

# Nourishing Our Missional Identity: Worship and the Mission of God's People

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## Introduction

Today the church in Western culture<sup>1</sup> faces a potentially disastrous crisis. There are two sides to this plight. The first is ecclesial: we have lost an understanding of the role and identity scripted for God's people in the biblical story. The second is cultural: there is confusion concerning the church's place in the surrounding cultural context. Wilbert Shenk correctly locates the root of this crisis as the loss of missional consciousness. On the one hand, the biblical identity of the church is fundamentally missional; yet that missional self-understanding has been forgotten. On the other hand, the proper relation of the church to its cultural milieu is in terms of a missionary encounter; yet we have been co-opted into the dominant culture and taken captive by its idols. What is urgently needed is a recovery of both our "inner mission consciousness" (missional self-understanding) and "outer mission consciousness" (missionary encounter with culture).<sup>2</sup>

Paul H. Jones argues that a big step toward the recovery of a missional consciousness will be our worship: "We are *how* we worship." He continues:

For the Church, corporate worship is the most visible and profound occasion for individuals to encounter both the gospel and the understanding of what it means to be a Christian in the world. When the community of faith assembles, the normative texts are read and interpreted, the formative rites are celebrated, and the faithful are equipped for service in the world. Inasmuch as the Church is anchored

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<sup>1</sup> By Western culture I refer to a cultural block that shares many foundational beliefs that are product of European history. In terms of scope, I would subscribe to Samuel Huntington's definition: "The West, then, includes Europe, North America, plus other European settler countries such as Australia and New Zealand" (*The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996], 46). Perhaps South Africa should be included as well.

<sup>2</sup> Wilbert R. Shenk, *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 86-99.

in the gracious acts of God, corporate worship sustains and transmits Christian identity formation.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, our worship is essential for our missional identity formation, and in this essay I want to probe the way the psalms accomplished this for Israel.

## **Worship and Mission**

Before proceeding to the Old Testament story it is important to say a few introductory words about worship and mission. Thomas Schattauer has articulated three ways that worship and mission are related to each other.<sup>4</sup> The first is the more traditional approach he calls ‘inside and out.’ Here worship and mission are understood as two different activities. Worship is what takes place on the inside and mission on the outside. Worship is the means by which the church is nurtured for its mission in the world. The second is a contemporary approach that has reacted against this bifurcation of worship and mission which he labels ‘outside in.’ Advocates of this view want to bring mission directly into worship either as an opportunity for evangelism (evangelicals) or as a rallying point for social and political action (liberals). Worship is collapsed into missional activities.

Schattauer offers a third way beyond these alternatives—‘inside out’. He believes this approach to be both ‘thoroughly contemporary’ and ‘radically traditional’ because it takes up the correct insights of the first two approaches and places them in the context of the *missio Dei*. Mission is first of all a matter of what God is doing for the renewal of the world rather than specific activities undertaken by the church. Thus the church is a people gathered in by God’s mission, and as such their worship is itself a witness to God’s saving work. The church’s worship is directed outward toward the world, not by transforming worship into evangelism or social action, but by celebrating the mighty deeds of God especially as revealed in Jesus Christ in the midst of the world as a witness to what God has done and is doing for the sake of the creation.

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<sup>3</sup> Paul H. Jones, ‘We are *How* We Worship: Corporate Worship as a Matrix for Christian Identity Formation’, *Worship* 69, 4 (July 1995), 347

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Schattauer, ed., *Inside Out: Worship in an Age of Mission* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 2-3.

Crucial to Schattauer's model is a reorientation of our understanding of mission. Mission is often conceived primarily or exclusively as tasks carried out by the church in the world for the sake of God's kingdom. Indeed, this is part of the church's mission but such tasks are derivative. A proper understanding of mission begins by recognising the priority of God's redemptive initiative—God's mission.

Christopher Wright has given us some helpful reflection on the *missio Dei*. He believes that God's mission is the key to unlocking the Bible's grand narrative. Classical definitions of the *missio Dei* that have dominated missiological discussion for the past half century have been primarily systematic and shaped by the metaphor of sending: the Father sends the Son, the Son sends the church in the power of the Spirit.<sup>5</sup> Although Wright appreciates this development, he believes it neglects the importance of the Old Testament, and so he wants to reframe it in two ways: first, to expand it beyond the metaphor of sending, and secondly, to make it more narrative.<sup>6</sup> For Wright, "*the whole Bible renders to us the story of God's mission through God's people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of the whole of God's creation.*"<sup>7</sup>

God's mission is his long term purpose to renew and restore the whole creation and the life of humanity. The mission of the church must be understood within this framework:

*"Fundamentally, our mission (if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of the world for the redemption of God's creation."*<sup>8</sup> Thus, the mission of the church is first of all a call *to be* something not *to go* somewhere or *to do* something. Of course, going and doing are important as elements of our participation but these initiatives must be understood in a subordinate way as part of a wider mission.

One more definition that Wright offers is helpful: "God's mission involves God's people living in God's way in the sight of the nations."<sup>9</sup> This definition gives us a sense of how God will employ his people in his mission. He will make them a display people who embody God's

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<sup>5</sup> For a brief history and understanding of the term 'missio Dei' see David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 389-393. For an early and important theological articulation see Georg F. Vicedom, *The Mission of God: An Introduction to a Theology of Mission* (trans. Gilbert A. Thiele and Dennis Hilgendorf; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965).

<sup>6</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 23, 62ff.

<sup>7</sup> Wright, *Mission of God*, 51. Emphasis his.

<sup>8</sup> Wright, *Mission of God*, 22-23. Emphasis his.

<sup>9</sup> Wright, *Mission of God*, 470.

original creational intention and eschatological goal for human life. He will come and dwell among them and give them his *torah* to direct them to live in the way of the Lord. As such his people will be an attractive sign before all nations of what God intended in the beginning and the goal toward which God is moving—the restoration of the creation and human life from the corruption of sin.

Essential to embodying God’s creational design and eschatological purpose for human life will be a “missionary encounter”<sup>10</sup> with other stories, other ways of viewing, understanding, and living in the world. Israel is set in the midst of the nations, and their call to make known YHWH and his redemptive purpose *necessarily* means an encounter with and challenge to the pagan ways of life of the surrounding peoples.

