

Streams of song

An overview of congregational song in the twenty-first century

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Are hymns relevant to Christians today? Albert van den Heuvel of the World Council of Churches reflected on the problem of finding relevant hymns in a preface written for a collection of new material in 1966:

There was a minister in a European country not very long ago, who told his congregation on a Sunday morning that they would only sing one hymn: “What we should like to sing about,” he said, “is not in the hymnal; what is in the hymnal about our subject is obsolete or heretical. So let us be silent and listen to the organ.”

This little story is, of course, irritating. I can already hear lots of people say: but there are beautiful hymns in our hymnal! Our fathers have sung them for many centuries! We have learned them from our mothers! What is wrong with Ambrosius’ hymns, Luther’s hymns, the Psalms, the Wesleyan treasury, and all the others? The man in our story would have shrugged his shoulders, I am afraid. His point is not that there are not good hymns, but that there are very few which support his preaching and that of his generation. I am with him on this. There are many things in the life of the denominations which are frustrating, but few are so difficult to live with as this one. Choosing the hymns for Sunday morning worship is an ever-recurring low ebb in my ministry.¹

The concerns raised by the European minister and echoed by van den Heuvel suggest that it may be time to see what has happened in the people’s song since the Second Vatican Council. In the more than forty years that have followed this quotation, their concerns have been answered many times over by an abundant

outpouring of congregational songs. Indeed, the mid-1960s signaled the beginning of an explosion of congregational song around the world. It is only now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, that scholars are in a position to begin to understand the diversity and wealth of congregational music available to the church since these years of liturgical reform – a diversity and wealth of hymnody unprecedented in Christian history.

Why must Christians sing? Albert van den Heuvel proposed the following reason:

It is the hymns, repeated over and over again, which form the container of much of our faith. They are probably in our age the only confessional documents which we learn by heart. As such, they have taken the place of our catechisms. . . . There is ample literature about the great formative influence of the hymns of a tradition on its members. Tell me what you sing, and I’ll tell you who you are!²

This essay examines the smorgasbord of congregational song that has emerged since the time of van den Heuvel’s observation with the hope that congregations will be more intentional about their diet of singing and broaden their tastes.

In the historic dialogue between *lex credendi* (law of believing) and *lex orandi* (law of praying), there is ample precedent for saying not only that belief and prayer are related, but that sung prayer shapes belief.³ The words we sing and the rituals we practice in Christian worship provide pedagogical foundations for belief. Erik Routley noted that “when a congregation sings [a hymn], they are not far from saying, ‘We think this. This is our own idea.’”⁴ Argentinean church musician Pablo Sosa affirmed this premise in perhaps even stronger terms: “The doctrines of the church do not become faith until they are sung.”⁵

Van den Heuvel, Routley, and Sosa, all involved in the ecumenical movement in the 1960s and 1970s, could not have predicted the explosion of congregational song in the world-wide Christian church that

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has followed in the years since they articulated the significance of hymn singing in the formation of faith – an explosion characterized by such quantity and diversity that it challenges earlier parochial conceptions of quality. The focus of this article is on the breadth of congregational singing in the church during the final decades of the twentieth century beginning with the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965).

Methodology

In the early 1990s I embarked on a project for The Hymn Society in the United States and Canada, examining hymnody from an ecumenical perspective. In the 1970s, soon after Vatican II, the Consultation on Ecumenical Hymnody (CEH) prepared a list of 227 hymns for ecumenical use. The first stage of my work was to survey the impact of the CEH in 38 North American English-language hymnals published between 1976 and 1995.⁶ The results of this study revealed some of the same concerns that were raised following the early attempts at common lectionaries. For example, some liturgical theologians examining lectionaries of their day lamented the lack of scripture readings that bore the witness of women. Later lectionary attempts have tried to respond to these concerns, and other imbalances and omissions.

Likewise, I observed that the work of the CEH was limited in its recommendations, failing to include congregational songs from many voices in the North American Christian community – especially minority groups and songs widely known in free-church traditions. The participants in the CEH were aware of these shortcomings, but could not muster a fuller participation from these groups in their process. The primary purpose of the CEH was formative – that is, to provide a body of hymns that would influence the shape of the church's sung faith, balancing theological and liturgical concerns. The participants hoped that the hymns on the CEH list would be chosen by future hymnal committees, creating a common body of sung faith at least in the church in the United States. I attempted to discern the impact of this noble effort in my article.

Following this study, I realized that the data I had collected revealed a much more complex picture of congregational song than the CEH process was able to demonstrate. What about newer hymns written since the CEH report in 1977?⁷ What about rich congregational resources that seemed to fall outside of earlier definitions of “hymn”?

It was at this point that I continued my research, but with a goal different from that of the CEH. Rather than developing a prescriptive list for guidance, I chose to develop a descriptive list that might inform future hymnal committees concerning the items that appear most often in North American hymnals, making no value judgments on the quality or ecumenical possibilities of any given item. The goal of this list was modest – simply to indicate what was being included in

hymnals. One list comprised items written before 1960, and a second list items composed after 1960, the latter group needing to be separated out since they had not had the benefit of time, and might not have been recognized by hymnal committees to the same degree. The results of this list produced from forty English-language hymnals published in Canada and the United States between 1976 and 1996 were then published in *THE HYMN*.⁸

It was out of this raw body of data that the current project evolved. After living with these results for some years in my teaching, patterns emerged. I realized that students, pastors, and church musicians were not equipped to appreciate the variety and quantity of the flood of new materials available to the church since the mid-1960s. The hymns in many hymnals tend to look more or less the same on the page, regardless of their cultural, ecclesiological, and historical origins. Hymnology texts offered glimpses of more recent literature, but had neither the space nor the perspective to organize current congregational song into a more comprehensible shape. This article is an attempt to discern meaningful patterns in the wealth of recent congregational song that reflects an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in myriad confessional and ethnic traditions for our time.

