CONNECTING SINGING AND DOING IN UNITED CHURCH
CONGREGATIONAL SONG:
A LITURGICAL THEOLOGY OF MISSION

by

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A thesis submitted to Emmanuel College, Victoria University, and the Pastoral Department of the Toronto School of Theology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology

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ABSTRACT

In The United Church of Canada, congregational song serves as a key source of both personal and communal missional identity. This dissertation will investigate the liturgical and missiological functions of United Church hymnody as found in hymn resources published after union in 1925. Its focus will be on the role of congregational songs, their missional qualities, and their capacity to encourage and enable worshippers to enact peace and justice.

Mission has been central to The United Church of Canada since its formation in 1925, and in its mission work, the United Church has sought to move from early twentieth century well-intentioned paternalism to a more postcolonial emphasis on justice, mutuality, and openness to other faiths. Worship has also been important to the church, and singing an essential element of its liturgical life. In the worshipping assembly, the singing of hymns involves both learning about and encountering God; it is also about mission and the living out of faith. As the church’s activity in God’s mission has changed over the years, the same kind of shift in the hymn repertoire can be noted.

Moreover, singing can also become a personal expression of mission, predisposing people of faith to embody the peace and justice they sing about. In this study, congregational song is set in the context of primary theology, in which worshippers encounter the Holy by enacting their beliefs and singing their faith. Both texts and tunes are examined as components of a sung theology which can effect transformation through symbols, metaphorical and expansive language, and hymns that themselves affect behaviour.

The connection between mission and music in the United Church is also studied through a “thick description” of four hymns which embody the development of mission consciousness. In this way, singing and doing are connected in a liturgical theology of mission: a song of God’s intentions for the world.
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PREFACE

My earliest memories of faith are about music. In fact, it might be said that my theological education began with a song.

I attended the United Church just around the corner, where Sunday worship meant that while adults listened to a sermon upstairs, the children went downstairs for Sunday School and a gathering that began with a hymn sing. I can still picture that darkened basement and illustrated slides as we sang “Birds are Singing, Woods are Ringing,” and “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” The lessons that followed may have been informative; the teachers may have been kind; but I don’t remember anything about them. What I do remember are the hymns – the wonder of creation and the love of Jesus Christ became alive to me through the music we sang in that little church where I grew up.

Later, I observed that the hymns1 I sang did not just teach me about my faith: they actually had an affective quality. When we sang “Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart,” I felt a hush come over the congregation as though we were in the presence of the Holy. On occasional Sundays, everyone worshipped together, and when we sang “Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life,”2 I felt we were called to go out and change the world. Congregational songs had become sources of theological belief and mission education.

During the seventies and eighties, I was privileged to be mission study editor for the United Church, and I became aware of the great mission issues of the day: racial oppression in southern Africa, emerging mutuality in mission, the dual mandate of evangelism and justice. It fell to me and other members of our unit to interpret those issues and encourage

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1 In this dissertation, the terms “hymn” and “congregational song” will be used interchangeably. “Hymnody” will refer to a collection of hymns or congregational songs. “Liturgical music” may refer to other kinds of singing during worship, e.g. psalms, chants.

2 The Hymnary (Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1930), #380.
people to become part of God’s great mission. During that time, missionaries and world outreach staff brought home the sounds and songs of the people with whom they worked, and part of my task (and passion) became the passing on of the music. Subsequent pastoral ministry, as well as my role as co-chair of a hymnbook committee and my work as editor of Gathering reinforced for me the connection between “singing and doing,” the ability of music to transform and encourage people to orient themselves to the world and to one another in a faithful, caring way.

Therefore, it is important to note, by way of full disclosure and identification of my own social location, that this work is the effort of a United Church “insider,” as one who has been involved in the production of mission and music resources, as well as their pastoral implications. Others would doubtless tell the story differently, but I come as one who has been a life long member of the United Church, aware of its accomplishments and failings.

As I begin this dissertation, I would like to pay tribute to the faculty, staff, and students of Emmanuel College. Faculty members, especially Dr. Bill Kervin, liturgy professor and my faculty advisor, and Dr. Fred Graham, professor of church music, were both insightful and generous with their time and resources. Staff members, particularly the librarians, were courteous and helpful in locating material and sorting out the vagaries of catalogues, citations, and computer glitches. And the students, with whom I shared worship and lunch and the occasional course, were unfailingly hospitable to this perennial student who wandered in from retirement to share in the excitement of life-long learning.

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3 The great resources of global song were not as easily located as they are today. As well, the technology we take for granted today (computers, digital recordings, e-mail, etc.) was non existent.

4 The Hymn and Worship Resource Committee, responsible for the publication of Voices United.

5 A United Church of Canada liturgical resource, published three times a year.
Throughout history, whenever something earth-shaking has happened, people have sung. When African-American slaves made their way to Canada through the Underground Railway, they sang spirituals to bolster their courage and pass subversive messages to one another. During the American civil rights movement in the 1960s, people sang, and during the demonstrations against the war in Vietnam in the 1960s and the war in Iraq in the 2000s, people gathered to protest and sing again.

For people of faith, congregational song has long been a repository of theology and the basis of much of their devotional life. The early Christian church was at first largely made up of Jewish converts who came from a great tradition of song.2 “How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?”3 lamented the Hebrew people in exile. Tradition holds that a shepherd boy on the hills of Palestine sang “The Lord’s my shepherd, I shall not want.”4 In temple and house church, people used songs and hymns for prayer and praise.

Music, especially singing, has long been associated with people’s deepest longings. “Tunes, and the experience of singing them together, are a natural and deep-down part of many people’s lives.”5 Music has also been about engendering courage to go out and change the world. When the disciples gathered in an upper room for a last meal with Jesus, they sang

1 The Hymnary #488.


3 Psalm 137.

4 Psalm 23.

a hymn before going out to the Mount of Olives.6 When apartheid was at its worst in South Africa, oppressed men and women sang and danced in defiance and hope and were strengthened by their unity and their songs’ eschatological visions of a world of peace, justice, and equality.7 It would seem that such singing not only gave voice to a people’s longings: it was also “performative” and helped them to realize that for which they yearned.8

The Christian faith is a singing faith, and for Protestants in particular, liturgical music as congregational song has been a foundational and formative part of spiritual life. The music of the worshipping assembly can be both educational and devotional, helping people learn about and encounter God through the singing of hymns; it can also be about mission, living out faith enacted in the liturgy. “At its core, our liturgical singing enables us to enter the most radical level of our identity and mission: to be the Body of Christ dying and rising for the sake of the world.”9 This can happen at both the personal and the communal level. As a pastor from a Protestant Church10 with a particular interest in liturgical music and congregational song, the relationship between congregational song and the carrying out of God’s mission is of particular interest for me. It raises crucial questions:

• How does congregational song enact mission and justice, unifying worshippers in a

6 Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26. James McKinnon, The Advent Project (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 19, conjectures that the hymn was most likely one of the Hallel Psalms 113-18, sung by Jewish families at the evening meal on the first evening of Passover.

7 In “The Beat that Beat Apartheid: The Role of Music in the Resistance against Apartheid in South Africa,” Anne Schumann comments that music went from mirroring reality in the 1940s and 50s to a “hammer” with which to shape reality by the 80s, using music to construct “an alternative political and social reality.” See http://www.univie.ac.at/ecco/stichproben/Nr_14_Schumann.pdf. (Accessed September 21, 2011).

8 More will be said about the transformative power of congregational song in subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

9 Kathleen Harmon, The Mystery We Celebrate, the Song We Sing: A Theology of Liturgical Music (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008), 77.

10 The United Church of Canada, formed in 1925 from Methodist, Reformed, and Congregational traditions.
commitment that works for the common good? What do the hymns we sing reveal about the nature of the Church (especially The United Church of Canada) and its shifting missiological paradigms?

- In what way does congregational song work to transform worshippers, both at the personal and communal level, into the Body of Christ for the world?

- What has been and continues to be the relationship between congregational song and worship and work within The United Church of Canada? How does the United Church’s congregational song relate to its liturgical theology and its mission?

This dissertation will investigate the liturgical and missiological functions of United Church hymnody as found in hymn resources published after union in 1925. Its focus will be on the role of congregational songs, their missional qualities, and their capacity to encourage and enable worshippers to enact peace and justice. It will explore and advance the thesis that in The United Church of Canada, congregational song serves as a key source of both personal and communal missional identity.

**Methodology**

This study will investigate hymnody and mission in The United Church of Canada using a phenomenological approach, aided by the use of “thick description” and attention to *praxis*, combining theory with the actual practice of hymnody within public worship. The first three chapters will be structured to follow a modified version of the *praxis* model:

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12 It may reference, but it will not focus on the pre-union hymnody of the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregational Churches. Similarly, since United Church mission work outside of Canada has always been carried out on an ecumenical basis, there may be some reference to global music not found in United Church resources, but this will be the exception rather than the norm.
theoretical and theological foundations will lead to case studies, followed by reflections, aimed at a deeper understanding and engagement. Rather than focusing on one particular aspect of mission or music, the dissertation will take a more synthetic approach, providing a broad overview of mission and its relationship to congregational song.

The phenomenological approach in this study relies on the work of such thinkers as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur, and Marianne Micks. Here, phenomenology is a method of discovering what subject matter is all about. Phenomenology allows not only reporting, but also comment: it is a form of analysis, rooted in description, which looks at aims, motives, intentions, and meanings of both the observer and the observed in order to discover “meanings which reside in [the subject matter].” By looking at meaning and significance, phenomenology also allows one to do away with “the tired old distinctions between [its] inner and outer, subjective and objective, individual and community aspects.” To achieve this, it is not enough to analyse what is already known: “in order to see the world and grasp it as paradoxical, we must break with our familiar acceptance of it” and perceive it anew in all its fullness.

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13 The hermeneutical circle known as praxis usually begins with experience, but I have chosen a different way of ordering the material since this study also brings a body of literature to bear on the nature of congregational song and its experience within United Church and other contexts. For further study of praxis, see Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: Continuum, 1981), and liberation theologians Juan Luis Segundo, The Liberation of Theology (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), and Gustavo Guttierez, A Theology of Liberation, History, Politics, Salvation (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1973).


16 Merleau-Ponty, preface, xiv.
A phenomenological approach to hymnody is an invitation to look beyond traditional questions and assumptions about praise, prayer, and community. Martin Marty, for example, uses a phenomenological approach in describing hymns by using such categories as silence, noise, and awe – categories that may not normally be used to analyse aspects of hymns and other liturgical music, but which may contribute to an understanding of the experience of hymnody, its biblical base and witness, and its value within the Christian tradition in new ways. 17

Although Marty’s categories are engaging and evocative, I will use a different approach in this study. An investigation into the connection between congregational song and mission, between the “singing and the doing,” will require more specific missional categories. As well, any analysis of the congregational songs and their relationship to God’s mission will require an examination of both texts and tunes as it addresses the following questions.

What words (i.e. hymn texts) are reflective of such missional values as liberation, justice, inclusivity, outwardly directed behaviour? The analyses of hymns in the chapters that follow include discussions pertaining to theological premises, biblical foundations, and language that is symbolic, metaphorical, inclusive, and expansive. Similarly, what music (i.e hymn tunes) encourages affective, outwardly directed behaviour? This means an examination of both melodic and harmonic structures, using specific musical categories and terms in the analysis: e.g. intervals, melodic range, tonality, modality. As well, other considerations include the “matching” of tunes and texts, which may enhance the meaning and effect of the songs; the effect of musical arrangements (both harmonious and dissonant) in aiding

reflection; and the ability of the music to enable theological reflection and effect changed behaviour.

It will also be important to use relevant categories to apply the same kind of analysis to mission itself. Categories for analysis will include biblical and theological foundations; historical and cultural context; worldview; relationship and openness to “the other.”

Closely allied to this phenomenological approach and especially helpful in analysing the so-called “mission” hymns in Chapter Three is the concept of “thick description,” first formulated by Gilbert Ryle, and expanded by anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Geertz calls us to understand the particularity of people’s culture by looking closely at their context, their behaviour and what influences them, as well as “made in the academy concepts”\(^\text{18}\) like symbol, ideology, ritual, and worldview. Thus, I will use historical and cultural, theological, liturgical, and missiological categories with which to examine four formative mission hymns in the life and work of the United Church.

In *Gather Into One: Praying and Singing Globally*, musicologist C. Michael Hawn suggests that using “thick description” is particularly helpful in examining global song.\(^\text{19}\) To biographical, cultural, and historical categories, he adds such personal, liturgical, and ecclesiastical hermeneutical questions as: what does this song mean to me? How does the song help me intercede before God on behalf of the world? How does this song help me welcome the stranger and make room at the table?\(^\text{20}\) These questions will also be helpful for use in the Conclusion to this study.


\(^{20}\) Ibid.
Both Geertz and Hawn contend that we need to understand the event, ritual, or idea as background information before something is directly examined. For example, the hymn “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains”\(^{21}\) with its reference to “men benighted”\(^{22}\) who call to have their land delivered from “error’s chain”\(^{23}\) can be seen as an example of questionable Euro-North American missionary notions of superiority, but it also needs to be examined within its context, as a reflection of nineteenth century colonial history, modernist culture, and a particular theological understanding of mission.

By way of procedure, each chapter in this study will first provide an overview of theoretical and theological foundations; then, case studies will examine actual practices in relation to the foundational considerations. Reflections follow, aimed at more deeply understanding the connection between missiology and liturgical music, between the “singing and the doing.” The Conclusion will attempt to articulate a liturgical theology of mission in The United Church of Canada.

Specifically, Chapter One: Mission and Congregational Song begins with an overview of the way in which The United Church of Canada has responded to God’s call to mission since 1925. The overview includes five “milestones in mission” which document the various aspects of the United Church’s life and work.\(^{24}\) They appear chronologically, not


\(^{22}\) Ibid., v. 2.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., v.1.

\(^{24}\) The overview, although cursory, is nonetheless original, relying heavily on church records and sources within United Church archival material – *Record of Proceedings* of General Councils, Reports of church committees, Yearbooks, etc. It is an attempt to locate the cultural and historical context of The United Church of Canada’s activity in God’s mission and is not meant to be a wide-ranging critique – that is a task for another more detailed study.
necessarily as an indication of an upward evolution toward perfection, but rather as deepening clarifications of the United Church’s self-understanding of its role in the world. The chapter moves to the question of the relationship between liturgy and mission, and in particular, the relationship between congregational song and mission.

Three case studies then consider how congregational song can enable God’s mission of peace and justice in: the doxological legacy of John and Charles Wesley; the peace and justice songs of the Iona Community; and the global songs of More Voices. All three case studies help to shed light on the connections between liturgy and mission in The United Church of Canada and to address its fundamental assumptions. Together they raise the question of whether hymn resources have evolved as the United Church’s involvement in mission has changed.

Chapter Two: The Transforming Power of Congregational Song begins with an examination of congregational song as primary theology. It then focuses on the transformative qualities of symbol, metaphor, and other aspects of sung liturgical language: i.e., how the community that worships and sings together is shaped by its musical language and forms; and how congregational songs can invite and predispose worshippers to modify their behaviour and inspire them to carry out God’s mission to the world. As well, it seeks to address the perplexing question of how we know that the singing of the worshipping assembly can be a transforming experience. Two case studies continue the discussion of congregational song as transformation: the sung prayer of the Taizé Community; and the transformative impact of Voices United, the United Church’s most recent hymnbook. This in turn leads to reflections on how text, tune, and singing itself can be transformative, thus
functioning as primary theology, enabling worshippers to experience God’s mystery through song.

Chapter Three: The United Church of Canada in Mission and Song uses Clifford Geertz’s method of “thick description” to investigate the relationship between congregational song and the United Church’s response to God’s mission in the world by examining four illustrative hymns that illuminate changing mission paradigms through the years. Through “thick description” of these hymns, significant historical, cultural, and theological developments in the way the United Church has carried out God’s mission in Canada and overseas will be evident. The aim of this analysis is to connect congregational song and mission in such a way as to offer people of faith and singing congregations a deepening understanding of their and their church’s mission.

Finally, Conclusions will also raise theological and historical questions for possible future work, including christological, cosmological, and intercultural considerations. How do we speak and sing of the saving significance of Jesus Christ in a pluralistic, multifaith world? How do we speak and sing of God’s mission in a world that has expanded far beyond the three tiered universe of many of our traditional hymns? What voices are missing from our existing resources? The study will close by looking at what “matters” in personal and communal mission identity and its relationship to congregational song, leading, finally, to an attempt to articulate a liturgical theology of mission.

The Roots of Mission

Before beginning any analysis of mission and congregational song, it is essential to consider the foundational roots of mission, how they might be framed theologically, grounded in scripture, and located in human history as well as salvation history.
God’s mission (*missio Dei*) is and has always been at the heart of the Christian Church. Creation itself might be called an act of mission, with God moving outward to be in relationship with all of God’s creatures. Mission begins with God’s gracious initiative and is derived from God’s Trinitarian nature: God, Son, and Holy Spirit first move into the world and then send the Church into the world.25

Revelation is also an essential part of mission. Christians believe that our relational God comes to us in Jesus Christ and calls us to live out the Good News by hearing and enacting Jesus’ message of love and justice – “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor . . . .”26 Jesus embodied something new: a complete enactment of God’s purpose for humankind to live abundantly, with peace and plenty for all; and a mandate for his followers to live out God’s purpose in a radically new way. From the beginning of the Christian church, the revolutionary nature of Christian mission was demonstrated, at best, in love and service and in new relationships within the community. This is still true of mission today: “at its most profound level, its purpose is to transform reality around it.”27

Mission, however, has never been about transforming reality just by doing good deeds: it has been (and continues to be) a way of life and a theological response to God’s initiative. Mission is about God’s covenant, Christ’s salvation and grace, and the Spirit’s reconciling love in action. This theological framework can find focus in scripture and in history.

25 David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 390. This section has been informed by the work of missiologist David Bosch and his comprehensive study of mission.

26 Luke 4:18, 19. NRSV.

27 Bosch, Foreword, xv.
The biblical story of God’s covenant promise of love and relationship tells of the call to Abraham, continues through the Exodus and settlement, and lightens the darkness of defeat and exile. “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”

God’s covenant is made freely and unconditionally, and therefore calls for response: as God is involved in the world, so too, God’s people are called to contribute to the care of creation and one another.

The telling of the story, however, is not always immediately clear. The Bible, as a collection of books written at different times and within different contexts, needs to be examined with care. Two examples related to mission may serve to illustrate.

On the one hand, Jesus calls disciples to care for the “other” without question, as in the Lukan story of the Good Samaritan, where a foreigner shows compassion for someone who may have been dying on the side of a road. Elsewhere, scripture suggests that caring for the “other” may have conditions: in the Book of Numbers, we read that the Hebrew people were given a “perpetual statute” that “those who touch the dead body of any human being shall be unclean seven days . . . all who touch a corpse . . . and do not purify themselves . . . shall be cut off from Israel.” One reading calls disciples to reach out without condition; the other constricts care with legalism. The contrast between the two heightens the radical vision of mission portrayed in the Samaritan story.

Similarly, scripture presents differing points of view around the question of the relationship of Christianity to other faiths. On the one hand, some passages claim Jesus as the

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28 Isaiah 43:1b.

29 Luke 10: 29-37. In the examination of biblical texts, I have been aided by the Bible study “Reconciling and Making New: Who is Jesus for the world today?” (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, The Committee on Theology and Faith, 1998), a United Church study of Christology and mission.

sole mediator between God and humanity – “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me,’”\textsuperscript{31} and “there is salvation in no one else.”\textsuperscript{32} On the other hand, there are biblical passages which suggest a more pluralistic approach and advocate openness to other paths to God – (Jesus said) “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold;”\textsuperscript{33} “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my ways, says the Lord,”\textsuperscript{34} and “but strive for the greater gifts, and I will show you a still more excellent way.”\textsuperscript{35}

However, even with these (and other) apparent contradictions, scripture, when read carefully and contextually, can provide valuable clues and direction for the carrying out of God’s mission. Overall, for example, it can read as pointing to a broadening circle of inclusivity: in the Old Testament, from the story of Ruth, a Moabite woman who married a Hebrew man and from whose bloodline came the house of David, to the post-exilic Isaiah who reminds the people of Israel that God will bring even foreigners “to my holy mountain.”\textsuperscript{36} In the New Testament, the gospel stories of Jesus’ interaction with others, like the Samaritan woman at the well,\textsuperscript{37} and parables such as the invitation to the banquet\textsuperscript{38} are

\begin{enumerate}
\item John 14:6.
\item Acts 4:12.
\item John 10:16.
\item Isaiah 55:8.
\item I Corinthians 13:12.
\item Isaiah 56:6,7.
\item John 5:1-42.
\end{enumerate}
followed by the early Christian church’s self-understanding as a body of Christ open to all. As such, these stories carry ramifications for our own time and the growing edges of ecumenism and interfaith dialogue.

In many contemporary Protestant and Roman Catholic churches, the biblical understanding of mission is frequently encountered through the use of the (Revised) Common Lectionary in scripture reading, sermons, and hymns. “The primary task of the Lectionary is to proclaim the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ within the believing community.” Martin Luther urged clergy to preach on the (medieval) lectionary “with a much clearer focus on the good news of God’s mercy in Jesus Christ.” Luther’s words might also be directed to contemporary preachers as they invite congregations to hear a Word of encouragement for mission.

Even a cursory examination of the liturgical calendar can reveal the lectionary’s missional thrust. The liturgical year begins with Advent waiting for God’s revelation in Jesus Christ to a needy world, and continues through Christmas celebrations to the Sundays after Epiphany, with their manifestation of the light of Christ for all nations and peoples. The

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39 See Acts 10 and Peter’s vision from which he concludes that “God knows no partiality,” (v.34) and Paul’s letter to the Galatians 3:28 – “there is no longer Jew or Greek . . . for all of you are one in Jesus Christ.”

40 Gail Ramshaw, *A Three-Year Banquet: The Lectionary for the Assembly* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2004), 19. Within a three year cycle, each of the synoptic gospels is featured, (with the gospel of John used at the most important festivals and during Lent in years A and B). The Old Testament, “a primary source of the word of God,” undergirds and complements the gospel passages, while the epistles encourage Christian communities to live in God’s Spirit and carry out the good news of their resurrected Christ.

41 Ibid., 9. Until 2001, Martin Luther and his successors used a one-year lectionary of only epistles and gospel passages. Contemporary Lutherans use an expanded lectionary as outlined above.

42 The early Christian Church marked Advent as a time to look for the second coming of Christ. This is being recovered in many churches today, with attention paid to such lectionary passages as Matthew 24: 36-44, and Mark 13: 24-37.

43 The lectionary gospel passages focus on mission to the Gentiles, as well as to the Jewish people.
season of Lent that follows offers both an opportunity to read and think about God’s covenant promises and love as recorded in the Old Testament, and a time to reflect on Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem and the meaning of the cross for the world, as recorded in the gospels. The deepening character of mission finds focus in the season of Easter: the gospel proclaims Christ’s resurrection, and the book of Acts is read in place of Old Testament lessons, allowing insight into how the new Christian church went about proclaiming the good news and carrying out God’s mission in Christ. The Day of Pentecost focuses on the gift of the Holy Spirit for all people, and in the season that follows, the scripture passages illumine the implications of that gift with witness to the life of mission in discipleship. As they hear the Word and enact the liturgy through the year, people of faith can engage in both the life of Christ and the Christian life, with its missiological implications for transformation and salvation.

As Bosch reminds us, we cannot view the christological salvific events\(^4^4\) in isolation: “in our mission, we proclaim the incarnate, crucified, resurrected, ascended Christ, present among us in the Spirit and taking us into his future . . . it is the Jesus who walked with his disciples who lives as Spirit in his church.”\(^4^5\) It is Jesus who enables us to be forgiving, reconciling people and who brings about change in the people he meets. Living the love that Jesus proclaimed is neither competition with other religions nor about building churches, but working with others toward the transformation and salvation of the world.

Christianity is not a magic message from long ago or far away . . . it is an experience to be lived, an experience of faith. This is not a Golden Rule of Thumb from a remote and timeless Jesus. It is the conviction

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\(^4^4\) Bosch, 512, ff defines six salvific events: the incarnation; the cross; the resurrection; the ascension; Pentecost; the Parousia. Each provides an image that contributes to what mission is and entails.

\(^4^5\) Ibid., 518.
that love, justice, forgiveness and renewal are possible in our world in our time.\textsuperscript{46}

Hans Küng has suggested that the entire history of Christianity can be subdivided into six major paradigms: the apocalyptic paradigm of primitive Christianity; the Hellenistic paradigm of the patristic period; the medieval Roman Catholic paradigm; the Protestant (Reformation) paradigm; the modern Enlightenment paradigm; the emerging ecumenical paradigm.\textsuperscript{47} Each of these paradigms reveals not only a particular understanding of Christian faith, but a distinctive understanding of mission. “In each of these eras, Christians, from within their own contexts, wrestled with the question of what the Christian faith was and, by implication, what the Christian mission meant for them.”\textsuperscript{48}

The modern Enlightenment era had a particularly powerful influence on Christian mission: “virtually everything that happened since the eighteenth century was, in one way or another, profoundly influenced by the Enlightenment worldview.”\textsuperscript{49} This was especially evident in the nineteenth century (Protestant) missionary movement, when missionaries travelled from Canada, the United States, and Europe to far flung areas of the world – Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean. They worked for the glory of God and the love of Christ and felt they had been chosen by God to minister to those who were calling them to “deliver their lands from error’s chain.”\textsuperscript{50} It was a time when mission was not only paternalistic, but also closely tied to commercial expansion of “the colonies.”


\textsuperscript{47} Bosch, 181, citing Hans Küng in Theologie-wohin? Auf dem Weg zu einem neuen Paradigma (Zürich-Cologne: Benziger Verlag, 1984), 25. Today, we might add the postmodern or postcolonial paradigm.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 182.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 262.

\textsuperscript{50} “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains,” The Hymnary #256, v.1. More will be said about this unofficial missionary “anthem” and the nineteenth century mission “era” in chapters one and three.
By the mid seventies of the twentieth century, most of the former colonies had gained independence, and mission consciousness had moved, for the most part, from paternalism to an emerging sense of mutuality. Voices from Asia, Africa, Latin America as well as North America called for a new understanding of mission. Even so, Bosch reminds his readers that “throughout most of the church’s history, its [i.e. the Christian mission’s] empirical state has been deplorable . . . . We may have been fairly good at orthodoxy, at faith, but we have been poor in respect of orthopraxis, love.”

He also argues that critics of mission have usually proceeded from the assumption that mission was only about the enterprise of evangelism and church planting and in doing so, they may have confused the missionary programs of the church with missio Dei, God’s call to mission which needs constant renewal.

Part of the renewal of the church’s mission today will need to come from those who are examining the issues from a postcolonial perspective. Feminist theologian Letty Russell describes the task in this way:

Postcolonial analysis challenges the many ways in which Christian mission has been part of the colonial project of destroying people’s culture and self-esteem, and associating God with gold, glory, sexism and racism . . . . We need to recognize that it, too, needs cultural and theological hermeneutics to sort out ways in which mission has helped

51 Bosch, 519.

52 Ibid.

53 A postcolonial perspective in liturgical studies is only just beginning to emerge, and at this date is pursued by a relatively small group of liturgical scholars. See Michael Jagessar and Stephen Burns, “Fragments of a Postcolonial Perspective on Christian Worship,” Worship Volume 80, no.5 (September 2006) and Christian Worship: Postcolonial Perspectives, (Sheffield, England: Equinox Publishing, 2011); Stephen Burns, Nicola Slee, Michael N. Jagessar, ed., The Edge of God: New Liturgical Texts and Contexts in Conversation (London: Epworth, 2008); and Stephen Burns, Liturgy. SCM Study Guide (London: SCM, 2006). This study does not undertake to further develop that work per se, but is certainly convinced of its value. See also the “Conclusions” section of this dissertation and remarks regarding “missing voices.”
people find out what is liberating and comes from God, and what has been a form of proselytizing which seeks to make carbon copies of the missionary’s home culture.\(^{54}\)

She also notes some of the complexities involved in such an undertaking.

Recently I taught a workshop at the Institute of Formation and Religious Studies in Manila . . . . Together we struggled to find a new vision of the church which would be one of peace, justice, and the inclusion of women, as well as men, in all aspects of leadership and decision making.

This gathering in the Philippines reminded me again and again that mission is alive and well . . . . The gathering also reminded me that colonialism is alive and well, and that the same is true of forms of domination in the church and our societies. Countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America may describe their circumstances as postcolonial, but in reality the world looks very much neo-colonial as modern global capitalism and US imperialism manage to control the life and death of people across the globe.\(^{55}\)

In light of the above reflections and considerations of the roots of mission, a working definition of mission may help as we begin to explore the relationship between mission and congregational song more specifically.

Christians are invited into God’s mission of love and relationship by Jesus Christ: they are called to live and speak of the saving grace offered by Jesus, and to listen respectfully and learn from neighbours of other faiths and cultures.

In the process, mission will come to mean being outwardly directed, living and acting in love and justice for all creation.\(^{56}\)


\(^{55}\) Ibid., 39.

\(^{56}\) Formulation by author.
Connecting singing and doing has been important in communities of faith for many years, as congregational singing has been and continues to be an important source for both faith and the living out of faith in mission. The good news in Jesus Christ has been proclaimed in song; faithful women and men have learned their theology through song; and mission and justice have been encouraged and experienced in song. As some liturgical theologians have posited: “congregational singing is one of those primary symbols that allows the Christian assembly to [share] in communal symbols of the truth about God and to do so for the sake of the well-being of the world.”

To be in mission “for the sake of the well-being of the world,” is also to be part of a particular context in which God’s call is answered, either individually or as part of a faith community. For the faith community called The United Church of Canada, being in mission has been both a disciplined (albeit changing) response to God’s call to care for creation and a process of deepening awareness of its role in the world.

**Foundations**

**Mission and The United Church of Canada**

At the time of church union in 1925 and the establishment of The United Church of Canada, three strains of overseas mission work merged, resulting in 625 missionaries living and working in Trinidad, Formosa, Honan, British Guiana, Korea, and central India (former

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1 *The Hymnary*, #496. Text: Catherine Hankey.

Presbyterians); West China and Japan (former Methodists); and Angola, Africa (former Congregationalists). The missionaries worked as doctors, educators, and evangelists and encouraged social justice and the growth of new churches.³

The 1925 United Church of Canada was largely white, Anglo-Saxon, and ministered to by male clergy.⁴ It was a church that wanted to win Canada and the world for Christ. The Basis of Union declared that the United Church intended to foster unity so that “in due time, so far as Canada is concerned, [unity would] take shape in a Church that may fittingly be described as national,”⁵ and that by God’s power and grace, “the kingdoms of this world [would] be made the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ.”⁶ For enthusiastic supporters, union would see “the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth . . . the visible expression of a common sense of conversion that had already given the evangelicals a sense of unity.”⁷

To foster this unity and claim Christ for the world, The United Church of Canada was very clear about its mandate for mission in its Articles of Faith. Article XX, for example, states: “We believe that it is our duty as disciples and servants of Christ to further the extension of His Kingdom . . . . We joyfully receive the word of Christ, bidding his people to

³ Missionary statistics from a presentation of United Church General Council staff to Emmanuel College, March 2, 2011. Other information about overseas work from the Recording of Proceedings (henceforth noted as ROP), 2nd General Council, 1926, 301, also describes WMS work in Japan: “the great movement over the past two years is that of independence. There is a fixed purpose to free the native church from its dependence on foreign money.”

⁴ Statistics from 1921-30 show that over forty percent of immigrants were of British origin. That wave of immigration had been preceded by the movement of United Empire Loyalists, also originally of British stock, following the American Revolution in 1776. ROP, 21st General Council, 1964, 243. Women were not ordained in the United Church until 1936, although important work was carried out by deaconesses and Woman’s Missionary Society workers before that time.


⁶ Ibid., 2.20. For more on this, see Phyllis Airhart, “Christianizing the Social Order and Founding Myths—Double Vision?” in Toronto Journal of Theology 12, no.2 (Fall 1996):169-178.

⁷ John Webster Grant, “What’s Past is Prologue,” in Voices & Visions: 65 Years of The United Church of Canada (Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1999), 126, 127.
go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, declaring unto them that God was in
Christ reconciling the world to Himself and that He will have all men [sic] to be saved.”

It was clear about “bidding . . . people to go into all the world,” and also clear about its mandate for mission within Canada itself. The church engaged in a plethora of Canadian outreach activities, ranging from education, to “missions among French, among Italian and Slavic races, and among Indians,” new church development, social service work among the urban poor, and hospitals. And as well as participating in colonial enterprises overseas, the United Church also engaged in colonialism in Canada, co-operating with the federal government in the First Nations Residential School system.

By the year 2011, the picture of mission in the United Church had changed radically. Rather than 625 “overseas missionaries,” there were 25 “overseas personnel.” Instead of “mission fields,” there were “partners in mission,” who may have received grants rather than people to enable them to carry out their own local mission enterprises. In Canada, there were no longer any residential schools for aboriginal children, and the United Church was continuing to turn its attention to right relationships with its First Nations members. Canada itself had become one of the most multicultural countries in the world, and the United Church had long abandoned its vision of being Canada’s national church in a Christian world: in 2006, it declared itself as an “intercultural” church, intentionally seeking to be more open to

8 Basis of Union, Article XX.

9 ROP, 1st General Council, 1925, 143-169 reports 16 colleges providing secondary school education, undergraduate university education, and theological training under the aegis of the former Methodist and Presbyterian Churches. Year Book 1926 and ROP, 2nd General Council, 1926, 319 refers to mission to other nationalities, while that same ROP reports on the work of the “nine hospitals supported by the former Methodist Church,” 329.

10 At the 33rd General Council, 1990, the Council adopted a motion from the sessional committee dealing with the Division of World Outreach that “the Division of World Outreach will normally use the term ‘overseas personnel of The United Church of Canada’ to describe those it appoints overseas, and that individuals so appointed will be described by what they do . . . .” ROP, 33rd General Council, 1990, 160.
other voices and expressions of faith. Ministry within the United Church was no longer focused primarily on ordained leadership, but carried out by lay and ordered men and women of differing sexual orientations and from many different races and cultural backgrounds.

It is not possible within the limits of this dissertation to include a comprehensive history of mission within The United Church of Canada. However, it may be helpful to identify five “milestones in mission” to show how the United Church has understood, carried out and continues to carry out God’s mission.

Milestones in Mission

• Establishment of a Unified Mission Fund

It may seem odd to call the establishment of a monetary fund a mission milestone, but from the beginning, the fund was framed by a theology of stewardship. The establishment of a unified fund for mission was and continues to be an important resource for the church as a faith-based response to God’s abundance. Over the years, “The United Church Maintenance and Extension Fund,” now the Mission and Service Fund, has played an invaluable role in enabling mission to be carried out in Canada and around the world. As well, it has helped to

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11 In its concern to respond to the United Church’s intercultural focus, in 2010, Emmanuel College in Toronto, in conjunction with the Canadian Dawn Foundation, the Canadian Council of Imams, the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, and other Muslim community leaders, initiated a Canadian Certificate in Muslim Studies for Muslim leaders and community members, illustrative of the changing face of theological education. [www.emmanuel.utoronto.ca](http://www.emmanuel.utoronto.ca) (Accessed March 7, 2011).

12 The Order of Ministry within the United Church includes both men and women ordained to the ministry of Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Care, and those commissioned to a diaconal ministry of Education, Service and Pastoral Care.

13 A comprehensive overview of the history and theology of mission in The United Church of Canada has not yet been written.

14 The milestones have been identified by the author as representing mission concerns both nationally and internationally. Other selections are also possible.

15 “Stewardship is everything I do after I say I believe.” Jewitt Parr, secretary of the Stewardship Department of the United Church in the 1980s and 90s, was fond of defining stewardship this way in many public gatherings throughout the Church.
educate people of faith about the meaning of mission and has motivated them to respond to God’s call.

Even at the time of union, the United Church was very clear about the connection between mission and the means to enable mission. The first General Council in 1925 combined the mission funds of the uniting churches and called for the establishment of The United Church Maintenance and Extension Fund and for twice yearly united campaigns where “the spiritual aims of the Church [would] be kept in the forefront, and embodied in a clear and impressive statement of the national and international responsibility of The United Church of Canada.”16 In 1928, the name of the fund was changed to the “Missionary and Maintenance Fund” and commended “as the recognized channel through which our gifts for the missionary and other enterprises of our Church at home and abroad should flow . . . .”17 Through the years, the Mission and Service Fund, as it became known in 1970, has been the largest contributor to the church’s budget. A pool of resources, it has continued to fund mission activities in Canada and overseas, including emergency relief resources, as well as administrative support on the national and regional levels, and congregations are encouraged to donate to the fund as well as to their own congregational ministries.

