Brown and Parker, 'For God So Loved the World?' 5.
[288] Zahl, Holy Spirit, 152.
[289] Ibid., 156-7.

> People today still experience powerful fears of being judged, of being found to be unworthy by some criterion or other. People still experience relational alienation and desire for reconciliation. People are still subject to deep worries about being loved and accepted rather than rejected and still experience debilitating feelings of anxiety. We still encounter the world as a place full of large-scale injustice and structural evil, and we still long for healing and repair on societal as well as individual levels. And we still experience "death anxiety," when we have not distracted ourselves too much to think about it.[290]

If Zahl is correct in arguing that these negative affective experiences of sin are common to the contemporary imagination, and can catalyse experiences of repentance and justification, then glossing over the subject in a Wesleyan fashion is a potentially detrimental approach to practical theology. The motivational-pastoral bent that Wesley adopts is functional only to the limited extent that it does not obscure the dialectic of sin and grace. As we shall see in the next chapter, Bethel Church is not so well-equipped to preserve this dialectic.

2.5 SUMMARY

The above account demonstrates the encouraging shape of Wesley's doctrine of sin and *ordo salutis*. This forms the theological foundation for Bethel's Charismatic account of sin and salvation, as I shall demonstrate. Wesley understands original sin to be a properly universal condition which absolutely removes humanity from God, except through God's intervening grace. Importantly, Wesley understands the negative consequences of sin in a relational, rather than ontological way: sin entails personal estrangement from God, which is overcome by affect and intellect together. Individuals are encouraged to 'work out our own salvation,' pursuing Christian Perfection through obedience to the Law and faith in Christ. Wesley minimises the part sin need play in the life of the Christian and presents intent as a means of classifying the seriousness of actualised sins. The relational nature of sin and salvation render certain sins less serious than others, on the basis of whether or not they involve the knowing and free breach of God's will.

[290] Ibid., 159-60.

Wesley’s account has a strong motivational element, emphasising individual agency in pursuing Christian Perfection, and offering the individual some relief from certain forms of moralism by emphasising a relationship between intent and the seriousness of sin. However, Wesley glosses over many weaknesses of his hamartiology, including several with practical implications. Although he acknowledges that the Christian is corrupted in themselves, and not only in relation to God, he does not explain how they might reliably identify their inward sin, in order to refrain from actualising it. That is to say, it is hard to consistently distinguish corruption from mere error, based on his hamartiology. Wesley’s suggestion that assurance can be measured by the fruits of salvation is susceptible to a similar problem regarding correct identification of the fruits of salvation. It, further, perhaps incentivises incorrect identification, or falsification, of spiritual fruits and other positive religious experiences (in order to deceive oneself into the comfort of tangible assurance). Maintaining intent as the standard by which the seriousness of sin is ascertained also bears this sort of risk, covering over the significance of certain sins with self-deception regarding volition and cognition. In short, then, Wesley’s failure to fully interrogate the potential of sin to corrupt the noetic and desiderative faculties is a major weak point in his hamartiology, and one that dogs the genealogy from Methodism to Independent Network Christianity, to eventually compromise Bethel’s theology.

CHAPTER THREE

The Weak Hamartiology of Bethel Church

DEFINING SIN * ORIGINAL SIN * ACTUAL SIN *
THE INCONVENIENCE OF SIN * SUMMARY

The hamartiology promulgated by Bethel Church is motivational-pastoral in the manner of John Wesley's, insofar as the subject of sin is infrequently addressed (due to its potentially discouraging qualities), and otherwise attends to actualised sin and the refrainment thereof. However, whereas Wesley presents the Word of God as the interpretative lens for religious experience, Bethel's theology emphasises an antipathy between the Holy Spirit and the 'spirit of religion', the respective conduct of Jesus and the Pharisees providing archetypal examples. On this basis, affective experiences, for example of tangible assurance, are presented as theologically authoritative; this primacy of experience incentivising Bethel's teachers to overlook the potential ongoing noetic and desiderative consequences of sin, in order to avoid problematising this schema. Instead, Bethel's optimistic anthropology suggests that the justified Christian is entirely free from sin, and its ongoing consequences.

The reliance of Bethel's theology upon tangible assurance and the resultant avoidance of hamartiology compromise the dialectic between sin and grace that Bethel might otherwise have been able to convey. Bethel's leaders often appear to conflate the actual and original dimensions of sin, and, consequently, apply a volitional and cognitive standard of sin to both actual sin *and* original sin. John Wesley's category of prevenient grace tempers the determinative effect of individual agency on effecting sanctification, but Bethel use no such category. The result is that sanctification, for Bethel, is presented as phenomenon dependent, in part, on moral intent and positive thinking, and typically evidenced by tangible assurance.

The limited terminology that Bethel's personnel use complicates my analysis of their hamartiology. Bethel's teachers do not positively define the term 'sin.' Nor do they clearly distinguish inward from outward sin, nor venial from mortal sin, nor sin 'properly' and

'improperly so called.' Ambiguity regarding such essential concepts as these make it hard to understand precisely what Bethel's personnel mean when they assert, for example, the ability of the Christian to refrain from all sin, or the falsehood of the doctrine of sin. I attempt to elucidate these problems here, and find the Wesleys' rather clearer hamartiologies helpful in so doing.

3.1 DEFINING SIN

The difficulty of investigating the noetic and desiderative effects of sin is pertinent for Bethel, who associate assurance of salvation with visible signs, such as refraining from sin, and positive – even overpowering – affect, such as healing or holy laughter. Bethel's preachers and songwriters consequently talk very little about sin. Bethel Church do not outright deny that sin is a serious spiritual problem, but rather affirm the atonement as a necessary mechanism for overcoming the estrangement of God and man. For example, Bethel's statement of belief notes a cause-effect between the crucifixion of Christ and the redemption of humanity:

> He was crucified for our sins, died, was buried, resurrected, and ascended into heaven, and is now alive today in the presence of God the Father and in His people. [...] We are saved by God's grace, through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. [...] The victorious and redemptive work of Christ on the cross provides freedom from the power of the enemy – sin, lies, sickness, and torment.[291]

Bethel's statement of belief moves swiftly from the crucifixion to its effects, belying an unwillingness to dwell on sin, and a keen focus on assurance of salvation. Unlike the Athanasian Creed, Bethel's statement does not mention judgment. It also suggests that the origin of sin, in justified Christians, is external; sin is the 'power of the enemy.' Mention of other negative phenomena – sickness and torment – further emphasise human passivity. As will become obvious throughout this section, Bethel frequently project accountability for sin onto the devil, or nebulous forces of evil. This risks undermining the dialectic of sin and grace by implicating mankind in sin only circumstantially. The relevance of sin to each

[291] Dann Farrelly, *Kingdom Culture* (Redding: Bethel Church, 2017), 10.

justified Christian then becomes contingent on their power in relation to opposing forces. In a practical theology that so emphasises tangible assurance and supernatural empowerment, imperviousness to sin could then become synonymous with spiritual maturity (as Kris Vallotton's statements will later suggest).

The third of Bethel's four 'cornerstones of belief' presents the atonement as the basis for salvation and sanctification. Abridged, these cornerstones present man's responsibility in response to divine grace as follows:

1. God is good [...] so we're required to dream big.
2. Nothing is impossible [and life is] designed around taking risk.
3. The blood of Jesus paid for everything.
4. We are significant [and therefore must] serve well.[292]

As in the statement of belief, sin is of minimal focus, whilst salvation and human agency in responding to grace is emphasised. This results from Bethel's pastoral concern to liberate believers from negative conceptions of God. However, the notion of divine judgment is often rejected alongside other negative conceptions of God. Bethel's volitional and cognitive standard of sin and therapeutic orientation together suggest that the individual ought not be judged, undermining the seriousness of sin and the dialectic between sin and grace. (I explore the therapeutic further in Chapters Six and Seven.)

Although their concept of sin is vague and unassuming, Bethel's preachers do present sin as a spiritual problem. However, they do not all uphold the doctrine of original sin, being reluctant to describe humanity as innately 'evil' in any way, although they consistently affirm an ill-defined, universal negative state that afflicts mankind. I now examine this negative state, before considering the extent of sanctification as Bethel understand it, and the impact of sanctification on outward sin in Christians – the two being intimately linked. I argue that Bethel's weak hamartiology undermines the orthodox dialectic of sin and grace, leading to a cheap account of grace, and the instrumentalisation of worship to a predominantly therapeutic end. The exposition of Wesley and the eclipse of sin in Western

[292] 'About', *Bethel*. <https://www.bethel.com/about/>

theology that I have given thus far will provide a foundation for this evaluation of Bethel's relatively weaker and less clear theology.

3.2 ORIGINAL SIN

Bethel Church present the universal state of man, after the Fall, as estrangement from God: an anti-relational orientation of consciousness, manifest in affect. This estrangement is retrospectively identified as such by believers, after encounter with God in something similar to Wesley's convicting grace. I say 'similar' here, because it is not evident that this encounter necessarily involves personal conviction of sin. At Bethel, the distinguishing feature between justified Christians and non-Christians is an awareness of personal "relationship with God," as opposed to unidentified emotional distance from God. This recalls the focus on affect and 'personal relationship' with God common to Wesleyan Methodism, Pietism, Moravianism and English Evangelicalism, amongst other movements.[293] However, where salvation through the cross is the lynchpin of Wesley's theology, Bethel focus on religious experience itself, presenting emotional and material comfort as signs of assured faith.[294] Their reliance on religious experience for assurance of faith and attempts to cultivate this effect (as my musical examples, later, detail) demonstrate a therapeutic inclination that similarly emerges in their treatment of the doctrine of sin.

Philip Rieff argues that Protestant America has provided an ideal breeding ground for a 'therapeutic' worldview that pursues emotional wellbeing and self-improvement as the source of meaning in life.[295] Rieff describes the 'revolutionary impulse' towards the therapeutic, in the West, which encourages clergy to become 'therapists, administrating a therapeutic institution – under the justificatory mandate that Jesus himself was the first therapeutic.'[296] I address Rieff's critique of the therapeutic more thoroughly in Chapter Six, but note here that Bethel appear to adopt a 'therapeutic' theology in this sense. A workbook written by Bethel's resident theologian Dann Farrelly demonstrates this point. Farrelly invites the reader to respond to Bethel's 'core value' about sin – entitled 'responsive to grace' – by reflecting upon the following questions:

[293] MacCulloch, *History*, 748-9.
[294] Collins, *Holy Love,* 134: Wesley links saving faith with the personal assurance that 'Christ loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*.'
[295] Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (Chicago: UCP, 1987) 53-4, 62, 253.
[296] Ibid., 251.

> Are there any areas in my life where I have been living out of a mindset of punishment or condemnation? If so, what are they?
>
> Do I emotionally or spiritually beat myself up when I think I failed or didn't do something right?
>
> Do I ever have negative thoughts about myself? Do I ever have feelings of self-hatred? If so, in what situations or circumstances do those thoughts or feelings come up?
>
> Do I have a tendency to live in isolation? If so, is there something I'm afraid of?
>
> Do I find it difficult to receive love from God and/or people? If so, why?[297]

Concluding this therapeutic reflection upon sin, Farrelly urges the reader to resist 'the lie that punishing or condemning yourself enough will make you more perfect, more loveable, or more Christ-like.' Farrelly's approach to sin, which attempts to mitigate any feelings of negative self-worth in the reader, dramatically contrasts with, say, John Calvin's concern for the corrupting effects of original sin, or even Wesley's exhortations about self-discipline. Farrelly's pronounced concern for emotional wellbeing is characteristic of Bethel Church's hamartiology more broadly, relying on a non-judgmental God.

Bethel Church presents original sin in an evasive way which leaves unclear whether or not they, as a Church, support the doctrine. They also treat its consequences in an uninterested, offhand manner. The church has codified certain theological statements and values in tracts published on their website. In a passage from a statement entitled 'What We Believe', which roughly adopts the structure of the Apostles' Creed, the following is declared:

> Humankind was created in the image of God to know and enjoy Him yet we wilfully rejected the Lordship and glory of God for which we were intended.

[297] Farrelly, *Kingdom Culture,* 56.

> Because of this, sickness, death, and judgment entered the world and now creation experiences the effects and consequences of sin.[298]

There is some ambiguity here, regarding whether wilful rejection is the same thing as sin, and why exactly sickness, death and judgment arise from wilful rejection. Further, given the statement implicitly refers to the origin of sin, it is unclear whether the references to 'we' refer to humankind in Adam, or those represented by Adam, or individual humans responsible for actualising their own individual sins. Bethel's ambiguous equivalence between sin and wilful rejection is indicative of their avoidant treatment of sin. Meanwhile, their examples of the consequences of sin, which are all unavoidable phenomena in the natural world, demonstrate their ambiguous stance on personal culpability for sin. It is not clear if the church consider 'wilful rejection' of God to be *original* sin, a phrase that is not used in their statement of belief, thirteen core values, or four cornerstones of church praxis.

The wilfulness of sin, specifically, is important to Bethel's gradation of the seriousness of sins by volitional and cognitive standards. This recalls Wesley's definition of sin as the voluntary transgression of a known law.[299] However, Wesley assumes that prevenient grace reinscribes knowledge of God onto human hearts, however faintly. Thus we are all, for Wesley, culpable for resisting this knowledge prior to accepting salvation. Bethel's doctrines do not explain how to determine what 'wilful' rejection of God might entail, showing that the church is even less interested in investigating the noetic or desiderative consequences of sin than Wesley is. Further, beyond acknowledging the problems of sin and judgment, they do not articulate any ongoing consequences of sin upon the faculties, such as are upheld by Augustine and Luther (and, in theory, by Wesley). This is perhaps a tactical, apologetic lack of clarity intended to refrain from putting off potential congregants unallured by the prospect of their own sinfulness.

The Fall

Kris Vallotton, of all Bethel's main preachers, is comparatively the most willing to talk about sin. To this end, he has expounded several times on the Fall narrative, and on the book of Romans. Vallotton endorses something like Wesley's relational distinction between sin properly and improperly so called. He states repeatedly that sin arose from

[298] 'About,' *Bethel*. <https://www.bethel.com/about/>
[299] Bryant, *Sin,* 212.

Adam and Eve's free will, and the free choice to obey or rebel against God. Their rebellion causes 'the part of them that was in communion with God' to die, resulting in all humans being born 'deformed', namely, with a 'dead spirit'.[300] Rather than sin having ongoing consequences on the faculties, it appears that, for Vallotton, sin has a purely relational effect (which might subsequently affect the faculties; he does not make this clear). Vallotton's spiritual deformity is akin to Wesley's mortal sin, 'sin properly so called,' which compromises the relationship between God and mankind. Whilst Adam and Eve originally had no sinful nature, they do after the Fall, and so do their progeny.[301]

Steffany Gretzinger, a main Bethel worship leader from 2011 – 2019, similarly describes the Fall as a relational issue in a sermon wherein she speculates on the psychological state of Eve. Gretzinger suggests that Eve, 'in her freedom... got a little isolated,' and had 'been alone a little too long.' In a manner reminiscent of Milton, Gretzinger claims that Eve's freedom allowed doubts to arise in her mind regarding the goodness of God. Eve's failure to share these doubts with God, Gretzinger explains, left her vulnerable to the 'lies' of the serpent.[302] Thus Eve's sin arises from an emotional distance from God that is exacerbated by a third party. Insofar as it diminishes Eve's absolute culpability for her sin by emphasising her vulnerability and mistaken judgment (rather than any deliberate rejection of God), Gretzinger's account of the Fall closely resembles Wesley's.

Gretzinger – in common with her colleagues – does not ask why an individual like Eve, who was perfect prior to her actualised sin, might doubt God's goodness. She further agrees that the result of the Fall is estrangement from God. Gretzinger's retelling of the Genesis narrative turns Eve into a scapegoat for the transformation of human nature from sanctified to sinful, emphasising the foolishness of Eve, and the devil's trickery. Gretzinger declares, whimsically, her resentment for Eve's infraction:

> I've had it out for [Eve] since, like, day one... We are *not* okay.[303]

[300] Kris Vallotton, 'Revisiting the Salvation Story,' *BethelTV* (27 February 2018). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/5169>
[301] Kris Vallotton, 'Our Battle Is Not Against Flesh And Blood,' *BethelTV* (3 September 2017). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/4932> Also, Kris Vallotton, 'Grace, Mercy, Righteousness, And Justice.
[302] Yoni Bramnick, 'Worship Leads us to Remember, Return and Reconnect - Steffany Gretzinger,' *YouTube* (9 May 2017). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNhI7vqMEoA>
[303] Bramnick, 'Worship [...] Gretzinger.'

Gretzinger's account of the Fall identifies Eve's weakness in faith as particularly pronounced. This is misguided, in a Girardian fashion that attributes negative affect to an external figure: Gretzinger arbitrarily identifies Eve, and the Fall she precipitates, as the obstacle to her desire – reconciliation with God – rather than implicating herself in the universal state of original sin (which, Gretzinger believes, can be remedied by Christ, and is therefore not an unsurpassable obstacle anyway). Gretzinger approach to sin is rather Levitical, and un-Christological, overlooking the grace testified in the Gospel: Gretzinger scapegoats Eve with the burden of universal sin, and rhetorically distances her own faith from Eve's, rather than scapegoating Christ, and accepting her own participation in sin.[304] This suggests that the avoidance of sin, at least in Gretzinger's case, results from a desire to immunise the individual from divine judgment.

Gretzinger emphasises the passivity of human participation in sin, not only in her sermon, but also in songs such as 'Letting Go,' or 'You Know Me,' which I revisit in later chapters.[305] Gretzinger does not discuss Adam's sin (which Wesley describes as positive rebellion), whilst claiming that Eve's sin arises from a moment of unbelief: the result of a deficiency, rather than an active quality such as pride or idolatry. Gretzinger describes the consequences of the Fall as circumstantial, rather than ontological or even relational, using bondage imagery – sin is a 'curse', and its effects include a 'cycle of brokenness that we have been trying to get out of since the garden.' Gretzinger's 'cycles of brokenness' associate no moral connotation with being 'broken' by sin, unlike alternative terms such as being made 'evil' or 'corrupt.'[306] Thus the original act of sin becomes an ill-judged mistake, imprisoning humanity against their will (for which Eve can still, albeit whimsically, be blamed). Gretzinger's confidence in the will contrasts with the Augustinian or Lutheran view that the will of fallen humanity is, itself, evil. Instead, Gretzinger appears to endorse something like Wesley's cognitive and volitional account of sin, which implies that one might 'willingly sin unwillingly.'[307] However, Wesley argues that sinful man willingly serves the devil, in idolatrous love of self and the world, and

[304] René Girard, 'The God of Victims,' in Graham Ward (ed.), *The Postmodern God*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 106-7. See also Gary Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 25-26.
[305] Lyrics include "falling" and "going" as euphemisms for sin or negativity, in 'You Know Me,' and references to becoming 'scared,' having a 'tired Hallelujah', and believing 'lies' in 'Letting Go'. More on this imagery in Chapter Six.
[306] Bramnick, 'Worship [...] Gretzinger.'
[307] Collins, 'Wesley's Life and Ministry,' 47.

should therefore be thought culpable for his sin.[308] By contrast, Gretzinger simply presents mankind as trapped by 'the enemy,' and Christus Victor as saviour.[309]

This interpretation diverges from Kris Vallotton's. Although Vallotton is deeply concerned with spiritual warfare, and the apparent power of the devil over mankind, he typically considers man much more culpable for his sin than Gretzinger does.[310] He takes care, in several expositions of the Fall narrative, to note that both Adam and Eve 'sinned without being a sinner,' blaming them, rather than the serpent's trickery. Like Wesley, Vallotton believes that Adam and Eve acted sinfully prior to possessing 'a sinful nature'.[311] Vallotton does not attribute this original righteous nature to all individual humans post-Fall, but posits an ontological change in mankind created by Adam and Eve's sin. He states that Adam and Eve's choice to disobey the precepts of God resulted in the corruption of their nature, and that of their progeny. These are, consequently, born 'deformed', with body and soul but without the spirit that enables eternal life. From this sorry state of affairs originates the necessity for fallen humanity to be 'born again'.[312]

Vallotton teaches that Christ's death on the cross fulfils the penalty for sin established by divine justice, allowing grace to be offered to sinners in the form of rebirth in Christ.[313] He depicts salvation as a transformation of nature that reverses the deformity of inherited, or original, sin (although he uses neither term, instead attributing to believers the sanctified nature shared by Adam and Eve before the Fall). Vallotton seems to affirm a substitutionary model of atonement, with legalistic statements such as 'the value of Jesus on the cross determines the value of the people he purchased', and 'his sacrifice paid for

[308] Wesley, 'A Sermon on Original Sin' in Outler, *Works II*, 179; Wesley, 'Salvation by Faith', in Outler, *Works I,* 123-4. Also, Collins, 'Wesley's Life and Ministry', 47-48.
[309] See Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor*, trans. A.G. Herbert (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1931). More on Aulén in Chapter Seven.
[310] Kay, *Pentecostalism*, 274: 'Spiritual warfare' draws from the scriptural implication, for example in Ephesians 6:12, that there is an opposition between 'invisible spiritual forces and the present world order.' Consequently, 'there are Christians who have conceptualized Christianity as a perpetual titanic battle between the forces of light and darkness. This contrast can turn every event and circumstance into a victory for God or the devil.' Kay suggests this idea gained a firm foothold in some Pentecostal and Charismatic theologies in the 1970s. Spiritual warfare results in a form of Christian prayer that is addressed to evil forces, in order to transform the material world through its performance. Close consideration of Bethel's concern with spiritual warfare is beyond the scope of this thesis.
[311] Bethel TV, 'Repentance Brings Breakthrough | Bill Johnson | Bethel Church,' *YouTube* (22 January 2018). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dbFPGiwkUc&list=PLUaRlPOu98p0_QvYqNo8ATqyrk8OiWYGM&index=61>
[312] Kris Vallotton, 'Grace, Mercy, Righteousness, And Justice: Sunday AM,' *BethelTV* (4 February 2018). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/5155> Also, Kris Vallotton 'Revisiting the Salvation Story,' YouTube. 27 Febuary 2018. <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/5169>
[313] Vallotton, 'Grace, Mercy, Righteousness, And Justice'; Kris Vallotton, 'Is Your House Haunted: Part 2,' *BethelTV* (8 March 2009). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/68> Also, Kris Vallotton, 'The Redemptive Story,' *BethelTV* (4 March 2018). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/5185>

our sins'.[314] However, like his colleagues, he attends more to the effect, than the mechanism, of salvation. Vallotton states that believers, due to their sanctified nature, 'have to *try* to sin' in order so to do. 'Sin is not a mistake', he declares, simultaneously relieving believers of their culpability for accidental sin, and emphasising their culpability for wilful sin. Unlike Wesley, on this point, Vallotten does not distinguish between sin through mistake and sin through ignorance.[315] The implication of this is that Christians are not held culpable, by Vallotton, for pursuing methodologically suspect means to attain knowledge of God. By presenting sin and salvation primarily as relational – namely, deliberate transgression against the person of God – Vallotton, like Wesley, presents the act of sin as less significant than the state of relationship it indicates and gives rise to.

Vallotton, who does not participate in Bethel's music production, is much more willing to acknowledge human sinfulness than Gretzinger, who had a central role in the Bethel Collective during her tenure as a worship leader. Although it is important to note that Vallotten speaks about sin relatively more than Bethel's other preachers, he much more commonly speaks on other topics such as prophecy, identity, trauma and grace. Regardless, Vallotton and Gretzinger's sermons clearly demonstrate their intent to avoid alienating Christians by discussing sin. Eric Johnson goes further, in his sermon 'The Joy of Consecration', where he explicitly refutes the doctrine of original sin altogether. The reason he gives for this is that, prior to Christ's Incarnation in history, God 'delighted in man', yet surely would not have delighted in a sinful creation. Eric continues:

> I struggle with the idea that before the cross [God is] mad at [humankind], but after the cross, now he's happy... No, God has always been happy. You're not born evil. Amazing how many teachings in theology start with that thought. Any time you start with that you will create a controlling and manipulative environment... Every system... must start from the concept and the idea that that people are good and they mean to do good. Even if they're not saved. When God created the world...before the cross... he said, "My delight is in people." [...] There's a big difference between hating sin and hating people.[316]

[314] Kris Vallotton, 'Revisiting the Salvation Story.'
[315] Wesley, 'Christian Perfection', in Outler, *Works II*, 100; Bryant, *Sin*, 246.
[316] Eric Johnson 'The Joy of Consecration.'

Here, Eric – apparently promulgating an account of sin as moral 'evil' – struggles to reconcile God's benevolence and wrath, choosing to deny the latter in order to emphasise the former. (His claim that 'you're not born evil' suggests that this is not simply a vigorous affirmation of prevenient grace, framed as God's 'happiness'.) Where, for example, David Bentley Hart acknowledges the seriousness of sin, and absolute distinction between divinity and humanity, in order to highlight divine grace, Eric uses anthropomorphic language to present God as relatable and friendly.[317] Eric's theological optimism is reflected in Bethel Church's first 'core value', which declares that 'God is in a good mood', further neutering the wrath of God with a reassuring and motivational theology that presents humanity as inherently pleasing to God.[318] Emphasising the unwavering friendliness of God towards man, and denying (by omission) God's wrath over sin, Bethel's theology of a non-judgmental God calls into question the significance of sin at all.

Bethel's neglect of original sin can be better clarified by comparison to John and Charles Wesley's disagreement regarding the meaning of Christian Perfection. Bethel's approach is closer to John Wesley's, who uses the term as a foil to actual sin, denoting an attainable level of holy volition. Despite his greater concern for actual sin, however, Wesley does not reject the doctrine of original sin. Instead, he maintains a clear distinction between original and actual sin, presenting his limited discussion of the former as incomplete and ancillary to the – more important – implications of the latter. Eric Johnson, by contrast, denies the doctrine altogether, whilst Bethel's statements of belief and core values adopt evasive language.

Vallotton, meanwhile, conflates the two forms of sin (as Eric Johnson appears to, in the previous quotation). Vallotton conceives of original sin – 'sin nature' – exclusively according to its actualised manifestations, with no consideration of how it might entail the underlying corruption of particular faculties.[319] His investigation of the practical implications of the 'deformity' of fallen man are limited to the acknowledgement of mortality, and an account of our increased susceptibility to 'attacks' from the enemy.

[317] Bentley Hart, *Beauty*, 159.
[318] 'Core Values', *Bethel*. <https://www.bethel.com/core-values/>
[319] Vallotton, *Spirit Wars,* 42-72.

Interpreting Ephesians 2:1-2, in a book on spiritual warfare, Vallotton emphasises the external origin of transgression:

> [I]n other words, before we knew Jesus, we were literally the puppets of demonic spirits.[320]

Vallotton also claims, in several different sermons, that the sanctified Christian's temptation to sin is the work of the devil, and explicitly not a quality originating in their own nature.[321] He explains that the '*sperma'* of the devil cannot become lodged within Christians: unless they allow these *sperma* to germinate by entertaining corrupt thoughts, the presence of God within them provides too hostile an environment for diabolical phenomena.[322] Thus for Vallotten, sin arises externally and must be deliberately participated in by the individual.[323] This view is surely encouraging to those who consider themselves resistant to sin, but implicitly presents believers as reliably capable of identifying the degree to which they are susceptible towards sin.

Eric Johnson also conflates anger with hatred, and the wrath of God with the wrath of man. This illustrates a problem that will crop up repeatedly in my musical examples later: that Bethel's personnel often understand the attributes of God in a way that is limited by their experience of man. Eric's short reflection quoted above reveals the anthropomorphism, and striking dearth of Trinitarianism, in Bethel's doctrine of God, presenting God as emotional in the way humans are, and potentially changeable over the course of history. Eric demonstrates the "optimistic anthropology" attested by Simeon Zahl, in his assumption that humankind possess a degree of innate righteousness, by virtue of their createdness, that affects God's judgment ('my delight is in people').[324] By rejecting the doctrine of original sin, and the notion of a God who judges mankind, Eric arguably undermines the significance of divine grace.

Wesley, by contrast, takes quite a different approach, despite his own distaste for the doctrine of original sin. Wesley posits that God is angry with sinful humanity, but that

[320] Ibid., 17.
[321] Vallotton, 'Our Battle Is Not Against Flesh And Blood.'
[322] Vallotton, 'Is Your House Haunted: Part Two.'
[323] See also Vallotton, *Spirit Wars,* 72.
[324] Eric Johnson, 'The Joy of Consecration.' Zahl, Simeon, *Blumhardt,* 5.

God's anger is different to human anger, and is righteous. Wesley avoids depicting God as a tyrant, or presenting works as an optional undertaking about which believers might become complacent. Quoting Philippians 2:12, Wesley translates 'fear' (*meta phobou*) and 'trembling' (*meta tromou*) as 'with the utmost earnestness of spirit, and with all care and caution,' and 'diligence, speed, punctuality, and exactness.'[325] The verse therefore, explains Wesley, endorses a cautious, diligent attitude towards faith, which prevents the disposition of the heart becoming mere self-indulgent or frivolous affect. Ultimately, Wesley trusts that God's judgment of sin and sinners, which necessitates the cross, is dispelled entirely by justification through Christ.

3.3 ACTUAL SIN

The state of salvation, as presented by Bethel, has two major distinctions from the state of sin. Firstly, estrangement from God is replaced by intimate relationship with God. This is portrayed as immediate, direct access to God's presence, experienced affectively. Bethel's ministers emphasise this intimacy in almost all public declarations, typically in anthropomorphic fashion. Music is essential to this endeavour. Gretzinger describes worship as a kind of electric shock that reminds believers of their connection to God, rather like an everyday Aldersgate experience.[326] Meanwhile, other members of the Bethel Collective emphasise their own intimacy with God, and their ability to share it with congregants, as intrinsic to their worship ministries:

> Together Brian and Jenn [Johnson] raise up worshippers who take hold of their true identity and pursue intimacy with God above all else.[327]

> As a worship leader Josh [Baldwin] enjoys creating space for people to feel seen, encouraged, and invited into intimacy with God where true peace and hope is found.[328]

[325] Wesley, 'On Working Out Our Own Salvation', in Outler, *Works III*, 204-5.
[326] Bethel TV, 'Why Worship | Steffany Gretzinger | Open Heavens,' *YouTube* (14 October 2016). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4bJnLliunfs>
[327] 'Brian Johnson', *Bethel Music*. <https://bethelmusic.com/artists/brian-johnson/>
[328] 'Josh Baldwin,' *Bethel Music*. <https://bethelmusic.com/artists/josh-baldwin/>

> [Bethany Worhle] is passionate about seeing people encounter God in a way that changes their entire way of living, and seeing miracles happen during worship.[329]

> During her youth, Emmy [Rose] always felt like there was more to God aligning with a pull towards the relational aspect of God. [...] Throughout her journey, she has held on to a theme of purity and intimacy alongside a sense-filled impetus that there that there is always more and it has to be real. At the core of Emmy is her desire to sync up with the faithfulness of God, believing that He always writes a better story.[330]

Bethel's worship lyrics frequently describe the believer's relationship with God in erotic or child-like terms such as these. I explore this theme further in Chapter Six, demonstrating its therapeutic function.

Secondly, salvation as Bethel presents it imbues the believer with new powers and capabilities. As does Wesley, Bethel claim that assurance of salvation is evident in the presence of the Spirit in the lives of believers. In the previous chapter, my genealogy of the development of the Charismatic movement, from Methodism, Holiness and Pentecostalism, showed that assurance of salvation is identified, over time, in ever more "tangible" forms of spiritual activity: first in holy obedience and the fruit of the Spirit, such as faith, hope and joy, and later in the gifts of the Spirit, notably healing and glossolalia. In keeping with this trajectory, Bethel's teachers present a 'naturally supernatural' account of salvation wherein spiritual empowerment naturally arises from salvation.[331] Most pertinently, for the doctrine of sin, this includes the ability to resist actual sin. More than this, however, the church emphasise the bestowal of Charismatic gifts, such as the gifts of healing, prophecy and tongues, and material benefits such as prosperity.

Due to the church's overarching concern with salvation, and tangible signs thereof, Bethel's infrequent teachings on sin are predominantly concerned with the actualisation of sin. These claim that believers can avoid actualising sin, recalling Wesley's own teachings

[329] 'Bethany Worhle,' *Bethel Music*. <https://bethelmusic.com/artists/bethany-worhle/>
[330] 'Emmy Rose,' *Bethel Music*. <https://bethelmusic.com/artists/emmy-rose/>
[331] Recall in the previous chapter, Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 23: Pentecostalism 'integrates the language of holiness and the language of power.'

on Christian perfection. Bill Johnson, Bethel's most senior pastor and apostle, addresses the topic especially rarely, being predominantly concerned with subjects such as supernatural empowerment, and identity in Christ. His statement that 'the blood of Jesus deals with sin, but the Word deals with impurity' summarises his interest in sin largely as an impediment to Christian formation, which is bolstered by knowledge of the Bible.[332]

Despite his relatively more developed theology of sin, Vallotton is also primarily concerned about actualised sin. Vallotton's teachings on Romans are consistently directed towards his claim that Christians are able to live lives entirely free from sin. He interprets Paul's statement in Romans 6:11, that those in Christ should consider themselves 'dead to sin,' to mean that Christians' sinful natures are replaced by sanctified natures due to the destruction of sin in Christ on the cross. In agreement with Bill Johnson, Vallotton attributes power over sin to the 'new man.' Belief in this power is the key to its actualisation – a claim that reinforces the place of positive affect within Bethel's theology.[333] Vallotton claims that sanctification naturally inclines Christians to not actualise sin, providing they withstand overt temptation from by the devil. This sharply contrasts with the suspicion towards the will found in much classical hamartiology.[334] Commenting on Romans 7:18-24, Vallotton warns:

> I've heard lots of people teach that if *Paul* struggled with sin... then certainly we'll struggle with sin... [but Paul] could not be talking about his *current* struggle with sin, because of what he said in [Romans] 5 and 6 and 8... Our old self was crucified with [Christ]... You don't have to sin any more because you are not a sinner.... You're the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus... You have

[332] Bill Johnson, 'The Art Of Living Clean,' *BethelTV* (12 August 2012). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/1416> Johnson's references to 'impurity' here are in relation to the subject of 'living in sin', namely, actualised sin, and how to correct this using the Bible. Johnson's supernatural and practical approach to ministry is evidenced further in his sermon 'Jesus, Full of the Holy Spirit,' *BethelTV* (5 November 2017). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/5028> 'Jesus Christ is perfect theology... theology is typically thought about that which we know about God and Jesus was perfect theology in that he modelled perfect knowledge of God, burning conviction about what to do and the actions that follows that illustrated what he believed. There wasn't a separation between idea and display.' Johnson goes on to frame this 'display' as primarily pertaining to healing.

[333] Kris Vallotton, 'The Redemptive Story.'

[334] Kris Vallotton, 'Revisiting the Salvation Story.' Also, Bill Johnson in WP Films, 'How Can God Use You If You Are Struggling With Sin?' *YouTube* (20 September 2017). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lAOKxvGxSIA>

[334] Bethel TV, 'Recognised by Him | Brian Johnson | Bethel Church,' *YouTube* (13 June 2017). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVLCjeu-xTs&t=15s&list=PLaPFXfU2ZbFHw8nOb_sTO7VRnV4txApMD&index=14>

[334] 'Core Values', *Bethel*. There is some recognition amongst Bethel's leadership that fully actualised sanctification is difficult to practice. However, they maintain a distinction between sinful nature, or 'identity,' and individual actualised sin, rejecting the presence of the former in the lives of Christians.

> to *try* to sin.... If you believe you are in a war with your old man, you can't even engage in the right enemy. You're going through spiritual warfare and you think you're in a war of sanctification, and actually... that's a war with the devil.[335]

Vallotton reiterates his interpretation of Romans 7 in many sermons and written works. In his 2012 book *Spirit Wars*, he glosses the text thus:

> The truth is that in that passage, Paul is telling the story of his BC life, not his life in Christ. He uses present tense language to emphasise the past tense struggle he had as a Pharisee.[336]

Bethel's second core value statement, entitled 'salvation creates joyful identity', affirms Vallotton's interpretation of sin in justified Christians, claiming that resistance to sin is their new 'natural' state of affairs. It carefully avoids espousing a simplistic doctrine of entire sanctification, noting that the process is both realised and ongoing:

> When we resist sin, we are not fighting against our old nature but instead are cooperating with our new selves in Him. We are both sanctified and embracing sanctification.[337]

The third core value statement, 'responsive to grace', presents this transformation of nature as the ground for personal 'empowerment,' emphasising individual agency in resisting sin:

> Our old self is dead – crucified with Christ. We are free and empowered to live in His righteousness and share in His sufferings.
>
> Deeply experiencing grace teaches us about righteousness, which empowers us to overcome sin and failure. The Father's love keeps us from focusing on sin or hiding in shame if we fail.[338]

[335] Vallotton, 'Our Battle Is Not Against Flesh And Blood.'
[336] Vallotton, *Spirit Wars*, 34.
[337] 'Core Values', *Bethel*.
[338] Farrelly, *Kingdom Culture,* 50: we 'joyfully experience' the transformative love of God, which enables us to love others 'at a higher standard than the law.'

It is clear, therefore, that despite the natural inclination towards good that Vallotten espouses, Bethel's theology also requires the justified Christian to undergo ongoing religious formation. This specifically entails cultivating an active belief in the transformation that has already been instantaneously effected. The determinative role of positive, motivational belief that Bethel attribute to sanctification recalls John Wesley's theology, wherein one has to believe in one's own ability to not actualise sin. However, where self-discipline is the means to enable this for Wesley, ontological transformation is the means for Bethel. For Wesley, man is considered justified, meaning that sin cannot overpower him against his will, but nevertheless persists within him, as a corrupting influence upon knowledge and the will.

Vallotton's account of sanctification is higher, a blend of features found in John and Charles' distinct concepts of Christian Perfection. Vallotton's 'new man' possesses a sanctified nature, much as Charles Wesley's Christian Perfection reinscribes the *imago dei*. Yet Vallotton's sanctification occurs much earlier, chronologically, than Charles', at the point of justification. Vallotton's sanctified nature results in the conformation of the human will to the will of God, as does John Wesley's Christian Perfection. Yet, for Vallotton, the will is transformed naturally, and immediately, whilst for John, the Spirit's work is fortified by constant self-discipline. The practical exhortations coming from Bethel pertain not to self-discipline, *per se*, but to positive thinking, and the power of mental motivation. For example, Dann Farrelly, in *Kingdom Culture*, suggests some habits that might help the reader confidently embody their new sanctified identity, enabling them to resist sin:

> Today I will set an alert on my phone/computer to remind myself twice a day that my old self was crucified with Christ and I am now empowered to live victoriously in His righteousness.
>
> For the next 48 hours, I'll focus on becoming free from the lie that I am a powerless victim of circumstances or other people's choices and, instead, become focused on my new identity that declares, "I am a victorious overcomer, no matter the situation!"[339]

[339] Ibid., 60.

Vallotton, similarly, coaches congregants to transform their thought processes in order to fully embody their 'identity in Christ,' and suggests that remedial, and not simply developmental, spiritual formation is necessary for this undertaking.[340] Interestingly, Vallotton and Farrelly's therapeutic approach to motivational thinking presents justified Christians as highly susceptible to noetic error with respect to their identity in God. For example, Vallotton states that the devil is capable of misleading Christians into 'listening to the wrong spirit,' suggesting that they can be deceived in spiritual matters.[341] Most interestingly, in another sermon, Vallotton casts aspersions on those who doubt his interpretation of Romans:

> I understand that if you came in here believing that Romans 7 is speaking about Paul and your struggle, then you're not going to be convinced. But if you read, you get [my] podcast and you listen to all that and you're still not convinced, [then] you just need an excuse to sin.[342]

This comment is intriguing, because it demonstrates that Vallotton thinks some Christians are capable not only of being deceived, but of self-deception. Vallotton does not reconcile these various positions: that justified Christians can reliably identify inward sin so as to refrain from actualising it, that justified Christians can be deceived by the devil, and that justified Christians, who naturally incline towards good due to their sanctified natures, can deceive themselves (a claim that surely contradicts itself).[343] Although Vallotton's account of the sanctified nature is not consistent, it demonstrates his attempt to use theology to motivate spiritual formation as he understands it. This endeavour – and, indeed, its incoherences – recalls Wesley's own approach. However, Wesley's support for the doctrine of original sin, and the ongoing corruption of certain faculties, offers some explanation for why Christians might sin or err. Vallotton, meanwhile, is forced to magnify the significance of the devil as the external origin of sins emergent in mankind.

---

[340] Vallotton, *Spirit Wars*, 101-105. The Bethel leaders' concern with positive thinking and declarations recalls the mid-20th-century Evangelical preacher Norman Peale's spiritual teachings, notably *The Power of Positive Thinking*.
[341] Kris Vallotten, 'Fear is Not Your Friend,' *BethelTV* (24 January 2010). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/438> Vallotton asserts that the 'fruit of false prophets' and malevolent spirits 'is that they perpetuate fear.'
[342] Vallotton, 'Is Your House Haunted: Part Two.'
[343] Vallotton, 'Fear is Not Your Friend.' Also, 'God's word transforms,' from 'Core Values', *Bethel*.

Vallotton is reasonable in suggesting, as does Wesley, that cultivating virtuous habits can motivate holy living. One might charitably interpret that, in saying Christians have to *try* in order to sin, Vallotton is acknowledging that sanctification is embodied, and not purely theoretical; he may be trying to identify a concrete way in which sanctification transforms the lived experience of justified Christians. However, his emphasis on motivation reinscribes Bethel's narrow account of sin, as being primarily to do with moral action. Vallotton and Farrelly's emphasis on motivation risks presenting the transformative work of the Spirit as a matter of individual agency. Further, these models of sanctification driven by habit or self-discipline imply that transformation of this sort is linear and continual, which Zahl questions, offering instead an 'affective Augustinian' model of transformation in sanctification that is driven by desire. Zahl points out that desires are not entirely explicable, even to the one possessing them, an insight that preserves the primacy of grace in transforming Christians:

> The issue of motivation is crucial here. In the Augustinian picture, we engage in such practices only when they have already been made pleasing enough to us that our desire to take part in them is stronger than our desire not to take part in them. The primary engine is the grace of God experienced...[344]

In contrast to this approach, the focus of Bethel's teachers on actualised sin, and on self-discipline in the avoidance thereof, overlooks the problem of desiderative corruption. The issue here is not Bethel's support of self-discipline as a useful tool for holy living, but in their overlooking the ongoing corrupting potential of sin as a useful tool for critiquing Christian practice.

Supernatural empowerment, and noetic corruption

For Bethel's leaders, sanctification does not merely rescue the believer from the state of sin. It clothes them with power, Vallotton claims, referring to Luke 24:49 (as I noted in my discussion of the spirits of religion and truth, in Chapter One). This power enables 'supernatural ministry,' in which the Christian wields the power afforded by the Holy

[344] Zahl, *Holy Spirit*, 221.

Spirit, in the 'authority of Christ.'[345] Bill Johnson's 'practical guide to a life of miracles' claims that

> It is impossible to give an adequate witness of God without demonstrating His supernatural power. The supernatural is his natural realm. Jesus was an exact representation of the Father's nature. His re-presentation of the Father is to be a model for us as we learn how to re-present Him.[346]

Supernatural empowerment of this sort, Bethel's leaders suggest, should be used not for personal gain, but to 'build the Kingdom of God on Earth', through prophecy, healings and other charismata.[347] This is the teaching for which Bethel is most famous, internationally, and it is central to the ministry training offered by BSSM.[348] Bethel's teachers emphasise that their Gospel message appears radical to many, as their distinction between the spirits of religion and truth demonstrates.

I showed in the last chapter how signs and wonders have become a significant feature of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. Much as Phoebe Palmer claimed to have found a 'shorter way,' to sanctification, so Bethel presents supernatural empowerment as the 'true' form of religious formation. The desire they profess, for 'more' of God, is reminiscent of the Pentecostal 'third blessing', although Bethel Church upholds no such doctrine explicitly. Bethel's teachings about charismata are not the concern of my thesis, and I will not dwell on them further than necessary. However, it is worth noting that Bethel considers spiritual gifts as assurance of salvation. Their keen focus upon spiritual gifts both enables their avoidant attitude to sin, and results from it. Spiritual gifts purport to assure salvation, according to Bethel, because they entail tangible blessings such as healings, positive affective experiences (such as holy laughter, or a feeling of inner warmth) or encouraging prophecies. They go further than mere assurance, however, because Bethel presents a whole new 'naturally supernatural' plane of existence, made accessible after sin

[345] See 'Jesus empowers supernatural ministry,' in 'Core Values,' *Bethel*. This value sensibly advises that, despite justified Christians walking in the authority of Christ, 'we are not Jesus.' It is notable how closely this associates the Holy Spirit with power. Simeon Zahl has that extreme optimism about the supernatural empowerment of justified Christians arises from theologies wherein sanctification is predominantly understood as an implantation of power through the Holy Spirit. See Zahl, *Holy Spirit*, 186.
[346] Bill Johnson, *When Heaven Meets Earth* (Shippensburg: Treasure House, 2003), 119.
[347] See 'His Kingdom is advancing,' from 'Core Values,' *Bethel,* which adds that 'we cannot change the world by human strength and ability alone.'
[348] See Chapter One.

has been rendered a predominantly retrospective quality in the life of the justified Christian.[349] It is significant that Bethel's teachings on this 'naturally supernatural' lifestyle vastly outnumber their teachings on sin, the weakness of their hamartiology shaping an account of grace that is accessible, and relatively uncomplicated to appropriate. This weights Bethel's teaching of the Gospel message towards the new abilities afforded by salvation, and away from the grace afforded to sinners. It also provides a convenient distraction from the problem of noetic corruption.

Bethel's personnel do not merely promote supernatural empowerment themselves, but appear actively hostile towards those who doubt it. Consider Eric Johnson's incredulity at the doctrine of original sin, or Vallotton's proclamation that 'people hate religion'.[350] The problem, as Bethel's teachers seem to see it, is not simply the Wesleyan view that too much talk of sin demotivates Christians. Rather, implicit in Bethel's theology of sin is the idea that traditional Christianity is needlessly subservient to the devil, wrongly accepting negative experiences like suffering and sinfulness as a natural part of life; Christians ought instead to abolish suffering through supernatural means, thereby furthering the Kingdom of God.[351] Much criticism of Bethel compares their teaching about supernatural empowerment to prosperity Gospel teachings (another example of a practical theology premised on an ineffectual dialectic of sin and grace). Bethel Church has also been accused of falsifying supernatural experiences and employing New Age ideas.[352] Yet, for Bethel's supporters, such scepticism demonstrates a lack of faith that corresponds to the lack of supernatural blessings enjoyed by sceptics. In this way, Bethel locate their Charismatic theology within a constructed dichotomy of true and false religion, evident throughout the genealogy I have already presented.

[349] See 'Hope in a Glorious Church: What Does this Mean?', from 'Core Values,' *Bethel*: 'We equip believers to live a naturally supernatural lifestyle so that they can bring transformation to their areas of influence.' The same values are reiterated in an infant baptism at Bethel, whereupon the following prayer is spoken over the infants: 'This is going to be their normal, visions from heaven will be their normal, the prophetic will be their normal.' See 'Baby Dedication,' *BethelTV* (27 August 2017). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/5053>

[350] Vallotton, 'The Redemptive Story.'

[351] For example, Bill Johnson argues that Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' cannot be a literal reference to disease: 'Paul refers to his thorn in the flesh which has been interpreted by many as disease allowed or brought on by God. That's a different gospel. Jesus didn't model it, and he didn't teach it. And Paul said, you can't change the standard.' See Raideragent, 'Bill Johnson False Teacher,' *YouTube* (19 August 2010).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzAwFYKe3h0&feature=youtu.be>

[352] See, for example, Hinn & Wood, *Defining Deception.*

3.4 THE INCONVENIENCE OF SIN

The corollary of supernatural empowerment, then, is the inconvenience of the doctrine of sin. I am not arguing that the supernatural experiences testified to by Bethel's visitors are necessarily false; however, as Zahl points out, the doctrine of sin suggests not only that justified Christians might falsify religious experiences, but also that they might 'misus[e]... perfectly authentic experiences of God.'[353] Yet the experiential hermeneutic enjoyed by Bethel (amongst Pentecostalism and Charismatics in general) makes acknowledging the noetic effects of sin 'thoroughly impractical,' as Stephen Moroney notes. If original sin effects an ongoing corruption of the faculty of knowledge, humanity appears to have no reliable means of evaluating religious experience, or indeed the distorting noetic effects of sin themselves. All sources we might use as authoritative – Moroney cites Calvin, Aristotle and the Buddha as examples – are presumably distorted by sin as well. We are, further, more likely to attribute the noetic failings caused by sin to other people than to ourselves, as Moroney states with recourse to psychological studies demonstrating the prevalence of attributional bias in humans. For example, people typically attribute their success to their own effort, and failures to external factors.[354] Meanwhile, we typically attribute other people's failures to their 'enduring personality traits,' and rate ourselves more favourably when it comes to socially desirable traits than we do others. We fall foul to the 'false consensus effect,' whereby we overestimate other people's agreement with our opinions, and demonstrate a clear gap between the confidence with which make predictions, and the accuracy of those predictions. These tendencies are demonstrable globally, not only in the English-speaking West.[355]

Moroney argues that there are workarounds to the noetic distortions that he attributes to original sin. He argues that individuals can, to some imperfect degree, identify their own distortions. The Word of God, and the illumination of the Spirit, might provide an ideal against which Christians can measure their own sins.[356] The lack of any objective interpretation of the Bible surely proves a hermeneutical problem here, divine grace in Biblical interpretation notwithstanding. Moroney also proffers 'intersubjectivity' as a potential solution to each person's sin-corrupted epistemological blinkers, to raise the

[353] Zahl, *Holy Spirit*, 9.
[354] Moroney, *Noetic Effects*, 80.
[355] Ibid., 90-7.
[356] Ibid., 81.

likelihood of distorted thinking being noticed. The constructive theologies of the later twentieth century speak to this effort, correcting or subverting popular metanarratives by way of divergent experience.[357] However, critics of social models of sin, such as Alasdair McFadyen, point to the unreliability of intersubjectivity; occasions of mass enthusiasm with self-selecting participants, such as large worship events, might well simply entrench one normative theological perspective. Further, it is not always clear which events are intersubjective and which are individualising, as the sociological research in the next chapter suggests. In any case, the radical, affirming subjectivity of Bethel's experiential hermeneutic will prove, as my musical examples later demonstrate, quite incompatible in its current form with the kind of caution and intersubjectivity that Moroney advocates.

3.5 SUMMARY

The hamartiology of Bethel Church is strikingly weak, pertaining almost exclusively to actualised sin. Wesleyan up to a point, albeit with a drastically more optimistic anthropology, Bethel's teachers present sin as a relational problem, its seriousness contingent on the degree to which individual cognition and volition motivate a purposeful rupture of relationship with God. Salvation, meanwhile, is thought to naturally incline the Christian towards good, and enable them to refrain from all actualised sin. Bethel's teachers, like Wesley, do not consider the position of inward sin in the Christian to any satisfactory degree. At Bethel, God is non-judgmental, and 'in a good mood.' Together, these features underemphasise the significance of sin, including its potential ongoing effects on the noetic and desiderative faculties. Bethel's uncritical account of inward and outward sin sees them simultaneously affirm the potential fallibility and infallibility of Christians in resisting sin. This contradiction appears to rely on an account of sanctification wherein the faculty of will achieves instant perfection, whilst the faculty of knowledge remains deficient and susceptible to error – to a slight enough degree that deeper interrogation of this problem appears to be thought unnecessary.

Bethel's defanging of sin will prove a problem in their worship ministry, as I show in Chapters Six and Seven: without an account of noetic and desiderative corruption, they have no theological tools with which to problematise their pursuit of tangible assurance,

[357] Ibid., 81. See Nelson, *Sin*, 16 n11 for a discussion of intersubjectivity as a means for mitigating sin.

and instrumentalisation of the worship event thereby. Chapters Six and Seven demonstrate how Bethel’s weak hamartiology, and therapeutic intent, is encoded into their use of pop musical norms, rendering the dialectic of sin and grace entirely ineffectual. However, before I address that subject, I need to examine the functions of worship (beyond its being instrumentalised as a means of grace), and set out the parameters of my musico-theological methodology. These are the topics to which I now turn.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Functions of (Pop) Worship

INTRODUCTION * WORSHIP AS FORMATION *
WORSHIP AS DIVINE ENCOUNTER * WORSHIP AS PRAISE * SUMMARY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines how Charismatic pop worship functions as a means of spiritual formation, divine encounter, and praise of God. These three functions might be easily undermined by the uncritical pursuit of tangible assurance. I will continue to press the case that a weak hamartiology – specifically, one with no clear account of ongoing corruption through sin – grounds such pursuit of tangible assurance. A full theology of worship is beyond the scope of this thesis; the purpose of this discussion is to ground my later observations about the therapeutic function of Bethel's worship music, using contemporary sociological research.

I contextualise my discussion of pop worship within a range of theological approaches to worship. I will continue to draw from the comparison between John Wesley and Bethel that I have made use of thus far. In addition to this, acknowledging my own location within the Anglican tradition, I refer throughout this chapter to the Church of England Liturgical Commission's 2007 report 'Transforming Worship', written primarily for Anglicans, but with interdenominational discourse in mind.[358] Seeking a *via media* through Christian worship theology, this report defines worship as 'the deepest response of redeemed

[358] S. Platten, G. Ambrose, J. Baker, A. Bergquist, M. Bonney, P. Bradshaw, P. Craig-Wild, [...] G. Waddington, 'Transforming Worship: Living the New Creation: A Report by the Liturgical Commission' (2007), §3.8, §1.7. In referring to this report by the Church of England's liturgical commission, I do not simply prioritise my own tradition, but also note that this thesis is written not so much with INC megachurches as an intended audience, but Anglican users of their resources.

humankind to God's loving purpose', and liturgy as its structural foundation.[359] The report seeks the commonalities across different worship traditions, claiming that liturgy should not be understood purely as a high church phenomenon. (A Charismatic liturgy, for example might involve opening with an extended worship set, welcome, notices, offering, sermon, corporate intercession and closing worship.)

Worship, then – according the Church of England's Liturgical Commission – is a response to God's loving action, undertaken within the context of the divine-human relation. This definition is broadly congruent with the Methodist and Charismatic accounts of worship that I have outlined thus far, both of which movements emphasise the affective dimension of the worship encounter, and present a degree of reciprocity for the worshipper: they receive divine grace, respond with praise, and are transformed in so doing. (I have noted that, for Bethel, this manifests in affect or the 'supernatural empowerment' of signs and wonders, and also the non-actualisation of sin.) Bill Johnson emphasises the affective dimension of worship, as well as the agency of the worshipper in choosing to worship, in the following statement about worship:

> It's more than a song we sing. It's our heartfelt response we give to God that places value on Him.[360]

This statement can be considered representative of the outlook at Bethel Church, prominently displayed on their website above a more detailed explanation of worship (more on which shortly). Similarly emphasising the worshipper's agency in the worship event, the website for Hillsong's worship conference, 'Arrows', quotes the Message translation of Psalm 25:12:[361]

> My question: What are God-worshippers like?
> Your answer: Arrows aimed at God's bull's-eye. [MSG]

As compared to the NRSV translation:

[359] Platten, 'Transforming Worship', §1.1: Liturgy is 'particular structured actions in which worship is expressed and by which worship is released.'
[360] 'Worship', *Bethel*. <https://www.bethel.com/worship/>
[361] 'Arrows: Hillsong Worship & Creative Conference Oct 21 – 23', *Hillsong*. <https://hillsong.com/wcc/>

> Who are they that fear the Lord?
> He will teach them the way that they should choose. [NRSV]

Meanwhile Hillsong leader Brian Houston's vision statement of 2014 declares that

> The church that I see is a worshipping church whose songs reflect such a passion for Christ that others sense His magnificence and power.[362]

This attributes an evangelistic function to the affect that, he suggests, is proper to the worship event: a function I have already evidenced in Chapter One. Suffice to note that affective worship is presented as attractive to both worshippers and 'others'.

The Liturgical Commission's broad account of worship is more systematised in its treatment of the nature and functions of worship, presenting three basic propositions that I examine in this chapter. As per my use of Wesley in the previous chapters, this provides a way of systematising the function of pop worship, as Bethel (et al) see it. Firstly, according to the Liturgical Commission, corporate worship is formative. This claim has precedent in scriptural and Patristic writings on the ability of worship to model the individual into the likeness of Christ, and draw them into the body of Christ, and grounds many critiques regarding pop worship music. Secondly, worship concerns the Trinitarian encounter with God.[363] Thirdly, the ultimate significance of worship is for praising God, as an end in itself.

I use the term 'pop worship music' or 'pop worship songs', and it should be noted that my observations primarily pertain to mainstream songs from the post-millennium period. My definition of this musical genre closely resembles Lester Ruth and Swee Hong Lim's definition of 'contemporary worship', which uses contemporary English language, popular music idioms and electronic technology, encourages physical self-expression in worship, supports a notion of 'musical sacramentality' ('where God is said to inhabit, dwell, or be enthroned upon the praises of God's people'), and concerns itself with contemporary issues.[364] Gordon Adnams describes the 'contemporary praise and worship' scene thus:

---

[362] 'The Vision,' *Hillsong*. <https://hillsong.com/vision/>
[363] Platten, 'Transforming Worship', §2.1, §2.5.
[364] Lester Ruth & Swee Hong Lim, *Lovin' on Jesus* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017), 14 (examples of contemporary issues given include Star Wars and the Vietnam War). Ben Quash makes a similar, albeit less literal, comparison between

> The music of 'contemporary' worship consists of songs characterized by simple, popular styles of text, music and instrumentation. These 'Praise and Worship' choruses are accompanied by guitars, keyboard and drums and often completely replace traditional chorale-style hymns and revivalist songs accompanied by organ and piano. Hymnbooks are left on the rack in favour of the digital projection of song texts onto screens, and in many cases, choirs disappear giving way to self-sufficient, amplified, small vocal ensembles fronting the band.[365]

This captures the way in which songs from large worship outfits like Bethel and Hillsong are adopted by smaller congregations. Whereas Ruth and Lim offer many examples of popular idioms used in worship music, such as country & western, or hip hop, I use the term 'pop worship' to denote the specificity of the musical idiom I am discussing. This is important to do, given the corresponding specificity of the musicological observations I make in later chapters, which do not necessarily apply to country & western, hip hop or other non-pop popular idioms. Diverging from Adnams, I use the term 'worship' rather than 'praise', as my argument in this thesis focuses on the formative and encountering functions of worship, rather than its ultimately being a means of praise for God. This is because the problems I identify with Bethel Music's approach to worship as a means of formation and encounter are significant enough to render discussion of praise in itself moot, for the time being.

4.1 WORSHIP AS FORMATIVE

Being formed in the Word

John Wesley affirms that worship should find its origins in the Word of God, and for formative, rather than strictly pedagogical, ends. For Wesley, sung worship conveys the Word in an affective manner that causes the worshipper to personally appropriate it into

---

music and the sacraments , stating that 'music may be a 'holy mystery' somewhat as the Christian sacraments are: acting as a means of grace and offering the hope of glory.' See Ben Quash, 'The Material, the Moral and the Mysterious: Three Dimensions of Music,' in James Hawkey, Ben Quash, & Vernon White (ed.), *God's Song and Music's Meanings* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 140.

[365] Gordon Adnams, ''Really Worshipping', not 'Just Singing', in Ingalls, Landau, & Wagner, *Congregational Music*, 185.

their own lives, regulating their personal religion in keeping with orthodox doctrine: hence his defence of congregational singing.[366] Bethel Church reflects a similar idea; Bill Johnson, in a short explanation of worship now preserved as a useful introduction on Bethel's website, summarises the relationship of worship and formation thus:

> Worship is what we were created for. Why does the Lord invite us into a place of worship? The Lord, in His mercy, designed it for us to find our fullest expression in life standing before Him accepted, delighted in, and ministering unto Him in thanksgiving and praise. God always chooses the best. If God, in loving us, chooses to design us as worshippers, then what's the point? You always become like what you worship. There's nothing He could want more for us than for us to become like Him. With that in mind, He designed us to be worshippers.
>
> In our history at Bethel, there was a line drawn in the sand where we said, "This is why we're alive, this is our supreme responsibility, our great God-given opportunity to be those who minister to the Lord." As a church, our entire ministry grew out of that priority. Most everything we've ever learned, we've learned as worshippers.[367]

Here, Bill Johnson suggests that, through worship, the worshipper becomes conformed to the image of God in some way, and implies that worship is the central facet of Bethel's overall ministry.

Westerfield Tucker schematises Wesley's understanding of formation in worship with three main components: a *ressourcement* of Scripture and earlier liturgies, musical simplicity that facilitates group participation, and the personal appropriation of a message; in worship, which is facilitated by the affectivity of sung worship (which Wesley

[366] Karen Westerfield Tucker, 'Wesley's Emphases on Worship and the Means of Grace', in Maddox & Vickers, *Cambridge Companion,* 226, 232: Compare what Westerfield Tucker calls Wesley's 'think and let think' attitude to doctrine, and his assumption that diversity of opinion would naturally result in diversity of worship, with his own well-documented meddling with other people's hymn lyrics; Wesley wanted to facilitate personal appropriation of doctrine through singing, without compromising the orthodoxy of hymn lyrics. Also, John R. Tyson, 'The Methodist National Anthem,' 23: amusingly, in 'Directions for Singing,' which first appeared in *Select Hymns* in 1761, Wesley writes that hymns ought not be revised. His own keen editing habit perhaps again reflects his extraordinary sense of calling...
[367] 'Worship,' *Bethel.* <*https*://www.bethel.com/worship/>

associates firmly with musical simplicity).[368] The hymns Wesley wrote or published are duly replete with scriptural language, set to the affective medium of music. Simplicity is, likewise, standard in pop worship music, and emotional appropriation of paramount importance. Its words are influenced by Scripture, yet incorporated into a comprehensible mainstream vernacular. Its music is simple and repetitive, easy to follow and learn. Thus pop worship combines a foundation in the Word with emotionalism in sung worship, in keeping with Wesley's understanding of formation in worship. Robin Parry, in his critique of the Trinity's place in Christian worship, suggests that sung worship shapes Christians' views of God even more than preaching or teaching do, despite the importance of each. This is, Parry claims, because sung worship is embodied and immersive, with a medium more memorable than sermons typically are.[369] Parry's intention is to recover a properly Trinitarian dimension to worship; to this end, he extends the obligation to worship leaders to be able to clearly articulate a doctrine of the Trinity, in order to better convey it through worship. (I am making a similar sort of suggestion, in this thesis, regarding hamartiology.) Parry suggests that regular Christians – by which I mean those not involved in public ministry – are not under the same obligation to wrestle with the doctrine of the Trinity, because they naturally absorb its contours from corporate worship, if it is properly expressed through that medium.[370] Adopting a more critical perspective, Martyn Percy claims that 'fundamentalist' 'ideologies' (of which he cites Vineyard as an example) are not 'primarily inductive' ways of thinking about doctrine. Rather,

> It is my contention that 'core' ideology can be located in the *worship* of fundamentalist groups: it is the worship of a community that provides it with its primary religious experience, and thus its certainty and ideology.[371]

My genealogy in Chapter One has already noted the increasing importance of personal appropriation of emotion in the movements that follow Wesley, and the strengthening association between worship and tangible assurance. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that the pursuit of tangible assurance directly problematises the idea of ongoing corruption through sin; it is this kind of 'certainty' arising from religious

[368] Westerfield Tucker, 'Worship,' 227; Wesley, 'Thoughts on the Power of Music,' *Arminian Magazine Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption,* No. 4 (1781): 103-107.
[369] Parry, *Trinity,* 7.
[370] Ibid., 9.
[371] Martyn Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power* (London: SPCK, 1996), 60.

experience that concerns Percy. Gordon Adnams demonstrates the centrality of personal appropriation of emotion in pop worship, through interviews with pop worshippers. Adnams presents a qualitative distinction, described by his subjects, between 'just singing' and 'really worshipping'. This distinction articulates well the emotional effort that the worshipper is obliged to make to engage in worship. 'Just singing' is described as

> un-minded singing, meaningless words and dispassionate singing... Singing on autopilot.[372]

When 'just singing,' no 'fresh thoughts' are inspired by the act of singing. Adnams quotes 'Tim,' who enjoys pop worship, but struggles to avoid being carried away by the music, forgetting about God.[373] This would be to focus on the wrong object during worship, and therefore not to worship at all. As Adnams summarises,

> just singing is not merely a type of (dis)engagement with song, but apparently missing a major point or purpose of singing in the worship service.[374]

The importance of emotional engagement in worship, strongly linked with sung worship in particular, has been affirmed, with qualification, since the Patristic era onwards. Figures such as Athanasius, Augustine and Basil venerated the specifically calming and emotionally regulative properties of sung worship, whilst expressing concerns that aesthetic pleasure could supersede the act of worship. (Augustine describes this possibility as a sin, and Basil as a 'passion of the flesh.')[375] Such concerns remain prevalent in criticisms of worship music thereafter. Dietrich Bonhoeffer echoes Augustine's concern that harmony, in sung worship, is overly emotionally stimulative, whilst Aimée Martimort echoes the concern of Pope Pius XII, reflecting on the difficulties of keeping music in a 'strictly functional role', that 'bombastic' music might distract from reflection upon the Word it conveys.[376] The contemporary pop worship idiom has received similar criticism from both academic and popular quarters, from figures such as Martyn Percy on the one

[372] Adnams, ''Really Worshipping',' 187.
[373] Ibid., 188.
[374] Ibid., 191.
[375] Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions I/1*, trans. Maria Boulding (New York: New City Press, 1997), 269 – 270. Athanasius, 'Letter to Marcellinus,' in *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. Robert Gregg (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1980), 123-4; Basil of Caesarea, 'Homily 10 on Psalm 1,' in *Saint Basil: Exegetic Homilies*, trans. Sister Agnes Clare Way (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1963).
[376] A. G. Martimort, *The Church at Prayer* (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1966), 118, 144.

hand, and John Blanchard and Dan Lucarini on the other. Concerns regarding emotionalism and aesthetic enjoyment complicate the notion of 'just singing'. Figures such as Adnams' 'Tim' suggest that 'just singing' might not exclusively involve disengaged singing-on-autopilot. It might, alternatively, appear as worshipful engagement that consists, in fact, only in aesthetic enjoyment. For this very reason, Adnams cautions that one ought not make assumptions regarding the 'inner state' of any singing worshipper.[377]

Adnams' 'really worshipping,' by contrast, has an affective dimension that 'just singing' lacks; it involves 'feeling the words' and personally identifying with the lyrics, which Adnams describes as 'my song given to God.'[378] To use Percy's language, this involves burgeoning 'certainty' of an affective sort, regarding whatever the lyrics and music suggest is happening in the worship encounter.[379] Adnams argues that the corporate dynamic of sung worship is essential to 'really worshipping', with worshippers' enthusiasm for participation growing over the course of the corporate worship event.[380] Ingalls concurs, arguing that the experience of being in a crowd of loud, homophonous singing is instrumental for creating a sense of participation, adding another formative component to the worship event.[381] Adnams observes that the volume of the crowd, and lack of inhibitions it engenders, enables 'personally expressive worship' where the crowd actually becomes 'background' to the individual's personal awareness of themselves in the presence of God. Thus the social context enables, but is also strangely diminished in, 'really worshipping':

> Really worshipping positions congregational singing and song as crucial components in the creation of an intensely individual, private, interior worshipful state and in so doing instrumentalizes the congregation and truncates the communal aspect of singing and its potential.[382]

Congruently, 'Transforming Worship' describes the importance of 'active participation' in worship, summarised as particular actions but also 'the whole-hearted prayerful

[377] Adnams, ''Really Worshipping',' 185: Adnams cautions that one ought not assume that the 'inner state' of any singer engaging in this act is, or is not, worship.
[378] Ibid., 190.
[379] Percy, *Power,* 60: 'It is the worship of a community that provides it with its primary religious experience, and thus its certainty and ideology.'
[380] Adnams, ''Really Worshipping',' 198.
[381] Ingalls, *Singing,* 59.
[382] Adnams, ''Really Worshipping',' 198-9.

engagement of each worshipper with the worship that is taking place.'[383] Monique Ingalls, nodding to Adnams' typology, notes that worshippers need to feel that they 'really worshipped' in order to be satisfied with the event, equating this with the success of the worship leader in fulfilling their role.[384] This coheres with INC leaders' statements about worship. For example, Brian Johnson speaks about God 'inhabit[ing]' his congregation's praise when leading worship, and suggests that he senses this affectively:

> There's that moment in worship you get to when you know something, when you feel something's supposed to happen... You don't exactly know sometimes... sometimes you just can feel like you're supposed to step out, and then one thing leads to the next and you start playing and you start figuring it out, and then all of a sudden, then it comes... Sometimes it's taken... in a lot of these moments it took even a few minutes sometimes, or even more, just to land that thing into *this*, this is what God [is doing].... [Sometimes] the atmosphere is created, and *then* all of a sudden you get the song.[385]

In the same interview, Brian presents the story of Joshua and the walls of Jericho as an example of a 'spontaneous outburst of the spirit', declaring that

> When God promises to inhabit your praise, he means business.

