Worshipping Trinity

Coming Back to the Heart of Worship

Robin A. Parry

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Singing the Trinity

Singing has been part of Christian worship for as long as there has been Christian worship, and it has been part of the worship of the Jews for a good while longer than that. While one can worship without singing, believers across many ages and diverse cultures have found singing to be of enduring value as a means of expressing and evoking praise. This chapter offers some reflections on how songwriters might go about writing more Trinitarian songs and how worship leaders might think about selecting songs so as to facilitate a greater awareness of the richness of the Trinitarian God.

God has not gifted me as a songwriter. My one attempt at the tender age of five produced a "masterpiece" with a lyrical profundity that would leave many a modern Christian hymn writer drooling with envy:

> If I were an angel
> I would fly high above the sky
> (repeat until bored)
>
> —Robin Parry © 1974 FishyMusic

And if you think that's naff, you should have heard the tune! So, I am not a songwriter. But I do sing. Not very well, I grant you, but the noise I make is (often) joyful even if not . . . pleasant. And I do worship God in song. And, as someone who has a moderately theological inclination, I do think about the words of songs. It is really in that capacity that I offer my reflections. I will leave it to the real live songwriters to supplement my comments with the poetic and musical advice that may remain lacking. The best practical

advice on lyric writing of which I am aware is Nick Page's hilarious and provocative book *And Now Let's Move into a Time of Nonsense.* It should be required reading for all songwriters.

What I want to show is that it is possible to write songs with rich Trinitarian lyrics in all sorts of different ways. I want to argue that if Christian songwriters have absorbed the Trinitarian theology expressed in chapters 2 to 5, they can let it loose in as many and diverse ways as their creative imaginations allow. I will give examples of "good practice" not in order that people should seek to copy them but in order to inspire fresh imagination. I use modern songs and a fair few old hymns. The old hymns may not resonate with contemporary audiences as they once did (although it depends who you talk to), but they do provide some wonderful examples of sound theology worshipping.

Substantially Trinitarian Songs

The most obvious kinds of Trinitarian songs are those that are *about* the Trinity—songs that take the Trinity itself as the central theme to be celebrated.[1] Here are three verses from *O Pater Sancte*, a tenth-century hymn.

> Father most holy, merciful, and loving,
> Jesus, Redeemer, ever to be worshipped,
> Life-giving Spirit, Comforter most gracious,
> God-everlasting.
>
> Three in a wondrous unity unbroken,
> One perfect Godhead, love that never faileth,
> Light of the angels, succour of the needy,
> Hope of all living.
>
> Lord God Almighty, unto thee be glory,
> One in Three Persons, over all be exalted;
> Thine, as we meet thee, be honor, praise and blessing,
> Now and for ever.
>
> (Tr. Alfred Edward Alston)

1. A terrific modern example is "Dance of Our God" by Geraldine Lattey and Mike Busbee (© 2004 Thankyou Music). It develops the metaphor of the three persons dancing and inviting creation into that dance. Consider too "Father Most Holy" by Nathan Fellingham (© 2005 Thankyou Music), which is based on *O Pater Sancte*, quoted above. There is also "Triune God" by the Vineyard songwriters Brenton Brown and Brian Doerkson (© 2005 Thankyou Music). All of these can be found on the album *Trinity* (Authentic Music, 2006).

Notice how the song draws attention to each person of the Trinity in verse one and then the unity of the Three-in-One in the second and final verses.

One ancient way of structuring strong, "in-your-face" songs about the Trinity is to devote a verse to each member of the Godhead in turn. There may also then be a final verse that pulls the three together and emphasizes their unity. Here is an example by Isaac Watts (1674–1748):

We give immortal praise
To God the Father's love,
For all our comforts here,
And better hopes above.
He sent his own eternal Son
To die for sins that man had done.

To God the Son belongs
Immortal glory too,
Who bought us with his blood
From everlasting woe:
And now he lives, and now he reigns,
And sees the fruit of all his pains.

To God the Spirit's name,
Immortal worship give,
Whose new-creating power
Makes the dead sinner live:
His work completes the great design,
And fills the soul with joy divine.

Almighty God, to thee
Be endless honors done,
The undivided Three,
And the mysterious One:
Where reason fails with all her powers,
There faith prevails, and love adores.

