

THE WHITLEY LECTURE  
2008

**How can we sing  
the Lord's Song?**

**Worship in and out of the church**

**Craig Gardiner**

Whitley Publications

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## The Whitley Lecture

The Whitley Lecture was first established in 1949 in honour of W.T. Whitley (1861-1947), the Baptist historian. Whitley was a notable scholar and pastor in both England and Australia. Following a pastorate in Bridlington, during which he also taught at Rawdon College in Yorkshire, he became the first Principal of the Baptist College of Victoria in Melbourne, Australia in 1891. This institution was subsequently renamed Whitley College in his honour. Returning to England after eleven years in Australia, he was a leading and influential figure in the denomination during the early part of the twentieth century. His *History of British Baptists* (1923) is still an important source of information and comment for contemporary historians.

Whitley was a key figure in the formation of the Baptist Historical Society in 1908. He edited its journal, which soon gained an international reputation for the quality of its contents, a reputation it still enjoys nearly a century later as the *Baptist Quarterly*. Altogether he made an important contribution to Baptist life and self-understanding, providing a model of how a pastor-scholar might enrich the life and faith of others.

The Lectureship established in his name is intended to be an encouragement to research and writing by Baptist scholars, and to enable the results of their work to be published. The committee consists of representatives of the British Baptist Colleges, the Baptist Union of Great Britain, BMS World Mission, the Baptist Ministers Fellowship and the Baptist Historical Society. It is always keen to hear about work being done by Baptist scholars, and is prepared to consider making grants, as well as offering advice and support.

Each year from 1996, a leading Baptist scholar has been appointed the Whitley Lecturer. The lecturer is invited to write and deliver a lecture as a significant contribution to Baptist thought. It is given at different locations during the course of the year, and published by the committee.

This year the committee is delighted that the Revd Dr Craig Gardiner, minister of Calvary Baptist Church, Cardiff, is the eleventh

in this series of Whitley Lecturers. Having trained and worked as a lawyer, and had a missionary assignment in Japan, Craig prepared for Baptist ministry at the South Wales Baptist College. There he studied for an MTh in Christian Doctrine, and a PhD under the supervision of the Most Revd Dr Rowan Williams and Revd Dr Karen Smith. He is a member of the BUGB Council and Faith and Unity Executive, and of the Baptist Peace Fellowship. Craig broadcasts regularly on BBC radio and is an occasional lecturer for Cardiff University.

In his Whitley Lecture Craig pursues his interest in the interaction of doctrine, spirituality and ethics. It is a foretaste of a more extended forthcoming book from Paternoster Press, *Melodies of Community*.

The printed lecture is available from the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

Peter Shepherd

(Secretary, Whitley Lectureship Management Committee)

# WHITLEY LECTURE 2008

## HOW CAN WE SING THE LORD'S SONG?

### Worship in and out of the church

#### INTRODUCTIONS

David is a pianist who makes a living as an accompanist. He also leads the worship in his local church. Often people will give thanks for the way he leads the singing on Sunday. They never ask about his music throughout the week.

Ella is a Greenpeace volunteer who has established a small garden for the Sunday school. Last week the fellowship prayed for her work with the children: no-one asked if she needed prayer for the protest planned for Monday.

Sam is a financial advisor. The church is glad that he has agreed to be their treasurer. They prayed God's blessing on him for this task, but no-one asked about the tensions he might face in a world where profit is the bottom line.

Sarah is their pastor. She is trying hard to muster up the energy to sing another song of victory when in truth she is worn out from a week spent with broken and fractious people and is feeling somewhat wounded by her work.

Why is it that often these worlds of work and worship do not find a common ground where one informs and shapes the other? After all David, Ella, Sam and Sarah all inhabit both, they seem to be encouraged and frustrated in both these spheres of life and their church teaches them that Christ is lord of heaven and earth. Yet as they gather for this act of corporate worship someone prays from the front:

Dear Lord, help us now to set aside the things of this week  
Forget about ourselves and concentrate on you.

David, Ella, Sam and Sarah all know what is meant by this earnest intercession but it jars them none the less. Is God not interested in who they are within their places of employment, ought God's people not to be concerned with life from Monday to Saturday. Is there nothing here in this act of worship that might equip them for the tough decisions of the coming week of work? Is there to be no space when stories of God's grace in the past seven days might be shared with one another? They have crossed a threshold from the secular to the spiritual ... they feel as if they have entered into a separate existence and as the next hymn is announced all four begin to wonder if they can keep the real world of this week at bay until this hallowed hour is done.

Finding a way to keep the sacred and the secular informing one another is not an uncommon problem with members of many churches. One reason many Christians have investigated the Celtic traditions of the faith is the promise of a spirituality that is earthed in the realities of the everyday.<sup>1</sup> But for many others it often seems that there is little connection between life in church on Sunday and life in the world on Monday.

The problem is not a new one: dividing life up into the spheres of the sacred and secular has a long, if dubious pedigree within the Christian Church. Concerns with the material, the earthy, the here and now have often been perceived as being entered into at the expense of the transcendent, the heavenly and the here-after. The realm of the spiritual has traditionally been identified as the concern of the Church and the anxieties of the world that so occupy the thoughts of folk like those of our imagined congregation are sometimes seen as irrelevant or even antagonistic to its purposes. This dualism that places spirit and matter in opposition to one another is essentially a continual re-emergence of the heretical Neo-Platonic and Gnostic philosophies that influenced the

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<sup>1</sup> The popular literature on Celtic Christianity is voluminous and of varying quality. A good start may be made with Ian Bradley, *The Celtic Way*, (London: DLT, 1993) together with *Celtic Christianity: Making Myths and Chasing Dreams*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) and J. Philip Newell, *Listening for the Heartbeat of God: A Celtic Spirituality*, (London: SPCK, 1997). See also James P. Mackey, *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995) and Thomas O'Loughlin, *Celtic Theology: Humanity World and God in Early Irish Writings*, (London: Continuum, 2000).

early church.<sup>2</sup> To such thinking, the gospel that God became human, that the Spirit condescended to material existence, was inconceivable and repugnant. Spirit was pure, matter was corrupt, the purpose of life was to escape the limits of the material and find liberation in the spiritual, reducing the one through a corresponding increase of the other. The two could not co-exist in their fullness within one being, as Christians asserted about Christ. And yet it was the claim that Christ had overcome the apparent logic of this dualism, that he was fully God and fully human, that lay at the heart of the church's worship.

For many it seems that the worship of the church offers nothing but a brief, if temporary, respite from the stresses and depravities of the fallen world outside or possibly that it may sufficiently immunise a believer against the evils of that world to which they must inevitably return in some way. In the best-case scenario it is anticipated that worship may aid the faithful in 'taking the ground', empowering them to conquer the world for Christ. The unspoken implication here is clearly that there remains part of creation over which Christ is not Lord. Of course this implication would be denied by those within the congregation, 'Jesus is Lord of all', they would affirm, but for all that, the hymns that are sung, the prayers that are offered, the conversations that ensue over coffee, convey an image that the realms of the spiritual and the secular are at war with one another and there is no mistaking where God is to be found. If this seems an extreme caricature then we might ask ourselves if being referred to as 'worldly' in a church that we

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<sup>2</sup> On Neo-Platonism see Placid Spearritt, 'Neoplatonism', in Alan Richardson and John Bowden eds., *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, (London: SCM Press, 1983), p395-6; for a more detailed examination of its central proponent, Plotinus, see Dominic J. O'Meara, *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). On Gnosticism see Robert M. Grant, 'Gnostic Spirituality', in Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff and Jean Leclercq, eds., *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, (London: SCM Press, 1989), p44-60, Rowan Williams, 'Defining Heresy', in Alan Kreider, ed., *The Origins of Christendom in the West*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), p324ff and Philip J. Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p9-10. A third influence on early Christianity was Stoicism, particularly its concept of *apatheia*, which sought to control the inclinations of nature through a solemn renunciation of the world.

have attended has ever been construed as a term of endearment. How did it compare to being spoken of as spiritual? And most importantly of all, how often are these two adjectives regarded as complimenting one another?