Streams of Song

At a conference in Dallas celebrating the publication of the Spanish-language United Methodist hymnal *Mil voces para celebrar* in 1996, Bishop Joel Martínez proposed in his sermon that “each generation must add its stanza to the great hymn of the church.” He went on to observe that “the stanza of our generation is the most diverse of any era in the history of the church.” While we have been nourished by the witness of past generations through the singing of their stanzas, there must be new songs that reflect the experience of God's work in our lives and in the world today.

This metaphor, describing our generation's “stanza” in the great, ongoing hymn of the church universal, is rich with possibilities. It implies that we should sing earlier stanzas from previous generations – can you really understand a hymn if you start on the last stanza? The metaphor also suggests that we should not only sing the songs from previous generations, but add new songs from our age; after all, who stops on the penultimate stanza without finishing the hymn?

The quantity and diversity of our generation's stanza does not lend itself easily to organization – the work of the Holy Spirit rarely manifests itself in ways that are easily discernable to human patterns of understanding. Yet, there are reasons why it may be valuable to attempt to recognize the gifts of the Spirit that have been given to the church in our age.

I have chosen “streams of song” as the overarching organizational metaphor. Streams have a source, and

*Seven streams of congregational song
that have shaped hymnals since Vatican II*

A preliminary perspective

STREAM 1	STREAM 2	STREAM 3	STREAM 4
Roman Catholic Liturgical Renewal Hymnody	Protestant Contemporary Classical Hymnody	African American Spirituals and Gospel Songs	Revival/Gospel Songs
<i>Themes</i>	<i>Themes</i>	<i>Themes</i>	<i>Themes</i>
Sacraments Psalm settings Lectionary Community Offices Refrain forms	Justice/environment Lectionary Scriptural paraphrases Worship and the arts Inclusive language Sacraments Christian year	Personal experience Salvation Refuge in times of trouble Praise of God	Salvation Spreading the gospel Christological focus Triumphal faith
<i>Precursors</i>	<i>Precursors</i>	<i>Precursors</i>	<i>Precursors</i>
Of the Father's love begotten O come, O come Emmanuel Where charity and love prevail	God of grace and God of glory (Fosdick) Hope of the world (Harkness) Lift high the cross (Kitchin-Newbolt) Where cross the crowded ways (North)	Lift every voice and sing (Johnson) Precious Lord We shall overcome Sweet, sweet spirit (Akers) Stand by me (Tindley) Leave it there (Tindley) Yes, God is real (Morris)	<i>Nineteenth-Century Gospel Songs</i> <i>Early Twentieth-Century Contributions:</i> Great is thy faithfulness (Chisholm) How great thou art (Boberg-Hine) Victory in Jesus (Bertlett)
<i>Examples</i>	<i>Examples</i>	<i>Examples</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Alleluia, give thanks (Fishel) Blest are they (Haas) Cantemos al Señor (Rosas) Celtic alleluia Cuando el pobre Gather us in (Haugen) Here I am, Lord (Schutte) Make me a channel (Sebastian) My soul gives glory (Winter) On eagle's wings (Joncas) One bread, one body (J Foley) Santo, santo, santo (Cuéllar) Taste and see Te ofrecemos Padre nuestro (Misa Popular Nicaragüense) Tú has venido (Gabaraín) Una espiga You satisfy the hungry heart (Westendorf)	Jubilate Group (UK) All who love and serve your city (Routley) Blessed be the God of Israel (Perry) Earth prayer (Murray) God of many names (Wren) God of the sparrow (Vajda) I come with joy (Wren) O day of peace (Daw) Silence, frenzied, unclean spirit (Troeger) Tell out my soul (Dudley-Smith) We utter our cry (Kaan) What does the Lord require (Bayly) When in our music (Pratt Green) Womb of life (Duck)	<i>Appearance of Spirituals in mainline hymnals</i> Bless the Lord (Crouch) Come Sunday (Ellington) Give me a clean heart (Douroux) Let it breathe on me (Lewis-Butts) My tribute (Crouch) Praise ye the Lord (Cleveland) Someone asked the question (Franklin) The lamb (M McKay) The Lord is in his holy temple (G Burleigh) Through it all (Crouch) Total praise (Smallwood)	Because he lives (Gaither) Freely, freely (Owens) He touched me (Gaither) People need the Lord (Nelson & McHugh) Share his love (Reynolds) Shine, Jesus, shine (Kendrick)

