

Why not more hymns? Is it okay to use modern "rock style" music for worship? We do get asked this all the time.

Our desire is to present music...either written last year, or 300 years ago...in a fashion that would not sound foreign to modern ears. Our church is committed to "contextualizing" the gospel, and we share that commitment as it pertains to worship. It is of no advantage to ask people to adopt a foreign musical style in order to worship. Anything that poses an unnecessary cultural hurdle to the greatest possible number of people engaging in worship should not be employed.

From a lyrical standpoint, many of the traditional hymns are a "platform" that the modern person would find increasingly difficult to use as a form of communication. The most obvious hurdle is dated and stilted language and/or difficult syntax. If someone were to write a heartfelt letter to a loved one (be it a spouse, a dear friend, or a child), would they use language that you would not normally use? Would they use words that were so dated that they themselves hardly understood their meaning? Would the syntax be convoluted? No, this form of communication does not represent words or phrases they would normally use; even to even address a person of immense honor, or someone especially dear to them. So although the words of some of the traditional hymns are indeed poetic, they would not reflect modern expressions of love, respect, or worship that people would use today.

A second hurdle to using many of the hymns relates to the musical styles with which they were originally written. In many cases, many of the older hymns are written in styles that sound very foreign to modern ears. Many use time signatures (3/4, 6/8 timing) that are not normally employed today. You'll recognize many of the traditional hymns are essentially waltzes or marches. Since we do the freedom to choose a musical form to communicate our feelings to the Lord, I believe fewer and fewer people in the 21st century would choose a polka, a march, or a waltz to do that.

There are those that would make a case for "tradition" as a reason to promote the use of hymns in the church. Certainly some traditions are fine; however the New Testament is clear on this: traditions are not to supersede higher spiritual goals. I believe the goal of maximum congregation involvement in worship supersedes any choice of musical style based on tradition. In almost every case in the New Testament, holding on to traditions simply for the sake of "being traditional" is severely condemned (see Mark 7:7-9). We have a higher goal that simply adhering to tradition; and that is, using the freedoms we have in Christ to employ whatever non-moral means to encourage as many as possible to immerse themselves more fully in God's kingdom.

"To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings". 1 Corinthians 9

The weight of Corinthians 9 would be towards using presentations and forms that the surrounding culture would be familiar with. In our case, musical styles that are most comfortable and useable by the surrounding culture...here in Daytona Beach, Florida in the early 21st Century....are more "Coldplay" than Fanny Crosby. And you see that this music is meeting great needs, and is partially the reason why our church appeals to college students, non-believers, young believers, and mature believers who are

encouraged by this advancement of God kingdom.

When some people pose the “why don’t you use more hymns” question to me, I wonder if underneath that question are the fond, warm memories of **their particular Christian experience**...growing up 20, 30, 40 years ago, singing the traditional hymns in a traditional church. I am sensitive to the fact that is where some people are! *But, it is important to note...very important...that this is a memory shared by fewer and fewer Christians today....and fewer still of the “unreached”*. To bring this (difficult language, dated and foreign musical styles) to bear on those who need to worship the Lord in Post-Christian America offers no spiritual advantage.

If you have read of the life of Hudson Taylor, the pioneer missionary to China in the 1800’s, you will see how he set aside the traditions of English Protestantism for the sake of reaching the Chinese using their culture. Some of the traditions were meaningful to the English (even though those, too, would change), *but not to the Chinese he was called to reach and serve*. There should be no compromise in the message; but the presentation and forms should change. They are supposed to change.

We have to admit that we are currently living in a post-Christian America. In other words, we are now missionaries in a non-Christian land. We need to employ the same thinking, creativity and cultural awareness employed by those on the mission field. We are to use our freedoms in Christ to reach the world around us. Many churches, enjoying these freedoms in Christ, use dance, poetry or drama in worship. It is why there is tremendous flexibility in the order of service, or methods in presenting God’s word in a nontraditional method. It is why using “overheads” or video is o.k. to use instead of hymnals. Whatever encourages the greatest number of people to worship and listen, to express their worship to the Lord and embrace His message in the gospel in an uncompromised fashion, is to be used.

How liberating this is! How challenging! We all find comfort our own definitions of the “status quo”, and each of us defaults to our own traditions...even me. However the lost world around us is constantly changing, and how we reach the lost sheep (or new believers, or modern American believers) is to be forever changing.

in Christ’s love

Pat Altes