

# Praise and Worship reflections

*Editor's note: Over the past year, we've run a series of articles addressing the question of Praise and Worship music in liturgy. Now a few other musicians respond.*

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## WHAT ABOUT ANAMNESIS?

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By David Pitt

In treating the texts of Praise and Worship music (P&W), Christina Ronzio astutely noted that “one of the opportunities this repertoire brings is the active engagement, both in song and gesture, of members of the faithful who may have, until now, felt alienated from the worship experience of the community” (“Evaluating the texts of praise and worship music,” *Celebrate!* 44: 4, 30). Putting forward a cause for the effect noted by Ronzio, John Dawson wrote that “the popularity of P&W among the young is most likely due to the close resemblance between the aesthetic features of this music and those of the secular music that fills our lives ... this music is often encountered within the context of a ‘mountaintop’ experience like a weekend rally or World Youth Day, creating an emotional attachment that is not easily forgotten” (“An introduction to praise and worship music,” *Celebrate!* 44/1, 26). These two statements highlight the issue surrounding liturgical use of P&W. Indeed, we

ought to seek ways to embrace those feel marginalized from our liturgical assemblies. I suspect, however, that in more cases than not the long-term effects of using P&W for this purpose might end up being opposed to the intended effects.

Since P&W styles are derived from the styles of popular, secular music, the styles used are going to change with the times. One need only examine radio playlists from five to ten (or even twenty to thirty) years ago for verification of this statement. Undeniably, current P&W will soon sound antiquated. The likely solution, just as with popular secular music, will be the abandonment of those songs. Consequently, the emotional attachments created with specific P&W songs (not P&W styles) will face a similar fate; hearing a song that was significant in our past helps revisit those experiences again, thus inviting new connections between past and present. The liturgical experience of a once-alienated group of people will, again, be alienation as they are left unable to recover, sonically, their own formative liturgical experiences. Furthermore, liturgical music will, once more, “not speak to them,” and the initial problem is reconstituted.

We might, instead, look to the helpful description of “religious music” found in the 1958 Instruction on music from the Sacred Congregation of Rites:

“any music which, either because of the intention of the composer or because of the subject and purpose of the composition, is likely to express and arouse pious and religious sentiments and is therefore ‘most helpful to religion’... But, since it is not meant for sacred worship and is expressed in a rather free form, it is not permitted in liturgical functions” (*De musica sacra et sacra liturgia ad mentem litterarum Pii Papae XII “Musicae sacrae disciplina” et “Mediator Dei,”* 10). If P&W were understood this way from the beginning, then the varied styles could easily continue to function that way for each individual throughout their lives. On the other hand, by inserting P&W into liturgical celebrations, we are ultimately asking that music to assume a burden that it is incapable of bearing—*anamnesis*.

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#### **IN ALL THINGS, BALANCE**

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*By Albert Dunn*

A number of years ago, when leading a choir comprised primarily of women religious, I considered occasionally including pieces of Gregorian chant. This, I assumed, would appeal to the group's aesthetic and perhaps remind many of an earlier time. Was I wrong! Not only did the group not have a shared experience of the material (I guess I was hoping to tap some vein of nostalgia), but found its musical demands quite challenging. Its style had receded from the prevailing cultural reality. This lesson has informed my subsequent choices regarding music

for liturgy. The lesson for me—and John Dawson mentions this in his articles—is that balance in all things is essential in all of our choices regarding liturgical music. Ursula K. LeGuin, an American author of science fiction and fantasy literature has a deep regard for the principle of ‘the equilibrium.’ To paraphrase liberally, she says “Rain on island A may mean drought on island B.” I believe she means that as many of the affecting factors as possible must be considered in making choices and still be ready for the unanticipated or unpredictable. Although many judgments about styles and suitability of music are highly subjective, solid principles have been formulated throughout the post-conciliar years and ongoing discussions, principles that can promote fluidity, rather than rigidity, about the evolution of our liturgies and its musical elements. I believe we can evaluate praise and worship music using these principles:

- Are the texts theologically sound?
- Do the texts speak of the actions of Christ within the community?
- Do the texts speak of the actions of the community within the Body of Christ?
- Does the music concretize our relationship with those around and those who have gone before us—does it bring us into communion?
- Does it embrace the experience of the assembly—is it inclusive?
- Does it welcome newcomers?
- Is it singable?
- Does it respect the history of the art form?