STREAM 5	STREAM 6	STREAM 7
<p style="text-align: center;">Folk Song Influences</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Themes</i></p> <p>Scriptural storytelling Narratives Social concerns Guitar</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Precursors</i></p> <p>O love, how deep Tomorrow shall be my dancing day Let there be peace on earth (Miller-Jackson) Blowin' in the wind (Dylan) Turn, turn, turn! (Seeger)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Examples</i></p> <p>Bring forth the kingdom (Haugen) I was there to hear your borning cry (Ylvisaker) Lord of the dance (Carter) Pass it on (Kaiser) She comes sailing (Light) The first one ever (Egan) Two fisherman (Toolan) We are the church (Avery & Marsh) What does the Lord require (Strathdee) When Jesus the healer (P Smith)</p> <p>Use of Southern folk tunes and shaped-note melodies</p> <p>British, Irish and Scottish tunes</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Pentecostal Songs</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Themes</i></p> <p>Praise of God Adoration of Jesus Use of scriptural fragments Personal, first person</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Precursors</i></p> <p>Azusa Street Revival (1906) Spirit of the living God (Iverson) His name is wonderful (Mieir) There's something about that name (Gaither)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Examples</i></p> <p>Alleluia (Sinclair) As the deer (Nystrom) Awesome God (Mullins) El Shaddai (Card-Thompson) Emmanuel, Emmanuel (McGee) Great is the Lord (Smith) How majestic is your name (Smith) I love you Lord (L Klein) Majesty, worship his majesty (Hayford) My life is in you (Gardner) Seek ye first (Lafferty) Shout to the Lord (Zshech) Spirit song (Wimber) Thy word is a lamp (Grant) We will glorify (Paris)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Publishers</i></p> <p>Hosanna/Integrity Maranatha CCLI</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Global and Ecumenical Song Forms</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Themes</i></p> <p>Freedom Justice Liturgical music Liturgical inculturation Modern missions Sung prayer</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Precursors</i></p> <p>Many and great, O God (Renville) Here, O Lord, your servants gather (Yamaguchi-Stowe) In Christ there is no east or west (Oxenham)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Examples</i></p> <p>Taizé chants: Bless the Lord Ubi caritas</p> <p>Africa: Jesu, Jesu (Colvin) Jesu tawa pano Thuma mina Siyahamba [Freedom is coming (Nyberg)]</p> <p>Asia: Saranam (D. T. Niles) Come now, O prince of peace (Lee)</p> <p>South America: Tenemos esperanza (Pagura)</p> <p>Iona: Goodness is stronger than evil Will you come and follow me</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Leaders</i></p> <p>John Bell David Dargie I-to Loh P Matsikenyiri Pablo Sosa</p>

each of the proposed seven streams of song come from particular sources of faith – a particular expression of piety. Streams come in various widths and depths. Not all streams are the same. Some of the song streams are rushing and seem to be overflowing their banks because of the musical outpouring being generated from their particular piety source. Others are steady in their flow, and yet others may be either drying up or merging with other streams. Streams meander; they do not flow in straight lines like canals. They occasionally crisscross each other. Such is the case with many songs in this overview. Some songs fit comfortably in two or more streams.

This fluid model stands in contrast to a pigeon-hole approach where everything is organized neatly. The fluidity of this model reflects how these songs usually appear in hymnals – songs from one tradition organized around a particular season of the Christian year or theological theme are placed in juxtaposition to other streams. Hymns demonstrate flexibility in their liturgical possibilities. Many hymns embody a range of themes, and one often notices that the same hymn appears in varying sections of different hymnals.

Finally, streams are vibrant parts of creation, carrying us along with them, offering constant changes in depth, rate of flow and character. Some parts of a stream are smooth with almost no sense of movement while others rush to a waterfall. Some songs still our souls, while others raise us to an emotional apex. Streams are always changing: every time we sing a song, it is a new experience. More familiar hymns still may surprise us with a new insight or provide security in a constantly changing world. Like an unforeseen turn in the bend of a river or an unanticipated cross-current, new songs often challenge us in unexpected ways, catching us off guard, delighting us as they provide words for feelings never before articulated, or confronting our previously held notions.

Few, if any, will navigate all of these streams with equal confidence. We all have our primary sources of piety and preferences for expressing this piety in song. Yet, the people of God who gather in the common assembly we call Christian worship may enrich their prayer by expanding the number of streams from which they draw.

Naming the Streams?

My research and experience of singing in a wide variety of Christian traditions indicates seven streams of song, drawing on seven sources of piety, each with its own identity while in some cases overlapping with others in varying degrees. For an overview of each stream with examples, see Table 1.

Stream One, Roman Catholic Liturgical Renewal, reflects directly the reforms of Vatican II and the outpouring of song for the assembly that came and continues to come from this historic council. Virtually no

hymnal is untouched by at least some congregational songs from this stream. At the center of the stream are songs for the sacraments, music for the lectionary, compositions for the Christian year, responsorial psalms, and ritual music. Because of the breadth of the Roman Catholic Church, these songs come to us from various parts of the world, but especially from Spanish-speaking locations as well as Euro-North American English speakers.

Stream Two, Classic Contemporary Protestant Hymnody, is a swelling stream originating in the “hymnic explosion” of Great Britain in the 1960s and 1970s and joined by rivers in other English-speaking countries, especially Australia, Canada, Aotearoa New Zealand, and the United States. While quite varied, the center of this stream includes paraphrases of scripture including fresh metrical paraphrases of the Psalms, hymns for the Christian year and sacraments, prophetic hymns on justice themes such as inclusion, peace, and ecology, hymns on ministry, and, in some sections of the stream, a strong interest in inclusive language.