Elevation Church's 'Hallelujah Here Below (Paradoxology)' similarly recalls Ruth & Lim's 'musical sacramentality,' with its lyric

> You have the heavens to call your home
> But you abide in the song we sing.[386]

That this, again, typically manifests in affect is demonstrated in the song's video, featuring Steffany Gretzinger alongside Elevation Worship, visibly signalling their increasingly

[383] Platten, 'Transforming Worship,' §2.20.
[384] Ingalls, *Singing,* 49.
[385] WorshipU by Bethel Music, 'Spontaneous Worship Course – Brian And Jenn Johnson | WorshipU.com,' *YouTube* (6 November 2019), 1:31. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRfot-guHr8>
[386] Elevation Worship, Steffany Gretzinger, 'Hallelujah Here Below (Paradoxology),' *Paradoxology* (Elevation Worship Records: 2019): 0:16.

affective responses to their song by closing their eyes, crouching and waving their hands.[387] The Christian worship songwriter John Mark McMillan further elucidates the role of emotional engagement in worship, whilst delivering a WorshipU teaching session at Bethel:

> Worship is not simply reciting facts that Jesus already knows about himself. Jesus is not interested in the facts. Number One [reason]: our facts are almost always at least a little bit wrong. Number Two is that he knows better about it than you do, he knows theology better than you do, so he's not impressed by you singing theology to him... He's not impressed and you have nothing to offer him other than yourself. So if our songs do not contain us, then God, I'm convinced, is not interested in them. He doesn't need your theology, he wants you.
>
> I thought how ridiculous it would be for me to compose a song about facts about my wife. And how much they sound like some worship songs. "Her shoes are size eight. She's allergic to fish. I pray that she never has fish on her plate." It's stupid! It's just the facts. That's how we sing about God all the time. "God you're good. You're wonderful. You did this, you did that." I don't care... "I hope this appeases you and you're not mad at me any more about those things I did before I was saved..." When praise becomes obligation it ceases to be praise. You have to want to do it or it doesn't work.[388]

McMillan is right to broadly suggest that emotional engagement in worship is a good ideal. However, setting aside the problematic notion of God being 'impressed' in worship, by either human theology or human being, McMillan presents an interesting dichotomy between propositions about God, and emotional engagement. This corresponds with the contrast Bethel's personnel often draw between the spirit of religion and the spirit of truth, which I discussed in Chapter One. By drawing this stark dichotomy, McMillan assumes that emotional engagement is not compromised by inappropriate conceptions of God, or

[387] Elevation Worship, 'Hallelujah Here Below (Paradoxology) (feat. Steffany Gretzinger) | Music Video | Elevation Worship,' (13 April 2019). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7MR77AVBOs>
[388] WorshipU by Bethel Music, 'John Mark McMillan – Authentic Songwriting | Teaching Moment', *YouTube* (8 January 2020), 12:30. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qangot7eJwc>

self-serving desires. He also implies that the worshipper can choose unilaterally, to some degree, to emotionally engage in this uncomplicated way (and, discouragingly, suggests that their failure to attain a state of sufficient engagement means that their praise 'doesn't work').

McMillan seems to suggest that the veracity of worship lies in the affective orientation of the worshipper, rather than in the account of God they describe and address. He is right to observe that worship cannot rely on correct concepts of the unfathomable divine. It is, nevertheless, notable that his approach appears to prioritise affect over theological grounding in the Word, to return to Wesley's schema. In doing so, it overlooks the potential for noetic and desiderative corruption through sin to complicate this picture.

Further, the two categories of theological propositions and emotional participation are not necessarily as distinct as McMillan suggests; rather than emotional engagement with God resulting directly in affective worship, the act of singing arguably infuses propositions of this nature with affective salience. Monique Ingalls, for example, argues that the corporate worship event, whether in church or in concert, has the power to shape and transform the doctrines it expresses. Worship concerts, she says, 'set aesthetic expectations and discipline the worshipping body in particular ways', encouraging audiences to 'frame their aesthetic experience as worship', and introducing to them new songs and worshipping styles.[389] Ingalls explores the worship event as a practice, rather than a propositional or aesthetic phenomenon. She notes that leaders of worship concerts, as in congregational worship, often frame the event as wholly participatory, collapsing the boundary between artist and audience by directing the crowd in their individual and corporate self expression (for example by instructing the crowd to sing louder, or repeat a chorus).[390] This surely only exaggerates the sort of phenomenon as that described by Athanasius, who claims that the singer of the psalms sings them as though they were his own words.[391] The participatory relationship between worship text, worship leader and worshipping congregation is also apparent in the exhortation, common in Charismatic pop worship, that each individual improvise a song simultaneously, and in prophetic declarations from the

[389] Ingalls, *Singing,* 42.
[390] Ibid., 56.
[391] Athanasius, 'Letter to Marcellinus,' 110: Athanasius declares that 'he who recites the Psalms is uttering the rest as his own words, and each sings them as if they were written concerning him, and he accepts them and recites them not as if another were speaking about someone else....'

worship leader intended to have an immediate, liberative effect on worshippers, whether individually or corporately.[392]

Ingalls' argument about corporate worship coheres with George Lindbeck's claim, in *The Nature of Doctrine*, that doctrines teach believers how to 'feel... in conformity with a religious tradition.'[393] Because Ingalls understands the worship event to be semi-improvisatory, she promotes a predominantly experiential and embodied way of understanding its liturgical role, rather than assessing the music and lyrics as text. Ingalls emphasises the formative qualities of worship as praxis (rather than, say, pedagogy), arguing that collectives are formed through praxis, not only common qualities such as location (for example, a church) or objective (for example, "being a Christian").[394] Religion, as Ingalls presents it, is a dynamic and relational entity, and 'religious discursive networks' are 'articulated through material practices' such as worship.[395]

Ingalls suggests that the level of engagement inspired within the corporate worship event determines the identity of the group as a congregation. It is therefore, for Ingalls, in the affective worship experience that the congregation is constituted:

> Performative moves [...] bring the congregation into being.[396]

By way of example, Ingalls refers to a 'finite range of worshipful gestures' derived from the Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions, such as swaying and the raising of hands, any of which the individual might choose from for their individual participation in corporate worship.[397] Ingalls' interpretation of the worship event would seem to prioritise embodiment, and the more physiologically stimulative properties of music (more on which in the next chapter). However, Simeon Zahl even more vociferously rejects the dichotomy between [emotional] 'participation' in worship and 'propositions', suggesting that the formative effect of doctrine precedes its embodiment in worship. This, he argues, stems from the 'irreducibly imaginative element involved in emotion', namely the premise of

[392] See, for example, Jenn Johnson, 'Joy of the Lord (spontaneous),' *You Make Me Brave* (Bethel Music: 2014).
[393] George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 34-5.
[394] Ingalls, *Singing*, 25.
[395] Ibid., 16.
[396] Ibid., 49. See also 44, where Ingalls expresses some reservation about the term 'worship experience', a popular phrase that has 'insinuated its way into the vernacular.'
[397] Ibid., 54.

emotion in the imaginative quality of intention towards cognitive objects. According to Zahl, then, even tweaking doctrines in apparently abstract ways can have significant emotional effects, because such tweaks transform the intentions that individuals have towards things as they imaginatively contextualise them.[398] This suggests that music and lyrics matter due to the way they direct the imagination, in addition to embodied practices.

An example might include Bethel's recording of Thomas Ken's 'Doxology,' set to the tune Genevan 134.[399] This music expressively frames the lyrics so as to affectively direct the imagination towards 'really worshipping'. An ascending melody, each line culminating in an unambiguous sounding cadence, carries the following text:

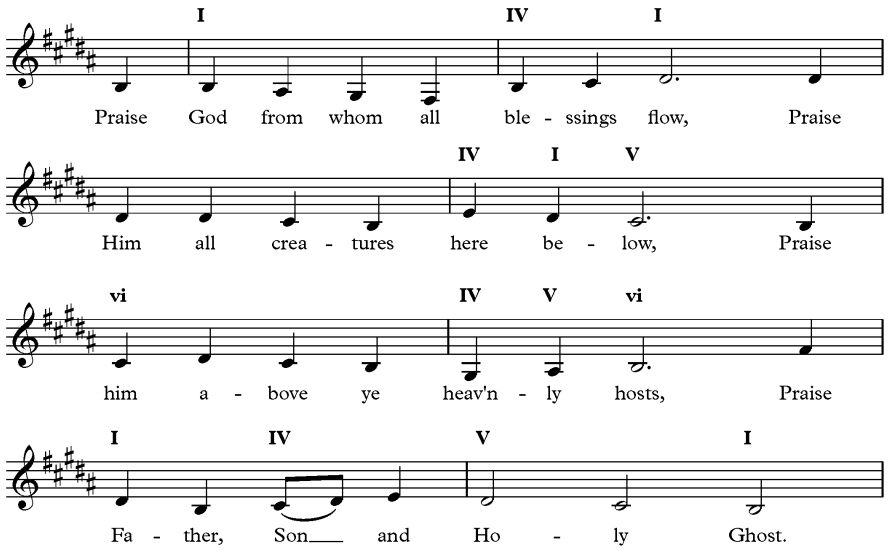


Figure 5. Bethel Music, 'Doxology.'

This is repeated for several minutes, as the otherwise static musical material increases in intensity, through increased volume, thickened texture and complexifying instrumental parts. In live performances, lyrics are interspersed with improvised proclamations, typical to the genre; a performance led by Kristine DiMarco includes such spontaneous proclamations as 'let it rise' and 'we lift our voices'.[400] This performance closes with prophetic statements such as 'all the ends of the earth are gonna hear your praises' and the following climactic statement by Kalley Heiligenthal, linking tangible assurance to worship:

[398] Zahl, 'On the Affective Salience of Doctrines,' in *Modern Theology*, Volume 31, No.3 (July 2015): 441-2.
[399] Bethel have several live recordings of 'Doxology,' but I am basing my comments here on Kristine DiMarco and kalley's performance. See Bethel TV, 'Doxology | Kristine DiMarco | Bethel Church,' *YouTube* (27 March 2019). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1CVV6TQO7M>
[400] See, for example, Bethel TV, 'Doxology | Kristine DiMarco | Bethel Church,' *YouTube* (27 March 2019). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1CVV6TQO7M>
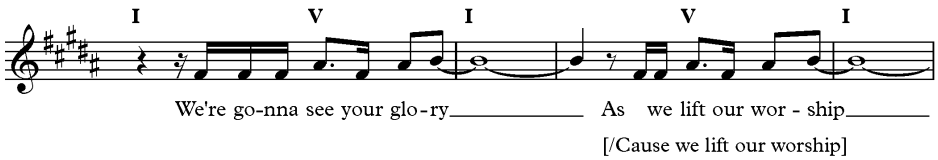


Figure 6. Bethel Music, 'Doxology,' vocal improvisation (9:52). [Brackets around ambiguous lyrics.]

This celebratory setting emphasises affect more than defining propositions (i.e. moves from the doxology to an affirmation of tangible assurance), and, unusually, utilises the kind of 'ressourcement' of earlier liturgies that Westerfield Tucker points to in Wesley. Importantly, the climactic arrangement implies a loss of inhibition in worship with each repetition.

Robert Wuthnow surmises that, for pop worship fans, church is predominantly thought to be about affect, forming in them a 'reflective orientation' to the world, rather than establishing concrete propositions, such as those in Athanasian Creed.[401] This is not to say that the propositional content of pop worship songs is irrelevant, in Wuthnow's view, but rather that the propositional content is subordinate, for fans, to the affective properties of the medium (more on which in the next chapter). Wuthnow's research emphasises the openness of the pop worship genre to conceptual manoeuvering – in other words, the prioritisation of affect over doctrine. He describes the contemporary view of spiritual formation as a contemplative practice that does not necessarily serve any particular religious tradition:

> [E]ngaging in devotional activities that encourage a reflective orientation to life, drawing on resources in one's religious upbringing that give a kind of ambiance to one's spiritual reflections, adhering to a religious tradition that is held with a certain degree of openness toward other traditions, engaging in some deeds of kindness toward others, and especially cherishing experiences in which one feels close to God.[402]

Wuthnow identifies two risks that this kind of spiritual formation might engender: a 'passivity problem' whereby congregants desire, respectively, to '"feel spiritual" without having to do anything', and a 'self-indulgence problem', whereby spiritual formation is

[401] Robert Wuthnow, *All in Sync* (Berkeley: UCP, 2003), 76.
[402] Ibid., 76-77.

merely simulated in the service of self-interest, for example the pursuit of personal fulfillment.[403] According to Wuthnow, the use of pop music to this end, at its worst, may engender superficial and self-seeking approximations of religion premised on subjective feelings. (I might note that, without a robust hamartiology, it could be hard to present this as a legitimate concern for justified Christians: see Kris Vallotton's comments on Romans in the previous chapter.) However, Wuthnow contends that, if undertaken seriously and with 'discipline', all manner of creative pursuits, including pop music, may indeed cultivate spiritual formation, enabling the worshipper to integrate their sense of personal identity with spiritual or theological reflection.

One problem of prioritising affect over doctrine, suggests Adnams, is that the intense identification required between the individual and the crowd for 'really worshipping' means that singing personally unappealing songs 'becomes problematic, if not impossible.'[404] This sheds light on an alienating side of accessible pop worship; Adnams describes it as 'narrow, exclusive and very contingent', on account of the need for emotional identification with the lyrics, if 'really worshipping' is to be achieved. This observation fleshes out comments made by Gordon Graham on the contingency of contemporaneity and accessibility in music: although pop worship rhetoric often implies that medium is more 'accessible' than hymns or anthems, this is not necessarily the case.[405] As such, the genre should not be uncritically considered to be have exclusively positive or encouraging effects.

Adnams even suggests that the pop worship event may be based more on shared feeling than on shared belief. Contemporary neurobiological research complements this claim; Forgas and Eich have suggested that when someone is in a particular mood, they are better disposed to process information of a similar affective tone.[406] In this vein, Wuthnow suggests that popular music is increasingly valued as a stimulus for spiritual growth – as compared to, say, sermons – because pop requires emotional identification rather than necessarily doctrinal identification, and therefore better facilitates religious exploration outside the church, and religious pluralism: in other words, pop offers congregants more

[403] Ibid., 44, 47.
[404] Adnams, ''Really Worshipping',' 199.
[405] Gordon Graham, 'The worship of God and the quest of the spirit,' in Hawkey, Quash & White, *God's Song,* 86.
[406] Simeon Zahl notes this in *Holy Spirit*, 41, drawing from J.P. Forgas, and E. Eich, "Affective Influences on Cognition: Mood Congruence, Mood Dependence, and Mood Effects on Processing Strategies," in I.B. Wiener, A.F. Healy & R.W. Proctor (ed.) *Handbook of Psychology*, *Volume 4* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2013), 61-82.

room for conceptual manoeuvering than doctrine does.[407] Indeed, Bethel Collective member Jenn Johnson describes this as one of her aims, professing her desire to write songs for, and to, people who are not yet Christians, and describes her worship songs as prophesies for them.[408]

Although pop worship clearly has a formative dimension, it is not clear how to distinguish spiritual formation through the genre from the mere impression thereof. Bethel themselves acknowledge something akin to 'just singing', with Brian Johnson, co-founder of Bethel Music, describing his own ministry in a sermon thusly:

> we write hoping one day we'll live the lyrics of the songs.... the truth is, we probably should sing 'I will give you *some* [not all] of my worship' because that's a little more accurate.[409]

The possibility of 'just singing' is a small crack in the smooth veneer of Bethel's worship theology, which seems otherwise unaffected by the potential corrupting effects of universal original sin, as I noted in Chapter Two. 'Just singing', as defined by Adnams, indicates some kind of corruption of desire, and therefore compromises the formative aspect of worship just as 'really worshipping' engages it. However, although some state akin to this is alluded to by members of the Bethel Collective, the concept of 'just singing' is not integrated into their music; instead, Bethel's worship songs quite forcefully overpower negative emotion with a resolute triumphalism, as my musical examples later demonstrate.

4.3 WORSHIP AS DIVINE ENCOUNTER

Although its individual and corporately formative aspect is important, worship is not exclusively, or primarily, about formation. This is often emphasised by pop worship artists, as per Brian Johnson's earlier comments about divine encounter in worship, wherein the Spirit of God 'inhabits' praise. Pop worship uses a distinctively informal liturgy, as reflected by Bethel's concern about the 'spirit of religion'. For example, whereas Augustine advocates responsorial psalmody as a means by which worship can be framed as

[407] Wuthnow, *All in Sync*, 36-7, 42.
[408] Jenn Johnson, 'Worship,' *BethelTV* (26 April 2017). <https://www.bethel.tv/shows/revival-chats/season-9/6784>
[409] Bethel TV, 'Brian Johnson, Recognised By Him.'

a response to the Word, Bethel open with an extended worship set, with meditative moments oriented towards the worshippers' immediate encounter with God.

In the pop worship genre, encounter with God is, demonstrably, tied to the purported accessibility and informality of the idiom, and often thought to be evidenced by its strong affective dimension. Wuthnow demonstrates this, for example in his profile of Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago. Willow Creek is a non-denominational Evangelical church, founded in 1975 by Bill Hybels. It is home to a 7,000 seat auditorium for pop worship that was built in 2004.[410] (Willow Creek also has a small worship band in the model of Bethel, Hillsong, *et al*; Willow Worship released EPs in 2018 and 2020.) Wuthnow's interviews with congregants show that accessibility and affectivity are entwined, in Willow Creek's worship ministry: pop worship is thought to be an accessible, and even "natural", way to engage with God and church, as demonstrated by its pronounced emotional effect. Wuthnow shares the stories of several Willow Creek members to this end. He describes a man who says that contemporary worship music reminds him that God is not exclusively 'separate and holy', whereas more traditional and formal styles of worship had led him to feel that God was aloof. Wuthnow also interviews Nancy Beach, a pastor and director of artistic programming at Willow Beach:

> Nancy Beach says she constantly has to remind herself that God isn't "my buddy," but is fully righteous compared to the sin-filled world in which we live. She thinks it is harder to remember this at Willow Creek than at other churches because the architecture does not remind her of the reverence that God commands and much of the music is meant to make people feel at home with God, rather than putting them in awe of God.[411]

Both Nancy Beach and the unnamed man note that pop worship engenders a feeling of intimacy with God, even as Nancy worries about its effect on her understanding of the attributes of God. If, at its best, the affectivity and accessibility of pop worship music encourages worshippers to find comfort, intimacy and a sense of expressive freedom in faith, Wuthnow does caution that, at worst, the genre might risk an inappropriate lack of

[410] 'Main Auditorium', *Willow Creek*. <https://www.willowproduction.org/venues/south-barrington/main-auditorium/>
[411] Wuthnow, *All in Sync*, 167.

reverence, or overly superficial conception of intimacy with God. (See my discussion of 'erotic infantilism' and the non-judgmental God of therapeutic Christianity in Chapter Six.)

Despite this potential risk, Wuthnow roundly opposes the (mis-)characterisation of worship music as a product that cynically breeds spiritual superficiality for the purposes of inflating record sales and congregation numbers. Wuthnow's description of Willow Creek emphasises the variety within their worship ministry: music is arranged differently every week, with new visuals, and songs often interspersed with or supported by skits, interviews or dances.[412] While Wuthnow states that pop worship music 'must be adapted, rather than simply being imported' into a church service, the creativity of Willow Creek's approach to informal worship appears to meet this standard, in his view.[413] Wuthnow's distinction between passive entertainment and creative engagement is not beyond critique. Consider Adorno's excoriation of 'pseudo-individualism', which superficially distinguishes essentially identical products from one another, and Freud's 'narcissism of small differences': the variety in Willow Creek's worship ministry might be presented in Wuthnow's flattering light, or in the less favourable manner of Adorno or Freud.[414] However, as I have noted, my ultimate concern in this thesis is practically applicable theology, rather than aesthetic matters.

Wuthnow's interviewees consistently emphasise the accessibility of pop worship. This quality relies on the familiarity of the pop idiom in the cultural consciousness, rather than the idiom's innate musical properties. The idea conveyed by Wuthnow's interviewees, that music can prove a 'natural' medium for communion with God, is described by Jeremy Begbie as a 'Romantic' attitude, wherein

> music by its very nature has the power to grant us some kind of immediate communion with God in a way which mediates healing and forgiveness.[415]

This Begbie contrasts with a 'Puritanical' attitude, which entails suspicion of music on the basis of its alleged tendency to draw people into idolatry, although suspicions of this sort

[412] Ibid., 154.
[413] Ibid., 166.
[414] Theodor W. Adorno, 'On Popular Music', in Richard Leppert (ed.), *Essays on Music* (Berkeley: UCP, 2002), 443, 442, 447. Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents*, trans. Joan Riviere (London: Hogarth Press, 1946), 90.
[415] Jeremy Begbie, *Music in God's Purposes* (Edinburgh: The Hansel Press, 1989), 7-8.

do predate Puritanism. In Begbian terms, Wuthnow's research demonstrates the broadly Romantic attitude of pop worshippers. Meanwhile, arguments against pop worship often demonstrate a more 'Puritanical' attitude, with concerns regarding idolatry, corrupting spiritual influences, and heterodox conceptions of the divine at the forefront.[416] (Begbie attributes neither attitude to himself.)

Steffany Gretzinger, previously of the Bethel Collective, is firmly in Begbie's Romantic camp. She argues, in her sermon on the Fall, that the event of (sung) worship returns worshippers to their original state of natural intimacy with God.[417] In worship, she says, 'we remember, we return and we reconnect' with God, and actualise God's original plan for humankind, which entails intimate communion between divinity and humanity. Gretzinger posits that simply being reminded of "who God is" is enough to reorientate the worshipper towards God. For Gretzinger, the event of communion with God through worship causes the individual to 'spill over with worship'. This is because the conceptual focus on God engendered in worship can 'remov[e] all of the space' between humankind and God, rendering the distance between them 'super thin', and effectively overwhelming the individual with an affective experience of divine goodness.[418]

Jeremy Riddle similarly reflects that repetitive worship songs can induce the spontaneous worship that results from awareness of the presence of God, by stimulating a feeling of God's immanent presence.[419] Riddle refers to choruses as 'comfort blankets' that can be repeated *ad nauseam* until the worshipper can spontaneously worship with conviction in their feelings: '*that* is what opens up a breakthrough and releases heaven on earth.' In other words, Riddle suggests that repetition allows time for the music to have an emotional effect, and thereby facilitates the assurance of salvation and God's "manifest" presence that results in positive affective experience and supernatural empowerment. Riddle's

[416] See Blanchard & Lucarini, *Rock the Gospel*, 73-79, and Mathew Guest, *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture* (Colerado Springs: Paternoster, 2007), 44-45.
[417] Bethel Church do encourage variety in worship, albeit in forms ancillary to the permanent fixture of sung worship. For example, a sung worship session might be accompanied on stage by "prophetic painting" displays, banner waving or dancing with scarves.
[418] Bramnick, 'Worship [...] Gretzinger.' Also, Bethel TV, 'Why Worship | Steffany Gretzinger | Open Heavens,' wherein Gretzinger seems to suggest that worship can arise in any form 'when you're connected', but that affective worship music worship can catalyse this connection.
[419] See 'Jeremy Riddle, Heaven Come Session 9,' *BethelTV* (2 June 2018). <https://www.bethel.tv/events/heaven-come-2018/day-3/7235> Riddle refers to choruses as 'comfort blankets', and says that repeating them 'opens up a breakthrough and releases heaven on earth.'

comments are congruent with Adnams' research, wherein he suggests that 'really worshipping' benefits from the repetition of immediately comprehensible lyrics:

> It seems that some worshippers highly value words that speak quickly to them and through them, not demanding explanation or analysis.[420]

Adnams quotes one worshipper who describes his experience of singing familiar words repeatedly, for example in a repeated refrain, and how this gives him an opportunity to continually meditate on the meaning of the text. This, for the worshipper in question, is easier than singing hymns, which constantly present new ideas at a rate too fast to process. Adnams summarises:

> Reiteration draws attention... repetition presents an opportunity for further discovery.[421]

Gretzinger's sermon explicitly frames (sung) worship as an antidote to the Fall, and a means by which Christians can return to the intimacy originally enjoyed in the Garden of Eden. She imbues sung worship (and, by implication, worship leaders) with a Promethean ability to effectuate human love of God, thereby enabling this pre-Fall state of communion through 'remembering' God's attributes. Gretzinger's theology of reconciliation through conceptual focus on God raises the question of the necessity of Christ's death and resurrection; there does not seem, in her account, to be any innate corruption from which humankind needs to be rid, and it is not clear if Christ's mediating role is essential for enabling the worshipper to 'remember' their way to a pre-Fall state of communion with God.[422] In keeping with Begbie's Romantic/Puritanical typology, this question is pertinent to Schleiermacher's Romantic theology of intuition, brief comparison with which might clarify Bethel's fuzzy account of worship.

Schleiermacher's *On Religion*, in its original 1799 edition, emphasises the intuitive capacity of the individual as a necessary mechanism for salvation, and neglects the salvific

[420] Adnams, ''Really Worshipping',' 193.
[421] Ibid., 194.
[422] I would speculate that Gretzinger, if asked, would affirm that Christ's work on the cross is essential. It is nevertheless noteworthy that this is not conveyed in her message, nor in her worship songs 'We Dance,' 'Letting Go' and the spontaneous song 'I See The Light,' which I will later examine.

work of Christ in the process. Like Bethel, Schleiermacher does this from an apologetic angle. Schleiermacher's early attempt to cajole his audience into Christian belief leads him to lower the threshold of religious intuition so as to eclipse original sin in favour of a social model of (bourgeois) sin, and almost rendering Christ incidental to salvation.[423] Bethel are relatively more orthodox, insofar as they insist that salvation requires faith in Christ specifically. Nevertheless Bethel, like early Schleiermacher, apparently have little interest in the effects of original sin, and demonstrate a profound confidence in the capacity of the individual to remember, or intuit, the attributes of God, and so commune with God. There is, certainly in Gretzinger's theology, no ongoing corruption posed by original sin, but merely an unaccountable weakness that persists after salvation, leaving the individual vulnerable to evil, yet not culpable for it. (I demonstrate this claim further in Chapter Six.)

Gretzinger's songs reflect her belief that intimacy with God, akin to the pre-Fall communion of Adam and Eve with God, is restored through worship. Anna Nekola agrees that intimacy with God is a major theme in worship music advertisements, stimulating sales. Nekola says this theme of intimacy sells the 'transformation of everyday spaces and routines':[424]

> Christian media promises to take each of us 'there' – to assist us in transcending this physical world so that we may, on our own, journey to meet the divine. This transcendent possibility promised by Christian pop music purveyed depends on a theology of an interpersonal relationship with God as well as an emotionalism derived from Charismatic practice...[425]

Of course, adverts typically sell that which the consumer lacks, and insofar as it promises the 'transcendent possibility' Nekola describes, Christian media fuels the idea that the worshipper is not yet 'there', and that its own products are the means to rectify this. Martyn Percy similarly concludes that Vineyard songs 'have a tendency to suggest that worship must somehow be engineered before God can be encountered,' implying the

[423] See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), 59, 120 – 121: Schleiermacher writes that man is born with a 'religious capacity' that is blocked by bourgeois socialisation, and in this early work treats the divinity of Christ in a somewhat ambiguous fashion, predominantly emphasising his moral teaching. Note that later, in *The Christian Faith*, however, Schleiermacher explicitly defends the particular divinity of Christ. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith,* trans. Terrence Tice, Catherine Kelsey & Edwina Lawler (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 565, 575.
[424] Nekola, Anna, 'I'll Take you There,' 126.
[425] Nekola, 'I'll Take You There', 134.

worship leader's essential mediating role, between the congregation and God.[426] Bethel's worship songs attempt to facilitate something that is, seemingly, not already extant when worshippers enter the room. This combination of accessibility and simultaneous inaccessibility again recalls Schleiermacher, who supported the Romantic idea that, although intimacy with God might be a 'natural' feature of the human condition, one's religious faculties must be cultivated in order to properly participate in this intimacy.[427] Jeremy Riddle, from Bethel Music, explains how Bethel's worship leaders attempt to cultivate the religious faculty to this end, premising encounter with God on formation through (their) worship practices:

> We do know that God is here right now, his presence is here, but if you want more of his presence, you're going to have to learn how to host it... God wants to interact. He wants relationship, he wants to be the centre of it all, not just in theory, not just in prayer, not just in Word, but in actual practice.[428]

Riddle also states that God's omnipresence is different from his 'manifest presence', implying that the former is passive, and the latter active. Sung worship, for Riddle, is the space where one can 'interact' with God 'in actual practice'. The contrast between this 'actual practice' and worshipping in the Word, which Riddle associates with mere 'theory', supports my claim that, in Charismatic worship, affect subordinates foundation in the Word – often represented by the spirits of truth and religion, respectively. Riddle speaks of 'grow[ing] a skill set', as a Christian, 'if you want to step into more', the inchoate signifier for the fruit of Christian formation pertaining to tangible assurance, which I discussed in the previous chapter. The 'skill set' described by Riddle involves a feeling of 'awareness' of God's presence and a willingness to 'adjust' to God's interventions in the world.[429] Further, it facilitates the 'actual practice' of hosting the manifest presence of God. This encounter both is, and results in, the 'more' of which Riddle speaks – in other words, the

---

[426] Percy, *Power,* 79.

[427] See Schleiermacher's dual warning against stifling outward intuition, and against over-indulging inward intuition, in the *Speeches*, 64. See also Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christmas Eve: A Dialogue,* trans. Terrence Tice (Eugene: Cascade, 2010), 31, for his counter-example of a well-cultivated intuitive faculty in the child Sophie, whose piano playing demonstrates not only her grasp of harmony and counterpoint, but also, Schleiermacher implies, her intuitive understanding of her place within, and connection to, the universe.

[428] Jeremy Riddle, 'Heaven Come Session 9,' *BethelTV* (2 June 2018). <https://www.bethel.tv/events/heaven-come-2018/day-3/7235>

[429] A good expression of this idea in song is IHOPKC's 'We Make Room,' recorded live at the Onething Conference, which declares 'we make room for you to move, we welcome you Holy Spirit,' and later 'send your fire down, send your presence down (we want your nearness).' Jaye Thomas, The Cry, 'We Make Room (Live) [Spontaneous],' *Here Is My Worship (Live)* (Forerunner Music: 2014).

manifestations of spiritual activity I previously described, such as tongues and prophesy, as well as privileged spiritual wisdom and positive affective experience.

Riddle is right to be concerned with the 'manifest presence' of God. Simeon Zahl, in his study on the Holy Spirit, writes that

> The question of divine "presence" [...] is closely related to the perennial theological and pastoral problem for Christians of how to understand the connection between eternal divine realities and the daily lives of particular individuals and communities in particular times and places.[430]

This concern for particular, lived experience of transformation in Christ is what Riddle seems to be getting at, when he refers to 'manifest presence' rather than 'omnipresence'. Zahl notes that theologies of sanctification often neglect to address the embodiment of those undergoing sanctification, focusing entirely on the metaphysical.[431] The impracticality of this approach can be easily masked by

> general statements about the Spirit "bettering" our union with Christ through the Eucharist, or "actualizing" changes in our "being" through participation in the Godhead need to be tempered by some kind of theological attempt to show how these metaphysical realities actually relate to the lives of real people in time. Otherwise, the Holy Spirit—theoretically the agent of this saving and sanctifying union with Christ— risks being reduced to a generic divine power, banal, clinical, and dehistoricized.

In certain respects, Bethel present the material difference to sanctified bodies fairly straighforwardly: positive affective experiences, and supernatural empowerment of some variety, as well as a strengthened faculty of will to aid holy living, and - it would seem - the absence of noetic and desiderative corruption. Whether or not these claims are true, they do clearly relate the presence of God to concrete, embodied circumstances – as in Riddle's discussion of 'hosting' the 'manifest presence' of God. However, Bethel's practical theology of divine encounter overlooks the possibility of false claims and

[430] Zahl, *Holy Spirit*, 51.
[431] Ibid., 69.

mistakes regarding encounter with God's presence, and arguably fails to sufficiently distinguish the person of the Spirit from a 'generic divine power'.[432]

This raises a broader problem of what could be described as the use of "placeholder" terms in pop worship. By this I mean the use of ill-defined, but affectively charged, words such as "more", "there" or "Lord".[433] Zahl notes that particularity of object is a vital facet of the delight in the Lord, for Augustine; yet, for Bethel – and across the genre – lyrics are addressed to "God", "Lord" or "Jesus", without the particularity of object that Augustine requires. For example, Bethel's spontaneous song, 'I Really Love You', reiterates variations on the following affective, but vague, theme:

> We really love you, we love you right now,
> And this is all about you, and we love you right now...
>
> Cause I really love you, my strength and shield
> I love you right now, my victory and my strength
> I really love you, yeah I love you right now...
>
> You are my everything, and I love you right now...[434]

Meanwhile, Bethel Music's 'Jesus We Love You' testifies in certain ways to the effect Jesus has had upon them, for example in this verse:

> The hopeless have found their hope
> The orphans now have a home
> All that was lost has found its place in you
> You lift our weary head
> You make us strong instead
> You took these rags and made us beautiful.[435]

[432] Ibid., 55-6.
[433] See, for example: Nekola, 'I'll Take You There'; Percy, *Power*, 75-6; Riddle, 'Heaven Come Session 9.'
[434] Bethel Music, 'I Really Love You (Spontaneous)' (2012): 1:11 – 3:21.
[435] Bethel Music, Paul McClure, 'Jesus We Love You (Live)', *We Will Not Be Shaken* (Bethel Music: 2015): 1:24; 0:58.

Nevertheless, there is no specificity regarding the salvific work of Christ, nor the nature of God, for example in the chorus:

> Jesus we love You, oh how we love You,
> You are the one our hearts adore.

I am not suggesting that these lyrics are "wrong" – and, as McMillan suggested earlier, mankind cannot fully grasp the nature of God in theological propositions (nor, I might add, in affect). However, continual neglect of questions regarding the nature of God, or failure to engage with orthodox doctrine, poses a problem. Martyn Percy indicates as much, with his claim that some Christian pop worship, such as the songs of John Wimber, fails to explain 'what or who is being addressed'. Whilst a song might refer to 'God', in Percy's view they will commonly fail to explain what *kind* of God:

> The data suggests that it is not so much God who is being addressed, but rather favourable concepts of God – an ideology – that has rooted itself in the individual and corporate identity of the worshippers.[436]

Percy said this in 1996, but more recent examples of 'favourable concepts of God' can be found in Riddle's use of 'more' as the intended goal of spiritual formation, or Nekola's identification of 'there' as the elusive product Christian media advertising. Percy, for his part, gives three examples of how the word 'Lord' functions in such ways. Firstly, to 'overstate' God's abundant power. Secondly, as an 'exchange mechanism' whereby worshippers feel they can 'hav[e] their problems solved by power' if they acknowledge and submit to that power. Thirdly, to 'encourage trust' in the Lord by way of the corporate affirmation of everyone having the same Lord.[437] The embodied nature of the worship event provides, writes Percy, a concrete 'strategy for participation', which is 'sociologically transcendent':

[436] Percy, *Power,* 61.
[437] Ibid., 75-76.

> The songs raise the participants above the lesser subjects and objects of this world so that they may actually touch God, and he them; overall, a 'community of feeling' is created by the worship.[438]

This returns to the issue of certainty I mentioned earlier, wherein affect becomes more important than the grounding of worship in the Word. Robin Parry, meanwhile, describes an eclipse of the Father in worship, and a solipsistic focus on Jesus. Parry suggests that this might be because Jesus 'seems more "like us" and therefore more approachable'.[439] I am not convinced by Parry's observation – my musical examples show that Bethel's songwriters very frequently address their lyrics to the Father. Nevertheless, Parry astutely notes that the person of Jesus can be treated, lyrically, as a blank canvas upon which the worshipper's feelings and preferences can be projected:

> It seems to me that there is a trend towards singing songs addressed to a Jesus who has been stripped of any references to the narrative that makes him who he is. Such songs speak of a "Lord" called "Jesus" who makes the singers feel loved and accepted, but often there is no reference to his incarnation, his teaching, his miracles, his life, his death-resurrection-ascension, or his coming return. It is not that there is anything necessarily wrong with a song that does this. If in a meeting some of the other songs, Scripture readings, prayers, and sermon fill in the details, then the congregation understands that the Jesus in these minimalist songs is the same painted elsewhere in such rich colours. The problem is that if such songs become dominant, we gradually lose sight of the biblical Christ and replace him with "Jesus-my-personal-therapist" or "Jesus-my-mystic-boyfriend." Jesus-the-personal-therapist and Jesus-the-mystic-boyfriend are vague characters who give worshippers warm fuzzy feelings of acceptance but I think one has to seriously ask whether such messiahs are the real Messiah at all.[440]

Parry is right to note that vague lyrics are not, in themselves, a problem; it is their

[438] Ibid., 62.
[439] Parry, *Trinity*, 85.
[440] Ibid., 88-89.

becoming normative that weakens the overall theology conveyed in worship. I might simply add that – as my musical examples also demonstrate – vague projections of Jesus are readily joined by projections of the Father and the Spirit. In this way, for Charismatic worship, the vagueness of worship lyrics can actually compromise the event's potential to provide a locus of divine encounter, by eclipsing logocentrism with a solipsistic, therapeutic bent. I interrogate the therapeutic as a quality of pop worship in later chapters but note here that there *is* a therapeutic, rather than necessarily logocentric, quality to the rhetoric of Bethel's personnel. Worship is often associated with the prophetic, at Bethel, with main worship leaders Brian and Jenn Johnson stating that worship '*is* prophetic in nature... He tells people who are close to his heart his secrets.'[441] Similarly, the worship leader Cory Asbury's profile, on the Bethel Music website, states:

> Cory carries a passion to lead people into encounters with the love of the Father. His prophetic worship style is marked by rich spontaneous moments in God's presence.[442]

The pursuit of revelation in worship is just one facet of tangible assurance. In a 2016 worship session at Freshwind Conference, Asbury's prophetic worship style was evidenced during an acoustic moment of his extended worship session. Over a sparse texture of guitar, piano and synth that gradually increased in volume and vigour, Asbury directed the worshippers to sing improvisationally as he stewarded the worship encounter in a prophetic tone:

> [*Spoken*] All across this room, just begin to gently lift your voice to him... [*Asbury speaks in tongues*].... [*Spoken*] Yeah, just let that love song rise, it's like a pleasing fragrance to his heart this morning... [*Sung*] You're giving him his love and you're singing over us today. [*Spoken*] Just lift your voices. Yeah, it's that gentle love song. You have no idea how that moves his heart, how it moves his heart when you lift your voice to him. [*Sung*] Just lift it up, just sing your song, no matter how weak it is, how insecure you feel, just lift your voices to the Lord, just let that love song rise to him...[443]

[441] WorshipU, 'Spontaneous Worship Course'.
[442] 'Cory Asbury: About Cory,' *Bethel Music*. <https://bethelmusic.com/artists/cory-asbury/>
[443] Catch The Fire Toronto, 'Freshwind 2016 Session E (Worship) - Cory Asbury (Bethel Music) - (March 25),' *YouTube* (31 March 2017). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RHey3Ucpdfo> 36:20 – 37:50.

These gentle, encouraging directives build towards an extended musical climax. Asbury declares that God is stirring up 'fire' in the 'stagnant waters of our souls,'. After a long guitar riff, Asbury launches into a rendition of Chris Tomlin's upbeat dance-pop worship song 'God's Great Dance Floor' (2013), which build up to the repeated refrain:

> I feel alive, I come alive,
> I am alive on God's great dance floor.[444]

This moment from Asbury's live set illustrates the reciprocity of worship as he sees it, leading the worshippers first to 'giv[e] him... love' and 'move[...] his heart', and then into an affective state of exuberant joy. That encounter with God is portrayed almost exclusively as an unambiguously happy, comforting, overwhelmingly joyful or pleasant experience is a quality of Bethel's worship ministry that I will revisit. This quality is reflected in the concern of Bethel worship leader Brandon Lake that worshippers enjoy faith as a positive affective experience:

> Brandon believes that the people of God should be the freest people on the planet, and he is passionate about releasing joy and excitement while pursuing the presence of God in worship.[445]

For now, it suffices to acknowledge Bethel Church's claim that worship facilitates a pre-Fallen state of encounter with God (often ill-defined), manifest in positive affect and supernatural empowerment. By relating positive affect and supernatural empowerment to assurance of salvation, Bethel limit the emotional scope of their music, circumscribing the extent to which negative experience can be integrated into the sung worship event. The emotional scope of the pop worship idiom is important because of the profound degree of emotional engagement required in the worship event. Martin Stringer argues that study of worship music must acknowledge the level of emotional engagement with the music that goes beyond merely 'the rite, the ritual or the liturgy':

[444] Chris Tomlin, 'God's Great Dance Floor,' *Burning Lights* (sixstepsrecords/Sparrow Records: 2013): 2:24.
[445] 'Brandon Lake: About Brandon,' Bethel Music. <https://bethelmusic.com/artists/brandon-lake/>

> The use of the word 'worship' places the emphasis not on the text or the performance as a thing in itself, as something in the world that can be recorded and analysed in an abstract form, but implies some level of engagement or experience of that thing, an approach to the ritual, rite or liturgy which can... be either 'right' or 'wrong'.[446]

The idea that emotional engagement is a more salient metric for the "success" of sung worship than doctrinal orthodoxy is borne out by the 'just singing'/'really worshipping' dichotomy. However, this circumscribes the purview of grace, suggesting that worshippers need to "meet God halfway", by emotionally engaging in positive affect during the worship event, in order to experience divine encounter. This approach to worship also short-circuits the formative aspect of worship, by assuming the worshipper possesses the spiritual and emotional faculties to distinguish 'just singing' from 'really worshipping', and approach worship with pure motives and an unproblematic conception of God.

4.4 WORSHIP AS PRAISE

In addition to its formative quality, and relation to encounter with God, worship should be ultimately understood as an end in itself: praise, the appropriate response to God and God's work in Christ. As 'Transforming Worship' states:

> But when all is said and done, worship is primarily for God's sake. The experience of worship may be deeply healing for individual worshippers, as they bring their own and the world's need before the love of God; it may powerfully shape and reinforce a worshipping community's sense of its own identity, and mark the position of individual Christians within the church; when it is authentically the worship of God, it will also be deeply attractive, communicating a contagious joy which gathers others to it. But all these functions of worship, important as they are, are secondary to its fundamental dynamic, which is to praise God for God's sake.[447]

[446] Martin Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 1999), 39.
[447] Platten, 'Transforming Worship,' §2.21.

Bill Johnson touches on this idea, when he describes 'ministering unto the Lord' in worship as the central aspect of Bethel's ministry.[448] However, as my discussion of "placeholder" terms suggests, the object of Bethel's praise is normally ill-defined. My comments in this chapter thus far, particularly those pertaining to tangible assurance and the prioritisation of affect over doctrine, have undermined the potential for Bethel Music to 'praise God for God's sake', hence the brevity of this final section. Although Bethel Music suggest that all of their worship is praise, a position that will be made clear from the examples I cite later, my argument problematises this view. Praise is accidental to Bethel's treatment of worship, which, as a means of formation and encounter, is instrumentalised to the therapeutic end of engendering tangible assurance. This endeavour almost entirely eradicates the ongoing significance and seriousness of sin in the life of the justified Christian. Consequently, Bethel Music's problematic approach to formation and encounter in worship must be addressed, before worship can be approached as, ultimately, a means of praise.

4.5 SUMMARY

The research undertaken by Wuthnow, Ingalls and Adnams demonstrates that there is an affective dimension vital to the pop worship experience. The distinction between 'really worshipping' and 'just singing' pertains to the embodied performance of the musical text, and informs the concern, arising from Wuthnow's interviews, that affect itself, rather than God, might become the focus of a worship set. Bethel's weak hamartiology and general doctrinal vagueness proves problematic for their music, in this regard. The research I have commented on has hinted that there are certain musical features that shape the worship event with regard to its affective properties - notably volume, repetition and homophony, thus far. However, without musicological analysis of the songs themselves, it is not clear *how* these features might shape the worship event: it is to the use of musicology, and the evaluation of musical expression, that I now turn.

[448] 'Worship,' *Bethel.* <*https*://www.bethel.com/worship/>

CHAPTER FIVE

A Musico-Theological Methodology

INTRODUCTION * MUSICO-THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS * THE EXPRESSIVE PROPERTIES OF FUNCTIONAL SONG * THE STIMULATION THESIS * THE CONTOUR THESIS * THE CONVENTION THESIS * A MUSICAL TYPOLOGY * SUMMARY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The parameters of my musico-theological methodology, detailed here, ground my analysis of how Bethel's worship music expressively frames its theology so as to undermine the sin-grace dialectic. The sociological literature that I have reviewed confirms that pop worship imbues its theological claims with affectivity, but has no way of evaluating what Edward Cone describes as the "subconscious" emotional layer that music adds to a written text.[449] Cone defines the role of music in functional song thus, using hymns as an example:

> The singer expresses himself directly as a member of a specific community, engaged in performing a task, or taking part in a ritual, or assisting at a social event... the music is taken for granted as simply there to be used. Hence no one listens to the music – or to the words either, for that matter. The music exists in order to create a sense of unanimity in the projection of the words, and the words are used, not for their poetic value (which is nonexistent), or even for their meaning, but for their availability as ritual symbols.[450]

Cone exaggerates in claiming that the music and words are purely incidental in functional music. Nevertheless, the pop worship genre is indeed a functional one, and Ingalls *et al* are

[449] Edward Cone, *The Composer's Voice* (Berkeley: UCP, 1974), 35.
[450] Ibid., 49-50.

right to emphasise the significance of the worship experience as an event. Insofar as the 'experience' might be prioritised over the 'worship', Cone is not wrong that the functional music in this respect is 'taken for granted' - as is demonstrated by the lack of engagement with musical texts in this field of inquiry. However, even as basic accompaniment with simple harmony, music is not a neutral conduit for lyrics, nor an incidental feature of the worship event. Rather, functional music expressively frames the lyrics it conveys, as subtext to a text. The potential for music to shape doctrine is especially important in this genre, given the stated objectives of worship outfits such as Vineyard, IHOPKC, Hillsong and Bethel to disseminate pop worship songs internationally as part of a Christian revival mission. While sociological analysis of worship praxis can helpfully show *how* doctrine is interpreted in communities where contemporary worship music is employed, musicological analysis of the music as text may be able to show us *why* this would be so.

My aim, in this chapter, is to explain how musicological analysis can complement the burgeoning field of theological inquiry into pop music. To this end, I will establish some parameters for how music might be thought to convey theological meaning. Over the next few chapters, I will not draw musical examples and comparisons exclusively from the pop idiom: although Richard Middleton rightly notes that pop and classical texts should not be compared uncritically, certain continuities between the basic norms of various Western classical and pop idioms mean this is a useful approach for illustrating my points, and, later, thinking about the stylistic limitations of the pop idiom.[451] I begin by reviewing recent theological scholarship regarding pop music, before categorising pop worship as a genre of "functional song". Then, I give an account of the popular worship song 'Ever Be' (2014), written by Bethel Collective member Kalley Heiligenthal (stage name 'kalley'), to demonstrate my musico-theological methodology. Finally, I propose a trifold model of musical expressive meaning: the stimulation thesis, the contour thesis and the convention thesis. I will only make claims regarding the expressive potential of music that can be defended by one of these three models, as they suffice for the level of expressive specificity that I attribute to pop worship music. Although this chapter gestures at the theological qualities of pop worship, notably its encouraging function, and oft-weak hamartiology, I largely postpone this kind of analysis until later chapters. This will enable me, here, to better focus on demonstrating the possibilities and limitations of musico-

[451] Richard Middleton (ed.), *Reading Pop* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 4.

theological analysis, which is too often employed in a spurious manner, if undertaken at all.

5.2 MUSICO-THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Monique Ingalls has argued that the significance of the (worship) event arises from the experience of participation. This idea is echoed widely, notably in Foucault's theory of institutional discipline, but also specifically with regard to music and theology in the works of Roger Scruton and Jeremy Begbie, two writers who, unlike Ingalls, use musical notation in their work.[452] Begbie follows Scruton in asserting that the inner emotions are 'formed and amended through dialogue with others.' For example, expressing emotion in the performance of a song composed by another shapes the emotions of the performer.[453] That musical performance is an embodied form of participation is, for Begbie as for Ingalls, particularly important. Begbie has described music not merely as organised sound, but as an 'engagement with the physical, created world' in a way that 'communicates human values' without being reducible to a mere 'vehicle for conveying a message.'[454] (How aesthetically distinctive Begbie thinks the musical medium is, in this respect, is not clear; with respect to embodied participation in an inchoate message, for example, music might be comparable to architecture.)

Due to the significance of emotional engagement for the worship event, and also the variable appropriateness of notated musicological analysis for pop music, much investigation of pop worship has focused on the text as a live, semi-improvisatory experience. This approach rightly acknowledges the embodied and corporate aspects of worship, and recalls Christopher Small's definition of music as an action, 'musicking'.[455] Monique Ingalls, Carolyn Landau and Tom Wagner use the term 'congregational music' (not song) 'to acknowledge improvisatory traditions in which music-making does not necessarily draw from or result in a fixed musical 'text',' and state that

[452] Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).
[453] Jeremy Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 17; Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 344 – 364.
[454] Jeremy Begbie, *Music in God's Purposes* (Edinburgh: The Hansel Press, 1989), 5-6.
[455] Christopher Small, *Musicking* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 2: 'Music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do. The apparent thing "music" is a figment, an abstraction of the action, whose reality vanishes as soon as we examine it at all closely.'

> the broader term 'music' also emphasizes the ephemerality of sonic performances in which there is not a clear script, creating space for the many Christian traditions around the world in which musical improvisation occurs within or among pre-composed pieces.[456]

They are right to acknowledge the improvisatory element of contemporary worship music, an observation shared by many secular pop musicologists as well. Simon Frith, for example, describes musical meaning as 'not just an interpretive but a social process,' because cultural interpretation and aesthetic taste are the means for individuals to assert themselves as individuals.[457] (Dai Griffiths, in turn, accuses Frith of subordinating music to politics in his writings on pop culture.)[458]

Theological analyses of pop music generally focus on its status as an embodied, corporate or affective phenomenon. The performance event is prioritised over its musical qualities, as in Ingalls' understanding of congregational music as a semi-improvisatory event. While this approach is helpful for situating pop worship music in a theological context and understanding its functions, and although musicology alone cannot fully capture the worship event, the meaning of a worship song or set is hardly entirely fluid. Rather, the event is significantly shaped by the fixed content of the text, both music and lyrics, and the transmission of a text that can be notated or imitated by ear from recordings. Pop worship music is not purely improvisatory, but relies on pre-composed melodies, lyrics and accompaniment, orchestrated according to convention, even whilst set lists change their orders and full band arrangements are sometimes swapped for acoustic renditions. Assessing the broad ambiences conveyed by pop music, and the experiences it induces, cannot produce a full picture of the genre without musicological analysis of those features that remain the consistent norm for each song, such as melody, harmony, rhythm, instrumentation and structure.

Clive Marsh and Vaughan Roberts' book *Personal Jesus* is an excellent example of this theological neglect of musical texts. Marsh and Roberts pose the question 'how does pop music work?', yet their answer focuses almost exclusively on song lyrics and cultural

[456] Ingalls, Landau & Wagner, *Congregational Music*, 3.
[457] Simon Frith, *Performing Rites* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 250.
[458] Dai Griffiths, 'The High Analysis of Low Music' in Allan F. Moore (ed.), *Critical Essays in Popular Musicology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 404-5.

interpretation, not the music itself.[459] Rather than engaging with the wealth of literature that investigates the expressive power of music, Marsh and Roberts present music as an inexplicable affective force, insofar as they attend to it at all. For the most part, they write about experiences related to listening to music, such as the 'experience of wonder' and the 'physicality of transcendence', without examining how these experiences are shaped by music in particular.[460] Although Marsh and Roberts acknowledge that, in theologically analysing pop music, attending to lyrics is not enough, they conclude that further investigation into praxis, rather than better musicological analysis, is required.[461] By neglecting to adequately analyse the music about which they write, Marsh and Roberts unwittingly lend credence to a problematic notion readily exploitable by pop worship: that, because music is an abstract medium, and because popular idioms are so mainstream as to be familiar and comprehensible to most people, pop music is an especially "authentic" way to express theological propositions – a voice from nowhere, so to speak.[462] This idea was in evidence earlier in the Bethel Collective's identification of pop worship with the 'spirit of truth', yet pop composition is as subjective as any other art or craft.

Nevertheless, the idea that some musical idioms can be natural or authentic fuels the ongoing neglect of musicology as a useful tool for theology. Writing on the theology of Pixar film music - another popular, familiar and mainstream musical genre - Kutter Callaway describes his musical examples without using musical notation. For example, Callaway describes an instrumental crescendo in Zbigniew Preisner's 'Lacrimosa' in Terrence Malik's film *The Tree of Life* (2011) in the following way:

> As the ghostly vapors condense into something only slightly more substantive, the timbre of "Lacrimosa" suddenly shifts, moving from sparse orchestration to a full symphonic underscoring... The orchestral underscoring dances in parallel with the vocal melody, descending in corresponding intervals of major and minor seconds. Yet, given that this shift is primarily dynamic rather than tonal, it is the texture of the music that moves most forcefully to the foreground of the film's frame. In conjunction with the sweeping images of space and time

[459] Clive Marsh and Vaughan Roberts, *Personal Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 81, 119.
[460] Ibid., 78-85.
[461] Ibid., 36.
[462] See Wuthnow, *All in Sync*, 152.

> coming into being, the once mournful music transforms into an overwhelming testament to the grandeur of the cosmos.[463]

Although this description is detailed, it is not entirely clear from reading what Callaway means, for example, when he writes that the texture is in the 'foreground', or that the music becomes more 'substantive', or that the accompaniment 'dances in parallel' with the tune. These are points that transcriptions might help to elucidate. Callaway defends his exclusively descriptive method thus:

> [M]any, if not most, of the large-scale tonal structures or motivic relationships that might be discerned through an analysis of the written score are, in practice, inaudible to most audience members.[464]

Callaway's approach is blinkered on two counts. Firstly, it assumes that written descriptions more closely resemble the experience of listening to music than reading musical notation. Secondly, it arbitrarily circumscribes what is and is not meaningful to an audience. Motivic development, recapitulation, modulation and so on are not simply film music conventions. They have *become* conventions, through their ability to aid effective storytelling with series of leitmotifs that are developed and transformed as a story unfolds. These musical structures emotionally frame the on-screen proceedings, whether consciously or unconsciously noticed by the audience. (Consider, by contrast, the awkward effect caused by the absence of music, a technique commonly used in comedy mockumentaries such as *This is Spinal Tap* or *The Office*, or the maddening thrust of musical repetition without development, as in Erik Satie's *En'tracte*.)

Callaway assumes that the meaning music conveys to an audience is limited to that which they consciously notice, exemplifying what Dai Griffiths describes as 'dumb-listener theory'. Griffiths, who writes about pop musicology specifically, describes the dual origins of dumb-listener theory in the ideas that, firstly, pop musicology has more social, cultural and political than musical content, and, secondly, that pop musicology provides some kind of liberation from dumb listening.[465] Griffiths fervently defends the pop musician and

[463] Kutter Callaway, *Scoring Transcendence* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013), 184-5.
[464] Ibid., 9.
[465] Griffiths, 'The High Analysis of Low Music', 410.

listener's ability to understand the idiom without necessarily knowing the music theory underpinning it. By way of counterargument, Griffiths cautions that neither the pop musician nor the listener are being 'attacked' by pop musicologists who argue that their songs are best understood with reference to the theory. Griffiths also points out that pop musicologists need not pretend that their musicological reading of a text is a full reading, understanding that this can stand alongside cultural or phenomenological readings.[466] Rejecting what he identifies as Simon Frith's use of dumb-listener theory, Griffiths says that to extrapolate from the failure of the pop listener to cognise a musicological claim that they do not 'totally' understand the piece to which they listen

> is wrong simply in the social usefulness of 'total understanding'.... but to suggest, insistently if more kindly, that 'one who *does* understand these points has a deeper understanding of the musical passages they adore' seems to me not only uncontentious but an entirely good thing, and for the truth and dignity of these observations we don't need dumb-listener theory, we need the originary conception of education for everyone, the importance of musical education as mind-stretching symbolic form, and purposeful-purposelessness as a social aim severed from capital.[467]

As such, Callaway is wrong to assume that, because music theory may not be at the forefront of the listener's mind, musicological analysis is superfluous. Whilst Martyn Percy writes that musical techniques can be meaningful to degrees that worship songwriters, performers and participants may not consciously cognise, this should not be characterised as dumb-listener theory (as Griffiths defines it), because Percy is ultimately concerned with theological formation, not aesthetics.[468] Percy's observation can be thought as a starting point for my efforts here and in the chapters to come to demonstrate how the pop idiom, as employed by Bethel Music, expresses theological meaning through music. Although it can pose an artificially stilted way of expressing a dynamic and semi-improvisatory medium, musical notation is the most precise tool with which I can pinpoint the relevant musical features that I want to theologically analyse. Admittedly, the difficulty of notating pop music can make this approach less than satisfactory. One particular

[466] Ibid., 412.
[467] Ibid., 411.
[468] Percy, *Power*, 61.

inconvenience is that pop transcriptions, particularly vocal lines, look much more complex at first glance than they actually are, because pop songs tend to use syncopated vocal lines that sound intuitive but are cumbersome to transcribe. However, this slightly misleading quality can be rectified simply by being borne in mind whilst reading, and those readers who cannot read music will find all the relevant information thoroughly explained in the prose. Ultimately, although "high" musicological analysis cannot provide a full picture of pop, worship or otherwise, neither can sociological approaches.

5.3 THE EXPRESSIVE PROPERTIES OF FUNCTIONAL SONG

Contrary to the adage, music is not a universal language, as the diversity of its forms (and tribalism of its fans) demonstrates.[469] Nevertheless, the Western musical tradition has basic norms, such as major or minor tonality, or regular rhythm, that are widely understood by most listeners to express particular moods or ideas. Pop worship music has developed from secular popular idioms,[470] and shares many expressive norms with Western classical music, and music for film and television. The variety of musical examples to follow appeals to the 'tacit knowledge' of, and aesthetic familiarity with, musical convention that Roger Scruton ascribes to most individuals. Scruton argues that most listeners can perceive the ordering of rhythm, tone and other musical devices without necessarily understanding music theory, much as they would comprehend the content of a sentence without necessarily understanding the theory of grammar.[471]

The example of Bethel Church's worship music that I use here, 'Ever Be', is from Bethel Music's bestselling 2015 album *We Will Not Be Shaken*.[472] It was written chiefly, and is performed, by Kalley Heiligenthal, known as 'kalley'. 'Ever Be' is stylistically representative of Bethel's worship songs, with respect to its structure, tonality and soundworld. The album's songs are described in an iTunes review as being 'rooted in popular hymnody', situating it (however spuriously) in the tradition of American popular

[469] Attempts have been made to construct a generative theory of musical meaning, notably Lerdahl and Jackendoff's in response to Leonard Bernstein: see Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983). This is beyond my purview; I have no need to argue that certain musical devices have inherent particular meanings, but simply that they might be reliably interpreted by most listeners as such.
[470] See, e.g., Begbie, *Music for God's Purposes*, 4.
[471] Scruton, *Aesthetics*, 18.
[472] Bethel Music, kalley, 'Ever Be (Live)', *We Will Not Be Shaken (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2014).

worship.[473] The album has a heavily produced sound, replete with synthesisers and reverb, but was recorded live in the summer of 2014, in a 'night of mountaintop worship' with Bethel Music and assorted congregants.[474] The album's mission statement is described in Bethel's online shop as follows:

> Meant to be a catalyst for other worship communities to take hold of what it means to "not be shaken," the album's title track "We Will Not Be Shaken" was birthed in a spontaneous moment of worship and hails a message of promise amidst adversity and the victory we have in Jesus.[475]

I will analyse 'Ever Be' independently of my argument elsewhere in this thesis about Bethel's doctrine of sin. 'Ever Be' is a song about the attributes of God, and is suitable for my limited purpose here, which is to introduce Bethel's musical style, and outline the sorts of claims I will make about the theologically expressive potential of music in the chapters to come. (My object here is not to make aesthetic judgments.)[476] I will begin with a basic description of the song 'Ever Be', before using the song to introduce three theses for musical expression.

'Ever Be': a preliminary example

Deryck Cooke has argued that tone and rhythm are the foundation of all music, with Western music adopting tone is the more fundamental of the two. Cooke cites plainchant as an example of tone without rhythm in notation, and a fundamental example of the Western musical tradition.[477] Tonality entails a hierarchy of pitches that are more or less closely related to a fundamental pitch, the tonic; the relationships between them engender effects of tension, expectation and resolution.[478] My discussion of 'tone' involves everything to do with pitch-class, such as melody and harmony, which in my musical examples are invariably tonal (rather than atonal), and typically occur in the Ionian or

[473] Apple Music, 'We Will Not Be Shaken (Live)'. <https://music.apple.com/us/album/we-will-not-be-shaken-live/959959559>
[474] Bethel Music, 'We Will Not Be Shaken'. <https://bethelmusic.com/albums/we-will-not-be-shaken/>
[475] Bethel Shop, 'We Will Not Be Shaken', *Bethel*. <https://shop.bethel.com/products/we-will-not-be-shaken-live>
[476] See Gordon Graham, 'The worship of God and the quest of the spirit: 'Contemporary' versus 'traditional' church music', in Hawkey, Quash & Vernon, *God's Song*, 86. Graham writes that there is a distinction between qualitative excellence (like beer, enjoyed with the senses) and functional excellence (like a bike that doesn't break). I am suggesting that worship music is insufficiently excellent with respect to its function (bearing in mind that 'excellence', whilst helpful, is not a requisite for worship).
[477] Deryck Cooke, *The Language of Music* (Oxford: OUP, 1991), 38.
[478] Wallace Berry, *Structural Functions in Music* (New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1987), 27.

Aeolian modes (major and natural minor), eschewing any of the less commonplace modes.[479] Generally, in pop music, tonality is functional and diatonic, harmonies are simple, and melodies are conjunct and catchy, with even phrase lengths. My discussion of rhythm and metre refers to the organisation of musical sound in time. Berry notes that all components of a piece of music are rhythmic, an observation I will revisit in due course.[480] In pop music, and pop worship music specifically, rhythms are usually regular, with musical ideas oriented towards predictable moments of emphasis (for example, more complex rhythmic textures emphasising the chorus recapitulation). In this way, rhythm regulates tone.

Throughout my analysis in the next few chapters, some of Bethel Music's most oft-used compositional features will become apparent. These include meandering vocal lines and cyclical chord progressions, a "cosmic" sounding timbre (created using synthesisers and reverb), and unyielding rhythmic regularity. The striking extent to which Bethel's instrumentation is used to reinforce rhythm – rather than voice-leading – and, in so doing, create ambience leads me to depart from Cooke slightly. With respect to contemporary worship music, tonality and ambience, of which rhythm should be considered a vital component, are the twin foundations of this pop worship idiom.

'Ever Be' is led by voice and piano, and supported by a thick texture of electric guitars, electric violins, synthesisers, and drums. Its 4/4 time signature is regulated by a simple semibreve bass line shared between piano and bass guitar, as well as a semiquaver motif recurrent throughout the song, played in the middle register of an electric guitar. A full drumkit thickens the texture, providing rhythmic impetus, and a sliding 'hook' (distinctive instrumental motif) recurs in the violin part, in all instrumental passages. Tied violin notes form a pedal that is complemented by considerable reverb, creating a hazy and languorous soundworld:

[479] Alf Björnberg examines the use of alternative modes in 'On Aeolian harmony in contemporary popular music,' in Moore, *Critical Essays,* but his comments pertain to a classic rock style that Bethel do not use.
[480] Berry, *Structural Functions*, 301.

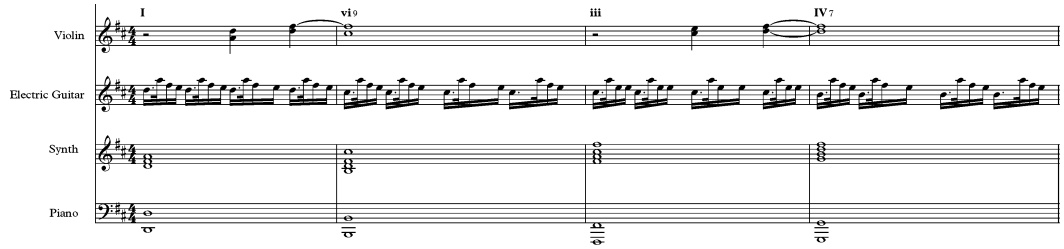


Figure 7. Bethel Music, 'Ever Be,' introduction (0:07).

Throughout the song, the vocal line meanders between the tonic and mediant, over relatively conventional progressions that resolve after little delay. (More on chords and their "meanings" later.) Short phrases are intoned in a natural speaking rhythm, at a comfortable pitch for the female voice:

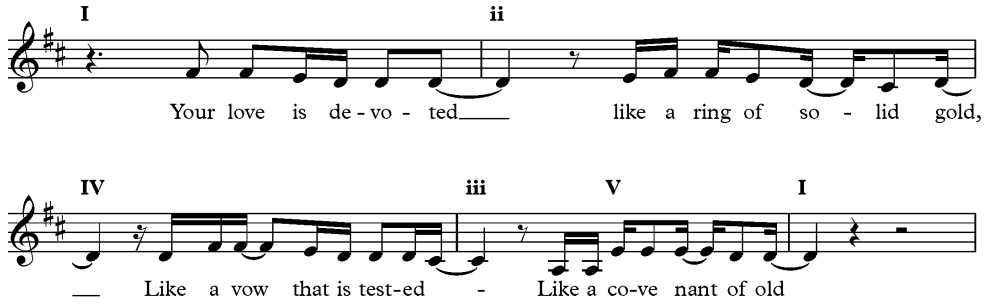


Figure 8. Bethel Music, 'Ever Be,' first verse melody (0:36).

The vocal range of the chorus (B_3 - F_4) is similar to that of the verse (A_3 - F_4); throughout the song the melody is static in this way, only spanning a short range in any one section. Some rhythmic interest is created by the alternation of stress on the first, second and third beats of the bar (see bold):

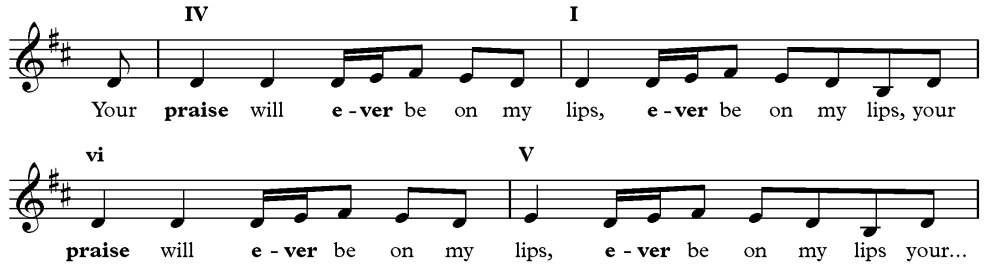


Figure 9. Bethel Music, 'Ever Be,' chorus (1:15).