Christians like those in our example congregation are worldly, in one way or another they are part of all that is going on around them. Some of them may be less comfortable with this than others, but all would recognise that interaction with the life beyond the Church is inevitable. Others may not wish to escape or deny this worldliness but they want to declare Jesus as Lord of that arena, as ruler of life beyond the sanctuary as much as within it. Such people have a heart to seek the ways of God in issues they encounter in the world, matters of work and money, questions over personal and global violence, they long to follow Christ in working for social justice and living in integrity with creation. They might even privately believe that their friends beyond the church are watching for signs of this engagement as proof of the relevancy of God to them, but sometimes it seems that little of what is happening around them on a Sunday is preparing them for the task.

This lecture hopes to offer a ray of hope to folk like David, Ella, Sam and Sarah by taking seriously the Church's claim that Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth. Using the metaphors of music we will draw out some connections between the sacred and the secular and offer a way of seeing God that affirms that heaven is as concerned with our politics as our prayers, as interested in our work as with our worship.<sup>3</sup>

## TWO BECOMING ONE ... THE THEOLOGY OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

For Christians, grappling with the tensions of being 'in the world but not being of it' is nothing new. As we've noted, it has been with us since the church began to struggle with the paradox of the incarnation. One pastor and theologian for whom this issue became quite literally a

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<sup>3</sup> The phrase comes from the Iona Community who speak of finding God in work and worship, prayer and politics, sacred and secular, see [www.iona.org.uk](http://www.iona.org.uk). See also Norman Shanks, *Iona: God's Energy, The Spirituality and Vision of the Iona Community*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999) and Ronald Ferguson, *Chasing the Wild Goose, The Story of the Iona Community*, (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 1998).

matter of life and death was the German Lutheran, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945).

Bonhoeffer was imprisoned and later executed by the Nazi regime for his work in opposing the work of Hitler. He was born into an upper middle class family and showed a precocious talent for music as a child. His family thought he might pursue a career as a performer, but following the death of one of his brothers in WWI he devoted himself to the study of theology. Although he remained interested in music all his life he clearly believed that his full devotion could only be given to one or the other. In a strange way then Bonhoeffer himself divided up his life into separate spheres, music in one and theology in the other, believing that to give his time and passion to one would detract from his commitment to the other. In much the same way, later in life he would break off a romantic attachment to a woman so as to give himself entirely to the work of leading a seminary at Finkenwalde.<sup>4</sup> However his dedication to theology was initially given to an academic pursuit at which he excelled, but it made little claim upon his life. It was as if again he had placed it into but one detached sphere of interest in his life. Yet while on a student trip to Africa he was struck with how,

In Islam everyday life and religion are not kept separate, as they are in the whole of the church, including the Catholic church. With us one goes to church and when one comes back an entirely different kind of life begins again.<sup>5</sup>

How life and religion could be manifest together in the Church became the subject of Bonhoeffer's doctoral studies and began to

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<sup>4</sup> Bonhoeffer reflected on this from Tegel Prison when he was then engaged to Maria von Wedemeyer, He wrote; 'I was once in love with a girl; she became a theologian, and our paths ran parallel for many years; ... Being totally committed to my work for the Church in the ensuing years, I thought it not only inevitable but right that I should forgo marriage altogether'. D. Bonhoeffer and M. von Wedemeyer, *Love Letters from Cell 92: The Correspondence Between Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Maria von Wedemeyer*, R. von Bismarck and U. Kabitz, eds., (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), p246.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to home from Tripoli, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1924, cited in Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian, Christian, Man for His Times, A Biography*, Revised edn., (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), p58-9.

occupy his thinking as an assistant pastor to a German congregation in Barcelona. There he told his affluent congregation that,

Jesus stands at the door and knocks, in complete reality. He asks you for help in the form of a beggar, in the form of a ruined human being in torn clothing. He confronts you in every person that you meet. Christ walks on the earth as your neighbour as long as there are people.<sup>6</sup>

On his return to Germany he experienced a deep personal transition, a ‘great liberation’ in which, as his biographer puts it, he moved from being a ‘theologian to a Christian’.<sup>7</sup> As he did so, he quickly identified the threat of Hitler’s Nazism and was immersed in the early stages of opposing the anti-Jewish legislation. But as Hitler’s power grew, Bonhoeffer became frustrated by the way in which the German churches limited themselves to the realm of the religious and refused to interfere with the activities of the state.<sup>8</sup> This was true even in the Confessing Church that had initially stood in opposition to the policies of the Third Reich. But even there prayer and politics, according to the inherited Lutheran theology of their context, were to be kept apart. Bonhoeffer increasingly saw all this as a denial of Christ’s lordship over the world and longed for a theology and discipleship that would bring these spheres of secular and spiritual together. Before that would happen, Bonhoeffer would make a further personal transition: he discovered a resolution to his personal dichotomy of music and theology.

For a while Bonhoeffer led a seminary for the Confessing Church until the Gestapo closed it down. Johannes Goebel, a student there once recounted being present when Bonhoeffer was relaxing, improvising at the piano. He claimed:

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<sup>6</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Sermon on Rev. 3:20, cited in Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson, eds., *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Revised edn., (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), p186.

<sup>7</sup> E. Bethge’s biography is subtitled ‘Theologian, Christian, Man for his Times’, indicating what he believes are three phases of Bonhoeffer’s life.

<sup>8</sup> The Church in opposition argued that a *status confessionis* was precipitated by Nazism i.e. they represented a challenge to the fundamentals of faith to which the Church must confess its opposition if it were to remain the Church of the Christian Gospel.

I asked him [Bonhoeffer] whether he had ever tried, or was trying, to compose anything. In a distinctly reserved tone he said he had stopped doing so since he had become a theologian, or something to the effect. This seems to me a typical trait of his nature. Bonhoeffer was a passionate preacher and theologian, as Bethge confirms. To sit down at an instrument and improvise or even compose - and not just play Mozart with exactitude ... - this can only be done in passion, and out of passion. Bonhoeffer cast this passion out of his life for the sake of the call to a greater 'passion'. This too is a contribution to the theme of 'Call and Discipleship'.<sup>9</sup>

Here he was clearly still struggling with devoting his passion to one sphere of life without feeling he was doing a disservice to another. However, after the closure of the Seminary, he began to work for *Abwehr*, part of the German Intelligence network that unbeknown to the Nazis, contained an active national resistance movement. Using his church connections as a cover for political subversion he began to live a dual life of reality and deception that he had to hold together with personal integrity. Learning how to do this was perhaps a prelude to the theology he would develop to overcome the separation of life into spheres.<sup>10</sup> But before that work could be completed he was arrested on suspicion of helping Jews escape to Switzerland.<sup>11</sup>

It was in a Nazi prison cell that Bonhoeffer began to see music and theology not as rivals for his commitment, but as companion disciplines<sup>12</sup>, separate spheres that themselves might come together under the Lordship of Christ. Bonhoeffer hit upon what he called 'his

<sup>9</sup> Johannes Goebel, 'When He Sat Down at the Piano', in Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann and Ronald Gregor Smith, eds., *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reminiscences by his Friends*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p124-125.

<sup>10</sup> See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Vol. 6, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), p62ff.

<sup>11</sup> Part of Bonhoeffer's double life in the German Resistance led to him participating in the 'U7' venture; a scheme to help Jews escape into Switzerland.