Stream Three, The African American Stream, finds a voice in virtually all confessional traditions. Here one will find a variety of musical expressions from spirituals and hymns to various styles of gospel music. This stream offers us songs born in the crucible of struggle, reflecting scripture and, often, expressing faith in the first person. Since the middle of the twentieth century, virtually all hymnals include songs from this stream, even in predominately Anglo confessional traditions. Songs from this stream are seen by many as a major, even unique, contribution from the United States to the larger church.

Stream Four, Gospel and Revival Songs, is perhaps on the wane as a separate stream. It appears to be merging with others, especially with Streams Three and Six. These songs of praise, personal salvation and experience, and a triumphal faith continue, however, to find their way into a remarkable number of hymnals, even in some traditions where they have not been a dominant voice.

Stream Five, Folk Hymnody, draws from several sources of piety and has always been a part of the church’s song. This stream experienced a revival in the civil rights movement and the antiwar era of the 1960s, spreading into folk masses and continuing as an idiom in its own right today. The use of the acoustic guitar lends informality to songs of praise and protest as well as to narrative ballads that are immediately accessible to groups.

Stream Six, Pentecostal Song, often called “Praise and Worship” or “Contemporary Christian Music” finds its piety source in early twentieth-century American Pentecostal traditions such as the Azusa Street Revival

(1906), but has expanded into a worldwide expression of Christianity in many languages. Its electric sounds have influenced other streams, especially Stream Three, and those devoted to this stream have their spiritual roots in a wide variety of confessional traditions. These songs, often rooted in scriptural fragments, range from ecstatic praise to intense prayer, and often address God directly in the second person, and petition Christ in the first person.

Stream Seven, the **Ecumenical and Global Stream**, attempts to bring into focus the contributions of two-thirds of the world's Christians, especially those that come from Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. European addendum contributions to global song come from two well-known ecumenical communities, Taizé and Iona. A direct result of the reforms of Vatican II and the pronouncement to "respect . . . and foster . . . the genius and talents of the various races and peoples,"¹⁰ this stream includes songs from many confessional traditions around the world that have been included in North American hymnals.

Limitations of the Model

Before turning in detail to the trends uncovered in studying congregational hymnody under this model, we should take care to note the model's limitations.

The model focuses on the breadth rather than the depth of current congregational song practice. While this approach demonstrates the considerable breadth of the church's song in the last half of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first, taking a broad perspective sacrifices a deeper focus on any one particular aspect of the church's song. Just as many hymns may appear in different sections of a hymnal, many songs may be included in more than one stream. The purpose of this approach is not to select a slot for every song, but to suggest that the various pieties that give birth to song since Vatican II have provided the church with unprecedented variety.

This approach is limited by its social location. Songs from North American hymnals have determined the contents of this study. A similar study conducted in England, Argentina, Australia, or Korea, for example, would reveal a significantly different reality. Some of the streams in this article might in other cultural settings be reduced to a rivulet – if they exist at all – and others might be added.

This approach is based on what is published rather than on congregational song practice. The focus is on what songs appears in hymnals and hymnal supplements since the Second Vatican Council, not on what congregations are actually singing. Some congregations, especially those who draw heavily on Streams

Three, Six, and Seven, have often moved on to more recent material not available in the hymnals reviewed. By the time a hymnal comes out, some of its contents are for many churches out of date. Other congregations do not use hymnals at all, relying on the projection of texts on screens or transmitting of songs through oral/aural means. Most recently, leaders of Emerging Church worship make extensive use of "home grown" compositions. Though locally composed music is not sung exclusively in Emerging worship, many Web sites from these congregations contain MP3 files of their original compositions. While the pastors and church musicians of every church are in effect the hymnal editors for their congregation, those who do not use hymnals bear a greater responsibility for selecting the breadth of sources that they use to shape the congregation's sung faith.

While I do not want to suggest that there is no correlation between congregational song collections and congregational practice, many congregations sing only a small percentage of their hymnal's contents, shaping in essence their own sung canon; others supplement their hymnals with additional resources by using one of several copyright licenses available to churches. Basing a study of the breadth on congregational song practice, while desirable, would be a very difficult, perhaps overwhelming, project to organize and report. While such a study based on actual practice would be valuable, I hope that the present approach lends insight into the breadth and depth of our generation's stanza.

Some groups are not included. The ritual music and chants of various Orthodox Christian traditions are not included, though a few examples appear in hymnals. Many hymnals include hymns originally in Greek and translated into English, usually in the nineteenth century. Since Orthodox congregations do not use hymnals and draw heavily on long-established traditional repertoire, however, it was difficult to include them in this study. Christian songs from the Middle East are rarely sung in North America. Translations of hymns emerging from Eastern Europe following the fall of Soviet Union have not yet found their way into many hymnals.¹¹ Relatively little Native American hymnody is available to the larger church. Though there are many singing traditions in Oceania, they seldom find their way into North American hymnals. These are but a few of the many song traditions that are currently practiced, but not included in this study. These gifts of the Spirit may yet come to us in the future.

General Trends Observed

Various patterns emerged in this study. The following overview highlights some of these patterns with the hope that awareness of them may enhance the reader's understanding of the various streams.