### **Israel’s Missional Role and Identity in the Old Testament Story**

Theodore Maccarenhas offers fruitful reflection on the role of the psalms in the missional calling of Israel.<sup>11</sup> To begin he correctly observes that the “Psalter is placed within the larger work of the Old Testament and as such the idea of the missionary function must be traced first within the Old Testament.”<sup>12</sup> And so, in the first section he reflects generally on the “missionary function” of Israel in the Old Testament story. Missionary<sup>13</sup> function is the role Israel sees for itself in God’s mission to restore humanity and the creation to himself.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> This is the language of Lesslie Newbigin, e.g., *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 1. By missionary encounter Newbigin refers to a clash of ultimate and comprehensive stories—the Biblical story and the cultural story. When this happens the foundational religious beliefs and reigning idolatrous assumptions shared by the cultural community are challenged. The people of God offer a credible alternative way of life to its contemporaries. There is a call for a radical conversion, an invitation to turn from its idolatrous beliefs and to come live in the true story of YHWH’s mighty deeds especially revealed in Jesus Christ.

<sup>11</sup> Theodore Maccarenhas, *The Missionary Function of Israel in Psalms 67, 96, and 117* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Maccarenhas, *Missionary Function of Israel*, xiii. William Richey Hogg also encourages us to understand the missionary calling of Israel as the “necessary context” for understanding the psalms. He sketches Israel’s history as the covenant people of the One Creator God set in the midst of the nations as a light to make God known and to bring blessing to all people as the story in which one must make sense of psalms (“Psalm 22 and Christian Mission”, *International Review of Mission* 306 (April 1988), 241-242.

<sup>13</sup> When expositing the views of Maccarenhas I employ his terminology of ‘missionary.’ Generally speaking I prefer the word ‘missional’ in this context. For a helpful analysis of the use of the terms ‘mission’, ‘missions’, ‘missionary’, ‘missional’, ‘missiology’, and ‘missiological’ see Wright, *Mission of God*, 22-25. About ‘missionary’ Wright says: “Because of the dominant association of the word *missionary* with the activity of sending and with crosscultural communication of the gospel—that is, with a broadly centrifugal dynamic of mission—I prefer not to

Israel is chosen by God to play a central role in the unfolding of God's redemptive purposes. Since God's renewing work is directed toward all nations "Israel relates itself not only to its God, but is his chosen one before the nations. It views and understands its origin, existence, and history in relation to the peoples and the nations."<sup>15</sup> Israel's missionary function is consistently elaborated in three words common in ecclesiological reflection—sacrament, sign, and instrument of salvation.<sup>16</sup> Israel is a sacrament, that is, a visible embodiment of God's salvation in the midst of history; Israel is a sign, that is, a picture of the renewal that is coming as the goal of universal history; Israel is an instrument that God uses in his ongoing work of redemption.

Mascarenhas believes that "the missionary function of Israel is perhaps best expressed in three metaphors: blessing to the nations, kingdom of priests, and light to the nations."<sup>17</sup> The following section of his book analyses Abraham as a blessing to the nations (Gen. 12:2-3), Israel as a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:3-6), and Israel as a light to the nations (Is. 42:1-6; 49:1-6).

It is clear that Mascarenhas has put his finger on key texts in the Old Testament that help us understand the missional role of Israel within the story of God's mission. In this he follows many who recognise the central importance of these texts for the Old Testament story.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, it is not so clear that the notion of metaphor adequately grasps the fundamental significance of these texts, especially Genesis 12:2-3 and Exodus 19:3-6. Indeed, when these texts are seen in terms of their pivotal place in the unfolding narrative of God's mission in the Old Testament, it becomes clear that they play a much more important role: they function together as a

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use the term in connection with the Old Testament." A better adjectival form of 'mission', he believes, is 'missional' (23).

<sup>14</sup> Mascarenhas, *Missionary Function of Israel*, 10.

<sup>15</sup> Mascarenhas, *Missionary Function of Israel*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> The Vatican II Document *Lumen Gentium* calls the church "a kind of sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and unity among all people" (LG, 1; cf. LG 8, 9). Subsequent Roman Catholic theology has continued with this threefold ecclesiological description. This terminology has become common in ecumenical Protestant ecclesiological reflection as well (Günther Gassman, "The Church as Sacrament, Sign, and Instrument: The Reception of this Ecclesiological Understanding in Ecumenical Debate", Gennadios Limouris, ed., *Church, Kingdom, World*. Faith and Order Paper; 130 [Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986], 1-17).

<sup>17</sup> Mascarenhas, *Missionary Function of Israel*, 18.

<sup>18</sup> For example, Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1961), 15-28; Robert Martin-Achard, *A Light to the Nations* (trans. John Penney Smith; London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), 32-41; Jo Bailey Wells, *God's Holy People: A Theme in Biblical Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984); Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Israel's Missionary Call", in ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1981), 25-34.

hermeneutical lens to read the entire story of the Old Testament. We will briefly trace this story through the hermeneutical lens formed by these two texts.

### *Genesis 12:2-3: Blessed to Be a Blessing*

This “stupendous utterance”<sup>19</sup> made to Abraham in Genesis 12:2-3 is set in the context of the first eleven chapters of Genesis. These chapters are universal in scope: God is the creator of the heavens and the earth, and is Lord of all the nations. Sin pollutes all cultures of humankind and likewise God’s judgement on sin is universal. In reference to Genesis 3-11 Gerhard Von Rad speaks of the author’s “great hamartiology”, his focus on sin, its effects, its consequences and God’s judgment.<sup>20</sup> Now, in Genesis 12 the biblical story narrows from its universal scope (all nations) to a particular focus (one man, one nation). The bad news of sin, alienation, curse and judgment on all nations is met with a promise of good news: God has chosen one man to bring blessing back to his creation and to all peoples.

Paul Williamson speaks correctly of a “twofold agenda”<sup>21</sup> in Genesis 12:1-3. Abraham is first of all to be formed into a great nation and be a recipient of God’s covenantal blessing. The purpose is so that all nations on earth might be blessed. This final clause ‘all peoples on earth will be blessed through you’ is “the principal statement of these three verses.” It is a “result clause” which indicates that the final goal of God’s election and blessing of Abraham is the salvation of the nations.<sup>22</sup> Thus “God’s calling and election of Abraham was not merely so that he should be saved . . . It was rather, and more explicitly, that he and his people should be instruments through whom God would gather that multinational multitude that no man or woman can number. . . . it is first of all election into mission.”<sup>23</sup> We are not told precisely how Abraham will be a blessing to all nations.<sup>24</sup> That will be given further clarification in Exodus 19:3-6.

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<sup>19</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, “The Kerygma of the Yahwist,” (trans. Wilbur A. Benware) *Interpretation* 20, 2 (1966), 140.