Clearly, of the music that John Dawson speaks of—to the extent that it can be identified—some may be appropriate for liturgical prayer, but some definitely is not. To paraphrase another expression, “All liturgical music is for praise and worship, but not all Praise and Worship music is for liturgy.”

I think a steady diet of one particular style of music, to the exclusion of others, ultimately risks starving that community's imagination. Like individual, devotional prayer, P&W music may effectively lead one to liturgy, one of many pathways to an experience of God.

Finally, I am reminded of Taizé and its music, which seems to call across generational, cultural and denominational borders to form common ground. Much of this has to do with the profundity of the music. So I think a prayer for musical prophets is not amiss.

Perhaps the fence of which Dawson speaks is the preferred place to sit, from which we can get a perspective of the whole scene. For now.

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#### **AN EVENT IN ITSELF?**

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*By Bernadette Gasslein*

Over the last few years, I've seen lots of ads in Catholic papers and publications for youth events listing the various activities of the day or weekend. I've noticed a growing tendency to a timetable such as "Sacrament of Reconciliation: 5:00 p.m.; Praise and Worship: 7:00 p.m., Holy Eucharist, 9:00 p.m." In other words, praise and worship seems to have the quality of an integral kind of event, a form of stand-alone devotional prayer. My question is quite simple: Can we take the music that belongs to a particular form of devotional prayer and

integrate it readily into liturgical prayer? Is P&W an event in itself—consisting mainly of music—that cannot be easily superimposed on the eucharistic liturgy?

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*Bernadette Gasslein is editor of Celebrate!*

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#### **CONNECTING WITH THE SECULAR WORLD**

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*By Geoffrey Angeles*

The rise of contemporary Christian music has become the new alternative for many young people who are "into" their faith, enabling them to justify their tastes in music by virtue of its Christian content. Praise and worship music stems from this trend and has indelibly marked our modern Christian communities in many ways. In one sense, the popularization of music with Christian content has enabled faith and the sacred to manifest themselves in a secular world by offering an expression that takes on a popular character. Consequently, the results of this new alternative in music have led to contentious issues in the context of liturgy. As Catholics, however, we are not alone in the process of trying to find a just venue for this musical phenomenon in our worship.

My first encounter with praise and worship music was about ten years ago when I was a music student at a Mennonite college. The college consisted mainly of students in their early twenties in either Christian studies or the music program. Some were heavily into contemporary Christian music, and some, deeply rooted in the more traditional music. Around that time, a new hymnal for the Mennonite community was published and its use was to be highly encouraged. The college chapel services used, for the most part, praise and worship music because of their subscription to CCLI

(Christian Copyright Licensing International; <http://www.ccli.com/>). Needless to say, there was some tension in reconciling differences involving issues such as the college's investment in a brand new hymnal geared for the Canadian Mennonite community, and the Mennonite community's musical identity that is known for its long-standing tradition of unified part-singing in the congregation. In facing this dilemma, the musicians of the college worked together to find creative ways of using the hymnal to suit their contemporary musical tastes. They began by learning and introducing new hymns from the hymnal as well as "modernizing" the music of traditional hymns, maintaining a praise and worship sound. The use of praise and worship music, however, became more a matter of appropriation rather than completely eliminating it from their services. As a result, the Mennonite hymnal was used for the chapel services, sustaining a tradition and identity while keeping a contemporary edge to the performance style.