Solo/congregational balance. Although congregational song is the focus of this study, several streams employ soloists or cantors in a variety of ways. In Stream One, cantors are essential to the performance of responsorial psalmody. Stream Three often draws upon soloists as catalysts for call/response singing – a standard feature of many African American styles. The gospel songs of Stream Four were often solos initially and later claimed by the congregation. The irregular meter of many folk songs in Stream Five is more conducive to solo singing than congregational participation in many instances. Contemporary Christian artists have extensive solo careers. Those who participate in the songs in Stream Six often learn them from CDs and DVDs as solo or ensemble selections, and then sing them as congregational selections. Many songs of the world church, the focus of Stream Seven, draw upon solo singers in a variety of ways, especially call/response songs in Africa. Cantors enhance the sung prayer of the Taizé Community. Only Stream Two, that of contemporary classical hymns, does not regularly make use of solo singing to enhance the performance of congregational song. Yet, when one examines the average hymnal, the importance of cantors or soloists is not apparent. This calls upon church musicians to understand the wide variety of performance practices needed to bring alive various musical styles.

Written and oral traditions. A popular notion of the compositional process often imagines a creative and thoughtful hymnwriter sitting at the computer composing a hymn text, or a musician seated at the piano notating on staff paper the melody of a hymn tune as it emerges from her or his artistic imagination. While this may be true for many composers, songs throughout the spectrum of streams are often composed and sung without the benefit of or even the need for a written score. Notation on a physical piece of paper may be an afterthought in many African American styles. Musicians who perform from a written score in Stream Three often see musical notation as a general guide to be melodically and harmonically modified on the spot or as a basis for extensive improvisation. Choirs in Streams Three, Six, and Seven often learn music through a process of oral transmission – totally without any written music. Written music is notoriously unrevealing in African music, providing only the barest outline that is enhanced through improvised solos, percussion parts, dance, and improvised harmonies. What looks so simple on the page becomes complex in performance for those who know the style. Many songs from the Asian subcontinent depend upon heterophonic improvisation around the melody and minute melodic variations, all of which resist notation.

Regardless of the musical style, a written score should never be confused with the sound and experi-

ence of singing a congregational song. Much, perhaps most, of the world's Christian song is sung by people who do not read music and, as a result, is primarily an oral experience. Those congregations who participate primarily in Stream Two, the most consistently literate of the seven streams, may feel disoriented as they attempt to participate in oral or semi-oral musical styles. Church musicians trained only in classical Western music may have difficulty in bringing orally conceived music to life.

Text/music independence. Stream Two, the English hymn tradition, has a heritage of tunes and texts composed by different people. Furthermore, the metrical nature of the texts allows numerous melodies to be paired with the same text. For example, depending upon which side of the Atlantic one resides, the same text may be sung to different melodies in England and the United States. Various other faith traditions also sing different tunes with the same words. The majority of popular meters with the most options for tunes are common in English hymnody, e.g., SM, SMD, CM, CMD, LM, LMD. While these and other commonly used meters are still employed by current text writers in Stream Two, many poets explore new meters that demand new tunes. Only a few composers in Stream Two have the skill to successfully compose both texts and tunes, such as Dan Damon, Marty Haugen, Michael Joncas, Jane Marshall, and Thomas Pavlechko in the United States, Pablo Sosa from Argentina, Per Harling in Sweden, and the late Spanish priest Cesáreo Gabaráin. Erik Routley, the eminent hymnologist, could also write both texts and tunes of lasting value.

By contrast, hymnals contain an increasing number of congregational songs with universally fixed text and tune pairings, or where the tune and text are integrally linked and composed together because of the nature of the text or original language. Most selections listed as “irregular” in the metrical indexes at the back of hymnals have fixed text-tune pairings. Irregular meters include African American spirituals and gospel songs from Stream Three, gospel and revival songs from Stream Four, folk songs from Stream Five, contemporary choruses from Stream Six, and global songs from Stream Seven, as well as hymns from Stream Two with stanzas of varying metrical length. In general, Stream Two demonstrates the most independence between texts and tunes, while other streams require a more integral, fixed relationship between words and music.

Variety of accompanying instruments. The pipe organ once was the dominant instrument for leading congregational song. In our age the organ has become one of many instrumental possibilities for supporting the people's song. Although the range of possible instruments varies widely within a stream, each stream has its normative instrumental sounds. Stream One may use organ extensively, but piano and acoustic gui-

tar are also common in various Catholic masses. The pipe organ has traditionally been the domain of Stream Two, though piano is commonly used along with other instruments such as handbells. African American styles call upon a variety of instrumental sounds; thus one will find everything from pipe and electronic organs and electronic keyboards to electric guitars and percussion in Stream Three. The gospel and revival songs of Stream Four have usually been notated for piano and organ (pipe or electronic) in combination. The acoustic guitar is the normative sound of the folk idiom of Stream Five, though piano is common along with light percussion of tambourines and congas. Stream Six is associated primarily with electric guitars and keyboards and heavy use of percussion – both trap sets and congas. It is not uncommon in congregations with more resources, however, to have the bands of praise teams augmented with brass and saxophones (“horn sections”) and electrified strings and other wind instruments. With Streams Six and Seven the center of instrumental gravity switches from a keyboard sound to a percussion-dominant sound, especially in various styles of world Christian music. Stream Seven may include a wide array of instruments associated with specific ethnic groups or regions of the world, ranging from particular kinds of drums and specialized percussion to string and wind instruments not common in Western music. For example, the *śruti* box, producing open fifth drones, is a staple of music from India and other countries in the Asian subcontinent. The guitar either supplants or enhances various keyboards (electronic, organ, or piano) in Streams Five, Six, and Seven. The increasing role of church orchestras has made the sounds of woodwind, brass, and string instruments more common, especially in streams Two, Four, and Six.