<sup>20</sup> Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1962), 1:154.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Williamson, “Covenant”, in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* eds. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 145.

<sup>22</sup> Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 64-65.

<sup>23</sup> Wright, *Mission of God*, 263-264.

<sup>24</sup> Perhaps Genesis 18:18-19 offers a clue: Abraham and his family are commanded to “keep the way of the Lord” and to do “what is right and just.” Both phrases point to a life that lives in God’s way before the nations.

### *Exodus 19:3-6: Priestly Kingdom and Holy Nation*

The means by which God will bring blessing to the nations is given more detail in Exodus 19. These programmatic verses are set in the context of Exodus which narrates the birth of God's people. The book of Exodus is not a "literary or theological goulash" but rather has a "theological unity" that is reflected in its literary structure.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the literary structure has profound theological implications for the missional identity and role of God's people in the biblical story.

The first eighteen chapters narrate the redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt. As Redeemer, God acts to free his firstborn son from slavery to Pharaoh to restore him to his rightful place in God's family (Ex. 4:22-23). Since Pharaoh was considered to be an incarnation of the Egyptian god Re,<sup>26</sup> and since pagan religion shaped all of the political, social, and economic life of Egypt,<sup>27</sup> this redemption was a profoundly *religious* liberation. Israel was freed from idols to serve the YHWH in every area of their lives. Upon the heels of this redemption God establishes a covenant with his people (Ex. 19-24). But why had God—the Lord of all nations—liberated this one small nation and bound himself to them in covenant? What role does God have for them to play? The answer is offered in Exodus 19:3-6 in the covenant task God gives Israel as his people. Here we find the "unique identity of the people of God."<sup>28</sup>

Three terms are used to describe Israel in their identity and role in God's mission: treasured possession, priestly kingdom, and holy nation. Israel was chosen as a treasured possession to play a priestly role as a holy nation. Israel would play a priestly role living as a model before and mediator to the nations. Israel would be a holy nation, living a distinctive life before the nations. We may summarise the significance of these labels in terms of Israel's call to mediate God's salvation to the nations as they lived before the nations a communal life that embodied God's

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<sup>25</sup> John I. Durham, *Exodus*. Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 3 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), xxi.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Mason Curtis, *Man as the Image of God in Genesis in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Parallels* (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 1984; Reproduced Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1985), 86-96; J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 108-111.

<sup>27</sup> Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948).

<sup>28</sup> Bailey Wells, *God's Holy People*, 34.

design for human life. As Durham points out, Israel was to “be a display people, a showcase to the world of how being in covenant with Yahweh changes a people.”<sup>29</sup> The universal horizon of God’s action in so calling Israel is clearly in view in the words “because the whole earth is mine” (v. 5).<sup>30</sup>

God’s people living in God’s way before the nations: this is one way we have described mission. Thus immediately upon the heels of this call the *torah* is given to guide Israel in living out their calling as a holy nation (Ex. 20-23). This instruction covers the full spectrum of human life. It points back to God’s creational intention for human life, now set contextually in this ancient near eastern setting. “The people of God in both testaments are called to be a light to the nations. But there can be no light to the nations that is not shining already in transformed lives of a holy people.”<sup>31</sup>

The final chapters of Exodus deal with the tabernacle and the story of Israel’s rebellion with the golden calf (Ex. 25-40). Together we see that the final brick in the building of God’s people in Exodus is God’s presence: As holy yet merciful and forgiving (Ex. 34:6-7), God comes to dwell in their midst. God will now carry out his mission to bring blessing to the nations as he lives among Israel as their divine king.<sup>32</sup>

Thus the book of Exodus renders to us the identity and role of God’s people: they are a redeemed people (Ex. 1-18), a covenant people (Ex. 19-24), and a people in whom God dwells (Ex. 25-40). God’s work of forming a people finds its focus and goal in the calling to be a priestly kingdom and holy nation before the watching eyes of the surrounding nations (Ex. 19:3-6). Durham contends that “this special role becomes a kind of lens through which Israel is viewed throughout the rest of the Bible.”<sup>33</sup> Or, as Dumbrell puts it even more strongly: “The

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<sup>29</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, 263.

<sup>30</sup> Dumbrell rightly notes that phrase “because [ki] the whole earth is mine” should be understood “not as the assertion of the right to choose but as the *reasons* or *goal* for choice” (“The Prospect of the Unconditionality of the Sinaitic Covenant”, in *Israel’s Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, ed. A. Gileadi [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988], 146). Cf. Terence Fretheim translates this ‘because the whole earth is mine’ and notes rightly that this links this text with the missional purpose of God first articulated to Abraham in Gen. 12:3 (“‘Because the Whole Earth is Mine’: Theme and Narrative in Exodus”, *Interpretation* 50, 3 [July 1996], 237).

<sup>31</sup> Wright, *Mission of God*, 358.

<sup>32</sup> On the importance of the presence of God in Israel for their mission, Martin-Achard says: “The evangelisation of the world is not primarily a matter of words or deeds: it is a matter of presence—the *presence of the People of God in the midst of mankind and the presence of God in the midst of His people*. And surely it is not in vain that the Old Testament reminds the Church of this truth” (*A Light to the Nations*, 79).

<sup>33</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, xxiii.



history of Israel from this point on is in reality merely a commentary upon the degree of fidelity with which Israel adhered to this Sinai-given vocation.”<sup>34</sup>

*On Display in the Land: Israel and the Nations*

Duane Christensen rightly observes that “‘Israel as a light to the nations’ is no peripheral theme within the canonical process. The nations are the matrix of Israel’s life, the *raison d’être* of her very existence.”<sup>35</sup> And so Israel is placed on the land in the midst of nations to shine as an appealing display people visible to the nations. From this point on “Israel knew that it lived under constant surveillance of the then contemporary world.”<sup>36</sup> Displayed on the land “Israel was visible to the nations.” Indeed, the “life of God’s people is always directed outward to the watching nations.”<sup>37</sup>

We note, however, an interesting phenomenon in the remainder of Old Testament history in the way Israel’s story is told. Even though God’s mission to the nations is “the meaning of Israel’s history” yet “during the whole history of Israel this comes to realization little if at all.”<sup>38</sup> For the purpose of this chapter two brief observations are important.

The focus of the Old Testament narratives is on the work of God in the midst of Israel to form them as a holy nation. There are two sides to this story. The first side is God’s work in their midst according to the covenant in grace and judgment. The second side is Israel’s struggle with the idolatry of the nations that surround them as they carry out their mission to be a holy people. The pagan idolatry of the nations poses a constant threat and temptation to Israel.