The first two bars of this four-bar phrase are accompanied by a plagal cadence (IV-I), a stable way of resolving a phrase that is conventionally associated with hymns. The pre-chorus between the verse and chorus similarly opens with a plagal cadence, and features a limited melodic range. The melody shifts between tonic and supertonic over increasingly unstable harmonic accompaniment, which moves from a pleasant IV – I cadence to the unresolved V – ii^7. This builds tension in anticipation of the chorus:
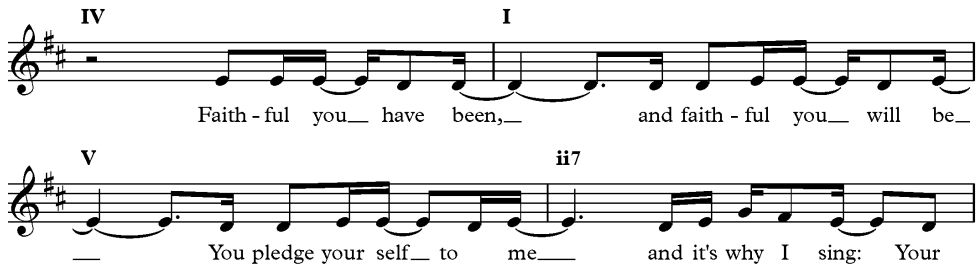


Figure 10. Bethel Music, 'Ever Be,' pre-chorus (1:03).

In short, the limited melodic range of 'Ever Be' contributes to its gentle and hazy ambience. The tune is easy to sing, conjunct, and generally devoid of any surprising developments. The melody, and the regular rhythmic framework to which it adheres, are supported by functional harmony, in which plagal cadences feature regularly.

Bethel's worship music, like most pop music, adopts a sectional structure, with songs composed of distinct blocks of material that do not necessarily employ motivic development. Instead, regular rhythm and near-constant drumming drives the song forward, reinforced by these "block" changes in texture and instrumentation. Pop worship songs are, typically, structurally distinct from secular pop songs in that they dramatically extend the chorus recapitulation, creating a protracted meditative period, and then close with a coda. This section, usually a sixteen-bar phrase, introduces a new musical theme with new lyrics. For example, in 'Ever Be', the chorus recapitulation with full band accompaniment occurs just after the three minute mark. Then, an improvisational-sounding vocal line ('ever be on my lips...') draws the melody upwards to A^4, bridging between the chorus and the higher range of the coda:

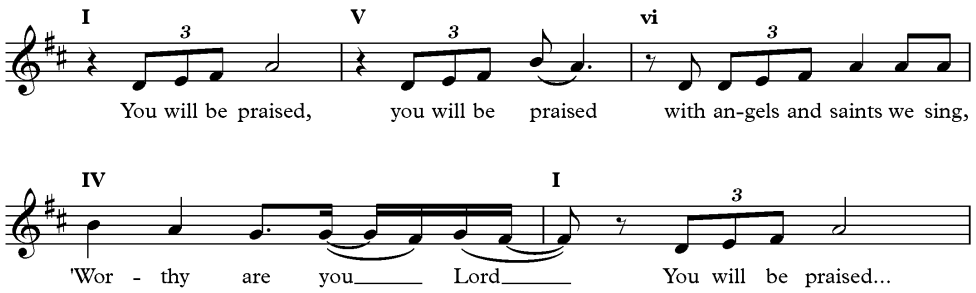


Figure 11. Bethel Music, 'Ever Be,' coda (3:22).

The conventional addition of a coda ends the worship song on a "high note", so to speak. Pop worship codas typically draw a song to its conclusion by repeating semantic propositions detailing how the worshipper might respond to the worship event: for example, by praising God, or by declaring the supernatural power of God. For example, in 'Ever Be', the coda repeats the above phrase 'you will be praised'. Brian Johnson's song 'Forever' includes a coda with the lyrics

> We sing Hallelujah
> We sing Hallelujah
> We sing Hallelujah
> The lamb has overcome.[481]

Hillsong Worship's 'Who You Say I Am' incorporates declarations into its coda:

> I am chosen, not forsaken,
> I am who you say I am.[482]

Similarly, the coda of Bethel's 'It Is Well' quotes Horatio Spafford's 1873 hymn of the same name:

> It is well with my soul
> It is well, it is well with my soul.[483]

[481] Bethel Music, Brian Johnson, 'Forever', *Tides* (Bethel Music: 2013): 3:50.
[482] Hillsong Worship, 'Who You Say I Am', *There Is More* (Hillsong Music and Resources LLC: 2018): 0:30.
[483] Bethel Music, Kristine DiMarco, 'It Is Well (Live)', *You Make Me Brave (Live)*, (Bethel Music: 2014): 3:06.

It is not explicit from the description I have just given alone how the music for a song like 'Ever Be' might express any theological meaning. The subject matter of the song is determined, most obviously, by the lyrics, in which the loving, steadfast and accessible nature of God is described in intimate terms, and the exhortation to praise God for these attributes is subsequently affirmed. However, the musical features I have just described do expressively frame the lyrics in what I have described as a 'hazy' and 'languorous' soundworld, conveying a sense of comfortable intimacy with God, with the coda encouraging an attitude of joy in worship. I will now introduce the three basic theses for how this might be so. These are the 'contour,' 'convention' and 'stimulation' models of musical meaning. They are important for my thesis insofar as they show how, say, particular instances of chromaticism, cadence or instrumental climax might respectively signify qualities like negativity, stability or intensity. As such, my claims, in the following Chapters Six and Seven, regarding the musico-theological expression of triumphalism and the therapeutic, will invariably be defensible by one of these models of musical meaning.

5.4 THE STIMULATION THESIS

The most basic explanation for the expressive potential of music is the stimulation thesis. This argues that certain musical devices are physiologically stimulating. Descartes advocates this view in his *Compendium of Music*, arguing that music is designed to 'please and to arouse various emotions in us,' and, concomitantly, inspires physical movement.[484] Descartes interprets music in view of its use as a means for structured social dancing, and the concerns he raises are about rhythm, speed and volume. For example, Descartes argues that the louder a sound is, the greater its impact on the 'spirit'. The pulse motivates the body, encouraging the listener to tap their foot, and arouses a particular emotion in the brain.

Some of Descartes' assumptions regarding physical stimulation through music have since been demonstrated in neurology, psychology and biology. For example Ian Cross claims that listening to music stimulates measurable activity in the premotor regions of the brain used for planning action. This means that listening to music, even passively and without

[484] René Descartes, *Compendium of Music,* trans. Walter Robert (Rome: American Institute of Musicology, 1961), 11.

external movement, is inextricably tied to 'at least covert planning for action'.[485] Anthony Storr, who concurs, recounts that the conductor Herbert von Karajan's pulse rate was measured whilst he conducted Beethoven's *Leonora No. 3*; his pulse rate increased the most during passages that were most emotionally moving for him, rather than during ones that were the most physically strenuous. Incredibly, von Karajan's recorded pulse rate fluctuated to a far greater degree whilst conducting than when he was piloting and landing a jet aircraft.[486]

Storr has claimed that music, for the most part, causes 'heightened arousal', such as alertness or excitement, in the listener. (Referring predominantly to art music, he notes that deliberately innocuous work such as Erik Satie's *musique d'ameublement* or Brian Eno's *Music for Airports* are exceptional cases.)[487] Arousal of this sort can be measured with electro-encephalograms that record the amplitude and frequency of brain waves, as well as through the skin's electrical resistance. It can be further observed in pupil dilation and changes in respiratory rates that match the music's tempo, as well as blood pressure and heart rate, which increase under arousal. As I have noted, 'Ever Be', typically of the genre, drives towards a climax that peaks in the coda, where volume and vocal range are raised, and the instrumental textures are thickened. The increased volume at this point (bearing in mind that higher-pitched sounds appear louder than equally loud, lower-pitched sounds) heightens the intensity of the song's message at that point, by stimulating greater neural and physiological arousal.

Dale Purves' attempt to establish a basis for music theory in biology can link these more general observations to particular musical features, and particular emotions. Purves' thesis is that musical preference correlates significantly with similarity to human vocalisations. Purves eschews a traditional, mathematical approach that bases tonal preference on the harmonic series and small integer ratios, arguing instead that tonal preference is the result of an evolutionary need to distinguish 'conspecific vocalisations, which are the most important tonal sound signals in our natural environment.'[488] Purves claim that the harmonic series is arranged as it is because it more or less matches the typical pitch

[485] Ian Cross, 'The Evolutionary Basis of Meaning in Music: Some Neurological and Neuroscientific Implications,' in Clifford Rose (ed.), *Neurology of Music* (London: ICP, 2010), 6.
[486] Anthony Storr, *Music and the Mind* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), 25-6.
[487] Ibid., 25.
[488] Dale Purves, *Music as Biology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 47.

relationships expressed in human vocalisations.[489] This particularly pertains to the use of a fundamental pitch, or tonic as a signifier of stability, and to octaves, perfect fifths, and perfect fourths, which are particularly common intervals found in speech signals (as well as being the first intervals in the harmonic series). Purves considers this a global phenomenon, having found similar results between American English, Farsi, Mandarin and Tamil, although I am concerned here only with American English, and with Western music.[490] Regarding Purves on conspecific vocalisations and tonal preference, it is perhaps worth noting that the coda of 'Ever Be' consists of a fanfare-like melody based on the perfect fifth between tonic and dominant, stridently sung in high chest voice:
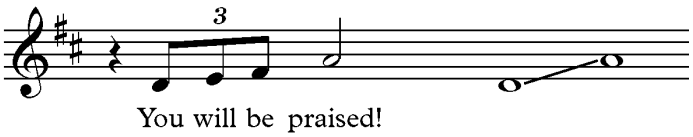


Figure 12. Bethel Music, 'Ever Be,' coda melody and range (1-2-3-5).

Purves' claims regarding the preference for consonance over dissonance, upon which Western music theory is traditionally premised, are similarly based in biology. In brief, Purves proposes that emotional expressivity is perceived, in music, according to the music's resemblance to human vocalisations, and the emotions that typically correspond to them.[491] Purves produces an infograph of emotions and their relative intensity, distinguishing, for example, between slight melancholy and despair, or contentment and extreme joy. His suggestion is that chord progressions are inherently expressive of such emotions based on their relation to the tonic, and to one another, and that tonality and emotion correspond to one another and can be systematised. In the case of 'Ever Be', this would suggest that the I-ii-IV-iii progression in Figure 13 (below) creates a sense of instability or fragility, whilst the ensuing perfect cadence – and the frequency of perfect and plagal cadences in the song generally – convey stability and order. This corresponds with the sentiment conveyed in the second verse, regarding weakness and strength:

[489] Ibid., 50-1.
[490] Ibid., 49.
[491] Ibid., 88-89.

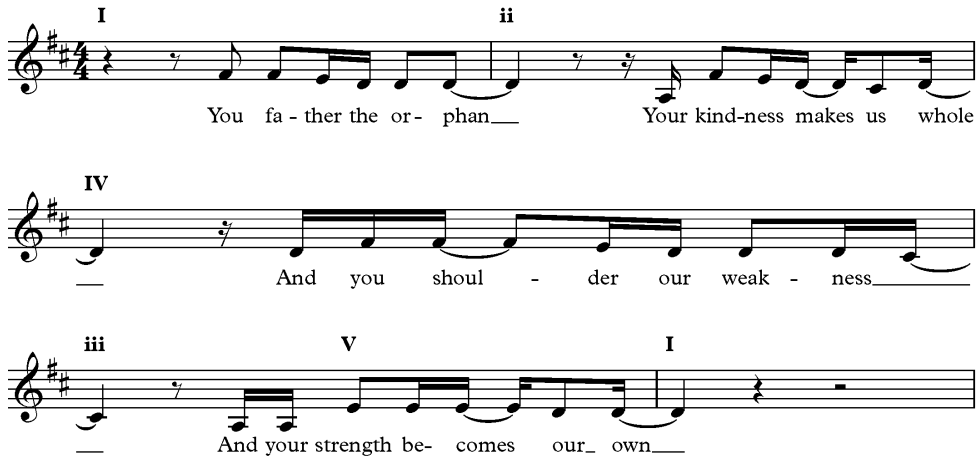


Figure 13. Bethel Music, 'Ever Be,' second verse (2:13).

Purves' typology of tonality and emotions is founded on the stability of the tonic, and the relative instability of all other notes. His is, however, an overly schematic way of discerning musical meaning. Even concerning pop music alone, and discounting lyrics, it would be hard to definitively argue that identical uses of, say, a four-chord progression convey identical sentiments, because of the expressive effect of instrumentation, rhythm, timbre and other such qualities. For this reason, my discussion of tonality in the next chapter relies more on the 'convention' thesis (see below) than on the stimulation thesis.

Purves' argument is not simply that people comprehend the expressive qualities of tonal arrangements, but that we are biologically predisposed to like the tonal combinations most prevalent in Western classical and popular music. (This model is, however, unable to explain why people might want to listen to sad, or otherwise emotionally tumultuous, music.)[492] I will return to some of Purves' more specific claims about particular musical features in due course. For now, it suffices to acknowledge that people like Storr and Purves think the meaning music has on us – whether we perceive it as happy, or sad, or whatever way we find it stimulating - is intimately linked to involuntary evolutionary predispositions, however hard these might be to definitively typify. Thus Storr and Purves are primarily concerned with the (involuntary) effect that ordered sound has on the body.

[492] See 'Tragedy and Horror,' in Shen-yi Liao and Tamar Gendler, "Imagination," in Edward Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2020). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/imagination/>

One significant objection to the stimulation thesis is often that it does not treat music as an aesthetic category, but rather like stimulation of any other kind. Peter Kivy takes this view, and tempers the kind of argument that Storr makes by pointing out that music does not stimulate emotion in the way that, say, wine stimulates intoxication.[493] Kivy cites Leibniz's argument that the soul responds intellectually, rather than sensually, to music, by 'counting' its note values. Kivy then argues that music must be 'cognised' in order to be understood: compositional devices such as volume or harmony must be understood in relation to a work as a whole. Ultimately, for Kivy, 'music is not a stimulus object but a cognitive one,' if it is to be understood as music, rather than as mere sound.[494] This, he suggests, is why different people enjoy different sorts of music. Someone with no musical understanding is likely, he contends, to enjoy a complex set of variations less than a musical person who can hear how the original theme is developed: the musical person perceives more clearly what the music is. Echoing Adorno's description of mass culture as 'babyfood,'[495] Kivy suggests that 'mindless' musical pleasure, such as when babies move rhythmically to music, is not the same as 'musical experience.'[496]

Given that I am dealing with a functional genre through a theological lens, matters of aesthetic value, and of responding to music 'as music', are not especially important. I do not wholly dismiss the stimulation model, because the affective dimension of the worship event, and its theological underpinnings in assurance of salvation, renders some physiological responses to music significant for my argument later. Stephen Davies, countering Kivy, acknowledges the kind of medical research I have just quoted as he argues that the attempt to absolutely distinguish physiological from aesthetic response is futile. This is because of the role subjective beliefs play in shaping both. For example, Davies argues that the distinction between stimulation by music and by drugs is not 'so

[493] Peter Kivy, *Music Alone* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 41.
[494] Ibid., 38-40.
[495] Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Schema of Mass Colure', *in The Culture Industry* (Hove: Psychology Press, 2001), 67. I am not making much use of Adorno in this thesis, predominantly for the reason that his reading of pop music, much like his reading of jazz, is somewhat 'absolutised'. By this I mean that his view of pop music is fixed, and – in this instance – in a singularly unflattering direction. The fact that Adorno died over fifty years ago, since when pop music has seen many sophisticated developments (alongside the perpetuation of musical 'babyfood'), does not help. I am not refraining from significant interlocution with Adorno simply because he is "outdated," in certain respects. However, the critique I am making here is a rare academic foray into a field that is already rife with highly charged criticism. Drawing too heavily from Adorno's polemical writings on the subject of pop culture seems more counter-productive than otherwise. See Max Paddison, 'The Critique Criticised: Adorno and Popular Music,' in *Popular Music*, Volume 2 (1982): 210. Paddison borrows the term 'absolutised' from Wolfgang Sandner.
[496] Kivy, *Music Alone*, 41.

stark' as Kivy would make out, by acknowledging the necessity of blind medical trials, which are undertaken because the 'user's beliefs can play a part in securing the effects of a drug-taking episode'. So with drugs as with music, Davies suggests.

The extent to which beliefs can shape the stimulative properties of music is where the stimulation thesis meets the convention thesis, which I will discuss shortly.[497] Davies alludes to conventional uses of music, such as the association of trance with certain kinds of Eastern music, and popular genres such as drum & bass. Gilbert Rouget, in his study of music and trance, argues that this association is not the result of nature, but of culture, premised on the expectation that rhythm induces self-forgetfulness and loss of inhibition.[498] Whilst Rouget's account of trance relies to some degree on the listener's willing participation, John Blanchard and Dan Lucarini, stalwarts of anti-pop sentiment with respect to Christian worship, are suspicious of the possibility of pop to negatively influence the worshipper regardless of intent. They imply that drums are able to unilaterally induce trance, of which they disapprove owing to its Eastern influence.[499]

Martyn Percy proposes a more nuanced view: that the worship environment, requiring intense emotional identification with the lyrics and the community (as I have shown), can coerce false affective responses out of the worshipper.[500] This happens through the use of conventional musical techniques – such as drumming, reverb, or the device I will later describe as 'cosmic ambience' – that the worshipper associates with physiological stimulation. Physiological stimulation, in turn, then encourages the affectivity of the worshipper's response to the music. Such occurrences would be instances where the convention thesis, whereby music expresses meaning through its conventional usage, meets the stimulation thesis, resulting in the association of certain musical features with physiological stimulation in such a way that reinforces the narrative of the stimulation thesis. Furthermore, the corporate nature of musical experience might intensify its

[497] Stephen Davies, *Understanding Musical Expression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 322-323, 333. Davies agrees with Kivy, and Scruton, that a purely sensual response to music does not count as the enjoyment of *musical* experience, and distinguishes on this basis between the 'hearer' and the 'listener', who has a 'higher degree of involvement' in music by understanding it in some way. He notes that Nicholas Cook makes a similar distinction, between musical and musicological listening.
[498] Gilbert Rouget, *Music and Trance* (Chicago: UCP, 1980), 91. Also 11, where Rouget defines trance as something that happens in groups, with a sense of sensory overstimulation with noise, and 'amnesia' (self-forgetfulness), stopping short of hallucinations.
[499] Blanchard & Lucarini, *Rock the Gospel*, 54-55, 78-79. Blanchard and Lucarini take a rather Gnostic stance on the pop idiom in general, arguing that is innately affiliated with the work of Satan, and implicates the pop worshipper by association.
[500] Percy, *Power,* 77-78.

emotional effect, by coordinating the emotions and physical responses of a whole group, as Storr argues.[501] This surely supports the formative function of the worship event, meaning that if the theology expressed in worship is in some way erroneous or imbalanced, it will become more so by virtue of its medium. Particularly given the significance of tangible assurance in the Pentecostal and Charismatic tradition, the express function of certain pop idioms to act as physical stimulants, and the power of belief in shaping affective and even physiological experience, it is necessary for me to consider the stimulation thesis as a potential source of meaning in pop worship music, even if I do not argue that the physiological effects of music necessarily have a moral or theological value in themselves.

5.5 THE CONTOUR THESIS

The contour thesis of musical meaning posits that music can convey meaning by resembling something, in aural form. My concern here is not with programme music, which relies on extra-musical narrative for expressive precision, but with functional song, wherein music expressively frames, but does not itself express, the lyrics. To this end, tonality (and the degrees of stability and relative instability it conveys), texture, volume and the resemblance of melody to human vocalisations are important for creating emotional contours. It is more complex to explain how, for example, visual phenomena or complex abstract concepts might be "translated" into the musical medium, if, indeed, they can be.

Regarding contours for emotion, Kivy explains the difference between cognitivist and emotivist approaches to the contour thesis.[502] Whereas emotivists claim that a 'sad' piece of music is so because it arouses sadness in the listener, cognitivists argue that 'sadness' is an expressive property of sad music. Kivy is a cognitivist, arguing that a piece of music might express something and subsequently arouse a reaction in us on that basis. He gives the example of a St Bernard, whose face is expressive of sadness, because it reminds us of how humans express sadness. Kivy observes that it is immaterial whether or not the Saint Bernard is actually sad: its downturned mouth, heavy jowls and drooping eyes make it appear so, regardless.[503] So it is with music, says Kivy, which might remind us of human

[501] Storr, *Music and the Mind,* 24.
[502] Kivy, *Music Alone*, 146.
[503] Peter Kivy, *Sound Sentiment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 50.

language or the voice in certain moods, for example slow and low, or high and energetic, or meandering: 'music is expressive in virtue of its resemblance to expressive human utterance and behaviour.' In consensus, Purves argues that a piece of music might be perceived as happy or sad, according to its resemblance, in speed, articulation or pitch, to a happy or sad voice. The apparently common propensity for listeners to conceptualise pitch in terms of physical space – fuelling the perception of different moods in music, according to its resemblance to human behaviours – is supported by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's examination of orientational metaphor in linguistics. Lakoff and Johnson argue that people understand the world in a 'fundamentally metaphorical' way, and that orientational metaphors are an enormously important way in which we organise systems of concepts in relation to each other.[504] Orientational metaphors such as 'happy is up' or 'sad is down' are based on human physicality and culture. For example,

> Drooping posture typically goes along with sadness and depression, erect posture with a positive emotional state.[505]

Other metaphors Lakoff and Johnson associate with "up" include, health, life, control, force and increase; "down", concomitantly, is associated with sickness, death, subjection and decrease. Emphasising the embodied nature of human existence, Lakoff and Johnson ague that orientational metaphors are 'concepts that we live by in the most fundamental way.'[506]

As per Kivy, these orientational associations extend beyond language, to musical features. For example, a melody might not be literally languorous or gentle, because it has no capacity to move or exert force. Nevertheless, the peaceful plod of the Anglican hymn 'Abide With Me', with its conjunct melody and conventional cadences, speaks to its frequent use in evening services. Similarly in the pop idiom, Bethel's 'Ever Be' verses and chorus are conjunct and sung at a relaxed pitch, rarely venturing far from the stable-sounding tonic. Although 'Abide With Me' and 'Ever Be' are stylistically quite different examples of Christian sung worship, both use conjunct melodies, proximity to the tonic

[504] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: UCP, 2003), 3.
[505] Ibid., 15
[506] Ibid., 56.

and sturdy perfect and plagal cadences to the same end: rising slightly, then sinking back to the tonic, each song's melody and harmony conveys a sense of stability and order.

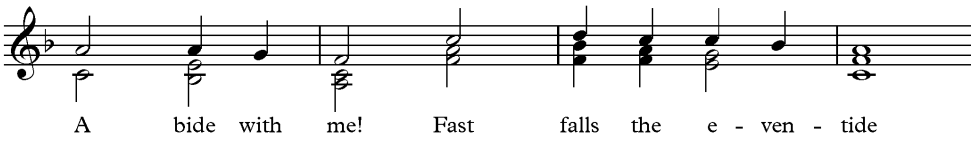


Figure 14. 'Abide With Me'.
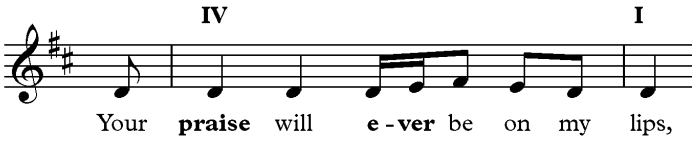


Figure 15. Bethel Music, 'Ever Be,' chorus (plagal cadence).

Instrumentation and timbre also form the basis for expressive contours. Consider the strident vocal line in the coda of 'Ever Be' (Fig. 11), the range of which results in an altogether more excitable sound than that of the verses. Contemporary mainstream pop also frequently manipulates texture and timbre using production techniques like echoes and reverberation, as well as dramatic volume and instrumental climaxes. By altering acoustics and textures, these features can generate a sense of emotional intensity from the otherwise rather static musical material. For example, although 'Ever Be' was recorded outdoors as part of a live worship album, the instruments themselves are heavily produced with added reverberation, imitating the acoustic of a vast room, rather than embracing the muffled acoustic of a windy cliff top.

Theologically, the relaxed 'Ever Be' corresponds with Wuthnow's observations of worshippers who appreciate the intimate and friendly portrayal of God in pop worship music. However, it would go too far to say that the music itself expresses the approachability of God; music does not have semantic value in this sense, with grammatical connections between its features and non-musical concepts or objects.[507] Whilst the lyrics to 'Ever Be' describe the attributes of God and the obligation to praise him, the pitch and speed of the melody recall a relaxed spoken voice, accompanied by simple, pleasant harmonies that resolve swiftly, and a hazy soundworld. Together, the music expressively frames the lyrics in such a way as to present an informal, and later

[507] Jeremy Begbie, 'Afterword,' in Hawkey, Quash & Vernon (ed.), *God's Song*, 184-5.

(during the coda) triumphalist, theology. Needless to say, the lyrics would be framed quite differently if the song was twice as fast, the harmony replete with Hitchcock chords, or the accompaniment performed on a serpent.

Some scholars have tried to use the contour model to suggest that music is expressive of abstract philosophical or theological ideas, but this would seem to overstretch the capacities of the medium. For example, in *Redeeming Transcendence,* Jeremy Begbie describes the triad as a Trinitarian signifier, being three things that are also one thing. Begbie is not wrong to suggest that one might use a triad as an example of how something might be three (notes) and one (chord) at the same time: a sort of limited analogy. He is right, too, to note the 'edgelessness' of sound, which fills the whole field of aural perception, unlike a painting. (Although this observation could perhaps be qualified: sound has no literal edges, but is often experienced as being boundaried in some sense. For example, a listener might be able to coordinate aural data to a physical location, or experience ringing in only one ear.) The 'generative abundance' that Begbie attributes to musical sound is, he argues, analogous to the Trinity:

> The Trinitarian connotations are hard to resist. What is a major triad if not a resonance of life-in-three – the three reciprocally interpenetrating without exclusion or merger... each irreducibly distinct yet together constituting the one divine space? And what is the threefold unity of God if not one of mutual enlivening, an infinite life of giving and receiving? My suggestion, then, is that music attests to an edgeless and dynamically outgoing space of a sort that would seem appropriate to the space that characterizes God's own triune being.[508]

Begbie is using the contour thesis here, but does not clearly distinguish the triad's pedagogical ("resonant," "attestable") potential from its innate expressive properties. His prose is rich with metaphor – the patterns of musical development are 'pregnant with possibilities for evoking the kind of uncontainability we have been speaking about'[509] – but betrays a theologically imperialist approach to musical devices. For example, in his

[508] Begbie, *Redeeming Transcendence*, 177-178.
[509] Ibid., 179.

exploration of Trinitarian 'resonance', Begbie fails to properly interrogate the nature of a triad. Begbie describes the chord like this:

> ...this uncontainable space is a space of liveliness – indeed, of outgoingness. The tones give themselves away to each other. Each actualizes its own being in receiving from, and giving itself to, others; in this way, the particularity of each is enriched.[510]

Overlooking the questionable anthropomorphisation of tone in this passage, Begbie refers to a major triad, presumably with the tonic as root, plus a major third and perfect fifth above. However, the third is grammatically "optional" in this triad; one might double the root, or the fifth. This would be an obviously inappropriate way to conceive of the Trinity, removing one hypostasis and doubling another (notwithstanding Sarah Coakley's regretful account of the Holy Spirit's diminished role in much visual art).[511] Further, a triad might be inverted, for the purposes of voice leading, or perhaps to create a less stable sound. One might argue that the tonic, in this respect, makes a good analogy for the Father, of whom Christ is begotten, and the Holy Spirit proceeds. However, it does not follow that, say, to begin a prayer or theological excursus with the Holy Spirit would render it relatively less stable than to begin with the Father, as grounding a triad on the fifth rather than the tonic or mediant would.

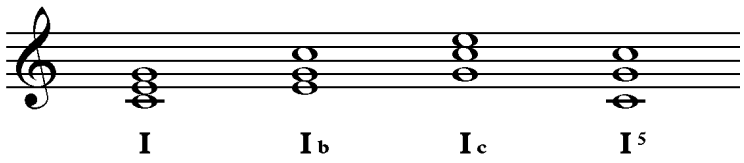


Figure 16. Different forms of major triad: I, Ib, Ic and a "power chord" with doubled root and no third.

Although Begbie takes the triad to be the foundation of (diatonic) tonality, Purves' has emphasised that the tonic, perfect fourth and perfect fifth are, in fact, the fundamental building blocks of Western tonality, as shown by much plainsong. The fundamental quality of these notes is, argues Purves, due to their foundational positions in the harmonic series, and also due to their prevalence in human vocalisations. It is, therefore, not clear that the major triad ought to be seen as fundamental to Western tonality in the way that the Trinity

[510] Ibid., 177.
[511] Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 212.

is fundamental to Christian theology. I would further mention that one might add notes to a triad, and those added notes become equally determinative for the sound. As the following figure demonstrates, one might add a major seventh to a major tonic triad to create a jazzy sound, or add the submediant to the base of the chord to suggest a change of key to the relative minor, or create dissonance with an augmented ninth (Fig. 17). Each of these examples is as much a unit of sound as the major triad – this is one respect in which the 'edgelessness' of sound is total – yet this is not how orthodox Christian theology understands the Trinity.[512]

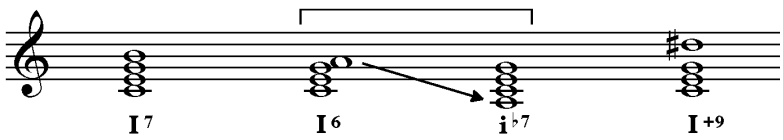


Figure 17. Adding notes to triads.

In short, the extent of Begbie's claim that the triad has Trinitarian "connotations" is not clear, yet it only makes sense – even analogically – when referring specifically to a 1-3-5 triad is in root position without additional notes. My rather pedantic digression on this point demonstrates the limitations of the contour thesis as a means for attributing abstract ideas to musical expression, as well as highlighting the rather suspect ways in which theological analysis can attempt to utilise music to its own ends, without considering how musically legitimate such an argument might be.

Clearly, there are limits to the contour thesis. The attribution of abstract ideas to musical expression often relies heavily on context, and there is no credible equivalent of Wittgenstein's 'picture theory' for music.[513] Absolute music, Kivy declares, might resemble human expression, or the way humans project their own expressive capacities onto other phenomena, but cannot be thought metaphysically representational in itself:

> ...no one would find it transparent, in listening to Beethoven's C sharp-Minor Quartet, that the music represents the human voice in a passion

[512] Deryck Cooke, for his part, remarks that 'only those who still believe strongly in the concept of happiness cling to the major triad,' and cites the aesthetically besieged Soviet composers as the prime example of those who do so. See Cooke, *The Language of Music*, 54.
[513] In any case, Wittgenstein refuted his own 'picture theory' of language, in *Philosophical Investigations*.

> [Hutcheson], or amiable conversation [Reid], or the thing-in-itself as striving will [Schopenhauer]...[514]

Begbie provides a good example of the extent to which music can elucidate metaphysical ideas, in his comments on tension and resolution. For Begbie, tension and delay in music has a pedagogical function, its teleological structure reflecting the 'plight of the human condition'.[515] Exactly how to understand this plight depends on context. For example, delayed resolution might be expressive of a longing for harmony and order, sparking theological reflections on the nature of sin and salvation. It might, equally, spark philosophical reflections on the thing-in-itself. In both cases, delay is intrinsic to the expressive content of the music, although context – in my case, song lyrics – would be required to ground the analysis in concrete propositions.[516] My overall point, on this matter, is that the contour thesis must be used carefully, lest innate semantic meaning is wrongfully attributed to a musical device.

5.6 THE CONVENTION THESIS

The final model I offer for how music expresses meaning is the convention thesis, which argues that the conventional use of music determines its expressive meaning. Think of John Williams' 'Jaws' theme, which in four decades of quotation and pastiche has become a conventional musical expression for danger, and, indeed, for sharks. The convention thesis was notably espoused by Deryck Cooke in 1959; Cooke attempted to systematise the expressive connotations of various tone formations, in an endeavour

> to pinpoint the inherent emotional characters of the various notes of the major, minor, and chromatic scales, and of certain basic melodic patterns which have been used persistently throughout our musical history.[517]

Reviewing the Western canon, Cooke argues that certain tone formations unconsciously deployed in keeping with convention to mean the same sorts of things. For example, Cooke

[514] Kivy, *Music Alone*, 51. See also 56, where Kivy notes that the resemblances of the contour thesis must be 'logical' - 'a kidney-shaped swimming pool is [not] expressive of kidneys.'
[515] Begbie*, Resounding Truth* (London: SPCK, 2007), 261.
[516] Begbie, *Theology, Music & Time,* 105.
[517] Cooke, *The Language of Music*, xi.

states that 'the tonic is the point of response' whilst the 'major third is the note... of pleasure'. He then surmises that 'to rise from the tonic to the dominant through the major third.... is to express outgoing, active, assertive emotion of joy.'[518] This description could well be applied to the 1-2-3-5 melody of the coda in 'Ever Be'. Here, an ascending melody frames the lyrics, which are an exhortation to praise God, in a triumphant fanfare (see Fig. 11 & Fig. 12). The A^4 and B^4 ('praised... worthy...') in this melody lend themselves well to vocal projection from the diaphragm, as recordings and performances of this song amply demonstrate. In a normal female range, these notes are low enough to be sung – belted – in chest voice, but are at the higher end of this range. This vocal line therefore requires a strong and engaged soft palate, and naturally comes out loudly.[519] That the melody is conjunct, leading the voice up to the higher notes by gradation, and lingering at its peak with simple, open-vowelled syllables (preɪ -, ˈwəː -), makes it easier and more satisfying to sing. The climactic end of the song – the coda is sustained for a full minute, and followed by another chorus recapitulation and instrumental outro – is, itself, a convention, quite apart from the 'active, assertive... joy' expressed in the melody.

Over the course of his book, Cooke summarises that the major mode signifies joy, and the minor tragedy; that ascending melody signifies active emotion, and descending passivity; and that the tonic, subdominant and dominant sound more stable than other points of the diatonic scale. Cooke does not attempt to explain *why* composers use, say, the minor mode to sound sad, or descending melodies to convey passivity, but simply claims that they *do*. His convention thesis is not concerned, as the contour thesis is, with demonstrating the inherently expressive qualities of the compositional techniques he discusses.

Roger Scruton critiques Cooke for his very literal and systematic treatment of tone and its expressive meaning. Scruton is concerned by the idea that this reduces music to little more than an aural code, and says that Cooke, and other adherents of the convention thesis, have failed to grapple with what actually makes music *meaningful* in itself, attending only to how it might symbolise one idea or another.[520] For Scruton, simply replacing an idea with a musical motif does not convey meaning in art. He defends Wagner's use of leitmotif in

[518] Ibid., 115. For his part, Cooke cites classical examples such as Byrd's 'Blow up the Trumpet' (1-3-5) and 'Every valley shall be exalted' (1-2-3-5) from Handel's *Messiah*, but also Bill Haley's 'Rock Around the Clock' (1-3-5).
[519] See Purves, *Music as Biology*, 32: Purves notes that loudness is not always accurately perceived, and a high pitched sound will typically be perceived as louder than a lower pitched sound of equal volume.
[520] Scruton, *Aesthetics,* 204-206.

the *Ring Cycle* from this charge on the basis that, rather than superimposing meaning from without, Wagner's leitmotifs gain meaning from their dramatic contexts. Scruton distinguishes, on this account, between what music "represents" and what it "expresses," the latter imbued with some organic link between music and meaning that renders it more aesthetically valuable.[521] Suffice to say, although Scruton finds the convention thesis unsatisfactory as a means for identifying musical meaning, he is dealing with art music, and ascribes to 'meaning' a certain value judgment. I, on the other hand, am dealing with functional music, and am not concerned about aesthetic value, as an end in itself.

Whether consciously or unconsciously used, the convention thesis can explain widely understood expressive properties in music that cannot necessarily be attributed to a quality inherent in the sound itself, or reliably proven to be a physiologically stimulated phenomenon. Consider, for example, the use of a rumbling bass pedal to express dread, the whole tone scale as a camp signifier for witchcraft, or the association between Theremins and the supernatural. Another example, which I acknowledged in my comments on the stimulation thesis, is drumming, which bears a conventional association with trance that is hard to absolutely distinguish from its directly physiological effects. In 'Ever Be' as in many pop songs, regular rhythm maintains the song's momentum, reinforced by a near-constant drumming. This duly antagonises Scruton, who claims that when drumming becomes the basis of musical momentum, voice leading is negatively affected:

> The music is generated from a point outside, assembled from a repertoire of effects, according to procedures which involve little or no invention, but which set the music into a machine-like motion with repetition as the principal device. This is particularly evident in the case of rhythm, generated by percussive sounds which have little or no relation to anything else that is happening.[522]

Scruton is correct to observe the lack of voice leading and motivic development in much pop music, and may be right that this is the direct result of regular rhythm being the means by which the music is driven onwards. Ultimately, for Scruton, the beat is merely a means

[521] Ibid., 137.
[522] Roger Scruton, 'The Cultural Significance of Pop Music,' *Roger Scruton*. <https://www.roger-scruton.com/about/music/understanding-music/175-the-cultural-significance-of-pop>

of suspending the terminal boredom that would, he suggests, otherwise afflict pop listeners. However, he fails to take seriously the textural differences between the various intensities of drumming in pop music. For example, the absence of drumming in the first verse of 'Ever Be' creates a sense of intimacy, the piano bassline regulating the rhythm. By contrast, the full drumkit utilised during the coda creates a stadium-esque intensity to support the strident vocals. It might, therefore, be more apt to note that it is not drumming itself, but the use of a sectional structure - each section having its own texture and motifs - that provides variety, and, ideally, suspends the listener's boredom. This textural variety rather undermines the argument that pop drumming is intrinsically linked to trance, which typically requires constancy for extended periods, and would suggest that this association is more conventional than physiological. Although Scruton is, regardless, unlikely to revise his views on the aesthetic value of pop drumming, I identify Bethel's use of rhythm, sectional structure and ambience as theologically meaningful in Chapter Six.

5.7 A MUSICAL TYPOLOGY

I want to close this chapter with a rough typology of the sort of musical expressive meaning that will be encountered in the next few chapters, bearing in mind the limited extent to which expressive meaning can be attributed to functional music. This will pre-emptively clarify for the reader Bethel's "normative" use of the pop idiom, as I describe it. This typology is written with my chosen genre in mind, that being mainstream Charismatic pop worship music produced by megachurches, from the millennium onwards, with Bethel Music as my case study. The following outline of tonal, motivic, rhythmic, instrumental and structural musical devices will ground my musico-theological claims in the following two chapters. The broad characteristics on which my assessments are premised include how "happy" or "sad", and "stable" or "unstable" the music sounds, the relatively static or dynamic effect created by treatment of motivic material, and the positioning of points of climax or anticlimax (created using volume and relative textural complexity). These, together, contribute to moods such as positivity, tranquility, or their opposites, and expressively frame doctrinal statements with suggestions such as divine immanence, or theological triumphalism.

(1) Structure

My comments on structure will be almost entirely uniform, focusing on the relationship between musical development and musical climax. Pop songs mostly adopt a sectional structure that sandwiches verses and choruses together, usually broken up by pre-choruses and middle eights. Pop worship songs typically add another motif to the end of the song, which I am referring to as the coda: it leaves the worshipper with an earworm that conveys some kind of point, usually about the worship event itself. Songs usually follow this template:

VERSE 1 – (PRE-CHORUS 1) – CHORUS 1
VERSE 2 – (PRE-CHORUS 2) – CHORUS 2
MIDDLE EIGHT
CHORUS RECAPITULATION
CODA

Sectional structure is significant because it enables variety in musical material without necessitating motivic or harmonic development. Instead, repetition of one motif is quickly swapped for repetition of a different one. In pop worship songs, lengthy chorus recapitulations or lengthily-repeated codas maintain interest towards the end of the song by moving towards and away from musical climax. Songs are commonly structured around a climactic point wherein static musical material is repeated indefinitely, with increasing volume and thickening instrumental texture. The lack of motivic and harmonic development becomes important, because in their absence, nothing links the climactic structure of the song to its motivic content. This is especially so in Bethel's music, the lyrics of which do not typically develop the theological ideas they introduce. Without motivic or thematic development in music or lyrics, climax adopts a purely cathartic function incidental to the purposes of worship I have outlined – namely, facilitating experiences of tangible assurance through strength of affect.

(2) Timbre

Musical ambience is created most immediately through instrumentation. In the pop idiom this might be enhanced or modified through production techniques, and is primarily evocative by way of contour or convention. For example, contemporary pop worship songs often open with synthetically reverberated pads that create a spatial contour of vastness,

due to their echoing sound. Bethel's 'Ever Be' is one of many examples. Reverberating pads provide a way of transitioning between songs in a worship set without moments of silence arresting the affective responses that build up during the songs. These reverberating pads contribute an otherworldly gravitas to the soundworld, reminiscent of divinity and the cosmos. Paralinguistic vocal techniques are another use of timbre that convey intensity or mood, for example a rasping belted voice emphasising moments of climax, or a breathy sound conveying intimacy.

(3) Texture

Over this background timbre, pop worship songs tend to move between two polar instrumental textures: acoustic, such as solo voice with keyboard or guitar, and full band, for example including drums, bass, more guitars and melodic instruments such as violin or violoncello. Acoustic instrumentation often sounds intimate, or expressive of vulnerability, due to the reduced manpower involved and exposure of individual expressive singing. Full band textures add impetus and import, creating a sense of magnitude through increased volume and manpower. I have already noted the significance of orientational metaphor, and its application to musical expression: layering backing vocals over a melody can make the sound seem more transcendent, contouring spatial height, for example. Meanwhile contrasting textures, as are used in most of Bethel's songs, emphasise the magnitude of the eventual climax.

(4) Rhythm

Rhythm, in the pop idiom as used by Bethel, is important for conveying impetus that drives a song forwards, and for conveying a sense of immediacy. Impetus is provided by drums, or other regular rhythmic uses of instruments such as guitar, bass or piano. I suggest, in later examples, that the consistency of the tactus can also reinforce a sense of "immediacy" that arises from static music material, rather similarly to Leibniz' 'counting of the soul' idea; such rhythmic consistency pushes the song onwards through its various sections without needing assistance from musical development itself. For example, 'Ever Be' has a very meandering verse and chorus melody, yet the steady 4/4 rhythm and even phrase lengths push the song forwards. Further, the fleeting rhythmic diminution heard in the chorus actually gives the song a little momentum, whilst reinforcing the tactus.

(5) Melody & Motif

I will note where "word painting" occurs in songs, wherein music is used to contour a non-musical concept. For example, the melody of the coda in 'Ever Be' is reminiscent of a trumpet fanfare, such as the opening Toccata of Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*. I draw from Purves, Lakoff and Johnson's observations about musical and physical space, wherein ascending melodies often sound like they increase in intensity, and descending melodies like they are decreasing in intensity. This also correlates with the timbre of the voice, which typically sounds strained or strident in its higher range, and relaxed in its lower range, due to the positioning of the vocal chords.

Motifs can develop throughout a piece of music, although I have noted that motivic development is structurally incidental to the pop idiom. Each different section of a pop song might bear some motivic similarity to the others, but this kind of "motivic congruence" is not exactly musical development, but more a basic similarity. For example, the verse and chorus of 'Ever Be' are not true examples of motivic development – they do not invert one another, for example – but they are composed of roughly the same notes, used in roughly the same way, to the same meandering effect. Motivic development is important insofar as it shows thematic progress; the absence of motivic development can sound very static.

Harmony

Harmony, like melody and motif, conveys mood and the development thereof. Bethel's use of harmony and tonality is limited, simple and diatonic. Although I do not attempt to entirely systematise the chords they use according to particular meanings, in the manner of Deryck Cooke, I often draw the following conclusions from the musical material, given the limitations I have described earlier in this chapter. Firstly, major chords conventionally convey positive emotion, and minor chords conventionally convey negative emotion. Therefore, the starting and ending chords of a four-chord sequence can often be straightforwardly read to indicate a different direction of emotional travel. For example, Coldplay's 'The Scientist' uses a four chord progression that begins with the relative minor chord, rests momentarily on the tonic before an imperfect cadence invites the whole chord sequence (vi – IV – I – V) to be repeated. Although most of these chords are major, the opening minor chord tinges the rest of the chords with a sense of sadness. By contrast, Hoagy Carmichael and Frank Loesser's 'Heart and Soul' uses those same four chords in a

different order (I – vi – IV – V). This song opens with the major tonic chord, closes with a cadence that draws out a lack of resolution as it moves from IV to V, and tucks the relative minor chord (vi) in between two positive and hopeful sounding chords.

Secondly, cyclical chord progressions – those which repeat without development or variation, even in one section – sound more "static" than harmonic development, which sounds like it is "going somewhere". Repeated *ad nauseam* amidst other ambient or climactic effects, cyclical chord progressions create a sense of immanence and involvement in the present moment. For example, compare 'The Scientist', which repeats its vi – IV – I – V chord sequence, to Leonard Cohen's 'Hallelujah', which modulates throughout each verse to the relative minor for the chorus (I – IV – V || vi – IV || V – III – vi), by way of a chromatic major mediant chord.

Thirdly, certain diatonic chords sound relatively "stronger" or "weaker", in relation to the tonic, based on their position in the harmonic series:

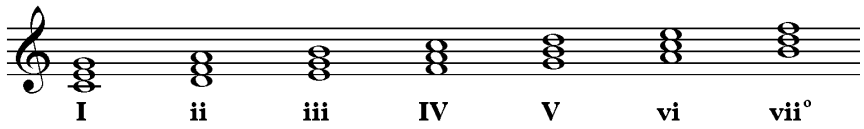


Figure 18. Diatonic chord scale. I, IV, V and vi sound relatively "stronger" than ii, iii and vii°.

Further, chords sound less stable each time they are inverted:

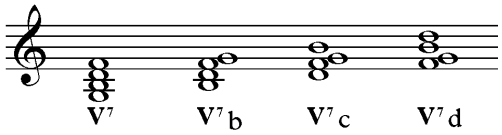


Figure 19. Inverted chords.

Harmonic consonance typically sounds stable, and dissonance unstable, as it moves away from a clear tonal centre. Cadences also sound relatively more or less stable or strong depending on the strength or weakness of the chords in them and their landing point. For example, perfect cadences resolve in a very final-sounding way (V – I), whereas imperfect cadences in pop songs await resolution in the next iteration of the chord progression (as in 'The Scientist'). Some cadences appear to build on that instability even more, as in 'Heart

and Soul'; if this cadence was modified to its relative minor, ii – iii, it would sound less positive, and less resolute (albeit not resolved). I make these sorts of observations, largely to do with the sense of dynamism and/or resolution in the music, later.

5.8 SUMMARY

Although the "semi-improvisatory" nature of the worship event certainly warrants sociological research into its affective properties, in this chapter I have defended the additional need for a musico-theological approach towards pop worship music. This method can more adequately address the relatively fixed qualities of worship songs, such as melody, harmony, form, rhythm and instrumentation, which expressively frame worship lyrics. I have introduced three theses for how music can have (theologically) expressive meaning: the stimulation, contour and convention theses, concluding with a musical typology that outlines the sort of musical qualities I theologically analyse in the next two chapters, and the theological implications I associate with them. As I have noted, theology, rather than aesthetics, is my main concern here. This is not a problematic subordination of one discipline (music) to the other (theology), because I am examining an idiom that serves a primarily ecclesial and theological function. The two chapters to follow will not polemicise against pop worship aesthetics, but will analyse the theological implications of Bethel Music's use of the pop idiom. I do this bearing Wuthnow's earlier observation in mind – that, at worst, pop worship music might preach a distorted Gospel, but at best it might be very encouraging in faith.

CHAPTER SIX

Therapeutic Devices in Pop Worship

INTRODUCTION * FROM WESLEY TO RIEFF * COSMIC AMBIENCE * EROTIC INFANTILISM * SUMMARY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In these next two chapters, I argue that Bethel Music's current use of the pop idiom in worship actively obstructs their ability to express a robust hamartiology. This chapter attends to two musico-theological devices consistently used by the Bethel Collective: cosmic ambience, and erotic infantilism. These are therapeutic devices, contributing to an intimate portrait of a 'manifestly present' God who can be tangibly experienced in the worship event. Cosmic ambience is ubiquitous in Bethel's songs, viscerally signifying the 'manifest presence' of God, and pre-emptively resolving themes of divine alienation, and judgement, thereby. Instrumental pedals, usually played on a synthesiser, are timbrally enhanced with heavy reverberation, introducing and closing songs, and persisting through quiet or contemplative moments. Erotic infantilism identifies the worshipper as a child of God, or God's beloved. This imagery is certainly scriptural, but – used overmuch – presents mankind as so vulnerable, sympathetic and loveable that God would almost appear unjust or unfeeling not to save us. This actually undermines the scandalous gospel of grace the Bethel Collective otherwise attempt to preach: the imagery is not *wrong*, but is anthropomorphic in one particular direction.

Bethel Music's normative use of cosmic ambience and erotic infantilism is therapeutic. Employed in conjunction to their scant explorations of sin, these devices pre-emptively dissociate sin from divine judgment and alienation. This compromises the dialectic of sin and grace by obscuring the seriousness of sin, and the costliness of grace thereby. My first three chapters emphasised the necessity of a hamartiology that accounts for noetic and desiderative corruption, even in justified Christians, in order to maintain an element of hermeneutic suspicion towards subjective religious experience. This is especially vital for a worship theology that actively pursues tangible assurance. This chapter

demonstrates that Bethel's worship music so vociferously encourages worshippers towards experiences of tangible assurance, through "immanent" sounding ambience and therapeutic lyrics concerning divine intimacy and its material manifestations in the body, that any suggestion of ongoing noetic or desiderative corruption would be fundamentally disruptive to the therapeutic function of worship.

My comparison of Wesley and Bethel thus far has elucidated Bethel's "therapeutic" use of pop worship. I have drawn this term from Philip Rieff, whose account of faith after Freud offers a more in-depth cultural interpretation of the motivational-pastoral dynamics at play in Bethel's music than Wesley does. I will begin by examining Rieff's account of the therapeutic, before presenting cosmic ambience and erotic infantilism as musico-theological devices oriented towards a therapeutic end.

6.2 FROM WESLEY TO RIEFF

The Triumph of the Therapeutic

I have already noted Wesley's motivational-pastoral precursor to Bethel's weak hamartiology. The sensual dimension of "really worshipping," which Adnams has presented as vital to the contemporary worship event, incentivises a blind eye turned to the potential noetic and desiderative effects of sin, lest worship experiences of assurance prove to be illusory or false. This is a fundamentally therapeutic incentive driving the pop worship event, skewing religious experience in a positive affective direction: recall, for example, Wesley's 'strangely warmed heart', or charismata such as prophecy or tongues. It need not be the case that the Spirit is thought to move predominantly in *positive* experiences and feelings, as Simeon Zahl has argued (a point I return to in the concluding chapter). However, this is the normative interpretation – because, as Rieff suggests, positive experiences of assurance fit into a broader therapeutic project of (re)assuring people.[523]

Following the 19th century boom of interest in religious experience, 20th century figures such as Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and William James considered the therapeutic value

[523] Rieff, *Triumph*, 35.

of religious experience as a means for elucidating pathologies and aspects of selfhood.[524] Rieff attributes the 'triumph of the therapeutic' in the 20th century to the pivotal work of Freud, in particular. Freud, by Rieff's account, fundamentally transformed the Western religious imagination by presenting examination of the self as the means through which "salvation" is won. Freud's project was therapeutic, not explicitly religious, although Rieff attends to its disruptive effect on religion.[525] Following the proliferation of "death of God" theology in the nineteenth century, which Rieff associates primarily with Nietzsche, Freud presented the interior as the authority of the individual, rather than an external God figure. The premise of Freud's psychotherapy was a universal malady of disordered desire, fundamentally at odds with maintaining a cohesive and civilized society, which is to be overcome through talking therapy.[526] For Richard Webster, Freud's therapeutic project is comparable to Augustine's articulation of original sin, although Webster suggests that Freud fails to reckon with the non-scientific, and fundamentally theological, character of his project:

> Freud himself is clearly unaware of the depth of his own submerged religious traditionalism when, in a significant passage, he introduces psychoanalysis as one of the great blows inflicted on 'the naive self love of man.'[527]

Webster compares Freud's 'naive self love of man' to Augustine's 'spiritual pride', and says Freud offers

> a theory of human nature according to which men and women, rather than being in control of their own lives, were doomed to remain the prey of a seething and unclean mass of impulses and desires which had become, through Adam's fall, an ineradicable part of their nature.[528]

Freud's theory is truly universal, much like a doctrine of original sin, according to Webster. Interestingly, Webster compares John Wesley's focus on Original Sin (as

[524] See Richard King, 'Religion, Sociology and Psychology,' in Martin Halliwell, and Joel D. S. Rasmussen (ed.), *James and the Transatlantic Conversation* (Oxford: OUP, 2014).
[525] Indeed, Rieff writes that Freud was explicitly critical of religion, the 'original cure', but also the 'original disease.' See Philip Rieff, *Freud* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1959), 290.
[526] See Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (London: Lund Humphries, 1946).
[527] Richard Webster, *Why Freud was Wrong* (London: Harper Collins, 1996), 314.
[528] Webster, *Freud*, 314.

Webster perceives it) to Freud's 'cult-like' psychoanalytic movement and the centrality of the sick unconscious within it. Citing Wesley's *Doctrine of Original Sin* (1757) as one of his longest works, and one that affirms the universality of sin (Wesley, for example, complains about talk of the 'dignity of human nature,' saying it undermines the human need for spiritual healing), Webster presents Wesley as a proto-therapeutic Christian.

> One of the aims of Wesley's movement, indeed, was to re-establish the 'reality' of the Christian's distempered soul. It did this by vitalising all the anxieties about irrational and sexual impulses by which Christians had traditionally been encouraged to feel but which had been, as it were, disconnected from the consciousness of mainstream Protestant rationalism. Wesley and his followers believed that it was necessary to bring these buried anxieties back into the Christian consciousness, for it was only by doing this that they could establish people's need for the religious therapy which they offered.[529]

Webster's reading of Wesley does not get the latter's motivational-pastoral theology quite right. As I argued in Chapter Two, Wesley can hardly be thought to 'focus' on original sin; his motivational-pastoral theology takes a predominantly avoidant attitude to the subject, hence the accusations of Pelagianism and so on that came his way. For this reason, neither can Wesley be thought to 'stoke up' Christian anxieties. However, Webster is correct to note the therapeutic potential of faith and the experience of assurance of salvation, and to agree that there is something akin to therapeutic respite in Wesley's approach, well before Freud's influence upon American Christianity. Rieff seems to be in agreement with this way of interpreting Freud as more religious than scientific, commenting that

> Freud's infamous and unavoidable 'sense of guilt,' which precedes any event that might elicit true guilt, is what he would not have it represent: shame in a sacred order otherwise false.[530]

[529] Ibid., 315-6.
[530] Rieff, 'Thoughts,' 112. He then says Job concludes with 'divine rejection of therapeutic reciprocity.'

In everyday life, Rieff says, therapeutic religion consists in therapeutic control, in which doctrinal and dogmatic propositions offer a feeling of control over anxiety, and therapeutic respite, which is an ecstatic or erotic relief from anxiety.[531] Rieff describes this as a 'doctrine of release' that is then elaborated upon in culturally particular formats. In these formats, experience and emotionalism pervade everything – Bethel's charged form of Charismatic worship would be an example.[532] The absence of objective authority, or 'order', is central to Rieff's concept of the therapeutic. For Rieff, 'psychological man', or the therapeutic, is his own subject:

> Clarity about oneself supersedes devotion to an ideal as the model of right conduct.[533]

This approach recalls Bethel's experiential hermeneutic, guided largely by the shifting ideal of 'Jesus [as] perfect theology', a loose enough statement that can defend a multitude of doctrinal claims, no matter how spurious.[534] (Relatedly, Rieff identifies as a characteristic of therapeutic religion its rejection of the "old way", in a manner that accurately captures Bethel's spirit of religion and truth dichotomy.) Rieff's comparison between the therapeutic and the ascetic is relevant to such apparently specific, but propositionally vague, slogans as this, which pepper Bethel's teaching. Bethel, as my genealogy has indicated, do not utilise the therapeutic in a Freudian fashion; rather, theirs is a declamatory "power of positive thinking," reminiscent of Norman Peale or Joel Osteen (albeit not necessarily intentionally). This is very evident in the lyrics to Bethel Music's spontaneous songs, but also in the church's official offering readings, which 'declare promises and truths' of God, and are read aloud by the whole congregation as financial offerings are given during a service. For example, 'Offering Reading No. 4' declares the following:

> I am powerful

[531] Rieff, *Triumph*, 34.
[532] Ibid., 254.
[533] Ibid., 56.
[534] See, for example, Bill Johnson, *Jesus Christ Is Perfect Theology* (Shippenberg: Destiny Image Publishers, 2009), 7: 'Jesus Christ is perfect theology. Whatever you think you know about God that you can't find in the person of Jesus, you have a reason to question.' See also 9: 'It is wrong to take an Old Testament revelation of God, of His nature, and pre-empt or trump the New Testament revelation of God found in Jesus Christ. Inferior covenants do not provide clearer insights into the nature of God. Scripture is Scripture. All of it was written for our instruction. But what is observed in the Law and the Prophets does not possess the clarity that is found in the person of Jesus.'

> And what I believe changes the world
> So today I declare
>
> God is in a good mood
> He loves me all the time
> Nothing can separate me from His love
> Jesus' blood paid for everything
> I will tell nations of what He has done
>
> I am important
> How He made me is amazing
> I was designed for worship
> My mouth establishes praise to silence the enemy
> Everywhere I go becomes a perfect-health zone
> And with God
>
> Nothing is impossible![535]

Rieff argues that both the therapeutic and the ascetic act so vigorously upon their convictions that the meaning of their actions are lost.[536] However, Rieff thinks that therapeutic religion is a counter-productive 'resolution' for the anxiety of unregulated desire it seeks to treat, in comparison to the better but more costly option of accepting one's anxieties and hoping for their eventual regulation.[537] These two resolutions are antithetical: one addresses the anxiety, and the other buries it. Rieff identifies grace as the motivation for choosing the costlier option:

> What is not is the predicate of what is: grace.[538]

In other words, negative experiences such as anxiety, disappointment and personal failing provide the believer with fertile ground for accepting grace from an external source such as

[535] 'Offering Readings', *Bethel*. <https://www.bethel.com/offering-readings/>
[536] Rieff, *Triumph*, 53.
[537] Rieff, 'Thoughts', 108.
[538] Ibid., 110.

God, as an alternative to (or fulfilment of) despair or striving. Rather than accepting the possibility of genuine grace, according to Rieff,

> The trouble with the therapeutic triumphant is that he uses faith merely as a weapon to free his various and unrealized enemy selves from both the morality and mercy that must represent, however imperfectly, the invisible world in which our visible world is enclosed: the world of sacred order and of the presence presiding in both worlds. The therapeutic no longer believes he is suffering from sin, but from the disease of too elevated a faith; from some residue of life in sacred order.[539]

For Rieff, then, the problem with therapeutic religion is that it eclipses any external authority ('sacred order') in order to comfort the individual and relieve their anxieties. This is instead of maintaining an external authority or order, and encouraging the individual to locate themselves within it, even in the position of one who has fallen short, with hope of redemption. Rieff's therapeutic man is therefore concerned with introspection and feeling, with subjectively measured overarching rules that allow the maximum amount of conceptual manoeuvring, rather than an order imposed from without. In short, the problem with the new therapeutic world, according to Rieff, is the absence of judgment (a symptom of the absence of authority).[540] This matter of conceptual manoeuvring is identified by Wuthnow as a potential problem, in his sociological studies of pop worship, as I noted in Chapter Three. Although Rieff suggests that therapeutic religion is an ineffective means to cure anxiety, this potential function is certainly used by other figures (and, later, by Bethel). In *Freud*, Rieff suggests that Freud is sceptical that religion actually helps to cure anxieties, but presents religion nevertheless as a means of therapeutically ameliorating them.[541] Rieff notes that Freud's scepticism in this respect is unlike William James's more amenable attitude towards symbolic religion. Meanwhile, in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, Rieff disparagingly describes Jung as a 'rational Protestant' utilising religion, amongst a variety of 'new age' phenomena, to deal with anxiety.[542]

---

[539] Ibid., 112.
[540] Ibid., 104.
[541] Rieff, *Freud*, 290.
[542] Rieff, *Triumph*, 64. Similarly, see Carl Gustav Jung, 'Psychology or the Clergy,' in *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, trans. W.S. Dell and Cary F. Baynes (London & New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), 229. Jung writes that man derive

Rieff critiques therapeutic religion for being unmoored from external authority, rather like my assessment of Bethel's experiential hermeneutic. It should be noted that Rieff claims his first account of the subject, in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, is not a polemic, and that the therapeutic might well create an 'enduring culture'. However, he remains sceptical of the therapeutic hermeneutic. In a statement pertinent to the question of noetic and desiderative corruption, Rieff claims the therapeutic approach to religion extends the boundaries of usual religious experience: religious experience is interpreted as the means of assurance, and when assurance is desired, experiences are more likely to be interpreted as religious. Rieff also notes the negative corollary of this, which is that when religious experiences and feelings of assurance are unforthcoming, 'religious emotionalism may lead to psychic collapse.'[543] This is supported by the sociological literature I reviewed in Chapter Three. It also testifies, again, to the bias towards positive religious experiences over negative ones.

In Rieffian terms, the problem with Bethel Music is that they use therapeutic control and respite to pre-emptively remove negativity from the salvation narrative. In order to engender positive feelings of assurance, the band couches all mention of negativity, sin and struggle in triumphalist or resolved musical devices. This compromises the dialectic of sin and grace, by rendering the negative half ineffectual, concomitantly undermining the positive half. This approach chimes with Webster's assessment of Freud's approach towards the dialectic of sin and grace:

> The crucial point about Freud's view of evil is that he sees it not as a permanent, inescapable condition of human beings, but as a developmental stage which all healthy individuals are biologically destined to leave behind them as they grow to maturity.[544]

Webster remarks that Freud makes the 'permissiveness' of psychoanalysis 'almost inevitable' because "sinfulness" is seen as something that will be automatically left

---

psychological wellbeing from his imaginative faculty, at least in part, this being the most effective means of manipulating a psychology.

[543] Rieff, *Triumph*, 35.

[544] Webster, *Freud,* 332.

behind.[545] We might attribute a similar permissiveness to the Bethel Collective, who also suggest that sin will be, or perhaps has already been, automatically left behind: not in words, but in their use of cosmic ambience, climax and erotic infantilism. As such, divine judgement has no clear place in the theology expressed in their worship music.

In this chapter, I refer to features of Bethel's worship music as 'therapeutic', suggesting that their use of the pop idiom is *unable* to express a robust hamartiology. Bethel's worship music is therapeutic in a limited sense, for example not attempting explicitly to divorce themselves from a concept of sacred order.[546] Although Rieff, according to Richard King, fails to adequately distinguish between analytic and therapeutic postures, Bethel Music is quite clearly not undertaking an analytic project in their (necessarily uni-directional) worship ministry.[547] In any case, the term 'therapeutic' more effectively denotes what I have thus far described as an 'avoidant attitude to sin'.

Symbolism in song

I will now attend to "cosmic ambience" and "erotic infantilism" in Bethel's worship music. These devices are shaped primarily through texture, timbre, rhythm and melody, although I also note the expressive potential of paralinguistic techniques. The effect of cosmic ambience is to pre-emptively couch Bethel's songs in a musical contour of divine "manifest presence". This undermines any mention of negativity by presenting it as already resolved, by virtue of it being part of the worship event. This is most evident in Bethel's spontaneous songs, which include especially Charismatic, prophetic lyrics and declarations, sung over cosmic ambience and instrumental climax, and repetition, and little else. The effect of erotic infantilism, which is conveyed through certain textural contrasts, variously breathy or hoarse vocals, and simplistic melodies, is to present sin as a form of negativity that is externally imposed on the vulnerable worshipper. Culpability for sin is eclipsed by the sympathetic portrayal of the worshipper. Both of these approaches remove the potency of sin as a threat to divine-human relations, and cheapen grace thereby.

[545] This 'permissiveness' refers to the non-judgemental demeanour of the psychoanalyst. Similarly, the absence of divine judgement in pop worship speaks to its therapeutic function, as well as the interpretation of sin as a primarily moral phenomenon.
[546] Rieff, 'Thoughts,' 102.
[547] Richard King, 'From Creeds to Therapies: Philip Rieff's Work in Perspective,' *Reviews in American History*, Volume 4, No.2 (June 1976): 292.

It is important to note that sympathetic portrayal of the worshipper in Bethel's music is not a problem in itself. The Gospel narrative of creation, Fall and gracious salvation through Christ affirms divine sympathy towards the sinner. More specifically than this, the significations of cosmic ambience and erotic infantilism are, themselves, Biblical symbols. The "manifest presence" of God amongst man is represented in numerous ways throughout the Scriptures, for example God passing by Moses, or the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Cosmic ambience as a means of setting the scene in corporate worship recalls, more particularly, a Charismatic and Pentecostal pneumatology of the Holy Spirit being "poured out" in devout gatherings. Imagery of God the Father is found in the sayings of Christ, including the Lord's Prayer and Christ's last words on the cross in Luke 23. Erotic imagery of the divine is also scriptural, for example found throughout Song of Songs and in the identification of the Church with the bride of Christ.

It is not these symbols that are problematic, but their usage, which is overly literal, normatively reinforcing but one portrait of God as a sympathetic, non-judgemental comforter and rescuer (and often in anthropomorphic language). Robert Cummings Neville has made a case for the 'truth of broken symbols', advising that Christian imagery, whilst often personalistic, should be read through an apophatic lens to protect it from being distorted. Neville argues against a 'literal personal theism', noting his observation as a child, to which he still more or less holds, that, rather that being best conceived as a personal being, 'God makes things go', rather like electricity or light.[548] However, Neville affirms the value of personalistic symbols of God: symbols, Neville writes, help us imagine the limits of the world that we inhabit, and therefore pertain to practical questions such as how we should live. As such, symbols have to be experientially engaged with if they are to be properly grasped.[549] What is important is that these symbols contain a genuine contrast between the infinite, to which they refer, and the finite, of which they consist.

This finite/infinite contrast idea is elucidated by Neville's claims regarding the two functions of an effective religious symbol. The first of these functions is to draw focus

[548] See Robert Cummings Neville, 'Intellectual Autobiography,' *Robert Cummings Neville*. <https://www.robertcummingsneville.com/robert-neville-intellectual-autobiography> Also, Christian Polke, 'Ultimates, The Ultimate, and the Quest of a Personal God: On Robert C. Neville's Philosophical Theology,' in *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy,* Volume 36, No.2 (May 2015): 155-6.
[549] Robert Cummings Neville, *The Truth of Broken Symbols* (Albany: SUNY, 1996), 64-5.

towards the religious object; the second is to show the relation of the individual to it. He offers the example of a gothic vaulted ceiling in a church, which indicates the 'loftiness' of God in physical space, and thereby 'give[s] worshippers a certain feeling of their place, dwarfed by lofty divine majesty'.[550] Personalistic imagery, such as God the Father, has an advantage in this respect, in that it easily locates the worshipper in relation to the religious object.[551] However, Neville rightly notes that interpreting religious symbols is not straightforward. For one thing, religious symbols often 'overlap', and are hard (if not impossible) to interpret systematically without the appearance of contradiction; Neville states that 'theology must accept' this non-systematic quality.[552] More importantly, religious symbols take finite phenomena as their interpretants, such as the gothic vaulted ceiling, whilst attempting to be expressive of the infinite, such as the being of God. This is at the heart of Neville's definition of religious symbols, as 'those whose primary reference, direct or indirect, is to a finite/infinite contrast, that is, at least partly to the divine or the infinite'.[553] As a consequence, religious symbols must always be understood as at least partially metaphorical, and even religious ideas themselves:

> Moving from symbols themselves to reference, the ancient question for the theological context is whether all theological ideas refer symbolically rather than literally. The reason for believing so is that, in one way or another, theological ideas directly or indirectly refer to the infinite by means of finite symbols. Even the symbol of the Infinite itself has one of its two main schema-images something like the mathematical notion of always being able to add another unit – always another year, always another place across space. The other main schema-image is also finite and negative – the infinite is what you get when you take away all finite determinations. It would seem then that every idea attempting to convey something about the divine should be recognized as a broken symbol, and if it is not broken it is idolatrous.[554]

Idolatry is one of two major risks of symbolism that Neville identifies, the other being the ineffectuality of 'dead' symbols that fail to engage. Regarding idolatry, he suggests that

[550] Neville, *Symbols,* 135. Neville calls this system the 'hypothesis of double interpretants.'
[551] Polke, 'Ultimates': 160.
[552] Neville, *Symbols,* 132.
[553] Ibid., 65 – 67
[554] Ibid., 128.

religious symbols are more seriously misleading not when they 'mistakenly ascribe false attributes to the divine', but when they attribute divine attributes to something other than the divine.[555] In this latter instance, there is a failure to maintain the finite/infinite contrast that Neville considers vital to a properly functioning religious symbol.[556] My suggestion is that Bethel's use of cosmic ambience, for example, risks conflating tangible feelings of assurance of salvation with divine grace itself, and fails to distinguish clearly between the divine object of the worship event, and the event itself. Neville notes that symbols do not give us the thing that is symbolised, but rather give a cognitive representation of it.[557] Although Neville suggests that devotional symbols often *should* be exaggerated, this compromising of their descriptive truth content allowing for their existential truth content to be better grasped by the worshipper, these symbols still need to be broken, and understood to be broken, in some way in order to avoid being idolatrous.[558] Bethel's emphasis on tangible assurance privileges the worshippers' cognitive representations of God, and the effects of the "manifest presence" of God, above other components of the worship event, most notably praise; they exaggerate without simultaneously breaking their symbols of cosmic ambience and erotic infantilism, and as such ascribe attributes of the infinite to mere finite phenomena.