<sup>12</sup> Interestingly this happened almost at the same time as he resolved the tensions between theology and romance. He was arrested mere days after becoming engaged to marry Maria von Wedemeyer, but sadly was killed before the marriage could ever take place.

little invention'<sup>13</sup>, the musical metaphor of polyphony, and saw through their coming together how the worlds of the sacred and the secular could be similarly engaged. Thus he wrote to best friend Bethge:

God wants us to love him eternally with our whole hearts - not in such a way as to injure or weaken our earthly love, but to provide a kind of *cantus firmus* to which the other melodies of life provide the counterpoint. One of these contrapuntal themes (which have their own complete independence but yet are related to the *cantus firmus*) is earthly affection ... Where the *cantus firmus* is clear and plain, the counterpoint can be developed to its limits. The two are "undivided and yet distinct", in the words of the Chalcedonian Definition, like Christ in his divine and human natures. May not the attraction and importance of polyphony in music consist in its being a musical reflection of this Christological fact and therefore of our *vita christiana*?...<sup>14</sup>

The Council of Chalcedon, held in 451 C.E, affirmed as formal orthodoxy what the church had confessed for centuries, namely that Jesus was 'undivided and without confusion but yet remained distinctly possessed of two natures, human and divine.'<sup>15</sup>

But as Bonhoeffer knew, since then the Church had consistently allowed and on occasions promoted the evolution of distinct realms of the spiritual and secular: spheres of influence that were allowed to continue in parallel, unaffected by one another in the lives of believers. To put it bluntly, the worship practices of the church did not often prepare its people for the ethical dilemmas that they encountered within the world beyond the sanctuary and those dilemmas were rarely allowed

<sup>13</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letter dated 21<sup>st</sup> May 1944, in *Letters and Papers from Prison: The Enlarged Edition*, (New York: Touchstone / Simon & Schuster, 1997), p305.

<sup>14</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letter dated 20<sup>th</sup> May 1944, in *Letters and Papers*, p302-303. Earlier, Bonhoeffer had hinted at the theme, instructing his nephew who was also his Godson, 'Music, as your parents understand and practise it, will help dissolve your perplexities and purify your character and sensibility, and in times of care and sorrow will keep a ground-bass of joy alive in you'. *Letters and Papers*, p295.

<sup>15</sup> Bonhoeffer cites the Chalcedon definition, 'ana kai ton auton Christon - en duo phyesin; asynchytos kai atreptos, - adiairetos kai achoristos', Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p87.

to shape the nature of the church's liturgy. Work and worship, prayer and politics, these things did not seem to belong together. Bonhoeffer lamented how this attitude had enabled the Christ of the Church to become separated from the Christ of the world, how it enabled the abuses of the Nazi regime to continue largely unopposed by Christian witness in Germany. Thus his primary interest in the ruminations of Chalcedon was not with the doctrinal nature of Christ per se, but with the ethical character of Christian living. How could the *vita Christiana*, the life of discipleship, be conducted in a way that our love of God did not necessitate a weakening of our love for the state of the world? To articulate such an ethic of discipleship he needed first to understand the ontology of Christ himself. As he did so, he was much taken with how the metaphors of music, polyphony, counterpoint and the *cantus firmus* helped him understand the nature of Christ.

Regrettably Bonhoeffer did not survive the war and we can only guess at where this thinking might have taken him. However I want to develop his idea of music as a metaphor for Christ in more detail because I think it holds the key to solving the two sphere dilemmas. In doing so, I want to encourage some reflection on the Trinity, the Church and the nature of our worship and discipleship.

If you don't know your Bach from your Beatles or your Mozart from your Eminem this is not a time to panic. No specialised knowledge of composition, orchestration or the top ten singles of the week is needed. I have no intention to theologise *about* music.<sup>16</sup> Nor am I going to offer a theological appraisal of music: whether God approves of Baroque and Opera, but is apt to censure rock and roll and hip-hop. Rather, I want to use music as a lens through which we might consider God, the Church and our worship. As such music will not only be something that helps us express our faith, through hymns and songs etc, but it will become something that aids our reflection on it.

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<sup>16</sup> See Jeremy Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p4. Begbie is developing Jacques Attali's assertion that 'Music is more than an object of study: it is a way of perceiving the world ... My intention here is thus... not only to theorise *about* music but to theorise *through* music'. Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p4.

I want to take us into the world of musical metaphor because such language is often our only recourse to being able to talk of God. God is beyond our understanding and so we are often left struggling for images that say what we want to say about God and to God. I do this acknowledging with St Augustine that if I have dared to speak anything of God then in the end undoubtedly it was not what I wanted to say!<sup>17</sup> But if anything more is to be said then it is to metaphor that we must turn, because metaphor expands our vocabulary for the things we cannot fully understand. It does so by bringing together familiar elements from the world around us and implying a resemblance to those things of which we have little knowledge. So when people have tried to imagine God they have done it by comparing the mystery of the Divine to the known world of rocks, lions, shields or shepherds.<sup>18</sup> Likewise when Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God, he likens the world of his listeners; (images of farming, fishing and kitchens etc), with the gospel values of love, forgiveness and justice. Thus the sphere of the common life revealed something, though never all, of a life lived in the presence of God. These were not images to be interpreted literally, but in using them as he did, Jesus encouraged his listeners to participate in the richness of their language rather than simply to be spectators of it,<sup>19</sup> to bestow upon it crafted images through which the spheres of life might be brought together.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> 'Have I spoken, something, have I uttered something worthy of God? No ... if I did say something, it is not what I wanted to say.' St Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, I. 13, R.P.H. Green, ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p17.

<sup>18</sup> Gen 49:24, Hosea 5:14, Psalm 3:3, Psalm 23:1.

<sup>19</sup> The point is made by Marva Dawn and Eugene Peterson, *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2000), p70-71.

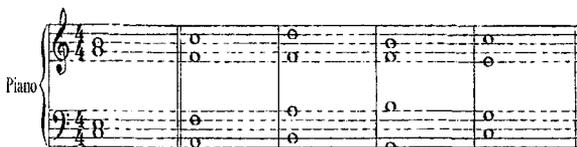
<sup>20</sup> As Aristotle says, 'half way between the unintelligible and the commonplace it is metaphor that produces knowledge'. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, III, 141b, as cited in Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), p67.

## THE METAPHOR OF POLYPHONY

One of the greatest attributes of music is its ability to transcend the separation of sacred and secular in a language all of its own.<sup>21</sup> In Church we have often thought of music as a way of giving expression to our faith, but it can also provide us with a way of thinking more deeply about God, or perhaps, even about our participation in the life of God. For the first eight hundred years of Christian worship music was monophonic, i.e. literally one voice, a single line of melody without accompaniment. For many monophony was seen as the most satisfying symbol of Christian unity.<sup>22</sup> However, the advent of notation led to the development of monody (melodies with accompaniment) and then polyphony: the simultaneous sounding of many interweaving melodies.

If a chord is sounded on a piano, then the different notes, C, E, G, or whatever, will all sound together. If a chord of C major 7<sup>th</sup> is sounded on a piano, then the notes C, E, G, and B will all sound together.

There can then be a progression of one block chord to another,



but there may also be a sequence of melodies overlapping and interweaving with one another over long periods of time.

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<sup>21</sup> Martin Luther (1483-1546), the 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant reformer and Ira D. Sankey (1840-1908) the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century revivalist both used melodies from the secular realm to subsequently carry words of Christian devotion in the sphere of the spiritual. In a reverse movement, hymns are still sung in the secular arena of Welsh international rugby matches with no pretension to Christian worship.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Wilson-Dickson, *A Brief History of Christian Music: From Biblical Times to the Present*, (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1997), p75.

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled 'Piano' and is in 4/8 time. It features a treble clef and a bass clef, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The music consists of several measures, each containing multiple notes that are played simultaneously, creating a polyphonic texture. The bottom staff is labeled 'Pno.' and is in 4/4 time. It also features a treble clef and a bass clef, with a key signature of one flat. This staff contains a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure, followed by several measures of polyphonic music with multiple notes sounding at once. The notation includes stems, beams, and various note heads, illustrating the concept of polyphony where multiple voices or parts are heard together.

In the example above we can see how music allows two or three or more notes to sound at the same time and to compliment one another. This is in contrast to the traditional logic that dominates the thinking of two spheres, where one thing must diminish in the presence of the other. The more spiritual you become the less you are worldly. This musical phenomenon is called polyphony. David Cunningham adopts this metaphor in his book on the Trinity, arguing that its chief attribute is, ‘simultaneous, non-excluding difference: that is, more than one note is played at a time, and none of these notes is so dominant that it renders another mute’.<sup>23</sup> Polyphony transcends the tendency to dichotomise our lives and instead permits and encourages differences that are united.