The Mission and Service Fund continues to work within the church’s theological and missiological framework. A recent pamphlet published by the United Church comments: “the United Church way is to work with partners in the church, in Canada, and around the world. In an emergency, in development work, we are there . . . every year we give about $30

16 ROP, 1st General Council, June, 1925, 222.

17 ROP, 3rd General Council, September, 1928. Recommendation, 109, adoption, 59. The recommendation also included a note about the need for a year round educational program “regarding the great departments of the work of our Church.”
million to support our work . . . used for our national and global mission with partners, our justice and peace advocacy, and our efforts to care for our environment.”

The Mission and Service Fund continues to be a concrete way for congregations to share in a communal response to God’s mission in a way that is faithful to the gospel and grounded in thankful stewardship for the earth and earth’s people. At the same time, it must also be acknowledged that there has always been a certain ambivalence toward the fund, as some congregations want only to give money to “their mission project,” unwittingly, perhaps, perpetuating paternalism.

- Vision of a Social Gospel

Well before church union . . . there had emerged a widespread conviction that social structures as well as individuals need to be changed, and renewed attention to such prophets as Amos and Isaiah reminded churches that *mishpat* or justice was one of the leading themes of the Old Testament.

At the time of church union, two departments were named to administer the mission work of the United Church: Home, which included mission work in Canada, Newfoundland, and Bermuda; and Foreign, mission work in other countries. These two departments were under the oversight and administration of the Board of Home Missions and the Board of Foreign Missions. But there was a third board whose responsibility also concerned mission and whose work laid the foundations for the United Church’s continuing concern for justice: The Board of Social Service and Evangelism. “The efforts of progressive Board of Social Service and Evangelism staff and board members helped to institutionalize the social

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19 Grant, 132.

20 “Basis of Union,” 12.1.
Christianity vision of church and society . . . a vision of a national Protestant church engaged in the social developments of the Canadian context.”

The Board took responsibility not only for moral pronouncements around abstinence from alcoholic beverages and the restriction of sex to marriage, but also set a framework for social justice in Canada. The “Report of the Commission on the Church, Nation and World Order,” for example, offered a road map for social justice in Canada, building on the foundations of proponents of the Social Gospel and the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order. The report called on the Canadian government to develop national planning with a “view to full employment, adequate production of goods serving basic needs, wise and just distribution, and basic security for all.” It lamented racism and discrimination and deplored “the bitter spirit of anti-Semitism which is manifest in different parts of Canada, and the exclusiveness and prejudice too often displayed toward non-Anglo-Saxon Canadians. And lest that anyone might think the report was just aimed at government levels, it also urged churches, especially clergy, to “interpret the word of God in relation to a world situation which calls for change . . . . Even at its best, preaching is not enough. The social implications of the gospel must be embodied in the forms of corporate worship.”

The social implications of the gospel have continued to be played out over the years.

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23 Ibid., 32.

24 Ibid., 34.

25 Ibid., 34.
“In the reports of the General Council . . . are calls for ‘day nurseries,’ better wages, and affordable housing for women working in industry after World War II; for an end to racial discrimination in hiring in the early 50s; and for maternity leave and portable pensions in the 1960s.”\textsuperscript{26} The list is long and the issues many, but the concern for social justice embodied in the founders of the United Church continues to be a major focus of the church’s life and work. The United Church’s “New Creed” calls the faithful to “seek justice and resist evil.”\textsuperscript{27} Its contemporary “Song of Faith” reminds them that the United Church is a church with purpose:

> We sing of God’s news lived out,
> a church with purpose:
> faith nurtured and hearts comforted,
> gifts shared for the good of all,
> resistance to the forces that exploit and marginalize,
> fierce love in the face of violence,
> human dignity defended,
> members of a community held and inspired
> by God, corrected and comforted,
> instrument of the loving Spirit of Christ,
> creation’s mending.
> We sing of God’s mission.\textsuperscript{28}

- **The Commission on World Mission**

Openness to people of other faiths and cultures has also been a concern of the United Church for many years. A remarkable World Mission Commission report to the church in 1966 laid biblical, theological, and cultural foundations for interfaith dialogue and understanding forty years prior to the United Church’s 2006 declaration of being an intercultural church. Meeting in Waterloo in 1966, the 22\textsuperscript{nd} General Council received the report and recommendations of the Commission on World Mission, which confessed that


\textsuperscript{27} “A New Creed,” Adopted by 23\textsuperscript{rd} General Council, The United Church of Canada, 1968; revision with inclusive language approved by the Executive of the General Council November, 1980; altered to include the line “to live with respect in Creation,” approved by the Executive of General Council, fall, 1995.

\textsuperscript{28} “A Song of Faith.” A statement of faith of The United Church of Canada/L’Église Unie du Canada. Adopted by the 39\textsuperscript{th} General Council, August, 2006.
the faith we own is so subtly blended of Greek and Hebraic elements, so intricately interwoven with the customs and standards of western life, that we remain unaware even of the need to disentangle them until we have an encounter with someone from Asia or Africa whose mind has never passed through the half-way house of Hellenism.29

Concluding that “we should probably welcome the religious plurality of the modern world,” the commission called the church to “actively pursue opportunities and occasions for dialogue with representatives of other faiths.”30 Since then, the church has engaged in interfaith dialogue by meeting with representatives of other faiths and by engaging in study, culminating in major reports and policy statements for the whole church’s study and consideration.31 But it was the 1966 commission that was crucial in laying the foundation for a shift in cultural and religious perspective.

More recently, in August, 2006, The United Church of Canada, speaking through its 39th General Council, voted to name itself as an “intercultural church.” A subsequent document attempted to explain the concept:

. . . Canadians are proud of our multicultural society. The United Church wants to go one step further. In our church, we want people from all different cultures to listen to each other and be heard. We want everyone to participate fully. We want our leaders to be as diverse as our population. We don’t want one dominant culture to decide how we do things. God is calling the United Church to change.32


30 Ibid., 436.

31 Three of the most recent illustrate the scope of concerns: “Mending the World: An Ecumenical Vision for Healing and Reconciliation” (approved by the 36th General Council, 1997), “Bearing Faithful Witness: United Church-Jewish Relations Today” (approved by the 28th General Council, 2003); and “That We May Know Each Other: United Church-Muslim Relations Today (approved by the 39th General Council, 2006). The reports were prepared by the United Church’s Committee on Inter-Church Inter-Faith Relations.

Some members of the United Church might be puzzled by the call to be an intercultural church and the assertion that “God is calling the United Church to change,” since they might have thought that the church was already involved in welcoming “all different cultures” to participate. However, this document reveals two new significant elements: the need for leadership that represents the diversity of Canadian culture and United Church membership; and the rejection of “one dominant culture” to decide how the church makes decisions. “We don’t know exactly what an intercultural church will look like. But it’s an exciting opportunity. God is calling us to work together to build something new.”

“Something new” will undoubtedly require much reflection and discernment as the United Church continues to carry out God’s call to mission within Canada, a multicultural, multi-faith society, with freedom of religion guaranteed by Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982. Toronto has been called the world’s most multicultural city, but it represents only a small part of the multi-faith picture. With the arrival of Chinese railway workers in 1858 and the opening of a Buddhist temple in Vancouver in 1905, Buddhism has been in Canada for a long time; Islam, at 2.5% of the population, is the fastest growing religion in the country, with the median age of Canadian Muslims a decade lower than the median age of the population at large; and there are significant numbers of people of other

33 Ibid., 4. The article/pamphlet speaks of the United Church’s dominant culture. “They often act as though it is ‘normal’ to be White, English-speaking and middle class.”

34 Ibid.


36 Michael Adams, Unlikely Utopia: The Surprising Triumph of Canadian Pluralism (Toronto: Viking Press, 2007), 59. Adams details nations of origin that make up more than one percent of a city’s population. Toronto is at the top of the list with 14 nations of origin, Miami has 9, Vancouver and New York 8, Los Angeles 7, Melbourne and Dubai 6, Amsterdam 5, and London (England), 4.

37 Ibid., 108.

Being part of a multicultural society and church also means listening with respect, and bearing prophetic witness with others against injustice, violence, and exploitation, whether or not they share the Christian faith. As Christians, we are called to be neighbours to the person next door or across the sea. But the mandate to be neighbourly is not confined to Christianity. We can learn from the hospitality of our Hindu neighbours, the faith practices of our Muslim brothers and sisters, the respect for creation from our aboriginal relations. An intercultural church will be a church of dialogue, co-operation, and openness, as together with other faiths and cultures, people in United Church congregations work together to oppose forces that threaten peace and justice for all. This, too, is an important part of Christian mission.

- The Apology to the First Nations Peoples

Long before my people journeyed to this land your people were here, and you received from your Elders an understanding of creation and of the Mystery that surrounds us all that was deep, and rich, and to be treasured.

We did not hear you when you shared your vision. In our zeal to tell you of the good news of Jesus Christ we were closed to the value of your spirituality.

We confused Western ways and culture with the depth and breadth and length and height of the gospel of Christ.

We imposed our civilization as a condition for accepting the gospel.

We tried to make you be like us and in so doing we helped to destroy the vision that made you what you were. As a result you, and we, are poorer and the image of the Creator in us is twisted, blurred, and we are not what we are meant by God to be.

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We ask you to forgive us and to walk together with us in the Spirit of Christ so that our peoples may be blessed and God's creation healed.39

This Apology to the First Nations people of the United Church was the culmination of a long and complicated relationship. At union, the United Church took over responsibility for work among native peoples carried out by former Methodist missionaries. On the one hand, they put the Cree language into syllabics in Northern Manitoba, enabling worship resources in the language of the people, and trained elders to disseminate the Good News as they travelled to their trap lines and trading expeditions. On the other hand, paternalism was alive and well as church consultations made it clear that the non-Indian missionary was an “indispensable person,” and the hub of community life in Indian communities.40 A Mission and Service bulletin, used by United Church congregations in 1947 reports that “on 50 Indian Missions, ordained ministers and missionary teachers serve 18,000 Indians . . .”41

Even while missionaries worked as pastors on reserves and as doctors and nurses in hospitals in remote areas, the United Church was also involved in the Residential School system, in which thousands of children were enrolled (many forcibly taken from reserves) in a school system that robbed them of their childhood, their language and their culture and subjected them, in some cases, to physical and sexual abuse. Well meaning Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries, committed to universal education (noted educator Egerton Ryerson was a prominent Methodist), had little understanding of the importance of cultural sensitivity.

39 The apology was delivered by (then) Moderator Robert Smith at the 31st General Council in August, 1986. ROP, 31st General Council, 1986, 85.

40 Stan McKay, “A First Nations Perspective” in Fire & Grace, 133. Former United Church Moderator McKay speaks of his experience in the Fisher River community of Manitoba, but his observations would be shared in many parts of the country. “The missionary was for generations, the authority figure in the church and community. Missionaries had power and influence in all areas – religion, law, medicine, and culture,” 134.

41 United Church M&S bulletins were bound together for archival purposes. These facts come from “The Bulletin,” 1947, 1146.
They did not question the federal government’s policy of assimilation, although there were a few early concerns about the system, including a brief to the federal government in 1947 which suggested replacing boarding schools with day schools.42 But it was not until the 1960s that there was more intense discussion, with United Church withdrawal from the residential school system in 1969. On October 27, 1998, at the meeting of the General Council Executive, the United Church apologized officially for its complicity in the Residential School system.

Today, the United Church continues to work with both native and non-native members in justice concerns related to such First Nations issues as: support of land rights and environmental concerns around proposed pipelines in northern British Columbia; the Truth and Reconciliation commission (related to the Residential School issue); and the Sisters in Spirit campaign concerning violence against aboriginal women. As well, efforts have been made concerning native peoples and church governance. Native ministry consultations in the early 1980s led to the formation of two First Nations theological colleges43 and in 1988, two years following the first Apology, the All Native Circle Conference (ANCC) was established in an attempt to give First Nations’ peoples a unified voice within the United Church. It comprised the all-Native Keewatin Presbytery of northern Manitoba and Ontario as well as three additional Presbyteries across Canada.44 Some Native ministry congregations in Ontario,

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42 http://www.united-church.ca. (Accessed March 14, 2011). In 1947, the Board of Home Missions presented a brief to a Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons.

43 The two theological colleges were Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Resource Center in Beausejour, Manitoba and the Francis Sandy Theological Centre in Paris, Ontario. The two colleges were amalgamated in the fall of 2011, with the Beausejour campus remaining open.

44 All Tribes (Alberta), Great Lakes Waterways (Ontario and Quebec), and Plains (Saskatchewan).
Quebec, and British Columbia chose to remain with their original Presbyteries and Conferences.45

In 2009, the Aboriginal Ministries Council (AMC) was created, which, with its General Council Office staff group, aims to include all First Nations United Church members and give them a greater voice. With the formation of the AMC, General Council staff member Maggie McLeod declared “we have for the first time in the United Church brought together all the various Nations and constituencies within the United Church, so that builds a lot of diversity.”46

With its colonial heritage, the United Church’s involvement in mission with First Nations has a spotty record. Misguided good intentions, overt and covert racism will take many years to overcome. But Stan McKay offers some hope. “As the original people of ‘Turtle Island,’ we recognize the need for the four winds that will heal the peoples of the four directions. And when the people are healed, the earth will be healed.”47

• Reviewing Partnership in the Context of Empire

We are called to a primary emphasis on mission, rather than on maintenance or survival. That means we are called to personal, congregational, and ecclesiastical transformation. We must tune our hearts, lifestyles, and structures to the profession, in word and deed, of good news in the midst of ever-present imperial bad news. We are called to a deeper discipleship as individuals and as church.48

In 2007-08, the “Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations” (JGER) unit of the United Church conducted a review of United Church global mission partnerships. It included

46 Ibid., 28.
47 McKay, 137.
48 “Living Faithfully in the midst of Empire,” prepared by the JGER unit (now known as the “Partners in Mission” unit), presented to General Council Executive, referred to 39th General Council, 2006.
a gathering of international mission partners, Canadian congregational research, and the writing of a report and its resulting “affirmations on Global Partnership,” presented to and accepted by the General Council Executive in November, 2008. The work of the consultation and the report built on and affirmed principles worked out some years earlier. The creation of the 1977 document “Mission with Justice: The Dual Mandate of World Outreach,” by Garth Legge had shifted the emphasis of mission, at least the public face of mission. Although over the years, many missionaries had been involved in justice work even while they worked as teachers, agriculturists, and doctors, the dual mandate of “doing mission, doing justice” became a mantra in the late 70s and early 80s – “‘To be faithful, you had to be involved in justice issues’ . . . . Justice worker became another role for overseas personnel. The dual mandate led the church to take human rights stands on issues such as apartheid in South Africa.”

Similarly, the 1988 document “Seeking to Understand ‘Partnership’ for God’s Mission Today,” set out partnership as a fundamental way of understanding mission. As well, the “El Escorial” guidelines on resource sharing with global partners in decision making and mutual accountability recognized “the resources those without money can share with us, and standing in solidarity with those who suffer from unjust systems . . . .”

The Partnership report itself acknowledges the value of previous foundational work, but also notes how that work has continued and even intensified.

In the 1980s the church solidified doing justice at the heart of its distinctive participation in God’s mission . . . consistent with its social gospel heritage, the church came to

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49 Garth Legge quoted in Fire & Grace: Stories of History and Vision, 39.

50 ROP, 32nd General Council, 1988, 597. Resource sharing guidelines were developed in a world consultation in El Escorial, Spain held in 1986.

51 Rebekah Chevalier, “Where Have All The Missionaries Gone?” in Fire & Grace, 39.
see its special contribution within the larger *missio Dei* as directed toward working with partners struggling for systemic justice and social transformation.\(^52\)

As well, the report affirms the focus on partnerships that are ecumenical, working together with people of all faiths, and based on “such values as mutuality, reciprocity, trust, and transparency.”\(^53\)

What has shifted from the nineteenth and early twentieth century heritage of colonialism is the acknowledgment of the church’s complicity in unjust structures that keep the world divided socially and economically. “The deepening practice of partnership has led the church to listen carefully to the experience and analysis of global partners concerning the nature of unjust economic systems.”\(^54\)

(This) has signalled a complete circle: from mission to foreign lands to mission with partners directed toward the injustices in their place, to mission with global partners directed toward recognizing ourselves as complicit in the creation of poverty, oppression, and environmental destruction in the world.\(^55\)

With its acknowledgment of complicity in injustice, including the United Church’s role in the First Nations residential school system, its attentiveness to interfaith dialogue, its emphasis on the United Church’s involvement with social justice, and its delineation of the importance of global partnership in carrying out God’s mission, “Reviewing Partnership in the Context of Empire” is a useful summation of the “Milestones in Mission” in the history of

\(^53\) Ibid.

\(^54\) Ibid., 10. The danger of complicity in unjust economic, social and other structures requires constant vigilance. There is much work to be done in overcoming our historical inadequacies and healing the damage that has been done, e.g. the United Church’s ambiguous liturgical relationship with its French speaking congregations; the “missing” aboriginal voices in our resources. See also the “reflections” section of this chapter, p.72 and the “Conclusions” to this dissertation.

\(^55\) Ibid.
United Church mission work and understanding. A helpful theological framework is provided by its definition of partnership in mission as “grounded in the relational nature of God who calls us into right relationships with one another, with all of creation, and with God.”

Mission and Congregational Song

Having considered the missional ethos of the United Church, we might well ask some questions about the relationship between mission and congregational song. How might singing motivate people of faith to live in mission? How might liturgical music enlarge the worldview of worshippers? What makes a hymn “missional?”

A hymn may be deemed missional in several ways, but first and perhaps most important is the relationship it provides between the hymn text and the possibilities for action in the world. Missional hymns have the ability to provide the singing assembly with an eschatological vision of transformed creation, an imaginative construal of the world as it might be if God’s creatures lived today according to God’s intentions. As S.T. Kimbrough has reflected: “Our songs are emblematic of the humanity we seek, a present experience of a new opportunity, and a glimpse of a new vision.”

O for a world where everyone respects each other’s ways, where love is lived and all is done with justice and with praise.

O for world where goods are shared and misery relieved. Where truth is spoken, children spared, equality achieved.

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56 Ibid., 4.
57 S.T. Kimbrough Jr., ed., Music & Mission: Toward a Theology and Practice of Global Song (New York: General Board of Global Ministries, GBG Musik, the United Methodist Church), 129, 130.
With the new vision may also come motivation for responding to God’s work in the world now, even as the hymns encourage solidarity and action for peace, justice, and plenty for all.

> When a poor one who has nothing shares with strangers, when the thirsty water give unto us all, when the wounded in their weakness strengthen others, then we know that God still goes that road with us, then we know that God still goes that road with us.\(^{59}\)

Thus, hymns that are missional tend to be more outwardly directed, evoking invitation to action rather than inward focused meditation,\(^ {60}\) and communal rather than individually oriented, as in the following hymn written in commemoration of the 1989 “Montreal Massacre.”

> Sisters, let us walk together sharing sadness, loss and grief, we will move through pain to wholeness, brokenness transformed to peace.\(^ {61}\)

And in their theology, missional hymns may tend to emphasize a liberating God, incarnate in Jesus Christ.

> God of freedom, God of justice, you whose love is strong as death, you who saw the dark of prison, you who knew the price of faith touch our world of sad oppression, with your Spirit’s healing breath.\(^ {62}\)

As such, missional hymns are often based on biblical passages that emphasize right relationships with creation, and peace and justice for all, as in this version of the Magnificat.

> My soul cries out with a joyful shout that the God of my heart is great,


\(^{60}\)Although some songs, like Taizé chants, because of their transformational character, can lead to missional values of community, love and justice. More on this in Chapter Two.


and my spirit sings of the wondrous things
that you bring to the ones who wait.
You fixed your sigh on your servant’s plight,
and my weakness you did not spurn,
so from east to west shall my name be blest.
Could the world be about to turn?63

And, of course, in the singing, there can be a powerful experiential connection with this
missional, incarnate God “who works with us and others by the Spirit”64 and connects singers
with others in the world.

Every peace and justice movement creates its own songs.
The oppressors of the world may try in many ways to
silence the cries of the people, but the songs are never
silenced. Even behind bars, prisoners sing songs as one of
the last means of making their rights heard. Why? Because
the song of justice is the Lord’s song.65

Finally, missional hymns can also be culturally diverse, with global and ecumenical
dimensions, open to other faiths.

Hope of Abraham and Sarah,
friend of Hagar, God of Ruth,
you desire that every people
worship you in spirit, truth.
Meet us in our sacred places,
mosque and synagogue and church.
Show us paths of understanding;
bless us in our common search.66

Given such considerations, it is not difficult to connect the qualities of missional
hymns with the United Church’s “milestones” and other expressions of mission.

• The communal and outward nature of missional hymns can be linked to the 1925
  establishment of a unified mission fund, which provided the new United Church

64 “A New Creed.”
65 Per Harling, “Global Song and Theology: Background and Context” in Kimbrough, 63.
with ecclesiastical structures which emphasized outward-looking mission work as a way for congregations to respond faithfully to God’s abundance.

- Missional hymns with a theological and biblical emphasis on a liberating God incarnate in Jesus Christ find resonance in the United Church’s vision of a Social Gospel, as well as its evolving view of partnership, in which doing justice is seen as the United Church’s contribution within the larger *mission Dei*.

- The Commission on World Mission would also find support in the ecumenical nature of the United Church’s hymn resources, as well as the emergence of new interfaith hymns in *More Voices*. As well, the First Nations apology can be seen as a kind of eschatological vision of right relations in a Canadian context.

The case studies that follow will continue to analyse the connection between mission and music, illustrating how congregational song can enable God’s mission of peace and justice. As well, they have the capacity to shed light on the connections between liturgy and mission in The United Church of Canada and to address its fundamental assumptions about mission. The first case study, the doxological legacy of the Wesleys and the Methodist church, speaks to the United Church’s Methodist roots and its concern to reach out with the good news of God’s love. The second, the peace and justice songs of the Iona Community, finds resonance with the United Church’s Reformed (Presbyterian) roots and its continuing focus on social justice. Finally, the case study of *More Voices*, with its emphasis on global music, connects with The United Church of Canada’s practice of mutuality in mission. As well, the inclusion of interfaith hymns in *More Voices* points to the United Church’s affirmation of global partnerships and its openness to a faith that is in dialogue with the world.
When the Methodist church became part of The United Church of Canada in 1925, it brought with it a legacy of congregational song that was both doxological, framed with thanks to a loving God, and missional in its encouragement to bring hope to poor and dispossessed people. This legacy included an enthusiasm for the centrality of song in worship; it also created conflict as worship and hymn resources were prepared for the new United Church. The publication of *The Hymnary*, bringing together the traditions of the Congregational, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches, provoked some of the sharpest divisiveness the United Church has known.

Methodism and the Wesleys

The story of John and Charles Wesley is a well known one: students at Oxford, whose rule of piety and good works earned them the (originally) pejorative name of “Methodists;” travellers to Georgia (USA) and the sailing that brought them into contact with the pietistic faith of the Moravians; and John’s famous 1738 Aldersgate conversion experience where his heart was “strangely warmed.”\(^6^7\) A hymn written by brother Charles captures the conversion, framed by the theological premises of salvation and doxology that marked much of their ministry.

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,
and sing my great deliverer’s praise?\(^6^8\)

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In the years following 1738, the Methodist movement spread, especially among people who had been hit hard by the industrial revolution, as they found hope in Wesleyan theology and worship, as well as the Methodist concern for social reform. Worship, marked by fervent preaching and spirited singing (in contrast to the reserve of Anglican worship), took place in massive open air gatherings (in part because the Wesleys were denied access to “their” Anglican churches). In the beginning, Methodist Anglicans supplemented their accustomed worship with preaching missions that included stories of personal salvation and communal singing, and Charles, “responding to the need for texts to be sung, became the tireless writer of new hymns for the Methodist renewal movement.” During his lifetime, Charles wrote over nine thousand hymns and poems. Wesleyan scholar Teresa Berger remarks that the hymns of Charles Wesley had a greater influence than John’s sermons and writing. In 1795, following the death of John Wesley, the Methodist church formally broke ties with the “mother” Anglican Church. “Thus, Methodism became the largest new church . . . in modern times, instead of the Anglican renewal movement it was meant to be.”

Today, Methodism claims members in every corner of the globe, found in such countries as Ghana, Sri Lanka, Chile, Malaysia, Singapore and Peru. When the United Methodist Church (with headquarters in the United States) was formed in 1968, a union of

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69 Berger, 65.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

The Methodist Church and the (US) Evangelical United Bethren Church, it had a membership of approximately eleven million and espoused “theological traditions steeped in the Protestant Reformation and Wesleyanism.” In 2007, statistics reported eight million members and adherents, the second largest Protestant Church in the United States (the largest is the Southern Baptist). The influence of the Wesleys can be seen in *The United Methodist Hymnal*, and what is called “connectionalism,” a concept “central to Methodism from its beginning.” Connectionalism, Methodists note, is expressed

[through] our clergy appointment system, our mission and outreach and through our collective giving. We live out our call to mission and ministry by engaging in ministry with the poor . . . creating new places for new people and renewing existing congregations, and developing principled Christian leaders.

Methodist congregational song is set within the framework of praise. “John Wesley’s preaching found an indispensable complement in the hymns of his brother Charles . . . and bequeathed to Methodism what Wesley called in the preface to their 1780 hymnbook ‘a little body of experimental and practical divinity.’” An examination of the hymns of Charles (and John) Wesley reveals a profound commitment to doxology. The hymns of Charles Wesley have been pivotal to the Methodist community’s expression of faith – “the heart and soul of these communities may be found not in normative dogmatic practices, but rather in

73 The Canadian congregations of the Evangelical United Brethren became part of The United Church of Canada in 1968.


75 The Wesleys’ output occupies almost 10% of *The United Methodist Hymnal*, with 5 hymns from John, and 51 hymns, 8 poems, and 6 liturgical responses from Charles.

76 United Methodist Website.

doxological traditions and their practice.”⁷⁸ Perhaps this why the hymn “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing”⁷⁹ is known as the Methodist church’s *leitmotif*, with its thanks for conversion, its acknowledgement of Jesus Christ as the source of salvation, and its call for all of God’s people, whatever state, to proclaim God’s goodness. “An ideal of Methodist theological reflection [is] a theology that can be sung.”⁸⁰ A brief look at a selection of the Wesley hymns illustrates some of the central theological themes:

- **Soteriology** is at the heart of the Gospel: Jesus is the saviour, all atoning lamb, lover of all souls.

  O for a heart to praise my God,
  a heart from sin set free,
  a heart that always feels thy blood,
  so freely shed for me.⁸¹

- **There is a personal awareness of sin:**

  O love divine, what hast thou done!
  The immortal God hath died for me!
  The Father’s co-eternal Son
  bore all my sins upon the tree.
  Th’immortal God for me hath died:
  My Lord, my Love, is crucified!⁸²

- **Salvation is universal, extended to all:**

  All praise to our redeeming Lord,
  who joins us by his grace,
  and bids us, each to each restored,
  together seek his face.⁸³

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⁷⁸ Berger, 24.

⁷⁹ “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, #57, v.1. Text: Charles Wesley. It appears as the first hymn in this 1989 hymnal edition, just as it is traditionally found as the first hymn in all Methodist hymnbooks. (The first 54 pages of *The Hymnal* are devoted to liturgies of baptism and eucharist).

⁸⁰ Berger, 24.


• Salvation is also personal:

    And can it be that I should gain
    an interest in the Saviour’s blood!
    Died he for me? who caused his pain!
    For me? Who him to death pursued?
    Amazing love! How can it be
    that thou, my God shouldst die for me.\(^{84}\)

• Salvation can be “heaven on earth,”\(^{85}\) realized eschatology in the believer’s life:

    Love divine, all loves excelling,
    joy of heaven, to earth come down;
    fix in us thy humble dwelling;
    all thy faithful mercies crown!
    Jesus, thou art all compassion,
    pure, unbounded love thou art;
    visit us with thy salvation,
    enter every trembling heart.\(^{86}\)

The theological foundations of the Wesleyan hymns are clear, as is their doxological framework. What is not as clear is an explicit reference to mission. A quick look at the Methodist repertoire reveals many hymns about personal salvation and few about reaching out to the poor.

    Depth of mercy! Can there be
    Mercy still reserved for me?
    Can my God His wrath forbear?
    Me, the chief of sinners spare?
    I have long withstood His grace,
    Would not hearken to His calls,
    Grieved Him by a thousand falls. \(^{87}\)

    Give me the faith which can remove

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\(^{83}\) “All Praise to Our Redeeming Lord,” Ibid., #554, v.1. Text: Charles Wesley.

\(^{84}\) “And Can It Be,” Ibid., #363, v.1. Text: Charles Wesley.

\(^{85}\) Berger, 140.


and sink the mountain to a plain;
give me the child-like praying love,
which longs to build thy house again;
thy love, let it my heart o’er power,
And all my simple soul devour.\textsuperscript{88}

Even so, we are cautioned by Paul Westermeyer to remember that Wesleyan hymns are about what God has done in Christ, and that justice is there with God, who is holy and just, who heals the sick and leads the blind.\textsuperscript{89} The holiness practised by the Methodists included social activism as well as personal piety. The Wesleys made friends with the poor, pleaded their cause, and wrote poems to celebrate those whose lives were models of justice.\textsuperscript{90} As well, the passionate preaching and enthusiastic singing that marked the open air gatherings of the evangelistic worship services brought hope to the masses of people who came to hear good news. “The Wesleys discovered in hymns a poetically and musically remembered faith, a means to digest and take God’s message of self-giving love into the streets and fields to everyone.”\textsuperscript{91}

Many of (Charles) Wesley’s poems were born out of conflict, crisis, violence, oppression, and opposition, and are still timely today. They have spread all over the world wherever people suffer, rejoice, and worship, for their message of self-giving love, as Wesley experienced it in Christ, redeems the time and those who sing them. The questions he was asking all his life are the questions we are asking today.\textsuperscript{92}

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\textsuperscript{88} “Give Me the Faith Which Can Remove,” \textit{The United Methodist Hymnal} #650, v.1. Text: Charles Wesley. Within the section “Called to God’s Mission,” there are no Wesley hymns, but a note to “see further” directs the worshipper to this selection.


\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 57.

\textsuperscript{91} Kimbrough, “Wesleyan Song and Mission,” 111.

As well, Teresa Berger points out that Charles Wesley’s hymns were intensely biblical – “Wesley, the poet, speaks the language of Scripture as if it were his mother tongue,”93 and in Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, people of faith find a God who is concerned with the salvation of the whole creation, and revealed in Jesus Christ, who proclaimed good news to the poor and the dispossessed. Also implicit in scripture is that God is one to be praised: again, we return to the language of doxology and its effect on the lives of people of faith. “The service (i.e. worship) of God and the service of humankind are related to each other . . . . One cannot exist without the other, neither can one replace or neutralize the other.”94 Although it may not be explicit in the Wesleyan hymns, the sense of mission and joy in the work of the Lord is spelled out in other hymns found in Methodist hymnbooks. Take, for example, these words from two well known Methodist hymns:

O Master, let me walk with Thee  
In lowly paths of service free;  
Tell me Thy secret, help me bear  
The strain of toil, the fret of care.95

We are not here to play. to dream, to drift,  
We have hard work to do, and loads to lift.  
Shun not the struggle, face it, ‘tis God’s gift.  
Be strong! Be strong!96

For Methodists, it would follow that a thankful, grateful person would be evangelical, wanting to share the good news and live in the joy of the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ as they went about doing good.

93 Berger, 81. She comments further that in the nine stanzas of the abbreviated version of “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing,” over twenty references to Scripture can be identified.

94 Ibid., 169.

95 “O Master, let me walk,” Methodist Hymn and Tune Book, #376, v.1. Text: Washington Gladden. The 1918 “official” Methodist Hymn and Tune Book would have been used by most Canadian Methodists prior to church union.

96 “We are not here to play,” Ibid. #387, v.1. Text: Dr. M.D. Babcock.
The Publication of *The Hymnary*

Canadian Methodists were prominent in the talks that led to United Church union in 1925, and for some former Methodists, it was perhaps the fear of losing the sense of joy in mission hymns and songs that brought them and former Presbyterians into sharp conflict over the 1930 publication of *The Hymnary*, the United Church’s first hymnbook.\(^9\) Former Presbyterians were accustomed to seeing and singing metrical settings of the psalms as the first pages of their pre-union *Book of Praise*; for former Methodists, “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing,” was the only way to begin their *Methodist Hymn and Tune Book*; the Congregationalists sang “O Worship the King” from the first page of their pre-union *Congregational Church Hymnal*.

One could only imagine how the (former) Methodists felt at the 1928 United Church General Council on seeing the first draft of *The Hymnary* in which the metrical psalms were placed at the beginning of the collection (making it look suspiciously like a Presbyterian hymn book). What else might have been changed or lost?

An examination of the former denominational hymn books as well as *The Hymnary*, however, reveals not a great deal of difference in the treatment of mission hymns. To begin with, the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregational books all contained the so-called missionary anthem “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains.” As well, they all contained a selection of what might be called “mission hymns” as well as “gospel songs.”

Within the Methodist book, there were three sections that might be classified as mission oriented: Missions (#271-298); Evangelism (#299-351); and Social Service (#352-

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408). Each comprised solemn, sturdy hymns such as “O Master, Let Me Walk With Thee” as well as rollicking favourites like “We’ve a Story to Tell the Nations”\textsuperscript{98} and “Blessed Assurance.”

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!  
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!  
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,  
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.  
This is my story, this is my song.  
Praising my Saviour all the day long.  
This is my story, this is my song.  
Praising my Saviour all the day long.\textsuperscript{99}

Within \textit{The Presbyterian Book of Praise} were found hymns of Discipleship and Service (#231-245); The Gospel (#120-156); and Missions (#430-458).\textsuperscript{100} Again, there is the same mixture of gospel hymns such as “Ninety and Nine” (#134) and more traditional, common metre hymns such as the following:

O that the Lord’s salvation  
Were out of Zion come  
To heal his ancient nation,  
To lead the outcasts home!\textsuperscript{101}

In the Congregational \textit{Hymnal} were found such mission hymns as “Christ for the World We Sing,” “Saviour, Sprinkle Many Nations,” and “O Spirit of the Living God . . . descend on our apostate race.”\textsuperscript{102} Mission hymns were also found in sections that differentiated “Mission Hymns” (#562-592) from “Mission to the Jews;” “Colonial Missions; “Home Missions; and “Departure of Missionaries.”


\textsuperscript{101} “O That the Lord’s Salvation,” Ibid., #442, v.1. Text: H.F. Lyte.

The greatest dissatisfaction with the draft of *The Hymnary* came from the lack of gospel hymns that could be deemed missional. It would seem that the Committee on Worship and Ritual, responsible for *The Hymnary*’s publication, made arbitrary decisions in picking and choosing which of the gospel hymns would make it into the new resource. They chose songs by Ira Sankey, but not by Fanny Crosby; “Work, for the Night is Coming” from the Presbyterian repertoire, but not “We’ve a Story to Tell Nations” from the Methodist, nor “Yet There is Room” (tune by Sankey) from the Congregationalist. The issues around *The Hymnary* were complex, no doubt exacerbated by conflict around United Church union itself.¹⁰³ In the end, it seems that the heat generated over *The Hymnary* was engendered not so much by denominational anxiety, but by the decisions and choices made by the Committee on Worship and Ritual and especially by its editor, Alexander MacMillan.

Fanny Crosby’s “Blessed Assurance,” for example, may have been popular with pre-union Methodist congregations, revivals, and camp ground meetings that reached out with good news to the poor, but it was not destined to appear in *The Hymnary*.¹⁰⁴ Its evangelical fervour, combined with its rousing text and tune, did not sit well with the Committee which preferred texts matched with tunes that were “reverent, strong, and simple, and worthy to provide a strong and devotional foundation for congregational praise.”¹⁰⁵ United Church music historian Bruce Harding comments on the bias of both committee and editor:

> There are numerous important factors which shaped the contents and format of *The Hymnary*. There is a . . . “high

¹⁰³ Only 71% of Presbyterians chose to become part of The United Church of Canada. In parts of the country, especially the Maritimes, there was strong opposition to union, resulting in some divided churches and even divided families. In contrast to the former Methodists, the muted response from the former Presbyterians to the draft of *The Hymnary* may be, in part, attributed to these “troubles.”