My argument is that acknowledging the potential ongoing corruption of justified Christians' noetic and desiderative faculties is a strong foundation for "breaking" religious symbols; Neville argues that it is not possible to have unbroken symbols for the divine; nevertheless, Bethel's therapeutic approach eclipses such caution in favour of unqualified encouragement towards a congenial account of God. This demonstrates Neville's observation that spirituality and the therapeutic do not necessarily have the same end, the latter oriented towards psychological wellbeing, and the former concerning relation to the divine. Although potentially coterminous in some instances, relation to the divine can often feel unpleasant or uncomfortable (for example, in instances of guilt or sorrow).[559] The therapeutic is by no means irrelevant to religious experience, but is pursued by Bethel Music potentially at the expense of the Gospel. Bethel Music employ unbroken devotional symbols for God, such as cosmic ambience and erotic infantilism, simultaneously relying

[555] Ibid., 62.
[556] Ibid., 62, 64.
[557] Ibid., 119.
[558] Ibid., 197-9.
[559] Ibid., 155-7.

on and perpetuating a weak hamartiology that undermines the orthodox dialectic of sin and grace.

6.3 COSMIC AMBIENCE

Spirituality in sound

I have explained Neville's hypothesis that properly functional devotional symbols entail a contrast between their finite referents and the infinite to which they point. As I noted in Chapter Four, pop worship music has been criticised by Christian quarters for having unedifying connotations; in cases like Blanchard and Lucarini, this has been specifically linked to the stylistic origins of contemporary church music in rock and roll, which some Christian critics consider inextricably related to a culture of sex, drugs, Satanism and suspicious New Age religions.[560] Such criticisms make explicit the association between characteristics of rock and roll, particularly thrusting power chords and vigorous drumming, and the 'sins of the flesh'. There is a slightly Gnostic tone to this brand of criticism in its suspicion of the body; such concerns are generally based on superstition and pastoral speculations.[561]

By contrast, the essayist Judy Berman makes a point more congruent with Neville's, whilst defending the spiritual value of "earthly" rock music. Berman writes about contemporary (or recent) bands occupying the secular sphere, noting the variety of religiosity in their personal lives. Drawing from Wassily Kandinsky's claim that worthwhile art must draw its audience towards 'the non-material strivings of the soul',[562] Berman claims rather that 'many [artists] bring spirituality to bear on the physical realm', turning their own musical strivings of the soul inwards, towards the desires of the psyche, rather than outwards towards matters divine.[563] Kelman interprets Berman as arguing that the sense of communion between the spiritual and earthly is what makes

[560] Blanchard & Lucarini, *Rock the Gospel*, 54-56, 78-100.
[561] Ibid., 29 (on the alienating potential of pop worship), and 126 ('how drugs and music merge is unclear, but there are alarming stories of the result'). See also, 225: I would suggest that weak hamartiology is foundational to Blanchard and Lucarini's concerns, as suggested towards the end of their book, when they pose the question 'does this music tend to give you a *repentant* view of man's depravity?'
[562] Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art,* trans. M. Sadler (New York: Dover Publications, 1977), 14. These non-material strivings include both the psyche and the cosmos.
[563] Judy Berman, 'Concerning the Spiritual in Indie Rock,' in *Believer Magazine,* No.64 (1 August 2009). <https://believermag.com/concerning-the-spiritual-in-indie-rock/.

indie rock so powerful: these songs convey a finite/infinite contrast, to use Neville's phrase.[564] Berman's symbols operate according to the convention thesis:

> Music may also make a grab for our souls by recalling the sounds or harmonic structures of devotional songs, thus reawakening our collective memory of what faith and worship feel like.[565]

Berman offers drone, the timbral 'groan of organs', and 'hand claps and delirious screams' as examples of such musical recollections that awaken the spiritual sense. Meanwhile, she attributes earthly themes to the lyrics of these songs, such as rural poverty, drugs and abortion. However, Berman's association of the spiritual dimension with music, and earthly themes with lyrics, is too simple, given my comments in Chapter Five about the physiological effects of music. Of particular interest here is rhythm, which can have a demonstrable and measurable regulative effect on the body. I noted, then, Leibniz' comments on the 'counting of the soul', wherein rhythms can stimulate a natural inclination towards regulation and proportionality. Regardless of the scientific truth of Leibniz' claim, this idea captures something of human experience of rhythm, which is that regular rhythms engage the brain with their even subdivision of time. For example, Rouget, in his study on rhythm and trance, suggests that the notion that rhythm underpins trance is not a phenomenon of nature, but of culture; he notes that people often expect to feel a certain reaction or release from pop music, on account of the regular rhythms that facilitate an impression of trance.[566]

Rouget's observation is evidenced throughout the history of Western pop, starting with its origins in African American spirituals and the influence of the antiphonal 'ring shout', with its repetitive and strongly rhythmic dimension, on subsequent popular music styles.[567] Duke Ellington capitalised on the associations of hot jazz with "primitivist" visions of Africa, by marketing his 'jungle' beats.[568] Robert Pattison has associated this use of instrumentation with a 'Romantic mythology' of blackness, describing it as a 'catalyst... necessary to

[564] Kelman, *Shout to the Lord*, 38.
[565] Berman, 'Concerning the Spiritual in Indie Rock.'
[566] Rouget, *Trance,* 91.
[567] Mellonee V. Burnim, 'Religious Music', in Portia Maultby & Mellonee V. Burnim, *African American Music* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 54 – 55.
[568] Harvey Cohen, 'The Marketing of Duke Ellington: Setting the Strategy for an African American Maestro,' in *The Journal of African American History,* Volume 89, No.4 (Autumn 2004): 296-7.

induce the reaction but not a true element of the result' for the white, expectant listener. He suggests that this Romantic mythology persists – albeit not in an overtly racialised form – in rock music.[569] The same appeal to a supposedly primordial psychological state through drumming and repetition can be found throughout the subsequent history of popular genres, for example in the 'repetition-driven ecstasy' of disco music,[570] raga rock's appropriation of Eastern drone techniques,[571] and in the cross rhythms of contemporary pop. Similarly, the indie rock songs Berman talks about in her article all use regular rhythms, grounding the ecstatic timbral experience she describes in her article within a self-conscious experience of embodiment. This insight – that timbre and rhythm together convey a finite/infinite contrast – is reflected in the consistency between Camille Paglia's description of 1960s psychedelic rock, and Lady Gaga's claim regarding the spiritual facility of her own music (both genres based on regular rhythm and amplification):

> The evangelical fervor felt by many heretical young people in the 1960s was powered by rock music, which at that moment was becoming an art form...the titanic, all-enveloping sound of rock was produced by powerful, new amplification technology that subordinated the mind and activated the body... Through the sensory assault of that thunderous music, a whole generation tapped into natural energies, tangible proof of humanity's link to the cosmos.[572]

> I make soulless electronic pop. But when you're on ecstasy in a nightclub grinding up against someone and my music comes on, you'll feel soul.[573]

Bethel's use of cosmic ambience to open and close their songs, supplemented by the regular rhythms that motivate the songs themselves, provides a symbol for the divine/human encounter that is one function of worship. This is, on the surface, an example of Neville's finite/infinite contrast. However, this symbol of encounter is unbroken. It engages no hamartiology: rather than being tempered by an account of potential noetic and

[569] Robert Pattison, *The Triumph of Vulgarity* (Oxford: OUP, 1987), 45, 57, 66.
[570] Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: UCP, 2005), 26.
[571] Brian Ireland & Sharif Gemie, 'Raga Rock: Popular Music and the Turn to the East in the 1960s,' *Journal of American Studies*, Volume 53, No.1 (9 June 2017): 2.
[572] Camille Paglia, 'Cults and Cosmic Consciousness: Religious Vision in the American 1960s,' in *Journal of Humanities and the Classics, Third Series,* Volume 10, No.3 (Winter, 2003): 62.
[573] Sean Michaels, 'Lady Gaga: I make soulless electronic pop,' *The Guardian* (2 July 2009). <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2009/jul/02/lady-gaga>

desiderative corruption, it eclipses this concern with a drive towards tangible assurance. Furthermore, the weak account of sin that Bethel Music present – of sin as volitional, cognitive or else imposed on the worshipper by external forces – reduces the distinction between human and divine nature to one of degree: the worshipper is not *sinful* as such, but simply weak or prone to err. (This problem is foreshadowed by the grey areas of John Wesley's hamartiology that I presented in Chapter Two.) The strikingly anthropomorphic language that Bethel personnel use to describe God compounds this problem of distinction between humanity and divinity. These problems all arise from the therapeutic pursuit of tangible assurance, yet compromise the efficacy of this endeavour for spiritual life.

What is cosmic ambience?

I have claimed that Bethel's music creates a finite/infinite contrast by contrasting a particular timbre with regular rhythmic patterns (usually reinforced through drumming). This timbre – 'cosmic ambience' – cocoons Bethel's songs in a wash of synthesiser pads that establish the tonality of a song. Long-held notes with mild dissonances and heavy reverberation are suggestive of vastness and supernaturalism, and aurally distinguish between the worship event and the other components of the church service. (Vastness is quite a literal contour created by the use of reverb, which echoes as though the notes were reverberating in a large room.) Cosmic ambience opens and closes almost all of Bethel's songs, and is heard during the quiet moments of songs, avoiding awkward silences during a live set. For example, Bethel's song 'Seas of Crimson' overlays the introductory piano hook with cosmic ambience:[574]
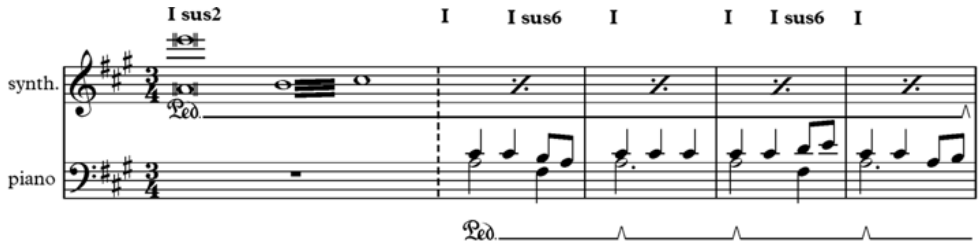


Figure 20. Bethel Music, 'Seas of Crimson,' introduction (0:01).

Here, cosmic ambience establishes the tonic (A), but also creates a sense of movement by shifting between the supertonic (B) and mediant (C♯). A slight pulsing of the synthesised sound, as well as the intermittent dissonance, creates a shimmering quality.

[574] Bethel Music, Brian Johnson, 'Seas of Crimson (Live),' *We Will Not Be Shaken (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2015).

In closing a song, cosmic ambience gradually winds down the emotional intensity of the worship event, instead of halting abruptly. For example, 'Seas of Crimson' closes with the above cosmic ambience outlasting the final iteration of the verse. Although cosmic ambience does not literally form a contour for the ineffable divine, the reverberating, shimmering sound contours spaciousness and supernaturalism. In this way, cosmic ambience provides a helpful musical shorthand for the placeholder terms I introduced in Chapter Four: recall Anna Nekola's comments about Christian music promising to take the worshipper 'there', or Jeremy Riddle's comments about seeking the 'more' of God, and hosting the 'manifest presence', rather than the mere omnipresence, of God in worship.[575] Music, as a non-propositional medium, is particularly effective as an open-ended signifier in this way.

Cosmic ambience is especially evident in Bethel's live-recorded spontaneous songs, due to the necessary simplicity of their construction. In spontaneous songs, prophetic declarations are sung in an improvisatory way, although the lyrics and melodies might be prepared before the worship session; these riffs are chosen in the moment, embellished with additional proclamations, and sung over cosmic ambience.[576] Bethel's spontaneous songs, musically, are otherwise characterised by repetition of phrases, simple chords, and musical climax, which typically involves the reinforcement of rhythm through drumming. These songs usually incorporate mild dissonance, predominantly suspended fourths and ninths, which create a yearning sound as they await resolution through the tonic chord. The overall effect is of building intensity, which expressively frames whatever propositions are being shared – joy, for example, or determination. Paralinguistic techniques such as breathiness, belting or vocal fry convey emotional intensity and nuances in mood, with the band supporting the singer through instrumental crescendos and diminuendos.

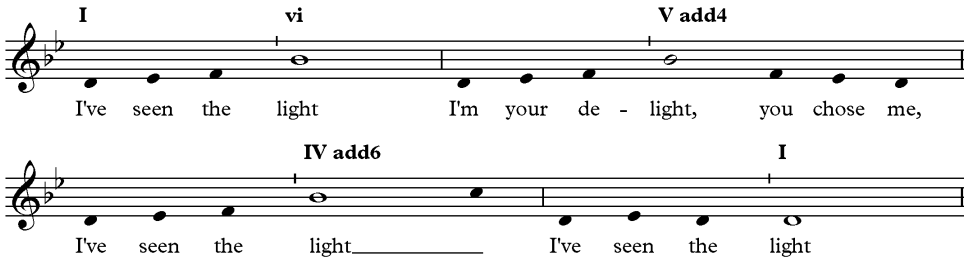
Cosmic ambience is also stylistically prominent in Bethel's 'Without Words' ministry, in which songs are re-recorded with no vocal line, for contemplative private worship.[577] These arrangements are texturally much more complex than Bethel's regular songs,

[575] Jeremy Riddle, 'Heaven Come Session 9.'
[576] IHOPKC are the main staple of this genre, owing to their 24/7 prayer room livestream, but Bethel have several of their own. See, for example, International House of Prayer, *Spontaneum* (Forerunner Music: 2018); 'Prayer Room,' *IHOPKC*. <https://www.ihopkc.org/prayerroom/>
[577] See, for example, Bethel's albums *Without Words* (Bethel Music: 2013), *Without Words: Synesthesia* (Bethel Music: 2015) and *Without Words: Genesis* (Bethel Music: 2019).

compensating for the absence of a vocal line (in songs written originally for voice) with arrangements full of reverberating suspensions, varied drum patterns and a very distinct sectional structure. Stylistically, the Without Words ministry uses cosmic ambience in a different manner, insofar as it involves more complex percussive arrangements and a wider variety of timbre. Climaxes of Without Words arrangements are never as grandiose as in their vocal counterparts; the emotional range is much smaller, as the arrangements are generally relaxing and contemplative in tone. For example, in the next chapter I identify Cory Asbury's 'Reckless Love' as a very rare Bethel song that addresses sin in a robust way, with a moody emotional effect. However, the Without Words recording lacks the grit of Steffany Gretzinger's vocal recording, the first verse replacing the original vi – V – IV chord progression with a vi – V - ♭II sequence that sounds warmer and more whimsical. Meanwhile, the climax replaces Gretzinger's raw vocals with a swell of auto-tuned strings reminiscent of a romantic film score. However, I will not attend to the Without Words recordings beyond these general observations about its distinctive style (namely, that these recordings are more contemplative in tone, and they use more distinctive timbral effects), because they contain no propositional content for the music to expressively frame. Instead, I will now present some more in-depth examples of cosmic ambience in Bethel's spontaneous songs, before theologically examining their use of cosmic ambience more broadly.

I See The Light

The spontaneous song 'I See the Light', sung by kalley on the *Starlight* album (2017), opens with a synthesised wash of cosmic ambience, over which kalley's lone voice begins to sing.[578] The titular hook emphasises an experience of religious assurance, with a triumphant, fanfare-like ascending motif:



[578] Bethel Music, kalley, 'I See the Light (Spontaneous) [Live],' *Starlight (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2017).

Figure 21. Bethel Music, 'I've Seen the Light,' titular motif (0:07).

The accompanying cosmic ambience loosely follows a repeated I – vi – V – IV progression, awash with suspensions. The song is mostly very positive, the melodic range peaking on 'light' ($B\flat_4$) and its rhyming words. However, kalley does briefly describe a sense of negativity:

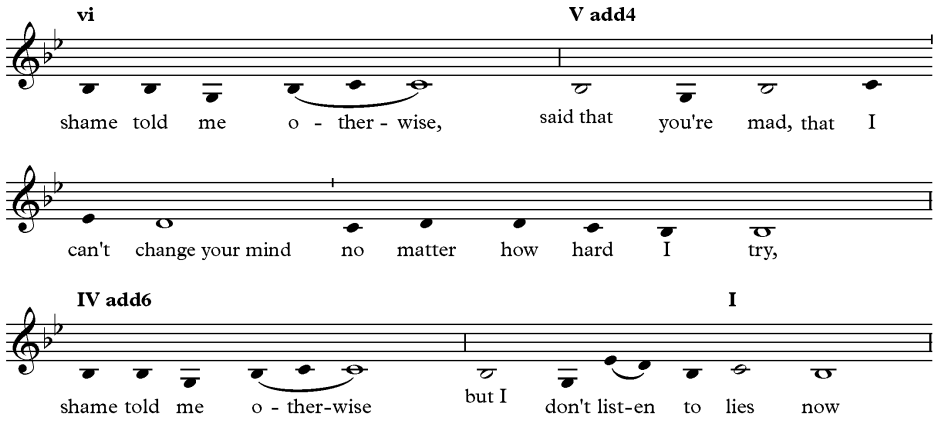


Figure 22. Bethel Music, 'I've Seen the Light,' "shame" motif (0:33).

This passage begins with the relative minor (Gm), travelling through the already established progression back to the major tonic; as kalley resolves these reflections on alienation from God, the congregants burst into spontaneous applause. These lyrics frame the worshipper sympathetically as a former sufferer of shame and believer of lies. Hamartiologically, this is significant insofar as these 'lies' are presented as external stimuli, and associated specifically with alienation from God. The retrospective nature of kalley's shame and lies are emphasised musically, firstly on the plagal cadence resolving the phrase 'lies now,' and then subsequently as kalley reiterates the titular hook, in a louder, belted voice over a IV – I – vi – V progression. Throughout each iteration of this hook, there is an increase in intensity. The hook first appears as a breathy voice over cosmic ambience, then as a belted voice, and subsequently with shimmering cymbals added, alongside a piano figure and an electric guitar motif. The full band joins the hook's fourth iteration, with drums emphasising every beat. This builds towards a therapeutic chorus that affirms God's love for the worshipper:

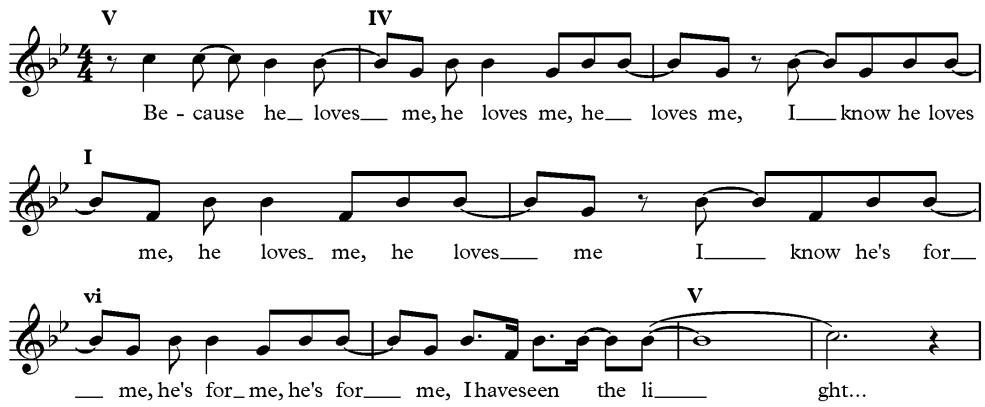


Figure 23. Bethel Music, 'I've Seen the Light,' "He loves me" motif (2:22).

The heavy drumming on every beat adds a conventional signifier of embodiment to the previously transcendent imagery. In addition to this instrumental crescendo, repetition emphasises kalley's declaration of God's love for her. The accompanying four-chord progression perpetuates itself by ending on an imperfect cadence that warrants further resolution, inviting repetition of the sequence. This maintains the mood that the thickening texture intensifies. The accompanying synthesiser pads become thicker, their top pitches ascending in range. After several repetitions, there is a dramatic reduction in instrumentation and in a breathy voice again, kalley sings "I believe it now" over closing cosmic ambience, bookending the spontaneous sung proclamations of assurance with this synthesised signifier of the 'manifest presence' of God.

On the Shores

The use of cosmic ambience in 'I See the Light' is similar to Steffany Gretzinger's spontaneous proclamations at the end of 'On The Shores', on the *Moments* album (2018), Bethel's first spontaneous worship album.[579] Lyrical themes of tangible assurance, through feeling and seeing, are reiterated. Nine minutes into the performance, the rehearsed song ends and the band dies down. Over cosmic pads and some bass and piano embellishment, Gretzinger breathily improvises in a repetitive lilt. Throughout this spontaneous proclamation, Gretzinger's vocal timbre becomes stronger, clearer and louder. Her improvisations rise in pitch, and she rasps with vocal intensity at the climactic point in which she describes the worshippers' 'song of victory'.

[579] Bethel Music, Jeremy Riddle, Steffany Gretzinger, 'On the Shores (Spontaneous),' *Moments: Mighty Sound* (Bethel Music: 2018).

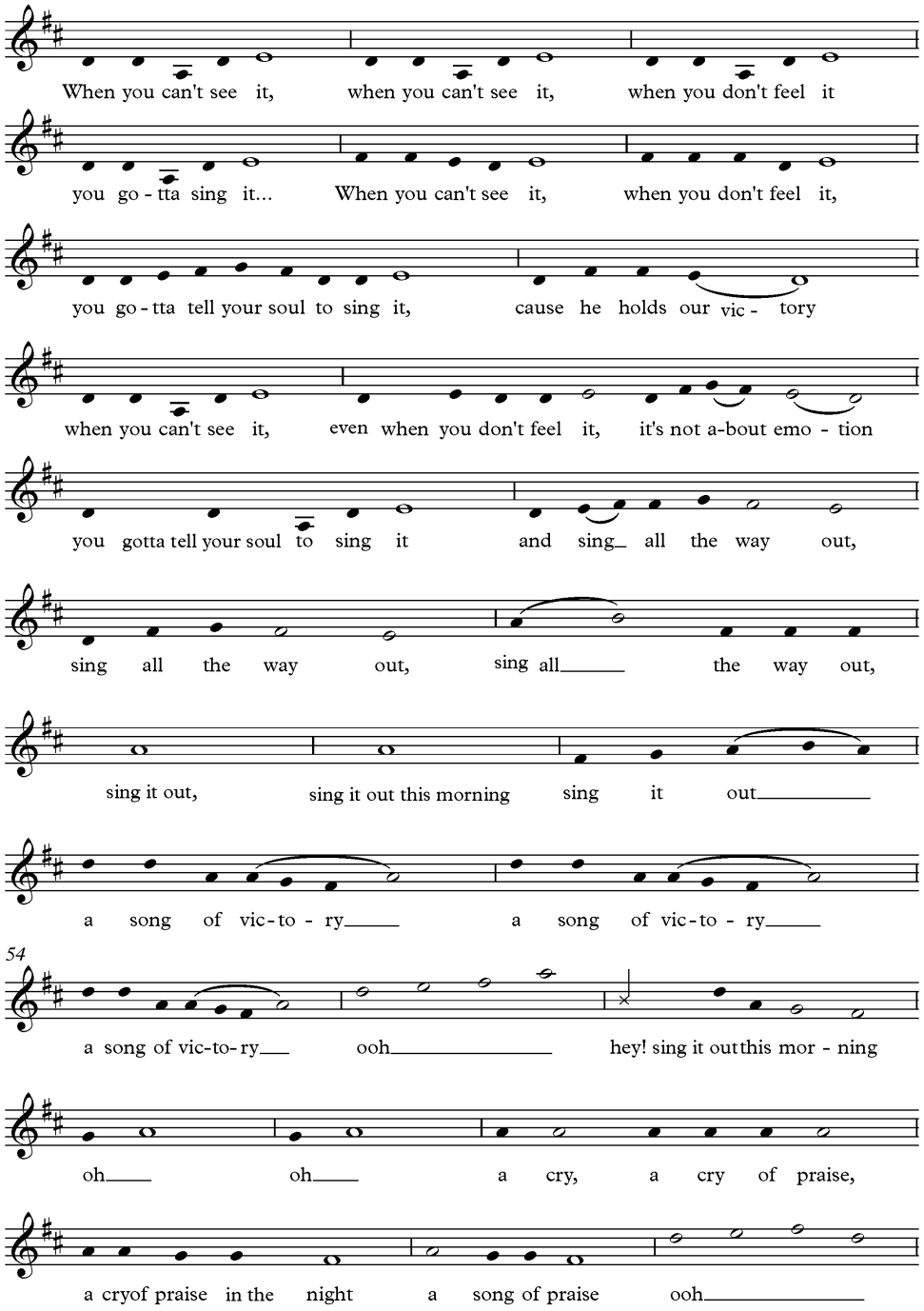


Figure 24. Bethel Music, 'On the Shores,' spontaneous moment, I (9:03).

Note that Gretzinger instructs the worshippers to dissociate from any emotional alienation they might experience 'when [they] don't feel it'. Instead, she motivates them to muster up a worshipful frame of mind by performing the act of praise even before they might feel inclined to do so. When Gretzinger issues the worshippers to 'sing all the way out', the worshippers can be heard singing individual songs, creating a wall of noise wherein every singer carries a different tune. The effect is similar to synthesised cosmic

ambience; the songs adopt diatonic harmony, and are predominantly based around the same scalic and arpeggiated patterns that Gretzinger used in her improvisation. This creates a richly ethereal babbling effect.

Gretzinger's improvisation decreases in intensity, winding down the worship experience. Continuing in a lower register, the breathiness returning to her voice, she sings over a synthesized I^{sus4} chord:

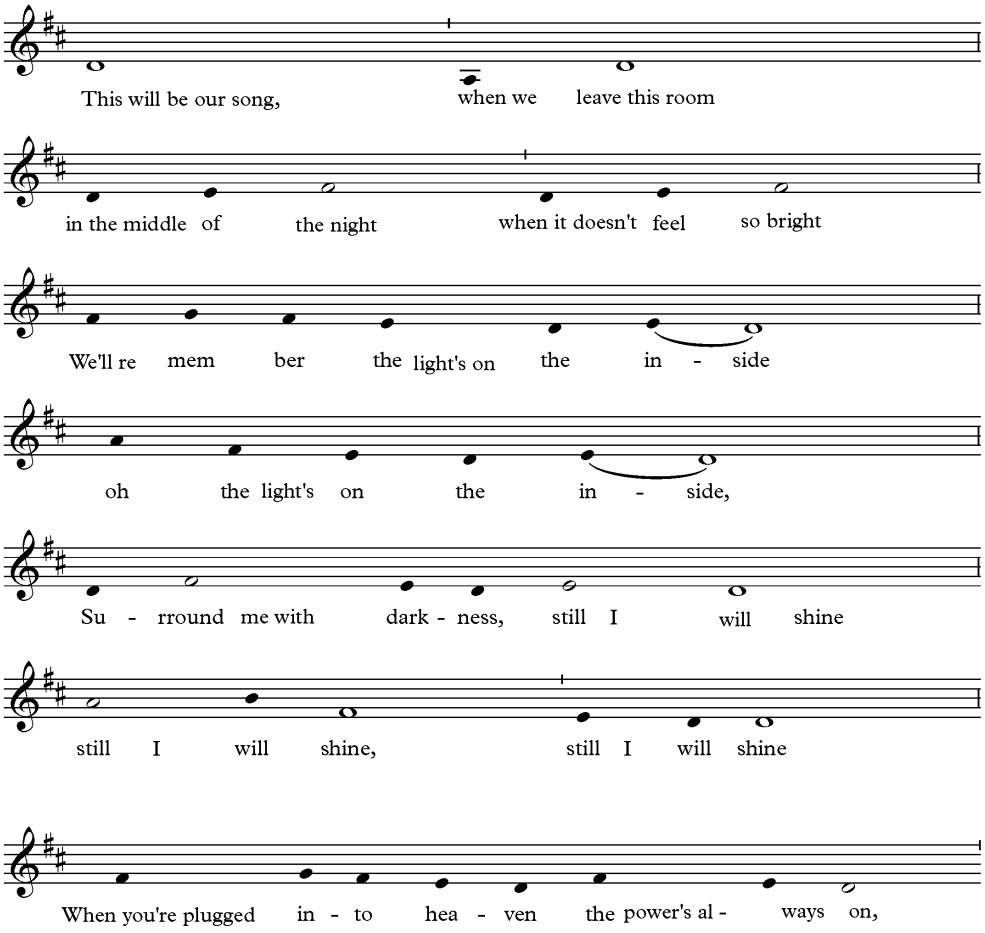


Figure 25. Bethel Music, 'On the Shores,' spontaneous moment, II (11:29).

Interestingly, in this song Gretzinger suggests that worship should not be contingent on particular emotional inclinations, even as she (alongside the rest of the Bethel Collective) endorses, in practice, a very normative emotional trajectory in this spontaneous song, from delicate vulnerability to triumphant worship. This is reflected in the timbre of her voice, the range of her melody, and the depth of the accompanying instrumental texture. This suggests that, at the very least, even if Gretzinger really believes that worship should not

be contingent on emotion, she and the band are using musical norms uncritically. Gretzinger continues, in spoken voice:

> Some of you need to sing some *more*, without being led into it, some of you are going back into a night, and you need to know the light's on the inside. You need to know the light's on the inside. The light's on the inside! *They can't turn out the light on the inside! They can't turn out the light on the inside!*[580]

Although Gretzinger works her voice again into a frenzied shout, accompanied by intensifying cymbal drumming and applause, her broad message is congruent with Charles Wesley's account of the inner peace of the Christian, which, he suggests, precedes any outward worshipful emotion. However, for Charles this inner peace undergirds his willingness to contemplate the place of negative affect in the justified Christian's spiritual life. By contrast, although Gretzinger alludes to internal (or perhaps external) struggle in this song, the triumphant and therapeutic attitude that permeates the music and lyrics evades such a Wesleyan reflection on negativity. (More on triumphalism in the next chapter.)

After a period of glossolalia, Gretzinger finishes by softly singing:

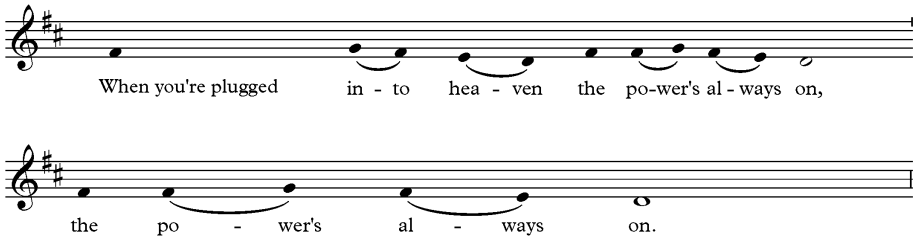


Figure 26. Bethel Music, 'On the Shores,' spontaneous moment, III.

Synthesised cosmic ambience supports Gretzinger throughout the song, with the band mirroring her intensity through instrumental crescendo and diminuendo, and drums grounding her transcendent vocals. The theme of the song lyrically demonstrates the unilateral implication of Bethel's cosmic ambience and musical climax: that by making

[580] Bethel Music, 'On the Shores (Spontaneous),' (2018): 12:20.

the effort to 'feel it', something akin to 'really worshipping', or 'hosting the manifest presence', can be engendered. In this spontaneous moment, Gretzinger directs the worshippers in their emotions, rather than speaking about God or the Gospel in any clear way. (This broadly follows the theme of the song that precipitates her improvisation, 'On the Shores', in which the worshipper 'give[s God] permission' to replace their 'disappointment' and 'tears' with 'joy'.) Martyn Percy critiques the implication that he perceives in pop worship: that some emotional state needs to be engendered musically before "real worship" can happen. Citing Cheryl Forbes' 'The Religion of Power', Percy attributes this to an inappropriate fixation on 'visible' manifestations of divine power as a form of assurance, signified by buzzwords like 'leadership' and 'authority'.[581]

Percy is writing with John Wimber and Vineyard Records in mind, but his argument applies to Bethel Music, whose rhetoric around worship encourages 'walk[ing] in authority,' and 'step[ping] into more'.[582] If the role of priest is to mediate between God and mankind, Bethel's worship leaders adopt a quasi-priestly function, within their largely sin- and sacrament-free theology; they assume a privileged authority to engender encounter with God through "really worshipping," and unleash the supernatural empowerment that goes with it. Consider the description of 'Moments: Mighty Sound' on the Bethel website, as

> captur[ing] the essence of our worship and the cry of a people hungry for God's world to invade ours.[583]

This phrase conveys the power Bethel attribute to tangible assurance. Cosmic ambience functions as an aural sign of this 'authority', unilaterally signifying intimacy with God, and the conditions for the worship event. This muscular theology of empowerment through worship is what Percy is critiquing when he says pop worship leaders assume a role as power-replicas of Christ, in a myopic interpretation of Christ's ministry that overlooks the role of lament, humiliation and negativity in the life of faith and the

[581] Percy, *Power*, 21.
[582] See Jenn Johnson, 'Bethel Music Worship School,' *BethelTV* (16 July 2018). <https://www.bethel.tv/events/bethel-music-worship-school-2018/week-2/7303> Also, Jeremy Riddle, 'Stepping Into Your Authority,' *BethelTV* (29 August 2014). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/2207> Also, Riddle, 'Heaven Come Session 9.'
[583] 'Moments: Mighty Sound,' *Bethel Music*. <https://bethelmusic.com/albums/moments-mighty-sound/>

Gospel.[584] Percy suggests that there is a coercive element to the worship leader's role in this context, claiming that there is a 'relationship of obligation between the believers' to cooperate with the worship leader:

> Worship, as an emotive force, has both a God-ward and a communal goal.[585]

The basis of such a relationship of obligation, in Bethel's case, is the overrealised association between positive affect and assurance of salvation that results in a narrow set of musical norms expressing a weak hamartiology. A story told by Jenn Johnson, about ineffective worship leading, demonstrates the resultant worship culture that lacks room for lament. She describes a situation in which Jason Upton was leading worship at a conference, and inclined towards lament:

> Jay had had one of those days, but Jay was not about to put on a pretty little face and just BS everybody. It was gonna happen. So he gets up to that keyboard... and he goes

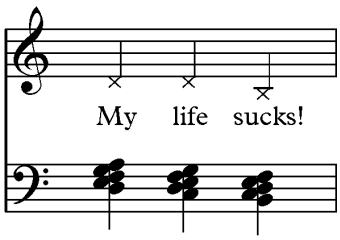


Figure 27. Jenn Johnson's story.

> Seven o'clock, packed house... The whole crowd is like, "Oop! He just said that!" Without missing a stinking beat, Don Potter – done this a few years – with his guitar goes, "It won't suck forever...!" Perfect, perfect![586]

This interaction between Upton and Potter is a good, if crude, example of how one might incorporate negative affect into worship. However, the interesting thing about this story is

[584] Percy, *Power*, 77-78: '...the portrayal of God, although loving and powerful, is nevertheless coercive and exclusive, since the operating power is *force.* Thus, the worshippers are ultimately instructed to become *not* what they are, and be transformed into a 'power-replica' of Christ or the Spirit.'
[585] Percy, *Power*, 72.
[586] citipointespecials, 'Ultimate Worshiper 2011 – Jenn Johnson,' *YouTube* (2 January 2012): 30:00. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mIOnVpJDnY>

how Jenn frames Upton's lament, describing it with whimsical understatement as 'a little too much,' and suggesting that Upton's posture was inappropriate for the worship context. When Jenn imitates Upton, the audience titters nervously, then falls silent. When she reaches her punch line, and resolves his tension, the room bursts into applause.

Joy of the Lord

Cosmic ambience is used to pre-emptively shape the liminal space of worship in the same way in 'Joy of the Lord'. However, this spontaneous song makes more explicit the link between 'really worshipping' and tangible assurance through supernatural empowerment and positive affect. Again, the song opens with synthesised cosmic ambience. Over murmuring in tongues, Jenn Johnson tells the audience to 'sing out in the spirit'; numerous different spontaneous songs rise from the congregation, as a picked guitar improvisation is sounded. Jenn encourages her audience of women to sing freely, interspersing her spoken word with sung glossolalia:

> Just sing out in the spirit, just lift your voices... Come on, lift your voices, make a sound, lift your voices... Come on lift your voices, stand to your feet, lift your voices, there's a sound about to come out of this place tonight. Come on, every woman, every mother, lift your voice, come on, breakthrough's happening right now, I can feel it in the atmosphere. Sing from your spirit, hey![587]

The band comes in, gentle acoustic guitar picking and cosmic ambience increasing in volume, whilst the drum pattern thickens in texture, heavy with cymbals. Jenn begins to belt hoarsely, and her lyrical focus shifting from tongues and free singing to the supernatural empowerment that arises from this kind of "really worshipping", as she conceives of it. First, she sings:

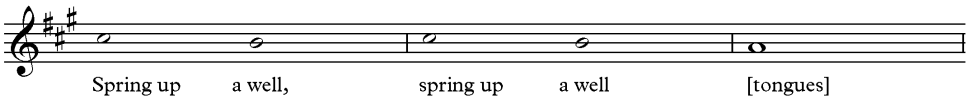


Figure 28. Bethel Music, 'The Joy of the Lord (Spontaneous),' I (2:13).

[587] Bethel Music, Jenn Johnson, 'Joy of the Lord (Live) [Spontaneous],' *You Make Me Brave (Live)*, (Bethel Music: 2014): 0:46 – 1:43.

Then, over cymbals sounding on every quaver beat:

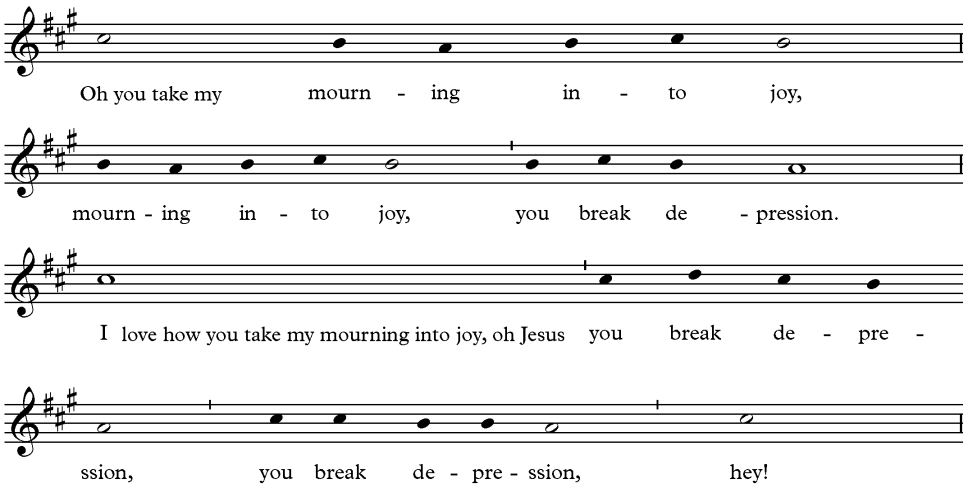


Figure 29. Bethel Music, 'The Joy of the Lord (Spontaneous),' II (2:36).

After an instrumental break, Jenn continues:

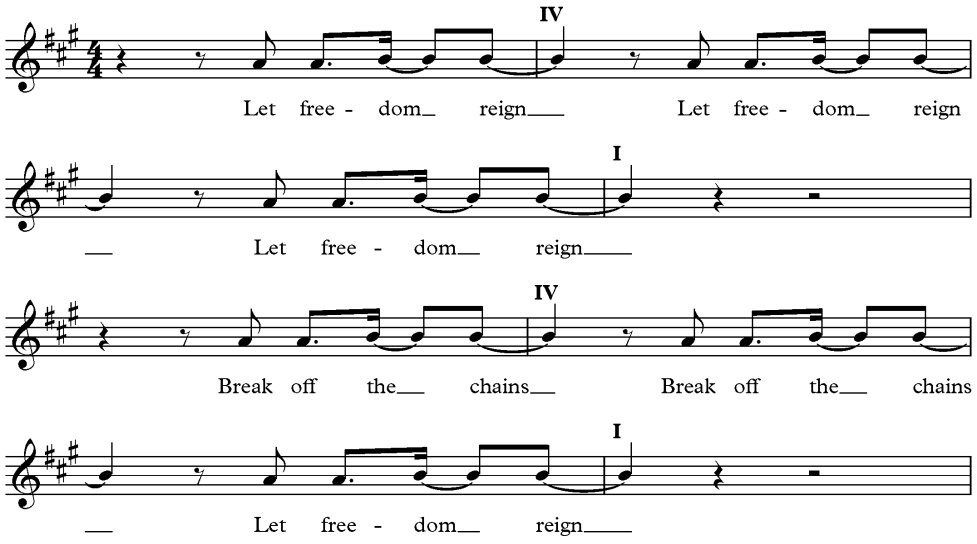


Figure 30. Bethel Music, 'The Joy of the Lord (Spontaneous),' III (3:13).

Throughout Jenn's improvised proclamations, a huge vocal and instrumental climax occurs, over synthesised cosmic ambience that rises in volume and pitch, and increasingly vigorous yet regular drumming. Jenn's use of declarations indicates that her song is not

just an act of expression, but also an act in which worship actively facilitates the work of the Spirit. After another instrumental break, the band thins out, and the worship leaders sing a riff together, drawn from Psalm 28:7. Combining the rhythmic hook with freely sung spontaneous declarations, they once again underscore the centrality of *positive* experience to the worship event:
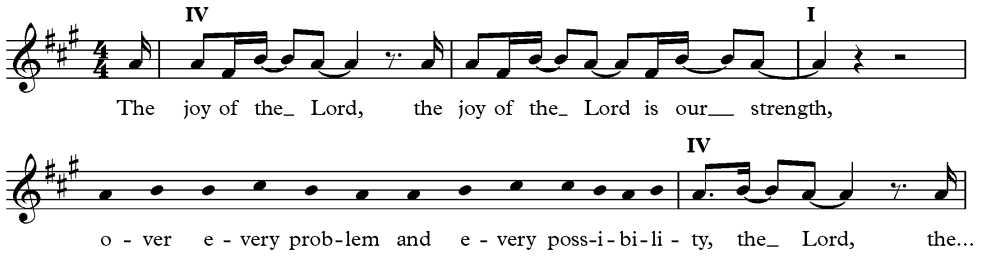


Figure 31. Bethel Music, 'The Joy of the Lord (Spontaneous),' IV (chorus) (4:17).

Jenn adds that 'there's breakthrough happening right now', exhorts the worshippers to 'dance and begin to move your bodies', and repeats the words 'joy' and 'overflowing joy'. She declares again that the joy of the lord 'breaks depression', as the worship leaders repeat this hook. After building to another climactic full band moment, the spontaneous song closes with powerful chords, and cosmic ambience that maintains the "worshipful" atmosphere. The association made by Jenn between "really worshipping" God and supernatural empowerment is made in several other of Bethel's spontaneous songs, such as 'Colors' ('bring your colour in my life, wipe away the dullness') and 'Sweet Praise' ('there is power in your name'). All of these spontaneous songs, and indeed the vast majority of Bethel's other songs, are cocooned in cosmic ambience.[588]

Problems with cosmic ambience

The effect of cosmic ambience is to delineate the worship encounter as an alternative liminal space, pre-emptively signifying the "manifest presence of God", as Riddle puts it, or suggesting that the space between God and man is – in the worship event – 'super thin,' in Gretzinger's words.[589] Cosmic ambience is the cue for worshippers to enter into a worshipful state of mind, and as such it is the foundation of "really worshipping" and the tangible forms of assurance with which it is associated. However, used straightforwardly and without being 'broken' (through critique or variation), the symbol

[588] For example, every song I transcribe in this thesis, opens and closes with cosmic ambience.
[589] Jeremy Riddle, 'Heaven Come Session 9,' Bramnick, 'Worship [...] Gretzinger.'

of cosmic ambience presents certain risks. Firstly, it risks depicting the encounter between God and man in worship as a supernatural phenomenon. This echoes Martyn Percy's concern about pop worship over-emphasising the supernatural being of Christ, rather than his humanity or the reconciliation of divinity and humanity, and Nekola's comments about worship taking the worshipper 'there'. Although worship should be oriented towards the divine, it does not necessarily follow that this should entail transcendence of human embodiment on the part of the worshipper.

Secondly, uncritical use of cosmic ambience risks overstating the worshipper's (or worship leader's) autonomy regarding divine encounter; the (finite) manipulation of aural phenomena can be conflated with the (infinite) thing it is meant to signify. Engineered at the push of a few synthesizer keys, the ease with which cosmic ambience is employed to signify the attitude of worship recalls an uncharitable interpretation of the early Schleiermacher's theory of intuition, and its corresponding criticisms. Schleiermacher's intuition can be thought a weak theory insofar as it posits little explanation for the 'anxious wall of division' between the human and the divine beyond cultural conditioning that engenders a bourgeois failure of the imagination.[590] The weak hamartiology of early Schleiermacher's theology can be read as implying that encounter with God rests predominantly on individual inclination. In this comparison, Bethel's cosmic ambience functions rather as Schleiermacher's 'maiden's kiss' does, catalysing the worshipper's metaphysical lunge towards divine encounter.[591] As such, it risks falling foul of Neville's idolatry charge, having more to do with supposed human capacity for the divine than with the divine itself.

Thirdly, where cosmic ambience is an unbroken symbol in this way, it covers over another symbol of human falliblity: namely, silence. Properly examining silence as a religious devotional symbol is beyond the scope of this project, but I do want to position it as an alternative to certainty and unbrokenness in musical sound. Vladimir Jankélévitch is right to note the importance of silence within and for music, polemicising against its opposite, as he perceives it:

[590] Schleiermacher, *Speeches*, 70.
[591] Schleiermacher, *Speeches*, 32.

> Grandiloquent music, resembling angry shrieks, is a form of emphatic stupidity: it sounds empty and it contains nothing but wind. If a frivolous definition of "emphasis" naively mistakes sheer volume for reality, or takes appearance for essence, then appreciating understatement means coming to terms with disproportion and makes us recognize that existence, with distracting irony, assumes paradoxical form, as a chiasmus: there is no simple proportional relationship between a given being's true importance and the volume of sound it emits, between its ontological weight and its phenomenological acoustic volume.'[592]

For Jankélévitch, silence is one vital means for truth in music, easily covered over by meaningless noise masquerading as 'emphasis'. Jankélévitch refers to music specifically, but the value of silence for thought, and for religious devotion, is a well-supported assertion. Susan Sontag expresses concern about the absence of silence being distracting to the extent that meaningful thought becomes impossible.[593] Whilst she refers primarily to 'high art', Stuart Sim argues that Sontag nevertheless 'identifies a positive role for silence within our culture', wherein silence is essential for making noise truly meaningful.[594] Rouget, distinguishing as opposite points on a spectrum between the 'silence' of ecstasy and 'movement, noise, overstimulation' of trance (which, I just noted, he associates with intent and drumming), refers to Teresa of Avila requiring 'silence, solitude and immobility' for *arrobamiento* (ravishment).[595] Don Saliers, speaking of the performative and ritual dimensions of music, claims that it

> confers upon human language addressed to God the appropriate silence and mystery required by prayer.[596]

An essential part of this, for Saliers, is the regulative structure of music, ordering sound amidst pauses. Saliers goes on to state that music adds silence and mystery to words, enriches the narrative that is being sung by embodying it, and approaches the inexpressible.[597] He also refers to the 'listening for' aspect of theology, saying that music

[592] Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton: PUP, 2003), 149.
[593] Susan Sontag, 'The Aesthetics of Silence,' in *Aspen*, No.5+6 (Fall-Winter 1967): §XIII.
[594] Stuart Sim, *Manifesto for Silence* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2007), 107, 110.
[595] Rouget, *Trance*, 6, 11.
[596] Don Saliers, *Music and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 4.
[597] Ibid., 61.

can 'open [...] a form of participation.'[598] However, silence, stillness, waiting and listening for God are quite different from Bethel's pursuit of tangible assurance, which, although it entails moments of 'waiting', is always underpinned with cosmic ambience, and oriented towards therapeutic prophetic declarations, or triumphalist theology (more on which in the next chapter).

When Bethel Music use cosmic ambience to indicate a new liminal space of being "there", or "really worshipping", it never wavers: in this way, the symbol suggests that divine encounter is unilaterally accessible. The harmonic makeup of cosmic ambience also presents encounter with God as overwhelmingly positive and resolved, overlooking the potential for divine encounter, say, to terrify, or be costly. A narrow emotional range is established, from mild negativity to predominantly ecstatic joy. Wherever light instrumentation occurs, cosmic ambience is always present, tempering what could otherwise proffer vulnerable silence.

Quite apart from the normatively positive tone of cosmic ambience, and the triumphalist structure of Bethel's worship songs, antipathy towards silence in worship is a vote of confidence in the justified Christian's faculties of knowledge and desire.[599] There can be no dark night of the soul, when cosmic pads are therapeutically signifying that the worshipper is already "there": that is, unless the worshipper entirely dissociates emotionally from the worship event (which would be to cease worshipping, according to the experiential worship theology Adnams finds in contemporary pop worship). Saliers, in referring to 'mystery', points to the function of silence as a response to the limited human capacity for knowledge of God; in speaking of 'participation' he alludes to the

[598] Ibid., 70.

[599] See WorshipU, 'Spontaneous Worship Course': in this interview, Brian and Jenn Johnson both advocate for simplicity in worship accompaniment, and warn against 'overplaying.' Reminiscing about a particular worship set, Jenn also suggests that, had Brian not filled a silence with accompaniment, the congregants' engagement with the worship event would have been disrupted. I experienced Bethel's cultural nervousness around silence myself, on the first day of my visit (5th April 2019), at a Friday night service at College View. During the opening worship set, the church was struck by lightning, and the power went out for about ten minutes. After an initial confused silence, the congregants began to whoop and clap, interpreting the power outage as a sign from God requiring some sort of response; the cheering would build up, and ebb away again nervously, as we waited. The worship leader, a junior figure I did not recognise from my research, apologised several times, and after a few minutes encouraged the congregants to sing freely in worship. Many individuals did so, with increasing urgency as the power remained off. When the lights and sound returned, there was a great, celebratory commotion, and sung worship resumed. Later in the service, a Bethel staff member appeared on the stage and explained that God had 'marked' the church, indicating a divine plan to 'do a new thing'. (This seemed to me an unintuitive way to interpret being struck by lightning!) I found the experience interesting for two reasons. Firstly, lack of recourse to cosmic ambience to ameliorate the silence appeared to flummox the worship leaders, even though the congregants could probably have been led to worship unaccompanied from memory. Secondly, the instinctive response of many congregants, when silence occurred, was to cover it with applause, in order to "recognise" the apparent spiritual sign taking place in an actively participatory, rather than contemplative, manner.

transformation of the faculties in sanctification. Yet cosmic ambience covers over the vulnerabilities and potential corruption that precede this process, encouraging worshippers into an affective state without remembering the content of sin, salvation from which provides the occasion for praise.

6.4 EROTIC INFANTILISM

What is erotic infantilism?

Bethel's use of cosmic ambience establishes the worship event as an alternative liminal space in which intimacy with God is a basic feature, uncomplicated by problems of noetic or desiderative corruption. This intimacy is emphasised by two images of vulnerability that Bethel convey through music and lyrics together, which situate the worshipper in relation to God: as a child, and beloved. Bethel's images denoting vulnerability draw from Biblical literature to present a radically anthropomorphised God the Father, and God the (jealous) lover. As per Neville's comments earlier about the importance of symbols being emotionally engaging, these intimately relational images are both engaging and relatable ways of emphasising the love of God. Neville notes that devotional symbols are unique amongst symbols insofar as they need to feel particular to the individual if they are to be engaging for devotional activity.[600] The symbols of God the Father, and God the lover immediately, in many cases, provide scope for personally appropriating the relation of worshipper to the object of worship: more so, perhaps, than the lofty vaulted ceiling of a Gothic church (to use Neville's earlier example).

Although the image of God as Father is a rich and vital Christian symbol, intrinsic to several areas of doctrine and more recently problematised for its potentially patriarchal implications,[601] Bethel use this image without defining or interrogating its content. The church's 'core values' emphasise that 'God is a good Father; we can trust Him regardless of our circumstances,' as opposed to an angry God of the sort Eric Johnson described in Chapter Three.[602] The core values do not otherwise define the manner in which God is a

[600] Neville, *Symbols,* 171-3.
[601] For example, see Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father*, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her*, and Brown & Parker, 'For God So Loved the World.' This area of study is so far from Bethel's concerns that I will not address it further.
[602] See 'Creating healthy families,' 'God is good,' 'Generous like my Father,' and 'Salvation creates joyful identity,' in 'Core Values,' *Bethel.* <*https*://www.bethel.com/core-values/>

father, but affirm that 'we are adopted as royalty into God's family' and that 'we are... beloved children of our Lord.' The core values also state that 'He is a good Father who gives good gifts to His children', including financial prosperity (God's generosity providing an example to follow). David H. Jensen, in his theology of childhood, characterises this era of life as being distinctively about 'imagination, paying attention and playfulness,'[603] capturing some of Bethel's filial theological tendencies. These qualities are reflected in the spontaneous elements of Bethel's worship music, such as free singing, prophetic declarations and laughter, as well as in structured musical features such as acoustic instrumentation, simplistic melodies and diatonic accompaniment based on scales and arpeggios, the building blocks of Western musical training. However, Bethel also emphasise the vulnerability of God's children, entailing a need for spiritual protection, pedagogy and gifts. A sense of stability and safety is engendered in their music by diatonic harmony, swiftly resolved with strong cadences, predominantly perfect and plagal.

The erotic is also a conventional Biblical symbol, for example found in Song of Songs, Hosea's living metaphor for the unfaithful Israelites, and the image of the Church as the Bride of Christ. Medieval mystics such as Teresa of Avila have described their religious experiences in striking erotic vocabulary; I have noted that Rouget uses Teresa as an example of religious ecstasy facilitated by silence. William James writes disparagingly about the pursuit of erotic infantilism in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, noting the streak of self-indulgence that might emerge:

> A God... full of partiality for his individual favourites, lacks an essential element of largeness...[604]

Quasi-erotic intimacy is a common feature of Bethel's songs, which often emphasise the therapeutic benefits that intimacy with God effects in the life of the individual worshipper. (This is most clearly conveyed by lyrics, although I will indicate its musical contours shortly.) Consider, for example, the titular declaration of the song 'You Make Me Brave',[605] or 'Come To Me', which declares

[603] David Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 36.
[604] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 346.
[605] Bethel Music, Amanda Lindsey Cook, 'You Make Me Brave (Live),' *You Make Me Brave (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2014).

> When the storm rages, I won't be afraid
> 'Cause I have locked eyes on you face to face.[606]

This viscerally intimate imagery is reflected in other songs of the genre, such as Jesus Culture's 'Rooftops,' which describes faith as 'falling in love,' and contains the following lovestruck chorus:

> I shout out your name
> From the rooftops I proclaim
> That I am yours, I am yours.[607]

Similarly, Hillsong's 'Valentine' describes the cross as God's means

> To woo us back from death and woe
> A valentine to a faithless world.[608]

The eroticism of pop worship is not sexually explicit, and generally conforms to anthropomorphic, heteronormative images of romantic love, which is a point I return to later; although on the one hand their erotic imagery is devotionally particular in the way that Neville encourages, it presents a narrow norm of both eroticism itself and religious experience as erotic. The erotic is also a difficult symbol to 'break', in the way that Bethel's songwriters use it. This is not only because of their general avoidance of sin as a theme, but also owes to their association of the erotic with strong affective states such as overwhelming ecstasy (which run counter to the caution required for hermeneutic suspicion). The ecstatic, erotic encounter in worship is musically conveyed by paralinguistic techniques such as breathiness or hoarseness, and languorous harmonic suspensions, alongside pulsing rhythmic patterns. It typically climaxes with belted passages with long held notes or slow melodic rhythm. Consider, for example, the thin texture of voice and cosmic ambience that opens all the spontaneous songs I have just quoted, the way each lead singer used vocal rasp to convey intensity of feeling, and the impetus of drums driving each song towards its climax.

---

[606] Bethel Music, Jenn Johnson, 'Come To Me (Live),' *You Make Me Brave (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2014): 2:43.
[607] Jesus Culture, Kim Walker-Smith, 'Rooftops – Live,' *Come Away (Live)* (Jesus Culture Music: 2010)
[608] Hillsong Worship, 'Valentine', *There Is More* (Hillsong Music and Resources LLC: 2018): 0:38.

The two images of divine fatherhood and erotic infantilism are often blended together, musically and lyrically. For example, in 'Ever Be', the worshipper is described as an orphan, and a bride.

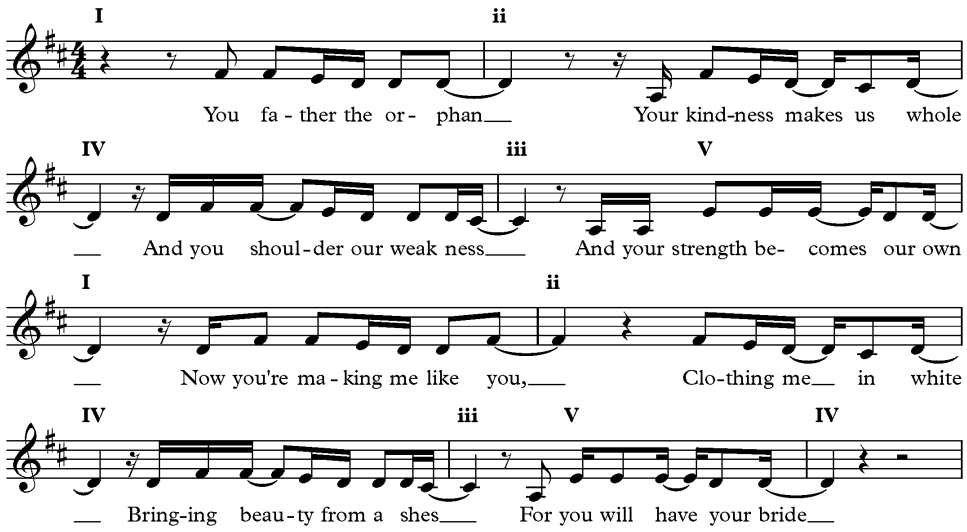


Figure 32. Bethel Music, 'Ever Be,' second verse (2:12)

This is complemented by the music, wherein a hazily romantic sound is created by the gently meandering melody, sung in kalley's low breathy register, and reverberating synthesised accompaniment. The images of God as both father and lover contribute to the non-moralistic hamartiology that kalley conveys, wherein sin is alienation from God, stemming from weakness and vulnerability, that compromises intimate relationship. In this excerpt, kalley more directly implicates the 'bride' of whom she sings, and with whom the worshipper is meant to identify, in certain negative phenomena than she does elsewhere in the song. This line alludes to ambiguous bridal imagery, perhaps referring to the Church, or to the worshipper themselves. These references to 'guilt' and 'shame', and the implied false identity that contrasts with the bride's 'true name', are the only references to something akin to sin in the song, expressively framed by harmony that builds towards a triumphant resolution. 'Guilt' is heard over the stable tonic (I), whilst 'shame' occurs over the dominant (V). This clearly hints of the resolution to come in the increasingly intense second chorus, co-opting the next phrase into the climactic trajectory that draws in the 'real worshipper':

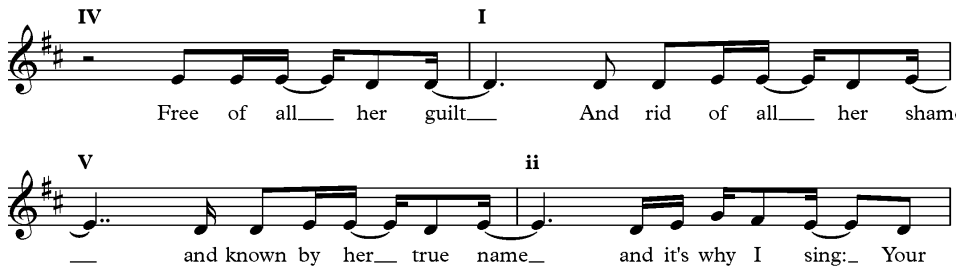


Figure 33. Bethel Music, 'Ever Be,' pre-chorus (2:41).

Overall, the effect is to coherently emphasise that sin is retrospective to the story about worship that kalley is telling, before entering into the therapeutic respite of the chorus' repeated refrain:

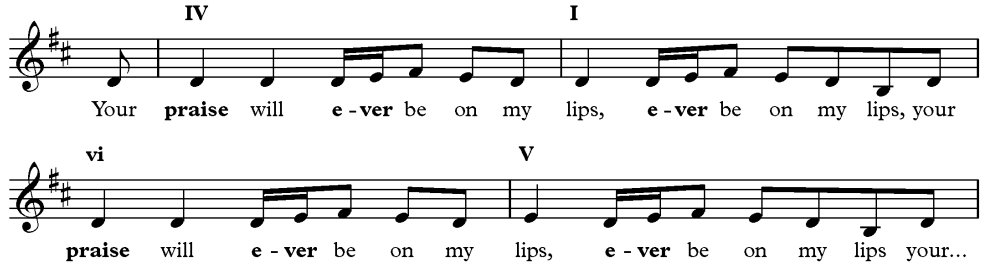


Figure 34. Bethel Music, 'Ever Be,' chorus (1:16, 2:53, 4:21).

This preliminary illustration has demonstrated that erotic infantilism is a therapeutic musico-theological device, on two counts. Firstly, it offers the worshipper therapeutic respite from a moralistic conception of sin, absolving them of individual complicity in sin by presenting them as a vulnerable character, yet beloved by God. Secondly, erotic infantilism facilitates experiences of tangible assurance by engendering a positive affective state, short-circuiting the Gospel narrative by deemphasising the negative side of the orthodox sin-grace dialectic. The effect of both anthropomorphic images is to present the worshipper as so vulnerable and appealing that, were God to judge them, God would, implicitly, seem unjust. The relational alienation of which sin is taken to consist is presented as already resolved, prior to the worship event, in which the worshipper recognises God as related to them in these intimate ways. These symbols therefore remain unbroken, used by Bethel as unproblematised images of assurance. As such, erotic infantilism proves another therapeutic device in Bethel's worship music, oriented towards emotional comfort, yet disincentivising the examination of "negative" phenomena such as sin.

Erotic infantilism in the spontaneous songs

As was apparent in my earlier discussion of cosmic ambience, Bethel's spontaneous songs often favour intimate language of a filial or erotic type. For example, 'Breathe', from *Starlight*, uses the language of God as a Father, and the worshipper as God's child. Opening with cosmic ambience and a bass line, Amanda Lindsey Cook improvises some lines emphasising the 'manifest presence' of God, such as 'you are here right now; I can see your smiling face.' The subsequent spontaneous song describes presents divine intimacy as a form of tangible assurance:

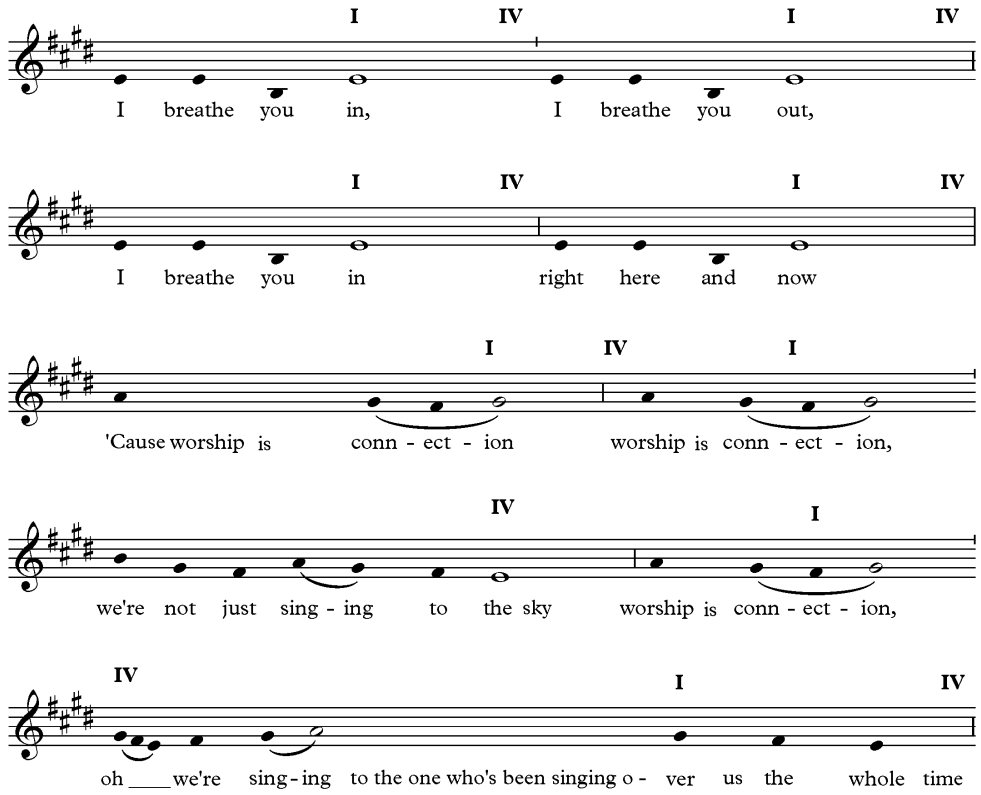


Figure 35. Bethel Music, 'Breathe' (1:25).