I believe that we are experiencing a similar situation as Catholics. Naturally, the hymns and songs that we sing in our worship ought to reflect who and what we are. Even though the use of praise and worship music may reflect and attract the tastes of some in our communities, the music selected must be sensitive to the identity and tradition of *all* the gathered faithful. Finding a solution in our parishes, however, will be challenging since our assemblies are typically more diverse, as opposed to a college community. Gearing particular liturgies to meet the different tastes (i.e. "organ mass", "guitar mass", "youth mass"), in my opinion, is never ideal. If we do not keep this in mind, we may run the risk of isolating communities of particular tastes within the larger

community rather than celebrating our unity in diversity.

Although I find it encouraging that Christian contemporary music is at an all time high, attracting many—and not just the young, it is important to continue an ongoing process for evaluating the music in our liturgies. For this reason, I admire John Dawson's evaluations and efforts to broaden our knowledge on praise and worship. He manages to capture the essence of liturgical music ministry when he underscores balance and integration as the key elements to sound musical judgment within the liturgy. The categories he presents for evaluating musical style will be an invaluable tool for many as music ministers continue their discernment in music selection. These categories clearly help to place the music we sing in an objective light, allowing us to attain a balance that can reflect the biblical paradigm of "body, mind, soul and spirit" which is our goal.

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## **WHEN AFFECTIVITY REIGNS**

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*By Christina Ronzio*

**J**ohn Dawson's article, "The emotional rush of praise and worship music," contains many good points and observations.

There is a sense in which P&W music gives participants a sense of emotional well-being, in much the same way that music therapists use sound. Because the music does—or is at least perceived to do—this, people argue for the use of P&W over hymns in worship.

John says, “The only relationship to our music that most of us have in a culture of sound bytes and instant everything is affective.” This comment made me consider other ways in which we, as worshippers, respond affectively to the liturgical celebration. We are less likely to respond affectively to other liturgical elements (i.e. presiding, the proclamation of the word, the homily). Some exceptions to this observation may include (on occasion) an affective response to the use of water, light, incense, etc., when the symbols are used abundantly.

John identifies the elements of P&W music (drum grooves, modulations, melodies, etc.). The use of modulations creates an affective response to the experience of singing as well as to listening. It is possible that some modulations can overshadow the nuances inherent in the sung texts and can almost manipulate the emotions of the singer/hearer. For example, the final verse of “O God Beyond All Praising” in itself is climactic. If a key change were introduced, would those singing the hymn respond more affectively to it than if there were no key change? I personally suspect that adding the key change would heighten the affective response.

I agree with John’s assessment that the human response to elements of the surprise/association paradigm found in P&W music has come to be seen as a spiritual experience, and that this is a red flag. At a P&W concert I have observed some individuals’ response to music that, to my ears, could only be described as Christian “grunge.” I found myself wondering if the response of worship I witnessed—people standing in the aisle of the church, eyes closed, hands in the air, swaying—was an act of worship of God as I could not hear any words over the music of the guitars, keyboard and drums. Because of the

lack of communication through text I did not know what kind of worship act I was being invited into.

I agree with John’s observation that it is important not to dismiss new music out of hand. As I read this comment I couldn’t help but think of the section on the musical judgment in *Music in Catholic Worship*. Paragraph 28 of this document speaks of the need to use various musical styles to aid liturgical worship while paragraph 29 acknowledges that not all good music is suitable to the liturgy. It is important to remember these values as musical styles employed in the liturgy continue to change and develop while, at the same time we continue to, as John says, “respect the aesthetic demands of the celebration” which is communal and multi-generational.

I find John’s observations on the design of church buildings very interesting. He acknowledges that evangelical or Pentecostal churches rely on P&W music for their worship (sacramental) experience, and so music space plays a significant factor in the design of the church. Next he notes that this is rarely the case with Catholic churches. While he makes this comment in relation to P&W music and its place in the worship experience within Catholic church architecture, it seems to be true that, even in the design of Catholic churches where “traditional/Catholic” music is employed, the music space may seem to be an afterthought.

John’s final comments are encouraging and provide us with a good approach to the introduction of P&W music in our liturgical celebrations. May we indeed be blessed with openness and wisdom as we continue to worship God today and in the future.

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