A *cappella* singing also takes place in a number of the streams to varying degrees; indeed, singing without instruments is an option throughout the spectrum of musical styles. Unaccompanied plainsong is characteristic of Stream One. Several musical styles used to support the strophic hymns of Stream Two were essentially *a cappella* in their origins, such as the music of the Sacred Harp or oblong tunebook tradition. The music of the African American spirituals may be best experienced when unaccompanied and harmonized by ear. Streams Four, Five, and Six employ unaccompanied singing more sparsely, but effectively, as points of variety. The unaccompanied voice is characteristic of various African and Asian musics. Within the broad range of artistic creativity, one can identify each stream by its instrumental soundscape alone, without texts.

Many songs demonstrate characteristics of several streams. The artistic imagination of poets and composers often bridges streams. For example, Fred Kaan’s celebrative communion text, “Let us talents and tongues employ,” a strophic hymn with refrain

essentially from Stream Two, is paired effectively with Doreen Potter’s Caribbean-based tune *LINSTEAD* performed with guitar, claves, shakers, and tambourines – sounds associated with the world church in Stream Seven. Many examples of text and musical exchanges take place between Streams Three and Four. For example, Andraé Crouch’s “My tribute” is one of the signature songs of African American gospel music, but alludes directly to Fanny Crosby’s “To God be the glory,” and draws upon the metaphors of the redemptive power of the blood of Christ common in the gospel and revival music of Stream Four. Increasingly, a classic strophic hymn associated with Stream Two receives a musical treatment common to the charismatic music of Stream Six. The folk styles of Stream Five still influence music written out of the piety of Stream One. Some of the music composed by David Haas and Marty Haugen and others still easily fits an acoustic guitar and has echoes of earlier folk masses.

Bridging streams may be a sign of vitality in the life of the church and is increasingly a sign of our stanza in the great hymn of the church. When a text from one stream is placed in counterpoint with a musical style from another stream, the result may be enlivening to both. A number of text- and tunewriters appear in more than one stream. These are signs of the Holy Spirit at work and fly in the face of those who take refuge in divisive camps that segregate musical styles from each other.¹²

Variety of song structures. I have written extensively about the significance of various structures employed in congregational song – especially strophic (a form that I call sequential), cyclic, and refrain forms – and the relationship of these structures to worship.¹³ Each structure has many variations that serve the text in a different way. Strophic hymns consist of several stanzas with many words that form a progression (sequence) of thought. Cyclic songs use fewer words that are repeated with musical variations – a theme and variation approach to structure. Refrain forms have attributes of both – sequential stanzas with cyclic refrains. Stream Two, the classic Protestant hymn, has characteristically though not exclusively used the strophic structures, a form that defines what a hymn “looks like” for many singers. The present study indicates that other structures have gained in their prominence during the last half of the twentieth century. The refrain form has long been associated primarily with both Streams Three and Four as a characteristic of gospel songs. Refrain structures are also a primary feature of much Roman Catholic Renewal music (Stream One) since Vatican II. Cyclic structures appear in several streams, but especially in Streams Six, the music of the charismatic movement, and Seven, principally music from Africa and the Taizé Community. Stream Five, the folk stream, uses primarily refrain and cyclic structures, but may employ variations of all.

The importance of this observation is ontological in nature: What is a hymn? Some definitions recall the Greek *hymnos*, a term indicating a song praising “a god or gods, a hero, a nation, or some other entity or reality.”¹⁴ Augustine’s classic definition of a hymn places God as the object of worship. Thus a hymn is “a song in praise of God.” From a literary perspective, “a hymn is usually a lyric poem with a metrical and strophic text. Literally, a lyric poem suited for singing to the accompaniment of a lyre or a harp, but more broadly, it is simply a poem appropriate for singing.”¹⁵ S. Paul Schilling continues this train of thought indicating that a lyric poem “gives voice to the poet’s feelings rather than to external events. Hymns are . . . lyrics [that] express the feelings, attitudes, needs, and commitments of their authors and those who use them.”¹⁶ It is this definition that may broaden our ontological response to the questions, What is a hymn? and What does singing do in worship?

While the structures of hymns have always demonstrated variety, historically strophic poetry (in stanzas) has shaped Western consciousness about the nature of hymns and how they communicate. Other structures were thought of as alternative or supplementary at best and, perhaps, inferior at worst. While strophic hymnody remains vital, even a cursory look at the most recent hymnals reveals that refrain and cyclic structures are on the rise. Depending on the liturgical tradition represented in a hymnal, cyclic structures may appear, in part, in a section of the hymnal labeled, “Service Music”;¹⁷ others include cyclic structures throughout, in a thematic arrangement; and often both approaches are followed in the same book. Diversity of structure characterizes twenty-first-century congregational song to such an extent that our notion of what constitutes a valid hymn has been challenged. Those who plan worship may benefit from an understanding of the liturgical possibilities inherent in the various structures, so that they might integrate the congregation’s song more purposefully and effectively into worship.

Physical responses to congregational song. Since the middle of the twentieth century, Streams Three, Six, and Seven insert another element into congregational singing: movement or dance. To those who sing in these streams extensively, part of the piety is expressed through kinesthetic involvement while singing. Movement is not optional, but is integral to the experience of singing. Specific musical styles and song structures, especially cyclic forms, lend themselves to a physical response. As these songs have become a part of our hymnals, they bring into our worship the possibility of congregational singing that is more fully embodied. Dance is a part of the diverse landscape of congregational singing in the twenty-first century.