Cook also describes this encounter as 'returning a love song' to God. The description of worship as 'connection', and Cook's emphasis on the tangibility of this connection ('breathing' God) encourages worshippers towards the pursuit of divine intimacy, and implicitly warns against "just singing". Imagery of breathing is emphasised by the repetitive music, which alternates between accompanying I and IV chords, contouring the rhythm of even breaths. The imagery of breathing also emphasises the resolved quality of man's relation to God the Father. The song 'Everything to You' has a similarly

tangible, almost fleshly, approach to assurance.[609] Opening with cosmic ambience and a moody guitar hook, Jenn Johnson first emphasises the greatness of God as Creator, before describing her individual significance in the eyes of God the Father. Jenn's voice shifts from husky intimate tones to climactic wailing, as the instrumentation thickens in accompaniment (i – VII – VI):

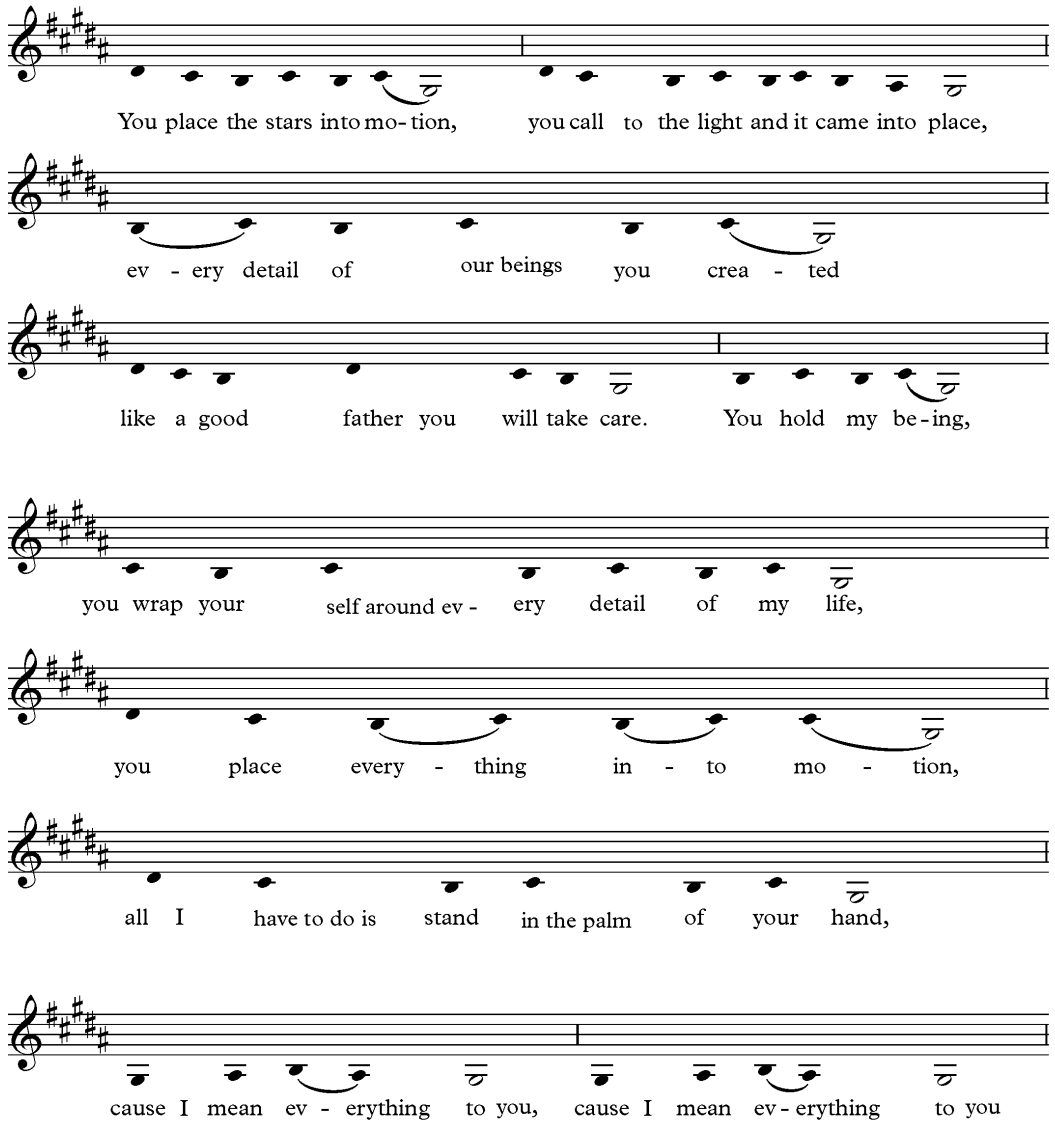


Figure 36. Bethel Music, 'Everything to You (Spontaneous),' I (0:31).

[609] Bethel Music, Jenn Johnson, 'Everything to You (Spontaneous),' *For the Sake of the World* (Bethel Music: 2012).
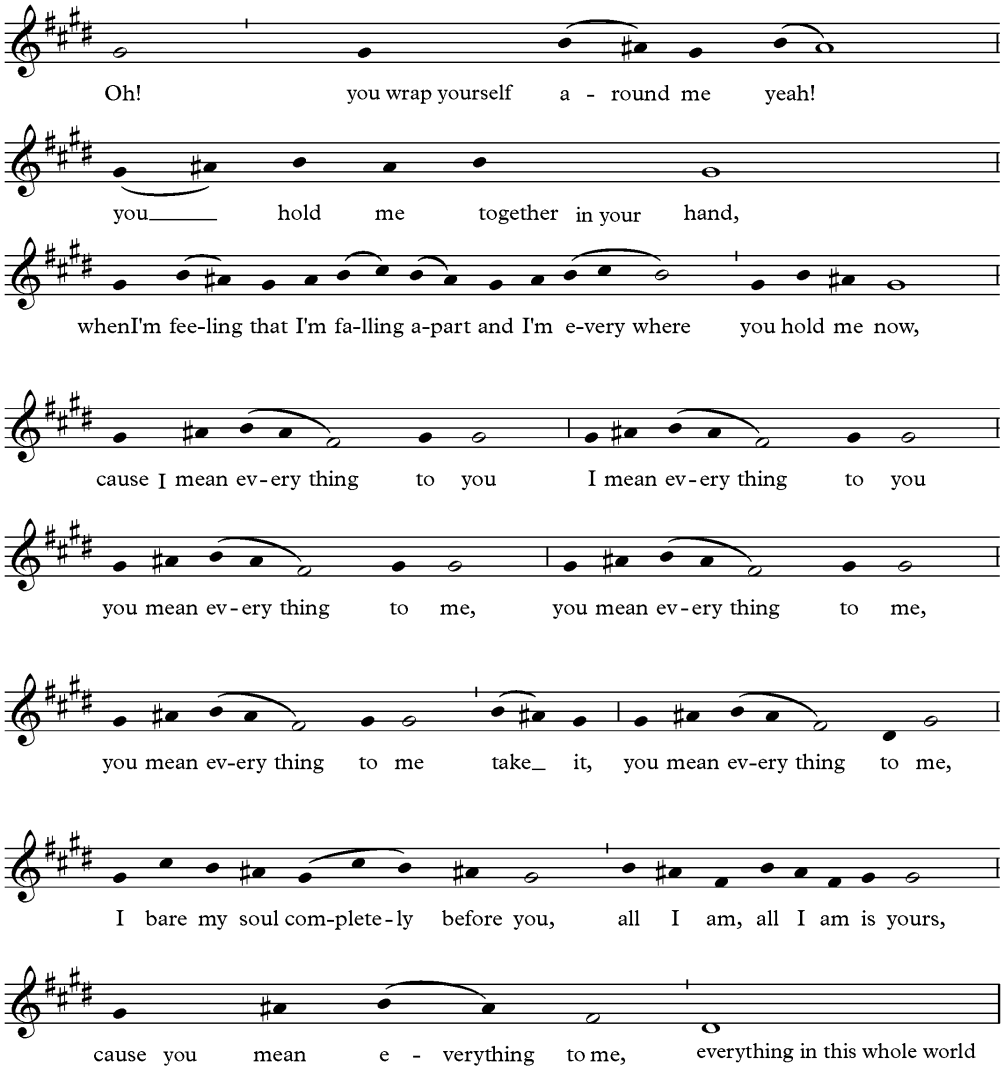


Figure 37. Bethel Music, 'Everything to You (Spontaneous),' II (2:12).

Jenn's descriptions of ''bar[ing]' her 'soul' and offering 'all I am' associate "really worshipping" with an ecstatic loss of control, mirrored by her increased pitch and vocal intensity. This language is reflected elsewhere in the Bethel worship lexicon – consider Brian and Jenn Johnson's album *Undone* (2001), Gretzinger's 2013 album *The Undoing*, Gretzinger's song 'Letting Go', or Jenn Johnson's 'In Over My Head'. Imagery of ecstatic self-surrender is present further afield, for example in Jesus Culture's 'Brave Surrender,' wherein Kim Walker-Smith declares

> I'm letting go
> Brave surrender

I'm taking hold
Of life eternal [...]

I'm running, I'm not stopping
Straight into your arms
You're closer, I hear you
Your voice cuts through the dark.[610]

In 'Everything to You,' Jenn Johnson emphasises the closeness of God, using erotic, tactile phraseology such as 'you hold me together in your hand' and 'you wrap yourself around me.' This, in addition to the central theme 'I mean everything to you', emphasises the value of the worshipper in the eyes of God. Sympathetic treatment of the worshipper, and a non-moralistic conception of sin that precludes (or at least eclipses) divine judgement, are evident in Jenn's one allusion to negativity, expressed as a 'feeling that I'm falling apart'. The avoidance of sin and negativity is reflected musically, in the positive, functional harmony (vi – V – IV) and the never-wavering cosmic ambience that signifies the "manifest presence" of God (and, concomitantly, the resolution of divine alienation). Jenn's breathy delivery adds a further dimension to the song's intimacy at the beginning, and develops into a primal roar by the end of the song as her propositions increase in intensity.

Several others of Jenn Johnson's songs share these characteristics, combining cosmic ambience, and breathy yet intensifying vocal delivery of erotic and childish lyrics that emphasise tangible assurance. 'You Make Me Happy' is similarly romantic and effusive; laughing, Jenn repeats the simple phrases 'I just love you God' and 'you make me happy'.[611] Again, she uses physical metaphors evoking the tangibility of assurance, emphasising that, in worship, 'we press into your face.' Further, Jenn adds 'I bring you a real song', alluding to Bethel's distinction between the spirits of religion and truth, and emphasising the tangible aspects of the worship event. Another example is 'A Little Longer', which includes the following section written from the perspective of God:

[610] Kim Walker-Smith, 'Brave Surrender,' *On My Side* (Jesus Culture Music: 2017): 0:45, 2:26. Self-surrender more generally is an enormously common theme; see, for example, Onething Live, Jonas Park, 'I Am Yours [First Love],' *Sing Your Praises* (Forerunner Music: 2014), or Elevation Worship, 'Available,' *Graves Into Gardens (Live)* (Elevation Worship Records, 2020).
[611] Bethel Music, Jenn Johnson, 'You Make Me Happy (Spontaneous),' *Here Is Love* (Bethel Music: 2010).

> Listen, you don't have to do a thing,
> Just simply be with me
> And let those things go
> 'Cause they can wait another minute.
> Wait, this moment is too sweet,
> Would you please stay here with me
> And love on me a little longer.[612]

The melody continually sinks down to the tonic, these little resolutions emphasising the stability of the worshipper's relation to God. The song presents God as a lover (earlier in the song, Jenn offers to 'dance a dance for you, pour out my love to you, what can I do for you beautiful king'), and suggests that the positive affective experience of intimacy, into which the worshipper can therapeutically imagine themselves in that moment, is the purpose of worship.

We Dance

Steffany Gretzinger's 'We Dance' similarly uses erotic infantilism, in melody, texture and lyrics, to present the worship event as a locus of tangible assurance.[613] The song highlights the vulnerability of the worshipper, therapeutically eclipsing the notion of divine judgement. A simple, childlike piano melody opens the song over a wash of cosmic ambience:
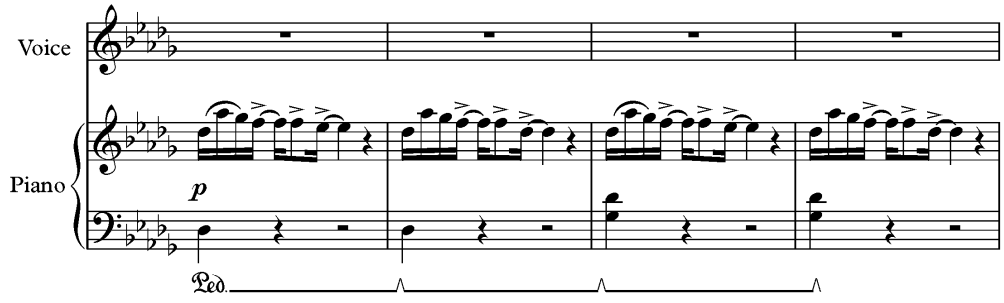


Figure 38. Bethel Music, 'We Dance,' introduction (0:00).

[612] Bethel Music, Jenn Johnson, 'A Little Longer (Live),' *You Make Me Brave (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2014): 3:44.
[613] Bethel Music, Steffany Gretzinger, 'We Dance (Live),' *You Make Me Brave (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2014).

This opening hook is simple, based around a diatonic major scale – one of the fundamental organising blocks of Western music, and one of the first principles of music taught to children on the piano. A leap from tonic to dominant precipitates a descending scale that lingers, unresolved, on the supertonic, awaiting a reiteration of the same motif. This happens over a simple chord progression of tonic and subdominant. Meanwhile, rests full of cosmic ambience emphasise the smallness of the solo piano within the spacious soundworld created. This use of texture and melody again points to the worshipper’s vulnerability. The sung melody (‘you steady me...’) is a variation on the piano melody – a fourth descending from the tonic and ascending to the supertonic. The voice and piano are later joined by a string section, and a chorus of worshippers.

The verse lyrics encourage greater belief in God in the face of unsteadying doubts. The lyrics employ the metaphor of partner dancing, with God leading the dance:
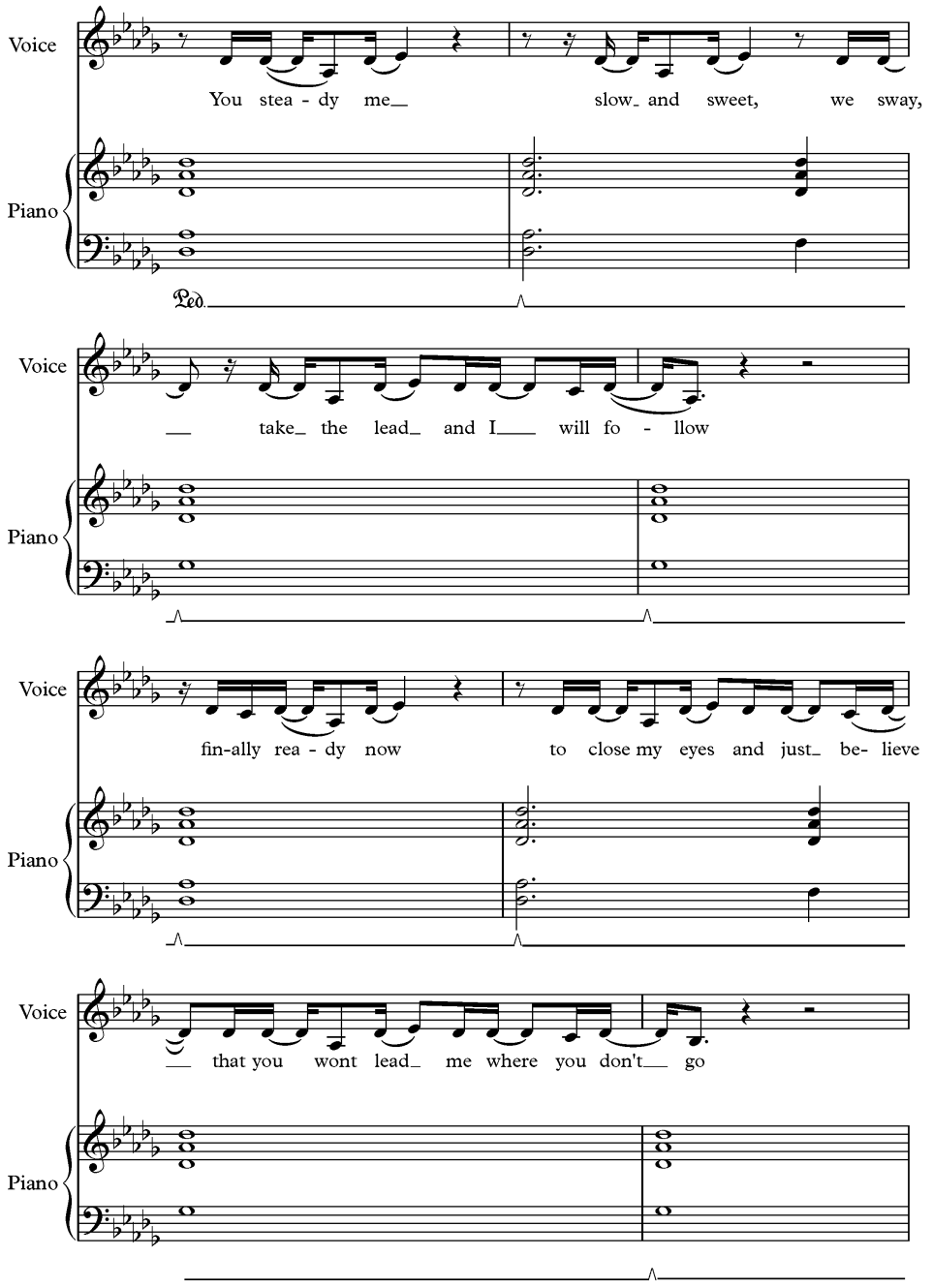


Figure 39. Bethel Music, 'We Dance,' first verse (0:15).

If Webster's critique of Freud is that Freud's original sin is naturally left behind through pedagogy, a similar idea is at work in 'We Dance,' with intimacy as the vehicle of change.[614] Gretzinger describes a progression from being unsteady (a non-moralistic image of negativity, or perhaps sin) to 'just believ[ing]' (reminiscent, in its evocation of emotional abandon, of "really worshipping"). Gretzinger's vulnerability and trust is

[614] Bethel Music, 'We Dance (Live),' (2014).

emphasised by 'closing her eyes and just believing', and 'following' God, as well as her unsteadiness without him. The melody shifts largely between tonic and supertonic, alternating between stable homeliness and awaiting resolution. This emphasises words like 'me' and 'believe', as well as mirroring Gretzinger's lyrical content.

The pre-chorus then elucidates a little about the obstacle to 'just believ[ing]'. The melody has no clear direction at this point, and is full of rests. Gretzinger describes the negative side of the sin-grace dialectic as 'faith get[ting] tired' and 'hope seem[ing] lost'. These phrases form the respective high and low points of the melodic range, and presents its counterpart (namely, grace) in the metaphor of dancing with God as the lead. If this can be presented as an example of Bethel exploring themes of sin in music, it is a very euphemistic way of so doing – the individual is not presented as the agent of this negativity, nor is any reason for its occurrence implied. All that is clear is that divine intimacy is the means through which difficulties are overcome, in the narrative. This brief, meandering pre-chorus resolves into a chorus featuring the introductory motif. This contrasts with the melody, which reinforces the diatonic harmony with a major third interval from tonic to mediant, whilst a romantic swell of strings supports the diatonic harmony:

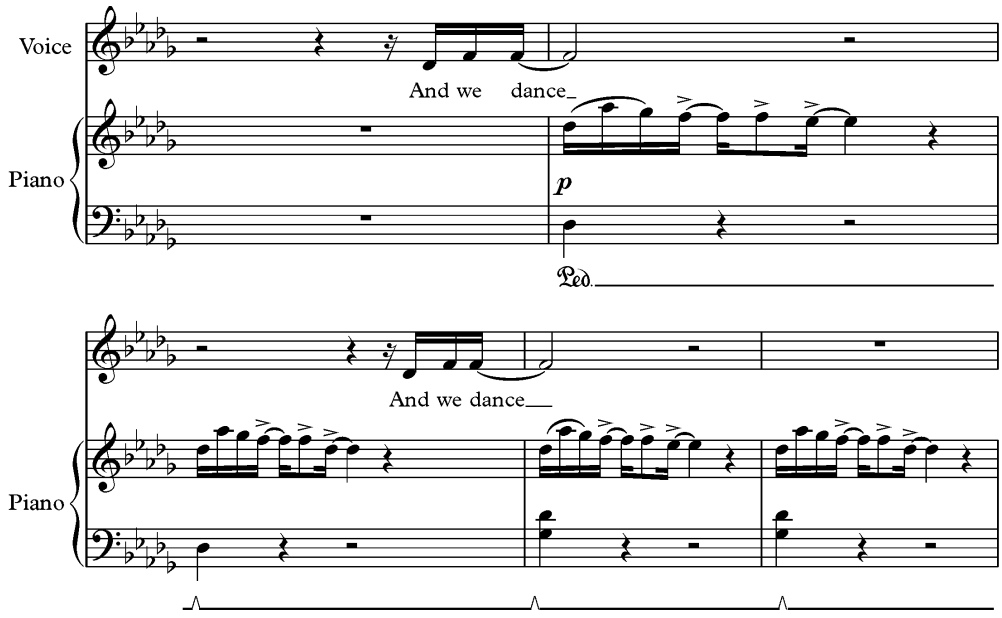


Figure 40. Bethel Music, 'We Dance,' chorus (1:02).

As strings accompany the second verse, Gretzinger declares that 'love had won for me', and describes herself using a physical metaphor, as being 'here in your arms'.

Embellishments on the second chorus hear her whisper 'just you and me' breathily, paralinguistically emphasising her intimacy with God. This is again emphasised by the stripped back instrumentation – just chorus and piano – for the middle eight:
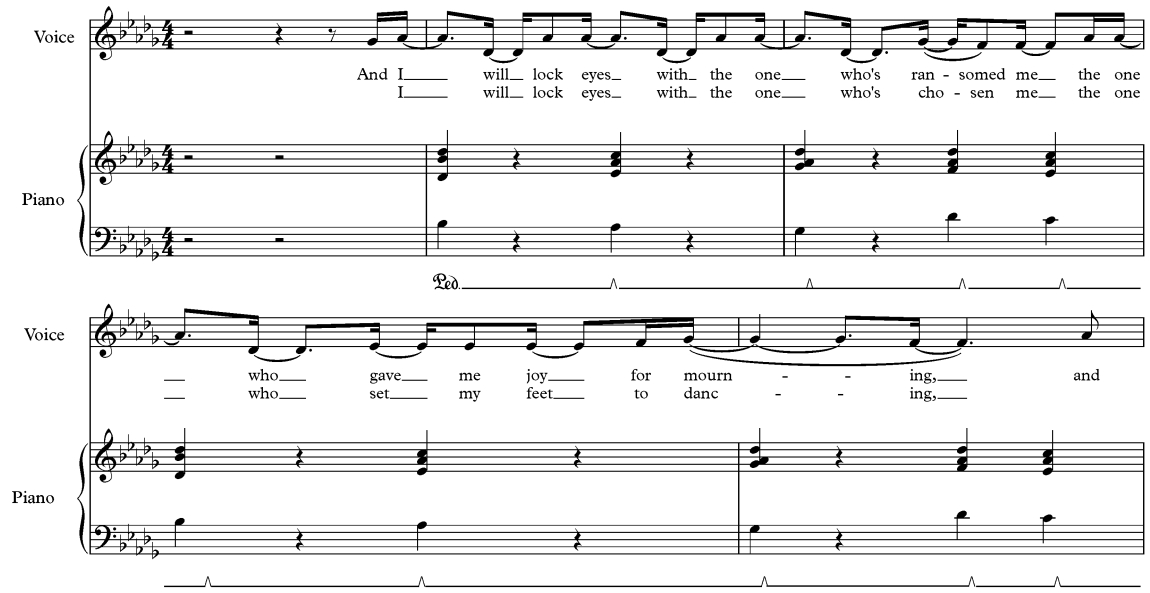


Figure 41. Bethel Music, 'We Dance,' middle eight (2:35).

Gretzinger's language of 'lock[ing] eyes' and being 'chosen' is, again, very intimate. The romantic strings return, thicker and higher, and Gretzinger's breathy head voice transforms into a chesty belt, as she recapitulates the chorus. An atypically quiet coda firmly establishes the therapeutic orientation of the song, with its simultaneously romantic and childish imagery:
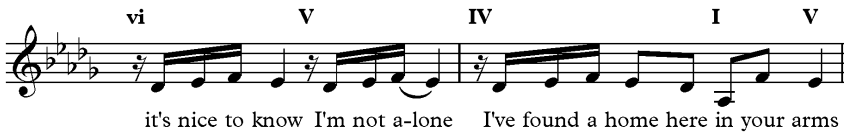


Figure 42. Bethel Music, 'We Dance,' coda (4:03).

Like the others, this melody is simplistic and childlike, moving conjunctly in the shape of a turn. Gretzinger self-presents sympathetically, with the vulnerability of a child.[615] God, meanwhile, is presented as a comforting parent or lover figure. Infantile imagery of this sort is present in swathes of the Bethel Collective's work. For example, in the spontaneous song 'Wonder,' Amanda Lindsey Cook exhorts the worshipper to be full of

[615] See, for example, 'Out of Hiding' and 'Cecie's Lullaby,' on Steffany Gretzinger, *The Undoing* (Bethel Music: 2014).

'wonder', 'wide-eyed and mystified... like a child' in the face of God.[616] This is set to a meandering (improvisatory) scalic refrain repeated over and over to climax:
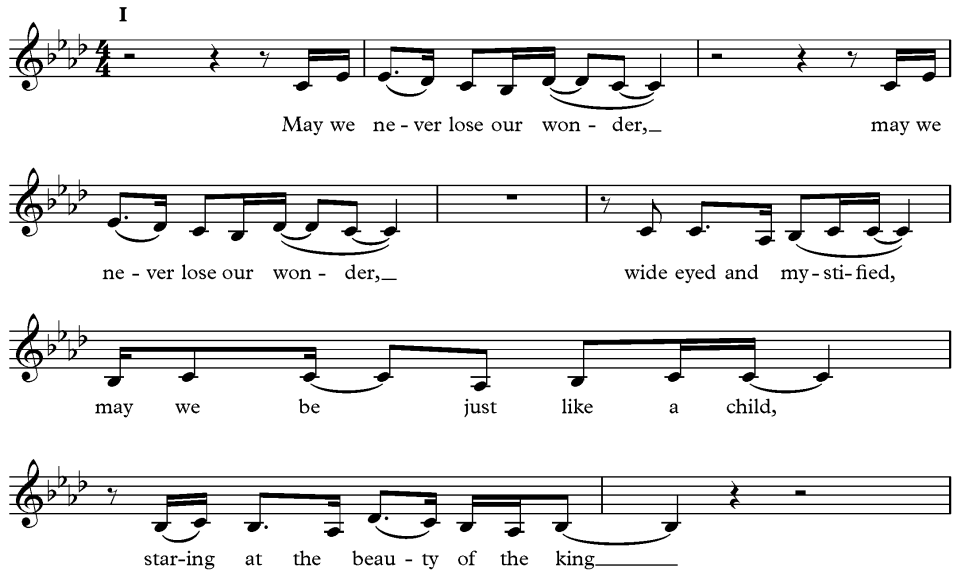


Figure 43. Bethel Music, 'Wonder' (0:09).

Similarly, the McClures' bouncing track 'You Are My One Thing' expresses the simple desire 'just to be close to you, just to walk next to you' over bouncing piano chords, using imagery of falling in love, and living 'like a child', to describe the worshipper's relationship with God.[617]

[616] Bethel Music, Amanda Lindsay Cook, 'Wonder (Live) [Spontaneous],' *You Make Me Brave (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2014).
[617] Bethel Music, Hannah McClure, 'You Are My One Thing (Live),' *We Will Not Be Shaken (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2015). Other notable examples include Jesus Culture's 'Halls of Heaven,' 'Fierce,' 'How He Loves,' and 'Rooftops'; Hillsong's 'I Give You My Heart,' or IHOPKC's 'I Am Yours (First Love),' 'I Love the Way You Think (Spontaneous),' and 'I Belong To You.'
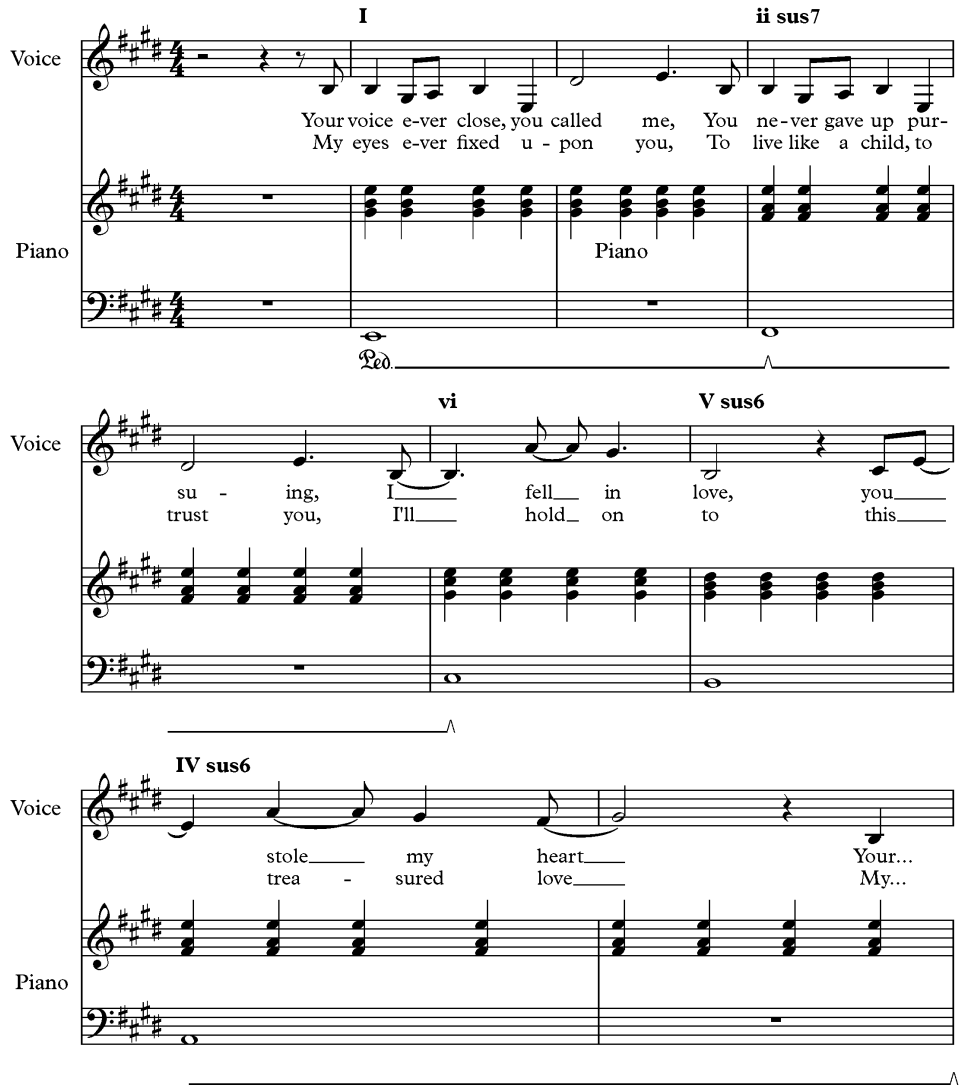


Figure 44. Bethel Music, 'You Are My One Thing' (0:29).

It is worth briefly looking to a Bethel Kids re-recording of Gretzinger's 'We Dance', to consider how Bethel convey being childlike, in a literal sense. In the Bethel Kids music ministry, teenagers and children from the church appear in music videos, re-record songs and perform at worship concerts. Bethel Kids' re-recordings present childlike worship with more vim and pep than Bethel Music do, and absent the erotic dimension. For example, the 'We Dance' recording by Bethel's Bright Ones adopts a bouncing EDM drumline, and is especially awash with cosmic ambience – dissimilar to Gretzinger's more ethereal vocal with piano. Musically, the main difference between the two arrangements is that the childish piano hook disappears from the chorus, and is replaced by an EDM-style sample, abruptly cut off for a percussive effect:
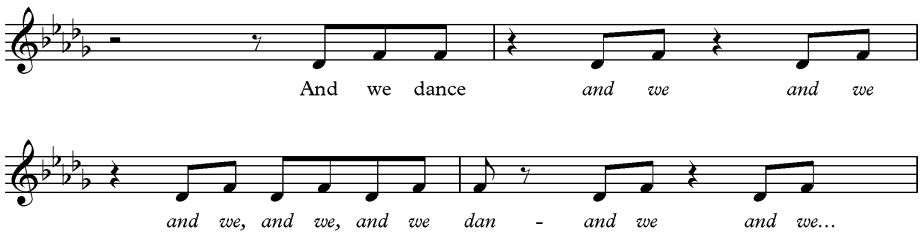


Figure 45. Bright Ones, 'We Dance,' chorus, with sample in italics (0:49).[618]

This replaces Gretzinger's child-like timbral vulnerability with an actual child vocalist producing an adult, club sound. In contrast to the official video of Gretzinger's recording (a lyric video showing a mountain landscape), the Bright Ones' video depicts a school dance, in which kids perform a pre-choreographed dance routine. Interestingly, the Bright Ones' videos, in general, involve numerous close-up shots of children singing to the camera, which their adult counterparts at Bethel Music never do in music videos. Meanwhile, the Bethel Kids website discusses their *Come Alive* DVD of Bethel Music cover songs in terms of affirmation and encouragement:

> [T]his project is aimed at cultivating in the next generation the greatness they possess as children of God, the inseparable connection they have to Jesus, and the truth that they are powerful vessels of worship and contributors in the kingdom.[619]

As far as the Bethel Kids ministry suggests, childhood faith is characterised by overwhelming feelings about God that are expressed, normatively, with exuberance and positivity, an emphasis on freedom that is combined with highly choreographed presentation and sound production, and a drive towards supernatural empowerment through worship. Thus worship is, for Bethel Kids, clearly a therapeutic endeavour in a Foucauldian, rather than Rieffian, sense, insofar as the Bright Ones are regulated into worshipping in Bethel's positive affective norm, without the respite from and control over anxiety to which Rieff's therapeutic pertains.

[618] Bright Ones, Peyton Allen, Josie Buchanan, 'We Dance', *Bright Ones* (Bethel Music: 2017).
[619] 'Bethel Music Kids: Come Alive,' *Bethel Music*. <https://bethelmusic.com/albums/come-alive/>

'Letting Go'

Another Gretzinger song, 'Letting Go', is even more erotic and therapeutic in expressing the worshipper's vulnerability, pursuing tangible assurance and treating sin in a euphemistic fashion. In this song Gretzinger presents negativity in her life as pedagogical problems that are overcome by her relationship with God; she characterises intimacy with God as 'letting go'. The song opens with cosmic ambience and a retro sounding synthesiser hook, consisting of descending intervals. Over a wash of cosmic ambience and some drumbeats sounds a verse with a characteristically meandering scalic melody, significant only in that it sounds free and improvisatory. This verse describes the difficulties of Gretzinger's therapeutic journey of faith, with a meandering melody that lingers around the tonic. Gretzinger describes a state of negativity as 'when my hallelujah was tired', which is resolved by God inspiring in her 'a new song'.[620]

This state of vulnerability resembles Gretzinger's lyric in 'We Dance' about when her 'faith gets tired'. The second verse similarly describes negativity as a form of vulnerability to external forces, as Gretzinger 'confess[es]' to being 'scared sometimes', and describes 'the lies that screamed inside', which are again defeated by God's power. Thus although she is 'scared' and violently besieged by 'lies', God overcomes these in some way. It is not clear whether the lies originate within Gretzinger, or are a form of spiritual warfare originating from without, although Gretzinger's teachings that I discussed in Chapter Two suggest that evil, and evil "lies" specifically, originate externally to the worshipper. (Indeed, Gretzinger even scapegoats Eve as the means by which these Satanic lies infect the human condition, obscuring her own moral agency entirely.) Martyn Percy observes the same phenomenon in Vineyard songs, wherein Charismatic leaders identify Satan as an 'adversary' through whom otherwise inexplicable negative phenomena can be explained.[621] The verses of 'Letting Go' are interspersed with a dramatic wailing chorus, where Gretzinger's melody leaps upwards and holds the note:

[620] Bethel Music, Steffany Gretzinger, 'Letting Go,' *Tides* (Bethel Music: 2013): 1:05.
[621] Percy, *Power,* 55.

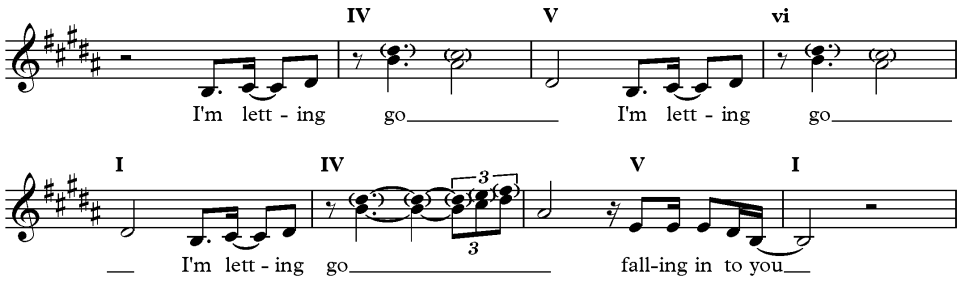


Figure 46. Bethel Music, 'Letting Go,' chorus (backing vocals in brackets) (1:15).

The melodic ascending leap here is dramatic and erotic, similar to those heard in the earlier spontaneous songs (such as 'I've Seen the Light'), and is emphasised by backing vocals a third above the melody. This is a compositional technique musicologists such as Anne François have associated with orgasm, and the transgression of boundaries. François writes that the disco singer Sylvester's use of falsetto is a signifier for 'alternative, fictive spaces which uncover the untruth of the real'.[622] She draws this conclusion from the slightly ethereal, non-corporeal sound of the falsetto voice, which has a quality of 'homelessness with respect to either gender'. Further, François argues that the falsetto voice's history of signifying respite in African American diasporic religion gives it a utopic significance.[623] It should be noted that, while François acknowledges that the falsetto voice precedes its use in the disco genre, she does not look beyond other 20th century popular genres such as gospel and soul. (This overlooks the role of high male voices in non-popular genres, which has often *not* been to convey qualities such as eroticism, transgression or utopic respite.)[624] Although her comments are specific to pop genres, François is right to note that often, in pop music, falsetto *does* have an erotic quality, that can be imitated by transcendent vocals in general. For example, Hunter Thompson, a member of the Bethel Collective, consistently uses erotic imagery in his work, sung with a clear timbre that, whilst not strictly falsetto, is unusually high in pitch. For example, 'My Dear', from Bethel's *Loft Sessions*, employs the same melodic leap as Gretzinger's 'Letting Go'.[625] This is after preamble verses

[622] Anne-Lise François, 'Fakin' It/Makin' It: Falsetto's Bid for Transcendence in 1970s Disco Highs,' in *Perspectives of New Music,* Volume 33, No.1/2 (Winter – Summer 1995): 447.
[623] François, 'Fakin' It/Makin' It': 448.
[624] On the male countertenor – not synonymous with falsetto – see: Peter Giles, and J.B. Steane, 'Countertenor,' *Grove Music Online* (OUP: 2001).
<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000006694#omo-9781561592630-e-0000006694>
[625] Bethel Music, Hunter G K Thompson, 'My Dear,' *The Loft Sessions* (Bethel Music: 2012).

including such erotic imagery as 'I am yours and you are mine' and 'I am ravished by his side,' and several section changes that build anticipation for the chorus:

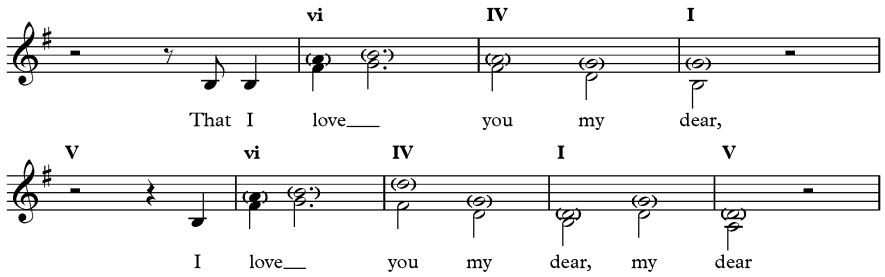


Figure 47. Bethel Music, 'My Dear,' chorus (2:00).

This motif forms the climactic point of the song, and is followed by a slew of melodies and different hooks layered over each other: an organised approximation of singing in the spirit. Thompson uses similar melodic range in another song, 'Come Awaken Love', from *Tides*.[626] Expressing erotic imagery ('like a fire in the night... burn within my soul and mind, till all I see are your eyes', and 'resurrect my soul's desire to burn with true love's fire', for example), the chorus to this song continually leaps to a transcendent-sounding height, layered with backing vocals that add "height" to the sound:

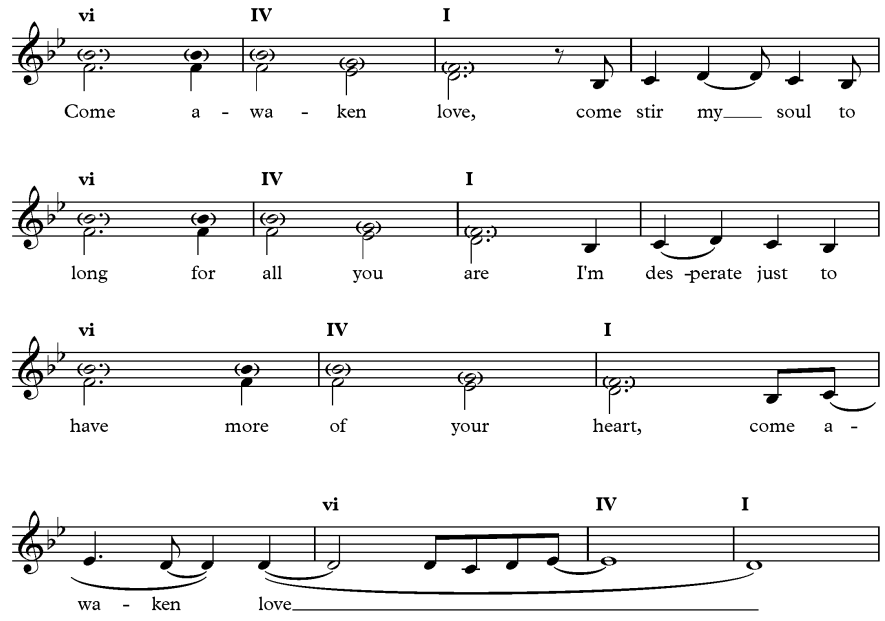


Figure 48. Bethel Music, 'Come Awaken Love,' chorus (1:11).

These melodic leaps in choruses such as 'Come Awaken Love', 'My Dear' or 'Letting Go' also function, in this way, as an additional signifier of the alternative liminal space that cosmic ambience already marks, and, more particularly, as a signifier of the ecstatic dimension of worship. Hunter Thompson aside, falsetto proper does not occur in Bethel's

[626] Bethel Music, Hunter G K Thompson, 'Come Awaken Love,' *Tides* (Bethel Music: 2013).

music, being a non-normative musical vocal technique in general – indeed that is one of François ' points.[627] (Thompson's falsetto voice is usually reserved for backing vocals, as in 'My Dear'; everywhere else, he just uses a surprisingly high mid-range.) A better comparison to Gretzinger's 'Letting Go', in this instance, might be another disco hit, Donna Summer's 'Love to Love You Baby', with its melodic contour of an orgasmic cry that Robert Fink describes as an 'abandonment to an almost superhuman multiplicity of climaxes.'[628] Although Summer's track has a predominantly entertaining, rather than therapeutic, function, Bethel's use of ascending melodic leaps in songs such as 'Letting Go' similarly signify an ecstatic encounter, albeit of a less explicitly erotic sort. These encounters are enveloped with cosmic ambience, and thematically contextualised by the worshipper's vulnerability in the face of God, the Father or lover.

The problem with erotic infantilism

Despite their endeavour to emphasise intimacy with God, in precluding categories of sin and judgment from the ecstatic encounter, Bethel Music undermine the radical nature of grace. Their use of "indecent" erotic signifiers eclipses the relevance of sin for their experiential hermeneutic, and creates an impression of supernaturally privileged access to tangible assurance. God the lover, friend and comforter is presented almost exclusively through the lens of unambiguously positive emotions, and divine judgement is divorced from this therapeutic view of God. (A rare exception to this, with respect to positive emotion, is Cory Asbury's song 'Reckless Love', which I discuss in the next chapter.)

The weak hamartiology underpinning Bethel's very optimistic use of erotic infantilism compromises the worshipper's capacity for self-examination, and for perceiving the corruption of man. Rowan Williams expresses some reservations, to a similar end, about eroticism in Christian worship song writing. Referring to the 'strongly unified style' of sung worship that has emerged from the Charismatic tradition, he cautions against uncritically endorsing this mode of devotion:

---

[627] Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 31-4: Fink describes pop songs as being oriented around moments of climax and release, deriving his sexual teleology of music from John Rockwell's 1979 review of *Music for Eighteen Musicians* and *Einstein on the Beach* in Rolling Stone, in which Rockwell links musical climactic teleology to orgasm. Surmises Fink, 'banishing teleology must mean banishing orgasm.' More on Bethel's use of climax as a means of engendering positive affect in the next chapter, but it should be noted that – not least because these texts are meant to be doxological in function – I am describing these musico-theological devices as 'therapeutic' rather than 'onanistic'.

[628] Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 42.

> Some of it, perhaps much of it, has a solid theological basis, and can be strongly evocative of the paradoxes of 'meekness and majesty' (to allude to the refrain of well-known example); much of it is utterly unadorned and often deeply moving adoration of Jesus. But there is a disquieting element in a good deal of this literature; it is not just that devotion to Jesus can often be expressed in a way that detaches it from the Trinitarian dynamic of the New Testament, it is also that the erotic idiom of medieval and Counter-Reformation spirituality can reappear with fewer checks and nuances than in earlier centuries. Jesus as object of loving devotion can slip into Jesus as fantasy partner in a dream of emotional fulfilment.[629]

Williams' concerns are also echoed by Jeremy Begbie, who agrees that pop worship draws Christ into our emotional world, rather than worshipping him.[630] The problem they both point to is the subordination of Christ to the experiential hermeneutic and subjective desire, externalising sin and conflating individual desire with the will of God. For Williams, the lack of Trinitarianism in worship music is the problem, a sentiment also explored in Parry's book on worship music. However, a more fundamental checking impulse of the sort Williams suggests is a hermeneutic of suspicion regarding religious experience: one that naturally follows from a robust hamartiology in which sin is understood to have potential ongoing noetic and desiderative effects. Percy, criticising the Charismatic approach to worship that focuses overmuch on intimacy with God, describes it as

> a realm not only of passivity but of passion; the emotions and feelings that are surrendered to God result in an inward order (control) that can counter the external forces (chaos) of sickness, evil, dissipation and impotence. This is the emotive power of the ideology: suggesting in metaphor, theme and form that surrender of self (especially the emotions and passions), and focusing them on the Lord, will result in the self being accepted by god, and turned into a positive force that can combat harmful outside pressures.[631]

[629] Rowan Williams, 'A History of Faith in Jesus,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), 231.
[630] Jeremy Begbie, *A Peculiar Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 36.
[631] Percy, *Power,* 66.

The process Percy describes is flawed for various reasons I have already touched upon: externalising evil further eclipses the need for a hermeneutic of suspicion towards the faculties of knowledge and desire. Percy explicitly suggests that reliance on divine intimacy can become both a means of and reason for obscuring the relevance of sin:

> There is thus a conflation between the agency of Vineyard worship and God's own self-involvement with the world. It is because the community is so close to God that issues like sin, the cross and conversion are seldom dealt with in song; such things are deemed to be peripheral. They are for those who are approaching God, not those who are already with him; the immediacy of God is gently pressed in worship, virtually to its limit.[632]

The subjective conception of God is evidenced in Bethel's ecstatic repetition of placeholder phrases like "more", "there", "you" and "everything", even as they fail to define these terms. Percy argues that 'God' the word is not the same as 'God' the name, and conflating the two leads to a chimera of divine intimacy that uses the signifier 'God' as a shortcut for divine encounter.[633] Yet without an inbuilt concept of individual fallibility, there is no consistent safeguard in Bethel's theology to avoid God becoming defined by subjectivity in the way that Williams, Begbie and Percy are worried about. Thus, Kelman can write the following:

> The perceived power of worship music that drew on rock and roll seemed to deepen and expand the experience of worship, drawing on emotion to propel worshippers' attention toward God. Experience, while not the intention of worship, provided a powerful concept for articulating worship when it worked.[634]

Nevertheless, figures such as Williams, Rieff and Begbie are correct to draw attention to the difficulty of ascertaining whether attention is being drawn to God or to the self; a weak hamartiology with no place for ongoing corruption further compounds this

[632] Percy, *Power,* 68
[633] Percy, *Power,* 72.
[634] Kelman, *Shout to the Lord,* 29.

problem. For Rieff, replacing external order with subjective authority results in the removal of judgment from the individual imagination. This removal of judgment is the basis of therapeutic respite, but also puts the individual in the position of judging God.[635] Bethel Music's use of erotic infantilism precisely obscures the idea of divine judgement from their theology. Man, as Bethel present him, is innately loveable and ought not be judged; the resultant experience of intimacy with God is then taken as a sign of the absence of sin, itself a means of assurance against problems such as ongoing noetic or desiderative corruption.

It is ironic that Bethel, who attempt to salaciously defy the 'spirit of religion' with their use of erotic imagery, actually reinforce an excessively dogmatic worship theology by doing this. Bethel adopt the trappings of eroticism, whilst purging the notion of intimacy of any negativity, ambivalence or grit for which they might be thought culpable. This is very different from Marcella Althaus-Reid's account of 'indecent theology', wherein Christ is identified particularly with the indecent. Althaus-Reid appeals to Christians to openly embrace their indecency, recounting stories of eroticism intermingled with faith. She describes the 'Lobster God', 'Genderfucking Trinity' and the Virgin Mary who 'has no legs.'[636] Althaus-Reid also suggests that the theology of Paul Tillich, and academic theology more broadly, would have been strengthened if he had integrated his own sexual proclivities into his intellectual life (and others followed suit). She issues the following challenge to her reader:

> ... God cannot be Queered unless theologians have the courage to come out from their homosexual, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, transvestite or (ideal) heterosexual closets. Out-of-the-closet theologians do not leave the personal aside, and that always implies a risk, but neither do the closeted kind. It would be delusory to believe that closeted theologians can compartmentalise their lives so easily. The difference is that the closeted theologians indulge permanently in duplicity between the realms of a public and a private theology.[637]

[635] Rieff, 'Thoughts,' 104-5.
[636] Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 46, 55-59, 71.
[637] Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 88-89.

Where Althaus Reid writes lewdly, attempting to shock the reader out of the inappropriately normative 'T-theology' that circumscribes the divine, Bethel Music use musical and lyrical cliché to render their erotic symbolism 'vanilla.'[638] It is not the Bethel Collective's apparent lack of interest in "queering" God that rankles, but the superficial approximation of scandal to duplicitously usher in the spiritual complacency of a safe and settled romance with 'God [...] my boyfriend/girlfriend.'[639] In so doing, Bethel Music employs eroticism as a means of therapeutic respite that equates divine intimacy with unshakeable holiness: at Bethel Church, children are nice, lovers are faithful, and the pervasiveness of universal sin overlooked. This undermines the costliness of divine grace, and overcomes any absolute distinction between divinity and humanity unilaterally.

6.5 SUMMARY

This chapter has shown how Bethel use two musico-theological devices – cosmic ambience and erotic infantilism – to a therapeutic end. The problem with their therapeutic approach is that it hinders the Bethel Collective's ability to express the emotional range necessary to convey a robust hamartiology, complete with an account of the ongoing potential effects of sin. The result is a normatively positive use of the pop idiom in worship, oriented towards engendering the experience of tangible assurance. Bethel Music's inability to convey the dialectic of sin and grace radically compromises their ability to present the Gospel through the pop idiom. Each allusion to negativity that does occur is ensconced in cosmic ambience, and neutralised by an insistently sympathetic framing of human frailty. Having established that there is an in-built disinclination towards attending to sin, in this therapeutic use of the pop idiom, the next chapter examines more closely the place sin *does* have, in Bethel's theology.

[638] See Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 33.
[639] Kelman, *Shout to the Lord,* 40: '... worship music has been the target of no small amount of criticism for being theologically thin, too focused on style, or too willing to indulge in romantic accounts of divine love of the "God is my boyfriend/girlfriend" variety.'

CHAPTER SEVEN

Sin: A Retrospective

INTRODUCTION * CHRISTUS VICTOR * CLIMAX IN ATONEMENT NARRATIVES * CLIMAX, EVERYWHERE * THERAPEUTIC TRIUMPHALISM * SUMMARY

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Triumphalist musical climax is a third musico-theological device through which Bethel perpetuate a weak hamartiology. Almost all of Bethel Music's songs utilise muscular climaxes that resolve negative imagery and engender an intense, trance-like worship experience, using instrumentation, volume and simple, repetitive harmony. Triumphalist climax presents sin as a retrospective issue for justified Christians, eclipsed by the pursuit of tangible assurance in (implicitly, positive) emotion, and charismata. As Bethel Music's systematic treatment of sin is non-existent, this chapter compares Bethel's songs about the atonement to their songs that mention sin in passing. The comparison will demonstrate that both categories are framed with exactly the same triumphalist climaxes, showing Bethel Music's normative and emphatic resolution of hamartiological themes. In this way, the therapeutic experience of "really worshipping", and the emotional intensity it instrumentalises, is encoded into Bethel's music, superseding the particular theological content of their songs.

I begin by addressing Bethel Music's atonement narratives, comparing their theology to Gustav Aulén's. Although Aulén is concerned, unlike Bethel, with academic theology, both are dogged by similar issues regarding the forces of evil, man's culpability for sin, and the scandal of grace. Both present the atonement as an already-concluded drama in which the justified Christian is largely passive, sidelining the possibility of ongoing corruption through sin. This obscures the negative side of the sin-grace dialectic more

than even a therapeutic theology needs to, not simply making "sin" relatively unthreatening to divine-human relations, but also externalising sin and rendering it retrospective for justified Christians. I then turn to Bethel Music's songs that mention sin, or a negative state akin to it, independently of an atonement narrative, showing that they similarly overrealise the defeat of sin. I close by presenting the bestselling songs 'No Longer Slaves' and 'Reckless Love' as examples of all three musico-theological devices, defending the latter as a more promising use of the pop idiom.

I write very frequently, in this chapter, of musical 'climax'. This is not for want of wider vocabulary, but rather because the songs I discuss are structured around their climax, and contain mini-climaxes within that trajectory. If nothing else, my frequent use of the word conveys the sheer intensity of the emotional identification required for 'really worshipping'.

7.2 CHRISTUS VICTOR

In arguing that Bethel's liberative and militaristic imagery reproduces some of the errors for which Aulén has been criticised, I am not suggesting that the Bethel Collective have read or drawn inspiration from Aulén. The comparison is nevertheless helpful for fleshing out Bethel's unsystematised theology. Both Aulén and Bethel Music present the atonement as a drama in which God, through Christ, decisively asserts his power over cosmic forces of evil, defeating them and liberating mankind from their effects – namely, enslavement to sin, death, and alienation from God. Aulén attempts to correct what he sees as an overly rationalistic and transactional atonement theology, encapsulated by Anselm's satisfaction theology. This theory, claims Aulén, inappropriately overlooks the Patristic Fathers' preference for Christus Victor theology.[640] Reconciliation with God, Aulén argues, results from Christ emasculating the forces of evil to which man is otherwise subject (although these forces are ultimately within God's control).[641] Aulén's muscular vision of the Gospel message focuses, in this way, on supernatural powers. The result is a Christ whose salvific function primarily has to do with power. Summarising and endorsing what he calls the 'main idea' of Irenaeus' atonement theology, Aulén says:

[640] Gustav Aulén, *Christus Victor,* trans. A.G. Herbert (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1931), 160.
[641] Ibid., 20.

> The work of Christ is first and foremost a victory over the powers which hold mankind in bondage: sin, death, and the devil. These may be said to be in a measure personified, but in any case they are objective powers; and the victory of Christ creates a new situation, bringing their rule to an end, and setting men free from their dominion.[642]

Aulén's argument has been widely criticised, for example by Colin Gunton, who argues that Aulén's use of Christus Victor is not Biblically unfounded, but is also not as straightforward as he claims. Gunton points to Origen as the renegade source of much cosmic battle imagery, suggests that the 'powers and authorities' of Colossians 2:15 might be interpreted as Christ's supporters rather than opponents, and implies that Aulén has proof-texted his reading:

> ... there is little explicit talk of victory elsewhere in Paul, while the Synoptic Gospels, though certainly using the language of struggle (see for example Mark 3.22-27) and the equally significant vocabulary of the kingdom of God, do not directly characterise the life and death of Jesus in language taken from the battlefield. That does not mean, of course, that it is wrong for us to see the Gospel writers as depicting a kind of victory, but that must depend rather on the meaning they give to their narratives as a whole than on particular proof texts.[643]

Gunton also notes the absence of militaristic imagery in the Johannine literature, although concedes that John does portray Christ's work on the cross as a victory and conquest of 'the world'. However, Gunton emphasises that this victory is not strictly completed – an important point underemphasised not only by Aulén, but also by Bethel Music in due course. Of the New Testament writers, Gunton comments that

> [t]he authors are not merely concerned with a divine act that is a past event, and certainly not with a merely cosmic conflict. The victory is both a

[642] Ibid., 35.
[643] Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 55-6.

> continuing and an earthly one. Both sides must be stressed if we are to see the matter as more than a myth, a 'story of the gods.'[644]

Gunton declares that Aulén's conception of Christus Victor emphasises too much the divine capabilities of Christ in his struggle, rather than his humanity, and his 'tragic' suffering.[645] It is important that Aulén's rather cosmic vision gives little practical sense of how "freedom from bondage" might manifest. It also gives the justified Christian meagre means for responding to this freedom, except to refrain from fearing any forces of evil. This emphasis of the supernatural is similarly evident in the Bethel Collective's music: I have noted their use of cosmic ambience, and the declarations of prophecy and healing in their spontaneous songs. I also suggested that Bethel's depiction of human weakness is rather rose-tinted, a point further evidenced by the triumphalism of their worship music, which places sin in the past tense, through cadence and climactic structures (more on which shortly).

One of Aulén's motivating concerns, in (re-)articulating the concept of Christus Victor, is to overcome any excessive legalism perpetuated by penal substitution models of atonement. This tendency, he claims, is not only at work in scholastic theology, but in Reformation theology as well.[646] Aulén approves of certain aspects of Luther's atonement theology – specifically, Luther's portrayal of the Law as a 'tyrant and enemy' from whom mankind is freed, his treatment of sin as an 'objective power', and the 'personal' nature of his conception of sin. However, Aulén claims that these qualities have been lost in the propagation of Reformation atonement theology, 'blunted' by rationalistic thinkers such as Melanchthon, who failed to grasp the 'sharply paradoxical' way in which Luther understood sin and grace.[647] (Aulén's rhetoric about rationalists such as Melanchthon recalls Bethel's own rhetoric regarding the legalistic 'spirit of religion' and their own 'spirit of truth'!)[648] Aulén counters the 'rationalistic' account of sin with a largely non-moralistic conception of sin, emphasising that sin impedes personal relationship with God. This approach is similarly found in Bethel's tendency to

[644] Ibid., 57.
[645] Ibid., 58.
[646] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 140, 164-5.
[647] Ibid., 143. David Bentley Hart says Aulén is wrong to problematise Anselm's belief that Christ's humanity effects the atonement; Aulén, says Hart, only erroneously thinks this pits Anselm against Paul, Patristics and Luther. See Bentley Hart, *Beauty,* 365-7.
[648] By contrast, Simeon Zahl remarks at length on the affective dimension of Melanchthon's thought, for whom being 'in terrors' at human sinfulness usefully inspires plight. See Zahl, *Holy Spirit*, 141.

present sin through imagery of 'blindness', 'suffering', 'death' and other phenomena to be suffered, passively.

Although he rejects the overly legalistic atonement theology that he perceives in Anselm, Aulén does not explicitly claim that sin is a non-moralistic category. The non-moralistic dimensions of sin as an external force of evil are more central to his account of Christus Victor. Nevertheless, Aulén expresses concern about what he perceives to be Enlightenment theology's weakening of sin, and the 'subjective' model of sin and atonement that follows, offering Schleiermacher as an example. Aulén accepts that Schleiermacher wanted to present a way around the rationalistic critiques of religion made by Enlightenment philosophers such as Immanuel Kant. However, Aulén concludes that Schleiermacher compromised sin in his manner of so doing, stating that salvation precedes atonement (or 'reconciliation') in Schleiermacher's theology, undermining the significance of sin as an impediment to reconciliation.[649] In Aulén's view, if the scholastics undermined the direct relationship between God and man by making it overly impersonal and transactional, dependent on penal substitution and undermining grace, the 'subjective' model that followed the Reformation attempted to restore this relationship by psychologising Christ's ministry and presenting him as little more than an exemplar. Aulén critiques Schleiermacher for considering a 'new attitude to the world, characterised by harmony, peace of mind, and self-realisation' as more important than the atonement in itself, foreshadowing Rieff's later concerns about therapeutic religion.[650] As Aulén summarises, regarding Schleiermacher's theology:

> The consequence is that the share of God in the process of salvation becomes secondary.[651]

Aulén's theory purports to turn from Anselm, and recalibrate Luther's theology, righting the distortions of Melanchthon and others, and returning to Patristic theology: the forces of evil are emphatically described as real and objective, to show that there is an impediment to man's possession of the love of God that doesn't rely on man's capacity

[649] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 153.
[650] Naturally, Schleiermacher would not agree with Aulén's characterisation. For Schleiermacher, Christ's resemblance to both God and humankind both facilitates redemption in the atonement, and also give mankind an example of divinity in humanity that we can 'grasp' and attempt to emulate. See Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 589-90.
[651] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 168.

for penitence. David Bentley Hart casts aspersions on Aulén's story, particularly his interpretation of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*. Hart suggests that Aulén 'unquestioningly' adopts a false dichotomy between a facile reading of Anselm's (in fact, surprisingly personal) account of sin, and the subjectivising bent of German liberal Protestant scholarship regarding his theology. According to Hart, Aulén mischaracterises Anselm, and is wrong to assume that Anselm is legalistic in his approach to penitential discipline. Hart notes that Anselm agrees that all penance is 'unsatisfactory', and Christ's redeeming work is absolutely essential for overcoming the unsatisfactory system of penitential discipline:

> [I]f grace, then, allows for a penitential return of the sinner, it does so solely because prayerful humility is the fitting form of a redeemed life, and because this way of return is the very promise and substance of salvation for one concerning whom the entire question of satisfaction... has been infinitely deferred, through superabounding mercy... In one stroke Anselm has done away with the notion that penitential practice is a punitive discipline intended to satisfy God's wrath, and shown it to be simply a thankful piety that responds to (and is the result of) an unmerited and transforming grace.[652]

Thus, for Hart, Anselm preserves grace, whereas de-emphasising man's complicity in sin cheapens grace.[653] Aulén, by contrast, strongly prioritises the non-moralistic dimension of sin, and consequently emphasises the objectivity of the forces of evil that enslave mankind. This is how he maintains an impression of their potency and significance, and therefore preserves the necessity of the cross – the predominant expression of divine grace – within his system. However, so thorough is Aulén's dramatic externalisation of the forces of evil that these forces seem to implicate the individual only in a passive sense. This ultimately undermines the personal nature of grace, in three main respects.

Firstly, it robs humanity of moral agency. This not only is an affront to the sense of personal agency that Alasdair McFadyen attributed to theologies critiquing the universality of sin (as I noted in Chapter Two). More importantly, it writes the individual's free choice to sin, and personal guilt for sin, out of the Gospel narrative.

[652] Bentley Hart, *Beauty,* 365.
[653] Ibid., 363-4.

This is unlike McFadyen's sophisticated account of universal (rather than social) sin, which integrates human agency with the involuntary universality of sin. There is, further, no sense that sin might be an ongoing facet of the life of the believer, in Aulén's system, once the forces of evil have been defeated (by Christ, and by faith in Christ).[654] Secondly, by rendering grace impersonal in this way, Aulén undermines the radical nature of grace, portraying God's reconciliation with mankind as a just, rather than merciful, act, rescuing mankind from more powerful, supernatural forces. This obscures the gratuity of which Paul writes in Romans 3:21-28.

Thirdly, externalising the forces of evil to the extent that Aulén does raises the question of why God would allow people to be enslaved by an objective force that operates in opposition to his purposes. The implication is that either God is not truly omnipotent, or God is the ground of sin. Aulén rather overstates the power of the devil in relation to the power of God. Gunton, for his part, argues that Aulén is wrong to reject Anselm, claiming that Anselm's satisfaction theory attempts to limit the power attributed to the devil, which he thought had been greatly overemphasised by the Church Fathers.[655] In this respect, Aulén's concern for cosmic forces of darkness is not, suggests Gunton, so much a return to Biblical revelation as it is a cherry-picked account of Scriptural embellishment.

To draw again from Neville's language, it would seem that Aulén's problem with satisfaction atonement theology is that he interprets Anselm's legalistic symbolism overly literally, taking it as a holistic view of the atonement. However, Christus Victor as Aulén presents it is just as much of an unbroken symbol; he rejects penal substitution on an overly literal basis, whilst taking Christus Victor and the triumph he effects as an 'objective' power dynamic to be straightforwardly known. This premature and overrealised resolution of the Gospel narrative presumes an optimistic anthropology that overlooks, or downplays, the human capacity for self-deception. Insofar as Bethel Music address the subject of sin, their Charismatic theology, and even more optimistic anthropology, exaggerates all these problems found in Aulén. Bethel Music eclipses

[654] This is not a necessary feature of Christus Victor imagery, which can of course coexist with a stronger and more personal hamartiology than Aulén's. See, for example, Kenneth G.C. Newport, *The Sermons of Charles Wesley* (Oxford, OUP, 2005), 54: Newport notes that Charles Wesley uses this kind of imagery as a way of dramatising his evangelical conversion, yet maintained that sin persisted in justified Christians. However, this is owing to Charles' use of diverse scriptural imagery.
[655] Gunton, *Atonement*, 87.

human moral agency for therapeutic purposes (as per the previous chapter), and undermine grace, which is presented as something more like divine justice in the face of human incapacity. Their treatment of the atonement leans upon a false dichotomy between transactional atonement and Christus Victor, mirrored in their suspicion of the 'spirit of religion', compared to their 'spirit of truth'.

7.3 CLIMAX IN ATONEMENT NARRATIVES

Sin has a relatively clear role in Bethel Music's atonement narratives, wherein simple motivic material, functional harmony and climactic musical structures resolve expressions of sin (or some state of negativity and alienation from God), landing upon intense, positive affirmations of the worship event. Whilst deemphasising sin, these songs undergird tangible experiences of assurance by emphasising the power of Christ, and emotionalism in worship. Of Bethel's several hundred songs, there are approximately a dozen that contain a full explication of Christ's atoning work, all of which use Christus Victor imagery.[656] These songs incorporate relatively more motivic development than Bethel's non-narrative songs typically do, as I show in the second section of this chapter. They also do not dwell particularly on sin, but do attest to a negative state that precedes salvation, using passive imagery. This contrasts with their Christus Victor imagery of man liberated from involuntary suffering by the atonement. All of these songs share the climactic structure I have already discussed, their ascending melodic trajectories and instrumental crescendos skimming past the seriousness of sin and culminating in lyrical exhortations to 'really worship'.

Gilbert Rouget has stated that hastening tempo and complexifying rhythmic patterns facilitate musical trance states.[657] Bethel Music, whilst not attempting to induce trance, similarly intensify musical features to deepen the emotional valence of their songs – notably, thickening instrumental textures and increasing volume. It is worth noting, as well, that the typical use of climax in contemporary pop worship is historically particular, and not used in the same way in other worship forms such as hymns,

[656] I do not discuss them all here: my working list of Bethel Music's atonement narratives notably includes 'What Would I Have Done,' 'God of the Redeemed,' 'To Our God,' 'Forever,' 'For the Cross,' 'Son of God,' 'Greatness of Your Glory', 'Seas of Crimson' and their cover of Matt Redman's re-working of the hymn 'Here is Love.'
[657] Rouget, *Trance,* 81.

plainsong, or spirituals, nor even in other forms of pop music. I suggest that Bethel Music's reliance on climax – which not only results in musical expressions of intensity, but also emphasise that intensity through textural contrast – further evidences the genre's therapeutic orientation towards experiences of tangible assurance. In short, Bethel Music adopts the teleological attitude that Webster described, when he argued that a therapeutic approach to sin can present it as something to be naturally developed away from. Sin is not only defanged through euphemism and a very sympathetic portrayal of the worshipper, but is quite explicitly presented as something resolved in advance of the positive emotional climax of the worship experience: tangible assurance is "proof" that sin is over. Supporting this thoroughly concluded account of sin, Bethel preacher Kris Vallotton declares that, if man were still corrupted by sin after conversion, then the cross would not have been effective (demonstrating a very static understanding of God's involvement in history).