A supreme example of this is found in the Thomas Tallis’ motet, *Spem in Alium*<sup>24</sup>. Here there are forty different voices arranged in eight five-part choirs, all interweaving and as Jeremy Begbie notes, ‘Despite the sonic profusion, it never sounds “jammed” or crowded ... there is a multiplicity without dissipation, togetherness without mutual overwhelming, each voice being enabled to become more fully itself.’<sup>25</sup> Indeed not only might there be a variety of interweaving vocal melodies as we have just displayed, but in orchestral music different

<sup>23</sup> David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p128.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Tallis, *Spem in Alium*, (London: The Decca Record Company, 433 676-2, 1992).

<sup>25</sup> See Jeremy S. Begbie, ‘Through Music: Sound Mix’, in Jeremy Begbie, ed., *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts*, (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 2000), p152.

instrumentation might be assigned to particular melodies, calling forth different timbres that are attached to respective melodies. In the latter case, each is distinct, not only in their melody, but also in their particular sound. So, a melody introduced by a solo horn does not prevent a countermelody of violins, violas, cellos and double basses. Nor is anything 'lost' when the solo theme is shared with a further polyphony of woodwind (oboes, clarinets, flutes, bassoons etc). To these we might add the punctuations of percussion (triangle, cymbal, xylophone, side drum and timpani) and the remaining brass (horns, trumpets, trombones and tubas).<sup>26</sup> Each voice is different, more fully themselves, and yet working together.

Using this image of polyphony Cunningham argues for three distinct but interpenetrating melodies bound in one perichoretic harmony.<sup>27</sup> As Robert Jenson has argued '*God is a melody. And as there are three singers ... the melody is fugued ... There is nothing so capacious as a fugue*'.<sup>28</sup> If, as Jenson and Cunningham suggest, the Trinity is polyphonic then each person of the Three, interpenetrating the lives of the others, is polyphonic too. Christ, in so far as Christ may ever be isolated from the Three, is polyphonic. Indeed Christ is particularly so in that within him are found the sounds of full humanity and divinity. Neither one depletes the fullness of the other, undivided and yet distinct, both sound in Him with complimentary polyphony. So, as Bonhoeffer tells us, the attraction and importance of polyphony as a metaphor consists in its being a musical reflection of the Christological fact: i.e. that Jesus is simultaneously worldly and heavenly, in him the melodies of the human and the divine proclaim him as the concurrent and eternal lord of heaven and earth. So it is in Christ that humanity encounters the

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<sup>26</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar makes similar insights, noting that symphony means 'sounding together' and adding that an orchestra must be pluralist to unfold the wealth of the totality that resounds in the composer's mind. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, trans. G Harrison, *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), p7. Cunningham notes that the word *concert* reflects this multiplicity (from *con+certare*, "to act together"). David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One*, p127.

<sup>27</sup> David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One*, p127-164.

<sup>28</sup> Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1: The Triune God*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p236.

most comprehensive performance of the divine polyphony and the most powerful contradiction of theologies or spiritualities that might allow for life to be split into separate realms of the sacred and secular.

### CHRIST'S CANTUS FIRMUS

In early polyphonic music there was often what was known as the *cantus firmus*, (literally, the firm song). This was usually a pre-existing melody around which the other countermelodies were then arranged. Walter Kemp notes how musically:

the contrapuntal voice in a *cantus firmus* composition owes its existence to the Tenor upon which it is erected; ... It is distinct from the Tenor... If heard without the Tenor it would seem self sufficient in motion, ambit and material; but its source of generation and control would remain the *cantus firmus*; it cannot operate beyond the ultimate "barrier" of the Tenor's dictates.<sup>29</sup>

The *cantus firmus* then lends its form to derivative melodies that fragment, mirror, echo, and retexture the original melody in other voices. Much like if you've ever sung along to the car radio, banging out additional rhythms on the steering wheel and adding your own vocal variations to the record. The *cantus firmus*, in this case our radio original, gives form to your derivative improvisations, to the counterpoint melodies that fragment, mirror, echo, and re-texture the original song. As long as each remains in relation to the *cantus firmus*, the music remains authentic. But if you are singing Stravinsky and the radio is playing Spice Girls, it will be quickly evident that something is awry.

Bonhoeffer argues that the vitality of this metaphor is that it enables us to imagine not only how the divine and human natures are brought together in the person of Christ, but the importance this has for our discipleship and worship. It is in Christ that the spheres of the sacred and the secular are uniquely brought together in a polyphonic whole. So too our worship and discipleship ought to interweave with neither

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<sup>29</sup> Walter H. Kemp, 'Polyphonous Christian Community of Dietrich Bonhoeffer', *Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No.1. (1976), p9.

diminishing the other. As long as the *cantus firmus* of our love for God is sure, then performing the harmonies of our discipleship in the world and our worship in the church will mirror, echo and retexture Christ in a polyphonic whole. Nor need I fear that these will ever operate beyond the call of Christ without knowing that we have departed from the ultimate barrier of the Tenor's dictates. Similar harmonies of each disciple will then sound together with the community of counterpoint: the fellowship of faith. For them, music becomes a 'vestige' of Christ left remaining in our world:<sup>30</sup> an eternal echo of heaven's ultimate epiphany in Jesus into which humanity is invited to participate.

Within the Welsh folk tradition there exists a most apposite echo of this Christological polyphony. In the practice of *Pennillion*, an instrumentalist, usually a harpist begins to play a pre-existent melody. The singer may begin at any point thereafter, not only adding extemporary words and an improvised melody, but also ensuring that the duo conclude the performance simultaneously. Similarly we may add our improvisations of worship and discipleship around the *cantus firmus* that Christ chooses to perform within our midst. So as Stanley Hauerwas suggests that, 'It may be that the Christian faith is "primarily an account of divine action" and "only secondarily an account of the believing subject."' <sup>31</sup> 'God is a performing God who has invited us to join in the performance that is God's life.'<sup>32</sup>

As such, to become Christ-like, for the individual and for the Christian community, is to acknowledge the human longing to live an authentically polyphonic life, it is to participate in the performance of God's melodies on earth. For Tony, Ella, Sam and Sarah life both in and beyond the Church will be about adding their voices and listening to

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<sup>30</sup> The phrase 'Vestige' comes from the Latin *vestigium* meaning a footprint or mark. David Cunningham's review of the theology of *Vestigia Trinitatis* notes the criticism offered by Karl Barth (namely that it allows human reason to overshadow divine revelation) but concludes that while God reveals God's self primarily through Christ, additional revelation occurs through the Church and the created order. See David S. Cunningham, *These Three are One*, p90-126.

<sup>31</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence*, (London: SPCK, 2004), p77.

<sup>32</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith*, p77.

those of others as they join together in the performance God already brings to creation.

This all dropped into place for me in the summer of 2003. My wife was singing with a choir in the First Night of the Proms. I had heard her practising the alto part at home during the preceding weeks. I knew it well. But in the concert, for the first time, I heard it together with sopranos, tenors, basses together with the instruments of a full symphony orchestra. To hear these parts come together was an epiphanal moment for me. Suddenly Bonhoeffer's metaphor of Christ as the *cantus firmus* suddenly reverberated with life. It was through our participation in Christ that these separate spheres would be held in harmony.<sup>33</sup>

#### POLYPHONIC PARTICIPATION AND PERFORMANCE

It is important to remember that this performance is already part of the polyphony of God in Christ: it is inherent in the living exchange between the Father, Son and Spirit. The Christian's true enjoyment of God is that they are consciously taken into this triune singing and are 'allowed to double the parts'.<sup>34</sup> The Christian community raises their voice to participate in the music already being performed in and through God.

Participation in this sense is not so much a participation in some common task or even in the melodies of heaven. Rather this is about

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<sup>33</sup> In fact the metaphor is sufficiently capacious to contain healthy dissonance as well. Neither every individual disciple nor every Christian community will manifest polyphony in harmonious ways. Some may find themselves in apparent tension or discord with others. But as von Balthasar notes, 'Great music is always dramatic; there is a continual process of intensification, followed by a release of tension at a higher level. But dissonance is not the same as cacophony'. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Truth is Symphonic*, p15. So even if for a while dissonance may exist within the Christian Community, the Church must still affirm that in and through Christ's *cantus firmus* all will, in the fulfilment of time, be resolved and reconciled. As the Christian community seeks to participate in this reconciling truth, it ought to proleptically accommodate such internal tensions, becoming on earth, a reflection of heaven's eternal polyphony.