Israel’s encounter with idolatry is an important thread in the story and this too must be understood in terms of God’s mission. Israel’s calling is to live in God’s way in the sight of the nations. However, those nations are not neutral and passive observers so to speak. In their cultural lives they do not serve YHWH but other gods. Thus Israel’s calling was one of a

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<sup>34</sup> Dumbrell, *Creation and Covenant*, 80.

<sup>35</sup> Duane L. Christensen, “Nations”, in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:1037. Cf. Wright, *Mission of God*, 455.

<sup>36</sup> J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, (trans. David Hugh Freeman; Phillipsburgh, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 14.

<sup>37</sup> Wright, *Mission of God*, 371.

<sup>38</sup> Blauw, *Missionary Nature of the Church*, 27. Cf. Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 30.

missionary encounter with the idolatrous cultures of the surrounding nations, a confrontation of the pagan gods with the claims of the living God. Israel's life was an alternative shaped by God's *torah* and as such was a light in the midst of darkness. Sadly, Israel's history demonstrated that instead of being a solution to idolatry they often became submerged in it becoming part of the problem.

Yet even though the narrative of the historical books zooms in on God's work and Israel's struggle with idolatry, we must not forget the bigger picture in which this drama is set—God's work in Israel for the sake of the nations. Put another way: God has a universal goal (all nations, whole creation) but uses particular means (Israel). Much of the focus of the historical books is on the particular means. Nevertheless, the universal goal remains the backdrop of God's mission and Israel's history.

A second observation is important: it is primarily in the psalms and the prophetic books that the universal horizon of Israel's election is unmistakably affirmed. In both present summons and future promise, Israel's mission as a light to the nations emerges in the prophets. Likewise the poets within Israel compose hymns and prayers that set Israel's calling in a universal context. In fact, as Miller points out “the praise of God is the most prominent and extended formulation of the *universal* and *conversionary* dimension of the theology of the Old Testament.”<sup>39</sup> Israel's missional role is constantly nourished by this dimension of their liturgy. W. Creighton Marlowe calls the psalms the “music of missions”<sup>40</sup> while Mark Boda speaks of the psalter as a “missional collection.”<sup>41</sup> Together the prophets and the psalms interpret Israel's history in terms of their mission to the nations.

## **Psalms in Israel: Nourishing a Missional Identity**

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<sup>39</sup> Patrick D. Miller, “‘Enthroned on the Praises of Israel’: The Praise of God in Old Testament Theology,” *Interpretation* 39 (1985), 9.

<sup>40</sup> W. Creighton Marlowe, “Music of Missions: Themes of Cross-Cultural Outreach in the Psalms,” *Missiology* 26 (1998): 445-456.

<sup>41</sup> Mark Boda, “‘Declare His Glory Among the Nations’: The Psalter as Missional Collection,” Bingham Colloquium 2006. See also Walter C. Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), 29-38; C. Wright, *Mission of God*, pp. 474-484; Lucien Legrand, *Unity and Plurality: Mission in the Bible*, trans. Robert R. Barr, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), 15-18; Roger Hedlund, *The Mission of the Church in the World: A Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991), 83-92.

Until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the psalms were primarily treated in terms of their theological content. Hermann Gunkel and Sigmund Mowinckel brought about a “sea change” in the scholarly study of the psalms when they developed a new approach to the psalms that investigated their purpose and use in Israel’s worship.<sup>42</sup> The psalms are not first of all theology but poetry that is used as the response of God’s people in worship and prayer: “The poetry of the Psalms is distinctive because it is prayed poetry . . . the language . . . the worshipping community uses to speak to God and about God, in response to his overtures in history. . . . The Psalms are the songs which accompany the People of God on their journey through history.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, as God’s people sing or pray, individually or corporately,<sup>44</sup> the psalms foster a faithful covenantal response to God’s mighty deeds whether that be praise, lament, thanksgiving, historical memory, love for God’s law, repudiation of idols, or more.

One of the things that the psalms did was nourish Israel’s missional identity: their God was the God of all nations; he was concerned for their salvation; and Israel’s election and covenant were directed to that end. Since mission is central to the Old Testament story there is much that can be said about how the psalms did this. In the next few paragraphs I will confine myself to two major themes. First, the psalms nourished a universalistic vision of God as the one true God who is creator and lord of all nations. This stands as a stark alternative to the pagan polytheism and henotheism that reduced the gods to tribal deities. They nourish Israel in the true story fostering a vision of the real world. Second, in numerous ways the psalms direct Israel’s attention to the nations as the ultimate horizon of their existence. George Peters counts over 175 universal references to the nations of the world and suggests that “the Psalter is one of the greatest missionary books in the world, though seldom seen from that point of view.”<sup>45</sup> The psalms not only lead Israel deeper and deeper into the true story of the world, they also continually remind Israel that it is the final goal of their election to make known this true God, this true story, the real world to the nations.

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<sup>42</sup> William Richey Hogg, “Psalm 22 and Christian Mission”, 239.

<sup>43</sup> Bernhard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 23.

<sup>44</sup> Much Old Testament scholarship believes that the psalms were Israel’s hymnbook for corporate worship in the temple. However, this view is not unanimous. Others believe that this is more of a prayerbook for individual devotion. In either case the psalms nourished the covenant life of the people of God as they sang and/or prayed, individually or corporately.

<sup>45</sup> George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 116.

## *The True God, the True Story, the Real World*

The psalms proclaim that there is one God: Israel's God, YHWH is the one and only, the true and living God who is King over all the earth. While he had made himself known to Israel, and is their God, He is also the God over all nations.<sup>46</sup> At the core of the Psalms is a universal monotheism.<sup>47</sup> God is the Creator of all things (Ps. 95:4, 5): Thus, he controls and rules the non-human creation (Ps. 18:7-15); he governs the history of the world (Ps. 33:10-11; 67:4); his laws of justice apply to all nations (Ps. 37). God rules and judges the nations (Ps. 83): Thus, all come under his judgment (Ps. 7:7-10); the nations must find salvation and refuge in him (Ps. 2:8-12); they cannot resist his power and purposes (Ps. 33:10-19). Truly YHWH is a God of universal power and dominion. He is the King of the whole earth, Creator, Sustainer, Ruler, Lord, and Judge. As Mascarenhas concludes: "The theology of the Psalms, like that of the entire Old Testament, reveals an absolute, exclusive and indisputable monotheism, unique among the religions of antiquity."<sup>48</sup>