In the following analyses, I use a numbering system to indicate the three stages of musical climax in pop worship, as follows:

> (**i**) Musical expressions of sin, or a general state of negativity consisting in subjection to evil forces, enslavement to sin and alienation from God. For example, thin instrumental textures, minor keys, dissonance, silence or low volume.
>
> (**ii**) Musical expressions of a negative state move towards the eventual (positive) climax. For example, melody raises in pitch, instrumentation thickens, or volume builds.
>
> (**iii**) Musical climax, signified for example by full band instrumentation, heavy drumming, rhythmic augmentation, high volume or use of upper vocal range.

This trajectory unfolds over the course of a whole song: in addition to which, on a smaller scale, each section of the song contains harmonic progressions which move away from, and back towards, resolution. (This numbering system will be typeset in bold, to clearly distinguish these numbers from chord numerals.)

'Forever'

'Forever', written by Brian Johnson, follows this structure, opening with a subdued reflection on negativity (**i**), building in melodic range and instrumental texture (**ii**), and closing with a climactic exhortation to worship, accompanied by the full band (**iii**).[658] The song tells the story of Christ's death and resurrection, indicating the nature of its salvific significance, and gestures towards the appropriate response: namely, worship. Recorded for the *Tides* studio album, the song opens with a sparse texture that effectively expresses something akin to the state of sin, some dissonant strains on an electric violin resounding over a reverberating and dissonant synthesiser pad signifying cosmic ambience (**i**). This atmospheric introduction features an ongoing ebbing and flowing tone movement that underwrites the introduction and first verse with a cosmic and slightly mournful sound.

The first verse conveys a sad scene of Christ on the cross; along with the introduction, it is the most delicate point of the song, and contrasts with the climax to come. The scene of the crucifixion is described by an arpeggiated melody that corresponds to simple, diatonic harmony, quickly dissipating the mild dissonance of the introductory cosmic ambience.

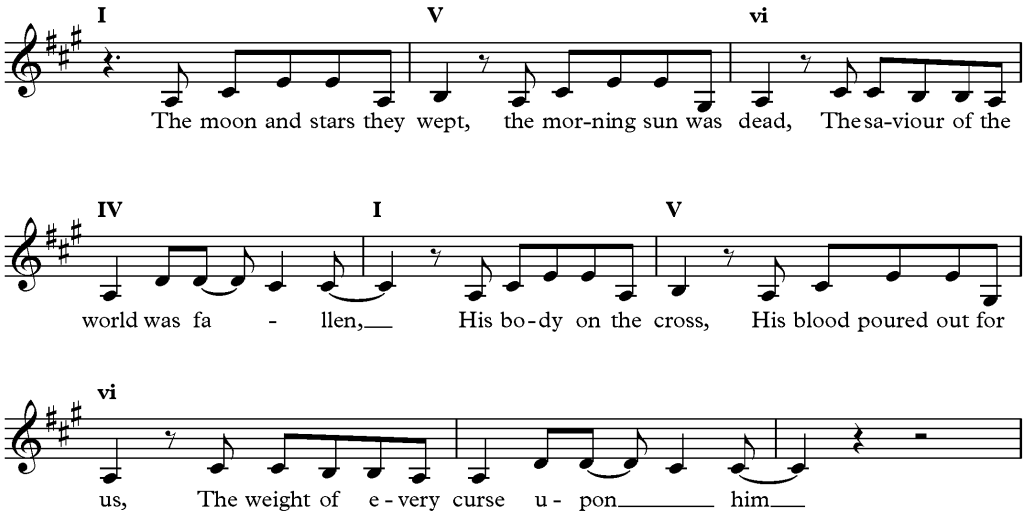


Figure 49. Bethel Music, 'Forever', first verse (0:06).

[658] Bethel Music, 'Forever,' (2013).

The accompaniment to the first verse is thinly orchestrated, consisting simply of piano chords struck on the first beat of each bar. The submediant chord (vi) is struck on the word 'dead', this minor harmony emphasising the verse's solemnity. This verse also contains the clearest reference to sin in the song, the lyrics stating that Christ's blood was 'poured out for us', and that he bore 'the weight of every curse upon him'. These lines seem to affirm substitutionary atonement, with Christ dying 'for us', although the use of 'curse' means that it is not clear that Christ's substitution is penal in nature.

After this delicate opening, the sparse texture and low vocal line conveying vulnerability, an instrumental crescendo begins (**ii**). A drumkit comes in, accompanying the introductory motif (albeit without its dissonance), and the next verses (0:46):

> One final breath he gave,
> As heaven looked away,
> The Son of God was laid in darkness.
>
> A battle in the grave,
> The war on death was waged,
> The power of hell forever broken.

The lyrics specifically affirm the separation of Christ on the cross from God. The ambience of mourning and sorrow gives way to militaristic imagery ('battle in the grave', 'war on death', 'power of hell'), calling to mind Gustav Aulén's representation of 'Christus Victor':

> This type of view may be described provisionally as the 'dramatic.' Its central theme is the idea of the Atonement as a Divine conflict and victory; Christ – Christus Victor – fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the 'tyrants' under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself.[659]

[659] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 20.

Aulén writes here of the 'evil powers of the world', implicating mankind in the evil under which they suffer. This is typically not so, for Bethel, who conceive of the powers of darkness as not only hostile to the will of God, but also independent of the will of man. In 'Forever', death is identified as such a power; in the songs to follow, the Bethel Collective present non-moralistic descriptions of curses, sickness, storms, shackles, burdens, darkness, sorrow, chains, and being lost. These examples correspond to, and exaggerate, Aulén's non-moralistic conception of sin as a state of alienation from God, which I revisit after I have finished unpacking the atonement narratives with which I am immediately concerned.

The opening lyrics to 'Forever' summarise the content of Christ's salvific mission in the previous stanza – a 'battle in the grave', the 'war on death' and the destruction of the 'power of hell'. This description is complemented by the conclusion of the coda, more on which shortly, which is that Christ 'has overcome'. The rest of the lyrics entail exhortations of praise. However, the triumphalist Christus Victor imagery in the lyrics that describe Christ's salvific work is emphasised by the climactic structure of the music (**iii**). The pre-chorus continues the song's progressive build, thickening the texture and, unusually, developing the motivic material:

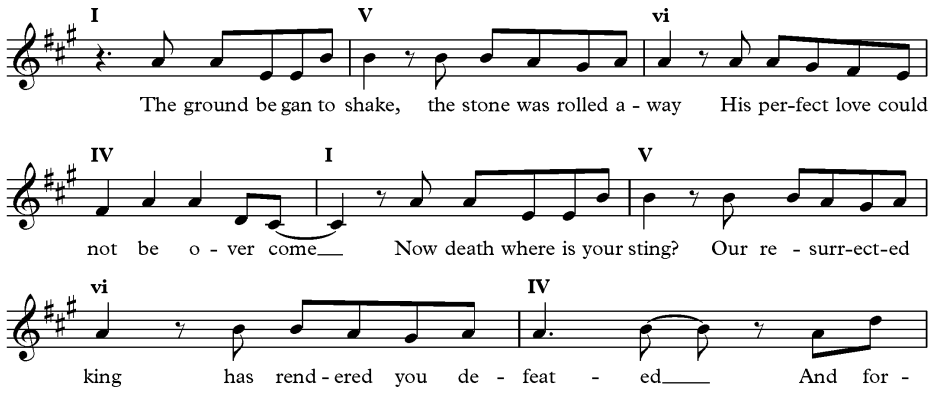


Figure 50. Bethel Music, 'Forever,' pre-chorus (1:13).

The drum pattern becomes fuller, whilst the congregants' voices are amplified, alongside backing vocals. The melody is transposed upwards and its arpeggiated movement inverted, in a rare instance of Bethel using unambiguous motivic development. The verse and pre-chorus melodies are both based on the shift from A to B and back to A again,

and both motifs share the same rhythm. Within this basic A-B-A melodic movement, the verse leaps upwards, from A_3 to E_4, and then resolves back down to B_3, creating a settled feel. By contrast, the pre-chorus plunges downwards and then ascends triumphantly, from A_4 to E_4 to B_4. The different positioning of the dominant note in relation to the tonic in each cell changes the character of the motif. Further, the pre-chorus occurs up an octave, the raised pitch conveying heightened dramatic tension. The motivic development and raised tension convey a sense of expectation for the chorus. Meanwhile, the increasing volume signifies intensifying emotion. The pre-chorus ends with a drum pounding twice per beat, the lyrics boasting in the power of Christ, and emphasising the 'defeat' of the devil with rhythmic augmentation.

The chorus of 'Forever' begins an eleventh above the original tonic note (A_3), intensifying the sound. It has a slower rhythm, using dotted crotchets, rather than quavers, enabling the song to linger at this climactic point. The chorus begins with a sung D_4 that clashes with the tonic (A major) chord supporting it, before resolving to $C\#_4$. This suspended motif, which is repeated throughout the chorus, is a rare, although not overly discordant, instance of harmonic tension that adds a yearning feel to the melody:

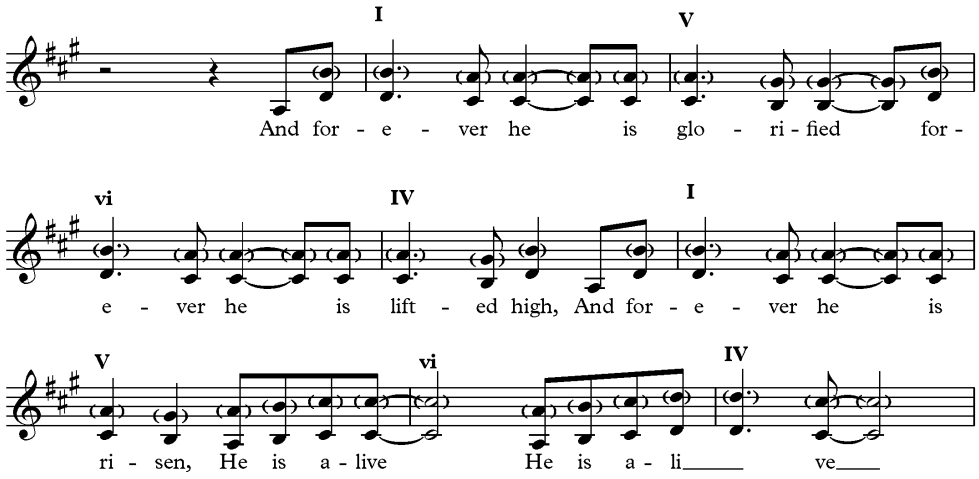


Figure 51. Bethel Music, 'Forever,' chorus (with backing vocals) (1:37).

A female voice sings a sixth above the melody, layering a harmony over the tune. As in the verse and pre-chorus, this pulls the song into a headier and more transcendent space. (Recall Lakoff and Johnson's comments about orientational metaphor, which I explained

in Chapter Five.) The backing vocals also increase the unstable sound of each suspension, by layering more non-diatonic notes over each basic chord. The chorus ends triumphantly, the melody ascending to its peak, and lingering upon the proclamation that 'He is alive'. In the *Tides* studio album recording, this is followed by a long instrumental section featuring prominent electric violin riffs on the chorus, culminating in an ultimately climactic statement of the coda. This is the absolute climax of the song, resolving all prior tension by opening on a tonic chord, and proceeding with a total lack of dissonance or suspensions. The material is unrelated to the previous motifs, and is rhythmically very regular. The coda's rhythmic and harmonic regularity adds stability to its message, which identifies the atonement with the worshippers' response in song:

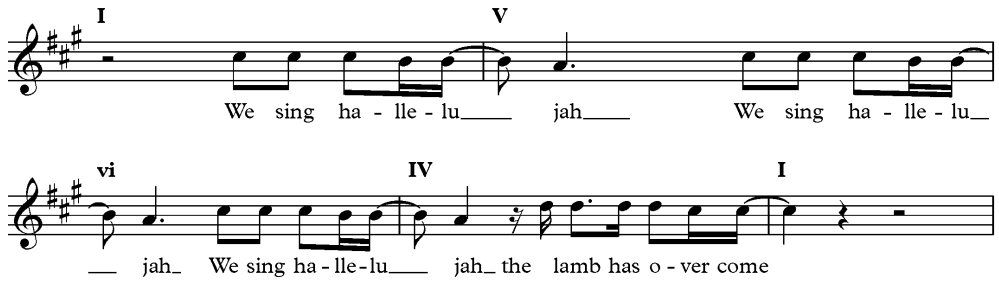


Figure 52. Bethel Music, 'Forever,' coda (3:51).

Note that the melody peaks with the statement 'the lamb has overcome', which concludes with a perfect cadence, this return to the tonic signifying a stable conclusion. The overall trajectory of the song is from weakness to climax, with sin fleetingly alluded to at the beginning, and swiftly yet emphatically 'overcome' through thickening textures, increasing volume, complexifying drum patterns and an ascending melody. Although the variety of textures and occasional harmonic complexity adds some musical diversity and emotional breadth to the song, the climactic structure presents negativity as unambiguously 'overcome'. Meanwhile, the lyrics' brief allusions to sin do not define, let alone elaborate upon, it. Whatever the negative forces to which the lyrics refer, they are utterly overshadowed by the climactic song structure, in which the worshippers are implicated by their 'really worshipping'. In 'Forever', sin is in the past, whilst praise is for the present.

The presentation of sin, within this atonement narrative, is entirely appropriate; 'Forever' displays, amongst Bethel's songs, a strikingly effective use of motif to expressively frame a coherent theology. However, the lack of diversity in Bethel's treatment of sin will become more apparent as I give further examples. The approach to climax found in 'Forever', which overcomes a sparse texture, generically signifying negativity or vulnerability (**i**), with an ascending motivic trajectory and thickening texture (**ii**) that leads to 'real worship' (**iii**), is apparent in all of the following atonement narrative songs that I address. This may well be appropriate for atonement narratives – a point I explore further in my conclusion. However, these three steps are found fairly uniformly in all Bethel's other songs that address sin, entrenching their weak hamartiology with a concern for divine power that takes precedence.

'Seas of Crimson' (We Will Not Be Shaken)

'Seas of Crimson' was co-written by the independent songwriter Daniel Bashta, and Brian Johnson.[660] The song echoes Matt Redman's popular rendition of the hymn 'Here is Love' (which Bethel recorded in 2010), in its hymnal tone and pop structure.[661] The title refers to the means by which sin is defeated, and Bashta's lyrics are uncommonly forthright, in their discussion of sin and Christ's work on the cross. 'Seas of Crimson' follows the thematic trajectory I have already identified, first setting out a theological description of the cross, and Christ's role in relation to mankind, and moving towards exhortations to prayer, and statements of God's power.

Like 'Forever', 'Seas of Crimson' opens with gentle cosmic ambience (**i**). This is followed by an instrumental melody. However, unlike in 'Forever', the cosmic synth sound that introduces the song is largely diatonic. It is concentrated on the interval of a major third starting on the tonic, with an audible shifting back and forth between the mediant and subdominant notes. A piano line then regulates this interval into a motif:

[660] Bethel Music, 'Seas of Crimson (Live),' (2015).
[661] Dave Trout, 'Interview with Daniel Bashta,' *Under the Radar* (27 February 2013). <https://web.archive.org/web/20140808110543/http://undertheradar.reframemedia.com/blog/interview-with-daniel-bashta> Bashta names Redman as an influence on his songwriting.
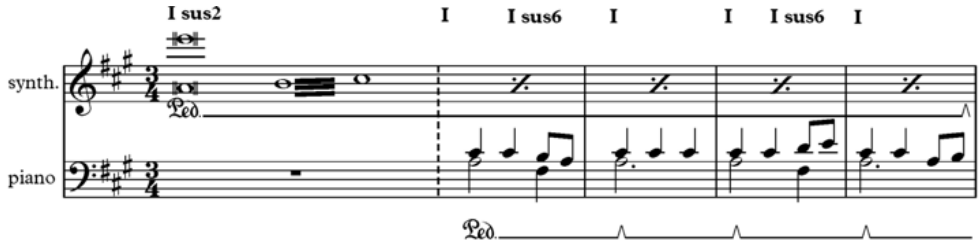


Figure 53. Bethel Music, 'Seas of Crimson,' introduction (0:00).

Here, sparseness, rather than dissonance, reflects the vulnerability that sin entails. The opening verses are hymnal in style, and develop this opening melody, moving in thirds that reinforce the stable, major tonality. The lines continually resolve with hymnal-sounding plagal cadences:

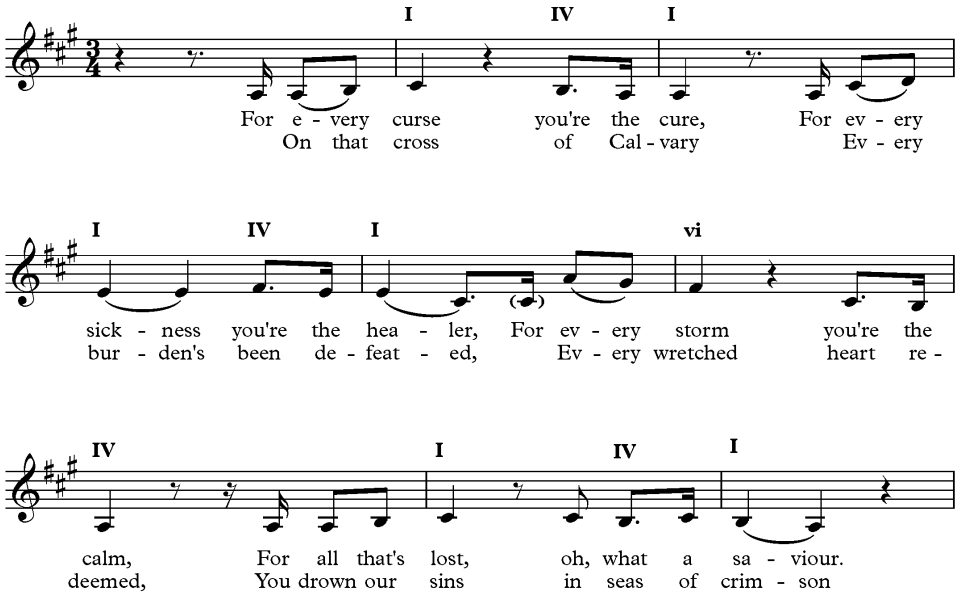


Figure 54. Bethel Music, 'Seas of Crimson,' verses one and two (0:20).

The song's gentle opening mood is complemented by mostly passive descriptions of sin. Imagery of 'curses', 'sickness', 'storms' and being 'wretched' and 'lost' convey a non-moralistic conception of sin, and dramatic rendering of its defeat by Christus Victor. (This is in keeping with the introduction's tranquil simplicity and lack of dissonance.) The verse melody develops, ascending by thirds and then inverting, before recapitulating in the final line. This is a very ordered use of melody, easy to follow in the pattern of traditional hymnody, with inevitable sounding resolutions that mirror the lyrical content of Christ resolving the problem of sin.

The second verse ('On that cross...') follows the same musical structure, but with heavier instrumentation (**ii**), and explains the significance of the cross in particular. Beginning, again, with initially passive language regarding sin ('burden'), the verse gently implicates the worshipper in their sin, by calling their heart 'wretched' at the climactic point of the verse. The violence of the final phrase underscores the seriousness of sin, as does the vastness implied by Christ's 'seas of crimson'. The present tense of 'drown' suggests ongoing action, possibly implying that Christ's defeat of sin is ongoing, or perhaps referring to the continuous proselytising undertaken by Christian communities like Bethel's. These possible allusions are expressively framed, however, by the song's resounding harmonic stability.

As in the verses, the chorus pastiches traditional hymnody. The rising and reiterated tone intervals sound more suspenseful than the conjunct scales of the verses (**ii**). The chorus melody finds its highest point with the celebration of Christ's resurrection 'from the grave', and concludes with a statement of praise:

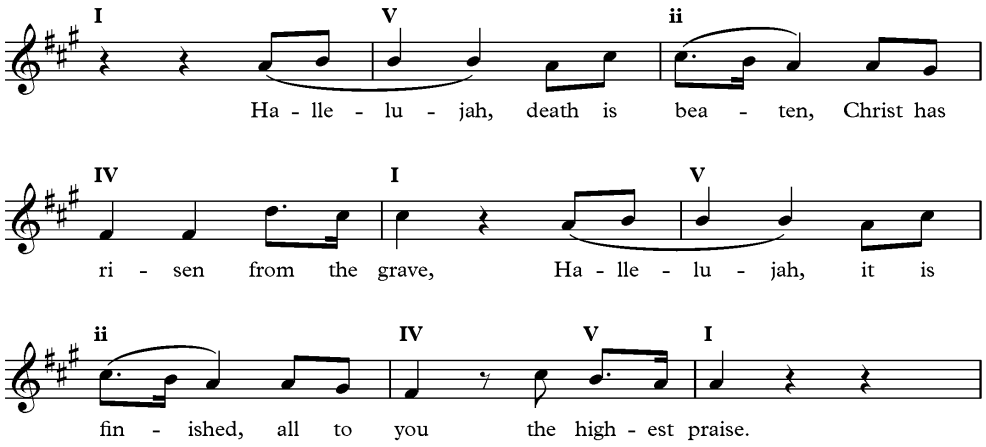


Figure 55. Bethel Music, 'Seas of Crimson,' chorus (1:04).

The third verse changes the focus from the purpose of Christ's salvific work to anticipation of Christ's second coming. This transitions into the chorus with an additional line, wherein the melody is sung an octave higher, the ensuing heightened intensity audible in Brian Johnson's voice (**iii**):

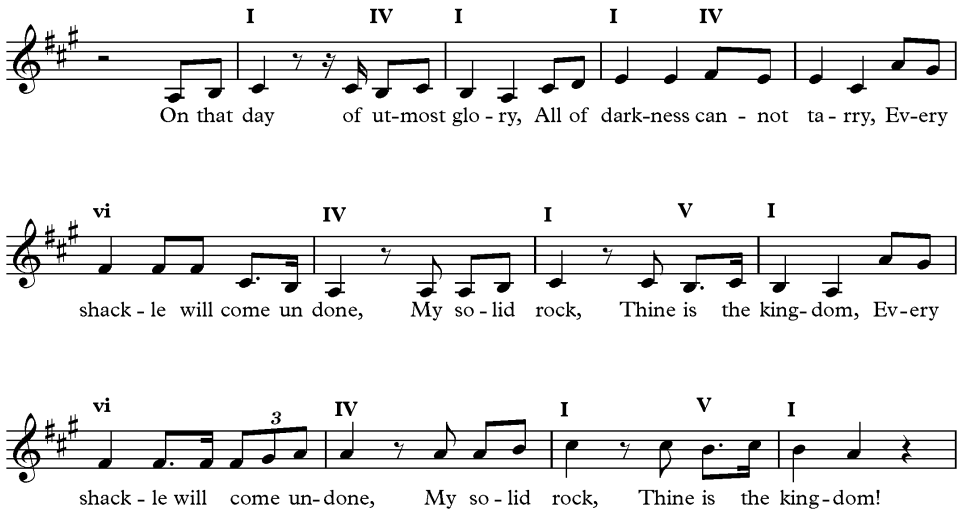


Figure 56. Bethel Music, 'Seas of Crimson,' verse three (1:34).

Here, with the reference to the undoing of shackles, the song alludes to a Christus Victor model of Christ as liberator, and affirms the unmatched power of God. After a chorus recapitulation accompanied by a full band, the song suddenly abandons its lyrical, hymnal style, in favour of a forceful middle eight. This is worth comparing to Matt Redman's earlier reimagining of 'Here is Love', as the musical style and its theological implication of divine power is the same.[662] 'Here is Love' is also a song that conveys to worshippers their salvation by the love of God, manifest in Christ's work on the cross. The hymn was written in the late 19th century, its tune by the American Baptist minister Robert Lowry, and lyrics by William Rees and William Williams. Redman adds a coda to the end of the older hymn, emphasising the vastness of the love in a more contemporary idiom. This section, which recalls Ephesians 3:18, departs strikingly from that earlier style, with a melody that pounds on every beat. This is emphasised by powerful chords that are struck every quaver beat by the whole band, and drum accompaniment. Harmonies are sung over the tonic pedal vocal line, mirroring the guitar harmony. The forceful sound of the music reflects the lyrics, which convey the power of God's love:

[662] Passion, Matt Redman, 'Here Is Love – Live,' *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (Sparrow Records/sixstepsrecords: 2004). Bethel Music recorded their own version of this song in 2011, for a live album of the same title. See Bethel Music, Brian Johnson, Jenn Johnson, 'Here Is Love,' *Here Is Love* (Bethel Music: 2013).

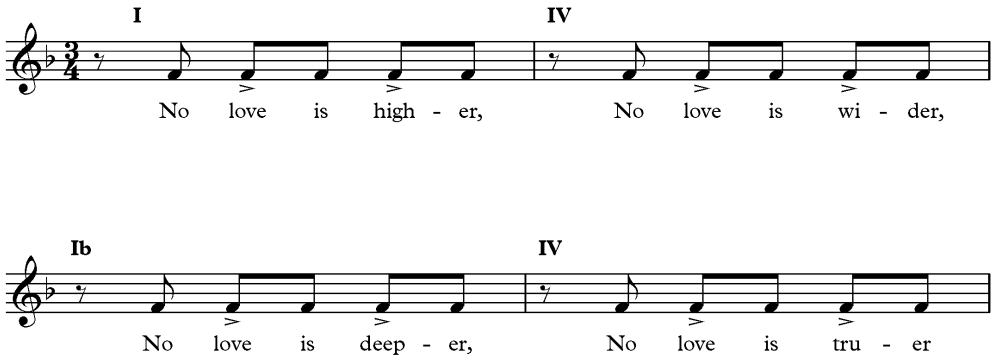


Figure 57. Matt Redman, 'Here Is Love,' coda (2:50).

The coda for 'Seas of Crimson' adopts an almost identical use of rhythm, melody and instrumentation, stressing every quaver beat and reiterating the tonic note in its first two phrases:

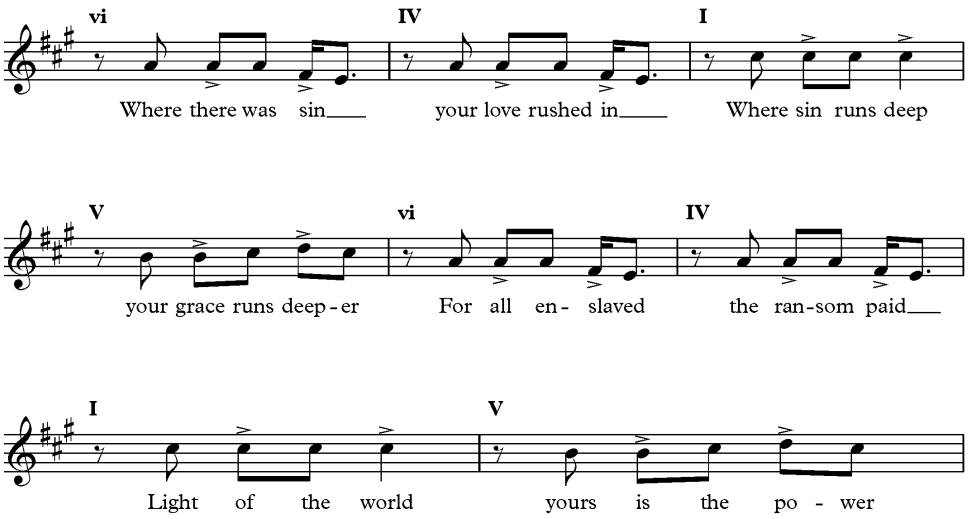


Figure 58. Bethel Music, 'Seas of Crimson,' coda (3:21).

Although this coda mentions sin twice, sin is not attributed to anyone in particular, nor are any definite characteristics associated with it except, perhaps, 'enslave[ment]'. More urgent are the overwhelming rhythmic blows of the music. True to the thematic journey of the song, the coda moves from acknowledgement of sin, to a statement of God's power. The final line ('yours is the power') makes this more explicit than Redman's coda. Meanwhile, the loud, triumphant music with ascending melody affirms a Christus Victor model of atonement. Although the song adopts a climactic and triumphalist

structure, it is important that the coda is new motivic material, and stylistically very different material at that. It does not develop from the prior material, but is simply stuck onto the end of the stylistically similar verse and chorus. In a 'song story' video interview, Brian Johnson makes clear that the powerful arrangement of the music is essential to its message. Brian identifies Daniel Bashta as the song's main writer, noting that Bashta wrote the opening verse. Brian, emphasising the need to 'boast about the love of God in a way that's fresh and new', remarks that

> those words have been said a lot, but when you say it like that in a new way I think there's more power on it.[663]

It is not entirely clear what Brian means by 'like that in a new way', but power is evidently of concern to him. This is reflected not only in his claim that the music has a spiritual consequence (or 'power'), but in the forcefulness of the music itself, which is emphasised by its stylistic incongruity to the rest of the song. In this way, although 'Seas of Crimson' quite ably signals the complexities of the doctrine of sin without dwelling on the topic, its theological reflections on sin are swallowed up in its climactic statement of divine power. Tangible assurance, once again, takes precedence.

Son of God (Have It All)

Cory Asbury's 2016 song, 'Son of God', adopts this same climactic musical structure. It also uses similar instrumental techniques, opening with a cosmic sounding reverberating synthesiser, and single piano chords struck on the first beat of their bars that create an impression of vast space through use of rests and reverb (**i**).[664] The verses and chorus are based on the same descending perfect fourth motif, from F to C. The vocal melody is static, with short phrases and long pauses. This lends a contemplative air to Asbury's description of the crucifixion:

[663] Bethel Music, 'Seas of Crimson (Song Story) – Brian Johnson | We Will Not Be Shaken,' *YouTube* (4 April 2015). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iW0c_A3lnmk>
[664] Bethel Music, Cory Asbury, 'Son of God (Live),' *Have It All (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2016).
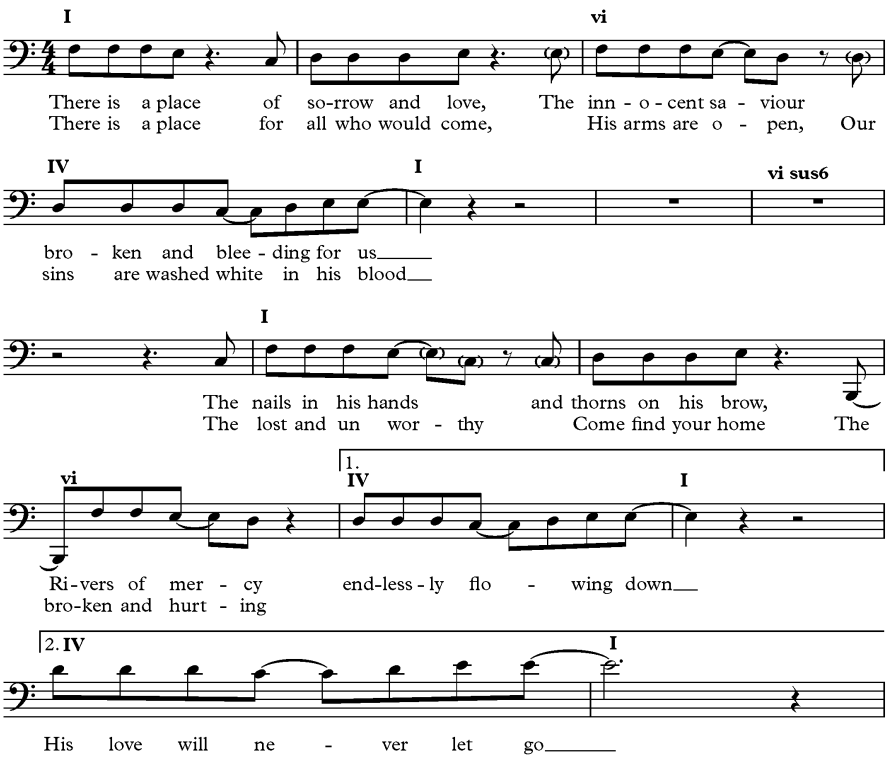


Figure 59. Bethel Music, 'Son of God,' verses one & two (0:13, 1:25).

Asbury's description of the crucifixion and its significance is not purely therapeutic. He establishes the sinlessness of Christ, the free availability of salvation, and Christ's vicarious defeat of human sin, as well as noting Christ's role as comforter. The vivid atonement imagery emphasises the costliness of grace, sung in a sober and vocally relaxed register. The second chorus is sung an octave higher (**ii**), in keeping with the song's climactic structure:

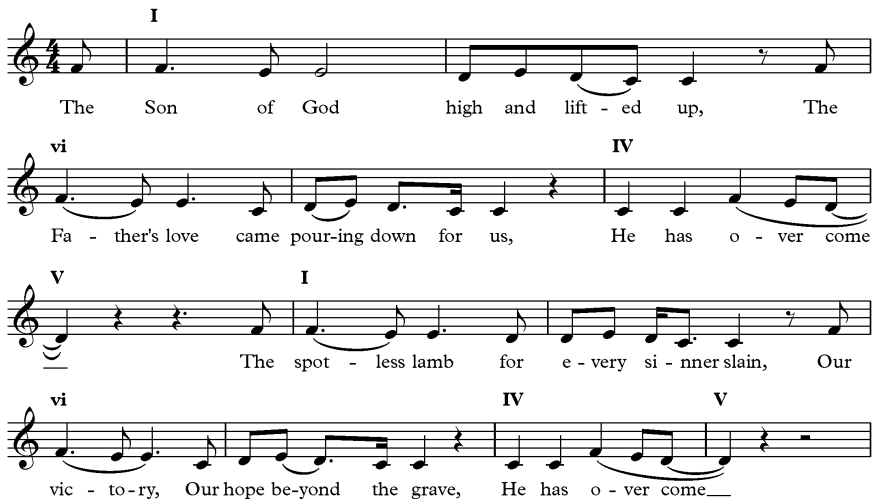


Figure 60. Bethel Music, 'Son of God,' chorus (0:54).

While Asbury reaffirms the specific salvific purpose of the crucifixion, the climax of the chorus is in the repeated refrain 'he has overcome', true to the Bethel Collective's proclivity for using Christus Victor imagery. This is sung over an imperfect cadence that creates a sense of expectation for its resolution (IV – V). Asbury's treatment of sin in 'Son of God' is corporate, always referring to 'sinners' in the abstract, or noting that Christ died 'for us'. This corporate dimension becomes personal in the climactic coda, the metric rhythm and homophonous instrumental texture of which stylistically resembles the hammering codas in 'Seas of Crimson' and 'Here is Love' (**iii**). This coda identifies the act of worship as the appropriate response to the cross, identifying 'love' as the ground of God's saving action, and the praise it engenders. The musical material expressively ensconces this declaration about love in a frame expressive primarily of power:

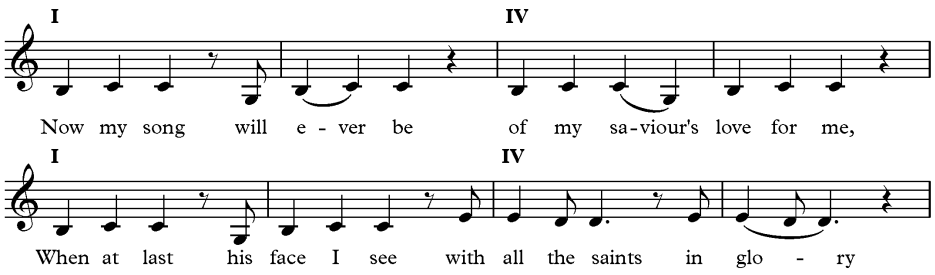


Figure 61. Bethel Music, 'Son of God,' coda (3:01).

These three examples all demonstrate Bethel Music's characteristic combination of Christus Victor imagery with a lyrical focus on subjective religious experience, with God's love for the individual worshipper emphasised in particular. In addition, some penal substitution imagery features, but is not coherently integrated with these symbols. Whilst neither of these images are problematic in themselves, the Bethel Collective are strikingly normative in their use of these symbols at the expense of all others. The effect is that two weak hamartiologies are interwoven: an atonement theology wherein sin is almost wholly externalised, and a theology of salvation wherein aspects of the life of faith, such as formation, divine encounter and supernatural empowerment, are unimpeded by innate sinfulness. In other words, the Bethel Collective confusedly propagate two conflicting models, without integrating them, by holding to penal substitution (which presupposes that sin is serious, and personally so) and at the same

time downplaying the seriousness of sin (for the motivational-pastoral reasons I have already associated with John Wesley and Schleiermacher).

There is a further discrepancy that warrants mentioning, between Bethel preacher Kris Vallotton's repeated claims that believers need to '*try* to sin' (see Chapter Three), and the great power attributed to the devil and to God in Bethel's music, which portrays individuals as rather passive agents in Bethel's music, enslaved by dark forces and liberated by Christ. The devil acts as a convenient scapegoat for the source of sin, enabling sin to remain a serious infraction against God whilst deemphasising individual responsibility for it, and skating over the possibility of innate corruption. This was evident in the erotic infantilism I described in the previous chapter, in Bethel Music's tendency to use passive language and infantile music as a therapeutic rhetorical device. Bethel Music combine their passive engagement in sin with a post-atonement subjective model of continual spiritual growth which has no negative corollary. In other words, as they present it, Christus Victor overcomes sin for humanity and inaugurates an age of potential supernatural empowerment for mankind. However, in this account of atonement theology, it is not clear how individuals might be implicated in the universal state of sin that precedes salvation. (This is a similar problem as McFadyen describes, regarding social sin.)

Meanwhile, Bethel's use of Christus Victor imagery, and the vividness of its musically frame, underlines Martyn Percy's comment that pop worship teaches believers to be 'power replicas' of Christ, in contrast to Paul's proclamation of divine strength in human weakness, in 2 Corinthians 12:9. This raises an interesting point made by Colin Gunton, regarding temptation. Gunton, glossing the temptation of Christ in the Gospel of Luke, notes that idolatry is to do with the misuse of power. Christus Victor, Gunton suggests, is not a human or a 'tragic' way of understanding the cross. To this end, Gunton warns against using this imagery incautiously:

> All the temptations are concerned in some way with the misuse of human power in relation to the created order, particularly as they might be conceived to present themselves to one claiming messiahship. In other words, they are in different ways conceived as temptations to idolatry, with worshipping 'the creature rather than the creator', in one of Paul's

> definitions of sin (Rom.1.25, cf.18). It is the refusal to succumb to the temptation that is Jesus' victory... Jesus' own refusal to succumb to temptation is the source of his power ('in the power of the spirit', v.14) to wage successful war against those very forces which hold human life in subjection.... According to Luke's account, then, the divine victory over evil is achieved by means of the human ministry of Jesus, and it is a victory that continues in the final crisis of that ministry.[665]

This is what makes the explicit divinity of Christus Victor's victory so concerning for Gunton, when taken as the only – or even the primary – model of atonement. The Bethel Collective do use different atonement analogies: for example, the abundance of 'for me's in their lyrics affirms substitution of some sort. However, their rhetoric primarily concerns Christus Victor, and externalises the forces of evil. The primacy of this scapegoating approach to sin is reinforced by the resolutely climactic structure of their music, its affective force, and Bethel's unwillingness to dwell on sin, in both music and lyrics. The issues I have identified in the songs thus far are not to do with individual musical features taken as isolated incidents. Rather, I have demonstrated that Bethel Music's treatment of the atonement frames sin and salvation almost exclusively in terms of power, eclipsing other considerations such as grace, in order to shore up the significance of the worship event. Sin is treated as retrospective on two fronts: firstly, through positive, simple, continually resolving musical material that accompanies evasive and euphemistic lyrics, and secondly, through the climactic structuring of this musical material. As I pointed out at the beginning of this section, this is potentially entirely appropriate to an atonement narrative; the musical climaxes in these songs all emphasise the efficacy of the cross. However, the exact same structure is applied to Bethel's songs that acknowledge sin yet are *not* about the atonement. This suggests that, perhaps, Bethel Music use musical climax not to expressively frame the efficacy of the cross, but to engender the therapeutic efficacy of the worship event.

This is a form of 'working out our own salvation', yet in a far more supernatural capacity than John Wesley envisaged with his concept of Christian Perfection. Affirming Christ's domination of forces of darkness is not only myopic, overlooking the vast capacity for

[665] Gunton, *Atonement*, 58-9.

"good people to do ill", as McFadyen so illustrates the complicity of huge networks of people in sin. It also, as Martyn Percy notes, directly risks engendering idolatry, by founding worship too literally on the affirmation of power, potentially replacing God, as the object of worship, with the power to overcome "dark forces". There is precedent for this argument in the critiques of Bill Johnson's focus on healing, which I mentioned in Chapter One. If the previous chapter demonstrated a therapeutic evasion of sin, the prevalence of climax in Bethel's music illustrates Bethel's power-oriented understanding of the Gospel. Consequently, Bethel Music covertly defy the 'constantly disruptive' symbolism Janet Soskice finds in the Gospels, reinscribing the supremacy of strength over weakness, and propagating a musical idiom that covers over sin, before it can be transformed by grace.[666]

7.4 CLIMAX, EVERYWHERE

Bethel Music's atonement songs present sin primarily as a non-moralistic form of alienation from God, and grace as an act of power wielded by Christus Victor. The development of motivic and lyrical themes is not intrinsic to the triumphalist musical structure (**i – ii – iii**) through which this is conveyed; however, the narrative structure of the atonement songs I have presented do correlate with a greater degree of motivic development than the examples preceding them, or those to follow. (Examples of motivic development would include the inversion of melody in 'Forever', or the embellishments on the 3-2-1 motif of 'For the Cross'.) However, it is not necessarily the case that the climactic musical structure utilises motivic development, as I demonstrated in the sudden stylistic shift of 'Seas of Crimson' (and its stylistic precursor, in Matt Redman's 'Here is Love'). I have surmised that the perennial movement towards musical climax is related less to the theological propositions in each song's lyrics, and more to do with facilitating an intense emotional encounter with 'really worshipping'. I am distinguishing, here, between the use of musical climax to contour the Gospel message, which I am not problematising, and the subordination of the Gospel narrative to "really worshipping," driven by climactic musical triumphalism. This concern is particularly warranted, given the closing message of all of these songs, which are invariably about participating in the

[666] Janet Martin Soskice, 'Blood and Defilement,' in *Feminism and Theology*, Janet Martin Soskice and Diana Lipton (ed.) (Oxford: OUP, 2003), 40-1.

act of worship itself. (This self-reflexiveness perhaps sounds intuitive but is not strictly necessary to the act of worship.)

The link between motivic development and musical climax all but disappears in the Bethel Collective's other songs that, however briefly, concern sin, piecing together scraps of atonement theology without recounting a full narrative. Selectively combining Biblical images is not, in itself, a problem; Neville acknowledges the risk of proof-texting, but also the potential benefit of weaving together different symbols.[667] However, without narrative structuring the lyrics, the focus of Bethel Music's worship event is shown, much more clearly, to be "really worshipping", and the experiences of assurance it purportedly facilitates. This is particularly evident, given the simplicity and emotional tenor of the music. Whilst the structural points of climax are the same in the following as in the previous examples, and the harmony similarly swift to resolve to the major tonic, the music is without motivic development. This means that, while the lyrics prioritise the worship event, the music loops in ever-intensifying cycles of the same static material, adopting a triumphant structure independently of any Gospel narrative; even when Bethel Music are *not* telling the story of Christus Victor, they use exactly the same climactic musical structures to expressively conclude the problem of sin, in order to engender an environment expressive of positive emotional encounters with the divine, and supernatural empowerment.

What Would I Have Done

Brian Johnson's 'What Would I Have Done' (2010), co-written with Tim Hughes and Christa Black Gifford, describes the personal impact of the cross in the life of the worshipper.[668] In so doing, the lyrics emphasise emotional response to the cross, which is described in substitutionary terms. Suspension-laden chord progressions build intensity throughout the song. Consider the introduction, played by a solo piano, laden with pedal, in which Brian complicates an ordinary IV-V-I progression in several ways, to create a sense of instability. The opening IV chord is rooted on the 7th (IV^{7}d), which, as an added note extrinsic to the subdominant triad, is the weakest note of the chord. The dissonance formed by the juxtaposition of F_5 and G_5 together, underscored by their bass position, invites resolution. Suspensions held over the barlines create a lingering sound, and no

[667] Neville, *Symbols*, 130-2.
[668] Bethel Music, Brian Johnson, Jenn Johnson, 'What Would I Have Done,' *Be Lifted High* (Bethel Music: 2011).

chord except the final chord of the phrase occurs both in its "normal" root position and without added notes. This final major third concludes the passage, in a IV-V half cadence that awaits resolution. Meanwhile, continuous quavers add a sense of motion to the motif, counting each half-beat:

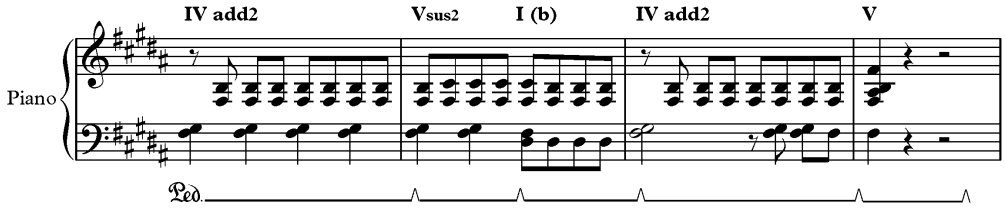


Figure 62. Bethel Music, 'What Would I Have Done,' introduction (0:02).

In this way, although the song opens with a fairly subdued tone, the rhythm and harmony convey a sense of movement towards the eventual climax from the beginning of the song (**i – ii**). The verses are sung in a low tessitura that matches the range of the moody opening motif. These describe the 'brokenness and shame' that Christ undertook on the behalf of man, using substitution imagery:

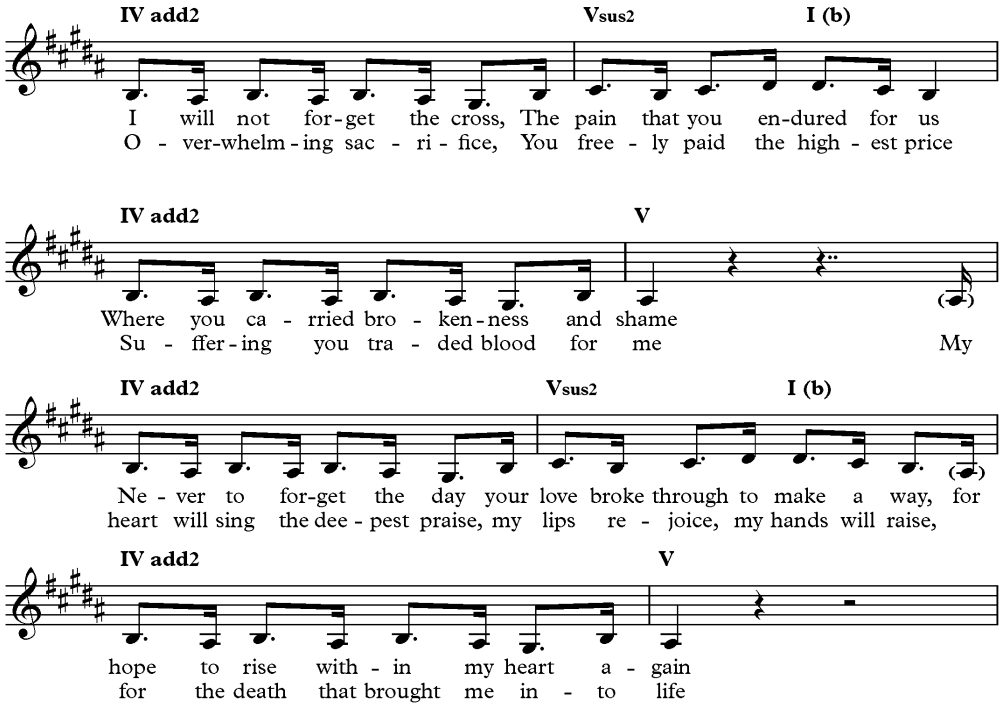


Figure 63. Bethel Music, 'What Would I Have Done,' verses one and two (0:29).

The vocal melody meanders around the tonic (B_5), occasionally rising up, before sinking again. This reflects the yearning feel of the chord progression underpinning it (**ii**). The lyrics refer to pain, brokenness, shame and sacrifice, and the melodic peak in the second bar emphasises the costliness of the cross: that which Christ 'en**dure**d for us', paying 'the **high**est price'. Each phrase ends with an unfinished-sounding half cadence. This is resolved by the pre-chorus, which breaks the tension and sombre mood of the verses and choruses, with its several perfect cadences:

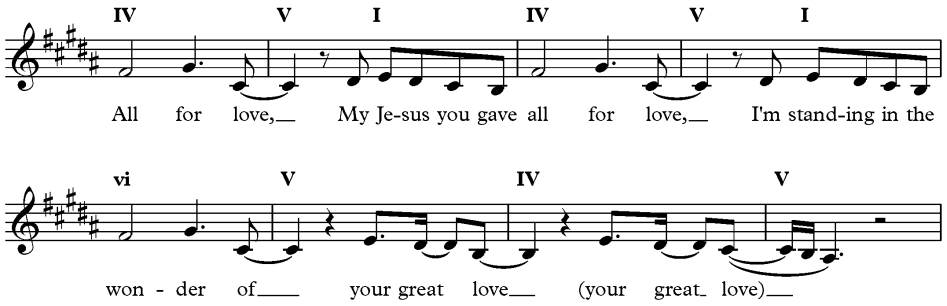


Figure 64. Bethel Music, 'What Would I Have Done,' pre-chorus (1:36).

The chorus lyrics then frame redemption in terms of emotional transformation. The melody rising in pitch and intensity, and landing on the relative minor chord (rather than the tonic), after each iteration of the titular question (**ii**):

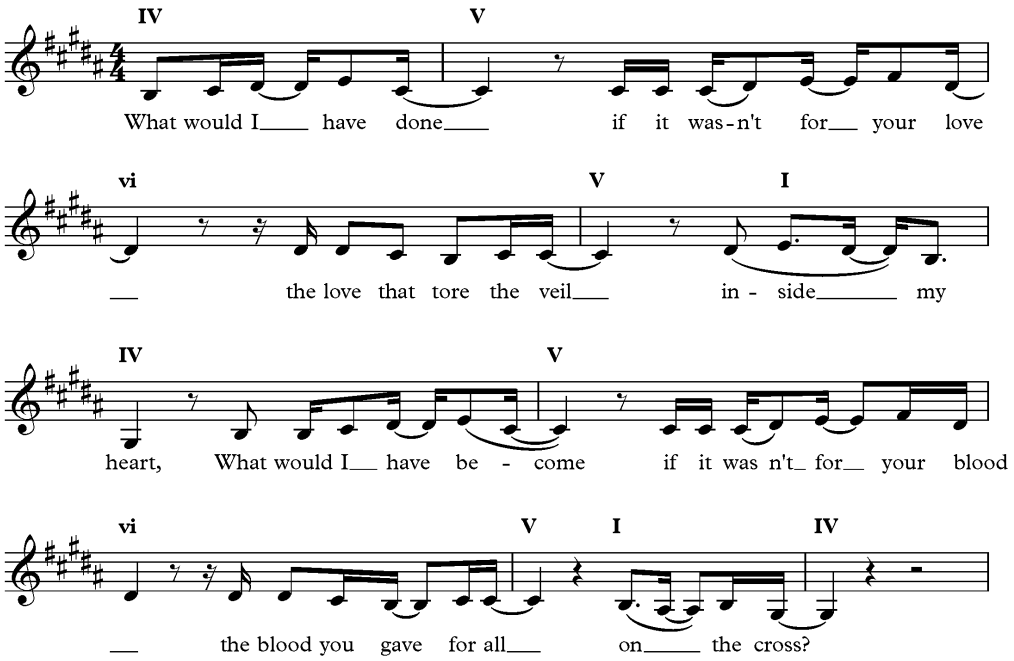


Figure 65. Bethel Music, 'What Would I Have Done,' chorus (3:03).

Brian draws from Matthew 27:51, an image that is commonly interpreted as a sign of Christ fulfilling the need for priests and propitiation. However, Brian presents it as an inner movement ('inside my heart'), akin to the 'anxious wall of division' between the individual and the infinite, of which Schleiermacher forecasts the destruction.[669] Schleiermacher's interpretation of this interior barrier to the infinite demonstrates how vital formation (*Bildung*) is to his concept of redemption. This pertains particularly to the intuitive faculty, through which, he suggests, one can understand one's unity with the universe. Therefore the negative state akin to sin, in the 1799 *Speeches*, is essentially a relational phenomenon whereby an underdeveloped or distorted intuitive faculty occludes communion with the infinite.[670] Schleiermacher's early theology makes his Pietistic influences clear; as I noted in Chapters One and Two, John Wesley's attention to religious experience was also borne of Pietist influence. In Chapters Two and Three I described the theological risks of an overly experiential hermeneutic, particularly one in which the significance of "negative" concepts such as sin or judgement is minimised. Here, Brian's affective, interior presentation of the torn veil does not explicitly entail a non-moralistic account of sin, but does frame sin – without naming it directly – in passive and relational terms.

Further, Brian's lyric offers an uncomplicated view of the justified Christian's faculty of desire. As I suggested earlier, the Bethel Collective's language of 'letting go' and 'undoing' suggests that the worshipper's desires are innately without corruption; thus in 'letting go', one becomes available for encounter with God, rather than tending naturally towards evil. I am not suggesting that the Bethel Collective *should* present human nature as naturally tending towards evil, as this is a stronger hamartiology than is needed to convey a dialectic of sin and grace. I am simply pointing out that they do not raise the question, relying instead on assumptions regarding the purity of the justified heart.

The therapeutic end of Brian's treatment of sin, here, is underscored by the climactic norm to which the song adheres (**iii**). The cyclical chord progression of the chorus is put to use after its second recapitulation; every closing unfinished cadence (I – IV) spurs on another repeat of the chorus, each more intense than the last. The texture thickens with

[669] Schleiermacher, *Speeches*, 70: Schleiermacher is alluding to the 'dividing wall' of Ephesians 2:14, which is 'broken down' by redemption through Christ.
[670] Schleiermacher, *Speeches*, 53: Whether or not this is God depends on 'the direction of one's imagination'...

hammering instrumentation, the melody rises an octave and belted female backing vocals add intensity and "height" to the sound. Unusually, there is no coda, and no lyrical pivot towards 'really worshipping' as the theme of the song. Nevertheless, 'What Would I Have Done' adopts the requisite climax, ultimately being structured around its own enormous crescendo. Thus the ambiguity, moodiness and sensitivity towards sin which, initially, the musical material ably conveys is lost in a normative, hammering climax, the song's theological propositions to be subordinate to the emotional intensity that the music engenders.

God of the Redeemed

Paul and Hannah McClure's 'God of the Redeemed' is, again, structured around a climax, from an intimate, slow rock texture, expressive of vulnerability and divine comfort, to a triumphant, full band anthem. The lyrics are replete with exhortations to "really worship". Although the song is fully six minutes long, the climax occurs in the first minute of the song, in the transformation of verse, through a pre-chorus, to chorus. The second verse is then accompanied by a full band and thick texture. The song opens with another non-moralistic description of the effect of the atonement, interweaving satisfaction imagery with liberative imagery that presents mankind as enslaved. The vocal range is low and relaxed (**i**), while the lyrics do not describe the state of sin, but elucidate the concept by its opposites, such as 'light and freedom':

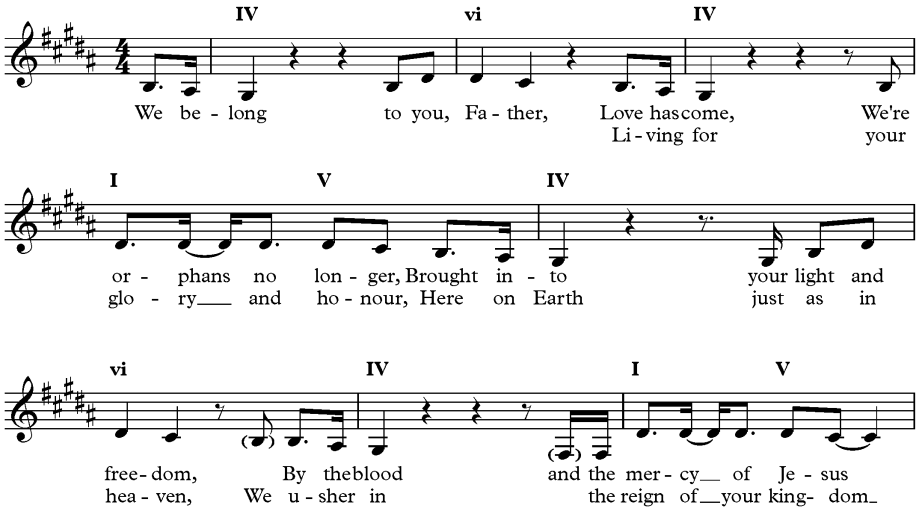


Figure 66. Bethel Music, 'God of the Redeemed,' verses one and two (0:00).

The song's most distinctive hook is the pre-chorus, which is repeated several times in the song, often consecutively. This pre-chorus uses word painting, setting an ascending melody to the words 'its rising', with a self-reflective concern with the act of worship itself (**ii**):

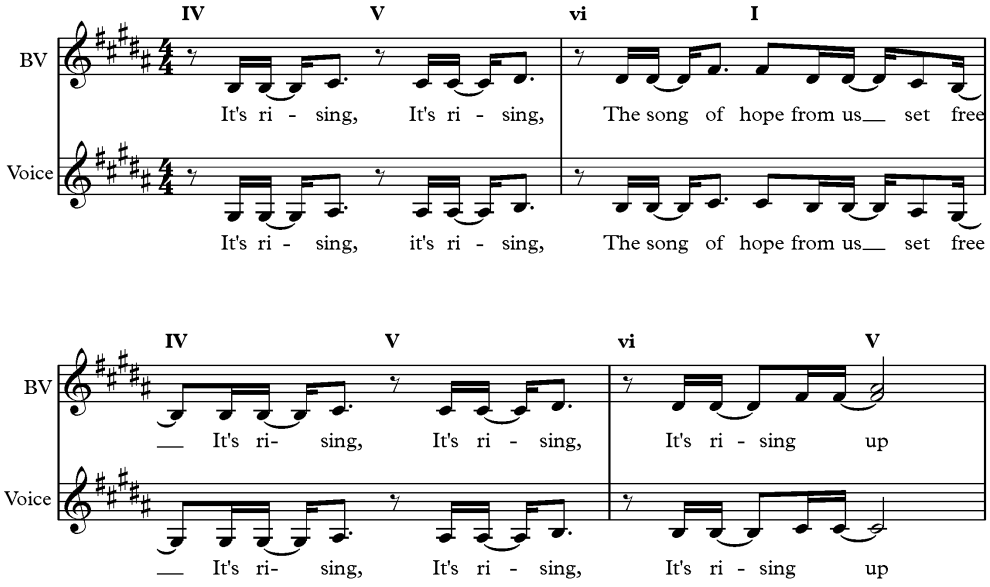


Figure 67. Bethel Music, 'God of the Redeemed,' pre-chorus (main vocal and backing vocal) (0:27).

The brevity and repetition of the ascending phrases build suspense, over chords that appear to lead towards a perfect cadence (IV – V – [...I?]) before feinting away (IV – V – vi) . Hannah McClure's backing vocals, a third above the main vocal line, draw attention to the corporate dynamic of the worship event. The impetus of the rising melody, and the pleasant proportions between the vocal melody and backing vocals, form a positive and hopeful sound, indicating the climax to come (**ii**). The pre-chorus ends with an imperfect cadence that awaits resolution in the first bar of the chorus:
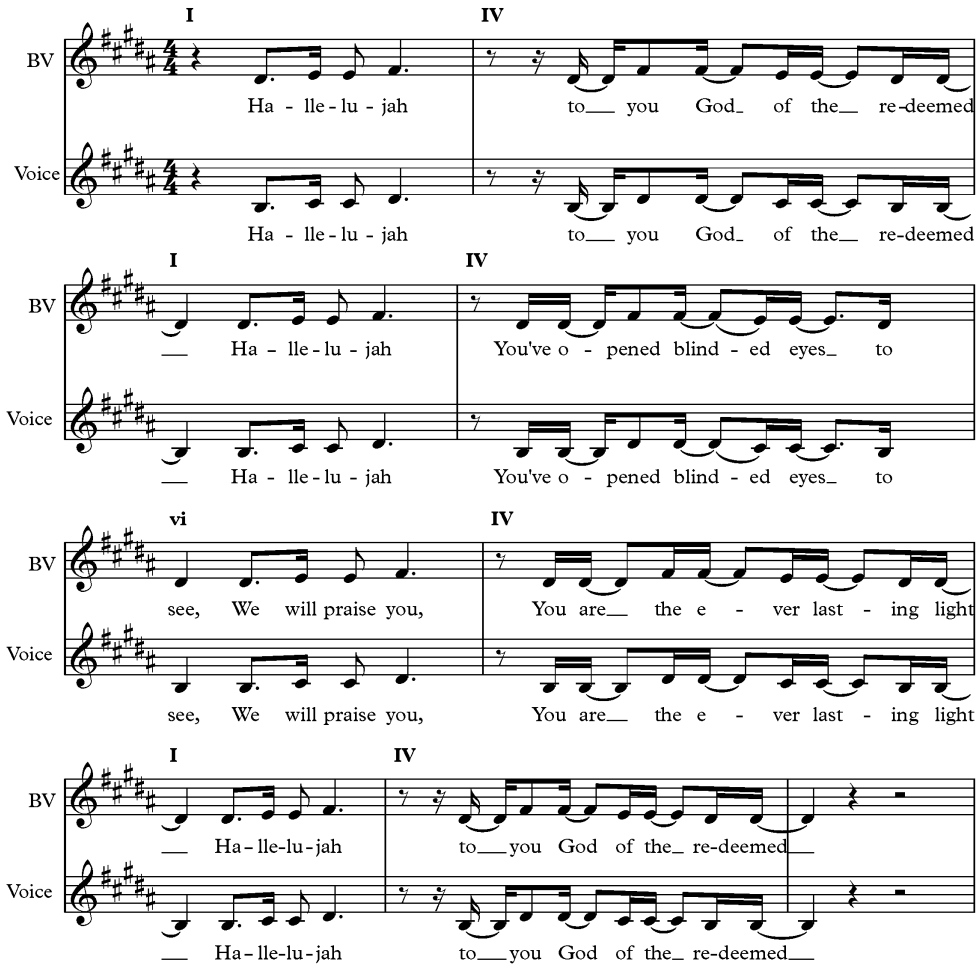


Figure 68. Bethel Music, 'God of the Redeemed,' chorus (0:41).

The chorus celebrates redemption, although it does not explicate the content of redemption beyond the non-moralistic reference to 'blinded eyes'. Hannah McClure's pleasant vocal harmony, a third above the melody, emphasises the positive frame of the song, which focuses on the act of worship as much, if not more, as the proposed reason for worshipping: here, 'Hallelujah' can be read not as a response to redemption, necessarily, but as a means for the worshipper to situate themselves in the act of worship (**iii**). The third verse (1:20) links the act of worship to the establishment and 'reign' of God's Kingdom on Earth:

> We belong to You Father, living for,
> Your glory and honour
> Here on Earth, just as in Heaven
> We usher in, the reign of Your Kingdom.

Although this song is nominally about redemption from sin, it seems to prioritise worship as the basis of a dominion theology, rather than reflecting upon sin and redemption themselves. The lyrics treat sin euphemistically, whilst the musical material is wholly positive-sounding, almost entirely devoid of minor chords, and replete with the pleasant proportions of harmonies sung in thirds. Meanwhile, the song's most distinctive motif contours, and perhaps engenders, excitement regarding the worship event itself, as well as the supernatural empowerment it might facilitate. Once again, sin features only in retrospect, underscoring the therapeutic function of the worship event.

Our Father

A striking example of music-theological triumphalism, particularly with respect to its treatment of hamartiology, is Marcus Meier's setting of the 'Our Father'.[671] One might expect this song to at least mention sin, given the traditional prayer's verses that pertain to temptation and the threat of evil.[672] Instead, sin is whitewashed entirely from the lyrics, and the song adopts a triumphalist musical structure, expressive of God's power, and implicating the worshipper in it. The song opens in a major key with cosmic ambience, before a melody based on descending scales and thirds is heard (**i**). The effect is gentle and contemplative, a tone that is reinforced by the lyrics, which abridge the Lord's Prayer to remove all mention of sin and evil:

[671] Bethel Music, Jenn Johnson, 'Our Father,' *For the Sake of the World* (Bethel Music: 2012).
[672] '...Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'
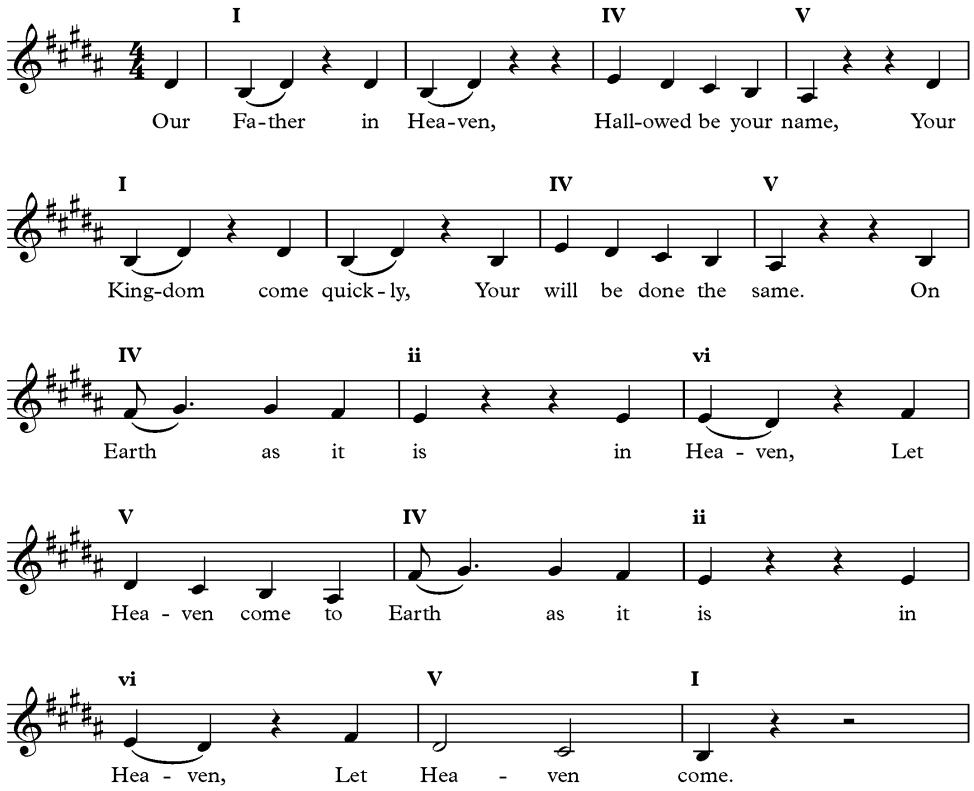


Figure 69. Bethel Music, 'Our Father,' verse and chorus. (0:32)

From the verse ('Our Father') to the chorus ('On Earth'), the range of the melody extends, from A♯$_3$ - D♯$_4$ to A♯$_3$ - G♯$_4$. The verse harmony starts with the tonic, and gently progresses to an imperfect cadence at the end of each phrase, by way of the subdominant. The chorus has a more yearning quality, resting on "weak" chords, for example the IV – ii – vi cadence, which culminates in an imperfect, rather than perfect, cadence (**ii**). The song's climax is oriented towards 'really worshipping'. This section is inaugurated by the repeated refrain 'let heaven come' on the second iteration of the verse and chorus, which eventually climaxes into the coda by way of an instrumental crescendo (**iii**):

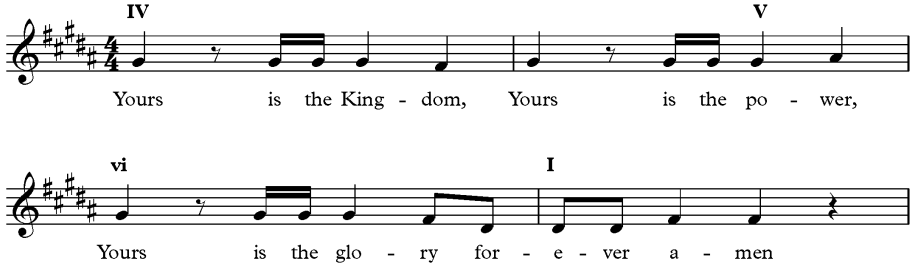


Figure 70. Bethel Music, 'Our Father,' coda. (3:58)

This climactic point of the song is emphasised by the full band instrumentation and thick texture of vocal harmonies, contrasting with the solo voice and cosmic-sounding ambience of the song's opening strains. This follows a long repetition of the 'let heaven come' theme, whilst an instrumental crescendo begins with the backing singers supporting Jenn Johnson's improvisatory lead vocal.