<sup>34</sup> Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1*, p235.

participation in *someone*, namely the polyphonic person of Christ. David Cunningham argues:

we take part not in *something*, but in *someone*, - *an other*. For example, to 'participate in the sufferings of another' is to make another's pain one's own ...

Similarly, if I ask you to 'take part in' my life, I am asking for a very significant degree of emotional, physical, and spiritual intimacy.<sup>35</sup>

So the Christian is called to participate in Christ in whom the fullness of the human and the divine, the spiritual and the secular sound simultaneously. Christ exemplified this in his willingness to participate in the pain and otherness of humanity. He does this generically through his incarnation (where he participates in all flesh) and in the crucifixion (where he takes upon himself the sins of the world), but also by example in personal specifics such as his weeping over the death of Lazarus. Christ was the exemplar of one who participated with the emotional, physical and spiritual intimacy of the suffering world. He was fully part of the world. As such, these earthly concerns must be an integral part of worship that might properly be called worldly and which might seek to honestly address the life of believers from Monday to Saturday.

Seeking to participate in the life of God is not to be considered arrogant presumption. We are not claiming to be God. Yet without daring to divinise humanity, the Church must affirm that she does share in the unfolding purposes of Christ. Bonhoeffer is clear on this:

We are certainly not Christ; we are not called on to redeem the world by our own deeds and sufferings, and we need not try to assume such an impossible burden. We are not lords, but instruments in the hand of the Lord of history; and we can share in other people's sufferings only to a very limited degree. We are not Christ, but if we want to be Christians, we must have some share in Christ's large-heartedness by acting with responsibility and in freedom when the hour of danger comes, and by showing

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<sup>35</sup> David S. Cunningham, *These Three are One*, p166.

a real sympathy that springs not from fear, but from the liberating and redeeming love of Christ for all who suffer.<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, participating in and performing Christ's polyphony in the world does not simply mean an engagement with the world on monophonic terms dictated by the Church, (sing our melody or be damned for we will countenance no other). This may have been the ecclesiological method in the past and may even be so for some now, but participation as it is understood here allows for the world to make its mark upon the church, in much the same way as Christ was acted upon by earthly events: (he was born and circumcised, celebrated and betrayed, arrested, denied, tried, beaten and executed). In the same way the Christian community and the performance of its worship will need to display not only a willingness to be in the world, but an openness to let the life of the Church be shaped by the pain and sufferings of the world, from those of all or no faith.

Even though we are often asked to think of God as Community<sup>37</sup> it is sometimes difficult to think in those terms, particularly if in so doing, we are then encouraged to participate in God. The question raised for some may be how this relates to the authority of scripture as a guide to Christian life. But scripture is not to be understood as God's rulebook, given with the purpose of keeping us firmly in one sphere of life and decidedly detached from another. Rather it opens the way to a deeper realisation that God is present in the midst of all of life. In fact the Bible might rightly be described as a worldly book, one that recognises no such separations of life.

Nicholas Lash has applied the analogy of performing a musical score to biblical interpretation and argues that it is not simply 'the *script* that is "holy", but "the people": the company 'who perform the script'.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, p14.

<sup>37</sup> For an insightful account of this see Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Theology of the Trinity*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000).

<sup>38</sup> Nicholas Lash, 'Performing the Scriptures', reprinted in *Theology on the Way to Emmaus*, (London: SCM, 1986), p37-46. See also Stephen C. Barton, 'New Testament Interpretation as Performance', in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 52, No. 2, (1999), p180.

Lash is helpful here in that he challenges us to consider the role of scripture through the metaphor of music. He suggests that a full interpretation of a piece of music requires more than the ability to read the notes or play the instruments. Nor, he says, is it sufficient to know the socio-historic context of the composer and their composition. While these things are important, Lash argues that the central interpretative action is the performance, which is a matter not just of technical proficiency but necessitates a creative fidelity to allow the score to come alive once more for the community of conductor, orchestra and audience.<sup>39</sup>

While Lash's comments might be helpful in understanding the performance of scripture it is important to note that performance alone is insufficient. What is required is a performance of our participation in the life of God. Bonhoeffer has been singled out as an archetypal 'performer of scripture', one whose life displayed a close relation between the reading and biographical embodiment of the Bible.<sup>40</sup> But Scripture is but one witness (albeit a vital one) to the *cantus firmus* that has invited our participative performance since the beginning of time. While not at all disagreeing with the assertion of Bonhoeffer as an exemplary performer of scripture, it is more helpful to understand him as a participative performer of the divine polyphony. He understood that performance necessitated being acted upon as much as acting on others, to listen as much as to be heard. He knew what it was to participate both in the human condition and the divine polyphony. Lash agrees that in the end, the 'fundamental form of the Christian interpretation of scripture' comes through the performed 'life, activity and organisation of the believing community'.<sup>41</sup> But even this does not go far enough, for people participated in performing God's song before the script was ever written, the performance predates the script. It is the script that bears witness to the participative performance of God's music. What the

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<sup>39</sup> Nicholas Lash, 'Performing the Scriptures', p40 ff.

<sup>40</sup> See Stephen E. Fowl and L. Gregory Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life*, (London: SPCK, 1991), Chapter 6, 'Living and Dying in the Word: Dietrich Bonhoeffer as Performer of Scripture'. See also Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence*, (London: SPCK 20004), p75-109.

<sup>41</sup> Nicholas Lash, 'Performing the Scriptures', p42.

community of faith performs is not the written script, but their participation in and with God, the music that existed from before notation, the melodies performed at present and the symphony that is yet to come. The purpose of all creation is for each created thing to perform what is already there in God, to be what it already is, in and through God's eye. The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins put it like this:

As Kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;  
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells  
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's  
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name; E a c h  
mortal thing does one thing and the same ...  
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is.<sup>42</sup>

Each created thing is called to perform itself as it is already sung with God.

This idea of performance should not permit any notion of 'play-acting', taking on 'a role'.<sup>43</sup> That would fail to grasp 'the risk and radical contingency, the open-endedness ... of the performance being given'.<sup>44</sup> This open-endedness is vital because the performance of the Christian community can never constitute the whole of the music. There is always more to hear and more to play. The melodies must be constantly re-informed both by the otherness of the world and by the eternity of Christ's *cantus firmus*. The music heard within the church inevitably calls to them from beyond the boundaries of their context and beckons them further towards eschatological fulfilment. As Hans Urs von Balthasar has noted in a book entitled, *Truth is Symphonic*, the Christian task is:

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<sup>42</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'As Kingfishers Catch Fire', in *The Complete Poems With Selected Prose*, (London: Fount, 1996), p52.

<sup>43</sup> Stephen C. Barton, 'New Testament Interpretation as Performance', p189.

<sup>44</sup> Gerard Loughlin, 'Telling God's Story: Bible Church and Narrative Theology', (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p134.

not to refuse to enter into the unity that lies in God and is imparted by him, but symphonically to get in tune with one another and give allegiance to the transcendent unity.<sup>45</sup>

This symphonic people will be open to the ways in which the melodies of God have been made known in the sphere of the spiritual and how they must interact with the revelations of God found in the world beyond the boundaries of the gathered church. As they do so each sphere will shape the other until it is uncertain where prayer ends and the action for justice begins.

#### THE DISCIPLINE OF COUNTERPOINT

In seeking to weave together prayer and action in this type of polyphonic life, Bonhoeffer left two brief mentions of what he called the *Discipline of the Secret*.<sup>46</sup> While it occupies little space in his writings many commentators agree it was integral to his theology and its praxis.<sup>47</sup> He noted how the early Church had practiced a discipline over the mysteries of faith such as Communion and Baptism by keeping a qualified silence before the world until such matters could be spoken of responsibly. But for Bonhoeffer the true mystery of faith that had now to be preserved, was as we have argued, the polyphonic Christ: Christ not simply as an object of religion and limited to the realm of the spiritual, but Christ who really was Lord of the whole world.<sup>48</sup> That was

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<sup>45</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Truth is Symphonic*, p9.