Notice how the hymn balances the honor due to each person of the Trinity. This song takes very seriously the theology expressed in the old creeds. Notice, too, how each verse identifies things specific to each of the persons. The Father "sent his own eternal Son"; the Son "bought us with his blood" and now "lives" and "reigns"; the Spirit "makes the dead sinner live" and "fills the soul with joy divine." And then, just in case any of you were mistakenly thinking that this is all "brain stuff" rather than "heart stuff," the last verse wonderfully expresses how the Trinity can restore the sense of

mystery to our worship. How can these three be one? Here reason fails but "faith prevails, and love adores." And how true this is! I have no problem with Christian theologians and philosophers trying to articulate how God can be both three and one, but when the rubber hits the road we cannot avoid the mystery. Our brains may seize up, but we worship all the same. Oh, what a mystery—this is our God. Though he is wrapped in enigma as with a garment, we adore him.

Here is Charles Wesley (1707–88) working to the same pattern:

Father in whom we live,
In whom we are, and move
Glory and power and praise receive
Of thy creating love.
Let all the angel throng
Give thanks to God on high;
While earth repeats the joyful song,
And echoes to the sky.

Incarnate Deity,
Let all the ransomed race
Render in thanks their lives to thee,
For thy redeeming grace.
The grace to sinners showed
Ye heavenly choirs proclaim,
And cry: "Salvation to our God,
Salvation to the Lamb!"

Spirit of holiness,
Let all thy saints adore
Thy sacred energy, and bless
Thy heart-renewing power.
No angel-tongues can tell
Thy love's ecstatic height,
The glorious joy unspeakable,
The beatific sight.

Eternal triune Lord!
Let all the hosts above,
Let all the sons of men, record
And dwell upon thy love.
When heaven and earth are fled
Before thy glorious face,
Sing all the saints thy love has made
Thine everlasting praise.

Charles Wesley took worshipping the Trinity seriously. In 1767 he published a whole collection of songs entitled *Hymns on the Trinity* containing 136 hymns to which he later added another fifty-two, making a grand total of 188. Not all these hymns were of the structure shown above, but they were all infused with a deep Trinitarian theology. I suspect that we need something very similar today as a resource for worship.

It is not just the great hymn writers of the past who employed the model. Keith Getty and Kristyn Getty provide an excellent contemporary example:

Come let us sing to the one
To the Father of life
For His light fills the earth like the sun
Come—tell of the wonders He's done
Great is the world He has made
Are the mysteries untold
Is His measureless power of old
Come—come let us sing to our God

Come let us sing to the one
To the Savior of life
Find the fullness of God in the Son
Come—tell of the wonders He's done
Wild is the mercy of Christ
Is the richness of grace
Is the unending life we embrace
Come—come let us sing to our God

Come let us sing to the one
To the Spirit of life
Leading us in the way of the Son
Come—tell of the wonders He's done
Strong is the Spirit within
Is the boldness to speak
Is the power to run when we're weak
Come—come let us sing to our God

To our God who is able
To strengthen us in His grace
Beyond all we imagine
Be all glory and praise
Be all praise

© 2003 Thankyou Music

What is interesting here is how the hymn expresses the equality of the three persons. The repetition of the first line of each verse ("Come, let us sing to the one") and the last line ("Come—come let us sing to our God"), as each new verse focuses on the Father, Son, and Spirit in turn, communicates that these three are all "the one" and are all "our God." The hymn gives equal attention and equal praise to each person of the Trinity. It is also worth noting how the writers have used some evocative language that sparks the worshipping imagination in ways that more familiar language may fail to. In particular, the words "wild is the mercy of Christ" provoke fresh ways of seeing Christ's mercy, and with that fresh vision can come renewed worship. Finally, for those who have eyes to see, this hymn contains numerous allusions to biblical teachings about the persons. For instance, the reference to the Spirit "leading us in the way of the Son" alludes to the prominent theme of the Spirit as the one who draws us to Christ, teaches us the things of Christ, and transforms us into the image of Christ. The line about the Spirit giving "boldness to speak" reminds us of the early stories in the book of Acts in which the Spirit empowered the believers to speak of Jesus with great courage in the face of hostility. Being steeped in Scripture allows those with a poetic gifting to write with a freedom and creativity that also reflect the purpose and meaning of biblical teaching.

Here is the climax of another overtly Trinitarian song by Keith Getty, co-written with Margaret Becker:

Oh my soul, come taste and see
The brilliance of the Trinity;
Holy Spirit, Father, Son,
Living waters poured from one.
In their shadow hide yourself,
In their company find your help,
Cleave to them it will be well,
Oh my soul, come praise your God.