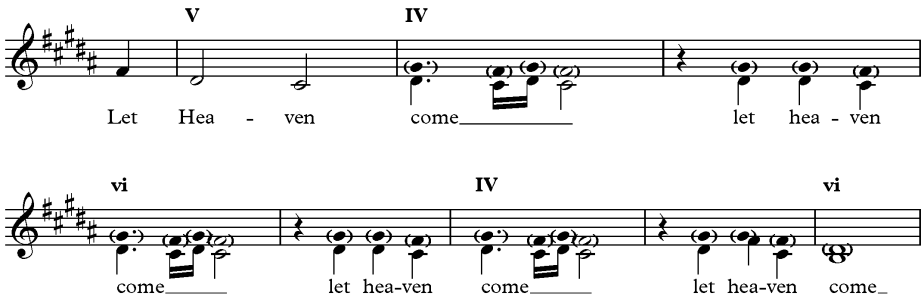


Figure 71. Bethel Music, 'Our Father,' interlude. (2:30)

This implies that the 'really worshipping' led by Jenn ('let heaven come') is rewarded with the power of God, so viscerally depicted by the coda's crashing drums, pugnacious rhythm (♩ - ♪♪ ♩ ♩) and belted vocal range ('yours is the power'). Once again, then, triumphalism is shown to be the most important, and the pursuit of tangible assurance. Meanwhile, the acknowledgement of sin is quite flagrantly purged from an orthodox (Biblical!) text.

7.5 THERAPEUTIC TRIUMPHALISM

The fleetingness of sin and the lens of power through which it is interpreted occurs similarly in many of Bethel's other songs, such as 'There's No Other Name' and 'The Lion and the Lamb,' 'Healer,' and 'Furious'. All of these songs are similarly structured around a musical climax created using melody, pitch, volume and instrumentation, and contrasted through occasional sudden decrescendos that build towards climax again.[673]

[673] Bethel Music, Francesca Battistelli, 'There's No Other Name (Live),' *Starlight (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2017); Bethel Music, Leeland Mooring, 'The Lion and the Lamb (Live),' *Have It All (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2016); Bethel Music, Leah Mari, 'Healer,' *Here Is Love* (Bethel Music: 2010); Bethel Music, Jeremy Riddle, 'Furious,' *Be Lifted High* (Bethel Music: 2011). For examples across the genre of this muscular therapeutic triumphalism, see also Jesus Culture, Kristine DiMarco, 'Break Every Chain – Live,' *Awakening – Live From Chicago* (Jesus Culture Music: 2011); Jesus Culture, Kim Walker-Smith, 'Freedom,' *Living With A Fire (Live)* (Jesus Culture Music: 2018); Jesus Culture, Kim Walker-Smith, 'Not Afraid - Live,' *Not Afraid (Live)* (Jesus Culture Music: 2018); Bryan & Katie Torwalt, 'Shores,' *Kingdom Come* (Jesus Culture Music: 2013); Hillsong Worship, 'God is Able,' *Hillsong Chapel: Forever Reign* (Hillsong Music and

These climaxes are typically used to present sin as unambiguously defeated, as I have shown.

One quintessential example of this – and the source of this thesis' title – is 'No Longer Slaves.' 'No Longer Slaves' has a sectional structure, the gently meandering scalic melody of the verses giving way to increasingly rhythmic, accented motifs in the chorus and coda.[674] A muscular climax is engineered, over the course of the song, through thickening textures, ascending melodies and crescendo. The first verse opens with a conjunct melody that maunders around the tonic, in a comfortably low tessitura for the singer, Jonathan Helser (**i**). This occurs over a bass pedal, reiterated on ever quaver beat, which foreshadows the climactic build to come. The lyrics are comforting, speaking of intimacy with God, who is presented as a loving and protective father figure who 'deliver[s]' his children from their 'enemies' and rids them of 'fear'. This comforting imagery is expressively framed by a simple harmonic framework entirely comprising major chords (I – IV – V – I); the accompaniment begins by lingering on the tonic chord, and resolves back to it with a stable-sounding perfect cadence:

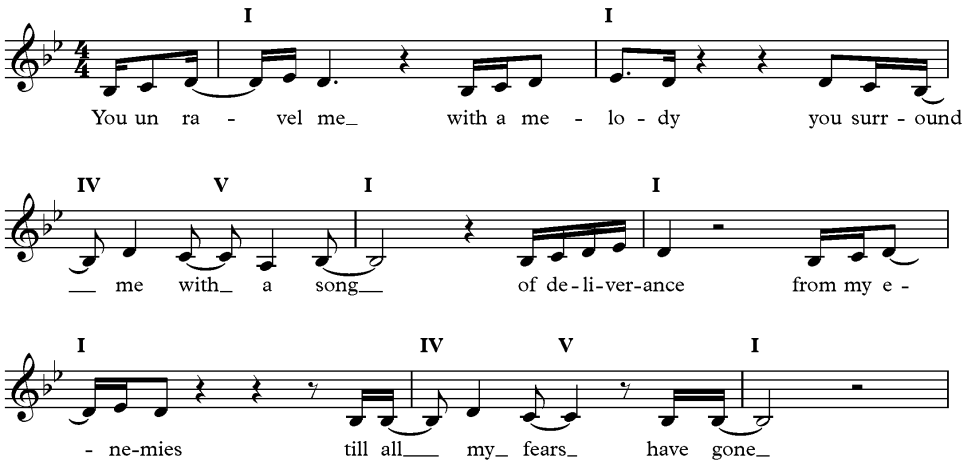


Figure 72. Bethel Music, 'No Longer Slaves,' verse (0:05).

The chorus is sung in a slightly higher range, lending a more piercing quality to Jonathan Hesler's voice. This also lends greater sense of urgency to the syncopated motif, before it

Resources LLC: 2012); Hillsong Worship, 'Mighty To Save,' *Mighty To Save (Live)* (Hillsong Music and Resources LLC: 2006) Hillsong Worship, 'You Never Fail,' *Glorious Ruins* (Hillsong Music and Resources LLC: 2013); Forerunner Music, Jon Thurlow, 'How Awesome Are Your Works,' *Fully Alive* (Forerunner Music/The Fuel Music: 2018); Onething Live, Lauren Holmes, 'Victorious In Love (Live),' *Love Makes Us Strong (Live)* (Forerunner Music: 2016); Elevation Worship, 'Unstoppable God,' *Wake Up The Wonder* (Provident Label Group LLC: 2014); Elevation Worship, 'Mighty God,' *There Is a Cloud* (Elevation Church: 2017); Elevation Worship, 'Authority,' *Graves Into Gardens (Live)* (Elevation Worship Records: 2020).

[674] Bethel Music, 'No Longer Slaves,' (2015).

resolves down to the stable-sounding tonic again (**ii**). The chords mirror those accompanying the verse, but the stability and positivity of the final perfect cadence (V-I) is emphasised in contrast to the relative minor chord (vi) that precedes it:
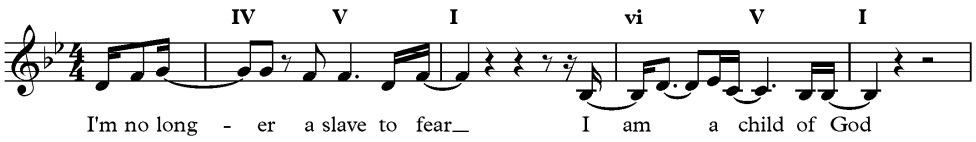


Figure 73. Bethel Music, 'No Longer Slaves,' chorus (0:31).

Helser proclaims that he is 'no longer a slave to fear', rather than sin. He does not define the source of his fear, although he places it in clear opposition to God. The middle eight contains more disjunct elements than the chorus, although it mirrors the same twisting melodic shape of the previous sections. The vocal line ascends towards the climax we eventually hear in the coda, over unfinished cadences that build suspense for the resolution to come (I – IV). A full band accompanies the wordless cry, foreshadowed in instrumental breaks throughout the song:

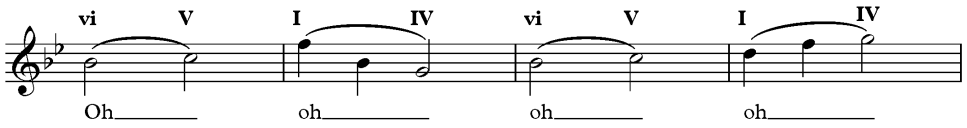


Figure 74. Bethel Music, 'No Longer Slaves,' middle eight (3:27).

Finally, the coda presents a hammering vocal line that reiterates individual notes (e.g. 'you split the sea'), whilst using rhythmic augmentation for emphasis (e.g. 'walk right through it'). This is accompanied by a full band, comprising drums, guitar, synthesiser and more, contrasting with the solo bassline with which the song opened. Meanwhile, the melody inhabits too high a range for Jonathan Helser's male voice to comfortably sustain it; Melissa Helser's rasping and intense vocal takes over with greater force (**iii**). Importantly, having whitewashed sin from the lyrics, the musical climax over the course of the song leads to a coda that declares the power of God, and the worshipper's being advantaged by this power:

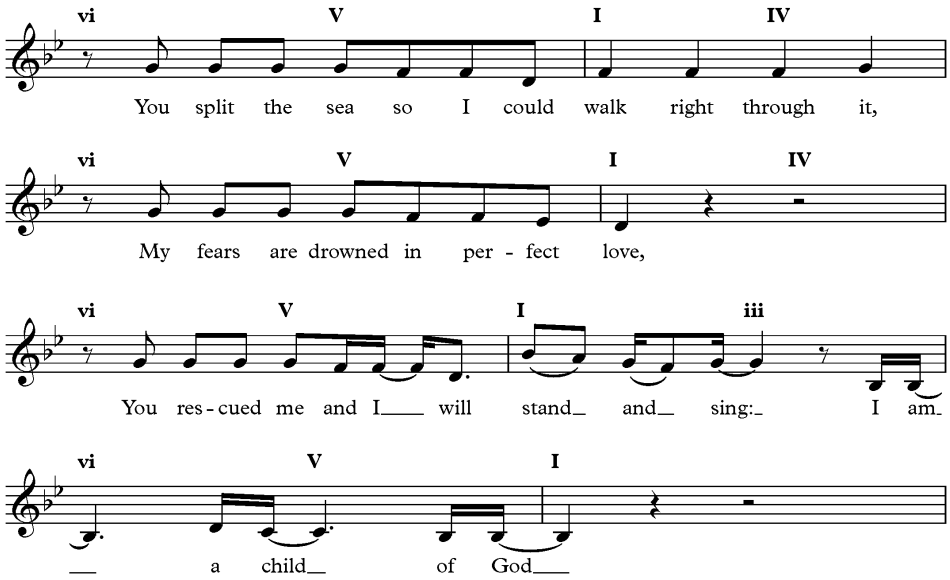


Figure 75. Bethel Music, 'No Longer Slaves,' coda (4:06).

Given the therapeutic function that, I have argued, motivates many of Bethel's worship songs, it is no wonder that 'No Longer Slaves' is only one amongst a wealth of Bethel's worship songs that quite explicitly present a triumphalist, therapeutic account of faith, using declarations to (ideally) encouraging effect. This rather exaggerates John Wesley's motivational-pastoral model, not only using the worship event as inspiration towards holy living, or as a means of engendering gradual sanctification, but actively declaring the positive and immediate transformation of the individual.

The popularity of 'No Longer Slaves' testifies to the therapeutic power of its message. Cruder examples, which more starkly demonstrate the unfortunate effects of Bethel's weak hamartiology, include 'Mercy', 'On the Shores', 'Old for New', 'Catch the Wind', 'Forever and a Day' (which declares 'I want to be heaven minded'), Kristine DiMarco's 'I Am No Victim,' or Steffany Gretzinger's 'This Is The Sound' (which announces 'I've come to breathe life on dry bones just like I see my Father do').[675] All of these songs utilise cosmic ambience, erotic infantilism and triumphant climax, these three features obscuring the significance of sin, and emphasising the importance of tangible assurance. The worship event as Bethel Music presents it, using these three features, is *primarily*

[675] Bethel Music, Amanda Lindsey Cook, 'Mercy (Live),' *Have It All (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2016); Bethel Music, Jeremy Riddle, Steffany Gretzinger, 'On the Shores (Spontaneous),' *Moments: Mighty Sound* (Bethel Music: 2018); Bethel Music, Hannah McClure, 'Old for New,' *Starlight (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2017); Bethel Music, Melissa Helser, 'Catch the Wind,' *Starlight (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2017); Bethel Music, Jenn Johnson, 'Forever and a Day,' *Be Lifted High* (Bethel Music: 2011); Kristine DiMarco, 'I Am No Victim,' *Where His Light Was* (Bethel Music: 2017); Steffany Gretzinger, 'This Is The Sound,' *Blackout* (Bethel Music: 2017).

therapeutic, subordinating the praise of God for (re)assurance that is demonstrable through tangible feeling. By tying physiological and emotional response to assurance, Bethel Music also tie their sung worship to the musical conventions that bolster their theology of assurance.

Reckless Love

One notable counter-example to the unambiguous and total defeat of sin in Bethel's Music is Cory Asbury's 'Reckless Love', which uses the same climactic structure as the other examples I have given.[676] However, it does not straightforwardly resolve the hamartiological themes it explores, but quite effectively conveys the orthodox dialectic between sin and grace, through music and lyrics. Although strengthening the pop worship genre's potential for hamartiological expression cannot be reduced to a need to make worship music "sadder" (as I discuss in the conclusive chapter to follow), this idea can help identify some mechanisms for more effective acknowledgement of sin in the idiom. As such, 'Reckless Love' demonstrates that the Bethel Collective are perfectly capable of using the pop idiom in an alternative manner to the therapeutic and triumphalist effect I have described, without very radically transforming their sound, or compromising their popularity.

'Reckless Love' is a moody song, premised around the usual climactic structure, which in this context affirms the rescuing power of God. However, unlike most of the other songs I have analysed in this chapter, 'Reckless Love' contains no explicit exhortation to 'really worship'. The song opens with cosmic ambience, then a descending scalic motif that prefigures the coda. The tuplet cross rhythm divides the time in a weary-sounding way, whilst the melody slowly descends to the tonic by way of suspensions (marked below with slurs) that add dissonance (**i**):

[676] Cory Asbury, 'Reckless Love,' *Reckless Love* (Bethel Music: 2018).

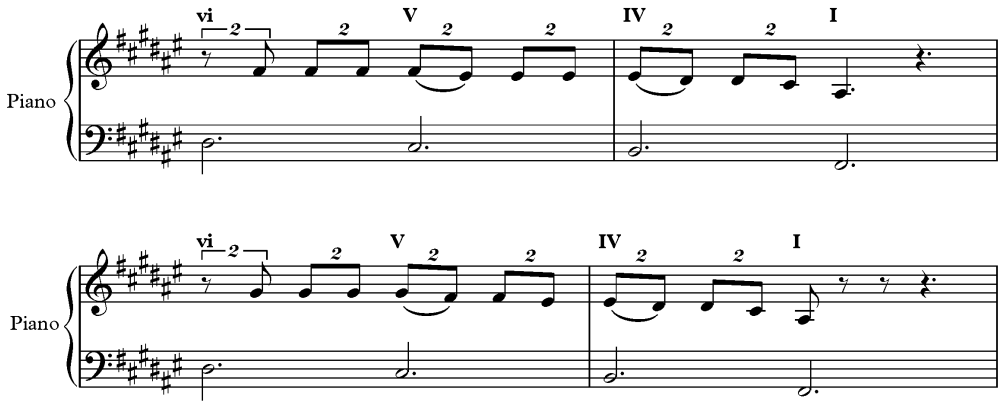


Figure 76. Cory Asbury, 'Reckless Love,' introduction (0:08).

Opening with this motif, which is recapitulated in the coda, adds a cyclical dimension to the structure of the song: rather than ending with a climax unrelated to earlier thematic material, the song is, motivically, brought full circle. This is not as straightforwardly triumphalist as the other songs I have quoted in this chapter, instead expressing the ongoing presence of dissonance and struggle in the life of faith.

The first verse describes the worshipper's knowledge of divine grace, a different, descending scalic melody mournfully returning to the tonic. The effect is subdued, the vocal part low and quiet (**i**):

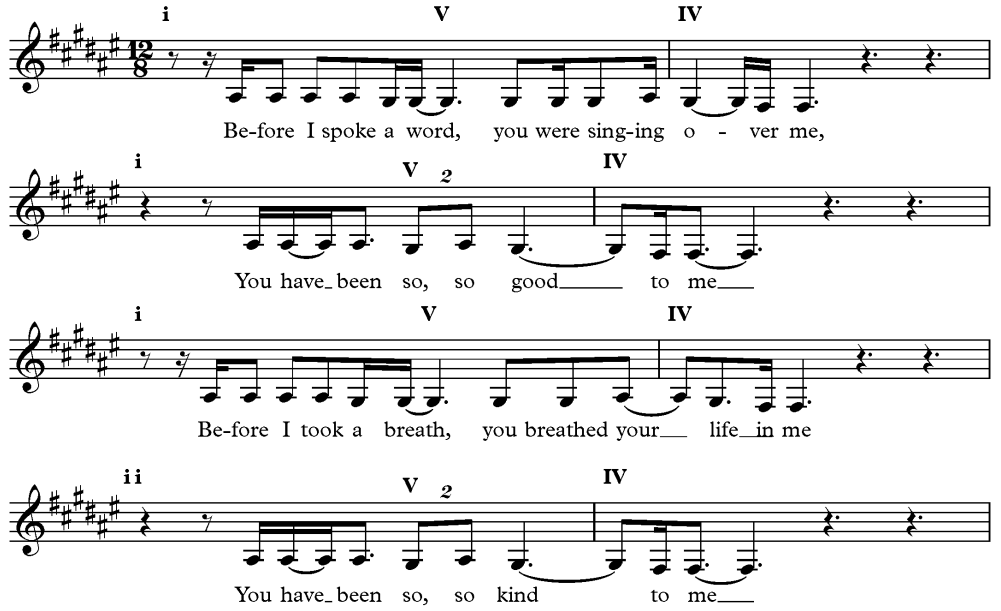


Figure 77. Cory Asbury, 'Reckless Love', verse one (0:26).

The second verse continues in the same lyrical vein (1:52):

When I was your foe, still your love fought for me
You have been so, so good to me
When I felt no worth, you paid it all for me
You have been so, so kind to me

Interestingly, and unusually, Asbury's lyrics describe him as having been God's 'foe', as well as using the usual vulnerability and penal substitution imagery. This goes further than the typical non-moralistic presentation of sin as alienation from God. Instead, Asbury emphasises his complicity in sin, in order to emphasise grace ('reckless love'), actively engaging the orthodox dialectic of sin and grace. These verses are interspersed with a proclamative chorus that begins each line with an emphatic 'oh', then following the same slightly mournful descending pattern. The range of the melody, which meanders slowly from $F\sharp_4$ to $F\sharp_3$, further expresses the contrasting points of the sin-grace dialectic. Backing vocals, a third above the melody, raise the melody higher into a transcendent space along with the instrumentation, moving the song towards its eventual climax (**ii**).
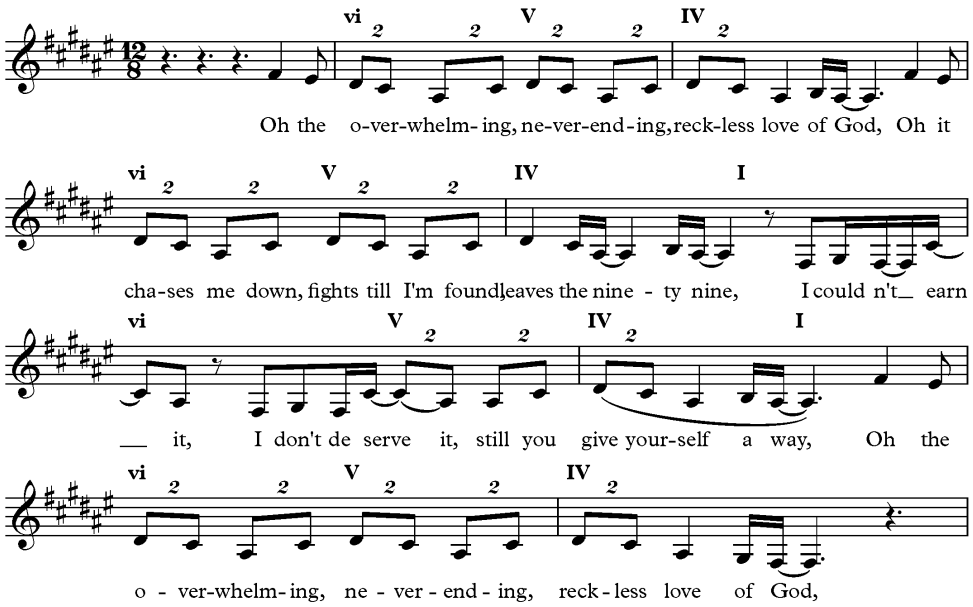


Figure 78. Cory Asbury, 'Reckless Love,' chorus (0:58).

After several verses a coda is heard, which musically resembles those of 'Here Is Love' and 'Seas of Crimson', in its pugnacious expression of divine power. Asbury sets the

introductory motif to hammering instrumentation, adding violent and heroic lyrical imagery (**iii**):
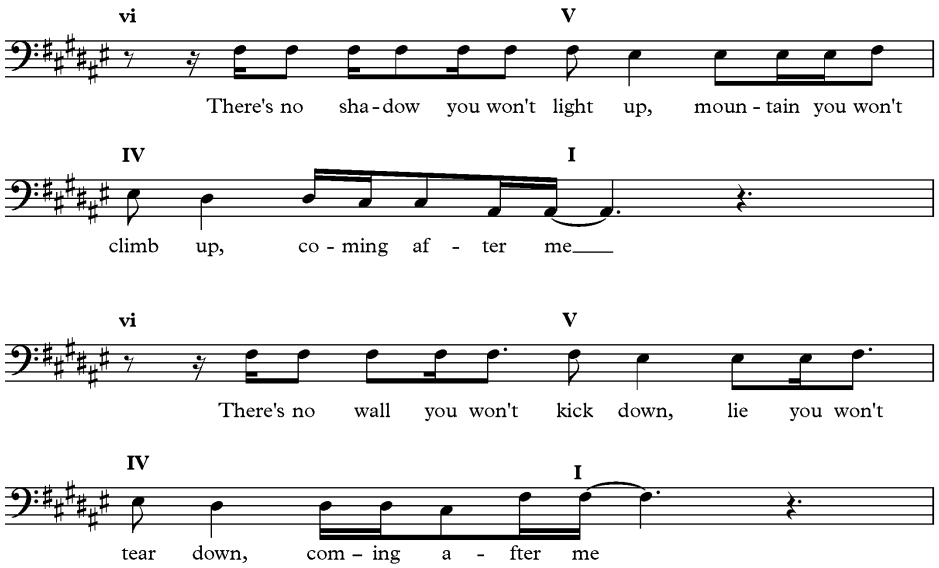


Figure 79. Cory Asbury, 'Reckless Love,' coda (3:19).

Note the leap of a major sixth with which the section ends; this continues the cyclical motion of the song, landing on the first note of the coda, inviting its repetition. The coda reiterates the contrast between sobering descending scales, expressive of sin, and punctuating proclamations elsewhere in the song ('Oh! The overwhelming...'), musically conveying the dialectic of sin and grace with which Asbury's lyrics are concerned. The continuous juxtaposition of these thematic peaks and troughs maintain a lingering sorrowfulness in the song, even as the gravelly vocal line leaps up an octave to repeat the coda with more intensity (**iii**). This, along with Asbury's lyrical admissions of personal guilt, is unusual, and ensures that his normative use of musical climax does *not* eclipse the significance of sin altogether, despite the emphatically "powerful" setting of the coda. In other words, harmonic tension and motivic congruence maintain a sense of sin as an ongoing quality in 'Reckless Love', whilst the lyrics implicate the individual personally in sin and salvation.

However, the musical norms of the genre overpower Asbury's more interesting use of musico-theological material, in Steffany Gretzinger's performance.[677] Adopting the same

[677] Bethel Music, Steffany Gretzinger, 'Reckless Love,' *Moments: Mighty Sound* (Bethel Music: 2018).

structure and cosmically ambient sound as Asbury's solo recording, Gretzinger's performance involves more repetitions of the chorus and coda. These are heard with greater volume and thicker instrumentation, emphasising the lens of power through which sin is presented, rather than Asbury's reflections on sin itself. After nine minutes, the song closes with Gretzinger's spontaneous declarations reflecting this priority:

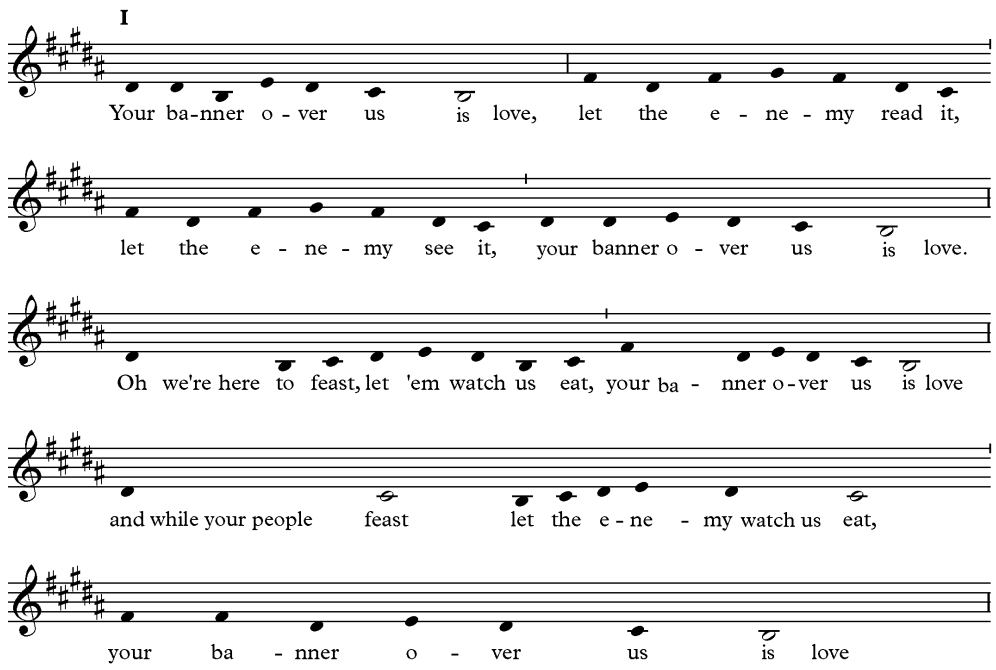


Figure 80. Bethel Music, 'Reckless Love,' spontaneous moment (9:12).

Here, Gretzinger frames God's love as a form of power (a 'banner'), and imagines the congregation of worshippers in a battle with the devil ('enemy'). While God's children enjoy the bountiful feast that the worship event, for Gretzinger, signifies, they taunt the devil with their plenitude. This gloating appeal to divine power differs from the more sombre account of divine grace in Asbury's studio recording, and demonstrates the triumphalist bent of Bethel's worship event.

After its release in October 2017, 'Reckless Love' became Asbury's bestselling song, and was later described by Billboard as the biggest Christian song of the year.[678] A furore followed, in online Christian magazines; issue was taken with Asbury's description of

[678] 'The Year in Christian/Gospel Charts: Lauren Daigle, Tasha Cobbs, Leonard Triumph,' *Billboard* (6 December 2018). <https://www.billboard.com/articles/events/year-in-music-2018/8488863/the-year-in-christian-gospel-charts-lauren-daigle.

God's love as 'reckless', rather than intentional, its costliness properly considered.[679] Andre Henry, writing for *Relevant*, points out that Asbury was formed, as a worship leader, at IHOPKC, where the worship band often use negative imagery to convey the costliness of the life of faith, and the glory of God thereby.[680] Henry pragmatically sidesteps the brouhaha over the word 'reckless', which, he rightly notes, could easily be replaced with a different word (for example, 'gracious', 'blessed', or 'jealous') without drastically transforming the message of the song. Henry states that Asbury's song is not 'heretical' for its description of God's love as 'reckless'. Nevertheless, he claims, the lyrics do not offer many examples of God's love that meet that description, and are inconsistent and weak:

> If there's any problem with "Reckless Love," it's that the songwriters meant to celebrate God's uninhibited, extravagant practice of self-giving but hit a snag on familiar tropes and platitudes of the worship genre before they could ever get to plumb the depths of their main idea. They don't sink their teeth far enough into the scandal of their own message.[681]

Asbury's response to the furore, written in a Facebook post, is interesting, and contentious, full of speculative phrases and slogans that demonstrate Bethel's experiential hermeneutic in action. He affirms the ongoing nature of sin in some form, but also reveals his preservation of the orthodox dialectic of sin and grace in the *song* to be subordinate to the overarching therapeutic, triumphalist and anthropocentric theology that I have critiqued throughout this thesis. Asbury's comments reveal a doctrine of God weakened in its intense anthropomorphisation. This, in turn, reveals the effect of the therapeutic orientation of Bethel's worship event, wherein effusive language and sensationalist music facilitate

[679] Stephen Altrogge, 'What You Really Need To Know About The Song "Reckless Love",' *The Blazing Center* (30 April 2018). <https://theblazingcenter.com/2018/04/reckless-love.html; Georgi Boorman, 'Sorry, Bethel Music, But God's Love Just Isn't 'Reckless',' *The Federalist* (28 December 2018). <https://thefederalist.com/2018/12/28/sorry-bethel-music-gods-love-just-isnt-reckless/; Kate Shellnutt, 'Bethel Music and Bieber Sang It. But Do We Really Believe In 'Reckless Love'?,' *Christianity Today* (24 April 2018). <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/april-web-only/reckless-love-cory-asbury-bethel-music-and-justin-bieber.html: Altrogge writes that God's love is intentional, not 'reckless'. Boorman concurs, writing that 'God is ultimate in thinking ahead, y'all', whilst her article's tagline suggests that her problem is similarly with 'one word: 'reckless.'' Meanwhile, a panel assembled by *Christianity Today* agreed, for the most part, that poetic language in worship songs will often stray from making literal theological propositions.

[680] Andre Henry, 'No, Cory Asbury's 'Reckless Love' Isn't Heretical, But Could've Gone Further,' *Relevant* (3 April 2018). <https://relevantmagazine.com/culture/no-cory-asburys-reckless-love-isnt-heretical/. Regarding negative imagery at IHOPKC, see Misty Edwards, 'I Will Waste My Life,' *Relentless* (Forerunner Music: 2017).

[681] Henry, ''Reckless Love' Isn't Heretical.'

positive affect, possibly at the expense of doctrinal coherence. Asbury's statement, in full, reads thus:

> Many have asked me for clarity on the phrase, "reckless love". Many have wondered why I'd use a "negative" word to describe God. I've taken some time to write out my thoughts here. I hope it brings answers to your questions. But more than that, I hope it brings you into an encounter with the wildness of His love.
>
> When I use the phrase, "the reckless love of God", I'm not saying that God Himself is reckless. I am, however, saying that the way He loves, is in many regards, quite so. What I mean is this: He is utterly unconcerned with the consequences of His actions with regards to His own safety, comfort, and well-being. His love isn't crafty or slick. It's not cunning or shrewd. In fact, all things considered, it's quite childlike, and might I even suggest, sometimes downright ridiculous. His love bankrupted heaven for you. His love doesn't consider Himself first. His love isn't selfish or self-serving. He doesn't wonder what He'll gain or lose by putting Himself out there. He simply gives Himself away on the off-chance that one of us might look back at Him and offer ourselves in return.
>
> His love leaves the ninety-nine to find the one every time. To many practical adults, that's a foolish concept. "But what if he loses the ninety-nine in search of the one?" What if? Finding that one lost sheep is, and will always be, supremely important.
>
> His love isn't cautious. No, it's a love that sent His Own Son to die a gruesome death on a cross. There's no "Plan B" with the love of God. He gives His heart so completely, so preposterously, that if refused, most would consider it irreparably broken. Yet He gives Himself away again. The recklessness of His love is seen most clearly in this – it gets Him hurt over and over. Make no mistake, our sin pains His heart. And "70 times 7" is a lot of times to have Your heart broken. Yet He opens up and allows us in every time. His love saw you when you hated Him – when all logic said,

> "They'll reject me", He said, "I don't care if it kills me. I'm laying My heart on the line."
>
> To get personal, His love saw me, a broken down kid with regret as deep as the ocean; My innocence and youth poured out like water. Yet, He saw fit to use me for His kingdom because He's just that kind. I didn't earn it and I sure as heck don't deserve it, but He's just that good. Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God.[682]

Asbury's main points, here, are to present the love of God as the object of religious experience, and to emphasise its personal nature ('for you'). His message is therapeutic, testifying of the 'broken down kid' who is 'use[d] for His kingdom'. This statement testifies plainly to Asbury's experience of divine grace, and hints at the dichotomy between the spirits of religion and truth which are so prevalent in Bethel's theology (note his effusive and slightly "outrageous" language). However, there is little theological interrogation of his anthropomorphic God, or his distinction between divine attributes and divine being. Asbury's speculative statement covers over any (infinite qualitative) difference between divinity and humanity; instead, his confidence in roving theologically "off script" demonstrates Bethel's experiential hermeneutic in action, and the absence of noetic corruption in their theological schema.

Compare this to the motivational-pastoral theology we started off with in John Wesley, and it is clear that Asbury's approach is far more cataphatic, founded much more explicitly on personal experience, although both Asbury and Wesley attempt to weave the acknowledgement of personal sin into a story primarily about divine love. Where Wesley focuses on the individual in order that they might regulate their action to support their faith, Asbury focuses on the individual in order to emphasise their attractiveness to God – ultimately a therapeutic endeavour. Wesley encourages the individual to conform to Christian traditions, even as he reconfigures them according to his own ideas. Asbury, by

[682] Cory Asbury, 'Many have asked me for clarity on the phrase, "reckless love",' *Facebook @coryasburymusic* (14 June 2017). <https://www.facebook.com/coryasburymusic/posts/10158977378510171. Asbury reiterates portions of this Facebook post in a live performance at a conference in 2017. See Bethel Music, 'Reckless Love (Live with story) – Cory Asbury | Heaven Come 2017,' *YouTube* (23 November 2017) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xx0d3R2LoU. The pastor and YouTuber Mike Winger critiques Asbury's song and this subsequent post in a video, in which he refutes Asbury, stating that the cross is a 'shrewd' divine plan, not a shot in the dark. See Mike Winger, 'Thinking Biblically about "Reckless Love," *YouTube* (16 July 2018). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79rjZLjh-cI.

contrast, utilises Bethel's dichotomy between the individual spirit of truth and the traditional spirit of religion, and presents the former as the locus of God's movement and attention, rather than the latter. Thus, whilst Wesley's account of noetic corruption is not especially robust (as I discussed in Chapter Two), Bethel's experiential hermeneutic actively impedes any incorporation of noetic corruption into their theology.

It is interesting that Asbury acknowledges the ongoing corruption of sin in this song, yet fails to think about what *effect* this might have, and how it might problematise his own experiential way of thinking about God. This epitomises one facet of therapeutic religion; sin is acknowledged, but always symbolically resolved before its implications might be interrogated. It also points to a doctrinal weak spot that worship songs might bolster, by making more use of less normatively positive and sin-avoidant imagery. What Asbury *has* managed to do, to this effect, is express a more varied emotional palette through exactly the same musical idiom as the other songs I have quoted, largely through his use of suspensions and motivic recapitulation. As Saliers suggests:

> beholding... the truth of things [requires] attention to the dissonant, the tension-filled, and the difficult truths as well as the harmonious....[683]

In this respect, Asbury's 'Reckless Love' demonstrates clearly the potential for encouragement in worship that deviates from normative positive affect, and the pursuit of tangible assurance – a subject I pursue further in my conclusion.

7.6 SUMMARY

I have shown that Bethel Music use triumphalist climax, presenting sin as a retrospective issue, regardless of the explicit theological content of their music. Fleeting mentions of sin are subordinated to the expression of the Gospel through a lens of power, by music that increases in intensity without development or much harmonic tension, and culminates with exhortations to 'really worship'. This conveys an immediate, positive emotionalism that precludes thorough consideration of sin. Bethel Music's theological triumphalism undermines the dialectic between sin and grace by de-emphasising sin so

[683] Saliers, *Music and Theology*, xi.

much that grace is presented therapeutically as God's indulgent love for mankind, and overshadowed by divine power over external forces, in which the worshipper can share. Sin is externalised, presented as an oppressive cosmic force of evil. I have shown that, whilst emotional breadth in the Bethel Collective's music is generally lacking, and their treatment of sin typically evasive, their reliance on triumphalist musical climax does not *necessarily* make it impossible for them to explore hamartiological themes. However, their therapeutic treatment of the worship event, and its normative association with positive emotion, does challenge their use of the pop idiom regarding its ability to convey a strong hamartiology. My aim, in the conclusion to follow, is to provide some constructive suggestions regarding how pop worship music might maintain its encouraging qualities, without obstructing negative emotion or robust hamartiology in the pursuit of tangible assurance, and instrumentalising worship as a therapeutic endeavour.

CONCLUSION

A Wesleyan Synthesis? Negative Affect in Pop Worship

INTRODUCTION * A WESLEYAN SYNTHESIS * GOD AGAINST WORSHIP * SANCTIFICATION AND NEGATIVE AFFECT * THE IDIOMATIC NORMS OF POP WORSHIP * SUMMARY

8.1 INTRODUCTION

I began this thesis by contextualising Bethel Church within a genealogy that began with John Wesley's motivational-pastoral theology. In comparing the hamartiologies of Bethel and Wesley, I demonstrated that both parties adopt a cognitive and volitional account of sin, attending primarily to actual sin and individual agency to refrain from it. Both demonstrate some distaste towards the doctrine of sin and its role in practical ministry, rarely and insubstantively addressing the possibility of ongoing corruption through sin. The neglect of sin is demonstrably more pronounced in Bethel's teaching, which does not account for the presence of error and weakness in the lives of justified Christians. I then reviewed some sociological literature on pop worship, suggesting that the pursuit of 'tangible assurance' through 'really worshipping' is a vital function of the pop worship event. The following chapter outlined some basic parameters for musico-theological analysis as it pertains to my field of inquiry. Finally, two musico-theological chapters demonstrated the weak hamartiology in the worship songs of Bethel Church, which I have argued is stylistically representative of the mainstream pop worship music genre more broadly – from the erotic infantilism of Bethel's 'We Dance,' and Jesus Culture's 'Rooftops,' to the near-identical triumphalist climaxes of Bethel's 'Seas of Crimson' and Matt Redman's 'Here is Love'. Positive, identity-based declarations have featured prominently in many of these songs, such as Hillsong's 'Who You Say I Am' and Bethel's 'No Longer Slaves'. God's particular "manifest presence" in the worship event has been expressed in the cosmic ambience that has pervaded nearly every song I have cited.

I have shown that Bethel Music's therapeutic use of the pop idiom typically hinders the expression of a stronger hamartiology: this was made especially clear in my comparison of Asbury's rather effective treatment of hamartiology in 'Reckless Love' with Gretzinger's more pronounced concern with divine power in her live recording thereof. In particular, I have presented cosmic ambience, erotic infantilism and triumphalist climax as three musico-theological devices that entrench weak hamartiology in Bethel's music. These devices are typical of the contemporary pop worship songs composed by the megachurch bands I have described, with cosmic ambience and triumphalist climax, in particular, featuring in most songs in this genre. These devices contribute to a musical landscape that is normatively positive, stable sounding, and quick to resolve tension and negative imagery. Cosmic ambience is expressive of the 'manifest presence' of God, immediately accessible in worship. Erotic infantilism emphasises the vulnerability of the worshipper, presenting them in a sympathetic light that implicitly challenges language of divine judgment. Triumphalist climax suggests that sin is a drama that has been concluded for justified Christians, undermining the idea of ongoing corruption of the faculties through sin, whilst remaining ambiguous about potentialities such as weakness or error.

The problem with these musico-theological devices, I have argued, is their normative usage, resulting in the entrenchment of weak hamartiology in Bethel's worship events – and, by extension, the worship events of those churches that stylistically resemble them, or follow their lead. Bethel's songs are not wholly undialectical, entirely failing to mention sin or lament alongside celebration or praise. However, the negative side of Bethel's dialectic of sin and grace is utterly ineffectual, insofar as it is overshadowed by their therapeutic triumphalism. This normative expressive frame eclipses the significance of sin for the justified Christian, instead therapeutically occluding negative affect in the worship event. At worst, grace is instrumentalised as a means of tangible assurance: the positive affect and supernatural empowerment associated with divine intimacy. Meanwhile, the content of sin with which grace deals is largely unexplored, and presented quite definitively as a concluded drama. In this way, Bethel Music eclipses the seriousness of sin for the justified Christian, and likewise the magnitude of grace. That the persistence of sin and ongoing corruption of the noetic and desiderative faculties are ignored also overlooks the sheer abundance of grace, compromising its ability to be meaningfully expressed in pop worship songs. These rely instead on the repetition of encouraging but insubstantively

Christian phrases, such as 'oh, oh, oh, you know me,' 'it's like I'm living for the first time,' or 'revival's in the air... love's returning, love's returning.'[684]

This does not mean that all moments of pop worship instrumentalise grace and overlook sin, in pursuit of the therapeutic, but rather that the songs used in pop worship tend in a therapeutic direction that may be theologically unhelpful in certain respects. The therapeutic is a legitimate variety of Christian experience. However, it is not a substantive variety of Christian experience; it has no necessary relation to salvation from sin through Christ. As I have noted, the end of therapy is psychological wellbeing, and the end of Christianity concerns relation to the divine. These can operate at cross-purposes, insofar as consciousness of sin is thought to precede repentance, whilst often being a singularly unsettling and psychologically distressing experience. This problem of divergent ends is particularly acute, given the therapeutic orientation of Bethel's Music, which results directly in three hamartiological problems.

Firstly, Bethel's church teaching largely does away with the doctrine of original sin, and is concerned instead with actual sin. There is little accounting, in their theology, for the non-transformation of justified Christians. This provides the context for Bethel Music's overwhelmingly non-moralistic treatment of universal sin in justified Christians as something akin to weakness. (I noted that Asbury's 'Reckless Love' was an exception to this normative trend.) This approach unfortunately presents grace as a divine rescuing of the sympathetic righteous, and appears to reject the justified Christian's involvement in universal sin. Secondly, Bethel's reliance on volition and cognition as the conditions for sin render the concept of ongoing noetic and desiderative corruption quite inconvenient (as they were for John Wesley). This problem is exacerbated by the increasing reliance on "tangible" signs of assurance, an ecumenical trajectory I detailed in Chapter One. Thirdly, associating "tangible" assurance with positive affect as normatively as Bethel's worship music does disincentivises diversity in emotional response to sung worship. More than simply failing to draw from the diversity of worshipful attitudes found in Scripture, this approach renders corporate worship an affectively exclusive event, accessible only to people who respond to it emotionally in a particular way. It appears to cast aspersions on

[684] Bethel Music, Steffany Gretzinger, 'You Know Me,' *The Loft Sessions* (Bethel Music: 2012); Bethel Music, William Matthews, 'This is What You Do,' *For the Sake of the World* (Bethel Music: 2012); Bethel Music, Melissa Helser, 'Revival's in the Air,' *Revival's in the Air (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2020).

the veracity of faith of those disinclined to "really worship" within a church community, for example due to mental illness, trauma, or more banal reasons such as boredom or hunger. It would also call into question the possibility of individuals truly belonging to a church community whose worship they dislike, insofar as the community is thought to be formed through worship.

Presenting a normative experience of justification, in this way, is not only something of an affront to the varieties of human experience. It, further, reduces of the Gospel to new kinds of legalism, wherein affective responses of particular sorts, or the appearance thereof, are mandated in the worship event. If salvation from sin by grace through Christ is the Gospel message, then concealing sub-optimal realities – such as the non-transformation of justified Christians, ongoing noetic and desiderative corruption, or the human propensity towards idolatry – is an act of hostility towards divine grace (not to mention an awkward circumscription of the realities of church life).

To precisely this end, Matthew Myer Boulton argues that not only is sin an inevitable part of earthly existence, but that worship itself is an occasion for sin, insofar as it is approached with mixed motives (including self-serving ones), risks the failure of full participation (as conveyed by the idea of 'just singing'), and invariably expresses a theology that is flawed, whether more or less so. My critique of Bethel Music, and – by extension – the norms of the contemporary mainstream pop worship idiom, does not merely concern its ability to convey doctrine in a pedagogically appropriate manner. Rather, the weak hamartiology promulgated by Bethel and their ilk conceals the very nature of the worship event: an occasion simultaneously of praise and of (often mundane) sin. At the expense of such a self-reflectively hamartiological event, instead, is a therapeutic assertion of human capability.

Worship that is, in this way, *ultimately* oriented towards motivational, pastoral or therapeutic ends is incompatible with Christian practice. Worship that is significantly, but not ultimately, oriented towards these ends might merely be unrelated to, or unhelpful for, Christian practice. Not forgetting to apply the possibility of noetic and desiderative corruption to my own studies, as well as to pop worshippers, I note with Myer Boulton that it is impossible to determine to what ends any particular worship event might be ultimately oriented. For this reason, as well as several others that I will get to shortly, I am not

suggesting that pop worship should be abandoned. I am, however, stating that orthodox Christians should consider a normatively therapeutic worship event to be a less than appropriate *ideal* for Christian practice.

I want to begin the following reflections by returning to the divergence in opinion between John Wesley and his brother Charles, regarding the extent of Christian Perfection. Whereas John suggests that Christian Perfection ought to be visible in order to be believable, Charles' concept of it is higher, and leaves room for ongoing sin in the lives of justified Christians. Retracing, once again, the steps back from Bethel Church to their theological ancestors will help frame my constructive solution to the problem of weak hamartiology in Bethel's music – and in much pop worship more generally. This undertaking draws from Matthew Myer Boulton's account of sin in worship, and Simeon Zahl's comments on the role of negative affect in the transformation of the Spirit, and will conclude with some brief examples of musico-theological possibilities to this end. My constructive suggestion is for pop worship to use musico-theological material that makes room for affective diversity in the worship event, such that hamartiology does not present itself simply as an inconvenience to the encouraging qualities of pop worship, but can resume its proper role as part of the sin-grace dialectic in that most encouraging of narratives – the Gospel.

8.2 A WESLEYAN SYNTHESIS

Although John Wesley accepts the orthodox qualities of the doctrine of sin (such as its universality and corrupting properties), his motivational-pastoral theology focused on the ability of the believer to attain Christian Perfection, in order to encourage the pursuit of good works. This endeavour is important to both Wesleys' theologies, but more determinative for John's rhetoric; John refrains from emphasising the ongoing corrupting effects of sin in most of his sermons, although he did not deny that they exist. Further, as I explained in Chapter Two, John leaves an interpretative grey area between error and iniquity, correlating the severity of sin with cognition of, and volition to do, evil. Altogether, this suggests that unconscious actual sin is rare, and that sin 'improperly so called' is less severe than sin 'properly so called'. It also places a lot of confidence in the believer's ability to distinguish sin from virtue.

Sin and its effects, for Bethel as for John Wesley, is a demotivating subject upon which to dwell. In Chapter Two, I quoted John's letter to Charles of 27th January 1767, which took issue with what John thought of as Charles' overly high account of Christian Perfection.[685] In this letter, John wrote that

> That perfection which I believe, I can boldly preach, because I think I see five hundred witnesses of it.[686]

As well as suggesting that his own account of Christian Perfection is believable because it is visible, foreshadowing the increasing concern for tangible assurance to come in later movements, John writes that Charles' account of Christian Perfection is not believable precisely because there are, he writes, no witnesses of it. (This is not strictly true, as Charles did see cases of Christian Perfection, as he conceived of it.)[687] John's concept of Christian Perfection, I have noted, pertains to the removal of *volitional* sin, but Charles thought true Christian Perfection would entail the removal of 'bosom sin', or the corruption of human nature itself, including ignorance and mistake. This being such a lofty goal, typically expressed at the point of death,[688] Charles is very emphatic about the importance for justified Christians to maintain an orthodox awareness of the possibility of ongoing sinfulness. For example he states in an early sermon:

> [E]very Christian is bound to acknowledge his own obnoxiousness to sin... [N]o Christian is in this life absolutely secured of attaining his crown of reward or can pretend to have advanced so high in the school of Christ, as to be free from all danger of falling from his station and forfeiting that portion of God's grace he has now attained... There is not perhaps a more dangerous piece of self-deceit, than for a man to think himself beyond the power of temptation, or out of the reach of danger.[689]

---

[685] Tyson, *Charles Wesley,* 391.
[686] Ibid., 384.
[687] Charles Wesley writes about the death of Mrs Hooper in his journal during the month of May, 1741. See Wesley, Charles, 'The Journal of Charles Wesley: April 3 – September 22, 1741,' *Wesley Centre Online.* <http://wesley.nnu.edu/charles-wesley/the-journal-of-charles-wesley-1707-1788/the-journal-of-charles-wesley-april-3-september-22-1741/.
[688] Joseph Cunningham, 'The Methodist Doctrine of Christian Perfection: Charles Wesley's Contribution Contextualized,' in *Wesley and Methodist Studies*, Volume 2 (2010): 41. '[T]o [Charles] Wesley, entire sanctification found outward expression through the peaceful, joyful, and loving disposition of those confronted by the gravest of existential obstacles.'
[689] Newport, *Sermons,* 99-100.

Here Charles is trying to impress upon his listeners that one ought not 'stop on the way to salvation', but should instead always try to live in a holy way. (Note that it was he, not John, who first established the Methodists in Oxford.) Newport has suggested that Charles, after his evangelical conversion of May 1738, tempers (although does not abandon) his previously rather terrifying emphasis on works-based righteousness to emphasise more the inner feeling of peace that comes from faith in the Gospel.[690] Importantly, although both brothers are concerned with works-based righteousness in this way, John does not worry too much about the ongoing corruption of the faculties in justified Christians, whilst Charles clearly does.

John expressed concern that the loftiness of Charles' Christian Perfection would prove discouraging to justified Christians, who might be dismayed to note a partial entrapment by sin after conversion. However, this need only be the case if positive affect is thought to be substantive of assurance – which, for Charles, it is not. Charles' account of assurance rests on propositions that are not necessarily manifest in outward signs, such as joy or healing, although he certainly appreciated miracles and thought that works were important.[691] Instead, it rests on a belief in inner peace; all the more so after his own evangelical conversion in 1738. Charles conceives of a holy peace that arises from (non-affective) faith in the ongoing work of sanctification. This persists during times of trouble, and is distinct from ecstatic religious experience. Charles' account of joy in faith is not normative:

> This doctrine, 'every Christian is happy,' is contrary to experience, there being many good Christians who scarce know what joy means.'[692]

Unlike John's neglect of sin, Charles' maintenance of ongoing sin, combined with a Spirit-led feeling of inner peace, allows him to divorce his theology of sanctification from tangible signs of assurance such as positive affect, or even healing. This does not mean that Charles thinks there are no normative outwards signs of faith; he describes in a sermon on Titus five effects of faith, the first of which is

[690] Ibid., 59, 64. This 'newfound confidence' persisted throughout Charles' theology after his evangelical conversion, despite 'assaults from Charles's congenital depressive personality.'
[691] J. Ernest Rattenburger, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns* (London: The Epworth Press, 1941) 160 – 161.
[692] Charles Wesley, 'Sermon 3: Psalm 126:7,' in Newport*, Sermons,* 126.

> reconciliation with God attested by an inward peace of conscience, even the 'peace of God which passeth all understanding, bequeathed unto us by our parting Lord.' This immediately springs from a sense of forgiveness; faith, pardon and peace being so linked together and intermingled that neither men nor devils can separate them...[693]

Other effects include joy, liberty (from guilt, and 'likewise from the power of sin'), and love evidenced in neighbourly affection. Lastly, in the justified Christian,

> The spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.[694]

This encouraging idea is reflected in Bethel's 'No Longer Slaves,' and Hillsong's 'Who You Say I Am,' amongst countless other pop worship songs. However, Charles also makes room for negative affect, noting that this can motivate faith in his sermon on Psalm 126:7:

> Humility cannot but lead to faith: a sight of our disease makes us soon fly to the cure of it. Who can feel himself sick and not long to be made whole? What contrite sinner is not glad of a saviour?[695]

For Charles, negative affect – signifying an awareness of sin – can become a cause for rejoicing, through the inner peace that faith brings. It is an assurance of the 'heart,' and hope through assurance 'leads to love, and in the love of God joy is perfected.'[696] In this way, Charles integrates the doctrine of sin with the act of praise in an fairly orthodox fashion. Thus rather than trying to regulate experience itself, by – for example – avoiding the discussion or acknowledgement of sin, or presenting a theology in which positive affect is normative of faith, Charles uses dogmatic beliefs (such as salvation for sinners through faith) to regulate the interpretation of experience. It is in the interpretation of experience in keeping with the Word of God expressed in doctrine, and not in the experience itself, wherein assurance lies. Thus post-evangelical Charles incorporates negative affect into an encouraging theology of sanctification, an idea I will return to in a moment.

---

[693] Charles Wesley, 'Sermon 5: Titus 3:8,' in Newport, *Sermons,* 160.
[694] Ibid., 161.
[695] Charles Wesley, 'Sermon 3: Psalm 126:7,' in Newport*, Sermons,* 127.
[696] Ibid., 128.

It is incorrect, nevertheless, to suggest that Charles' theology conveys a straightforwardly encouraging hamartiology. Charles' rhetoric regarding sin is evocative, but often terrifyingly pessimistic, as in his sermon on Phil 3:14-15, in which he emphasises the perilous obstacles to salvation – the devil, and human nature itself.[697] Charles' insistence that human nature inclines towards ill supports his suggestion that individuals need to be suspicious of self-deception. However, it presses the point further than is necessary to simply maintain a dialectic of sin and grace.[698]

I am not proposing, then, that pop worship should simply draw more from Charles Wesley, and less from John, as it were. Charles overlooks the importance of encouragement in the life of faith, which ought not be underestimated. Encouragement in faith, and therapeutic approaches to the Gospel, are legitimately useful resources for the emotionally or spiritually wounded, particularly those who find the thought of judgment difficult to cope with. (Recall Eric Johnson's extreme reactivity to imagery of the judgmental God, or the unnamed man quoted by Wuthnow in Chapter Four.) Nor am I proposing that churches such as Bethel modify their theology of tangible assurance in order to advocate something closer to Charles' inner peace. This would be a facile response to the Charismatic theology that informs Bethel's teaching, and would itself overlook the problem of potential ongoing noetic and desiderative corruption.

Rather, this vignette of the two Wesleys and their contrasting views instead is meant to point towards a synthesis. There is a more encouraging way of maintaining Charles' sense of ongoing sin, without compromising John's motivational-pastoral angle: by integrating the idea of corrupted faculties into a worship theology that trusts in grace, and maintains room for negative affect – rather like the account of Charles I have given above, but without his terrifying rhetoric. It is to this constructive possibility that I now, finally, turn.

[697] Charles Wesley, 'Sermon 1: Philippians 3:14-15,' in Newport, *Sermons,* 99-100.
[698] Newport, *Sermons,* 55.

8.3 GOD AGAINST WORSHIP

I have upheld, throughout this thesis, the orthodox claim that sin universally effects a corruption of the noetic and desiderative faculties. This results, as Simeon Zahl notes, in a degree of inscrutability concerning human motivations and desires, even our own; an observation shared by Augustine, Luther and even Bethel's prophetic leader, Kris Vallotton (as I noted in Chapter Three). It is in this vein that Boulton presents worship as the 'occasion for sin' – and, concomitantly, the occasion of grace.

> It is simply true, I believe, that most worship is driven by fear, guilt, selfish ambition, or gratitude. Each one emits its own ethos, sometimes in subtle (or not-so-subtle) ways that frame (or undermine) the meaning of the words we speak.[699]

It would, Boulton says, be impossible to approach worship with perfect motives, given the corrupting effects of sin. He suggests that there is a touch of Pelagianism present in all religious ritual, following Barth's claim that a fundamental alienation from God occurs in the 'presumptuousness' of the posture of worship.[700] However, quite apart from Pelagianism, the mixed motives with which Boulton claims worship is approached potentially undermine a Christian case for the therapeutic function of worship. Although a comforting quality of God is attested to in Scripture, the endeavour towards individualistic emotional wellbeing through worship is exactly the kind of selfish ambition that Boulton acknowledges. (This is in addition to Bethel's use of the therapeutic having little to do with the Gospel narrative itself, given the way Bethel Music cover over the seriousness of the alienation from God that sin entails and grace addresses.)

According to Boulton, because even worship is an occasion of sin, it is an activity undertaken prior to full reconciliation to God. This makes worship anathema, in some way, to God:

[699] Matthew Myer Boulton, *God Against Religion* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), X.
[700] Boulton, *Religion*, 35; also 58.

> God is against religion, and preeminently against worship. Human salvation, in this view, does and will mean the end of liturgy once and for all.[701]

Worship cannot, by this logic, be straightforwardly understood as an event of divine intimacy, in the way that Bethel Music suggests. Consider the guest singer Kari Jobe's patter before singing 'Forever' for the *You Make Me Brave* live album (2014). Over cosmic ambience, Jobe says the following:

> I love the cross. I love the fact that when Jesus died on the cross it meant that we can come before him with boldness, because when that veil was torn in two it gives us *this* access, it gives us *this* moment, these moments that we live for. That his presence comes and hovers and we can feel it.
>
> Aren't you so thankful for Jesus? Aren't you so thankful for the price that he paid on the cross, to pay for our sin and give us mercy and grace, but *more* than that I love that he wanted us, he wants us, he loves to be with *us.*
>
> Will you lift your hands for a moment? I just want you to tune into that for a moment, of just saying 'God I thank you for the cross. There's no one like you Jesus, thank you lord, we press into you tonight, Lord, we love your presence, we love you, we love you.[702]

Clearly Jobe interprets the divine encounter of the worship event in an affective way. She also emphasises the tangibility of God's presence ('we can feel it', 'we press into you tonight, Lord, we love your presence'). Jobe identifies Christ as the means through which 'this access' is granted, but seems to describe a general, rather than particular, revelation of God's presence that is accessible by 'com[ing] before him with boldness'. That is to say, individual agency is the means through which worship results in divine encounter – rather like the early Schleiermacher's account of intuition, in which the only quality akin to sin is the wilful non-cultivation of the intuitive faculty. By contrast, for Boulton (as for Barth), revelation in worship is always particular, with divine grace overcoming a Kierkegaardian 'infinite qualitative difference' between God and man.

---

[701] Boulton, *Religion*, 5: bad news for liturgists.
[702] Bethel Music, Kari Jobe, 'Forever (Live),' *You Make Me Brave (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2014)

Functional idolatry

However, this is not to deny the possibility of divine encounter in the worship event. Boulton does not portray worship as a hopeless endeavour. Instead, he attributes any value in worship not to human offering, but to God's transformation of human failing into an event of reconciliation:

> ...in Jesus Christ, God undertakes and overcomes worship's disastrous choreography, renovating it into a way of vicarious participation in divine life, now carried out "in the name" of God the Son.' 'God's opposition [to worship] takes place, so to speak, from the inside out, reversing our gesture of departure into a gesture of return.[703]

Although religion, for Boulton, is idolatry, it is a spiritually useful idolatry in a manner akin to Charles Wesley's earlier comment about humility. Following Barth, Boulton suggests that religion is 'indispensable' to us because it

> demonstrate[s] the emptiness of offerings delivered in order to stand aright, the catastrophe of sin and separation from divine friendship.[704]

Without religion, Boulton suggests, we would not recognise sin (particularly not the sin embodied within religion), and would consequently misunderstand the status of humankind in the world and in relation to God. Boulton presents religion as a means through which humankind grasps for control and power over things eternal, but also a means for revealing this tendency. The disastrous worship event can be transformed, by 'actually pray[ing] in the name of Jesus Christ', which draws human being out of the individual and into the Triune life of God.[705] This process appears to rely on intent – undertaking prayer in the name of Christ is to accept some kind of participation in the Trinitarian life.

[703] Ibid., 6.
[704] Ibid., 53.
[705] Ibid., 169.

Boulton suggests that, through flawed human prayers undertaken in the name of Christ, the 'fall is reworked into reconciliation'.[706] However, Boulton's account of this process is not affective, nor embodied: what might his 'choreography of participation' concretely look like, and in what concrete ways is separation between the individual and God effected? This problem of embodiment is raised by Simeon Zahl repeatedly in his book on the Holy Spirit as well. For Zahl, failing to account for the particular and embodied, rather than merely theoretical, ways in which the Spirit moves people is to depersonalize the Spirit:

> In my view, general statements about the Spirit "bettering" our union with Christ through the Eucharist, or "actualizing" changes in our "being" through participation in the Godhead need to be tempered by some kind of theological attempt to show how these metaphysical realities actually relate to the lives of real people in time. Otherwise, the Holy Spirit—theoretically the agent of this saving and sanctifying union with Christ— risks being reduced to a generic divine power, banal, clinical, and dehistoricized.[707]

Zahl offers some criteria for the "practical recognisability" of an experience of the Spirit: temporal specificity, and affective impact, pertaining to both feelings and desires.[708] While he offers an account of the Neo-Thomist model of sanctification as one in which the Spirit's work is practically recognisable in this way, Zahl suggests that this model associates religion too closely with virtue, potentially reducing the life of faith to morality. Further, it arguably presents habit as the only means for engendering moral change (Zahl notes that this did not work, in practice, for Martin Luther).[709]

Both of these problems have a hamartiological dimension: I have presented sin as a quality extant prior to individual moral agency, and have emphasised the ongoing corrupting effects of sin that undermine an optimistic anthropology of this Neo-Thomist sort. As an alternative, Zahl – who agrees that sin is more than a category for assessing morality[710] –

[706] Ibid., 170.
[707] Zahl, *Holy Spirit,* 71.
[708] Ibid., 73-75.
[709] Ibid., 110-114.
[710] Ibid., 158.

presents an account of sanctification that is affective, in which feelings and desires are transformed over time, prior to developing habits or re-shaping discourse:

> The issue of motivation is crucial here. In the Augustinian picture, we engage in such practices only when they have already been made pleasing enough to us that our desire to take part in them is stronger than our desire not to take part in them. The primary engine is the grace of God experienced...[711]

Transformation through negative affect

One practically recognisable work of the Spirit in this model pertains to sin. Zahl suggests that painful affects or disturbing psychological states – 'sin that weighs on the conscience and the body' – can act as catalysts for repentance, such as Melanchthon's 'terrors'. For Zahl, negative affect in relation to the Law creates a context in which a feeling of 'plight' can arise, re-shaping the individual's feelings and desires towards God.[712] Zahl's non-linear, affective account of sanctification through the Spirit, crucially, makes room for negative experience in the life of the justified Christian:

> One implication of the tethering of sanctification to embodied experience is that, under the aspect of providence, the entire spectrum of human experience is implicated in the processes by which God frees Christians from bondage to sin and fosters the desires of the Spirit.[713]

If sin is a dynamic constituent even of the worship event, as Boulton and Zahl both suggest, it is especially unfortunate that pop worship not only shies from acknowledging sin, but actively promotes a theology that conceals the significance of sin for justified Christians. This wastes an opportunity to 'ease the suffering associated with [negative] affects' by resolving it, through discourse into the Gospel narrative. It also potentially exacerbates such suffering by reinforcing a theology of sanctification that has no room for negative affect of this sort. As I quoted Rieff, in Chapter Six:

> What is not is the predicate of what is: grace.[714]

---

[711] Ibid., 220.
[712] Ibid., 193-4.
[713] Ibid., 213.
[714] Rieff, 'Thoughts', 110.

Rieff recognises, even if the therapeutic does not, that negative experiences such as anxiety, disappointment and personal failing provide the believer with fertile ground for accepting grace from an external source such as God, as an alternative to (or fulfilment of) despair or striving. (Unlike Charles Wesley, Rieff does not combine this observation with fire-and-brimstone rhetoric about good works.) The therapeutic might be put into practice in many ways; Bethel's therapeutic would likely be more effective if it looked beyond engendering immediate positive feelings as a normative indicator of tangible assurance, towards a more actively formative worship theology that found a role for negative feelings in justified Christians, as *well* as positive. Robin Parry observes, to the same end, that lament in worship is not hopeless:

> The Psalmist asks, "Why?" and "How long?" but neither of those questions need indicate a lack of hope for ultimate salvation.... Christian hope for the future can co-exist with lament *precisely because* deliverance and consolation lie in the future and our present experience can be dark.[715]

Indeed, Parry suggests that, in some cases, lament can precisely be the means by which these negative feelings are redeemed, at least in part:

> The sense of powerlessness and the loss of one's voice are intrinsic to many kinds of suffering and lament counters that. It gives the powerless and broken ones their speech back.[716]

The alternative – to eclipse negativity and sin in the way that Bethel Music more typically does, in order to pursue a narrow ideal of tangible assurance – entails exactly the kind of worship idolatry that Boulton decries, in a form that covers over its own insufficiency and therefore actively refutes the grace it supposedly celebrates. (Which is certainly not to say that grace cannot work through Bethel Music, but that their songs might be unhelpful instruments of Christian practice in this respect.)

[715] Parry, *Trinity*, 130.
[716] Ibid., 132.

One member of the Bethel Collective has had some success incorporating negative affect into worship songs. Kristine DiMarco has spoken openly about her 'need' for a 'supernatural God,' but – despite her overt pursuit of tangible assurance – has written several songs that address themes of lament and doubt.[717] However, these songs, such as 'Take Courage' and 'It Is Well,' are thematically resolved, using the therapeutic triumphalism that I have critiqued. They do not convey an ongoing hamartiology, and still ultimately try to encourage the worshipper, through triumphalist climax, into a positive affective experience pertaining to God. Nonetheless, they do offer some potential respite for the alienated worship in between these climaxes. 'It is Well', for example, conveys a sense of ongoing pain through a juxtaposition of lyrics with melody and harmony, the chorus proclaiming 'it is well' over a repeated, wistful IV – vi chord progression. Meanwhile, 'Take Courage' has a moody, low melody, wherein descending phrases of even length resolve continually back to the tonic, as the worshipper affirms that God is 'in the waiting'. This sentiment recalls Charles Wesley's attempt to find the peace of Christ within the trials of everyday life. Parry provides a useful concept for such laments as these that might better enable lament without resolution: 'aspirational spiritual formation,' in which desires and motivations are cultivated. Thus lament, in this instance, might focus on the desire to rejoice, testifying in more clearly to the transformation of the faculties, without seeking explicitly to resolve negative affect.[718]

Reforming worship

Boulton rightly points out that his portrayal of the worship event as fundamentally disastrous complicates the endeavour to reform worship: there is no 'righteous advantage' in so doing – indeed, the opposite.[719] As an example, he presents the lawyer in Luke 10:25-37, who angles for a legalistic approach by which he might justify himself, and inherit eternal life. Boulton notes that Christ, answering in parable, refrains from indulging this desire for a new law, describing Christ's response as

> a standing rebuke to the incessant Christian effort, alive and well today, to embrace the saving difference... that Christians have over Jews, or over non-

[717] Bethel Music, 'SHORT FILM: I NEEDED A SUPERNATURAL GOD | KRISTINE DIMARCO'S STORY', *YouTube* (31 October 2017). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4OAsxUJx2M.
[718] Parry, *Trinity*, 142.
[719] Boulton, *Religion*, 195.