¹⁰⁴ Years later, it was chosen to appear in *Voices United* (#337).

church” mentality on the part of the Committee [which] resulted in the battle over the “good old tunes” and gospel repertoire . . . [and] a colonial mentality [which] led to a preference for what was new and exciting in the mother country over distinctly Canadian repertoire. All of these facts . . . can be largely attributed to its secretary, Dr. Alexander MacMillan.106

A former Presbyterian, MacMillan also prepared the 1918 Book of Praise for the Presbyterian Church in Canada. His presentation of the first draft of The Hymnary to the 1928 United Church General Council evoked angry reaction from former Methodists, many of whom would have been “less than enthusiastic about a Presbyterian being in charge of this enterprise.”107 Although MacMillan believed in basing the hymnody on the traditions of the three uniting churches as well as honouring the music of the universal church, the committee made a clear distinction between lower and middle-class hymnody, and at least one member of the hymnbook committee “was not particularly anxious to perpetuate the more exuberant aspects of Methodism’s frontier past.”108

Following the General Council presentation, the draft was referred to presbyteries for comment. Reaction was swift and not complimentary. Some of it came in the form of letters to the New Outlook magazine, the precursor to the United Church Observer, as well as correspondence to the committee and even to the Moderator of the United Church. An excerpt


108 Professor S.P. Rose in Clifford, 40. However, in addition to The Methodist Text and Tune Book, Methodists used many other hymn collections in schools, homes, and Sunday schools, and existing popular gospel anthologies at campground meetings and revivals. They may have been sources for some of the beloved Methodist hymns such as “Softly and Tenderly” (#494) and “O Christ in Thee my soul hath found” (#482) that did not actually appear in the 1928 draft of The Hymnary but were added later. Neither of the two hymns came from any of the “official” pre-union denominational books.
from one letter illustrates the passion evoked by the omission of many beloved Methodist hymns:

Really, I am more than anything concerned about some of the great hymns that have been the glory and joy of my parents and grandparents . . . they put into song so powerfully what we have been taught to be of priceless worth . . . . I believe our Branch of the Church can only bring its contribution to the glory of the United Church in its own way, through its own spirit, its own interpretation of the Gospel, and its own spiritual traditions. I believe that these have been built up by means of our songs as well as by preaching, and that we should retain the hymns that have had the most powerful influence in our development as a church.109

The letters and other feedback produced some revisions to the content of *The Hymnary*, and eventually the controversy died down. However, there are still some who doubt whether *The Hymnary* was truly able to capture the “evangelical fervour of the Wesleys,”110 as in the following assessment.

In producing the 1930 *Hymnary*, much of the energy was directed towards synthesizing the traditions of the three founding denominations. In retrospect, however, the musical results of church union largely favoured the Presbyterian influence . . . in virtually all respects, the new hymn book looked like a revision of the 1918 *Book of Praise*, lending a strong Presbyterian character to congregational music in the new church.111

Even so, the doxological legacy passed on by the Wesley heritage cannot be denied. Wesleyan favourites such as “Love Divine,”112 O for a Thousand Tongues,”113 and “Jesus,

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109 Letter from W. L. Tuttle to Alexander MacMillan in Harding, 29. United Church of Canada Archives, Toronto, Correspondence re *The Hymnary*, Acc. 82.209C - Box 2 - File 11.

110 *The Hymnary*, Preface, vi.

111 Harding, 251. The Presbyterian domination, however, is not so obvious in relation to mission hymns and missional gospel songs. It seems that all three (former) denominations might have had cause to complain about the omission of certain gospel songs from their tradition.

United by Thy Grace”¹¹⁴ have been sung in the United Church since union and are still well loved by congregations today. Theologically and liturgically, (former) Methodist hymns continue to call the faithful to God’s mission.

**Case Study: The Peace and Justice Songs of the Iona Community**

Along with the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church in Canada was an important part of United Church union in 1925. With its Reformed roots, it brought with it a strong tradition of preaching and scriptural analysis. The Iona Community, affiliated with the Church of Scotland, comes from that Reformed tradition, and its worship is very dependent on the Word (and words) in scripture, song, and sermon.¹¹⁵ As well, the community’s songs speak to its passion for peace and justice, a passion shared by The United Church of Canada today. The Iona Community’s repertoire has become an important part of the United Church’s worship life and is represented in both *Voices United* (19 hymns, chants, and service music responses) and *More Voices* (14 hymns and shorter songs).¹¹⁶

Iona is a small island off the west coast of Scotland, a place of white, solitary beaches, deep blue waters, constant wind, and a destination for thousands of tourists and pilgrims each year. Iona is also home for sheep farmers and guest house owners; and it is the

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¹¹³ “O For a thousand Tongues.” Text: Charles Wesley. *Methodist Hymn and Tune Book* #1; *The Hymnary* #41; *The Hymn Book* #48; *Voices United* #326.

¹¹⁴ “Jesus, United By Thy Grace.” Text: Charles Wesley. *Methodist Hymn and Tune Book* #528; *The Hymnary* #373; *The Hymn Book* #255; *Voices United* #591.

¹¹⁵ Although the worship services in the Iona Abbey church often use symbolic actions, they are still heavily dependent on words spoken or set to music.

¹¹⁶ Credited to the work of John L. Bell or The Iona Community.
heart of the Iona Community, “a fellowship of almost 200 members, mostly in Britain, and 1500 Associate Members, with 1400 Friends worldwide.”  

The story of Christianity on the island goes back to the time of St. Columba, who left Ireland for Iona in 563 CE. He founded a community whose monastery became a centre of mission, hospitality, and a place of pilgrimage throughout the British Isles and beyond. The Island of Iona was known as a sacred place where kings of Scotland (14), Ireland (4), and Norway (8) were buried. The community continued for four hundred years after Columba’s death in 597 when it petered out, largely because of Viking raids at the end of the ninth century. In 1203, the Benedictines were asked to establish a new community on Iona; they built a stone monastery on the site of the Columban foundation, but during the Reformation, the Iona monks dispersed, and the abbey buildings fell into disrepair. In 1899, the Duke of Argyll gave the ruins of the Abbey and the Nunnery to the Church of Scotland, and by 1910, the Abbey Church was restored, although the other buildings were in ruins.

The present community acknowledges its debt to history in this way:

We are inheritors of the Celtic tradition, with its deep sense of Jesus as the head of all, and of God’s glory in all of creation. So we use prayers from the Celtic Church for welcome, for work, and in expressing the needs of the world. We are inheritors of the Benedictine tradition, with its conviction that “to work is to pray,” its commitment to hospitality, and its sense of order, all reflected in our services and our lifestyle. And we are the inheritors of the tradition of the Reformers, with their evangelical zeal, [and] their call to commitment . . . .

117 “The Iona Community is,” Coracle, October/November, 2008: 1. Membership was listed as 200 in the Coracle, but has since increased and is now at nearly 300. From a conversation with Community Leader Peter MacDonald, October 19, 2011.


The contemporary Iona Community was born from a sense of mission and continues with a sense of mission. It was founded in Glasgow in 1938 by the Rev. George MacLeod in the context of the poverty and despair of the Depression in Glasgow where he was minister of Govan (Church of Scotland) Church. In 1935, MacLeod made a proposal to the Iona Trustees for the restoration of the Iona Abbey buildings by a community that would comprise building tradesmen (from Glasgow) and theological students who would learn from one another. In this way, he would reach out to the men of Govan by giving them employment and would also teach theological students something about ministry in that “thin place.” He joked that the builders would teach the students how to work, and the students would teach the workers how to pray. In 1938, MacLeod took the first group to Iona, and a community that worked and worshipped together gradually emerged.

The work on the Abbey was finally completed in 1967. Following the restoration, the community that began as a “brotherhood,” devoted to the training of Presbyterian ministers, gradually changed into an ecumenical, international group of lay and clergy men and women, committed to a life style that linked personal religious obedience and action for social and political change. The Isle of Iona continues to be the spiritual heart of the community and its place of pilgrimage, but the community that began with a vision to rebuild the Abbey still continues today, working for social change and congregational renewal from their base in Glasgow and in other areas around the world. Their work is described this way:

Members’ involvement varies according to the area they live in and their individual circumstances, but it is clear that

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120 “George MacLeod often referred to Iona as a ‘thin place’ where ‘only a tissue paper’ separates the material and spiritual world.” Nancy Cocks, Invisible We See You: Tracing Celtic Threads Through Christian Community (Ottawa: Novalis, 2006), 12.

121 Among the members and associates are a number of Christian affiliations including Presbyterian, Anglican, Methodist, Roman Catholic, and Quaker.
across the community there is an unwavering commitment to peace and justice, reflected in many types of activity, from quiet peacemaking in our neighbourhoods and families, to political lobbying and nonviolent opposition to weapons of mass destruction.

There are also member-led groups working on: justice and the integrity of creation (opposing nuclear weapons, campaigning against the arms trade and for ecological justice); political and cultural action to combat racism; action on local and global poverty and justice; issues in human sexuality; and the deepening of ecumenical dialogue and communion.

There is a network of members engaged in inter-religious dialogue, and a Council-appointed group considering theological issues.122

Although members of the Iona Community live by “The Rule” and the disciplines of prayer, study, and social action, the renewal of congregational worship is one of their goals, and worship forms an implicit base for community life.123 When family groups meet in Glasgow or London, they use the daily office found in The Iona Abbey Worship Book and The Iona Community Prayer Book; when community members gather for political action, they do so within a context of prayer and song; when visitors or volunteers become part of the community for a week or three months, they take part in worship two or three times a day. Worship and work have always formed the basic rhythm of the Iona Community.

The Iona Community was challenged by founder George MacLeod to recover the “essential grandeur” of Reformed worship.124 As well, the Celtic sense of the presence of

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123 The Iona Community Prayer Book (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2010), 1, spells out the five-fold Rule: daily prayer and Bible reading; sharing and accounting for the use of resources, including money; planning and accounting for the use of time; action for justice and peace in society; meeting with and accounting to each other.

124 Hawn, 200.
Christ in all of life and the reality of the Trinity have become essential parts of community worship.

Today I awake and God is before me  
At night as I dreamt, he summoned the day . . . .

Today I arise and Christ is beside me  
He walked through the dark to scatter new light . . . .

Today I affirm the Spirit within me  
At worship and work, in struggle and rest . . . .

Within the context of Reformed worship, with its emphasis on the Word in scripture and preaching, music plays a vital role; it also frames the lives of Iona Community members in their passion for peace and justice. Following a demonstration against British nuclear submarines at the Faslane Naval Base, for example, one of the members wrote:

We took the Iona Office, Norman Shanks leading us in the responses . . . . and the rain pelted down, and “the quality of mercy was not strained,” as the police cars arrived and the wonderful band of drummers broke into a thunderous drumming of joy, and peace-makers began to dance . . . . We sang together as people of Civil Resistance: “no more Trident over me!”

At worship on the island of Iona, singing undergirds the service of Morning Prayer, as well as the evening liturgies. The congregational songs are often challenging and mission oriented. Many of the songs of the Iona Community have been developed by the Wild Goose Resource Group (WGRG), or Wild Goose Worship Group as it is also known, originally a group of sixteen volunteers dedicated to worship renewal, today consisting of four people

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125 Iona Abbey Worship Book (Glasgow: Wild Goose publications, 2000), 191, vv. 1, 2, 3. This hymn was probably written by John L. Bell, but the community is dedicated to musical creation as a collaborative process, and the songs and hymns in the Iona Community’s major worship book have no author identification.

126 George Charlton in Neil Paynter (ed), This is the Day: Readings and Meditations from the Iona Community (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2002), Month 4, Day 1.

127 The wild goose, an ancient Celtic symbol for the Holy Spirit, has been adopted by the community as their “logo.”
(including an administrator) who lead workshops in all parts of the world and experiment with liturgical renewal from their home base in Glasgow. They work for the restoration of congregational singing; study of the Bible in light of contemporary needs; and prophetic insight, along with an awareness of the experience of injustice. The songs from the Iona Community offer “a rare combination of poetic realism and awe-filled mystery. The result is disturbing, discomforting, and disquieting.”

The peace and justice songs of the Iona Community, many of them written by John Bell, but also by other members, are noted for their sharp and provocative lyrics.

When the son of God lay dying, long ago,
some played dice and some knelt crying, lost and low.
Cynics sneered and wagged their tongues,
mockers mimicked funeral songs:
this, while God’s own Son was dying,
long ago.

Humankind repeats Golgotha every day:
God gets gagged while friends and followers turn away.
Profit threatens peace on earth,
greed to hunger gives new birth
as the world repeats Golgotha
every day.

About this particular hymn, Bell and co-author Graham Maule comment: “Good Friday is the time when we realise that, despite the centuries which intervene, the world still exhibits an uncanny ability to recrucify Christ in the personal and corporate failures to do justly, love

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128 Hawn, 220, 221.

129 Other members include Anna Briggs, Douglas Galbraith, Kathy Galloway, Ian Fraser, and Graham Maule.

130 “When the Son of God Lay Dying,” The Courage to Say No (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 1996), 35, vv.1,4. Also found in Voices United, #153. Text: John Bell and Graham Maule. The version in Voices United was copyrighted in 1988 and does not contain the verse about God being gagged. Presumably it was added as the hymn was used over the years and then revised in this 1996 publication. The process of writing and rewriting over a period of time is often used by the Wild Goose Resource Group.
mercy and walk humbly with God.”

Another WGRG song addresses injustice in the world and God’s call for response, this time in the form of a lament:

Inspired by love and anger,  
disturbed by need and pain  
Informed by God’s own bias,  
we ask him once again:  
‘How long must some folk suffer?  
How long can few folk mind?  
How long dare vain self interest  
turn prayer and pity blind?’

God asks ‘who will go for me?  
Who will extend my reach?  
And who, when few will listen,  
will prophesy and preach?  
And who, when few dare follow,  
will walk the road I show?’

Not only are the texts provocative: sometimes the musical settings are as well. In many cases, the musical settings are written by John Bell and match the words wonderfully. “Ride On, Ride On,” for example, evokes the parade on Palm Sunday; its rhythmic ostinato accompaniment and intense drawn out vocal line bring to mind both the cheering and the jeering in the biblical narrative. At other times, the words are set to tunes that seem paradoxical (as in the text cited earlier).

Inspired by love and anger,  
disturbed by need and pain,  
Informed of God’s own bias,  
we ask him once again:  
‘How long must some folk suffer?  
How long can few folk mind?  
How long dare vain self interest  
turn prayer and pity blind?’

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131 Ibid., 35.


133 “Ride On, Ride On,” Voices United #126.

134 “Inspired by Love and Anger,” Common Ground #63.
The words of the song are about peace, justice, victims of greed, and prisoners of wealth.

They are set to the tune “Sally Gardens,” an Irish folk song.\(^{135}\)

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\begin{verbatim}
Down by the Sil- ly gar- dens My love and I did meet. She passed the Sal- ly
gar- dens with lit- tle snow white feet. She bid me take love eas- sy, As the
leaves grow on the tree. But I, be- ing young and fool- ish, With her did not a- gree.
\end{verbatim}
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The folk song is about unrequited love: “Love and Anger” is about unrequited justice.

Another unusual pairing is “Hymn of the Passion” and the tune QUEM PASTORES.\(^{136}\) The text is about the journey from the palms to the passion:

- Jesus, donkey-carried treasure . . .
- Jesus, man of God neglected, Jesus, God in man rejected,
  Crucified and unprotected: It is finished!” shout and die.\(^{137}\)

The tune, written by Praetorius in the sixteenth century, comes from a Latin Hymn “Quem Pastores Laudevere” in which shepherds praise the one who has been born the king of Glory. The text about Jesus, mocked, rejected and unprotected is in sharp contrast with the tune that evokes tender adoration of a future king.

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Finally, consider “The Servant,” a paraphrase of Isaiah 53: 1-6.

Who would ever have believed it?
Who could ever have conceived it?

Like a sapling in dry soil,
He was rooted in our presence;
Lacking beauty, grace and splendour,
No one felt attracted to him.138

The text is set to AE FOND KISS, a Scottish traditional tune, best known in conjunction with a poem by Robert Burns.

Ae fond kiss and then we sever;
Ae farewell, and then forever;
Deep in heart-wrung tears I’ll pledge thee,
Warring sighs and groans I’ll wage thee.139

The words of “The Servant” are about the suffering of the One whose death and resurrection transformed the world. The music is also a lament and a love song, but it evokes a sensibility that seems to be at odds with the Isaiah passage. Bell and Maule give no reason for the unusual pairing of text and tune. Perhaps the pairing carries no particular significance, except

that the folk tunes would be well known in certain parts of the world; perhaps it indicates a mischievous turn of mind on their part. But for those who are aware of the musical context (or subtext), the discrepancy between the words and music brings home even more forcefully the discrepancy between what is and what is hoped for in the call to carry out God’s mission.

This study has opted to focus on the peace and justice songs of the Iona community, even while being aware that the community’s music repertoire also includes refrains and short songs of response and acclamation, scriptural proclamation, and social commentary. But the peace and justice songs of Iona are central, because they underline the importance of proclamation through text and tunes that inspire and call people to action. As well as inspiring action, the songs can influence attitudes and behaviour.

John Bell has spoken and written about the connection between the songs we have sung (and still sing) and the attitudes we assume, particularly in relation to the colonial mindset of the mission hymns of the 19th and early 20th century. In a lecture given at the University of Newcastle in 2001, Bell described a “Black Sambo” figure in his childhood Sunday School used to collect money for missions. He noted:

> adults could swell their voices in such sublime verses as “Let the Indian, let the Negro, let the rude barbarian see that divine and glorious conquest once obtained on Calvary” . . .

indeed, the unchallenged sentiments of . . . the missionary songs popular in the early 20th century may – in retrospect – be seen as contributory to the overt and covert racism still extant in 21st century societies.141

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140 The refrains and responses have been valuable in worship renewal, even if it is ironic that they have been added within the context of George MacLeod’s desire to renew the “essential grandeur” of Reformed worship.

The WGRG now includes global songs in its collections partly to counteract the church’s colonial past, but mainly “out of the desire to be in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed around the globe.”

It has consciously worked at making songs and prayers from the global church part of its public witness both to our incorporation in the body of Christ, and our need to express visible and audible solidarity with those elsewhere in the world whose joys and sorrow we are called to share.

In its theology of God’s glory and Christ’s incarnation, so central to Celtic spirituality; in its work and worship; and its desire to reach out to the world through its songs, prayers, and justice concerns, the Iona Community plays a significant role in bringing to the attention of people of faith a vision of God’s intentions for a redeemed creation. The community’s liturgical resources of songs and prayers have also been important to United Church of Canada hymn resources and congregations, as has its emphasis on the renewal of congregational song, an undertaking shared by United Church worshippers.

**Case Study: The Publication of More Voices**

With fifty of its 225 selections from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, *More Voices*, published by the United Church in 2007, seeks to bring to congregations a greater awareness of the gift of global song and its contribution to the church’s practice of mutuality in mission. Since many of the selections are short refrains and responses, they are easily used within worship, although there is a danger that music directors may use the short songs and responses as exotic tags, ignoring the possibility of integrating longer global hymns into the liturgy. The publication of *More Voices* also illustrates the role of hymnbook

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142 Hawn, 206. John Bell, in particular, has travelled around the globe, collecting, collating, and arranging songs from Africa, Asia, and Latin America (as well as North America).

143 Bell, 138.
supplements in the church’s liturgical life and the opportunity supplements provide for communities of faith.

United Church Hymnbook Supplements

Like vitamin “supplements” taken to ward off colds and promote better health, hymn book supplements in the United Church have often added to the vigour, health, and flavour of congregational singing.

More Voices is one in a long line of hymn book supplements in the history of United Church worship. The role of such supplements . . . goes back to our beginnings and addresses the ongoing challenge to balance established and emerging musical, liturgical, and theological developments in each generation.144

Supplements to The Hymnary, The Hymn Book, and Voices United have not, of course, been the only musical resources cultivated by the United Church. There was music published to support Christian Education resources, especially the “new curriculum” of the sixties.145 As well, the Committee on Education for Mission and Stewardship, part of the United Church’s Division of Communication, published musical resources to accompany mission studies.146 Notable among the supplements developed for specific purposes were Songs for Little Children (1937) and The Canadian Youth Hymnal (1939). But perhaps most influential were Songs of the Gospel (1948), a supplement to The Hymnary, and Songs for a Gospel People (1987), a supplement to The Hymn Book, both of which impacted the connection between mission and congregational song. The publication of Songs of the Gospel in 1948 may have

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145 “Simon, Simon,” Voices United #597. Text: Robert McLean, was part of the kindergarten curriculum he wrote in 1964.

146 “Sing and Celebrate!” Nancy E. Hardy, ed., recording and accompanying music leaflet was one such resource, developed in conjunction with a mission study celebrating the 50th anniversary of The United Church of Canada in 1975.
co-incided with a resurgence of evangelism in Canada and the United Church, but
undoubtedly also indicated the remaining degree of dissatisfaction with the omission of many
beloved gospel songs from *The Hymnary*.\(^\text{147}\) In 1946, a memorial from British Columbia
Conference to General Council asking for the publication of a collection of gospel hymns
forced the Committee on Church Worship and Ritual to take the dissatisfaction seriously.\(^\text{148}\) A
sub-committee was formed to deal with the issue. It “presumably chose to pass the project on
to a private firm, and Gordon V. Thompson (of Toronto) seemed a natural choice.”\(^\text{149}\) *Songs
of the Gospel* restored such “old favourites” as “Blessed Assurance” and “Just As I Am” that
had failed to make the grade in the making of *The Hymnary*.

*Songs for a Gospel People* (1987), a supplement to the 1971 *Hymn Book*,

was conceived out of a growing sense of need for renewal of
congregational singing and a vision of new directions which
that renewal might take . . . a vision of how this might
happen was glimpsed by those of us who stood under the
yellow and white striped canopy of the worship tent at the
6th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in
Vancouver in the summer of 1983.\(^\text{150}\)

Much like the publication of *Songs of the Gospel*, *Songs for a Gospel People* came to
fruition from the initiation of the western United Church conferences and the co-operation of
an outside publisher, in this case Wood Lake Books, “a leading religious publisher and
distributor in this country [Canada].”\(^\text{151}\) The compilers of *Songs for a Gospel People* had a

\(^{147}\) Harding, 142, draws attention to the interdenominational Youth for Christ movement, as well as the
United Church Moderator’s Crusade for Christ and his Kingdom in the mid-forties.

\(^{148}\) ROP, 12th General Council, 1946, 57-58.

\(^{149}\) Harding, 145.

\(^{150}\) “Forward,” *Songs for a Gospel People*.

\(^{151}\) “A Proposal to Develop and Publish a Supplement to *Voices United*.” Minutes of the Executive of
vision of a resource that would be ecumenical, inclusive, and “faithful in great issues of justice and peace in the world.” Among its 134 selections are chants from the Taizé Community, songs from the world church, as well as other songs that articulate the compilers’ vision.

When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you there?
When I needed a neighbour were you there?
And the creed and the colour and the name don’t matter Were you there?

Many of the songs made their way into *Voices United* as well as laying a foundation for the mission emphases of *More Voices*.

*More Voices* (2007) was published as a supplement to *Voices United* (1996). Its goal was “to help United Church congregations continue to sing their faith ‘lustily and with good courage’” and to “continue on the path prepared by *Voices United*.” To that end, the proposal to the General Council Executive, approved in 2004, listed as its aim the inclusion of “Canadian content” in theology, language and composition; music for youth and young adults; world music; diverse instrumentation and arrangements; chants and choruses. Once the work started, the development team added more goals: to learn from the Aboriginal community; to include contemporary Christian repertoire; and to include more short songs and refrains. In addition, the team was careful to note its theological framework: to balance the

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152 *Songs for a Gospel People*, Foreword. The vision was set out by editor R. Gerald Hobbs, along with Helen Hobbs, Darryl Nixon, and Ralph Milton.


154 From a PowerPoint presentation “Meet the *More Voices* Development Team,” by the *More Voices* Development Team (June, 2006). Reference is made to “John Wesley’s Directions for Singing, IV,” *Voices United* #720, as well as the introduction to *More Voices*.

155 Minutes of the Executive of General Council, April 23-26, 2004,100.
God/Jesus/Spirit language; balance “we” and “me” songs; increase mindfulness to creation; be sensitive to images of light and darkness; and sometimes push the “edges” of both right and left.\textsuperscript{156} Once again, as in the publication of \textit{Songs of the Gospel} and \textit{Songs for a Gospel People}, an outside publisher was involved, this time a collaborative effort between the United Church Publishing House and Wood Lake Publishing Inc. The collaboration made the project possible in a time of staff and fiscal restraints.

There are many songs in \textit{More Voices} that might be classified as mission songs, with their concern to reach out to a hurting world and encouragement for people of faith to do the same. They include care for creation, interfaith dialogue, and the call to peace and justice. But in connecting congregational song and the mission of the church, \textit{More Voices} is perhaps most effective in its inclusion of a variety of global songs with their enactment of mutuality in mission.

\textbf{The Gift of Global Song}

The concept of mutuality in mission expands the meaning of mission from telling and doing to telling/listening and doing/receiving. “Partners on both sides develop a deep sense of appreciation for each other’s beliefs, culture, traditions, and limitations, and share the God-given resources and experiences with one another . . . .”\textsuperscript{157} One way of sharing “God-given resources” is through the gift of global song that “provides the means, the substance by which Christians of diverse cultural expression may relate to one another.”\textsuperscript{158} Thinking globally in song can also mean recognizing an expanded theological framework that encompasses the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[156] \textit{More Voices} PowerPoint presentation.
\end{footnotes}
Incarnation, Creation, and the Holy Spirit. A brief look at More Voices reveals how its selections may fit into such a framework.

Looking at the Incarnation from a global perspective means understanding that God came in Christ for all of humanity, not just for one part of the world or the other. “The wonder of incarnation is too significant to relegate to a single world view. The more we see how others view God’s unique gift to us, the more we understand the gift of salvation.”\textsuperscript{159} And so, using More Voices, we can sing a resurrection hymn from Japan:

When a grain of wheat, into the ground has fallen,
into the cold ground, and lies in waiting for the spring,
and lies in waiting for the spring;
this fallen grain will rise to life,
this fallen grain will rise to life!\textsuperscript{160}

or a response from Jamaica, recalling Jesus in the wilderness:

Me alone, me alone in-a the wilderness.
Forty days and forty nights in-a the wilderness.\textsuperscript{161}

Singing songs from the world church also helps to foster a more diverse and complete picture of God’s creation, blessed by the power of the Holy Spirit. “Singing globally is a concrete step that moves us from Babel to Pentecost.”\textsuperscript{162} From the Philippines, there is a song of thanksgiving for creation:

Lord, your hands have formed this world,
every part is shaped by you.
Water tumbling over rocks,
air and sunlight each day’s signs
that you make all things new.\textsuperscript{163}

\textsuperscript{159} C. Michael Hawn, Halle, Halle: We Sing The World Round – Songs from the World Church for Children, Youth, and Congregation (Texas: Choristers Guild, 1999), 4.

\textsuperscript{160} “When a Grain of Wheat,” More Voices #125. Text: Toyohiko Kagawa, trans. Frank Y Ohtomo.

\textsuperscript{161} “Me alone,” More Voices #118. Traditional song, Jamaica: arr. Patrick Pescod.

\textsuperscript{162} Hawn, Halle, Halle, 4.

\textsuperscript{163} “Lord, Your Hands have Formed,” More Voices #181. Text: Ramon and Sario Oliano, Philippines.
From China, thanks for the gift of the Spirit:

Holy Spirit, you’re like the wind,
blowing gently above the trees;
where the wind blows, the flowers bloom,
where the wind blows, there is life.
May it blow, O blow o’er me;
I pray that it shall never cease.
Holy Spirit, you bring the springtime,
like muted flowers fragrance outpour.164

Finally, the songs of the world church can provide an eschatological vision of God’s redeemed creation. In spite of poverty, violence, and ravages of war, the joy and hope of people of faith from the so-called “Third World” have much to teach North American brothers and sisters. From Latin America, worshippers are

Sent out in Jesus’ name,
our hands are ready now
to make the world the place
in which the kingdom comes.165

while from Africa, we have the assurance that

As long as we follow in the way that God is leading,
we know God’s reign will surely come.
We know this, we know this,
yes, God’s reign will surely come.166

Similarly, songs from Africa, Latin America, or Asia can also help to expand our theological understanding – our sense of thanks and celebration in knowing that we are surrounded by God’s Spirit, and that we are loved by our liberating God who has come to us


165 “Sent out in Jesus’ Name” More Voices, # 212. Traditional song, Cuba. Trans. Jorge Maldonado.

166 “As Long As We Follow,” More Voices #140, v.1. Text and Tune: Joseph Kabemba, Congo.
in Jesus Christ and is with us in our joy and in our suffering. The songs can also provide a sense of mutuality as we pray and sing with others around the world.

But do we really learn to share and care for others in the world simply by singing African responses to our prayers, and by adding drumming to our hymn accompaniments or bamboo flutes to our benedictions? How can we sing with integrity that takes us beyond musical tourism, even musical colonialism? The United Methodist Church provides leadership to church communities in addressing some of these questions. As part of its world outreach ministry, it encourages global song and has shown consistent commitment to its development through the Global Praise Program of the Board of Global Ministries. The program began in 1993, and each year it convenes a Global Praise Working Group of authors and composers from around the world to share songs, plan publications, and design conferences to encourage the singing of global songs by local congregations. Participants have included Pablo Sosa from Argentina, I-to-Loh from Taiwan, Per Harling from Sweden, Ludmilla Garbuzova from Russia, and Patrick Matsikenyiri from Zimbabwe. Growing out of this work, S.T. Kimbrough Jr., staff person for the Global Praise program, offers some clues for the use of global songs:167

- Honour another culture and song by respecting the language and musical style, and by providing the best possible singable translations and paraphrases that are true to the original text.

- Make sure the theological framework of the song has integrity. “It matters tremendously what we sing. The theology of song is of vital importance! One of the frustrations regarding global song is that churches born in mission and now writing

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their own songs tend to reproduce the theology they learned from their mission forebears. That may be good or bad.”168

- It is important to develop leaders who can be sharers, users, and teachers of global song. “In almost all Christian traditions, it can be said that song is a commentary/interpreter of faith . . . it is in the interest of all Christians to deepen their spirituality through the faith born in the song of all peoples.”169

One of the strengths of *More Voices* and its presentation of global song lies in its use of original languages, along with a pronunciation guide, as well as some direction for authentic accompaniment. Guitar chords are included where appropriate, and accompaniment is left out when the genre of the song calls for it.170 Sometimes, there are performance suggestions that also give some background. The footnote to “Alleluia” #52, reads “A traditional song among the descendants of African slaves in Uruguay. Try it with guitar accompaniment and with maracas and other percussion.” *More Voices* has made a good start with some of its performance suggestions, but it might have been helpful to have included more contextual notes, particularly with the global songs.171 If this were not possible, an accompanying website might have given music leaders a broader base from which to present the new resources. When songs from many parts of the world are presented with care and

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168 Ibid., 107. Kimbrough cites an African church leader who stressed the need for peace in Africa and then asks “Where are the African songs of peace? . . . . Have Africans tended to duplicate the gospel song emphases of mission, which have often not had songs of peace and justice advocacy in their repertoire?”

169 Ibid., 109.

170 This is particularly true with Asian songs: e.g. #181 – “Lord, Your Hands Have Formed.” Michael Hawn points out that “much traditional Asian music is monophonic, using only a single melodic line,” and that with African music, “using percussion instruments is not optional. The hands and body are percussion instruments as well.” Hawn, *Halle, Halle*, 6, 7.

171 In some of the Iona Community’s Wild Goose Resources Group collections (e.g. *Many and Great*), there are a few lines at the bottom of each page that set out the context of each global song.
integrity, worship becomes more exciting, and the worldview of the worshippers is enlarged. In the process, mutuality is enhanced and our worship life becomes enriched by others whose names we do not know, but whose faith we share.

Reflections

This chapter began by marking out some “milestones in mission” in the history of United Church mission, providing an institutional framework for an examination of congregational songs as they relate to mission. The framework has pointed to some general questions: have the songs been biblically based, theologically sound, and historically aligned with biblical and theological precepts? Have they been valuable liturgical resources in enabling people of faith to question, challenge, and act on what they believe, or have the songs simply reinforced prevailing cultural attitudes?

The same questions might also be asked more specifically about singing within The United Church of Canada itself. As an ecclesial body, the United Church’s theological view of mission was set out at union in 1925. In some ways, it has not changed much over the years, although the colonial view of being chosen by God to bring light to the dark corners of the world has certainly shifted. The United Church would probably still understand mission as the heart of the Christian church, “a way of life and a theological response to what we have been given.”172 The call to follow Christ, recorded in scripture and experienced in relationship, would still be central in congregations and church courts, as would the “call to

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172 Personal definition of mission as suggested at p.17. Since the United Church is congregational in practice, it is difficult to define what all the members would subscribe to. However, since the church is also conciliar, it is possible to describe what the United Church believes by looking at its history and official documents which are formed after much consultation on congregational, presbytery, conference, and General Council levels.
do good to all men [sic].”173

At the same time, the way of carrying out mission has changed radically. The mandate “to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations”174 has been tempered by the insights of the Commission on World Mission, with its call for interfaith dialogue and understanding. The United Church has worked to address its record of colonialism with First Nations communities, and an important first step was the Apology to First Nations peoples, with its admission of cultural imperialism and blindness to First Nations’ spirituality. And the church’s complicity in the “creation of poverty, oppression, and environmental destruction in the world” has been detailed in the “Partnership” report.175 The ecclesiastical response to God’s call seems to be constantly evolving. Has congregational singing done the same?

On the one hand, it has. The global music of More Voices, with its invitation to mutuality, is a far cry from the Euro-centric contents of The Hymnary. The peace and justice songs of the Iona Community, many of which are found in contemporary United Church music resources and favoured by a multitude of congregations, challenge and encourage people of faith to live justly in partnership with people of all faiths in all parts of the world, espousing values set out in the Partnership Report.176 And the doxological heritage of Methodism, one of the founding faith traditions of the United Church, continues to inform the sense of love and thankfulness of the hymn repertoire, and encourages the faithful to “help to see in each a friend, each other’s cross to bear, let all their friendly aid extend, and

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173 “Basis of Union” 2.20.
175 Partnership Report, 10.
176 Ibid., 9. The values listed are mutuality, reciprocity, trust, and transparency.
feel the other’s care.”

On the other hand, as the church continues to evolve in today’s intercultural, multi-faith context, there is a continuing need to develop congregational songs that reflect new understandings of living in right relationship with one another and in the world. If the church is serious about its relationship with First Nations congregations, for example, attention also needs to be paid to their musical heritage. The 1986 apology, with its admission of being closed to First Nations’ spiritual gifts, is one indication of the extent to which First Nations’ spirituality has been ignored. How might the musical resources of the United Church rectify that omission?

In the same vein, if the church is serious about acknowledging Canadian (and United Church) complicity in “the creation of poverty, oppression, and environmental destruction in the world,” there will be room in the hymn repertoire for more confession and lament, not only about the state of the world, but also about our part in it. As well, there would be a place for “assurances of pardon,” hymns that encourage and acknowledge faithful people who “seek justice” even while they are walking humbly with their God and one another. (Micah 6:8)

Finally, if the church is serious about interfaith relationships, this will be reflected in the songs that acknowledge “the other,” and songs that acknowledge our relationship with “the other.” More Voices has made a start: “You Are My Father” uses a traditional Sikh liturgical text and tune, with directions for authentic accompaniment. Two interfaith

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177 “Jesus, United by Your Grace,” Voices United #591, v.2. Text: Charles Wesley.

178 This question will be addressed in the Conclusions to this study.

179 Partnership Report, 9.

180 “You are My Father,” More Voices #105. Traditional Sikh liturgical text: trans. Singh Sahota.
hymns acknowledge common faith roots: “Hope of Abraham and Sarah,” and “In Star and Crescent.”

From time to time, United Church members have raised concerns about existing mission hymns. In 1960, in a letter to the editor of The United Church Observer, the Reverend John Morris called for change, looking for “new mission hymns which realistically mirror our time . . . [that] will not distinguish too much between the ‘heathen’ overseas and the folk at home . . . will not expect the Kingdom to come so easily or absolutely . . . “

These concerns had already come to the attention of the Committee on the Revision of the Hymnal, and were included in their presuppositions. In an examination of The Hymnary, the committee had come to the conclusion that recognition of our growing awareness of the Church as God’s people sent on a mission into the world is almost confined to such sections as Fellowship and Service, and National and International Life, while the section on mission clearly reflects a period during which it was still possible to make a neat geographical distinction between Christian and non-Christian nations. It is becoming increasingly difficult, in this era of rapid change, to recognize the world described by some of our hymns.

At about the same time, United Church Observer editor A.C. Forrest, responding to the radical changes to mission proposed by 1966 The Commission on World Mission’s

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183. These were presuppositions created by the committee prior to being joined by Anglican participants, leading toward the subsequent publication of the 1971 Anglican-United Church Hymn Book. The presupposition articulated above was removed from the revised presuppositions after the Anglicans joined the conversation.

184. Minutes of the Joint Committee on the Revision of the hymnal, September 12-14, 1967. United Church Archives 85.046C-1.
presentation to the 22nd General Council, noted “operative words” like ecumenical co-operation, ecumenical orientation and dialogue, and little or no emphasis on proclamation, winning, or persuading. From his correspondence, Forrest was able to articulate some of the concerns of people in the congregations: “Someone asked whether . . . we should abandon the singing of some of our missionary hymns and get new ones. He was quickly assured that this was the case, and that the Hymnary committee was preparing for such changes.”