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One final thought on the tripartite pattern of song: the examples we have examined so far are what we could call "fruitcake" songs. I don't mean that they were written by people who were (or are) fruitcakes! I mean that they are very rich in theological content. They are what my hippy friends would call "heavy" songs. While there is an important place for "heavy" songs in the worship of the church, if the charismatic renewal has taught us anything it is that there is also a place for simpler, more intimate songs

("meringue" songs?). There is no reason in the world why very simple songs cannot exhibit the tripartite structure. The following song, for example, is by Donna Adkins:

> Father, we love you,
> We worship and adore you,
> Glorify your name in all the earth.
> Glorify your name, glorify your name,
> Glorify your name in all the earth.
>
> Jesus, we love you . . .
>
> Spirit, we love you . . .
>
> © 1976 Maranatha! Music

They don't get much simpler than that!

David Tripp did some telling research in the 1980s into some popular collections of worship songs. He looked at the percentage of each book given over to what he called "substantially Trinitarian content."[2] By this he had in mind songs such as those discussed above. His results for these books were as follows:

> 14.6% *Christian Prayer* (American Catholic, 1976)
>
> 9.6% *The Church Hymnary*. 3rd ed. (Anglican, 1973)
>
> 9.1% *Hymns and Psalms* (Methodist, 1983)
>
> 8.9% *Mission Praise* (The Billy Graham Mission England Hymnal, 1983)
>
> 0% *Faith, Folk and Clarity* (an influential private collection, 1967)

David Tripp observes that song collections that were put together by denominational bodies have a noticeably higher percentage of "substantially Trinitarian" songs. Collections put together by interdenominational or charismatic groups tend to have fewer "in-your-face" Trinitarian songs.

There is a great need today, and in every generation, for songwriters to revisit this ancient Trinitarian song pattern and to bring it alive again and again and again. In fact, for those with the gift of word-craft and theological insight there are an infinite number of variations of this theme. However, such a song type, helpful though it is, is not essential for worship to be richly Trinitarian—as we shall see in the next section.

2. Tripp, "Hymnody and Liturgical Theology." I ought to point out that my figures represent the figures Tripp gives when the hymns with a Trinitarian doxology are taken out of the equation.

Songs That Highlight Their Trinitarian Syntax

A concept that is important to grasp when it comes to understanding Trinitarian worship is that of Trinitarian syntax. All Christian songs need to be consistent with a Trinitarian syntax. What do I mean by that? Well, think first of the notion of syntax. All languages have a syntax—a set of rules about how words do and do not fit together meaningfully in that language. All communication in a language must express this syntax correctly—otherwise meaning and communication begin to break down. The stronger the deviation from the syntax, the more unintelligible an utterance becomes. Every time you open your mouth and speak you are manifesting the syntax of whichever language you are using. You may not be speaking *about* syntax—in fact, it is unlikely that you are. You may be talking about the weather, or what you saw on TV last night, or how Granny Weatherspoon from down the road got fined for speeding in her motorized wheelchair. *Whatever* you are speaking about, you are bringing syntax into play. What I want to suggest is that there is an analogy between the role syntax plays in a language and the role the Trinity plays in Christian living and faith. Although it is not an exact analogy, I think it will help us begin to get at how our songs may express the Trinity more fully.

Here is my basic claim: The Trinity functions in Christian God-talk in such a basic and foundational way that it starts to function something like a syntax—a set of rules about how Christian language works. Christian beliefs about God and about the world are so deeply influenced by Trinitarian thought that, whenever Christians open their mouths to speak about God, creation, humanity, ethics, love, salvation, or whatever else, their words should be consistent with a Trinitarian syntax. Rich Christian language will display the vast range of this syntax. I base this claim on the kind of things we discussed in chapters 2 through 5. There we saw how the Trinity is connected to all the different parts of the biblical story and Christian living. This fact has big implications for songwriting. It means that even songs that are not *about* the Trinity can still be deeply Trinitarian.

At the most basic level, no Christian songs should break the rules of the Trinitarian syntax. If they do, they end up becoming the Christian

equivalent of gibberish. It seems to me that virtually no Christian songs violate the rules of the syntax. They do not contradict what is taught in the creeds and so can be seen as legitimate Christian speech to and about God. So if there is a problem with contemporary Christian worship it is not at the level of breaking the rules—it is not the problem of singing heresy.