The discussion in this section indicates the diversity of our stanza, and some of the challenges in leading the breadth of congregational song available to the church.

Purposes of This Approach

Assuming that what we sing plays a significant role in shaping our faith, this study attempts to examine the breadth of our sung prayer. Prayers of praise, thanksgiving, adoration, invocation, confession, intercession, and blessing all come in sung forms. While not all congregational singing is prayer, even in this expanded sense, learning to pray well is part of our liturgical responsibility. In an essay entitled “The integrity of sung prayer,” Don Saliers notes:

At the heart of our vocation as church musicians and liturgical leaders is the question of how we enable the Church to “pray well” – to sing and dance faithfully and with integrity. . . . When we are engaged in sung prayer, we are not simply dressing out words in sound; rather, we are engaged in forming and expressing those emotions which constitute the very Christian life itself.¹⁸

The Holy Spirit has provided today’s church with a diverse spectrum of possibilities for praying well. The present approach explores ways in which our sung prayer is changing.

The diversity of congregational song discussed here may be overwhelming to many. I encourage the reader to delight in the gifts of the Spirit. Mark Bangert uses the metaphor of varied cuisine to express the richness of sampling diverse, authentic musical styles in worship. He cautions us, however, that, “Great cuisine is not an end in itself. Feasts and everyday meals are occasions for conversation and the building of community. It is across food that we get to know each other.”¹⁹ It is through the sharing of our songs that we gain a broader understanding of the universal Christian church.

A Hypothesis and a Challenge

When I examined the forty hymnals as well as additional hymnal supplements that have shaped this study, a noteworthy pattern seemed to emerge. I sensed, in broad terms, a correlation between musical style and theological emphasis. This hypothesis challenges some widely held assumptions that musical style, as an artifact of culture, is neutral and conveys nothing in and of itself, i.e., a given content may fit into any style and communicate the same content. While it is true that some theological themes emerge across streams, specific differences appear from stream to stream; some theological themes are more prominent in some streams than in others.

Don Saliers acknowledges the link between musical style and theology:

The musical idiom conveys a great deal about how the community conceives of God. Acoustic images reflect theological imagination at work. When the quality of the music is grandiose or pompous, the projected image of God may contain more of the self-image of the worshiping community than the community realizes. When the quality of music is pleasant and folksy, the projected image of God may be strong on intimacy and ease, but lacking in awe or mystery. . . . [M]uch depends upon the language used to address God or to describe God's relation to the world and to human beings. Gregorian chant is simple in one sense, but not without mystery. This may be said for melodies from folk traditions . . . such as are found in Appalachian traditions or in the Spirituals. So we must attend to the wedding of text and tune, and to the way in which the assembly actually sings – what musicians refer to as the “performance practice” of the words set to music.²⁰

For Saliers and for us, music matters in worship not just as a conveyor of emotion (though music certainly has affective import), but as a window into the piety of a worshiping body, and a partner in the process of articulating the sung theology of a tradition.

The unprecedented musical eclecticism of congregational song styles since the Second Vatican Council replaces hundreds of years when a given tradition could be recognized more or less monolithically by a single musical style, for example, plainsong or Renaissance polyphony for the Roman Catholic Church, gospel songs for nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Revival traditions in the United States, or Victorian hymnody for nineteenth-century Anglicanism. To some, the eclecticism of our era connotes a fragmented church. From these who are perplexed by the sheer variety musical options, we hear the questions, “Where is all of this leading? What style will finally win out?” To others, the diversity of musical styles found in church music indicates a hopeful trend. Rather than asking where we are headed, these people relish a time when the musical fullness of the church, manifest through stylistic diversity and theological perspectives, seems to be at hand. Rather than a fragmented church, the myriad styles of music may be a theological indication that now is a time of unprecedented creativity in the Spirit, a time of unparalleled cross-cultural and ecumenical exchange, and a time to conceive God and God's actions among humanity in the broadest, least restricted terms.

Congregational song styles are more restrictive than many other forms of music because they must be effective with large groups of people who rehearse very little (if at all) and who are as a whole untrained in music or singing. Effective congregational singing requires accessibility and, to varying degrees, immediacy. Because all congregational song has its fulfillment in

worship, some music – albeit within a wide variety of musical styles and forms – is better for this purpose than others.

The assumption that music carries no inherent meaning and is, therefore, a neutral conveyer of content is largely an assumption of Western classical aesthetics that values “absolute” music. Move into popular culture or traditional societies and this assumption breaks down very quickly. Based on this study, the poets in each stream tend to prefer a general musical style or a group of closely related styles to convey their theology. This study does not explain this conclusion completely, but I hope brings it to a greater awareness as an important factor.

If this conclusion is indeed true, one can assume a general relationship between musical style and theology. Congregations in North America have the possibility of singing many more musical styles than their forebears in any other time in history. We may also deduce that singing out of only one stream, as varied as it might be and as comfortable as it may seem to the congregation, could limit the breadth of sung theology a congregation encounters. This approach challenges all who lead worship to not limit their songs to a single stream, but to dip into several streams for an abundant sung faith with the hope of broadening the theological perspectives of their congregation and enjoying the variety of ways of praying that congregational singing offers. Each congregation will have its own starting place or preference within this spectrum of current congregational song practice. Regardless of where a given faith community centers its sung faith, a vital singing congregation should broaden the range of its sung – and prayed – faith by incorporating songs from the depth of its particular confessional historical tradition and from the breadth of the current streams suggested in this article.