The calls for hymns that would articulate a new mission consciousness, as well as reflect ecumenical, interfaith co-operation were joined in 1980 by requests for the use of inclusive language in hymn and other worship resources. In these areas, changes were made, ranging from new hymns in *The Hymn Book*, to inclusive language in *Voices United*. It is, perhaps, a sign of a healthy church that as questions continue to be raised, changes may occur in the hymn repertoire, albeit often more slowly than one might wish.

Over the years United Church hymn writers, musicians, and hymnbook committees have worked to produce “new mission hymns which realistically mirror our time,” while also encouraging the singing of heritage hymns that provide a legacy of doxology, peace, and justice. As each new generation heeds the call to God’s mission, one can only hope that it will also answer the call to provide new liturgical resources.

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185 A.C. Forrest, editorial, “Radical Change in Mission,” *The United Church Observer*, October 15, 1966, 10. It is interesting to note that in the June 1, 1968 edition of *The Observer*, F.H. Wilkinson and Richard H.N. Davidson, co-chairs of the committee responsible for the publication of *The Hymn Book*, wrote a brief letter to the editor saying that the committee was still looking for new hymns, among them hymns on “the Church in the World.”

186 ROP, 28th General Council, 1980, 779-780. Memorials asked for revisions to *The Hymn Book* and even a new edition of *The Hymn Book*, saying that “exclusive masculine imagery of God and masculine terms referring to the children of God are inconsistent with our theology.”

187 Frederik Kaan, in particular, contributed many new hymns with themes of peace, justice, and stewardship in *The Hymn Book*. 
CHAPTER TWO

“Will You Come and Follow Me?”

The Transforming Power of Congregational Song: Personal and Communal Responses

The preceding chapter described the United Church’s particular contribution to God’s call to mission in Canada and around the world. Mission, however, is not only an institutional response to God’s call: it can also involve a life-changing personal response, especially for members of a faith community. Many of us who are (or have been) pastors have had the experience of preaching for a congregation that sits, quiet and respectful (sometimes looking bored) through our sermons, and then after singing the hymn that follows, suddenly becomes a joyful, responsive group of men and women, alive with faith and commitment. What happens between the quiet and the animated response? I would suggest it is the singing. If the hymn is inspiring, perhaps chosen with care to reflect the scriptural and theological basis of the sermon, it can lead people to an encounter with the living God; it can also open up the meaning of that encounter and lead to transformation.

Music, especially congregational song, is an indispensable part of Sunday liturgy. “Music can create receptivity of heart to attune what God may be speaking.” Congregational songs can articulate the Word; they can be essential components of the liturgical ordo; and they are crucial in building community attuned to God’s mission. As the worshipping assembly sings together, it can be transformed. This kind of transformation, of course, is not only confined to music in worship. Whether at a baseball game, a political rally, or an event focused on a particular concern, songs can unite a group and strengthen the cause. Through singing, attitudes and behaviour can be changed.

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1 Voices United #567, v.1. Text: The Iona Community.

2 Don Saliers, Music and Theology, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 70.
As rescue work became reconstruction work in the days and weeks following the 2010 Haitian earthquake, staff from the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF - Doctors Without Borders) noticed that “a curious sound rose from the fractured concrete and twisted metal – singing.”

For MSF psychologist Reine Lebel, singing became a way of dealing with traumatic events, and she encouraged musicians who had lost loved ones in the earthquake to write about their grief and to share it in song. In this way, they gave voice to both their fears and hopes and led their compatriots in a process of transformation. Lebel enlisted four young men to form a group she called *Troubadours D’espoir* (Troubadours of Hope), and with the staff, the Troubadours wrote songs that had clinical content (e.g., how to keep disease down by keeping latrines clean) as well as articulating what they’d been through. “People would start singing, dancing and clapping, huge crowds formed with many joining in . . . Singing actually helps with pain. It releases endorphins in the brain and eases suffering, both physical and emotional . . . singing and dancing is a way to access joy.”

For people of faith, singing can be both transformational and missional. It can be a way of accessing joy and thanksgiving as well as exploring and empowering response to suffering and injustice. Congregational songs can lead to new understandings of God and God’s world; as well, they can encourage changes in behaviour that might work for the good of the world.

**Foundations**

**Congregational Song as Primary Theology**

Congregational song can be transformative because it is primary theology, working at a deep level where the “singing and doing,” the experience of liturgy becomes most

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4 Ibid.
important in the expression of faith. Primary theology is rooted in the methodology of liturgical theology. Liturgical theologian Dwight Vogel explains: “the term ‘liturgical theology’ is sometimes restricted to systematic or dogmatic reflections on the content of belief. When asked what the generative source and basic reflection of belief is, however, we may be pointed to the liturgy.”

In other words, there is an important sense in which the foundations of theology are found in the liturgy itself. Worship is, in this sense, theologia prima, primary theology. Liturgy is about enacting, doing theology rather theological discourse. Liturgical theologian Gordon Lathrop is one who understands worship as primary theology, where worshippers come to understand and experience God and the Church’s faith through what they do in liturgy: “to see what the assembly actually says about God [italics mine], go into the gathering place.” Worshippers enact the liturgy and come to understand faith as they read or hear the Word preached, participate in the sacraments, pray, and sing in the name of Jesus.

Moreover, theologian Aidan Kavanagh says that “the liturgy of faithful Christians is the primary theological act of the Church itself.” He reminds believers that Presence, not faith, drew Moses to the burning bush, and that creeds did not produce baptism; rather, baptism gave rise to Trinitarian creeds. For Kavanagh, liturgy as primary theology is an ongoing process of experience, memory, and reflection by real people in real, changing circumstances. Secondary theology, on the other hand, is discourse about liturgy,

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8 Ibid., 92.
formulations of doctrines and expressions of faith. It involves study, interpretation and analysis.

Kavanagh’s distinction between the primary theology of liturgical action and the secondary theology of discourse and analysis has been challenged by others who suggest that when worshippers come together, “they participate in a liturgical rite that itself has been shaped and honed by secondary theological reflection . . . .”9 Whether or not we agree with Kavanagh’s distinction between primary and second theology per se, what is important to appreciate is the centrality of liturgy in how the church comes to understand and encounter God’s mystery in Christ. As Kavanagh puts it, just as the human community does not just use a language but is the language it speaks, so the Christian church does not just use a liturgy: it is the liturgy by which it worships.10

A similar argument might be made concerning congregational song. Congregational song, when used in worship, can function as primary theology. Liturgical theologian and musician Don Saliers describes sung theology as prayer, proclamation, and the imaginative exploration of religious belief. “Hymns are . . . the bearers of images that are both the theological content and experiential patterns of faith and affection.”11 Congregational songs set specific biblical, liturgical, and doctrinal claims about God to melody and harmony.12

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10 Kavanagh, 97.

11 Saliers, 36.

12 Ibid., 20.
Wesleyan scholar Teresa Berger points out that as primary theology, many hymns are genres of doxological speech, and that there is a marked difference between theological and doxological language: “both doxology and theology are statements of faith that assume faithful response to the saving acts of God.”\(^\text{13}\) Theological reflection uses scholarly language, while doxology is the “explicit and implicit speech of praise, confession of faith, prayer, and thanksgiving directed to God for God’s glorification.”\(^\text{14}\) Theology and doxology have distinct goals, but coincide in their reflection and response to God. This is especially true with reference to congregational song: “when theological differences exist, people are often still able to sing and pray together.”\(^\text{15}\) It is important to remember that “a worshipping congregation sings, not as presentation or performance for someone else, but as a vehicle for its encounter with God . . . congregational song is theologically important.”\(^\text{16}\)

Thus, congregational songs or hymns are theologically important, but not necessarily systematic. Hymn writer Brian Wren observes a hymn cannot formulate a comprehensive systematic theology because that would require viewpoints to be elaborated, questioned and argued, something a hymn text in its poetic, epigrammatic form cannot do. “A hymn invites us, not to step back from faith and examine it, but to step into faith and worship God.”\(^\text{17}\)

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\(^{13}\) Berger, 171.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 17.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 23.


\(^{17}\) Ibid, 351.
However, most hymns do express a theological viewpoint. For example, the hymn “Take Up Your Cross” presents the viewpoint that discipleship means emulating the cross of Jesus.

Take up your cross, the Saviour said,
if you would my disciples be;
take up your cross with willing heart,
and humbly follow after me.  

Similarly, “He Came Singing Love” is a contemporary portrayal of God’s self-giving love in Jesus Christ who calls for our obedient response.

He came singing love
and he lived singing love;
he died singing love.

He arose in silence.
For the love to go on
we must make it our song;
you and I be the singers.  

Even as congregational songs can articulate theology, they can also reveal deep theological meanings within the liturgical ordo, as found in baptism and communion hymns. For example, “We Know That Christ Is Raised” summarizes the scriptural and theological basis of baptismal beliefs in an Easter mode. The text speaks of Christ, crucified and risen.

We know that Christ is raised and dies no more.
Embraced by death, he broke its fearful hold,
and our despair he turned to blazing joy.

Hallelujah!  

It also reminds us of the words of scripture regarding baptism and sets out the themes of salvation and resurrection succinctly and poetically.

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18 Ibid., 368.
22 Romans 6: 3, 4. “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we, too, might walk in newness of life.”
We share by water in his saving death;  
Reborn, we share with him an Easter life  
as living members of a living Christ.  
Hallelujah!\textsuperscript{23}

Similarly, within the liturgical \textit{ordo}, the communion hymn “We Gather Here,” welcomes everyone to the Table and presents an eschatological view where

\begin{quote}
We are now a family  
of which Christ is the head,  
Though unseen he meets us here  
in the breaking of the bread.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

In such singing, the assembly is reminded that Christ comes to bring living water and the bread of life to everyone.

The immediacy of the liturgy as theological act often escapes our notice . . . yet we are aware that in our corporate worship we are speaking to and about God.

We are engaging in sign-acts that manifest and embody the presence of God and transform us. The nature of this theological act is not restricted to the words we use (whether the language of Scripture, liturgical texts, or congregational songs), or the actions we perform, although it is embodied in them . . . without the primary experience, the secondary reflections are hollow.\textsuperscript{25}

In the primary liturgical experience of congregational song, people of faith can uncover deep theological truths about who they are and Whose they are, and in the singing, the worshipping assembly can encounter Holy Mystery. In this way, congregational songs become liturgy as primary theology and a means of transformation.

\textsuperscript{23} “We Know that Christ is Raised,” v. 2.

\textsuperscript{24} “We Gather Here,” \textit{Voices United} \#469, v.2. Text: Brian Jeffery Leech.

\textsuperscript{25} Vogel, 8.
**Congregational Song as Symbol**

Congregational song as primary theology can be transformative, first of all, through the use of symbol: with words that reveal several levels of being, and with music that enhances meaning. As well, the song itself can operate as a symbol of unity and affiliation.

Liturgical theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet argues that every discourse operates on two levels: as symbol, which becomes the foundation of identity and relationships (like a national flag); and as sign, which operates on the level of cognition and information (like a directional arrow). Religious symbols become foundational by offering access to the mystery of the Divine with “a character that points to the ultimate level of being, to ultimate reality, to being itself, to meaning itself.”

Symbols are transformative in that they can change our values by shifting our centre of awareness. They can help us discover new ways of understanding by operating on different levels of meaning. Water, for example, can be the liquid in a flowing brook or issuing from a gushing tap; it can also symbolize refreshment, nurture, or the life with God promised by Jesus to the Samaritan woman at the well. Light can illuminate dark corners; it can also symbolize knowledge, revelation, or openness. “What is distinctive to religious

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29 John 4:14.
symbolism is that it gives, or purports to give, religious insight.”30

Music as congregational song, psalmody, or sung prayer, can itself be a primary liturgical symbol for the gathered assembly. Just as the communion table can be a symbol of abundant life, and the baptismal font can be a symbol of dying and rising with Christ, “music has the potential to communicate to the worshiping assembly the challenge to live a fuller life with God in Christ.”31 This can happen at the local congregational or parish level, as the assembly gathers for worship each week. It also happens in particular religious communities, such as the Taizé Community in southeast France or the Iona Community in western Scotland.32

Within the musical resources of The United Church of Canada are many hymns that set out faith in symbols, demonstrating that “symbols, by their evocative power, arouse the imagination and invite participation. [They work by inducing] a kind of indwelling in the world of meaning to which it points.”33 In the hymn “In the Bulb There Is a Flower,” the singer is drawn into the meaning of resurrection and hope with a series of symbols of mysterious and transformative growth:

In the bulb there is a flower,
in the seed, an apple tree,
in cocoons a hidden promise,
 butterflies will soon be free!
 In the cold and snow of winter
there’s a spring that waits to be,
 unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.

30 Dulles, 143. It should also be acknowledged that many religious symbols are ambivalent. For example, water, symbol of life and source of new life promised by Jesus, can also be a symbol of death by flood or drowning. This ambivalence can be reflected in congregational songs as praise or lament.

31 Kubicki, 124.

32 A case study about the Iona Community was found in Chapter One; the Taizé Community will be described in this chapter, below.

33 Dulles, 257.
There’s a song in every silence,  
seeking word and melody,  
there’s a dawn in ev’ry darkness,  
bringing hope to you and me.  
From the past will come the future;  
what it holds, a mystery,  
unrevealed until its season,  
something God alone can see.  

Not all hymns, of course, are symbol based. Some simply repeat scripture without the deepening of meaning provided by symbols or poetic devices such as metaphor. Even though it might be argued that every congregational song can regarded as a symbol because the singing of the assembly is itself a symbol of unity, I would suggest that there is an intrinsic difference between hymns that are symbol based and hymns that are sola scriptura or knowledge based. Consider, for example, two hymns about the life of Jesus. The first, noted earlier, employs symbolism; the second does not.

He came singing love,  
and he lived singing love,  
he died singing love.  
He arose in silence;  
For the love to go on  
we must make it our song.  
You and I be the singers.

Jesus saw them fishing by the shore of Galilee,  
casting out their nets into the sea.  
Simon Peter, Andrew and the sons of Zebedee,  
waiting in their boats so patiently.  
And Jesus said, “Oh, come and follow me.  
Oh, leave behind your nets. I call you.  
Oh, come and fish with me,  
and your life will never be the same again.”

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34 “In the Bulb There is a Flower,” *Voices United* #703, vv.1, 2. Text: Natalie Sleeth.

35 Daniel J. Levitin, *The World in Six Songs* (Toronto: Viking Canada, The Penguin Group, 2008), theorizes that all the songs in the world can be divided into six categories: friendship, joy, comfort, knowledge, religion, and love.

The first hymn (“He came singing love”) captures the life, work, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the symbol of a song of love and offers his followers an invitation to carry on his love. The second hymn (“Jesus saw them fishing”) is a recapitulation of Jesus’ call to the disciples as found in scripture.\(^{38}\) Both are calls to discipleship, and although the second one is instructive and scripturally accurate, the first is, arguably, more evocative and an invitation into the deeper meaning, not just the fact of the Christ event.

As well, symbols are not confined to the text of liturgical song. Albert Blackwell asserts that music as “moulded sound” has the potential to bear sacramental meaning.\(^{39}\) Similarly, Kathleen Harmon says that “sounds reveal interiority in a way that our other senses cannot,” and that when people are brought together and united in song, “the tones themselves are the medium that bring about this change.”\(^{40}\)

Traditions of communal spiritual practice use a variety of musical sounds to awaken consciousness: the bell in Hinduism, the drum and cymbals in Buddhism, the Jewish shofar and trumpet. For Christians, the music of congregational song is a vehicle that has the means to comfort and convict, and to carry them beyond what the words alone signify. “Memorable music has a unique power to store memorable lyrics in memory for sustenance, spiritual growth, and recall in times of need.”\(^{41}\) Musicians or pastors often speak about going to

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\(^{38}\) Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20.

\(^{39}\) Albert L. Blackwell, The Sacred in Music (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 16. Blackwell also acknowledges the critique of Susan McClary who is suspicious of the claims of transcendent meaning in the sound of the music of composers like Mozart. 105 ff.

\(^{40}\) Harmon, 24, 28.

\(^{41}\) Wren, 381.
nursing homes where people suffering from dementia have heard a familiar hymn tune that worked on their consciousness and brought back words they thought they no longer had.\textsuperscript{42}

Blackwell calls attention to “music’s dark resources,”\textsuperscript{43} especially harmonic dissonance, which disturbs the singer and brings home the message more deeply than a simpler (and more familiar) diatonic melody undergirded by straightforward major or minor chords. Consider, for example, the hymn “Silence, Frenzied, Unclean Spirit,” an exposition of the Markan story in which Jesus healed a man possessed by demons.\textsuperscript{44} The dissonant harmonies and repetitive melodic line reinforce the text and symbolize the “demons of the mind” and the incoherent ramblings of the man “with an unclean spirit.” The music evokes the “frenzied, unclean spirit” and the cry from Jesus to “cease your rantings.”

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{music_score.png}
\caption{“Silence, Frenzied, Unclean Spirit,” Voices United # 620, v.1. Text: Thomas Troeger. Tune: Carol Doran. The music adds symbolic meaning to the text and captures the suffering of the possessed man who cried out for healing.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{42} When preparing Voices United, the editorial committee often referred to the need to include music that would be true to people’s “memory banks.”

\textsuperscript{43} Blackwell, 133.

\textsuperscript{44} Mark 1:21-28.

\textsuperscript{45} “Silence, Frenzied, Unclean Spirit,” Voices United # 620, v.1. Text: Thomas Troeger. Tune: Carol Doran. The music adds symbolic meaning to the text and captures the suffering of the possessed man who cried out for healing.
In addition to possessing “dark resources,” the music of a congregational song has the ability to work symbolically by enhancing and enlivening the text, and by conveying theological insights. There is no doubt that a good tune enhances and enlivens the text. The hymn “And Can It Be That I should Gain,” by Charles Wesley is traditionally set to SURREY (CAREY’S)\textsuperscript{46} or SAGINA.\textsuperscript{47} SURREY, as published in the 1930 *Hymnary* is as follows:

SURREY may have appeal because of its gentle nature, but SAGINA better carries the wonder of redemption through the atoning love of Christ. As the congregation sings

\begin{equation}
\text{A-maz-ing love! How can it be}
\end{equation}

the music rises with each phrase, reaching a climax at

\begin{equation}
\text{that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?}
\end{equation}

with the shape of the musical phrase reflecting the wonder of the believer.

\textsuperscript{46} “And Can It Be?” *The Hymnary* #276. Tune: Henry Carey.

\textsuperscript{47} “And Can It Be?” *The United Methodist Hymnal* #363. Tune: Thomas Campell.
There are, of course, other examples. PICARDY, with its initial rising minor scale and modal harmonies invites the singer into God’s mystery – “Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and with awe and reverence stand.”

As well as enlivening a text, music itself can be a source of theological reflection. Don Saliers calls hymns “theological miniatures, or lyrical theology,” while Brian Wren says “it is conceivable that a congregational song tune can express and generate theological insights.” He cites Victoria Sirota’s examination of “O Little Town of Bethlehem” that uses both FOREST GREEN and ST. LOUIS as possible tunes.

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49 Saliers, 36.

50 Wren, 355. Saliers also says that hymns and song can be essential to how persons conceive of God. “How Great Thou Art,” for example, expresses the viewpoint that God is experienced in awe and wonder. Saliers, viii.
FOREST GREEN is bright and singable, portraying the joy of the incarnation, but somewhat lacking in the ability to evoke the silence to which the carol also speaks.

![music notation]

ST. LOUIS, on the other hand, through its harmonies and melodic shifting from major to minor keys, “sets conflicting feelings of fear, awe, and yearning that would be present for those actually witnessing the entrance of Christ on earth.”

![music notation]

Thus, there are various ways in which symbolic function is an important element in the transformative process of singing. “By engaging in symbols, by inhabiting their environment, people discover new horizons for life, new values and motivation.”

Congregational song can itself operate as a symbol of unity and affiliation; hymns can reveal different levels of meaning through symbols within the text; and the music can draw worshippers into mystery in an ecclesiastical culture too often dominated by words.

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51 “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” Voices United #64. Tune at #518: English traditional melody.


53 “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” Voices United #64. Tune: Lewis Henry Redner.

54 Dulles, 136.
But how can we prove that they work? Dulles argues that experience is key. He acknowledges that although “validation of symbolic knowledge is notoriously difficult,” experience is a valuable clue.

What cannot be empirically verified [however] may be capable of experiential validation. The most powerful index of reality will frequently be the sense that the pattern of meaning corresponds not only to the symbols that brought it into focus but to a vast multitude of clues drawn from the totality of experience. . . . Religious teachings . . . are confirmed when they motivate their adherents to live up to their own highest ideals.55

Congregational singing is one area where experience has validated symbolic knowledge as singers have been motivated “to live up to their own highest ideals.” One criterion for validation might be the ability of the hymn to endure. Hymns that have passed the test of time have pointed and continue to point singers to missional values that reinforce actions and attitudes of love, praise, service, and justice.56 In the United Church’s hymn repertoire, for example, are missional hymns that come from the 1925 uniting churches and are still sung today. There are a number of hymns from Isaac Watts of the Congregational Church, including “Jesus Shall Reign.”57 From Methodist Charles Wesley are many examples, including “Jesus United By Your Grace,”58 while the Reformed tradition is represented by

55 Dulles, 259.
56 At the same time, it should be acknowledged that some hymns have persisted in spite of real life, where values of peace and justice have been observed more in the hoping than reality. Perhaps the value of such hymns lies in their persistent theological vision for the church and people of faith.
57 “Jesus Shall Reign” Voices United, #330; The Hymn Book, #164; The Hymnary, #249.
58 “Jesus United by Thy Grace,” Voices United, #591; The Hymn Book, #255; The Hymnary, #373.
Calvin’s “I Greet Thee, Who My Sure Redeemer Art,”⁵⁹ and by the many metrical and responsive psalms in all three hymn books.⁶⁰

Another criterion might be the ability of the hymn to connect with important events of history. In the southern United States, the anti-discrimination protest marchers of the 1960s found courage in the songs of African-Americans who, in their slavery, had already found a liberating God in the gospel and had turned those lessons into music.

The freedom songs of South Africa similarly united and galvanized forces in the fight against apartheid. In 1978, Anders Nyberg of Sweden took a choir of young people to South Africa to sing and learn songs from black South Africans. They experienced apartheid, learned freedom songs from the anti-apartheid movement, and upon return to Sweden, sang the songs in Swedish churches.⁶¹ The South African Freedom Songs were incorporated into the Swedish hymnal, sung at the meeting of the Lutheran World Federation in Budapest in 1984, and spread rapidly around the world. “The publication and recording of these songs was significant in anti-apartheid awareness in Europe.”⁶²

As well, the hymn “Bless and keep us, God”⁶³ is a prayer that the church not be separated – within itself, from creation, and from God. It and other hymns like it were part of the demonstrations that played a large part in bringing down the Berlin wall, as East German Christians gathered to demonstrate for peace and freedom with their candles, prayers, and

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⁵⁹ “I Greet Thee,” Voices United, #393.

⁶⁰ It should be noted that a separate section for psalms in United Church is found in only Voices United and The Hymnary.

⁶¹ Selections were published in the United States in 1984 as Freedom is Coming (Chapel Hill, NC: Walton Music).


hymns. “It was perhaps most significantly used in 1989 by East German congregations in Leipzig just before they went into the streets to march for peace and freedom.”64

One should not underestimate the significance of experience as validation of the missional efficacy of congregational song.

The Language of Congregational Song

While symbols are important within all liturgical traditions and operate both within and as congregational song, the function of language within hymnody is equally important, especially for churches within the Protestant traditions.

Words have always been important in The United Church of Canada, whether found in the reading of scripture, the preaching of sermons, or the singing of hymns. Perhaps this is because as a church in the Reformed tradition, United Church liturgy has traditionally focused heavily on the Word. Although in Christian worship, the normative liturgical ordo may be Word and Table, the Eucharist is not celebrated every Sunday in many United Churches. But there is almost always a sermon.65

The importance of words has also been set out in United Church polity: in 1980, as part of a debate about inclusive language, the 28th General Council of the United Church acknowledged the significant connection between words and actions by admitting that “whereas changes of language alone will not affect changes in attitudes and actions, it is

64 Leonard Lythgoe, commentary on #596, Voices United Music Leaders’ Edition (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1997).

65 Emphasis on the United Church’s preaching ministry is found in the Church’s founding documents. Article XVII of the Doctrine section of “The Basis of Union”: “Jesus Christ, as supreme Head of the Church, has appointed therein a ministry of the word and sacraments, and calls men and women to this ministry.” The “training for the ministry” section that follows stresses the importance of preaching: where the candidate has a BA, followed by three years of theological education - “before ordination, every candidate shall spend twelve months in preaching and pastoral work,” or in cases where the BA degree is unattainable, “two years’ preaching under the supervision of a Presbytery,” The Manual, “The Basis of Union:” II - Training for the Ministry 10.3.1,2.
unlikely that attitudes and actions will be altered significantly without an accompanying change of word patterns.66

The relationship between words and actions has been explored by performative language theorists and philosophers, notably J.L. Austin, who reminds readers that not all words describe or report, but that “the issuing of the utterance is [sometimes] the performing of the action.”67 To say something can actually do something or cause something to happen. “I am at the meeting” is descriptive. “I adjourn the meeting” is more than descriptive: I am actually dismissing the participants. Austin’s work has been expanded by other performative language theorists such as Geoffrey Warnock and John Searle, but all agree that “utterances possess . . . the power to effect what is being stated.”68

Daniel Levitin expands the concept of performative language as he notes the symbiotic relationship between music, language, and action.

> We write songs to teach our young, as in alphabet songs and counting songs. We write them to encode lessons that we’ve learned and don’t want to forget, often using metaphor or devices to raise the message up to the level at which art meets science (rather than simple observation), making it at once more memorable and more inspiring . . . . 69

Even a cursory examination of performative language theory suggests a strong relationship between speech acts, i.e. “words that act” and congregational songs. Austin describes five different kinds of speech acts: **verdictives**, which assess; **exercitives**, which

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66 Minutes of the Executive of the United Church’s General Council, November 17-20, 1981, referring to action of the 28th General Council.


69 Levitin, 177.
urge and advise; *commissives* which promise or commit; *behavitives*, which allude to attitudes and social behaviour, e.g. apologizing or commending; and *expositives*, which use words in a particular way, e.g. I reply, I argue.70

Writers of transformative hymn texts will likely find commissive words most helpful, along with the behavitive ones, because those categories pertain to commitments, attitudes, and social behaviour. Austin gives examples of such commissive words as “promise, undertake, covenant, bind myself,” while “commending, thanking, and blessing” are examples of behavitive words.71 The words we sing are important, as they often reinforce what we believe. “It is a fair assumption,” says Brian Wren, “that . . . uses of language express what the speakers really think and match how they behave.”72

Austin’s theories can be helpfully applied to congregation songs. Consider the following commissive hymns. The first promises companionship and covenant.

> We are pilgrims on a journey,
fellow travellers on the road;  
we are here to help each other 
walk the mile and bear the load.

> I will hold the Christ-light for you  
in the night-time of your fear;  
I will hold my hand out to you, 
speak the peace you long to hear.73

The second promises a lifestyle that follows God’s way.

> I’m gonna live so God can use me  
anywhere, Lord, anytime. (repeated)

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70 Austin, 152,3.

71 Ibid.


I’m gonna work so God can use me anywhere, Lord, anytime. (repeated)\textsuperscript{74}

The efficacy of chanting is also an example of how behavitive congregational singing can lead to a change of attitude and behaviour. “It is in the process of repeatedly articulating these ‘right attitudes’ that transformation can be effected. In other words, singing praise or thanksgiving, contrition or forgiveness has the ability to form the singers in those Christian attitudes.”\textsuperscript{75} Through repetition of the simple words, along with mantra-like music, the following chant predisposes the worshipper to an attitude of penitence, especially when performed liturgically in an act of confession.

\textsuperscript{74}“I’m Gonna Live,” Voices United #575, vv.1,2. Text: African-American spiritual.

\textsuperscript{75}Kubicki, 125. Saliers, 61, says that singing enacts praise, thanks, sorrow, and lament.

\textsuperscript{76}“Senzeni na?” More Voices #66. Text: Zulu –“What have we done?” See p.2, “The Beat that Beat Apartheid.”
Wren comments further about the power and performance of language to influence behaviour and actions: “though language does not determine how we think, it shapes and slants thinking and behaviour.”\(^77\) Words can start people marching in the streets and stir others to stone marchers.\(^78\) Levitin adds that music as language has the power to move us “because of the way that medium and meaning combine in song, the combination of form and structure uniting with an emotional message.”\(^79\) Words and music that work together can become powerful experiential symbols of transformation.

**Metaphorical Language**

While congregational songs can be transformative with words that enact faith, they can also be transformative through the use of poetic imagery, especially metaphor, which Wren has called “the most significant form of God-talk.”\(^80\) A metaphor is a way of describing something using a different object to clarify and intensify, often altering the original in the process. “A metaphor . . . tells us something new about reality.”\(^81\) Metaphors add new dimensions to the text by generating new insights and appealing to the senses and imagination. They are potentially useful for theological discourse, for metaphors do not attempt direct descriptions, but suggest meaning through an association of ideas.\(^82\) “God is

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\(^78\) Ibid., 75.

\(^79\) Levitin, 13, quoting Pete Seeger.

\(^80\) Wren, 87.

\(^81\) Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theology: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 53. Ricoeur speaks of the tension between the two elements that come together (e.g. mantle of sorrow) and that we should not speak of the metaphorical use of a word, but rather “the metaphorical utterance.” As “utterance,” metaphor is ideally suited for liturgical language.

\(^82\) Janet MacDonald, “Music as a Legitimate Metaphorical Theological Language.” (BA thesis: Canterbury Christ Church University College, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, 2003), 7.
not literally the ‘Good shepherd’ for example, but the metaphor highlights qualities about
God which cannot be described literally.\textsuperscript{83}

In the following text, hymn writer Thomas Troeger offers a fresh understanding of
our preparation for worship through the use of metaphor.

\begin{quote}
As a chalice cast of gold,
burnished, bright,
and brimmed with wine,
make me, God, as fit to hold
grace and truth and love divine.
Let my praise and worship start
with the cleansing of my heart.\textsuperscript{84}
\end{quote}

Here, we not only look forward to taking the cup at the Table; we have the possibility of
becoming the cup, brimming with potential and filled with God’s grace and love. The chalice
is transformed into the human containing possibilities for encounter with God’s mystery and
the resulting discipleship. Wine, a symbol of the earth, “brims” the chalice and promises new
life in Christ.

The use of metaphor can also expand our understanding of God and the Church, as in
the following text.

\begin{quote}
You call us out to praise you,
the God who gave us birth,
to gather in communion,
and treasure your whole earth;
we are your living story,
to hear and to be heard;
we praise your name, who writes us, the author and the word.

For varied hues and textures,
new patterns, still you search,
to weave your seamless garments,
the fabric of your church;
our tattered faith you cherish,
reclaim from wear and moth;
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid, 8.

\textsuperscript{84} “As A Chalice Cast of Gold,” \textit{Voices United} #505, v.1. Text: Thomas Troeger.
We praise your name who twines us,  
the weaver and the cloth.85

In subsequent verses, the author praises God the baker, the healer, the singer. The whole hymn is replete with images which stir the imagination and extend our understanding of God and the Church today.

Liturgical theologian Gail Ramshaw describes how metaphorical language creates a new reality: “by seeing something old or new in terms of something else, metaphor changes everyone’s perception from that time forward.”86 She uses what she calls the “yes-no-yes” hermeneutical method in analysing the function of metaphor in liturgical speech. The first act is to apply biblical criticism in an effort to describe the indescribable in terms that people today would understand – a yes.87 The second is to realize the inadequacy of any metaphor to describe the ineffable – a no. “Yet, finally, to be the community that meets weekly to praise God, we take the third step. Yes – this is the language we use to name truth . . . to claim that worshippers ‘believe in the Bible’ means that they take to themselves the biblical metaphors for God, for the human self, and for human community, and so form themselves into an assembly around Christ.”88 However, Ramshaw also warns us that it is important for metaphors to be hospitable to the community and symbolically accessible in order to work

85 “You Call Us Out,” Voices United #569, vv.1, 2. Text: Anna Briggs.


87 Ibid., 175. In her analysis, Ramshaw uses as an example a historical-critical method to analyse the use of the word rock in the Bible (from the image of God as rock to its symbol in the incarnation and its reference to Jesus as rock, Peter as rock, the Church as rock, etc.).

88 Ibid., 176.
and function: “they shouldn’t need footnotes.”\textsuperscript{89} For Ramshaw, all speech about God requires metaphor – “metaphor illumines and intensifies.”\textsuperscript{90}

In the following hymn, Brian Wren uses a number of hospitable and accessible metaphors to expand our understanding of God beyond the traditional naming of God as king, male, powerful, and all-knowing.

\begin{quote}
Bring many names, beautiful and good 
celebrate, in parable and story, 
holiness in glory, living, loving God. 
Hail and hosanna! Bring many names!

Strong mother God, working night and day 
planning all the wonders of creation, 
setting each equation, genius at play: 
Hail and hosanna, strong mother God!

Warm father God, hugging every child 
feeling all the strains of human living, 
caring and forgiving till we’re reconciled: 
Hail and hosanna, strong father God!

Old, aching God, grey with endless care, 
calmly piercing evil’s new disguises, 
glad of good surprises, wiser than despair: 
Hail and hosanna, old aching God! \textsuperscript{91}
\end{quote}

The metaphors in this hymn provide new names for God, giving the singer fresh, new insights while critiquing commonly held stereotypes (women are weak; men are cold and remote; elderly people are nervous and useless). To recall Ramshaw again, the metaphors effectively illuminate and intensify the image of God.

To such observation, we can also add that cultural context is important. God as shepherd may be a beloved biblical metaphor, but many people today have never seen a

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{90} Gail Ramshaw, \textit{Treasures Old and New: Images in the Lectionary} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 30.

shepherd (or sheep!) and have no concept of what he or she does. But while searching for new and relevant metaphors may be admirable, care needs to be taken. An urban person might wish to praise God, “our caring streetcar driver,” for example, but such a metaphor would not make much sense to someone who lives in the country and has no concept of a city dweller’s dependence on a streetcar driver for care and safety; likewise, what is significant to a rural person might not find resonance with a city dweller. Metaphors need to be both hospitable and commonly understood.

For good reason, symbolic and metaphorical language have become almost interchangeable in religious discourse: bread, for example, can be thought of both as metaphor and symbol. There is, however, a subtle difference between the terms. One way of differentiating them is to say that a metaphor is a way of describing something using a different object: God as weaver, father, or mother. A symbol is a way of clothing abstract concepts with meaning: light as a symbol of revelation or hope; apple seed as a symbol of growth; singing as a symbol of unity. “Barbed wire may be the twentieth century’s most enduring contribution to the language of symbolism.”

Barbed wire (symbol of imprisonment and oppression) surrounding a lighted candle (symbol of hope) is the instantly recognizable symbol and logo of Amnesty International.

Whether language is metaphorical or symbolic is perhaps not as important as the effect of language and its ability to make meaning deeper and clearer for the worshipping assembly and so assist its role in the process of transformation.

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92 Nancy Ruth Jackson in Harold and Patricia Wells, *Jesus Means Life* (Toronto: The Division of Communication (CEMS), The United Church of Canada, 1983), end matter.
Transformative Language

What is also important in the process of transformation is the use of language that is both inclusive and expansive. Language matters. Language and performance are inextricably linked, and as we have seen, the use of both metaphor and symbol can strengthen the ability of language to deepen understanding of faith. But language also has power – to exclude or include, to aid in expanding our perceptions of God, and to transform notions of leadership within the church and elsewhere.

*The Hymn Book* was published before the idea of inclusive language had become crucial, and it is full of hymns using language that is experienced by many to be exclusive. Imagine how it would feel to sing “Stand up, stand up for Jesus” if you could not stand up or “Mine eyes have seen the glory” if you were blind? The most common use of exclusive language is that which excludes women.93

For feminist leaders in the church, equality and power sharing have had a great deal to do with the use of language.94 For them, the church’s symbols and language have, throughout history, been an integral part of patriarchy, a social system built on the premise that the male human is normative and the female derivative or secondary. Patriarchy, says feminist liturgical theologian Marjorie Procter-Smith, devalues and oppresses women: it supports a hierarchical androcentricism that can lead to subtle controls with language that excludes, or symbolic systems that are wholly male-centred or, at worst, lead to extreme punitive controls such as sexual harassment, or violence.95

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94 In the United Church, this was especially true in the 1970s and 80s, when feminist concerns began to be raised; questions about language became particularly prominent.