To understand what I perceive the problem to be, perhaps we could use a different analogy. Imagine Adam and Eve in Eden's garden. God says, "You may eat from any tree in the garden except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Suppose that Adam and Eve choose to obey the command and never eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. However, imagine also that they only ever eat from an apple tree just to the left of it. They are surrounded by lemons and oranges, pears and plums, figs and grapes, and every imaginable fruit under the sun, but they never touch them. Clearly they have broken no rules, but it is also clear that they are robbing themselves of some great fruit-eating experiences. In the same way, although our songs do not break the rules of the Trinitarian syntax they often fail to explore the richness and freedom it allows. The songs fail to bring out the Trinitarian dimensions of Christian faith and life for worshippers to enjoy. If there is a problem with Christian worship songs, it is more a failure to bring out the Trinitarian dimensions of the God we worship than a problem of violating Trinitarian faith.

It is both possible and imperative to write songs that highlight the Trinitarian syntax. If we are to enjoy rich Trinitarian worship, it is crucial that we sing songs on all sorts of topics—from creation to new creation, from repentance to lament to celebration, from the cross to the resurrection, from salvation to sanctification, from mission to the love of God—that highlight the place of Father, Son, and Spirit in connection with the topic. Highlighting the syntax is somewhat like designing a building with the pipework on show rather than hidden behind the walls. The following are good examples of songs that are not *about* the Trinity as such but that put the Trinitarian pipework on show.

In 1977 Dave Richards wrote a song about the church that also draws deeply from the Trinitarian streams. Although the first person of the Trinity is not named, the song is clearly a dialogue between him and the congregation.

For I'm building a people of power
And I'm making a people of praise
That will move through this land by my Spirit,
And will glorify my precious name.

Build your church, Lord,
Make us strong, Lord,
Join our hearts, Lord,
through your Son.
Make us one, Lord,
In your body,
In the Kingdom of your Son.

© 1977 Kingsway's Thankyou Music

Here is a well-known Graham Kendrick song about renewal and revival that wears its Trinitarian heart upon its sleeve.

Lord, the light of your love is shining,
In the midst of the darkness, shining;
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us,
Set us free by the truth You now bring us,
Shine on me, shine on me.

Shine, Jesus, shine,
Fill this land with the Father's glory;
Blaze, Spirit, blaze,
Set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river, flow,
Flood the nations with grace and mercy;
Send forth Your word,
Lord, and let there be light.

Lord, I come to Your awesome presence,
From the shadows into Your radiance;
By the blood I may enter Your brightness,
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness.
Shine on me, shine on me.

As we gaze on Your kingly brightness
So our faces display Your likeness.
Ever changing from glory to glory,
Mirrored here may our lives tell Your story.
Shine on me, shine on me.

© 1987 Make Way Music

This is clearly not a song about the Trinity but about spiritual renewal. Nevertheless, in a very non-contrived way it brings out the Trinitarian syntax of renewal in the all-important chorus. Other renewal songs with overt Trinitarian syntax include Dave Fellingham's "Days of Heaven" (1994) and Andy Park's "Down the Mountain the River Flows" (1994). One could, in theory, go on to add songs about all sorts of topics, but my search for examples has run aground. I have not yet found many illustrations of modern songs about the cross or creation, for instance, which bring out the Trinitarian dimensions discussed in chapter 2 of this book. One example is Nathan Fellingham's song "You are the Lord."[3] It is my belief that such songs could be the most important kinds of songs for fostering a renewal of Trinitarian worship, so their scarcity is both a disappointment and a great opportunity for those who compose new songs. If you are a songwriter and wish to start writing more Trinitarian material then here is a vast land just waiting to be explored.

It is worth noting that such songs often focus on one of the persons of the Trinity but bring out the relationship with the other two. For instance, in "Shine Jesus Shine," above, the Son is the main focus but the Spirit and the Father are present too. We could imagine a photograph of a person standing in focus in the foreground with two other characters slightly out of focus standing some way behind. The photograph picks out the three characters and draws special attention to one without wanting the viewer to lose sight of the others. Many songs with overt Trinitarian syntax do just this. So the song may, as does Melody Green's "There is a Redeemer," address the Father but thank him for giving us his Son and for leaving his Spirit until the completion of the work on earth. Or a song may address Jesus, praising him for his rule in heaven at the Father's side and asking him to pour out his Spirit upon the congregation. The out-of-focus members of the Trinity can be very out of focus and merely mentioned in a single overt reference or they can be moderately prominent. The highlighting of the Trinitarian syntax can be quite subtle or it can be very overt.

It is also worth noting that sometimes one of the persons of the Trinity can be clearly present without being named. For instance, a song may invoke the Lord Jesus to pour rivers of living water down upon his people.