<sup>46</sup> In German, Bonhoeffer referred to the practice as the *arkandisziplin*, but John Williams notes that this term can be misleading, precipitating English translations of 'the arcane discipline' or 'secret discipline' that tends to describe the practice as the pious counterpart to his ideas on worldliness. See John W. Matthews, 'Responsible Sharing of the Mystery of Christian Faith: *Disciplina Arcani* in the Life and Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer', in Geoffrey B. Kelly and C. John Weborg, eds., *Reflections on Bonhoeffer: Essays in Honor of F. Burton Nelson*, (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 1999), p114ff.

<sup>47</sup> See John W. Matthews, 'Responsible Sharing of the Mystery of Christian Faith: *Disciplina Arcani* in the Life and Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer', p114. Bethge agrees that its practice was central to Bonhoeffer's discipleship. See Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, p881.

<sup>48</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, p280-281.

the *cantus firmus*, and if it were held to fast, then a praxis, which we might rename the *Discipline of Counterpoint* would ensure an ongoing interaction between the melodies of work and worship, prayer and politics.<sup>49</sup> The *Discipline of Counterpoint* requires the responsible performance by the Christian community in church and world of the mystery that is the Polyphonic Christ. This Discipline will nurture harmonies of spirituality that would sustain engagement in the world and prevent the actions of the people for justice burning out in well-meaning secularism. Similarly the movement of harmonies from the secular back into the sacred would protect the church from becoming a pious ghetto.<sup>50</sup>

However for the sake of clarity it is helpful to examine both sides of this dialectic separately. Of course the necessity of looking at how we may perform the melodies of Christ within the Church and then subsequently reviewing our participation in Christ in the world as if they were two distinct spheres represents the very dichotomy that we hope to transcend and which the *Discipline of Counterpoint* is designed to overcome.

#### MAKING MELODY WITH IN THE CHURCH

The first arena in which Christians may seek to perform this polyphony of God is through the corporate worship of the Church. Such worship will be informed by the counterpoints of life flowing from and into our encounters with the Christ who is present when two or here meet in his name, but who also takes seriously the life of faith beyond the sanctuary. Thus as John Weaver has recently argued, worship will become ‘outside in’<sup>51</sup> comprising a gathering of the counterpoint that has formed our participation in the performances of Christ in the

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<sup>49</sup> *The Discipline of Counterpoint* receives more detailed attention in the forthcoming book, Craig Gardiner, *Melodies of Community*, to be published by Paternoster in 2008.

<sup>50</sup> See Larry Rasmussen, ‘Worship in a World Come of Age’ in A. J. Klassen, *A Bonhoeffer Legacy: Essays in Understanding*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1981), p277ff.

<sup>51</sup> John Weaver, *Outside-In: Theological Reflections of Life*, (Oxford: Regent’s Park College, 2006).

preceding days. This will include how Christ in the world has made his mark upon us through the lives of others as much as any mark we have made upon the world as his disciples. But it will also be worship that is 'inside out': it will provide a space in which believers may retune their lives to the *cantus firmus*, and from which they might be inspired and empowered to participate in doubling the parts of Christ's presence in the world beyond.

Yet in understanding how worship might reflect the polyphonic character of God we need to begin much further back. The Church does not have a reputation for excellence when seeking to hold diversity in unity. Each denominational division of the Church has historically tended towards a monophonic homogenisation that has dismissed other's variant beliefs and practices. So too, local discord over patterns of worship can quickly descend into factions seeking to silence others rather than making any move towards models of polyphonic plurality.

Polyphonic worship works against such homogenising tendencies within a congregation and across the denominations. It begins by consciously gathering the worship practices that come from our diverse histories, placing them alongside those patterns of the present and engaging in dialogue with those that are emerging for the future. It begins by acknowledging that while some of the practices of the past may be no longer relevant to contemporary worship, the wealth contained in the traditions cannot be set aside quickly. But it will acknowledge that even the best of the past may need to be re-contextualised for the present. Gathering pieces of what has gone before and re-arranging them is a classic mark of today's post-modern culture. Musical examples of this are legion, but might include Jacques Loussier's jazz reinterpretation of Bach, Jan Garbarek's fusion of saxophone with the medieval choral sound of the Hilliard Ensemble or the deliberate cultural fusions of something like the Afro Celt Sound System.<sup>52</sup> Adopting a similar process for the worship in the Church will

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<sup>52</sup> Jacques Loussier, *The Very Best of Bach*, (BMG Entertainment, 74321 698742, 2000); Jan Garbarek and the Hilliard Ensemble, *Officium*, (Ecm., 445369-2); Afro Celt Sound System combines African and Celtic traditional music with pop technology and dance rhythms. See Afro-Celt Sound System, *Vol. 1, Sound Magic*, (Real World Records cdrw61. 7243 8 41736 2 3, 1996).

require the old and new to learn how to complement rather than compete with one another.

This will include the diversity of people participating in worship, including those who plan it and facilitate its performance. The former clerical monophony will be replaced by a rich diversity of lay and ordained, male and female, married and single, rich and poor, those with physical or mental disabilities, young, old and middle aged, all orientations, colours and creeds will be included. We make no distinction because God makes no distinctions.<sup>53</sup>

There will need also to be a polyphony of ritual in this worship. Some traditions are more laden than others in his regard, but all worship has within it symbolic actions that mark key moments in the story of the community. These may be moments like baptism, weddings or funerals: rites whose particular words and symbolic actions 'are a special kind of doorway into a new stage of life'.<sup>54</sup> They may also include regular moments of worship such as reciting the Lord's Prayer or celebrating The Lord's Supper. However, polyphonic worship might also include 'innovative rites' that speak to the community of an 'otherness' that draws them beyond its normative paradigms of belonging and commitment. Such innovation may be divided into patterns of comfort or disturbance. Rites of comfort may be those designed to bring assurance in times of disorientation.<sup>55</sup> Alternatively rituals may be designed to deliberately disturb the people beyond their comfort into some new commitment of discipleship. One brief example may illustrate the point. In a service held immediately after the events of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 the congregation were shocked and needed both to express their grief over those who had died and their solidarity with those working in the on-going emergency relief operation. At the front of the Church were placed newspaper pictures of the disaster and a large pile of unwashed stones. As a lament was sung, people were invited to come and move the stones, in solidarity with the rescuers who were still

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<sup>53</sup> See Galatians 3:28.

<sup>54</sup> Roger Grainger, *The Message of the Rite: The Significance of Christian Rites of Passage*, (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1988), p45.

<sup>55</sup> The terminology is taken from Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1984), p19 ff.

at that time removing rubble from Ground Zero. As they did so, they were further invited to build the stones into a cairn of remembrance for those who had died and to then commit themselves to personally seek out paths of peace. After this prayers of assurance and commitment were offered. This was both a comfort to a disturbed people and an opportunity for them to move beyond disorientation. Of course a symbolic action may suggest many meanings to the congregation, allowing different members to respond, each according to their own personal context. In this way the same action may be comforting to one and disturbing to another. If a number of different rituals are offered at separate points within one worship space people can then to participate in God and perform their response in different ways.

This raises questions over space. Can many things happen simultaneously without distraction and chaos? If one note is played and a second and a third is added, each occupies the same 'audio-space', but each is heard distinct from the other. Cunningham notes how in a similar fashion the architecture of Medieval Cathedrals enabled:

a beehive of activity, in which many people are doing many different things at once. In the midst of their diverse activities, they are held together by their common focus on Christian worship and the Christian life. They do all meet under the one roof; but their activities are many and various, and no-one seems particularly concerned that other people, in other parts of this great room, may not be doing the same thing. Rather than being distracted by this great swell of activity, people seem to thrive in it, and to concentrate their attention all the more fully on their own particular acts of participation in the Christian life.<sup>56</sup>

Such worship may need to address how architecture might proclaim the polyphonic character of the Christ. This is important because Church architecture not only reflects the ways that Christians worship, but it also shapes the worship itself or, as James White notes, '[it] not uncommonly misshapes it.'<sup>57</sup> So while the Church could 'worship only with difficulty without buildings ... often we worship with difficulty

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<sup>56</sup> David S. Cunningham, *These Three are One*, p272.