95 Marjorie Procter-Smith, *In Her Own Rite*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 17.
Of course, patriarchy has not been confined to the church, nor has the church been alone in its concern for language. In 1985, for example, the Government of Ontario adopted an official policy of using gender-neutral language in all official publications, including bills and regulations, and in 1988, Ontario began revising all existing public general statutes and all regulations. The Ontario Statutes database has many examples showing the use of the singular "they" to refer to indefinite singular nouns.\textsuperscript{96} As well, universities, most newspapers and schools of journalism, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), city councils, and the media office for the Canadian Olympics team have made a commitment to the use of gender-neutral language.\textsuperscript{97}

For the United Church, however, language concerns go beyond being “gender-neutral.” As early as 1976, editorial guidelines for writers within The United Church of Church of Canada recognized that gender-neutral language does not challenge historical assumptions and stereotypes (e.g. doctors, lawyers and ministers are male; nurses and secretaries are female).\textsuperscript{98} Guidelines drawn up for writers and editors of educational resources cautioned that “material designed for children should show married women who work outside the home and treat them favourably” and that “both men and women should be shown engaged in home maintenance activities.”\textsuperscript{99}


\textsuperscript{97} Brenda MacLauchlan, \textit{Just Language: A Guide to Inclusive Language in The United Church of Canada} (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1999), 5.

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 6.

In 1980, the 28th General Council recognized the relationship between language, attitudes and actions. At the meeting of the General Council executive that followed, it was agreed to set up a standing committee to develop language guidelines and monitor existing resources because “the use of exclusive language can maintain the power of one group of people over other groups . . . to change our expression of reality to inclusive language is to bring change to power relationships and power structures.”

Liturgical language, however, is not only about bringing change to power relationships and power structures. It is also about bringing change to the way we speak and sing about God as well as transforming the way we think about and pray to God. Marjorie Procter-Smith describes three possible ways to respond to the problem of exclusive, androcentric language: by using non-sexist language to avoid gender-specific terms; being inclusive by balancing gender references; and by employing emancipatory language which would transform language use and challenge stereotypical gender references. Procter-Smith dismisses non-sexist language, saying that “a gender-less world . . . is rather flat and colourless.” Inclusive language is a bit better, since it seeks to balance gender language so both male and female references are included. “This approach not only restores colour and clarity to language, it also encourages the inclusion of names of women to balance the names of men . . . .” But there are still difficulties, especially with “God language:” male and female references can be problematic because they are not symmetrical: “Queen is not

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100 Minutes of the Executive of General Council, November 17-20, 1981, referring to action of the 28th General Council.

101 Ibid.

102 Procter-Smith, 63.

103 Ibid.
parallel to King; lady is not parallel to Lord in common use; mother carries wholly different connotations from Father . . . .”104 Thus the result can, in fact, perpetuate certain stereotypes.

Procter-Smith proposes a third model: emancipatory language, in which language is used to challenge and transform: by including explicitly new female references to God; by balancing diversity and unity; and by choosing to challenge “our colonized imaginations.”105 However, although Procter-Smith urges God-language that is “firmly rooted in the lived experiences of real women,” beyond naming Goddess worship as a source, she does not clearly lay out examples of what she means, and what emancipatory God language might look like.106 The use of Goddess language might be useful in feminist circles, but one might be less certain about its acceptance in a general congregational setting, even a United Church one. It is perhaps ironic that in her quest to seek out new liturgical language, in this case, Procter-Smith becomes less inclusive, rather than more.

A more pastoral and praxis-based approach is taken by liturgical scholar and hymn writer Ruth Duck whose approach is named as “expansive language, [which] seeks not so much to eliminate traditional masculine imagery as to place it among a broad range of other metaphors from Scripture, tradition, and faith experience.”107 Duck notes that content as well as gender matters, and that “one of the best ways to expand liturgical language is to use imagery for God appropriate to the liturgical moment,” e.g. at a baptism, water imagery may

104 Ibid.
105 Ibid., 112. For Procter-Smith, the traditions of Goddess-worship can provide a valuable resource.
106 Ibid.
refer to God as Source, Living Water, Wellspring. As well, expansive language “attends to metaphors concerning race and disability as well as gender.” The following hymns use expansive metaphorical language.

You, God, are my firmament,
roof for my head, shelter from storm,
nourishing bread, tender and warm . . .

You, God, are a tower of strength,
I shall not fear, I shall not fall,
knowing you’re near, guardian of all . . .

Are you a shepherd, good shepherd who leads us,
safely through danger, while calming our fears?
Are you a father who shelters and feeds us,
shares in our laughter and wipes away tears?
(Refrain): Yes, you are shepherd, parent and teacher,
but you are greater than all that we know.
Holy and living, loving and giving.
God, you are with us wherever we go.

Are you a mother, good mother who bears us,
comforts, protects us and helps us to rest?
Are you a teacher who daily prepares us,
challenging students to offer their best?
(Refrain): Yes . . .

Expansive language, whether spoken or sung, can be both helpful and transformative in its attempt to include everyone equally, and in its ability to broaden our theological references. It not only expands our understanding of God but also reflects the inclusive nature of the gospel.

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108 Ibid, 293. For these images, Duck cites David Cunningham, These Three are One (Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 1998), 348.

109 Vogel, 294.

110 “You God are My Firmament,” Voices United #279, vv.1,2. Text: Miriam Therese Winter.

111 “Are You A Shepherd?” More Voices #126, vv.1,2. Text: Ruth Duck.
Connecting Singing and Doing

In the following anecdote, a pastor reflects on his experience of the transformational power of congregational song.

During the first two days of my ordained ministry, I was called to do a funeral for a sixteen-month-old toddler who had been tragically killed in an automobile accident. Through the days leading up to the funeral, my eyes welled with tears a lot, my heart hung on prayers uttered in sighs too deep for words, and my arms reached out for extra hugs from and for my own kids.

Not only was I filled with deep sorrow for the family of that small child, I was overwhelmed with a deep anxiety about having to be the one who would attempt to speak a word of hope in the face of that community-wide tragedy.

I remember going to the 1969 United Church Service Book for some guidance. It seemed strikingly odd to me that it would instruct me to include near the start of the funeral service the singing of a hymn “setting forth the greatness and goodness of God.” I wondered how we could possibly draw forth strength to praise God when our hearts were so heavy with grief.

But as we began to sing “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty” on that day of remembrance, our weak and quiet voices began to fill with strength and hope. Even through our tears, people who were bent down from the steely weight of sorrow were able to stand straight.

I learned some important lessons that day. We offer God our worship not only when we have hope, but when we need hope. I discovered that praising God isn’t a solo activity; we do it with and for each other. And I experienced first hand that when we rejoice in the Lord, it reminds us that even though our world may feel like it is spinning apart, God has not let go of us.\textsuperscript{112}

What the pastor discovered on the day of that funeral was the connection between singing and doing, and what might be possible as we sing our faith. Singing praise to God enabled

\textsuperscript{112} Mark Giuliano in Singing A Song of Faith, Nancy E. Hardy, ed. (Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 2007), 68.
that grieving community to be comforted by their Creator, to find strength and “stand straight” once more.

The connection between faith and action has been similarly explored by moral theologian William Spohn. In “Christian Spirituality and Theological Ethics,” he reflects on the relationship between belief and behaviour. “The Gospel narratives make it clear that Jesus taught his followers both how to pray and how to act in a manner that befitted their new relation to God.” Spirituality, says Spohn, is about the relationship between what we believe and what we do, and perhaps more important, the relationship between what we do and what we can become. This he names “virtue ethics,” in which “action follows from character and in turn reinforces moral identity.” This moral identity is the result of practices which “change the shape of character by educating the affections . . . [and] through them, the Spirit redefines the affections so they increasingly resemble those of Christ.” In other words, as people of faith, we become what we practise. If we practise giving thanks, we are more likely to become thankful people, even when we are mourning the death of a child. If we practise loving our neighbour (as Jesus taught us to do), we are more likely to become loving people. “The practices learned in communities of faith testify to the characteristic qualities of God and develop the corresponding affections.”

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114 Ibid.
115 Ibid., 273.
116 Ibid., 277.
117 Ibid., 278.
Virtue ethics can also be applied to the music of the worshipping assembly. As the pastor found out at his first funeral, when people of faith sing together, they can articulate their faith as found in scripture and lived out in experience; they can become a sign of God’s purpose for creation; and they can become a community, open to God and to their own needs and the needs of the world. In this way, singing and doing can become connected.

Daniel Levitin offers yet another perspective on the relationship between faith and action: it is not only about practice, but is also closely linked to who we are as human beings. “A cornerstone of contemporary society is trust and the ability to believe in things that are not readily apparent, such as abstract notions of justice, cooperation, and the sharing of resources implied by civilization.”

The fundamental human ability to form societies based on trust, and to feel good about doing so (via judicious bursts of oxytocin and dopamine), is intimately linked to our religious past and spiritual present. And music has been there to imprint these thoughts on our memory, sometimes long after a ritual or ceremony has ended, and long after an epiphany or revelation has passed.

Similarly, Saliers argues that music plays a particularly active function in liturgy, reminiscent of the dynamics of virtue ethics: “doctrine and creed are more profoundly shaped by what we do or fail to do in the music of worship . . . than by hundreds of sermons.” Over time, the community of worship is actually shaped by its musical language and forms – “to rightly sing to the glory of God is also to be disposed toward the intensification and sanctification of all that is truly human.”

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118 Levitin, 236.
119 Ibid., 223.
121 Ibid., 295.
and justice, the very “doing” of repeated song predisposes them to believe in love and justice and to act on that disposition. As well, Wren suggests that singing songs and hymns together as faithful people can help us become what we practise.

Thus, as Wren points out, hymns can be formative: they can shape and model faith by telling the story of God in Christ and drawing singers into the drama of salvation. In the following example, the singers not only learn the story of faith from the hymns they sing, they begin to understand discipleship and how it might be practised.

The risen Christ, who walks on wounded feet from garden tomb through darkened city street, unlocks the door of grief, despair, and fear, and speaks a word of peace to all who hear.

May we, Christ’s body, walk and serve and stand with the oppressed in this and every land, till all are blessed and can a blessing be, restored in Christ to true humanity.

As well, hymns can be transformative: they can move worshippers from isolation to belonging, from indifference to interest, from conviction to commitment. As Spohn would say: “when we act on our commitments, they become habits of the heart, and so shape the sort of person that we are becoming.”

When at this table I receive a blessing, the broken bread, the wine of life for me, then let me share the peace with you, my neighbour, and let the Spirit set our spirits free.

If at this table I have need of healing, unbidden grief, relationship gone wrong, then let me know the hands of God enfolding,
and let lament become believing song.”  

Here, confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation become action, practices enacted together around Christ’s table, providing a framework of transformation for the worshipper.

In addition, hymns traditionally help us to be thankful. John Wesley, “father of Methodism,” along with his brother Charles, set congregational song within the framework of praise. As well, John Calvin and other leaders within the new “reformed” church of sixteenth century Geneva and Strasbourg chose to embrace metrical psalmody as their congregational song. In doing so, they taught their followers that Psalms can be important sources for spirituality. Hymns of praise and Psalms frame people’s lives with gratitude. They call us to give thanks for life and to acknowledge our creator, source of all good, in praise and thanksgiving.

Beyond the Psalter, as the Wesleys and others have found, many hymns create opportunities to give thanks to God and in doing so, call the singers to live as thankful people.

Give thanks for life, the measure of our days,
mortal, we pass through beauty that decays,
yet sing to God, our hope, our love, our praise,
Hallelujah, hallelujah!

As we sing, we give thanks, and as we give thanks, we become convicted by what Mary Jo Leddy calls “radical gratitude” and the “hope of creating something new in the world, of becoming someone new.”

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126 “When at this Table,” *More Voices #199*, v.v.1, 2. Text: Shirley Erena Murray.

127 It would be both foolish and arrogant to give the Reformers sole credit for the use of the Psalter in worship. Hymnologist Paul Westermeyer reminds us that “the psalms are the womb of church music. They are not only the hymnal of the Old Testament and the songs of Israel . . . the Church has continually gravitated to the Psalms for the ground of its song.” Paul Westermeyer, *Te Deum: The Church and Music*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 23.

Finally, hymns can provide an *eschatological vision* of a transformed creation, the world as it might be if God’s creatures lived today according to God’s intentions. In United Church hymn resources, there seems to be a rich selection regarding the latter and curiously thin selection regarding the former.

The “Articles of Faith” of the United Church’s “Basis of Union” refer only briefly to eschatology in the “Last Judgment and Final Triumph.” Article XIX of the Doctrine section affirms: “we believe that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust, through the power of the Son of God, who shall come to judge the living and the dead;” in Article XX we read “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself . . . by his power and his grace all His enemies shall finally be overcome and the kingdoms of this world be made the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ.”

The “Song of Faith,” recently adopted by the United Church as its contemporary faith statement addresses a redeemed creation this way:

> We sing of a life beyond life
> and a future good beyond imagining:
> a new heaven and a new earth
> the end of sorrow, pain, and tears,
> Christ’s return and life with God,
> the making new of all things . . .

> In the meantime, we embrace the present,
> embodying hope, loving our enemies,
> caring for the earth,
> choosing life.\(^{131}\)

The 1930 United Church *Hymnary* contains hymns about “Jerusalem the Golden” and ranks of saints who circle the throne of God in their white robes.\(^{132}\) Both *The Hymn Book*


\(^{130}\) “The Basis of Union.”

\(^{131}\) “A Song of Faith.” Noteworthy is the consistent use of the metaphor of song and singing.
and Voices United include hymns written by Canadian R.B.Y.Scott with their vision of a “world of God.” Contemporary resources, however, seem to pay more attention to “the meantime,” with songs that offer possibilities for peace and justice here and now.

Live into hope of captives freed,
of sight regained, the end of greed,
The oppressed shall be the first to see
the year of God’s own jubilee.

Live into hope of liberty,
the right to speak, the right to be,
the right to have one’s daily bread,
to hear God’s word and thus be fed.

It is difficult to find many new hymns about a redeemed creation. There are a few exceptions: “I see a New Heaven,” an expansion of Revelation 21, presents a vision of a new heaven and new earth.

I see a new heaven. I see a new earth
as the old one will pass away,
where the fountain of life flows
and without price goes
To all people who abide in the land.

As well, “We cannot Own the Sunlit Sky” provides a picture of creation at peace.

God calls humanity to join
as partners in creating
a future free from want or fear,
life’s goodness celebrating,
that new world beckons from afar,
invites our shared endeavour,
that all may have abundant life
and peace endure forever.

132 The Hymnary, #175.
134 “Live Into Hope,” Ibid. #699, vv.1.3. Text: Jane Parker Huber.
135 “I See A New Heaven, Ibid. #713, vv. 1, 2. Text: Carolyn McDade.
136 “We Cannot Own the Sunlit Sky,” More Voices, #143, v.3. Text: Ruth Duck.
Congregational songs in the United Church today seem to concentrate more on providing a hope-filled vision of creation as it can be right now. In a world beset by poverty, pollution, and violence, such singing can nevertheless remind people of faith that they are able to carry out God’s mission to the world.

In this section, we have explored the transformative power of congregational song as it employs symbols in texts and tunes; words as performance, metaphor and expansive language, and song’s ability to effect changed behaviour. The case studies that follow endeavour to further illustrate in praxis what has been discussed more theoretically. The first case study, an exploration of the life and music of the Taizé community, concentrates on congregational song as symbol, even as it notes affective behaviour. The second is a study of *Voices United*, the United Church’s major hymn and worship resource. It looks not only at the resource itself but also at the missional qualities and assumptions of the committee instrumental in putting the hymn book together.

**Case Study: The Taizé Community**

Postmoderns want interactive, immersive, in-your-face participation in the mystery of God.\(^{137}\)

Liturgy in this postmodern world must aim for enchantment, not entertainment . . . Entertainment as a cultural model is inadequate to the mission of the gospel because it works best when it leaves one satisfied with oneself and one’s world. Enchantment, on the other hand, casts a spell that leads one from a drab world to another, brighter, more interesting world.\(^{138}\)


In a postmodern context, the growing interest and participation in Taizé sung prayer by United Church congregations may be attributed, in part, to a yearning for “participation in the mystery of God.” This yearning can also be seen in the United Church’s new statement of faith, written in poetry (not prose) that refers to God as “Holy Mystery,” and among new hymn resources that include songs of “wonder and mystery.”

Shadow and substance, wonder and mystery
spell-binding spinner of atoms and earth;
soul of the cosmos, persons and energy,
source of our being, we sing of your worth.

Perhaps the compilers of recent United Church worship resources sensed that the sung prayers of the Taizé community might have the ability to “enchant” and lead to a “brighter, more interesting world.” Taizé songs and responses have appeared in growing numbers as United Church hymn resources have been developed. *Voices United* contains nine Taizé selections: three in the service music section, and eight in the hymn section, at least one for each liturgical season. *More Voices* also contains nine selections, spread throughout the resource under liturgical headings: Gathering, Praise, Lament, etc. The numbers within the two resources may not be as equal as they appear at first glance, as the later published *More Voices* contains a greater overall percentage of chants: the nine from *Voices United* are placed within the context of 700 plus hymns and responses (about 1%); the eight from *More Voices* are found within 225 selections (about 4%).

What may be as important as the number of sung prayers within the hymn resources is the increasing appearance of Taizé style worship in the United Church. Many congregations use Taizé chants within the liturgical *ordo* of Sunday worship, and Taizé style

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139 A Song of Faith.

worship is often offered either as a mid-week or Sunday evening offering. As they sing and pray, worshippers may experience the gentle power of Taizé chants as they become immersed in and susceptible to the transformational qualities and missional values of peace and reconciliation engendered by the music.

Sung Prayer at Taizé

The Taizé Community of today has been called “an extraordinary place, a place of international encounter, a place of prayer that goes beyond the normal possibilities.”\(^{141}\) From its inception, it has also been about mission. The community’s founder, (Brother) Roger Schütz, son of a Swiss Reformed pastor and a French Protestant mother from Burgundy, dreamed of establishing a house of reconciliation. In the early 1940s, he founded his house in the village of Taizé, in the southeast area of France, as a sanctuary for “war refugees – many of them Jews who were fleeing to the free areas of France like Burgundy.”\(^{142}\) He was joined by a small band of Swiss Protestant men, and on Easter Sunday, 1949, the Taizé Community was formalized as three French and four Swiss brothers took the traditional monastic vows of celibacy, common goods, and life under the authority of a prior.\(^{143}\) They continued their ministry of peace and reconciliation and just as Jewish refugees had been welcomed and offered a safe haven during the Second World War, so French orphans and German prisoners-of-war found a similar welcome after 1945. Today, the Taizé community comprises about a hundred brothers from different Christian traditions and over twenty-five countries. They make a commitment to “live together in joy, simplicity, and mercy as a

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\(^{143}\) Ibid., 62.
‘parable of community,’ a sign of the Gospel’s call to reconciliation at the heart of the world.”

What has been remarkable about the life and work of the community has been its significant role in the spiritual formation of adults and young people, and central to this role has been the development of sung prayer. The worship and the prayer life of the Taizé Community have changed radically since its formation in 1949. In the early days (50s), the community prayers were taken from French Huguenot sources and the sung Genevan Psalter. The development of sung prayer known today as “Taizé music” came about because the brothers of the Taizé community wanted to offer hospitality and spiritual nurture to the many young people who began to flock to Taizé in search of meaning and “Holy Mystery.”

In the late 60s, a surge of non-French young people led the brothers to look for a way to be more inclusive: the operative question became “what will help the community pray together?” This question became even more crucial at Easter, 1974, with the first “Council of Youth,” a gathering of some 40,000 young people from different countries, speaking numerous languages. One brother was commissioned to find a way to adapt the prayers so everyone could participate. He heard about a “canon form” used in a Benedictine Monastery outside Barcelona in Spain and realized that the “mixture of universality and simplicity in a repetitively sung prayer . . . seemed to promise a certain accessibility for pilgrims of different nations.” The introduction of such canons as “Cantate Domino,”

145 Santos, 110.
146 Santos, 107.
“Ubi Caritas,” “Magnificat,” and “Jubilate Deo” into the Taizé liturgy had profound implications for what was to come.

While changes were happening at Taizé, even greater changes were taking place in the Roman Catholic Church: the convening of Vatican II, which transformed Roman Catholic worship, especially the relationship of music to the liturgy. By emphasizing the role of the assembly, reintroducing the vernacular, making a recommitment to ecumenical concerns, and broadening options for musical styles and instruments in the liturgy, Vatican II had a profound impact on the Roman Catholic Church and sister churches around the world. The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)* promoted liturgy with linguistic patterns and music of individual cultures, even while sharing a common historical liturgical shape.

It was shortly after the conclusion of Vatican II that Jacques Berthier, a Parisian lay Roman Catholic church musician, whose work was affected by the reforms of Vatican II, composed the body of music that came to be known as “Taizé music.” A collaborative process between the Taizé brothers and Berthier resulted in chants with simple, biblically based words, and beautiful, yet accessible melodies that drew pilgrims into prayer. It meant that “perhaps for the first time in the history of the church, a manner of praying has emerged that links young and old, Catholics and Protestants and dozens of different nationalities.”

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147 Kubicki, 5.

148 Hawn in Kimbrough, 26.

149 Santos, 104. Santos also comments that there are variations in the selection of chants: in the morning, as people are waking up, chants are sung in a lower key; the afternoon chants are more joyful in tone and tempo, while the evening begins with joy and moves to contemplation.

150 Ibid., 124.
Taizé Song as Symbol

At Taizé, “music becomes a means whereby the brothers are able to reach out to the pilgrims . . . and provide them with a pathway for discovering their own prayer.”\textsuperscript{151} The community’s sung prayer operates as religious symbol where the tunes and texts become symbols of reconciliation and mutuality, and the singing itself becomes a symbol of unity in Christ. Singing the chants over and over again, surrounded by crowds of pilgrims in a common, sacred space, can be a powerful and transforming experience: the singing itself becomes \textit{theologia prima}, an enacted, embodied vehicle of God’s self-revelation. Although the Taizé chants were composed to be sung as prayer and created with the text in mind (the texts are taken from scripture and liturgy), the music also becomes a symbol of harmony and reconciliation. The tunes are mellifluous, gentle and accessible, with simple harmonies, lending themselves to easily learned part singing.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{music notation}
\caption{Music notation of Taizé song.}
\end{figure}

In many United Church of Canada worship services, Taizé songs are accompanied on keyboard, sometimes with instrumental descants, but the songs are often most effective when sung without accompaniment (\textit{a capella}). In this way, the singers themselves come to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{151} Kubicki, 77. The “sophisticated, effortless melodies” have melody lines that are tuneful, of limited vocal range, and simple to sing without being banal.
\end{itemize}
symbolize a reconciled community in tune with Holy Mystery and reliant on God and one another.

Within the chants, there are generally four genres of music: ostinato response and chorales; litanies; acclamations; and canons. In all cases, members of the assembly are placed in relationship with one another and with the cantor, embodying mutuality and interdependence. “The mantra-like quality of the music structures the assembly’s experience of time and space and creates a sonic environment within which the assembly ritualizes its relationship with God and one another.” 153

Michael Hawn, in describing the spectrum of congregational musical forms, suggests that Taizé song is cyclical (unlike sequential hymns); based on oral tradition and ear oriented (in contrast to keeping eyes glued to a hymnbook); uses a theme and variation model; is concise; is community oriented; and moves toward total participation and integration of participants, as they become part of “the prayerful quality of the sung Word.” 154

The texts of the songs themselves can also symbolize relationship. They often appear in different languages, embodying both hospitality and unity for those who come to the community from many different countries. 155

153 Kubicki, 70.

154 Hawn, Gather into One, 237. For further discussion of the Taizé style of singing, see William S. Kervin, Gathered for Worship (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 2010), 122-124.

155 Kubicki, 81. At first, words were in Latin, seen as a “neutral” language, accessible especially to youth who came from many countries to worship together. (Now the song books are in many languages, including Latin, English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Korean, Russian, Polish).
Taizé Song and Transformed Behaviour

Taizé songs are intrinsically symbolic and therein have the potential to affect and transform behaviour. “As with all liturgical symbols, music has the potential to communicate to the worshiping assembly the challenge to live a fuller life with God in Christ.”

Today, the Taizé brothers and volunteers welcome, house, and feed up to 6,000 pilgrims a week for a time of worship, Bible study, and community building. Although the French countryside is beautiful, pilgrims do not come for the scenery or for luxurious accommodation. They are housed in large twenty-person tents or dormitories where rooms accommodate up to eight to ten people, sleeping on metal bunk beds. Meals are served in a large outdoor shelter and are “simple and utilitarian.” On arrival, the pilgrims are expected to sign up for a work team and become engaged in cleaning, food preparation, welcoming, or working at the snack shop or gift shop, where books, artwork, and pottery are sold to undergird the work of the Community.

The week emphasizes reconciliation, with the ecumenical community of brothers providing a model of unity, with freedom to forgive and love one another within a context of

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156 “Jesus, your Spirit in Us,” More Voices #102. Text and tune: The Taizé Community.

157 Kubicki, 124.

158 Santos, 33. In commenting on the food, Santos wryly continues: “Don’t get me wrong; it’s filling and at times even tasty. But it’s not meant to sustain you for your lifetime . . . it’s designed to feed six thousand people in about an hour.”
sung prayer, and shared gifts of trust and responsibility. Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox brothers and pilgrims are brought within a space of hospitality and acceptance, with the music providing an experience of “transcending barriers, not only between pilgrims, but also between the human and the divine.”\textsuperscript{159}

As well, the pilgrims are continually surrounded by experiences that build community and a sense of belonging. At worship three times a day, they can experience God’s self-revelation as they are drawn into the Holy through singing and praying the scriptures. During the Bible introduction and sharing times (usually led by young people in consultation with one of the brothers), they learn to listen to one another in an international, multilingual, ecumenical setting. And with their work groups, the pilgrims achieve a level of expectation and trust that their tasks will be done well and joyfully. What many experience at Taizé is changed behaviour: participants are enabled to move from isolation to belonging, from alienation to acceptance and to experience community where unity and reconciliation are enacted. As well, young people in particular “experience a deep sense of belonging, a sense of intimacy with others and with God that partly stems from their participation in shared communal work.”\textsuperscript{160} In essence, the community and worship life of the Taizé Community provide an eschatological vision of the missional values of peace, justice, and love. French writer and Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément expresses it this way:

\begin{quote}
The community grew, without premeditation, like a living organism . . . . It was like a witness to an alternative history, the history of the upside-down world expressed in the Beatitudes, the history of the poor and the neglected who, nevertheless, are the ones who stop the Herods and the Pilates of the world from destroying humanity . . . .
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{159} Kubicki, 144.

\textsuperscript{160} Santos, 144.
At Taizé, people from different and sometimes opposing denominations, cultures, races, and languages pray and worship together. Yes, it is really possible; Christ destroys every separating wall.¹⁶¹

It is within this context that the sung prayers resonate so profoundly.

The chants and other music resources of the Taizé Community’s sung prayer have added new dimensions to the worship and hymn resources of churches around the world, including The United Church of Canada. They have the potential to enrich the contemplative aspect of public worship and to provide a valuable dimension to Sunday and weekday gatherings. There is a danger, of course, that the chants may be used as just one more piece of music in worship, that the efficacy of silence within worship and the mantra-like quality brought about by deep repetition may be lost. But when used as they were intended, as ritual symbol, the Taizé sung prayers encourage the enactment of the missional values of peace and reconciliation they proclaim.

¹⁶¹ Clément, 11, 12.

Case Study: Voices United

The development of Voices United demonstrated much that is vibrant and alive in The United Church of Canada – its spirit of inclusivity, its ability to embrace diversity, its willingness to risk and address its current social context.163

A new hymnbook can often be a source of transformation for a church, whether at the local or national level. While it is probably still too early to say whether the 1996 publication of Voices United succeeded in that lofty goal, transformation was certainly one of the hopes of the committee responsible for its publication.

Voices United was the third major hymn book produced by The United Church of Canada since union in 1925 and came out of a mandate of the 1990 meeting of the United Church’s General Council to produce a new hymn and worship resource that would provide support for worship well into the next century. For many in the United Church, the General Council’s decision was welcome news. The hymnbooks of the pre-union churches and the United Church Hymnary had been important sources of devotion and inspiration for the United Church, but the subsequent 1971 Hymn Book, published jointly by the Anglican and United churches, had proved to be problematic. While The Hymn Book was appreciated for some of its new hymns and its design features (e.g. use of quarter-note notation, making it easier for musicians to read), its exclusive language and editorial attitudes that dismissed certain songs as “mawkish and mediocre” fostered a growing dissatisfaction with The Hymn Book’s language and imagery.164 The dissatisfaction was partially ameliorated by the

163 David Kai, “With Voices United” in Fire & Grace, 84.

164 Stanley L. Osborne, If Such Holy Song: The Story of the Hymns in The Hymn Book (Whitby: The Institute of Church Music, 1976), 532. Osborne comments on pushing evangelical tunes aside because of “a desire for artistic melody and harmony.” In the preface to The Hymn Book, he also writes that texts needed to adhere to “certain standards . . . rather than an effusion of generalized religious sentiment.” (The Hymn Book, Preface, 2).
appearance of *Songs for a Gospel People*, the supplement published in 1987. But a supplement was not enough.

In the early 80s, petitions asking for inclusive language worship resources had begun to reach General Council, and both the 1982 and the 1986 General Councils had “heard the requests for the investigation of hymn use and future needs of the church.”

A Worship Book Task Group was appointed in late 1988 and charged with gathering data about the (then) current state of congregational worship music. Well over 3,000 responses were received from questionnaires sent to congregations, resulting in a recommendation passed by the 33rd General Council that the church commit to “the production of worship and hymn resources in format as practical, economical, and accessible as possible.” The Council also mandated the formation of a 24 person working group to carry out this task. It became known as the Hymn and Worship Resource Committee (HWRC).

In the preamble to Resolution no. 93, which committed the United Church to a new hymn and worship resource, the “whereas” clauses included some of the hopes for what became *Voices United*. It was to be a resource that would take into account “new understandings of the Gospel’s demand upon us, particularly in relation to creation and human community, and the development of spirituality and discipleship;” it would honour the “increasingly diverse community (in terms of demographic makeup, ethnic and racial composition, theological perspectives);” and it would “take into account the cross-

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165 ROP, 32nd General Council, 1988, Resolution 80, 528.

166 Ibid., Resolution 93, 529.
generational emphasis approved by previous General Councils, and be affirming of all members of the community.”¹⁶⁷

A new worship and hymn resource would also have the potential for new perspectives on how the church was to carry out God’s mission. From the beginning, the HWRC articulated hopes for a resource that would be inclusive, articulate a commitment to service and justice as well as the need to receive from others, honour linguistic and ethnic diversity, and would be prophetic (“not just who we are, but who we shall be”).¹⁶⁸ At its initial meeting in Mississauga in April, 1991, the committee affirmed the mandate they had been asked to carry out by the General Council. But what the committee really wanted was to enable congregational renewal: they understood their task as one of transformation through song and liturgy.¹⁶⁹

As one of the co-chairs of the HWRC, it was my privilege and responsibility to be involved in many facets of the enormous task of putting together a major new hymn and worship resource for the United Church.¹⁷⁰ There were many issues confronting the HWRC and its staff in the development of Voices United. However, most germane to this dissertation’s focus are the issues of inclusive language; mission hymns; and the missional life of the HWRC itself.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.


¹⁶⁹ Early general principles included “Let’s give the Hymn Book back to the people.” HWRC minutes September 27-29, 1991. As well, the preface to Voices United speaks of the resource as a “people’s book,” and this principle was prominent throughout the life of the committee’s work.

¹⁷⁰ The other co-chair was Leonard Lythgoe.
Inclusive Language

The publication of *Voices United* grew out of a milieu calling for language that would be inclusive and might challenge patriarchal assumptions of church and society. Language matters occupied a large part of the HWRCs deliberations, especially in its initial meetings, as the committee represented a broad spectrum of theological perspectives, from those who felt the language issues of paramount importance, to those who felt they really did not matter that much. One of the first tasks of the committee was to establish principles and language guidelines. That they were approved in their entirety in November 1993, eight sets of meetings after the committee had started its work, indicates, to some extent, how difficult it was to come to a consensus around the complex issues. The guidelines were divided into “people language,” (expected to be gender inclusive and sensitive to non-gender issues), “God language” (a balanced use of male gender images with female gender images), and “other” (avoidance of militaristic, triumphalist language, and of any suggestion of God’s rejection of Israel or Jewish guilt for the death of Jesus). In addition, the use of “Lord” was to be reduced when naming or referring to God, and a range of images used to name or refer to Jesus – e.g. Lord, Friend, Companion, Saviour, Lover.

The HRWC consulted widely and produced two samplers of material for consideration by the United Church constituency. They also read correspondence from and listened to a number of committees and interest groups: among the voices were those

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171 Even though the General Council of 1986 had approved language guidelines, it did not mean that everyone agreed with them, and the HWRC spent much time coming to a consensus about principles that would guide their work.


173 Ibid., 210.
representing the feminist movement, particularly the Committee on Sexism.\textsuperscript{174} In the end, the language of \textit{Voices United} became both inclusive and expansive: with language changes to traditional hymns; with new hymns added, using expanded imagery for God; and through the omission of problematic hymns. In practice, because the committee had taken so much time and energy to formulate them, the guidelines worked well in helping the committee choose what went in and what stayed out.

For example, some hymns, already beloved repositories of faith and devotion, were retained, with the language changed to become inclusive.

\begin{quote}
O brother man, fold to thy heart thy brother\textsuperscript{175}

became

O Christian, love your sister and your brother\textsuperscript{176}

Dear Lord and Father of mankind forgive our foolish ways\textsuperscript{177}

became

Dear God, who loves all humankind, forgive our foolish ways\textsuperscript{178}
\end{quote}

New hymns were added to break down the language of exclusion or expand metaphors or imagery.

\begin{quote}
Joyful is the dark, holy, hidden God,
\end{quote}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{174} Although there were several informal women’s groups at this time in addition to the UCW (United Church Women) which was part of the formal structure of the church, the HWRC probably listened most to the General Council Committee on Sexism which monitored the progress of \textit{Voices United} and was both consistent and persistent.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{175} “O Brother Man,” \textit{The Hymn Book} #299, v.1. Text: John Greenleaf Whittier.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{176} “O Christian, Love Your Sister and Your Brother” \textit{Voices United} #594.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{177} “Dear Lord and Father,” \textit{The Hymn Book} #249, v.1. Text: John Greenleaf Whittier.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{178} “Dear God, Who Loves All Humankind,” \textit{Voices United} #608.}
rolling cloud of night beyond all naming:
Majesty in darkness, Energy of love
Word-in-flesh, the mystery proclaiming.
Joyful is the dark, joyful is the dark, joyful is the dark.  

Mother and God, to you we sing:
wide is your womb, warm is your wing.
In you we live, move and are fed
sweet flowing milk, life giving bread.
Mother and God, to you we bring
all broken hearts, all broken wings. 

The first hymn (“Joyful is the Dark”) was chosen to work toward breaking down stereotypes – i.e., light/white is good; dark/black is bad. The other (“Mother and God”) was chosen to illustrate expanded imagery for God and is one example of many such biblical images.

New versions of old hymns also expanded the language of hymns already in the church’s repertoire. Consider, for example:

Faith of our fathers, living still, in spite of dungeon, fire and sword . . . .

The original version of this hymn uses three verses about “our fathers.” The new version expands the language in verses 2 and 3:

2. Faith of our mothers, daring faith, your work for Christ in love revealed . . . .

3. Faith of our sisters, brothers, too, who still must bear oppression’s might . . . .

The HWRC also found that many of the denomination’s “good old hymns” used military metaphors that could not be transformed.

Lead on, O King eternal: the day of march has come
Henceforth in field of conquest thy tents shall be our home. 

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179 “Joyful is the Dark,” Ibid. #284, v.1. Text: Brian Wren.
That hymn was omitted, as was “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.”\textsuperscript{183} The question of “Onward Christian Soldiers” was particularly problematic for members of the HWRC: they were aware of the hymn’s enduring popularity in the public sphere, even though they suspected that very few people paid any attention to what the hymn actually said.\textsuperscript{184} The decision about whether or not to include “Onward Christian Soldiers” came during the last meeting of the whole committee (June 26, 1995) after much discussion and consideration of correspondence that had come to managing editor John Ambrose from veterans and other groups across the country. When the committee looked carefully at the words of “Onward Christian Soldiers,” the question of language became paramount. They realized the hymn contravened the guidelines with which they had been working for five years. The vote to exclude was unanimous.\textsuperscript{185}

The language guidelines set out by the HWRC proved to be essential not only for \textit{Voices United}, but subsequent publications, notably \textit{More Voices}, the 2007 supplement to \textit{Voices United}. As well, the changes in language proved to be a transformative factor in the lives of some of the committee members and their congregations. As one member of the Committee recently commented, “I remember the important role which major theological discussions (about inclusive language, for instance) played in honing my personal approach to liturgy and congregational life.”\textsuperscript{186} The inclusive and expansive language of \textit{Voices United}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[183] “My Eyes Have Seen The Glory,” \textit{The Hymn Book} #156. Text: Julia Ward Howe.
\item[185] The HWRC worked by consensus, so holding an actual vote shows how seriously the committee took this particular decision.
\item[186] Don Parsons, e-mail message to author. March 30, 2011.
\end{footnotes}
may prove to be one of the most important transformative factors in the life of congregations as they sing together and work to carry out God’s mission.