3. © 2004 Nathan Fellingham. Thankyou music/MCPS. It can be found on the Phatfish album *Faithful: The Worship Songs* (Authentic Music, 2004) and on the worship compilation *Trinity* (Authentic Music, 2006). The latter is a worship CD that Nathan Fellingham was inspired to put together after reading the first edition of this book. It includes sixteen Trinitarian worship songs written and performed by a range of contemporary songwriters.

Most Christian congregations are so familiar with the allusion to the Holy Spirit suggested by the water imagery that I imagine few would miss it. Other allusions may be much more subtle, and the subtler they are the less likely it is that people will be aware of them. For instance, the fourth stanza of Wesley's hymn "And Can it Be" alludes very subtly to the Spirit when it says, "Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night; thine eye diffused a quickening ray; I woke, the dungeon flamed with light." The words are addressed to Jesus, and the "quickening" (meaning "life-giving") ray must be the Spirit. There is nothing wrong with using subtle references that many may miss, but if we are seeking to draw attention to the Three-in-One in our worship we need to realize that songs with very subtle allusions will only do the job if we explain them or use them in combination with other, clearer songs about the Trinity. However, the potential of various degrees of allusion to the persons opens up endless possibilities for the creative songwriter that are well worth exploring. This leads me to a final reflection on syntax.

The language of songs needs to do at least two things. First, it must accurately reflect the biblical revelation of God. Secondly, it must inspire those singing to offer up their devotion through the song to God. The Spirit will often anoint a skill as a wordsmith to forge new ways of "seeing afresh" old biblical truths. I do not want to suggest that we should abandon biblical language in our songs. Not at all! I am convinced of its power and life. I am simply arguing for the freedom to allow songwriters to sometimes generate new imagery and language that remains true to the revelation of God in Christ. As the hymn writers of old knew, it is not a requirement that all Christian songs should restrict themselves to biblical language. Nick Page's book *And Now Let's Move into a Time of Nonsense* explores at some length the idea of finding contemporary language for worship and, while he goes further than I would, his book is very helpful and thought-provoking. Sometimes, by finding new ways to express the biblical understandings of God, we can open them up again for people who have become jaded in their vision through sheer familiarity with the language. In the Wesley hymn we just looked at, for example, the image of Christ's eye diffusing the Holy Spirit like a life-giving beam that floods the sinner's dark dungeon with flaming light is both imaginative and inspirational.

Songs with a Trinitarian Doxology

A final category of overtly Trinitarian songs include songs which, oddly enough, are not really very Trinitarian at all but which add Trinitarian doxologies at the end. For instance, William Kethe's hymn "All People That on Earth Do Dwell" (1561) simply refers to "God" and "the Lord" in the verses, and then adds the following doxology to the end:

> Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
> Praise him, all creatures here below,
> Praise him above, ye heav'nly hosts:
> Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Similarly, the English translation of Francis of Assisi's hymn "All Creatures of Our God and King" by William Henry Draper (1855–1933) ends with the following words:

> Let all things their Creator bless,
> And worship him in humbleness.
> O praise him! Alleluia!
> Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
> And praise the Spirit, Three in One!

At first sight these appear to be the least satisfactory kinds of Trinitarian songs because the Trinity seems like something of an afterthought, tacked onto the end rather than being integral to the song. Nevertheless, they do offer the Trinitarian equivalent of an adrenalin rush—a short, focused, and intense burst, explicitly highlighting the Three-in-One. These doxologies also draw the singers back to reconsider the "God" and "Lord" that they have just sung to. The doxology makes explicit what may be merely implicit in the rest of the hymn—that this is no mere "unitarian" deity but the triune God and Lord. This could possibly have the beneficial effect of forging a habit whereby congregations learn to consciously construe seemingly "unitarian" songs in Trinitarian ways. Of course, this habit would only be formed if such doxologies were common—sadly they are very rare in songs and seem to find a more ready home in liturgy.

Trinitarian doxologies could serve as endings to Christian choruses that set Psalms to music. Although with the benefit of Christian hindsight we can see that the God addressed in the Psalms is the Trinity, the psalmists were not aware of this fact. The language of the Psalms is consequently not Trinitarian, and yet Christians through all ages have found them a

wonderful resource for worship. One classical way of handling this liturgically is to add a Trinitarian doxology to the end of a Psalm recital to provide an explicit context for a Christian understanding of the Psalm. If Christian songwriters used the same practice musically, we would have a simple way of putting a Christian "spin" on the Psalms that we sing. One can also make Trinitarian use of the Psalms by actually modifying the words in the light of God's revelation in Christ.