Future Streams?

This spectrum of congregational song is but a particular snapshot of how people are singing in a particular place (English-speaking North America) and time (the last two decades of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first). How might such a survey look in 2050? As new hymnals are published and songs are increasingly disseminated through the media, the Internet, and individual mechanisms (such as the iPod), I propose that we will have more streams than now. Given the exploding Latino population throughout the United States, at least one stream devoted to Spanish-language congregational song will be necessary. The many currents found in African American congregational song may divide and form separate streams. Hip-hop and other urban forms, for example, already show signs of becoming a significant voice in the African American church.²¹ These forms may be claimed by other ethnic groups as well. Stream

Seven, Ecumenical and Global Song, is already potentially overflowing its banks. As communities who represent these songs continue to immigrate to North America, they may require separate and broader consideration. New voices are emerging, including Stuart Townend's Celtic sounds that are being embraced across many streams. The Emergent Church movement is producing a plethora of grassroots musicians, some of whom will find broader acceptance. Increasingly, texts and music will cross streams. For example, a Stream Two classical text may be set to Stream Six music.²² Regardless, this overview is but a point along the journey in the continuing expansion of congregational song.

At the beginning of this essay, I quoted Albert van den Heuvel, who boldly claims: "Tell me what you sing, and I'll tell you who you are!" Perhaps through singing more broadly we may also discover who we may become. 

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Notes

¹From Albert van den Heuvel, *Risk: New hymns for a new day* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1966), preface.

²Ibid.

³Geoffrey Wainwright discusses the history and significance of *lex orandi* and *lex credendi* in depth in *Doxology: The praise of God in worship, doctrine, and life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), chaps. 7 and 8.

⁴Erik Routley, *Hymns today and tomorrow* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1964), 21.

⁵Unattributed quotation in Pablo Sosa, "Spanish American hymnody: A global perspective," *The hymnology annual: An international forum on the hymn and worship*, vol. 3, ed. Vernon Wicker (Berrien Springs, MI: Vande Vere, 1993), 60–61.

⁶C. Michael Hawn, "The Consultation on Ecumenical Hymnody: An evaluation of its influence in selected English language hymnals published in the United States and Canada since 1976," *THE HYMN* 47:2 (April 1996), 26–37.

⁷This report was published as "Hymns and tunes recommended for ecumenical use," *THE HYMN* 28:4 (October 1977), 192–209.

⁸C. Michael Hawn, "'The tie that binds': A list of ecumenical hymns in English language hymnals published in Canada and the United States since 1976," *THE HYMN* 48:3 (July 1997), 25–37.

⁹A helpful study that has also attempted to organize twentieth-century hymnody is David W. Music, *Christian hymnody in twenti-*

eth-century Britain and America: An annotated bibliography (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001). Though the vast majority of the book contains extremely helpful bibliographic information, there is a brief introductory chapter that suggests a structure for approaching twentieth-century hymnody. Music's categories include 1) Mainstream Hymnody (Streams One and Two of the current study); 2) Popular Congregational Song (primarily Stream Six of the current study); 3) Ethnic, Global, and Insular Hymnody (primarily Streams Three and Seven of the current study); and 4) Congregational Psalmody (partially covered in Streams One and Two of this study). In addition, Streams Four and Five, focusing respectively on Gospel and Folk Hymnody, receive specific treatment in the current study. Finally, Music's summary includes the entire twentieth century, where the current study focuses on hymnody since the Second Vatican Council.

¹⁰*Sacrosanctum concilium*, 1963, par. 37.

¹¹This is changing gradually. *Evangelical Lutheran worship* (2006), the most recent hymnal of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, has included hymns in translation from Eastern Europe. Some of these will undoubtedly be included in future hymnals.

¹²Variety of musical styles with the same text can make a significant difference. *Evangelical Lutheran worship* (2006) has, for example, ten Eucharistic settings with different musical styles. The different musical settings open up new realms of meaning in the established structure and traditional Eucharistic texts.

¹³See C. Michael Hawn, *One bread, one body: Exploring cultural diversity in worship* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2003), 126–139, and *Gather into one: Praying and singing globally* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), chap. 7.

¹⁴See S. Paul Schilling, *The faith we sing* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 5.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷*The new century hymnal* (1995) takes this approach by listing a number of cyclic songs from the global Christian community in the index of service music rather than in the alphabetical index of first lines and titles. *Evangelical Lutheran worship* (2006) includes many cyclic global songs in the index "First lines and titles of liturgical music."

¹⁸Don Saliers, "The integrity of sung prayer," *Worship* 55:4 (July 1981), 291–292, 293.

¹⁹Mark Bangert, "Welcoming the ethnic into our church musical diet," *Cross accent: Journal of the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians*, 5 (January 1995), 7.

²⁰Don E. Saliers, *Music and theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 28.

²¹In addition to many YouTube sites and other examples available on the internet, see, for example, a collection published by the Episcopal Church (USA): *The hip hop prayer book*, ed. Timothy Holder (Harrisburg, PA: Church Publishing, 2006).

²²For example, Lim Swee Hong provides a Praise and Worship-style setting for Charles Wesley's "Ye servants of God" in S T Kimbrough, Jr., and Carlton R. Young, eds., *Global praise 2* (New York: GBGMusik, 2004), 116.