Mission Hymns

As noted earlier in Chapter One, the compilers of the 1971 Hymn Book had expressed concern about finding new mission hymns to include in the new resource, but the “explosion of hymn-writing” during the time period between the publication of The Hymn Book and Voices United had not yet happened. While the peace and justice hymns of Frederik Kaan had been welcome new additions to congregational singing in The Hymn Book, the HWRC had the good fortune to be able to tap into the repertoire of such hymn writers as Ruth Duck, John Bell, Shirley Murray, as well as Pablo Sosa, Tom Colvin, I-to Loh, and others from the global church.

Voices United also contains many “heritage” mission hymns about mission and service: “O Master, let me walk with thee in lowly paths of service free,” and “Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life,” are two of many hymns that appear in all three United Church hymnbooks. What appear to be new in Voices United are mission hymns about partnership and mutuality in mission, as well as those about peace and justice.

In loving partnership we come. . .

We are the hands and feet of Christ,
Serving by grace each other’s need. . .

The poor and rich, the strong and weak

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187 United Church Observer, June 1, 1968. Letter from F.H. Wilkinson and Richard H.N. Davidson saying that the committee was till looking for new hymns, among them hymns on “the Church in the World.”

188 Voices United, Preface.

Are brought together in your love.  

As a fire is meant for burning with a bright and warming flame, so the church is meant for mission, giving glory to God’s name. Not to preach our creeds or customs, but to build a bridge of care, we join hands across the nations, finding neighbours everywhere.

To the call for peace has been added a more overt call to justice.

Jesus Christ is waiting, waiting in the streets; no one is his neighbour, all alone he eats. Listen, Lord Jesus, I am lonely too. Make me, friend or stranger, fit to wait on you.

Jesus Christ is raging, raging in the streets, where injustice spirals, and real hope retreats Listen, Lord Jesus, I am angry too. In the Kingdom’s causes let me rage with you.

In addition to including new mission hymns about mutuality, peace, and justice, the HWRC took great care in ensuring that global song assumed more prominence than it had in the past.

The current theology of mission understands its interactions with culture, and music features prominently in Christian experience, so it is especially significant to wonder about the role of music in relation to mission . . . . Mission is relationship and transformation, and this is what global song best embodies.

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190 “In Loving Partnership We Come.” Voices United #603, vv.1,2,3. Text and tune: Jim Strathdee.

191 “As A Fire is Meant for Burning.” Voices United #578, v.1. Text: Ruth Duck. This is one of the best examples of a hymn that sets out mutuality in mission. It is explored in greater depth in chapter three of this dissertation.

192 “Jesus Christ is Waiting.” Voices United #117, vv.1,2. Text: John L. Bell.

193 The “global” hymnody in The Hymn Book is mostly confined to European sources, with the exception of two Asian hymns (#61 and #413), both in translation by Bliss Wiant, an American missionary who went to China with the goal of introducing hymns to Chinese Christians in an idiom they would recognize.

Commitment to global music was shared by many faith communities in the twentieth century, including the HWRC. Minutes from their first meeting record these intentions: “we commit ourselves to seeking resources of . . . the world church, reflective of our place in the global communion.” As well, the first draft of the committee’s principles included the assertion that “The collection will bring into our life worship resources of other churches in Canada and around the world.” In its work to include a range of global resources, the committee was aided by selections in the 1987 *Songs for a Gospel People*, as well as other resources like those of the Wild Goose Resources Group from the Iona Community and the Global Praise group of the United Methodist Church. Particularly helpful was a visit by Argentinean musician and theologian Pablo Sosa with his presentation and subsequent discussion about “the rationale for the encouragement and use of global music in congregations and for its inclusion in the *Voices United* resource.” Sosa reflected on the fact that although music is a universal form of expression, it is not really a universal language. We do not all understand and enjoy the same music, even though every new hymnal seems to have songs from many countries for enrichment and enjoyment. What has been and continues to be important is being with people through song, standing with people in their struggles, and making room for other ways of expression with openness and encouragement. Sosa also cautioned that care needed to be taken in implementing the singing

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196 HRWC minutes, November 8-10, 1991, Appendix E.

197 The membership of the HWRC included Gerald Hobbs, editor of *Songs for a Gospel People*, and co-chair Leonard Lythgoe, who had been deeply involved in the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held in Vancouver, July 24-August 10, 1983, where global worship resources had been prominent and inspiring for many of the United Church people present.

198 HWRC minutes, February 10-13, 1994, 8.
of global resources with trained leaders and careful presentation of the songs, including
details of notation and tempo – as many details as possible. “If the text is written in the
original language, or a combination of original and translations, we would need to sing it
all!”\textsuperscript{199}

\textit{Voices United} contains more than fifty selections from the global church: from Africa
(6), Asia (12), The Caribbean (2), and Latin America (22). In addition, there are African-
American songs (10), and First Nations selections (2). Many of the songs appear in both
English and the original language, making it possible for people to sing with some
authenticity. It is difficult, however, to say how much the global songs have been used and
whether they have been integrated well into worship. It probably would have been helpful to
include performance suggestions in the congregational edition of \textit{Voices United} to enable a
greater understanding of the context and culture of the songs.\textsuperscript{200} Nevertheless, the global
songs add richness to the texture of \textit{Voices United}. As well, they open the Church to a greater
awareness of a suffering, liberating God who shares the joys and sorrows of singing people
around the world. As such, the songs of the world church become an integral part of mission.

\textbf{The Hymn and Worship Resources Committee - A Missional Unit?}

The staff person responsible for the content of \textit{Voices United} was John Ambrose, who
brought to the task “a wealth of experience as pastor, musician, and administrator.”\textsuperscript{201} From

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{199} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{200} Performance suggestions are made in the Music Leaders’ edition. Unfortunately, not all users of \textit{Voices United} would have access to it.
  \item \textsuperscript{201} Preface, \textit{Voices United}. There were other staff members with responsibilities for publishing, graphic design, marketing, etc. Ambrose was involved in these details, but his primary task was to oversee the content and layout of the resource, and to introduce the new resource to United Churches across the country. The committee was also ably served by the presence (and liaison function) of Dr. Fred Graham, who held the liturgy position at the United Church’s national office and was able to provide both musical and liturgical expertise.
\end{itemize}
the beginning, Ambrose defined his role as “managing” editor. Rather than Ambrose bringing material to the committee for approval, members of the HWRC worked in sub-committees and brought material back to the whole committee for approval and then to Ambrose for final work. The volunteer HWRC took on a huge responsibility. In addition to meeting together three times per year over five years, members also met in regional sub-groups as well as sub-committees concerned with texts, tunes, children’s and youth resources, the Psalter, and liturgical material. In addition, many took on responsibility for monitoring such specific areas as women’s interests, heritage hymns, global music, and regional concerns. “As a result, *Voices United* is very much the product of the Hymn and Worship Resources Committee.”

Indeed, the committee itself might be described as missional, working through the theological and pastoral implications of an inclusive, transformative body of congregational song. Since most of the committee members were either pastors or church musicians, they had a profound understanding of the importance of hymnody and its implications for the church. They were also very clear that they had been entrusted with a mission to bring a new vision of congregational song to the wider church. As well, the committee embodied missional values in its diversity and inclusivity; in its concern for justice and equality; and in the conduct of meetings, which became about mutuality and trust.

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202 Ibid.

203 Of the 25 committee members who worked on the project for the whole time, thirteen were order of ministry, working in pastoral charges; other members were either part time or full time church musicians. Two were university professors.

204 “I believe every member of the HWRC saw their task as one of mission to the church, this was our sole and primary focus in every decision and discussion that took place.” Allen McIntosh, e-mail message to author, February 8, 2011.
A careful process of nomination and selection had ensured that the HWRC was representative of the United Church in terms of geography, gender, racial origin, lay/ordered ministry, musicians and non-musicians. As well, committee members comprised a broad theological spectrum, which became especially evident in discussions around inclusive and expanded language, images of God, and “changing the texts of time-honoured poetry.” The diversity of the committee was both enriching and challenging for many of the committee members.

The concern for hymns that engendered the Church’s mission of justice and mutuality was an essential element in the committee’s deliberations. But justice and mutuality were also embodied in the way the committee operated as they worked through their differences and honoured one another’s opinions and differences. The meetings themselves became transformative experiences as committee members grew in mutual respect and trust. HWRC operated by consensus: votes were seldom taken, decisions were made after much discussion, and agreement was reached by the whole body. A motion requiring approval of two-thirds of those voting was possible, but only after it was determined by the steering committee that consensus was impossible. In fact, there was very little need for a formal vote.

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205 Appreciation was expressed for the inclusion of non-musicians on the committee: “the process planned for a ‘grass-roots’ kind of committee in many senses.” David Kai, e-mail message to author, March 8, 2011. “HWRC represented a varied spectrum of belief and experience within the United Church as well as regional influences.” Mary Beth Nicks Barbour, e-mail message to author, March 29, 2011.

206 Lydia Pedersen, e-mail message to author, March 2, 2011.

207 “I am living proof that the HWRC was a missional unit . . . it transformed me in the area of inclusivity.” Diana McLeod, e-mail message to author, March 18, 2011.

208 A steering committee comprising the managing editor, the two co-chairs, and two “floaters” prepared the agenda for each meeting and monitored the progress of each meeting. Prior to each meeting, a draft agenda was circulated to the whole committee for comment and then amended by the steering committee.

209 Note has been made about the vote concerning “Onward Christian Soldiers,” p.128, 129.
Although the process of consensus was new to many members of the HWRC (including the co-chairs), it proved to be an important vehicle in engendering careful listening and trust. The process of consensus became a means of reconciliation in an often divided committee.

There was nothing better to work together toward a decision by consensus. . . and nothing harder. I remember the wrestling with a decision (such as the title of the book or the colour). It would seem that we were never going to come to consensus. But then it would happen. A few more conversations; a few more questions; some silent contemplation; perhaps even waiting until the next day or the next meeting; and suddenly we were there. We had a decision and oh, did it feel good. It truly felt that God’s spirit was in the midst of our decision. It felt faithful and truthful. . . and the whole time and energy devoted felt worthwhile. And later, in presenting workshops about VU and answering questions, I could take full ownership in the decision.210

When *Voices United* was published in 1996, it received limited reviews and comments from such publications as *Touchstone* and *The Hymn*, but little analysis of its liturgical and hymnological content. But in its own deliberations, the HWRC spent significant time in theological and liturgical discussions, and came to understand that they “were leading, and in some ways pushing the United Church truly into what it claimed to be, an inclusive and justice-oriented denomination . . . [with] new language and new ideas for expressing their faith.”211 In this way, “the presence of *Voices United* became an important symbol of a congregation’s willingness to engage with something new . . . [and] a kind of theological symbol of a congregation’s life.”212

**Reflections**

Congregational singing has the potential to be transformative through the use of symbol and language, affecting the worldview and behaviour of the singers. As well,

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210 Susan Lukey, e-mail message to author, March 29, 2011.

211 Ibid.

212 Parsons.
congregational songs can enable the connection between singing and doing, leading the faithful to a renewed sense of mission.

What seems to be most important, as illustrated in the case studies of this chapter, is the singing itself. At the community of Taizé, pilgrims are drawn into an ecumenical setting where sung prayer, along with Bible study and work, combine to effect unity and trust and embody the missional values of love and justice. At the often rancorous meetings of the Hymn and Worship Resource Committee, charged with the task of putting together *Voices United*, consistent hymn singing reminded the committee members of their vision and mission and served as a source of reconciliation. Moreover, the committee saw its work as missional and transformative because of the power of congregational song in the life of the church. As managing editor John Ambrose observed as he crossed the country introducing *Voices United* to United Church gatherings, “you literally sit at a workshop and see conversions taking place.”

The effect of singing on behaviour has been demonstrated in history time after time. From freedom songs that made their way from South Africa to Europe and strengthened the anti-apartheid movement, to songs that gave courage to the Haitian people following their devastating earthquake in 2010, the transformative power of singing has been evident.

The singing, of course, is essential: it is in itself a symbol and a means of transformation. But good music and texts are important, too. Music can enhance and enliven a text and can be a source of theological reflection. As well, it can create community and shared vision. And as this examination of hymnody has shown, texts are also crucial: words have the power to exclude or include, as well as the ability to broaden one’s theological understanding of God, Jesus Christ, and the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The use of

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metaphorical and symbolic language means that the gospel can become more than mere biblical texts put to music: it can become a means of invitation to live out the love that Jesus Christ proclaimed and lived.

Both the music and worship of Taizé, and the appearance of *Voices United* have been welcomed in United Church congregations. In Vancouver, the presence of Taizé style worship in a local congregation has added a transformative note: “where sermons and hymns lose appeal, simple chants and a tranquil atmosphere can create a path to the holy.” As well, the use of expansive and inclusive language in *Voices United* has been noted with appreciation: “it’s such a delight for people like me to learn that the church believes I am included in God’s blessing, that they [sic] are not just for men.” Others commented on the transformative effect of the (then) new resource. “At Gower Street United in St. John’s . . . [the ] choirmaster calls *Voices United* ‘one of the single largest changes in the United Church in the past 50 years.’”

If it can be said that being in mission means being outwardly directed, living and acting in love and justice for all creation, congregational song clearly plays a significant part in helping that happen. As hymns assist understanding of God’s mission and articulate missional values, as they encourage outwardly directed behaviour and action, and as the singing itself becomes a symbol of unity and reconciliation, the community participates in a process of transformation. And when this happens, the singing has become primary theology and an encounter with a missional God who calls people of faith to follow and live in Christ.

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CHAPTER THREE

“O for a Thousand Tongues”¹
The United Church of Canada in Mission and Song

Foundations

While Chapter One looked at the relationship between congregational song and the carrying out of God’s mission, and Chapter Two at the more transformative aspects of missional hymns, this chapter combines the general with the specific in an analysis of four so-called mission hymns to show how hymnody has framed the United Church’s call to mission at both the institutional and personal levels. The analysis will be facilitated by the use of “thick description,” a methodology which will allow an examination of the hymns from a number of perspectives.

Thick Description

The concept of “thick description” was first formulated by British philosopher Gilbert Ryle and expanded by American anthropologist Clifford Geertz.² Its aim is to look at a subject from many angles and draw “large conclusions from small, densely textured facts,” rather like peeling away the layers of wallpaper in an old house, with resulting discoveries of historical, social, and cultural context.³ “Thick description refers to the researcher’s task of both describing and interpreting social action or behaviour within its particular context.”⁴ It is not just about recording events, but interpreting their circumstances, intentions, and

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³ Geertz, 14.

strategies. Geertz calls us to sort out “structures of significance” in order to understand the particularity of people’s culture by looking at time and place, what people say, what they do, and what is done to them. Cultural and historical context will be important in “thickly” describing the mission hymns in this chapter, as will theological, liturgical, and missiological categories and questions.

Liturgical theologian Don Saliers has said that “the actions and juxtapositions of the liturgy invite every culture to discover their own translation of the [holy] city promised by God. At the same time, the liturgy does not simply absorb culture, but also critiques what is incompatible with God’s turning to the world.” Would that were so! There may be some truth to Saliers’ statement, but if we examine liturgical music carefully, we find that congregational songs have not always critiqued what is incompatible with God’s turning to the world, and that sometimes they reinforce human complacency with the state of the things as they are. We also find that the cultural milieu of the hymn writers has shaped their worldview, along with their hymns and prayers.

Congregational song in the Protestant Church, for example, has occasionally been counter-cultural, but has more often reflected the culture in which it has been sung (or imported to other regions of the world). When Martin Luther sang about demons in his hymn “A Mighty Fortress is Our God,” he was reflecting a medieval culture and worldview in which Satan and devils were part of the landscape. When nineteenth century missionaries sang about bringing the light to “men benighted,” they were reflecting a modernist culture in

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5 Ibid., 541.
6 Geertz, 7.
8 “A Mighty Fortress is our God,” Voices United #262. Text: Martin Luther.
which knowledge was pre-eminent, and people were objects of knowledge to be conquered and “saved.”9

Musicologist Michael Hawn suggests that employing “thick description” may be useful in analyzing and describing global song in particular, since “thick description . . . permits the interpretation of a sign whose meaning may be assumed in the original culture, but whose occurrence may not have been perceived by an outsider.”10 Both Geertz and Hawn contend that we need to understand the event, ritual, or idea as background information before looking more specifically. The following categories will be used in the “thick description” of the mission hymns in this chapter. They have been adapted from Hawn’s analysis to aid understanding from a United Church perspective and give the singer (and the reader) a thickly textured perspective on the hymn.11

- Historical and cultural context: through what lens does the hymn view the world? How does the hymn reflect or challenge the prevailing culture?

- Biblical and theological foundations: what biblical understandings are conveyed by the hymn text? What does it tell us about God who came to us in Christ?

- Liturgical function: How does the music relate to the text? How might the music enhance the theological base of the hymn? How might the hymn appear within the liturgical ordo? How might it help us pray for the world? What elements of symbol or language might add to the hymn’s ability to be transformative?

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10 Hawn, 30.

11 Ibid.
• Missiological implications: what are the implications for mission, especially for the life and work of The United Church of Canada? How do the hymns reflect the changing ethos of mission? How are the “singing and doing” connected in the hymn?

This study will focus on four particular mission hymns as case studies: “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains;”\(^\text{12}\) “Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling;”\(^\text{13}\) “As A Fire is Meant for Burning;”\(^\text{14}\) and "With the Wings of our Mind."\(^\text{15}\) A “thick description” has the possibility of providing an understanding of how and why the church has carried out mission activities over the years, and how, in deepening that understanding, the church’s congregational song has embodied a faithful response to God’s call. The methodology has the potential to help us better understand not only the historical mission activity of the church, but our own faith – our relationship to one another and our relationship to God who is revealed in Jesus Christ, all, in this case, through the practice and performance of congregational song.


\(^{13}\) The Hymnary #494. Text and Tune: William J. Thompson.

\(^{14}\) Voices United #578. Text: Ruth Duck. Tune: Marty Haugen.

Case Study: “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains”

1. From Greenland’s icy mountains, From India’s coral strand,
2. Shall we whose souls are lighted With wisdom from on high,
3. Waft, waft, ye winds, His story, And you, ye waters, roll,
4. Where Africa’s sunny fountains Roll down their golden sand,
5. Shall we to men be nighted The lamp of life deny?
6. Till like a sea of glory It spreads from pole to pole;
7. From many an ancient river, From many a palm-y plain,
8. Salvation! O Salvation! The joyful sound proclaim,
9. Till our ransomed nature The Lamb for sinners slain,
10. They call us to deliver Their land from error’s chain.
11. Till earth’s remotest nation Has learned Men-si-ah’s Name.


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16 This printed version is from the Hymnal of the Moravian Church (Bethlehem, PA: The Moravian Church in America, Northern and Southern provinces, 1969), #270 and is used here for the clarity of the typeface. However, all comments and references will be directed to The Hymnary, #256, with which it is identical in tune and arrangement.
In its time, “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains” was “the inevitable hymn for all missionary occasions.” It came to The United Church of Canada through its Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregational roots and reveals nineteenth century cultural, theological, and missiological understandings and attitudes that remained in place for many years. A small fictional anecdote about nineteenth century missionaries in Hawaii may serve to illustrate its effect. In James Michener’s historical fiction novel Hawaii, Abner Hale graduates from Yale Divinity School and volunteers to carry God’s word to the “heathens” of Hawaii. When the small band of missionaries reaches Hawaii, they are overcome with the beauty of the land:

The missionaries then raised their voices in the hymn that had recently come to summarize such [missionary] efforts around the world, “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains,” and when the surging second verse was reached, each sang as if it had been written with Hawaii alone in mind:

“What though the spicy breezes
Blow soft o’er Ceylon’s isle,
Tho’ every prospect pleases,
And only man is vile!
In vain with lavish kindness
The gifts of God are strown;
The heathen in his blindness
Bows down to wood and stone.”

It was unfortunate that this was the first hymn to be sung in Lahaina, for it crystallized a fundamental error in Abner’s thinking. As long as he lived, he would visualize Lahaina as a place “where every prospect pleases, and only man is vile.” He would perpetually think of the Hawaiian as both heathen and blind.

Even though the United Church Hymnary omits the verse about “the heathen in his blindness,” the remaining verses and the inclusion of the hymn itself in The Hymnary reflect a certain theological and cultural understanding of mission.


Historical and Cultural Context

Written in 1819 by Anglican Bishop Reginald Heber, “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains” made its way across the sea from England to North America where it quickly became a favourite mission hymn.

The hymns of the Church may be called the flowers of the Church’s history. The hymns of any epoch grow out of the spiritual life of that epoch, and express its best thought and feeling. Of this, Bishop Heber’s hymn is an example. The hymn itself is the outgrowth of that missionary movement in England . . . the aroused conscience and quickened pulse of England have a witness in this and other hymns of the time.19

The verse that featured “the heathen in his blindness” appeared in the pre-union Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregational Hymnbooks, precursors to The Hymnary, but, as noted above, it was omitted in the 1930 Hymnary.20 The records of the Committee on Church Worship and Ritual, responsible for the publication of The Hymnary, do not indicate why the verse was omitted, but the Record of Proceedings of the United Church’s first General Council in 1925 show that missionaries of the new United Church did not think that the people in their mission fields were blind heathens, and that already, attitudes about mission were shifting. From the reports of the Congregational Foreign Missionary Society we read about Angola and “the Ovimbundu tribe of the great Bantu race, a people of virile qualities, intelligent and of a happy disposition;”21 from The Presbyterian Church we read “we share the privilege of helping more than 30,000 Korean Christians evangelize their homeland;”22 and from the Methodist mission in West China comes the report that “the

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19 Benson.

20 Congregational Church Hymnal; Methodist Hymn & Tune Book; The Presbyterian Book of Praise.

21 ROP, 1st General Council, 1925, 105.

22 Ibid., 110.
Christian church as a whole . . . begins to engage itself with problems of self-government and responsibility for community service and wider evangelism.”

A commentary on “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains,” published in 1921, opines that “the non-Christian religions are now regarded with a more sympathetic feeling than in Bishop Heber’s time,” and that “there would seem to be room in our hymnals for fresh missionary hymns.” Nevertheless, for our purposes, “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains” has a certain value in that it is illustrative of a particular (if somewhat shifting) mission paradigm and was one of the liturgical resources of the United Church for many years. It reflects the context in which it was written, so-called “modernism” or “enlightenment” worldview that had a profound influence on the world and the church. During the enlightenment era, medieval cosmology, with its hierarchical view of church and society was challenged and transformed by Renaissance, Reformation, and Revolution.

The Enlightenment was “pre-eminently, the Age of Reason.” The mystery of the medieval world disappeared, and “knowledge became the new source of power, and the instruments and technology of science became new tools of power.” The culture of modernism had a particularly powerful influence on the Protestant Church: “in the case of Protestantism, virtually everything that happened since the eighteenth century was, in one

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23 Ibid., 86.
25 The terms “modernism” and “enlightenment” are used interchangeably. The age of “Enlightenment” began with the Scientific Revolution of the 1500s-1700s, about the same time as the Protestant Reformation (Martin Luther’s theses appeared in Wittenberg in 1517).
26 Bosch, 263.
27 Ibid., 264.
28 Leddy, 74.
way or another, profoundly influenced by the Enlightenment worldview.\textsuperscript{29} The Enlightenment stressed the primacy of reason and brought scientific and technological advances to the West which could “establish itself as master of all others in virtually every field.”\textsuperscript{30} The advances were used to further the cause of colonialism, bringing mission activities in line with larger economic, political, and ideological goals of the colonial masters.\textsuperscript{31} Indeed, says missiologist David Bosch, “until fairly recently, virtually all Westerners took it for granted that the reshaping of the entire world in the image of the West was a forgone conclusion.”\textsuperscript{32} And so the missionaries sang:

\begin{quote}
Can we, whose souls are lighted with wisdom from on high,
Can we to men benighted the lamp of life deny?\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

As well as a sense of superiority, missionaries from the “enlightened” West brought with them the concept of manifest destiny. They were not only superior: they had been chosen by God as standard bearers to the heathens of the world who were calling them “to deliver their lands from error’s chain.”\textsuperscript{34} Individuals became objects of western mission, souls to be saved, typically with little regard for the community or context. “Each remotest nation” was to learn “Messiah’s name,”\textsuperscript{35} and “by the end of the nineteenth century, missionaries were pouring in the thousands into Africa and Asia, confident that they had

\textsuperscript{29} Bosch, 262.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 291.
\textsuperscript{32} Bosch, 292.
\textsuperscript{33} “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains,” v.2.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., v.1.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., v.2.
something to offer to the deprived people . . . [who] were eagerly waiting to embrace what they had to offer.”

Bosch underlines the shortcomings of this era: “the Enlightenment was supposed to create a world in which all people were equal, in which the soundness of human reason would show the way to happiness and abundance for all. This did not happen.”

Thus, modernity found its influence in such nineteenth missionary hymns as “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains,” which not only reflected the cultural context of the times but the theological and biblical understandings the missionaries brought with them.

Biblical and Theological Foundations

“From Greenland’s Icy Mountains,” uses biblical allusions to reinforce the self perception of the West. Faithful missionaries are deemed to be enlightened, wise, and devout, and such attributes are seen as rooted in scripture. For the biblically literate people of the time, scriptural metaphors would become missional touchstones. Wisdom, “one manifestation of the divine,” is bestowed on colonialist Christians “whose souls are lighted with wisdom from on high.” One is reminded of Paul’s letter to the Romans and his call to “speak God’s wisdom . . . which God decreed before the ages.” Missionaries are urged to bring the “lamp of life,” perhaps echoing the psalmist’s view of the Word of God as “a lamp for our feet and a light for our path,” and Jesus, God’s Word, as “the light of the

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36 Bosch, 289.
37 Ibid., 274.
38 Ramshaw, Treasures, 428.
39 “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains,” v. 3.
40 Romans 2:7.
41 “From Greenland’s, Icy Mountains,” v.3.
42 Psalm 119:105.
world.”

They are called to deliver the lands “from error’s chain,” a metaphor of enslavement, reminiscent of the man from Gerasenes, who was chained and bound until he was rescued by Jesus.45

The hymn also expresses particular theological understandings. Jesus is the “slain Lamb”, who is ransomed for us and atones for our sinful nature, and God is portrayed as “Redeemer, King [and] Creator” of the universe who will “return to reign” in Christ.47 It clearly presents an eschatological viewpoint, our future with God and Christ. Marianne Micks comments that “how Christians think about God necessarily influences the ways they act out their cultic response to him [sic]; the forms of their worship influence in turn the doctrines they develop and defend.”48 In this case, the forms of worship are the hymns we have sung and still sing. For the nineteenth century missionaries who adopted “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains” as their anthem, God was King, Creator, and Redeemer, and the future belonged to this King who would come again in “like a sea of Glory” spread “from pole to pole.”49 In order to realize this eschatological vision, mission meant proclaiming Christ until “each remotest nation [had] learnt Messiah’s name.”50 While there may also have been health care, agricultural, and teaching programs as part of the mission enterprise,

43 John 1:9.
44 “From Greenland’s Icy Mountain,” v.1.
45 Mark 5:4.
46 Ibid., v.4.
47 “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains,” v.3.
48 Micks, 87.
49 “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains,” v.3.
50 Ibid., v.3.
this hymns tells us that the aim of the missionaries was, nevertheless, primarily soteriological – in short, conversion.

Liturgical Function

“From Greenland’s Icy Mountains” was first set to an old English ballad tune “‘Twas When the Seas were Roaring.” But when the hymn made its way across the sea from England to Savannah, Georgia, it was reset by Lowell Mason, and its popularity was ensured by the new tune which became quickly wedded to the text. It is easy to see how the hymn would become such a popular mission hymn. The text is biblically based and reflects the missionaries’ self-understanding of their place in the world and their duty to bring the light of Christ to the world’s “dark” corners. As well, the music symbolically enhances the theological import of the words. The setting is simple, in a major key, written to be sung in unison or four part harmony, and the structure is straightforward. The first phrase of music (“from Greenland’s icy mountains”) is repeated three times and many of the intervals and sequences are repeated, making it easy to learn and to sing the variations that follow.

A – From Greenland’s icy mountains – a. from India’s coral sands
A – Where Afric’s sunny fountains – b. roll down their golden sand
B – From many an ancient river, from many a palmy plain,
A – They call us to deliver – c. their land from error’s chain.

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1. From Greenland’s icy mountains, From India’s coral strand,
2. Shall we, whose souls are lighted, With wisdom from on high,
3. Waft, waft, ye winds, His story, And you, ye waters, roll,

Where Afric’s sunny fountains Roll down their golden sand,
Shall we to men be-nighted? The lamp of life deny?
Till like a sea of glory It spreads from pole to pole;
Section B (“from many an ancient river”) draws our attention to the words and enhances their meaning through the rising music (see below): vs.1 - from many an ancient river, from many a palmy plain; vs. 2 - salvation! O salvation! vs. 3 - till o’er our ransomed nature the Lamb for sinners slain. In verses two and three, there is a particular emphasis on the theological concepts of salvation, atonement, and redemption by Christ, the Lamb whose ransomed body reigns over us.

“From Greenland’s Icy Mountains” would have been used in Sunday worship services as well as gatherings called to recruit missionaries (or money) for the cause. When used in regular worship, it could have had one of several places within the liturgical ordo. It could be used as a gathering hymn, calling the assembly to praise their God who has come in Jesus, the ransomed Lamb for sinners; it could be used in response to scripture that emphasizes Jesus’ call to the lost; or it could serve as a concluding hymn, commissioning each worshipper to evangelize, to think about their role in relationship to the benighted souls waiting for the light of Christ.
If used in a missionary rally, the hymn could well serve as a prelude to an “altar call” to those who might be contemplating missionary work; it could also be sung while an offering was being taken, or used as a commissioning hymn for missionaries about to go off to foreign fields. It would be transformative, a source of encouragement and motivation, affecting the attitudes and behaviour of everyone in the gathered assembly.

While in our postmodern, postcolonial era, it might be difficult to imagine this hymn being sung on any occasion today, in its time, “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains” would have been an effective instrument, written by someone who had “a burning passion for the proclamation of the Gospel throughout the world.” It remained in the repertoire (or at least in the hymnbook) of United Church congregations until 1971 and the publication of The Hymn Book.

**Missiological Implications**

Written in 1819, “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains” appeared on the scene long before the 1925 United Church union, but still served to encourage mission work and to underline the United Church’s mandate for mission. As noted in Chapter One, the United Church’s mandate for mission was very clearly spelled out in its Basis of Union: “We believe that it is our duty as disciples and servants of Christ, to further the extension of His Kingdom . . . We joyfully receive the word of Christ, bidding his people to go into all the

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51 The nineteenth century saw a flourishing of missionary societies, some non-denominational and some denominationally related, e.g. the China Inland Mission. Mission rallies, many of them huge, were held to raise money and enthusiasm. (Bosch, 332-334).

52 MacMillan, *Hymns of the Church*, 178. MacMillan expressed great admiration for Reginald Heber, a “worthy representative of an old English family” (175), and a follower of the Oxford Movement. Heber’s three year tenure as Bishop of Calcutta resulted in his death in 1826, a sad ending for the man who had written “Salvation! O salvation! The joyful sound exclaim . . . .” In spite of this, it should be recognized that both “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains” and MacMillan’s enthusiastic endorsement serve to underline the colonial mentality implicit in some of the selections in *The Hymnary.*
world and make disciples of all nations, declaring unto them that God was in Christ
reconciling the world to Himself and that He will have all men [sic] to be saved . . .”53

The mission and missionary holdings inherited from its Presbyterian, Methodist, and
Congregationalist roots were fields of activity where missionaries were involved in medical,
educational, and evangelistic work and where they worked alongside local leaders to bring
the good news. But even as United Church missionaries attempted to encourage partnership,
United Church congregations in Canada were still singing “From Greenland’s Icy
Mountains,” with its built-in sense of superiority, calling missionaries to deliver lands “from
error’s chain.” And even though United Church mission reports of the time emphasized the
attributes of the people on the mission “fields,” they were also paternalistic. For example, the
same report that noted the intelligence of the Ovimbundu people included this comment:
“there will be great scope for missionary activity amongst this backward, yet deserving
people.”54

Church historian Neil Semple has observed that foreign mission activities can never
be isolated from larger economic, political, and ideological goals: “the non-Western
countries offered immense opportunities for profit, power and prestige.”55 Harold Wells and
Patricia Wells, Canadian theologians and former missionies in Lesotho, comment: “the
Church went into the Third World hand in hand with the colonizers, and for all their fancy
rhetoric about ‘civilizing the native,’ the colonizers were there for one purpose: to exploit the
resources of those countries . . . in the words of the famous African explorer-missionary,

53 The Manual, Basis of Union, Article XX. It should be noted that mission work was not confined to
overseas, but also took shape on Canadian frontiers and First Nations communities.

54 ROP, 1st General Council, 1925, 105: comment regarding the Congregational mission in Dondi,
Angola.

David Livingstone to a gathering at Cambridge University, ‘I go back to Africa to make an open path for commerce and Christianity.’”\textsuperscript{56}

Even though “the Church, through its educational and medical institutions has helped many of the people of Africa and Asia to cope with the onslaught of the western world,”\textsuperscript{57} the primary missiological intent of “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains” is somewhat different. The hymn originates from a sending church for whom Jesus is Lord and deliverance from sin most important; the church’s mission is in response to “benighted” people in need of salvation. Like a lot of good intentions, the hymn conveys attitudes that, from a vantage point in the twenty-first century, seem unfortunate.


\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 25.
Case Study: “Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling”

Text and Tune: Will L. Thompson (written 1880)

Note: In The Hymnary version, there is another verse inserted between verses 2 and 3.

Time is now fleeting, the moment are passing –
Passing from you and from me;
Shadows are gathering, deathbeds are coming –
Coming for you and for me!

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58 This printed version is from Hymns for the Family of God (Nashville: Paragon Associates, Inc., 1976) #432, and is used here for the clarity of the typeface. However, comments made will be about the hymn as it appears in The Hymnary, #494, with which it is identical in tune and arrangement. A change in verse has been noted above.
The story is told that in 1899, as Dwight Moody lay dying, he overheard a conversation between his doctor and Will Thompson, author of “Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling.” In his concern for Moody, Thompson had travelled from Ohio to Moody’s home in Northfield, Massachusetts and wanted to check on him. At first, the doctor refused to admit Thompson. But Moody, a well known preacher and gospel song writer, recognized the voice and called for him. Taking Thompson’s hand, Moody said, “Will, I would rather have written ‘Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling’ than anything I have been able to do in my whole life.”

With the gospel hymn “Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling,” we move from India’s coral sands to mission in North America. As well, we find changes to the prevailing culture that begin with the Social Gospel and the revival movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

**Historical and Cultural Context**

The Social Gospel movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries underlined the modernist view that faith was closely tied to ethical and responsible action. Christianity was defined as a social religion concerned with the quality of human relations on this earth. It was an attempt to apply Christianity to the collective ills of an industrializing society, emphasizing that God was at work in social change, creating moral order and social justice. Its roots were in the expansion of the evangelicalism of the nineteenth century “expressed variously in German pietism, the Methodism of the English-speaking world, the

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60 Although the hymn was written prior to United Church union in 1925, comments made here about urban and small town context would still be relevant after union.

missionary movement, and American revivalism . . . . Among its doctrines was a belief in the possibility of personal perfection beyond the temptation of sin."

In Canada, the Social Gospel was played out in a mostly Protestant background dominated by the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Anglican churches. Among social problems, those of immigration and slums in the large cities prompted response from the churches with the establishment of institutions like the Fred Victor Mission (Toronto) and settlement houses in Toronto and Montreal. As well, action from the so-called “first wave” of such feminists as Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney, and Emily Murphy played an important role in the early part of the twentieth century. Some years later, the influence of those women was recognized and celebrated. As feminist scholar Randi Warne has reflected: “Of equal importance is the discovery that Christian feminists have a heritage. Even within a tradition which has tended to reflect, as Nellie McIlung might say, the masculine view, women have laboured together to bring forth a new vision of humanity."

The “first wave” of feminism was rooted in the temperance and suffrage movements of the late nineteenth century. The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), founded by France Willard in 1873 (the year of Nellie McIlung’s birth), was endorsed by McIlung’s generation and important in the emergence of the Social Gospel movement. When middle-class women went into the slums to educate and help the poor, “they were appalled. The extreme poverty and abysmal living conditions faced by Canada’s urban immigrant poor shocked many back to their parlours, but even more into political action.”

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62 Ibid., 385.