A Full Typology of the Trinitarian Content of Worship Songs

Having looked at three different kinds of songs that include all the persons of the Trinity, it will be helpful to have a system for categorizing all Christian songs in terms of how they relate to Trinitarian thought. The following categories cover the various possibilities:

1. *Three-person Songs*
   - (a) Substantially Trinitarian songs
   - (b) Songs with overt Trinitarian syntax
   - (c) Songs with a Trinitarian doxology
2. *Two-person Songs*
   - (a) Father and Son
     - (i) Substantial
     - (ii) Overt syntax
   - (b) Father and Spirit
     - (i) Substantial
     - (ii) Overt syntax
   - (c) Son and Spirit[4]
     - (i) Substantial
     - (ii) Overt syntax

4. I have actually come across yet another category, which could be called "You Lord and Spirit songs" in which it is not clear whether it is the Father or the Son who is being asked to send the Spirit.

3. *One-person Songs*
   (a) Father Songs
   (b) Son Songs
   (c) Spirit Songs
4. *"You, Lord" Songs*

"You, Lord," songs are ambiguous songs that do not clarify exactly which person the song is about or being addressed to. I sometimes refer to them as "God" songs. Arguably they highlight the unity of God, and there ain't nuffin' wrong with that. Their ambiguity allows for a certain flexibility since they can be used to refer to the whole Godhead or to any of the persons. That flexibility is something that a worship leader can exploit, as we shall discuss later in this chapter.

I want to emphasize that there is nothing wrong with any of these kinds of songs. *None* of them violate Trinitarian syntax, and I can honestly say that I did not find a single song in my research for this book that was anti-Trinitarian. I did find some with naff tunes (you know what I'm talking about!) and some with words that fell short on grounds other than Trinitarian orthodoxy, but we're not interested in such failure here. The point is that any of the above kinds of songs can be legitimate Christian songs.

You may be thinking that I have just undermined my own argument that our worship is often not Trinitarian enough. If, as I have just stated, any of the types of Christian songs are okay, then what is the problem? The problem lies in the selection of songs in the context of individual meetings and over a series of meetings. Suppose that most or all of the songs selected for a meeting are "Son songs." Clearly the worshippers will be brought to focus on Jesus, but what of the other two persons? If this pattern of song selection continues over a period of time, then a Trinitarian imbalance begins to occur in our spiritual lives.

Sometimes, though less often, the imbalance is that everything becomes so Father-focused that the Son and the Spirit fall from view. It is also possible (although I have never heard of it happening) that the Spirit could receive attention at the expense of the Father and Son. It is exactly this kind of unbalanced focus that I contend is all too common—especially in non-liturgical and charismatic worship.

Why does this imbalance occur? It is not because worship leaders intentionally decide to serve up unbalanced devotion. Such thoughts never

cross the minds of those who lead communal worship. I suggest that it usually happens by sheer accident. It is rare, in my experience, to find worship leaders thinking about how best to achieve a Trinitarian balance in worship. Why would they? After all, it is not something that is often (or ever) suggested to them. When worship leaders are thinking about song selection they may be thinking about the theme of the service; they may be praying and "listening" to God for ideas; they may be thinking of the songs that have blessed them recently; or they may even be looking for songs with groovy tunes or the right kind of tempo or in the right key so that they can seamlessly flow from tune one to another. They may be thinking about all these things and more besides, but they are probably not also thinking, "How can I help the people focus their devotion on Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?" Trinitarian imbalance, consequently, goes unnoticed. The Trinitarian content of the selection of worship songs, if it is present, is there by happy accident and, if it is absent, is missing unintentionally.

Because Trinitarian concerns do not often govern song selection, any Trinitarian emphasis in worship often results from a leader just happening by happy accident to have chosen songs that do the job. So it is a matter of interest to know how many songs out there in the vast supermarket of worship songs fit into the different categories. For instance, if a high percentage of available songs are "Son songs," then lack of attention to Trinitarian balance is more likely to lead to worship in which the Father and the Spirit drop out of view. Similarly, if the percentage of songs that mention the Spirit is low then it becomes highly likely that the Spirit will accidentally be neglected.

In order to give a taste of the Trinitarian content of some contemporary worship songs, I have analyzed the lyrical content of many of the worship song albums that have come out of the Vineyard movement over a period of four and a half years. Vineyard have exerted an enormous influence on the worship songs used in churches across the world, and so they make an interesting case study.