> Christians generally, or, indeed, the advantage that some Christians have over other Christians.[720]

Boulton astutely suggests that one cannot reform worship with the hope of "fixing" it, or otherwise perfecting it. Instead, the act of reform 'continue[s]' the disaster, perpetuating the mixed motives, Pelagianism and unneighbourliness of worship, in the form of critique and renewed efforts.[721]

Although we cannot, then, prevent the worship event from being a 'presumptuous' 'disaster' riddled with self-deception, Boulton suggests that pedagogical worship reform might at least alert worshippers to this state of affairs, by changing the way we '**describe** Christian worship – even at its very best – in clearly critical terms.'[722] His two concrete suggestions include being 'more clearly dialectical' – not talking about dialectic, but maintaining an awareness of both the disaster of sin and hope in salvation – and so being in an 'accessible', 'emotionally resonant' and 'engaging' way. Boulton suggests that sacramental language is a good way of doing this, because the sacraments are 'fundamentally dialectical in character in that they simultaneously replay both fall and reconciliation.'[723]

I noted in Chapter One that Bethel Church perceives their worship ministry as a way of spreading their theology and message remotely, without church planting. Perhaps because of this focus, and their self-consciously international ministry, the Eucharist does not appear to be an important part of their services; Sunday services do not typically include a Eucharist, for example. When I visited Bethel in April 2019, I was surprised to find two large buckets of pre-packaged communion wafers and shots of grape juice that had been consecrated in advance, for visitors to partake in alone if they felt so inclined. One of these tubs was in the prayer room, and the other had been placed in the corner of the main hall during a healing morning, while the band worshipped ambiently on the stage.

---

[720] Ibid., 198.
[721] Ibid., 208: 'The reformer of Christian worship finds herself in a strange position: she sets out to reform something disastrous, yet recognizing at the same time that her renovations alone will not alleviate the disaster, but only continue it. She nevertheless sets out in the hope and trust that God will act through her work, taking it up in to the divine work of reconciliation.'
[722] Ibid., 202.
[723] Ibid., 209.



Figure 81. The Eucharist at Bethel, 6 April 2019.

This arrangement suggests a weakly sacramental theology at best; there is scant participation or anticipation in taking one's own sacrament from a bucket, without a corporate Eucharistic prayer, or someone to share it with. There can be little ritual veneration of the body and blood of Christ, when droplets of (presumably) pre-consecrated 'real Concordia grape juice' rim the single-use plastic that is to be thrown away, after the sacraments have been ingested. Compare this quick sacrament to the long, lingering moments found in Bethel's worship sets, where congregants sing the 'song of their heart', and worship leaders slowly make prophetic declarations over the corporate body before them, or the long anticipation of musical climax and the spiritual "breakthrough" associated with it.[724]

This is to say that there is no clear relationship between Bethel's worship music and their sacramental activities in their own church, offering no model of how the two might be integrated elsewhere. Conceiving of such a model is beyond my remit in this project, particularly given that the sacrament occurs in particularly located instantiations (unlike, say, a worship song that is created and then disseminated), and so matters pertaining to it belong to various levels of church governance (and not ancillary comments in a DPhil thesis). However, Boulton's advocacy for dialectic fits neatly with my main criticism of Bethel in this thesis – that their own dialectic is ineffectual, and would be strengthened with a use of the pop idiom that is better equipped to convey negative emotion, and its place in the work of the Spirit, and used to this end.

[724] The term 'breakthrough' indicates a visceral inbreaking of the Spirit; it is a form of tangible assurance, manifest in positive affect or supernatural empowerment, with a connotation of therapeutic wellbeing. See, for example, Bethel Music, Jeremy Riddle, 'Breaking Through,' *Tides* (Bethel Music: 2013), and Bethel Music, Brandon Lake, 'We Praise You – Live,' *Revival's In The Air* (Bethel Music: 2020), which declares 'the God of breakthrough's on our side.' In a live performance of 'We Praise You,' Brian Johnson speaks again about Joshua and the walls of Jericho, and encourages the congregants to pursue 'breakthrough' in the worship experience: see Dwaine H, 'We Praise You – The God of breakthrough is on our side – Bethel live worship,' *YouTube* (6 July 2019). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YI11dD5RP5I> 5:40: 'when we partner with faith and praise combined, it's amazing what God does in our lives.'

8.4 SANCTIFICATION AND NEGATIVE AFFECT

I have already commented on Simeon Zahl's endeavour to explore the transformative work of the Spirit in an embodied way, and his suggestion that negative affect is useful to this end. Zahl notes that the 19th century theologian Christopher Blumhardt's very experiential Pietistic theology carves out a chunky place for negative experiences of the spirit in particular, and presents this use of negative experience as a potential antidote to religious enthusiasm, which I am equating with the kind of normative triumphalism and therapeutic theology that I have critiqued. Zahl's project here is to reconcile the division in Protestant theology between *sola scriptura* and *Schwärmerei*, and he does this by way of a low anthropology integrated with the doctrine of original sin. Zahl, supportive of the affective dimensions of Blumhardt's theology, wherein 'unmediated experience' of the divine is not necessarily rational or mediated by scripture,[725] notes that Blumhardt finds a place for both positive and negative affective religious experiences. Positive experiences might include feelings of joy or love, signifying intimacy with God.[726] Zahl characterises affective religious experiences of a negative kind thus:

> Instead, sanctification and empowerment experiences are subverted in his thought into a new category, what I call negative experience. In essence, "negative" experience is the *opposite* of the traditional moment of sanctification and/or empowerment in Pietist and Pentecostal theology. It is a painful encounter with the truth of one's sin, and the destruction by God of "egoistic" pretensions to power. It is the revelation of God's power and holiness over and against human impotence and unrighteousness, and results in "Sterben", not "New Birth."[727]

As Zahl details, Blumhardt's use of negative experience stems from his concerns regarding the "egoism" of the flesh, and its tendency to subvert positive experiences of God and "weak" revelatory experience to selfish, rather than Godly, purposes, and misleadingly

[725] Zahl, *Blumhardt,* 20.
[726] Ibid., 90-1.
[727] Ibid., 91-2.

orienting the Christian towards the flesh.[728] By contrast, the *Sterbet*[729] of negative pneumatological experience is connected, for Blumhardt, to divine judgement: it poses a limit to the virtue and godliness of the individual, and thereby makes room for the sanctifying work of the Spirit.[730] 'Disempowerment,' Zahl suggests, rather than Bethel's 'supernatural empowerment,' is central to *Sterben*:

> 'Disempowerment' is an essential part of negative experience. "Negative" experience is a radical reminder of their *lack* of "power" and their inescapable tendency to misuse any power they might have, even power given from on high, as in the healings.[731]

This is congruent with Zahl's earlier remarks, regarding the Law as the occasion for grace, by virtue of man's inability to uphold it, and Boulton's comments, similarly regarding the presumptuousness of worship. For Zahl, Blumhardt's account of negative experience is a potential way 'beyond the impasse' between Lutheran concerns about religious enthusiasm, and the centrality of experience for Pentecostalism: because negative experience can be painful, uncomfortable or humbling, there is less incentive to falsify it.[732]

I want to suggest in the remaining reflections that, were Bethel to strengthen their hamartiology in such a way, their theology would not only be more resistant to religious enthusiasm, but also to treating worship as an ultimately therapeutic endeavour. Bethel's therapeutic approach, I have argued, subordinates the Gospel message of salvation from sin through Christ to a generically encouraging, but not necessarily Christian, message of empowerment through a comforting God. Incorporating negative affect as an important sign of the transformation, through the Spirit, of those faculties corrupted by sin could ameliorate this problem, by strengthening the negative side of Bethel's dialectic of sin and grace. This is essential if sanctification is to be understood as the object of divine, not

[728] Ibid., 98.
[729] Ibid., 102: Zahl glosses *Sterben* as 'the judgment and spiritual "death" of the one experiencing God,' and particularly the righteousness of God.
[730] Ibid., 101. Rather like Wesley's volitional account of sin, this posits intent as an important agent in sanctification. However, Blumhardt's is a "disempowering," rather than "empowering," theology - rather than focusing on the ability of the Christian to pursue Christian Perfection, his account of negative experience foregrounds the *inability* for the believer to do this, and their need for grace in order to be sanctified.
[731] Ibid., 103.
[732] There are, of course, problematic and inappropriate ways one could put this into practice, for example interpreting psychological distress as a sign of wrongdoing.

human, agency, and the worship event to be understood in this context as a flawed human practice, rather than a means for "accessing" God.

Any experience of the Spirit can be read as encouraging, in the context of the Gospel; Bethel do not have to altogether refrain from conveying an encouraging message, but ought to divorce spiritual encouragement from positive affect. This approach to the worship event might even be *more* encouraging than their current one, certainly for those worshippers who feel alienated from a worship theology that does not account for the non-transformation or supernatural disempowerment of non-justified Christians. Lastly, it would probably not incentivise the falsification of religious experience to the same extent that positive affect can.

In short, incorporating negative affect into the worship event would make "really worshipping" much less normative, and therefore more inclusive. It would also more vitally factor caution and self-interrogation into the undertaking towards encounter with God, reminding the worshipper of their reliance on grace, instead of instrumentalising grace as a kind of absolute progress towards holiness that is straightforwardly accompanied by positive affect and supernatural empowerment. As Matthew Myer Boulton notes in his book on Calvin:

> ...distinctively *Protestant* accounts of ecclesial practices will situate them within a critical framework, continually pointing toward the dangers that attend them, including self-deception and spiritual pride. The reality of human sin, Protestant theologians will insist, does not somehow go on hiatus simply because an idea or practice is "biblical" or "liturgical" or "devotional" or "spiritual."[733]

Incorporating negative affect into the worship event is a way of remembering the ongoing corruption of the faculties through sin, in worship, without having to explain it systematically. In remembering sin, worship points towards the need for grace: maintaining the orthodox dialectic. Facilitating affective diversity in the worship event,

[733] Matthew Myers Boulton, *Life in God* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2011), 226. Bethel Church does not identify as 'distinctively Protestant,' but the suggestion stands nevertheless, and all the more so for those Anglican churches using their music.

and not simply striving towards a positive ideal, does not only allow for the acknowledgement of sin, and its universal effects. It further allows for varied emotional responses in the worship event, engaging the corporate worshipping body in a more inclusive way, and testifying to the transformation of desire – a 'gradual work' of grace, to use Charles Wesley's terminology. Categories such as Parry's 'aspirational spiritual formation', and Zahl's suggestion that negative affect can be a more reliable indicator of the work of the Spirit, allow for people to truly "come as they are" to the worship event. By contrast, a low ideal of tangible assurance, and the banishment of negative affect, results in a poor use of the therapeutic at the expense of sanctification; a red herring of worship that requires more and more, and clearer, superficial signs of tangible assurance.

8.5 THE IDIOMATIC NORMS OF POP WORSHIP

It follows from this theological reflection that a therapeutic theology in which positive affect is substantive for the "success" of the worship event is a hindrance to the robust expression of hamartiology, the full inclusion of the corporate worshipping body, and the unhindered acceptance of divine grace. A therapeutic theology of this kind necessitates presenting sin as a past-tense issue for the justified Christian, particularly overlooking possible noetic and desiderative corruption (which would call the validity of positive religious affect into question). Although there has been some variation in mood and tone between the songs I have presented in this thesis, they – like genre more broadly – maintain this problematic subordination of hamartiology to the therapeutic.

If the "success" of the worship event can be distinguished from the requirements of musical triumphalism and the therapeutic, the stylistic norms of pop worship can be diversified, in order to testify to the role of non-positive experience in sanctification. I refer to this as 'negative' experience, but this can be widely construed, for example to include things that do not necessarily feel negative, such as apathy, or boredom. I am suggesting that Boulton's pedagogical re-description of worship as disastrous should be applied to pop worship, and Zahl's idea about the Spirit moving through negative affect as well, insofar as my critique of the serious effect of its weak hamartiology stands up. Bearing in mind Boulton's problematisation of worship reform in general, I will offer a few possible

examples of how the pop worship idiom might avoid triumphalist and therapeutic musical norms.

The creative possibilities are, of course, endless. The pop idiom is used to evocative and emotionally varied ends by myriad musicians in Christian and secular music. Although it is often musically simple in certain respects (for example, diatonic harmonies built on thirds and fifths, regular rhythm, standardised sectional structure), the pop idiom provides a much larger toolbox than the fairly normative style that has arisen in the Charismatic pop mainstream, as I have detailed it here. Musically, I have mostly criticised the therapeutic conveyance of comfort, stability, triumphalism and obfuscation of sin (and negative affect) in this thesis. It follows that my suggestions here should point out some corresponding alternatives. I have complained that Bethel's music – and the genre of which it is reflective – relies on generating a positive feeling in worshippers, to convey tangible assurance and a sense of therapeutic faith.

There is enormous scope for pop worship to diverge from these problematic norms without becoming esoteric or stylistically unrecognisable. Importantly, although I have focused on negative affect here, the endeavour to re-describe worship does not simply mean making music *sadder* (sadness not being the only form that negative affect takes). Boulton, introducing a category of 'penitential jubilation,' rightly notes that 'Christian must also describe Christian worship – even at its worst – in equally clear terms of faith and hope.'[734] My intention is not to attempt to inscribe a different norm upon pop worship music, but to gesture towards the way a currently normative expressive frame might be diversified. This is the end to which I am adopting Zahl's suggestion that negative experience might be a more reliable indicator of the Spirit. The suggestions to follow should not be taken as comprehensive; they are merely preliminary suggestions, illustrative of my argument. All of these comments originate from the broader idea that pop worship would do well to diverge, at least sometimes, from the norms I have critiqued.

Cosmic ambience

I have presented cosmic ambience as an inappropriately simplistic signifier for the "manifest presence" of God. Although cosmic ambience is a potentially useful liturgical

[734] Boulton, *Religion*, 202, 205.

device, insofar as it might signal a change of state between worship and non-worship, distinguishing worship in this way might unhelpfully suggest that God is "more" present in worship than at other times. Recall Martyn Percy's concern that 'something needs to be engineered before worship can happen,' forcing the worshipper to rely in a particular way on the worship leader. This could suggest that the worship band (and their equipment) are facilitating something that normal worshippers cannot do by themselves, by so associating worship with the ambient sound. Such an implication fails to acknowledge the universality of sin, and the absolute alienation from God that is *only* overcome through divine grace (not through affectively responding to synthesisers).

There is room for more textural and timbral variety in pop worship music, beyond just cosmic ambience. Bethel's Without Words ministry is a start with respect to timbral variation – these recordings incorporate busy percussive textures, for example. However, they are still awash with cosmic ambience, and climax in a therapeutically triumphant manner (although these climaxes are less pronounced than in their sung counterparts). Silence is still filled – by ambience and percussive busyness – and the worship event still normatively utilises a distinct soundworld.

This points to a major problem with cosmic ambience, which I discussed in Chapter Six: that cosmic ambience precludes silence from the worship event, overregulating the affective diversity for which I am advocating – awkwardness, for example, or discomfort, or boredom. Cosmic ambience, as a signifier of the worship event, reinforces a normative mood for worship. It is, therefore, instrumental to the therapeutic positivity of pop, and the emotional alienation it can engender (at worst). There are many examples of silence being used effectively in Christian music, such as Harry Belafonte's evocative pauses between each phrase in the spiritual 'Steal Away.'[735] Think also of the simple phraseology, punctuated by contemplative rests, in Taizé; an arrangement of 'Bless the Lord my Soul' by Simply Taizé intersperses chorus and sparse string accompaniment with its occasional pauses, reflecting the sombre text it sets.[736] Not using cosmic ambience could force some therapeutic discomfort into the worship event, allowing for more affective diversity within a congregation. This could be stressful for people who seek a particular "high" from the worship event, or who assume that worship requires "really worshipping," and find silence

[735] Harry Belafonte, 'Steal Away,' *My Lord What A Mornin'* (Sony Music Entertainment: 1959).
[736] Simply Taizé, 'Bless the Lord,' *Simply Taizé* (Integrity Music: 2014).

counterproductive to these ends. However, as I have noted already, there is no perfect worship, and worship that is ultimately therapeutic is at odds with Christian practice.

Given the evangelistic streak of pop worship ministries, it is worth noting that there are certain instruments that are more common to churches in general, such as keyboard, guitar or rudimentary percussion. Although the timbral replicability of pop worship songs does not seem to be of major concern in Bethel *et al*'s recordings, it is worth bearing in mind for the purposes of my suggestions here. For example, writing for very esoteric instruments such as the hang hang, in the pursuit of timbral variation, would require cumbersome rearranging efforts made by churches who wanted to perform those songs themselves. However, the practical matter of ordinary churches having limited musical resources is a potentially very fruitful means for acknowledging the imperfections and limitations of human worship. Many amateur musicians are particularly gifted, to a greater or lesser degree, at demonstrating Boulton's claim that there is no perfect worship: these faithful (and, indeed, faithless) efforts can aptly illustrate, by analogy, the limits of human worship, and the sin-grace dialectic thereby.

Structure and teleology

I noted in my chapter on triumphalism that, along with the therapeutic positivity (or avoidance of negativity) in Bethel's music, the drive towards triumphant climax presents sin and negativity as retrospective phenomena. Most of Bethel's songs (and in the genre generally) adopt a sectional structure, as I have detailed. There is nothing wrong with this structure in itself, but it is perhaps worth interrogating where climactic points in a worship song support its theological meaning, rather than simply including climaxes at the expected points. For example, I suggested that Brian Johnson's 'Forever' climaxes in keeping with the development of the musico-theological themes of the song, which discuss atonement theology. Similarly, Asbury's 'Reckless Love' uses a disjunct melody in its climactic choruses to contrast with the regretful mulling of its verses, conveying thereby the radicalism of divine grace, and the profound hope and gratitude it can inspire.

By contrast, many pop worship songs seem to use climaxes that do not necessarily relate to either the earlier material in the songs, or the lyrical material – recall my comments about the codas of 'Here is Love' and 'Seas of Crimson'. This raises points about motivic development, and about climax itself. Firstly, if pop worship used motivic development or

motivic resemblances between sections to underpin the theology of a song, it could develop the motifs it revisited, rather than simply intensifying them, as in Brian Johnson's 'Forever.' Secondly, although there is nothing wrong with climax in itself, driving every worship song to a triumphant climax focuses the corporate worshipping body on experiences of positive affect that I have problematised. Bethel's wealth of "self-improvement" songs, such as 'Catch the Wind' and 'You Make Me Brave,' suggest that these affective experiences are often as much to do with self-image as they are about spiritual formation, divine encounter, or praise. Further, I have noted that the normative use of climax continually resolves negativity and sin in the life of faith, in a manner that fails to express possibilities such as ongoing corruption, or the non-transformation of justified Christians. Yet pop worship need not be structured around points of climax in the manner that Bethel Music demonstrates. Traditional hymnody often adopts a strophic form, with each verse conveying subtler peaks and troughs than Bethel's climactic codas, created through complexifying, and then resolving, harmonic progressions. African American spirituals have long made use of repetition that does *not* drive towards climax, as in Belafonte's 'Steal Away', as has much liturgical music, using a cantor to repeat intonations. Use of call-and-response repetition of these sorts are, furthermore, especially suited to corporate worship.

Along with considering the climactic points in each song, one might consider the teleological structure of the worship event as a whole. At churches such as Bethel, Hillsong and HTB, worship songs are embedded within a lengthy worship set, aurally saturated with cosmic ambience. This strongly distinguishes sung worship from the rest of a church service, allowing time for people to begin "really worshipping" before the worship set ends, at which point they cease "really worshipping" and listen to the sermon, or some such activity. Alongside a normatively positive and climactic set of songs, this can reinforce the idea – which Boulton absolutely refutes – that worship occupies a spiritual space that is somehow more holy than everyday life (and, indeed, the rest of the service). These long worship sets could be varied in their usage, with sung worship interspersing other elements of services. At live worship concerts, long sets are unavoidable, and this is where timbral and textural variation could be employed very effectively. Consider Leonard Cohen's 'You Want It Darker', a pop song exploring a religious theme, without using the teleological thrust ubiquitous in pop worship. Cohen punctuates extended spoken verses

accompanied by drums and choir with choruses of hope and release.[737] The brevity of these choruses contrasts with the extended repetition of pop worship. Yet Cohen convey the sin-grace dialectic effectively, through as simple devices as spoken word, and minor tonality, and textural contrast.

Harmony

I have made the point at various times during this thesis that Bethel's use of harmony is limited. This is broadly true of the pop idiom in general (with exceptions), where interest is more likely created through texture, timbre, lyric and melody, over regular rhythm and functional harmony. The problem with Bethel's use of functional harmony, in the context of their use of the pop idiom more broadly, is that it invariably resolves without any tension or journey, compounding their rather facile therapeutic portrayal of the life of faith. Further, this use of harmony is predictable, meaning that the worshipper doesn't have to pay attention to the music, but can instrumentalise it as a means for "getting there" (to use Nekola's phrase).

There is, however, no shortage of ways to use simple, functional harmony in less predictable or simplistically positive ways. Harmonic rhythm could be less regular, lingering on certain chords, or moving irregularly through a song. Harmonies might also be less swift to resolve. Chromaticism might be incorporated more, to create a sense of discordance or angst, or minor chords utilised more readily and emphatically. For example, another Leonard Cohen song, 'Hallelujah', is a good example of a corporately singable song, written in the pop idiom, wherein each verse and chorus modulates. In each verse, Cohen sets up a regular harmonic rhythm in the first four lines that continually returns to the major tonic chord, and then deviates from this rhythm. When Cohen sings 'it goes like this, the fourth, the fifth' (in a faster harmonic rhythm, creating a sense of momentum building), he begins a progression that modulates to the relative minor, and delays the return to the major tonic until the end of the chorus.[738] The nature of this delay subverts the regular harmonic rhythms typical to pop music, and takes the harmonic progression on a journey that moves in and out of different moods, which fittingly accompany the reminiscent lyrics. Modulating between the major and minor in this way is a simple harmonic device that could well express the dialectic between sin and grace. Alternatively,

[737] Leonard Cohen, 'You Want It Darker,' *You Want It Darker* (Sony Music Entertainment: 2016)
[738] Leonard Cohen, 'Hallelujah,' *Various Positions* (Sony Music Entertainment: 1984): 0:21 – 1:00.

refraining from harmony altogether – as John Wesley himself, following Augustine, thought best – in sung worship might have any number of striking effects.

I am deliberately not recommending the integration of pop worship with *avant garde* classical styles. Nor am I warning against it; there are many classically trained pop artists who dabble evocatively with classical or *avant garde* compositional techniques, such as Regina Spektor or Joanna Newsom. (However, these devices typically affect instrumentation, melody and rhythm more than harmony, which remains fairly conventional in their music.) I would not suggest that classical or *avant garde* composition is necessarily a helpful "solution" to the normativity of the pop idiom in worship music for the practical reason that the average church has limited access to musicians and instruments, and a congregation of varied musical proficiency. Pragmatism regarding the replicability of pop worship songs that are designed for dissemination across the church is, therefore, sensible – and not in order that sung worship "sounds good." Rather, the difficulty of the musical material should not be an obstacle to corporate sung worship, and pop worship of the sort I have examined is a participatory medium. Twelve-tone worship songs, to use a crude example, would not be replicable or accessible to many congregations and worship bands. Pop music for corporate worship should, for the most part, utilise melodies that are easy for most people to sing, and rhythms that are easy for most people to follow.

Lyrics & singing

My notes on lyrics are minimal, concerning only the general avoidance towards dealing with negativity that I have noted throughout this thesis; attempting to micromanage lyrics is an impractical (and impossible) task, whereas offering a memeable directive such as "pop worship should diverge from the unthinking use of musical norms, in order to express and facilitate a greater affective diversity" is relatively practical. Pop worship lyrics could do much more to acknowledge and examine negative phenomena. For example, although Bethel's songs do sometimes refer to 'fear', 'pain' and 'shame', and occasionally even 'sin,' these concepts are rarely interrogated. Lament, a staple of the secular pop genre, not to mention of the Psalms, could also be effectively incorporated into sung worship. Consider the female acapella group Sweet Honey in the Rock's 'Prayer', which laments over sin:

> Lord, must I do unto others, before they do unto me?
> Must I arm myself to protect myself from harm and injury?
> Oh no, that is not the lesson that I learned on my mother's knee
> When she told me to do unto others only what I'd have them do unto me.[739]

Despite the sorrow in these lyrics, they are dialectical in the way that Matthew Myer Boulton recommends, testifying not only to human failing and the need for redemption, but also to the ideal that Christ provides, in repeating his dictum.

8.6 SUMMARY

These comments, which are not remotely comprehensive of the possibilities of creative, Christian engagement with the pop idiom, couch my appeal for dialectic in concrete terms. Although pop worship is an encouraging and therapeutic medium, this should not be taken as its ultimate function. As a means to formation, divine encounter and praise of God, Christian worship has some obligation to convey the main contours of the Gospel, and this includes the doctrine of sin – without reference to which, grace cannot be adequately understood. In particular, I have suggested that a worship theology should maintain some sense of the ongoing corruption of the noetic and desiderative faculties: this dogmatic proposition offers worship the opportunity to problematise itself, and worshippers the opportunity to remain wary of establishing new legalisms.

As a 'disastrous' event, chequered by human failing yet pointing towards the divine, worship music is, perhaps, especially obligated to convey something of the dialectic of sin and grace, with joy and celebration, ideally, found alongside sorrow, discomfort and alienation. The weak hamartiology of Bethel Music, and their contemporaries, fails to account for the ongoing presence of sin in the lives of justified Christians, and requires strengthening in order to have some hope of expressing, through dialectic, the significance of grace. A broadening of the musical idiom might, in this way, help with the 'disastrous' worship reform of which Myer Boulton writes – an endeavour both expressive of, and ultimately reliant upon, grace.

[739] Sweet Honey in the Rock, 'Prayer,' *Sacred Ground* (Earthbeat: 1995).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adorno, Theodor W., *Essays on Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002)

Adorno, Theodor W., *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (Hove: Psychology Press, 2001)

Althaus-Reid, Marcella, *Indecent Theology* (New York City: Routledge, 2000)

Althaus-Reid, Marcella, *The Queer God* (New York City: Routledge, 2003)

Altrogge, Stephen, 'What You Really Need To Know About The Song "Reckless Love," *The Blazing Center* (30 April 2018). <https://theblazingcenter.com/2018/04/reckless-love.html> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Anderson, Allan, *An Introduction To Pentecostalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004)

Anderson, Gary A., *Sin: A History* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009)

Asbury, Cory, 'Many have asked me for clarity on the phrase, "reckless love",' *Facebook @coryasburymusic* (14 June 2017). <https://www.facebook.com/coryasburymusic/posts/10158977378510171> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions I/1*, trans. Boulding, Maria (New York: New City Press, 1997).

Aulén, Gustav, *Christus Victor,* trans. Herbert, A.G. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1931).

Baker, Frank (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: Volume 25: Letters I: 1721-1739* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980)

Begbie, Jeremy, *A Peculiar Orthodoxy: Reflections on Theology and the Arts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018)

Begbie, Jeremy, *Music in God's Purposes* (Edinburgh: The Hansel Press, 1989)

Begbie, Jeremy, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000)

Bentley Hart, David, *The Beauty of the Infinite* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003)

Berman, Judy, 'Concerning the Spiritual in Indie Rock,' *Believer Magazine* No.64 (1 August 2009). <https://believermag.com/concerning-the-spiritual-in-indie-rock/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Berry, Wallace T., *Structural Functions in Music* (New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1987)

Bethel Church, 'About,' *Bethel*. <https://www.bethel.com/about/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Church, 'Church,' *Bethel*. <https://www.bethel.com/church/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Church, 'Classes,' *Bethel Redding*. <http://bethelredding.com/classes?page=1> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Church, 'Core Values,' *Bethel*. <https://www.bethel.com/core-values/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Church, 'Offering Readings,' *Bethel*. <https://www.bethel.com/offering-readings/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Church, 'Worship,' *Bethel.* <*http*s://www.bethel.com/worship/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Church, 'WorshipU,' *WorshipU*. <https://worshipu.com/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Music, 'About,' *Bethel Music*. <https://bethelmusic.com/about/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Music, 'Bethany Worhle,' *Bethel Music*. <https://bethelmusic.com/artists/bethany-worhle/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Music, 'Bethel Music Kids: Come Alive,' *Bethel Music*. <https://bethelmusic.com/albums/come-alive/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Music, 'Brandon Lake: About Brandon,' *Bethel Music*. <https://bethelmusic.com/artists/brandon-lake/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Music, 'Brian Johnson,' *Bethel Music*. <https://bethelmusic.com/artists/brian-johnson/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Music, 'Cory Asbury: About Cory,' *Bethel Music*. <https://bethelmusic.com/artists/cory-asbury/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Music, 'Emmy Rose,' *Bethel Music*. <https://bethelmusic.com/artists/emmy-rose/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Music, 'Josh Baldwin,' *Bethel Music*. <https://bethelmusic.com/artists/josh-baldwin/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Music, 'Moments: Mighty Sound,' *Bethel Music*. <https://bethelmusic.com/albums/moments-mighty-sound/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Music, 'We Will Not Be Shaken (Live),' *Apple Music*. <https://music.apple.com/us/album/we-will-not-be-shaken-live/959959559> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Music, 'We Will Not Be Shaken,' *Bethel Music*. <https://bethelmusic.com/albums/we-will-not-be-shaken/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry, 'Academics,' *BSSM*. <http://bssm.net/school/academics/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry, 'BSSM First Year Syllabus,' *BSSM*. <https://bssm.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/BSSM-First-Year-Syllabus.pdf> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry, 'BSSM Homepage,' *BSSM*. <http://bssm.net/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry, 'Introduction,' *BSSM*. <http://bssm.net/school/introduction/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Shop, 'We Will Not Be Shaken,' *Bethel*. <https://shop.bethel.com/products/we-will-not-be-shaken-live> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Testimonies, 'A Walking Miracle,' *Bethel* (10 May 2016). <https://www.bethel.com/testimonies/a-walking-miracle-2/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Testimonies, 'Supernatural Weight Loss,' *Bethel (*4 April 2016). <https://www.bethel.com/testimonies/supernatural-weight-loss/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Testimonies, 'Youth Ministers On Airplane,' *Bethel* (5 April 2016). <https://www.bethel.com/testimonies/youth-ministers-on-airplane/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Blanchard, John & Lucarini, Dan*, Can We Rock the Gospel?* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2006)

Bockmuehl, Marcus, *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Boorman, Georgi, 'Sorry, Bethel Music, But God's Love Just Isn't 'Reckless,' *The Federalist* (28 December 2018). <https://thefederalist.com/2018/12/28/sorry-bethel-music-gods-love-just-isnt-reckless/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Borkett-Jones, Lucinda, 'Vineyard worship music is having a moment' *Christian Today* (28 February 2015).

<https://www.christiantoday.com/article/vineyard.worship.is.having.a.moment/48563.htm > Accessed 28 August 2020.

Boulton, Matthew Myer, *God Against Religion: Rethinking Christian Theology Through Worship* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008)

Boulton, Matthew Myer, *Life in God: John Calvin, Practical Formation, and the Future of Protestant Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011)

Bringle, Mary Louise, 'Debating Hymns,' *The Christian Century* (1 May 2013). <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2013-04/debating-hymns> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Brown-Lawson, Albert, *John Wesley and the Anglican Evangelicals of the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh, Cambridge & Durham: The Pentland Press, 1994)

Brown, Joanne Carlson & Bohn, Carole R. (ed.), *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1990)

Brown, Michael, 'An Appeal to Holly Pivec and Prof. Doug Geivett to Separate Yourselves From the Hyper-Critics' *Christian Post* (14 May 2018). <https://www.christianpost.com/voice/an-appeal-to-holly-pivec-and-prof-doug-geivett-to-separate-yourselves-from-the-hyper-critics.html> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bryant, Barry Edward, *John Wesley's Doctrine of Sin*, doctoral dissertation. (Kings College London: 1992)

Burch Brown, Frank, *Good Taste, Bad Taste, and Christian Taste: Aesthetics in Religious Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)

Burdon, Adrian, *Authority and Order: John Wesley and his Preachers* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005)

Callaway, Kutter, *Scoring Transcendence: Contemporary Film Music as Religious Experience* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013)

Christerson, Brad & Flory, Richard, *The Rise of Network Christianity: How Independent Leaders are Changing the Religious Landscape* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017)

Coakley, Sarah, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013)

Cohen, Harvey G., 'The Marketing of Duke Ellington: Setting the Strategy for an African American Maestro,' *The Journal of African American History,* Volume 89, No.4 (Autumn 2004): 291-315.

Collins, Kenneth J., *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997)

Collins, Kenneth J., *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007)

Cone, Edward T., *The Composer's Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974)

Cooke, Deryck, *The Language of Music* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1991)

Cunningham, Joseph W., 'The Methodist Doctrine of Christian Perfection: Charles Wesley's Contribution Contextualized,' *Wesley and Methodist Studies*, Volume 2 (2010): 25-44.

Davies, Stephen, *Understanding Musical Expression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994)

Dawson, Connie, *John Wimber: A Biographical Sketch of his Life and Ministry in America*, doctoral dissertation. (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing: 2012)

DeJong, Peter Ymen, *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dort, 1618 - 1619* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, 1968)

Descartes, René, *Compendium of Music,* trans. Robert, Walter (Rome: American Institute of Musicology, 1961)

Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World (Ada: Chosen Books, 2008)

Dostoevsky, Fyodor, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Garnett, Constance (Mineola: Dover, 2005)

Elevation Worship, 'About,' Elevation Worship. <https://elevationworship.com/about/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Farrelly, Dann, *Kingdom Culture: Living the Values that Disciple Nations [A Core Values Journal]* (Redding: Bethel Church, 2017)

Fink, Robert, *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005)

Ford, David (ed.), *The Modern Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005)

Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Sheridan, Alan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995)

François, Anne-Lise, 'Fakin' It/Makin' It: Falsetto's Bid for Transcendence in 1970s Disco Highs,' *Perspectives of New Music,* Volume 33, No.1/2 (Winter – Summer, 1995): 442 – 457.

Freud, Sigmund, *Civilisation and its Discontents*, trans. Riviere, Joan (London: Hogarth Press, 1946)

Frith, Simon, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Harvard University Press, 1996)

Gagnon, Robert, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001)

Geivett, R. Douglas & Pivec, Holly, *A New Apostolic Reformation? A Biblical Response to a Worldwide Movement* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2014)

George, Carol V.R., *God's Salesman* (Oxford: OUP, 1993)

Giles, Peter, & Steane, J.B., 'Countertenor,' *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press: 2001) <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000006694#omo-9781561592630-e-0000006694> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Guest, Matthew, *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture* (Colerado Springs: Paternoster, 2007)

Gunton, Colin E., *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994)

Gutiérrez, Gustavo, *The Power of the Poor in History* (London: SCM Press, 1983)

Hackett, Conrad & McClendon, David 'Christians remain world's largest religious group, but they are declining in Europe, *Pew Research Center* (5 April 2017). <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/05/christians-remain-worlds-largest-religious-group-but-they-are-declining-in-europe/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Halliwell, Martin & Rasmussen, Joel D.S. (ed.), *James and the Transatlantic Conversation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)

Hawkey, J., Quash, B., & White, V. (ed.), *God's Song and Music's Meanings: Theology, Liturgy and Musicology in Dialogue* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020)

Hays, Richard B., *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996)

Hempton, David, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion 1750-1900* (London: Routledge, 1996)

Henry, Andre, 'No, Cory Asbury's 'Reckless Love' Isn't Heretical, But Could've Gone Further,' *Relevant* (3 April 2018). <https://relevantmagazine.com/culture/no-cory-asburys-reckless-love-isnt-heretical/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Hensley-Clancy, Molly, 'Meet The "Young Saints" Of Bethel Who Go To College To Perform Miracles,' *BuzzFeed* (12 October 2017). <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/mollyhensleyclancy/meet-the-young-saints-of-bethel-who-go-to-college-to> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Heyward, Carter, *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* (New York: Harper, 1989)

Hillsong Worship, 'Who You Say I Am,' *There Is More* (Hillsong Music: 2018)

Hillsong, 'Arrows: Hillsong Worship & Creative Conference Oct 21 – 23,' *Hillsong*. <https://hillsong.com/wcc/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Hillsong, 'Fact Sheet,' *Hillsong*. <https://hillsong.com/fact-sheet/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Hillsong, 'The Vision,' *Hillsong*. <https://hillsong.com/vision/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Hinn, Costi W., & Wood, Anthony G., *Defining Deception: Freeing the Church from the Mystical-Miracle Movement* (El Cajon: Southern California Seminary Press: 2018)

Hoganson Media, 'DOVE NOMINATED BETHEL MUSIC GATHERS ITS BIGGEST RETAIL DEBUT EVER WITH FIRST STUDIO ALBUM, TIDES,' *Jesus Freak Hideout* (11 September 2013). <https://www.jesusfreakhideout.com/news/2013/09/11.DOVE%20NOMINATED%20BETHEL%20MUSIC%20GATHERS%20ITS%20BIGGEST%20RETAIL%20DEBUT%20EVER%20WITH%20FIRST%20STUDIO%20ALBUM,%20TIDES.asp> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Holdcroft, L. Thomas, 'The New Order of the Latter Rain,' *Pneuma*, Volume 2, No.1, (1 January 1980): 46-58.

iBethel, 'Bethel and the Assemblies of God,' *Web Archive* (1 July 2011). <https://web.archive.org/web/20110701134709/http://www.ibethel.org/bethel-and-the-assemblies-of-god> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Ingalls, M., Landau, C., & Wagner, T., (ed.), *Christian Congregational Music: Performance, Identity and Experience* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013)

Ingalls, Monique M., *Singing the Congregation: How Contemporary Worship Music Forms Evangelical Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018)

International House of Prayer, 'Christian Creeds,' *IHOPKC*. <https://www.ihopkc.org/about/christian-creeds/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

International House of Prayer, 'Global Prayer Room,' *IHOPKC*. <https://www.IHOPKC.org/prayerroom/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

International House of Prayer, 'Prayer Room,' *IHOPKC*. <https://www.ihopkc.org/prayerroom/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

International House of Prayer, 'Statement of Faith,' *IHOPKC*. <*http*s://www.ihopkc.org/about/statement-of-faith/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

International House of Prayer, 'What is IHOPKC's stance on the New Apostolic Reformation?' *IHOPKC*. <https://www.IHOPKC.org/press-center/faq/IHOPKC-part-new-apostolic-reformation/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Ireland, Brian, & Gemie, Sharif, 'Raga Rock: Popular Music and the Turn to the East in the 1960s,' *Journal of American Studies*, Volume 53, No.1 (9 June 2017): 57-94.

James, William, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Penguin, 1985)

Jankélévitch, Vladimir, *Music and the Ineffable*, trans. Abbate, Carolyn (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003)

Jensen, David H., *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005)

Jesus Culture, 'What We Believe,' *Jesus Culture*. <https://jesusculture.com/sacramento/statement-of-faith/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Johnson, Bill, *Jesus Christ Is Perfect Theology* (Shippenberg: Destiny Image Publishers, 2009)

Johnson, Bill, *When Heaven Meets Earth* (Shippensburg: Treasure House, 2003)

Jung, Carl Gustav, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, trans. Dell, W.S. & Baynes, Cary F., (London & New York: Routledge Classics, 2001)

Kandinsky, Wassily, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art,* trans. Sadleir, M. (New York: Dover Publications, 1977)

Kay, William K., *Pentecostalism* (London: SCM Press, 2009)

Kelman, Ari Y., *Shout to the Lord: Making Worship Music in Evangelical America* (New York: NYU Press, 2018).

King, Richard H., 'From Creeds to Therapies: Philip Rieff's Work in Perspective,' *Reviews in American History*, Volume 4, No.2 (June 1976): 291 – 296.

Kivy, Peter, *Music Alone: Philosophical Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1994)

Kivy, Peter, *Sound Sentiment: An Essay on the Musical Emotions (Including the complete text of The Corded Shell)* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989)

Lakoff, George, & Johnson, Mark, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2003)

Land, Steven J., *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993)

Lerdahl, Fred & Jackendoff, Ray, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1983)

Liao, Shen-yi & Gendler, Tamar, "Imagination," in Zalta, Edward N. (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2020 Edition). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/imagination/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Lindbeck, George A., *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984)

Lindström, Harald, *Wesley and Sanctification* (London: The Epworth Press, 1956)

Lippy, Charles H., 'The Camp Meeting in Transition: The Character and Legacy of the Late Nineteenth Century,' *Methodist History,* Volume 34, No.1, October 1995: 3 – 17.

Longs, Herb, 'Bethel Music's "Have It All" Becomes Worship Ministry's Highest Billboard Top Albums Debut,' *The Christian Beat* (21 March 2016). <http://www.thechristianbeat.org/index.php/news/1810-bethel-music-s-have-it-all-becomes-worship-ministry-s-highest-billboard-top-albums-debut> accessed 11 June 2019.

Lunn, Julie A., *The Theology of Sanctification and Resignation in Charles Wesley's Hymns* (New York: Routledge, 2018)

MacCulloch, Diarmaid, *A History of Christianity* (London: Penguin, 2010)

Maddox, Randy L. & Vickers, Jason E. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

Maddox, Randy L., *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994)

Marsden, George, *Reforming Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987)

Marsh, Clive, & Roberts, Vaughan, *Personal Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012)

Martimort, A. G., *The Church at Prayer: Introduction to the Liturgy* (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1966)

Maultby, Portia, & Burnim, Mellonee V., *African American Music: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2006)

McFadyen, Alasdair, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

Michaels, Sean, 'Lady Gaga: I make soulless electronic pop.' *The Guardian* (2 July 2009). <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2009/jul/02/lady-gaga> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Middleton, Richard (ed.), *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Music* (Oxford: OUP, 2000)

Moltmann, Jurgen, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993)

Moore, Allan F. (ed.), *Critical Essays in Popular Musicology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007)

Moroney, Steven K., *The Noetic Effects of Sin* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2000)

Murray, Iain H., *Evangelicalism Divided* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000)

Nathan, Rich, & Wilson, Ken, *Empowered Evangelicals: Bringing Together the Best of the Evangelical and Charismatic Worlds* (Bosie: Ampelon, 2009)

Nelson, Derek R., *What's Wrong with Sin? Sin in Individual and Social Perspective from Schleiermacher to Theologies of Liberation* (London & New York: T&T Clark, 2009)

Neville, Robert Cummings, 'Intellectual Autobiography,' *Robert Cummings Neville*. <https://www.robertcummingsneville.com/robert-neville-intellectual-autobiography> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Neville, Robert Cummings, *The Truth of Broken Symbols* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996)

New Wine, 'About,' *New Wine*. <https://www.new-wine.org/about> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Newport, Kenneth G.C., *The Sermons of Charles Wesley: A Critical Edition with Introduction and Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

Noll, Mark A. & Blumhofer, Edith L. (ed.), *Sing Them Over to Me Again: Hymns and Hymnbooks in America* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006)

Osteen, Joel, *I Declare: 31 Promises to Speak Over Your Life* (Brentwood: FaithWords, 2013)

Ott, Philip W. 'Medicine as Metaphor: John Wesley on Therapy of the Soul,' *Methodist History* 33 (1995): 178 – 191.

Outler, Albert C. (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: Volume I* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984)

Outler, Albert C. (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: Volume II* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985)

Outler, Albert C. (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: Volume III* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986)

Paddison, Max, 'The Critique Criticised: Adorno and Popular Music,' *Popular Music*, Volume 2 (1982): 201 – 218.

Paglia, Camille, 'Cults and Cosmic Consciousness: Religious Vision in the American 1960s,' *Journal of Humanities and the Classics, Third Series,* Volume 10, No.3 (Winter 2003): 57 – 111.

Palmer Knapp, Phoebe (ed.), *Notes of Joy for the Sabbath School: The Social Meeting and the Hour of Prayer* (New York: W.C. Palmer, Jr., 1869)

Parry, Robin A., *Worshipping Trinity: Coming back to the Heart of Worship* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2013)

Pattison, Robert, *The Triumph of Vulgarity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987)

Peale, Norman, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (London: Vermilion, 2004)

Percy, Martyn, *Words, Wonders and Power: Understanding Contemporary Christian Fundamentalism and Revivalism* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1996)

Pieper, Josef, *The Concept of Sin,* trans. Oakes, Edward T., (South Bend: St Augustine's Press, 2001)

Platten, S., Ambrose, G., Baker, J., Bergquist, A., Bonney, M., Bradshaw, P., Craig-Wild, P., Dawtry, A., Delap, D., Govender, R., Hill, M., Jones, R., Kennedy, D., Kings, G., Lomax, T., Stratford, T., Thomas, P., Turner, C., & Waddington, G., 'Transforming Worship: Living the New Creation: A Report by the Liturgical Commission' (2007)

Polke, Christian, 'Ultimates, The Ultimate, and the Quest of a Personal God: On Robert C. Neville's Philosophical Theology,' *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy,* Volume 36, No.2 (May 2015): 154 – 167.

Purves, Dale, *Music as Biology: The Tones We Like and Why* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017)

Riches & Wagner, 'The Evolution of Hillsong Music,' *Australian Journal of Communication,* Volume 39, No.1 (2012): 17 – 36.

Rieff, Philip, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1959)

Rieff, Philip, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987)

Rose, Clifford F. (ed.), *Neurology of Music* (London: Imperial College Press, 2010)

Rouget, Gilbert, *Music and Trance: A Theory of the Relations between Music and Possession* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980)

Ruth, Lester & Lim, Swee Hong, *Lovin' on Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017)

Schleiermacher, Friedrich, *Christmas Eve: A Dialogue,* trans. Tice, Terrence (Eugene: Cascade, 2010)

Schleiermacher, Friedrich, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Crouter, Richard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988)

Schleiermacher, Friedrich, *The Christian Faith,* trans. Tice, Terrence, Kelsey Catherine L., & Lawler, Edwina (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016)

Scruton, Roger, 'The Cultural Significance of Pop Music,' *Roger Scruton*. <https://www.roger-scruton.com/about/music/understanding-music/175-the-cultural-significance-of-pop> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Scruton, Roger, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997)

Shellnutt, Kate, 'Bethel Music and Bieber Sang It. But Do We Really Believe In 'Reckless Love'?,' *Christianity Today* (24 April 2018). <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/april-web-only/reckless-love-cory-asbury-bethel-music-and-justin-bieber.html> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Shuttleworth, Abigail D., 'On Earth as it is in Heaven': A Critical Discussion of the Theology of Bill Johnson,' *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association*, Volume 35, No.2 (2015): 101 – 114.

Shuttleworth, Abigail Delyth, 'On Earth as it is in Heaven: A Study of the Healing Praxis of Bill Johnson,' doctoral dissertation (University of Birmingham: 2015)

Sim, Stuart, *Manifesto for Silence: Confronting the Politics and Culture of Noise* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007)

Small, Christopher, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1998)

Sontag, Susan, 'The Aesthetics of Silence,' *Aspen*, No. 5+6 (Fall-Winter 1967)

Soskice, Janet Martin, & Lipton, Diana, *Feminism and Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)

Storr, Anthony, *Music and the Mind* (London: Harper Collins, 1992)

Stringer, Martin D. *On the Perception of Worship* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 1999)

Synan, Vinson, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971)

Temperley, Nicholas, Olleson, Philip, Pelkey, Stanley C., & Horton, Peter, 'Wesley Family,' *Grove Music Online* (2001).
<https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.44468> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Trout, Dave, 'Interview with Daniel Bashta,' *Under the Radar* (27 February 2013).
<https://web.archive.org/web/20140808110543/http://undertheradar.reframemedia.com/blog/interview-with-daniel-bashta> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Tyson, John R., *Charles Wesley: A Reader* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989)
Unknown, 'Alpha is running all around the globe,' *Internet Archive* (22 March 2015).
<https://web.archive.org/web/20150322141016/http://alpha.org/global> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Unknown, 'America's Changing religious Landscape.' *Pew Forum* (12 May 2015)
<http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Unknown, 'Bethel Music: Chart History,' *Billboard*.
<https://www.billboard.com/music/Bethel-Music> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Unknown, 'Bethel Music: Chart History: Billboard 200: Tides,' *Billboard*.
<https://www.billboard.com/music/Bethel-Music/chart-history/billboard-200/song/795509> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Unknown, 'Bethel Music: Chart History: Christian Albums: Tides,' *Billboard*.
<https://www.billboard.com/music/Bethel-Music/chart-history/christian-albums/song/795509> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Unknown, 'Digital Albums: the week of April 2, 2016,' *Billboard*.
<https://www.billboard.com/charts/digital-albums/2016-04-02> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Unknown, 'Megachurch Definition,' *Hartford Institute for Religion Research*.
<http://hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/definition.html> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Unknown, 'Regeneration: Preaching Like the God of Small Beginnings,' *Wesleyan Sermons* (21 October 2013). <http://wesleyansermons.com/2013/10/21/regeneration-preaching-like-the-god-of-small-beginnings/> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Unknown, 'The Year in Christian/Gospel Charts: Lauren Daigle, Tasha Cobbs Leonard Triumph,' *Billboard* (6 December 2018). <https://www.billboard.com/articles/events/year-in-music-2018/8488863/the-year-in-christian-gospel-charts-lauren-daigle> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Vallotton, Kris, *Spirit Wars: Winning the Invisible Battle Against Sin and The Enemy* (Bloomington: Chosen Books, 2012)

Vickers, Jason E., *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013)

Wagner, C. Peter, *Apostles Today: Biblical Government for Biblical Power* (Bloomington: Chosen Books, 2006)

Ward, Graham (ed.), *The Postmodern God*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997)

Weaver, John, *The New Apostolic Reformation: History of a Modern Charismatic Movement* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2016)

Webster, Richard, *Why Freud was Wrong: Sin, Science and Psychoanalysis* (London: Harper Collins, 1996)

Weiner, I.B., Healy, A.F., & Proctor, R.W. (ed.), *Handbook of Psychology*, *2nd Edition* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2013)

Wendell Jones, Martyn, 'Inside the Popular, Controversial Bethel Church,' *Christianity Today* (24 April 2016). <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/may/cover-story-inside-popular-controversial-bethel-church.html> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Wesley, Charles, 'The Journal of Charles Wesley: April 3 – September 22, 1741,' *Wesley Centre Online.* <http://wesley.nnu.edu/charles-wesley/the-journal-of-charles-wesley-1707-1788/the-journal-of-charles-wesley-april-3-september-22-1741/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Wesley, John, 'Thoughts on the Power of Music,' *Arminian Magazine Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption, No. 4* (1781): 103-107.

Wesley, John, *A Discourse on Sin in Believers,* 4th edition (London: R. Hawes, 1776)

Wesley, John, *The Journal of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2000) <https://ccel.org/ccel/wesley/journal/journal.i.html> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Wiley, Tatha, *Original Sin: Origins, Developments, Contemporary Meanings* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989)

Willow Creek Church, 'Main Auditorium,' *Willow Production*. <https://www.willowproduction.org/venues/south-barrington/main-auditorium/> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Wimber, Carol, *John Wimber: The Way it Was* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1999)

Worthen, Molly, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)

Wuthnow, Robert, *All in Sync: How Music and Art are Revitalizing American Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003)

Yrigoyen, Charles Jr. (ed.), *T&T Clark Companion to Methodism* (London: T&T Clark, 2010)

Zahl, 'On the Affective Salience of Doctrines,' *Modern Theology*, Volume 31, No.3 (July 2015): 428 – 444.

Zahl, Simeon*, Pneumatology and Theology of the Cross in the Preaching of Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt* (London: T&T Clark, 2010)

Zahl, Simeon, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020)

DISCOGRAPHY

Bethel Music, Amanda Lindsay Cook, 'Wonder (Live) [Spontaneous],' *You Make Me Brave (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2014)

Bethel Music, Amanda Lindsey Cook, 'Mercy (Live),' *Have It All (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2016)

Bethel Music, Amanda Lindsey Cook, 'You Make Me Brave (Live),' *You Make Me Brave (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2014)

Bethel Music, Brandon Lake, 'We Praise You – Live,' *Revival's In The Air* (Bethel Music: 2020)

Bethel Music, Brian Johnson, 'Forever,' *Tides* (Bethel Music: 2013)

Bethel Music, Brian Johnson, 'Greatness of Your Glory,' *Have It All (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2016)

Bethel Music, Brian Johnson, 'Seas of Crimson (Live),' *We Will Not Be Shaken (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2015)

Bethel Music, Brian Johnson, 'To Our God,' *For the Sake of the World* (Bethel Music: 2012)

Bethel Music, Brian Johnson, Jenn Johnson, 'Here Is Love,' *Here Is Love* (Bethel Music: 2013)

Bethel Music, Brian Johnson, Jenn Johnson, 'I Really Love You (Spontaneous),' *For The Sake of the World* (Bethel Music: 2012)

Bethel Music, Brian Johnson, Jenn Johnson, 'What Would I Have Done,' *Be Lifted High* (Bethel Music: 2011)

Bethel Music, Cory Asbury, 'Son of God (Live),' *Have It All (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2016)

Bethel Music, Francesca Battistelli, 'There's No Other Name (Live),' *Starlight (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2017).

Bethel Music, Hannah McClure, 'Old for New,' *Starlight (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2017)

Bethel Music, Hannah McClure, 'You Are My One Thing (Live),' *We Will Not Be Shaken (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2015).

Bethel Music, Hunter G K Thompson, 'My Dear,' *The Loft Sessions* (Bethel Music: 2012)

Bethel Music, Jenn Johnson, 'A Little Longer (Live),' *You Make Me Brave (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2014)

Bethel Music, Jenn Johnson, 'Come To Me (Live),' *You Make Me Brave (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2014)

Bethel Music, Jenn Johnson, 'Everything to You (Spontaneous),' *For the Sake of the World* (Bethel Music: 2012)

Bethel Music, Jenn Johnson, 'Forever and a Day,' *Be Lifted High* (Bethel Music: 2011)

Bethel Music, Jenn Johnson, 'I Can Feel You,' *Tides* (Bethel Music: 2013)

Bethel Music, Jenn Johnson, 'Joy of the Lord (Live) [Spontaneous],' *You Make Me Brave (Live)*, (Bethel Music: 2014)

Bethel Music, Jenn Johnson, 'Our Father,' *For the Sake of the World* (Bethel Music: 2012)

Bethel Music, Jenn Johnson, 'You Make Me Happy (Spontaneous),' *Here Is Love* (Bethel Music: 2010).

Bethel Music, Jeremy Riddle, 'Breaking Through,' *Tides* (Bethel Music: 2013)

Bethel Music, Jeremy Riddle, 'Furious,' *Be Lifted High* (Bethel Music: 2011)

Bethel Music, Jeremy Riddle, Steffany Gretzinger, 'On the Shores (Spontaneous),' *Moments: Mighty Sound* (Bethel Music: 2018)

Bethel Music, Jonathan David Helser, Melissa Helser, 'No Longer Slaves (Spontaneous) [Live],' *We Will Not Be Shaken* (Bethel Music: 2015)

Bethel Music, kalley, 'Ever Be (Live),' *We Will Not Be Shaken (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2014)

Bethel Music, kalley, 'I See the Light (Spontaneous) [Live],' *Starlight (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2017)

Bethel Music, Kari Jobe, 'Forever (Live),' *You Make Me Brave (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2014)

Bethel Music, Kristine DiMarco, 'It Is Well (Live),' *You Make Me Brave (Live)*, (Bethel Music: 2014)

Bethel Music, Leah Mari, 'Healer,' *Here Is Love* (Bethel Music: 2010)

Bethel Music, Leeland Mooring, 'The Lion and the Lamb (Live),' *Have It All (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2016)

Bethel Music, Melissa Helser, 'Catch the Wind,' *Starlight (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2017)

Bethel Music, Melissa Helser, 'Revival's in the Air,' *Revival's in the Air (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2020)

Bethel Music, Paul McClure, 'Jesus We Love You (Live),' *We Will Not Be Shaken* (Bethel Music: 2015)

Bethel Music, Steffany Gretzinger, 'Letting Go,' *Tides* (Bethel Music: 2013)

Bethel Music, Steffany Gretzinger, 'Reckless Love,' *Moments: Mighty Sound* (Bethel Music: 2018)

Bethel Music, Steffany Gretzinger, 'We Dance (Live),' *You Make Me Brave (Live)* (Bethel Music: 2014)

Bethel Music, Steffany Gretzinger, 'You Know Me,' *The Loft Sessions* (Bethel Music: 2012)

Bethel Music, William Matthews, 'This is What You Do,' *For the Sake of the World* (Bethel Music: 2012)

Bethel Music, *Without Words* (Bethel Music: 2013)

Bethel Music, *Without Words: Genesis* (Bethel Music: 2019)

Bethel Music, *Without Words: Synesthesia* (Bethel Music: 2015)

Bright Ones, Peyton Allen, Josie Buchanan, 'We Dance,' *Bright Ones* (Bethel Music: 2018)

Bryan & Katie Torwalt, 'Shores,' *Kingdom Come* (Jesus Culture Music: 2013)

Cory Asbury, 'Reckless Love,' *Reckless Love* (Bethel Music: 2018)

Elevation Worship, 'Authority,' *Graves Into Gardens (Live)* (Elevation Worship Records: 2020)

Elevation Worship, 'Available,' *Graves Into Gardens (Live)* (Elevation Worship Records, 2020).

Elevation Worship, 'Mighty God,' *There Is a Cloud* (Elevation Church: 2017)

Elevation Worship, 'Unstoppable God,' *Wake Up The Wonder* (Provident Label Group LLC: 2014)

Elevation Worship, Steffany Gretzinger, 'Hallelujah Here Below (Paradoxology),' *Paradoxology* (Elevation Worship Records: 2019)

Forerunner Music, Abi Bennett, 'Fingerprints,' *Fully Alive* (Forerunner Music/The Fuel Music: 2018)

Forerunner Music, Brandon Oaks, 'Drawing Close,' *Fully Alive* (Forerunner Music/The Fuel Music: 2018)

Forerunner Music, Jon Thurlow, 'How Awesome Are Your Works,' *Fully Alive* (Forerunner Music/The Fuel Music: 2018)

Harry Belafonte, 'Steal Away,' *My Lord What A Mornin'* (Sony Music Entertainment: 1959)

Hillsong Worship, 'Glorious Ruins,' *Glorious Ruins* (Hillsong Music and Resources LLC: 2013)

Hillsong Worship, 'God is Able,' *Hillsong Chapel: Forever Reign* (Hillsong Music and Resources LLC: 2012)
Hillsong Worship, 'Here With You,' *Open Heaven / River Wild* (Hillsong Music and Resources LLC: 2015)
Hillsong Worship, 'Mighty To Save,' *Mighty To Save (Live)* (Hillsong Music and Resources LLC: 2006)
Hillsong Worship, 'Touch Of Heaven,' *There Is More* (Hillsong Music and Resources LLC: 2018)
Hillsong Worship, 'Valentine,' *There Is More* (Hillsong Music and Resources LLC: 2018)
Hillsong Worship, 'Who You Say I Am,' *There Is More* (Hillsong Music and Resources LLC: 2018)
Hillsong Worship, 'You Hold Me Now,' *Hillsong Chapel: Yahweh* (Hillsong Music and Resources LLC: 2010)
Hillsong Worship, 'You Never Fail,' *Glorious Ruins* (Hillsong Music and Resources LLC: 2013)
Hillsong Worship, Delirious?, 'I Give You My Heart,' *[UP] UNIFIED:PRAISE (Live)* (Hillsong Music and Resources LLC: 2004)
International House of Prayer, *Spontaneum* (Forerunner Music: 2018)
Jesus Culture, Chris Quilala, 'Fierce – Live,' *Let It Echo (Live)* (Jesus Culture Music: 2016)
Jesus Culture, Chris Quilala, 'Halls of Heaven – Live,' *Love Has A Name* (Jesus Culture Music: 2017)
Jesus Culture, Kim Walker-Smith, 'Freedom,' *Living With A Fire (Live)* (Jesus Culture Music: 2018)
Jesus Culture, Kim Walker-Smith, 'How He Loves - Live,' *We Cry Out (Live)* (Jesus Culture Music: 2007)
Jesus Culture, Kim Walker-Smith, 'Not Afraid - Live,' *Not Afraid (Live)* (Jesus Culture Music: 2018)
Jesus Culture, Kim Walker-Smith, 'Rooftops – Live,' *Come Away (Live)* (Jesus Culture Music: 2010)
Jesus Culture, Kristine DiMarco, 'Break Every Chain – Live,' *Awakening – Live From Chicago* (Jesus Culture Music: 2011)
Kim Walker-Smith, 'Brave Surrender,' *On My Side* (Jesus Culture Music: 2017)
Kristine DiMarco, 'I Am No Victim,' *Where His Light Was* (Bethel Music: 2017)

Kristine DiMarco, 'I Will Follow You - Live,' *Mighty (Live)* (Jesus Culture Music: 2015)
Leonard Cohen, 'Hallelujah,' *Various Positions* (Sony Music Entertainment: 1984)
Leonard Cohen, 'You Want It Darker,' *You Want It Darker* (Sony Music Entertainment: 2016)
Misty Edwards, 'I Will Waste My Life,' *Relentless* (Forerunner Music: 2017)
Onething Live, Jonas Park, 'I Am Yours [First Love],' *Sing Your Praises* (Forerunner Music: 2014)
Onething Live, Jonas Park, 'I Belong to You (Live),' *Love Makes Us Strong (Live)* (Forerunner Music: 2016)
Onething Live, Katie Reed, Misty Edwards, 'I Love the Way You Think (Spontaneous) [Live] (feat. Katie Reed),' *All Cry Glory (Live) [Deluxe Edition]* (Forerunner Music: 2017)
Onething Live, Lauren Holmes, 'Victorious In Love (Live),' *Love Makes Us Strong (Live)* (Forerunner Music: 2016)
Passion, Matt Redman, 'Here Is Love – Live,' *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (Sparrow Records / sixstepsrecords: 2004)
Simply Taizé, 'Bless the Lord,' *Simply Taizé* (Integrity Music: 2014)
Steffany Gretzinger, 'Cecie's Lullaby,' *The Undoing* (Bethel Music: 2014)
Steffany Gretzinger, 'Out of Hiding,' *The Undoing* (Bethel Music: 2014)
Steffany Gretzinger, 'This Is The Sound,' Blackout (Bethel Music: 2017)
Sweet Honey in the Rock, 'Prayer,' Sacred Ground (Earthbeat: 1995)

VIDEOGRAPHY

Apologia Studios, 'Defecting From Bethel: Part 2 (Exclusive),' *YouTube* (11 May 2019). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GF2t_VRorXQ> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Apologia Studios, 'EXCLUSIVE: Defecting From Bethel,' *YouTube* (24 April 2019). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-TlYGF1_kJg&t=1135s> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Music, 'No Longer Slaves (LIVE) – Jonathan and Melissa Helser | We Will Not Be Shaken,' *YouTube* (17 February 2015). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxkNj5hcy5E> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Music, 'Reckless Love (Live with story) – Cory Asbury | Heaven Come 2017,' *YouTube* (23 November 2017). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xx0d3R2LoU> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Music, 'Seas of Crimson (Song Story) – Brian Johnson | We Will Not Be Shaken,' *YouTube* (4 April 2015). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iW0c_A3lnmk> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel Music, 'SHORT FILM: I NEEDED A SUPERNATURAL GOD | KRISTINE DIMARCO'S STORY,' *YouTube* (31 October 2017). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4OAsxUJx2M> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel TV, 'Baby Dedication,' *BethelTV* (27 August 2017). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/5053> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel TV, 'Doxology | Kristine DiMarco | Bethel Church,' *YouTube* (27 March 2019). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1CVV6TQO7M> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel TV, 'Jeremy Riddle, Heaven Come Session 9,' *BethelTV* (2 June 2018). <https://www.bethel.tv/events/heaven-come-2018/day-3/7235> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel TV, 'Recognised by Him | Brian Johnson | Bethel Church,' *YouTube* (13 June 2017). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVLCjeu-xTs&t=15s&list=PLaPFXfU2ZbFHw8nOb_sTO7VRnV4txApMD&index=14> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel TV, 'Repentance Brings Breakthrough | Bill Johnson | Bethel Church,' *YouTube* (22 January 2018). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dbFPGiwkUc&list=PLUaRlPOu98p0_QvYqNo8ATqyrk8OiWYGM&index=61> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel TV, 'Why Worship | Steffany Gretzinger | Open Heavens,' *YouTube* (14 October 2016). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4bJnLliunfs> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Bethel TV, Bill Johnson 'Jesus, Full of the Holy Spirit,' *BethelTV* (5 November 2017). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/5028> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Bethel TV, Bill Johnson, 'The Art Of Living Clean,' *BethelTV* (12 August 2012). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/1416> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Bethel TV, Eric Johnson 'The Joy of Consecration,' *YouTube* (28 July 2013). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/1733> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Bethel TV, Jenn Johnson, 'Bethel Music Worship School,' *BethelTV* (16 July 2018). <https://www.bethel.tv/events/bethel-music-worship-school-2018/week-2/7303> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Bethel TV, Jenn Johnson, 'Worship,' *BethelTV* (26 April 2017). <https://www.bethel.tv/shows/revival-chats/season-9/6784> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Bethel TV, Jeremy Riddle, 'Heaven Come Session 9,' *BethelTV* (2 June 2018). <https://www.bethel.tv/events/heaven-come-2018/day-3/7235> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Bethel TV, Jeremy Riddle, 'Stepping Into Your Authority,' *BethelTV* (29 August 2014). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/2207> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Bethel TV, Kris Vallotten, 'Fear is Not Your Friend,' *BethelTV* (24 January 2010). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/438> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Bethel TV, Kris Vallotton 'Revisiting the Salvation Story,' *YouTube* (27 February 2018). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/5169> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Bethel TV, Kris Vallotton, 'Grace, Mercy, Righteousness, And Justice,' *BethelTV* (4 February 2018). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/5155> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Bethel TV, Kris Vallotton, 'Is Your House Haunted: Part 2,' *BethelTV* (8 March 2009). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/68> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Bethel TV, Kris Vallotton, 'Our Battle Is Not Against Flesh And Blood,' *BethelTV* (3 September 2017). <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/4932> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Bethel TV, Kris Vallotton, 'The Redemptive Story - Sunday AM,' *BethelTV* (4 March 2018), 4 March 2018. <https://www.bethel.tv/watch/5185> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Bethel TV, Seth Dahl, 'Goodness Leads To Repentance,' *BethelTV* (2 April 2018). <https://www.bethel.tv/shows/seeds/season-1/7121> Accessed 28 August 2020.
Catch The Fire Toronto, 'Freshwind 2016 Session E (Worship) - Cory Asbury (Bethel Music) - (March 25),' *YouTube* (31 March 2017). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RHey3Ucpdfo> Accessed 28 August 2020.
citipointespecials, 'Ultimate Worshiper 2011 – Jenn Johnson,' *YouTube* (2 January 2012). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mIOnVpJDnY> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Dwaine H, 'We Praise You – The God of breakthrough is on our side – Bethel live worship,' *YouTube* (6 July 2019). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YI11dD5RP5I> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Elevation Worship, 'Hallelujah Here Below (Paradoxology) (feat. Steffany Gretzinger) | Music Video | Elevation Worship,' *YouTube* (13 April 2019). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7MR77AVBOs> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Emiliana Martín, 'Recognize Political Religious Spirit,' *YouTube* (15 August 2016). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lp0CrBLL5k> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Mike Winger, 'Bill Johnson's Theology and Movement Examined Biblically,' *YouTube* (13 February 2018). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3tEv26OMTU> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Mike Winger, 'Thinking Biblically about "Reckless Love," *YouTube* (16 July 2018). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79rjZLjh-cI> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Raideragent, 'Bill Johnson False Teacher,' *YouTube* (19 August 2010)

WorshipU by Bethel Music, 'John Mark McMillan – Authentic Songwriting | Teaching Moment,' *YouTube* (8 January 2020) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qangot7eJwc> Accessed 28 August 2020.

WorshipU by Bethel Music, 'Spontaneous Worship Course – Brian And Jenn Johnson | WorshipU.com,' *YouTube* (6 November 2019). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRfot-guHr8> Accessed 28 August 2020.

WP Films, 'How Can God Use You If You Are Struggling With Sin?' *YouTube* (20 September 2017). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lAOKxvGxSIA> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Yoni Bramnick, 'Worship Leads us to Remember, Return and Reconnect - Steffany Gretzinger,' *YouTube* (9 May 2017). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNhI7vqMEoA> Accessed 28 August 2020.

Zach Williams, 'Zach Williams – No Longer Slaves (Live from Harding Prison),' *YouTube* (5 October 2018). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDnA_coA168> Accessed 28 August 2020.