64 Ibid., 199.
McClung, social transformation required structural transformation. “So long as women were required to exercise influence only indirectly, the world (no less, the church) would continue to meet men’s needs and speak to men’s concerns.”\(^{65}\) She became active in the WCTU, the suffrage movement, and within the United Church, the fight for the ordination of women. Social and political action for McClung and her contemporaries were accompanied by singing, and this era spawned hymns that called people of faith to:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Rescue the perishing, care for the dying;} \\
\text{Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;} \\
\text{Weep o’er the erring one, lift up the fallen,} \\
\text{Tell them of Jesus the mighty to save.} \\
\text{Rescue the perishing, duty demands it;} \\
\text{Strength for thy labour the Lord will provide;} \\
\text{Back to a narrow way patiently win them;} \\
\text{Tell the poor wanderer a Saviour has died.}^{66}
\end{align*}
\]

As well, old moral causes like the campaign against drink were revived.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Tis thine alone, almighty Name,} \\
\text{To raise the dead to life,} \\
\text{The lost inebriate to reclaim} \\
\text{From passions’ fearful strife.} \\
\text{What ruin hath intemperance wrought!} \\
\text{How widely roll its waves!} \\
\text{How many myriads hath it brought} \\
\text{To fill dishonoured grave!}^{67}
\end{align*}
\]

Once again, music seemed to give strength and unity to people of faith as they toiled to make the world a better place.

Singing was equally important within the phenomenon of revivalism. When John Wesley died in 1791, there was one preacher, one organized circuit and sixty members of the

\(^{65}\) Ibid.

\(^{66}\) “Rescue the Perishing,” \textit{The New Canadian Hymnal} (Toronto: S.W. Fallis, 1916) #153 and \textit{The Hymnary} #499, vv. 1,4. Text: Frances Jane Crosby Van Alstyne. Although \textit{The New Canadian Hymnal} was not published by the Methodist Church, it was one of many hymnbooks of the time and would have been used by Methodists, particularly in their Sunday Schools and class meetings.

\(^{67}\) “Tis Thine Alone,” \textit{The Methodist Hymn-Book} (Toronto: Methodist Book and Publishing House, 1884), #919.
Methodist Church in Upper and Lower Canada. By the end of the 1800s, over thirty percent of Ontario claimed to be Methodist. This dramatic change came about because of a revivalist approach to evangelism that preached holiness and focused on an individual’s conversion experience and the life changes that followed. Although Methodists did not introduce revivalism, they recognized it as an effective strategy, particularly for frontier and rural communities. By mid-century, revivals had become a familiar feature of religious life that included rules for “holy” living: prohibition of alcohol, card playing, dancing, circus going, and theatre attendance.

Revivalism went beyond the walls of Methodist churches to small towns, where professional evangelists were invited to stay for weeks at a time, conducting services of song, scripture, and invitation. They continued the emphasis on individual conversion and at the same time encouraged integration of faith and everyday practices. As well, Methodist campground meetings upheld the revival tradition, with its emphasis on conversion and personal piety. Revivalism found resonance in hymns that emphasized sin and salvation.

Come ye sinners, poor and wretched
Weak and wounded, sick and sore,
Jesus ready stands to save you,
Full of pity, love, and power . . .

Encouragement for “Holy living” was found in hymns that called believers to

Dare to do right! Dare to be true!

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69 Airhart, 24. These “rules” were added as a footnote to the Methodist General Council Discipline of 1886.

70 Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). Marks describes the “Great Revival” of Thorold, Ontario in 1892, when four Protestant Churches invited evangelists Hugh T. Crossley and John E. Hunter to lead four weeks of services, resulting in a transformation of that community.

Other men’s failures can never save you; 
Stand by your conscience, your honour, your faith. 
Stand like a hero, and battle till death.  

“Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling” is one such mission hymn from this era that reaches out to people hungry for hope with the invitation to “come home” to Jesus.73

Biblical and Theological Foundations

“Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling” is a congregational song about being lost and found. These themes are woven throughout the Bible, as is the call to follow God’s way through Christ. The parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son74 are among the best known and loved stories of God’s patient and merciful love for all creation. The call to return to God is also clear. From the Old Testament come the words of the prophets: “when Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called him;” and “return, O Israel to the Lord your God.”75 In the gospels, we hear the call of Jesus, “I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”76


73 It should be noted that even though “Softly and Tenderly” was written in the nineteenth century, it would still resonate with people many years later, both urban and rural. The Hymnary was published at the beginning of the Depression, with its resulting hardship for many people. Metropolitan United Church in Toronto is one example of churches that found their mission in reaching out to the urban poor. It “assisted 180 families in 1932” and sent children to fresh air camps. As well, “more than one thousand found a warm welcome” at the Unemployed Men’s Club on Saturday nights. Judith St. John, Firm Foundations: A Chronicle of Toronto’s Metropolitan United Church and Her Methodist Origins 1795-1984 (Toronto: Metropolitan United Church, 1988), 137. Dr. Peter Bryce, who began a long ministry at Metropolitan in 1938, was instrumental in influencing both church and government to reach out to the poor. “From the first, he was deeply concerned about the poor and destitute for whom no government help was available.” St. John, 157.

74 Luke 15:3-7; 8-10; 11-32 respectively.

75 Hosea 12:1, 11:1.

76 Matthew 13:9.
These themes are evoked throughout the gospel hymn “Softly and Tenderly.” Jesus calls the prodigal to “come home, come home,”77 and waits “patient and loving,” “waiting and watching,”78 like the father who was filled with compassion when he saw his son “while he was still far off,” and ran to welcome him with joy.79 We are reminded that the call of Jesus is to bring healing and wholeness to the lost and lonely; as well, as Paul’s letter to the new Christians in Corinth reminds them (and us), they can be with God “in whatever condition you were called.”80

“Softly and Tenderly” would have been popular at revival meetings as well as hymn singing at home. It would have been a hymn of great encouragement to people who needed comfort in their poverty and a word of salvation in a time that highlighted personal religion. The dominant themes of the hymn emphasize the individualism of the era’s religion. The images are simple: God is like a mother waiting at the door for an errant child to come home;81 God is like a father working in the fields, ready to put down the hoe and kill the fatted calf when the wanderer returns. Mercy and compassion are freely given for “you and for me.”82 Jesus is a merciful saviour who calls and pleads for us when we are lost, pardons us when we have sinned and comes for us when we die.83 The eschatological vision is one of assurance in the eternal love of Jesus. It evokes such other gospel songs as “Come let us sing

77 “Softly and Tenderly,” refrain.
78 Ibid., v.1.
80 I Corinthians 7:24.
81 Marks, 197, comments that the late nineteenth century saw a rise in popularity of feminine religious images, with hymns that featured welcoming, domestic imagery.
82 “Softly and Tenderly,” vv.1,3,4.
83 Ibid., vv.3,4.
of a wonderful love,” in which the “Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet – why do they roam, they do they roam?”

Even so, their inclusion in *The Hymnary* became a source of controversy in the new United Church of Canada.

**Liturgical Function**

Alexander MacMillan, editor of *The Hymnary*, had this to say about gospel songs:

> Sacred song was one of the means employed to commend and impress the gospel message. *The hymns . . . were simple* and unadorned, and made no pretension to be regarded as part of the permanent literature of the time . . . the melodies also, with their easily-caught refrains, were simple, and not intended to be set in place with the lasting music of past and present times. But at their best, they had and have their place, and have served an important purpose . . . in arresting the careless, and reviving the spiritual life of many who had become lukewarm.\[86\] [italics added]

One wonders how Alexander MacMillan might have reacted if he had heard “Softly and Tenderly” sung at a memorial service for Martin Luther King Jr. at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia on April 8, 1968. Trying to forecast what might be part of “the lasting sacred music of past and present times” is always fraught with danger.

The music of “Softly and Tenderly” is both simple and sentimental, but it has an integrity about it, attuned to the text and its biblical/theological themes of call and lost and found. Theologically, the tune and the musical arrangement enhance the text and create a context for conversion and holiness. The hymn would be particularly appealing to people attending Sunday worship or a midweek revival meeting because of the music’s invitational character. The hymn is easily sung in four part harmony, and its AABA structure makes it

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85 See also Chapter One, page 46.

instantly accessible.\textsuperscript{87} The refrain (line 3), in particular, invites participation and transformation with its call and response pattern begging for a change of attitude and behaviour. The sopranos sing “come home,” and are echoed by the other three parts. Then all unite in singing together – “ye who are weary come home,” with the chromatic notes of the soprano line on “come home” adding to the feeling of pathos.

One could imagine this song being used in the ordo of worship in a number of ways. It could be used as a response to the Word, especially when the scripture is about being lost and found (the Lukan parables are the obvious ones, but equally appropriate would be some of the healing stories, the call to Matthew, the story of Zacchaeus). It could also be used after a prayer of confession. But more important, it is a hymn of invitation, to be used at a time of an altar call or an equivalent time of dedication, commitment, and offering. Its origins in the nineteenth century revival movements point to its certain use in revival services as well as the campground meetings that characterized the time. Although not found in today’s United Church hymn resources, it continues to reach out with its simple appeal and gentle music.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{87} A – “Softly and tenderly,” A – “Patient and loving,” B – “Come home,” A “Earnestly, tenderly.”

\textsuperscript{88} “Softly and Tenderly” was used in the 1985 academy award winning film “Trip to Bountiful.” As well, it was featured on Anne Murray’s 1999 album “What a Wonderful World” (Straightway Records), which
Missiological Implications

Although “Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling” might be called a “heart song” rather than a “head song,” it is still part of the modernist view of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries’ rationalist emphasis on faith, morality, and ethics. It emphasizes the view that religion is mostly about conversion and salvation, and mission is equated with charity.89

As well, the inclusion of “Softly and Tenderly” in The Hymnary illustrates the conundrum faced by The Committee on Church Worship and Ritual in trying to reconcile the traditions of the churches that came together to form The United Church of Canada as they worked toward the publication of its first hymn book.90 As already noted, Alexander MacMillan, editor of The Hymnary believed that what was appropriate for the new hymn book was “thoughtful meditation on God’s glory and the wonders of His grace.”91 He and the committee made a clear distinction between lower and middle class hymnody: Salvation Army, “catchy gospel songs, white and black spirituals were ruled out.”92 Gospel songs like Fanny Crosby’s “Blessed Assurance” and Ira Sankey’s “God is Love! His Word Proclaims It”93 would have been popular in camp meetings and revivals. They did not, however, make it into The Hymnary of The United Church of Canada, even though they were an integral part.

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89 On the surface, this hymn is individualistic, but becomes Social Gospel when translated into concepts of holiness and witness bearing. For Methodists in particular, holiness would include both personal piety and social activism. See Paul Westermeyer, Let Justice Sing: Hymnody and Justice.

90 For more detail on the decisions affecting the inclusion (or not) of gospel hymns, see Chapter One, page 46.f.


92 Ibid., 41.

93 The New Canadian Hymnal, #12, #33.
of the singing faith of that era. John Beckwith, eminent Canadian composer and music historian, underlines the era’s use of gospel songs by pointing to the “million selling paper-bound anthologies of the Moody-Sankey revivals reprinted for Canadian consumption that were among the revival collections of the 1880s and 1890s.”94 “Softly and Tenderly” does not appear in any of the three uniting denominational hymnbooks. It does appear, however, in other hymn resources of the time, and we can assume that Methodists in particular picked up hymns and songs from those resources for their revivals and campground meetings.95 However, the North American revivalist camp meeting tradition was not familiar to The Hymnary committee members, and one unidentified member of the committee commented on the inclusion of gospel songs in the hymnbooks this way:

[as for those] entitled Gospel Songs, I have no doubt which section of the Hymnary of the family’s hymn-book would show the most thumb marks. Seriously, I say that all of the 38 are in the Salvation Army hymn book and United Church people in Nfl [sic] will be encouraged in large numbers to sing them there.96

This kind of evaluation reveals a particular bias, leading one to wonder how these men (and the committee was made up of only men) could choose to ignore the impact these gospel songs had on the nineteenth century Methodist church. The music may not have seemed “reverent and strong” to musically sophisticated ears, but it formed a significant base for the revival movement and the faith of the people. Some years later, Stanley Osborne, editor of the 1971 Hymn Book, voiced his opinion in a similar vein:


96 When The Hymnary was published, “The Gospel Call” section contained 41 selections. Committee comments, United Church of Canada Archives, Committee on Church Worship and Ritual, Hymns – words only submitted for study. C6C5R, file 25.
The desire for artistic melody and harmony pushed the evangelical tunes further to the side . . . . In sophisticated circles, it was not considered proper to stir congregations by insipid, mawkish tunes that set the toe in motion . . . music for the uncultured is, at best, transient . . . In the final analysis it always hovers on the brink of mediocrity.97

Looking back, one cannot help but wonder whether attitudes like those of Osborne, MacMillan and their committees helped pave the way for the loss of Methodist evangelical fervour. It should also be noted that “Softly and Tenderly” represents a particular genre of nineteenth century mission hymns, and that gospel songs are not the only mission selections in the hymn book. Another whole section included in the *Hymnary* is called “Missions.” Hymnbook selections aside, the missiological intent of “Softly and Tenderly” remains one of charity and caring for the lost and lonely in a pioneer-cum-industrial society.

Both “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains” and “Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling” represent concepts of mission that David Bosch would call “Mission in the Wake of the Enlightenment.”98 The movement to a more postmodern paradigm in mission would result not only in new thinking about mission, but also in new songs written and sung in response to new missiological understandings, perspectives, and experiences. To one of those we now turn.

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97 Osborne, 532.

98 Bosch, Contents, x.
Case Study: “As a Fire Is Meant for Burning”


99 “As a Fire Is Meant for Burning,” *Voices United* #578.
“As a Fire Is Meant for Burning” was written in 1983, following a visit by hymn writer Ruth Duck to the United Church of Christ (USA) mission work in Turkey. It represents a significant shift in thinking about mission. Rather than superior beings coming from the enlightened West to bring hope to the heathen of the world, missionaries have become “teachers” and “learners,” working side by side with “neighbours everywhere.”

Historical and Cultural Context

“As A Fire Is Meant for Burning” signals a move well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in terms of a liturgical theology of mission. The hymn is a reflection of a more postmodern challenge to the certainties and narrow rationalism of the Enlightenment. It is of a different era, and gone is any sense of cultural superiority. Two world wars and countless conflicts since, combined with a sense of impending ecological collapse, have changed our attitudes to the world around us, and with it, our sense of manifest destiny. The postmodern culture, or “postmodernity” as Michael Gallagher prefers to call it, arose in reaction to modernity’s failure to provide satisfaction in a culture based on reason and knowledge, where everything, including human beings and the natural world were “seen as the objects of scientific research . . . that could be analyzed, catalogued, and rehabilitated.” Modernity had made lasting and important achievements: scientific advances that lessened human suffering; the rise of democracy; the value of the individual, and a concern for emancipation.

100 Ibid., “As a Fire Is Meant for Burning,” v.1.


102 Leddy, 74.
and human rights. At the same time, it had also spawned Auschwitz and Hiroshima and a “culture of waste.”\textsuperscript{103}

In postmodern culture, relationships and experiences take on a more important role. This is also true with postmodern worship, at least in the Protestant world. “If postmodern worship can’t make people furiously feel and think (in the old ‘modern’ world, we would have said only ‘think’), it can’t show them how God’s Word transforms the way we ‘feel.’”\textsuperscript{104} Concern for relationships and the influence of postmodernity on the United Church (and other churches) can be seen in Duck’s mission hymn. “As a Fire Is Meant for Burning” is a snapshot of contemporary mission thinking among “mainline” Protestant (and to a large extent, Roman Catholic) churches.\textsuperscript{105} Instead of being “souls . . . lighted with wisdom from on high,”\textsuperscript{106} mission workers are teachers, and learners, pilgrims who are also seekers. “Men [sic] benighted”\textsuperscript{107} have become neighbours, among “earth’s peoples, many hued.”\textsuperscript{108} The colonialism, even arrogance found in “From Greenland’s icy Mountains” has been replaced with a “humble, listening Spirit” in which we give glory to God and live “to God’s delight.”\textsuperscript{109}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[105] For example, churches which are members of The World Council of Churches: Lutheran, United Church of Christ (USA), Methodist, Reformed, United Church of Canada, etc.
\item[106] “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains,” v.3.
\item[107] Ibid., v. 2.
\item[108] “As a Fire,” v.3.
\item[109] Ibid., v. 2.
\end{footnotes}
“As a Fire” is a hymn about mutuality in mission and about a church that both sends and receives, learning as well as teaching on a pilgrim way. Mission activity is a Pentecostal imperative, not confined to overseas, but to “neighbours everywhere.”

Jesus Christ is light, and the light is spread by lives of humility and love, demonstrating God’s love, rather than just preaching about it. The key to the hymn, and the thinking behind it, is not domination and superiority (a modernist concept), but relationships and respect.

Biblical and Theological Foundations

Ruth Duck’s hymn writing reflects a strong biblical base, and as a poet and hymn writer, she is also concerned with metaphorical and expansive language, particularly in relation to the naming of God: “to speak about God is to speak metaphorically. Our liturgical language describes the infinite and holy God in terms based in earthy human experience: rock, wind, shepherd, mother, faith, potter. Such language is metaphorical, because God is both like and unlike such earthly realities and relationships.”

We find such metaphorical, expansive language in “As a Fire.” God is portrayed as the One who is worthy of our praise: “the church is meant for mission, giving glory to God’s name.”

God is the One who takes delight in love, justice, and righteousness in the earth;

God is the mother who invites us to take delight in her nurturing care and calls us to live in that delight.

Christ is the light

110 Ibid., v.3.
111 Ruth Duck in Vogel, 286.
112 “As a Fire Is Meant for Burning,” v.1.
113 See Jeremiah 9:23. “. . . I act with steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the earth, for in these things, I delight, says the Lord.”
114 Isaiah 66:11. “. . . that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious bosom.”
115 “As a Fire,” v. 2.
who calls us to show the light “by our gentle, loving actions.”\textsuperscript{116} Christ is the road for pilgrims on the way.\textsuperscript{117}

All three mission hymns analysed thus far are based on scripture, but to different ends and with different results. The first (“Greenland’s”) uses biblical allusions to reinforce a manifest destiny of superiority; the second (“Softly and Tenderly”) reminds the singer of the Bible’s story of grace and salvation and call. “As a Fire . . .” relies on biblical metaphors of renewal. The hymn begins with a reference to fire and immediately evokes an image of Pentecost and the birth of the Christian church with “tongues of fire” and violent winds filling the house where the apostles were staying.\textsuperscript{118} The church “is meant for mission,”\textsuperscript{119} but these are missionaries with a difference: they are to “find neighbours everywhere,”\textsuperscript{120} alluding to the question and the implied answer in the parable of the Good Samaritan – “But who is my neighbour?”\textsuperscript{121} And unlike the nineteenth century missionaries whose souls were “lighted with wisdom from on high,”\textsuperscript{122} these teachers and learners are “vessels made of clay,”\textsuperscript{123} like the new Christians in Corinth to whom Paul wrote: “but we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God . . . .”\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{116} John 8:12. “As a Fire,” v.2.

\textsuperscript{117} Allusion to John 14:6 – “I am the way . . . .”

\textsuperscript{118} Acts 2:3.

\textsuperscript{119} “As a Fire” v.1.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., v.1.

\textsuperscript{121} Luke 10:25.

\textsuperscript{122} “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains,” v.3.

\textsuperscript{123} “As a Fire” v. 2.

\textsuperscript{124} 2 Cor.4:7.
Beyond the clay vessels, though, there are the words of Jesus: “from the fig tree, learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.” So we, too, are called to be signs of growth, like “a green bud in the springtime” and like a rainbow after a storm, a sign of God’s covenant with the earth and earth’s people, “many hued.”

For nineteenth century missionaries, the future belonged to their Kingly God who would come again in “a sea of Glory” spread “from pole to pole.” In order to realize this eschatological vision, mission was about proclaiming Christ until “each remotest nation [had] learnt [the] Messiah’s name.” In contrast, “As a Fire Is Meant for Burning” presents a God who is not a King, but a more intimate being who takes delight in our “humble, listening Spirit.” The future is about “a new and glorious dawn,” reflecting the light of Christ, a time of life renewed in peace and neighbourliness. In order to realize this eschatological vision, mission is about dialogue, teaching, learning, loving, caring, demonstrating God’s love. The aim of overseas personnel is “to build a bridge of care,” and to be a sign of unity for the people of the earth.

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126 “As a Fire,” v.3.
127 Ibid., v.3.
129 “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains,” v.3.
130 Ibid., v.3.
131 “As a Fire Is Meant,” v.2.
132 Ibid., v.3.
133 Ibid., v.1.
Liturgical Function

“As a Fire Is Meant for Burning” was first set to BEACH SPRING, a pleasant tune with a modal melody line. Although from a pastoral point of view, BEACH SPRING, with its limited melodic range and simple rhythm (two short, weak beats followed by two longer strong ones — ♬♩♩♩♩■■■■■■) may have the advantage of looking easier to sing, the Haugen tune JOYOUS LIGHT does a better job of conveying the Pentecostal spirit and joy in mission. As well, the Haugen tune enhances the text theologically, underlining the notion of mutuality in mission. It is also less repetitive and more dynamic than BEACH SPRING.

The musical dimensions of mutuality have been explored elsewhere by neurosurgeon Oliver Sacks who comments that the primary function of music is collective and communal, bringing people together: when music is communal, there is an actual binding or “marriage” of nervous systems: “it is very difficult to remain detached, to resist being drawn into the rhythm of chanting or dancing.”134 Kathleen Harmon observes that “both song and speech employ words, but speaking sets up confrontational differences between the speaker and the one spoken to . . . . In singing, however, individuals come together in a single identity . . . .”135 The tune and harmony of JOYOUS LIGHT work particularly well in this hymn in bringing individuals together in a single identity. As well as being the medium that conveys the theological intent of mutuality in mission, the music actually enhances the words of “As a Fire” and evokes a transformative experience.

134 Sacks, Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain (New York; Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 244-245.
135 Harmon, 29.
The first section ("As a fire is meant . . .") sets the theme; then, with an octave leap, the singer is reminded what giving glory is about; in the second verse, the focus is also on action, while in the third, the singer is pointed to a “rainbow . . .” In the singing, the liturgical community finds direction, the music bringing home the meaning of mission.

The hymn could be used in a number of ways within the ordo of public worship: as a processional hymn that could include presentation of symbols of mission, or as an introduction to prayers of the people which could focus on the needs of the world and celebrate the ability of the congregation to engage in mission. It has particular transformative potential as a closing hymn that brings together the joys and concerns of a community of worshippers who care about the world and sends them out for neighbourly mission.

Missiological Implications

Although “As a Fire Is Meant for Burning” was not written by a member of The United Church of Canada (Ruth Duck is an ordained minister within the United Church of Christ, USA), nevertheless, the hymn presents a valid picture of The United Church of Canada’s theology and approach to mission today. Written in 1983, it reflects changes in attitudes and policies that are still valid today and began within churches some years prior.

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136 Daniel Levitin, *This is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession* (New York: Dutton, Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 2006), 29, comments that in music, relationships are key, and that “every culture we know of has the octave as the basis for its music; there is a strong sense that the octave makes us feel that we have come home again.” In this case, the octave leap reinforces God’s glory, our gentle, loving actions, and the hope of the rainbow, symbol of God’s covenant.
As early as 1964, Asian churches were recording the need for change: a mission Report of the East Asian Conference of Churches exclaimed “all must receive; all must send.”\(^{137}\) Within The United Church of Canada, criteria for development projects began to include the participation of receiving agencies in decision making, encouragement of local leadership development, and commitment to ecumenical, community oriented projects.\(^{138}\) As well, basic questions began to be asked about the church’s role in God’s mission: “what is the meaning of mission or missionary? How best can we resolve the confusion between Christianity and Western culture and values? What do we mean when we say ‘Christ, the way of salvation’?”\(^{139}\)

By the mid seventies, The United Church of Canada was talking about “Mutuality in Mission,” not only sending Christians to witness in other parts of the world, but bringing Asian and African Christians to witness to their faith in Canadian church congregations.\(^{140}\) The United Church’s Division of World Outreach had adopted a practice called the “Dual Mandate,” meaning “doing mission” (evangelism, inter-church witness), and “doing justice” (solidarity, advocacy, and engagement in justice concerns). Missionaries stopped being “missionaries,” and became “overseas personnel,”\(^{141}\) partners in mission who went “to relate to one another “in a humble, listening spirit,” and give “glory to God’s name”\(^{142}\) in loving actions, learning, as well as teaching. The hymn echoes changes in mission polity by


\(^{138}\) ROP 26\(^{th}\) General Council, 1974, 236.

\(^{139}\) Ibid., “Africa Report” by Garth Legge, 233.

\(^{140}\) ROP, 27\(^{th}\) General Council, 1977, 367.

\(^{141}\) ROP, 33\(^{rd}\) General Council, 1990, 160.

\(^{142}\) “As a Fire” vv.1, 2.
encouraging mission partners to “join hands across the nation, finding neighbours everywhere.”¹⁴³ It also reflects the guidelines drawn up by the compilers of Voices United – “The collection will . . . proclaim Christ’s call to faithful discipleship in terms of our society and our time.”¹⁴⁴

The missiological intent of “As a Fire Is Meant for Burning” is quite different from both that of “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains” and “Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling.” The intent of this analysis is not to defend one mission theology and practice over another per se, nor to condemn the missionaries of the nineteenth century. They were, after all, products of their time and their worldview, focused on serving God as they toiled to save humankind. Rather, as “thick description,” it is to demonstrate that while hymns may illustrate attitudes of the times in which they were written, they can also be liturgy as theology, liturgical theology. In the process of examining mission hymns, we can see how the singing not only enables us to experience the love of God, but to influence how we might love our neighbour and carry out God’s mission in the world.

¹⁴³ Ibid., v.1.

Case Study: “With the Wings of Our Mind”

Text: Ik-Whan (Timothy Moon), trans. A. Marion Pope (written 1981)
Tune: Don-Whan Cho (composed 1982)

1 With the wings of our mind on the wind fly-
   ing, to the silent breathless earth God’s love send-
   ing, to the dry and thirsty earth God’s love send-
   ing.

2 Ttu-go-un ma-um pa-ram-e shi-
   ro sum-ma-k’in i-ttang-e po-nae-
   no-ing, to the brave justice flag wave high a-
   bove, to the heavens and the earth free-
   dom bringing.

3 With the wings of our song on the wind flying
   to the dreary desolate earth our love sending,
   let the vision of light open wide our hearts
   ’till the songs of our hope freedom ringing.

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145 “With the Wings of our Mind,” Voices United, #698.
“With the Wings of Our Mind” moves this study’s examination of music and mission to a particular context – South Korea in the 70s and 80s; and a particular concern – justice and human rights.

**Historical and Cultural Context**

“To speak of the people of Korea is to speak of survival – survival for more than four thousand years, but with a distinct culture and character.”146 A country of strategic military and political importance, Korea was invaded and colonized by Japan in 1910, divided at the 38th parallel in 1945, with Russian domination in the north and American influence in the south, and ravaged by a three year civil war (augmented by international powers) in the early 50’s that left cities in ruin, roads, bridges and railways inoperative, millions homeless, and thousands dead or wounded.147

South Korea, the context for “With the Wings of Our Mind,” has also been troubled by periods of military repression. In 1961, the army seized control of the government and imposed tight control of news media, freedom of assembly and of speech. Government repression continued throughout the 60s, and in 1972, President Park Chung Hee declared martial law. President Park was assassinated by the head of his own Secret Police in 1979, but any hope of reform was dashed by “a renewal of even more violent repression” in 1980.148 “During [those] years, the church and its leadership had been in the forefront of the criticism of the growing government repression. As a result, many ministers, theological


147 Korea was annexed by Japan in 1910 and a Japanese colony for 35 years. Flemington, 4.

students, and ordinary Christian men and women were arrested, tortured, and imprisoned for expressing and acting upon their Christian convictions.”149

It is out of this milieu that “With the Wings of Our Mind” was written. Ik-Whan (Timothy) Moon, an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK), has been both an Old Testament professor at Hankuk Theological Seminary (PROK), as well as a pastor at the Galilee (PROK) Church in Seoul, well known for its support of the struggle for justice and human rights in South Korea.150

He criticizes and protests. He goes to prison again and yet again for anti-government activities – not because he is unpatriotic but because he is too patriotic to allow his country to be destroyed, or his people to be used, without risking all he has or to cry out against the wrongs. “Thus says the Lord . . . .”151

Paul Stott, hymn blogger from the United Church congregation of Trinity-Saint Paul’s in Toronto, reflects on “With the Wings of Our Mind:” “This poetic and reflective text was written by Ik-Whan (Timothy) Moon and translated from the original Korean by (our own) Marion Pope.152 It was published in the seminal Asian hymnal Sound the Bamboo (1990).”153 He goes on to quote Marion Pope who comments on the hymn and its author as follows:

While he was a political prisoner for his struggles for justice during the military dictatorships of the 60s, 70s, and 80s in The Republic of Korea (South Korea), the Rev. Moon, Ik-Hwan (Timothy Moon) composed

149 Ibid.

150 The Galilee Church no longer exists. It arose during the worst days of repression in the 1970s and 1980s and was a place where people could gather (even illegally) to pray, sing, hear news about prisoners, and support one another.


152 Former United Church of Canada overseas personnel in South Korea and member of Trinity-Saint Paul’s United Church in Toronto.

much poetry for hymns. They expressed his hopes for justice and probably sustained him during seven periods of imprisonment, the last time for going to the north and achieving a commitment from Mr. Kim, Il Sung, to work with the south toward unification.

Since political prisoners were kept in solitary confinements and were not allowed pen and paper to write, at the monthly 10 minute visit with his wife, he would start shouting out his latest poetry from down the hall so she could write down as much as possible. This was one of those poems, set to Korean music by the composer Cho, Don-Whan.\textsuperscript{154}

Moon’s third imprisonment was in May, 1980, on the eve of the Kwanju massacre,\textsuperscript{155} and this hymn’s call for freedom and justice underlines the struggle of that time.

**Biblical and Theological Foundations**

Like a modern day Paul writing (in this case, dictating) from his prison cell, Timothy Moon combines poetry with scriptural allusions and a theology that underlines his trust in a loving God and his hope for a future of universal freedom. The text’s power lies in the contrast of images between the now and the someday possible: the “silent breathless earth”\textsuperscript{156} will be restored with “the fountain of love;” “the brave justice flag”\textsuperscript{157} will wave even in a country now under martial law; and “songs of hope”\textsuperscript{158} will ring for freedom.

One of the main images in the hymn is wind, an ambivalent symbol in scripture. In the first story of creation, a wind from God “swept over the face of the waters,”\textsuperscript{159} but

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{155} In 1980, more than 20,000 students demonstrated peacefully in support of democracy in Kwangu, a city of (then) 800,000 people in the southern province. “Paratroopers moved into the city. Bodies littered the streets and public buildings and hospitals overflowed with the dead and injured … (a week later), more than 17,000 heavily armed troops returned to storm the city with tanks and helicopters, shooting down all resistance.” Lois Wilson, *Mission Magazine, Faith and justice: The Moderator’s Message* (Vol 5 no.3, 1981), 16.

\textsuperscript{156} “With the Wings of Our Mind,” v.2.

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., v.2.

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., v.3.

\textsuperscript{159} Genesis 1:2b.
throughout scripture, wind is often depicted as a source of both danger and futility. In Luke 8:23, a windstorm swamps the boat of Jesus and his fishing disciples; in Isaiah 32:2, a righteous king and just prince “will be like a hiding place from the wind, a covert from the tempest;” in Ecclesiastes 2:11, the philosopher reflects that “all was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.” Moon transforms this negative image of wind and reminds us of the story of Pentecost, when a mighty wind “filled the entire house . . . and all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.” With wind comes both power and protection: “With the wings of our mind on the wind flying” also recalls the many biblical references to eagles’ wings and both the impetus and care offered by the mighty bird.

Another important reference point is the contrast between desert and life giving water. In each verse of the hymn, there is text about the earth which is “silent and breathless,” “dry (and) thirsty,” and “dreary (and) desolate.” Again, we are reminded of the prison in which Timothy Moon was incarcerated as well as biblical stories of wilderness or the Israelites in the desert. But with “our tears on the wind flowing to the dry and dusty earth,” there is also the hope of Isaiah’s promise to the people in exile that “waters shall break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert,” or the living water promised by

160 Acts 2:2,4.

161 “With the Wings of Our Mind,” v.1.

162 Deuteronomy 32:11; Exodus 19:4; Psalm 91.

163 “With the Wings of Our Mind” vv.1-3.

164 Exodus 14:3, 14:1; Deuteronomy 8:2.

165 “With the Wings of Our Mind,” v.2.

166 Isaiah 35:6b.
Jesus to the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well in Sychar. The “wings of (our) tears,” along with the fountain of God’s love, will transform the earth and bring the advent of blooming flowers.

The hymn ends on a note of light and hope, reinforcing Jesus’ promise of abundant life alluded to in verse two, and looking forward to the sounds of freedom. The hymn is one of trust in God whose sending love will transform a people lost in the wilderness. God is like an eagle bearing her people on her wings; God is like a fountain of love springing forth with joy. And although Moon does not name Jesus specifically, the “vision of light” that will “open our hearts” can be seen to recall Jesus Christ, the light of the world. For Moon, the eschatological vision is clear: justice and freedom will prevail, even though the earth is dry and desolate right now. People are subjects of their future, not objects, and the call to mission is one of carrying out God’s intention that “the brave justice flag (will) wave high above” and songs of hope and freedom will ring out for all humankind.

“With the Wings of Our Mind” arises out of the context of Minjung theology. The minjung are the poor, oppressed and alienated people of society – like the people Jesus healed and comforted and infused with hope. “Minjung theology is a distinctly Asian theology which connects people directly to their God . . . . Although Minjung theology has come to life in South Korea only since the mid 1970s, it has become a central theme of discussion among intellectuals, theologians, historians, dramatists and other scholars

168 “With the Wings of Our Mind,” v. 2.
169 John 10:10.
170 “With the Wings of Our Mind,” v.3.
171 Ibid., v.1.
throughout Asia.” Proponents of Minjung theology begin with the story of God’s liberation of the Israelites from Egypt: “The Israelites in their suffering under harsh oppression were the minjung of Egypt. The Old Testament faith thus began with Yahweh who dwelt with the minjung.” In the New Testament, “Jesus made the poor and alienated and oppressed minjung the object of his mission . . . he was totally united with the minjung and identified with the very lowest.”

For the PROK and ministers like Timothy Moon, Minjung theology took flesh in the struggle for democratization and expansion of human rights. As Kim Sang Keun put it: “we have prayed and fought for social and economic justice and equality for the weak and powerless – the minjung.” The hope of light for a “dreary desolate earth” makes “With the Wings of Our Mind” a valuable resource for an understanding of mission as a contemporary quest for justice.

**Liturgical Function**

There are a number of possibilities to consider regarding the liturgical function of “With the Wings of Our Mind,” but two stand out. One is the integrity of music and text; the

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173 Kim Sang Keun, “The PROK in Mission,” *Mission Magazine, 35.* In 1984, Kim was general secretary of the PROK.

174 Ibid.

175 Ibid.

176 “With the Wings of Our Mind,” v.3.
Other is the hymn’s genre. The hymn is not only an expression of hope for justice in the face of oppression; it is a gift of global song to the world beyond South Korea.  

Methodist global song leader S.T. Kimbrough Jr. has said that “music is absolutely necessary if we are to move outside of ourselves, relate to others, and build community.” Global music makes it possible for us to “move outside of ourselves;” it provides the “heart songs” by which United Church congregations (and others) are able to connect with people in other parts of the world, to rejoice with them and pray with them. This is not to say that United Church hymn resources are only now discovering songs from other nations, but to point out that the more contemporary hymnbooks contain indigenous resources set out by such musicians as Pablo Sosa of Argentina, I-to-Loh of Taiwan, and Patrick Matsikenyiri of Zimbabwe who collect the songs of their people and offer them to the world church with integrity and authenticity. The areas of the world we once went to “save” offer rich liturgical resources that can have a profound impact on our spiritual lives. Global music helps us look beyond ourselves and acknowledge that we are part of a greater whole. It is “the God-given language that gives the fullest expression to prayer, joy, suffering and praise of the Creator.” In this sense, global music is incarnational, enabling singers to articulate what they believe and long for; and it is liberating, empowering people to sing in the face of

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177 See also comments about global song within the context of the case study of More Voices in Chapter One of this study.


179 The nations were, by and large, European. See The Hymnary #271 (“I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say”) by Horace Bonar of Scotland; #19 (“Now Thank We All Our God”) by Martin Rinckart of Germany. The Hymn Book offers a Chinese carol (#413 “Stars of Ice”), but again draws almost exclusively on European and North American resources.

180 e.g., Voices United and More Voices.

181 Kimbrough, Mission & Music, 3.
oppression because of a suffering God who participates in their suffering.\textsuperscript{182} “With the Wings of Our Mind” offers just such a gift from South Korea. It was written by a South Korean, set to music by a South Korean composer within a particular South Korean context. Even though it was translated into English by Canadian Marion Pope, as a respected United Church overseas personnel working in Korea fluent in the language, she was sensitive to the nuances of Korean. She explains it in this way.