Categorizing songs is not an exact science. For instance, some of the songs I have classified as "Son Songs" may refer in passing to Jesus as "Lamb of God" or "Son of God." Such references clearly imply Yhwh, even if he is not in focus. Songs such as these could have been classified as "Two-person songs," however, I have classified songs with brief and incidental allusions to the Father or Spirit as "Son songs." Some of the songs that I have classified as "You Lord" songs employ biblical allusions which would enable

those who are familiar with the Bible to identify the person of the Godhead implied by the words. However, unless such an allusion was obvious and likely to be recognized by the average Christian in the congregation, I have classed them as "You Lord" songs. With the three "You Lord and Spirit" songs I have taken an educated guess as to whether the "Lord" refers to the Father or the Son. Such blurring of categories could be multiplied but I have found that, on the whole, the songs fit neatly into the different groups.

Vineyard Worship Songs 1999–2004

I have looked through twenty-eight worship albums[5] produced by Vineyard Music between 1999 and 2004, containing 362 songs (though some songs appear more than once).[6]

1. *Three-person songs* (5 songs = 1.4 percent)
   (a) Substantially Trinitarian songs (3 songs [inc. 1 repeat])
   (b) Songs with overt Trinitarian syntax (1 song)
   (c) Songs with a Trinitarian doxology (1 song)
2. *Two-person songs* (substantial "binitarian" songs or with overt "binitarian" syntax) (32 songs = 8.8 percent)
   (a) Father and Son (19 songs)
   (b) Father and Spirit (4 songs)
   (c) Son and Spirit (9 songs)

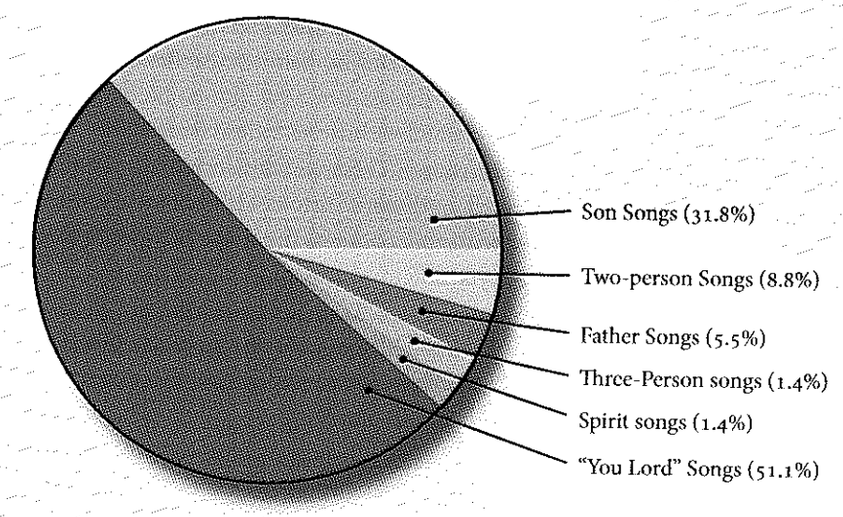
5. The albums are *Hungry* (1999), *Believe* (2000), *Jesus I Believe You* (2000), *Surrender* (2000), *Fruit of the Spirit* (2001), *Breathe* (2001), *Wonderful Mercy* (2001), *Prayer Expressions of Worship* (2001), *All I Need* (2001), *Change Me on the Inside* (2001), *Never Look Back* (2002), *Humble King* (2002), *The Call* (2002), *Beautiful* (2002), *Holy* (2002), *If You Say Go* (2002), *1000 Generations* (2002), *Free to Fly* (2002), *Desire* (2003), *Hungry Live* (2003), *Lord, Reign in Me* (2003), *One Glimpse* (2003), *Just Like Heaven* (2003), *This is Love* (2003), *You and You Alone* (2003), *Set Me Free* (2003), *Hold On* (2004), *Shout to the Earth* (2004).

6. Because of this small number of repeats the results are less than 100-percent precise, although these repeats still reveal the overall emphasis of an album. Also, some songs are borderline. A song may hint strongly that it is about Jesus, for example, but not name him. In such cases I simply had to make a call as to whether it is a Jesus song or a "you, Lord," song.