<sup>57</sup> James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, p89.

because of them'.<sup>58</sup> Thus even when worship is conducted from distinct liturgical locations such as the pulpit, the communion table, the worship band or the baptismal pool, the congregational focus is usually united in one space and centre at one time. Rarely is the arrangement of Church architecture sought to deliberately reflect among the worshippers the plurality that is revealed in the polyphonic Christ.<sup>59</sup>

If Christ is both Lord of what otherwise is seen as sacred and secular space then these considerations cannot be limited to ecclesiastical buildings. There is no sacred space reserved for the sound of music any more than there is some arena from which the note is absent. So worship might then be deliberately located in places that transcend traditional boundaries of sacred space; in pubs or shopping-centres and similar locations. Or it might take place without buildings at all. The Celtic traditions worshipped in the open air around a standing cross<sup>60</sup> and in events like 'Greenbelt' thousands have shared Communion in a field.<sup>61</sup> Outside worship may also incorporate public acts of procession and pilgrimage such as walks of witness on Good Friday. True to its vision to bring the spheres together, such worship can form a part of political resistance such as the regular protest outside the Faslane Nuclear Submarine Base.<sup>62</sup>

The prayers of the Community at worship will also allow for a unity and diversity that might include an open time for spoken prayer,

<sup>58</sup> James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, p90.

<sup>59</sup> One helpful consideration of creating space for worship is R. Giles, *Re-Pitching the Tent: Reordering Your Church Building for Worship and Mission*, (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1999). See also Ian Green, "'Build my Church' – Some Theological Considerations on the Theme of Church Design", *Ministry Today*, Issue 11, (October 1997), p27-36.

<sup>60</sup> The large crosses would act not only as a gathering point for congregations but the illustrations of biblical stories carved into them would be used as teaching aids. Further more it may be that the crosses took on for the Christians the same symbolism as older standing stones had been for the ancestors, namely as a marker point between the worlds of heaven and earth.

<sup>61</sup> See <http://www.greenbelt.org.uk>.

<sup>62</sup> A specific Peace Liturgy written for 'A Wet Day' and adaptations of acts of worship held outside the Faslane Base can be found in Kathy Galloway, ed., *The Pattern of Our Days: Liturgies and Resources for Worship*, (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 1996), p69-74.

opportunity for silent meditation, body prayer, praying with icons, praying with the psalms and sensory prayer. Any one act of polyphonic worship may include a variegated combination of this diversity including possible opportunities for the community to pray simultaneously as a number of smaller groups. And because the Christ who is worshipped by the community is acknowledged as both Lord of the Church and the World then their prayers will move beyond a parochialism of ecclesiastical care. The community will pray not just for those known to them personally, but will connect to the wider Church beyond its locality, to the world who do not know the Christ they worship and, in these times of ecological degradation, to the planet itself. It will speak to God, in solidarity with places and people of suffering and brokenness or joy and celebration.

As well as spoken prayer, space for silence is important in a frenetic and cacophonous world particularly if Christians are to hear the *cantus firmus*<sup>63</sup> and listen with discernment to their performance in the world as God hears it. The spoken prayer which dominates much public worship tends to be a 'left brain' activity that neglects the more intuitive sides of the human condition. For some personalities this is welcome and comfortable, but for others it is a largely un-engaging practice. There needs also to be an apophatic space that leads people into the meditative mystery of an encounter with God perhaps through practices

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<sup>63</sup> Indeed even in heaven there is a silence kept (Revelation 8:1). Rachel Muers takes this verse as a beginning for her work on 'responsible silence'. She claims that this silence in heaven is a 'listening silence' that when undertaken by God 'forms an integral understanding of who God is both in relation to Godself and in relation to the world and that this in turn shapes who people are in relation to God and one another'. This is, she says, 'God hearing God's own Word'. See Rachel Muers, *Keeping God's Silence: Towards a Theological Ethics of Communication*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p15 ff.

such as the Rosary or 'The Jesus Prayer', the use of icons<sup>64</sup> and, although it is not silent, praying in tongues.<sup>65</sup>

Another ancient practice of prayer that has re-emerged in recent years is the labyrinth. The journey taken along its path is a twisting but consistent route, looping closer to and further from the centre but steadily moving there. There is then a similarly meandering return journey towards the exit. Often the journey inwards is seen as one of prayer and personal reflection, while the outward path considers worldly acts of discipleship: the whole process being one in which the spheres of sacred and secular are personally integrated.

Finally there will be a diversity of sound and music within such worship. We have noted how polyphonic worship is open to 'otherness' in ritual and people, and such openness will also characterise the 'soundscape' of worship:<sup>66</sup> particularly the readings, the preaching, the music and singing of the people. Traditionally Scripture readings are taken from one translation of the Bible, read by one person and in one language. Polyphonic readings may wish to vary the translations used, involve two or more people, of different gender, age, social backgrounds. It might also include reading the passages in a variety of languages represented by those in worship.

This may lead to an exploration of polyphonic preaching: what does it mean to expound the scriptures polyphonically? Literally it means that there should be more than one voice present in the revelation of the

<sup>64</sup> For an introduction to the use of icons see Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983); Jim Forrest, *Praying with Icons*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1997); Simon Jones, *Windows into Heaven*, (Oxford: Lion, 1998), and Rowan Williams, *The Dwelling of the Light: Praying With Icons of Christ*, (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2003).

<sup>65</sup> Other practices might include the imaginative exercises of Ignatian spirituality or involve the senses. For instance, the traditional use of incense is a sensory metaphor by which worshippers can appreciate their prayers rising up as a fragrant offering to God, but other examples might include tasting honey as a reflection on Psalm 81:16 or praying as we shape clay in response to Jeremiah 18.

<sup>66</sup> The phrase 'soundscape' is borrowed from C. Michael Hawn, *Gathering into One: Praying and Singing Globally*, (Grand Rapids, MI. / Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), p274.

meaning and application of the Bible. This does not deny the place of a singular proclamation undertaken by an individual, but it offers the possibility for periods of dialogue with the community on the text before the preacher prepares the sermon, or it might invite such interaction within or after the sermon. This enables the preacher to listen to what God says through the people and the whole fellowship the opportunity to participate in the performance of the Word for that day.

Likewise in hymnody, English-speaking congregations think nothing of singing the words 'Amen' and 'Alleluia', even a *Kyrie Eleison*. All these are of a language other than English but have been made familiar by repeated use. Simple chants such as *Mungu ni mwema*<sup>67</sup> from the Democratic Republic of Congo or *Tatanaca, mamanaca, Sarantanani*<sup>68</sup> from Bolivia can be taught easily to English speaking congregations. To sing such songs in English speaking Churches serves two aspects of polyphonic worship. Firstly it acknowledges that Christ is the Saviour and *cantus firmus* of Christian people all around the world. By singing their words in their language, the polyphony of Christ's incarnation into other cultures is affirmed. Secondly, solidarity is expressed with their context. Thus to sing the words of a lament written during the Apartheid regime, '*Senzeni Na / Sono sethu*' (What have we done? / What is our sin?)<sup>69</sup> is to join in the cries of suffering people there and all over the world.<sup>70</sup> As John Bell of the Iona Community comments: 'When we sing, however falteringly, in another tongue, we represent and experience both the universality of the Church and the grandeur of God who is not limited by anyone's mother tongue'.<sup>71</sup>

Thus, in each aspect of the Church's worship its polyphonic character should be revealed. The important point is not so much the

<sup>67</sup> See the collection of songs, *One is the Body*, (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2000), p96.

<sup>68</sup> See the collection of songs, *Sent by the Lord Am I*, (Glasgow: Wild Goose Worship Group, 1991), p32.

<sup>69</sup> See *Sent by the Lord am I*, p66-67.

<sup>70</sup> If sung within the un-persecuted Church the same words become an enquiry into what the church there has done to relieve or add to the burden of others.

<sup>71</sup> John Bell, Editor's Introduction to *Common Ground: A Song Book for all the Churches*, (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1998), p7.

content of such worship but its vision: the responsible performance of the mystery that is the Polyphonic Christ.