The first image literally means “hot mind (or heart)” and I could not think how to translate it, but since so many other images included those of wings, wind, flying and waving flags, I used the word “wings” for hot. The verbs ending each line were written in a traditional poetic form that we might call present participle, so I used that form in English.\textsuperscript{183}

The editor of the Music Leader’s Edition of \textit{Voices United} suggests teaching the song “without accompaniment to highlight the pentatonic melody. In performance, a simple, spare organ registration, with soloing of the melody, should prevail.”\textsuperscript{184} The melody might also be accompanied by a bamboo flute and sung without harmony.

Both Lythgoe and Pope comment about how well the tune fits the text. Lythgoe says “notice the contrast between the two sections of the hymn,”\textsuperscript{185} while Pope comments, “the first two lines of the music sound like flowing movement to me to reflect the wind of the Spirit.”\textsuperscript{186}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{182} Hawn, \textit{Gather Into One}, 146.
\item \textsuperscript{183} Stott Blog.
\item \textsuperscript{184} Editor Leonard Lythgoe, “Performance Suggestions,” \textit{Voices United Music Leader’s Guide}, #698.
\item \textsuperscript{185} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{186} Pope in Stott Blog.
\end{itemize}
In the second half of the hymn, the mood of the text shifts, with the music following.

Again, Lythgoe and Pope comment that “the last two (lines) are more stirring and uplifting,”\textsuperscript{187} (so) “keep the dotted rhythms crisp and build the dynamics to reflect the change of mood in the text.”\textsuperscript{188} In this way, the theological intent of the words is enhanced by the music.

\textsuperscript{187} Pope in Stott blog.

\textsuperscript{188} Lythgoe.
In *Gather Into One*, Michael Hawn, considering the function of global song, asks the liturgical question: “how does the song help me intercede before God on behalf of the world?”\(^{189}\) Perhaps “With the Wings of Our Mind,” with its images of flight and light and its eschatological vision of justice and freedom, can provide a framework for Word, prayer and Table and enable intercession on behalf of all suffering and oppressed people, wherever they are and in whatever circumstances they live. It has the potential to become a source of solidarity with others; it can also become a means of strengthening the faith of those who sing the hymn.

**Missiological Implications**

“With the Wings of Our Minds” points to a crucial aspect of the carrying out of God’s mission: working for justice and human rights. Although it needs to be placed within its South Korea context, the hymn also reflects The United Church of Canada’s mission policies. Furthermore, the hymn is yet another expression of changes in the United Church’s approach to mission: from paternalistic enlightenment in far off lands; to charity at home; to mutuality, working at the request of partner churches and agencies in a wide variety of settings; to an overt concern to uphold the need for justice in whatever the global context.

The United Church of Canada has been involved with the church in Korea for over one hundred years, since the arrival of Presbyterian missionary James Scarth Gale in 1888. At the time of United Church union in 1925, The United Church of Canada inherited the Korean “mission field” and has had overseas personnel in Korea ever since.

In 1953, the Korean Presbyterian Church faced serious conflict around issues of theology and methods of biblical scholarship taught at the then Chosun Theological Seminary (now the Graduate School of Theology, Hanshin University). The faculty of the

\(^{189}\) Hawn, 30.
seminary “were deeply committed to developing higher theological education and articulating Christian theology from a Korean perspective.”¹⁹⁰ The conflict led to a serious split and the establishment of two new bodies: the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) and the (more conservative) Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK). The United Church of Canada chose to work with the PROK.¹⁹¹ In the early eighties (the time during which “With the Wings of Our Mind” was written), there were eleven United Church overseas personnel working in Korea in a variety of capacities: public health, teaching, advocating on behalf of disabled children, nursing, communication work.¹⁹² It would be fair to say that most of the United Church personnel working with the PROK supported the struggle for justice, and many continued that support when they returned to Canada. Indeed, through the years, the church in Korea has been one of the most dominant social institutions in Korea. “While others, including the government, have shared or assumed leadership in education, medicine, and agriculture, areas in which the Christian church had pioneered and played a dominant role in the earlier years of this century, a new area of concern opened – the struggle for the restoration of democracy and the protection of human rights.”¹⁹³ Today, the PROK continues its work in “serving the poor and the marginalized, the ‘Minjung’ . . .


¹⁹¹ Even though the United Church’s partner in mission has been the PROK, the United Church has continued to maintain its involvement in North Korea, particularly through efforts of United Church Women, the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, and the work of former moderators the Very Revs Lois Wilson and Sang Chul Lee in facilitating communication and working toward reunification. David McKane, “Question Box,” The United Church Observer, (February 2011), 37.

¹⁹² Mission Magazine, 40.

¹⁹³ Bayliss, Mission Magazine, 11.
(and) has been a prophetic voice for democratization, human rights and reunification, protesting courageously against military dictatorship governments.”

The missiological context and intent of “With the Wings of Our Minds” is one of solidarity and advocacy and implies a further step in how mission is envisioned and sung into being by The United Church of Canada: to stand in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed people of the world, whether they live in South Korea, South Africa, or the Occupied Territories of Palestine.

Reflections

This “thick description” of the four mission hymns has revealed both the value of contextual particularity and possible dangers of oversimplification and generalization. On the one hand, an examination of “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains” has offered a lens through which to view the world of nineteenth and twentieth century mission, as well as the evangelistic view of the missionaries. On the other, “Greenland’s” is only one of the liturgical resources offered to worshipping congregations at that time. That era (and other selections in The Hymnary) also invited people to sing “In Christ there is no East or West” which called for “one great fellowship of love throughout the whole round earth,” implying a more universal approach to relationships in mission.

Similarly, “Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling,” from the Social Gospel era was popular in North American revival circles and a source of help to people of faith who needed to hear a word of hope in their poverty. It was not, however, the only strand of hymnody pertaining to the Social Gospel. The Social Gospel movement provided charity to the poor and at the same time worked for systemic change and the creation of a moral order and social


195 “In Christ There is No East or West,” The Hymnary #252, v.1. Text: John Oxenham.
justice. In “O Day of God,” R.B.Y. Scott, one of the best known Canadian hymn writers of the Social Gospel, calls for justice as well as charity.

O day of God, draw nigh in beauty and in power; come with thy timeless judgement now to match our present hour.

Bring justice to our land, that all may dwell secure; and finely build for days to come foundations that endure.196

Nevertheless, in its call to the lost and the lonely, its unashamed sentimentality, and its widespread popularity, “Softly and Tenderly” represents a strand in the fabric of mission that has been a central part of the church.

Both “As a Fire Is Meant for Burning” and “With the Wings of Our Mind” move mission and hymnody toward a more postmodern paradigm, where the cultural superiority of the west is no longer assumed, and mission is about working with, rather than for people. Mission is still a gospel imperative, but it is done within a self-consciously multi-faith, multicultural, and intercultural context. Both hymns are reminders of the gifts of humility and love that can be exchanged among people from around the world. At the same time, even as congregations sing about justice and humility, the United Church is still working out what it means to live as an intercultural church and carry out its mission within the context of global partnership.

Even so, thick description has been helpful in illuminating important dimensions of the context of each of the four hymns, as well as enabling us to see how they have echoed the evolution in United Church mission polity and activity over the years. The hymns and their thick description have widened our worldview and understanding of missio Dei, God’s

mission to men, women, and children in Canada and around the world. As the world and the church have changed, so has our singing — or so we would like to believe. Reality, of course, is never quite so simple, and it would be facile to assume that the march from paternalism and revivalism to mutuality and solidarity has been liturgically consistent. As well, to assume that people’s hearts and minds (and hymnbooks) change as quickly as the world does might rightly be called wishful thinking.

However, the methodology of thick description has provided a way of allowing reflection on familiar texts and tunes in new ways. Being aware of the complexity of context in which a global song is situated may be one way of avoiding musical tourism. For example, like many African-American spirituals, “Over My Head” (*More Voices* #88) contains different layers of meaning. One story about it reminds us that when the captured Africans in Sierra Leone waited for the slave ships to take them to America, they were herded into the basement of churches.197 “Over their heads,” they heard music of people singing hymns and hoped “there must be a God somewhere.” Knowing this cultural context can change the singing to lament and move the singers from celebration to contemplation. Thus, thick description has concrete liturgical implications.

As well, understanding the biblical and theological foundations of a hymn may lead to deeper reflection on and engagement with personal faith. Reflecting on the function of the hymn within the liturgy may assist in enabling people of faith to know how faith is enacted through song. And examining the missiological assumptions may lead to a better understanding of a call to mission, both personally and corporately. In the case of the four specific hymns analysed, thick description has offered a more richly textured understanding of the evolution of The United Church of Canada’s mission activities and policies. As well,

197 Heard at a worship service narrated by students home from working in Sierra Leone. c.2005.
the methodology has shown that in the singing, there has also been the opportunity for significant personal and communal faith development.

At its best, this exercise has offered more than a historical parade. It has also engendered a fuller measure of understanding and an invitation to enter more deeply into the experience of others, to care for, and to pray with them. As mission has been expressed musically in The United Church of Canada, mission and liturgy have become inextricably intertwined and congregational song has functioned as an evolving liturgical theology of mission.
CONCLUSIONS

“How Can I Keep From Singing?”¹
Connecting Singing and Doing

Following this examination and analysis of congregational song and the mission of the church, it seems appropriate to make some concluding remarks to underline the claims of the thesis statement that “in The United Church of Canada, congregational song serves as a key source of both personal and communal missional identity” – a liturgical theology of mission.

This dissertation has provided a broad overview of mission and its relationship to congregational song in The United Church of Canada. By employing a phenomenological approach and a modified praxis model of analysis (theory, practice, reflection), it has examined the role of the United Church in carrying out God’s mission and the way missional identity has been expressed liturgically in the congregational songs of its faith communities. Each of the three chapters has examined the thesis statement from a different perspective, in the process addressing the following critical questions.² The questions have served as useful guides in the quest to connect singing and doing at both an ecclesial and personal level.

Answering the Critical Questions

• How does congregational song enact mission and justice, unifying worshippers in a commitment that works for the common good? What do hymns reveal about the nature of the Church, especially The United Church of Canada, and its shifting missiological paradigms?

¹ “My Life Flows On,” Voices United #716. Tune and text: Robert Lowry
² See also, Introduction, 2-3.
Chapter One set out the foundations for The United Church of Canada’s understanding and practice of mission. It showed that in its mission work, The United Church of Canada has sought to move from an early twentieth century well-intentioned paternalism to a more postmodern, post-colonial emphasis on justice, mutuality, and openness to other faiths. In its singing, the same kind of shift can be noted. In *The Hymnary*, the United Church’s first hymnbook, we find such hymns as “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains.” By 1996, with the publication of *Voices United*, “As a Fire Is Meant for Burning” notes the shift to mutuality in mission, while in *More Voices*, “Hope of Abraham and Sarah” broadens the hymn repertoire even more to provide invite interfaith understandings.

Today, mission hymns at their best are based on biblical and theological understandings of a liberating God, incarnate in Jesus Christ; can provide an eschatological vision of peace and justice; are outwardly directed; and have global, ecumenical, and intercultural dimensions. As hymn repertoire has changed through the years, singing congregations have been able to integrate new understandings into their faith and life. In their singing and living, they can become unified in a commitment that works for the common good.

In light of the “milestones” that have marked the United Church’s response to God’s call to mission, Chapter One examined three case studies as illustrative of the way liturgical music has reflected or expanded understandings of mission. The first case study, the doxological legacy of the Wesleys and the Methodist Church, showed how thanksgiving (doxology) has undergirded the Methodist concern for social justice and care for the poor that began in the 18th century and continues today. This doxological foundation, combined
with an enthusiasm for singing the faith, became crucial to the new United Church when in 1925, the Methodist Church in Canada joined with the Congregationalists and most Presbyterians to make up The United Church of Canada. The second case study, the peace and justice songs of the Iona Community spoke not only to the Reformed roots of the United Church, but to its emphasis on justice, an important part of United Church ethos since union. In the third case study, global song, as found in More Voices, the latest collection of hymns and songs published by the United Church, highlighted the integration of world songs into the liturgical life of the church as further evidence of the move from well meaning paternalism to mutuality in mission.

- **In what way does congregational song work to transform worshippers, both at the personal and communal level, into the Body of Christ for the world?**

In Chapter Two, we moved from a study of the connection between mission and music within the context of the United Church to an examination of the power of congregational song to transform people of faith, encouraging and predisposing them for mission. The transformative power of congregational song was articulated within a framework of primary theology, in which worshippers encounter the Holy by enacting their beliefs and singing their faith. In this case, primary theology becomes sung theology, with both texts and tunes as essential components. Both words and music have the possibility of leading to transformation through the use of symbols, where words can open up different levels of meaning, and where the song itself can become a symbol of unity and reconciliation. As well, transformation is effected with language that is metaphorical, inclusive, and expansive, and with hymn texts that connect singing and doing. Moreover, singing can actually predispose people’s attitudes and actions by what they sing – they can
become what they practise. If they sing about love and justice, they are more likely to believe in those values and practise them. If they sing about being thankful, they are more likely to become thankful people and more likely to become the body of Christ for the world.

The transforming power of liturgical music was demonstrated by the experiences cited in two case studies. The sung prayer of the Taizé Community draws pilgrims into a holy space, where they encounter God’s mystery though song. Worship, combined with Bible study and community work, can lead to transformation and reconciliation among the men and women from many parts of the world who gather at Taizé. Elsewhere in churches in many countries, including The United Church of Canada, the sung prayer of the Taizé community has proven to be an important component in congregational worship and an opportunity for people of faith to encounter God’s mystery in a new way. The study of the development of the United Church’s primary hymn resource, *Voices United*, examined the transformational impact of that hymn book, particularly with reference to language. As well, the work of the Hymn and Worship Resource Committee, responsible for the book’s publication, was itself interpreted as missional in the way it embodied and worked through issues of inclusivity, theological integrity, and pastoral concern for United Church congregations.

- *What has been and continues to be the relationship between congregational song and worship and work within The United Church of Canada? How does the United Church’s congregational song relate to its liturgical theology and its mission?*

In Chapter Three, an examination of four mission hymns illustrated the development of the United Church’s call and response to mission. A “thick description” of these hymns traced the various threads that have made up the tapestry of the United Church in mission in
Canada and overseas over the years, providing analysis of historical, cultural, biblical, theological, and missiological contexts. The process of analysis provided a deeper understanding of the mission consciousness of the church.

Further examination of “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains,” for example, pointed to its origins in the nineteenth century missionary movement that worked to bring God’s light to an “inferior, dark” world. Analysing the historical context enabled deeper understanding of the text and context – the hymn was the product of a modernist, colonial era and reflects a mission consciousness that may have been compassionate, but was paternalistic and condescending. No longer sung today in United Church congregations, it is, nevertheless, a reflection of the church’s past and, like it or not, could still reflect attitudes of racial superiority even today. Although the church has moved away from the missionary stance implied in “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains,” it remains a reminder of what was and still might be.

“Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling” moved mission from “Greenland’s Icy Mountains” to the frontier and early industrial society of North America and emerged from the Social Gospel milieu of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Here, faith was linked with ethical action, and evangelism involved reaching out to the poor as well as issuing an invitation to conversion. Religion was a personal matter, emphasizing individual sin and individual salvation, many times expressed within the context of revival meetings that brought faith and hope to many for whom life was difficult. Yet, “Softly and Tenderly” also broadened the theological spectrum of congregational song, with its sentimental allusions to a father-mother God, who in Jesus, waited patiently at the door for the prodigal sinner to come home. Its gospel song genre, with its gentle tune and call and response refrain,
continues to be popular among many groups today, even though it is no longer found in contemporary United Church hymn resources.

“As a Fire Is Meant for Burning” provided evidence of a shift in missiology, underlining changes in attitudes to mission. Far removed from the nineteenth century missionary movement, this late twentieth century mission hymn evokes a sense of humility and mutuality in a more postmodern world. No longer are North Americans and Europeans bringing the light to dark nations; they have become not only teachers, but also learners, “vessels made of clay.” 3 “As a Fire” reflects a missiological shift in the structures of United Church, as well as the possibility of affecting attitudes toward mission in congregations. Since the sixties and seventies, mutuality in mission has become an important component of mission and relationships within many churches all over the world. 4

The fourth hymn, “With the Wings of Our Mind” comes from an imprisoned pastor in South Korea, where the PROK (Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea) is a significant mission partner of The United Church of Canada. When the hymn was written in 1981, South Korea was undergoing a period of severe political repression, and the hymn presents an eschatological vision of a transformed world where “the brave justice flag” of human rights, democracy, peace, and justice will wave high. 5 During this time, United Church overseas personnel in South Korea actively supported the PROK, including the

3 “As a Fire Is Meant for Burning,” v.2.

4 One hesitates to call such churches “mainline,” with its hierarchical connotations, but I would include the PLURA churches in Canada in this group (Presbyterian, Lutheran, United, Roman Catholic, Anglican), as well as their counterparts in the United States and other parts of the world.

5 “With the Wings of Our Mind,” v.3.
family of Ik-Whan Moon, the writer of “With the Wings of Our Mind.” The hymn evokes the United Church’s “Dual Mandate” (“Doing Mission, Doing Justice”), first formulated in the mid-seventies and affirms its commitment to social justice and its support for mission with partners around the world.

The methodology of thick description helped to uncover the many historical, theological, and biblical layers of each of the hymns. Perhaps more important, because of both the general and particular nature of the analysis, it showed how mission has shaped the liturgical life of the church, and how liturgy, through congregational song, has helped people of faith reflect and grow in their understanding of the relationship between the church and the world.

Possibilities for Further Research

The three “critical questions” posed in the Introduction and reprised here also suggest other possibilities for research: the first two are theological; the next two are historical. All four need to be examined within a missiological framework.

The first theological area in need of further study is christological. How do we speak and sing of the saving significance of Jesus Christ in a pluralistic world – what does mission mean in an interfaith context? The “Roots of Mission” section of the Introduction touched briefly on the “missional” work of Jesus Christ, suggesting that following Jesus need not be in competition with other religions, but that discipleship can be found in “working with others toward the transformation and salvation of the world.” The 1966 Commission on

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6 Because the PROK was involved in justice issues, the South Korea government was particularly heavy handed, including sending government agents to church services to watch and take notes of possible sedition.

7 See introduction, 14.
World Mission report to the United Church’s 22nd General Council stated that “we should probably welcome the religious plurality of the modern world” and “actively pursue opportunities and occasions for dialogue with representatives of other faiths.”

Although the United Church has been involved in interfaith dialogue since then, and has produced major reports for the church’s consideration, the question still remains for the average person in the pew: how do we speak and sing of Jesus Christ today as faithful Christians, even while we are open to others who find a different path to God? How will that affect our liturgical and community life? How might it change our response to God’s call to mission, and how might this influence our search for and production of liturgical resources, especially congregational songs?

A second theological area for further consideration is more cosmological. How do we speak and sing of God’s mission in a world which has expanded far beyond the three tiered universe articulated in many of the hymns some of us sang as we were growing up? United Church minister and “evolutionary mystic” Bruce Sanguin asks “how would we pray together if we took the science of evolution and the new cosmology seriously – if we saw the presence we call God intimately involved with the modern scientific realities of the universe, the planet, and human beings?”

Liturgical theologian Catherine Vincie challenges us to integrate a new cosmology and ecological consciousness into our lives and our work. “This new cosmology has implications for the understanding of God, the universe, and humanity’s place in it. It involves not only how we live, but how we will pray as individuals and

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communities.”10 What implications might new understandings of the cosmos have for the mission of the church? How would they affect our congregational songs as well as our work in the world?

More historical realities give rise to a consideration of the “missing voices,” the parts of our church community not adequately represented in our hymn repertoire.11 The first “missing voice” belongs to Protestant French Canadians. There has been a French Protestant presence in Canada since 1604 with the founding of Acadia and New France by Pierre Dugua de Mons,12 although history also reveals that over the years there has been a good deal of repression of French Protestantism, especially in Quebec.13 In 1841, the first French-speaking Protestant congregation (now l’Église Unie Saint-Jean) was established in Montréal, and the first French hymnbook was published in 1862 (Chants évangéliques).14 Both Presbyterian and Methodist churches had French-speaking missions in the 1880s, comprising 70 ministers and 100 mission points by 1900, and all the French-speaking congregations joined United Church union in 1925. The period between 1930 and 1950 saw a decline in the French-speaking Protestant movement, including the assimilation of French Protestants into the English Protestant school system. Today, the French unit of the United Church of Canada is small,15 and the church has only two French-speaking congregations. However, the inclusion of French-speaking Christians in the church has been a source of strength and renewal for the United Church, and the rich heritage of French-speaking Christians in Canada continues to influence the church’s liturgy and worship practices.

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11 I mention only two areas for possible future work here. No doubt, there are other voices that could be considered: e.g., dis/ability theology and liturgy, queer theology, the voices of the LGBT community.

12 Some of his 78 companions were also Huguenot. Historical information about the French Protestant presence, especially in Quebec, can be found at The United Church of Canada website, http://www.united-church.ca. (Accessed May 17, 2010; September 10, 2011).

13 With the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, (the Edict, proclaimed by Henry IV of France in 1589 had promoted religious tolerance), civil and religious liberties were renounced, and French Protestants lost the right to worship in Quebec. However, the arrival of Swiss and French missionaries in 1834 resulted in the establishment of a Francophone Protestant presence in Quebec once more.

14 Laurent-Eduard Rivard, Chants évangéliques [Montréal ?:s.n.].
Church struggles to have the French voice heard and works to integrate French language and cultural concerns with other voices.

With the publication of *The Hymn Book* in 1970, *Voices United* in 1996, and *More Voices* in 2007, there has been a greater attempt to include the United Church’s French-speaking population by providing French translations for some of the hymns, and in a few cases, music as well. The question remains, however, why the original Huguenot and other Protestant French voices in Canada were not included in the United Church’s first hymn book. We could, of course, blame the British-centric temper of the times; nevertheless, this is an interesting avenue in need of further study.

The First Nations peoples of Canada are other critical missing voices. At union in 1925, the United Church took over responsibility for work among “native peoples” carried out by former Methodist missionaries. On the one hand, missionary James Evans put the Cree language into syllabics in Northern Manitoba, enabling worship resources in the language of the people; on the other hand, compilers of major United Church hymn collections have largely ignored First Nations’ musical resources. There is just one First Nations’ hymn in *The Hymn Book,* one in *Songs for a Gospel People,* three in *Voices*

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15 Both *The Hymn Book* and *Voices United* contain French translations of a number of hymns. *More Voices* contains both translations of texts (27 selections), as well as original texts and tunes (4). A committee of the “Ministries in French” unit was responsible for assembling *Nos Voix Unies* (published 2009) a new French language hymn book using translated hymns from both *Voices United* and *More Voices.*

16 Any study of French Canadian Protestant resources would also need to acknowledge the presence of French Canadian communities outside of Quebec, e.g. New Brunswick, Manitoba, Northern Ontario.

17 “‘Twas In The Moon Of Wintertime,” *The Hymn Book* #412.

United, and two in More Voices. In addition, there are translations of favourites like “Amazing Grace,” and “How Great Thou Art,” into Cree, Mohawk, and Ojibway, but these are translations, not original texts or tunes.

The omission of aboriginal music may be related to unfamiliarity and perceived difficulty in singing it. S.T. Kimbrough comments that “when it comes to deciding whose song we will sing, we like most of all the styles of music and text familiar to us.” It may also be about racism. Kimbrough acknowledges that aboriginal American languages “have probably received the least respect of any others in Christian song.” I suspect his remark would be equally relevant for aboriginal Canadian languages. It may also be about musical style. As well as language issues, there may need to be more work done with aboriginal melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic structures. What musical styles exist within Canadian aboriginal culture? Or, because of early efforts by the government (and church) at assimilation and the resulting repression of native culture, have distinctive styles disappeared? Or is there a particular musical style that waits to be rediscovered?

It would be interesting to investigate whether the musical resources of First Nations have been ignored because they have been geographically, linguistically, or musically

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19 “T’was in the Moon of Wintertime,” Voices United #71; “O Great Spirit,” VU #239; “Many and Great” VU #308.

20 “We Are All One People,” More Voices #141; “Hey ney yana.” MV #217.

21 It should be noted that there exists the English Companion to the Cree Methodist Hymn Book, edited by the Rev. F.G. Stevens, Fisher River, Manitoba, in the 1920s. The question is whether the Cree hymns were original First Nations’ hymns or translations of British Methodist hymnody.


23 Ibid, 106.

24 Blackwell, 59 ff. makes a distinction between a culture’s music which is predominantly harmonic, as is the case with most music derived from post–medieval European culture, or predominately melodic, as in the case of much of the folk music in the world.
inaccessible, or because they do not fit our Euro-North American concept of song or for some other reason.\textsuperscript{25} Whatever research is done, it would need to involve wide consultation and collaboration. Any exploration would also need to acknowledge the complexity of the Canadian aboriginal community: there is not one First Nations voice, but many nations, many peoples of differing languages, traditions, and ways of expressing their spirituality.

\textbf{Matters of Mission and Congregational Song}

The three critical questions (and answers) have served a useful function in the quest to find how congregational song serves as a source of both personal and communal missional identity. To those reflections I would add the following concluding comments to further the discussion of the connection between mission and music, and between singing and doing.

\textbf{Singing Matters.}

Singing matters, and singing together matters even more. When it comes to espousing such missional values as peace and justice, or encouraging and motivating people to look outward and care about the world God loves, it is the communal singing that counts as much as the text, tune, or rhythm of a song. Singing together can, first of all, promote affiliation and bonding. Cognitive psychologist Daniel Levitin points out that “something special happens when a group starts to sing together.”\textsuperscript{26} He reminds his readers that when people come together to sing, just being part of the group means that no one person has to remember all the words to a song: a kind of group memory emerges, whether at a football game, around a campfire, or at a worship service in a cathedral or small church. For people of faith, “singing and praying together helps [them] become an inclusive sign of God’s purpose for

\textsuperscript{25} The style of music making among aboriginal cultures may be quite different from music experienced within Euro-American cultures. See Kimbrough’s discussion - “Who Owns Middle C?” as he explores music making across cultures. \textit{Music & Mission}, 5.

\textsuperscript{26} Levitin, \textit{The World in Six Songs}, 182.
creation.” Even more than that, singing together enables people to celebrate, to “enact praise, thanksgiving, and blessing” and to protest against injustice in safety (safer than protesting alone) – “protest songs have an ability to inspire, motivate, bind, focus, and move people to action.”

Singing may also have the ability to promote God’s intentions for us as part of creation because it is a gift of wholeness: it engages every part of us. “When we sing, and enliven the text through music, and enter into that music not just with our mouth and ears, but with our whole being, then we are doing something which is both personal and holistic.” Music making, especially singing, confounds those who would divide what we do into “left brain” (the seat of logic) and “right brain” (the artistic, creative side) activities: all four lobes of the brains are involved. As a result, “singing activates things that seem so central to human life itself: bodily, emotional, intellectual, and moral animation.” Singing is, by its very nature, incarnational. Somehow, when we sing, we are able to articulate our beliefs and the deep longings of our souls. And when we sing together, the Spirit can move us to become part of a greater whole. “The power of art is that it can connect us to one another and to larger truths about what it means to be alive and what it means to be

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29 Levitin, 63.

30 Bell, The *Singing Thing*, 78.

31 Daniel Levitin, *This is your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession* (New York: Dutton, 2006), 83. Levitin points out that making music involves every region and neural subsystem of the brain: the frontal lobe of the brain (responsible for planning, self-control, and perceptual organization); the temporal (hearing and memory); the parietal (motor movements, spatial skill); the cerebellum (emotions, planning of movement).

32 Saliers, 61.
human.”33 The more all our senses are involved, the more likely we are to believe in the
eschatological vision presented in such songs as “We Shall Overcome” and “O for a world
where everyone respects each other’s ways . . . ”34 and the more likely we are to live and
work toward its fulfillment.

Singing together can also be a transformative experience, as noted in a previous
chapter. Hymn writer and theologian John Bell in speaking of a recent performance of the
Venezuelan Simon Bolivar orchestra in England, wondered whether making music together
might even be an antidote to criminality.35 He also cited a school in Yorkshire, where the
principal had made singing a priority with a 190 voice choir that included every child who
did not go home for lunch. One of the teachers commented on the noticeable decrease in
behavioural problems. “You can pay a fortune for sports equipment and instructors and one
of the by-products is to make the children competitive. You hire a part-time singing teacher
and you make the children co-operative.”36

The effect of singing on behaviour has been demonstrated in history time after time.
From the hymn singing of East German Christians prior to the dismantling of the Berlin Wall
to songs that gave courage to the Haitian people following their devastating earthquake in
2010, the transformative power of singing has been evident in many ways and at many times.

33 Levitin, This Is Your Brain, 238. Levitin also acknowledges the theories of scientists (with whom he
would not agree) who have said that music is useless: it could vanish and leave us unchanged (cognitive
scientist Steven Pinker); it has no role in the survival of the species (cosmologist John Barrow); and it is an
“evolutionary parasite” (psychologist Dan Sperber), 243 ff.


35 Known as El Sistema, this is a program in Venezuela that has involved some 4,000 poor children
playing in 150 orchestras across the county.

36 John L. Bell, All That Matters: Collected Scripts from Radio 4's Thoughts for the Day, Volume 2
(Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2010), 64.
Music, especially singing, has power to transform. But we must not also forget that music, like many other symbols, can be ambivalent and that there may be other issues to consider. Even though singing together can be a “hermeneutic of participation that draws those assembled into a potentially transformative experience,” we are reminded by Brian Wren that music’s transformative power can also be ethically ambiguous. Music can both transform and distort. Wren contrasts the power of music to revitalize an inner city neighbourhood in the movie *Sister Act* with a scene from *Cabaret*, where the singing by a fresh faced, blond German youth is co-opted by the demonic power of music in Hitler’s ideology. Singing together has the power to “connect us to something larger than our own existence;” it also has the ability to reinforce stereotypes and promote outmoded, even dangerous attitudes. It would seem that although singing together is of prime importance in connecting singing and doing, other considerations remain critical.

**Music Matters**

When considering the connection between congregational song and the mission of the church, the temptation is to focus primarily on the text of the songs, to look at cultural, historical and theological connotations: what they reveal about the song, and how the words might espouse missional values of peace, justice, and care for creation. I would argue that the music is as important as the words we sing. It is perhaps ironic that I, as a member of a church with Reformed roots, would think that singing and music is equally (if not more)

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37 Hawn, *Gather Into One*, 212.


39 Levitin, *This is Your Brain*, 237.

40 See Chapter One, page 60 of this dissertation and John Bell’s comments that the unchallenged sentiments of some of the nineteenth and twentieth missionary songs may be seen as contributing to overt and covert racism today.
important than texts in connecting “singing and doing.” Words are important, but those who focus on words alone are prone to forget that a dull tune might actually keep the faithful from singing their treasured texts. In his plea for a broad spectrum of emotion in congregational singing, John Bell wryly notes that “sometimes one gets the impression that charismatic congregations sing predominately rousing praise choruses . . . while Presbyterians and Calvinists by style of singing, if not by subject matter, inhabit the deserts of negativity and unhappiness.” Text is important, but the elements of singing and music are just as essential in enacting faith.

Kathleen Harmon proposes that “music [then] reveals the fundamental togetherness in the being of things: subject and object stand together, self and other face the same direction . . . . Experiencing self and others as co-participants in the fundamental unity of all being requires that we traverse the frontiers that seem to separate us. The essential nature of music is this very crossing.” Added to that, we are reminded by scientists that lyrics are stored in the brain and linked to music, and are often only retrieved through the music itself. Song lyrics always have music to help them along, since music frames and articulates the texts, enhancing and enlivening them. “The shape and pulse and pitch of music echo something of the very way we experience our world and our lives.”

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41 Bell, The Singing Thing, 25.
42 Harmon, 30.
43 Oliver Sacks, Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain (New York, Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 37. Sacks also comments on “brainworms” and the power of music in advertisement: many people are set off by a theme designed to hook the listener. “It bores like an earwig into the ear or mind,” 42.
44 Levitin, Six Songs, 25.
45 Saliers, Music and Theology, 30.
As well as enhancing and enlivening texts, much of the power of music lies in its ability to evoke emotion. Some of this power comes from the fact that we are born with a predisposition to interpret sounds in particular ways, e.g. abrupt, short, loud sounds mean “be alert;” slow, long, quiet sounds are calming, or neutral. As well, some comes from its ability to evoke highs and lows through melody, instrumentation, or tempo. How many have found themselves in tears watching a movie because the music has enhanced the (long anticipated) meeting of the lovers or the last words of a dying hero or heroine? This is true not only for secular music, but for hymns that bring back past associations, both tender, warm memories and unhappy negative experiences. It is also true for mission hymns that evoke hope and purpose through the use of soaring melodies or catchy rhythms.

Music as a source of theological reflection and enhancement has also been noted with reference to some of the mission hymns analysed in this study. Haugen’s tune JOYOUS LIGHT enhances the words and underlines the theological intent of mutuality in mission in “As a Fire Is Meant for Burning.” We saw how within the bright, optimistic melody, Haugen uses an octave leap to point to the meaning of giving glory, and a rainbow in the sky. In “Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling,” the call and response pattern of the refrain (“Come home, [come home], Come home . . .”) reflects the tenderness offered to the prodigal, and the hope and care extended by a loving mother-father God to struggling people in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Although music itself is not formal theological discourse (one needs words for that), it can point beyond itself to God’s mystery and our part in God’s creation. Music can become ritual symbol, with power to elicit participation and transformation within the worshipping

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46 Levitin, This is Your Brain, 90. Levitin adds that the brain imposes structure on a sequence of sounds, but how this leads to emotional reactions “is part of the mystery of music,” 107.
community. At the Taizé community and other worship centres that use Taizé sung prayer, the music itself often becomes a means of unity and an enactment of the missional values of peace, justice, and reconciliation.

Language Matters

Words spoken, sung, preached, and prayed have always been central in the worship and theology of the (Reformed) Presbyterian Church, one of the forerunners of The United Church of Canada. Words are important. They can include or exclude, feed one’s soul, or mangle the Spirit. When it comes to singing the faith and espousing missional values, language that is metaphorical, inclusive, and expansive goes a long way to transform the mindset and worldview of the singers.

As noted earlier, the importance of words has been set out by the United Church, resulting, in 1986, in an official policy of inclusive language which has been used in the publication of liturgical and other resources ever since. The words we sing often reinforce what we believe, and any hymn, but particularly hymns that espouse peace, justice, and care for creation should embody those values in their language. “A just lyric reflects God’s valuation of the potential dignity of human beings, and is not marred by language that wounds, stereotypes, degrades, and excludes.”47 This means that language needs to be inclusive in referring to both human beings and God. Hymn writer Ruth Duck calls for Trinitarian language that evokes love, justice, and equality, and does not reflect a patriarchal culture of domination of women by men, or a racist culture “by constantly portraying God as light and never dark.”48 She also proposes an “expansive approach to language which places


traditional masculine language for God among a broad range of images found in scripture and experience.\textsuperscript{49} Thus, the way language is used is of primary importance, and so are the texts that result, with the potential to encourage outwardly directed behaviour and a worldview consistent with God’s call in Jesus Christ.

**Mission Matters**

Mission is at the heart of the Christian faith and the identity of The United Church of Canada. From its formation in 1925, the church has worked hard to define and understand its role in carrying out God’s mission to the world. Worship has also been a central component of United Church identity, as congregations have gathered to hear God’s Word, to pray, and to sing together so that they might share a vision of God’s intentions for the world and their part in it. In the congregational songs of the gathered assembly, people of faith have raised a voice for justice and peace and have found in song the means to relate to other men and women around the world.

As this study has shown, congregational songs have been sources of education, formation, motivation, and transformation, both at an ecclesial and personal level. Moreover, both personal and communal missional identity have been served by congregational singing which connects singing and doing within a liturgical theology of mission – not a perfectly articulated systematic theology, but an evolving song of God’s intentions for the world.

**A Liturgical Theology of Mission**

Through the ages,

\begin{verse}
people of faith
have sung and prayed
\end{verse}

\textsuperscript{49} See Duck in Vogel, 292.
and have been encouraged
to reach out to others in faith.

In their singing and praying
they have embodied
a liturgical theology of mission.

A liturgical theology of mission
invites us to sing
of our relational, loving God
who comes to us in Jesus Christ
and calls us to live for others.

All our lives are touched by God’s Spirit –
inclusive, expansive, harmonious,
pushing us outward
to join in songs of justice and freedom
with many voices
from all parts of God’s world.

We sing in celebration and praise for all
who witness to God’s good news
and work to share their knowledge and grace.
And we sing in confession,
aware of our complicity in creating poverty
and destroying God’s good earth,
and thankful for God’s limitless love
and forgiveness.

We sing as Church, the body of Christ,
transformed and redeemed,
raising our voices united,
inspired to action,
as we envision a future
where all of God’s creatures
will live and sing together
in peace and in harmony.
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