3. *One-person songs* (140 songs = 38.7 percent)
   (a) Father songs (20 songs = 5.5 percent)
   (b) Son songs (115 songs = 31.8 percent)
   (c) Spirit songs (5 songs = 1.4 percent)
4. *"You, Lord," songs* (185 songs = 51.1 percent)

These can be represented in a pie graph as follows:

The Trinity in Vineyard Lyrics



Now I do not wish to suggest that Vineyard are representative of all the diverse streams of contemporary Christian worship music, and it may well be that analyses of other song sources or a different cross-section of Vineyard albums would yield different results. Nevertheless, it does seem that contemporary worship songs from other sources often share with Vineyard a strong twin focus on "You Lord" and "Jesus" (82.9 percent of the Vineyard songs surveyed were Son songs or "You Lord" songs. About 87 percent of the songs did not mention the Father and about 94 percent did not mention the Spirit). For instance, a cursory glance at three worship albums from the influential Hillsong Church in Australia (*Blessed*, 2002, *Hope*, 2003, and *For All You've Done*, 2004) reveals that nineteen of the forty-six songs are "You, Lord," songs, twenty-four are "Son songs" and just three combine Father

and Son. So the Father only received three references and the Spirit did not feature at all. The challenge for all worship songwriters (Vineyard, Hillsong, and others) is this: how can you maintain the particular vision for worship that God has given you and at the same time deepen the Trinitarian dimension? I must emphasize that all I am saying about Vineyard and Hillsong (or anyone else) is that whatever God-given emphases they have, they must go hand in hand with an emphasis on the Christian God—the Trinity. I have no intention of criticizing any particular songs nor of undermining the distinctive DNA of any particular song-producing group. If, for instance, the emphasis of Vineyard worship songs is intimacy then so be it—but let it be intimacy *with the Triune God*. My criticism here is not intended as the destructive criticism of an enemy looking for songwriters to devour, but the constructive criticism of a supporter looking to help songwriters to think more theologically.

It seems to me that two practical conclusions follow from this. First, we need our songwriters to write more "Three-person songs" of the substantial Trinitarian variety, as well as those with overt Trinitarian syntax. The more good songs we have with this content, the more likely it is that they will be chosen and, by happy accident, shape a more Trinitarian spirituality. It should be a priority in each age to produce a good number of fresh three-person songs. I would urge Hillsong and Vineyard songwriters and others to do this. There is absolutely no reason why the style of worship they represent could not be deeply Trinitarian.

Second, we do need to train those who lead worship to bear in mind the need for Trinitarian balance as they select songs. If we use "Son songs," let's also use "Father songs" and "Spirit songs." Let's throw in a couple of "Father and Son" songs alongside "Spirit and Father" songs and so on. And let's think up ways of addressing "You Lord" songs to specific persons of the Trinity or to the Godhead as a whole. This could be as simple as the worship leader saying, "Let us worship Jesus" before beginning to sing. Or if a "You Lord" song is set in the midst of various songs addressed to Jesus, that particular song is then colored by that context and functions as a song addressed to Jesus. Alternatively, a prayer afterwards could pick up the language of the song and address it to the whole Godhead, making the song function as a "Three-person song."

Such training and preparation is crucial, but it is not at all easy—so I have a practical suggestion to make. A church could have someone look at their list of songs used in public worship and color-code it according to the typology I gave earlier. Although it would take the person who did

the initial coding quite some time, it would enable every person who then selected songs from the list to see exactly what Trinitarian balance they were achieving through their selection in glorious Technicolor. Without this sort of system, worship leaders may start off with the best intentions in the world but find that it is just too much hassle to maintain such a balance week after week. A color-coded list would keep the issue at the forefront of the leader's mind and make the task much easier. Suppose the leader felt that the congregation needed to focus more on the Spirit. The leader would not have to sit and stare blankly at the wall, racking his or her brain to try and recall a good Spirit song. The color-coded list would enable the leader to quickly find all the relevant songs and then pick the one that would work best. If the songs were available on a computer, as is increasingly the case in churches, then they could be coded there in such a way that a worship leader could simply type in a search for "Father-Son" songs, say, and have them all appear before her instantly. Indeed, more detailed computer classification could allow searches for combinations of categories, like songs about the cross that are also "three-person songs" or "songs about creation" that are "Son songs" and so on. Computers offer numerous ways of making such balanced song selections possible and easy.

While this chapter makes no pretence at being the definitive guide to Trinitarian songwriting and selection, we have seen the mandate to correct the imbalance in our worship and have begun to explore the way ahead. God willing, these ideas will begin a mighty avalanche of praise to the Three-in-One as those whom God has gifted to lead worship allow the infinite possibilities to capture their holy imaginations.