It is important for us, as a people who have been grounded in this monotheism all our lives, to be shaken out of our complacent familiarity and get hold of the radical uniqueness of Israel's faith among the nations. Truly the claims of Israel about their God were "astonishing claims. They were also unprecedented and unparalleled claims."<sup>49</sup> The surrounding nations were henotheistic and polytheistic, and their gods were tribal deities that ruled only particular nations. From the historical records we know that Israel was constantly tempted and seduced by this overwhelming religious power. The psalms nourished an alternative vision of God and the world in contrast to the pagan religions of the surrounding nations. In nourishing a monotheistic vision of God, the psalms engage in a polemic against the idols and pagan religions that surrounded

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<sup>46</sup> Mascarenhas says: "Universalism is one of the characteristic traits of the Psalms. The principal texts invite all the earth to sing to the Lord, the families of the peoples to praise him and affirm that Yahweh reigns over the whole world and governs with justice. This follows from the universalistic theology of the Psalter." (*Missionary Function of Israel*, 64)

<sup>47</sup> On monotheism in the Old Testament see the fine article by Richard Bauckham, "Biblical Theology and the Problems of Monotheism", in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 187-232.

<sup>48</sup> Mascarenhas, *Missionary Function of Israel*, 67.

<sup>49</sup> Wright, *Mission of God*, 85; cf. Simon Sherwin, "'I Am Against You': Yahweh's Judgment on the Nations and Its Ancient Near Eastern Context", *Tyndale Bulletin* 54 (2003), 149-160.

Israel (Ps. 115:1-8; 135:15-17). If Israel was to be a light to the nations they must be firmly grounded in a monotheistic and universalistic vision of YHWH in contrast to the idols of the nations.<sup>50</sup>

If this be God then two appropriate responses are in order. From all the nations, praise: If “the lordship of this God is universal in scope” then it “should bring forth the conversion of every being to the worship of Israel’s God.” Miller continues: “This call to the nations and peoples to praise the Lord is no incidental or exceptional matter. It is pervasive in the Psalms . . .”<sup>51</sup> The response from Israel is the obligation to make known this God to the nations. As H. H. Rowley has put it, “Monotheism necessarily implies universalism. If God is One and there is no other, then He must be the God of all men, and if men are to have any true religion He it is that they must worship.”<sup>52</sup> It is *this God* that makes himself known to Israel and, as Rowley continues concerning Israel, “they to whom knowledge has been mediated are called to share their treasures with all men.”<sup>53</sup> Wright expresses similar sentiments:

. . . Israel believed that they had come to know him as the one and only true and living God. In his transcendent uniqueness there was no other god like YHWH. Furthermore, they had a sense of stewardship of this knowledge since it was God’s purpose that ultimately all nations would come to know the name, the glory, the salvation and the mighty acts of YHWH and worship him alone as God.<sup>54</sup>

### *Israel’s Missional Obligation to Make the Truth Known*

The psalms nourish this obligation to share their treasures with all people by continually orienting Israel to the nations as the ultimate horizon of their election and covenant. The danger

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<sup>50</sup> See Wright, *Mission of God*, 71-188;

<sup>51</sup> Miller, “Enthroned on the Praises of Israel”, 13.

<sup>52</sup> H. H. Rowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1950), 62. See further Richard Bauckham, ‘Biblical Theology and the Problems of Monotheism’, in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, eds. Craig Bartholomew, Mary Healy, Karl Möller, and Robin Parry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 187-232; and C. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 75-92.

<sup>53</sup> Rowley, *Biblical Doctrine of Election*, 62.

<sup>54</sup> Wright, *Mission of God*, 92.

for God's people then, as today, is that election and covenant can be misunderstood in an insular and introverted sense of privilege that is forgetful of missional responsibility. The psalms contend against such exclusivity. We can briefly summarise this dimension of the psalms in seven statements.

(1) The psalms nourish a vision of universal worship in which a multitude made up of all nations bow before the Lord (Ps. 33:8; 46:10; 67:3-4; 102:15; 150:6); (2) The psalmists summon and invite all the nations to worship YHWH (Ps. 47:1; 66:8; 67:3, 5; 68:32; 96:7, 10; 100:1; 117:1); (3) The psalmists exhort the people of God to proclaim and declare the mighty deeds of God before the nations (9:11; 18:49; 96:2-3; 105:1); (4) The psalmist responds to these exhortations with his own intention to fulfil this obligation (18:49; 57:9; 108:3); (5) The psalmist prays for God's blessing on Israel so that the nations might recognise that God is the true and living God (Ps. 67); (6) The psalms picture a future fulfilment when all the nations of the earth will join Israel in the praise of YHWH (Ps. 2; 22:27-31; 66:4; 86:9).<sup>55</sup>

While passages that orient the life of Israel toward the nations are scattered throughout the psalms, there are some psalms whose entire thrust is to remind Israel of their missional calling. Both Mascarenhas and Marlowe see Psalms 67, 96, and 117 in this way.<sup>56</sup> Surely if Israel sang Psalm 67 on a regular basis they could not but recognise that they were a 'so-that people', blessed *so that* they might bring blessing to the nations.

May God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make his face shine on us—  
*so that* your ways may be known on earth,  
your salvation among all nations.  
(Psalm 67:1ff. TNIV).

## **Worship and Mission in the Church Today**

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<sup>55</sup> Scott Hahn speaks of a "liturgical hermeneutic" by which he means an interpretation of the story of Scripture that sees its goal as the worship of God by peoples from all nations. See "Canon, Cult, and Covenant: Towards a Liturgical Hermeneutic", in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 207-235; "Worship in the Word: Toward a Liturgical Hermeneutic", *Letter and Spirit*, Vol. 1 (2005), 131-136. See also John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993).

<sup>56</sup> Marlowe, "Music of Missions", 450-452; Mascarenhas, *The Missionary Function of Israel in Psalms 67, 96, 117*.

Perhaps Israel did not sing Psalm 67 enough. In any case, in spite of the nourishment of their liturgy, Israel failed in their calling to be a light to the nations. As their history slides increasingly downhill into rebellion, the prophets emerge on the scene with the promise that God is not finished. A day is coming when Israel will be restored—gathered, purified, and given the Spirit (Ezek. 36:24-27)—and God’s purposes for the nations and creation will be fulfilled. It is in the work of Jesus that this is fulfilled.<sup>57</sup> During his ministry he limits his focus to regathering Israel (Matt. 15:24). Israel is purified by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and endowed with the Spirit.<sup>58</sup> The little flock—restored, eschatological Israel<sup>59</sup>—is commissioned to continue the mission of Jesus now not only to Israel but to all nations (Matt. 28:18-20; John 20:21).<sup>60</sup>

As Gentiles are incorporated into the Abrahamaic covenant (Gal. 3:7-9) and engrafted onto Israel’s covenant story (Rom. 11:17-21) they are likewise incorporated into the missional calling of God’s people.<sup>61</sup> There is a difference now: since Pentecost, they are newly formed as a multi-ethnic and non-geographically based people sent among the nations. Thus the central “missional mandate” of the Old Testament (Ex. 19:3-6) is freshly applied to the New Covenant people of God (1 Pet. 2:9-12).