#### MAKING MELODIES IN THE WORLD

The melodies of Christ will also be performed in the sphere of the secular. The Church has not always viewed the world beyond its walls as a potential place for the melodies of God to be performed or heard. That it happens at all is, as Samuel Wells has noted, not because ‘God so resented the Church, but because God so loved the world.’<sup>72</sup> Such action is much like heaven’s overture: it is the proleptic activity of God in the world today and the forerunner of the eschatological fulfillment. This counterpoint is found within all such righteous action whether it is performed by Christians or by people of other or no faith. Christians acting in this way will do so, being conscious of their allegiance to the polyphonic Christ. But others, who claim no allegiance to Christ, may still share a parallel commitment to work for justice.<sup>73</sup> However sweet the name of Jesus may sound in a believer’s ear, non-believers may still participate in the music without ever fully recognising its *cantus firmus*. The task for the Christian here is to simply recognise and participate in God’s music in the world around them: adding their voices and doubling the parts through action for peace, social and economic justice and sustainable ecology.

Thus in the work for peace the Christian may make common cause with those who view non-violence as a pragmatic tactic in a world bristling with arms, but the believer, like Jesus, also understands non-violence to be a melody of heaven finding its voice on earth. That Jesus engaged in no act of violence was, claims Walter Wink, ‘a direct corollary of the nature of God and of the new reality emerging in the

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<sup>72</sup> Samuel Wells, *God’s Companions: Reimagining Christians Ethics*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p34.

<sup>73</sup> A universal definition of justice is difficult to find: The call to say ‘Yes, to a global ethic’ by Hans Küng and others may affirm a fundamental consensus on binding values and irrevocable standards in the core values of the world’s religions but it faces increasing difficulties in a world which rejects the meta-narratives of the global faiths. See Hans Küng, ed., *Yes to a Global Ethic*, (London: SCM Press, 1996).

world from God'.<sup>74</sup> Echoes of this new reality had been heard in a series of melodies proclaimed by the Hebrew prophets, times when 'swords would be beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning forks' (Is 2:4) and when 'the wolf would lie down with the lamb' (Is 11:6). It was 'good news for the poor, freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, release for the oppressed and the year of the Lord's favour. (Is 61:1-2). The promise of this melody was fulfilled in Christ (Luke 4:21) and he brought more than an absence of conflict. He was, in person, the Hebrew concept of 'shalom': that polyphonic network of harmonious social relationships between people and with God.<sup>75</sup>

Shalom is not simply about the absence of violence but justice too. 'There can only be a community of peace when it does not rest on *lies* and *injustice*'.<sup>76</sup> The music of justice allows the melodies of every person to find the fullness of their voice and potential in response to the *cantus firmus*.

At the core of justice for the church is the ability and the willingness to listen to the voice of others, particularly those who may appear less advantaged than ourselves, to empathize and stand in solidarity with them and to welcome them into the melodies of God's community. It is to recognise the melody of God in the songs of those from below, those longing for justice. As Bonhoeffer noted

We have for once learnt to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the

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<sup>74</sup> Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p209.

<sup>75</sup> Shalom, the Hebrew concept of peace is to be contrasted with the classical Greek concept of peace (Eirene) that envisioned a harmonious balance of tranquillity while the *Roman Pax* was stability maintained by the peace-keeping military might of the Empire. For a discussion of these differences within the context of the community of faith, see C. Norman Kraus, *The Community of the Spirit: How the Church is in the World*, (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1993), p133ff and Rowan Williams and Mark Collier, *Beginning Now: Peacemaking Theology*, (London: Dunamis, 1984), p13-24.

<sup>76</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928-1936. Collected Works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Vol. I., (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p168-169.

maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled – in short, from the perspective of those who suffer ... We have to learn that personal suffering is a more effective key, a more rewarding principle for exploring the world in thought and action than personal good fortune. This perspective from below must not become the partisan possession of all who are eternally dissatisfied; rather, we must do justice to life in all its dimensions from a higher satisfaction, whose foundation is beyond any talk of ‘from below’ or ‘from above’.<sup>77</sup>

Similarly when we consider the area of ecology, in this time of impending crises there are clear reasons why more sustainable patterns of living need to be developed whether you are Christian or not. But for the disciple of Christ the physical creation is valued because it reverberates with the song of God. Jürgen Moltmann argues that when Genesis speaks of God’s Spirit hovering over the waters of creation we should envisage not a brooding dove but the vibrating ‘song of creation’ in which, ‘The word names, differentiates and appraises. But the breath is the same in all the words, and binds the words together’. He adds:

We should think of the fundamental resonances of music out of which sounds and rhythms emerge ... In the quickening breath and through the form-giving word, the Creator sings out his creatures in the sounds and rhythms in which he has his joy and his good pleasure.<sup>78</sup>

So, once more, the task for the Christian is to find their place in the sound and rhythms of God’s created pleasure and to do so in such a way as to do no violence or injustice to another created being.

While such actions in the sphere beyond the spiritual can be considered a confessional matter for the individual Christian practising a *Discipline of Counterpoint*, the acts of justice and peace they perform before the world should nonetheless be ‘a silent and hidden affair’.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, p17.

<sup>78</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today’s World*, (London: S.C.M. Press, 1994), p96.

<sup>79</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, p300.

Their performance must be melodies of action that capture the imagination of the world and provoke it into its own participation. Bonhoeffer called this 'the deed that interprets itself' and argued that 'if this deed is to have become a force, then the world itself will long to confess the Word'.<sup>80</sup> He rightly distinguished this provocative but responsible sharing of the mystery of Christ from occasions when the Church had done nothing other than 'loudly shriek out (its) propaganda' instead of preserving in silence 'the most sacred possession of the community'.<sup>81</sup> This is the other side of the *Discipline of Counterpoint*, its action in and for the world. The responsible performance of melodies of peace and justice in the world will not seek the preservation or advancement of the Church but will hope simply for a more just world and a 'better worldliness'.<sup>82</sup> Thus some believers will choose to engage in such action through the Church or other faith-based organisations, groups like BMS World Mission, Christian Aid or TearFund.<sup>83</sup> However many others will do so as part of 'secular' groups, such as local councils, national political parties, *CND*, the *Campaign Against the Arms Trade*, *Greenpeace*, or *Amnesty International*.<sup>84</sup>

#### HOLDING IT ALL TOGETHER

In closing I want to return to the picture of a local church represented by David, Ella, Sam and Sarah. As they journey with one another into the responsible performance of the Polyphonic Christ it is hoped that each of them will have found some encouragement and inspiration. David may be encouraged to reveal the moments of genuine

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<sup>80</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 'The Nature of the Church', in Geoffrey B. Kelly, and F. Burton Nelson, eds., *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Revised edn., (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), p86.

<sup>81</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 'The Nature of the Church', in Geoffrey B. Kelly, and F. Burton Nelson, eds., *A Testament to Freedom*, p86.

<sup>82</sup> See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p60.

<sup>83</sup> Previously known as The Baptist Missionary Society, see [www.bmsworldmission.org](http://www.bmsworldmission.org). See also [www.christian-aid.org.uk](http://www.christian-aid.org.uk), and [www.tearfund.org](http://www.tearfund.org).

<sup>84</sup> See [www.cnduk.org](http://www.cnduk.org), [www.caat.org.uk](http://www.caat.org.uk), [www.greenpeace.org.uk](http://www.greenpeace.org.uk), and [www.amnesty.org.uk](http://www.amnesty.org.uk).

transcendence he has felt while playing Mozart ... and his friends may rejoice with him, organise a recital and affirm his encounters with the divine. Ella may be asked about her day of protest. And as she weeps over the hurt she feels for God's creation she might just speak of the financial penalty the courts have imposed upon her for acts of civil disobedience. The offering on Sunday morning will satisfy the judge. Most of it was paid personally and quietly by Sam. He is now speaking to Ella about investing in corporations with proven ethical and ecological policies. He's cycling to work and donating what he's saved financially to the children's garden. Sarah is their pastor. Her eyes are wet with tears of joy, her cheeks are radiant with excitement ... she still must meet the broken and the fractious, but something new and nourishing has just been born around her. She cannot put a name to what has begun among her people, but she remembers its tune from days gone by:

*it is the whistling of God at work.*

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