Luke gives us a picture of this church in mission in Jerusalem after Pentecost (Acts 2:42-47). Again worship and the gathering of God’s people are central in nourishing this community for their missional calling. They are a people committed to four things—apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42). As they are nourished by the true story they embody it in their lives and as such are an attractive community, a light shining in the midst of Jerusalem (Acts 2:43-47). Their lives of compassion, justice, joy, worship, and power emit a

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<sup>57</sup> Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of the Christian Faith* (trans. John P. Galvin; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 70-73.

<sup>58</sup> Some have seen a contradiction between Jesus’ exclusive focus on Israel (Matt. 15:24) and the inclusive universality of the prophets and his own message. But this must be interpreted in terms of Jesus regathering Israel as the preliminary eschatological event that precedes the mission to the Gentiles. For a defense of this interpretation, see Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations* (London: SCM Press, 1958); James LaGrand, *The Earliest Christian Mission to ‘All Nations’ in the Light of Matthew’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). Likewise Lohfink states: “Now the decisive point is that *the restoration of Israel occurs in order that the Gentiles also seek the Lord* (cf. Acts 15:17)” (*Jesus and Community*, 140; his emphasis).

<sup>59</sup> Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 9-12; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 300.

<sup>60</sup> Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 75-81, 132-147.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 198.

radiant light and “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2: 47).

Here the missional calling of the church is nourished by worship, and the same need remains today as much as with ancient Israel and the early church. What can we learn from the psalms? First, worship today needs to tell the true story of the world inviting God’s people to come live in the real world it narrates. A few years ago Bob Webber and Phil Kenyon issued a clarion call to the Western church. It is a summons to growing faithfulness in the midst of huge threats to the gospel and Christian identity at the beginning of the twenty-first century. They say: “Today, as in the ancient era, the Church is confronted by a host of master narratives that contradict and compete with the gospel. The pressing question is: *who gets to narrate the world?*”<sup>62</sup> Webber believes the three leading contenders are the Muslim story, the liberal capitalist story, and (somewhat surprisingly) the Marxist story.<sup>63</sup> Over against such contenders the authors say: “In a world of competing stories, we call Evangelicals to recover the truth of God’s word as *the* story of the world, and to make *it* the centerpiece of Evangelical life.”<sup>64</sup> Getting this straight is the first order of business. Later in the document they offer reflections on the importance of worship for this task. They begin: “We call for public worship that sings, preaches and enacts God’s story.”<sup>65</sup> Jones makes the same point: “The Church is a ‘story-formed community’ that is rooted in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. . . . In order for the community of faith to endure through time and to withstand the threats of inculturation, the story of what God has accomplished for the Hebrew people and the Christian community must be continually re-told in corporate worship.”<sup>66</sup> Truly the Bible must narrate the world for the Christian community.

Neither the intellectualism of Enlightenment-inspired worship nor the self-centred narcissism of some contemporary worship will draw us into the story of Scripture. Rather, worship fashioned on the pattern of the Psalms—focusing on the narrative of God’s mighty deeds—can move us more deeply into God’s story. Worship enables us to celebrate what God has done in the past but not as a stale history lesson. Since we are part of that story our worship

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<sup>62</sup>Bob Webber and Phil Kenyon, *A Call to an Ancient Evangelical Future* (2006), ‘Introduction’, third paragraph. The call can be found at the following website: [http://www.ancientfutureworship.com/afw\\_wkshps.html](http://www.ancientfutureworship.com/afw_wkshps.html)

<sup>63</sup> “Together in the Jesus Story”, An Interview with Bob Webber, *Christianity Today* (September 2006). Online at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/september/10.54.html> accessed 6 August 2008.

<sup>64</sup> Section 1 ‘On the Primacy of Biblical Narrative’

<sup>65</sup> Section 4 ‘On Church’s Worship as Telling and Enacting God’s Narrative’

<sup>66</sup> Jones, “We Are *How* We Worship”, 353.



also nourishes our participation in his ongoing work which continues to the present and will continue until God's purposes are fulfilled. John Burkhart claims that "Fundamentally, worship is the celebrative response to what God has done, is doing, and will do."<sup>67</sup> The way the worship is structured, the hymns that are chosen, the way various elements are introduced and related to each other all can focus our attention on the story of God's mighty deeds—past, present and future—in which we find our place.

This story told in the Bible is the true story in which God's people are called to live. It must, therefore, be held over against all competing stories, and worship will play a crucial role. A particularly poignant example of this is found in the book of Revelation.<sup>68</sup> John's vision, which constitutes the book of Revelation, comes on the Lord's day, the day of worship (Rev. 1:10). The church in Asia Minor is threatened by the invincible power of Rome and is in danger of being domesticated. The threat of the imperial cult put pressure on the church to accommodate itself to the idolatry of the empire. Surely the great might of Rome demonstrated that the world it narrated was the real world. Yet the book of Revelation audaciously challenges what appears to be the "sheer facticity" of Rome's established order.<sup>69</sup> To the small and weak community, threatened by overwhelming odds, John makes bold to say that the true story of the world is revealed in a man crucified by the Roman Empire but who now reigns over all and is guiding universal history to its final goal. John offers this vision as an "alternative world"<sup>70</sup> and thus "constructs a counter-narrative disputing the imperial one, opening up a different way of seeing the world."<sup>71</sup> This counter-narrative is the story of the Kingdom of God centred in the cosmic Christ and involved in a cosmic battle but assured of a cosmic victory. It is this story that is celebrated in the liturgy, songs, and prayers of God's people in Revelation. The worship of the early church in the Roman Empire was both a *witness* to the true story of the world revealed in Jesus Christ and the place where the church was *nourished* in this story so that they might

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<sup>67</sup> John E. Burkhart, *Worship* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 17.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Rodney Clapp's chapter 'The Church as Worshiping Community: Welcome to the (Real) World' in *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 95-96.

<sup>69</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 145.

<sup>70</sup> Johannes Nissen, *New Testament and Mission: Historical and Hermeneutical Perspectives* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2004), 147.

<sup>71</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, 104. The outstanding last chapter of this book is an important call for the church to embody the biblical story over against the powerful, encroaching story of global capitalism. He uses the book of Revelation as an example of a church that resisted an imperial story.

heroically refuse to “compromise with a system they see as aligned with the forces of sin and death.”<sup>72</sup>

Here we catch a glimpse of what worship ought to be. The cultural narrative that threatens us today may not be as explicitly hostile but is surely as dangerous.<sup>73</sup> Today’s church is being co-opted by this story through entertainment and advertising, through television and internet, through sports and shopping malls. Unless the church learns to create another reality—the real world<sup>74</sup>—in its worship, the witness of the church will be hopelessly compromised by the powerful idols of our culture. Liturgy today must witness to the real world, the true story, the living God as revealed in Jesus Christ, and thereby form a people ready for a missionary encounter in their various callings.

Worship must enact the true story of the world and nourish believers in their callings. But the second thing we learn from the psalms is that we must be continually directed to the unbelieving world as the ultimate horizon of our calling. We have received the gospel, not simply for our own good, but to communicate it in life, word, and deed.<sup>75</sup> As Israel of old, the church is in need of a worship that directs our lives to the nations.

The same elements of liturgy can direct attention either inward on ourselves or outward, orienting us to the nations and our calling. Usually scholarly attention is directed to the word and sacrament.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, the word and sacraments need to be rescued from an introverted orientation that only dwells on benefits for believers, and instead utilized to point the church to their calling in the world. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper remind us of our mission in an ongoing story. Each of these rites focuses on the mightiest of God’s deeds—the cross of Jesus. Yet it matters *how* we focus on Christ’s crucifixion. Too often our celebration of these sacraments nurtures a passive

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<sup>72</sup> Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983), 305.

<sup>73</sup> Craig Bartholomew and I have told that story in *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008) in three chapters ‘The Western Story: The Roots of Modernity’, ‘The Western Story: The Growth of Modernity’, ‘What Time Is It? Four Signs of Our Time in the Western Story.’

<sup>74</sup> Note the sub-title of Clapp’s chapter: ‘Welcome to the (Real) World’, *A Peculiar People*, 94.

<sup>75</sup> The church and Christians are “to *be* the witness, *do* the witness, and *say* the witness.” (Darrell Guder, *Be My Witnesses: The Church’s Mission, Message, and Messengers* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985], 91.

<sup>76</sup> For example, Clapp, *Peculiar People*, 99-113; Jones, “We Are *How* We Worship”, 353-357; András Lovas, “Mission-Shaped Liturgy”, *International Review of Mission* 95, 378/379 (July/October 2006), 354-358; Michael W. Goheen, “Narrating the World: What Can Church Leaders Do?”, *Catalyst* 33,3 (March 2007). Online at <http://catalystresources.org/issues/333Goheen2.htm> accessed 5 August 2008; Schattauer, *Inside Out*, 23-86. Beyond chapters on proclamation, baptism, and communion this book also discusses liturgical assembly, liturgical year, liturgical space, music, ritual practice, and occasional service.

reception of the means of grace designed solely to give individual salvation. Yet there is no better place to remind the congregation that this is our call to communal participation in God's mission. The cross is that place where God accomplished his purpose to defeat sin and evil for the sake of the creation he loved. In baptism we are incorporated into the community that shares in this victory and is called to make it known to the world. Baptism is a rite of initiation into a community that continues the mission of Jesus until the end. The Eucharist continually nourishes us for that mission by orienting our lives to the central event where the victory of the kingdom was accomplished and pointing us forward to the culmination of God's purpose. Put simply, both sacraments should be eschatological and missional, and our liturgical celebration of them should foster this view.<sup>77</sup>

Preaching is a central element of worship. The business of preaching is to bring us face to face with Jesus Christ and all his saving power to equip us for our mission in the world. Jesus stands as the fulfilment of a long story. The Old Testament was written to form and equip a people to play their role in God's redemptive purposes for the world. The New Testament tells the story of Israel with Jesus as the fulfilment, applying that story to form a faithful missional people in new cultural contexts. Thus to preach Christ, in his life, death, and resurrection, is to form a missional people to embody God's purposes in the world. Jesus reveals and accomplishes the end of universal history. Our preaching of Christ is God's power to give us kingdom life and equip us for our mission in the world.<sup>78</sup> Seen from this perspective, the rampant practice of distilling principles from the text to satisfy an immediate gratification for relevance seems a far cry from what is needed. Sermon bits or morsels separated from their redemptive-historical context may be tasty, but, like candy, will not nourish us. It may help us feel better or comfort us or guide us or inform us but leave the idolatrous cultural story untouched.

Besides word and sacrament, many other liturgical elements offer an opportunity to nourish a missional consciousness. The way the congregation is gathered, welcomed, and called to worship will cast a certain light on the whole service. The service of confession of sin can be

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<sup>77</sup> Some of the content of this paragraph is indebted to an unpublished address, Newbigin gave to a gathering of Anglican and Reformed church leaders, in an attempt to resuscitate an eschatological and missional understanding of baptism and Lord's Supper over against what he calls a "Christendom" appropriation of the sacraments in the Western church (*How Shall We Understand Sacraments and Ministry?* (Unpublished paper written for Anglican-Reformed International Commission, London, 1983).

<sup>78</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 35-59.

introduced and presented as a time to be cleansed from our capitulation to cultural idolatry, a time to be renewed and empowered for our calling in the world.<sup>79</sup> Confessions of faith can reinforce a missional cast to our faith.<sup>80</sup> Our prayers should move beyond the needs of the congregation and direct us outward to a world in need. The charge to the congregation and benediction at the end can be done in a way that encourages the congregation to think in terms of God's presence accompanying them in their mission.<sup>81</sup> These along with numerous other signals will have a long-term effect in nourishing a congregation in their missional identity—chosen for the sake of the nations.

Our music is exceedingly important.<sup>82</sup> Much music today simply does not nourish an outward orientation; the blessings of the gospel are celebrated only in terms of their benefit to believers. Indeed much music is in grave danger of being co-opted by the selfish me-oriented consumer story of our culture. The gifts of the gospel are more spiritual consumer items to be enjoyed by the Christian community than gifts given for the sake of the nations. Blessed *to be a*

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<sup>79</sup> The song 'See How the World Groans' puts confession of sin in a missional setting:  
See how the world groans beneath sin's spell! Lord, who will go? Lord, who will go?  
Someone must care for them, someone tell, tell of Christ, tell of His power to set men free!  
*Refrain: Here am I, my Lord! Send me, send me! I am wanting to be what You want me to be!*  
*Use me when and wherever and how You best see; Here am I, my Lord, send me!*

How can I go with my sin and shame? Great God on high! Lord, who am I?  
Cleans now my heart with the living flame! Make me pure, O make me strong Lord, I will go.  
*Refrain: Here am I . . .*

Make me a servant to serve just You—Lord, I'll obey, use me, I pray!  
Teach me to speak, may my life ring true! All my words, and all my actions pleasing you!  
*Refrain: Here am I . . .*

<sup>80</sup> An outstanding example of this is the contemporary testimony of the Christian Reformed Church in North America entitled *Our World Belongs to God*. Three things stand out about this delightful document. 1) It is in *narrative* rather than systematic form. 2) It is *missional* to the core. The longest section is entitled 'The Mission of the Church' (paragraphs 41-54). 3) It is written in beautiful *poetic and doxological language* making it especially suitable for worship. It can be accessed at [http://www.crcna.org/pages/our\\_world\\_main.cfm](http://www.crcna.org/pages/our_world_main.cfm) There is a second version that has been accepted by the 2008 Synod which will be available soon.

<sup>81</sup> Clayton J. Schmidt, "Sent and Gathered: A Musical Metaphor for Missional Liturgy", *Word and World* 26, 2 (Summer 2006), 121-129.

<sup>82</sup> In defense of this perhaps it is worth quoting again Luther's well known words from his preface to Georg Rhau's *Symphoniae Incundae*: "Next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise. For whether you wish to comfort the sad, to terrify the happy, to encourage the despairing, to humble the proud, to calm the passionate or to appease those full of hate—what more effective means could you find than music? The Holy Ghost himself honors her as an instrument for his proper work when in His Holy Scriptures he asserts, that through her, his gifts were instilled in the prophets. . . . The gift of language combined with the gift of song was given to man that he should proclaim the Word of God through Music" (Luther's Works, Fortress Press and Concordia House, 1957, Volume 53, 323).

*blessing* and *chosen for the sake of the world*: often in our music it is the ‘blessed’ and the ‘chosen’ that are emphasised, shorn of their ultimate purpose.

Along with older songs there are a host of contemporary songs with rich lyrics and tunes which direct the worship of God’s people to their ultimate goal. For example, the hymnbook appropriately entitled *Mission Praise* offers many fresh songs that nourish the missional calling of the church.<sup>83</sup> I conclude this paper with the lyrics of a few of those songs which express in song the theme of this paper.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *Complete Mission Praise*; Compiled by Peter Horrobin and Greg Leavers (London: Marshall Pickering, 1999). Beyond the songs that are expressed in the text of this chapter, some other excellent songs that can be found in this hymnal are ‘Beauty for Brokenness’ (806), ‘An Army of Ordinary People’ (32), ‘For I’m Building a People of Power’ (151), ‘From the Sun’s Rising’ (164), ‘Go Forth in His Name’ (955), ‘Great is the Darkness’ (835), ‘Here I Am’ (229), ‘We’ll Walk the Land’ (743), ‘All Earth was Dark’ (8), ‘One Shall Tell Another (541), ‘See How the World Groans’ (923), ‘That the World May Believe’ (847), ‘Light to the World (643), ‘Where It Matters, There You’ll Find Us’ (866), Let All the Earth Hear His Voice (403).

<sup>84</sup> As a concrete illustration of what I am saying, the songs expressed here came as a result of polling my grown children on what songs were meaningful for them in developing a missional vision while growing up. We would sing for at least a half hour every night. Each of my kids (along with their spouses for those who are married) has found their place in God’s mission, and would assign a large portion of the credit to the singing in family worship. My poll simply asked them which of the songs (listed in the former footnote) were most meaningful for them.

## GREAT IS THE DARKNESS

Great is the darkness that covers the earth,  
oppression, injustice and pain.  
Nations are slipping in hopeless despair, though  
many have come in your name,  
Watching while sanity dies, touched by the madness  
and lies.

*Refrain: Come Lord Jesus, come Lord Jesus, pour  
our Your Spirit we pray,  
Come Lord Jesus, come Lord Jesus, pour out Your  
Spirit on us today.*

May now Your church rise with power and love; this  
glorious gospel proclaim.  
In every nation salvation will come to those who  
believe on your name.  
Help us bring light to the world, that we might speed  
Your return.

*Refrain: Come Lord Jesus . . .*

Great celebrations on that final day, when out of the  
heavens You come.  
Darkness will vanish, all sorrow will end, and rulers  
will bow at Your throne.  
Our great commission complete, then face to face we  
shall meet.

*Refrain: Come Lord Jesus . . .*

## THAT THE WORLD MAY BELIEVE

How do we start to touch the broken hearts, the  
barren lives, the lonely and bereaved?  
Lord, in your name we shall go forth: Your healing  
power forever is the same!

*Refrain: That the world may believe, that the world  
may believe,  
That the world may believe in You!*

We shall proclaim the love of Jesus Christ—a man of  
sorrows, yet a man divine;  
His worthiness, His loveliness, His faithfulness  
forever we will sing!

*Refrain: That the world . . .*

And so we go into a lonely world where fear reigns  
and sorrow fills the air;  
Yet, as we go Your Spirit comes—Your cleansing  
power You give to us to share!

*Refrain: That the world . . .*

## BEAUTY FOR BROKENNESS

Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,  
Lord in Your suffering world, this is our prayer.  
Bread for the children, justice, joy peace,  
Sunrise to sunset, Your kingdom increase!

*Refrain: God of the poor, friend of the weak,  
Give us compassion we pray, melt our cold hearts  
Let tears fall like rain; come, change our love from a  
spark to a flame.*

Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,  
Work for the craftsmen, trade for their skills,  
Land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,  
Voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak.

*Refrain: God of the poor . . .*

Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,  
Cities for sanctuary, freedoms to share  
Peace to the killingfields, scorched earth to green,  
Christ for the bitterness, His cross for the pain.

*Refrain: God of the poor . . .*

Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams,  
Plundered and poisoned, our future, our dreams,  
Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed,  
Make us content with the things that we need

*Refrain: God of the poor . . .*

Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame  
Until your justice burns brightly again;  
Until the nations learn of your ways,  
Seek your salvation and bring you their praise.

*Refrain: God of the poor . . .*

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